

‘This Ruinous Element’: African and Mexican Americans as ‘Racial Problems’ in early 20th Century California

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I affirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own.

Signed _____

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Abstract

This thesis explores the contrasting practices and discourses through which African and Mexican Americans were managed and marked as supposedly racial populations. It focuses primarily on Los Angeles and on the first four decades of the 20th century. This focus, however, often shifts temporally and widens geographically, as I excavate the historical roots of each of these processes. I argue that the rigid exclusion of African Americans and the more flexible boundaries placed around Mexican Americans cannot be understood as resulting from variant racial differences but must be examined within the specific historical and material conditions from which they emerged, namely slavery, on the one hand, and conquest and immigration, on the other.

After an initial consideration of these circumstances, I trace their ideological and practical consequences in three areas. First, I examine how black and Mexican people were inversely defined within the regime of racial classification and anti-miscegenation law. Next, I examine how black and Mexican ‘difference’ was spatially imposed in the city of Los Angeles. Finally, I consider how patterns of collective violence, and the related segregatory practices of the World War II military reinforced substantially different social boundaries around each group.

I base this examination upon a wide range of primary sources, including official documents such as court transcripts, congressional hearings, and FBI reports, as well as popular and academic works from the period. Underlying my argument is the notion that race is produced within historically specific social relations; as such, it demands rather than provides explanation. Though historical in perspective, I believe the questions raised here, and the approach with which I attempt to answer them, will be relevant to more recent debates about the workings of racism, particularly those that focus on multiethnic contexts.

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1. Introduction: Neither Equal nor Negro

This thesis argues that there have been critical differences in the manner in which African and Mexican Americans have been socially positioned and ideologically conceived as population ‘elements’ and ‘racial problems.’ These differences have often been either overlooked or misunderstood in race-based analyses. Guided by the theoretical principle that race cannot explain racism, I argue that these experiences must be examined within the distinct historical and material conditions of slavery, on the one hand, and conquest and immigration on the other.

1.1 Caste and ‘Semi-Caste’

Throughout the 20th century, Mexican and African Americans have shared many of the same conditions and continue to do so today.¹ In 1940s Los Angeles, as I will discuss further in the body of this study, Mexicans and blacks were both subject to *de jure*, though not *de facto*, segregation in public places. Both black and Mexican Angelenos were plagued by police brutality.² The anti-Mexican violence that erupted in the city in 1943, in which large groups of servicemen stationed in Southern California attacked and stripped supposedly criminal Mexican youth revealed that Mexicans, like African Americans, were vulnerable to mob violence. Both groups were largely relegated to low paid manual labor and, as we will see, often subject to restrictions on their residential mobility. At first glance, the picture suggests an even plane of racialised oppression, in which both dark-skinned peoples are more or less equally reviled and degraded. As the historian David Montejano observes, for many Americans, ‘blacks and Mexicans were basically seen as different aspects of the same race problem.’³ As we will see in Chapter Three, during congressional debates over proposed legislation to restrict Mexican immigration held at the end of the 1920s,

¹ Researchers found, for example, that in 1998 and 2000 only 3% of African Americans and (native born) Mexican Americans had a four-year college diploma. Predictably, in 2000, both groups earned significantly less than their white counterparts. Edward Eric Telles and Vilma Ortiz, *Generations of Exclusion: Mexican Americans, Assimilation, and Race* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2008), 110, 139.

² For a study of the early 20th century Los Angeles Police Department and its relationship with the city’s Mexican American community see: Edward J Escobar, *Race, Police, and the Making of a Political Identity: Mexican Americans and the Los Angeles Police Department, 1900-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

³ David Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987), 262.

many citizens, scholars and politicians alike indeed expressed the anxious view that the large wave of Mexican immigrants entering the country were creating a new incarnation of the Negro Problem. As one citizen observed in a letter read before the hearings, ‘God knows, we have one wretched race problem on our hands – may another one not be added.’⁴

