

**Scenes from the Cutting Room Floor: Black Womanhood and The Visual Politics of Mixed
Race Family Albums 1918-2020**

by

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DEDICATION

To my parents, Jan May and Ralph Curry, who taught me what hard work looks like

To my brother and sister-in-law, Matthew May-Curry and AnneMarie McClain, who lift me up
with kindness and care

To my niblings Marshall and Lily, who remind me every day to laugh

To my friend David L. Hutchinson, who passed as I completed a final draft of this dissertation,
and who taught me how to be free.

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This dissertation is well-traveled. Many people have touched this project, and have supported me through my doctoral degree, too many to accurately capture in these pages.

I formally began this research in the summer before my senior year at Williams College in 2014 as a Creating Connections Consortium (C3) fellow at University of California Berkeley, where I took part in their Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program. That summer I wrote the first iteration of my chapter on the de Blasio family, presented on my first academic panel, and was given the opportunity to explore what it meant to pursue a research project. My graduate student mentor in the department of African American Studies, Michael McGee, would sit with me for hours in Berkeley coffeeshops discussing my research interests, offering me insights into pursuing a doctoral degree, and reading draft after draft of my early articulations of this project. Those early writings and glimpses into mentorship in the academy, as elementary as they were, underpin not only this dissertation but who I am as a scholar.

After this summer experience, I then worked to extend this research into a senior thesis in the political science department at Williams College where I began to understand what it meant to put my work in relation to an ongoing scholarly conversation. My thesis advisor, Mark Reinhardt, taught me what it meant to pursue a rigorous, well-articulated argument, all while advising me with kindness. When I submitted my research on the de Blasio family to *American Quarterly* for review four years later as a graduate student and received my first “revise and resubmit,” it was Mark who offered six pages of bullet-pointed notes that deciphered the

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My time as a doctoral student at the University of Michigan in the department of American Culture has been chock-full of generous and savvy faculty, staff, and students. I have learned from the presence and mentorship of people including Matthew Countryman, Michael Awkward, Frieda Ekotto, Martha Jones, LaKisha Simmons, Sara Blair, Ava Purkiss, Victor Mendoza, Emma Flores, Charles Ransom, Sandra Gunning, Ian Shin, Megan Sweeney, Gayle Rubin, and Michael Witgen. Marlene Moore, thank you for always knowing the answerS to my many questions, and for never letting anything slip through the cracks. Tammy Zill, you were a spot of joy, and your bright smile made me feel safe walking the halls of the department. I have

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It is often said that a graduate student's time in academia is made or broken by their mentorship and advising relationships. In this regard, I have been lucky to have been mentored by a whole team of professors who have encouraged and supported me every step of the way, and who have served in various capacities outside of the official bounds of my dissertation committee. My committee members – Tiya Miles, Evelyn Alsultany, Kristin Hass, and Jessica Kenyatta Walker – are among the most generous people I have ever met. Jessica, thank you for stepping in last minute as a committee member and for your notes. Kristin, I will never forget our one-on-one sessions where you mapped out the entire field of cultural theory for me or the many reads you gave my early chapter drafts. Evelyn, your belief in me from year one has encouraged me time and time again. Teaching with you was so fun, and sitting in your office in AC was my favorite time of the week. Your kindness, infectious smile, and commitment to racial and social justice work in the university made me understand how to navigate academia with care and commitment. Thank you for your incredible organizational skills, for your countless letters of recommendation, and your reassurances over these many years.

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Michelle
Somerville, Massachusetts
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PREFACE – I Was Gifted A Camera



This was my breaking point. It was Fall, at the end of a long day during my senior year in high school. The plan had been communicated to me earlier that week by a school administrator: I was to be the subject of a photoshoot for the school’s promotional materials, a task I had grown accustomed to over my thirteen years in attendance. It was not uncommon at this small private school in the suburbs of Northeast Ohio for the school photographer, a tall unassuming white man, to circulate through the halls and classrooms, blending in with the walls, only making

himself known by the shutter click of his DSLR. Over time, I learned to listen for his shutter, knowing that it would not be long before I would see the events he captured reproduced and circulated across the city. As one of a small handful of Black students and one of even fewer mixed-race students, I spent most of my childhood playing “I spy Michelle” in the school’s many brochures, newsletters, and quarterly magazines, counting how many times I could spot myself on the page. From a young age, I grew accustomed to these sightings, even taking special pleasure in them and catching myself feeling sad or confused when I was left out. On rare occasions I had more control over the image; every so often I would be asked to take part in a staged diversity shoot where a pre-selected group of students of varying hues would gather together around a table full of books and act engrossed or handed shovels and asked to garden in the school’s small plot of vegetables. In these moments I was prepared, aware of my role, and happy to play it. It confirmed to me a story that I was told at the dinner table: that I was special, that I represented the best of both worlds, that I should feel proud to be set apart in this way.

This particular day, however, was different. When I arrived outside at the shoot’s location the school administrator appeared concerned. “Could you take your hair out from that bun,” she asked, pointing to the tight knot of hair on the top of my head, her eyebrows furrowed. Taken aback by the boldness of her request, I went inside and stood in front of the mirror, contemplating whether or not I should comply. As many people with long curly hair understand, wearing your hair in a bun is often the natural consequence of being several days removed from a wash day, and often results in a flattening of your natural curl pattern so that when the hair is taken out from the up-do it requires immediate attention. Yet more than a fear of looking unkempt, the administrator’s request was the first time I had been asked to explicitly change my appearance for the camera, something that felt like a departure from their previous, more benign

bids for diversity. An uneasiness stirred inside of me; by this time in my young life I was beginning to understand that what was being asked of me was to make hyper-visible my blackness, my mixedness, and the many colorist racial scripts that come with “good hair.” A perpetual people pleaser and woefully unconscious to any alternatives, I took my hair out from the bun and used an athletic headband from my gym bag to pull back my flyaways, settling for a half-up, half-down style.

By the time I had returned outside, the photographer and administrator were set up, and a third mystery person had appeared. A young blond boy, no older than seven, stood quietly on the sidewalk awaiting instructions. “Who is this,” I asked the pair, trying to get my bearings on the changing scene. “We thought it’d be nice to have someone join you today for you to interact with,” the administrator said. Meanwhile, the photographer stood adjusting his camera, characteristically quiet and inconspicuous. Still trying to connect the dots, I came to find out that this unnamed boy was specifically driven the twenty minutes from the elementary school campus to the high school for this photo shoot, a fact that still surprises me to this day. Dazed, slightly nauseous, and unable to utter a word of protest, I went through the motions of the photoshoot, taking my cues to smile, to hold the unnamed boy’s hand, to stare into each other’s eyes with familiarity and kindness. When the photoshoot was over, I left for softball practice, quietly seething and unable to put words to the objectification that I had just experienced.

In Toni Cade Bombara’s 1971 short story “The Blues Ain’t No Mockingbird,” two tall men with cameras have a similar agenda. Told from the perspective of a young Black girl in the rural south and set during the early years of the food stamp program, the story follows the unfolding events of an unexpected visit from the County, as two government workers attempt to film and photograph a Black family’s home and grounds. As the camera “buzzed” over the yard,

the playing children, the garden, and eventually the family's house, the grandmother of the family steps out onto the porch and asks them to kindly "shut that machine off." "Now Aunty," the smiling cameraman says, hoping to soften her with kinship and pleasantries. "Your mama and I are not related," she said in return, as they slowly back away from the porch. Using this moment as a teaching lesson for all the watching kids, the grandmother recounts a story of a man who was about to jump off of a bridge. "so here comes... this person... with a camera, takin pictures of the man and the minister and the woman. Takin' pictures of the man in his misery about to jump, cause life so bad and people been messin with him so bad. This person takin up the whole roll of film practically. But savin' a few of course." When the children ask how the story ends, the grandma doesn't respond, and instead goes back into the house. Meanwhile, the men do not leave the family's property until Mister Cain, the granddaddy and patriarch of the family, breaks their cameras in two with a motion "like a sudden and gentle bird."

In their capacity to both bestow glory upon and to injure their subjects, photographs have proven a key battleground for Black people in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Often, the most slippery of images are those that endeavor to "uplift" the race. These photographs, veiled in pleasantries and kinship – pride even – function as mechanisms of control and mitigation, offered as proof of progress, as documentary proof of aid given. For Bambara's characters, the elders knew not to trust this act of kinship and paternalism, and instead see the intrusion of the camera as an affront to their pride and autonomy. Interestingly, while it is the patriarch who ultimately removes the threat of the camera, it is the matriarch who understands the potential harm of the photographers' desires, a lesson she quickly communicates to her kin. Indeed, her lesson is revealing: instead of rushing to save the suicidal man in a moment of need (or respecting the graveness of the unfolding events by refraining from capturing them), the

photographer saves room on his film-roll in the off-chance that he might capture something even more sensational: the jump. A grim proverbial tale, the grandmother's cautionary words remind readers of the stakes of and motivations behind images, even those untaken or unseen.

In my case, the resulting photographs of my photoshoot would be used in promotional materials for years to come, and the following year I left for college with a mission to understand what social and historical events lead to these experiences. As many individuals and scholars of mixed-race identity often report, college was a watershed moment for me in my understanding of racial community and politics. I came to disavow the notion that I was “special” simply because I was desired, and quickly learned to distrust those who made their racial desires toward me known. I was gifted a camera and started taking photos of my own. I came to understand that an identity rooted in blackness was an expansive position upon which I could build a political consciousness. This consciousness not only informs my writing but also my framing of how the families included in this dissertation navigate Black political culture and visual representation in their lifetimes. Nothing, however, radicalized me more than feeling the arresting motivations of the white gaze behind the camera, and the need to offer a corrective to this narrative of exceptionalism that had been modeled in the form of images throughout my childhood. This dissertation is, in part, my attempt at that corrective. More than a counternarrative, it is offered as an explanatory balm to all those who have been asked, in so many words, to take their hair down.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation asks two interrelated questions. First, how do visually iconic representations of Black-white families shift in relation to Black cultural politics and aesthetics throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries? Looking at widely circulating photographs and representations of iconic mixed-race families over the last century, I argue that these images have been shaped by a common set of visual themes and symbols that attempt to convey interracialism as perpetuating racial progress, integration, and social normativity. The continued use and evolution of these visual codes over time has coalesced into an iconography of interracial Black-white families, reproduced in American culture through the uplift of iconic mixed-race families in narratives of racial progress.

Second, this dissertation asks what it would mean if Black women (their visions, their feelings, their memories, their presence) guided our understanding of the visual politics of racially mixed families in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries? What images and stories of interracial kinship are centered when collected and curated through a Black feminist intellectual and historical lens? This study traces the shifting reception of Black and racially mixed women's curatorial visions of interracial kinship over the past century, marking how Black women's uses and narration of the public and private family archive situates interracial kinship within (rather than apart from) Black gender, sexual, and class politics and aesthetics. I argue that Black

women have used private family archives throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries to shape, reshape, and disrupt the visual icon of the mixed-race family over time, instead creating icons of Black racial affirmation for multiracial families. While sometimes operating in concert with the dominant, public visual iconography of mixed families, Black women's curatorial approaches toward images of interracial kinship overwhelmingly reveal the emotional and psychological effects of these iconic representations on Black women, mothers, and racially mixed Black women and daughters.

Using visual cultural analysis and archival research, each chapter offers a different take into how one or a number of iconic racially mixed families use images to negotiate notions of social and racial identity in public and in private, and how these negotiations impacted their politics in turn. Spanning from roughly 1918-2021, I situate these families within the very particular cultural, historical, and intellectual contexts in which they lived. Attending to Black women's curatorial labor as it functions within domestic spaces and contexts, this study rethinks the political discourse regarding racial intimacy within interracial families in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In doing so, it reconstitutes this affective work back within histories of Black communal care, kinship, and survival rather than histories of uplift, progress, assimilation, and postracial futurities.

INTRODUCTION

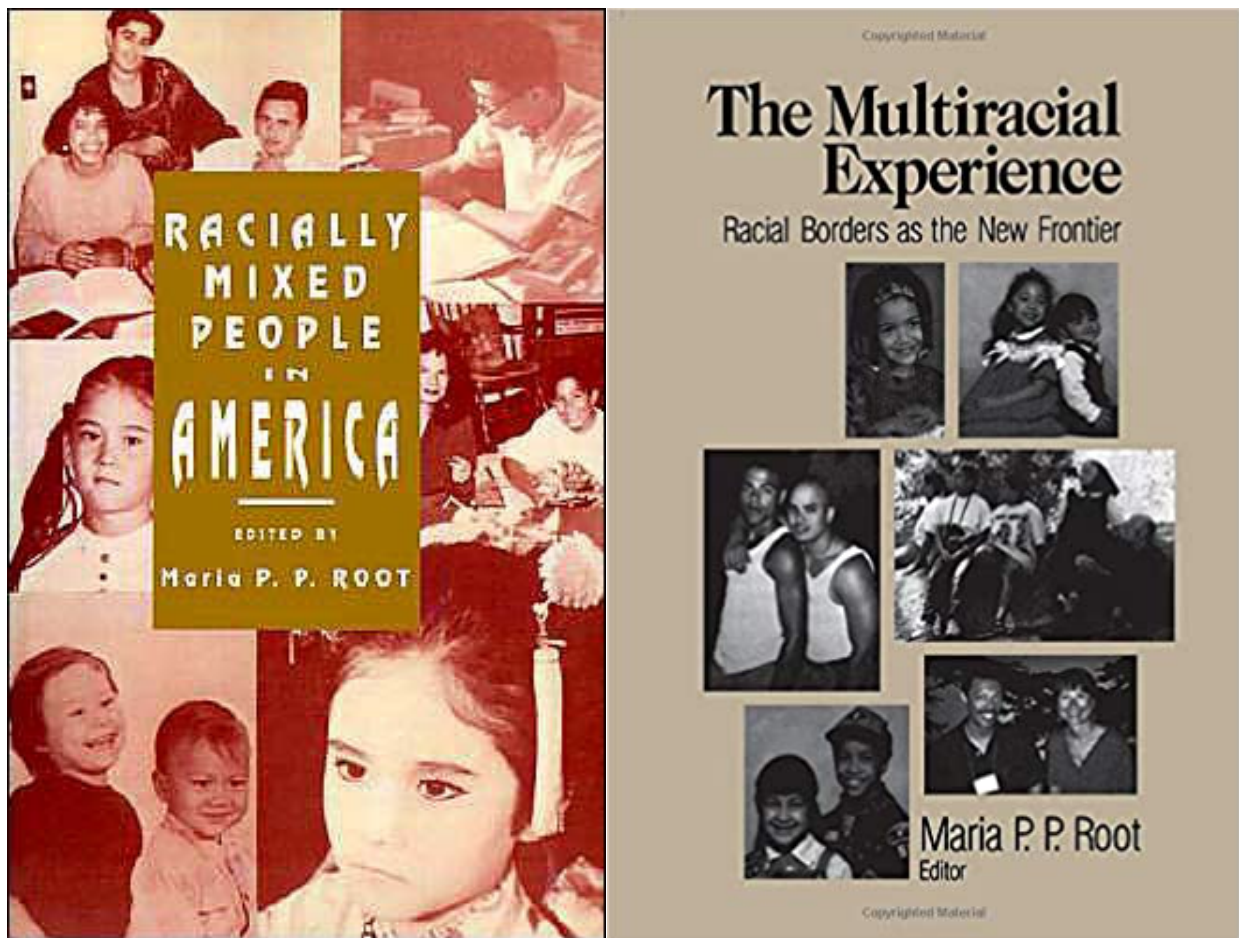


Figure I-1: Cover of *Racially Mixed People in America* (1992) edited by Maria P.P. Root. Figure 1-2: Cover of the *Multiracial Experience: Racial Borders as the New Frontier* (1996) edited by Maria P.P. Root.

On the cover of clinical psychologist Maria P.P. Root's foundational edited collections *Racially Mixed People in America* (1992) and *The Multiracial Experience* (1996), family photographs frame mixed-race identity as something readers can see [Figure I.1-2]. Informal group snapshots are placed alongside studio portraits in a gallery-like display, inviting viewers to

compare and contrast not only racial phenotype but family relations. Images of interracial couples are situated alongside portraits of racially mixed children, implying a common experience generally deemed “racially mixed” and an understanding that interracial heterosexuality produces mixed-race children. Inside the covers, scholarly essays challenge theoretical and political conceptualizations of race as binary or static by examining the experiences of mixed-race individuals in various racially-bound contexts such as the U.S. Census, the education system, mental healthcare, transracial adoption, and the household. These texts, widely viewed across the field of mixed-race studies as canon, gather scholarly works from the fields of ethnic studies, anthropology, education, law, psychology, nursing, social work, and sociology to offer critical viewpoints on the “new frontier” of racial identity at the turn of the twenty-first century.

In *Souls of Mixed Folk* (2011), Michele Elam points to this use of family photography as indicative of a pervasive trend across studies of mixed-race identity. Noting how many of the major mixed race studies textbooks of the 1990’s and early 2000s utilized photographic collages as their covers, Elam suggests that in an attempt to make visible a “marginalized population,” these displays in effect reproduced many of the same socially deterministic notions of race, sexuality, and gender that the collections’ scholars ostensibly sought to dismantle.¹

The images work together to codify anew the already iconic status of the heteronormative unit at the expense of other family formations. The photos are not merely reportage of a neutral demographic phenomenon, but the graphic naturalization of a particular political representation of a people. The fact that only heterosexual couples appear (and appear over and over again) on these ‘family album’ covers extends the presumption of heterosexuality to the other images of solitary mixed race children – if they are the biological or adopted offspring of same-sex or

¹ See texts such as *Mixed: An Anthology of Short Fiction on the Multiracial Experience* (2006), *New Faces in a Changing America: Multiracial Identity in the twenty-first Century* (2002), *The Multiracial Experience: Racial Borders as the New Frontier* (1996), and *Multiracial Child Resource Book: Living Complex Identities* (2003).

intersex couples, we never see it. By implication, these alternative family mixes are not deemed ‘representative’ of the mixed-race constituency, and thus are silently omitted from the field of representation.²

Here, Elam maps out how the field of mixed-race studies is founded upon a biological understanding of multiracial inheritance grounded in the heterosexual family unit, implicating not only our understanding of the uses of family photography but the ontological ground upon which multiracial politics rest. Especially as anthologies work to define, unite, and empower particularly new fields of study, this trend (and the larger discourse of the 1990s Multiracial Movement that circulated simultaneously with the foundation of the field) codified photo-realism as a primary entryway into discussions of mixed-racial identity in the new millennium, and the family unit as the protagonists of this frontier. At its best, this use of photography made hyper-visible a family formation that for much of American history has been an illegal form of relation, and effectively normalized the existence of many such families across the nation. At its worst, this trend embraced and made iconic a time-worn mode of racial typology that uses photography as a primary form of evidence of the existence of race in and on the body. Taken together, the overreliance on family photography in these early mixed-race studies textbooks suggests a particularly important relationship between mixed-race identity and the family image throughout American cultural history.

How would our reading of mixed-race family images change, however, if we were to engage in a visual reading practice grounded in a Black Studies scholarly and curatorial tradition? What cultural aesthetics, narratives, memories, performances, and – most importantly – people are made visible with attention to Black American cultural history? Again, Elam’s text

² Michele Elam, *Souls of Mixed Folk: Race, Politics, and Aesthetics in the New Millennium* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 36.

serves as an instructive model for this work. Writing from an English and Black Studies disciplinary practice, Elam's *Souls of Mixed Folk* explores "the possibilities for a mixed race expressivity that is continuous with, rather than parallel to, a capacious African American tradition constantly in dialogue and debate with itself." Throughout, Elam centers cultural texts that use the questions raised by a Black-white mixed-race identity in an American context to enact an "aesthetics of resistance." Rather than producing works in service of "rearing healthy multiracial children," these cultural producers "offer experiments across genre...that validate mixed race experiences as opportunities for social insight without administering prescriptive morals or promising emancipatory politics." Attuned particularly to the relationship between mixedness and blackness, Elam draws a thru-line between the strategic historical erasures that led to mixed-race identity being framed as a nouveau category of the late twentieth century and an ongoing Black aesthetic project that illuminates how, in the words of W.E.B Du Bois, "we are all so horribly mixed."³ Through this lens, we might view the preoccupation with photographs of the mixed-race nuclear family unit as more specifically a preoccupation with visualizing how the trappings of racial inheritance have changed in light of shifts in American miscegenation laws, social norms, and family values. This view of genealogy includes the establishment of patriarchal lines of property, "the transmission of material goods within the white community, and the corresponding disinheritance of Black mothers and any children born of an interracial union."⁴

Furthermore, reading photographs of interracial families through a Black studies frame ties the iconicity of mixed-race families to other moments of Black iconicity within American

³ W.E.B Du Bois "The Concept of Race," in *Dusk of Dawn* (1940), in *W.E.B. Du Bois: Writings*, ed. Nathan Irvin Huggins, 665. Quoted in Elam's *Souls of Mixed Folk*, 17.

⁴ Eva Saks, "Representing Miscegenation Law," *Raritan* 8 (1988): 53-54.

history, namely the uses of iconic photographs in promoting Black racial uplift. In the various Black social movements of the twentieth century, for example, visual cultural historian Leigh Raiford writes of how Black movement leaders understood and wielded the power of photography toward making visible the “fugitive brutality” that Black Americans experienced under the law in the Jim Crow south and elsewhere. In making these images “integral to processes of national, racial, and political identity formation,” Raiford notes how the repeated use of these iconic images came to stand in for “images of legitimate leadership, appropriate forms of political action, and the proper place of African Americans within the national imaginary.”⁵ Looking at the role of photography across African American social movements, “imprisoned in the luminous glare” of the photographic flash are not only attempts to capture offenses against Black people but attempts to define, represent, and control the memory of an ever-evolving Black public.⁶

⁵ Leigh Raiford, *Imprisoned in A Luminous Glare: Photography and the African American Freedom Struggle* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2011), 3.

⁶ Martin Luther King Jr., *Why We Can't Wait* (New York, N.Y.: New American Library, 1968), 39. Full quote reads: “The brutality with which officials would have quelled the black individual became impotent when it could not be pursued with stealth and remain unobserved. It was caught—as a fugitive from a penitentiary is often caught—in gigantic circling spotlights. It was imprisoned in a luminous glare revealing the naked truth to the whole world.”



Figure I.3-4: images of the Loving family taken by Life magazine photojournalist Grey Villet. These images were not published in the 1966 Life photo essay of the Lovings detailing their life in exile outside of Caroline County, where both Mildred and Richard Loving were both born and intended to raise their children, Peggy, Donald, and Sydney. Instead, these photos were treated as family photos in the Loving family's home and were later published in 2017 by the Villet family in conjunction with the 50th anniversary of the Loving Supreme Court decision.

Reading the images that adorn the covers of mixed-race studies textbooks through this context calls viewers to question what or who is left off the page and, by extension, what or who is maligned through the political representation of mixed-race families. Take, for example, the iconic family images taken of the Loving family of the *Loving V. Virginia* Supreme Court case that overturned the nation's anti-miscegenation laws [Figure I.3-4]. Frequently, images of the Loving family circulating in popular culture both at the time of their court battle and in the contemporary moment focus on the intimate kinship and nuclear family normalcy encapsulated by Richard and Mildred Loving's love for each other and their three children. In these images, a dehistoricized multiracialism (freed from its possibility to signal racialized, gendered, and classed degrees of inequity) moves "public challenges to racism and social injustice into the neutralized space of the loving family or into comfortably inclusive communities of families."⁷ Taking into account the family's particular racial and gender configuration, that of a Black and native woman and a white man, brings us closer to understanding the unique photographic consequences of the color line and racial progress narratives for Black women. Indeed, the above images of the Lovings were part of a series of images released to the public in 2017 in conjunction with the 50th anniversary of the *Loving* court win, taken by *Life* photographer Grey Villet while the Lovings were living as fugitives of Virginia law in a rented farmhouse on the outskirts of Caroline County. Treated as beloved family photographs within the Loving family until their public printing, these images complicate the more agreeable emotional register upon which iconic images of the Lovings relied. In these images, Mildred appears in particular as a woman and as a mother who navigates a more complex reality defined by the pressures and

⁷ Habiba Ibrahim, *Troubling the Family: The Promise of Personhood and the Rise of Multiracialism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 14.

confines of domestic womanhood. Not only must she live in fear of capture and disproportionate punishment under the law as a non-white woman, but Mildred also navigated the daily concerns of a housewife: childrearing, household chores, haircuts, moments of play, moments of quiet contemplation. Bound up in the culture of secrecy that colors many Black women's inner psychic worlds in the early and mid-twentieth centuries, images of Mildred navigating her home life under the duress of fugitivity from the state move discussions of the Loving family away from a mere icon of love and progress. Indeed, the problems created by reading such images across time – namely, the public racial imaginaries and private racial and gendered intimacies captured by the circulation, reproduction, and reception of twentieth century visual narratives of mixed-race black families– are the central focus of this dissertation.

My dissertation, *Scenes From the Cutting Room Floor: Black Womanhood and The Visual Politics of Mixed Race Family Albums 1918-2020*, asks two interrelated questions. First, how do visually iconic representations of Black-white families shift in relation to Black cultural politics and aesthetics throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries? In answering this question, I use predominantly photographic and literary archives to understand how public and private visions of mixed-race families evolve as narratives of Black racial progress take into account new understandings of social normativity, legitimacy, and respectability. While my focus on the specific social position of racially mixed families requires an attention to visibility, locating these families within the Black social movements of their time similarly requires an emphasis on Black cultural politics. Indeed, attending to the socio-political specificity of twentieth-century interracial Black-white families and mixed-race individuals demands that scholars reflect upon the Black political and aesthetic contexts that shaped these families' representation. Specifically, consideration of the changes within Black cultural politics over time

reveals how visual representations of these families operated in relation to notions of Black racial progress, boundaries between what was considered public and private, and the role of the family in mediating social norms such as gender, sexuality, and class. Looking at widely circulating photographs and representations of iconic mixed-race families over the last century, I argue that these images have been shaped by a common set of visual themes and symbols that attempt to convey interracialism as perpetuating racial progress, integration, and social normativity. These visual themes include signaling generational cohesion through the nuclear and extended family unit; motherhood and domestic labor as marking and underpinning racial inheritance; racially mixed childhood as a space to negotiate racial authenticity and the boundaries of Black culture and aesthetics; and the family unit itself operating as a stand-in for other social units, such as the middle class or the nation. The continued use and evolution of these visual codes over time has coalesced into an iconography of interracial Black-white families, reproduced in American culture through the uplift of iconic mixed-race families in narratives of racial progress. Marking the ubiquity of this iconography across Black cultural and political forms (literature, photography, political campaigns, film), this dissertation underscores how iconic images of mixed-race families “become part of the story that Americans tell each other and the world about the unfolding of nation and the possibility of democracy.”⁸ As the primary texts covered in this dissertation span the length of the last century (beginning in roughly 1919 and ending in the present year of 2021), I aim to understand how this iconography evolves and becomes more or less politically salient to an American public as Black cultural politics shift in its framing of interracialism.⁹

⁸ Nicole R. Fleetwood, *On Racial Icons: Blackness and the Public Imagination* (Newark: Rutgers University Press, 2015), 4.

⁹ I use American public here intentionally; As Nicole Fleetwood writes of this term, “by American public, I do not mean to suggest that there is one definition of Americans or what constitutes the public. Instead, I use American

What would it mean, however, if Black women (their visions, their feelings, their memories, their presence) guided our understanding of the visual politics of racially mixed families in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries? What images and stories of interracial kinship are centered when collected and curated through a Black feminist intellectual and historical lens? As gestured toward in my reading of mixed-race studies anthologies, previously scholarly and popular conversations about mixed-race families in the twentieth century that attempt to situate these iconic representations in a history of multiracialism have focused on the rather recent advocacy work of white women and mothers on behalf of their racially mixed children in the context of the 1990s multiracial movement.¹⁰ In local and national identity-based advocacy groups such as Project RACE (Reclassify All Children Equally) and Association of Multiethnic Americans (AMEA), white mothers during this period were overwhelmingly concerned for the self-esteem of their multiracial children and politicized their concern as a kind of new racial ethics. In a post-*Loving* moment in which anti-miscegenation laws no longer presented a political challenge to interracial couples and families, Habiba Ibrahim contends that legalism “had vanished as an effective recourse of addressing how race still functions in both the romantic creation of families and the ongoing state regulation of families.” In its place, Ibrahim argues that white mothers uplifted the nurturing of their children’s racial identity development in the home and spaces like the United States Census as a unique form of racial intimacy and reason for their politicization around issues of race and racism. Scholars working in the burgeoning field of mixed-race studies at this time produced academic works and anthologies based predominantly in the fields of sociology and psychology, emphasizing the importance of

public as a fraught concept, a necessary fiction of how various constituents, populations, and individuals make sense of the nation as a collective body.” Nicole Fleetwood, *On Racial Icons: Blackness and the Public Imagination* (Newark: Rutgers University Press, 2015), 3.

¹⁰ Ibrahim, *Troubling the Family*, 85, 89-90.

nurturing family environments and the crucial role of parenting in affirming biracial and multiracial (rather than monoracial) categorization.

In comparison to white mothers who operationalized maternal affect toward understandings of multiracialism as a space of “love, romance, family, and trust,” Black women and mothers throughout the late twentieth century were treated as either “maternal failures” or “overly motherly and domestic (without the privileges that patriarchy grants normative domesticity).” Importantly, Ibrahim notes that white mothers relying on the “morality of maternal love...exploits, to a large degree, the manner in which black mothers have little purchase to this emotional connection when it comes to their own children.”¹¹ Judgments on Black mothers’ ability to nurture affirmative multiracial identities overlooked “the burden of structural inequalities that denied most Black women access to the same educational and economic privileges that facilitated traditional models of white motherhood.”¹² It also overlooks how discussions of Black motherhood and interracial kinship in the American context often begin with the traumas and pathologies resulting from the infamous racial classification law of the seventeenth-century Virginia colony, *partus sequitur ventrum*. This law – and its many iterations across the nation – dictated that the child follows the condition of the mother, making it such that children of enslaved Black women were born into slavery and those born to free white women (even if indentured servants) were born free. To this day, Black women’s feelings and perspectives on interracial kinship in the public sphere are more likely to signal a state of mourning and even bitterness over the collective’s experience of antiblackness rather than the

¹¹ Ibrahim, *Troubling the Family*, 89.

¹² Brigitte Fielder, *Relative Races: Genealogies of Interracial Kinship in Nineteenth-Century America*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020), 87-88. See also Daniel P. Moynihan, “The Moynihan Report” [1965]. In *The Moynihan Report and the Politics of Controversy: A Transaction Social Science and Public Policy Report*, edited by Lee Rainwater and William L. Yancey (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1967), 47–94.

promise of multiracial futurity or post-racialism that a politicized white motherhood signals. In effect, the hyper-visible, hyper-presentist politics that located the promise of multiracialism within the identity-based efforts of families (and particularly white mothers) during the multiracial movement made less visible the longer historical contexts that Black women's political and social perspectives on interracial kinship and relationships offer.

Attention to the influence of interracial intimacy on the production and circulation of images makes clear how the attending social pressures and consequences of racialized kinship are unevenly distributed throughout various members of interracial families. This difference in racialization is evidenced throughout the chapters of this dissertation in *how* mothers, fathers, children, and other kin narrate the significance of family images for themselves and others. Exploring these relationships through visual culture reveals how concerns of sexual privacy and fears of retaliation impact how images and family memories circulate in public and private life – what stories and visions are deemed appropriate for public consumption, and which images and narratives line the cutting room floor. An attunement to Black women's less visible histories and emotions reminds us that the existence of a widely circulating, iconic, and public family archive of images suggests the existence of a less-widely accessible private family archive. This second, more circumstantial archive can be found in family photo albums and can take the form of keepsake objects or treasured family heirlooms. They can surface in memoirs or institutional archives or exhibitions or can be buried in footnotes or offhand in presentations. Often, the images that remain unseen by the public are tantamount to those images that remain protected and sacred within the family trust. These beloved images represent intimate ties between family members, stowed away for safekeeping, sometimes even acting as the only evidence of relation. At other times, however, the images excluded from the public record are those that rub up

against the acceptable narrative of the family, that perhaps offer alternate visions of interracial kinship than those that circulated in the popular imagination at the time. Family members cite many reasons for withholding these images including family politics, media priorities, limitations of form and genre, property ownership, and archival boundaries. Nevertheless, these images hold valuable information about what was considered both sacred and profane at the time and, importantly, what was personal and political. Much like Du Bois' color line, these categories also blurred based on priorities related to survival and circumstance, and by the twenty-first century the popular organizing rallying cry of "the personal is political" encouraged Black people and Black women in particular to bring what were once considered private matters (sex and sexuality, domestic labor, economic income) squarely into public discourse. This evolution over time corresponds with a general shift in public-private boundaries within kinship relations; as dominant notions of family move from seeing kinship as a private and protected matter in the early twentieth century to understandings of kinship as a public and political matter in the twenty-first century, public and private visions of interracial families shift in turn.

Given Black women's central role as curators of family archives, I categorize this work of collecting, curating, and narrating the public and private visual archive as one of the many "invisible forms of labor – family labor, semiotic labor, individual and community labor" that Black and racially mixed women navigate with a unique affective and historical lens.¹³ My use of affect here is specific to a scholarly lineage within African American Studies and Black Women's Studies, namely that of Hortense Spillers, Darlene Clark Hine, Nicole Fleetwood, Habiba Ibrahim, Tavia Nyong'o, and Jared Sexton. These scholars note how Black racial affect concerning interracial sexuality can bring the "ghostly remainders of history" – of sexual

13 Tina Campt, "Family Matters: Diaspora, Difference, and the Visual Archive," *Social Text* 27, no. 1 (98), 2009: 83.

coercion, racial fetishism, and the dehumanization of flesh – into the present, inviting a process of conjecture “that cuts into the readily present plotting of the historical and sociological.”¹⁴As such, the private archive viewed through a Black feminist lens gives shape to and extends our understanding of interracial intimacy – what Jessica Marie Johnson defines as “corporeal, carnal, quotidian encounters of flesh and fluid” – beyond narratives of progress, futurity, or uplift. Rather than position this second archive of images as offering a more authentic vision of mixed-race families in comparison to iconic images, these treasured visions instead push viewers to consider how interracial kinship impacts everyday expressions of gender identities, sexual identities, and class consciousness and position.¹⁵

Scenes from the Cutting Room Floor traces the shifting reception of Black women’s curatorial visions of interracial kinship over the past century, marking how Black women’s uses and narration of the public and private family archive situates interracial kinship within (rather than apart from) Black gender, sexual, and class politics and aesthetics. I argue that Black women have used private family archives throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries to shape, reshape, and disrupt the visual icon of the mixed-race family over time, instead creating icons of Black racial affirmation for multiracial families. While sometimes operating in concert with the dominant, public visual iconography of mixed families, Black women’s curatorial approaches toward images of interracial kinship overwhelmingly reveal the emotional and psychological effects of these iconic representations on Black women, mothers, and racially mixed Black women and daughters. Receptions of this work shift over time. While in the early and mid-twentieth century Black women’s visions and narrations of interracial kinship were

14 Ibrahim, 29.

15 Jessica Marie Johnson, *Wicked Flesh: Black Women, Intimacy, and Freedom in the Atlantic World* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020), 13.

treated as the unresolved political surplus or emotional excess of racial integration and uplift projects, by the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries Black and mixed-race women's private visions, aesthetics, affects, and perspectives became integral to signaling the political potential of mixed-race families and identities for Black politics. Though this shift over time is suggestive of the public's increased ability to hold space for the gendered and sexual histories of Black and mixed-race women and mothers due to the intellectual and activist labor of Black and women of color feminists, their greater visibility within mixed-race families in the twenty-first century still exists more in the realm of aesthetics and representational iconicity than in policy commitments impacting Black women or in changes to Black Americans' experiences with inequality. Whereas the surplus politics of Black womanhood once made Black women's intimate and domestic lives invisible to the public, in contrast, the very publicness of Black and mixed-race women's lives in the late twentieth- and twenty-first-centuries brought about a politics of mixed-race kinship overdetermined by its radical potential.

Attending to this category of curatorial labor as it functions within domestic spaces and contexts, I hope to rethink the political discourse regarding racial intimacy within interracial families in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, reconstituting this affective work back within histories of Black communal care, kinship, and survival rather than histories of uplift, progress, assimilation, and postracial futurities. The marking of Black women's visual curatorial work as a kind of racialized and gendered labor through this dissertation then works to honor the affective contributions that Black women have made toward forming and sustaining visual archives grounded in a politics of racial intimacy and affirmation. Indeed, if there is to be potential in politicizing the mixed-race family as a site that challenges our understandings of racial intimacy, it must involve uplifting voices and representations of families that "consider multiracialism as

inextricably linked to the pitfalls of mandatory domesticity, the racism of patriarchy, and antiqueer politics as determinants of the ‘proper’ family.”¹⁶

Taking my cue from the structure of Marianne Hirsch’s *Family Frames*, I think of this dissertation as an album in itself, one that is organized chronologically and by family. As in an album, each chapter offers a different take into how one or a number of iconic racially mixed families use images to negotiate notions of social and racial identity in public and in private, and how these negotiations impacted their politics in turn. Representations of iconic families offer a site of negotiation in Black political and aesthetic culture that is especially attuned to structures of feeling, with both kinship and racialization “speaking to the affective elements inherent in relations: who belongs with whom and how and with what responsibilities.”¹⁷ We might think of these chapter albums as “Inside Out Histories,” using family stories and cultural micro-histories that are easily recognizable (or, in some cases, iconic) for contemporary viewers as “an entry point for more challenging big histories stretching far beyond the here and now.”¹⁸ Spanning from roughly 1919-2020, I situate these families within the very particular cultural, historical, and intellectual contexts in which they lived. Notably, during the four periods of time captured here, the boundaries of what constituted a recognizable and acceptable Black racial and cultural identity were in a state of flux due to changes in law, media technologies, and social movements. The first period, situated in the 1920s, highlights the relationship between racially mixed black families and the figure of the New Negro, as well as the ideas and texts of the Black cultural renaissance taking place in Harlem, Chicago, Atlanta, and other major Black urban hubs. The second period considers the civil rights era, particularly how interracial family images were

¹⁶ Ibrahim, *Troubling the Family*, 89.

¹⁷ Fielder, *Relative Races*, 12.

¹⁸ Marjory Gomez O’Toole, “Hyperlocal History – Beyond the Here and Now,” *Humanities for All blog*, 23 March 2021.

mapped onto the goals and visions of integration and marks the *Loving v. Virginia* decision as a key site of contestation over images of the “new” (Black, American, liberal) family. The third period navigates the post-*Loving* moment of the 1980s and 1990s where Black creatives living in the cultural enclaves of New York City’s Fort Greene neighborhood used aesthetics and cultural critique to debate how new conceptions of multiracialism and multiculturalism blurred the boundaries of Black racial identity and community. The deterioration of post-racial politics at the end of Barack Obama’s presidency and the attending social reckoning presented by the Black Lives Matter movement marks the final period. While Black mothers figure prominently throughout this dissertation, not every family included is a Black mother-white father unit. Similarly, while not every chapter includes a counter-textual photographic family archive, I work to highlight how privately held identities and experiences shape visual representation in the public sphere.

The “Enabling Unthought Condition:” Mixed-race Studies, African American Studies, and the Racially Mixed Family

During a roundtable event in 2015 when Jared Sexton was asked why he wrote so critically about understandings of blackness within the field of mixed-race studies, Sexton responded by saying that anti-blackness in mixed-race studies, mixed-race politics, and popular culture operated as an “enabling unthought condition.”¹⁹ Taking a long view of the evolution of Black identities in the twentieth century, Sexton argued that “the relative fluidity and rigidity of racial classification in the United States tend to operate in an inverse proportion to the level of political repression of black movements” – the more fluid racial classification is, the more Black

¹⁹ “What’s Radical About Mixed-race?” conversation between Jared Sexton and Minelle Mahtani at the Asian/Pacific/American Institute at NYU. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jSMQpRzcGpA> (2015)

political concerns and desires are intolerable.²⁰ Sexton claimed that a presentist treatment of history within mixed-race studies fueled a pathologizing of blackness regardless of whether the field's claims considered Black identities, particularly as rigid understandings of Black identities offer a foil to the "post-racial" perceptions of mixed-race identities. In contrast, in her 1996 edited collection *The Multiracial Experience: Racial Borders as the New Frontier*, Maria P.P. Root argues that instead of "marking one or more" or checking a multiracial box from amongst a list of races, and "assuming that it might still be too radical to totally eliminate the question, what if it were reduced to determining whether or not the individual identifies as multiracial or monoracial? Could we not move on to the ethnicity and ancestry questions?"²¹ Instead of dealing with the real-time political implications of racial categorization at the time, Root's now-famous introduction in its advocacy for better personal identifiers marks the turn within mixed-race studies towards ethnicity and family ancestry as a corrective to the social construction of race. She argues further that "the dialogue that multiracial people and their families have opened...may be part of a moving to a deeper level of change to make the borders between races more permeable and eventually less discernible."²² Root's hope is for race to eventually disperse into an indefinable brown through the multiracial body, making intermarriage and the family the site of America's liberation from the problem of race. Taken together, Sexton and Root represent the poles of the debate between the fields of African American Studies and Mixed-Race Studies as well as between notions of private and public conceptions of racial identity.

20 "What's Radical About 'Mixed Race'?" Minelle Mahtani, Ann Morning, & Jared Sexton," panel conversation hosted at the Asian/Pacific/American Institute at New York University, April 20, 2015, *Youtube*, May 18, 2015 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jSMQpRzcGpA.>; In the case of the 1990's multiracial movement in which advocates for multiracial categorization successfully acquired the ability to "mark one or more" on the 2000 United States Census, the war on drugs and the privatization of the prison industrial complex under the Clinton administration disproportionately targeted the black community, and lead to the current overpopulation of America's prisons today.

21 Maria P.P. Root, *The Multiracial Experience: Racial Borders as the New Frontier* (New York: Sage, 1996), xxv
22 *Ibid*, xxvii

This dissertation contends that the existing ambivalent (if not openly spiteful) relationship between Mixed-Race Studies and African American Studies stems not solely from the concerns and critiques of the 1990s Multiracial Movement and its treatment of the heterosexual family but from a long and fraught intra- and interracial battle over the political utility of what Ralina Joseph calls “the problem-special dichotomy” of mixed race blackness. While some representations of multiracial identity present mixed race individuals as mired in private pain and confusion, other representations “equate multiracialism with progress,” with multiracial individuals acting as embodied bridges and utopian harbingers of public racial reconciliation. As Ralina Joseph writes, “on the one hand, multiracial blackness is disdained for its imagined primordially raced nature, with its tragic-mulatta lineage. On the other hand, multiracial blackness is *desired* for its imagined transcendent quality, where it is ahistorically divorced from racism and sexism in the United States with its troubling history of chattel slavery, Jim Crow racism, and entrenched misogyny.”²³ Through my historicization and methodological approach to my source materials, I locate this problem-special dichotomy as a battle over images. Specifically, I map this dichotomy onto the circulation of family images in public and private, noting how stereotypes of racial mixedness as “tragic” or “exceptional” impact how families view the social value of their family image.

Several scholars working on mixed-race identity who do not claim a disciplinary allegiance to mixed-race studies and rather claim a home in African American Studies have situated representations of mixed-race individuals and families within Black social and cultural movements. In doing so, these scholars have explored variations on the public-private binary and its effect on representations of Black kinships, such as enslavement versus freedom, the personal

²³ Ralina Joseph, *Transcending Blackness: From the New Millennium Mulatta to the Exceptional Multiracial* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 2, 4.

versus the political, family versus nation, and the individual versus the collective. In

Transcending Blackness, Ralina Joseph notes that “the genealogy of the exceptional multiracial begins with white racist ‘defense’ of black bodies through abolitionism.”

For example, beginning in 1848, the white preacher from New York City and brother of Harriet Beecher Stowe, Henry Ward Beecher, held so-called antislavery auctions where he would parade young, near-white-looking female slaves around his congregation in order to raise the money required to buy their freedom. Throughout the years of these auctions, “the girls (all of them Christian and attractive) grew whiter and whiter, until in 1856 Beecher found and ‘auctioned’ one slave who was completely indistinguishable from one of his parishioner’s fairest daughters.”²⁴

Joseph notes how the racially mixed and passing female body became a site where a varied public could grapple with critiques of Black essentialism and, by extension, institutionalized structures founded upon nonsensical racial hierarchies and oppression. It is important to acknowledge in this example the intertwined role of the visual and kinship, as Henry Ward Beecher played with the parishioners’ understanding of interracial intimacy by drawing out the seeming similarities between enslaved Black girls and their free white daughters. Throughout the abolitionist era, these visual appeals took on many forms, including illustrations in Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and carte de visite photographs of racially ambiguous and near-white enslaved children that circulating throughout the North as evidence of slavery’s inherent atrocities. The implications of these visual appeals simultaneously created a widespread iconography that promoted the moral deservingness of racially mixed people that was tied to the body as well as a logic that supported this iconography rooted in appeals to kinship and affect. We might ask here what images and narratives of enslavement this iconography suppressed, and how, in turn, this suppression later implicitly shaped the curatorial decisions of Black women

²⁴ Joseph, *Transcending Blackness*, 21. Quoted from Steven Talty, *Mulatto American at the Crossroads of Black and White Culture: A Social History* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2003), 3-6.

and mothers throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. While a fully historicized consideration of this question is outside the timeline of this dissertation, in chapters one and two in particular I explore the effect that Black women's feelings of invisibility and shame have had on interracial family images.

In *Troubling the Family*, Habiba Ibrahim articulates the public-private dichotomy in post-*Loving* multiracial politics as a conflation of family and nation. Evoking Lauren Berlant's discussion of citizenship and the family in the Regan era of the 1980s, Ibrahim notes how the rhetorical and activist agendas of multiracial family organizations relied upon a conceptualization of the nation as an "intimate public sphere."²⁵ This "nationalist politics of intimacy" is "invested heavily in the family," specifically the protection of the multiracial child from racial alienation.²⁶

Alienation becomes the conduit through which challenges to racism and social injustice go from being public activism to private concerns about self-esteem and care for intimate relationships. Further, a focus on the children acts as a deferral mechanism: it keeps at bay adults grappling with the complications of political subjectivity. It staves off the open acknowledgment of how very limiting a project that prioritizes unification at the expense of political thought, action, and negotiation can be. A focus on the children seems to conclude with a national retreat from the fortification of the public as a sphere for political activity. The literal child becomes the iconic child, and the icon stands in for an open acknowledgment that politics leads to the falling apart and the dispersion of collectives. In this way, the only public life that can sustain itself is one that fortifies the meaningfulness of private lives.

²⁵ Lauren Berlant writes that "the intimate public sphere of the U.S. present tense renders citizenship as a condition of social membership produced by personal acts and values, especially acts originating in or directed toward the family sphere. No longer valuing personhood as something directed toward public life, contemporary nationalist ideology recognizes a public good only in a particularly constricted nation of simultaneously lived private worlds." Lauren Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1997), 5-7. Quoted in Ibrahim, *Troubling the Family*, 39.

²⁶ Ibrahim, *Troubling The Family*, 39.

In short, Ibrahim emphasizes through the multiracial family how the analytic “the personal is political,” in turn rendered “the political as private” by attempting to protect considerations of childhood multiracial identity-development from the structural and endemic actions of adults in the civic sphere.²⁷ In the cultural sphere, this dynamic played out through the proliferation of anthologies on the multiracial experience, parental memoirs, and mixed race coming of age memoirs, a genre Michele Elam terms “mixed-race Bildungsroman” narratives. In these texts, the family provides the primary site of contestation and identity development, even as many of these memoirs acknowledge that “fortifying the public space is somehow the key to futurity.”²⁸ Tying this dynamic to the relationship between multiracial and Black politics, Ibrahim underscores how the preoccupation with the “intimate public” of the multiracial family in the 1990s benefitted from the trope of the hyper-public, pathologically dysfunctional Black family dependent on the welfare state. In this stereotypical view of Black, urban, single-mother families “the State is obligated to take on a blurrily public/private role of patriarchal substitute,” wherein contrast multiracial families – headed by a supported and legitimating white maternal figure – offered the procreative promise of a post-racial nation free from the structural barriers associated with blackness. Ibrahim ultimately concludes that even though the 1990s Multiracial Movement was “rife with opportunities to become self-reflective” about discourses of the family and investments in “racializing and gendering heteronormative desire,” multiracial activists ultimately did not attend to the Black movement legacies upon which their claims to personhood and civil rights rested.

Given this political and scholarly history rife with missed opportunities, this dissertation hopes to respond to Ibrahim’s call to interrogate political multiracialism’s investments in

²⁷ Ibid, 19.

²⁸ Ibid, 114. For “mixed-race bildungsroman” see Michele Elam, *Souls of Mixed Folk*, 126.

“racializing and gendering heteronormative desire” by sitting with the specific representation of Black-white families within Black cultural histories and particularly Black womens’ histories. Indeed, in *Souls of Mixed Folk*, Michele Elam marks a desire within mixed-race studies to move away from studying Black-white racial mixture, with scholars suggesting that the history of this particular configuration is well-trod territory and should therefore be set aside to focus on other interracial contexts. Elam writes that, “the fact that looking at race through the lens of black and white is now considered so very twentieth-century, so been-there-done-that, so *tired*, is precisely part of the challenge of the post-civil rights politics that defines what is or is not passé, that licenses what can or cannot be said and heard.”²⁹ To be sure, mixed race studies texts that work outside the Black-white paradigm can help us think comparatively and expansively about racialization, with scholars acknowledging how race, ethnicity, and nationality produce compounding and contradictory identity categories over time.³⁰ As a progressive impulse that attempts to see multiracialism as an inevitable and welcomed good of a post-civil rights era, however, doing away with considerations of Black-white racial mixture suggests that the structural inequities that still shape Black peoples’ lived experiences with racialization exist on a separate racial timeline. We can see this in the case of the post-racial discourse surrounding the presidency of President Barack Obama even as the Black Lives Matter movement that swelled

29 Michele Elam, *Souls of Mixed Folk*, xix.

³⁰ See Rebecca C King-O’Riain, Stephen Ed Small, Minelle Ed Mahtani, Miri Ed Song, and Paul Ed Spickard. *Global mixed race*. (New York: New York University Press, 2014).; Joanne L Rondilla,., Rudy P. Guevarra, and Paul Spickard, eds. *Red and yellow, black and brown: Decentering whiteness in mixed race studies*. (Newark: Rutgers University Press, 2017).; Rudy P Guevarra, *Becoming Mexipino*. (Newark: Rutgers University Press, 2012).; Myra S Washington,., *Blasian invasion: Racial mixing in the celebrity industrial complex*. Univ. Press of Mississippi, 2017.; Kent A. Ono, *War baby/love child: Mixed race Asian American art*. (University of Washington Press, 2013).

during his presidency called attention to police brutality against Black and brown communities. Instead, Elam uses her work to move “back from the ‘beyond black and white’ paradigm” by placing mixed-race Black-white cultural texts and aesthetics squarely within the histories and traditions of African American cultural history, a methodological move which I also make within this dissertation. In the following section, I detail how discussions of Black womanhood in scholarly literature, fiction, and images in the twentieth century inform my reading of the political potential of mixed-race families. Specifically, I note how contributions to the fields of African American women’s history and Black feminist thought offer this dissertation space to understand how Black and racially mixed women negotiate notions of interracial kinship and mixed-race identity through a specific relationship with visual cultural politics.

A Black Women’s visual cultural history of interracial kinship: Theories and Epistemologies

My hope through this dissertation is to join scholars such as Michele Elam, Habiba Ibrahim, and Ralina Joseph who explore mixed-race identity and interracial kinship by placing their works in conversation with African American women’s cultural history and Black feminist thought. I aim to contribute a visual cultural perspective to this conversation, and bring new primary sources to an existing and robust discourse about blackness, womanhood, and racial mixture. For these scholars, the blooming of African American women’s histories and Black feminist literature during the social movements of the 1970s and 1980s helped expand understandings of the political potential of kinship and racialization. In *Troubling the Family*, Ibrahim argues that a timeline of multiracial kinship that “incorporates the unfinished historical narratives of second-wave feminism and black nationalism” could offer a “more richly interracial, anti-elitist, and gender- and sexuality-conscious social sphere.” Ibrahim suggests that

acknowledging how gender normativity becomes an operationalizing grammar of multiracialism during the multiracial movement of the 1990s, makes it “possible to focus on a range of stakeholders whose interests often ran against the grain.” One of these stakeholder groups includes Black mothers.

The concept of black maternity in multiracialism indicates a curious absence. The lost legacy is not only black women as objects of gendered analysis, but also, and more precisely, as the agents of analytics of how race and gender are intersectional, and how this condition has material effects. Without capturing what has been lost, the multiracial movement itself remains incomprehensible.³¹

What would it look like to attune ourselves to this “lost legacy” within the twentieth century using the texts and frames of Black women? What would a Black feminist historiography of mixed-race representation look like? One place to turn to is scholarly theorizations of Black womanhood and Black motherhood from slavery to the present. Theorists working in the discipline of African American studies have provided useful and expansive language to understand the impacts of coercive interracial sex and enslaved Black motherhood on ideologies of gender and embodiment, working to articulate how slavery’s control over Black women’s bodies and reproductive lives has been taken up in the public sphere in the form of literature, images, and aesthetics in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In Hortense Spillers oft-cited essay, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” Spillers details how one of the foundational ways that slavery places Black women outside of white patriarchal gender norms is by creating a separation between body and flesh, “using these terms as metaphors for captive and liberated subject positions, respectively.” If the body refers to the captive state of bondage, then the

³¹ Ibrahim, *Troubling the Family*, 6.

language of “flesh and blood” allows us “to see the codes of visibility operating on the (hyper) visible body that is its object.”³²

It makes good theory, or commemorative "herstory" to want to "forget," or to have failed to realize, that the African female subject, under these historic conditions, is not only the target of rape- in one sense, an interiorized violation of body and mind - but also the topic of specifically externalized acts of torture and prostration that we imagine as the peculiar province of male brutality and torture inflicted by other males. A female body strung from a tree limb, or bleeding from the breast on any given day of field work because the "overseer," standing the length of a whip, has popped her flesh open, adds a lexical and living dimension to the narratives of women in culture and society [Davis 9]. This materialized scene of unprotected female flesh - of female flesh "ungendered"-offers a praxis and a theory, a text for living and for dying, and a method for reading both through their diverse mediations.³³

Spillers suggests here that Black women’s “excess” flesh as a “primary narrative” marks a state of racialized and gendered being “that does not escape concealment under the brush of discourse, or the reflexes of iconography.”³⁴ Put in other words, being uniquely mindful of Black women’s fleshy bodies brings us closer to understanding the specific and diverse brutality of slavery and its consequences on Black women’s liberatory actions, memory practices, and sexuality “in the wake” of slavery. As this relates to interracial sexualities in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, an attunement to the embattled history and perceptions of Black women’s bodies explains why post-*Loving* multiracial politics worked so hard to create distance between multiracial futurity and black motherhood. Indeed, Jared Sexton notes how the political multiracialism of the 1990s used the racially harmonious ideals of love,

32 Nicole Fleetwood, *Troubling Vision: Performance, Visuality, and Blackness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 112-123.

33 Hortense Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” *Diacritics*, Summer 1987, Vol. 17:2, 67-68.

34 *Ibid*, 65.

romance, family, and trust to elevate interracial relationship and interracial sexual acts “up and away from the low areas of the body, the putative site of racism’s pernicious effects.”³⁵

Other theorists have taken up Spillers’ body/flesh distinction to think through how Black women (their bodies, their labor, their internal lives) are both hyper visible and invisible in the cultural and public sphere. In *Troubling Vision*, Nicole Fleetwood applies this conceptualization of flesh to theories of blackness and visibility, noting how Black women have used visual representations of “excess flesh” to present an “oppositional gaze” that turns the “scopic desire to discipline the black female body” into a gaze that “troubles the field of vision.” Pointing to the embodied performances of cultural figures such as Janet Jackson and Lil’ Kim and photographic artworks by Renee Cox, Fleetwood notes how Black women’s intentional performances of “excess flesh” work “to signal historical attempts to regulate black female bodies, to acknowledge black women’s resistance of the persistence of visibility, and to challenge debates among black activists and critics about what constitutes a positive or productive representation of blackness.”³⁶ Alternately, in “Black (W)holes and the Geometry of Black Female Sexuality,” Evelyn Hammonds describes this “excess” flesh as a kind of “black hole,” noting how “Black women’s sexuality is often described in metaphors of speechlessness, space, or vision, as a ‘void’ or empty space that is simultaneously ever visible (exposed) and invisible and where black women’s bodies are always already colonized.” Hammonds marks how Black women have responded to the hegemonic discourses on race and sex “with silence, secrecy, and a partially self-chosen invisibility.”³⁷ Expanding on the nature of this “self-chosen invisibility,” Evelyn

35 Jared Sexton, *Amalgamation schemes: Antiblackness and the critique of multiracialism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 261.

36 Nicole R. Fleetwood, *Troubling Vision: Performance, Visibility, and Blackness*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 112.

37 Evelyn Hammonds, “Black (W)holes and the Geometry of Black Female Sexuality,” *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 6, nos. 2–3 (1995): 132.

Brooks Higginbotham charts how Black women reformers in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, seeking to protect themselves from emotional distress and social reprove, used silence as a political strategy to resist hypersexualized constructions of their sexualities and bodies. This protection took the form of concealment, covert acts, the creation of alternative art forms, and a desire for what Darlene Clark Hine terms a politics and culture of “Dissemblance.” Hine defines dissemblance as “the behavior and attitudes of Black women that created the appearance of openness and disclosure but actually shielded the truth of their inner lives and selves from their oppressors.”³⁸ Hine speaks directly to a legacy of rape and sexual coercion, and how Black women in part moved towards the Northeast and Midwest during the Great Migration to escape the explicit racial violence of the region as well as to seek professional opportunities.

Hine’s theorization of Black women’s everyday responses to histories of sexual violence proves tactile for my understanding of blackness, womanhood, and motherhood in the context of interracial kinship in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. A culture of dissemblance offers language for understanding why even private family archives will sometimes only offer a partial glimpse into Black women’s internal lives and experiences with the home space. As archival historians argue, the absence of evidence itself provides clues about the types of choices that color the daily lives of archival subjects. These silences, countless and unknowable to the archival viewer, can reflect the variously marginalized positions of archival subjects, with women, Black women, and queer peoples’ lower positions within the archive reproducing the restrictions of the laws and cultural norms that subsume their presence in the social order. When dealing with photographic archives these invisibilities are arguably even more difficult to understand, as the photographer’s eye and the curator’s omitting discretion further shape how

³⁸ Darlene Clark Hine, “Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women and the Middle West: Preliminary Thoughts on the Culture of Dissemblance,” *Signs* 14, no.4 (July 1, 1989): 912-920.

scenes are documented, and events are remembered. Quoting Deborah Gray White, Hine suggests that we might point to a culture of dissemblance to explain why Black women have been reluctant to donate their papers to manuscript repositories, a decision which she attributes to a “perennial concern with image, a justifiable concern born of centuries of vilification.”³⁹ This concern is particularly present in chapter one, where Black middle- and upper-class women and mothers in the late 1920s in their correspondences with their friend and racially mixed Black researcher, Caroline Bond Day, frequently expressed their concerns about how their families were to be visually represented in a study to a majority white male anthropology readership. Indeed, Hine’s theory of dissemblance offers me a way of understanding Black women’s and mothers’ relationships to family photographs, as decisions on what images of the family are fit for public consumption double as acts of protection over self and kin. Later I discuss the relationship between Black women and their photographic archives in-depth, pointing to the visual publics of the drawing-room and the photo album as sites that offered various degrees of autonomy over intimate images.

Another venue of contestation over the “lost legacy” of Black womanhood in interracial kinship is in literature; texts written by Black and racially mixed Black women authors such as Nella Larsen’s *Quicksand* (1928), Octavia Butler’s *Xenogenesis* series (1987-89), and Danzy Senna’s *Caucasia* (1998) do some of this recuperative work by illustrating the positive relationship between Black mothers and their mixed-race children. Through this literature, Black women’s perspectives underscore how the history of Black women and mothers is too often “reduced to the images of the long-suffering mother,” instead offering insights into the every day and ideological ways that Black women cultivate strong (sometimes biological, sometimes non-

³⁹ Deborah Gray White, "Mining the Forgotten: Manuscript Sources for Black Women's History," *Journal of American History* 74 (June 1987): 237-42.

biological) kinship and care networks. Arguing that these literary texts “undermine socially prescribed definitions of Black authenticity” Gyasi Byng Francisco notes how these texts portray the beneficial effect Black mothers have on their children’s racial identities. “Even when the Black mother is absent,” Francisco writes, “the maternal bond that develops between biracial women and their ‘othermothers’ negates stereotypes like the Mammy, Welfare Queen, and Jezebel.”⁴⁰ Similarly, scholarly works at the intersections of queer theory and Black women’s history have offered examples of literary texts that challenge the inherent antiblackness of hypodescent, instead representing ways that Black families and racially mixed individuals can “queer” heterosexual or biologically deterministic genealogies of racial kinship. In *Relative Races*, Brigitte Fielder proposes a queer genealogy of race through hypodescent, noting how matrilineal racialization “oddly aligns with Black feminism in its resistance to patriarchal and even heterosexual notions of race’s biological transfer.” Rather, Fielder notes how claims to Black maternity in nineteenth-century literary texts became a way that Black and native mothers have been prioritized “over other kin in narratives of mixed-race women and mixed-race children whose racialization both uses and resists tropes of white womanhood in order to resist white supremacy.”⁴¹ This lineage is particularly present in chapter three, where Kellie and Lisa Jones, daughters of Black Arts Movement writer Amiri Baraka and Jewish beat poet Hettie Jones, describe the woman-centered artistic kinship networks that sustained their ties to geographic and racial community.