As we will see throughout the chapters of this thesis, all manner of observers, from academics to FBI agents, to real estate agents and eugenicists, used African Americans as a reference point with which to locate Mexicans on the American social map. In 1946, Ruth Tuck, who studied Mexican life in California, described the Mexican social position as one of ‘semi-caste’, somewhere between equality and the closed caste status enforced upon African Americans.⁵ In his classic study of Mexican Americans, *North from Mexico*, Carey McWilliams, the noted California author, activist and attorney, asserted that though ‘the pattern of discrimination against Mexicans is spotty and less rigid than against Negroes,’ according to the conventional indices of status, health and housing, Mexicans occupied a lower status than blacks in Los Angeles.⁶ Such comparisons of the groups were also frequently employed to evaluate the perceived qualities of Mexican people and the problems they may pose to American society. In a 1930 passage often quoted by scholars of Mexican American history today, Texan sociologist Max Handman described the increasingly unpopular presence of Mexicans in his home state:

The problem there is the inability of the American community to control the situation because it has no technique for handling partly colored races. We have a place for the Negro and a place for the white man: the Mexican is not a Negro, and the white man refuses him equal status. What will result from

⁴ U.S. Congress, "Immigration from Countries of the Western Hemisphere: Hearings," ed. Committee on Immigration and Naturalization (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1928), 65.

⁵ Ruth D. Tuck, *Not with the Fist. Mexican-Americans in a Southwest City* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1946), 44.

⁶ Carey McWilliams, *North from Mexico: The Spanish-Speaking People of the United States* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1948), 272.

this I am not a prophet enough to foretell, but I know that it may mean trouble.⁷

This use of blackness as a kind of social barometer is revealing in a number of ways. As noted it reflects the fact that both groups were widely understood to be racially problematic populations, as well as that members of each group were often subject to exploitation and exclusionary practices. It also, however, begins to expose a fundamental asymmetry between the two groups. The very use of the Negro as a touchstone for measuring Mexicans' status or interpreting the meaning of their presence illustrates both the unique social positioning of black people and the centrality of the so-called Negro Problem in national discourse.

A brief moment in the hearings of the California Senate's Committee on Un-American Activities in the mid-40s is interesting to consider here. The Committee, a 'fact-finding' body commissioned to hunt out politically subversive intrigue, turned its investigative eye to the purported wave of Mexican juvenile delinquency and the 1943 riots. The Committee's main focus was to determine if fascist or communist factions were infiltrating the Mexican community and manipulating its youth. Its report goes to great lengths to link those who had vociferously condemned the anti-Mexican violence of the riots with communism. The report's appraisal of Carey McWilliams, called to testify in the hearings, first summarized his views of the riots and discrimination against the Los Angeles Mexican community. Then, abruptly, it turns to focus on his views on 'interracial intermarriage,' which, it states, 'are identical with *Communist Party* ideology.'⁸ In a very telling exchange, the chair of the committee, staunchly anti-communist state senator Jack Tenney demanded to know what McWilliams thought of 'miscegenation.' After McWilliams explained that he believed anti-miscegenation statutes to be prejudicial and ultimately ineffective in preventing interracial liaisons, Tenney, unsatisfied, pushed him further.

Tenney: I say, do you favor intermarriage?

⁷ Max Handman, "Economic Reasons for the Coming of the Mexican Immigrant," *American Journal of Sociology* 35(1930): 609-10.

⁸ Joint Fact-Finding Committee on Un-American Activities in California and Jack B. Tenney, *Excerpts from Senate Journal of April 16, 1945, Containing Report* (Sacramento: Assembly of the State of California, 1945), 194.

McWilliams: I say it is presumptuous of me to say that 'A' should marry 'B.'

Tenney: I'm not talking about 'A' and 'B,' I'm talking about whites and Negroes.⁹

On the surface it seems very odd indeed that McWilliams' views on marriage between 'whites and Negroes' should be relevant in an investigation of Mexican American youth. If Tenney was concerned about the transgression of racial boundaries, why did he not ask McWilliams what he thought about marriage between whites and Mexicans? For that matter, why should 'favoring miscegenation' be seen as evidence of subversion at all?

Tenney's question begins to illustrate that the distance between 'denied equal status' and 'Negro' was by no means negligible. As we will see, though broadly exploited economically and degraded socially, Mexicans were not excluded in a number of ways that are of critical symbolic and material importance: they were not marked legally as a separate race and could marry white people; while many poorer Mexicans were spatially confined within camps and *colonias*, middle and upper class Mexicans could often buy homes in the Los Angeles's suburban neighborhoods; and, finally, though painted as depraved gangsters in the city's wartime press, Mexican young men served unmarked in the ranks of a US military that segregated black soldiers so comprehensively it was as if, as the March on Washington Movement suggested in 1943, they were 'deadly plague carrier[s].'¹⁰ And if the two groups were often discursively linked, another prominent thread of discourse explicitly distinguished the characteristics of the Mexican from the supposedly more destructive or dangerous qualities of the Negro. During the congressional debates on Mexican immigration, John N. Garner, a congressman from Texas who later served as vice president under Franklin Roosevelt, defended Mexicans from comparisons to blacks, stating:

⁹ *Ibid.*, 195.

¹⁰ Dwight Macdonald and Nancy Macdonald, "The War's Greatest Scandal: The Story of Jim Crow in Uniform," (New York: March on Washington Movement, 1943), 9.

I do not think the negro problem is a fair comparison. The negro problem is a different problem. It is a problem beyond the solving of man at the present time, because of the race. You can not assimilate that race.¹¹

Both Garner's defense of Mexicans and Tenney's association of miscegenation with political subversion reflect the fact that black Americans have frequently and singularly been treated in American history as an immutably alien and discordant presence. Loic Waquant has described this succinctly. African Americans, he writes, have been 'constructed symbolically and handled institutionally, not merely as non-citizens laying outside of the inaugural social compact of the republic, but as veritable 'anti-citizens' standing over and against it.'¹² Mechanisms of classification and segregation – laws and practices which mark, identify and differentiate and separate – have been applied to African Americans in a uniquely broad and rigid manner and with unparalleled durability, even among other non-European minorities. Black people were strictly and exhaustively identified through classification laws, barred from legitimate sexual relations with whites, tightly spatially confined within the city of Los Angeles, and sequestered within the American military, even, as many pointed out, during a war against fascism.

How do we make sense of these differences and what do they tell us? At a 1967 conference of the Inter-Agency Committee on Mexican-American affairs, a contributor named Leonel J. Castillo reflected on the differences between blacks and Mexican Americans:

It is much easier for us to assimilate into the American culture than it is for Negroes...The Negro cannot escape his color. He is black. This identity, while denying him some of the

¹¹ *Restriction of Western Hemisphere Immigration*, 22.

¹² Loic Wacquant, "Race as Civic Felony," *International Social Science Journal* 57, no. 183 (2005): 136.

assimilation afforded the Mexican American,
serves as a very tangible link with his brothers.¹³

In Castillo's view, the Negroes' blackness was both the root of their identity and the source of their exclusion. As we have already seen, he was not alone in attempting to make sense of the conditions of each group in terms of their respective physical differences from white people. Handman's characterization of 'partly-colored' Mexicans as occupying a midway or indeterminate position is defined in contrast with the perceived fixedness of the Negro 'place' and the constituent assumption that this place was function of their fully-coloredness. Continuing to carry Handman's 'partly-colored' torch into the 21st century, more recent scholars explored the problem of Mexicans' 'racial ambiguity,' as I will discuss in Chapter Four, as if such measures – the obvious racialness of black skin or the ambiguous racialness of brown – were objectively apparent.

As scholars have noted and as I will discuss in more detail later, racism cannot be understood as a general force, but emergent within specific historical and material conditions.¹⁴ The 'racial problems' racism delineates and the racial qualities it identifies cannot provide us with any answers that do not themselves require explanation. As such, we must look to history and circumstance. The singular manner in which blackness has been constructed and managed in the United States has not been driven by difference in pigmentation, but rooted in the absolute historical centrality of slavery within the economic, political, intellectual and social development of American life. As historian David Brion Davis asserts, 'black slavery was basic and integral to the entire phenomenon we call "America."'»¹⁵ In order to frame the discussions in the chapters that follow, it is important to here take a moment to examine the ideological mechanism of race and the emergence of an anti-black racism that posited blackness as self-evident fact and self-generative social prison.