40 Francisco, Gyasi Byng, “Dismantling the tragic mulatto/a: interrogating racial authenticity, genre, and black motherhood in African American women’s fiction.” PhD diss., University of Rochester, 2019.

41 Fielder, *Relative Races*, 6. Similarly, Alexis Pauline Gumbs articulates a queer positionality for Black motherhood, arguing that “to answer death with utopian futurity, to rival the social reproduction of capital on a global scale with a forward-dreaming diasporic accountability is a queer thing to do...to name oneself ‘mother’ in a moment where representatives of the state conscripted ‘Black’ and ‘mother’ into vile epithets is a queer thing.” Alexis Pauline Gumbs *Revolutionary Mothering: Love on the Frontlines* (PM Press: Canada, 2016), 21.

Joining this scholarly lineage of literature seeking to move beyond the image of the long-suffering or silent Black woman and mother, what I aim to contribute to this conversation is an understanding of how Black women's visions of mixed-race families in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries illuminate new readings of the icon of the mixed-race family as well as new readings of Black womanhood in the context of interracial kinships. Highlighting how Black women have variably negotiated their social and political position over time and with varying degrees of success, I focus on how the public and private curation of visual family texts becomes an emotionally significant form of labor through which contemporary viewers can see this negotiation (of racialization, of gender performance, of sexual identity, of class consciousness) taking place. Using the language of Hortense Spillers and Nicole Fleetwood, I contend that the emotional "excess" of slavery's many maternal traumas extends into perceptions of Black mothers' politics and representation in the contemporary moment and is reproduced in public images and image-texts of interracial families in the twentieth and twenty-first^t century as a kind of "troubling" of interracial or post-racial futurity. I attend to these many theorizations of Black women's cultural representation – as an ever-expanding "void" of silence and invisibility on one hand and as a productively troubling force on the other. I chart how in the context of the twentieth century and twenty-first century mixed-race families, Black mothers' and Black women's visual presence (and their opinions and feelings about their representation) are treated as the "excess" of narratives of multiracial futurity and racial progress due to the sexual violence and social radicalism that their lived experiences with race, gender, and sexuality call forth. While in the early and mid-twentieth century this representational excess is more clearly a result of a long history of denial of the emotional violence and loss of reproductive autonomy stemming from sexual claims on Black women's flesh, by the late twentieth and early twenty-

first century this remainder manifests more so as a perpetual failure of the tools of visual representation to make good on the multiracial utopia these families gesture toward. Following Fleetwood's uses of visual culture, I work to show how this troubling is "not *necessarily* a liberatory enactment."⁴² While in some cases this troubling acts as an active resistance to biological deterministic genealogies and pathological scripts of Black motherhood (as in the case of the participating families in Caroline Bond Day's *A Study* and in the expanding notions of family that Kellie and Lisa Jones offer), at other times Black womens' troubling effect on the visual archives of mixed-race families is simply a consequence of the assumed politics that their blackness and womanness gestures towards (as in the case of Mildred Loving and Chirlane McCray during Bill de Blasio's mayoral campaign). What's more, in the private lives and family archives of notable mixed-race families, Black mothers and racially mixed women offer interpretative models that "trouble" the heterosexual and biologically deterministic discourse that dominated late twentieth century discussions of racial mixture and narratives of Black racial progress. In this next section, I turn to a review of the literature in the field of visual culture, offering up examples of how visual culture scholars have attuned themselves to the overlapping histories of photography and racialization. While reviewing visual cultural scholarship, I specifically focus on the boundary between the public and private archives and its impact on representations of race.

Race, Visual Culture, and The Metaphotographical Text

Codified and entrenched within image-making practices, racial classification has been a primary way that photographers, photographic subjects, and consumers have attempted to assert control over how to look. Photographs can operate both as sites of racial recognition – offering a

⁴² Fleetwood, *Troubling Vision*, 112.

window of control over representations of authenticity, identity, and cultural value – and as sites of racial domination and bodily surveillance. Critical visual cultural studies offers fertile theoretical ground to understand how images act as both *indexes* (of historical events, moments, and people) and as *symbols* (of multiple ways of seeing, ways of remembering, and intentions).⁴³ Images appear as meaning-making tools in a range of sites – Scholars such as Roland Barthes, John Berger, Allan Sekula, Ariella Anzoulay, Laura Wexler, Shawn Michelle Smith, Nicole Fleetwood, bell hooks, and Marianne Hirsch chart a path through understanding approaches to the photograph and the photographic archive as a documentary text, icon, keepsake, counter text, collectible, and analogy of racial meaning. These thinkers are invested in asking a “common set of questions” about looking that expand beyond the context of the photograph and work toward “how *viewing* creates *viewers*, how acts of looking are encouraged and circumscribed culturally, and how access to the gaze shapes subjectivity.”⁴⁴ For this dissertation’s purposes, the line between the institutional and personal photographic archive presents a particularly useful site to explore how image-makers, viewers of images, and photographic subjects inscribe different (sometimes conflicting) meaning to the power of the gaze to inscribe racial identity. Alongside these scholars, what I aim to contribute to that conversation is a visual reading practice that maps the ever-evolving lines between institutional and personal image archives onto shifts in mixed-racial identity formation and kinship throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. While many scholarly texts have asked *why* representations of multiracialism are politically persuasive,

43 This was an articulation that came out of Sara Blair’s “The Image and The Novel” class in the Winter of 2016.

44 Shawn Michelle Smith, *Photography on the Color Line: W.E.B. Du Bois, Race, and Visual Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 22. In pointing to a “common set of questions,” Smith points to the scholarship of Irit Rogoff and Nicholas Mirzoeff. Nicholas Mirzoeff, *An Introduction to Visual Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 3-4; Rogoff, “Studying Visual Culture,” in *An Introduction to Visual Culture*, 20.

this reading practice is in service of understanding *how* image-making and curation become central sites for articulating multiracial identity and kinship as a political position.

For Black people in the struggle for freedom (over their bodily autonomy, over their self-image) in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, photography offered the possibility to “look back” against denigrating visions of blackness in the public sphere.⁴⁵ While the creation of a “counterhegemonic world of images” that could stand in opposition to these widely circulating degrading depictions “on salt shakers, cookie jars, pancake boxes” was a key effort of Black visual culture before racial integration, photographs also offered an opportunity for Black people, specifically the Black middle and upper classes with access to this medium, to assert a historical and memorial positionality for a Black public sphere.⁴⁶ Photographic portraits and documentary snapshots alike helped make the case for the abolition of slavery, served as centerpieces of anti-lynching campaigns, and offered a glimpse into the world-making of Black families, church congregations, social clubs, and fraternal organizations. Leigh Raiford describes these collective efforts as a kind of memory work in response to the “dislocation, subjection, and dehumanization that has marked [Black peoples’] experience of modernity,” what she calls a “critical black memory practice.” With photography “standing at the crossroads of history and memory,” Raiford points to moments throughout American history in which Black people have used images to mobilize “social and political identities and movements.”⁴⁷ Recognizing “the salience

45 Jovonna Jones, “Troubling Dignity, Seeking Truth: Black Feminist Vision and the Thought-World of Black Photography in the Nineteenth Century,” *Souls*, 22:1 (2020), 32-43.; *Specters of Democracy* Ivy G. Wilson, *Specters of Democracy: Blackness and the Aesthetics of Politics in the Antebellum U.S.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).; Jasmine Nichole Cobb, *Picture Freedom: Remaking black /visuality in The Early Nineteenth Century* (New York: NYU Press, 2015)..; Maurice O. Wallace and Shawn Michelle Smith, eds. *Pictures and progress: Early photography and the making of African American identity* (Duke University Press, 2012). Smith, *Photography on the Color Line.*; Anita Hill, *Visualizing Blackness and the Creation of the African American Literary Tradition* (Cambridge University Press, 2014).

46 bell hooks “In Our Glory: Photography and Black Life,” from *Art On My Mind* 57. 59.

47 Leigh Raiford, “Photography and the Practices of Critical Black Memory,” *History and Theory* 43 no. 4: (Dec., 2009), 113, 119.

of memory to African American life, history, and culture” critical black memory acknowledges how memory as a mode of critique both functions to bring history to bear on the present and as a way to survive persistent inequities. Black memory “has attempted to suture continuity in the face of rupture and fragmentation. It has proffered futurity woven out of ‘the ineffable terror’ of the past...black memory implies a certain act of redemption.”⁴⁸

In this dissertation, the personal archive emerges as one of these redeeming sites through which Black photographic subjects and curators of images can grapple with and assert agency over public history, family memory, and Black visual culture. *How do private images circulate amongst kin? Who does the taking and arranging of images in family albums and frames and why? What family narratives are ceremoniously mythologized, what narratives are intentionally forgotten?* In her oft-cited essay “In our Glory,” bell hooks offers the mid-twentieth-century Black family “snapshot” as an everyday site of critical and immediate intervention through images. Hidden from public view though thoroughly on display, these more informal images were curated “according to individual desire” and presented in picture frames on living room mantles, on the “gallery space” walls of Black homes, and in family photo albums on the coffee table. These image collections created intimate sites of contestation over Black representation across class boundaries that could “be packed, stored, moved from place to place,” that could be exchanged between friends and kin networks, and “ultimately these images, the world they recorded, could be hidden, to be discovered at another time.” Importantly, hooks notes that while the camera became a powerful political instrument in Black life, the taking of pictures was “tied to patriarchy,” a duty which her father took on as his sole responsibility. In contrast, the narration

48 Ibid, 120.

and meaning-making of these images fell to women.⁴⁹ Describing her mother's mother as "a keeper of walls," hooks recalls receiving lessons about "the importance of the arrangement, why a certain photograph was placed here and not there" and underscores how these considerations were markedly different than those that might go into the creation of a photo album, where images were "shut away" and only available upon request.⁵⁰ In the construction of the family archive, we also see the construction of racial and gendered identities, as the selection and narration of family images also becomes an articulation of womanhood and blackness.

Indeed, women appear as key curators and critics throughout the history of photographic images, in charge of sustaining the emotional resonance and "unconscious optics" of the family image long after its initial capture.⁵¹ In *Tender Violence*, Laura Wexler writes of how in the nineteenth century white middle-class women and white female photographers policed definitions of American domesticity through family photography. These family images exploited a sentimental vision of the family through and against "the mechanics of racialized terror" that operated across depictions of the American colonial empire in the form of chattel slavery, lynching, international imperial conquest, Native reform schooling.⁵² At the same time, free Black women who had access to image-making technologies worked to cultivate family images that stood in contradistinction to depictions of transatlantic slavery and racial domination. We can see this in the cultivation of free Black women's friendship albums in the early nineteenth century, a site of "early feminist construction of Black women's spectatorship and the management of free Black female bodies in the slave era." These albums repurposed the

49 In contrast, Hirsch writes that the works of maternal photographers "tend to be represented in their capacity to wound, scar, or kill their children" *Family Frames*, 154.

50 Bell hooks, "In Our Glory," 60-61.

51 Hirsch, Marianne. *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Post-memory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 154.

52 For "mechanics of racialized terror" see Laura Wexler, *Tender Violence : Domestic Visions in an Age of U.S. Imperialism* (University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 53.

structural forms of white women's print culture and rehearsed the "optics of respectability" that judged Black women's conduct by "how it raised or depressed the social status of all African descendants." The home space was a key site of this work. Displayed in the "semipublics" of Black women's parlors, Black women's critical visual culture created "intimate publics" where Black women "acculturated one another into dominant hegemonic definitions of seeing themselves, and into critical reflectivity...about the norms of visual culture."⁵³

By the twentieth century, the semi-publics of the parlor gave way to the hyper-publics of print media, the gallery space, the television, and the many "meta-photographic texts" that worked to place images in new narrative contexts.⁵⁴ That image-making technologies became a ubiquitous part of American public and domestic life by the late twentieth century does not, however, negate the continued usage of images toward social and racial subjugation. Nicolas Mirzoeff argues that critical visibility studies should oppose "visuality" as a cure-all as it is a "technique of colonial and imperial gaze...by which power visualizes History to itself."⁵⁵ No image or image archive is pure of these motivations; while photographic archives produced by or housed in institutions of power (mugshots, passport photos, scientific studies) often use the photograph as a document to order and surveil different types of bodies, so too have personal family archives rendered unsavory memories or family secrets invisible, creating selective visions of intimacy that absolve kin of ridicule or trauma. Rather, Mirzoeff argues that the "critical" potential of critical visibility studies is to "'look' on that which authority holds to be out of sight, and to be seen to be doing so, from a place that is freely chosen." In taking stock of what is out of sight, images and meta-photographic texts can become counter texts, acting as

53 Jasmine Nichole Cobb, *Picture Freedom: Remaking Black Visuality in the Early Nineteenth Century* (New York: NYU Press, 2015), 22, 70, 73-74.

54For "meta-photographic text" see Marianne Hirsh, *Family Frames*, 8.

55 Nicholas Mirzoeff, *The Visual Culture Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2013), xxx.

both a resource and a model for offering alternatives to the narrative manipulations that come with both institutional and family histories. In my work I hope to extend this notion of Black women's intimate visual publics up and through the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, noting particular moments where ideologies of freedom, domesticity, uplift, privacy, black critical memory, and respectability are expressed through visions of racially mixed families and kinship.



Figure I-5: "Untitled" from the Kitchen Table Series by Carrie Mae Weems (1990)

Late twentieth-century Black women photographers such as Carrie Mae Weems and Latoya Ruby Frazier have used the site of the family to visualize Black women's unique and

universal point of view, informing my readings of both kinship and spaces of domesticity. In Weems' landmark 1990 *Kitchen Table Series*, Weems sets up a series of unfolding fictional scenes at her kitchen table that explore themes of romantic partnership, motherhood, womanhood [Figure X-5]. Most often Weems centers herself in the image as the principal actor or muse, staging and navigating tense moments of domestic interaction: a game of cards between her and a presumed lover, doing her makeup while a presumed daughter watches, getting her hair done by a maternal figure, herself alone in various state of joy and conflict glowing in a film-noir half-light. Weems' domestic portraits are impactful for their ability to pronounce these everyday scenes as moments of negotiation, where layers of gendered, sexual, and racial meaning sit plainly in view for all to unpack. The body of work is often described as a turning point for Black representation in the art world, openly capturing moments of intimacy (or perhaps dissemblance) for Black women on a scale previously unseen. However, through Weems' embodiment of the muse – a woman who stands in for all women – she suggests that the Kitchen Table Series images, and many of her other images throughout her career, offer up universal truths about family and womanhood. “This woman can stand in for me and for you; she can stand in for the audience, she leads you into history. She’s a witness and a guide,” Weems told fellow photographer Dawoud Bey in 2009.⁵⁶ This work upends tropes of Black women in the visual arts; relegated to the background of images as helpers, props, or objects of sexual desire, Black women are given the space to lead, to find pleasure and comfort in themselves. What would it mean if Black women (their visions, their feelings, their memories, their presence) guided our understanding of the politics of racially mixed families in the twentieth century?

⁵⁶ “Carrie Mae Weems by Dawoud Bey,” *Bomb Magazine*, 1 July 2009, <https://bombmagazine.org/articles/carrie-mae-weems/>. Quoted in Jacqui Palumbo, “Revisiting Carrie Mae Weems’s Landmark ‘Kitchen Table Series,’” 19 August 2020, <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-revisiting-carrie-mae-weemss-landmark-kitchen-table-series>.

Bringing Black women's concerns over their public image to bear on the visual culture of mixed-race families allows for new readings of images of Mildred Loving in the Loving family photographs in *Life* and *Ebony* magazines. Alternately, the visual disruption caused by Black women acting as universal muses helps unpack why images of Chirlane McCray proved a major hurdle to Bill de Blasio's goal to unite a racially divided New York City through the universal sign of his family.

Much of the work of this dissertation includes a survey of visual cultural representations of Black-white racial mixture. Scholars note how throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries racially mixed individuals frequently functioned as "interventions," appearing as suggestive figures who attempt to mend or further trouble the color line.⁵⁷ Literary works such as James Weldon Johnson's *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, Pauline Hopkins' *Contending Forces*, Jean Toomer's *Cane*, and Nella Larsen's *Passing and Quicksand* center racially mixed protagonists as morally and socially grey vessels through which they could grapple with other complex social mores such as gender roles, class lines, and rural and urban boundaries. In these novels, encounters between characters act as "specular events," or as negotiations of embodied and visual "received figures."⁵⁸ These cultural texts were in part

57 For works discussing mixed-race identity and racially mixed individuals as interventions see Danzy Senna, "Passing and the Problematic of Multiracial Pride (or, Why One Mixed Girl Still Answers to Black)," in *Black Cultural Traffic: Crossroads in Global Performance and Popular Culture*, ed. Harry Justin Elam, Jr., and Kennell A. Jackson, 85 (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005).; Danzy Senna, "The Mulatto Millennium," in *Half and Half: Writers on Growing Up Biracial and Bicultural*, ed. Claudine Chiawei O'Hearn, 12 – 27 (New York: Pantheon, 1998); Kimberly McClain DaCosta, *Making Multiracials: State, Family, and Market in the Redrawing of the Color Line* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007).; Kim M. Williams, *Mark One or More: Civil Rights in Multiracial America* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006).; Betsy Erkkila, in *Mixed Bloods and Other Crosses: Rethinking American Literature from the Revolution to the Culture Wars* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005).; Anthony Appiah, "Towards a New Cosmopolitanism," *New York Times Magazine*, January 1, 2006, 30 – 37.; Jennifer DeVere Brody, *Impossible purities: Blackness, femininity, and Victorian culture*. (Duke University Press, 1998). For primary source examples see Pauline Hopkins *Contending Forces*, Amma Asante's film *Belle*. James Weldon Johnson *Autobiography of an Ex Colored Man*. Vinn Diesel in *The Fast & The Furious* film series.

58 Lena Hill, *Visualizing Blackness and the Creation of the African American Literary Tradition*, (Cambridge University Press, 2014), 5

products of ongoing debates happening amongst Black intellectuals and creatives within the Harlem Renaissance and New Negro movements of the 1910s and 1920s about racial integration and cultural assimilation, particularly whether the road to Black racial uplift would naturally, imperatively, or unfortunately lead to race-mixing.

As the century progressed and the rigid, de jure segregation of the early and mid-decades gave way to the more entrenched, de facto segregation of its later decades, racial categories (through the law, by the Census, and in culture) became more indistinct. By extension, visual cultural representations of mixed-race figures became more varying in their interventions, their import shifting from a mere icon of social ambiguity to attempting to convey more entrenched notions of racial performance, authenticity, and community. In her debut novel *Caucasia*, Danzy Senna offers the metaphor of the “canary in a coal mine” to refer to the social and symbolic role that mixed-race characters have played throughout twentieth century American culture. As caged canaries were used by miners to warn workers of the accumulation of dangerous gases such as carbon monoxide (the canary’s death providing a warning to exit the tunnels immediately) so too has the “tragic mulatta” provided a visual icon through which American society can work out suggestive and dangerous racial projects such as biological racial categorization, eugenics, and racial passing. Senna casting the racially ambiguous figure as the color line’s canary reflects how the “problem of the twentieth century has been redrawn in the decades after civil rights so that the ways in which political engagement convenes around a color line is no longer determined primarily by any one set of binary principles.” Instead of seeing the hypervisibility of the mulatta as a sign that biracialism as a category can or should be sustained socially, Ibrahim points out the mulatta’s inadequacies to make visible the more entrenched nature of power in a postmodern racial landscape. Moreso suggestive through the “dehistoricized shell of her body,” the racially

ambiguous canary might struggle to, for example, sound the alarm on increased incarceration rates amongst Black and Latino men during the war on drugs, a social and political scourge that existed simultaneously with the battle to gain a “multiracial” category on the census during the 1990s Multiracial Movement. Similarly, representations of racially mixed families in the present moment that attempt to “become the central arena for transforming public matters of inequity” might fall short in capturing the aims of the Black Lives Movement, which point to the entrenchment of racial surveillance and violence in the police state and systems of mass incarceration.⁵⁹ Indeed, it is interesting that we can mark a proliferation of multiracial families in advertisements and other media in this current moment. This representational diversity and inclusion work on the part of major media corporations may attempt to quell criticisms of the endurance of white supremacy in the twenty-first century and serve as a point of positive identity development for racially mixed children, but as a response to the explicit goals of the movement falls short of “looking back” upon systems of power. In uplifting the multiracial canary as a pivotal figure in considerations of the color line, what structures of power become more entrenched? Here, the cutting room floor takes stock of what and who has been made less visible, and what systems of power come into view as images of kin are exchanged between kin, and discussed as objects of importance, intimacy, and memory.

Chapter Outlines

Chapter One titled “‘In Worlds of Their Own:’ Caroline Bond Day and the Word Portraits of the ‘Brown Middle Class,’ 1926-1932” discusses the work of Harvard Anthropology master’s student Caroline Bond Day, who collected genealogical and anthropological data on

⁵⁹ Ibrahim, *Troubling the Family*, 44. See also Habiba Ibrahim, "Canary in a Coal Mine: Performing Biracial Difference in Caucasia," *Literature Interpretation Theory* 18, no. 2 (2007): 155-172.

346 mixed-race Black and white families from 1927-1931. As a young, middle-class, educated, racially mixed Black “Race Woman” herself, Day completed an anthropometric and sociological project she had started during her undergraduate studies at Radcliffe College in which she explored the generational effects of Negro, white, and native racial mixture. Among the fifty families showcased in the published study were some of the most prominent Black leaders and intellectuals of the early twentieth century, including the families of Du Bois, Walter White, and E. Franklin Frazier, a clear testament to Day’s social circles on the outer edges of the Harlem renaissance. In *A Study*’s attempts to define intra-racial boundaries and class distinctions, Day also seeks to use mixed-race kinship as an icon to advocate for the rights of all Black Americans. Performing both the arbitrary and world-defining lines between negro, colored, and mulatto at the time, this chapter explores how Black scholarly and organizing efforts toward full citizenship, gender and social equality, and scientific vindication were tied up in representations and classifications of interracial kinship. Day similarly used family photography toward these ends, as her intention of creating a visual record was in hopes of showcasing the endurance and longevity of kinship relations despite the often traumatic events that lead to racial mixture in the family tree. However, the vast archive of correspondences and unused images housed at Harvard’s Peabody Museum that Day chose (or, in some cases, was asked) *not* to put “on record” in her published study reveal more than just the business of gathering and curating research materials to prove the existence of a community.⁶⁰ Rather, this chapter explores how the Peabody archive, brimming with unpublished photographs, letters, notes to self, half-answered questionnaires, scribbled approximations of blood quantum, newspaper clippings, performance pamphlets, and book club brochures offers a window into a network of mostly Black women and

60 “on record:” CBD to Hilda Evans, Caroline Bond Day Papers, Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnography: Harvard University.

mothers negotiating how and on what terms they wanted to represent their families to a white public. In comparison to Day's *Study*, which at times catered to the white gaze at the expense of family history and cultural nuance, Day's surviving archive, like Du Bois' exhibition, illustrates a community within a community openly grappling with what it meant to represent itself for both private and public audiences.

My second chapter titled ““That Image Business:’ *Loving v Virginia* and The Iconography of Interracialism” delves into the visual representation of the Loving family of the *Loving v Virginia* Supreme Court Case in *Life* and *Ebony* magazines. Thinking across the photo documentary reporting on Black-white families and interracial marriages during the civil rights movement (from roughly 1951 to 1968), I argue that the photographic representation of the Lovings was an *effect* of an already circulating taxonomy of images, what I term the “iconography of interracialism.” Using conversations emergent in gender and sexuality studies, visual cultural studies, and social movement history, I historicize this iconography and the subsequent representation of the Loving family as part of a larger strategy of using heteronormative gender roles to incorporate black people into the fold of moral, progressive society. Moving beyond this regime of images, this chapter also looks to the images that lined the cutting room floor, namely unused photographs from photographer Grey Villet's *Life* photo essay, recently released to the public in 2017 for the 50th anniversary of the *Loving* win. In these images, previously treated as family photographs by the Lovings, Mildred Loving, in particular, appears as a fuller photographic subject, as contemporary viewers are offered a way of understanding Mildred's daily efforts to cultivate a future that could only be imagined. Rather than insist on Mildred's radical politics through these photographs, my ekphrastic readings

merely acknowledge that these actions of refusal, anticipation, quotidian joy, and terror existed, and maintains an ambivalent posture toward her politics.

Chapter Three titled “To ‘claim what was partial and provisional:’ The Jones Sisters and the Family Archive” considers the public texts and images of Lisa and Kellie Jones, the daughters of Black Arts Movement writer and activist Amiri Baraka (formerly LeRoi Jones) and Jewish beat poet Hettie Jones. Kellie and Lisa’s leftist upbringings and later their respective careers in the arts are a case study in how the Black diasporic political projects of the 1960s and 70s based in community-building gave way to new kinds of visual, aesthetic, and kinship concerns in the “post-soul era.” Born in 1959 and 1961 respectively, both sisters are also early members of the *Loving* Generation, born roughly between 1965-1985 and coming of age as part of a generation of mixed-race people who were positioned by the media to embody the hopes of civil rights legislation such as *Loving v Virginia*, The Voting Rights Act, and *Brown v. Board of Education*. This chapter then asks what the Jones sisters’ relationship to their family’s public and private archive of texts and images reveals about how mixed-race families functioned as a socio-political symbol in the late twentieth century. Collectively, the Joneses – as public creatives in their own right and as a family whose intimate ties to each other are as complex as the movements they helped found – are a departure from the iconic mixed-race Black families of the early and mid-twentieth century detailed in chapters one and two and set the stage for many of the conversations of the political significance of mixed-race identity in the Black lives matter moment. Placing images from Baraka and Jones’ photographic archives at Columbia University alongside Lisa Jones’ *Bulletproof Diva* and Kellie Jones’ *Eyeminded*, this chapter asks what can be made of the mixed-race family’s narration and vision of itself when it purposefully goes *public?*

Chapter four titled “Beyond ‘Biracial Cool:’ Bill de Blasio, Chirlane McCray, and the Visual Politics of the Mixed Race Family” considers the visual politics of mixed-race families in the context of the Black Lives Matter movement through the depiction of New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio’s family. During his 2013 mayoral campaign, De Blasio’s access to what Cathy Cohen calls “third wave Black politics” allowed him to use his relationships with his son, Dante, and wife, Chirlane McCray, to secure a majority vote in a divided and diverse electorate. However, in centering his family in campaign advertising as a tool to express his “biracial cool,” the de Blasio campaign did not account for how both the mixed race family and the visual realm are historically fraught terrain in American history. Using Nicole Fleetwood’s notion of black iconicity, this chapter explores how McCray’s presence as a Black queer mother and founding member of the Combahee River Collective presented a political challenge to de Blasio’s ability to control his family’s image and follow through on his message. Because he did not adequately attend to the activist histories or policy needs of the voter blocks his mixed-race family represented, the very same characteristics that made de Blasio a standout candidate were ultimately used to critique him, his campaign, and subsequently his 2020 presidential bid.

A Note on Terminology

While this dissertation acknowledges and interrogates problems of racial identity and kinship, the language available to discuss race is often limiting and problematic in its application and emotional resonance in the present. While I predominantly use the term “Black” to refer to people of African diasporic descent more broadly, I also use the term “African American,” where applicable. Following the explanation of Brigitte Fielder, I often utilize the term “mixed-race Black people” “to describe a specific and particular way of being Black. This registers the fact

that such people more often than not in the nineteenth-century United States (and afterward) have been identified as Black rather than as white and generally did not regard the category “mixed race” as a racial designation of its own.”⁶¹ The terms “racially-mixed black people” and “multiracial blackness” appear throughout in similar ways. The terms “mixed-race,” “multiracial,” and “interracial” to refer to families and relationships are used interchangeably and across time periods, while recognizing that these terms have a specific and recent provenance in late twentieth-century racial discourse. I want to explicitly acknowledge the antiblackness that can accompany such understandings of mixed-race Black people as “mixed-race” rather than Black, particularly as it might imply or assume that inherited Blackness through “hypodescent” or “one drop” social norms should necessarily be understood as oppressive. As Ralina Joseph explains, “the very ability to ‘mix’ races rests upon the premise that race is a stable and singular entity.”⁶² For this reason, I also purposefully avoid using the term “biracial” due to its implication that racial identities can be binary or inheritable in biological or genetic ways. At times I use phrases like “people of color” in my discussions of people of various non-white racial identities, or to describe people of unknown but decidedly non-white racialization. Throughout this dissertation, I do my best to attend to how terminology is itself a space of racialization throughout the periods discussed. I do acknowledge, here, how the uneven usage of these terms may cause some dissonance and recognize that the limitations of language and its change over time is an unavoidable element of discussing race.

⁶¹ Brigitte Fielder, *Relative Races*, 10.

⁶² Ralina Joseph, *Transcending Blackness*, 7.

CHAPTER ONE: “In Worlds of Their Own:” Caroline Bond Day and the Word Portraits of the “Brown Middle Class,” 1926-1932

My great-grandmama told my grandmama the part she lived through that my grandmama didn't live through and my grandmama told my mama what they both lived through and my mama told me what they all lived through and we were supposed to pass it down like that from generation to generation so we'd never forget. -Gayl Jones, Corregidora

What might this phrase, “mirror with a memory,” mean for African Americans and their relationship to the vicissitudes of photography and the vagaries of memory in particular? What indeed is the significance of photography for “a watchful people, a people who could not not know: a people of long memory”? What is the role of this visual medium for a people who have long held up a mirror to the underbelly of U.S. society, reflecting back a fractured nation? - Leigh Raiford



Figure 1-1: Photograph of W.E.B Du Bois' "Exhibit of the American Negroes" booth at the Paris Exposition. Image Source: Library of Congress

At the turn of the twentieth century, W.E.B. Du Bois's "Exhibit of American Negroes" at the 1900 Paris International Exposition interrogated "the problem of the color line" through the essential medium of the new modern era: images. Using photographic portraits and infographics to present "an honest, straight forward exhibit of a small nation of people" Du Bois used the world stage to picture Black life "without apology or gloss."¹ While undertaken with money from the U.S. government's Department of Education and Social Economy, the exhibit was the idea and product of Black leaders and institutions, showcasing a collection of 200 titles by Black writers, 150 periodicals, materials from over a dozen Black colleges, and 363 photographs taken primarily by Thomas E. Askew, Atlanta's first Black photographer. Du Bois placed particular importance on these photographic materials, organizing them into albums entitled "Types of American Negroes, Georgia, U.S.A." and "Negro Life in Georgia, U.S.A" and presented without caption or markers that would indicate social status, blood quantum, or identity. More than a record of Black racial uplift and dignity since emancipation, DuBois's exhibition meticulously deployed vastly different source materials to create "a visual record of Black living that could reference itself."² That this record could "reference itself" was of utmost importance; in a visual field saturated with degrading and stereotypical depictions of Black people, Du Bois composed

1 W.E. Burghardt Du Bois, "The American Negro at Paris." *The American Monthly Review of Reviews*, vol. XXII, no.5 (November 1900.): 575-577, online source p 12.; A note on terminology: throughout this chapter I use the terms "Negro" and "Colored" only as they were used in the source material, as it was used in common terminology (i.e. "New Negro," or *Who's Who in Colored America*), or as it would be used as a distinct identity category apart from "Black" or "mulatto" in official records such as the census. I do so with the intention of not invoking the pejorative usage and history of these terms, while also acknowledging their common circulation as terms among Black and white communities alike. Where applicable, I instead use the more contemporary terms Black or African American.

2 Jovonna Jones, "A Visual Record of Black Lives, Four Decades After Emancipation," *Aperture Blog*, 24 April 2020, <https://aperture.org/blog/visual-record-Black-lives-emancipation-du-bois/>. Jones pulls the language of Black life "referencing itself" from DuBois's rhetorical question from "The American Negro at Paris:" "When, however, the inevitable question arises, What are these guided groups doing for themselves? There is in the whole building no more encouraging answer than that given by the American negroes [*sic*], who are here shown to be studying, examining, and thinking of their own progress and prospects.;" W.E. Burghardt Du Bois, "The American Negro at Paris," *The American Monthly Review of Reviews*, vol.XXII, no.5 (November 1900): 576.

an aesthetic archive of materials shaped by the visions and interests of Black Americans on an international stage. Only existing as a booth for a handful of months in 1900, Du Bois's exhibition has been taken up by scholars, artists, and activists and has endured as one of the most precedent-setting aesthetic considerations of Black life in the twentieth century.

In 1932, former student of Du Bois and Harvard Anthropology Masters student Caroline Bond Day published *A Study of Some Negro-White Families in the United States*, a genealogical, anthropometric, photographic, and sociological survey of 346 Black families with racially mixed backgrounds. As a young, middle-class, educated, racially mixed Black "Race Woman" herself, Day completed a project she had started during her undergraduate time at Radcliffe College in which she explored the generational effects of Negro, white, and native racial mixture. Among the fifty families showcased in the published study were some of the most prominent Black leaders and intellectuals of the early twentieth century including the families of Du Bois, Walter White, and E. Franklin Frazier, a clear testament to Day's social circles on the outer edges of the Harlem renaissance. Among the larger genealogical dataset were the families of some of Day's prominent female friends and peers, including journalist Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, artist Laura Wheeler Waring, and opera singer Lillian Evans. While sourcing most of her subjects and data from the same communities as Du Bois (that being the educated and professional Black middle and upper-classes in Atlanta and surrounding areas) and with similar objectives of visually representing Black racial uplift and respectability, Day's study barely scratched the surface of the public's awareness. Despite garnering a small write-up in *The Crisis* due to Day's connections with Du Bois, *A Study* came and went out of the public eye with little comment from voices interested in the problem of the color line.

There are numerous possible reasons for this lack of attention to Day's study beyond the fact that her project was produced on a much smaller scale than Du Bois's exhibit. As a woman and as the first Black person to receive a master's in Anthropology, Day joined a cohort of Black women intellectuals who were not given the respect or job security that they deserved for equally rigorous research in comparison to many of the Race Men of the time.³ As a Black social scientist and as a woman in a field in which "the colored investigator" in question was assumed to be a man, Day's work was repeatedly treated as subjective by her colleagues and superiors, her research interests biased, and her data potentially riddled with errors.⁴ As a result, after publishing *A Study* Day continued to move around to different institutions and teaching positions in Drama and English at Howard University (a position Zora Neal Hurston had once held) and later at North Carolina College for Negroes, never holding a position in her discipline of anthropology. Alternatively, the lack of attention could be due to Day's study using the assumptions and methodologies of physical anthropology, methods that had been popularized throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by scientists and white supremacists to support the belief that Black people were biologically inferior. Trained under prominent Harvard anthropologist and eugenicist Earnest Hooton in anthropometry, or the scientific study of the measurements and proportions of the human body, Day's main anthropological intervention with her collected data was to use photography to assist in the measurement, comparison, and

³ For a survey of Black women's intellectual history and the various challenges of being a Black woman scholar in the early twentieth century see Mia E. Bay, Farrah J. Griffin, Martha S. Jones, Barbara D. Savage, *Toward an Intellectual History of Black Women* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015).; for overrepresentation of men in histories of racial uplift and the historiography of Black political thought see Hazel V. Carby, *Race Men* (Cambridge Harvard University Press, 1998; reprint, 2009).

⁴ In a letter to Ernest Hooton (Day's mentor at Harvard), Carl Seltzer, a fellow grad student studying under Hooton and assisting in the analysis of Day's anthropometric data writes "Obviously, these figures cannot be accepted. Either Mrs. Day's 4/4 negro group is not pure or else she was unfortunately not as yet proficient in the taking of observations. The fault probably lies in her observing, for the accompanying pictures do not agree with her. It seems to me that the only thing to do is to either accept all of her observations entirely or to discard them." Carl Seltzer to Earnest Hooton, 25 August 1930, Hooton Papers PMAE: HU.

categorization of various mulatto “types.” This data included 3,500 photographs alongside 177 genealogical charts, 59 comprehensive family histories, and 196 hair samples, with Day even convincing many of her 2,537 subjects (themselves professors, businessmen, teachers, and society women) to submit to having their bodies measured with various instruments such as the skull-measuring caliper [Figure 1.2-3].

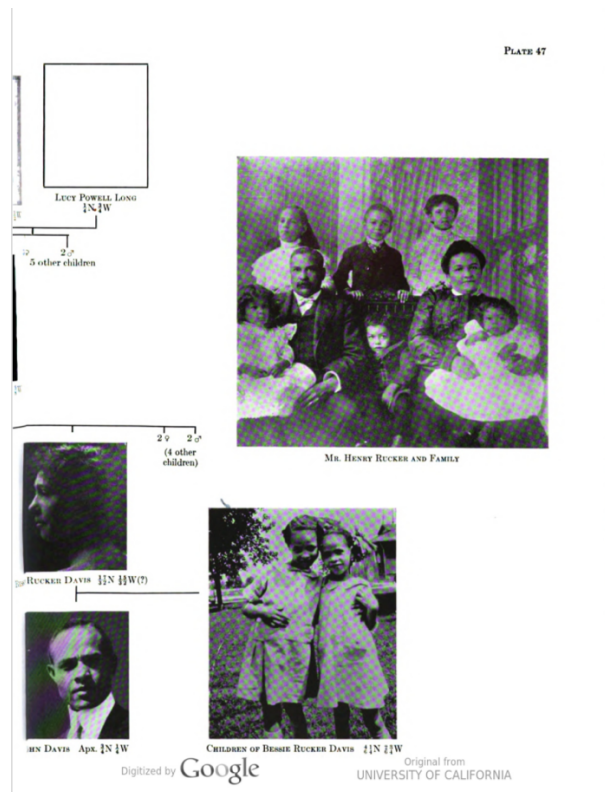


Figure 1-2: Family charts from Caroline Bond Day’s *A Study of Negro-White Families* Plate 47 Chart D1, the Rucker Family. Figure 3: Plate 2, depicting mulatto types.

Day’s “vindicationist” mission was specific: to prove to the anthropological establishment that racial mixture did not produce biologically degenerate or sterile offspring nor did it biologically predispose racially-mixed Black people to achievement and social uplift, two supported anthropological beliefs at the time. As Day writes in the introduction to *A Study* “there is nothing mysterious or unnatural in the mixture of races and nothing extraordinary in the physical results

of those mixtures.”⁵ Even though these methods and conclusions were somewhat passé by the 1930s in intellectual and Black movement circles given the turn toward cultural relativism through the works of Franz Boas and Melville Herskovitz, it was not uncommon for Black social scientists of the time to use the methods of anthropometry to vindicate Black people and communities deemed biologically inferior in the popular imagination and discourse.

Then again, the relative silence from Black scholars and presses for Day’s work could be due to her sociological conclusions rather than her anthropological ones. As a researcher and as a civically inclined woman invested in racial uplift work in her spare time, the sociological elements of the study were certainly of utmost importance to Day. With Hooton and his other graduate students having largely taken over the anthropometric analysis and writing for *A Study*, Day’s own contributions were focused on transcribing detailed family histories of racial mixture as well as writing a sociological section in which she analyzed her subjects as a social class and as a cultural community. In her introduction, Day detailed the uniqueness of her study in comparison to other Black social studies

The people studied in this group are not, for the most part, the type with which the public is familiar individually, nor are they those used as literary material by the novelists and playwrights of today. Many of these families, especially those in the South, *live in worlds of their own*, tucked away here and there on some quiet street, or in little peaceful neighborhoods, frequently unknown and unobserved by those about them. The average tourist in the South never suspects their existence. If he is shown Negro life at all, he is usually conducted through a slum district, the squalor of which probably seems heightened to him by the fact of physical differences. If he were to see this group, in which physical differences are less striking, he would probably be impressed with similarities to any other middle-class group of American people, rather than differences.⁶

5 Anastasia C. Curwood, "Caroline Bond Day (1889–1948): A Black Woman Outsider Within Physical Anthropology," *Transforming Anthropology* 20, no. 1 (2012), 85.

6 Caroline Bond Day, *A Study of Some Negro White Families*, (Peabody Museum of Harvard University, 1932), 3. Emphasis added.

Day reasoned that her white middle- and upper-class intellectual readership could warm to the idea that all Black people were worthy of the fullest interpretation of citizenship if only they could see the educational and socio-economic achievement of her light-skinned and white-passing subjects. This reading is further corroborated by an early draft of her manuscript in which Day writes, “Here is a group who buy homes, send their children to school, patronize whatever in civic life they are allowed to, and on the whole are law-abiding citizens. Yet apparently generosity, humility, forbearance, adaptability, a sense of humor, and a high standard of living are not qualities which make most for citizenship today?”⁷ While to a contemporary reader this line of argumentation may appear flawed, Day – like many writers in the 1920’s who explored the confounding and ever-evolving position of racial mixture in American culture – believed that drawing attention to the nuances of mixedness was in service of all Black people, regardless of color and class status.⁸ Yet even with the aesthetic admiration of light-skinned women that proliferated in Harlem Renaissance and New Negro movement culture texts and social spheres, Day’s argument explicitly uplifting racially mixed Black families as model Black citizens was a departure from DuBois’s concept of The Talented Tenth, or Alaine Locke’s articulation of the New Negro, which both hinged upon a meritocratic understanding of racial uplift. Day was careful, however, to not go as far as to say that mulattoes as a group were

7 ‘C. B. Day Mss. [untitled draft] n.d.’ Manuscripts, CBD Papers, PMAE:HU.

8 The 1920s also saw a rise in the production of fiction about racial mixture, color-consciousness, and passing; works such as Nella Larsen’s *Quicksand* and *Passing*, Jean Toomer’s *Cane*, Wallace Thurman’s *The Blacker The Berry* and Jessie Faucet’s *Plum Bum* use the cosmopolitan and/or tragic mulatta as a literary figure to explore the boundaries of racial categorization through gender, class, and sexual identities. For more on the significance of the mulatto to the evolution of Black literary fiction see Judith Berzon, *Neither White nor Black: The Mulatto Character in American Fiction* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1978); Hazel Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1987); Werner Sollors, *Neither Black nor White yet Both: Thematic Explorations of Interracial Literature* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1997).; Jennifer DeVere Brody, *Impossible purities: Blackness, femininity, and Victorian culture* (Duke University Press, 1998.); most recently I find my thinking on this canon of literature most informed by Michele Elam and Habiba Ibrahim. Michele Elam, *The souls of mixed folk: Race, politics, and aesthetics in the new millennium*, (Stanford University Press, 2011).; Habiba Ibrahim, *Troubling the family: The promise of personhood and the rise of multiracialism* (U of Minnesota Press, 2012).

inherently biologically or socially superior in comparison to “pure Negroes.” Using her anthropometric findings she clarified often throughout *A Study* that she believed “Negroes who are of unmixed blood are just as capable of achievement along all lines as those who are mixed,” citing colorism and access to cultural advantages from white family members as reasons for why racially mixed people represented the bulk of the Black elite.⁹ Rather, Day was convinced that if white viewers were only to see the “interesting types” on display in her photographic archive who closely resembled their own kin, that they would be inclined to look favorably upon the problem of the color line. Ultimately, Day’s limited reception was most likely due to how all of these factors – her identity, her methods, and her conclusions – awkwardly came together in *A Study*, resulting in a confusing and often contradictory contribution to the representation of a very specific Black community.

To be sure, a key problem of Day’s published study – and the central point of interest for this chapter – is the discord between the source material Day collected for her research and the conclusions she then drew from them and eventually published. The vast archive of correspondences and unused images housed at Harvard’s Peabody Museum that Day chose (or, in some cases, was asked) *not* to put “on record” in her published study reveal more than just the business of gathering and curating research materials to prove the existence of a community.¹⁰ Rather, the archive, brimming with unpublished photographs, letters, notes to self, half-answered questionnaires, scribbled approximations of blood quantum, newspaper clippings, performance pamphlets, and book club brochures offers a window into a network of mostly Black women and

⁹ “It is my firm belief that Negroes who are of unmixed blood are just as capable of achievement along all lines as those who are mixed. Although it may seem that the bulk of accomplishment lies among the latter group, that fact is, in my opinion, entirely due to some early economic or cultural advantages accruing to the progeny of white fathers or mothers because of this very circumstance. In addition to this it has always been easier in most parts of this country for the “light colored” person to obtain employment and to get along in various ways with more ease than his darker brother. This holds true frequently in even the most humble positions.” Day, *A Study*, 26.

¹⁰ “on record:” CBD to Hilda Evans, CBD Papers, PMAE:HU.

mothers negotiating how and on what terms they wanted to represent their families to a white public. In comparison to Day's *Study*, which at times catered to the white gaze at the expense of family history and cultural nuance, Day's surviving archive, like Du Bois' exhibition, illustrates a community within a community openly grappling with what it meant to reference itself.

Day's archival papers have been a treasure trove for early twentieth-century cultural historians interested in the public and private lives of whom E. Franklin Frazier dubbed "the brown middle class." Frazier defines this emerging group as the result of intermarriage between the old southern "mulatto elite" and "the lower and darker strata" who, through educational and professional achievement, rose through ranks of caste and class in the 1920s and 30s. Frazier argues that while the mulatto elite worked to stabilize the moral and cultural values of social conservatism and color-privilege, these traditions proved "outworn...in the new world of the modern city," especially when challenged by "ambitious representatives of undistinguished families."¹¹ While Frazier is largely pessimistic about the political potentialities of the brown middle class, previous scholarship on Day's archive by historians Heidi Ardizzone, Anastasia Curwood, and Allyson Hobbs have posed questions based precisely on defining the scope and stakes of representing this emerging community within a community. Ardizzone's 2006 article "Such Fine Families," the most comprehensive scholarly work on Day's *Study* to date, explores what Day's project tells us about the social values and visual culture of racially mixed Black families. Ardizzone argues that while not asserting an "elevated status for people of mixed ancestry," Day utilized her families' biological and social proximity to whiteness to "enhance the familiarity of her subjects" for white readers and make the subject of full citizenship for *all*

¹¹ Edward Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Family in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939), 308-313; see also Vernon J. Williams Jr, "E Franklin Frazier: Revisited," *Spectrum: A Journal of Black Men* 1 no. 1 (Autumn 2012): 42-44.

Black people (not just the mulatto elite) more palatable.¹² Illustrating both the anti-racist political objectives of Day's study as well as her bias toward her fellow racially mixed peers, Ardizzone concludes that Day's project awkwardly shifts between seeing racial mixture as both exceptional and ordinary. Extending this question, Curwood's 2012 article "Caroline Bond Day (1889–1948): A Black Woman Outsider Within Physical Anthropology" asks how Day leverages the methodologies of her time to represent this community to a white academic elite, arguing that Day, as a Black woman and as an anthropologist, used her status as both an insider and outsider to act as a spokesperson in her discipline to vindicate the racist assumptions made about racially mixed Black people at the time.¹³ Addressing Day's Study as a family history project, Hobbs' *A Chosen Exile* focuses on the substantial number of families with white-passing kin in Day's Study, noting how Day's vast and incomplete archive enacts the violence and shame of rape and racial passing on family bonds, both of which ultimately "stymied her work of assembling coherent family trees."¹⁴

In this area – that of Day's attention to family history and gendered kinship relations – is where this chapter stakes its central claim. Why did Day choose to take a family approach to her study of racial mixture? Interestingly, Day never answers this question directly, even as her study hinges upon the analysis of family trees and bloodlines. Day could have easily made her project about collecting data on solely mixed-race individuals. An individual approach would have still lent itself to similar anthropometric conclusions regarding mulatto types, as well as equally

12 Heidi Ardizzone, "'Such Fine Families': Photography and Race in the Work of Caroline Bond Day," *Visual Studies*, 21 no. 2 (2006): 127.

13 Curwood, "Caroline Bond Day (1889–1948)."

14 Allyson Hobbs, *A Chosen Exile* (Harvard University Press, 2014), 156.; In *A Study*, Day writes that "out of 346 families studied, thirty-five of them included one or more individuals who had completely lost their racial identity. Most of these are married to white people, and for that reason we have to omit them from our lists." Day also indicates that 50 families included members who she personally knew passed but she "did not attempt to study them because of the difficulties mentioned." *A Study*, 5, 11.

demonstrated her subjects' achievements as model American citizens. Perhaps Day knew that while this approach would provide evidence for the existence of racially mixed types, it would likely be received as a record of isolated exceptions, or reinforce the assumption that racial mixture was a new phenomenon of a modern era rather than an ongoing event sanctioned by the forced breeding practices of American chattel slavery. Interestingly, in the majority of families included in Day's study, racial mixture was an event of an ancestral past; of the 2,537 adults included in the study, only 14 were considered "first generation" (F1) crosses, that is, the child of a presumably Black parent and white parent. Only 28 individuals were second generation (F2) and remembered one or both of their grandparents. That the lion's share of the study's participants were third or fourth generation "crosses" did not seem to deter Day from further defining her subjects as distinct from "pure Negro" families. In fact, Day's ability to trace racial mixture as far back as five generations was a sign to her (and her interlocutors) that this group represented a unique biological, social, and cultural community, one that intermarried and maintained its group norms over the course of centuries. While this was partially true in that free Blacks and mulattoes in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries often married and socialized amongst themselves, many of Day's subjects also strongly identified as Negro, saw very little distinction between themselves and "pure Negroes," with some even actively rejecting the notion that there was any cause for distinction.¹⁵ Given Day's sociological investments and own personal attachments to both the subject matter and the study's participants as friends and kin, it is likely that Day's attention to families was more complex than simply demonstrating how racial mixture was an enduring physical phenomenon worthy of scientific study.

¹⁵ For a comprehensive history of "mulatto culture" as it existed both within and apart from "Negro culture" in the nineteenth century see Joel Williamson, *New People: Miscegenation and Mulattoes in The United States* (Free Press: 1980).

Perhaps instead Day's attention to families was an acknowledgment of the interlocking fates of Black communities in the face of anti-Black racism, especially considering the invaluable role of Black relatives and fictive kin in creating viable Black care structures amidst de-jure segregation. We get a glimpse of this thinking through Day's fiction writing, the bulk of which was written before beginning her master's research. Like Zora Neale Hurston, a fellow young Black anthropologist popular amongst Harlem's Black intelligentsia for turning her research on Black southern folkloric culture into literary works, Day turned her research into fiction as a way to explore the emotional limits of white-passing privilege and the distancing from Black communal structures that it often requires. In 1926, a year before beginning her graduate studies at Harvard, Day published a short story in *Opportunity* titled "The Pink Hat." Set in a bustling city, the story dramatizes the life of a light-skinned racially mixed Black woman who discovers that if she dons a pink hat in public that she can "deceive" those around her and pass as a white woman. With her newfound freedom of mobility, Sarah, the protagonist, uses the hat as her "magic carpet" and enjoys the trappings of middle-class white urban consumerism: shoe shopping, attending a Greek play, viewing an art exhibit, and sitting in a crowded streetcar. Yet her newfound freedom is spoiled upon breaking her ankle. Rejected from a white hospital and forced to rely upon her "colored family" and neighbors in the colored section of town to receive care, Sarah is struck by the long-term futility of passing and concludes: "who'd want a hat?"¹⁶ As a woman capable of passing herself, Day's semi-autobiographical short story mirrored her own politics on the subject of family and racial mixture: though longing for a bourgeois existence unfettered by racial caste, an alignment with her racial kin proved essential to a fuller, more supported life. Perhaps Day made this calculated decision in her own life,

¹⁶ Caroline Bond Day, "The Pink Hat," *Opportunity* 4 (1926): 379.

knowing that anything less would be, as James Weldon Johnson's *Ex-Colored Man* laments, "trading in my birthright for a mess of pottage."¹⁷

As such, in *A Study's* attempts to define intra-racial boundaries and class distinctions, Day also seeks to use mixed-race kinship as an icon to advocate for the rights of all Black Americans. Performing both the arbitrary and world-defining lines between negro, colored, and mulatto at the time, Day's project explores how Black scholarly and organizing efforts toward full citizenship, gender and social equality, and scientific vindication were tied up in representations and classifications of interracial kinship. Day similarly used family photography toward these ends, as her intention of creating a visual record was in hopes of showcasing the endurance and longevity of kinship relations despite the often traumatic events that lead to racial mixture in the family tree. Yet in paying attention to differences between Day's study and her archive of materials, it seems that Day and her subjects largely disagreed on what was politically and culturally valuable about these family memories and images and, perhaps most significantly, *who* these memories and images were for. For Day, her published study was ultimately invested in proving the coherence of family trees as a way of demonstrating to white readers the generational coherence of other ideologies within the Black elite such as middle-class values and gender roles. But when we place this investment alongside the private remembrances and archival excess of her subjects housed at Harvard's Peabody Museum, Day's families demonstrated the paradoxes of these very concepts and the intimate stakes of such a desire.

In comparison to Day's project, for Day's subjects, racial mixture operated less so as a present act and more so as a community-forming collective memory of coercion and compromised choices of the past mediated predominantly through the texts, images, stories, and

17 James Weldon Johnson, *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (Penguin, 1912), 100.

lore of family history. The memory of these events not only informed how Day's families attached certain value judgments onto these sentimental objects and ephemera from their family's past but also how they used their family histories to inform present judgments of themselves in relation to other types of Black families. Most notably, the stakes of these histories were almost always conveyed by women, often mothers, who were themselves the daughters and granddaughters of women who had been raped by white men under the duress of enslavement. Writing in the opening pages of *A Study*, Day notes that of her 346 families studied "only twenty-two questionnaires were filled out and sent in by mail; the others were answered during personal conferences with some member or members of the family, usually the mother or some other mature person."¹⁸ When in-person conferences were not possible, many of Day's female friends, peers, and elders reflected the stakes of Day's own questions back to her in their correspondences, sometimes over the course of several years. Most offered up equal parts encouragement and warning; while proud of her pursuit of a degree and her interest in racial uplift work, Day's mostly female correspondents pushed back in ways that indicated a lack of trust and understanding in the project to work in their best interests. Offering clues to their own gender and sexual beliefs as well as the rules of decorum that dictated their social circles, many expressed a desire to maintain their family's anonymity for fear of repercussions. Reasons ranged from practical to moral; while some wanted to uphold a social conservatism that taking part in a study might denigrate, others flat out objected to the collection of measurements and blood percentages.¹⁹

¹⁸ Day, *A Study*, 5.

¹⁹ In a 1928 letter in which a Mrs. CJ Percival and her husband declined to participate in Day's study due to her husband not wanting "to put himself or the family on record," Mrs. Percival writes that "I regard it as a real honor that you were chosen. You have done well, Carrie. Very well, and I am proud of you. Your mother has good reason to be very happy with two such bright daughters." Mrs. CJ Percival to CBD, 31 January 1928, CBD Papers, PMAE:HU.

With Black mothers and women serving as the storytellers and co-curators of Day's archive and by extension the telling of family history, what role did Black women and mothers play in shaping and mediating family narratives of sexual violence, interracial relationships, colorism, and brown middle-class culture? Throughout the archive not only did Day's female friends and correspondents turn over valuable portraits and snaps from their living rooms and photo albums, in their letters and questionnaires Day's correspondents offered up word portraits of their beloved kin.²⁰ While these word portraits dutifully describe the physical appearance of their kin to aid in Day's physical anthropology ends, they also offer clues into how these families made social meaning out of their own physical appearance and racially mixed genealogy. Given that much of this meaning-making did not make it into Day's published study, what does Day's representation of negro-white families tell us about how family narratives and histories circulate in public versus private spaces, especially considering the many differences between what Day chose to highlight in *A Study* and what exists in her unused archive?

In engaging with the excess materials and family histories of the archive I argue that Day's use of mixed-race identity and kinship as an icon of endurance and social fortitude was neither politically viable as a tool for Black liberation nor psychologically fruitful for the emotional well-being of racially mixed individuals in the early and mid-twentieth century. These family visions were also not true, as the private remembrances of Black mothers troubles the respectable public narrative Day (and often the families themselves) worked to curate. While this intensity of a desire for privacy and control over the Black family image yields over the course of the twentieth century, Day's *Study* and its archive reveal how racially mixed families in the 1920s and 30s negotiate and manipulate the lines between public and private for their own

²⁰ I get the language of "word portraits" from Tiya Miles' forthcoming book *All That She Carried* (Draft manuscript prologue, pg 11)

protection. This chapter begins with a bird's eye view of Day's published study and its treatment of family structures through the use of photography and family history. It then moves through several close readings of Day's unpublished archive with particular attention to the correspondences and conversations amongst women that illuminate new possibilities for reading these family histories. Extending these readings to the photographic ephemera contained in the archive, it concludes with a close reading of how these archival images depart from Day's published images.

A Study and Its Student

From 1927-1932, Day focused most of her research efforts and funds on gathering a visual and genealogical record of a very specific community whom she frequently referred to as "the better class of Colored Americans of mixed blood."²¹ Signaling in this phrasing the slippage between racial mixture and middle and upper-class status for Black Americans at this time, Day insisted in *A Study* that this group was not to be confused with the negro intelligentsia or "college-bred persons of distinction," even as "a large percentage of these were persons of mixed blood."²² Day described how she worked to make sure her data was not "top-heavy" with these groups and detailed how she purposefully omitted 16 of the 20 members of the Phi Beta Kappa students in the Washington D.C. area that she had among her acquaintance, as well as pre-existing data from Atlanta University over the 50 years prior.²³ Even so, Day's own motives betrayed her efforts as

21 CBD to Judea 21 July 1927, CBD Papers, PMAE:HU.

22 Day, *A Study*, 23

23 "For example, in selecting individuals at the school where most of the measuring was done, I included not only such students as were of mixed blood, all four of the professors, and one dining-room matron, but made an especial effort to get the only one of the cooks and serving-women who was appreciably mixed. On the other hand, when collecting data in Washington, D. C., I purposely omitted some of the intelligentsia, lest the proportions of the study become top-heavy with them. There are to my knowledge residing in that city seven Negroes with the degree of Doctor of Philosophy; four of these are women and three are men. Doubtless it would have been possible to secure data from all of them, if the aim of the study had been to select college-bred persons of distinction. As a matter of

she wrote to Hilda Evans, a friend and one of her subjects, that *A Study* “will be published in one of a set of encyclopedic-looking volumes which are seldom read except by scientists but I am rather proud to have some such fine families to place on record there.”²⁴ Though not intentionally invoking the word-play encompassed in the phrase, Day’s “fine families” were fine not only because of their lighter skin, hair, and facial features that exemplified mulatto “types,” but because of their capacity to serve as iconic *representatives* of the Black race in their performance of middle-class values for a specifically white viewing public in a moment in which these values were being shaped into laws, policies, and social practices.

Day was one of several academics, lawmakers, and cultural critics interested in how the changing futures for Black Americans in the twentieth century would impact Black families, racially mixed and white-passing Black people, and the small but growing Black professional class. As northern urbanization promised a new life and steady work in the industrial sector for millions of Black southern families and as small southern towns became heavily trafficked multiracial hubs of activity, the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries created urban spaces that were “worlds of strangers,” full of Black southerners eager to begin again.²⁵ The post-emancipation era gave Black families a level of autonomy of their kin, as “control over one’s labor and one’s family life represented a dual gauge by which true freedom could be measured.”²⁶ In the early to mid-1900s, Black academics such as E. Franklin Frazier, W.E.B DuBois, and Alaine Locke wrote extensively on the future of Black families, gender roles, and the maintenance of patriarchy in the modern era, with particular attention to behaviors that would

fact I refrained from soliciting records from all Save two. Similarly, I am informed that there are included in the acquaintanceship of one person in this group at least twenty Phi Beta Kappa students whose records might have been obtained with little difficulty. Instead we have only four." Ibid.

24 CBD to Hilda Evans, date unknown, CBD Papers, PMAE: HU.

25 Hobbs, 33-34.

26 Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family From Slavery to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), 46.

contribute to the devaluation of traditional family bonds. In his oft-cited *The Negro Family in the United States* (1939), Frazier argued that the consumer habits and economic authority of “brown middle-class” women (or, as Locke called them, New Negro women) contributed to the deterioration of the Black family, citing their growing empowerment through education and employment as adversely impacting the authority of Black men. Instead, Frazier saw skilled working-class Black male laborers as the unsung heroes of the Black family, an argument that would later be co-opted and weaponized by sociologist and Assistant Secretary of Labor Patrick Moynihan in his now infamous 1965 case study “The Negro Family: The Case for National Action” or “the Moynihan Report.” Moynihan used Frazier’s argument as evidence of the emasculation of Black men within the Black family unit, ultimately placing further blame on working-class Black women and single mothers for dominating the family space.²⁷ The Moynihan report was used by politicians and the public alike to help solidify the trope of the “welfare queen” as a burden on the American government and economy and would be cited by Black scholars and feminists in the future as evidence of the propagandist relationship between social sciences and policy.²⁸ As Frazier noted how the mulatto elite functioned as key gatekeepers “against the degradation of morals and manners” in the early twentieth century, perceptions of racial mixture certainly extended into class-cultural perceptions of all Black families.²⁹

27 For more on the relationship between Frazier and Moynihan, see Anastasia Curwood, "A Fresh Look at E. Franklin Frazier's Sexual Politics in The Negro Family in the United States," *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race* 5, no. 2 (2008): 334-335.

28 Roderick A. Ferguson, “Something Else to Be: Sula, The Moynihan Report, and the Negations of Black Lesbian Feminism” in *Aberrations in black: Toward a queer of color critique* (University of Minnesota Press, 2004).; Coates, Ta-Nehisi. "The case for reparations." *The Atlantic* 313, no. 5 (2014): 54-71.; Habiba Ibrahim, “Legitimizing the Deviant Family: *Loving vs. Virginia* and the Moynihan Report” in *Troubling the Family.*; Tiffany Lethabo King, "Black 'Feminisms' and Pessimism: Abolishing Moynihan's Negro Family," *Theory & Event* 21, no. 1 (2018): 68-87.

29 Frazier, 312.

What's more, the ways that various groups attempted to address racial mixture in the family further revealed the political propagandist relationship between the sciences and the law, in that the sciences showed a vested interest in supporting and providing evidence for the legal boundaries between white and Black. In particular, "anxieties about racial imperceptibility, and particularly the indeterminate status of Blacks, corresponded with larger concerns about one's proper place in an increasingly mobile and inconstant society."³⁰ As these migratory changes increased the likelihood of regular social contact between all races but particularly white and Black populations, fears regarding interracialism and the "proper place" of racially mixed Black people proliferated. Without the clear lines that separated the enslaved and the free – even as many enslaved peoples were often the unacknowledged offspring of free white peoples – lawmakers and civilians alike feared the consequences of unimpeded miscegenation and Black people passing into whiteness unchecked. In southern state courts, the fear of racial mixture manifested in exceedingly specific and stringent racial categorization laws that doubly worked to define acceptable family structures along racial lines. Some of these laws were race and gender-specific, making punishments for relations between Black men and white women more severe than for other types of interracial relations as a fail-safe to protect the innocence of white womanhood. In Virginia, eugenicist and public health advocate Walter Plecker was a key player in pushing forward laws that worked to clearly define the boundaries of whiteness, resulting in the 1924 Racial Integrity Act.³¹ One of the strictest racial categorization laws the nation had seen to date, the Racial Integrity Act banned interracial marriage, codified the enforcement of the

³⁰ Hobbs, 33.

³¹ For more on Virginia's 1924 Racial Integrity Act see Peggy Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America* (Oxford University Press, 2009).; Arica L. Coleman, *That the Blood Stay Pure: African Americans, Native Americans, and the Predicament of Race and Identity in Virginia*. (Indiana University Press, 2013).

“one-drop rule,” and in doing so defined the types of families deemed acceptable and those deemed deviant in the eyes of the state’s judicial system. A testament to the Act’s endurance in Virginia and the entrenchment of reactionary intellectual responses to the widespread modernization of the late nineteenth century, these laws would not be fully overturned until the supreme court’s intervention through *Loving v Virginia* in 1967. That Mildred and Richard Loving’s case rested on their desire to live and build a quiet, unassuming home for their family in Caroline County suggests that these laws were as much about policing sexual relations as they were about policing family formations and futures.³²

In the hard and social sciences where Day staked her claims, anthropologists and sociologists heavily disagreed on whether race was stable and observable as an inheritable trait or whether it was an increasingly fluid cultural and social idea. At the same time as states passed laws codifying the acceptable fractions of colored blood one could have to be considered white, the subfield of anthropology that Day was a part of, physical anthropology, continued to use its proximity with scientific objectivity to shape and uphold the hierarchy between human races, species, and types. These scientific debates mirrored widespread curiosity in “the mulatto problem,” which intensified as migration, density of interracial spaces, and popular interest in scientific trends such as eugenics grew in the early twentieth century.³³ Day’s own mentor, Earnest Hooton, made a name for himself in the study of racial mixture in the 1910s and 20s and became popularly respected for his contributions to criminology and eugenics in the 1930s and

32 For more on reactionary intellectual responses to modernization in the social sciences see Amos Morris-Reich, *Race and Photography: Racial Photography as Scientific Evidence, 1876-1980* (University of Chicago Press, 2016), 7.

33 In Monroe N. Works’ 1928 *Bibliography of the Negro in Africa and America*, Works cites only ten publications on “race mixture” between 1886-1900, and one hundred and eight between 1900-1927. Monroe N. Works *A Bibliography of the Negro in Africa and America*, (New York: NW Wilso Co., 1928), cited in David H. Fowler, *Northern Attitudes Towards Interracial Marriage: Legislation and Public Opinion in the Middle Atlantic States and the States of the Old Northwest, 1780-1930*, (New York: Garland Pub., 1987), 275.

1940s. He strongly believed in the inherited nature of racial characteristics and used his research in Massachusetts state prisons and beyond to advocate for the sterilization of criminals, the mentally ill, and the disabled. Despite his eugenic beliefs, Hooton's urgings toward racial equality gave him a measure of respect amongst Black racial uplift organizations such as the NAACP.³⁴ Day counted herself amongst Hooton's admirers, taking every opportunity in her correspondences to compliment him on any advances on his research or published study and often recommended his research to skeptical friends.³⁵

Among a slate of thirteen anthropological projects funded under Hooton's supervision between 1926-1930, Day's *Study* was one of a number of projects at Harvard concerning the global study of racial and ethnic mixture and its biological impact on the human body. Among

34 Earnest Hooton was the chair and key developer of Harvard's anthropology department for nearly two decades. He made a name for himself in the study of racial mixture in the 1910s and 20s, and became popularly respected for his contributions to criminology and eugenics in the 1930s and 1940s. While some regarded Hooton as an arch conservative and racist, Hooton considered himself committed to liberal causes, especially as he used his research to argue for the possibility of social equality between the races despite their phenotypic differences. In a lecture titled "The Study of Anthropology by Negro Students" given at Howard University in 1929, Hooton notes, "You have a cultural heritage. In Africa, considering the environmental difficulty, man there has done things of which you should be proud, and which should be given a great deal of extensive study; which will provide a historical background. In the course of time they have absorbed Roman cultures, and supplanted it with a part culture of their own. I am here to predict truly that the very fact of the survival of the Negro against adverse circumstances in Africa and his remarkable progress in this country is the beginning for a very high individual culture of the race itself." Hooton Papers, PMAE: HU. In 1944, Hooton gave a speech on his research at an NAACP gathering in Chicago attended by over twenty thousand people. When Hooton died in 1954, his *New York Times* obituary identified him as "one of the outstanding anthropologists of the world." Often recommending Hooton's research to her friends who were more skeptical of the project, or even as a suggested speaker at the Pan-African Congress, Day trusted Hooton as a collaborator. In a letter to Nina Gower DuBois, Day writes, "I also wish to make this suggestion; that an invitation be sent to Dr. E.A. Hooton...He is very much interested in our group in this country and is very widely informed about Africa, and is in touch with a great many people who are concerned with our problems. I am rather late in making this suggestion, but he would be a very able speaker at the conference" CBD to Mrs. N.G. Dubois, 26 July 1927;

35 In a 1940 letter to Hooton, Day writes to Hooton "I have been intending since last fall when I first read your book "Twilight of Man" to write and congratulate you upon it and tell you how hugely I enjoyed it." CBD to Hooton 3 September 1940, Hooton Papers, PMAE: HU. As late as 1942, CBD opens a letter to Hooton with "I was much interested and pleased with your recent article in S.M."; in a letter to Leslie Blanchard, Day writes "Which leads me to say that if you care to write to him and ask [Hooton] certain definite questions, such as: does race mixture make for inferior or superior mental and physical characteristics? And, what are the possibilities for physical reversion to type in such crossings? I am sure that he would be glad to answer you...of all the anthropologists who have made a special study of this phase of the work, I think he has the best grasp of the situation in the United States" CBD to Leslie Blanchard, 24 March 1926, CBD Papers, PMAE:HU.

these projects were titles such as “The Study of Finns and Lapps,” “The Study of Syrians and Armenians,” and “The study of Maya-White crosses.”³⁶ Questions that concerned this lab included, “how do racial hybrids compare with their respective parent stock in fertility and vitality? What is the status of hybrids with respect to social efficiency and economic and political stability? How are physical and mental characters inherited in such hybridizations? Do such hybrids when produced in large numbers form a buffer class or to be assimilated by one or other of the parent stocks, and in either case what are the sociological and biological consequences?”³⁷ Anthropologists used the methods of phrenology, craniology, anthropometry, and criminology to assign racial meaning to bodily difference, often taking these external observational measurements of racial phenotypes and applying them to racial interiorities, essences, and behaviors. Day’s study was the only one in this lab with an explicit focus on families, indicating that an interest in kinship and genealogy set Day’s project apart from her peers’. In his letters requesting funding from the Bureau for International Research at Harvard, Hooton would often point to Day’s study as the most precedent-setting of those under his supervision, noting how Day’s unique position as a member of her subject group allowed her unmatched access into the “almost inaccessible class of educated persons of mixed Negro and White descent.”³⁸ As a white anthropologist, this access via Day would be invaluable to Hooton and his career.

Day’s 127-page study contains three different sections that corresponded with her different research aims. After Hooton’s foreword and Day’s introductory comments is a 34-page “Anthropological Observations” section, which includes fifty written family histories as well as

36 “List of Studies Carried Under Dr. E.A. Hooton and Amounts Granted for the Research 1926-1930,” Hooton papers PMAE: HU.

37 Earnest A. Hooton, “Progress in the study of race mixtures with special reference to work carried on at Harvard University,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 65, no. 4 (1926): 315.

38 Earnest Hooton foreword to *A Study*, iii.

Day's observational analysis of her data set through photographic family trees and anthropological questionnaires. This section is then followed by a 65-page anthropometry section titled "The Anthropometry of Some Small Samples of American Negroes and Negroids (Based upon the Author's Observations)," which contains data tables and analyses of the 44 body measurements taken of Day's subject pool including head circumference, brow ridges, hair texture and amount, sitting height, and nose breadth. A short 18-page section titled "Sociological Observations" concludes the book and includes an analysis of cultural and social statistics such as profession, income, club memberships, homeownership, marriage and divorce rates, and hobbies. With the anthropological section opening the study and framing her sample of 2,537 subjects, Day uses predominantly observations of phenotypic differences through the analysis of photographs as well as blood quantum data to conclude that racial mixture occurs on a continuum of three types: a dominant type leaning toward white phenotypic features, a recessive type leaning toward Black phenotypic features, and an intermediate type which falls in between dominant and recessive [Figure 4-5].

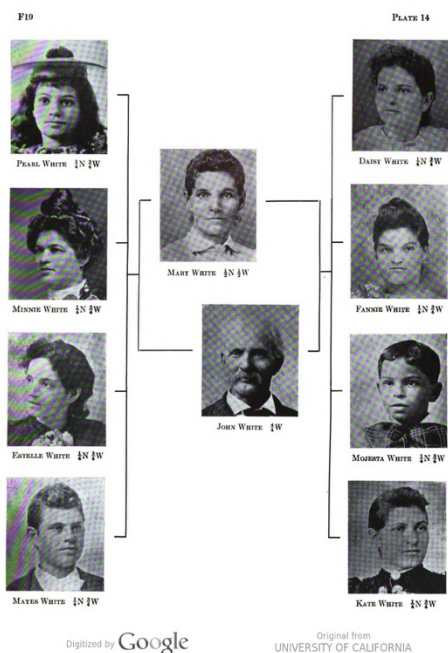


Figure 1-4: Plate 14, F19. Captions read: Daisy White (1/4N 3/4W), Estelle White (1/4N 3/4W), Fannie White (1/4N 3/4W), John White (4/4W), Kate White (1/4N 3/4W), (Mrs.) Mary White (1/2N 1/2W), Mayes White (1/4N 3/4W), Minnie White (1/4N 3/4W), Mojesta White (1/4N 2/4W), Pearl White (1/4N 3/4W). Figure 1-5: Plate 16, C26. Captions read: John Hervey (1/2N 1/2W), Margaret Hervey (1/2N 1/2W), [Mrs. Wheeler] Hervey [2 Bros. & Sister of Margaret], Jennie Thomas [Mrs. Hervey] (1/2N 1/2W), John Wheeler (1/2N 1/2W), John Hervey Wheeler (1/2N 1/2W), Marjorie Wheeler (1/2N 1/2W), Ruth Wheeler (1/2N 1/2W).

These types, Day further argued, occurred in all proportions of intermixture, though *A Study* found that “the dominant to European types showed no obvious Negroid features when the proportion of Negro blood involved is three-eighths or less.”³⁹ While twenty-first century anthropologists would bristle at the premise of categorizing racial group types, Day’s observational conclusions at the time suggested that many of her subjects who had 3/8 Black ancestry or less could pass for white, and that the same blood quantum lead to many different expressions of racial mixture in different family trees, rather than Blackness operating as a biological “one drop” that was irrefutably or uniformly expressed. In doing so, *A Study* provided unambiguous proof of the futility of enforcing many of the racial integrity laws that existed at the

39 "Makes Study to Find out What White Blood Does to Negro," *Wyandotte Echo*, June 13 1930.

time which defined a white person as someone "who has no trace whatsoever of any blood other than Caucasian."⁴⁰ Especially as Day used photographic observation to draw attention to the relatively ambivalent correlation between blood quantum and appearance, Day's study provided visual proof that "when white Americans defined people of mixed ancestry as Negro and then could not distinguish them from themselves, the biological arguments of Black inferiority became ludicrous."⁴¹

Given that Day's study was not only interested in racial types but in *how* these types evolved over generations, Day used her physical observations to shed light on how in the post-emancipation context families made certain kinship decisions based on (or sometimes in spite of) color or racial type. Practiced amongst antebellum free Blacks and continued throughout chattel slavery's nadir in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, it was common if not often encouraged to view marriages to similarly racially-mixed partners as a mechanism through which Black families might obtain (or maintain) the social benefits of a lightened family tree.⁴² Leaning on her intimacy and shared understanding with her subjects, Day used her data to surmise some of the social factors and consequences of such kinship decisions, hypotheses that were unique to Day's study in comparison to her white male anthropologist peers who were solely interested in heredity. In practice, Day often commented on the effects of "back-crosses" in a family's lineage, or the event of a subject having children with someone who had a greater proportion of Black ancestry. Using the language of "back-crosses" to denote the reversion of Black phenotypes, Day hints at how this event is perceived as a regression in both scientific and

40 See Virginia Acts of Assembly (1924): Ch. 371.

41 Ardizzone, 120.

42 Williamson, *New People*, 118-120.; In 1918 Edward Reuter writes, "whatever talent there is among the mulattoes remains among the mulattoes; whatever talent there is among the black group marries into the mulatto caste. In either event the talent of the Negro race finds its way into the mulatto groups." Edward Byron Reuter, *The Mulatto in the United States Including a Study of the Role of Mixed-blood Races throughout the World* (Boston: Badger, 1918), 396.

social spaces. While recording how the family members' appearances specifically expressed these back-crosses, Day was also interested in some of the assumptions and stereotypes that were associated with this occurrence. Day discussed the common fear of "regression" through a darker child being born into an otherwise white-passing family, and the assumption of this being due to hidden traces of Blackness in the family tree. Day also discussed the opposite occurrence, that of a white-passing child being born into an otherwise darker-skinned family

There is only one case in which scandal has been connected with any of the families recorded here. In this case the paternity of a blond child in an otherwise swarthy family gave rise to the common supposition of the infidelity of the mother. Further genealogical investigation, however, revealed that the child is a natural product of a third generation mating of mulattoes where we might expect variation of a rather extreme type.⁴³

That the only "scandal" recorded amongst Day's respectable subjects was that of a Black mother being accused of having illicit relations with a white man due to the color of her child indicates how physical characteristics within a single family became a subject of community-wide scrutiny, with consequences that were often unevenly saddled by Black women. As Brigitte Fielder writes of interracial kinship, the racial status of an ambiguously raced child "has implications even for previously racially defined parents, particularly for mothers who are held responsible for (re)producing race."⁴⁴ In effect re-racializing the parents through a "queer genealogical timeline" of child to parent, Fielder emphasizes that racialization particularly in the nineteenth century is not unidirectional and can take place in "backward" and "horizontal" ways. Compounded by social class norms within the Black middle-class and elite that rewarded the heavy scrutiny of group boundaries and castes, Day used her genealogical research and racial

⁴³ Day, *A Study*, 109.

⁴⁴ Brigitte Fielder, *Relative Races: Genealogies of Interracial Kinship in Nineteenth Century America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020), 2.

type conclusions to refute (and in this “vindicate”) community-wide narratives of how family members should be held responsible for the varying appearances of their kin.

To be sure, Day’s study did not take for granted the social aspects that contributed to how her families reported their racial identities and relayed genealogical information, especially as both Day and Hooton did not fully trust the accuracy of the collected data. In his concluding observations of the anthropometric data in *A Study*, Hooton writes that he was “convinced that some individuals have been erroneously classified — a few with considerable White blood having had reason to regard themselves as full Negroes.” Continuing that he believed that the whole study contained “a little more White blood than is credited,” Hooton’s comments suggest an awareness that it was not always possible (or socially favorable) for Black families to account for white ancestors in their family tree.⁴⁵ Among Day’s families, only five of the 243 pre-emancipation interracial unions were marriages, pointing to the staggeringly high probability that many of these families had become racially mixed through rape and sexual assault.⁴⁶ In just 136 of the 243 unions descendants reported the full name or other identifying information of the white paternal figure involved. What’s more, even if Black kin did have this genealogical information, the legal enforcement of the one-drop rule through racial integrity and anti-miscegenation laws made it such that white ancestry was legally discredited and as such purposefully omitted from official records. In some cases, Day’s subjects openly expressed a distaste for acknowledging these white ancestors even if they did have access to genealogical information, as it was not uncommon for Black families to willfully omit the memory (or at least public acknowledgment) of these white figures from the family line and subsequently from

⁴⁵ Day, *A Study*, 106.

⁴⁶ 18 of the unions reporting contained “a man [that] was said to have had no other wife or family except his negro family” and 12 unions were legal marriages between a white woman and a Black man. Day, *A Study*, 108.

calculations of their own racial identities. These factors combined with the unevenness of racial categories on the United States Census throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries suggest that Hooton's hypothesis was likely correct; many more white ancestors appeared amongst branches of Day's family trees than is recorded in *A Study*.

Whereas Hooton and his lab assistants openly questioned the data for its numerical accuracy, Day seemed more concerned with the raw anthropometric data's inability to convey the nuances of her families' histories. As the lead writer of the anthropometry section of *A Study*, Hooton frequently commented on the spottiness of Day's data collection, lamenting that he had "found it necessary to take over the writing work of [Day's] physical anthropological material."⁴⁷ Citing Day's clear interest in the sociological elements of the study as a potential reason for the data's supposed inaccuracy, it seems that Hooton likely found Day's interest in the social wellbeing and uplift of her subjects to have affected her ability to objectively collect data. This was a common concern amongst white anthropologists at the time who were apprehensive about the entrance of Black researchers into scientific fields, especially as they saw the mantle of objectivity as the exclusive territory of white scientists. In a 1930 article detailing his work to date on racial crossings, Hooton wrote that the ideal colored investigator "had to be a person not only of scientific gifts and understanding, but also of such unquestioned honesty and impartiality as to guarantee the validity of his findings. And these, to be acceptable, should be checked rigorously by a disinterested white scientist."⁴⁸ Seeing as Day was decidedly interested in her

47 Earnest Hooton to Professor Wilson of the BIR, date unknown, Hooton Papers, PMAE:HU.; In a 1928 letter referenced having previously assigned another graduate student from his lab to start in on the analysis, see Earnest Hooton to G.G. Wilson of the BIR, 28 April 1928, Hooton Papers, PMAE: HU.

48 Earnest Hooton, "Radcliffe Investigates Race Mixture," *Harvard Bulletin*, 3 April 1930, 769.; Earlier in 1926 Hooton writes "it has long been the opinion of the writer that reliable data on Negro-White crosses in this country can best be secured by the utilization of competent investigators. He has obtained from Mrs. Bond and from other colored students much new information concerning the inheritance of physical characters in such mixtures, all of which, however, requires confirmation from mass studies before it can be presented as final." Hooton, "Progress In the Study of Race Mixtures," 321.

subjects as colleagues, friends, and relatives, her research methods reflected countless commitments that Hooton did not share and even actively dismissed.

In contrast to Hooton's staunch ties to objectivity, Day's seeming reticence with anthropometric studies of racial mixture might have been due to an awareness of the changing winds of her field. Progressive white anthropologists such as Franz Boas, Hurston's mentor at Columbia University, and Melville Herskovitz rejected the then-popular notion that cultures and races underwent an evolutionary process from primitive to modern, an assumption that undergirded much of the physical anthropology work of the time. Herskovitz in particular took on the task of revisiting previous hypotheses made by anthropologists studying racial mixture that were made on shaky (re: propagandist) anthropometric evidentiary grounds. In his 1926 study "On the Relation Between Negro-White Mixture and Standing in Intelligence Tests" Herskovitz used a combination of anthropometric and sociological methods to challenge and refute the premise that the intelligence of Negroes varied based on their percentage of white blood.⁴⁹ At the same time as Black families were scrutinized for their innate ability to uphold white middle-class family structures and values, Boas and Herskovitz instead began using the theory of cultural relativism to prove the non-hierarchical nature of racial and ethnic difference, providing evidence for how social institutions and power structures shaped culture. Perhaps taking cues from her skeptical subjects and Black intellectual peers, or perhaps seeking to focus on other aspects of her study that were more readily available, from early on Day invested most

49 "We are forced to recognize, therefore, that the relationship between test scores and physical traits denoting greater or less amounts of Negro blood is so tenuous as to be of no value in drawing conclusions as to the comparative native ability or relative intelligence of the Negro when compared to the White. This leads us to recognize further that general conclusions of this type which have been made have resulted from insufficient analyses of the data in hand, or from lack of proper genealogical data," Melville J. Herskovits, "On the relation between Negro-white mixture and standing in intelligence tests," *The Pedagogical Seminary and Journal of Genetic Psychology* 33, no. 1 (1926), 41.

of her time and research funding toward collecting photographs and family histories from her subjects.

In comparison to Hooton, Day saw the silences and gaps in her standard data collection methods as an opportunity to lean on source materials that were more reliable among Black families, namely sentimental material objects. Where family information proved scarce, Day turned to “wedding certificates, inscriptions on tombstones, and names in old family Bibles...to corroborate the testimony of any individuals who seemed to be doubtful of dates or names.”⁵⁰ While wedding certificates and tombstones would have been public record, Day also sourced heirloom objects such as a breast-pin worn by Sue Sanson containing a precious photograph of an ancestor, or old letters proving ties between long-gone kin.⁵¹ Only a handful of generations removed from enslavement in which it was often forbidden for the enslaved (themselves property) to own or pass down property, the objects that Day sourced from her families were often treasured possessions. With tape marks, adhered scrapbook paper, and glue residue clinging to the backs of the photos, the images Day received not only illuminate how her families wanted to represent themselves to a larger public, but also how these photos held valuable physical and sentimental positions in family homes. Especially as family members passed into whiteness and others migrated over state lines in pursuit of brighter futures, these objects were sometimes the only objects tying family members together. In her correspondences with her subjects in pursuit of these materials, Day knew the priceless value they held in family homes, and would insist on the safeguarding of them while they were in her possession, promising their safe return after she had finished copying or studying them.⁵² While Day used these objects to

⁵⁰Day, *A Study*, 6

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² CBD to Cecelia C. Saunders April 30 1927.; CBD to Alice Dunbar Nelson April 27, 1927.; CBD to Mazie Sapp August 16, 1927.

inform and visually represent her construction of family trees, because of the objectives and constraints of the study the only materials published were photographs. Even still, Day's rigorous pursuit of a different, more culturally specific form of evidence seeking suggests that she had a different relationship to the goals of her project in comparison to her mentor. While Hooton seemed consistently concerned with the purity and accuracy of the results, Day seemed more interested in representing the cohesion and endurance of these family trees, a goal that was reflected in how she then curated the materials in *A Study*.

“Such is the difficulty in working with photographs alone”

For Day, photography was a recognizable tool through which she could illustrate the strength and character of a family tree on the pages of *A Study*. As a Black woman and as an anthropologist, Day understood the draw of her photographic archive for intellectuals and civilians alike, especially given the consumption of photographs in both public and private spaces at the time. As she was preparing her master's thesis for publication in 1931, Day wrote to Hooton that she felt “the photographic charts are the part of the study that is really valuable and these notes of mine just something to explain them a bit.”⁵³ If we are to take Day at her word, it is in her 46 published photographic family trees that Day saw her central intervention. To be sure, the unprecedented nature of her photographic collection was a key selling point; while various other social scientists before Day had collected portraits of different Negro types, no study had gathered portraits of entire families, allowing viewers to scrutinize and evaluate the progression of racial types through generations of racial mixture. As head of the study's lab, Hooton often wrote to board members of the Bureau for International Research inviting them to

53 CBD to Earnest Hooton, 8 September 1931, 4–5, CBD Papers, PMAE:HU.

view Day's family photo charts and take in the range of "types." Doing so was a means of drumming up interest in the project but also a way of seeking out further funding for Hooton's lab, especially as much of the BIR funding Day had received went to her photography needs (photo-copying, commissioning portraits, ordering prints).⁵⁴ In this way, Day's use of photography primarily catered to white viewers, especially as she believed in the ability of the white gaze to overturn the larger public's racial imagination. This assumption about the truth-telling nature of photography remained true even as these solid grounds were continually tested by the very subject matters in which Day was invested: racial mixture and portraiture.

Day began her photographic collection during her undergraduate studies at Radcliffe by soliciting her friends and acquaintances for recent portraits and snapshots through the mail, receiving in return a variety of individual and family photos that reflected both the private and public lives of her subjects. Continuing to collect images throughout her master's research until 1931, Day's photographic collection ranged in kind from studio portraits (in the form of daguerrotypes, carte de visites, cabinet cards) such as graduation photos, class photos, and military photos to informal images that served more vernacular purposes such as family kodaks, newspaper clippings, and random snaps. Indeed, her image collection reflected how photographs were "the currency of common friendship and common life."⁵⁵ Not only was this currency common but photographs did an incredible amount of heavy lifting for Black Americans as

⁵⁴ In a report updating the BIR on the progress of his lab, Hooton writes to the chairman of the BIR inviting the whole committee to view Day's collection of photographs, saying "It would be desirable to have available for further collecting by Mrs. Day...If the members of the Committee would be interested in inspecting the great collecting of photographs and genealogical charts which Mrs. Day has assembled, we should be glad to arrange for an exhibition to be held in the Peabody Museum." Hooton to Professor C.G. Wilson, April 18, 1928, Hooton Papers, PMAE:HU.; Evidence of Day paying her subjects to commission studio portraits includes a letter from Day to Etta O'Neal, "I have decided to send this little check for \$5 to pay for having her photographs taken, for I know that that is part of every girl's commencement; and I am selfish enough to hope that she will send me one of the pictures." CBD to Etta O'Neal April 28 1927, CBD Papers, PMAE:HU.

⁵⁵ Shawn Michelle Smith, *American Archives: Gender, race, and class in visual culture*. (Princeton University Press, 1999), 69.

sentimental material objects, political tools, and sites of social interpretation. As evidenced by the enduring footprint of Du Bois' Paris exhibition and Frederick Douglass sitting for at least 160 portraits over the course of his lifetime, the genre of commissioned photographic portraits, cabinet cards, and daguerreotypes in the nineteenth century and later Kodak snaps in the twentieth century offered middle and upper-class Black people the ability to control and perform their identities on their own terms.⁵⁶ Through the portrait, social markers such as class status, gender roles, culture, and even interiorities could be performed and controlled by its subjects, rather than caricatured and manipulated by white propagandists.

Photographs also played a valuable part in the private sphere, creating counterhegemonic galleries on the walls of living rooms, the surfaces of coffee tables and bookshelves that amounted to every day "sites of resistance" in Black homes.⁵⁷ Considered treasured documents within a family, family portraits and snaps not only circulated as banal material objects changing between family hands, albums, and frames, but also as valuable "selective visions" of the family that solidified the longevity of important family narratives, events, and memories for friends and acquaintances.⁵⁸ For those who did not have access to portrait studios or could commission photographers on their behalf, the growing access to Kodak cameras in American households throughout the twentieth century offered Black families irrespective of class the possibility to

⁵⁶ Abigail Cain, "How Frederick Douglass Harnessed the Power of Portraiture to Reframe Blackness in America" *Artsy*, 2 February 2017, <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-frederick-douglass-photographed-american-19th-century>.; It is also well recorded how Sojourner Truth leveraged the carte de visite portrait to fundraise toward abolitionist goals. See Nell Irvin Painter, "Representing Truth: Sojourner Truth's Knowing and Becoming Known," *The Journal of American History* 81 (Sept. 1994): 462.

⁵⁷ bell hooks, "In our glory: Photography and Black life," in *Art On My Mind: Visual Politics* (The New Press, 1995), 59.

⁵⁸ Gillian Rose, *Doing Family Photography: The Domestic, the Public and the Politics of Sentiment* (Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2012), 13.

deploy the “political instrument” of the camera toward the creation of pleasure and counterhegemonic visions alike.⁵⁹

For racially mixed families and individuals in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the photographic portrait became another site in which speculation over their racial identity invited “a combination of sympathy, speculation, voyeurism, and moral outrage.”⁶⁰ Mary Niall Mitchell writes of how abolitionists commissioned and leveraged portraits of white-passing enslaved children and siblings, particularly enslaved girls, to play upon both the anxieties of white viewers who feared that “white people could become enslaved in the South, should slavery continue to spread” and the “northern fascination with light-skinned ‘fancy girls’ sold as slaves in the New Orleans market.”



Figure 1-6: Portraits of white passing enslaved children. On left, portrait of Rebecca Huger, Charles Taylor, and Rosina (Rosa) Downs. Carte de visite (1863). Courtesy of the Historic New Orleans Collection, Museum/Research Center. On right, portrait of Fanny Lawrence. Carte de visite (1863), Library of Congress

⁵⁹ bell hooks, “In our glory,” 60.

⁶⁰ Mitchell, Mary Niall, “‘Rosebloom and Pure White,’ Or So It Seemed.” *American Quarterly* 54, no. 3 (2002): 373.

sold as personal keepsakes and to major presses such as *Harpers Weekly* to fundraise for schools for freedpeople, the success of these commissioned studio portraits relied upon utilizing the childrens' status as chattel to draw out sensationalized reactions from the viewer [Figure 6]. This tactic was particularly successful as Victorian middle-class families at the same time were beginning to understand and represent white childhood innocence as something precious to be nurtured and protected. At the crossroads of implied Victorian innocence and enslavement, the carte de visites played with familiar viewing practices and expectations for human dignity for sympathetic white northerners. Keeping in mind the backdrop of family separation and forced sexual exploitation of enslavement, portraits of racially mixed and white-appearing children in the latest Victorian fashions repackaged the horrors of enslavement for the white middle-class family parlor. "In the invitation to scrutiny and in their sale price," Mitchell writes, "these photographs mirrored the activities of the slave market itself." 61 Similarly, in his 1900 *Types of American Negroes* photographic project, W.E.B. Du Bois used portraits of people of mixed ancestry to "challenge the color code of racial taxonomy." With marked emphasis throughout his project on images of racially mixed girls and young women, Du Bois attempted to reclaim the biracial woman from scripts of concubinage and sexual deviancy, "re-presenting her as a woman of grace, elegance, and refinement."62 Implicit in the recuperation of social respectability for racially mixed women was the recuperation of the patriarchal Black family unit, in that Black women's sexual purity became the exclusive business of Black men and husbands. This goal of re-presentation at the turn of the century certainly extended well beyond depictions of racially mixed individuals and families, as race leaders such as Du Bois and Mary Church Terrell

61 Ibid, 373, 379.

62 Smith, *Photography on the Color Line: WEB Du Bois, race, and visual culture* (Duke University Press, 2004), 63.

encourage Black people to embody a community identity that mirrored the social and aesthetic values of the white middle class.

Considering that one of Day's goals for *A Study* was to provide a view of "the better class of colored Americans of mixed blood," the individual and family photos she selected for publication illustrate how her subjects used the photographic medium to signal and perform their politic of respectability. Originally coined by Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham to describe a social, sexual, and moral ideology shared amongst Black women organizers of the progressive era, "respectability politics" has since functioned as an umbrella term amongst Black studies scholars to mark a specific bent of "Black reformism and intra-racial class politics" that sees the "reform of individual behavior as a goal in itself and as a strategy for reform."⁶³ In a similar spirit to Booker T. Washington's infamous call to post-emancipation Black laborers to "cast down your bucket where you are" and pull themselves up by their bootstraps, respectability politics move from the premise that individual betterment leads to collective uplift, with the ultimate goal being full incorporation into white systems of value. Higginbotham ties these beliefs to particular socially conservative behaviors, namely "temperance, cleanliness of person and property, thrift, polite manners, and sexual purity" as part of what racial uplift proponents saw as the mandatory "entrance fee" to earn respect and full citizenship in the eyes of the nation and particularly the white masses.⁶⁴ These respectable behaviors also extended into respectable politics, as social reform causes such as the settlement movement brought middle-class workers near low-income neighbors with the purpose of simultaneously alleviating poverty and sharing knowledge and

⁶³ For "Black reformism" see Paisley Jane Harris, "Gatekeeping and remaking: The politics of respectability in African American women's history and Black feminism," *Journal of Women's History* 15, no. 1 (2003): 213.; Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous discontent: The women's movement in the Black Baptist church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 187.

⁶⁴ Booker T. Washington, "Atlanta Compromise Speech," 1895

cultural values. Indeed, for a short time after completing her masters Day worked as General Secretary of the Phillis Wheatley YMCA and as executive director of the Southwest Welfare House in Washington DC, giving public lectures about the middle-class settlement worker's role in community works.⁶⁵ While members of the Black working, educated, and middle classes such as E. Franklin Frazier and Zora Neale Hurston hotly contested socially conservative entrance fees into the upper-classes by calling into question the effectiveness of individual reform as a long-term liberation tactic, respectable decorum certainly held a gatekeeping function for Black middle- and upper-class social circles and heavily extended into aesthetic and sartorial choices.⁶⁶

In many of the family photos published in *A Study*, respectable gender and class scripts inform both the structure of the image and their use within the narrative of the work. With the traditional studio images situated within the opening pages of the study as well as sprinkled throughout the family trees, Day presents readers with families that are representative of not only their blood quantum group (mulatto, quadroon, etc) but of the race [FIGURE 7-8]. Ardizzone

65 "At the service tomorrow morning woman's day will be celebrated. Mrs. Caroline Bond Day, executive director of the Southwest Welfare House, will discuss 'The Settlement Worker's Part In the Community Program.'" "Activities In Local Churches" *The Evening Star*, 18 May 1935.

66 Upon winning the second-place prize in the 1925 literary contest for the Urban League's journal, *Opportunity*, for her play "color struck," literary newcomer Zora Neale Hurston made a famously grand entrance into the party following the award dinner. "Calaaaaah struuuuck" Hurston yelled, as she flung her "long, bright-colored scarf" around her and glided into the room.⁶⁶ The party-goers in attendance included affiliates of a cohort Alain Locke would dub "The New Negroes" in an anthology published the same year: diploma-carrying members of a Black educated northern elite, middle-class Race Men and Women interested in social uplift work, and the rising stars of Harlem's literati charged with creating and interpreting the new age of Black art for a modern public. As an unabashedly attention-grabbing brown-skinned southern woman embodying and riffing off of the gendered politics of colorism and intra-racism that her play called into question, Hurston's debut on the Black literary scene presaged a defiant challenge to the open embrace of color-privilege and respectability in the 1920s urban north. Hurston carved out spaces of her own to publish her works; in 1926 "Color Struck" was published in the inaugural (and only) issue of *Fire!!*, a literary journal started by Hurston alongside a rising generation of like-minded young African American writers (including Wallace Thurman, Countee Cullen, and Langston Hughes among others) who "wished to give expression to their 'individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. If white people are pleased, we are glad. If they are not, it doesn't matter. We know we are beautiful. And ugly too.'"⁶⁶ Defiant, loud, and setting "Fire!!" to the scene, Hurston's literary ethnographic writing is remembered today as a clear intervention against a mode of social respectability and literary formalism that had laid sole claim to the realm of uplift in the early twentieth century.; see E. Franklin Frazier's scathing critique of the Black middle- and upper-classes in his work *Black Bourgeoisie* (Free Press: 1957).

notes that the family portraits Day chose almost always reflected a “nuclear, male-dominated, heterosexual family,” a kinship structure that Day and her subjects used to signal their place within the American middle-class. In doing so Day strategically distanced her families from images of extended Black kinship networks in overcrowded urban housing, images that specifically sought to depict Black family formations as deviant or unevolved. To further avoid this reading, Ardizzone notes, when representing larger family units in her family trees Day broke branches of extended families into different family trees and layouts, a tactic that allowed her to imply both family cohesion and a mindfulness of traditional family norms. In the sociological section of the study, Day chose to display informal family snaps of mother-daughter and father-son pairs, implying both intact generational and gendered inheritances [FIGURE 9-10]. In these more intimate posed snaps, parent and child sit or stand closely together, mirroring each other in dress and expression. Not only is the viewer meant to read racial phenotype through-lines between kin, but due to their placement within the sociological section viewers are encouraged to read these through-lines as proof of other types of social inheritances: religion, club membership, wealth, profession. Conveying the endurance of these legacies seemed especially significant given that in correspondences with Hooton after the publication of *A Study* Day would discuss her interest in the futures of a group she called “the 5th generation,” or the youngest generation of racially mixed children amongst her subjects. Day found this group so intriguing that a decade after *A Study*’s publication she wrote to Hooton with an idea for “a book or at least an article on some such subject as The Fifth Generation.”⁶⁷ Given that this group would be – under the terms of Day’s study – five generations removed from the original event of

67 CBD to Hooton, 12 January 1942 Hooton Paper, HU:PMAE.

racial mixture, Day seemed keenly interested in how this group presented itself not only as discrete families but *as a social group* over the course of decades.



a

FATHER $\frac{3}{8}N \frac{5}{8}W$

MOTHER $\frac{3}{8}N \frac{5}{8}W$



b

TYPES OF QUADROON FAMILIES



Figure 1-7: Plate 5 from A Study. Caption reads “Father 3/8N 5/8W, Mother 3/8N 5/8W) Figure 1-8: Plate 6 from A Study. Caption reads “Types of Quadroon Families.” Figure 1-9 and 1-10: Plate 55 from A Study, caption reads “Parents and Children.”

As such, Day’s selected images in her sociological section also showed how the politics of respectability extended beyond an individual’s self-expression in staged moments of occasion or celebration and into everyday spaces of social gathering and identity development, namely family homes. Indeed, most of Day’s subjects were homeowners; out of the 268 residences represented by Day’s 346 families, a staggering 214 of the homes were owned. Yet beyond solely homeownership, calls from both the Black male intelligentsia and Black women’s suffrage and club movements to protect and uplift Black families worked to make explicit linkages between the performance of traditional gender roles and the general wellness and appearance of the home space.⁶⁸ With a small number of gainfully employed, often college-educated Black

⁶⁸ Writing at the turn of the century in *The Philadelphia Negro*, W.E.B. DuBois urged “the mass of Negro people” to “sacredly guard the home, to make it the centre of social life and moral guardianship” W.E.B. DuBois, *Philadelphia Negro* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania press, 1899), Kindle location 2767. DuBois also expressed concern that Blacks were spending more than they could afford on clothing and “extravagantly furnished parlors, dining rooms, guest chambers, and other visible parts of the homes.” DuBois, *Philadelphia Negro*, Kindle location 2601. Thank you to Tiya Miles for pointing me to these passages.; In 1897, Mary Church Terrell spoke in

men working as accountants, professors, businessmen and university presidents, a growing class of “leisure women” took pride in the labor of domestic improvement, making the home space a site for aesthetic beauty and comfort. This relationship to the home space stood in stark contrast to that of the majority of Black families who needed two incomes to support their family, with many Black women laboring as domestics for white families, themselves unable to turn their full energy and attention to their own homes. Family portraits staged sitting on the front porch of a family home were common as a way of simultaneously showing both the family and the home, with “even the post of a porch or the parasol held by a younger daughter” implying their middle-class status.⁶⁹

her first presidential address to the National Association of Colored Women (NACW) that “Believing that it is only through the home that a people can become really good and truly great, the N.A.C.W shall enter that sacred domain to inculcate right principles of living and correct false views of life.” Mary Church Terrell, “First Presidential Address to the National Association of Colored Women,” Nashville, Tennessee, September 15, 1897.
⁶⁹ Ardizzone, 117.



Figure 1-11: Plate 54 from *A Study*. Caption reads “Four Homes in Atlanta, Georgia”

In her sociological section, Day published representative photos of her families’ homes, even touring her subjects’ residences and rating them in their interior design styles, cleanliness, and overall appearance [Figure 1-11]. Quoting Mary White Ovington’s observations of a residential section of Harlem in which two of Day’s subjects lived, Day marvels at the “long French windows,” “charming iron balconies,” “tall gateways leading into private garages” where automobiles were parked.⁷⁰ Day writes of homes with “especially well-equipped libraries and pictures which show that unusual taste has been exercised in their selection. Botticelli,

⁷⁰ Day, *A Study*, 112. Day quotes Mary White Ovington, *Portraits In Color*, (New York: Viking Press, 1927) 8.

Rembrandt, Corot, and DaVinci were some of the masters, of whose works I saw copies in many homes.” Day continues to describe original works by Black and African artists displayed in “conspicuous places,” suggesting that her families maintained a pride in or appreciation for Black cultural forms.⁷¹ A different type of family photo emerges through Day’s lengthy descriptions of the inside of her subjects’ homes as she works to extend the aesthetic sensibilities of the “better class” onto the material objects and pieces of art with which they surround themselves.

Day used these photographs to further show how homeownership was not only a sign of economic achievement but also a means of providing a protected and pleasurable space for social activities. As de jure segregation made many of the cultural activities associated with the interests of the educated middle and upper-classes inaccessible (theaters, galleries, concerts, lectures), the home space became a location for women’s clubs, reading groups, and bible studies to meet safely. Day herself was a part of the Utopian Literary Club and the Chautauqua Circle, two elite women’s social uplift clubs based in the Atlanta area whose meetings were held in private homes. While the purpose of the clubs was largely to gather to discuss scholarly and civic topics, members of the Chautauqua Circle often shared meals at elegant tables set with fine linens, china, and silver.⁷² As a result Day indicates that her subjects’ home life reflected a unique relationship to the home space as a social epicenter.

"Consequently the more intelligent class of colored people are thrown back upon such entertainment as they can create in their own homes and among themselves. It is not to be wondered at then if, shut off to themselves, a group within a group, they have retained a few remnants of an older and less desirable social order, not being allowed opportunity to benefit by the progressive new order. The result is that in some sections, especially in small communities, we still have a form of lavish hospitality

71 Ibid.

72 Betsy Riley, “Ladies of the Club,” *Atlanta Magazine*, 2 December 2013, <https://www.atlantamagazine.com/great-reads/ladies-of-the-club/>.

which is considered as extravagance and attributed to characteristic Negro laxity, when in reality it is only an outlet for sociability which dares not assert itself in any other way.

The insolated social culture of her families, Day argues, was both a response from middle- and upper-class Black families to being shut out of the very white cultures they sought to embrace as well as a reflection of Black communities creating structures of support and care for one another out of the security of homeownership. By noting hospitality as characteristic of an older Black social order, Day acknowledges the continuity (and even thriving existence) of these care structures even amongst the brown middle class and educated Black elite, and the subsequent derision they had garnered in the eyes of white outsiders. Through photographs of home exteriors, readers of *A Study* can imagine the lively interiors of Black family life.

In instances where Day could not obtain family portraits, however, her research assistants and Day herself became photographers. While completing her fieldwork in Atlanta, Day and her research assistants traveled to her subjects' homes and had family members ranging in age from infant to elderly pose in front of a white sheet backdrop, composing their face with neutral expressions from front and profile views [figure 1.12].



Figure 1-12: Plate 4 from A Study. Plate shows a mixture of studio portraits and racial type photography. While in the first two images the subjects have been compelled to pose for a scientific photographer, the third and fourth images represent a standard portrait format.

In doing so, Day relied upon the central tenants of racial type photography, a genre of image-making that politically and aesthetically clashed with the more dignified tenants of portrait photography. Simultaneous with the rise of portrait photography in the nineteenth century came the equally common practice of using photography to order and surveil people of all kinds deemed other. Just as portrait photography was inscribed with a visual language composed of signs and symbols meant to signal the social standing and achievement of its subjects, scientific “type” photography employed a visual language “for the regulatory needs of the state or the classificatory imperatives of colonization.”⁷³ Type photography extended the mantle of

⁷³ Tina Campt, *Listening to Images*, 5

objectivity to the scientific photographic gaze with the expressed purpose of hierarchically ordering different social groups and bodies, and was used as key pieces of scientific evidence in anthropological and evolutionary biological studies of “primitive” ethnic groups, criminals, those labeled disabled or suspected to be mentally ill, and the working classes.⁷⁴ Themes common amongst type photography included a cropped frame in which the subject is compelled to pose expressionless and often nude from the torso up in front of a neutral or white backdrop. This scientific gaze extended into other types of ordered spaces; the invention of the mug shot or “signaletic notice” photographic system by French police officer Alphonse Bertillon in the late nineteenth century allowed law enforcement to measure and record the “criminal body,” a practice that quickly spread across the world as a modern means of surveillance. Creating a photographic archive (or what Allan Sekula calls a “shadow archive”) of criminal types designed for home viewing, these images were then disseminated to the public and consumed widely, leading to a civilian population encouraged to “discipline their gaze in order to protect themselves.”⁷⁵

The similarity in style and usage of the mug shot and the racial “type” photograph created explicit linkages between criminal and non-white bodies, as well as whole generations of viewers trained to tie phenotypic characteristics to interior essences and behaviors. Consequences specific to Black people proliferated; similar to how civilians were taught how to spot “passing criminals” by studying mug shots for common facial features and bone structures, white scientists, policemen, and civilians alike prided themselves in their ability to correctly identify

74 Amos Morris-Reich, *Race and Photography: Racial Photography as Scientific Evidence, 1876-1980* (University of Chicago Press, 2016), xiii.

75 Shawn Michelle Smith, *American Archives*, 69.; For “shadow archive” see Allan Sekula, “The Body and the Archive,” *October*, Winter 1986, Vol 39: 10.

white-passing Black people, seeing this deception as an equally criminal act.⁷⁶ Allan Sekula writes that this practice was founded “on the basis of mutual comparison, on the basis of the tentative construction of a larger, ‘universal’ archive, that zones of deviance and respectability could be clearly demarcated.”⁷⁷ As this image genre became a key mechanism within the infrastructure of the state (through required photo IDs) and of the nation (through passport photos) throughout the early and mid-twentieth century, Tina Campt writes of how this system of images required Black people to become “mute supplicants of governmentality” in order to gain a semblance of mobility that was only marginally granted and often perilous. On the blurry line between “postured performances” and “compelled poses,” mug shots and identification photos were not a far cry away from Harvard professor Louis Agassiz’s “Slave Daguerrotypes” of the 1850s.⁷⁸ Commissioned by Harvard to specifically provide scientific evidence of the racial inferiority of Black people, Agassiz forced an enslaved man and woman named Renty and Delia to pose in front of the camera in the nude, with the subsequent images creating a formidable biological “type” that Black people would be compared to for decades to come.

The racial type image was a mechanism through which many of the most enduring stereotypes of racially mixed families and individuals were disseminated for public consumption in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries [Figure 13]. Even before the proliferation of photographic evidence within the sciences, mid nineteenth century eugenicists such as Josiah Nott used lithograph drawings depicting the effects of racial hybridity to provide visual evidence for their hypothesis that “physical signs provided indices to the distinct moral and intellectual characters.”⁷⁹ Similar to uses of eighteenth-century Spanish and Mexican *Casta* paintings

76 Smith, 70.

77 Sekula, 14.

78 Tina Campt, *Listening to Images*, 9-10.

79 Shawn Michelle Smith, *American Archives*, 189.

depicting variations on racial type within racially mixed families, scientists and colonial governments were interested in visually pinpointing “the very narrow color line drawn by ‘one drop’ of blood laws.” For Nott and Casta artists, racial type drawings taught viewers to equate “a multitude of people with a single, imaginary face,” imbuing the phenotypic effects of racial mixture with a quality of fantasy and the unknown [Figure 14-15].⁸⁰ On the eve of emancipation, pro-slavery propagandists used similar lithograph drawings on the cover of anti-miscegenation pamphlets, with drawings that closely resembled Nott’s anatomical caricatures.

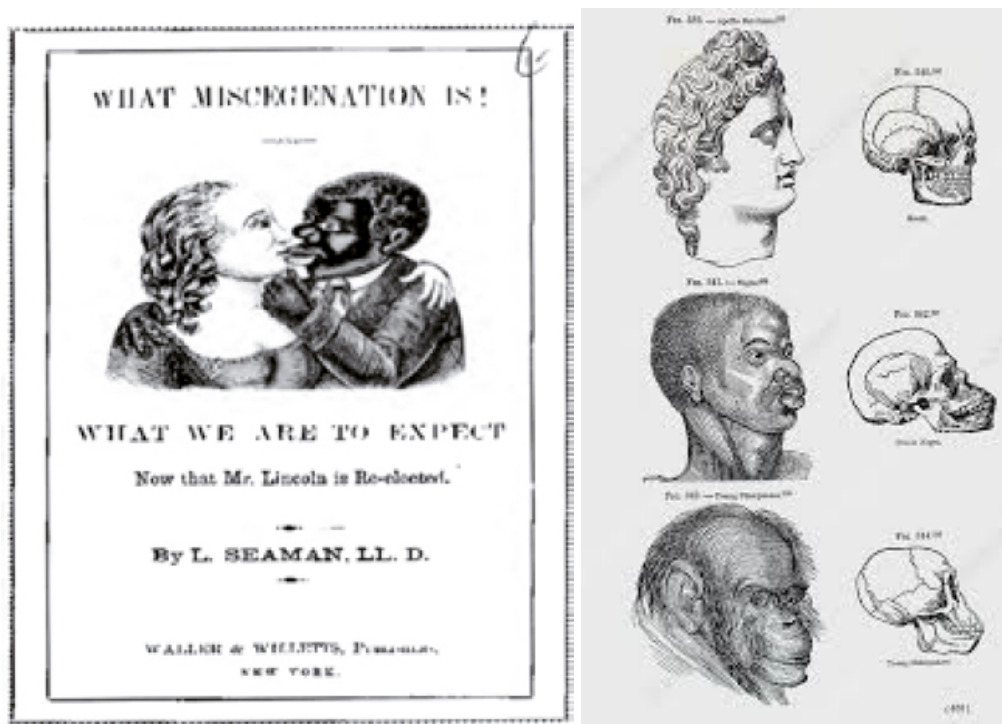


Figure 1-13: Cover of *What Miscegenation Is What We Are To Expect Now That Mr. Lincoln is Re-elected* by L. Seaman L.L. D (New York: Waller & Willets, Publishers, 1865).

Figure 1-14: “Illustrations of Comparative Types of Races,” from pages 458 and 459 of *Types of Mankind or, Ethnological researches based upon the ancient monuments, paintings, sculptures, and crania of races...* by Josiah Clark Nott and Geo. R. Gliddon (Philadelphia, 1854). Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 49.



Figure 1-15: *Las castas*. Casta painting showing 16 racial groupings. Anonymous, eighteenth century, oil on canvas, 148×104 cm, Museo Nacional del Virreinato, Tepetzotlán, Mexico.

With the proliferation of photography, scientists searched for these imaginary faces in real human forms. Francis Galton, a eugenicist and cousin of Charles Darwin, used the photographic medium to provide documentary evidence for the “properties of blood” in the face, and “re-inscribed the photographic likeness as the evidence of family character, and thus, . . . as the sign of racial identity.”⁸¹ Nott and Galton both hypothesized that racial hybridity produced congenitally weak, neurologically flighty, and sterile children, with Galton combining anthropometric evidence with photographic evidence to link certain anatomical facial features to these conclusions. What’s more, as camera technology became more widespread, over time the photographic evidence used to support these claims shifted away from exclusively type photos. By the late nineteenth century, Shawn Michelle Smith contends, family photography increasingly took on scientific valences. “if the photographic portrait was first circulated as a

81 Ibid, 45, 134.

family heirloom,” Smith writes, “it was later exchanged as a document that *recorded* an ancestral heirloom, namely the ‘inherited character’...[becoming] the evidence of the eugenicist album.”⁸² At the intersection of type photography and family frames, contesting the effects of racially mixture emerged as a way of contesting other social identities such as class and moral right and wrong.

As both a photographic portrait subject and scientific photographer herself, Day would have direct experience with how the two image genres she employed resonated on vastly different spiritual and political registers. As foils to state-sanctioned identification photos, racial and criminal “type” photography, and widely circulated photographs of lynchings, family portraiture and snapshots empowered Black families to define themselves specifically against the institutions of white supremacy that used photography to order, surveil, and suppress Black bodies. It is particularly puzzling, then, that Day was unaware of (or perhaps intentionally ignored) how her use of the two genres in *A Study* presented a visual reading practice that walked a fine political line between vindication and further instantiation of racial tropes. This conflict was largely played out on the pages of *A Study* without comment from Day, and instead presented itself through a number of passive but pivotal curatorial choices. When condensing her collected images into organized family trees for publication, Day used portraits and type photography nearly interchangeably, often allowing them to share space side by side. What’s more, Day would often remediate the images in the process, cropping family photos and turning them into tight headshots, or taking full-body portraits and tightening the frame so that only the subject’s heads remained. While likely done to save space on the page and to focus the viewer’s eye on facial features, the effect further flattens the portrait’s essence and adds an eerie intimacy

⁸² Smith, *American Archives*, 125.

with the subject's tight gaze. Existing on the page as floating heads divorced from nearly all the social context and respectability, they worked so hard to illustrate, it is as if Day's subjects stare out from a dark (though not altogether otherworldly) reality, one in which all portraits of Black people, even the most dignified, are potential mugshots.



Figure 1-16: Example of how Day cropped and altered portraits for her scientific and publication purposes. On left, original archival image of Alice Frye, courtesy of the Peabody Museum. Figure 1-17 On right, Plate C34 from *A Study*.

Further altering them toward her research ends, Day then captioned the cropped images with each individual's calculated proportions of Black, white, and native blood. [Figure 13]. In other instances, Day used family photographs as examples of racial "group types," commenting that they were good examples of a certain type of phenotypic feature playing out through several generations. These usages of her amassed photographic archive shift the spirit of the images, creating a "web of intersecting gazes, some sanctioned and others denied."⁸³ While the cropped portrait of Mrs. Alice Frye allows for a more intimate gaze, the viewer is denied the pleasure of the portrait's oval shape fit for a frame, or the details of her lace applique that suggest a feminine sensibility. Combined with the application of Mrs. Frye's racial blood quantum, the visual

⁸³ Shawn Michelle Smith, *Photography On The Color Line*, 10.

dissonance represented by this remediated web of interests calls into question whether the original politics of the photographs remained in their new state.

Looking to the archive, glimpses of Day's understanding of these photographic limitations appear in her correspondences. Given that much of Day's observations were done using photographs of various kinds, the quality, age, and "accuracy" of the photographs greatly varied. As part of her process of gathering photographic evidence, Day had a photographer make in-house copies of the images, creating photographic copies and in some cases copies of copies.⁸⁴ The mechanical process of reproducing these Black and white and sepia photos created variations in the intensity of color, with some images becoming darker or lighter depending on their original form, consequently making subjects' skin appear darker or lighter or obscuring details such as hair texture [Figure 14]. Day was aware of these problems and would write to Hooton acknowledging them as shortcomings. Writing about variations across images in Hilda Evans' photos, Day writes

There is an underlying ruddy color in her skin which does not show of course, and something that is just non-negroid about the sheen of her hair and general cast of the face...the cause of this misrepresentation comes from the fact that at least two of the pictures of Hilda taken in groups are reproductions of Kodak pictures and they always reprint with an intensity of color, or rather, reprint darkly, if you know what I mean...I noticed that in the case of the photographs of Archibald Brown, Rose Floyd, and (?) which I took. When placed beside photographs made by photographers they invariably look darker in comparison with other members of their families than they should. *Such is the difficulty in working with photographs alone.*⁸⁵

⁸⁴ One correspondent, Mary T. Granger, commented on the subpar quality of her photographic contribution, lamenting, "I am glad to be able to send you my father's photograph although it is a poor one, reproduced from an old and faded daguerreotype." Mary T. Granger to CBD, 20 May 1930, CBD Papers, PMAE:HU.; Another correspondent, Ethel B Evans, who agreed to help Day gather more family photos writes "I shall try to get a few families soon, my greatest hinderance is getting pictures, some pictures are such poor representations of the people like the Gail woman." Ethel to CBD 14 January 1927, CBD Papers, PMAE:HU.

⁸⁵ CBD to Hooton, 2 March 1932, Hooton Papers, PMAE: HU

Especially as Day's photographic observations were contingent upon these very fickle factors, Day wrote to her subjects asking for verifications or clarifications of observations she had made. In their responses to Day's questions, her correspondents often revealed their own colloquial understandings of photography and racial categorization. In a letter from Ethel to Day, Ethel B Evans presumably provides answers to a number of Day's questions regarding the appearance of some portraits Ethel had sent to her. "Now about your pictures," Ethel writes, "Charlie Lewis' father is whiter than my aunt Willie and papa, his mother lives and you can't tell her from a white woman....for true they have Mexican blood in them, now if Mexican blood is called negro then it needs to be changed...Mrs. Gail is much better looking than that old picture, and the hair in that picture is not a good representation of her real hair."⁸⁶ In another letter Day asks another subject, Ethel Tears, a number of odd follow-up questions seeking to clarify some of the observations Day had made based on the photographs Ethel had sent. "Has Jemima Matthews a mouth up-turned at one corner like her photograph, or is that a defect of the enlargement? If her 'husband' - lamb - was a white man, why is his hair so frizzly?"⁸⁷ Ethel responds, "No defect, just born that way, a very ugly lady, nappy headed too." In regard to Day's second question, she notes "this white fellow Lam must have had straight hair, he was a rough character, fought and lived near the border of Mexico...I think he hasn't combed his hair." In their attempts to quickly and casually compare racial features with different ethnic groups – at times associating moral wrongs and rights with aesthetic beauty, class, and region – Day's subjects approached her anthropometric questions with a level of subjectivity that bordered on gossip. The information they offered often pushed up against Day's desire to represent her subjects as coherent family units and respectable members of society: rough characters on the border of Mexico to explain

⁸⁶ Ethel to CBD 14 January 1927, CBD Papers, PMAE:HU.

⁸⁷ CBD to Ethel Tears 16 August 1927, CBD Papers, PMAE:HU.

unkempt hair, poor hairstyles to explain texture differences, ugliness as a stand-in for variations in lip size.



(on left) Figure 1-18: Archival images from Day’s papers showing differences in color saturation. On left the family of George White (F2). (on right) Figure 1-19: unidentified images from the Sims family (E15). PMAE: HU.

In other instances, Day would change her photographic observations and sociological information based on information she knew about the subject, including the subject’s feelings toward their own appearance. Writing to Hooton about how she had chosen to label the features of acquaintances based on photographic observations, Day admits, “I have become more conscious of two instances in which I am sure there would be cause for objections....in the first instance, in the case of Kate Graves 2nd you are quite right, the girl’s hair is frizzly almost to the point of kinkiness, but she is sensitive about it and it sounds less objectionable to simply say it is more A6, which is really the same thing.”⁸⁸ In consulting her subjects on how they (or their

⁸⁸ CBD to Hooton, 2 March 1932, CBD Papers, PMAE:HU.; For discussions of Day changing sociological information or encouraging subjects to approximate data (income, age, etc) see CBD to Georgia W. Johnson, March 21 1927. “For I really know almost all of the sociological data about you, anyway about your age, I put that back a

friends) should be categorized, and then subsequently changing these categorizations based on her degree of social relationship with them, Day's correspondences show how visual reading practices are more often a reflection of the viewer's subject position than they are a reflection of what the images themselves document.

While Day used the intimacy of her social relationships to create a formidable visual lookbook that offered material proof of how Black family bonds were acknowledged and maintained over generations, Day's families demonstrate the social and emotional cost and upkeep of these representations. Due to the private nature of written correspondences, her subjects' responses reflect social nuances that Day's study could not capture, especially as they articulated the color line as cultural rather than biological. That Day's published family trees often contained a blank square where the photo of a white male ancestor should have been – even as stories of said ancestors permeate the letters written by her female subjects – suggests the limitations of family history projects that do not make space for the very messiness of family and history.

“My Dear Carrie:” Storytelling and Word Portraits From the Archive

In contrast to the curated coherence of Day's published study, the layers of ambivalence within Day's archival materials housed at Harvard's Peabody Museum offer contemporary audiences a different view of her project, and by extension family history and racial mixture.

few years for good measure." ; CBD to Roberta Curry Lindsey, April 11 1927, CBD Papers, PMAE:HU. "Even though you are not able to give all the information, please send what you can and where you don't know exactly or don't wish to state exactly just put the approximate amount." ; while most age approximations were in relation to women, Day encourages one man to feel comfortable lying about his age, perhaps due to his coming from a prominent family. "If you don't want to tell your exact age, like the ladies, that's alright; just approximate any question that you can't answer definitely" CBD to Edgar Westmoreland, April 11 1927, CBD Papers, PMAE:HU.