¹³ Leonel J. Castillo, "Inter-Minority Relations. a Presentation Delivered at the Mexican American, a New Focus on Opportunity. Testimony Presented at the Cabinet Committee Hearings on Mexican American Affairs, El Paso, Texas. October 26-28, 1967. Inter-Agency Committee on Mexican American Affairs, Washington D.C.," in *Ernesto Galarza Papers* (Stanford: Special Collections Archive, Stanford University, 1967), 7.

¹⁴ Stuart Hall, "Race, Articulation, and Societies Structured in Dominance," in *Black British Cultural Studies: A Reader* (1996), 322.

¹⁵ David Brion Davis, *Inhuman Bondage : The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 102.

1.2 'And is this difference of no importance?'

Several years after the American Revolution, in a now (in)famous passage of *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Thomas Jefferson discussed a series of laws that had been in place under the monarchy which he felt had 'inculcat[ed] principles inconsistent with Republicanism.'¹⁶ The revisions Jefferson envisioned to these laws included an amendment to 'emancipate all slaves born after passing the act.'¹⁷ These newly freed slaves, it was proposed, would be sent forth with arms and supplies to colonize 'such place as the circumstances of the time should render most proper,' and in the meantime 'vessels [shall be sent] to other parts of the world for an equal number of white inhabitants...to induce [them] to migrate hither.'¹⁸ To explain the apparent absurdity in employing vast resources to send away one large group of people only to replace them with another, Jefferson wrote:

It will probably be asked, Why not retain and incorporate the blacks into the State, and thus save the expense of supplying, by importation of white settlers, the vacancies they will leave? Deep-rooted prejudices entertained by the whites; ten thousand recollections by the blacks, of the injuries they have sustained; new provocations; the real distinctions which Nature has made; and many other circumstances, will divide us into parties, and produce convulsions which will probably never end but in the extermination of the one or the other race. To these objections, which are political, may be added others, which are physical and moral. The first difference which strikes us is that of color. Whether the black of the negro resides in the reticular membrane between the skin and scarf-skin, or

¹⁶ Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (Richmond, VA: J. W. Randolph, 1853), 147.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 148.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 149.

in the scarf-skin itself; whether it proceeds from the color of the blood, the color of the bile, or from that of some other secretion, the difference is fixed in Nature, and is as real as if its seat and cause were better known to us. And is this difference of no importance? ¹⁹

Shifting swiftly from the emancipation of the slaves and the political challenges this presents, he fixed the gaze of his analysis upon their bodies, the ‘secretions’ of their kidneys and skin glands in comparison to whites, the structure of their ‘pulmonary apparatus’, their habits of sex and sleep, and their mental ‘faculties’—‘much inferior to whites’ in reasoning ability but equal in memory. (Mightn’t their ‘ten thousand recollections’ someday lead to a dark testament to this ‘fact’?) Jefferson compared black people to both Native Americans and the slaves of antiquity, in each case finding them considerably wanting. After acknowledging that the ‘races of black and red men’ had been understudied as subjects of ‘natural history,’ he nevertheless made a tentative conclusion: ‘I advance it therefore as a suspicion only that the blacks, whether originally a distinct race, or made distinct by time and circumstances, are inferior to the whites in the endowments both of body and mind.’²⁰ Never turning back to elaborate upon the details of emancipation, Jefferson seemingly concludes that the project is, at least temporarily, impossible. ‘This unfortunate difference of color, and perhaps of faculty, is a powerful obstacle to the emancipation of these people.’²¹

This passage elegantly captures the development of a historically distinct ideological mechanism in America. It was not merely that Jefferson and others began to assert that black people were naturally inferior. There was nothing unique about understanding relations of power and wealth in a given society to be naturally ordained. As historian Barbara Fields writes, ‘part of what human beings understand by the word “nature” is the sense of inevitability that gradually becomes attached to a predictable, repetitive social routine: “custom, so immemorial that it looks like nature”.’²² Neither, as Collette Guillaumin argues, was the idea of visually marking

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 155.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Barbara J. Fields, "Slavery, Race and Ideology in the United States of America," *New Left Review* 181, no. May-June (1990): 106.