This is partly due to differences in authorship; while the study is written almost entirely through the voices of its investigators, Day and Hooton, the archive is full of the voices and stories of its subjects. Here, Day's subjects perform close readings of their own family histories that are at once ordinary and remarkable, weaving image and narrative together in a way that the constraints of Day's study could not account for. Containing the original surveys filled out in the neat cursive scripts of various subjects, her calculation books, notes to self, unused images, and her correspondences with hundreds of friends and colleagues, the archive draws attention to the materiality and many layers of mediation within Day's work. Attuning ourselves to the different goals of the archive, what visions of the family does Day's archive allow, what stories rise to the top, what voices must we still strain our ears for?

It is tempting to romanticize the resistance found in Day's archive – and any institutionally based archive – as a wellspring of authenticity, especially when searching for voices that counteract the dominant tellings of history. As historians warn, the archive is an alluring yet “fundamentally misleading storehouse of information;” full of the political biases and blind spots of the institutions that built them.⁸⁹ In the case of Day's archive, we must think of the privileged platform many of Day's families had access to while alive in comparison to other Black families, as many were the beneficiaries of long-standing color privilege, educational advancement, and socio-economic mobility. In one letter, an unnamed mother writes to her daughter “Ruth” tracing her family history back to “the colonial days.” Relaying that her relatives had been free since the eighteenth century, the mother writes of how Ruth's ancestor was a founding member of the Brown Fellowship Society, a fraternity for free mulatto men in Charleston, South Carolina founded in the late eighteenth century. Writing of how this

⁸⁹ “fundamentally misleading:” from Tiya Miles' draft manuscript for *All That She Carried: The Journey of a Ashley's Sack, A Black Feminist Keepsake* (Penguin Random House, 2021), 21.

association impacted their family's politics and job opportunities in white elite establishments, Lee writes, "from constant association with this class of people it is but natural that our people should feel and think as they did. So these three generations of ours were as ardent state rights men as the founders of old Carolina class."⁹⁰ In comparison to those subjects for whom white ancestors were a stain on their family tree, for others their relative proximity to whiteness was something to lean into and cultivate generationally, seeing lighter skin and Eurocentric features as an avenue toward social and economic autonomy. That Day could turn to reference texts such as *Who's Who in Colored America* to collect and confirm biographical and photographic information about some of her more high-profile subjects stands in stark contrast to the types of archival scavenging that many historians have to do in order to recover the existence of Black women throughout American history. Indeed, Day's archive is uniquely situated in discussions of Black women's history, seeing as Black women make up a majority of Day's correspondences and their withholding is explicitly documented, as opposed to implied through silence. Yet whether by purposeful omission, coercion, or accident, a variety of silences still pervade this archive; Black women's voices even in their most archivally visible forms must be intentionally and creatively pursued.

Two Black feminist writers, Marisa Fuentes and Darlene Clark Hine, outline a way through these archival difficulties, both writing out of a desire to highlight the complexity of Black women's positionality within the official record. In tracing the "dispossessed lives" of enslaved Caribbean women in the traditional archive, Marisa Fuentes speaks to how much of the work of writing Black women's histories in the Black Atlantic has been the work of archival recovery, of piecing together fragments of Black women's lives amidst the silences by which

⁹⁰ unknown to "Ruth," CBD Papers, PMAE:HU.

they were bound. The work of recovery, Fuentes argues, requires the historian to “[change] the perspective of a document’s author to that of an enslaved subject,” and in doing so “[fill] out miniscule fragmentary mentions or the absence of evidence with spatial and historical context.”⁹¹

Applying this method to Day’s archive necessitates viewing her correspondences and questionnaires through the lens of her study’s participants: as institutional documents that invite and often demand fragmentary responses. These parameters encourage contemporary viewers to conflate Black women’s withholding with a lack of agency or lack of information when in actuality the terms of agency that Day’s participants operated undertook a much more complex view of power. Day certainly contributes to this fragmentation, as *A Study* barely holds space to directly address the centuries of rape and coerced interracial sexual encounters her families were subjected to, instead deferring to the language of illegitimacy suitable for a white readership.

“Aside from the existence of an acute and complex social situation in which they find themselves today,” Day writes in the opening pages of *A Study*, “these individuals have a family history much of which has been shrouded in the mystery and humiliation of illegitimacy.”⁹²

Interestingly, while her published work uses the more socially acceptable language of “illegitimacy” to refer to the “complex social situation” wrought by the sexual economy of chattel slavery, the voices of Day’s archive do not directly address events of sexual coercion, assault, and rape by name either. If anything, many of Day’s subjects perform in earnest the explicit choice to withhold and often use archival fragmentation as a way of protecting the sanctity of the family unit.

91 Marisa Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 4.

92 Day, *A Study*, 4.

In this way, Day's correspondences provide a window into a community of women and mothers who use what Darlene Clark Hine calls a "culture of dissemblance," to protect themselves and their family's history from judgment. Originally used to describe the internal lives of Reconstruction-era Black women in the Middle-West, Hine defines the culture of dissemblance as "the behavior and attitudes of Black women that created the appearance of openness and disclosure but actually shielded the truth of their inner lives and selves from their oppressors."⁹³ A culture of dissemblance informed how Black women responded to the compounding circumstances of Blackness and womanhood including sexual violence from white men; intra-racial gendered oppression; inferior labor conditions; and negative stereotypes perpetuated through public culture. This tactic is different from suggesting that Black women's histories have been lost, implying a weakening or fading of intergenerational wisdom.⁹⁴ Rather, Black women's "veil of secrecy" shielded from inquiry those cherished and "empowering definitions of self," that allowed them "to function, to work effectively as a domestic in white households, to bear and rear children, to endure the frustration-born violence of frequently under- or unemployed mates, to support churches, to found institutions, and to engage in social service activities, all while living within a clearly hostile white, patriarchal, middle-class America"⁹⁵

As such, while many of Day's correspondents were happy for Day's success and invested in her as a friend and colleague, the dominant emotion that pervaded their letters was suspicion. This suspicion manifested in a number of ways, one of which being Black people's general

⁹³ Darlene Clark Hine, "Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women and the Middle West: Preliminary Thoughts on the Culture of Dissemblance," *Signs* 14, no.4 (July 1, 1989): 912.

⁹⁴ Kendra Field, "Things to be Forgotten: Time, Place, and Silence in African American Family Histories," Q & A response following her lecture, Little Berks symposium, Berkshire Conference of Women Historians, Radcliffe Institute, Cambridge, MA, June 7, 2019.

⁹⁵ Hine, 915-916.

hesitancy toward any type of organized data collection from outsiders. When Zora Neale Hurston began collecting folk tales in the Black south as an anthropologist affiliated with Columbia University, Hurston recalls initially being met with a “featherbed resistance” by those she interviewed. Writing in *Mules and Men*, Hurston recalls that her subjects “let the probe enter, but it never comes up. It gets smothered under a lot of laughter and pleasantries. The theory behind our tactics? The white man is always trying to know into somebody else's business. All right, I'll set something outside the door of my mind for him to play with and handle; he can read my writing, but he sure can't read my mind.”⁹⁶ Given a long history of disinterested white anthropologists and photographers traveling into Black communities and absconding with cultural stories and practices, Hurston's experience as a Black anthropologist using the same methods of data collection was initially met with a healthy dose of suspicion. So too, was Day's work. When poet and activist Alice Dunbar Nelson returned her questionnaire to Day, Nelson retorted “what on earth are you doing with all this rigid questionnaire business? The only thing it doesn't ask is if your grandmother's aunt had epizootic in the left hind toe.”⁹⁷ Another subject, Corinne Wingut, writes to Day that her husband strongly objected to participating in yet another study. “Louie is awfully set in some of his ideas and I do not mind saying that he was not a bit in sympathy with miss Hurston when she came to ‘measure us’ last summer. So that is why I have to say that [*crossed out - this is all only because it's you*] I am letting you have the picture only if it's for your own use.”⁹⁸ Day's subjects' healthy suspicion of her work stemmed from knowing

96 Zora Neale Hurston, *Mules And Men* (New York: Harper and Row, 1935), 2. See also Toni Cade Bombara's “The Blues Aint No Mockingbird” (1971) in which Bombara illustrates the protection of a Black family's home against a white male photographers looking to create a narrative about the Black experience without their permission. In the short story the grandmother meets the “buzzing” of the photographer's camera with a stoic iciness, despite the smiling faces of the intruders. Bombara puts a face to the antagonist of the Black women's veiled secrecy, an antagonist preoccupied with weaponizing visual narrative.

97 Alice Dunbar Nelson to Caroline Bond day, 8 July 1927, CBD Papers, PMAE:HU.

98 Corinne Wingut to Caroline Bond Day Jan 4 ?, CBD Papers, PMAE:HU.

that even when the investigators were Black, the rigidity of scientific studies could rarely capture the depths of Black peoples' lived experiences of race.

What's more, the anthropological, anthropometric, and sociological information that Day requested of her subjects involved exhaustive and intrusive probing. At the beginning of her graduate work in 1927, Day solicited the help of her friend Ethel B Evans to procure physical blood samples, a practice she quickly learned her subjects would not be amenable to and which she later took out of her findings. Writing from the field, Ethel alerts Day that "In the Porter family, Porter the father has not given me his blood sample, he claimed it was too painful, so you see what I am up against."⁹⁹ On the sociological surveys, questions included political affiliation, salary, occupation, church membership, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People membership, diseases, hobbies, and monthly rent or mortgage payment. Even more intrusive, the physiological questionnaire asked questions aimed at refuting some of the more pervasive and demeaning stereotypes of mulattoes as sterile, including age at puberty, number of miscarriages and still-born children, contraception use, age of menopause, and number of children. Interestingly some of the forms seemed to be co-opted from Hooton's criminology studies in prisons, as questions also included "offense" and "length of sentence."¹⁰⁰ The exhaustive nature of these family history questionnaires often lead to confusion amongst Day's subjects or partial information. Even W.E.B. DuBois who was a renowned sociologist and would certainly be familiar with a mixed-methods survey responds with questions, "My dear Carrie, I

⁹⁹ "Ethel" to CBD, 17 January 192, CBD Papers, PMAE:HU. In a return response Day notes "I have long since given up hope of getting those blood samples from you, so that is alright. I decided that unless I could get them of whole families they are not worth very much." CBD to Dr.E B Evans 11 April 1927 CBD Papers, PMAE:HU.

¹⁰⁰ Division of Anthropology Harvard University sample questionnaire, CBD Papers, PMAE:HU.

have tried several times to complete the questionnaire which you left for me, but I was afraid I have partially misunderstood it."¹⁰¹

Alongside their confusion, other correspondents questioned the nature of Day's project and were suspicious of how she did not account for the potentially high stakes for her families that came with publishing family information. For some of Day's subjects, revealing the nature of their family bloodlines to the wrong person was a matter of safety and security. One correspondent signed "Hil" scribbled a hastened letter in pencil on a folded half-sheet of unmarked paper explicitly pleading with Day to not include them in the study. "I made a sworn statement of my status as w and it was contested and I swore that there was no such record of me. Now if at any time it is found out I will be made to lose my job as well as some other thing which will cause me serious embarrassment. Please Carrie under no condition use it for it will ruin my whole life."¹⁰² Given that "works as white" or "has a white collar job" was often a shorthand for discussing someone who was passing to be upwardly-mobile, "Hil" was worried that Day drawing any attention to their racially mixed family tree would directly impact their socio-economic livelihood.¹⁰³ We can imagine Hil hurrying to compose and send this note to Day, choosing a pencil out of necessity and not bothering to date it or send a return address for anonymity's sake. Others such as Emma Williston wrote back specifically to address the publication of photos, "I wish to make it quite clear to you that under no circumstance would I like you to use any of my photos of my children singly or in groups."¹⁰⁴ Alice McNeil wrote to Day that, "I've answered the questionnaire as well as I could. I do not know how to figure the proportion of negro blood (no 5) both my father's grand[fathers] were white...-the grandmothers

101 DuBois to CBD, 9 May 1928, CBD Papers, PMAE:HU.

102 "Hil" to CBD, CBD Papers, PMAE:HU.

103 Hobbs, 152.

104 Emma Williston to CBD 6 April 1928, CBD Papers, PMAE:HU.

being Negro – but what proportion I do not know, they never told their children much – mainly because they were ashamed of their illegitimacy. There is lots of information that we have lost due to that mid and pre-Victorian reticence.”¹⁰⁵ This “Victorian reticence” encompassed not only a social conservatism encouraged amongst middle and upper classes but also gendered expectations of what knowledge should and shouldn’t be discussed between Black women, mothers, and daughters.

While there is no record of Day’s response to Hil, Williston, or McNeil, Day spent much of her energies during her correspondences addressing the fears and answering the questions of skeptical friends. It became such an issue that Day crafted a scripted response, and even a way of structuring her archive to reflect their wishes. Writing to Elizabeth Cook, Day reassures her that “while I am getting material concerning about five hundred of our best families, I have a great number of families who feel about the same way that you do. They shrink from any publicity whatsoever. So I have to divide my work into two groups: that which I can publish and that which I cannot.”¹⁰⁶ Even as Day often insisted in her correspondences that her published study would showcase her fifty best families, in actuality her study was partially defined by her subjects’ refusal to be publicly represented. This choice on the part of her subjects – often guised in the language of “a pleasing modesty” – implies an understanding of family histories and visions as a privileged knowledge reserved for a precious, trusted few.¹⁰⁷

While for white-passing families and individuals the stakes of publishing their family histories in any official manner were always high, for some of Day’s Black female subjects the task of even obtaining and sharing the information within their family was a hurdle in and of

105 Alice McNeil to CBD, 11 June 1928, CBD Papers, PMAE:HU.

106 CBD to Elizabeth Cook, 30 March 1927, CBD Papers, PMAE:HU.; See also CBD to Mrs David Jones, 21 March 1927, CBD Papers, PMAE:HU.

107 Day, *A Study*, 4.

itself. Attempting to appeal to her peers' sense of pride and curiosity, Day frequently operated under the assumption that mothers would hold more or all of their family history and encouraged her female subjects to ask their mothers about their genealogy. "Since you seem to be the family secretary" Day writes to Alice Rucker, "you can read it to your mother for me and if there are any corrections make them on this sheet and return it to me."¹⁰⁸ Georgia Hall writes, "there were only a few corrections and mama has indicated them in the sheet."¹⁰⁹ Women would report back to Day about the information they had gathered from their mothers, or more often the lack thereof. In a warm, chatty letter to Day from "Mama Penney," Penney closes, "you may rest assured that I am more than glad to be of service by answering any questions that will be of help in your line of work. But, oh Carrie, dear, raking out those horrid ancestral skeletons is so painful I tried to bury them long ago. And with my mother the past was a closed book."¹¹⁰ Admitting that she had once tried and failed to get this information from her own mother, or perhaps knew never to ask, Mama Penney indicates how ancestral skeletons are inherited along kinship lines, holding a powerful bearing over both the past and the present. Other mothers passed this shame off as a general distaste for discussions of racial mixture.

"Then came the card and I asked Mother about it and told her what I wanted and the purpose and all and with her characteristic pride she said she would rather not enter into it...Of course, to be perfectly frank I have always thought it rather strong for people to point with pride to their ancestors of the type in question no matter what their blood and standing...Of course that is just my way of looking at it and every one else has an equal right to his opinion."¹¹¹

108 CBD to Alice Rucker, date unknown, CBD Papers, PMAE:HU. Similarly, Day writes to John Davis, "You need not bother with the columns which should be filled in with information about your family tree because I have already gotten that information from your mother." 11 April 1927, CBD Papers, PMAE:HU.

109 Georgia Hall to CBD, 3 May 1930, CBD Papers, PMAE:HU.

110 Mrs. Edgar J. Penney to CBD, 23 August 1927, CBD Papers, PMAE:HU.

111 Unknown to CBD, 8 December 1926, CBD Papers, PMAE:HU.

The “characteristic pride” to which this unnamed daughter refers gets at a larger desire amongst Black women to protect themselves against the potential harms of entreating and probing eyes.

Acting as keepers of family history and lore, mothers appear frequently throughout Day’s correspondences as secret keepers, or as figures that guard traumas from leaving the boundaries of the family trust. Day regularly navigated the obstacles of shame and its attending emotions – guilt and silence – with her female subjects in particular, especially as Day’s project required her subjects to recount (even if implicitly) stories of rape, abuse, and missing family members who had long since decided to pass into whiteness. In an exchange between Day and Mrs. W.A. Granger in which Day expresses how “especially anxious” she was to receive “an account of [Mrs.Granger’s] fine family,” Mrs. Granger responds, “Frankly I did not know just what to do about answering these questions, some of which seemed so personal and so intimate. I wondered in what way use would be made of that.”¹¹² Another unknown correspondent writes that “I know I have been more than unpardonably negligent but at first I was at sea about the information for really mother has never talked of the ‘folk’ to us at all. Somehow we seem to hold a rather different view of the things than many others and for that reason, as I said I knew nothing of definite data to give to you.”¹¹³ It is then both surprising and wholly unsurprising that Black mothers held the keys to Day’s family trees. In the wake of the many dispossessions of enslavement, “the root of slavery” Tiya Miles writes, is the “theft of the maternal.”¹¹⁴ The act of mothering for enslaved mothers, as Hortense Spillers notes in “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” became “the mythically revered privilege of a free and freed community.”¹¹⁵ At the same time,

112 CBD to MRS W A Granger March 21 1927, with return note from Mrs.Granger Oct 5 1927. CBD Papers, PMAE:HU.

113 Unknown to CBC 8 December 1926, CBD Papers, PMAE:HU.

114 Tiya Miles, Ashley Sack’s forthcoming book manuscript chapter 4, 33.

115 Hortense Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” 74.

even as the act of mothering during enslavement was continuously compromised by forced separation and labor conditions, the knowledge of the identity of a woman's rapist was often well-known and sometimes even well-documented in court proceedings, journals, and narratives. As Darlene Clark Hine notes, virtually every nineteenth-century slave narrative written by a woman contains a reference to or vivid description of a rape or sexually violent encounter in which the perpetrator is explicitly named.¹¹⁶ While some in Day's Study may have chosen to keep the skeletons of these past encounters hidden, deciding, as in the closing words of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, that this was "not a story to pass on," other mothers chose to pass down these histories to their children. Through Day's archives, we see the power of both disclosure and withholding, as some women take the opportunity to learn more about their family history, while others create a "discursive alternative in which absences become presences in written form."¹¹⁷ In these visible absences marked by blank squares on a family tree, women and mothers ordain themselves to write rapists and slaveholders out of the historical ledger.

What's more, in comparison to Day's scientific usage of photography, Day's female subjects demonstrated the vital role that photographs and material ephemera played in mediating everyday relationships among women, friends, and families. As Patrizia Di Bello writes, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries middle-class women cultivated a uniquely tactile relationship to family images. Thinking beyond photography's realist utility, Di Bello writes that women instead combined photographic images with other types of mnemonic materials that tied their personal experiences to the act of looking. In the "thoroughly modern" practice of photo album

¹¹⁶ Clark Hine, "Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle West," 912. Hine also cites Terry McMillan, *Mama* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987); Grace Edwards-Yearwood, *In the Shadow of the Peacock* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1988); Alice Walker, *The Color Purple* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982); Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1972); Gloria Naylor, *The Women of Brewster Place* (New York: Penguin, 1983).

¹¹⁷ Tiya Miles, Ashley Sack's forthcoming book manuscript chapter 6, 15-16.

curation, women handled, fingered, touched, and placed photos onto the page and into lockets or frames for display, or exchanged photos as tokens of friendship and kinship. These mnemonic rituals, Di Bello argues, “are the only activity women are allowed to indulge away from considerations of service to others.”¹¹⁸ Robin Bernstein further contends that “things” can compel people into certain scripted actions.¹¹⁹ Thinking of Black women and mothers’ scripted actions toward family keepsakes, Michele Mitchell writes of how aspiring Black middle-class families used material objects such as Black dolls, books about racial improvement, and photographs of Black families “to reinforce an intertwined ideology of acceptable gender roles and racial uplift.”¹²⁰ That some of Day’s families could trace their family trees back up to five generations and had evidence through photographs, letters, and other official documents suggests a privileged relationship to material ephemera marked by the interlocking benefits of colorism and social class.

As such, where they withheld their genealogical knowledge, Black mothers and community elders were more willing to engage in the discussion and material exchange of photographs. Day encouraged her subjects to send photos no “matter how old or soiled the picture may be.”¹²¹ While many placed an explicit restriction on the circulation and publication of these photos, in return Day’s female correspondents often vividly described both how their kin looked in photos and how the images themselves circulated and mediated family relations.¹²² In doing so, women would create word portraits composed of both written renderings of physical

¹¹⁸ Patrizia Di Bello, *Womens Albums and Photography in Victorian England: Ladies, Mothers, and Flirts* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2007), 3, 96.

¹¹⁹ Robin Bernstein, “Dances with things: Material culture and the performance of race,” *Social Text* 27 no. 4: 81.

¹²⁰ Michele Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny after Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 178, 179, 194.

¹²¹ CBD to Mazie Sapp, 16 August 1927, CBD Papers, PMAE:HU.

¹²² For restrictions on family photos in the archive see Elizabeth Abel Cook (Mrs) to CBD Feb 24 1927.; Corinne Wingut to CBD Jan 4.; Emma L. Williston April 6 1928. A.D. Badger to CBD July 29, 1930.

images and detailed descriptions of family members of whom they had no photos. Recounting to Day her attempts at finding family images to send along, M.H. Wheeler writes “The picture has been lost and found two or three times, and right now I can’t put my hands on it but may before I send this letter. I put the precious thing away carefully and others don’t know where I put it.” After a long, chatty letter relaying news regarding book club events and mutual friends, Wheeler writes in the post-script “Here I am looking for this picture until (Sam dick?) my dear husband walks in with it in his pocket; has had it a long time. Says he hasn’t anything of his children to carry around.”¹²³ Writing to William H. Hunt, Day notes “I am using in my book one of the old photographs of yourself which I got from mother. If you have another good post-card size one of you, however, that you can spare, I should prefer it because this one is a little indistinct.”¹²⁴ That some families only had one precious image would be significant, indicating how the object might have had many lives as it was passed down through family members or tucked away in a family bible, wallet, or album.

What’s more, women and mothers were forthcoming in their desire to visually describe their kin, seeing Day’s clarifying questions about photographs as a chance to assert and clarify their own family visions. If we are to think of these women as co-curators of Day’s photographic project, we might also think of their descriptions to Day of family photos as a kind of interpretation work, encouraging certain readings and guiding the viewer toward specific conclusions. J.A. Palmer writes a long family history to Day, noting how she hoped Day would settle a family dispute about her and her child’s racial identity. Giving insights into how photographs mediated and conflated understandings of racial and national identities, Palmer writes, "Was brought up to believe I was a American and never gave it a second thought. About

¹²³ Wheeler to CBD, 30 April 1928, CBD Papers, PMAE:HU.

¹²⁴ CBD to William H. Hunt 2 June 1930, CBD Papers, PMAE:HU.

two years ago a lot was said about my not being white and the boy about Indians. Can you by looking at the pictures straighten things out"¹²⁵ Another correspondent, Cecelia C. Saunders writes to Day with a similar desire for photographic observation, noting "I remember telling you at one time that I had an idea that there was quite an oriental strain in my family. You saw my brother and did not see evidence of the strain; on the other hand, I have a niece now - my brothers little girl - who represents the fifth generation and yet who has eyes that are quite oriental. If you are interested in any of this, I shall be glad to do anything which might be of service to you."¹²⁶ Others wrote with more superficial (though altogether decisive) curatorial requests, like Annie Sims Lewis who wrote to Day that "I did not like the picture. I think I am too skinny for a side photograph. I have one here but I expect it is too large, so I will not send it. I am sending some Kodak pictures however I want you to use the one that you like best."¹²⁷ Day incorporated her subjects' willingness to describe, debate, and gossip about their family's appearance into her research, noting in *A Study* that "where it was impossible to see or obtain photographs of the original Black and white ancestors, we secured the best descriptions available from those who remembered them. Frequently such information came from older people in the community who were not related, but whose unofficial business it was, seemingly, to remember the ancestry of everyone else."¹²⁸ Here we see a community attempt to make sense of itself beyond material record, illustrating a way of engaging with photographs and visual culture that both speaks back to dominant ways of seeing throughout American history and also accounts for the messiness (and frequent failure) of this work to subvert entrenched social inequities.

Throughout Day's archive we see women and mothers using photography to assert aesthetic and

125 J.A. Palmer to CBD 9 April 1930. CBD Papers, PMAE:HU.

126 Cecelia C. Saunders to CBD, October 15 1927, CBD Papers PMAE:HU.

127 Annie Sims Lewis to CBD, February 3, 1927, CBD Papers PMAE:HU.

128 Day, *A Study*, 5.

moral judgments about family members. In the wake of these speculations and assertions both Day's project and her subjects reflected back the "ambivalent myopia" produced by studies of racial mixture as a social and biological concept at the time.

Looking to the unstaged moments in the archive, it is no wonder then that the family photos that were left to live in Day's archive tap into a different emotional register than those that were published in *A Study*.





Figures 1-20-22: Unidentified archival images from CBD Papers, PMAE:HU

Sifting through the hundreds of unmarked photos placed under Day’s care, I longed to appreciate the images and the lives captured within them as evidence of something beyond figural data points on a family tree. Writing of the loneliness of Du Bois’s Atlanta Negro portraits, Jovonna Jones marks how the space of the archive can allow for moments of intimacy with the photographic subject that may be otherwise withheld from the public. “To be Black and aspirational at the turn of the century and on the world stage” Jones writes, “is to possibly feel isolated and scrutinized, even while being admired.” I did find several moments of joy, intimacy, and surprise throughout Day’s archival photographic collection, images offering “a glimpse of Black sociality beyond the twin burdens of representation and exceptionalism.”¹²⁹ In one image, stolen glances of motherly love hold open a moment of tender warmth between parent and child while a father proudly clutches a camera in his hands – a sign that he too could create visions of

¹²⁹ Jovonna Jones, “A Visual Record of Black Lives, Four Decades After Emancipation,” *Aperture*. April 24, 2020, <https://aperture.org/editorial/visual-record-black-lives-emancipation-du-bois/>.

his family [FIGURE 15]. In another image, flares of sunlight through the parting of trees give an ethereal quality to a happy social gathering, one of the only images in the archive with a candid, documentary air that presumably extends beyond the family unit [FIGURE 16]. Perhaps most poetically, a double exposure animates a commissioned racial type image, reflecting back another subject or perhaps the photographer – potentially Day herself – onto the face of her subject [Figure 17]. With the white cloth backdrop positioned like a translucent veil, the viewer is reminded of the endless “veils” that divide Black peoples from their white counterparts, such as Du Bois’ metaphorical theorization of “The Veil” that separates Black and white Americans.¹³⁰ In the glaring moment of the photographic capture the viewer is given a rare glimpse behind the veneer of racial photography.

In this way the triumphs of Day’s project exist in tension with its failures; even for those subjects for whom shame, skepticism, and ambivalence colored their participation in the study, almost all found Day’s project interesting in some capacity, citing a desire to learn more about their genealogy and a sense of pride in witnessing Day’s rise through the ranks of academia. J.K. Williams writes to Day, “We have sought information of relatives, but with little success... We know you are going to succeed in your research work and get your degree. We want you to know that we are deeply interested in you and your work, and that the remembrance of your kindness and graciousness is very dear to us.”¹³¹ Even Alice Dunbar Nelson who made cutting remarks

130 Toiya Lister, “The Soul of Black Opera: W.E.B Du Bois’s Veil and Double Consciousness in William Grant Still’s *Blue Steel*,” Thesis, Butler University, 2018.; For original discussion of “the veil” see W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Mineola: Dover Publications, 1994).

131 J.K. Williams to CBD 26 January 1927, CBD Papers, PMAE:HU.; See also “Congratulations on having been appointed to this work. It;s just like you to the doing something worth while.” Mazie Sarns Johnson, 21 July 1927 CBD Papers PMAE:HU.; “This is wonderful work you are doing. I would like something like this to do some day. Many are called but few are chosen for such choice vocations” Julia C. Howard to CBD 11 June 1930, CBD Papers PMAE:HU.; “It is the kind of thing that greatly needs to be done and I wish for you, what you certainly deserve, the fullest measure of success. I am very glad to cooperate with you to the extent of my ability, in filling out the enclosed form and sending you such photographs as we have.” Leslie Pinckney Hill to CBD 24 January 1927 CBD Papers PMAE:HU.

regarding Day's exhaustive questionnaires followed her criticism with a quick word of encouragement: "fascinating work, don't you think?"¹³² Her subjects seemed to fully understand that in both their participation and in their refusal they were contributing to a collective visioning of their social group in a way that before had not been attempted. However, while Day wanted to create a coherent, respectable visual record of how racial mixture was passed down phenotypically – and by extension create order and bestow new meaning out of the disorder that sexual violence and coerced choices had caused to family trees – her friends and subjects urged her to address the emotional and material toll that these histories had produced in the present.

"Oh my Nana, there you are"

In comparison to similar projects exploring racial identity by Black intellectuals and creators at the time, Day's work was met with "faint praise" and was not well-received by her peers or the public.¹³³ The press's coverage of *A Study* clearly illustrated that Day's emphasis on racial types eclipsed most of her sociological conclusions and racial uplift politics, demonstrating how Hooton and Day's anthropometric conclusions were largely misunderstood by the popular imagination. While *The Wyandote Echo* and *The Washington Tribune* only reported on Day's categorization of the three types of racial mixture and her collection of genealogical data, the December 1932 *Crisis* reviewed Day's work and offered that it was 'one of the most intelligent scientific studies of the Negro yet made.'¹³⁴ Perhaps due to the preexisting working relationship between DuBois and Day, *The Crisis* was the only press to offer quotations from Day's opening

132 Alice Dunbar Nelson to CBD, 27 April 1927, CBD Papers, PMAE:HU.

133 Hubert B., Ross, Amelia Marie Adams, and Lynne Mallory Williams, "Caroline Bond Day: Pioneer Black physical anthropologist" in *African American Pioneers in Anthropology*, edited by Faye Harrison and Ira E. Harrison. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999).

134 "A Study of Some Negro White Families" *The Washington Tribune*, 6 January 1933. ; "Makes Study to Find out What White Blood Does to Negro" *Wyandotte Echo*, June 13 1930. ; Dubois, W. E. B. 1932. Books: A study of some "Negro-White families in the United States," *Crisis* 39 no. 2 (December): 385.

socio-political framing comments, highlighting Day's respectability-driven argument about the high class of her subjects in comparison to "the squalor of Black slums highlighted in literary works." Day's argument about how there were no hierarchical outcomes between the dominant, neutral, and regressive mulatto types she cataloged did not appear in any write-ups. It seemed instead that there was more interest in the fact that she was able to categorize these types than there was interest in the photographic or sociological evidence she had gathered, further suggesting that the photographs held very little sway beyond their use as racial photography. What's more, given that Day's goal was to use her families to argue for equal rights for all Black Americans, it is ironic that Day knew that her published study wouldn't be sold at a price point that even her middle and upper-class families could afford.¹³⁵ With *A Study* limiting its initial publication run to 250 copies at \$3.25 apiece (roughly equivalent to \$26 today), Day ultimately suspected that her work would be more in demand by libraries, Black scholars, and the heads of organizations than the people she hoped to help.¹³⁶ Despite these barriers to popular reception, throughout the 1930s and 40s Day maintained a dogged allegiance to the methods and assumptions of racial anthropology, and periodically wrote to Hooton to discuss the latest trends in the field and to brainstorm ideas for future projects based on her previous studies. Often writing about what interesting "specimens" and "human types" her friends' children were and

¹³⁵ Writing to Hooton in the months before publication Day writes, "I hardly think that more than a half-dozen of the families written up would buy the book at the suggested price. I may be wrong however, and shall enclose a list of names and addresses, so that you may send them notices if you think best. Your suggestion of sending a copy of the family history and plate to each seems a better one to me." CBD to Hooton March 2 1932, CBD Papers, PMAE:HU.

¹³⁶ Yet even in the scholarly venues she targeted Day's work faltered; *A Study* was not reviewed by any major journals or scholars, and was only cited in one study by white male sociologists Louis Wirth and Herbert Goldhammer in 1944 in which Wirth and Goldhammer used Day's data to argue against the idea that mulattoes were physically inferior. Even as E. Franklin Frazier's work on the Black Bourgeoisie could have been considerably enriched by Day's data, Frazier never publicly supported Day's work despite his family being included amongst the 50 published families. Anastasia Curwood has contended that this might be due to tensions between Day and Frazier, due to Day embracing the bourgeois norms of the educated elite and Frazier heavily critiquing those very norms (even as he himself was affiliated with those circles). Curwood, "Caroline Bond Day," 86.; see also Curwood, "A Fresh Look at E. Franklin Frazier's Sexual Politics in The Negro Family in the United States."

promising to send photos or make special trips with them to Hooton if he was intrigued, Day's use of physical anthropological methods remained central to her interest in racial mixture.¹³⁷

In contrast, even before Day had begun her master's research her peers had found more emotionally viable ways of discussing the effects of colorism and racial mixture and its impact on Black social causes. Upon winning the second-place prize in the 1925 literary contest for the Urban League's journal, *Opportunity*, for her play "color struck," literary newcomer Zora Neale Hurston made a famously grand entrance into the party following the award dinner. "Calaaaaah struuuuck" Hurston yelled, as she flung her "long, bright-colored scarf" around her and glided into the room.¹³⁸ The party-goers in attendance were certainly amongst Day's circles: diploma-carrying members of the Black educated northern elite, middle-class Race Men and Women interested in social uplift work, and the rising stars of Harlem's literati charged with creating and interpreting the new age of Black art for a modern public. As an unabashedly attention-grabbing brown-skinned southern woman embodying and riffing off of the gendered politics of colorism and intra-racism that her play called into question, Hurston's debut on the Black literary scene presaged a defiant challenge to the embrace of color-privilege and respectability in the 1920s. Not only did Hurston's presence continue to ruffle feathers in the various social settings that she frequented, but the perspective Hurston brought with her into the study of Black racial identity and folkloric expressions in her field of anthropology elicited adverse responses from her peers and mentors. In the following years, Hurston's training as a cultural anthropologist and ethnographer at Columbia University from 1928-1932 would test her ability to hold these politics

137 "I was in New York this summer visiting with my boy, who is now sixteen, and I wanted to go over to Boston and take both children – I wanted you to see them – presuming that you are still interested in observing different human physical types, although I see that your new book is altogether about the apes." CBD to Hooton, 12 January 1942, Hooton Papers, PMAE:HU.

138 Robert E. Hemenway, *Zora Neale Hurston: a literary biography*. (University of Illinois Press, 1977), 60.

and remain financially supported. Still, Hurston carved out spaces of her own to publish her works. In 1926 “Color Struck” was published in the inaugural (and only) issue of *Fire!!*, a literary journal started by Hurston alongside a rising generation of like-minded young African American writers including Wallace Thurman, Countee Cullen, and Langston Hughes among others. According to the mission of *Fire!!*, the editors “wished to give expression to their ‘individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. If white people are pleased, we are glad. If they are not, it doesn’t matter. We know we are beautiful. And ugly too.’”¹³⁹ In comparison to Day’s embrace of her white audience, for Hurston and her peers the disavowal of the white reader was central to marking the twin pillars of fear and shame that upheld colorism and color privilege.

Readers of Day’s published study and viewers of her archival materials at the Peabody Museum today still grapple with the unresolved tensions between the two, as well as what still resonates about Day’s political project. Elizabeth Alexander, who is a poet, scholar, and current president of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, writes from the twenty-first century of the mixture of emotions that came with encountering her own family tree in Day’s Peabody Museum archive. Alexander’s grandmother, Wenonah Bond, was Day’s half-sister who in 1927 at the age of nineteen years old offered a sample of her hair for Day’s analysis. Pulling from her own loving memories, Alexander recalls images of her Nana spending many hours brushing and braiding Alexander’s hair throughout her childhood, as well as her Nana’s “wavy and soft” blue-gray hair which she kept “slightly crisped with hairspray.” “I touched her hair, though I was not supposed to...Oh my Nana, there you are. Here is your hair between my fingers...this was a Wenonah Bond I never knew, nor did my mother. No, not Wenonah. A hank of her hair at

¹³⁹ María Eugenia Cotera, *Native Speakers: Ella Deloria, Zora Neale Hurston, Jovita González, and the Poetics of Culture* (University of Texas Press, 2008), 78.

nineteen, according to her sister's notations, ½ Negro, ¼ Indian, ¼ White. What does it, what could it possibly tell me?"¹⁴⁰ Marking the dissonance between the flattening biology of blood quantum and the binding ties of bloodlines, Alexander felt both disconnected from and moved by this experience in the archive. The fractions of blood listed alongside her grandmother's name simply could not capture the fullness of her Nana's then-young life, as Alexander described her as an educated and traveling "woman on the go." At the same time, as a remnant of a long-gone loved one, a clipping of hair held in a granddaughter's hands brought to life the kinship bonds represented by the stark lines of *A Study's* family trees, making real the endurance of Black family frames and ways of remembering. It is in this spirit that Alexander remembers discovering Day's published *Study* as a child on the shelves of her family home, passed down as a family treasure documenting their family history and connection to the Bond family line. "the book amazed me" Alexander recalls, "It was strange. It was discomfiting. It was unlike anything I had ever seen, nor have seen since. It seemed to both expose the secret lives of black people and yet conceal further secrets behind its pages...its pages led me to think about myself as an adolescent, about what my own bloodlines 'added up to.'" Even from a young age, Alexander admits to seeing past the "high white collars and crocheted shawls" captured in the family photographs. Here, we see Alexander grappling with the emotional world sitting just beyond the frame, a world which Day and her subjects worked so diligently to hide from public scrutiny.

In the archive, the lived realities of Black motherhood and Black maternal memory exist as the excess of the political project Day levied through *A Study*. Day's collected correspondences were overwhelmingly those materials that demonstrated the toll of a culture of dissemblance and a politic of respectability on Black women's relationship to family stories and

¹⁴⁰ Elizabeth Alexander, *Power and Possibility: Essays, reviews, and interviews*. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007), 78-80.

storytelling for future generations. Similarly, Day's archival images hold space for alternative visions of family portraiture, as disparities between the study and the archive expose the less glamorous (though wholly pivotal) curatorial efforts that informed the use of copied, cropped, and variously altered photographs. Even as Day's Study would never be considered pivotal to Black political or activist frames, her way of arguing for the political possibilities of the mixed-race family finds echoes throughout the twentieth century. In the decades to come as the question of the legality of interracial marriage made its way to the United States Supreme Court, political representations of mixed-race families hinged upon the performance of socially normative values of gender and sexuality. In the case of the Loving family of the 1967 *Loving v Virginia* Supreme Court case, photographic depictions of Mildred Loving in the press and the home mirrored Day's treatment of Black maternal excess. In the images that lined the cutting room floor, Mildred's internal life animates the domestic space as a site in which public and private blur.

CHAPTER TWO - “That Image Business:” *Loving v Virginia* and The Iconography of Interracialism

“A few years ago throughout the country the middle-class black woman—I used to say not really black women, but the middle-class colored women, c-u-l-l-u-d, didn't even respect the kind of work that I was doing. But you see now, baby, whether you have a Ph.D., D.D., or no D, we're in this bag together. And whether you're from Morehouse or Nohouse, we're still in this bag together.” – Fannie Lou Hamer, from “It's In Your Hands”

*“We have thought about other people, but we are not doing it just because somebody had to do it and we wanted to be the ones. We are doing it for us – because we want to live here.” Richard Loving in *Life Magazine*, 1966.*

When Charlayne Hunter was accepted into the University of Georgia in 1961 and became the first African-American woman to attend the school in its history, Hunter insisted that the press not make her into a symbol of the Civil Rights Movement. After marrying her white classmate Walter Stovall, the son of a wealthy chicken feed manufacturer, Hunter maintained still that it was nothing more than a personal matter. “I have to break away from that image business sooner or later,” Hunter told *Time*, “I can't spend my life being an image.”¹ Hunter's resolve that her interracial marriage was not to be made into an icon of the national push toward integration finds echoes across the reporting on the topic at the time. Of the small handful of Black-white couples and families profiled by national newspapers and magazines in the 1950s and 60s, many prioritized their own privacy over advocating for the project of integration. When asked to comment on how her presence at the university and her marriage might impact “the Negro cause,” Hunter responded, “all that We Shall Overcome business. I believe in it, sure. But

¹ “The Image” *Time*, September 13, 1963.

there are some things I believe in that I just don't believe in talking about.” In the years following, the national conversation regarding interracialism followed suit; the press represented the work of reimagining civil society as simply uninteresting to the interracial couples they profiled, if not antithetical to the idea that “love sees no color.”

Consequently, when after eight years Mildred and Richard Loving successfully won their case in front of the United States Supreme Court in 1967 to overturn the nation’s anti-miscegenation laws, the win felt more like an afterthought of the civil rights movement than a central action item of African American activists and organizations. The press reported the Supreme Court win as earned largely through the court system rather than on the streets, through sit-ins, or boycotts where Black organizers waged a multi-pronged assault on the nation’s white-supremacist social institutions. The press used the Loving family’s life in their small town of Central Point, Virginia as an ideal icon through which they might speculate what the American family – the premiere frontline of Western moral and racial socialization – might symbolize as a result of the legalization of interracial marriage. On this topic, Black and white presses alike were surprisingly of one accord. Photographs of the Loving family in a 1967 photo essay for *Ebony* by acclaimed Black civil rights journalist Simeon Booker tell a story of a healthy, working-class, community-oriented family whose central concern was to quietly carry on with their lives. Similarly, the visual narrative offered up by white South African photojournalist Grey Villet’s nine images in the March 18th, 1966 *Life* magazine photo essay titled “The Crime Of Being Married,” illustrate the life of a private, closed-off family who lived in an equally isolated Virginia community that “just want to live and be left alone.”² The accompanying narrative by *Life* reporter Bill Wise is linear and normative – the marriage of a Black woman and a white man

² Grey Villet, “The Crime of Being Married,” *Life Magazine*, 18 March, 1966.

produces racially ambiguous children, who “manage to take it all in stride” with the help of socially accepted gender roles, remaining in Black social circles, and working through established channels of state redress.³ Though *Life* and *Ebony* approached the Loving’s story with different political and cultural interests in mind – with *Life* imagining a white middle-class reader and *Ebony* imagining a Black middle-class reader – intriguingly both magazines used a similar set of signs and symbols in representing interracial families. This suggests that the average reader would have already formed visual shortcuts regarding mixed-race families in relation to other sorts of families and political structures due to the existence of similar images of Black-white families circulating. Given the national media’s apolitical positioning of interracial families in the 1960s, how did these preceding representations impact the types of photographic images created of the Loving family? Subsequently, how did audiences use images of the Loving family to form judgments about the role of interracial families in the larger project of integration?

The social and political dissonances captured by the circulation, reproduction, and reception of twentieth-century visual narratives of mixed-race black families both before and after the *Loving* decision – are the larger frame of reference for this chapter. While the social impact of *Loving* has been studied by numerous scholars, legal and social histories have largely neglected the visual reception of the Loving family. As the images captured by *Life* and *Ebony* photographers have gone on to have an understudied afterlife, there remains a need to engage with the *Loving* decision as a visual culture moment that has impacted both representations of mixed-race families and political discourse today. Unpacking the ongoing “image business” that preceded the Lovings will better locate the contemporary conversation about the Loving family

³ *Life* Magazine, 18 March 1965. 87.

and the *Loving* decision as an effect of this visual model, rather than a symptom of the ontological state of interracialism.

If, as an effect of its importance in American legal history, the Loving family must be paradigmatic of the interracial family's socio-political triangulation at this time and beyond, it is certainly true that images of the Loving family in the print media helped solidify the tie between interracial families and heterosexual social norms, specifically the sanctity of the American nuclear family home. Because the Lovings were making lawful claims on the state through the 14th amendment, the liberal discourse that sprung from this moment aligned the legitimacy of multiracial black-white families with racial uplift, economic prosperity, and gender and sexual normativity.⁴ As this extended to the visual field, rather than position interracialism as a radical force, photos of Black-white families reified the values of heterosexual marriage, domesticated womanhood, property rights, and nuclear family values by folding interracial couples and families into the fold of liberal values. Mirroring the moralizing beginnings of documentary photography in the early twentieth century, images circulating in the national press as early as 1951 used the allegedly "new" social formation of the legal interracial family to double down on messages that ensured that race relations wouldn't interfere with the ongoing project of heteronormative gender and sexual formations. Yet while this apolitical narrative was in part a response to a national concern, these sentiments were also echoed by the couples profiled. As Charlayne Hunter's distaste of "that image business" makes plain, the desire on the part of interracial couples to distance themselves from national conversations about race and rights indicates how this iconography was not merely a tool levied by the press but was a result of a set

⁴ Daniel McNeil, "Slimy Subjects and Neoliberal Goods: Obama and the Children of Fanon," *Journal of Critical Mixed Race Studies* 1, no. 1 (2014).; Jodi Melamed, "The Spirit of Neoliberalism: From Racial Liberalism to Neoliberal Multiculturalism." *Social Text*, no. 89 (2006): 1-24.

of socio-political norms that interracial couples and families were actively negotiating in the mid-twentieth century.

This chapter argues that the photographic representation of the Lovings was an *effect* of an already circulating taxonomy of images of the interracial family in the national press, rather than a paradigm-shifting phenomenon. Thinking across the photo documentary reporting on interracial Black-white families during the civil rights movement (from roughly 1951 to 1968), I contend that photographs of the Loving family relied upon what I term the Iconography of Interracialism. I define the Iconography of Interracialism as *the signs and symbols commonly present in visual representations of mixed-race black and white families that serve to depoliticize the family unit and uplift heterosexual social norms*. In building this term I have borrowed from sociologist John Grady's work on "the iconography of integration," which he uses to describe the visual themes present in advertisements in *Life* magazine depicting Black-white interracial contact from 1967-2000. Although Grady's work involves the period immediately after the civil rights movement, his discernment of how this iconography is a function of social interactions during the 1950s and 60s is useful to this chapter.

[The Iconography of Integration] celebrates a world of achievements, active enjoyment, and the nurturing of social ties especially among family and friends. If the iconography of segregation is about the fulfillment of white needs and assigns a crucial role to blacks as a component in the infrastructure of that dream, then the iconography of integration is about satisfying the wants and dreams of both blacks and whites.

In defining this iconography Grady notes that white liberals saw the purpose of integration as the work of extending to Black people the moral duty of upholding "the good life," or a set of social values that relied upon certain types of approved interactions between the races and genders. However, Grady takes care to distinguish between the press' representation of "the good life" as

uplifted by the Iconography of Integration and the higher-order integration work of the civil rights movement, work that prioritized the pursuit of racial justice and equity over social harmony between races. To be sure, the civil rights movement was not purely an integrationist movement – detractors of the project of integration within Black activist circles saw legal decisions such as *Brown v. Board of Education* as perpetuating a “progressive empire” that ultimately “disguised colonial oppression in humanitarian and liberal gestures.”⁵ While the NAACP legal team’s meticulously orchestrated plan to unravel de jure segregation pushed forward with the backing of white liberal allies, the more radical left project of Black nationalism offered up the idea of a Black diasporic nation-state, calling for a return back to Africa rather than further integration within American culture.

That this ideological rift regarding the importance of integration did not fall easily down racial lines is telling of how fraught the politics of visual representation were at this time, and how these diverging political projects extended into other considerations of race mixing. By putting images of interracial families in conversation with the larger project of integration stemming from the civil rights movement, it becomes evident that the Iconography of Integration and the Iconography of Interracialism share overlapping goals, especially as they rely upon heteronormative gender roles to incorporate black people into the fold of moral, progressive society. This chapter then demonstrates how the Lovings were inserted into an ongoing conflict between those who understood the project of Black liberation to be one of recreating American civil society versus those who hoped to gradually settle into society as is. In determining how this conflict extends into visual representation, I aim to illustrate how this iconography is particularized to photographs of interracial couples and families. The bulk of the analysis of this

⁵ Olivia Marcucci, “Zora Neale Hurston and the Brown Debate: Race, Class, and the Progressive Empire” *Journal of Negro Education* 86, no. 1 (2017): 13.

chapter is then dedicated to characterizing the dominant themes audiences called upon in the years leading up to the *Loving* decision to make judgments about the politics of mixed-race families. Consequently, the work of defining the iconography of interracialism is also the work of understanding how a small handful of well-placed images can impact the social behaviors of an American public. The iconography of interracialism attempts to make sense of the evolving structures of power between two vastly differentiated racial groups by homing in on images that place these racial groups in intimate proximity to each other through the space of the nuclear family unit.

By extension, the Iconography of Interracialism also captures how various media technologies available at the time sought to make sense of black and white people in relation to each other. During the 1950s and 60s, advances in image-making technologies afforded news stations and the print media the ability to quickly broadcast the ongoing events of the civil rights movement, capturing moments of racial violence that forced white Americans to confront the unequivocal existence and horrors of white supremacy. Photography simultaneously gave viewers access to an American public that was changing in demographics as quickly as the industry itself while also heightening the public's relationship to "the real" through documentary photography. This perception of photographic reality had particularly high stakes for Black people and Black political causes; the difference between being perceived as aggressive or peaceful could be reflected in dominant perceptions of the entire racial group.

As such, this chapter works to historicize the Iconography of Interracialism and the subsequent representation of the Loving family as a function of choices made by photographers and consumers considering the quickly evolving discourse surrounding both race and photography. Indeed, racialized visual reading practices of these documentary photographs were

ostensibly informed by other types of real-time information, including socio-economic and political messages found in heavily circulating documents such as The Moynihan Report. While public discourse points to the 1967 *Loving* decision itself as the definitive moment that legitimized the multiracial family as a legal entity in the state's eyes, gender and sexuality scholars Habiba Ibrahim, Siohban Somerville, and Roderick Ferguson argue that in fact it was Patrick Moynihan's conclusions in his 1965 report *The Negro Family: A Case for National Action* that actually set up much of this legitimizing work. Indeed, Ibrahim argues that Moynihan placing blame and criminality on the single Black urban mother created a perfect foil for the Loving's claim to rural Virginia land and a stable home as the basis for their challenge to the state.⁶ An attunement throughout this chapter to how various groups responded to controversial social documents and events tied to the civil rights movement then allows contemporary viewers to see how images of the Loving family were both a product of a longer political project as much as they were a product of the sensational nature of photographic journalism.

What would happen, then, if we were to look beyond the regime of images created by the dominance of the iconography of interracialism in the press and instead grapple with the images that lined the cutting room floor? By centering images that did not circulate beyond the Loving family until 2017, the last section of this chapter reads photographer Grey Villet's unused photos from his *Life* photo essay. In their varying subject matter and emotional resonances beyond the media narrative of the Lovings, Villet's unused images offer a glimpse into the sheer terror and silencing effects of the "miscegenation drama" from the perspective of Mildred Loving. As represented in Villet's photos through Mildred's subtle upheavals of her daily circumstances, to grasp the seriousness of the Loving's decision to challenge the law in court and stand their

⁶ Habiba Ibrahim, *Troubling the family: The promise of personhood and the rise of multiracialism*. (U of Minnesota Press, 2012) 67.

ground in Virginia is to begin to recognize Mildred as a political actor, even as *Life* and *Ebony*'s narratives take this agency away from her. Rather than see her as a passive icon of a romanticized interracialism or integrationist project, Mildred's visual representation shows the difficulty of holding both a fear of and kinship with whiteness, both an alignment with Black separatist politics and apprehension toward its intimate implications. What's more, these unused images allow contemporary viewers to theorize about the politics of Black motherhood within the interracial family at this time. By generously reading into Mildred's silences, in this paper I hope to invert what some scholars have read as Mildred's fear of civic and political engagement instead as a problem of representing the Black maternal domestic sphere through the liberal gaze of the American press. Wise and Booker's choices to render Mildred as silent inform how viewers are primed to read political passivity into the interracial relationships of Black women, rather than contextualize their everyday choices as important markers of how American racial projects become intimately woven into their lives. Furthermore, interrogating *Life* and *Ebony*'s curatorial decisions makes plain why it is important to represent the everyday choices of Black women as always already in relation to political positionalities and moments.

Finally, as 2017 marked the 50th anniversary of the *Loving v. Virginia* verdict, scholars and cultural producers alike have reengaged the Loving family's legacy with renewed contemporary stakes. The 2016 Oscar-nominated film *Loving*, particularly in its usage of Grey Villet's persona and images, offers fertile ground for a consideration of how recent media has situated the Loving story in relation to contemporary issues of race, gender, and power. Paying close attention to how Villet's unused images informed the film's cinematography suggests that, in comparison to the print culture of 1950s and 60s, the contemporary consumer public has been primed to look through Mildred eyes.

2.1 Iconography of Integration, Iconography of Interracialism

During the 1950s and 60s, the visual choices made by photojournalists of national magazines and newspapers were ostensibly informed by the racialized, gendered, and classed scripts of the civil rights movement. By the mid-1960s visual technologies were prevalent and widely consumed – televisions and cameras captured the seemingly unfiltered reality of American life, informing the worldview of the average American on a daily basis.⁷ Scholarly works look back upon the media’s involvement in the civil rights movement as the instrument that forced the American public’s hand, underscoring how Black activists knowingly wielded images that sought to expose white supremacy and uplift Black dignity.⁸ In 1965, when moving masses of police with tear gas and billy clubs advanced upon peaceful protesters crossing the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama, the grainy images that appeared in *Life* magazine in the days following showed the complete chaos of the U.S. police arm in action (figure 2.1). While iconic in their own right, the photographs shot by photojournalists Charles Moore, Flip Schulke, and Frank Dandridge for *Life* relied upon an already circulating reading guide for what civil and political unrest meant in relation to racially marked and gendered bodies. Although liberal America understood the mass violence of Selma’s peaceful protests to be unjust, the wide circulation of these spectacular scenes of violence enacted upon Black protesters promoted a “hit and run” style of reporting, where photojournalists flocked toward crisis level civil rights events such as Selma in order to attract larger audiences, while neglecting to report on the more regional

⁷ Leigh. Raiford, *Imprisoned in a Luminous Glare: Photography and the African American Freedom Struggle*. (UNC Press Books, 2011), 90. Raiford notes that by 1954 58% of homes owned a TV set. This number would have been significantly higher over a decade later.

⁸ Gene Roberts and Hank Klibanoff, *The Race Beat : The Press, the Civil Rights Struggle, and the Awakening of a Nation / Gene Roberts and Hank Klibanoff* (Knopf, 2006).

and grassroots energies of the movement.⁹ As a result, much of the visual cultural studies work about the civil rights period has served to disentangle the “shadow archive” that constitutes the counter images of the movement from the media’s dominating gaze, which served to frame the movement for majority-white audiences as ultimately non-threatening to the status quo of white racial power.¹⁰

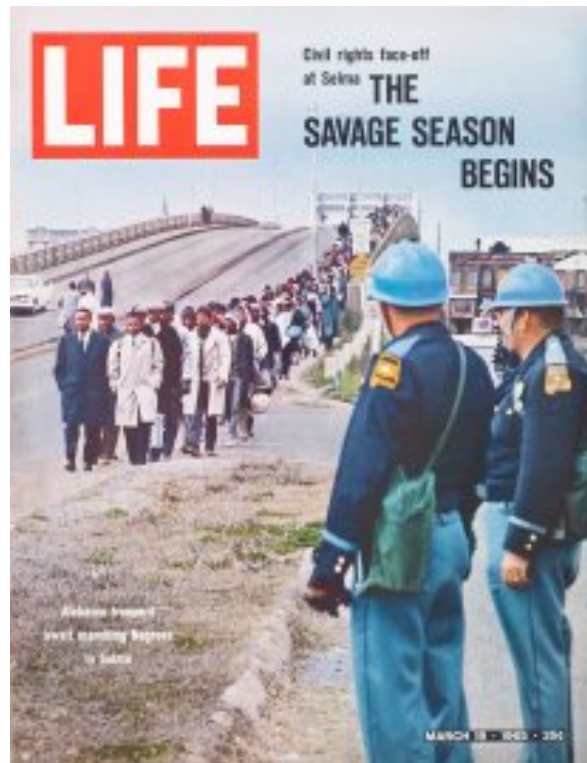


Figure 2-1 Cover story 'Selma Starts the Savage Season,' LIFE, March 19, 1965.

Fears of how interracial protests suggested racial mixing in other, more sacred social spaces caused the media and Black organizers alike to treat interracial contact in sensational and highly skeptical ways. With integration as the dominant policy framework promoted by the early leaders of the civil rights movement, white anxieties proliferated surrounding the increase in

⁹ Leigh Raiford, “Imprisoned in a Luminous Glare:” History, Memory, and the Photography of Twentieth Century African American Social Movements” Ph.D. Diss., Yale University, 2003, Proquest (3084356), 130.

¹⁰ Martin A. Berger, *Seeing through Race : A Reinterpretation of Civil Rights Photography / Martin A. Berger ; Foreword by David J. Garrow* (University of California Press, 2011); Leigh Raiford, *Imprisoned in a Luminous Glare: Photography and the African American Freedom Struggle* (UNC Press Books, 2011).

state-sanctioned contact between Black and white communities in spaces such as churches, schools, and bedrooms. In a 1965 *Ebony* article titled “would you want your daughter to marry one?” Alabama republican congressional representative William L. Dickinson claimed that the march on Montgomery was a "gigantic interracial sex orgy replete with prostitutes disguised as nuns."¹¹ The article noted how Dickinson (and white southern political leaders in general) attempted to equate the project of integration to a broader, more insidious project of enforced miscegenation as a way of diverting attention from Alabama's denial of Black voting rights. In comparison, organizer of the Mississippi Freedom Summer of 1964, Fannie Lou Hamer, was fearful of the dangers of interracial coupling amongst the young SNCC volunteers in the south – particularly between white female students that had traveled from the north and black men – and the damage it might do to forwarding the more pressing work of Black voter registration. Of that summer, Hamer lamented, “If some whites laid hands on one of those young girls, every Negro man in Ruleville would be in trouble. That kind of trouble kills people in Mississippi. And what would become of the Movement then?” When, as the summer rolled on, Hamer found that her warnings had fallen on deaf ears, her anxieties swelled. “It’s just as if I never said nothin’ to them at Oxford! They sit out under trees in the back yard playin’ cards with the Negro boys. Why, that back yard faces the hospital! Or they stand around in the front in groups, chattin’ and laughin’! Some of them even wave at cars as they drive by! They cut through white property to get to town. And they go to town to buy curlers and cokes!”¹² Hamer’s deep worry stemmed from an awareness of exactly who would be more harmed by any violent reactions from white southerners to the vision of interracial mingling. Hamer’s view of these interactions extended

11 Hans J. Massaquoi, “would you want your daughter to marry one?” *Ebony*, Aug 1 1965.

12 Tracy Sugarman, *Stranger at the Gates; a Summer in Mississippi. Illustrated by the Author. Foreword by Fannie Lou Hamer* (Hill and Wang, 1966), 114.

into a wider-held belief amongst civil rights organizers that substantial racial integration would only come as an effect of shifts in structural policies, rather than exist as a goal in and of itself.

Whether interracial relationships represented an act of integration or assimilation was debated more acutely as well, with groups like the NAACP deciding to not prioritize the fight against anti-miscegenation laws over other pressing court fights. Early on, the NAACP attempted to distance themselves from getting involved in the anti-miscegenation legal debate by using language that neither stirred controversy nor admitted a lack of care. In a 1952 interview with an NAACP field secretary in Los Angeles the representative played into the notion that differences between racial groups were shallow, stating that “we of the NAACP believe there is but one race, the human race. Those who believe some marriages are interracial and others not do not believe in equal human rights.”¹³ Similarly, over a decade later in a 1963 *U.S. News and World Report* interview, NAACP executive secretary Roy Wilkins said that the NAACP “does not place high priority” on interracial marriage, which is why it is not pursued “with intensity.” Elaborating further, Wilkins suggested that the NAACP did not pursue heavy action against these laws because they were concerned about how black women would be chiefly disadvantaged, noting how the laws “do not have recourse to the ordinary social protections that are inherent in the marriage statutes and in the paternity statutes and so forth.”¹⁴ Rather than folding in the right to marry interracially as a natural part of the larger push toward integration, the NAACP was careful to assess the potential harm to Black women that these laws might forward. Instead, the NAACP pointed to “the negligible numbers of interracial marriages in the north, highlighting the history of interracial sex in the south, and echoing notions about the nature of sex and gender that

¹³ Romano, *Race Mixing*, 90-91.

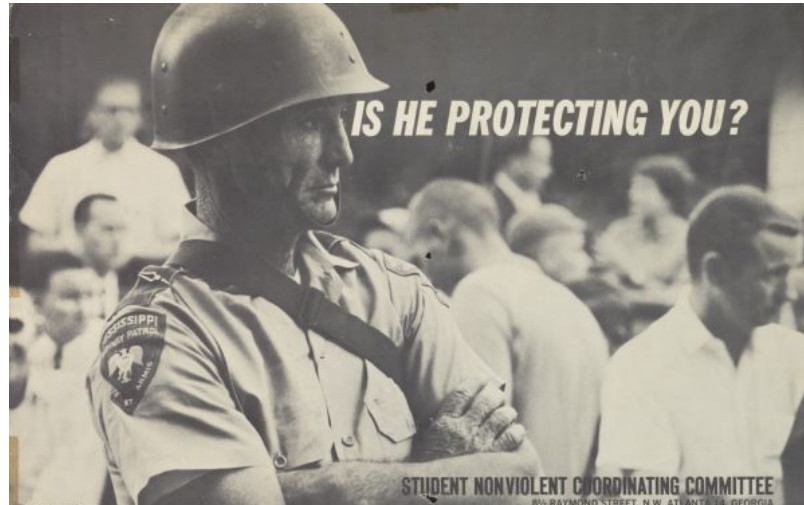
¹⁴“How the NAACP Stand on Intermarriage,” *U.S. News and World Report*, Sept 2, 1963.

were conventional enough to make Victorians proud.”¹⁵ While not entirely bowing out of the fight against anti-miscegenation law, the NAACP struggled to find a simultaneous balance between passively opposing interracial marriage while also opposing the racist underpinnings of anti-miscegenation laws, a position that reverberated across Black organizing ideologies throughout the 1960s.