social groups new or unique. However, the application of the framework of ‘natural history’ to humans, and the social relations between them, had distinct epistemological consequences, introducing new concepts of nature and visual difference.²³ Within this schema of classifying, Guillaumin writes, ‘*according to somatic/morphological criteria*’, colour emerged as a new kind of mark. While other kinds of marks inscribed upon the body, for example the branding of slaves or convicts, the tonsure of the monk or the wig of the married Orthodox woman, were understood as symbols of a particular status, colour came to be understood not as a symbol but ‘*a sign of a specific nature of social actors*.’²⁴ Guillaumin succinctly describes the consequences of the shift:

For the old mark was recognized as *imposed* by social relationships, known as one of their consequences, while the natural mark is not presumed to be a mark but the very *origin* of these relationships. It is supposed to be the internal (therefore natural) ‘capacities’ that determine social facts.’²⁵

Thus what we see in the passage from *Notes on the State of Virginia* is that not only did Jefferson find his slaves to be inferior, which is not that unusual in itself, but that he examined their supposed natural parts and qualities in order to analyse the social, political and economic problem of slavery.

While Jefferson pioneered the doctrine of black difference to rationalise the continuation of slavery after the Revolution, later generations and some of their scholars came to understand this ‘difference’ as the reason black people were enslaved in the first place, and later, that it in itself is what has marked African Americans out for particularly rigid exclusion in the centuries since. In later versions of such arguments, it is not that the colour of black people is still imagined to demonstrate their inferiority per se but that their colour is understood to have particular unavoidable effects upon white people. Their exclusion has been more severe than that of other non-European minorities, such arguments either imply or

²³ Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, 155.

²⁴ Colette Guillaumin, "Race and Nature: The System of Marks (1977)," in *Racism, Sexism, Power and Ideology* (London: Routledge, 1995), 140.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 142.

claim explicitly, because black people are *more* different than other non-Europeans. In *White Over Black*, Winthrop Jordan renders this thesis in most eloquent terms. His account of the relationship between slavery and racism is also important here because his analysis is multiethnic, contrasting the relations between European colonists with indigenous American peoples and Africans. While giving an insightful analysis of the divergent social contexts which shaped early Euro-American concepts of natives and blacks, Jordan seems to feel that these substantial historical differences alone are not enough to explain the very different manner in which the two peoples came to be understood. The Africans' blackness, he insists, must also be accounted for – as if it were indeed a 'fact' existing outside the context of subjective perception. 'Virtually every quality in the Negro invited pejorative feelings,' he writes, 'What may have been his two most striking characteristics, his heathenism and his appearance, were probably prerequisite to his complete debasement.'²⁶

There is, of course, a fundamental problem with the notion that there are 'prerequisites' to debasement, qualifications that some people must exhibit to be considered enslaveable in the first place. In Jordan's terms, the combination of Africans' colour and savagery, in English eyes, added up to 'that sense of *difference* which provided the mental margin absolutely requisite for placing the European on the deck of the slave ship and the African in the hold.'²⁷ Commenting on this commonly held notion that Europeans had some intrinsic abhorrence of enslaving their fellow Europeans, Fields writes, '[h]umanity has learned again and again that shared color and nationality set no automatic limit to oppression. Ultimately, the only check upon oppression is the strength and effectiveness of resistance to it.'²⁸ Of course, European Americans did fixate on the colour of their slaves; but neither the colour of Africans nor the fixation of Europeans upon it can be considered outside of the historical relationship in which they *became* important. Guillaumin puts this succinctly:

It is heart-rending to hear so many well-intentioned people (then as now) question themselves about the reasons that could exist for 'reducing the blacks to

²⁶ Winthrop D. Jordan, *White over Black : American Attitudes toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (Williamsburg, Virginia: University of North Carolina Press, 1968), 97.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Fields, "Slavery, Race and Ideology in the United States of America," 102-03.

slavery' (contempt, they think; visibility; who knows what else?). But no 'blacks' *per se* were reduced to slavery; slaves were made – which is very different. All these strange reasons are sought and advanced as if 'being black' existed in itself, outside of any social reason to construct such a form, as if the symbolic fact asserted itself and could be a cause.²⁹

As Jordan's analysis shows, if the idea – or at least the explicit articulation of the idea – of innate black inferiority was largely understood to be morally unacceptable by the second half of the 20th century, the importance of 'difference' as a producer of social conditions remained entrenched. Writing in 1949 a Harvard sociologist commented that: 'The doctrine [of the Negro's innate inferiority] will probably continue to shift its ground and become extenuated...it may even disappear. But a race problem will remain as long as there are races; that is, as long as there are recognized physical differences between peoples.'³⁰