Specifically, the choice to put forth integration as the central ideology of the civil rights movement – even as integrationist framings were not the only ideology existent within Black organizing efforts – influenced how interracial images were received within the movement and by the national press. Social movement scholar Steve Valocchi notes how early alliances formed in the 1930s between older leaders and lawyers within the NAACP and the white liberal elite in Roosevelt’s administration worked to structure the project of Black racial uplift around the goal of integration. These parties shared a view of the “negro problem” as that of a failure to extend the principles of eighteenth-century liberalism – primarily property ownership and the vote – to Black Americans. With the help of the “black professional managerial class” and Roosevelt’s Black Cabinet, other movement frames such as the direct-action campaigns of the Black working classes and the National Negro Congress were given less weight within the national discourse. To be sure, younger, more politically radical voices such as Marcus Garvey, Zora Neale Hurston, Angela Davis, and even W.E.B Du Bois in his later years rejected the legal, lobbying, and education approaches in favor of direct-action efforts emergent in Black nationalist groups, church communities, and the communist party.¹⁶

¹⁵ Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally*, 179.

¹⁶ Steve Valocchi, "The Emergence of the Integrationist Ideology in the Civil Rights Movement," *Social Problems* 43, no. 1 (1996): 122-23.



*Figure 2-2 SNCC, “Is He Protecting You?,” poster made from photograph by Danny Lyon, University of Mississippi campus during James Meredith’s attempt to register, September 1962 .Poster Collections, State Historical Society of Wisconsin Reprinted from Danny Lyon, *Memories of the Southern Civil Rights Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991)*

Consequently, images of direct-action events generated by the photographers for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), Danny Lyon and Tamio Wakayama, bear little to no resemblance to those produced by the likes of *Life*, *Time*, and *U.S. News and World Report’s* photographers. SNCC photographers captured images of direct actions such as the 1961 freedom rides and the 1964 freedom summer that questioned the idea of law enforcement as a structure that sought to protect black people at all [Figure 2.2].¹⁷ These young photographers practiced what Leigh Raiford calls “critical black memory,” or the “ongoing practice through which a range of participants speak back to history and assess ongoing crises faced by black subjects.”¹⁸ We can see critical black memory in action as SNCC photographers and other Black activist groups similarly used lynching photographs to contest violent narratives circulating in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries about Black men.

¹⁷ Raiford, *Imprisoned in a Luminous Glare: Photography and the African American Freedom Struggle*, 94-96.
¹⁸ "Photography and the Practices of Critical Black Memory," *History and Theory* 48, no. 4 (2009): 118.

Indeed, John Grady's understanding of the Iconography of Integration must rest within these conflicting interpretations of integrationist ideology, where even seemingly harmless representations of black-white interracial mixing like what viewers might find in a Seagram's advertisement (Figure 2.4) take on the anxieties, hopes, and complications of the period. In his 2007 sociological study "Advertising images as social indicators: depictions of blacks in LIFE magazine, 1936–2000," Grady compiles every advertisement containing at least one Black person in *Life* Magazine from 1936-2000 (an archive comprised of 2,602 advertisements) and analyzes the themes that arose in depicting Black life and experiences. Grady then categorizes the advertisements falling between 1936-1960 as representing the Iconography of Segregation and advertisements from 1967-2000 as depicting the Iconography of Integration. According to Grady, the Iconography of Segregation illustrates a world in which Black people, particularly young Black males, exist in subservient roles to white people, serving in both public and private spaces as porters, servants, or waiters [Figure 2.3]. Rare are images in which Black and white figures touch, as are advertisements that include only Black people in domestic or intra-racial social spaces. Based on this characterization, one could argue that because of the power dynamics at play in the social movement photography of the 1950s and 60s by the likes of *Life* photographers Charles Moore and Spider Martin, these images passively use the Iconography of Segregation as an index to read Black subjects in moments of protest, violence, or fear as inferior to white, agentive subjects.



Figure 2-3, representing the Iconography of Segregation. Sal Hepatica. Life magazine, 15 November 1937. 'Wife: Wouldn't you know? I'm catching cold! Guess I'll arrive singing, "California, here I cub"'. Husband: What you need – pronto – is a laxative and something to help counteract acidity. If only . . . Porter: Pahdon me, fo' overhearin' yo', but Sal Hepatica does BOTH those things. It's a min'ral salt laxative and it helps Nature counteract acidity, too. Las' trip, a doctah tole me.' Figure 2-4, representing the Iconography of Integration, Seagram's. Life magazine, 25 February 1972.

In contrast, the themes present in the Iconography of Integration suggest that there is a greater capacity for white viewers to imagine Black people sharing in the fruits of the American dream [Figure 2.4]. Grady contends that the Iconography of Integration has three thematic clusters which constitute over 90% of the ads since 1967. First, advertisements at this time show a variety of different types of Black people alongside white people equally engaged in *sharing the rewards of consumer society* in close physical proximity to one another (and on rare occasions intentionally touching one another). Second, they demonstrate that Black people can *exemplify well-deserved success* but only as cultural icons or as anonymous everymen that have triumphed over adversities. Finally, Black people act as *witnesses to the need for social cohesion and moral purpose*. Interestingly, Grady notes that across thematic clusters Black people were

more likely to be portrayed in public rather than private settings, with the portion of ads with Black subjects in them set in private spaces decreasing until it reached a low in the 1960s. He also remarks that while the iconography of integration may show more interracial groups close to each other, direct eye contact across races was virtually nonexistent. Grady's results show that due to the looming reality of civil rights gains for African Americans in the 1950s and 60s, the fear of a less hierarchically-defined America translated directly into a shift in visual culture such that advertising images became devoid of interracial intimacy. As a result, Grady concludes that the "major obstacle to racial inclusion on the part of whites is the exclusion of blacks from whites' personal and private worlds."¹⁹ From these characterizations, Grady argues that if advertising images writ large rely upon a sense of fantastical realism that reflects society's desires and fantasies, then the lack of ads accentuating interracial intimacy shows that "whites have had a difficult time imagining how to share a common world with blacks as equals, and they have barely begun to explore what equality would look like, and feel, in more personal and private realms."²⁰

The Iconography of Interracialism – or the iconography that serves to visually and thematically represent the moral role of interracial couples, marriages, and families in the American context– then served as a visual battleground for both Black and white presses to represent the role that interracial families might play within the project of integration. By close reading images from news articles that center the issue of interracialism in both white and Black national newspapers and magazines, it seems that the media's over-usage of images portraying Black-white couples and families as deeply apolitical functioned as a response to the

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ John Grady, "Advertising Images as Social Indicators: Depictions of Blacks in Life Magazine, 1936–2000," *Visual studies* 22, no. 3 (2007): 235.

overwhelming propensity to see these relations as the undoing of the nation's moral and ideological frameworks. This distancing from the political then created photographs of interracial couples, families, and peoples that spoke on behalf of the integrationist goals of the movement but was itself devoid of the actual work of the social movement.

What I find to be the six recurrent images, symbols, and ideas found in the Iconography of Interracialism allow the 1950's and 60s viewer to do as little work as possible to imagine the interracial family as an already normal family formation in American society. First, (and perhaps most ubiquitous), are traditional family images that capture intimate family moments. Like most family portraiture, these images seek to perform the importance of family cohesion through banal and sentimental performances of unity. In these images, the couple or family takes part in a shared activity that requires them all to be near one another like cooking, reveling in the extraordinary ordinariness of the moment [Figures 2.5-8].²¹ Driven by the desire to capture familial love in action, these photographs offer a peek into the family's daily life without drawing the viewer's attention to the heavily staged nature of the shot. Because of their ordinariness, these types of family photos are generally accepted as "not visually innovative. The poses and the events are predictable; the compositions are banal; red-eye and wonky framing are acceptable."²² Pierre Bourdieu argues that "ordinary practice seems determined ...to strip photography of its power to disconcert...Only ever capturing moments which have been torn from the temporal flow by virtue of their solemnity, and only capturing people who are fixed, immobile...it loses its power of corrosion."²³ With the assumption made by skeptics at the time that most interracial marriages would end in divorce, images that emphasized the continuity of

21 Michael Haldrup and Jonas Larsen, "The Family Gaze," *Tourist Studies* 3, no. 1 (2003): 24.

22 Gillian Rose, *Doing Family Photography: The Domestic, the Public and the Politics of Sentiment*, (Routledge, 2016), 11.

23 Pierre Bourdieu and Shaun Whiteside, *Photography: A Middle-brow Art*. (Stanford University Press, 1996), 76.

traditional family activities simultaneously sought to show how ostensibly boring interracial families could be while also championing how successful interracial unions could be in nurturing nuclear family structures.



*Figure 2-5 (top left): from “Is my mixed marriage mixing up my kids?” Ebony Oct 1, 1966
 Sammy Davis Jr. disciplines children. Caption reads “Leaving New York apartment, Sammy has parting chat with May, Mark, and Tracey. When he and Swedish actress were first wed, he told press, ‘I want a big family, I don’t care if the children are polka dots as long as they say ‘yes daddy.’’ Sammy and May have been married for six years now, and plan to adopt several more youngsters.” Figure 2-6 (top right): From “Marriage That Could Not Work,” Ebony July 1, 1967. Article details relationship between a black surinamese “bushnegro” woman and dutch white man. Caption reads “children born to Ekens; Theodore, 33, and Marie Magdalene, 23. Teddy, 4, was born in bush; Sandra, 2, and month-old Ronny, in a city clinic with aid of midwife. Marie’s ‘bus’ or first name, is Anoisie, meaning beautiful. Bushnegroes, descendants of runaway African slaves, are nine per cent of Surinam’s population.”*



Relaxing has become difficult for couple and children, Toby, 4, and Neisha, with “the pressure of letters, phone calls, interviews and visitors,” says Mrs. Wright. Four-bedroom home in rear was in a rundown condition when Wrights bought it.



Interracial Canadian family consists of Mr. and Mrs. Michel Farkas and their three adopted children, Caroline, 2, Marc, 4, and Joanne, 6. Canada’s Open Door Society crusades for adoption of multi-racial children by white couples.

Figure 2-7(bottom left): From “Trials of an interracial couple” Ebony Oct 1, 1965. Caption reads “Relaxing has become difficult for couple and children, Toby, 4, and Neisha, with “pressure of letters, phone calls, interviews and visitors,” says Mrs. Wright. Four-bedroom home in rear was in a rundown condition when Wrights bought it. Figure 2-8 (bottom right): From “Are Interracial Homes Bad for Children?” Ebony March 1, 1963. article gives examples of different types of interracial couples, including families composed of transracially adopted children. Caption reads “Interracial Canadian family consists of Mr. and Mrs. Michel Farkas and their three adopted children, Caroline, 2, Marc, 4, and Joanne, 6. Canada’s Open Door Society crusades for adoption of multi-racial children by white couples.”

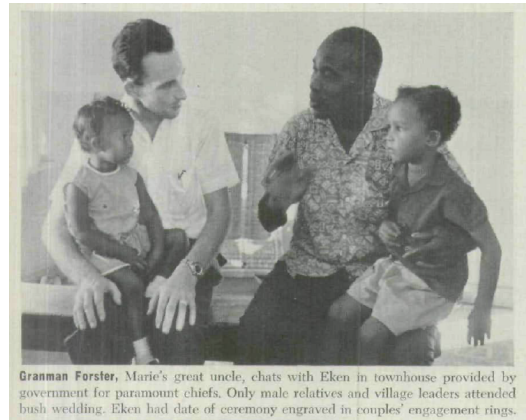
What’s more, fears based on early nineteenth and twentieth-century anthropological race science similarly perpetuated the idea that the children of interracial relationships were assumed to be either deviant and sterile on the one hand or exceptional race leaders on the other.²⁴ In one particularly suggestive photo of singer Sammy Davis Jr.’s interracial family from a 1966 *Ebony* article titled “Is My Mixed Marriage Mixing Up My Kids?” Davis is shown disciplining his children by threatening them with a cane [Figure 2.5]. An image for which many viewers would have a reference point, the young children stand in the doorway and look up at him obediently, undoubtedly being instructed on how to fix their behavior. On raising his children, Davis describes himself as being a little “old-fashioned,” in that respect, discipline, and responsibility were of primary concern for him as a parent.

“You avoid having mixed-up children in a mixed marriage the same way you avoid having mixed-up children in any marriage. You give your children honest values, plenty of love and affection, and all the discipline and guidance they need when and as they need it... I’m firm about courtesy and respect. My children eat their food, speak when they are spoken to, say ‘thank you’ nice and easy, excuse themselves from the table, and don’t have the complete run of the house.”

²⁴ Frederick Hoffman, *Race Traits and Tendencies of the American Negro* (New York: Macmillan, 1896) reprinted in Renee Christine Romano, *Race Mixing : Black-White Marriage in Postwar America / Renee C. Romano* (Harvard University Press, 2003), 7. Hoffman, a social scientist, argued that miscegenation was responsible for the increasing Black mortality rate, as well as black people’s “consequent inferior social efficiency and diminishing power as a force in American national life.”

Davis's ethics of parenting relate that an interracial union is only as successful as its ability to uphold traditional family values and civic behaviors. For *Ebony's* readers, Davis's disciplinary family photograph is a reminder of the similarities across American heterosexual family structures. That Davis and Britt's marriage would only last from 1960-1968 due to an affair between Davis and actress Lola Falana is perhaps a pointed illustration of the limits of uplifting these social norms as indicative of deeper held morals.

An important extension of the traditional family photograph, a second element of the Iconography of Interracialism are family shots that show the family interacting with members of the couple's respective extended family [Figures 2.9-11]. These images seek to show how other, less violent critics who are only looking out for the best interests of their loved ones can eventually "come around" to the idea of the union.





California grandparents splash with grandchildren during Wright family's visit last August. Unlike most parents who live in an all-white community, Peter and Frances Morse did not respond irrationally or bitterly to daughter's marriage.

Figure 2-9(top left): “Interracial Marriages in the South,” *Ebony* June 1978. Caption reads “The King family enjoys an evening of word games with the family’s matriarch, Mrs. Margaret King, who resides with them.” Figure 2-10 (top right): From “Marriage That Could Not Work,” *Ebony* July 1, 1967. Article details relationship between a black Surinamese “bushnegro” woman and Dutch white man. Caption reads “Granman Forster, Marie’s great uncle, chats with Eken in townhouse provided by government for paramount chiefs. Only male relatives and village leaders attended bush wedding. Eken had date of ceremony engraved in couples’ engagement rings.” Figure 2-11: “Trials of an interracial couple” *Ebony* Oct 1, 1965. Caption reads “California grandparents splash with grandchildren during Wright family’s visit late August. Unlike most parents who live in an all-white community, Peter and Frances Morse did not respond irrationally or bitterly to daughter’s marriage

Indeed, the practice of disowning children who marry interracially was a common parental reaction at the time, with many family members repeating the sentiment that seeing their children intermarry was like signing their death certificate or sending their child off to war.²⁵ This fear of severed extended family ties extended even into court proceedings, as a 1963 custody case in Michigan ruled to take a white woman’s children away from her after she remarried a Black man. In this case, the court ruled that the interracial marriage had “alienated the mothers’ parents and deprived their children of the good care and influence of grandparents.”²⁶ Interpreting “good care and influence” as also encompassing the more tangible aspects of white generational wealth and property ownership, the purpose of depicting interracial families as cohesive beyond the immediate family unit dissuaded viewers from seeing interracial unions as nullifying the

²⁵ Ibid., 62.

²⁶ “Are interracial homes bad for children?” *Ebony* March 1, 1963

privileges of whiteness. In “coming around” to the idea of their child’s interracial marriage, these extended family members are depicted as gracious, good sports who are motivated only by the love they have for their kin.

Third, interracial couples and families are visually represented as taking part in the joys of interracial social settings [Figures 2.12-13]. With the assumption at the time that interracial marriages pointed toward an isolated social sphere for both white and Black partners, these images depict interracial families building a vibrantly mixed community of friends and peers. Rather than center the abnormality of the family structure, the communities assembled around these families are shown as already accepting of interracial marriage and reflecting the same level of integration. The evil “other” is then portrayed as a Klan-esque white supremacist whose only recourse is to halt the project of integration through acts of violence. Images of the viable interracial social circles around these families then model the behaviors that liberal integrationists hope to achieve. Unlike the Iconography of Integration, in which Black and white people socializing in home settings or making direct eye contact was still considered taboo, these images show these dynamics happening with ease.

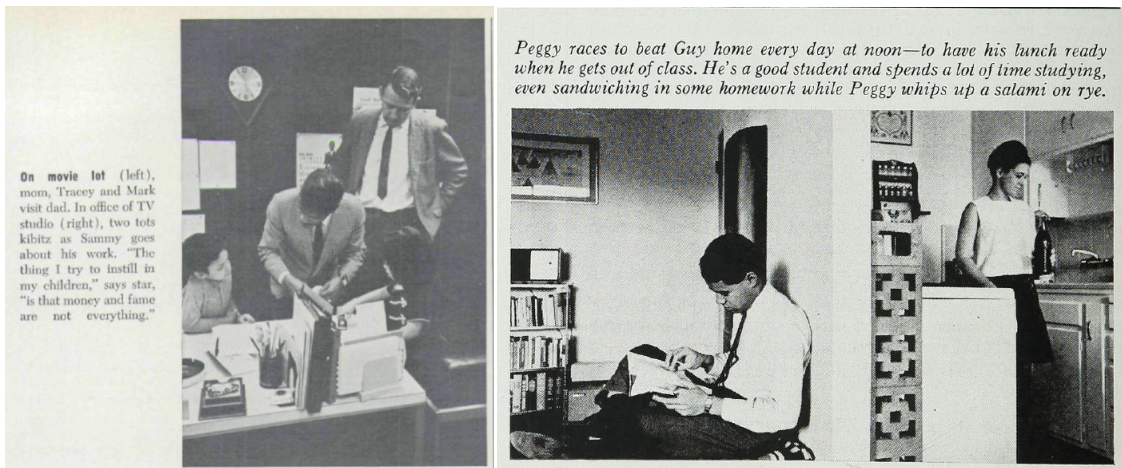


Figure 2-12 (left): The Wright family photographed with friends in UC Berkeley, from “Trials of an Interracial Couple,” Ebony Oct 1, 1965. Figure 2-13; and their son Toby playing with neighborhood kids and cousin. Caption concludes that “Toby and friends are not infected with adult prejudice,” from “Trials of an Interracial Couple,” Ebony Oct 1, 1965.



High school music teacher, Wright also has 20 private pupils. Nine-year-old neighbor David Brenner's parents met Wrights through mutual friend. A busy mother with part-time job as a technical typist, Tamara Wright takes weekly ballet lessons.

Manager of heavy materials department, Eken inspects tractor with employer Jules deVries in showroom. Because mines hire only single men as surveyors, Eken got city job as salesman, worked up to present post. DeVries is wealthy Creole merchant.



On movie lot (left), mom, Tracey and Mark visit dad. In office of TV studio (right), two tots kibitz as Sammy goes about his work. "The thing I try to instill in my children," says star, "is that money and fame are not everything."

Peggy races to beat Guy home every day at noon—to have his lunch ready when he gets out of class. He's a good student and spends a lot of time studying, even sandwiching in some homework while Peggy whips up a salami on rye.

Figure 2-14 (top left): From "Trials of an Interracial Couple," *Ebony* Oct 1, 1965. caption reads "High school music teacher, Wright also has 20 private pupils...A busy mother with part-time job as a technical typist, Tamara Wright takes weekly ballet lessons." Figure 2.15 (top right): From "Marriage That Could Not Work" *Ebony*, July 1, 1967. Caption reads "Manager of heavy materials department, Eken inspects tractor with employer Jules deVries in showroom. Because mines hire only single men as surveyors, Eken got city job as salesman, worked up to present post. DeVries is wealthy, Creole merchant." Figure 2-16 (bottom left): From "Is my mixed marriage mixing up my kids?" *Ebony* Oct 1, 1966. image of Sammy Davis Jr. at work. Caption reads "On movie lot, mom, Tracey and Mark visit dad. In office of TV studio, two tots kibitz as Sammy goes about his work. 'The thing I try to instill in my children,' says star, 'is that money and fame are not everything.'" Figure 2-17: From "Why should my child marry yours?" *Ladies Home Journal* April, 1968. Image of Peggy Rusk (daughter of then Secretary of State Dean Rusk) and husband Guy Smith. Caption reads "Peggy races to beat Guy home every day at noon – to have his lunch ready when he gets out of class. He's a good student and spends a lot of time studying, even sandwiching in some homework while Peggy whips up a salami on rye."

Similarly, the fourth element of the iconography of interracialism depicts couples individually going about their lives as normal contributors to society. In these images, wives and husbands separately engage in activities about town, run errands, and perform tasks at work, giving the

sense that people in interracial unions are still able to blend into the crowd as average “everymen” or “everywomen,” rather than being marked as deviants or outcasts [Figures 2.12-15].

Fifth, photographs frequently portray interracial couples and parents standing near access points to the family’s home – doorways, windows, porches, steps– looking out onto an obscured outside space [Figures 2.16-17]. Often shot as solo portraits, these images have an ominous quality to them and seek to represent the interracial couple as insulated from the outside world by the home space. With the frame of the photograph capturing the individuals inside the bones of the house, the material focal point is the home itself. The protection of their property from damage is then equated to the protection of their interracial union, wherein an insulated “us” is made legible by the looming presence of a violent, invisible “them.” Images like that of Tamara and Vincent Wright [Fig. 2.16] read as a performance of this fear, especially as the composition of the photograph centers the window, instead of the couple, as the focal point of the image. Viewers are given the sense that windows and doors mediate the safety of the interracial family, especially as they act as portals to the outside, or particularly vulnerable locations through which the outside may come in. As a commentary on the importance of the space of the home to the safety of the interracial family, these images generally equate the necessity of homeownership to the fight against miscegenation laws.



Figure 2-18 (left): Photograph from "Trials of an Interracial Couple," Ebony Oct 1, 1965. Tamara and Vincent Wright standing in the window of their home. Figure 2-19 (right): Photograph from "Marriage that Could Not Work," Ebony July 1, 1967. Image of Surinamese "bushnegro" woman, Marie Magdalene Amoenoimoeno married to a Dutch white man in Suriname in South America. Family profiled in

Sixth and finally, in line with the integrationist work of the NAACP, the Iconography of Interracialism situates the courts as the sole space in which racial politics are addressed [Figs. 2.18-20] Shots of court proceedings and seemingly banal meetings with lawyers replace the more radical shots produced by SNCC photographers, or even the more sensationalized images by Charles Moore. Rather than take to the streets or hold the police in contempt, these images illustrate interracial couples as working alongside law enforcement and legal officials in order to seek the proper channels of state redress.

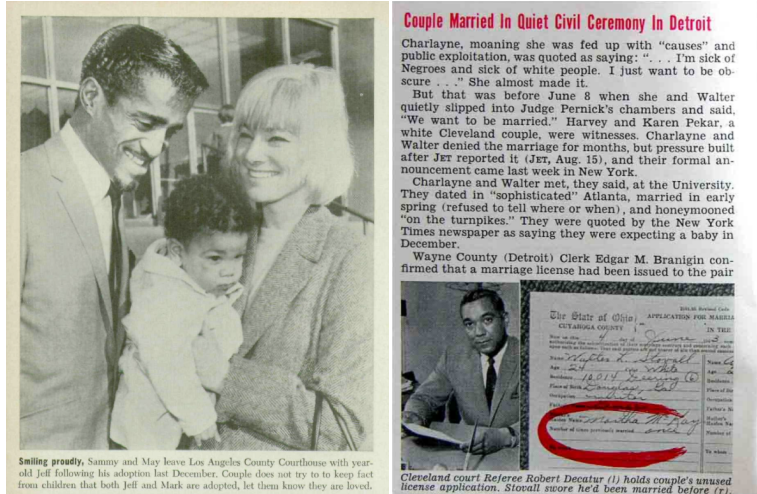


Figure 2-20 (left): From “Is My Mixed Marriage Mixing My Kids Up?” *Ebony*, Oct 1, 1966. Sammy Davis Jr. and actress wife May Britt leaving courthouse following their son, Jeff’s, legal adoption. Figure 2.21 (right): Close up of Charlayne Hunter’s marriage certificate to Walter Stovall alongside Cleveland court Referee Robert Decatur.; Figure 2.22 (bottom): Vincent Wright standing in the street in front of the family’s home talking to a policeman with Wright’s son leaning against the door of the police car. Caption reads ““I was shocked!” recalls patrolman William O’Rourke, who was passing by Wrights’ house when cross blazed. ‘You hear about it but you never expect to see it,’ he said of the Klan-style crime. At first Wrights felt police didn’t fully cooperate, but now area is patrolled regularly, more frequently at night. East Meadow Committee for Human right and other local civil rights groups sparked police improvement and community concern.” from “Trials of an Interracial Couple,” *Ebony* Oct 1, 1965.

Taking in the Iconography of Interracialism as a whole, it is important to note how its composite themes are shaped by diverging gendered discourses for white and Black women. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the “cult of domesticity” functioned as the default option for white women; homemaking and the cultivation of family life were seen as the moral and innate call of womanhood. The simultaneous development of family photographic portraiture at this time operated as another way to perform the hierarchies of domesticity. When

placed on the mantel in a family home, family photographs aligned the sentimentality of the material photograph keepsake with the sentimentality of the family unit. Family portraits served to “stage affect” such that the viewer was “seeing sentiment as a way of organizing family life.” Laura Wexler notes how this view of domestic photography posed a problem for people outside the cult of domesticity (i.e. non-white middle class women) as “the culture of sentiment aimed not only to establish itself as the gatekeeper of social existence but at the same time to denigrate all other people whose style or conditions of domesticity did not conform to the sentimental model.”²⁷As a result, family photography’s narrow focus on the sentimentality of the family requires a “disengagement from the body that labors” such that the heterogenous and arduous work of the American domestic household often done by people of color is made invisible.²⁸ Wexler uses the term “the innocent eye” to describe how this sentimental model particularly impacted how white women were represented in domestic photography “as if looking out from within, without seeing, the race and class dynamics of the household.” She continues that the ‘averted gaze’ of domestic sentiment “functioned to normalize and inscribe raced and classed relations of dominance during slavery and to reinscribe them after its legal end.”²⁹

Put in conversation with the overrepresentation of white woman-black man unions in the media at this time (despite the roughly equal number of the 51,000 interracial marriages counted in the 1960’s Census involving black women), what happens, then, if we think of the apolitical depiction of interracial marriage as a continuation of the domestic white woman’s innocent

²⁷ Laura Wexler, *Tender Violence : Domestic Visions in an Age of U.S. Imperialism / Laura Wexler* (University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 67.

²⁸ Gillian Brown, *Domestic Individualism: Imaging Self in Nineteenth Century America*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 64,71

²⁹ *Ibid*, 6.

eye?³⁰ As this invisibilizing work has distinct consequences for representations of the domestic labor of Black mothers, the notion of the “innocent eye” is inadequate for understanding how Black women are uniquely captured by the iconography of interracialism. Indeed, for Black women, whose ability to access the “innocent eye” of domestic photography was foreclosed at the nascence of their role within the American racial-gendered order through enslavement, the Iconography of Interracialism then served a different purpose. Rather, for Black women the Iconography of Interracialism showed the innocence and ordinariness of the interracial union itself, in that through post-emancipation interracial unions the memory of sexual violence perpetrated against Black women by white men during enslavement would be overwritten. This was in part accomplished in the press by inserting Black women into the already legible genre of sentimental domestic photography but was also accomplished by Black women in interracial unions situating themselves as tired of “all that we shall overcome business,” as Charlayne Hunter relates. As the photojournalistic reporting on the Loving family also demonstrates, the relative silence of Mildred Loving does particular work to represent the Black mother-white father family as having a “clean start” through the nation’s legal acceptance of interracial marriage.

2.2: Life, Ebony, and the Lovings

Given the photographs of interracial families circulating in the national press, images of the Loving family did not set a visual cultural precedent but instead conformed quite closely to the established Iconography of Interracialism. Differences in how the Loving’s narrative was tailored by white and black magazines then indicate how this iconography was taken up toward various political ends. Two major feature-length photo essays appeared in *Life* and *Ebony*

³⁰ Romano, *Race Mixing : Black-White Marriage in Postwar America*, 87 n.11.

magazines in 1966 and 1967 respectively, the *Life* article arriving during the Loving family's arduous process of appeals and the *Ebony* article profiling the family in the triumphant months after the Supreme Court decision to rule in favor of the Loving's case. While the *Life* photo essay relied heavily on the formal thematic devices of the iconography of interracialism to demonstrate how apolitical the family was, *Ebony* instead used the same visual narrative to detail the political actions of Richard Loving. Both photo essays, however, effectively obscured the labor of Mildred Loving, who was portrayed as a nearly unwilling participant in the events of their case, when in fact she was the catalyst for the entire court appeals process.

With both articles poised in the closing years of the civil rights movement and beginning stages of what we have come to recognize as the Black Power movement, it is important to note how strikingly out of touch with the changing tide of Black politics and aesthetics these images seem. The *Life* photo essay, photographed and written by white South African photojournalist Grey Villet, appeared in *Life* on March 18th, 1966, just a day shy of the one-year anniversary of *Life's* coverage on the 1965 march on Selma. Three months later on June 16, 1966, in a speech in Greenwood, Mississippi during the March Against Fear, Black nationalist organizer (and former Freedom Rider) Stokely Carmichael would lead protesters in a chant for Black power that was televised nationally. The 1965 assassination of Malcolm X coupled with the 1965 Watts Riots and other urban uprisings lead to groups like SNCC calling for more power to be held by Black organizations and peoples, rather than continuing to seek redress through traditional channels. The interracial marriages of popular Black figures such as Amiri Baraka, James Forman, Sammy Davis Jr., and Alice Walker were severed by this time as well, marking a seeming important shift in the personal and public priorities of Black public figures. Frustrated by the slow pace of economic improvement and voter registration in Black communities, popular

Black activist rhetoric increasingly embraced the more radically suggestive frames of militancy and separatism. With the founding of the Black Panther Party in October of 1966 and the opening of the official Black Panther headquarters in Oakland, California in January of 1967, the liberal readers of *Life* would have a growing sense of the changing momentum of Black liberation strategies.



Figure 2-23: Stokely Carmichael, president of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), shown speaking during a Black Power rally at the University of California's Greek Theater on October 29, 1966. From Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-111429.

It is highly likely then that Villet intentionally did not include images that would allow *Life* readers to read the violent visual tropes of either the civil rights or burgeoning black power movements onto the Loving family. Of the 49 known images taken by Villet of the Lovings, the nine images included in the *Life* photo essay create a linear narrative of Villet's two-week stay with the family in their Virginia home, highlighting the private lifestyle they preferred to maintain. Yet even as the Lovings strove for privacy, their lives were inevitably shaped by the prevailing laws and scripts of American society. Beginning with two cropped solo portraits of Mildred and Richard's faces against neutral backgrounds [Fig. 2.23], the images invite a scrutiny of their weary and time-worn expressions as they confront yet another legal loss within the long

court appeals process. While Mildred's gaze is pointed downward and her face is cast in shadow, Richard's gaze tilts upward, his face flooded with light. At 26 and 32 respectively, the portraits make both Mildred and Richard look much older than their age, making it easy to read the anxieties of their court battle directly on their bodies. To be sure, readers were primed for viewing this type of grief in the eyes of interracial couples; in one letter to the editor, a reader noted how "greatly depressed" they were by the faces of Mildred and Richard, writing that their expressions were "that of many others in the same situation."³¹ Through Roland Barthes' monumental study of photography in *Camera Lucida* we have come to label the affective "shock" of this type of documentary photograph the "punctum," or the element of an image that has caught and revealed the hidden meaning behind something that, before the photographic capture, was rendered unknowable.³² Like those images of couples staring out from within that had preceded these portraits, the resultant feeling for the viewer upon encountering these portraits is one of having immediate access into the Loving's tumultuous world, a world which *Life's* predominantly white armchair readership would find potentially fascinating.

While "lifting the veil" on the internal lives of a couple caught up in what the article labeled the "crime of being married," Villet is careful, though, to couch Mildred and Richard's deep worry as a response to potentially losing the trappings of an ostensibly American dream, rather than as an indictment of the American dream itself. While at the same time Black organizers in cities were fighting over fair housing, the Loving's claim to property rights was represented not as a desire to reframe the capitalist system but instead simply as a need to provide for their family. Leaning on the iconography preceding him, Villet juxtaposes the Lovings' worry with the tender futurity of their multiracial children. On the following page of the

31 "Letters To The Editors," *Life Magazine*, Apr 8, 1966.

32 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (Macmillan, 1981), 32.

Life article sit three images of the Loving children that bare little trace of their parents' pained expressions [Fig 2.24]. Unlike stills from the 1963 Children's crusade in Birmingham, Alabama in which fire hoses turned upon non-violent protesting youth and children were hauled off to detention centers, the Villet photographs portray the Loving children as free to be curious and cared for.



Figure 2-24 (Left): Grey Villet and Bill Wise, “The Crime of Being Married,” *Life Magazine* March 18, 1966. Photo caption reads “Mildred Loving, 26, and husband Richard, 32, consider latest setback in their battle to win the right to live in Virginia.” Fig. 2-25 (Right): Grey Villet and Bill Wise, “The Crime of Being Married,” *Life Magazine* March 18, 1966. Caption of top photograph reads “The Lovings’ three children, Peggy, 6, Donald, 7, and Sidney, 8, frolic in the meadow behind their rented home. Although Peggy’s features are pure white and Sidney’s are heavily Negroid, all three children are accepted unquestioningly by other children as well as the adults of both races throughout the community.” Bottom caption reads “Donald laughs with his father in their home, while Peggy goes for a walk with her mother. Of the girl’s future, Mildred says, ‘Anybody she loves, that’s what I want her to have.’”

As an indicator of who may steer America’s future, Wise’s interpretation of Villet’s images of the Loving children avoids having to address the family’s monumentally political actions, instead implying that through the nurturing of their children in private the Lovings are engaging in the improvement of the American public sphere. Unlike images of the Little Rock

Nine integrating their high school flanked by federal guardsmen in 1957, images of the Loving children illustrate how their parents only seek to nurture their children's human value, rather than stoke their political agency.³³ The images following the initial portraits capture the Loving children, Peggy, Donald, and Sidney, in a moment of play as dandelion seeds detach from their stems in Sidney's hands and catch the wind. Their facial expressions are bright, their bodies in motion such that parts of their hands and shoulders blur with the indistinct background. Below this shot sit two mirror images, one in which Richard rests on the couch with Donald in matching plaid button-ups, and one in which Mildred and Peggy walk hand in hand away from the camera in matching dresses. Under the image of Mildred and Peggy, the caption reads "Of the girl's future, Mildred says, 'Anybody she loves, that's what I want her to have.'" Rather than see her daughter's future as an extension of the Loving's political coming of age, Mildred's primary desire for her daughter is a fulfilling marriage. Here, the heterosexual future of the progressive nation is reproduced in the future of the playful multiracial child; rather than depict the Lovings as champions of the public sphere, *Life's* images convey that the work of building American social structures happens above all through parenting. Habiba Ibrahim calls this conflation of the multiracial body with modernity "multiracial time."

The primary timeline of multiracialism—family time—casts a dark shadow on the alternative modes of temporality that nonetheless underpinned the [multiracial] movement's development. Discourse about the health of the multiracial family, its legal legitimization, and a cultural politics of its recognition indicates a rupture between the appearance of state neutrality regarding the development of multiracial families on the one hand and overt statist interest in the racialization of the black family on the other. Statist recognition of functional multiracial families entailed a legally color-blind marriage market, which implicitly constitutes heterosexuality as antiracist. At the same time, blackness—or how subjects had been constituted as black through varying discourses on

³³ Katharine Capshaw, *Civil Rights Childhood: Picturing Liberation in African American Photobooks* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press: 2014), x.

race—determined the manner in which the black family, and particularly black motherhood, was always already antithetical to the neutral ideal of national belonging. The appearance of neutrality is required to produce particular forms of racial visibility.

Made acutely visible by the chosen images of the Loving children, Villet's photographic narrative demonstrates how the Iconography of Interracialism follows the logics of multiracial time quite closely to establish the existence of a multiracial identity as neutral. As documentary proof for the maintenance of family values, the protection of multiracial children is also the maintenance of the heterosexual family as a nuclear unit, effectively concealing representations of black families that constitute the photographic "negative" of these images.



Figure 2-26 Gordon Parks, "The Fontenelles at the Poverty Board, Harlem, New York" (1967)

Photographs from the same period by photojournalists Stephen Shames and Gordon Parks of unsupervised Black youths playing in urban landscapes and single-mother Black families being shuffled through the Welfare system offer a foil to the Loving images [Fig 2.2.5]. Indeed, if the fear of miscegenation was in part a fear of white partners losing access to white society and wealth and instead becoming intimately involved with the presumed pathologies of urban black

communities, the Loving images demonstrated the relative ease with which Richard and their children could be protected from this fate through the cultivation of their family unit.³⁴

Furthermore, Villet's photographic representation of the Loving family's moral health also extended into his images capturing the family's Central Point, Virginia social circle. As many *Loving* scholars have detailed, the Loving's community in Caroline County was known for its racially heterogeneous makeup; Historian Peter Wallenstein notes how the Loving's church, St. Stephen's, was known for having a mixed congregation of black, white, and native backgrounds as early as 1924. Though often described as a largely white-passing group of over 300 church-goers, the existence of this church serves as a lightning rod of proof for scholars that the Lovings were not altogether unique in their choice of lifestyle amongst their peers. As such, following the shots of the Loving children, an image shows the Lovings socializing with Richard's Black friends while lounging out in public around their shared drag racing car [Fig 2.26]. Tapping into the thematic scripts of the Iconography of Interracialism, the photo depicts harmonious cooperation across racial identities as a welcome site rather than a sign of forced integration. What the Villet images then add to this narrative is a visual representation of what happens when there is a desire for this racially integrated social sphere to be legally formalized in the eyes of the state. Considering *Life's* readership and mission to document ostensibly American life, we might then understand the chosen Villet images as part of the cultural corpus that worked in favor of rendering this formalization as part of the American character instead of antithetical to its social foundations.

34 The caption describing the Lovings at play reads, "although peggy's features are pure white and Sidney's are heavily Negroid, all three children are accepted unquestioningly by other children as well as the adults of both races throughout the community," *Life Magazine*. 19 March 1965, 86.



Figure 2-27 (left): From Life Magazine “The Crime of Being Married.” Photo caption reads “At a Sunday outing, the Lovings (seated) and Negro friends celebrate Richard’s drag-race victory with beer. Raymond Green, at right, is co-owner of the drag car. Below, the family joins Richard’s mother on the steps of her farmhouse. Of her son’s marriage she says, ‘At first I didn’t feel too good about it. Then I made up my mind if Richard wanted to, it was fine.’” Figure 2-28 (right): From Life Magazine “The Crime of Being Married.” Judge Leon M. Bazile issued original decision which barred the Lovings from living in the state. Below, they review next appeal with one of the lawyers handling the case for Civil Liberties Union.”

This work was mirrored by the work that needed to be done to write anti-miscegenation laws out of the American legal canon, especially considering that many of the first laws agreed upon by early state legislature were anti-miscegenation laws. As Chandan Reddy argues, “of the many legal decisions delivered by the Supreme Court at mid-century, *Loving* is possibly the only text...in which the Supreme Court declared in writing that the norm to which state marriage laws assented prior to *Loving* was one of ‘White Supremacy.’” Through this recognition, the *Loving* case was situated as part of a “historic shift, what Howard Winant referred to as the ‘racial break,’ in which the state apparatus moved from being officially white supremacist to officially

liberal ‘antiracist.’”³⁵ In an effort to mitigate the potential damage caused by the nation’s highest court admitting its own culpability in the perpetuation of white supremacy, the *Life* images and commentary at the time served to visually establish the antagonist as an antiquated and quickly disappearing “other,” rather than as a thriving group or structure under the responsibility of the state.³⁶

As a way of placing the blame on the law rather than on the nation’s character or history, the *Life* article points specifically to the original ruling of one Virginia judge, Leon Bazile, whose portrait is included alongside a shot of the Lovings sitting in their attorney’s law offices looking forlorn [Fig 2.27]. Presiding over their initial court case in 1959, Judge Bazile (who passed in the same year as the Supreme Court’s ruling on the *Loving* case) offered up the language needed by the ACLU to fight against anti-miscegenation laws, ruling that “Almighty God created the races white, black, yellow, Malay and red, and He placed them on separate continents, and but for the interference with His arrangements there would be no cause for such marriages.”³⁷ Based on the narrative presented by the *Life* article, it was *this* antiquated interpretation of an equally antiquated law, not the combined actions of civilians and systems of structural power, which were responsible for the Loving’s exile and subsequent trauma. Even as a photograph of Mildred, Richard, Peggy, and Richard’s mother looking out from the ledge of Richard’s mother’s home with furrowed brows suggests a continued need for a watchful parental eye to prevent the bigoted actions of others from interfering with their safety, *Life* argues that the real threat can be found in the courts.

35 Chandan Reddy, "Time for Rights: Loving, Gay Marriage, and the Limits of Legal Justice." *Fordham Law Review*. 76 (2007): 2857

36 Ibid.

37 Caroline County (Va.) Commonwealth v. Richard Perry Loving and Mildred Dolores Jeter, 1958-1966. Caroline County (Va.) Reel 79. Local Government Records Collection, Caroline County Court Records, The Library of Virginia. 6 January 1959

In September of 1967, just months after their Supreme Court win, an *Ebony* photo essay spanning five pages titled “The Couple That Rocked The Courts” painted a very different portrait of the Loving family. The author of the article, Simeon Booker, was an acclaimed African American journalist who, among many other civil rights events, had covered Emmett Till’s funeral for *Jet* magazine in 1955. It was perhaps on purpose (if not poetically coincidental) that the person who had reported on the first great media event of the civil rights movement was also responsible for relaying the events of one of the last legal civil rights pushes of the decade. Interestingly, the piece could not be more of a departure from the themes of the Till memorial piece, in which Booker relayed the gruesome details of the circumstances of Till’s murder as a call to action. While overtly relying on the themes of the Iconography of Interracialism, the Loving family’s grief-stricken looks captured by Villet are nowhere to be found across the 14 images shot by *Ebony* photographers Maurice Sorrel and Robert Walker. With smiling, unguarded expressions the article conveys a triumphant lightness centered on the actions of one hero: Richard. The opening vignette feels pulled from the pages of a utopian American history novel

Speeding in a 1964 gray Ford sedan along a Virginia highway one morning last June, Richard Perry Loving unwillingly became a civil rights hero. Scarcely caring about playing a historic role in American human relations, the 33-year-old white man raced to make his first public appearance at a crucial press conference. Harassed, persecuted and vilified for nine years in Virginia, the rugged hot rodder from isolated Caroline Comity refused to give up what he treasured most—the love of a Negro woman. Because of his determination, he tackled and erased the most controversial barrier in American life—the agonizing Dixie ban on marriage between whites and Negroes.³⁸

With a description that places Richard alongside every “Great White Man” in history, Booker’s narrative of the Loving story is re-cast for Black audiences as the long-anticipated racial

38 Simeon Booker, “The Couple That Rocked The Courts,” *Ebony*, September 1967, 78.

awakening of the southern white man. Given that white men have been the protagonists (though not sole perpetrators) of the nation's white supremacist history, through Richard Black readers encounter the working-class rural white man anew. Even as Richard maintained a persona as an "another Joe" amongst the racially mixed community of Central Point, what the *Ebony* article found equally as important to convey was his status as the protagonist, cool guy, and key actor of the Loving story. Yet with Richard described by historians as quiet and unassuming and the known facts of the Supreme Court battle actually placing *Mildred* as the one who sought out legal aid from the ACLU, it is fairly startling that *Ebony* was keen to champion Richard's efforts alone.³⁹ Charges against the magazine of simple sexism are inadequate to reconciling this discrepancy, as even within the same issue *Ebony* profiled two Black female state senators in an in-depth piece titled "Women Who Make State Laws." The article champions the state senators for their political lives and even applauds them for taking roles presumed to go to Black men, noting that "the inevitable increase in the emergence of black men should in no way hinder the ambitious black women of spirit coupled with political acumen."⁴⁰

By reading into the visual absences in *Ebony*, it seems then that the downplaying of Mildred's role in the arch of the court battle was the result of multiple groups' interests in policing the boundaries of behavior for Black women, or in this case the type of Black woman Mildred could be in the context of her interracial marriage. Indeed, while both *Ebony* and *Life's* conclusions about the Loving family ultimately maintained their apolitical lifestyle, *Ebony's* Black readership would carry its own preconceived worries about the potential ramifications of interracial marriage equality, namely the perceived safety of Black women entering into

39 Wallenstein, Peter. *Tell the Court I Love My Wife: Race, Marriage, and Law--An American History*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.

40 "Women Who Make Laws," *Ebony*, September, 1967, 29.

consensual relationships with white men. What investment, then, did *Ebony* have in visually conveying Richard as a political actor, and Mildred as silent benefactor? *Ebony*'s interest in Richard's heroic political act reflected the varying consumer interests of the Black American middle class who made up the magazine's dominant readership. In particular, the Black middle-class' investment in racial uplift through generational wealth contributed to the invisibility of Black mothers' needs and internal lives in the 1960s and beyond.

First and foremost, the monthly magazine's owner and Black business tycoon, John H. Johnson, sought to guide readers toward particular understandings of the achievements of the Black middle class. Owner of *Negro Digest*, *Jet*, and *Ebony*, Johnson was a self-made millionaire who, in his desire to champion the Black community in the post-World War II era, produced media that sought to illustrate the intertwined respectability and consumer citizenship of Black Americans, including "all the swell things we Negroes can do and will accomplish."⁴¹ But rather than attempting to mimic the white middle class, Johnson's magazines produced and supported content that illustrated the unique buying power of the Black community. Beyond economic success, in Johnson's eyes one of these major achievements of the twentieth century was the growing number of black-white interracial marriages within black middle class and elite social circles. Historian Renee Romano details the extent to which each of Johnson's publications "exhibited a fascination with interracial marriage that bordered on obsessive."⁴² In the serious editorial-based *Negro Digest*, articles titled "Does Interracial Marriage Succeed?" discussed successful marriages across the color line as early as 1945. In *Ebony* and *Jet*, images of celebrities such as Lena Horne, Sammy Davis Jr., and Eartha Kitt made interracial marriage an

41 Jason Chambers, "Presenting the Black Middle Class: John H. Johnson and *Ebony* Magazine, 1945–1974." In *Historicizing Lifestyle: Mediating Taste, Consumption and Identity from the 1900s to 1970s* (Ashgate Publishing: 2006), 56.; "Ebony Marks 5th Anniversary of Publication," *Advertising Age*, October 2, 1950

42 Romano, *Race Mixing*, 91.

activity of the Black elite, rather than of the deviant. Similarly, in 1962 *Ebony* published a thorough history of black-white sex and relationships for black audiences to understand going back to 1609. In an article titled “Miscegenation in America,” journalist and historian Lerone Bennett Jr. makes clear the always already mixed nature of white, Black, and Indian identities and the inevitability of these unions despite the law’s best efforts. While the article reads like a compilation of miscegenation dramas, careful readers also received a clearly articulated history of interracial relations to date. In part a reflection of his readers’ values and in part his own agenda, Johnson’s emphasis on the growing number of romantic interracial relations in his publications demonstrated that a growing number of Black people “accepted the magazine’s basic premise that social relationships between blacks and whites would ultimately help race relations.”⁴³ In an attempt to depict interracial marriage as a potential future for the Black middle class, Johnson’s publications perpetuated the image of a color-blind future, one in which interracial marriage would single-handedly “kill Jim Crow” and would allow “all races [to] exchange ideas, customs, dance, play, worship, and love together.”⁴⁴

Sorrel and Walker’s photographs of the Lovings in *Ebony*, like Villet’s, similarly locate the Lovings on the property of their rented farmhouse and do so with the expressed intention of drawing the viewer’s attention to property ownership [Fig. 2.28]. In the Loving’s case (and in the case of many couples who went to court to contest anti-miscegenation laws), the desire for property rights was part and parcel of their desire for marriage equality, marking the intertwined history of white supremacist law-making and the protection of white generational wealth. As a challenge to this history, Booker’s article and accompanying images use Richard’s willingness to cultivate this wealth for his family through property as a clear sign of civil rights gains for the

43 Ibid, 94.

44 Ibid.

not move until decision came.”⁴⁶ According to the article, the location of the home for Richard was equally tied up in the ability to love his wife properly. In the final lines of the article, Booker recounts from Richard’s perspective the story of the night before the Supreme Court heard the Lovings’ case: “For the first time I could put my arm around ‘Baby’ and call her my wife *in Virginia*” [emphasis added]. This plot point in Booker’s account of the Loving story would prove to have staying power in the nation’s cultural memory; in the 2016 film adaptation of the Loving story entitled *Loving*, Richard’s low voice opens the teaser trailer as he stands on an open plot of land with Mildred. “I’m gon’ build you a house,” he says, “Right here. Our house.”⁴⁷ In this narrative, too, is a claim to protect his wife; as Renee Romano uncovers, *Ebony* and *Jet* in particular showcased marriages between white men and black women over the inverse pairing as a way of showing how these relationships were, according to *Jet*) “on a high plane of respect and devotion, untouched either by scandal or notoriety.”⁴⁸ With “night integration” being of utmost concern for Black advocacy organizations like the NAACP, Richard’s desire to protect Mildred and provide for his family through economic property rights veered from the narrative many had come to rightfully associate with interactions between white men and black women in the South. In highlighting Black woman and white man relationships, Johnson’s publications – quite like the messaging of Black women’s social clubs of the early twentieth century – were especially eager to shift the narrative away from the hyper-sexualization of Black women and toward their pursuit of wholesome lifestyles. As the presumption of hyper-sexuality was bolstered by a history of nonconsensual sexual encounters protected by state law, Booker’s photo essay details

46 Booker, 80

47 Youtube, “LOVING - Official Trailer [HD] - In Theaters Nov 4,” *Focus Features*, September 15, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bQMF5MSohPA&ab_channel=FocusFeaturesFocusFeaturesVerified.

48 Ibid, 94. See also “Negro Women with White Husbands,” *Jet*, February 21, 1952, p. 25

in particular the great lengths Richard went through to provide for and protect his family *through the law*. One community member is quoted in the article stating that

“A lot of the folks down here just don't have the guts Rich had. There has been plenty mingling among races for years and nobody griped or tried to legalize it... Rich just wasn't that type. What he wanted, he wanted on paper and legal. As a result, he broke up the system. The power boys in the county despised Rich because he ended the white man's moonlighting in romance. Now they got to cut out this jive of dating Negro women at night.”⁴⁹

One tactic to avoid further sensationalizing of Black women's sexuality was to avoid depicting it at all. While Sorrel and Roberts's images capture what Booker describes to be glances of “loving devotion” between the pair, not one of the images picture Mildred and Richard touching, kissing, or sharing an intimate moment. Even in the image described as loving, the pair make straight-faced eye contact over the kitchen table surrounded by family [Fig. 2.28]. Beyond *Ebony's* largely Black readership, the American public still had very few reference points for interracial intimacy of this kind. Public displays of heterosexual intimacy, let alone interracial intimacy, were still quite taboo for the time, with the first TV broadcasted kiss between a Black woman and a white man happening just one year later in 1968 on *Star Trek* between Captain Kirk and Lieutenant Uhura. While the assumption of sexual intimacy is suggested by the existence of their children and in the fact of their marriage, information such as the Lovings' eldest, Sidney, being a child of a previous marriage and their second child, Donald, conceived before the Lovings were married, is conspicuously left out of both *Life* and *Ebony* articles. The viewer instead reads the Loving's interracial intimacy through their material cultivation of a shared home space; the house as banal artifact cleverly serves to mitigate the sensational visions of miscegenation.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 80-82.

Yet in order to move beyond an understanding of the Loving's farmhouse – and, by extension, the interracial family – as banal artifact, Wexler reminds us that viewers must move beyond the “innocent eye” and negotiate Mildred Loving's role as homemaker, mother, and domestic. With Mildred described as a “helpmate,” “soft-spoken,” and “a tan-skinned woman with quiet charm” – descriptors that worked to draw attention away from an understanding of her as a political actor – *Ebony's* focus on Richard's actions prioritized the perception of southern white progress, rather than the maternal labor that was undoubtedly involved in the Loving's civil disobedience. As a central tenet of this dissertation, privileging the actions of Black mothers provides a different political lens through which to look at the mixed-race Black-white family of the twentieth century. My choice to center Black motherhood, in this case Mildred Loving, works as a challenge to the stagnating conversation within the burgeoning field of Critical Mixed Race Studies on whether or not interracial families and mixed-race children in the American context are “radical” or “political” enough in relation to Black organizing interests. While Mildred Loving has been heralded as the silent and largely voiceless “hero” of the multiracial movement of the late 1990s and early 2000's, a look at Villet's unused photographs encourages viewers to continually expand their understanding of political actions in the context of Civil Rights beyond marches, sit-ins, and boycotts.

2.3: Finding Mildred on the Cutting Room Floor

Taken together, Mildred's representation by the national media is – recalling the words of Hortense Spillers – countenanced by a “powerful stillness” that has typified the larger state of Black embodiment since enslavement.⁵⁰ Rather than see the progression of Black women's

⁵⁰ Hortense J. Spillers, “Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (1987), 66.

rights as a linear narrative marching through history, Spillers notes how Black women in particular have not been allowed to act as agents of their own bodies and lives, appearing instead as objects of study, conquest, metaphor, or (in many cases) absence. As this uniquely translates to the visual field, Nicole Fleetwood extends Spillers' understanding of blackness as negation by noting how looking for race in images becomes an act of "doing," in which race is continually reproduced through overdetermined representations of Black people. For Black women, these repetitive representations rely on the iconicity of the sexualized body, in effect obscuring the individuality and everydayness of Black women's experiences. In order for visual culture scholars to grapple more fruitfully with the images produced out of this stillness (a stillness that equally assumes a lack of visible archival presence), Black feminist visual culture scholar Tina Campt argues that viewers must attune themselves to everyday forms of refusal built into moments of stillness, such that we might understand representations of "stasis" as "invisible forms of motion held in tense suspension" and "an active, tense, and expressive practice of both restraint and constraint."⁵¹ Campt goes on to note how these acts of refusal perform a commitment to survival "in which one enacts...the conditions which will have sustained and valued black life."⁵² As a black feminist practice of calling up a future that is not promised, Campt contends that this alternate practice requires the tense of the future real conditional, or "that which will have *had* to happen" (emphasis in original).⁵³

By attending to that which would have had to happen for Mildred and her family to live through the court appeals process in the nearly 50 images of the Loving family that lined the cutting room floor, contemporary viewers instead encounter Mildred through instances of

⁵¹ Tina M Campt, *Listening To Images*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 52, 57.

⁵² Jacob Breslow, "Listening to Images," *Feminist Review* 117, no. 1 (November 01 2017): 202-03.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 17.

refusal, anticipation, quotidian joy, and terror. Treated as family photographs by the Lovings and among Mildred's dear possessions, these images have only recently surfaced for public consumption in a 2017 art book titled *The Lovings: An Intimate Portrait* published by Grey Villet's wife and journalist, Barbara Villet, for the 50th anniversary year of the *Loving decision*.⁵⁴ As a way of understanding Mildred's daily effort to cultivate a future that could only be imagined, Villet's prints do the vital work of representing Black women's labor without valorizing or sensationalizing it. Rather than insist on Mildred's radical politics through these photographs, my ekphrastic readings merely acknowledge that these actions existed, and maintains an ambivalent posture toward her politics and "what had to have happened."

From a photographic standpoint, Villet's unused images lend themselves well to this reading; Barbara Villet noted how Grey loved working with Tri-X film, explaining that it was because he could push exposure with the film therefore capturing light and motion in more organic ways. Calling them his "fuzzy prints," Grey's photographic style encouraged his subjects to "act as they are," allowing him to produce prints that felt "as real as real can get."⁵⁵ Rather than being remediated multiple times over by journalists and magazine editors, Villet's unused images are less interested in presenting the interracial family in a certain light. In their status as family photographs, contemporary viewers may more easily treat this collection of images as more closely resembling a family photo album which, as a genre in its own right, is known to capture a spectrum of moments ranging from the every day to the heavily staged. Indeed, what comes through most clearly in these images is the full breadth of The Lovings' lives despite the limiting forces at play. Full of the mundane events that color many families' lives but also the

⁵⁴ Barbara, Villet, *The Lovings: An Intimate Portrait* (Princeton Architectural Press, 2017), 89.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 7.; Kathleen Phalen-Tomaselli, "A 'Lovings' story: Local woman tells tales of the famed interracial couple," *The Post Start*, 10 March 2017, https://poststar.com/news/local/a-lovings-story-local-woman-tells-tales-of-the-famed/article_4da08a15-7b2f-5c1b-a7c8-10c3b5373c94.html.

acute emotional weight of standing in daily opposition to the state, Mildred's visual presence in particular comes through as a rebuttal to *Ebony's* Richard-centered story and *Life's* white liberal nationalist frames.

Villet's images allow us to see how Mildred had to have been afraid of judicial and physical punishment and had to have maintained this fear in order to imagine a future for herself and her family in Virginia. In comparison to Richard, Mildred's experience with the law demonstrates how Black women were more heavily punished for engaging in interracial sex than white men. According to the Loving's attorney, Phil Hirschkop, when the Lovings were first arrested for breaking Virginia's anti-miscegenation law, Richard was let out after one night while not yet 19-year-old, pregnant Mildred spent "the better half of a month... in a filthy little tiny black cell with a metal bunk."⁵⁶ To challenge the law and return to Virginia after the Lovings had been sentenced to 25 years of exile by Judge Leon Bazile was then to risk recapture and increased jail time for Mildred in particular. When read through Mildred's daily fear of retaliation, the Loving's fugitive farmhouse as a material icon of the American dream transforms into a space of both captivity and fugitivity. Unlike *Ebony*, Villet's images portray the farmhouse as a space that both limits and frees the Lovings and urge viewers to see themselves as complicit in the imprisonment of Mildred, in particular. During the time in which Villet was on assignment, the Lovings were in the long process of court appeals and were living illegally in Virginia under a fake name. Since Mildred did not have a car, she was limited to staying with her three children at home most of the day. A series of Villet's images illustrate the quotidian daily

⁵⁶ Hillary Kelly, "We Were married on the Second Day of June, and the Police Came After Us the 14th of July." *The Washingtonian*, 2 November 2016, <https://www.washingtonian.com/2016/11/02/virginia-case-legalized-interracial-marriage-the-loving-story/>.

acts associated with watching over the house, including several of Mildred in which the viewer is made privy to what can only be interpreted as her concern.



*Figure 2-31: Photograph, 1966, Mildred Loving by Grey Villet published in *The Lovings: An Intimate Portrait* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2017) Mildred Loving peering out from the window of their rented farmhouse.*

One such image [Fig. 2.31] is of Mildred at dusk peering through their farmhouse window out onto their rented property. Taken from the exterior of the house with half of the scene submerged in the tall grass, the viewer is made to look through the eyes of a predator staring at its prey. In the upper half of the photograph, the Loving's darkly lit house is further shaded by barren trees that pepper the surrounding grounds. Similar to the fear scripted by the iconography of interracialism, Mildred stands guard over her family's property with a watchful eye, her hand holding back the curtains as if to make her presence known and visible. Yet instead of being staged, the documentary style of this shot exhibit's the habitual nature of Mildred's fear. Barbara Villet notes how, particularly in the early months of their return to Virginia, Mildred would often stand in the window throughout the day (sometimes until four in the morning), living in a state of

constant dread of unknown cars in the driveway and delays in Richard's return home.⁵⁷ Similar to the fugitive slave Harriet Jacobs' "loophole of retreat" in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* which Jacobs uses to leverage her hiding place to keep an eye on her owner, Mildred's watchfulness can similarly be seen as a kind of refusal of the terms of her own captivity. As a tactic of survival, Camppt would categorize Mildred's watchfulness as a type of "practice homed in response to sustained, everyday encounters with exigency and duress that rupture a predictable trajectory of flight."⁵⁸

In further demonstrating the ways in which Mildred's usage of fear helped to produce the conditions for her and her children's futures, Villet's images lay bare that Mildred had to have acted, and in these actions she had to have spoken. Even as Mildred was described as quiet in the *Life* and *Ebony* pieces, multiple sources actually credit her with initially reaching out to lawyers, as well as describing her as talkative in comparison to Richard's stern and silent demeanor.⁵⁹ During Villet and Wise's initial interview with the Lovings at the beginning of Villet's two week stay, Barbara recounts the initial nervousness of this interaction for Mildred despite her acting as the spokesperson for the couple, noting how "she unconsciously kept twisting her wedding band, as if to assure herself that it was still on her finger. Standing quietly apart and always intensely aware of fleeting signs of emotion, Villet caught the tensions of the moment on film."⁶⁰ The image taken of this encounter [Fig. 2.32] is a close-up of Mildred's fidgeting fingers, her wedding ring sliding up over the knuckle on her ring finger.

⁵⁷ Barbara Villet, *The Lovings*, 17.

⁵⁸ Camppt, *Listening to Images*, 10.

⁵⁹ Wallenstein, 106.; Barbara Villet, 11,16

⁶⁰ Barbara Villet, 16.



*Figure 2-32: Photograph, 1966, Mildred Loving by Grey Villet published in *The Lovings: An Intimate Portrait* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2017). Mildred Loving fidgeting with her wedding ring.*

The ring, much like the Loving's wedding license that hung in their bedroom the night of their initial arrest, served as another marker of the legitimacy of their union. With wedding bands serving as symbols of permanence and steadfast devotion, Mildred's transformation of this object through her physical manifestation of the tension of civil disobedience demonstrates the multiple refusals at play. Taken alongside the initial self-control displayed in response to the intrusiveness of *Life* reporters and photographers, the image serves as an example of black women's stasis, of restraint and constraint. With Mildred's motions marked by the fuzziness of Villet's photographic technique, what stands out as well is the stark tan line left behind by the band, an indication that she would continue to wear it outside the house. Multiple photographs in the collection confirm this to be true, as Villet captures Mildred running errands, walking about town, and socializing with friends with the ring on her finger. As a partial refusal of the terms of her fugitivity, Mildred's wedding band is displayed prominently throughout Villet's photographic collection. However, when initially confronted with the possibility of the

photographic capture of this protest through the introduction of a photographer into her home life, Mildred's instinctual reaction is to protect herself from the gaze of Villet's camera. This image, absent from the *Life* photo essay, allows contemporary viewers to expand their understanding of Mildred's perceived passivity.

Finally, and perhaps most interestingly, Villet's images show how Mildred would have had to perform her racial identity in ways that simultaneously took into account the racially mixed nature of life in Central Point, Virginia as well as the national Black-white divide. Though Mildred's Black identity remained central to the case's aspirations to undo some of the racial sexual scripts that rendered Black women as objects of sexual desire and fetishization, Mildred instead identified as Native American. In a 2016 interview, Mildred's grandson, Mark Loving, recounted "I know during those times, there were only two colors: white and black. But she was Native American, both of her parents were Native American."⁶¹ Mildred herself in a 2004 interview confirmed this in saying "I am not black. I have no black ancestry. I am Indian-Rappahannock. I told the people so when they came to arrest me."⁶² As noted by many *Loving* historians, the fact that Mildred herself did not identify as Black on her marriage license or throughout her life implies that she, like Charlayne Hunter, was not interested in many of the claims of "linked fate" being made during the civil rights movement. Historian Arica L. Coleman notes that Mildred's choice to identify as Native instead of Black or some version of Afro-Native was informed by deeply embedded politics of her small town in Virginia, a community that was well aware of Virginia's 1924 Racial Integrity Act. The Act contained a loophole known as the

61 Elle D., "Mildred Loving's Grandson Reveals She Didn't Identify, And Hated Being Portrayed, As Black American" 3 November, 2016. <http://blackgirllonghair.com/2016/11/mildred-lovings-grandson-reveals-she-didnt-identify-and-hated-being-portrayed-as-black-american/>.

62 Arica L. Coleman, "What You Didn't Know About *Loving v. Virginia*," *Time*, 10 June 2016, <http://time.com/4362508/loving-v-virginia-personas/>.

“Pocahontas Exception,” meaning that those with no more than 1/16th American Indian ancestry would be legally considered white. Claiming a native identity was then to approximate oneself to whiteness in a way that a Black identity simply could not. To read Mildred as a Black woman is then going against how the Lovings had constructed their lives in relation to their racial landscape.

Though Coleman’s interviews with Mildred have her insisting on her native identity, the Loving’s lawyers and the press were not operating under the same impression. When Coleman asked one of the Loving’s former lawyers, Bernard Cohen, about Mildred’s racial identity, he flatly denied knowing that Mildred identified as Indian at all. “That’s news to me... she always insisted that she was black.”⁶³ Holding these two interviews in tension, what can we make of the disconnect between Mildred and her lawyers? Perhaps Cohen is intentionally rewriting Mildred’s story in the name of protecting the historical memory of the case as a Black-white issue. Or perhaps Mildred knowingly played into understandings of herself as Black in order for her case to be received. In Mildred’s initial letter to then-Attorney General Robert Kennedy in which she sought legal advice, Mildred describes herself as “part negro, + part Indian,” a sign that she at least acknowledged that her blackness had contributed to her legal and social circumstances. As a way of navigating the nation’s ever-changing racial terrain, Mildred’s circumstantial identification was of course not unprecedented, especially given the racially mixed nature of the Loving’s Virginia community.

Villet’s documentary images allow contemporary viewers to further understand how Mildred, like many people who lived in racially mixed communities, made choices that necessarily reflected the simultaneously fraught and quotidian nature of racial formations in

⁶³ Ibid.

America at the time. Stephen Berrey terms this matrix of performances, choices, and relationships the “Jim Crow routine”

In their interactions with each other and with “props,” blacks and whites remade Jim Crow with each daily performance. Focusing on Jim Crow as a series of enactments reveals one of the central features of this racial system. Many white Southerners imagined a world not of separation or isolation but rather of a particular form of racial intimacy and harmony.

Unlike the iconography of integration – which represents the racist “other” as out of sight– Villet’s images help demonstrate how deeply *visible* race-based social systems were through the social institutions around the Loving family. Images of the couple running errands outside the Caroline County lines to avoid arrest emphasize how the miscegenation laws inconvenienced their daily lives. A photograph of Mildred taking Peggy and Donald to a school fair at the mixed-race school they were required to attend (despite their white-passing appearance) indicates the institutionalization of these systems. Barbara Villet notes how the racially integrated Sumerdauck Dragway, where Richard and his racially mixed drag racing team regularly competed, was one of the only spaces in which the Lovings could escape the entanglements of their daily lives. At the dragway, Grey captured the lovings as “entirely themselves, open in their public displays of affections and emotionally at home as part of a mixed group of close friends.”⁶⁴

This chapter has argued that instead of placing the blame on the Loving family’s private interests and actions that in fact a larger visual iconography was at play well before the Lovings challenged the Virginia courts. Though scholars have previously perceived Mildred’s fear as leading to the family’s disengagement from black socio-political movements, by generously reading into Mildred’s quiet fear as instead a daily refusal of the parameters of “correct” black

64 Barbara Villet, 72.

political engagement at the time, contemporary viewers of Villet's photographs can grapple with the futurity of the Black-white family without also implying the erasure of Black politics.

2.4: (Mildred) *Loving* 50 Years Later

As I have outlined throughout this chapter, it was not just the choices of the Loving family captured by the frame of the photograph but the overlapping interests of the national media, civil rights organizers, lawyers, and interracial families themselves. The visual representations of interracial families that were produced out of these interests contributed to the perpetuation of a singular, apolitical narrative of the black-white family. By disentangling Mildred's narrative from this script, I hope to revisit how we might perceive the political icon of the mixed-race black family in the decades after *Loving v. Virginia*. In doing so we are called to revisit the oft-cited principle that the personal is deeply political, which in turn reminds contemporary viewers that conceptions of the private or the domestic (even during periods in American history when these spaces were considered strictly binary) are always already considerations of the public and the political.

One way in which to begin this work is to engage how contemporary cultural producers and audiences have taken up the Loving's story to make sense of current racial projects and formations. Commemorative efforts such as the creation of Loving Day in 2004 by mixed-race activist Ken Tenabe seek to celebrate the *Loving* verdict annually on June 12 by sponsoring national multicultural celebrations and gatherings. Though not recognized by the government as a national holiday despite efforts by Tenabe and other organizers, Loving Day's celebratory focus on interracial families and multiracial children has only further aligned the Iconography of Interracialism with the legacy of *Loving v. Virginia*. Critics such as Chandan Reddy and Osagie

Obasogie see these commemorative efforts as hollowing out the true offering of the *Loving* verdict, which at its heart acted as an admission by the U.S. legal system of the deep entrenchment of white supremacy in its laws and policies, what critical race scholars Omi and Winant would call a “racial break.”⁶⁵ At the time of the *Loving* decision, the Supreme Court’s admission extended to an understanding of the relationship between anti-miscegenation laws and other similar white supremacist policies such as Virginia’s sterilization laws for the feeble-minded. In a 2017 *Atlantic* article, Obasogie urges readers to think beyond the celebration of love contained within the *Loving* verdict, and instead look to legal and political parallels in the present moment.

Loving v. Virginia...speaks to contemporary social and political initiatives whose true purpose is often masked by distracting and disingenuous rhetoric. This can be seen in current government proposals aimed at banning travel from certain Muslim-majority countries, building a physical barrier on the southern border, revoking health care from millions of people, and decimating civil rights programs and social services that provide support for the most vulnerable. A robust understanding of *Loving* instructs us to peel back the superficial economic and political justifications for these contemporary proposals. This allows us to appreciate how they are often motivated by an eerily reminiscent...logic regarding who is weak and who is strong, who belongs and who doesn’t, and who deserves to live and who should perish.⁶⁶

Consequently, when the *Loving* family’s legacy was revisited by director and writer Jeff Nichols fifty years later in the fall of 2016, the stakes of exploring the *Loving* decision were high. What would yet another celebratory representation of the *Loving* family add to the contemporary conversation given the lack of interest in the full legal scope of the verdict’s offerings? At the time, the racial political climate contended with a number of unfulfilled promises made by the

65 Chandan Reddy, "Time for Rights: *Loving*, Gay Marriage, and the Limits of Legal Justice," 2858-2859.

66 Osagie Obasogie, "Was *Loving v. Virginia* Really About Love?" *The Atlantic*, June 12, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/06/loving-v-virginia-marks-its-fiftieth-anniversary/529929/>

Obama administration. In the wake of an increase in anti-Black police brutality throughout the latter half of his presidency, the hope that President Obama was interested in serving the Black community's interests beyond the mantle of representation had been largely given up on by Black Lives Matter organizers. What's more, with the film's debut situated squarely within the twilight of the Obama era and the presidential election of Donald Trump, a story of interracial love triumphing over white supremacy – depending on its treatment by Nichols– could either alienate or uplift audiences who felt invisible under state power.

While an in-depth film analysis of *Loving* is outside of the scope of this project, a brief comparison between the film's portrayal of the family and the visual legacy of the *Life* and *Ebony* articles highlights shifts in Black social movement priorities and the consumer public's desires, and subsequently how these priorities have changed media representations of the Loving family. Perhaps implicitly taking cues from the visible and celebrated presence of Black women at the helm of prominent social movements such as Black Lives Matter, Nichols smartly used the *Loving v Virginia* anniversary to revisit the familiar story through new eyes: Mildred's. That the twenty-first century brought a retelling of the Loving story through the figure of a Black and native woman (rather than a white man) suggests a desire to consider the nation's historical touchstones with a view from below. A number of scenes bring Mildred's presence into full view; in the film, when the family is exiled to Washington D.C. after their initial Virginia trial, Mildred is shown watching a TV news broadcast covering the March on Washington. The viewer learns that it is in this moment that Mildred decides to write Robert Kennedy regarding the appeal to their court case, marking Mildred (not Richard) as the one who chose to pursue legal action. By depicting moments in which Mildred is watching TV news coverage of major

events in civil rights history, the film also suggests that Mildred was influenced by the ongoing events of the civil rights movement, even as she herself would not align herself as such.

What's more, the presence of Villet as a character in the film as well as the influence his unused images had on the cinematography of the film suggests that the contemporary viewer has been primed to look through Mildred eyes, rather than Richard's. In one scene, the film depicts the Lovings agreeing to Villet's visit for publicity purposes, and even captures Villet's character making deliberate choices to capture particular types of family moments. In recreating the iconic couch image of the Lovings, often used as the stock photo for mainstream news coverage of their devoted love, Villet is shown sitting up against the wall surreptitiously raising his camera to take the shot as the TV muffles the sound of the shutter click [Figure 2.33-2.34].

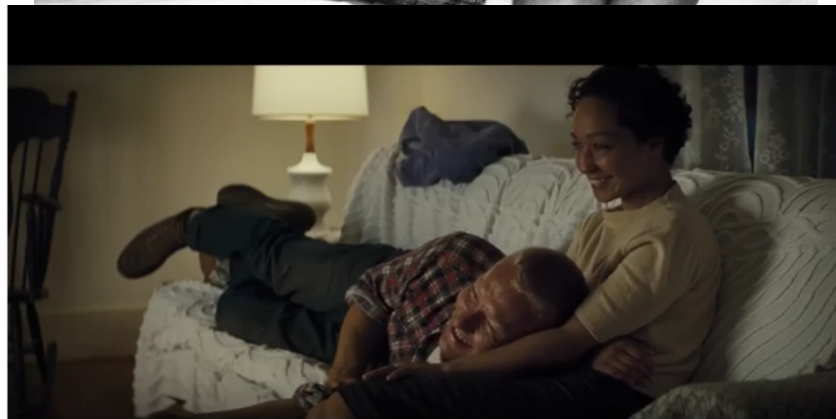


Figure 2-33: Photograph, Mildred and Richard Loving by Grey Villet published in The Lovings: An Intimate Portrait Mildred and Richard sitting on the couch. Figure 2-34: still from Loving (2016), recreation of Grey Villet image.

Though ultimately retold as a love story, *Loving* pushes viewers to consider what human costs they *obscure* when they are quick to celebrate only certain aspects of the court case's triumphs. Throughout the film, Mildred's steady gaze forces the viewer to encounter her singular, unique experience with the events of their initial arrest, life during exile, and trial. In comparison to encountering Mildred as wife and mother in *Life* and *Ebony*, *Loving* goes to great lengths, much like Villet's unused photographs, to show Mildred physically by herself. Long, lingering camera shots show Mildred with her eyes wide in fear staring out the window, on the phone with lawyers, and huddled in Central Point's jail cell for many days after her and Richard's arrest. Though Mildred, played by Ruth Negga, is still portrayed as characteristically "quiet," Negga's gaze disentangles this disposition from a political passivity. Nominated for an Oscar in 2017 in the category of Best Actress, Negga's performance allured audiences through what film critics called her "weary eyes." Described as "If Modigliani ever painted the Delta blues," Negga's expression recalls a tender, melancholic, though unceremoniously present version of Mildred.⁶⁷ Through her quietude, viewers are asked to pay attention to the relative quiet of the entire film, a practice that brings feelings of fear, anxiety, and solitude (rather than uniform celebration) to the fore. This was an aspect which Negga, herself Ethiopian and Irish, saw as a draw for her as an actress; "It's a thrilling and invigorating thing to discard language in a way, almost completely... There's a lovely tension that can happen in a silence."⁶⁸ Though one

67 Wesley Morris and A.O. Scott, "The Year's Most Captivating Film Performances," *The New York Times*. 8 December, 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/08/magazine/great-performers-la-noir-the-years-most-captivating-film-performances.html?_r=0.

68 Tim Lewis, "Ruth Negga: 'There are films that really mark you. *Loving* is one of those for me'" *The Guardian*, January 20, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2017/jan/29/ruth-negga-loving-interview-rising-star-oscar-nomination>.

might see this interpretation as further silencing Mildred, what is captured in this silence is Mildred's persistently disobedient acts in the face of a monstrously violent white supremacist state.

As the film works to place greater weight on these singular visions of Mildred, contemporary viewers are then further able to take what would otherwise be considered overly-celebratory images of Mildred and Richard's interracial love and place them alongside the structures of power that control the bounds of this love. In the following chapters, I am interested to see how the following generation, those who would consider themselves of the *Loving* Generation, is represented and represents themselves in light of dominant representations of interracial love and family intimacy. Where does the child of the movement place themselves, how are they placed?

CHAPTER THREE - To “Claim what was partial and provisional:” The Jones Sisters and the Private/Public Family Album



Figure 3.1; Bob Thompson, LeRoi Jones and His Family, 1964. Oil on canvas, 36 3/8 x 48 1/2 inches. Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. Gift of Joseph H. Hirshhorn, 1966.

In the opening pages of *Eyeminded* (2011), writer and curator Kellie Jones discusses an unfinished painting made of her family by artist and family friend Bob Thompson in 1964. As the daughter of Black Arts Movement writer and activist Amiri Baraka (formerly LeRoi Jones) and Jewish beat poet Hettie Jones, Kellie reads the history and troubled representation of

interracial sex and mixed race identity through Thompson's artistic treatment of her and her younger sister, Lisa.¹

My mother and father are painted in; my sister and I are only outlines, sketched out in chalk. Thompson painted over another work and a single gnome-like figure shows through, in some ways a substitute for us children...In the lower right-hand corner of [the canvas], ghostly chalk letters hover over the unfinished portion of the painting; ever more faded, a blocky signature emerges. KELLIE, I signed, and in doing so claimed what was partial and provisional, emerged where I was never supposed to, declared this space and my liminality not as a failure but as a site of layering, multiplicity, and possibility, a space even utopic.²

Kellie notes that in its unfinished/finished state, the Thompson painting inadvertently reiterates the common tropes of racially mixed people as genetically deviant, tragic, as unfortunate excess, and mixed-race girls and women in particular as open signifiers for racial play and fantasy. As if an afterthought of Baraka and Hettie Jones's immediately recognizable subversive love, Kellie and Lisa's presence looks like an uncomfortable mistake or an unwelcome intrusion. Given that in the year following the painting's creation Amiri would divorce Hettie, "escape" the interracial bohemian East Village, and move away from his daughters to the Black enclave of Harlem and then eventually to build a Black nationalist arts community in Newark, the portrait is a time capsule of an evolving Black radical consciousness – one in which the political and cultural significance of mixed race families found unstable footing.

Yet rather than let this first reading speak on behalf of her experiences, Kellie offers an alternative interpretation, one that draws out the possibilities located in the small but mighty act of autonomy she had exercised by signing her name. At the time of the painting's creation, Kellie

1 This chapter does not attempt to refer to Amiri Baraka by his given name and changing names — Everett LeRoi Jones, LeRoi Jones, Imamu Amear Baraka, and Imamu Amiri Baraka. Instead, for reasons relating to clarity and style, I choose to refer to him throughout by his final name, Amiri Baraka.

2 Kellie Jones, *Eyeminded: Living and Writing Contemporary Art* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 26.

was only five years old, just barely conscious of how the powerful act of naming has been exercised throughout history as a way of claiming space, rights, and – perhaps most significantly – identity. More than a singular moment of individualization, Kellie instead poses this act of naming as an early moment of ethical community building. She reads writing herself back into history as “a continual action, a responsibility not just to oneself but also to community – national and outer-national – one where we choose the better parts of our histories and ourselves. To live a conviviality that is spontaneous and organic, an intermixture that is at once banal and subversive in its ordinariness.”³ Indeed, the East Village of Kellie and Lisa’s childhood and later the Fort Greene neighborhood of their young adulthood were havens for multicultural artists and freethinkers, mirroring this spontaneous conviviality and giving way to a new generation of artists and activists. While deeply invested in the hyperlocal aspects of creative community, both Hettie and Amiri saw artistic expression as a direct intervention into the most pressing national issues of the civil rights, Black Arts, and women’s liberation movements.

It is in this spirit that Kellie and Lisa’s leftist upbringings and later their respective careers in the arts are a case study in how these Black diasporic political projects based in community-building gave way to new kinds of visual, aesthetic, and kinship concerns in the post-soul moment. Together Lisa and Kellie have been labeled archetypes of The New Black Aesthetic, described by scholars such as Mark Anthony Neal, Greg Tate, Bertram Ashe, and Trey Ellis as a cultural movement shaped by an emerging young Black, urban, middle-class intelligentsia invested in expanding and riffing off of soul-era Black identities. As highly educated, well-traveled, second-generation bohemians, the Jones sisters use their access to educational institutions, museums, and the media to push forward a Black political aesthetic.

³ Ibid.

Similarly, Kellie and Lisa (born in 1959 and 1961 respectively) can be seen as early members of the *Loving* Generation, born roughly between 1965-1985 and coming of age as part of a generation of mixed-race people who were positioned by the media to embody the hopes of civil rights legislation such as *Loving v Virginia*, The Voting Rights Act, and *Brown v. Board of Education*. Finally, their participation in Black feminist cultural criticism and women of color-centered artistic spaces brings them into the fold of second and third-wave feminist histories and serves as a poignant foil to the critiques of Baraka as a patriarchal and misogynistic icon of Black nationalism.

This chapter then asks two questions. First, what do the Jones sisters' coming of age in the 1970s, 80s, and 90s tell us about the relationship between the *Loving* Generation and the post-soul era? While scholarly conversations of mixed-race identity during the 1980s and 90s often rightfully emphasize the identity and policy-based goals of the Multiracial Movement as defining mixed race discourse at the time, little has been written on the overlapping evolution of Black popular culture and its influence on notions of identity and politics for mixed race individuals and families. Indeed, though Kellie and Lisa Jones write about their mixed-race background as a contributing factor to their social and artistic perspectives, their coming of age in the post-soul moment as well as their family's prominent contributions to Black cultural and political conversations call them to consider their racial identity as part and parcel of a larger Black experience. During this era, Black writers, artists, and thinkers such as Fran Ross, Greg Tate, Aaron McGruder, and Dream Hampton – while still maintaining a “dogged allegiance to their communities” – took up the charge of troubling the boundaries of blackness through various considerations of class, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality.⁴ The Jones sisters' public works

⁴ Trey Ellis, "The New Black Aesthetic." *Callaloo Winter*, No. 38 (Winter, 1989), 233-243.

similarly use their mixed-race family and interracial social community as fodder to interrogate the boundaries of race, art, gender, family, and community. In her 1994 memoir *Bulletproof Diva*, Lisa reproduces autobiographical and cultural criticism essays that detail her work as a playwright and former freelance journalist for the *Village Voice*. Kellie's 2011 collection of essays, *Eyeminded*, similarly takes up questions of kinship and community, as each section of the book is prefaced by writing from each member of her family – Amiri Baraka, Hettie Jones, Lisa Jones, and her Husband Guthrie Ramsey.

Second, this chapter asks what the Jones sisters' relationship to their family's public and private archive reveals about how black-white interracial families functioned as a socio-political symbol in the late twentieth century. Given that the Jones family's prolific creative output and participation in Black political culture presents a significant departure from representations of mixed race families of previous decades as private, what can be made of the mixed-race family's narration and vision of itself when it purposefully goes *public*? Collectively, the Joneses – as public creatives in their own right and as a family whose intimate ties to each other are as complex as the movements they helped found – are a departure from the iconic mixed-race Black families of the early and mid-twentieth century detailed in chapters one and two. As key actors in the civil rights and black power movements, Amiri Baraka and Hettie Jones were leftist radicals in a way that the Loving family or Caroline Bond Day's social circles only timidly and occasionally signaled. It is significant here that traditional depictions of the nuclear family unit do not align well with the Joneses narrative – with divorce and community family practices in the East Village coloring their upbringing, the Jones sisters are less inclined in their writings to see the traditional family unit as a persuasive political starting point. In engaging with their family and notions of family as a public and expansive entity, rather than as a solely private or

heteronormative unit, the Jones sisters treat the family archive as nearly open source, or as open to interpretation in the same ways that a popular film, album, artwork, or novel might be. This relationship to the public family archive makes room for open and fraught displays of ambivalence toward categories of family and identity, a marked divergence from the more private deliberations of self that took place in the *Loving* and Day archives. What's more, this ambivalence, particularly as it plays out in the photographs and works of art that surround the Jones family such as the Thompson painting, does not automatically signify a negative valuation of self or identity, but rather operates as a tool to explore the possibilities of difference as an organizing principle for kinship itself.

This understanding of difference and change as common pervades the Baraka/Jones family's public writings, as each has attempted to speak back to (or offer counterexamples to) the "official" record and criticism of their lives in their works. In the preface to the *LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka Reader*, Baraka writes of his frustration with literary critics' desires to label his political phases from Beatnik to Marxist Leninist with concrete timestamps. "The truth is that in going toward and away from some name, some identifiable 'headline' of one's life, the steps are names too, but we ain't that precise yet. We go from step 1 to step 2...But there is real life between 1 and 2. There is the life of the speed, the time it takes, the life therein, in the middle of, the revelation, like perception, rationale and use. To go from any where to any there."⁵ Of Hettie Jones's memoir *How I Became Hettie Jones*, Deborah Thompson notes how for Hettie "identity is not a matter of 'being' but of 'becoming'" as her narrative is "quite literally, the story of a woman who 'traded Hettie Cohen for Hettie Jones.'"⁶ As Hettie's life and writings have often

⁵ Amiri Baraka and William J. Harris, *The LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka Reader* (New York: Basic Books, 1991), xi.

⁶ Deborah Thompson, "Keeping up with the Joneses: The Naming of Racial Identities in the Autobiographical Writings of LeRoi Jones/Amiri Barak, Hettie Jones, and Lisa Jones," *College Literature* 29, No. 1 (Winter 2002), 85.

been circumscribed within her relationship with Baraka, this emphasis on identity transformation brings a depth to her narrative that her public image struggled to capture. In her essay “How I Invented Multiculturalism” in *Bulletproof Diva*, Lisa writes that through her childhood in New York City she came to understand how “cultural pluralism was more than a performance piece for well-heeled art house patrons, but an everyday life led by thousands of Americans, black, yellow, brown, red, and yes, even white.”⁷ For Kellie, she writes of her own kind of becoming as a sharpening of her critical eye toward art and culture.

To be sure, in their ties to the East Village, the Beat poetry and Black Arts Movements, and the Black diasporic aesthetic projects of the 80s and 90s, members of the Jones family both willingly ushered in and rejected many idealized types that emanated from the specific contexts of their communities. While Baraka blazed a path through Black cultural nationalism with poetry and performance that led to Haki Madhubuti naming him the “acknowledged father” of the Black Arts movement, Kellie and Lisa explored race and identity through pop culture and figurative art, dwelling in the possibilities of satire and abstraction and organizing community-based projects through these new articulations. Much like how the Combahee River Collective operationalized their notion of “identity politics” to better understand the specific causes that contributed to the unsolved murders of twelve Black women in Boston, Baraka’s creation of a Black nationalist artistic voice animated his organizing work as national chairman of the Congress of African People as well as his creation of the Spirit House Repertory Theatre and the African Free School as local Black Nationalist political operations in Newark. For Kellie and Lisa, early notions of difference as an ordinary aspect of their family and community life are fundamental to their later

⁷ Lisa Jones, *Bulletproof Diva* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 10.

writings and help inform how their political and cultural projects of the late twentieth century are remembered and theorized in the present.

Placing Kellie and Lisa's cultural contributions alongside the works of Black public intellectuals and creatives, this chapter argues that the concerns and triumphs expressed by the *Loving* Generation should be understood within (rather than apart from) the project of creating a new image of the Black cultural vanguard moving into the new millennium. By equally placing the Loving Generation within the post-soul era, (specifically the changing nature of the Black public sphere in the 1970s and 80s) we can see how the Jones sisters' familiarity with negotiating putatively authentic definitions of Black identity were not marginal experiences wrought out of their mixed-race background but were squarely represented by the 1980 and 1990s mass media marketplace, and the cultural criticism of the post-soul intelligentsia. These politics grew out of not only expanding visions of blackness and the political possibilities of culture but of family and kinship, which more readily included non-nuclear understandings of "chosen" kin and community. This chapter begins with a discussion of the intersecting timelines of the *Loving* Generation, the Post Soul era, and the New Black Aesthetic. I then turn to a consideration of Lisa Jones' Rodeo Caldonia High Fidelity Performance Theatre group, a womanist performance collective active in the late 1980s that served as a creative incubator for some of the most prominent women of color artists of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Using her writing on the Caldonias in her memoir, *Bulletproof Diva*, as well as images of the group that appeared in print, I underscore how the group's aesthetic and cultural contributions stem from the Jones family's creative community as well as from the post-soul and New Black moment of the 1980s and 1990s. I then turn to Kellie Jones' 2011 essay collection *Eyeminded*, and consider how the collection functions as a kind of public performance of a family album, one that brings a

critical visuality to concerns of family, race, and art. When placed in conversation with the family photo albums and loose images found in Amiri Baraka and Hettie Jones' respective archival papers at Columbia University, I discuss how *Eyeminded* operates as a kind of counter-text to these images or, as Marianne Hirsch offers, a "metaphotographical text."

The Post Soul, The New Black, and The Loving Generation

Born roughly between 1965-1985, the *Loving* generation is defined by their birth after the *Loving* decision but before the 1990s multiracial movement, when mixed-race identity re-entered the public sphere through debates over a "Multiracial" category on the 2000 census. Members of this generation often freely self-identify as Black while acknowledging how over the course of their adulthood public conversations about mixed-race identity in the 1990s and 2000s pushed them to evaluate and sometimes reconsider their relationship to their own racial identities. As suggested by chapter two's discussion of the inclination within mixed race studies scholarship to over-canonize the *Loving* moment as a turning point in American race relations, discussions of the newness of the *Loving* generation are similarly fraught with exceptionalism. While the children of *Loving* were certainly neither the first generation containing racially mixed people nor the first generation whose racial mixture was accounted for by the federal government, their status as the children of some of the first marriages *and families* nationally recognized as *legal* presents a unique viewpoint on and intimate relationship to the evolving nature of race and blackness at this time. Kellie and Lisa, born in 1959 and 1961 respectively, are just premature of the bounds of this generation, though articulate in their writings the symbolic importance of *Loving* and *Brown v. Board of Education* as key markers of their childhood.

The recent 50th anniversary of *Loving v. Virginia* in 2017 alongside the rise of the Loving Generation as key contributors to twenty-first-century popular culture and intellectual thought

has brought about an interest in the origin stories of this cohort. Most notably, a 2018 docu-web series titled *The Loving Generation* chronicles the coming of age of this group through the lens of family, politics, and culture. Over the course of four short episodes, creator Anna Holmes (founder of feminist news website *Jezebel*) and director and producers Lacey Schwartz (*White Like Me*) and Mehret Mandelfro interview prominent mixed-race creatives and critics including Melissa Harris-Perry, Soledad O'Brien, Rebecca Walker, Nikole Hannah-Jones, Matt Johnson, and Elaine Welteroth, chronicling their experiences with their identity as it evolved from childhood to the present moment. The broad range of experiences reported by those interviewed reflects a desire on the part of the docuseries to show how the post-*Loving* nation brought about a new condition of possibility for the performance of Blackness specifically and the scope of the Black community writ large. This condition of possibility, the docuseries suggests, was a direct result of both shifts in Black popular culture and legal policies that impacted Black communities such as busing programs and affirmative action, the embrace of multiculturalism as a dominant discursive apparatus in the 1990s, and later the election of President Barack Obama.

For many cultural producers of the *Loving* Generation, they articulated these shifts through changes in kinship bonds, as parents and loved ones of different races contended with being among the few or only interracial families in their communities at the time. If Caroline Bond Day's families and Mildred Loving and her family preferred that negotiations of race and family happened behind closed doors away from the private eye, the *Loving* Generation brought with it a desire to dissect the emotional and symbolic space of the interracial family as a site of public cultural concern in the form of memoirs and other media. As the integrationist energies of the civil rights movement positioned interracial relationships as a radical and subversive act, the embracing of a racial taboo in the private lives of interracial families gave way to questions in

the literature produced by their children of how the personal matched the political in daily life. As Minkah Makalani argues, these works – particularly those produced in the 1990s – tend to position individual Black people as scapegoats for the interpersonal problems common amongst individuals of mixed-race, such as feelings of cultural homelessness experienced after being “bullied” by a Black peer or family member. Rather than criticize the systems and institutions that structurally uphold hierarchical racial categorization, Makalani contends that these narratives use life experiences and feelings of hurt at the hands of their black peers and family members to shift the blame away from historical racial structures and onto the singular actions of individuals in the present.⁸ Similarly, in *Souls of Mixed Folk* Michele Elam speaks to how many of these works negotiating mixed-race kinship and identity in the late twentieth century followed in the footsteps of the “the bildungsroman” or coming-of-age story arch.⁹ Elam contends that the mixed-race bildungsroman is a coming-of-age tale in which the cultivation of a racialized self is tied closely to the growth of western modernity as well as the uplift of the heterosexual family unit and the act of childrearing as the frontline of racial reconciliation.¹⁰

For the most part, Kellie and Lisa’s explorations of their coming of age fall outside of these literary patterns and are echoed by those interviewed in the *Loving* Generation docuseries. For this cohort, the expansive scope of the Black community presented a space for inclusion

⁸ Minkah Makalani, "A biracial identity or a new race? The historical limitations and political implications of a biracial identity." *Souls* 3.4 (2001), 102, 107.; Jared Sexton *Amalgamation schemes : antiblackness and the critique of multiracialism* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

⁹ Michele Elam, *The Souls of Mixed Folk: Race, Politics, and Aesthetics in the New Millenium* (Stanford: Stanford U Press, 2011), 126. A sampling of this list includes *Caucasia* by Danzy Senna; *The Color of Water: A Black Man's Tribute to His White Mother* by James McBride; *Black White Jewish* by Rebecca Walker; See fuller list in Paul Spickard, "The subject is mixed race: the boom in biracial biography" in *Rethinking 'mixed race'* (Chicago: Pluto Press, 2001): 76-98.

¹⁰ For more on the heterosexual family unit and racial reconciliation see Habiba Ibrahim, *Troubling the Family: The Promise of Personhood and The Rise of Multiracialism* (Minneapolis; University of Minnesota Press, 2012).; Robyn Wiegman, "Intimate publics: race, property, and personhood," *American Literature* 74, no. 4 (2002): 859-885.; Chandan Reddy, "Time for Rights-Loving, Gay Marriage, and the Limits of Legal Justice." *Fordham Law Review* 76 (2007): 2849.; Kimberly McClain. DaCosta, *Making Multiracials: State, family, and market in the redrawing of the color line* (Stanford University Press, 2007).

rather than exclusion and was grounded in a longer view of the history of racial intermixture. Journalist Nikole Hannah Jones asserts that “to me claiming my blackness is rejecting white supremacy. It is not claiming the privilege that I could. It is not desiring to be closer to that which is in power.”¹¹ In rejecting what she suggests is an exceptional relationship to whiteness, Hannah Jones presents mixed race identity as a series of political, social, and cultural *choices*. In *Bulletproof Diva*, Lisa Jones describes her and her social circles as making similar decisions about their identities

We take David Dinkins's gorgeous mosaic quite literally and we aren't alone. We value the ethnic histories, rituals, stories passed down to us from our families of origin, from our families of choice, and from our book learning. We swap these traditions, make up new ones. At home, we identify each other by turf: Peter is Miss Mott Street, I'm Miss Bowery, Miss Dorado Beach is Maria. Yet we'd probably be more comfortable with the public monikers black, Latino, or Asian, than with "biracial" or "multiracial." Most of us just hit the big three-oh. We saw the sixties as grade-school kids. We memorized TV pictures of dogs sicced on black folks in Mississippi and stories our grandparents told of Japanese internment camps out West. The idea of a "multiracial" category on the census fills us with ambivalence. Is this just one more polite, largely academic game of identity hopscotch folks are playing while Los Angeles burns? Still, we're keeping our ears open.¹²

As the more vocal (and largely white mother-led) sects of the 90s multiracial movement saw the Census as an identitarian battleground for discussions of multiracial inclusion, Lisa and her peers more closely aligned themselves with ongoing issues of systemic injustice. Characterizing Census politics as “identity hopscotch,” Lisa positions this trend as ill-fitting considering how her social circle’s lives were shaped at the intersection of “families of origin” and “families of choice.” The politics of place and current events figure heavily into their own understanding of

¹¹ Episode 1, *The Loving Generation*, Directed by Lacey Schwartz and Mehret Mandefro, (Topic, 2018), <https://www.topic.com/the-loving-generation>.

¹² Jones, *Bulletproof Diva*, 55.

“home,” a word that acts as a stand-in for both a physical family home and a symbolic tie to cultural belonging. While they are open to the possibilities of identity as a kind of playful territory for racial performance and expansive cultural invention, their foundation in mixedness as a private identity category built through kinship ties feels less important. Instead, both Lisa and the *Loving Generation* docu-series propose that these identity-based choices were not the exclusive territory of mixed-race people and heterosexual family units at the time but were rather a condition of the rapidly changing field of Black popular culture in the 1980s and 90s. Indeed, the *Loving Generation*’s experience with identifying and disidentifying with putatively authentic notions of blackness and mixedness was as common of a concern as it was for their Black peers who similarly grappled with the commoditization and ubiquity of Black popular culture through hip hop, Black sitcoms, and films by the likes of Spike Lee and Bill Cosby.

This was a generation of many “posts.” As Senna suggests of her Fort Greene peers, “we, too, had been born post-Civil Rights Movement, post-*Loving*, post-Soul, post-everything. We were suspicious of militancy, black or otherwise, suspicious of claims to authenticity, racial and otherwise. We were culturally hybrid – ‘cultural mulattos,’ as Ellis put it – whether we had one white parent or not.”¹³ Rather than see this generational trend toward skepticism and cultural ambiguity as a retreat from the assertion of a robust or unified Black identity, *Village Voice* cultural critic Greg Tate wrote in 1986 in his famous essay “Cult-Nats Meets Freaky-Deke” of how young people like Lisa and Senna and their friends were a glimpse into the next generation of Black cultural expression. This generation could simultaneously pay homage to Black cultural history while riffing off of and complicating its many futures. “The future of black culture,” Tate

13 Senna, Foreword to *Oreo*, xii.

writes, “demands that this generation bring forth a worldly-wise and stoopidfresh intelligentsia of radical bups who can get as ignorant as James Brown with their wangs and stay in the black.”¹⁴

Here, the intersecting timelines and trends of the *Loving* generation’s coming of age and what Nelson George calls the post-soul era gives context to the Black public sphere in which the Jones sisters came of age. Tapping into longings for Black autonomy, cultural nationalism, and solidarity in the face of mounting assassinations and violence against Black activists and peoples, the Soul era’s response to anti-blackness embraced Black vernacular, sartorial, and aesthetic expression to assert an ostensibly Black voice that influenced Black politics and culture. As Nelson George iterates, “We became ‘soul sistas, and ‘soul brothers’ who dined on ‘soul food,’ exchanged ‘soul shakes,’ celebrated with ‘soul claps’ as ‘soul children marching for ‘soul power.’”¹⁵ Criticisms leveled against this cultural era point to the flattening of identities that occurred through the uplift of narrow notions of what Black pride could look like; to be sure, one could not as easily be Black, queer, and proud or Black, female, and proud. Even Baraka – who has been hailed as the “acknowledged father” of the 1960s Black Arts Movement – notoriously struggled to navigate the dissonances between his radical public writings and fraught family life. Larry Neal defines the Black art coming out of this community as a “spiritual sister” to the Black Power movement of the late 1960s early 1970s, noting that both “relate broadly to the Afro-American’s desire for self-determination and nationhood. Both concepts are nationalistic. One is concerned with the relationship between art and politics; the other with the art of politics.”¹⁶ These artists and creatives offered corrective visions of Black America and America writ large, but also the cultivation of inclusive, pan-African racial solidarity. Given that the enemy of Black

14 Greg Tate, “Cult-Nats Meet Freaky-Deke,” *Village Voice Literary Supplement*, December 1986, 8.

15 Nelson George, *Post-Soul Nation: The Explosive Contradictory Triumphant and Tragic 1980s As Experienced by African Americans* (New York: Penguin, 2004), vii.

16 Larry Neal, “The Black Arts Movement,” *The Drama Review: TDR*, 12.4, Black Theatre (Summer, 1968), 29.

nationalism was certainly the “white establishment,” Baraka’s own social circles in the Village, his sexual encounters with men, and his relationship with Hettie suggest that in practice the monocultural lines of the Black Arts Community were more porous than perhaps they would care to admit, a point Baraka himself acknowledges.¹⁷ This tension is poignantly illustrated in the contrast between Baraka’s poems “SOS” and “Black Art,” both written between 1965-1966 and produced at the same time as his divorce from Hettie. While in “SOS,” Baraka offers a Diasporic rally cry for the movement by “calling all black people, man woman child/ Wherever you are, calling you, urgent come in,” in “Black Art,” Baraka is less concerned with inclusivity, calling out for “Black poems to/ Smear on girdlemamma mulatto bitches/ Whose brains are red jelly stuck/ Between 'lizabeth taylor's toes. Stinking/Whores!”¹⁸ The ideological distance between Baraka’s inclusive call-in and his deployment of misogynistic and bigoted tropes of mixed-race women – even as his own daughters were mixed race – suggests that the Black Arts Movement and the Soul era at times produced “a certain insularity” that at times blinded itself to its own bountiful contradictions.¹⁹

As a response to the limiting aspects of the soul era, as well as the socio-economic and cultural conditions of the post-civil rights urban north, representations of Blackness during the post-soul era of the 1980s and 1990s used satire and parody to consider differences within Black experiences based on social circumstance. Mark Anthony Neal notes how during this time a number of circumstances tied to space, politics, and culture fueled this interrogation of identity and nation: Reagan-era policies impacting the landscape and policing of urban black communities; the eroding of civil rights legislation; the creation of hip hop as a counter-cultural

¹⁷ "Nationalism and Social Division in Black Arts Poetry of the 1960s," in Harper, *Are We Not Men?* (Oxford UP, 1996.)

¹⁸ Amiri Baraka “SOS” and “Black Art” *SOS: Poems 1961–2013* (Open Road, Grove/Atlantic, 2015).

¹⁹ Jones, 7.

Black musical form as well as the marriage of hip hop to corporate capitalism; the emergence and mobility of a Black middle class; the desegregation of public and higher educational institutions; and the shift from industrialization to deindustrialization.²⁰ Neal notes how the aesthetic that this era produced endlessly parodied or "bastardized" soul era and other modern cultural texts to create new meanings more in line with the contemporary moment. Similarly, Neal describes the "critical desires of the post-soul imagination" as threefold: 1. the reconstitution of (Black) community in the wake of the erosion of the black public sphere in the 1950s and 1960s 2. "a rigorous form of self and communal critique" that uses mass culture and the assessment of it as an avenue for progress and 3. "the willingness to undermine or deconstruct the most negative symbols and stereotypes of black life via the use and distribution of those very same symbols and stereotypes."²¹ In defining the scope of the post-soul imagination Neal also points to a young "intelligentsia" of writers and creatives based in the urban north who, by the nature of their social positioning, were poised to interpret this critical desire into cultural content for the masses.

In their cultural criticism and creative output, the post-soul intelligentsia (of which Lisa and Kellie were card-carrying members) emerged as a key "transitional figure in the arena of African American arts and letters" in the 1980s and 90s.²² As described by Neal, the post-soul Intelligentsia was made up of young, Black creatives, academics, and critics born after the 1963 March on Washington who, in their distance from the Civil Rights era and skepticism of soul era claims to authenticity, embraced the "oppositional possibilities" of the 1980s Black urban masses. Unlike the New Negro intellectuals of the 1910s and 20s who Neal describes as limited

²⁰ Mark Anthony Neal, *Soul Babies: Black Popular Culture and The Post-Soul Aesthetic* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 3

²¹ Ibid, 120.

²² Ibid, 104.

by their elitism as well as their allegiance to the social contexts of the southern and the rural, Neal notes that the post-soul Intelligentsia is more likely to write about and relate to “the chickenhead” and “the babymama” than the “Harlem dandy” or the “Phi Beta Kappa.”²³ Instead, Neal places the roots of the post-soul Intelligentsia in the output of 1940s and 1950s black “creative intellectuals” such as Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, Lorraine Hansberry, and Gwendolyn Brooks due to their concern for the social context of the urban north as well as their use of their work as a space for social protest. Particularly as these writers of the 1940s and 1950s did not explicitly produce their works out of white institutions or historic sites of Black intellectual discourse, they offered the post-soul intelligentsia a blueprint for how to leverage their foothold in traditionally white colleges and institutions to reaffirm their allegiances to Soul-era Black popular expression and communities.²⁴ Indeed, the works produced by this young cohort took stock of the mainstream institutions with which they were often affiliated to bring front and center the intersections of race, culture, and power. With the mass media commoditization of Black culture in the 1980s and 1990s bringing representations of Black communities into the fore of primetime television sitcoms, top 40 hits, and blockbuster successes, the post-soul intelligentsia showcased the value in both “the study of everyday life” and the usage of popular culture as a mode of “mass social praxis.”²⁵

Given the boom of cultural production coming out of enclaves like Greenwich Village, A handful of scholars of 1980s and 1990s Black cultural production have argued that the Jones sisters were a part of a new vanguard within the post-soul intelligentsia who used aesthetics to expand upon homogenous understandings of race, gender, and sexuality. In a 1989 *Callaloo*

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid, 106.

25 Ibid, 102.

article, Black cultural critic Trey Ellis focuses on a “minority’s minority mushrooming with the current black bourgeoisie boom,” which he calls “cultural mulattoes” and dubs their experimental and culturally hybrid self-fashioning “The New Black Aesthetic.” According to Ellis, this emerging cohort of cultural mulattoes was not concerned with defining the limits of Black identity but “flout publicly the positivist black party line” as a result of their multicultural upbringings and having the relative advantages of being second-generation middle-class.²⁶ The article calls Kellie and Lisa out by name for their contributions to Black cultural production through art and film in the 1980s, with Ellis writing that “never before have individual, educated blacks had the ability to assimilate so painlessly, yet both Jones sisters didn't. Says Lisa, ‘I had a lot of options, but I chose [blackness].’”²⁷ Ellis identifies the cultural mulatto’s “wholly black” aesthetic as precisely what allows them to expand the boundaries of blackness, an act which he calls “blaxploration.” In its most evolved and engaged form, Michele Elam notes how this “critical mulattoesque move can engender a generous-blackness that reconciles pre-civil rights and post-soul conditions and forms an artistic basis for a ‘new politics of difference,’ one that can embrace ‘multiplicity, and heterogeneity...the contingent, provision, variable, tentative, shifting, and changing.’”²⁸ Scholars such as Mark Anthony Neal and Tera Hunter, however, question whether this cohort experimented with social identity in the name of political resistance or rather sought further inclusion in the global marketplace and white institutional spaces. Neal notes how Ellis’s NBA “allows himself and presumably others like him the space to be simultaneously ‘seddity’ like the New Negroes and as ‘ghetto-fab’ as the ‘niggas’ all the while

²⁶ Ellis, 234.

²⁷ Ibid, 236.

²⁸ Elam, 21.

traveling through white universities, publishing houses, corporate boardrooms, and art galleries as postmodern ‘Race men.’”²⁹

Publications like the *Village Voice* (to which Lisa was a regular contributor) championed the New Black Aesthetic and printed the writings of post-soul critics such as Greg Tate, Nelson George, Harry Allen, and Dream Hampton. The marriage in this space of Black aesthetics and Black cultural criticism opened up space for the serious critique of Black popular expressions of hip hop, comedy, and film by Spike Lee, George Clinton, Richard Pryor, Ntozake Shange, and Octavia Butler. Lisa’s essays for the *Voice* navigated the waters of Black hair, dating, Black womanhood and mixed-race identity, music, movies, and the latest Black cultural phenomena (Mahogany greeting cards, The Ebony Fashion Fair, soul food restaurants). Her sharp and clever commentary cut across layers of highbrow, lowbrow, and insider-lingo to understand larger through lines within Black popular culture. As Lisa grew into her own voice as an artist and critic, the communal work of her womanist collective, The Radio Caldonia High Fidelity Performance Theatre Group, became a space in which she could build off of and experiment with Soul era Black expressions of identity and kinship in a way that reflected her own desires as a young Black woman and creative. “It is a laughing voice, impudent, at times even sinister” Lisa writes of her writing style. “In the company of the Caldonias I become a rogue. Our call and response is lusty and loud. I begin to write thinking of Rodeo as my audience, not, as it had done

29 Mark Anthony Neal, 112. Similarly, Tera Hunter notes on Ellis’s positionality, “If one has to attend an elite, predominantly white university to live among black people for the first time, to what extent is he talking about an aesthetic that is homegrown in black culture?” Tera Hunter, “It’s a Man’s Man’s World:” Specters of the Old Renewed in Afro American Culture and Criticism,” *Callaloo*, No. 38 (Winter, 1989), 247. Ellis does concede, however that “cliquish elitism and snap judgments on the content of one's character based on the cut of one's clothes could wilt the NBA even before it has fully bloomed. Insiders too often dwell on the differences between the NBA's buppies, b-boys, and bohemians.” Ellis, 240.

before, the gray bosses at work, gray professor at university, gray poets of the textbooks. This frees me, I feel at the time, to say and do anything.”³⁰

“Look at us, acknowledge us, commit us to memory:” The Visual Politics of the Rodeo Caldonia High Fidelity Performance Theatre group

Treated as a blip on the tailwind of feminism’s “third-wave,” the Rodeo Caldonia High Fidelity Performance Group was an avant-garde Black women’s performance collective that existed from 1985-1988 in Fort Greene. Co-founded by Lisa Jones and Alva Rogers, the womanist collective was a rotating group of nearly 20 women over the course of its existence, many of whom would go on to make a sizable impact on the arts and culture world. Lisa co-wrote three books with filmmaker Spike Lee and is a notable essayist in her own right; Rogers is an actress and singer who went on to play the leading role in *Daughters of the Dust*; photographer Lorna Simpson has become one of the foremost Black women artists of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries; Daphne Rubin-Vega originated the iconic role of Mimi in *Rent*; Chakaia Booker has had a successful career as a sculpturist; and Kellie Jones is an internationally recognized curator, art historian, and MacArthur “genius” grant recipient. The group was loosely formed after Kellie asked Lisa to put together a performance piece for the opening of an exhibition she had curated for the Longwood Arts Project in the Bronx on the Caribbean and colonialism. The resulting performance piece for the exhibition, “Carmella & King Kong,” only lead to one other piece titled “Combination Skin,” but the formation, ethos, and short-lived activities of the collective foretold a new kind of local artistic project and aesthetic. Lisa describes *Combination Skin* as “a one-act comedy . . . about a futuristic game show called \$100,000 Tragic Mulatto,” and “explores the tragic mulatto myth and the American

³⁰ Ibid, 131-132.

crossover dream.” *Carmella and King Kong*, inspired by Lisa’s time traveling in the Caribbean with Kellie, is a “cautionary tale about how women reconcile feminism with heterosexual love,” telling the story of a young artist who “discovers that the man she has fallen in love [with] is [the] monster and cinema darling King Kong.”³¹ One can imagine the through-lines from Lisa and Kellie’s Greenwich Village childhood and Baraka’s Spirit House to the Caldonia’s performance space, even as the Caldonia’s experimented with new aesthetics that centered womanist and post-soul cultural politics.

Regularly performing in churches, storefront galleries, and bars, Lisa described the Caldonia’s performances as “exorcisms,” where the mission was to “to get from under the hegemony of whiteness that continued to press in on us,” and “be selves of our own making.”³² Wholly unconcerned with considerations of the white gaze or the male gaze, these performances were “rites of self-love, staged in public” that riffed off the cultural texts of the soul generation that preceded them to make new meanings out of their expanding environments and communities. The origin of the group’s name sought to capture their lives as “hardheaded brown girls with pretty lips,” combining the lyrics to a Louis Jordan song (“Caldonia” Jordan sings, “what makes your big head so hard?”) and womanist playwright Ntozake Shange’s relocation to Texas from New York.³³ To be sure, Lisa’s creation and Kellie’s participation in the Caldonia’s was an effect of their coming of age at the intersection of Loving Generation, the post-soul Intelligentsia, and the New Black Aesthetic.

At the intersection of the soul and post-soul, Lisa Jones writes openly of how she found her writing voice and personal aesthetic by interrogating the Black cultural spaces of her family

31 Morris and Hockley eds, *We Wanted a Revolution*, 125.

32 Catherine Morris and Rujeko Hockley eds, *We Wanted a Revolution: Black Radical Women, 1965-9185: A Sourcebook* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 124.

33 Lisa Jones, *Bulletproof Diva*, 126.

life and childhood and allowing them to influence her experimental years with the Rodeo Caldonias. In her opening remarks at the 2017 symposium for *We Wanted a Revolution: Black Radical Women, 1965-1985* at The Brooklyn Museum, Lisa spoke to how her childhood immersed within Black Arts Movement community spaces surprisingly provided a lens through which she could make sense of her mixed-race identity. “The Black Arts Movement said, go forth and make black art, black people; make art that reflects your experience. So even though the movement at the time put forth circumscribed definitions of blackness, and would have been ambivalent at best about race-mixing, I was still able to come out of the time, as a young person, and say, I have to do me, because, that’s what you said, didn’t you?”³⁴ Of course, it is one of her father’s poems that Lisa invokes here; in “SOS” Baraka writes, Calling all black people/ Calling all black people, man woman child/ Wherever you are, calling you, urgent, come in.” Similarly, in *Bulletproof Diva*, Lisa recounts how during the Caldonia rehearsals she often thought back to her early memories of taking part in rehearsals with “Papa B.’s” performance group at the Spirit House in Newark. “a dozen of us, adults and children, piled into a broom closet one night to record sound effects for *Slaveship*. Recreating the entire Middle Passage in a broom closet. I was not more than seven, but I remember women crying and men moaning and someone holding me very tight, as if the ship and the water that Papa B. had told us to imagine were right there.”³⁵ Offering a glimpse into the emotional inheritance of the Black Arts movement that the Jones sisters negotiated as adults, this haunting family memory captures the line where communal understandings of Black kinship and history became viscerally intertwined with the work of cultural production. From the remove of adulthood, Lisa can make sense of how these family memories were part of a nexus of Black cultural production. "Growing up, the Caldonias inhaled

³⁴ Morris and Hockley eds, *We Wanted A Revolution*, 122

³⁵ Jones, *Bulletproof Diva*, 137.

the parody so evident in blaxploitation flicks and saw, through the rose-colored glass of childhood, the Black Arts movement's celebration of everything Afroed and black. The renaissance of fiction by Black women that dawned in the seventies, we caught that too. These books made us feel less invisible, though their stories were far from our own lives as big-city girls.”³⁶

Throughout her career, however, Lisa has addressed several occasions the claim that she and the Caldonias were key upstarts of the Post Soul or the New Black Aesthetic, insisting instead that their images, writings and performances were far from an attempt at Black exceptionalism or iconicity. “Such a lofty goal was the furthest thing from our minds back then,” she writes “I can testify. Though reflecting on those performances of ours...it's clear to me that our take on blackness and femaleness did trumpet the cultural explosion that followed.” Rather, Lisa writes that the Caldonias were as much about the small acts of radical sisterhood and womanism as they were about pushing the boundaries of blackness and performance. She describes the group members’ “elaborate rituals at the quest of beauty...Like Madame C.J. inventing a wider tooth hot comb. You will love yourselves by any means necessary.” Similarly, Lisa ties the familiar pleasures of her “girl gang” to other Black kinship spaces “like my grandmother’s house, where Gramma, Aunt Cora, and Mom addressed the world’s ills with a little Jonnie Walker Red and a clean dishrag...like the We Waz Girls Together Off-Campus Collective...where we took character names from black women’s fiction and imagined ourselves divas of myth.” Far from being unmoored from Black communities and consciences, Lisa recounts the Caldonia’s social scenes as if they were pulled from Black literary history, a history which she entwines with her own family history.

36 Ibid, 133-134.

Nellie throws a fundraiser for us in his new brownstone duplex in Fort Greene. Filmmakers and cartoonists and hip-hop enfant terribles show. Everyone takes their shoes off at the door so as not to mess up Nellie's polished wood floor. This reminds me of the old days when Papa B. was a Moslem, no shoes in the house and no bacon. The Caldonias cook trays and trays of chicken. We stand beautiful and strong and explain our mission: to carry Hansberry's legacy to the twenty-first century.³⁷

These spaces, ripe with the creative spirit of the era, also produced an organic and potent “exchange of ideas” between the Caldonias and Black male artists such as Greg Tate, Marc Brown, Steve Williams, Al Blue, Lewis “Flip” Barnes, and Vernon Reid. Here, the grand schemes of reinventing feminism and blackness were more so captured by the everyday objects, parties, morsels of gossip, artworks, and pleasures of creating community.

In this way, the Caldonias' negotiation of their individual and collective creative inheritances gave way to aesthetic and sartorial explorations of self, expressions that took a playful and unabashedly public stance towards racial and cultural intermixture. Two images of the Caldonias from 1986 draw attention to this praxis. In one image for *Interview* magazine profiling the collective [Figure 3-2], the members of Rodeo Caldonia pose in outfits that sartorialize their post-soul meets art house cultural politics. At the intersection of mischievous costuming and serious aesthetic statement, the group is seated on the side of what looks like forgotten train tracks. A range of natural hairstyles, headwraps, and accessories individualizes each member, even as they all take variations on the same squared pose.

³⁷ Jones, *Bulletproof Diva*, 136. For “hot comb” and “girl gang” see p. 139.



Figure 3-2: The Rodeo Caldonias posed for *Interview Magazine*, 1986.

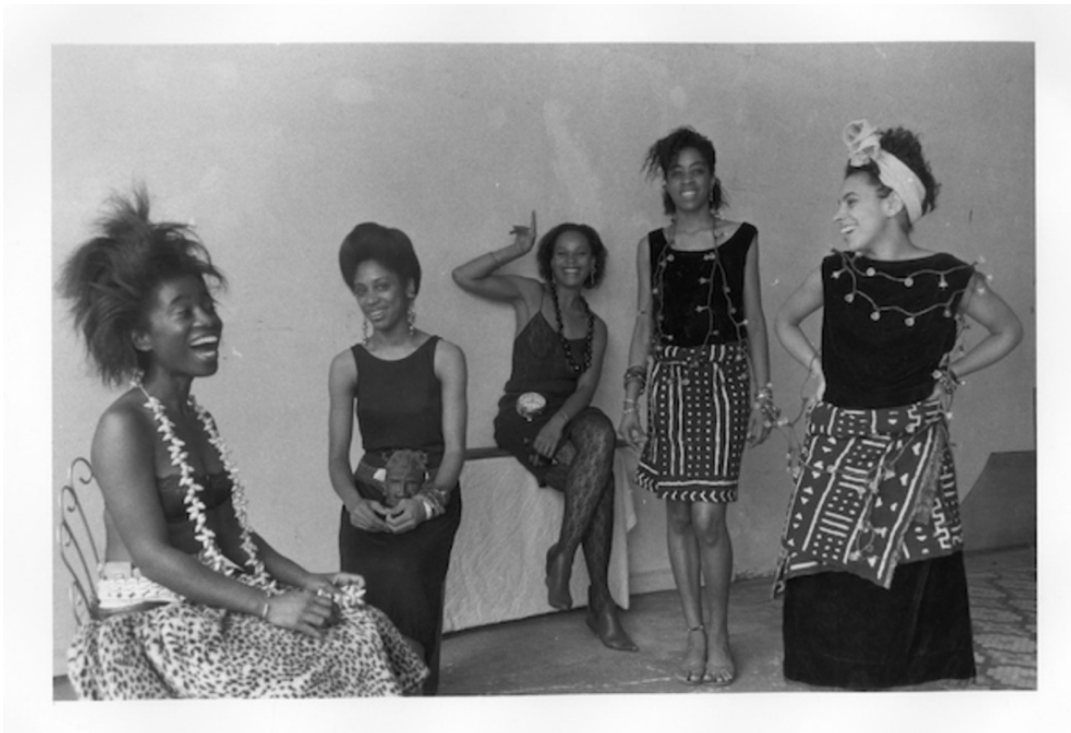


Figure 3-3: Photograph of the Rodeo Caldonias taken by Lorna Simpson, 8 x 10 in. (20.3 x 25.4 cm). Courtesy of Lorna Simpson, 1986. (Left to Right: Alva Rogers, Sandye Wilson, Candace Hamilton, Derin Young, Lisa Jones), 1986.

In the center, Alva Roger almost resembles a Virgin Mary, patron saint, or martyr figure holding leaf fronds while Lisa is perched above in a graphic t-shirt and leather jacket, a knowing smirk letting on that she and the others are aware of the power of the scene as its being captured. Their gazes, direct and challenging, confront the viewer with the fullness of their subjecthood, almost daring someone to admonish them for “acting up” in public. While certainly an editorial image, staged and shot with careful attention to composition, the group maintains a nonchalance that suggests that they don’t seek out the validation of the viewer. Rather, the Caldonias seem more interested in the act of gathering itself, and the statement that such a gathering of young Black women could mean for the creation of art and the boundaries of blackness. In a second image taken by Caldonia Lorna Simpson, the group appears to be posed more spontaneously in a half-circle, caught in a moment of conversation or perhaps song [Figure 3-3]. Alva and Lisa mirror each other’s open-faced expressions, both adorned in printed cloths and statement jewelry. Lisa recalls fondly the taking of the photo and the day that followed

“I am wearing a red silk bathrobe. A white baby doll is pinned to my temple like one of Billie’s gardenias (Who knows what look I was going for – Lady Day reincarnated as a womanist kitchentable surrealist playwright?) I remember the day well. After the photo session the Caldonias walked around downtown, where we continued to act out and take photos of ourselves. Look at us, we were saying, acknowledged us, commit us to memory”³⁸

Combined, the two images of the Caldonias capture the intentionality behind the creation of Black womanist creative space and aesthetic, with Lisa’s reflections drawing attention to how they reveled in the publicness of this effort. While perhaps in the same organizing lineage as the women’s clubs of the 1920s and 30s that met in the privacy of women’s family homes, the desire to act out in public was itself a political departure from the respectability politics that dictated

38 Ibid, 135.

decorum. What's more, these staged group shots, themselves family photos of sorts, offer a foil to the Jones family photos and portraits of the official archives that challenges the "family myths" that accompany family photography. Whereas the Thompson painting imagined the Jones sisters' inheritance as a deformed and mutable question mark, the images of the Caldonias became a visual space in which Lisa and her peers could "remain constant: smartass girls with a sense of entitlement...delighting our sexual bravura, and [living] womanism as pleasure, not academic mandate."³⁹ A testament to this sturdiness, later in 2017 at the *We Wanted a Revolution* symposium, Lisa reiterated that "no we were not new at all, but squarely in the tradition." Rejecting any mantle of exceptionalism or newness that often accompanies discussions of racially mixed people in particular, Lisa locates the roots of the collective's political contribution within a lineage of Black womanist praxis. When media executives wanted to commoditize the Rodeo Caldonia story as a new genre of Black womanhood, Lisa wrote that "little did Hollywood know that we were from a long line of art-race-rebels dating back to Harriet Wilson...or maybe our first ancestor was Josephine Baker...or the kick-respectability-to-the-curb blues storytelling of Bessie Smith and Ma Rainey."⁴⁰ Given that at the time of the Caldonias inception the Black arts scene and the art world writ large was bereft of such pluralistic representations of Black women (a world of which Baraka was for many years a key patriarchal gatekeeper), Lisa and the Caldonias chart an aesthetic path through Black arts history that centers Black women. It is this historicization within her own family history as well as within Black women's history that has led to the Rodeo Caldonias being taken up by Black feminist scholars as an example of the blurred lines between any kind of "wave" model of feminism or Black organizing.