1.3 Freedom and Bondage: 'To rule us out is to make us an exception'

Racial explanations have been readily applied to the inequalities and degradations of other groups in America; we will see how they were applied to Mexican immigrant labourers in Chapter Three. Yet as has already begun to emerge, in Jefferson's comparative examination of Native and African Americans, in Jordan's historical interpretations of each group's relationship with American colonists and even in Leonel Castillo's assessment of Negroes' and Mexicans' respective places in American society, black difference has often historically been attributed with special powers of causation. While these three, and many others, attempted to explain this discrepancy in terms of the degree of the supposed difference itself, in other words, black people are more unlike white people than other unlike groups are, the root of this perception must be sought historically. Foreshadowing the twin talismans of 20th century race ideology, 'blood' and 'mixture,' Jefferson commented upon what made

²⁹ Guillaumin, "Race and Nature: The System of Marks (1977)," 141.

³⁰ Maurice R. Davie, *Negroes in American Society* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1949), 383.

American slavery unique: ‘Among the Romans emancipation required but one effort. The slave, when made free, might mix with, without staining the blood of his master. But with us a second is necessary, unknown to history. When freed, he is to be removed beyond the reach of mixture.’³¹ The idea that Romans were able to incorporate their freed slaves because they were so ethnically or somatically akin to them is misleading.³² The ancient world, however, does provide an important clue about what made American slavery ‘racial.’ But in searching for answers in the realm of blood, ‘scarf-skin’ and bile, Jefferson was looking in the wrong place. The crucial ideological difference in American and ancient slaveries was that in the latter, as Moses Finley points out, slavery was taken for granted ‘as an institution of the *jus gentium* (law common to all peoples), and...“what natural reason prescribed for all men.”’³³

In an absolutely fundamental point of contrast, many Americans, from the very beginning of the nation’s existence, felt slavery was corrosive in practice and in principle. It is a profound mistake to presume that the ‘Founding Fathers’ were simply so racist that they did not recognize the hypocrisy (or the risk of being branded hypocritical) in declaring ‘all men are created equal’ and treating a tenth of their population as chattel. Virginia judge St. George Tucker stated that while America had been a land of promise to Europeans, it had been a ‘vale of death to millions of the wretched sons of Africa.’³⁴ Reflecting on his countrymen’s recent struggle for emancipation from Great Britain and the incongruous continuation of slavery among them, he asked:

Should we not have loosed their chains and broken
their fetters? Or if the difficulties and dangers of such
an experiment prohibited the attempt during the
convulsions of a revolution, is it not our duty to

³¹ Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, 155.

³² Romans did incorporate their freed slaves as citizens upon manumission. However, these slaves were certainly not, generally speaking, ethnically or somatically the same as their masters. Romans had a motley population of slaves taken from a vast empire, many of whom were somatically different from their masters, including people from Africa. Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 58, 117.

³³ M. I. Finley, *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology* (London: Chatto and Windus Ltd, 1980), 99-100.

³⁴ St. George Tucker, *A Dissertation on Slavery* (Bedford, Massachusetts: Applewood Books, 1796), 9.

embrace the first moment of constitutional health and vigour, to effectuate so desirable an object, and to remove from us a stigma, with which our enemies will never fail to upbraid us, nor our consciences to reproach us?³⁵

The historical ingredient key to shaping Americans' understanding of the slaves among them is exactly the doctrine of equality which later observers have found to be so paradoxical. In her now classic essay, 'Slavery, Race and Ideology in the United States of America,' Fields argues that the profound contrast between the radical freedom of most and the bondage ad-indefinitum of some made the development of a racial explanation for the persistence of slavery entirely logical:

Racial ideology in its radical American form is the ideology to be expected in a society in which enslavement stands as an exception to a radically defined liberty so commonplace that no great effort of imagination is required to take it for granted. It is the ideology proper to a "free" society in which the enslaved descendants of Africans are an anomalous exception. There is no paradox; it makes good, common sense.³⁶

Racial ideology, 'the explanation of why some people could rightly be denied the [liberty] others took for granted,' took particular hold after the Revolution, she argues, because until most people could take liberty for granted, for example the white people who had once been held as indentured servants, there was nothing to explain. 'Nor,' she writes, 'was there anything calling for a radical explanation where everyone in society stood in a relation of inherited subordination to someone else: servant to master, serf to nobleman, vassal to overlord, overlord to king, king to the

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

³⁶ Fields, "Slavery, Race and Ideology in the United States of America," 115.

King of Kings and Lord of Lords.’³⁷ Frederick Douglass arrived at a strikingly similar understanding of his own social position as a former slave:

If I were in a monarchial government...where the few bore rule and the many were subject, there would be no special stigma resting upon me, because I did not exercise the elective franchise...But here, where universal suffrage is the...fundamental idea of the Government, to rule us out is to make us an exception, to brand us with the stigma of inferiority.³⁸

Upon reflection, then, it is not at all surprising that the man who was one of the first Americans to directly formulate ‘the suspicion’ of some men’s innate inferiority in ‘scientific’ terms was the same who had so eloquently declared the equality of ‘all men’ some years previously. Without the principle of universal equality, the condition of the enslaved would require no special examination and represent no special problem to be reconciled.

Though it might seem that the existence of such widespread repugnance of slavery could only benefit the slaves themselves, the view of slavery as an unnatural institution often simply entrenched views of black people as equally aberrant. The more conspicuous, unnatural and deleterious to free society the institution seemed, the more conspicuous, unnatural and deleterious seemed those marked by slavery, or in the terms of the developing racial ideology, those whose very presence *incited* domination. As it has been noted by numerous observers, it was not in the South that anti-black racism first solidified and where the legal and social mechanisms of segregation were first deployed but in the North where slavery had earlier been abolished and in the expanding territories of the West.³⁹

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 114.

³⁸ Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863 - 1877* (New York: Perennial, 2002), 75.

³⁹ Fields, "Slavery, Race and Ideology in the United States of America," 115. Alexis de Tocqueville famously noted: ‘Race prejudice seems stronger in those states that have abolished slavery than in those where it still exists, and nowhere is it so intolerant as in those states where slavery was never known.’ Alexis De Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 339. For an account of pre-Civil War segregation in the North, see Leon Frank Litwack, *North of Slavery. The Negro in the Free States, 1790-1860* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961).

Whereas the ideology of slaveholders conceptualised black slaves in their right and natural place under white masters, to the benefit of all parties, those who rejected slavery often found that blacks had no right or natural place. Accordingly, civic groups like the American Colonization Society proposed that the problem of slavery could be solved most effectively by removing all the black people. For his part, St. George Tucker, the anti-slavery judge introduced earlier, suggested an emancipation plan, through which, as one early 20th century historian put it, ‘Virginia could obtain the benefits of the deportation of the colored people without incurring the expense of sending them away.’⁴⁰ His plan laid out a strict limitation of civil rights, including a provision that they should not be able to contract ‘a matrimony with any other than a Negroe or mulattoe.’⁴¹

By excluding them from offices, the seeds of ambition would be buried too deep, ever to germinate; by disarming them, we may calm our apprehensions of their resentments arising from past sufferings; by incapacitating them from holding lands, we should add one more inducement to emigration and effectually remove the foundation of ambition, and party struggle.

Interestingly, Tucker was distinctly ambivalent to Jefferson’s racial postulations. He put a footnote by the reference to Jefferson’s claim that blacks were an ‘inferior race of mankind’ which noted that David Hume advanced the same opinion but that James Beattie countered it ‘with many powerful arguments.’ ‘Early prejudices,’ he wrote, ‘...would render an inhabitant of a country where Negroe slavery prevails, an improper umpire between them.’⁴² For Tucker, the problems associated with emancipation were entirely pragmatic – how to end the tyrannical and grievous institution of slavery without setting loose ‘a numerous, starving, and enraged banditti upon the innocent descendants of their former oppressors.’⁴³ Though never adopted,

⁴⁰ Henry N. Sherwood, "Early Negro Deportation Projects," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 2, no. 4 (1916): 488.