³⁹ Ibid, 129.

⁴⁰ Morris and Hockley eds, *We Wanted A Revolution*, 127.

As a child and young adult whose family archive was as open source as the popular works that she often wrote about in the *Village Voice*, Lisa Jones' creation of the Rodeo Caldonias was an important extension of a family practice. In turning to Kellie Jones' public works, a portfolio equally defined by and organized around the public nature of her family life, questions of aesthetics and visibility as a way of participating in a larger African American literary and Black Arts tradition figure much more prominently. Equating the blurred lines of Black art forms prominent in the public eye with the blurred lines of her own racialization, Kellie turns a critical eye toward the ephemera of her family archive. In doing so, Kellie leverages both her critical visibility and her racial mixedness in its multiple signifying forms as a way of mirroring the always already (culturally, racially, spiritually) mixed nature of blackness.

“A Site for Mutual Recognition:” *Eyeminded* and The Family Archive

In the introduction to her 2011 essay collection *Eyeminded*, art historian and curator Kellie Jones remembers the feeling of visiting Amiri Baraka's archival papers at Columbia University, which at the time had recently been donated to Butler Library.

What fascinated me was the raw, unprocessed nature of its elements at that moment – rickety banker's boxes, still covered with the patina of time – new to Columbia, as well as new to the official archive. In these containers I witnessed things moving from being part of the fabric of life, along the trajectory toward official knowledge. Yet all told, what they revealed are the materials and business of being a writer and activist...I do see myself passing through these boxes at Butler Library, I remember these times and places written and talked about: find myself too in the images, sounds, and pages and pages, and pages. I am there in these pages, and these pages are there in my memory.⁴¹

Taking the rare opportunity to put into writing how it felt to be represented in an official archival capacity, Kellie acknowledges how public memory is a route into understanding the material

⁴¹ Kellie Jones, *Eyeminded*, 22-23.

ephemera of her family history. While cosigning the archive's "official" truths with her own young memories, Kellie is also sure to qualify her endorsement in noting how, limited by the bounds of its own materiality, the archive's eye is only able to capture the "business" of her family's artistic public life. Instead, she suggests that the Jones family's "true" private life had eluded archival understanding and encourages readers to imagine the many events and conversations that could not be captured within Butler Library's banker's boxes. To illustrate the universality of this feeling, Kellie places this archival moment in conversation with the remembrances of another important public family. In Barack Obama's memoir *Dreams from My Father*, Obama writes of a similar encounter with a family photo album when visiting his father's third wife, Ruth, in Nairobi, Kenya. In the album, an "alternate universe" of a harmonious and happy family stared back at him. This "fantasy" did not match up with his understanding of his own father and family, even as these same family portraits were replicated on the walls of his Kenyan sister, Auma's, walls. In Kellie's words, Obama realizes through this disconnect with this "official" family archive that "the history that the photo album represents is not the only story but a partial tale, something that in its materiality is yet unfinished and incomplete." Kellie further marks how Obama uses the idea of the "partial tale" to explore the power of counter-memory throughout his memoir, framing this anecdote to illustrate how family photography "is not just about how the family looks in the pictures, but how the pictures look in the family."⁴² If the archive can only offer partial truths, what truths does the Jones family's official archive capture and *fail* to capture? As a kind of metatext to the official archive, what does Kellie's *Eyeminded* offer readers in our understanding of the nexus of kinship and community connections that both fuels and eludes the Jones family's cultural production?

42 Marianne Hirsch, *The Familial Gaze*, 82, quoted in *Eyeminded*, 26.

The home that Hettie and LeRoi made together on the fourth floor of 27 Cooper Street in the East Village was a space that played host to a cast of important figures in the Beat poetry scene, and by the time of Baraka's departure had staged the production of many of his early Black Arts movement texts. It was in this space that Hettie and Roi founded Totem Press—a small publishing operation where they edited books—and Yugen—a magazine that published Baraka's writing as well as the writing of Beat writers like Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, and William S. Burroughs. The kitchen table served as their office, with Hettie assembling the magazine by hand, at night after work and childcare. Of these long laboring hours, Hettie reflects that "Nobody suffered. I just had all of this energy to affect change on the people who held on to the established way of looking at things in literature, because that was the small world that I could affect."⁴³ Painting a picture of a life equally bursting with work and play, Susan Brownmiller writes that "the Joneses gave rollicking parties that won the admiration of Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg; they were dirt-poor, generous hosts to a roster of itinerant poets and painters who needed places to sleep. Hettie did the cleanup detail and also produced two daughters. Only in retrospect did she recognize her identity in bohemia as loyal, dependable, uncomplaining wife to a charismatic, talented, womanizing poet."⁴⁴ During this time, Baraka was beginning to write poems that indicated his distrust of his community of beat poets and white bohemians, and wrote defensively as a way of proving himself not only as a writer but as a Black man.⁴⁵ In his autobiography, Baraka refers to this period of his life in the Village as "the shadow, the 'Other,' the dead past" where he was guided by a "make-believe fairyland

43 Antwaun Sargent, "The Legend Upstairs: Writer, Poet, and Activist Hettie Jones," *The Standard*, 15 March 2017, <https://www.standardhotels.com/culture/hettie-jones-east-village-interview>.

44 Susan Brownmiller, "The Bride of LeRoi Jones," *The New York Times*, 11 March 1990, <https://www.nytimes.com/1990/03/11/books/the-bride-of-leroi-jones.html>.

45 On writing defensively see Kimberly W. Benston and Amiri Baraka, "Amiri Baraka: An Interview," *Boundary 2* (1978): 303-318.

subjectivism” and a pursuit of white women that signaled “some kind of classic bohemian accoutrement.”⁴⁶ At this time Baraka wrote perhaps his most famous piece, “The Dutchman,” an allegorical one-act play that dissects the interaction between Clay, a Black man, and Lula, a white woman, on a New York Subway car. What begins as a flirtatious conversation slowly intensifies throughout the journey as the two fight over racial and sexual relations, concluding in a violent end for Clay. By 1964 Baraka was writing poems like “Black Dad Nihilismus,” where he realizes that he must “Choke my friends / in their bedrooms” to escape their bohemian influence and political vision. At the same time, after Kellie’s birth Hettie was beginning to write children’s books that “demanded a more inclusive, diverse world” in response to a lack of picture books with Black children.

In Amiri Baraka and Hettie Jones’ individual papers at Columbia, family photographs offer partial but meaningful glimpses into the business of the Jones family’s “fabric of life” as well as insights into the curatorial choices made to remember family scenes. While both discontent and care are visibly and invisibly woven throughout every family archive, it is striking how Amiri and Hettie’s photographic collections frame the same period very differently. Of the ten images that make up Baraka’s collection of family photos from this period, nine are portraits of Kellie and Lisa during their infancy taken in the early 1960s. Tellingly, there are no photos of the whole family or Hettie, unless she is present behind the camera as the photographer. In the warm tones and tight angles of the images, Kellie and Lisa are frozen in time as small cherubs surrounded by the larger-than-life trappings of artistic and intellectual living. Appearing as babies nestled amongst stacks of books and empty glasses, they are awash in afternoon light,

⁴⁶ “The shadow”: Amiri Baraka, *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones* (Lawrence Hill Books, 1997), xxii.; On white women: Baraka, *Autobiography*, 208.

blissfully unaware of any turmoil to come, content to smile and yawn in their father's arms
[FIGURE 3.4-6].



Figures 3.4-6: family photographs from Amiri Baraka's papers Box no. 70 folder 1, Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Columbia University in the City of New York.







Figures 7-10: family photographs from Hettie Jones' papers Box no. 59 folder 4, 6, Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Columbia University in the City of New York.

Historians of photography have long worked to understand the narrative and representational impulses behind family photography. In Marianne Hirsch's *Family Frames*, Hirsch writes of how family photographs "immobilize the flow of family life into a series of snapshots," and "perpetuate familial myths while seeming merely to record actual moments in family history."⁴⁷ Often, these images "reduce the strains of family life by sustaining an imaginary cohesion, even as it exacerbates them by creating images that real families cannot uphold." Similarly, feminist theorist and photography historian Laura Wexler has written that photography more so shows us

⁴⁷ Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Post-memory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 7.

a “record of choices” rather than a record of “the way things were.” She writes that “it is only through the understanding of choices that have been made between alternatives – learning what won out and what was lost, how it happened and at what cost – that the meaning of the past can appear.”⁴⁸ Tina Campt extends this idea in noting how it is important to read photographs not just as documents reflecting a set of choices but as “records of intentions.” Campt further argues that to understand the relationships that surround the making of a photograph, what she calls the “social life of the photo,” we must also account for “who these individuals aspired to be” and how images act as “personal and social statements that express how ordinary individuals envisioned their sense of self.”⁴⁹ What is the record of choices and intentions captured by Baraka’s family photo archive? Who did Baraka aspire to be at the time, and how does his archive envision Baraka’s sense of self in the context of his family? While the answers to these questions feel elusive considering the small number of images, the unmistakable poetry of the photos Baraka chose to keep and send to Columbia suggests a desire to memorialize the myths of this family frame over the ambivalence of daily life, where at times the light over-saturates, the children return smiles with tears, and the parents drift apart.

In contrast, in its sprawling content that captures the ordinariness of everyday life, Hettie Jones’ photo archive begins to offer alternative visions to the silences that Baraka’s family photo collection lets flourish. While literary critics and cultural historians have often treated Hettie’s biography and career as fodder to better understand the drama and political evolution of Baraka’s early years, in Hettie’s photographic collection, a small and unsystematically assembled family photo album paints a forthright picture of a young, artistic, sociable, and busy family in

48 Laura Wexler, *Tender Violence: Domestic Visions in An Age of US imperialism* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press Books, 2000), 133.

49 Tina Campt, *Image Matters: Archive, Photography, and the African Diaspora in Europe* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 6.

motion.⁵⁰ Organized with no regard for chronological time or narrative, the album is a 14-page collection of informal domestic moments, childhood adventures, and formal portraits, lifted from various decades and pasted onto adhesive paper. Considering how many families often use the family photo album as a way to commemorate precious public and private milestones (baby's first baptism, baby's first steps, baby's first day at preschool), the lack of thematic or temporal chronology even within the same page of Hettie's album suggests a lack of regard for the form of the photo album as a narrative kinship device [Figure 3-7]. It is likely that Hettie (or another family member) assembled the photo album long after the events captured within the images, using the album more so as an organizing storage device than as a way of memorializing a certain narrative of the family.

Here, the threads of community care and artistic life that animated Hettie and Amiri's marriage and Kellie and Lisa's childhood are on casual and ambivalent display, with the people, books, and artworks that populated their domestic life filling up the landscapes of family frames. Hettie and LeRoi appear as working parents who drink, smoke, frown, clean, pose, and laugh both together and apart while Kellie and Lisa exist as sociable and curious children who read, play instruments, interact with other children, and adventure about the city. While some images are over and underexposed, fraying at the edges, time-worn and barely legible as scenes, other moments are captured in triplicate. In one particularly striking image [Figure 3-8], Hettie, LeRoi, and Kellie sit at the kitchen table. LeRoi reads the paper at the table while Hettie sits behind him holding a teacup in one hand while the other holds her head, her elbow rested on the ledge of a

50 In a 1991 review in *the Los Angeles Times* of Hettie's memoir, Charles Solomon writes that "Aware of her husband's brilliance, she took proofreading and secretarial jobs to support their family, while yearning to be accepted as an author in her own right." The review ends with "Readers are more likely to pick up this book to read about the early career of Leroi Jones than to read the life of Hettie Cohen Jones." Charles Solomon, "How I Became Hettie Jones by Hettie Jones," *Los Angeles Times*, 21 July 1991, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1991-07-21-bk-134-story.html>.

laundry basket. Both the foreground and background are cluttered, adding to the overwhelm of the domestic scene; a large salad bowl frames Kellie's small body and leads the eye up to a wall filled with dishware and art. Offering an unglamorous glimpse into a private moment in the Jones home, the image dramatically mirrors one published of the Loving family in *Ebony*. Interestingly, while *Ebony* used a similar scene from the Lovings home life to argue for the patriarchal normalcy and relative quietude of their interracial family, this photograph for the Joneses – relegated to the family archive – acts as a foil to the high-profile avant-garde vision of their interracial life in the Village. In another image [Figure 3-9, 3-10], a blurry hint of Lisa's toddler legs is visible from behind Hettie's frame as she bends over to pick something up off the ground. In front of Hettie, a pair of Kellie's longer toddler legs stretch out from behind the armrest of the chair, hazy in their rambunctious movement. Hettie, who is in flip flops and her hair pulled back in a headband, looks up at LeRoi who is dressed in a heavy suit. With one hand perched on his hip and the other holding a can of beer, LeRoi stares back blankly at the unfolding moment. Behind Lisa, a pair of cats hover in the doorway, surveying the scene. This image is part of a set of two from the same moment, the second capturing LeRoi playfully reaching out for Kellie as she bounces on the seat of the couch. Visually, the image offers a glimpse into a likely common occurrence, that of LeRoi returning home at the end of a day to a house full of the goings-on of life. The living room walls carry artworks of varying shapes, and a whiskey box sits beneath a decorative wooden entryway table filled with assorted objects. Strikingly, this image set is the only moment captured that contains the whole family. Taken as a whole, we might understand Hettie's album as providing photographic evidence for many of the childhood scenes that Kellie and Lisa describe in their adult writings, a testament to how their

upbringing under Hettie's care was a space that nurtured a "truer" narrative of their social lives and community identity.

If Baraka's collection of images offers a myth of the artistic family, and Hettie's album gathers together the everyday acts that uphold the artistic family, then Kellie Jones' *Eyeminded* explores the political afterlives of a childhood lived at the intersection of public art and private life. As Kellie argues, the Jones/Baraka family public archive overlaps with the private family archive so much so that she describes family conversations about art in the latter half of the twentieth century as a kind of "family gossip." Indeed, Kellie's central aim for *Eyeminded* is to consolidate her enormous contribution to the curation and critique of African American and African Diasporic art through her many essays on the works of David Hammonds, Lorna Simpson, Carrie Mae Weems, and Dawoud Bey, Howardena Pindell, and Betye Star.⁵¹ Treating these essays with the same weight in her story as she would a family document, the collection opens with a question that may be asked of this dissertation as a whole: "how is art a connective force, a glue between people, creating the sense of community whole but also of family and affiliation?" In answering this question, Kellie articulates the "continual action" of negotiating individual and collective (official and unofficial, private and public, local and national) memories through art and community practice as the essential work of her career, an action which she works to structurally replicate in the pages of *Eyeminded* as a "community archive" based in kinship. Taking a long view of her multicultural coming of age growing up as a high-profile "Child of the Movement" in Newark and the East Village, *Eyeminded* offers a metacommentary on how the arts communities of her girlhood lead to an adult arts network informed by family and community relations. Confirming many of the same early memories as

⁵¹ Kellie Jones, *Eyeminded*, 4, 7

Lisa, Kellie writes that “We studied Africa and learned some Kiswahili. We celebrated Kwanzaa, learned African dance, marched in African Liberation Day parades, even performed in the play *Slave Ship, 1969* as voices of screaming children.”⁵² She recalls attending a multicultural preschool named The Church of All Nations, spending afternoons playing in the art studio of interracial artist couple Al and Wyn Loving, and living in their four-story tenement building at Cooper Square that housed free jazz musicians, painters, and photographers. In looking back on those early lessons at the intersections of art and community building, Jones draws out specific moments from her childhood that demonstrate how blurred the lines between family archive and public archive truly were, and how the visual arts were a tool for asserting her presence as a girl, as a viewer, and as a Black person of mixed heritage. Of this time, she remembers how through the intersection of these communities she came to understand that “creativity was not the exclusive province of specific types of people,” a notion that she later articulates as a kind of ethical community building that places the ordinariness of difference and political evolution at the fore.⁵³

Much as Agamben describes the role of the “witness” who speaks back to the official archive, *Eyeminded* is structured around a series of family “testimonies” that allow the Jones/Baraka family to collectively intervene into the public memory of their family as well as the criticism of art. Notably, two moments of interchange happen at the open of each chapter (respectively titled “On Diaspora,” “In Visioning,” “Making Multiculturalism,” and “Abstract Truths”); having thematically assigned a selection of her own writings to each family member, Kellie asks them to respond to her essays, offering an introduction to the chapter. Following this introduction is a republished poem or essay by that family member, creating indirect dialogues

⁵² Ibid, 7.

⁵³ Ibid, 6.

not only between kin and art but between artistic texts themselves. As a whole, the resulting volume offers a gathering place for her family to publicly rehearse the connections between art, multicultural/racial identity, and family that had long fueled their private relations. Marianne Hirsch offers the helpful notion of the “meta-photographical text” to describe how scholars and artists like Kellie Jones often produce works that attempt to disrupt the “documentary authority” of family photographs by reproducing them or by describing them in the narrative contexts of novels, exhibits, memoirs, and theoretical writings. These texts allow for “self-conscious contextually” that break “the hold of a conventional and monolithic familial gaze.”⁵⁴ By “performing the conversations” that have existed among them for decades, Kellie Jones decenters herself as the sole authority figure of her family archive, instead deferring to the collective.

Of note are the two sections in the text that open with her parents’ voices, particularly as their introductions provide thematic parallels to their photographic archives and respective public personas. In the first section “On Diaspora,” which Kellie offers to her father, Baraka notes in a tone that would suggest an initial wariness at the project that “for reasons many could speculate about she has given me a large clutch of writings mostly about women artists and performers...most of it is ‘conceptual art,’ which I have always thought of as related to newspaper puzzles and word games...so I must confess to being daunted by what I , from jump, didn’t claim to dig too much.”⁵⁵ Knowing her father’s relationship to Black Arts Movement aesthetics that often over-signified its subjects as Black as a way of foregrounding blackness as a serious subject of political inquiry, Kellie’s choice to have her father be in conversation with Black female conceptual artists suggests a desire to challenge him on topics related to blackness,

⁵⁴ Hirsch, *Family Frames*, 8

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 37.

womanhood, and abstraction. After Baraka's introductory essay, Kellie reproduces Baraka's 1961 poem "Preface to a Twenty Volume Suicide Note," which he dedicates to Kellie. Detailing feelings of depression and stasis that make Baraka question his role as writer and creator, the poem ends with an image of hope as he "tiptoed up/to my daughter's room and heard her/ talking to someone, and when I opened/ the door, there was no one there.../Only she on her knees, peeking into/ her own clasped hands." Painting an allegorical picture that likens Kellie to a praying angel that saves him from suicidal despair, the stanza mirrors the reverential photographs that Baraka kept of his children and later gave to be archived at Columbia. However, through the intentional structure of *Eyeminded* Kellie takes the opportunity to reverse the roles of parent and child, and by extension archival curator and archival subject. Between Baraka's introductory essay (in which he dutifully refers to his daughter as Prof. Jones and abides by her terms of engagement) and the selected poem depicting Kellie as Baraka's saving grace, *Eyeminded* complicates images of Baraka as solely the patriarch of the Black Arts Movement and Black Nationalist thought, and instead locates him as a student of Kellie's hopeful vision.

In the second section titled "In Visioning," Kellie places her writings from the 1970s in conversation with her mother, and in doing so draws out the impact that coming of age under Hettie's care at this time had on her ability to understand her personal life in relation to the artistic world around her. As Kellie and Lisa often described in their public writings, their home in the East Village in the 1970s was a reflection of Hettie's commitments to cultivating multicultural harbors for her children, local creatives, and the pursuit of art. Confirming these memories, cultural critic Hilton Als reminisces in *the New Yorker* of his teenage years visiting Hettie's home in the Village as Lisa and Kellie's friend, describing their home space as "a warren of rooms tidily kept and filled with books and papers and welcoming love—just the kind

of haven burgeoning artists such as...my teen-aged self were learning to seek out in a universe, which, we could already feel, had few safe harbors for people like us.”⁵⁶ In her introduction to these essays titled “Seeing Through”, Hettie provides glimpses into what it was like to watch Kellie’s critical eye towards art develop as a child in their home space and beyond, and draws parallels between Kellie’s artistic coming of age in the 1970s and the personal explorations of the included artists. The essays in Hettie’s section discuss how artists in the 1970s and 80s made art that sought to find a balance between self and society, particularly as artist-activists waged battles over depictions of blackness and womanness in the ever-expanding realm of mass media.⁵⁷ Referencing her 1970’s poem, “In the Eye of the Beholder” which directly follows her introduction and that describes how Kellie “see[s]/through/ her shining/black eyes,” Hettie writes of the exacting nature of Kellie’s vision even from a young age. “As her mother I treasure [Kellie’s eyes] shining revelation of her spirit, the willingness of her direct gaze. Of equal importance is that they are black...and ‘black’...has come to us in this century signifying pride.”⁵⁸ Hettie continues that central to Kellie’s vision towards art and life is that it not only allows her to situate the important contributions of Black artists as responses to racism and anti-blackness, but that her seeing through her “black eyes” “directs us to the personal” which “need not be figurative, need not follow a formulaic view of what African American art ought to look like.” Here, Hettie suggests that what defines Kellie as an art historian and critic is her ability to use her “eyemindedness” (a faculty cultivated at home and in community) to “offer others ways of seeing” that are less tied to racial authenticity and meaning-making. Much like the ordinary

⁵⁶ Hilton Als, “Amiri Baraka’s First Family,” *The New Yorker*, 11 January 2014, <https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/amiri-barakas-first-family>.

⁵⁷ Kellie writes that “Protests by artists against the museum status quo led to the unlocking of these cultural citadels. This same energy also led to the development of alternative non-profit galleries and ethnically specific museums.” These spaces in the public sphere acted as a “space to carry on a ‘discourse of recognition,’ a setting for performances of acknowledgment and worth.” *Eyeminded*, 11.

⁵⁸ Kellie Jones, *Eyeminded*, 160.

disorder of Hettie's photo album (or the playful and chaotic aesthetic of Lisa's Rodeo Caldonias), Hettie's essay illuminates how Kellie similarly embraces difference and disorder as a means of illuminating Black contemporary art.

As a whole, *Eyeminded* constructs a new kind of family photo album, one that earnestly rehearses in both structure and content how the notion of the "community archive" offers an oppositional vantage point on the family than the "official archive" of images housed in Columbia and beyond. Here especially we can see the similarities between Kellie and Lisa Jones' political projects. Their embrace of aesthetics and cultural criticism mirrors the tendency amongst post-soul Black creatives and intellectuals to utilize Black popular expression as an arena to interrogate the state of the Black public sphere as well as hold the mass media accountable for their visual representation of Black life in the 1980s and 90s. Here too we can see the role that expanding notions of family and community played in shaping the sisters' cultural contributions, as both use their family's public archive to create "site for mutual recognition" within and across racial groups.⁵⁹

Conclusion

While the family unit is an important (if not primary) space for instilling and passing down racial knowledge, this chapter has argued that for the Jones sisters, the family archive operates as a public, open-source site through which they interrogate and redress notions of kinship as well as acts of art and culture. Here, the legacies of the civil rights and Black power movements were filtered through their parents' public involvement in them, and in turn impacted how they saw the political function of the family unit itself. For Lisa, this view of kinship

⁵⁹ Ibid, 25.

allowed her to create a performance collective that attended to both its precise location within Fort Greene's post soul and New Black community as well as its indebtedness to Black cultural lineages. For Kellie, who utilizes the structure of her family unit as an organizing principle throughout her essay collection, the back and forth performed between her and her family members seeks to call the reader's attention to the inherently public nature of these kinship bonds. The call and response between family members' works also extends notions of family to cultural works, as each text informs the contributions of the next. In the next chapter on representations of New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio's mixed-race family during his 2013 mayoral race, I explore how Black motherhood operates as both a symbol of Black authenticity as well as a troubling icon that signals the unfinished business of the identity-based movements of the late twentieth century.

CHAPTER FOUR - Beyond “Biracial Cool:” Bill de Blasio, Chirlane McCray, and the Visual Politics of the Mixed Race Family



Figure 4-1: The de Blasio family on the cover of *New York Magazine* in the October of 2013

Just one day before New York City residents went to the polls to vote in the 2013 mayoral election, *New York Magazine*'s cover story offered an in-depth look into the lives of the family of democratic candidate and projected winner Bill de Blasio. “Meet the De Blasios” the cover reads, with a photograph of the family that beckons the viewer inside the embrace of Bill’s 6-foot 5 inch frame. With Republican mayoral nominee Joe Lhota expected to return meager numbers at the polls, the magazine assumed that the de Blasio family represented the changing winds of New York politics. De Blasio himself was not naïve to the role his family played in his

image. As a progressive running on a platform aimed to unite what he saw as “a tale of two cities,” the de Blasio campaign frequently utilized the symbolic potential of his mixed-race family to connect with New York City’s diverse voting public. In the press, images of the de Blasios took on a life of their own, particularly as the media used the family as an index of the racial, gendered, and sexual problems of the twenty-first century. An article from the *Huffington Post* called de Blasio’s family an “electoral asset,” noting how de Blasio maintained a “biracial cool” that set him apart from the other white mayoral hopefuls. This biracial cool was “a multivalent Rorschach for [the] political campaign. It appeals to multiple demographic groups. It demonstrates that race doesn’t matter. It demonstrates that race *does* matter. Its mere existence is politically suggestive, even when the family members aren’t doing anything.”¹ Another article similarly asked its readers to “meet the ‘boring white guy’ of the future,” reminding voters of how de Blasio, due to his non-white family, would be both the new normal *and* a break from the Republican agenda of mayor Michael Bloomberg’s administration.

The photographs chosen for the *New York Magazine* cover and the accompanying images in the feature uplift the de Blasio family as a public icon, using the visual language associated with Black celebrity and the American nuclear family unit to signal to voters that de Blasio was set to become the jovial patriarch of the new-age Black political first family. As icons “carry the trace of godliness” in their attempt to capture the sacred, it is all the more persuasive that the family is standing directly in an ethereal white light, their smiles and skins tones beaming and reflective. “It’s not just the white-accented cameo-style portrait in the fashion of a primetime promo, each gaze designed to introduce and imprint that character into your heart/infotainment

¹ Kevin Noble Maillard, "Biracial Cool: Bill de Blasio's Fresh Electoral Asset," *The Atlantic*, November 6, 2013. <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2013/11/biracial—cool—bill—de—blasios—fresh—electoral—asset/281173/>.

diet,” visual analyst Michael Shaw writes, “it’s the Hollywood-style titling and typeface, as if branding The De Blasio family as a show. It might as well read: Meet The Jeffersons ... with a *White Dad!*”² Unlike the families discussed in previous chapters, the de Blasios are decidedly and purposefully public, and encourage viewers to join in on the fun. Gone is the piece-meal fractioning of blood quantum below family photographs that characterized Caroline Bond Day’s representation of the mixed-race family; the de Blasios have embraced their blackness *and* their mixedness and proclaim a comfortability with how these identities intersect. Gone too is the subtle shame of the Loving family photographs, in which the family is largely confined to the home space – Mildred in particular relegated to the shadows. The unabashed publicness and lightness of the de Blasio’s proclamation of a mixed-race family identity is a uniquely twenty-first-century image, fit for a progressive candidate of one of the most diverse cities in the world. With the dome of de Blasio’s son Dante’s afro foreshadowing what was “new” about New York, the magazine’s portrait indicates how racial mixedness can often be projected beyond the body itself and onto those in intimate proximity – family, friends, brands – offering up a racial authenticity that may be otherwise inaccessible.

This chapter asks what the media representation of the de Blasio family tells us about how Black-white kinship operates as a visual and political symbol in the twenty-first century.³ Here, I draw on African-American Studies’ historical analyses of twentieth-century political thought and racial progress to highlight how certain Black individuals are made legible as race leaders and visual icons, namely the works of Cathy Cohen and Nicole Fleetwood. Cathy Cohen

2 Michael Shaw, “Meet the de Blasio’s!” *Reading the Pictures*, October 29, 2013, <https://www.readingthepictures.org/2013/10/meet-the-de-blasios/>.

3 A note on terms: This chapter utilizes “mixed race” when speaking about Black-white individuals, families, or the field of “mixed race studies.” It uses “multiracial” when discussing the larger phenomenon of interracial relations, or ideologies surrounding the 1990s Multiracial Movement. I do this to streamline my usage of terms as well as to distance this discussion from the usage of “biracial” to describe people of more than one race, due to its ability to linguistically suggest race as binary or racial categories as finite.

has theorized the “third wave Black politician” as one of the key post-Civil Rights Movement narratives tying Black political representatives to ideas of progress and authenticity.⁴ Taking President Barack Obama, Cory Booker, and Deval Patrick as the archetypes of this category, Cohen notes how these politicians stray from the posturing of the technocratic Black politicians of the 1990s and the more “racially-bound” Black politicians of the 1960-70s. A key characteristic of third-wave politicians is the makeup of their “legitimizing constituency;” rather than a predominantly Black voting base, third-wavers intentionally maintain a base of white voters. White voters see the mass appeal of these politicians in their status as “hopemongers” who position the historic nature of their campaign as the end of racial divisions rather than as a new stage in what will remain a difficult struggle against white supremacy. Cohen suggests that third-wavers use their blackness and the blackness of their authenticators to position themselves as being both inside and outside Black communities in order to not lose the goodwill of Black voters. While President Obama makes frequent reference to being raised by his white grandparents from Kansas, Michelle Obama’s position as his spousal authenticator allows voters to read his Black identity as equally founded on personal narrative and family history. Instead of operating as race leaders, Cohen notes, third-wavers thrive as *raced* leaders, simultaneously incentivized to be untethered from blackness while also signifying Black lineages and rhetoric. Thinking alongside Cohen, I read the media coverage surrounding Bill de Blasio’s successful bid for Mayor in the year following President Obama’s 2012 re-election as evolving out of this third-wave Black political moment.

⁴ Cathy J. Cohen, *Democracy Remixed: Black Youth and the Future of Black Politics* (Oxford University Press, 2010), 202, 207-13. See also usage of “Third Wave Black Politics” in Thompson III, J. Phillip. *Double Trouble: Black mayors, black communities, and the call for a deep democracy* (Oxford University Press, 2005), 15.; Theodore J Davis Jr, *Black Politics Today: The Era of Socioeconomic Transition* (Routledge, 2013).

The most striking similarity between de Blasio and third-wavers is how de Blasio benefitted from authenticating proximity to his mixed race family, especially as they signaled - in their responses to the media and in their self-fashioning - their allegiance to the politics and symbols of blackness. De Blasio's wife and right-hand political strategist, Chirlane McCray, was a founding member of the Combahee River Collective, a Black queer socialist feminist group established in 1974. Their then 15-year-old son, Dante, was well known for his afro styled after Angela Davis and became the poster child for the campaign due to the success of his appearance in a TV advertisement calling for an end to "stop-and-frisk" police tactics that unfairly targeted Black and brown young men.⁵ Their 18-year-old daughter, Chiara, wore her hair in locs mirroring McCray's. De Blasio himself campaigned on a platform that hoped to aid predominantly Black and brown communities, promising the end of stop-and-frisk as well as raising taxes on the rich to pay for initiatives such as free early childhood education. Alongside the latitude his white privilege offered, it was this allegiance (and the allegiance of his family members) to Black socio-political needs and gains that differentiated de Blasio during the campaign from the facile matchmaking of multiracialism and progressivism found in third-wave rhetoric.

Yet de Blasio's access to his family's blackness did not come without its own political consequences. To be sure, Chirlane McCray's presence in the mayoral campaign and beyond represents more for Bill de Blasio than his authenticating relationship to Blackness. During the campaign, the print media subjected McCray to unending racist, sexist, and homophobic attacks in a bid to undermine the campaign's handle on the narrative of de Blasio's interracial marriage

⁵ Colby Hamilton, "Bill de Blasio's Son Tells All About His Show-Stealing Afro," *DNA Info*, 16 August 2013, <https://www.dnainfo.com/new-york/20130816/upper-west-side/bill-de-blasios-son-tells-all-about-his-show-stealing-afro/#slideshow>. See also Ruth Ferla, "The Afro as a Natural Expression of Self," *The New York Times*, 2 Oct 2013, <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/03/fashion/the-afro-as-a-natural-expression-of-self.html>.

and family.⁶ Combined with diminishing public opinion of de Blasio's administration during his time in office, the de Blasio campaign is a rich site to explore the limitations of relying upon "biracial cool" as a long-term political strategy. Specifically, this tactic did not consider how representations of mixed-race families have historically struggled to account for Black motherhood and non-heterosexual identities. In *Troubling Vision*, Nicole Fleetwood argues that Black people and the Black body in particular always already troubles the visual field in American society. Given that the American public has historically diminished and chastised Black people for the various ways that their bodies take up space, Fleetwood contends that Black visual culture tends toward representations of *Black iconicity*, or representations that place undue work on singular Black representations. Fleetwood underscores how these iconic representations have been centered on masculinity, positioning Black women as overdetermined by the shocking "excess" of their bodies.⁷ As both the embodiment of de Blasio's progressive values and as the measuring stick of Black radical authenticity to which de Blasio could never measure up, McCray's physical presence and political authority during the mayoral election posed a substantial threat to the campaign's political narrative. As such, unpacking the Black queer socialist feminist history in which McCray participated can complicate and deepen the analysis on the family offered thus far by both scholars and the press, especially as this background may extend into perceptions of the politics of mixed race families in the present.

Recently, scholars based in African-American Studies and the burgeoning field of Critical Mixed Race Studies such as Habiba Ibrahim, Michele Elam, and Ralina Joseph have

6 I call Chirlane McCray a "queer Black woman" throughout this article for several reasons. While McCray in 2013 insisted that she "hates labels" and often avoids putting a name to her sexuality, McCray has also spoken openly throughout her career about dating both men and women, and often makes reference to the fluidity of her sexuality. See Linda Villarosa, "Chirlane McCray: From Gay Trailblazer to Politician's Wife," *Essence*, 9 May 2013, "<https://www.essence.com/celebrity/politicians-wife-chirlane-mccray/>."

7 Nicole R. Fleetwood, *Troubling Vision: Performance, Visuality, and Blackness* / Nicole R. Fleetwood (University of Chicago Press, 2011), 5.

written about the limitations of “biracial cool,” pushing mixed-race scholarship to more rigorously consider how Black-white identity both impacts and is impacted by other social identities such as gender, sexuality, and class. Habiba Ibrahim explores how representations of mixed-race families in the late twentieth century made the “practice of romantic love itself seem neutral and individualistic” in an attempt to propose multiracial childhood as a harbinger of a less contentious future for progressive racial politics.⁸ Pointing to the over-representation of white mothers advocating for the rights of the mixed-race children and heterosexual families during the Multiracial Movement of the 1990s, Ibrahim notes how, in contrast, “the value that Black mothers did indeed grant their Black children has been consistently ignored, disrupted, and torn apart.”⁹ Similarly, Ibrahim argues that interracial parents and mixed-race children “negotiate questions of intimacy and common interests on uneven ground,” and representations that do not account for these differences “leave the ethics of love unquestioned.”¹⁰ Indeed, de Blasio was not only a politician running on a platform, he was also a white father who unevenly benefited from being placed in intimate relation to the performance of Black youth culture, Black feminism, and queer identity.

In his quest to win the 2013 New York City mayoral election in the opening moments of the Black Lives Matter movement, Bill de Blasio emphasized his intimate proximity to blackness by way of his mixed-race family to signal his racially progressive politics. De Blasio’s access to Third Wave Black political rhetoric allowed him to specifically and strategically use his

⁸ Habiba Ibrahim, *Troubling The Family: The Promise of Personhood and the Rise of Multiracialism* (Minneapolis: Minnesota Press: 2012), 82.

⁹ Ibid, 89. For early mixed race studies texts and “novelty” of mixed-race experience see Joel Williamson, *New People: Miscegenation and Mulattoes in the United States*, (Free Press, 1980).; Maria P.P. Root, ed., *The Multiracial Experience: Racial Borders As the New Frontier* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1996).; Naomi Zack, *Race and Mixed Race* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993).; Rebecca Chiyoko King and Kimberly McClain Dacosta, “Changing Face, Changing Race: The Remaking of Race in the Japanese American and African American Communities,” in Rood, ed., *The Multiracial Experience*.

¹⁰ Ibrahim, 83-84.

relationships with his son, Dante, and wife, Chirlane McCray, to secure a majority vote in a divided and diverse New York City electorate. However, the de Blasio campaign did not account for how both the mixed race family and Black motherhood are historically fraught and contested terrain in the US both politically and visually. The de Blasio campaign did not (or perhaps could not) consider how representations of mixed race individuals and families have often demonstrated the *limitations* of racial authenticity as a meaningful measure of racial progress or equity throughout the 19th and twentieth centuries. In this way, McCray's presence as a Black mother and a Black queer woman with socialist feminist commitments presented a significant challenge to de Blasio's ability to control his family's image and follow through on his ideological message. Because de Blasio did not adequately attend to the activist histories or policy needs of the voter blocks his family ostensibly represented, the very same characteristics that made de Blasio a standout candidate were ultimately used as tools to critique him, his campaign, his time in office, and his short-lived 2020 presidential bid. The case of the de Blasio campaign suggests that if the "biracial cool" of the twenty-first-century mixed-race family is to be anything more than temporarily politically suggestive it must take seriously the historical and representational ground it invokes, namely the always already "mixed" history of Black identity, families, and politics.

“Six Inches of Political Black Gold:” de Blasio’s Multiracial Politics in the “Tale of Two Cities”



Figure 4-2: Image still from “Dante” TV advertisement. Figure 3: Image still from “Attention” TV advertisement.

More than any single speech or platform, the political emergence of Bill de Blasio’s son, Dante, rocketed the de Blasio campaign forward. When polling data confirmed a near tie between democratic mayoral frontrunner Christine Quinn and de Blasio in early August, one day later the de Blasio campaign debuted its first TV advertisement, entitled “Dante.”¹¹ The 30-second advertisement showed Dante, at 15-years-old, sporting an afro and speaking about his

¹¹ An average of August 7th polling data by the *Huffington Post* speculated the first date in which de Blasio surpassed Quinn, with de Blasio at 23.2%, and Quinn at 22.9% support. The difference was so small, though, that we can say the race was a statistical tie.

father's pledge to end the stop-and-frisk era, increase affordable housing, and raise taxes to support early childhood care [Figure 3]. The ad was family-centric – clips of Dante and Bill walking together through Brooklyn are spliced together with shots of the family laughing around their kitchen table. The ad incited a landslide of commentaries on the ethics of tying one's family life so closely to political theater, though all concluded that it was one of the most persuasive political advertisements in recent memory.¹² Black Democratic moderate mayoral candidate Bill Thompson, who just four years earlier had easily captured 80% of the Black vote against then Mayor Bloomberg, could barely hold their attention in 2013, especially as de Blasio's platform signaled more direct aid for communities of color. Two months later, "Dante" was followed by "Attention," a similar ad starring de Blasio's 18-year-old daughter, Chiara. The ad was playful, showing a daughter defending her father against political attacks, as well as an older sister competing with her brother for the spotlight in a side-by-side panel [Figure 4]. Though "Dante" is still considered the campaign's defining advertisement, the message remained consistent across TV spots: the de Blasio children embodied the progressive spirit of the campaign.

Interestingly, the press latched onto Dante's hair as a way of offering playful commentary on how the de Blasio campaign operationalized blackness as a campaign strategy. In a turn of phrase verging on the pornographic, *The Atlantic* called Dante's afro "six inches of political Black gold," calling attention to its seductive political and social possibilities. ¹³ *The New York Times* featured "The Afro" in the Style section, and published an op-ed by a journalist who expressed "kinship and concern" for Dante as a result of having his own secret afro past as a

12 Clay Cane, "Diversity Politics: Did Bill de Blasio's Biracial Son Change the NYC Mayoral Race?" *The Huffington Post*, 22 August 2013, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/bill-de-blasio-biracial-son_b_3785622.html.

13 Kevin Noble Maillard, "Biracial Cool: Bill de Blasio's Fresh Electoral Asset."

young white man in the 1970s.¹⁴ Dante's 'fro became a national conversation; during a photo-op in which President Barack Obama endorsed de Blasio's bid for Mayor, Obama praised Dante's afro and reminisced on his own similar hairstyle during his college years. In response to this press, the de Blasio campaign began promoting the Twitter hashtags "#Fromentum" and "#GoWithTheFro" to playfully endorse the popularity of the ad. In an interview with *The New York Magazine* a month after the "Dante" ad aired, Mayor Michael Bloomberg denounced the de Blasio campaign as "class-warfare and racist." When asked to elaborate, Bloomberg fumbled for the right words stating, "Well, no, no I mean he's making an appeal using his family to gain support. I think it's pretty obvious to anyone watching what he's been doing. I do not think he himself is racist. It's comparable to me pointing out I'm Jewish in attracting the Jewish vote."¹⁵ Certainly, the "Dante" ad operationalizes a Black radical aesthetic toward a white man's campaign with the purpose of gaining the minority vote. Yet even as the popular reception of the "Dante" ad foretold a shallow embrace of multicultural representation, the fashioning of Dante's afro as a symbol of Black radical potential serves as a critical point of context for the viewer.¹⁶ In fact, many Black New York City voters saw de Blasio's focus on the blackness of his family as a win for the Black community.¹⁷ Within a week of the ad's airing, Dante made it clear to the press that he was aware of the lineage of this radical aesthetic. In an interview chronicling his hair journey throughout his childhood, Dante shared that he first fell in love with the afro in the

¹⁴Ibid; Bruce Handy, "My Afro, Myself," *The New York Times*, 8 Oct, 2013, <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/09/opinion/my-afro-myself.html>.; Ruth Ferla, "The Afro as a Natural Expression of Self," *The New York Times*, 2 Oct 2013, <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/03/fashion/the-afro-as-a-natural-expression-of-self.html>.

¹⁵ Chris Smith, "In Conversation: Michael Bloomberg," *New York Magazine*. Sept 7, 2013. <http://nymag.com/news/politics/bloomberg/in-conversation-2013-9/>.

¹⁶ Kobena Mercer, "Black Hair/Style Politics," MIT Press, Cambridge (1990): 36.

¹⁷ Michael M. Grynbaum, "Many Black New Yorkers Are Seeing de Blasio's Victory as Their Own," *The New York Times*, 10 Nov 2013, <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/11/nyregion/many-black-new-yorkers-are-seeing-de-blasios-victory-as-their-own.html>.

third grade, after being inspired by the Black pride that was associated with the rise of the hairstyle in the 1960s and '70s.¹⁸ The campaign would lean on these historical associations in order to foreground other issues related to the perceived otherness of Black New Yorkers, including stop-and-frisk.

De Blasio's 2013 mayoral campaign smartly positioned de Blasio's progressive track record as the answer to Mayor Michael Bloomberg's neoliberal urbanism. With Bloomberg's entrepreneurial background and ties to Wall Street, his administration from 2002-2013 cast the city as a business in a cosmopolitan international marketplace.¹⁹ Coupled with this vision was a corporate multiculturalism that played on the symbolic potential of the city's multiethnic population. Unlike the overt race-baiting and "repressive urban ordering" of Mayor Rudy Guilliani's administration, Bloomberg's mounted a "super charged city-wide form of gentrification" that reimagined the city as a playground for the postindustrial elite, and utilized the idea that New York was a "gorgeous mosaic" that required an ambitious redevelopment plan to match.²⁰ In practice, enacting this vision led to class and racial tensions as the worst consequences of the administration's policies were felt predominantly by the city's working-class, Black, and Latino communities. Aggressive policing strategies such as stop-and-frisk were marketed as a response to the perceived urban disorder of the city as well as a way of protecting Black and Latino populations from themselves. In contrast, when de Blasio announced his bid for Mayor standing in front of his Brooklyn home alongside his wife and children, the emphasis on "the people city hall forgot" was an appeal to the ordinary person in a way New York City

18 Colby Hamilton, "Bill de Blasio's Son Tells All About His Show-Stealing Afro" August 16, 2013, *DNainfo*. <http://www.dnainfo.com/new-york/20130816/upper-west-side/bill-de-blasios-son-tells-all-about-his-show-stealing-afro>

19 Julian Brash, *Bloomberg's New York: Class and Governance in the Luxury City*, (University of Georgia Press, 2011), 17.

20 Julian Brash, "The ghost in the machine: the neoliberal urban visions of Michael Bloomberg," *Journal of Cultural Geography* 29, no. 2 (2012), 143-144.

hadn't heard in over two decades.²¹ The press framed his subsequent win as hope for a new progressive era in New York politics, one which responded to both the local and national calls of the 2011 Occupy Movement and the burgeoning Black Lives Matter Movement. To be sure, much of the political potency of the de Blasio family symbol rests in its access to the Black-white binary. The campaign's ability to turn the "tale of two cities" into a tale of Black and white class divide relies upon a wholly inaccurate vision of New York, considering that this conceit relies on its inattention to non-black Latinx and Asian communities.

As such, as a politician running on a campaign promise to end stop-and-frisk, de Blasio's capacity to tap into an innocuous racial novelty in the post-Bloomberg moment was a direct result of his simultaneous whiteness and proximity to third-wave Black politics. How might we trace the success of de Blasio's political ascendancy through and beyond the third-wave political archetype, considering that he is a white man? Though de Blasio has never claimed any allegiance to a Black political tradition or third-wave trend, the reception of his white identity by New York voters was primed by the ways his political narrative seemed to extend these lineages. Similar to third-wavers, he possessed enough of a history of social radicalism to warrant a positive response from minority voters and enough ties to the white middle class to assure moderate-leaning voters that this radicalism could simply be the fervor of youthful idealism.²² Born in New York in 1961 and living the majority of his early years in Cambridge, Massachusetts, young de Blasio was a student organizer and later a participant in the socialist movements in Nicaragua in the 1980's and 90s. In these early years, de Blasio yearned for a

21 David Chen, "De Blasio, Announcing Mayoral Bid, Pledges to Help People City Hall Forgot," *The New York Times*, 27 January 2013, <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/28/nyregion/bill-de-blasio-kicks-off-campaign-for-mayor.html>.

22 Michael M. Grynbaum, "Many Black New Yorkers Are Seeing de Blasio's Victory as Their Own," *The New York Times*, 10 Nov 2013, <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/11/nyregion/many-Black-new-yorkers-are-seeing-de-blasios-victory-as-their-own.html>.

democracy that “pervaded all levels in society,” and was influenced by a mixture of liberation theology, grassroots organizing strategies.²³ In 1989, de Blasio got his first taste of New York City politics as a volunteer coordinator for the mayoral campaign of David Dinkins, the first and only Black mayor of the city, with whom he worked for four years after Dinkins won the election. His transition into city politics marked a shift away from his activist affiliations, and by 1992 de Blasio was marked “absent” by the minutes of the Nicaragua Solidarity Network, with the attached note of “must be running for office.”²⁴ De Blasio would take progressively larger steps toward the middle as he worked as regional director of Housing and Urban Development for New York and New Jersey under President Bill Clinton in 1997. By 2000 de Blasio was working as the campaign manager for Hilary Clinton's successful Senate race and thereafter became the representative for district 39 of Brooklyn, serving from 2001 to 2009 and as a public advocate from 2009 onward. During his time as public advocate, de Blasio was known for his support of campaign finance reform, funding for early childhood care, and aiding small businesses, all of which found their way into his mayoral platform. By the time of his run for mayor, de Blasio was able to separate himself from the rest of the democratic hopefuls through his dedication to local politics. This background as well as his campaign’s articulated racial and class politics played particularly well following Michael Bloomberg’s mayoralty, which alienated those outside the elite.

Similarly, it is the affordances allowed by de Blasio’s whiteness, particularly his status as a white father, that enabled his trajectory to diverge from those of his third-wave peers. By nature of their historic races, third-wavers represent what Cohen calls a “racial success story –

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Javier C. Hernandez, “A Mayoral Hopeful Now, de Blasio was Once a Young Leftist,” *The New York Times*, 22 Sept 2013, <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/23/nyregion/a-mayoral-hopeful-now-de-blasio-was-once-a-young-leftist.html>.

identity politics without bitterness, minimal demands from people of color, and only a few references to past inequality.”²⁵ In essence, not only must third-wavers be perceived as authentic, they must also be nonthreatening. In 2016, a controlled study noted how displays of “racial novelty” in political advertising by Black male candidates, particularly those who present themselves as part of interracial families, accrue significant support from voters toward their political campaigns, even surpassing white candidates. The study found that Black male candidates who showed a personal affinity for whiteness greatly increased their chances of not being perceived as a threat to the status quo.²⁶ Consequently, if a Black candidate with Black children ran on a campaign platform that sought to give protections to those children through changes to law enforcement policy, his efforts would undoubtedly be perceived as tribalistic rather than progressive. In comparison, de Blasio did not have to prove his whiteness to white voters and was less concerned with being perceived as a menace to New York politics. Indeed, de Blasio’s advocacy for Black civil rights was not as easily seen as tribalism, but rather only added to his novelty, allowing him to be simultaneously more Black than white candidates and more white than Black candidates.

Furthermore, distinct from third-wavers whose legitimizing constituency is liberal white voters, De Blasio was able to campaign for the support of the liberal minority vote, a demographic he won with ease in part through his proximity to his family that was both non-white and middle class. In his *New York Magazine* cover story, De Blasio knew that to be elected he needed to signal that he could be both a businessman in line with Bloomberg’s mayoralty and

25 Cohen, 209.

26 Ethan Porter and Thomas J. Wood, "Race, Interracial Families, and Political Advertising in the Obama Era: Experimental Evidence," *Political Communication* 33, no. 3 (2016).

man of the people, noting how he strove to “assemble a Cabinet that looks like New York.”²⁷ “His household touches more than a hopeful multiracial chord,” the article suggests, “it also represents the economically beleaguered middle class, a segment of the city that hasn’t been at the center of the Bloombergian universe.”²⁸ Beyond signifying kinship, the normalcy of the de Blasios’ middle-class home came to symbolize the intersecting pathos of class and race struggle.²⁹ To picture de Blasio’s Cabinet was to envision a group of individuals who were meant to feel at home in his Park Slope home, or even his wedding. Footage from de Blasio and McCray’s wedding video appeared in the *New York Times* during the campaign, showing African drumming and dancing, a multiracial bridal party, and a minister proclaiming that “we see here the future of humanity...let us come together joyfully and celebrate the wonderful children, the family, the Bildungsroman they will bring to the world.”³⁰ For de Blasio it seemed his mixed race family actualized the imaginative visual work many voters do at the polls: who do I want to represent me, what type of people will they surround themselves with? To the voter, de Blasio carried out his campaign as if his home life was not impervious to the political decisions he would likely make about the middle and working classes as Mayor. ³¹ In the short term, this strategy proved effective. Election exit polls revealed that de Blasio reached into virtually all demographics, including 52% of the white vote, 85% of the Hispanic votes, and 95% of the Black vote. He also won in the higher income bracket despite his bid to raise taxes on the rich.

27 Chris Smith, "The 99% Mayor," *New York Magazine*, 4 November 2013, <http://nymag.com/news/features/bill-de-blasio-2013-11/index6.html>.

28 Ibid.

29 Maureen O'Connor, "Why the De Blasio Family Matters: Meet the 'Boring White Guy' of the Future," *The Cut*, 11 Sept 2013, <https://www.thecut.com/2013/09/why-the-de-blasio-family-matters.html>.

30 “Scenes From the de Blasio-McCray Wedding,” *The New York Times*, Oct 2, 2013, <https://www.nytimes.com/video/multimedia/10000002475685/scenes-from-the-de-blasios-wedding.html>.

31 Grynbaum, "Many Black New Yorkers."

Moving beyond de Blasio's third-wave proximity, perceptions of his campaign's progressivism were aided by the political consciousness of the twenty-first century Black-white mixed race public figure his son gestured toward. What seems to be overlooked about the politics of multiracial identity in the contemporary moment is the growing number of mixed race public figures marking the failed promises of post-racialism in the Black Lives Matter moment, promises that are often reliant on uplifting representations of multiracial Blackness in lieu of other types of Black representation. In a moment in which the respectable performance of a racialized self has been proven to not protect someone against having a violent encounter with the law, mixed race individuals find themselves having to reevaluate their understanding of racial categorization from one of solely personal choice to one of political exigency.³² Supporting this position, in 2011 Michele Elam asked multiracial people to "think twice and check once" on the U.S. Census, arguing that the Census does not function as a place to work out issues related to personal identity (as the 1990s Multiracial Movement contended) but rather works as a socio-economic document meant to regulate the allocation of resources into minority communities.³³ Far from a distancing from blackness, these individuals offer up a socio-political response to the experience of being made to embody racial progress, even as the rhetoric of third-wave Black politicians and the media represent this work as centered on family history and personal choice.

In recent memory, prominent mixed race Black-identifying figures such as Amandla Stenberg, Naomi Osaka, Colin Kaepernick, and Jesse Williams have jeopardized their access to opportunities to advance their respective careers in favor of speaking out against the anti-

³² We might also consider this position a return to an understanding of black identity articulated by the "race men" and women of the early twentieth century who came from racially mixed ancestry such as W.E.B Du Bois, Walter White, E. Franklin Frazier, and Caroline Bond Day.

³³ Michele Elam, "2010 Census: Think Twice, Check Once," *Huffington Post*, April 8, 2010, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/michele-elam/2010-census-think-twice-c_b_490164.html.

Blackness of their workplaces while simultaneously becoming popular activists toward Black causes. We might place Dante de Blasio in the mix of this cohort as his relationship to the campaign's anti-police brutality platform lead to him being named the 6th most influential teen by *TIME* in 2013. Dante's status as an "influential teen" allowed him in subsequent years to exercise his own voice on racism at his prestigious high school, Brooklyn Tech, and comment on the racist origins of Yale University's building names.³⁴ Indeed, Dante's agency during and after the campaign would demonstrate that he was not just a prop in his father's political theater. The campaign's creation of a platform that centered Black boyhood from race-based violence troubles the assumption that multiracialism unambiguously portends a divestment from Blackness and Black political needs. In many respects, the de Blasio campaign demonstrates how the mixed race family as a visual sign in the context of the Black Lives Matter moment has moved from indexing mixed race as an issue of personal choice to the recognition of how it indexes political and social inequities.

This newer (or perhaps older) understanding of the politics of mixed-race identity in the BLM moment is not unanimous, however, especially as the political discourse surrounding mixedness still carries with it some of the universalist and post-racial claims of the 1990s multiracial movement. The killing and subsequent media coverage of 19-year-old Tony Robinson by Madison, Wisconsin police in 2015 is an example of the tension between these two poles. Unrest and protests ensued in Madison when police officer Matthew Kenny fired seven shots at Robinson inside his home upon responding to reports of a "black, light-skinned male in a tan jacket and jeans" running into the road jumping in and out of traffic, as well as physically

34 Abby Jackson, Mayor de Blasio's Son is Among Protesters at Yale and Wants to Wipe a Racist's Name From Campus," *Business Insider*, 24 Nov, 2015, <https://www.businessinsider.com/dante-de-blasio-is-protesting-racism-at-yale-2015-11>.

assaulting his friends. Autopsy reports and witness testimonies from friends show that Robinson at the time had consumed magic mushrooms, Xanax, and marijuana and seemed to be acting unlike himself, which was further confirmed by the original “911” call coming from one of Robinson’s friends who was afraid that Robinson was endangering himself.³⁵ During a press conference calling for peace, Robinson’s uncle, Turin Carter, urged the public to treat Robinson’s death as a universal issue, stating Robinson’s Black and white parentage was a testament to the fact that “All Lives Matter” and that “We are all multiple races and we each have our own complex heritage.”³⁶ Carter insisted that there was no way you could look at Robinson and see only a Black male. To be sure, the family’s effort to control the political response to Robinson’s death by uplifting his mixed-race identity did not hold up when confronted with the workings of institutional racialization, as instances of police brutality disregard personal racial identifications. Even as Robinson’s family attempted to disaggregate his story from a litany of Black male death through emphasizing his “racial ambiguity,” the police scanner and report immediately identifying him as a “black male” precludes a productive conversation of what it means to be policed as a mixed-race individual. Tony Robinson was overly policed and killed because he was perceived to be a Black man, not because he identified as a mixed-race man. Carter’s attempts at solidarity with the Black Lives Matter Movement rested upon the assumption that racial mixedness was a more universal position through which to galvanize universal support, effectively sidelining blackness as an overtly one-sided position. One could argue that de Blasio benefitted from both readings of his family’s mixedness, as he

35 Wisconsin Division of Criminal Investigation Case Report Number: 115-1188/145, 13.

36 “Turin Carter Statement on Death of Tony Robinson, Jr.” Wisconsin Radio Network, 9 March, 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C2de0ESJuo4>.

simultaneously navigated issues of police brutality and worked to unite the “tale of two cities” via the proxy of his family.

With momentum building over the course of the year around the national conversation on police brutality, De Blasio’s interpretation of his role as both father to a mixed race child and public representative of a diverse constituency was buttressed by the statement of one particularly powerful mixed race public figure. On March 22, 2012 during a press conference held to address mass unrest regarding the murder of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin by George Zimmerman, President Barack Obama inserted himself into the burgeoning social consciousness of what would soon become known as the Black Lives Matter movement. Speaking from the perspective of a bereaved parent, President Obama noted "You know if I had a son, he'd look like Trayvon." More than a moment of empathy, the president’s sentiments forced a public acknowledgment that the highest political office in the United States was held by someone who a.) was of Black parentage and b.) could be in a position of helplessness at the hands of his own justice system as the parent of a Black child. Obama’s statements were not taken well by all demographics. When asked, “Do you think President Obama’s comments were appropriate?” 28 percent of white people surveyed said yes and 59 percent said no, while, in contrast, 78 percent of Black people said yes and 7 percent said no.³⁷ To white voters, it seemed, this truth threatened the post-racial third-wave frame that the media built around the Obama presidency, wherein Obama’s audacity to hope for a better racial future began to sound like mere campaign rhetoric. Conversely, to Black voters, Obama's statement was one of only a handful of moments during his presidency in which he had offered more than lukewarm support of anti-police brutality

³⁷ Respondents were read the “if I had a son” line and then immediately asked several questions. In response to the “approve” question, 13% of whites and 15% of Blacks were unsure. http://www.thedailybeast.com/content/dam/dailybeast/2012/04/06/Newsweek_DailyBeast_Race_In_America_Survey.pdf - 11, last accessed May 25, 2012.

positions.³⁸ We might look to this press conference as yet another point on a long continuum of moments that “popped the bubble” of the nation’s collective racial fantasy in the twenty-first century. A little over a year later in 2013, de Blasio mirrored President Obama’s sentiments, but this time from the position of a white father. “It’s not an abstraction to me” de Blasio commented, “I’ll state the obvious: I know it could happen to my own son.”³⁹ While the through-line between Obama and de Blasio’s thoughts offer de Blasio a connection to experiences related to Black racial trauma and political discourse, one could argue that even as issues of police brutality are personal for him, de Blasio’s worries do not upend national post-racial narratives in the same way as Obama’s comments did. On the other hand, the unprecedented acknowledgment of a white father’s worry over the safety of his mixed-race son in fact demonstrated for New York voters the pervasiveness of routine violence against people of color.

That this worry came from a father’s perspective is also telling – Chirlane McCray did not make statements regarding her children’s safety, perhaps knowing that in doing so she would evoke a longer, more racially violent lineage of Black mothers mourning the murders of their Black children at the hands of a white police state.⁴⁰ As illustrated by the public mourning of Mamie Till Mobley at the sight of Emmet Till’s open casket in 1955 and Leslie McSpadden’s cries for justice on the street corner of Michael Brown’s murder in 2014, Black motherhood as a category of female labor in the American context has become knowable through its violently racializing grammar. Through the never quite past tense of enslavement up through the syntactic

³⁸ Mark Reinhardt, “Stuff White People Know (or: What We Talk About When We Talk About Trayvon),” *Theory & Event* 15, no. 3 (2012) <http://muse.jhu.edu/> (accessed January 28, 2015).

³⁹ Arun Venugopal, “It’s Official: de Blasio for Mayor,” *WNYC News*, 27 January 2013, <https://www.wnyc.org/story/265372-its-official-deblasio-mayor/>.

⁴⁰ Images of Sybrina Fulton Trayvon Martin’s mother (and later images of Leslie McSpadden, Gwen Carr, and Geneva Reed-Veal), mourning her son’s death find a mirror in the iconic images of Mamie Till Mobley alongside Emmett Till’s casket, photographs that would go on to define the Civil Rights movement.

order of the welfare state and the sharp punctuation of sexual violence, loss, and death, Black motherhood's burden to signify grief in the American racial imagination is ongoing. The invisibilizing nature of the labor of mourning is similarly violent, especially as it leads to silences in the archive and in the advocacy for women's rights. Jennifer Nash writes of how in the Black Lives Matter moment, Black feminist writers from the political left have pinpointed the "haunted" nature of Black maternity, with the "relentless" terror of seeing your children killed by state-sponsored violence "constituting the unseen but always-felt backdrop of the quotidian."⁴¹ Black feminists, Nash asserts, have then constructed Black motherhood as a political identity, one that aligns the act of mothering in spite of the "maternal anxieties about children's survival" as "synonymous with self-making, world-making, creativity, spirituality, and utopianism waged in the face of antiblackness."⁴² As a result, for McCray Black political motherhood presented a kind of double-bind in the context of the mayoral campaign. To have explicitly asserted herself as a Black mother in the Black Lives Matter moment would have given a platform to a Black radical politic that de Blasio's New York City base would have seen as overly impassioned by racial sentiment. Similarly, to have called attention to the state of mourning that Black motherhood engenders in America would have given a platform to a narrative of blackness as a condition of restraint rather than one of a hopeful, cosmopolitan progressivism which the de Blasio family's image gestured toward. Both narratives, particularly the underlying binds of Black motherhood in the context of the interracial family, function as the excess of de Blasio's politics.

41 Jennifer Nash, "Black Maternal Aesthetics," *Theory & Event* 22 no. 3 (July 2019): 551.

42 Nash, 558.; See also the central argument around the queerness of Black mothering in Alexis Pauline Gumbs, China Martens, Mai'a Williams, and Loretta J. Ross, *Revolutionary Mothering: Love on the Front Lines* (Oakland: PM Press, 2016).; See also Patricia Hill Collins' articulation of blood mothers and "othermothers," and the virtues of communal care and support that underpin women-centered care networks. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (Routledge, 2002) 178-183.

While enmeshed in the same American racial history, conversations on Black motherhood in the twenty-first-century mixed-race family must be distinct from the pre-Emancipation realities of Black enslaved motherhood as an effect of sexual violence, and distinct still from white mothers advocating for “accurate” racial categorization for their mixed race children in the late twentieth century.⁴³ Indeed, discussions of mixed race Black-white families in the present have not taken into account what unique effects contemporary Black motherhood might have on the politics of mixed race families and identities. Attending to such conversations allows us to see how the de Blasio campaign struggled to anticipate or control how this history would impact feelings toward McCray, especially as representations of McCray and her politics faced scrutiny by the press. As a founding member of the Black, queer, socialist, and feminist Combahee River Collective whose manifesto has become a foundational text for discussions of “identity politics,” Chirlane McCray’s presence as a reminder of this legacy challenged the New York City electorate and the de Blasio campaign alike to resituate twenty-first-century political multiracialism within a longer trajectory of queer and Black feminist organizing in the 1970s and 1980s.⁴⁴

Chirlane McCray and the limits of “Biracial Cool”

In a moment in which scholars and activists have returned to the resonating texts and voices of the 1960s and 70s to help explain present inequities, Chirlane McCray’s political presence is key to understanding how the past work of interracial feminist coalitions has impacted national conversations about Black motherhood, mixed race families, and radical

43 Kim M. Williams, *Mark One or More: Civil Rights in Multiracial America* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008).

44 For linkages between second wave white feminist discourse and 1990s multiracial politics see Ibrahim, ix.

politics in the present. While the “interstitial politics” of Black feminist grassroots organizing have been and still are taking place on a local level, grand-scale public debates surrounding Black Lives Matter for the first time are acknowledging the work of the Black women and queer players at the center of the Movement, and making historical links between representations of Black female organizers of the past and present.⁴⁵

Yet to be successful with a diverse and divided New York City voter base, it seemed that the de Blasio campaign could easily champion McCray as a Black person in an interracial family but could not sufficiently account for McCray as a Black *woman* and as a Black *queer* woman without wading into the unfinished business of groups like the Combahee River Collective. Such an intersectional consideration would reveal that the very notion of “identity politics” that Combahee contributed to conversations of activist praxis has become warped within American political theatre, particularly in this third-wave political moment. For de Blasio, the overreliance on representations of his mixed race family offered him access to racial identity politics through personal proximity rather than policy commitments or political agendas. Habiba Ibrahim writes of how this warped notion of identity politics that has circulated in American politics since the mid-1990s has hindered our collective ability to mobilize around personal identity in imaginative ways. Thinking specifically of the post-racial dreams attached to President Obama’s multiracial identity, Ibrahim writes

If Obama signals the promise of personhood we’ve been dreaming of, then the question remains what potentials are lost when we dream away the challenges that still exist to expanding our lives in public. The ‘personal is political’ has become commonplace as we move through the twenty-first century. However, does the promise of personhood still generate various, complicated, and imaginative approaches to becoming political. What becomes of this promise when the mystifying role history plays in

45 Kimberly Springer, *Living for the Revolution : Black Feminist Organizations, 1968-1980* (Duke University Press, 2005); Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor ed., *How We Get Free: Black Feminism and the Combahee River Collective* (Haymarket Books, 2017).

attaching personhood to politics seems to rely on deference to state power, and the compartmentalization of identitarian categories that obscure the complications and contradictions within them?⁴⁶

While perhaps de Blasio's commitment to police reform through Dante serves as a counterpoint to this usage of identity politics, the political narrative his campaign leveraged certainly offered the promise of personhood that his family embodied as a way toward a multicultural New York City. Yet in dreaming away the challenges posed to the campaign narrative by McCray's queer socialist feminist background, the potential for robust policy commitments that reflected black women's politics was squandered. As a result, McCray's relationship with her husband and children left her uniquely vulnerable to attack, as she could not as easily separate the implications of her identities from de Blasio's political agenda. With the campaign's overemphasis on representation giving the right-wing press and tabloids ample material to fuel a racist and homophobic smear campaign, McCray was simultaneously championed for embodying the political aims of her family and severely questioned for allowing what some saw as a shallow misapplication of Combahee's legacy through electoral politics. Indeed, it seems that McCray's presence on the political stage became bound up in two competing lineages of Black-white interracialism in American history: one in which multiracial families signal the promise of progressive social politics and one in which the continued poor treatment of Black motherhood, womanhood, and queerness troubles narratives of American progress and racial justice. This simultaneous signification is precisely the reason that studies of the relationship between mixed race and Black identities remain important in the twenty-first century, in that the representational work that these symbolic mixed race families accomplish struggles to reflect the socio-political changes that they hope to illustrate and advance.

⁴⁶ Ibrahim, 169.

Describing herself as a perpetual outsider, McCray was born in Massachusetts to Caribbean-American parents and raised in a town in which her Black family was one of two. McCray recounts stories of racial trauma that reflected the era's segregationist structures—students at her all-white high school taunting her, residents of their Springfield suburb passing around a petition asking that the family “keep out.”⁴⁷ While attending Wellesley College McCray became a founding member of the Boston-based Combahee River Collective, a group dedicated to incorporating the concerns of Black lesbians into feminist organizing and politics, with other members including Barbara and Beverly Smith, Audre Lorde, and Gloria Hull. As an activist and writer, McCray wrote about her experiences being a Black woman and a lesbian through poems appearing in *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology* and eventually in *Essence Magazine*. In her groundbreaking 1979 *Essence* piece titled “I Am A Lesbian,” McCray writes in a style similar to fellow Combahee member Audre Lorde's 1982 biomythography *Zami*, reflecting on the impact past lovers and experiences had on her understanding of herself as a queer Black woman. McCray wrote as someone who felt that she could be a representative for “those who are embroiled in a struggle to be themselves in a society that frowns on difference” as well as for those who worry that “the monster of conformity will rear its angry head and devour me.”⁴⁸ Declarative statements about the totality of her queerness and her certainty that she would never marry make the piece feel distant from the realities of McCray's present, even as the politics of the piece were echoed across de Blasio campaign's platform. Even still, McCray's *Essence* essay is considered the first time an out lesbian wrote about their sexual

47 Andrew Marantz, "Significant Other" *The New Yorker*, 5 August, 2013, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2013/08/05/significant-other>.

48 Chirlane McCray, “I Am A Lesbian,” *Essence Magazine*, Sept 1979, 10:5.

identity in a Black magazine.⁴⁹ Taken alongside the CRC's now famous 1977 statement articulating the "development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking," McCray's early writings demonstrate a commitment to identity politics as tied to Black queer feminist activism and policy concerns. These allegiances remain a part of McCray's public profile; in 2018 at the inaugural Power Rising summit for Black women McCray reiterated that "to me, a feminist is someone who values Black women first and foremost. ... Someone who supports Black women, helps to lift them up and encourage them. And not just those who are doing well already."⁵⁰ This dedication to Black women during her time as First Lady translated into her spearheading a one-billion-dollar mental health reform plan, ThriveNYC, in 2017. Notably, one of the initiatives, Sister Thrive, is dedicated to collaborating with Black women-led organizations to train 10,000 Black people in what she calls "Mental Health First Aid." Other initiatives work to specifically target the needs of minority and disadvantaged mothers, with one program expanding maternal depression screenings in public hospitals and another increasing parental visits for mothers at Rikers Island.⁵¹

To be sure, the Black queer socialist organizing legacy McCray brought with her into the mayoral election presents an intriguing future for Black feminist politics, especially as her politics (and by extension Combahee's) were assumed to map onto de Blasio's and vice-versa. With action points from the campaign including free early childhood public education, the

49 Jeffery J. Ivanonne, "Barbara Smith: Mother of Black Feminism, Revolutionary Publisher," *Medium*, 25 June 2018, <https://medium.com/queer-history-for-the-people/barbara-smith-mother-of-black-feminism-revolutionary-publisher-4189232e15b0>.

50 Vanessa Williams, "Before there was 'intersectional feminism, there was the Combahee River Collective'" *Washington Post*, 1 March 2018, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2018/03/01/before-there-was-intersectional-feminism-there-was-the-combahee-river-collective/>.

51 Jeffery C. Mays, "1 in 5 Mothers Gets Postpartum Depression. New York City Plans to Help," *New York Times*, 5 February 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/05/nyregion/postpartum-depression-treatment-nyc.html>.

creation of affordable public housing for the city's low-income families and ending an era of stop-and-frisk policing that had been in effect since the 1990s, it seemed some of McCray's Black queer socialist feminist ideals of the 1970s had found a comfortable foothold in the agenda de Blasio proposed. McCray's organizing background and behind-the-scenes political training translated into a talent for political theater, strategic thinking, and a willingness to go beyond the habitual call of the "first lady." By the time McCray met de Blasio in 1989, McCray had had an equally active political career, serving as a speechwriter for Mayor Dinkins' administration and later as a public relations consultant. Often found by his side on campaign stops, McCray has been called de Blasio's "political conscience," and his "optics guru."⁵² After de Blasio's election in 2014, McCray played an essential role in staffing the mayor's office, helping to "stage the new optics of power in the de Blasio era."⁵³ Of the twelve senior staff in the mayor's cabinet, six were women and only three were white men. Of the 80 commissioners, deputy mayors, and agency heads de Blasio hired, more than half were women. McCray's chief of staff was a Black woman, her communications director a white woman. However, staging the optics of identity politics should not be confused for substantive policy change, and it remains unclear how this staffing will affect outcomes for the communities represented.

As a result, the print media's coverage of McCray's nontraditional involvement and activist past fueled a war of images that attacked McCray's ability to uphold the mantle of womanhood, motherhood, and First Ladyhood. The press demonstrated an interest in McCray's political trajectory and presence insofar as it would portend damage to de Blasio's chances of a successful candidacy, even at times becoming both inadvertently and aggressively racist and homophobic.

⁵² Miller, "Chirlane McCray's City."

⁵³ Ibid.



Figure 4-4: December 2012 *New York Post* Political Cartoon by Sean Delonas depicting Bill de Blasio and Chirlane McCray in bed together.

In December of 2012, just before de Blasio announced his mayoral bid, the right-wing *New York Post* printed a lewd cartoon by Sean Delonas caricaturing de Blasio and McCray's marriage. In the homophobic and racist cartoon, de Blasio and McCray are depicted lying in bed in lingerie sharing a cigarette with the caption over McCray's head reading "I used to be a Lesbian but my husband, Bill de Blasio, won me over." De Blasio sits scowling in women's undergarments with body fat rolling over the waistline of his underwear while McCray's cleavage hangs over the bedsheets. Perhaps Delonas wants to signal that this is a depiction of the *real* de Blasio behind closed doors: a bitter perversion of his progressive platforms, stripped of his political prowess and authenticating access to minoritized positions. Even more suggestive is the spotlighting of de Blasio, rather than McCray, as the object of this queering moment. Not only has McCray rubbed off on him but she is speaking for him in the edge of the light.

The cartoon ridicules de Blasio and McCray for both their interracial relationship and McCray's queer sexuality as a way of undermining what might be initially refreshing to voters about the pair. As with most political cartoons, the striking nature of this image stems from its usage of widely circulated, immediately accessible stereotypes of social group-norms. Simultaneously playing on tropes of the sexually aggressive Black female Jezebel, the emasculating matriarch, and the sexually dominant queer top, de Blasio is emasculated through the compounding deviancies of his wife's blackness and queerness. Scholarly works on the overlapping treatment of interracial relationships and queer sexuality throughout American history instruct us on how powerful this pairing of stereotypes can be as a means of demarcating what may be considered normal and abnormal sexual conduct.⁵⁴ In some ways it seems like McCray's queerness (in the cartoon and beyond) reactivates narratives about the sexual non-normativity of interracial sex and marriage, making it more difficult for representations of de Blasio's mixed race family to read as normal. Similarly, in taking their sexual agency away and implying that McCray has been "won over" by her husband, the cartoon misrepresents the fluidity of sexual identity and strips the institution of heterosexual marriage of its trademark right to sexual privacy.

In the days after the cartoon's publication, De Blasio and McCray went on the defensive at a press conference attended by Al Sharpton. Adding to de Blasio's call to "Leave my wife alone, leave my children alone" McCray took to the podium to add

"I'm a bit uncomfortable standing here talking. I'd rather be writing an article. But I wrote the [*Essence*] article 33 years ago

54 Roderick A Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique*. (U of Minnesota Press, 2004).; Robyn Wiegman, "Intimate publics: race, property, and personhood." *American Literature* 74, no. 4 (2002): 859-885.; Siobhan B. Somerville. "Queer Loving." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 11, no. 3 (2005): 335-370. <https://muse.jhu.edu/> (accessed October 31, 2018).; Peggy Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America*. (Oxford University Press), 2009.; Chandan, Reddy, "Time for Rights-Loving, Gay Marriage, and the Limits of Legal Justice," *Fordham Law Review* 76 (2007): 2849.

because I believe it's so important to speak out for what's important to you no matter how your words might be twisted or turned. It's important because when you verbalize something you put it out there for people to deal with. Your silence will not protect you."⁵⁵

McCray's reaction to crass mudslinging from the right-biased *New York Post* – a reaction that would come to define how she would handle the press well into de Blasio's term – was to resist the silencing forces of racism, sexism, and homophobia by controlling her own autobiographical narrative. As a trained speech and creative writer McCray's decision to offer verbal correctives was apt in a political arena overdetermined by calls for visual authenticity.⁵⁶

To be sure, the de Blasio's were not unique third-wavers in having to respond to race-baiting political caricature; the Obama family also fielded frequent attacks that attempted to alienate Michelle and Barack from the carefully manicured third-wave imagery they presented to the press. On the July 21, 2008 cover of *The New Yorker*, the Obamas were depicted burning a flag while standing in the Oval Office dressed as archetypes of anti-American values [Figure 5].

⁵⁵ Capital New York, "Bill de Blasio to New York Post: 'Leave my wife alone,'" December 10, 2012. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Hz-eeTnl0I>.

⁵⁶ Richard Iton, *In Search of the Black Fantastic : Politics and Popular Culture in the Post-Civil Rights Era* (Oxford University Press, 2008).

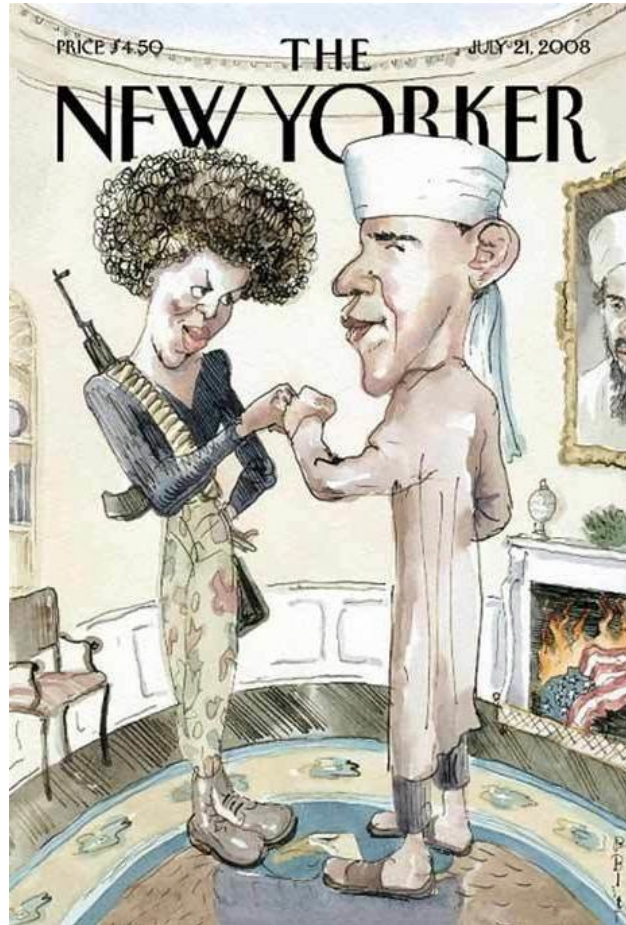


Figure 4-5: July 21, 2008 cover of The New Yorker

While Barack wears attire associated with Muslim men (a nod to accusations from the right during his campaign), a machine-gun-toting Michelle resembles a militant Black Panther, a group the Obamas have never aligned themselves with. The cover's depiction of Michelle in particular veered from her public appearance during the presidential campaign; gone were the relaxed hair and fitted professional dresses. Instead, Michelle's large afro hair and clothing more closely resembled that of Cathleen Cleaver and Angela Davis. While the cover was widely condemned, Fleetwood argues that these representations fed into how the Obamas continually portrayed their family "in the most normative and steadfast ways" so much so that depictions of family became "a measuring stick used to guide and discipline black populations about the

expectations and responsibilities of normative citizenship.”⁵⁷ Through this control, however, the Obamas were not spared from criticism; The director of photography for the Associated Press condemned President Obama in a scathing op-ed as “manifestly undemocratic” for trying to offer a “sanitized visual record of his activities.” The writer argued that Obama’s control over his image defied “the principles of openness and transparency he campaigned on,” an accusation that revealed an underlying assumption about the unfettered access of the public gaze.⁵⁸ This catch-22 – both hyper-caricatured and hyper-sanitized – reveals how the visual field still poses an undeniable hurdle to the progressive narratives of third-wave politicians and their authenticators.

As such, despite McCray’s strong response against the cartoon, visual attacks on her character by the press continued throughout the campaign and well into de Blasio’s mayoralty.⁵⁹ At the funeral of slain police officer Wenjian Liu in 2015 in which the New York City Police in attendance turned their backs to Mayor de Blasio in protest as he addressed the crowd, McCray also made headlines for her perceived disrespect of the police by reportedly wearing blue jeans to the funeral. Although the designer of the pants insisted that the material was a dégradé blue trouser, the media called the incident “Jeansgate,” forcing City Hall to issue a statement on the fashion issue in a moment where the NYPD’s protest against de Blasio’s anti-police brutality stance signaled greater issues at hand.⁶⁰ When in 2018 *The New York Daily News* implied that de Blasio and McCray’s office romance in the Dinkins administration should be considered sexual

⁵⁷ Fleetwood, *Racial Icons*, 54.

⁵⁸ Santiago Lyon, “Obama’s Orwellian Image Control,” *The New York Times*, December 11, 2013, https://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/12/opinion/obamas-orwellian-image-control.html?ref=opinion&_r=0.

⁵⁹ Capital New York, “Bill de Blasio to New York Post: ‘Leave my wife alone,’” December 10, 2012. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Hz-eeTnl0I>.

⁶⁰ Vanessa Friedman, “The Fury Over Chirlane McCray’s Trousers,” *The New York Times*, 9 January 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/11/fashion/the-fury-over-chirlane-mccrays-trousers.html>.

harassment (an opinion reiterated across multiple news outlets over the course of five years), McCray penned an essay titled “Don’t Rewrite My Office Romance into a #MeToo Moment.”⁶¹

Some of the most egregious attacks from the press, however, targeted McCray’s mothering abilities. Given that McCray avoided statements that would align her experiences as a mother with the concerns and calls of Black mothers at the beginning of the Black Lives Matter movement, McCray instead tapped into the more universal scripts of what Jennifer Nash commonly associates with “white political motherhood.” In a 2014 *New York Magazine* cover story titled *The Power of Chirlane McCray*, McCray admitted to struggling with juggling motherhood and her desire to work.

“I was 40 years old. I had a life. Especially with Chiara—will we feel guilt forever more? Of course, yes. But the truth is, I could not spend every day with her. I didn’t want to do that. I looked for all kinds of reasons not to do it. I love her. I have thousands of photos of her—every 1-month birthday, 2-month birthday. But I’ve been working since I was 14, and that part of me is me. It took a long time for me to get into ‘I’m taking care of kids,’ and what that means.”

McCray admitted to an ambivalence toward motherhood that was far from unique – what *Dame Magazine* at the time called “a tale as old as time” – and that was precisely the point.⁶² To be sure, calling attention to the impact of motherhood and domestic labor on the career trajectories of women was a central feminist claim of the 1970s women’s organizing spaces in which McCray came of age, a political position Jennifer Nash aligns with “white political motherhood.” Nash defines white political motherhood as a collective performance of ambivalence toward

61 For articles in the media on the de Blasio office romance see Shane Coldmacker “In New York an Influential First Lady Redefines the Position,” *The New York Times*, Oct 20, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/20/nyregion/chirlane-mccray-first-lady-de-blasio.html?mtrref=www.google.com>; Michael Barbaro, “Once Alienated, and Now a Force of In Her Husband’s Bid for Mayor” *The New York Times*, Oct 1, 2013, <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/02/nyregion/once-alienated-and-now-a-force-in-her-husbands-bid-for-mayor.html>.

62 Lisa Butterworth “NYC’s First Lady Never Said She Was a Bad Mom,” May 20, 2014, <https://www.damemagazine.com/2014/05/20/nycs-first-lady-chirlane-mccray-never-said-she-was-bad-mom/>.

compulsory reproduction, a sentiment which is commonly expressed in the form of confessional memoirs. While Nash insists that this genre provides a “crucial counter-archive to the prevailing patriarchal narrative of maternal fulfillment,” she also highlights how Black women and mothers have historically not had access to this type of political maneuver.⁶³ Indeed, the press’s response to McCray’s statements reinforced this denial of Black women’s ambivalence toward mothering. The following day, *The New York Daily News* ran the headline, “Didn’t want to be a mom: Chirlane’s sorrow.” The *New York Post* similarly printed an article titled “NYC First Lady: I was a bad mom” and implied that McCray’s daughter Chiara suffered from depression and substance abuse due to McCray’s early motherly neglect [Figure 6].



Figure 4-6: Cover of *New York Post* May 18, 2014. Chiara de Blasio’s floating head sits in the bottom right corner of the cover, with the misleading phrase of “I WAS A BAD MOM” lifted from McCray’s *New York Magazine* interview.

The press often returned to this accusation whenever Chiara made headlines, making ties between McCray’s radical politics and the mental health of her children. *The Post* wrote that this realization “shattered the carefully crafted image of de Blasio’s close-knit family, which helped

63 Nash, 557.

vault him into office,” yet did not similarly accuse de Blasio of paternal neglect in the name of a career in politics.⁶⁴ The blame, of course, was McCray’s to saddle alone. As a result, not only could McCray not perform the “political work around death and dying” that Black political motherhood has come to signify but McCray was also publicly shamed for rehearsing the scripts of white political motherhood, effectively barring her from having an opinion on motherhood altogether beyond the standardized iconography of the interracial family.⁶⁵ In a political arena saturated by symbolic imagery, the press fell back upon a well-trod history of sensationalizing Black women’s bodies and bodily autonomy to mock the transgressive presence the de Blasio administration had on New York politics.

The media represented McCray’s body and maternal presence as the iconic surplus of de Blasio’s progressive politics – their romance unlikely, their partnership unnatural, images of McCray are perpetually in excess of de Blasio’s goals.⁶⁶ Black feminist theorists have given language to describe how this state of being and quality of representation has made Black womanhood a “terrible weight.”⁶⁷ Extending Hortense Spillers opening provocation on excess in “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” Nicole Fleetwood argues that “the black female body functions as the site of excess in dominant visual culture and the public sphere at large.” Fleetwood traces a visual lineage from the Hottentot Venus to Josephine Baker to Millie Jackson to Pam Grier to Serena Williams, and suggests that the Black female body is “always troubling to dominant visual culture and that its troubling presence can work productively to *trouble* the field of

64 Bruce Golding, “NYC’s First Lady: I Was a Bad Mom,” May 18, 2014, <https://nypost.com/2014/05/18/chirlane-mccray-didnt-want-to-spend-every-day-with-baby-chiara/>.

65 Nash, “Black Maternal Aesthetics,” 570.

66 Nicole Fleetwood underscores how iconic representations of blackness have been centered on masculinity, positioning Black women as overdetermined by the shocking “excess” of their bodies. Nicole R. Fleetwood, *Troubling Vision: Performance, Visuality, and Blackness* (University of Chicago Press, 2011), 5.

67 Hortense Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (Summer, 1987): 65.

vision.”⁶⁸ Placing McCray in this lineage through the *Post* cartoon and “Jeansgate” acknowledges how McCray’s public life as a wife and mother has been dominated by negotiations of overwhelm, of decorum, and excess.

As politicians’ wives treated as twin pillars of Black First Ladydom, both Michelle Obama and McCray’s representations as Black mothers, as racial authenticators, and as troubling presences are further complicated (or queered) by questions of class and sexual politics. In a 2012 speech Michelle claimed the moniker “mom-in-chief,” a term she would repeat often over the course of Obama’s presidency as a way of signaling that despite her position in public office her first priority was raising her two daughters, Sasha and Malia. While some female members of the press criticized this public embrace of a traditional feminine gender role as a “feminist nightmare,” Melissa Harris-Perry called this title change a “Black motherhood dream” and pointed out how Michelle’s assertion to care for her own children was a refusal of the “mammy” role many Black women in public positions are often forced to inhabit.⁶⁹ Furthermore, as a powerhouse in her own right, journalist Andrea Plaid writes that “a little-acknowledged reality of Michelle Obama’s Mom-In-Chief mantle is that it’s a break for a woman who for years earned more than her husband, maintained a home and reared two daughters, all while her husband pursued a political career.”⁷⁰ Negotiating the tropes of both low-level mammy and high-powered matriarch, impressions of Michelle Obama’s status as mother and wife are in part caught up in interpretations of her socioeconomic class. So, too, are impressions of McCray and her radical

68 Nicole Fleetwood, *Troubling Vision*, 109, 112-113.

69 Melissa Harris-Perry, “Michelle Obama a ‘feminist nightmare?’ Please,” MSNBC, November 23, 2013, <http://www.msnbc.com/melissa-harris-perry/michelle-obama-no-ones-feminist-nightmare>.; on “feminist nightmare” see Michelle Cottle, “Leaning Out: How Michelle Obama Became a Feminist Nightmare,” *Politico Magazine*, November 21, 2013, <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2013/11/leaning-out-michelle-obama-100244#.UtBxrdJDvuw>.

70 Andrea Plaid, “What to Expect from New York City’s Black Feminist First Lady,” *In These Times*, January 26, 2014, <https://inthesetimes.com/article/chirlane-mccray-new-yorks-black-feminist-first-lady>.

feminist politics. Because of McCray's transition into establishment politics, Black feminists in academia and in the public sphere have become skeptical of her allegiances to grassroots organizing and her ability to represent the policy needs of Black women. Echoing Cathy Cohen's reading of the third-wave Black politician, Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor suggests that the emergence of an elite Black women's political class has led to Black feminists transitioning from utilizing protest as the primary mode of engagement to using formal politics within the Democratic party to advocate for Black women. Pointing to McCray's upper-class status and position of power, Taylor implies that McCray's ascendancy into the political elite is not something to celebrate, for McCray is not necessarily "on the same team" as other Black feminist organizers working today.⁷¹ It seems that McCray's presence represents a challenge to the movement legacy she helped build, especially as her relative power within New York politics presents both opportunities and pitfalls for Black feminist organizing.

What, then, does McCray's representation by the de Blasio campaign and in the press tell us about what the mixed race family signifies in twenty-first-century American politics? The success of Barack Obama and de Blasio's third-wave electoral campaigns suggest that utilizing one's proximity to mixed-race kinship can make a Black male candidate palatable and give a white male candidate a measure of authenticity. However, Black female politicians such as McCray – who do not have access to the privileges of masculinity, whiteness, or heterosexuality to fall back upon – suffer disastrous consequences. Given that McCray's profile portends a bid for political office herself, it seems far-fetched to imagine the same emphasis on her mixed-race family working as a campaign strategy for her in the future, especially as her status as a Black

71 "Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor: What We Can Learn From the Black Feminists of the Combahee River Collective," *Democracy Now*, 22 January 2018 https://www.democracynow.org/2018/1/22/keeanga_yamahtta_taylor_what_we_can.; see also Keeanga-Yahmatta Taylor, *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation* (Haymarket Books, 2016).

mother and woman formerly politically affiliated with Black lesbian socialist feminists disrupts the tricky patriarchal balance needed to mobilize her own brand of “biracial cool.”⁷² To be sure, de Blasio’s transition from democratic socialist to belle of the New York liberal elite aligns with the political reception of Black-white interracial intimacies in the twentieth century, in that what was once considered illegal was eventually made to maintain heteronormative and nationalistic logics of the state.⁷³ Yet, at the same time, the continued poor treatment of McCray despite her relative political power also aligns with this history, as Black mothers within the context of mixed-race families have been treated as the “constitutive shadow” or foil of white motherhood, unable to access the “reverential light and humanizing lexicons of the maternal.”⁷⁴ As the legacy of the CRC’s statement becomes tied up in the perceived successes and failures of McCray’s entrance into the political elite, both McCray and de Blasio have been called to answer for how his administration failed to follow through on the identity politics with which he aligned himself. The ways in which the de Blasio family was deployed as a symbol to unite the “tale of two cities” – even as this same symbol was used to attack McCray – illustrates how social identities are staged in the staging of images and platforms alike, such that voters are urged to conflate progressive politics with embodied identities.

Conclusion

As time has revealed, the de Blasio family is not the saving grace of New York City’s structural inequalities. Neither is the de Blasio family’s representation indicative of a new age of

72 Miller, “Chirlane McCray’s City.”

73 Habiba Ibrahim, *Troubling the Family*; Kevin Noble Maillard, “The Multiracial Epiphany of Loving.” *Fordham L. Rev.* 76 (2007): 2709.; Chandan Reddy, “Time for Rights-Loving, Gay Marriage, and the Limits of Legal Justice.”

74 Habiba Ibrahim, *Troubling the Family*; (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 2012), 88-89. For “constitutive shadow” see Ruby C Tapia, “Race, Class, and the Photopolitics of Maternal RE-vision in Rickie Solinger’s *Beggars and Choosers*,” *Feminist Studies*, 36, no. 2 (2010): 386.

political multiculturalism bolstered by the signifying labor of Black bodies. While nearly everyone recognized that the family and its depiction played a large political role, most existing commentary has been narrow or reactionary in scope. Conversations regarding the importance of the de Blasio family to the view of Black feminisms, motherhood, mixed race families, and queer identities are stunted by conflating the family's representation and lived social identities with larger wind changes in structural racism, sexism, classism, or homophobia in America.

As a result, voters and political strategists alike must be cautious in how they equate the de Blasio family's personal identities with conversations on how to remedy structural oppression and promote inclusive public policy in New York City. De Blasio's tenure in office has proven that representations of parental worry for Dante's safety were not enough to fully change the policing of Black and brown bodies in New York. While instances of policing themselves have decreased by 98% since 2013, the statistics on who is being stopped remain the same. Black and Latino populations still compose 89% of those stopped, marking the continued utilization of racialized police tactics.⁷⁵ Similarly, during the opening moments of the COVID-19 pandemic, the NYPD's enforcement of social distancing orders encouraged the over-policing minority communities, as 90% of those arrested were Black or Latinx.⁷⁶ Furthermore, while Chirlane McCray's support of projects such as public education and mental health reform indicates a continued understanding of her role as first lady to be a steward of the people, McCray seems perpetually penalized by both the press and the city's electorate for both withholding aspects of herself and for speaking too frankly about the state of inequality. Since the election, scholars have critiqued McCray for subsuming her queer identity under her progressive politics, arguing

⁵⁴ New York Civil Liberties Union, "Annual Stop and Frisk Data," <https://www.nyclu.org/en/stop-and-frisk-data>.

⁷⁶ David Freedlander, "Everybody Hates Bill," *New York Magazine*, 22 June 2020, <https://nymag.com/intelligencer/article/how-bill-de-blasio-lost-new-york-city.html>.

that her “silence” on matters of her own personal choices will only contribute to understandings of queer identity as a choice.⁷⁷

Beyond representation by the media, the political implications of de Blasio’s 2013 mayoral campaign set the stage for his failed presidential bid for the 2020 election, in which the emphasis on his family remained a central component of his platform. Given the presence of presidential candidates Cory Booker and Kamala Harris, both of whom identifying as Black and respectively courting the Black vote, de Blasio’s third-wave adjacency was a less effective strategy for proving his authenticity at the national level. During the first democratic presidential debate in June of 2019, de Blasio noted that he was the only presidential candidate who knew what it meant to raise a Black son in America, a comment which the public responded to with more skepticism than compassion. Many within his New York City constituency felt disgruntled if not outright betrayed by his presidential bid, given New York’s public housing crisis and the poor state of his relationship with the local press. As an “ideological man in a traditionally non-ideological job” de Blasio conducted a mayoral campaign which made it difficult to measure the success of his platform promises beyond the representational sphere.⁷⁸

Ultimately, one mixed race family was asked – by both sympathetic and at times hostile journalists, resistant and excited voters and, instrumentally, the de Blasio campaign itself – to do a great deal of political cultural work. The reason to interrogate the significance of the de Blasio campaign is not to better define the specific subject-positions held within mixed race families and by individuals involved in interracial relationships. Rather, giving these representations weight within conversations of racial formations in the American context allows the structural

77 Sheena C. Howard, "Identity as a Rite of Passage: The Case of Chirlane McCray," In *Black Women and Popular Culture: The Conversation Continues* (Lexington Books: 2014), 293.

78 Matt Flegenheimer, “How Bill de Blasio Went From Progressive Hope to Punching Bag,” *The New York Times*, 6 Aug 2019 <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/06/magazine/mayor-bill-de-blasio-2020-campaign.html>.

inequities of our moment to become more legible. Part of this work extends into recognizing the limits of what the symbol of the family unit can stand for in politics, as well as the limits of the de Blasio family to reconstruct racial and sexual hierarchies.

EPILOGUE: “The House of Windsor and A One-Woman House:” Meghan Markle, Black Motherhood, and the Visual Politics of the Mixed Race Family



Figure 5-1: Oli Scarffoli Scarff, AFP, Getty Images May 19, 2018. Meghan Markle (right) and her mother, Doria Ragland, arrived for her wedding ceremony to marry Britain's Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex, at St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle, in Windsor.

On the day American actress Meghan Markle became the Duchess of Sussex, her mother, Doria Ragland, was by her side. In the Rolls-Royce on the way to the ceremony at St. George's Chapel, the two sat close, waving to a sea of onlookers craning their necks for a glimpse of the new royal family members. Ragland matched her daughter's royal wave, the scooping curve of her hand mimicking the iconic wave of Queen Elizabeth II, her daughter's future grandmother-

in-law. During the ceremony, Ragland smiled adoringly as Markle walked down the aisle, and nodded her head in affirmation as the Black American Bishop, Michael Curry, quoted Martin Luther King Jr. in front of a mass of Britain's aristocratic elite. "We must discover the power of love, the redemptive power of love. And when we do that, we will make of this old world a new world. Love is the only way," Curry recited. As Markle and Prince Harry exchanged vows, global audiences watched in awe as Markle became the "first Black British royal," and shared in the pomp and circumstance of what many saw as a landmark shift in international representational politics.¹ Across mainstream presses, journalists asked what it meant for the United Kingdom, a colonial superpower and monarchy founded on the purity of royal bloodlines, to welcome a person of color – a racially mixed person, a Black person – into its ranks.² Similarly, American audiences were captivated by one of their own becoming a princess, seeing Markle's ascension from daughter of a single mother to television actress to royal as a kind of

¹ Jonathan Capehart, "The blackest moment in global pop culture since Obama's election night," *Washington Post*, 22 May 2018, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/post-partisan/wp/2018/05/22/the-blackest-moment-in-global-pop-culture-since-obamas-election-night/>.

² Kim Hjelmgard and Jane Onyanga-Omara, "How Meghan Markle will reinvent the royal family. And the U.K.," *USA Today*, May 16, 2018, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/life/2018/05/16/royal-wedding-meghan-markle-u-k-meaning/606574002/>; Arianna Davis, "Why I'm So Proud Meghan Markle Made The Royal Wedding Unapologetically Black," *Refinery29*, May 19, 2018, <https://www.refinery29.com/en-us/2018/05/199634/royal-wedding-meghan-markle-black-pride-essay>; Nosheen Iqbal, "Has Meghan Markle changed Britain's attitude to race and royalty?" May 13, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/may/13/has-meghan-markle-changed-britains-attitude-race-and-royalty>; Kehinde Andrews, "The royal wedding is over. Now we can admit it was never a vehicle for meaningful racial progress," May 21, 2018, <https://www.cnn.com/2018/05/21/opinions/royal-wedding-not-the-moment-black-britons-were-waiting-for-opinion-intl/index.html>; Afua Hirsch, "Why A Royal Meghan Markle Matters," *Time*, May 17, 2018, <https://time.com/5281096/meghan-markle-multicultural-britain/>; Jessica Contrera, "The Making of Meghan Markle," *The Washington Post*, May 16, 2018, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/style/wp/2018/05/16/feature/meghan-markle-prince-harrys-bride-a-confident-mixed-race-woman-marries-into-the-royal-family/>; Salamishah Tillet, "Meghan Markle and the Bicultural Blackness of the Royal Wedding," *The New York Times*, May 20, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/20/arts/television/meghan-markle-royal-wedding-blackness.html>; Ellen Barry, "What Meghan Markle Means to Black Britons," *New York Times*, May 12, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/12/world/europe/meghan-markle-prince-harry-royal-wedding-race.html>; Shenelle Wallace and Edward Helmore, "The Markle effect: black women see the royal wedding as workplace inspiration," *The Guardian*, May 12, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/may/12/meghan-markle-effect-royal-wedding-african-american-women>;

extension of an American fairytale, much like British audiences saw Lady Diana Spencer as a princess of the people.

A noticeable number of Black women on social media and in the press, however, expressed a near-unanimous affinity for Ragland and the narrative of Black motherhood that she evoked.³ Unsurprisingly, images framed their initial comments; photos capturing a poised and teary-eyed Ragland at the ceremony reminded Black women of their own mothers and the pride they might have similarly felt in sharing that moment. Before the ceremony, fashion and lifestyle blogger Megan Pinckney Rutherford commented on why her eyes would be on Ragland.

Granted, aside from her skin tone, she doesn't resemble my mother at all. Yet when I saw her in that box all I could see was my mom—a black, middle-class single mother who spent her entire life striving to give her only child the best life possible while also teaching her to become a self-sufficient woman...it's one thing for Prince Harry to fall in love with Meghan and look past what the world so often deems as flaws, but an entirely different thing for him to embrace a woman, her mother, who is the antithesis of what culture has always deemed as royal.⁴

Similarly, in *The New Yorker*, Doreen St. Felix wrote about the significance of the joining of two seemingly opposing “houses:” The House of Windsor and a One-Woman House. St. Felix makes

³ “For the Dorias of the World’: Chicago Mom’s Poem Inspired by Meghan Markle’s Mother During Royal Wedding Goes Viral,” *NBC Chicago*, May 23, 2018, <https://www.nbcchicago.com/news/local/meghan-markle-mother-royal-wedding-poem/148864/>; Chloe Hall and Alysha Webb, “What Meghan Markle’s Royal Wedding Means to 14 Black Women,” *Elle*, May 24, 2018, <https://www.elle.com/culture/celebrities/a20867113/meghan-markle-prince-harry-wedding-women-of-color-reactions/>; Anna North, “The fraught gender and racial politics of the royal wedding, explained,” *Vox*, May 15, 2018, <https://www.vox.com/2018/5/15/17335946/meghan-markle-royal-wedding-2018-prince-harry-windsor-race-gender>; Gena-Mour Barrett, “Are Black Women Allowed To Talk About Anything Other Than Meghan Markle?” May 19, 2018, <https://www.elle.com/uk/life-and-culture/culture/a20757051/black-women-meghan-markle-royal-wedding/>; “To quote a reader from the NYTimes: ‘...from the back of the bus to the front pew at a royal wedding’. Doria Ragland was the embodiment of quiet dignity, grace and class. Not only is she the mother of a princess, she held herself like a queen. Go, Doria! #RoyalWedding.” Nai Mei @naimeiyao, Twitter Post, May 21, 2018, <https://twitter.com/naimeiyao/status/998637019118100483?s=20>; “This @NewYorker piece gave me shivers as did Ragland’s presence @ #RoyalWedding,” Fatima Syed @fatimabsyed, Twitter Post, May 21, 2018, [https://twitter.com/search?q=\(%22Ragland%22%20OR%20%22Markle%22%20OR%20%22Mother%22%20OR%20%22royal%20OR%20wedding%22\)%20\(%23royalwedding\)%20until%3A2018-05-25%20since%3A2018-05-19&src=typed_query](https://twitter.com/search?q=(%22Ragland%22%20OR%20%22Markle%22%20OR%20%22Mother%22%20OR%20%22royal%20OR%20wedding%22)%20(%23royalwedding)%20until%3A2018-05-25%20since%3A2018-05-19&src=typed_query);

⁴ “Why I’ll be Watching Meghan Markle’s Mom on Saturday,” *Over the Moon*, 18 May 2018, <https://blog.overtmoon.com/planning/why-ill-be-watching-meghan-markle-mom-doria-ragland-royal-wedding/>.

a point to not make a tragedy of Ragland's sole presence as Markle's family representation, instead highlighting their close and loving relationship as a marked departure from the reserved public affectations of the British aristocracy. "Ragland isn't an actress like her daughter," St. Felix writes, "but she said many things with her face... Sometimes the camera would catch Ragland as if she were in a trance, lost in some intimate thought." Nor does St. Felix follow in the footsteps of British tabloids who, when the news of Markle and Prince Harry's budding relationship went public, ran headlines like "Harry's girl is (almost) straight outta Compton: Gang-scarred home of her mother revealed – so will he be dropping by for tea?"⁵ Rather, through Ragland's presence St. Felix highlighted similarities and differences between the pair's experiences with anti-Black racism and misogynoir. "They are different women. Markle makes it a point to call herself biracial. She vaguely invokes the 'wounds' of American history, but is careful not to frame herself as a race hero... [In] front of billions, Markle entered one of the oldest halls of whiteness, with the flowers of former colonies sewn onto her veil, and blended in. Ragland stood out."⁶ Across public discourse, viewers would echo this notion that Markle's racial ambiguity would shield her from feeling the full force of racial bigotry that might have found her if she were more phenotypically Black, or if she readily claimed a racial identity that aligned her more closely with blackness, rather than her preferred "biracial" or "woman of color" identifiers.

As time would tell, the assumption that Markle would blend in proved too hopeful. The years following brought an endless barrage of anti-Black attacks against Markle from British

5 Ruth Styles, "Harry's girl is (almost) straight outta Compton: Gang-scarred home of her mother revealed - so will he be dropping by for tea?" 2 November 2016, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3896180/Prince-Harry-s-girlfriend-actress-Meghan-Markles.html>

6 Doreen St. Felix, "The Profound Presence of Doria Ragland," *The New Yorker*, 21 May 2018, <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/annals-of-appearances/the-profound-presence-of-doria-ragland>.

tabloids.⁷ Markle would again lean on her mother when she and Prince Harry later decided to abdicate their senior positions and “leave” the royal family because of this treatment, retreating to her home state of California and seeking refuge in friends and family. In a 2021 nationally televised “tell all” interview with Oprah Winfrey, Markle and Prince Harry offer an unprecedented glimpse into the family drama of the Royal family, focusing on the entrenched racism of not only the monarchy but of living members of the Windsor bloodline. Notable among their many insights into the racial politics of the two families, Markle conveyed how her mother expressed concerns early on about her treatment within the royal family, telling Winfrey how Ragland “remained in silent dignity for four years, watching me go through this.”⁸ In Markle’s words we recall a long tradition of Black mothers’ coerced and chosen silences in light of American interracial histories, a lineage that this dissertation has demonstrated to be one of the central concerns of Black and racially mixed female curators, authors, scholars, and viewers. We see this in the many women correspondents who participated in Caroline Bond Day’s study and who spent much energy in their letters deciding which family stories were suitable for a white intellectual public, and which stories were too horrible to recount. Through Grey Villet’s

⁷ For a comprehensive list of press events see Kayleigh Dray, “A comprehensive list of all the s**t Meghan Markle has taken from the British press and public,” April 2020 (this list is continually updated, last accessed June 14, 2021), <https://www.stylist.co.uk/people/meghan-markle-racist-bullying-tabloids-prince-harry-wardrobe-malfunction-duchess-difficult-examples/342213>.; for a list of notable headlines see Louise Berwick, “Harry to marry into gangster royalty? New love ‘from crime-ridden neighbourhood,’” *The Daily Star*, July 20, 2019, <https://www.dailystar.co.uk/news/latest-news/prince-harry-meghan-markle-gangster-17055768>.; In an article from *the Daily Mail*, one journalist wrote that “Miss Markle’s mother is a dreadlocked African-American lady from the wrong side of the tracks.” Rachel Johnson, “Rachel Johnson: Sorry Harry, but your beautiful bolter has failed my Mum Test,” *The Daily Mail*, November 5, 2016.; four headlines that were later removed from circulation by ITV, a British TV channel, include *Daily Mail*, December 2017: “Yes, they’re joyfully in love. So why do I have a niggling worry about this engagement picture?” [Word ‘niggling’ blurred out].; Glen Owen, “‘Meghan’s seed will taint our Royal Family:’ UKIP chief’s glamour model lover, 25, is suspended from the party over racist texts about Prince Harry’s wife-to-be” *Daily Mail*, January 13, 2018, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-5266657/Ukip-leaders-girlfriends-racist-Meghan-Markle-messages.html>.; New York Post but attributed to The Guardian (using first part of headline only), May 2019: Lee Brown, “BBC’s Danny Baker on comparing royal baby Archie to a chimp: ‘I f—ked up. Badly,’” *The New York Post*, May 10, 2019, <https://nypost.com/2019/05/10/bbcs-danny-baker-on-comparing-royal-baby-archie-to-a-chimp-i-f-ked-up-badly/>.

⁸ Oprah Winfrey, *Oprah With Meghan and Harry: A CBS Primetime Special*, 7 March 2021.

unpublished photographs of the Loving family, viewers are given a window into Mildred Loving's emotional world, revealing, in turn, the many daily political acts that she enacted outside the public eye and that informed her "quiet" characterization by the media. Indeed, that Black women writers were so captivated by Ragland's visual presence hinted at a similar concern for her interior life, as they articulated a fraught relationship with the simultaneous affective power and structural limitations of iconic mixed-race family photos and Black women's places within them. Indeed, the seeming universal assumption that Markle's racial ambiguity would protect her from experiencing antiblackness or misogynoir is an indicator of how the American public expects iconic representations of Black-white interracial kinship to heal or circumvent structural legacies of inequality.⁹ As it turned out, rather than her visual appearance and representation it was Markle's proximity to the matrix of social pathologies and stereotypes associated with blackness and particularly Black womanhood – single motherhood, hypersexuality, broken marriages, gold-digging, violent Black neighborhoods – that undid the iconic narrative of international racial reconciliation to which their nuptials aspired.

⁹ Jeneé Osterheldt, "Meghan Markle becoming a Duchess could not overshadow her Black reality," *Boston Globe* 10 January 2020, [bostonglobe.com/2020/01/10/lifestyle/meghan-markle-becoming-duchess-could-not-overshadow-her-black-reality/](https://www.bostonglobe.com/2020/01/10/lifestyle/meghan-markle-becoming-duchess-could-not-overshadow-her-black-reality/).



Figure 5-2. Image still from “Oprah with Meghan and Harry: A CBS Primetime Special” on Friday, March 12, 202. Courtesy of Harpo Productions and Joe Pugliese.

That Markle chose Oprah for this interview also suggests an understanding of the symbolic and affective work that Black matriarchs signal within discourses of multiracial kinship and Black cultural history (Figure 5-2). As Janice Peck writes, “as a woman hosting a genre directed at a female audience, Winfrey is expected to frame the ‘topic’ of racism in terms of its emotional, interpersonal dimensions, thereby reducing the potential for political conflict.”¹⁰ Habiba Ibrahim extends this reading of Winfrey to how in the past she has played a “bridgelike” role for the Black community in moments of inter- and intraracial conflict, marking that it was also during an interview with Winfrey that Tiger Woods in 1997 discussed for the first time his “Cablinasian” identity, a term he came up with to signify his multiracial background. When many in the Black community saw in this Cablinasian confession “a refusal and unmaking of a race man,” it was again Winfrey who hosted the follow-up program “The Tiger Woods Race

10 Janice Peck, “Talk about Racism: Framing a Popular Discourse of Race on Oprah Winfrey,” *Cultural Critique* 27 (1994): 90.

Controversy” to address the backlash and discuss Woods’ Black heritage. In both Woods’ and Markle’s cases, Oprah’s mediation grounded their experiences with racial mixedness within a tradition of Black ancestral accomplishment and familial approval, rather than multiracial exceptionalism. Looking at stills from the CBS special, it is difficult not to take note of the icons and tropes of Black womanhood that underpin the racial territory that the interview traverses, and that push the royal “miscegenation drama” into the realm of racial spectacle. Oprah, who has been simultaneously pigeonholed and has herself historically embraced the role of “new age mammy for suburban soccer moms” is well known for her ability to utilize an affect of maternal care that often implicitly reduces “all things racial to the personal.”¹¹ It was perhaps intentional that viewers could compare the notoriously cold disposition of Queen Elizabeth to the sunny and warm charm of Oprah’s conversational style, while simultaneously engaging with a centuries-old history of racism and colonialism embodied in and enacted by the crown. In choosing Oprah, Markle and Prince Harry presumably worked to signal a departure from this cold lineage, while still allowing their escape from racial trauma to remain in the realm of family dispute, rather than institutional failure.

Beyond the spectacle, however, at the root of Markle and Prince Harry’s recountings were the insurmountable truths of ancestral violence, white supremacy, and colonial terror that make the British royal bloodline a wholly inhospitable place for Black kin. In one particularly poignant moment, Markle expressed regrets over her silence about her experiences with racism while performing her royal duties.¹² Winfrey swiftly interjected with a clarification: “were you

¹¹ Tammy Johnson, “It’s Personal: Race and Oprah,” *Colorlines*, December 15, 2001, <https://www.colorlines.com/articles/its-personal-race-and-oprah>.; In an interview with the online-zine *Well Rounded Entertainment*, she stated, “First of all, let me address the ‘mammy’ thing. We are all here because somebody was maternal. I think that’s about the best thing that we have going for ourselves.” Quoted from *Colorlines* article.

¹² Habiba Ibrahim, *Troubling the Family*, xvii-xviii.

silent or were you *silenced*” with Markle confirming “the latter.” The public took up this turn of phrase to discuss the difference between the two positions of negation, with Black viewers in particular marking this moment as an important reminder of how systems of oppression contribute to personal choices and social pressures. That Winfrey pinpointed this particular crux of helplessness calls to mind Black women’s specific understanding of the uses of silence, one that this dissertation has similarly traced within interracial kinship spaces. We might relate Markle’s silence to Chirlane McCray’s, who during her husband Bill de Blasio’s campaign avoided overtly discussing her queer sexual identity in knowing the potential compounding marginalizations her blackness, womanness, and queerness represented. Here, we might again bring Ragland back into the fame, as Black women on social media mused at who urged Markle and Prince Harry to break their silence and leave the Royal family. As novelist Kaitlyn Greenidge wrote on Twitter “Megan and Harry went to see her black hippie Mama and she sat them down in a garden somewhere and told them to set their intentions and only go where love is served. I know that’s what happened. I can smell the lemongrass tea and sage from here, and I love it.”¹³ In a comment thread below, academic and public essayist Tressie McMillan Cottom responded “I just told someone not ten minutes ago that this is really that mommas doing more than it is Megan’s lol.”¹⁴ While both comments are perhaps meant to be more light-hearted than serious, Greenidge and Cottom affirmed what many viewers during the royal wedding understood through images of Ragland: her presence tied Markle to a lineage of cultural and gendered blackness that proved significant and pivotal for her navigation of race in both the public and private sphere.

13 Kaitlyn Greenidge, Twitter Post, 8 January 2020, 4:19pm.

14 Tressie McMillan Cottom, Twitter Post, 8 January 2020.

This dissertation has argued that the visual culture of mixed-race Black-white families in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has coalesced into an iconography reproduced in American culture through the elevation of iconic mixed-race families in narratives of racial progress. It has also argued that Black and racially mixed women – as curators, intellectuals, memory-keepers, artists, and as photographic subjects – trouble this iconography, complicating its facile assumptions about the trajectory of progress by demonstrating its effect on private visions and narratives of interracial kinship. By looking to the images that lined the cutting room floor, or the private family archives of images and image texts that see to the family as an affective unit, I show what new readings of interracial kinship surface and, by extension, *who* is made more visible.

As this close reading of Markle and Ragland illuminates, a key figure made more visible through this lens is Black mothers. Previously, scholarly discussions within African American studies, visual cultural studies, and Critical Mixed Race Studies regarding interracial families during this period have largely focused on how these visual politics play out in the context of white mother-Black father families. Pointing to the need to interrogate the overrepresentation and fear of this configuration in the public and popular sphere, these conversations have left unattended the ways that Black motherhood in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has carried a unique history and politics of representation since enslavement. As a result, in the context of the shifting political discourses surrounding mixed-race families in the post-*Loving* moment, Black motherhood was in turn deemed an unfit social category to “perform the critical act of reconceptualizing multiracial politics in the same way, with the same agency, and with the same self-consciousness that white motherhood [could].”¹⁵ In highlighting the visual and

¹⁵ Ibrahim, *Troubling the Family*, 90.

narrative labors of Black women, I have worked to chart the evolution of the visual culture of mixed-race families in relation to Black cultural histories, an archival and curatorial project that in turn made Black motherhood a central concern.

Indeed, the Black women and mothers that this dissertation centers have been tasked and task themselves with the affective laboring of helping maintain a group self-consciousness that combats and attempts to shield their kin from the many violences of anti-blackness. In the context of Caroline Bond Day's families, the work of relaying family histories in light of a lineage of often violent racial mixture was a labor of protecting the emotional worlds of the women and mothers both living and long passed. Choosing what images to send was colored by knowing what images were too precious to part with and which images aligned more closely with their strivings in Black public and social spaces. For the Loving family, Mildred and Richard Loving's desire to provide a safe and private home life for their family drove their relationship to the press as well as their relationship to the many images that were kept within the family for the decades after *Life* and *Ebony* magazine. The dominant "iconography of interracialism" at the time produced a matrix of associations that tied the Lovings' narrative to a discourse of integration and progress. This in turn made invisible Mildred Loving's particular experience with racial violence and domesticity as a Black woman and mother, something photographer Grey Villet's unused photographs help reframe as a kind political positionality previously unexplored within the Loving narrative. For the Baraka-Jones family and Kellie and Lisa Jones in particular, interrogating their family archive meant similarly interrogating the evolution of Black culture, Black feminisms and womanism, and the role of aesthetics in mediating this changing scene. As racially mixed Black women themselves, their own curatorial visions in *Bulletproof Diva* and *Eyeminded* were uniquely poised to draw out new readings of the

post-soul era, the Loving generation, and the role of women and mothers within these frames. In the de Blasio family, Chirlane McCray's presence as a Black queer mother tied Bill de Blasio to a lineage of Black radical politics that both aided and hindered his campaign. While undeniably key to his appeal amongst New York's constituency, McCray's sustained role as "spousal authenticator" and politician committed to Black feminist policies proved a double-edge sword for de Blasio's ability to control the progressive narrative of his mixed-race family, and for McCray's well-being. Taken together, both the iconic and the everyday representation and choices of Black women and mothers bring many forms of labor into view: family storytelling, domestic cultivation, spiritual and social community, and mutual aid family care. The often-neglected gender analysis in multiracial discourse not only makes these experiences less visible but leaves them uninterrogated as sites of political contestation.

As LaMonda Horton-Stallings notes, "what is profane changes over time depending on when and where it originates."¹⁶ While at times publicly circulating images of mixed-race families have signified and justified political and social radicalism within social movement spaces – the visual shock of varying skin tones and interracial harmony signaling an embrace of sexual deviancy and a disavowal of racial hierarchies – at other times similar images have been used by scientists, politicians, and the media to uphold traditional gender roles, racial binaries, and heterosexual family structures. In the post-emancipation nation, de jure segregation as well as the taboo of interracialism at the turn of the century had immense consequences for the visibility and safety of interracial couples and the survival and well-being of victims of interracial sexual violence – to mix races was to cross a social and legal boundary that remained firmly intact. Du Bois' invocation of the "horribly mixed" nature of all Americans reminds us

¹⁶ LaMonda Horton- Stallings, *Funk the Erotic: Transaesthetics and Black Sexual Cultures* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 16

that the color line has always been more figurative than literal – or perhaps more social than biological. In reality, racial mixing occurred both under and outside of the punitive gaze of the law throughout American history in the coercive context of chattel slavery, as well as in port towns, the borderlands, and in immigrant communities across the country. The difference between what was done in the light of day and what and who was cloaked by the secrecy of the dark was itself a reflection of how the color line could be willed into bending; as white men crossed the color line unscathed, Black men and women, in turn, faced dire consequences. While interracial kinship was once a starkly profane and illegal relation – spoken of in the hushed tones of an unsavory family secret – today depictions of interracial families dominate TV and print advertisements, win political campaigns, and are openly heralded as a reflection of what a “majority-minority” nation will soon look like.¹⁷

This dissertation has charted the evolution of these representations of interracial kinship over the last century and has concluded in the present moment to illuminate how many of the same promises and concerns that colored iconic visual representations at the opening of the twentieth century are still relevant today. To be sure, there are a number of elements of multiracial politics and visual culture that this dissertation has not been able to attend to, and that merit further scholarly study, beginning with Black womanhood. These paths include a deeper

¹⁷ A list of TV advertisements features interracial couples include JPMorgan Chase, “So You Can” by McGarry Bowen LLC, Zenith Media, aired 2016.; Toyota, “2017 Toyota Mirai: Owner Testimonials,” *Youtube*, December 1, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HFZhfaA9dnw>. ; State Farm, Twitter Post, December 21, 2016. <https://twitter.com/StateFarm/status/811603055762436096>. Tweet reads “who said yes? Cheers to the newly engaged this holiday season! Be sure to #ProtectTheBling!”; Old Navy, Twitter Post, April 29, 2016, https://twitter.com/OldNavy/status/726063493955342336?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Cwterm%5E726063493955342336%7Ctwgr%5E%7Ctwcon%5Es1_&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fjezebel.com%2Fembed%2Finset%2Fiframe%3Fid%3Dtwitter-726063493955342336autosize%3D1.; Hyundai, “Beef Jerky | 2021 SANTA FE,” *Youtube*, January 4, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ygr8SKIA3Nc>.; Vicks, “Vicks Nyquil Severe Honey TV Commercial, Soothing, 2020, <https://www.ispot.tv/ad/nmon/vicks-nyquil-severe-honey-soothing>.; Progressive, “Cute Guy,” https://www.ispot.tv/ad/tx_/progressive-laundromat.; Pringles, “New Pringles Scorchin,” *Youtube*, Dec 8, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6tMbgXIDeUM>. Interestingly, most of these advertisements are Black-white couples.

study of queer sexuality and its relationship to interracial kinship, including both the compounding identities of queerness and mixedness as well as the experience of interracial queer couples and representations of their kin. Indeed, it is striking how very little has been written on this family dynamic in scholarly spaces, even as alternative and digital media spaces such as zines take up these topics in abundance. Another unexplored territory includes mixed-race identity in the digital sphere, including the implications of new media forms on multiracial kinship and its representation within Black digital communities. As the nation continues to grapple with the implications of its changing demographics and the position of interracial families as icons of this horizon, how might we ensure that these conversations take seriously the historical grounds and political aesthetics that continue to obscure the lived realities of our most marginalized groups? I hope my dissertation serves as a framework to engaging with this question critically and rigorously.

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