⁴¹ Tucker, *A Dissertation on Slavery*, 93-94.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 89.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 90.

his proposals are important because they illustrate that segregation did not spring, fully formed, from the depths of racial instinct. Rather, as Tucker openly suggested, fixing freed slaves as unincorporated internal aliens was an effective means of managing the particular political and social problems their presence would entail.

In some Northern localities with free black populations, Tuckeresque policies were introduced, legally or extra-legally, to hold apart that which could not be removed entirely and in other free states citizens debated ‘immigration’ laws to prevent the settlement of black people.⁴⁴ Debating the terms under which their new home, freshly strong-armed from Mexico, would become a state of the Union, delegates at California’s First Constitutional Convention voted to outlaw slavery and then considered adding a provision to the new constitution to also bar the entrance of free black people. One such delegate, describing potential black immigration as a ‘black tide setting in here and spreading over the land... a greater curse than the locusts of Egypt,’ exhorted the convention: ‘Is it just... to encourage by our silence the emigration of a class of beings who at best are dead weights in society – resting on our social institutions like an incubus of darkness?’⁴⁵

Of course American anti-black racism cannot be thought of as a solid, unchanging entity but has varied in significant ways in time and space and according to the class, interest and social grouping of those who have expressed and enforced it. However, the sense of blackness as *anomalous* and disruptive, a perception fomented in the arresting deviation between freedom and bondage, reverberates through - and was continually recreated by - the discourses and practices considered in this thesis.

1.4 ‘...May another not be added’: Comparative analysis of racisms and the legacy of slavery

A number of important points emerge here, both with regard to race as a general ideological mechanism and with regard to the historical development of racial blackness. As the writings of Thomas Jefferson, a man at the forefront of both

⁴⁴ Litwack, *North of Slavery. The Negro in the Free States, 1790-1860*. See Chapter 3, ‘The Politics of Repression,’ for a helpful overview of laws, practices and debates in different localities.

⁴⁵ Convention California. Constitutional and J. Ross Browne, *Report of the Debates in the Convention of California, on the Formation of the State Constitution, in September and October, 1849* (Washington: Printed by John T. Towers, 1850), 49.

American democracy and American racism, so clearly capture, the practical and philosophical confrontation with the institution of slavery engendered ‘a specific, intellectual condemnation of the Negro race as separate and inferior.’⁴⁶ Racial ideology, catalysed by slavery, became an effective and widely applicable means of interpreting profound inequalities in power in a country founded upon the ideal of universal equality. Because the enslavement of African Americans was tightly bound to the development of American racial ideology, anti-black racism has clearly informed understandings of other social groups, as we will see in the case of Mexican Americans.

However, though American racial discourses have liberally used blackness as metaphor and measure, the social relations through which blackness, as an ideological form and legal status, was created and maintained have been specific and distinct. Of course this is true of Mexican Americans or any other social grouping. But because blackness has been so closely associated with race, it has often been the case that the quarantine like conditions to which African Americans have been subject are understood as the function of race generally rather than the legacy of slavery specifically. The consequence is the assumption that the same conditions prevail, in greater or lesser degree, in all so-called race relations - that is, in all social relations involving white and nonwhite actors.

As the experiences examined in this thesis readily illustrate, it is a mistake to believe that the perception of racial difference, degradation or inferiority prescribes a standard treatment. Such perceptions cannot be understood outside of the particular historically specific social realities in which they come to have meaning. It is for this reason, as I will discuss momentarily, that it is problematic to attempt to understand issues of social inequality primarily through the images and explanations offered by racial ideologies themselves, and/ or with the conceptual language they supply. In my examination of these key points of divergence in the manner in which African and Mexican Americans were managed, the demands of slavery, on the one hand, and conquest and large-scale immigration, on the others, created very distinct sets of social relations, though each were forged in exploitation and domination. I will examine how these distinctions were reflected ideologically and in legal and quotidian practice. To assume that at their core both sets of relations were determined by the

⁴⁶ Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny : The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge, Mass. ; London: Harvard University Press, 1981), 101.

whiteness of the dominating group and the not-whiteness of the dominated is to ultimately remain captive to the notion that ‘natural’ characteristics determine social relationships. Furthermore, in the American context, this assumption leaves the fundamental question of why black people have been subject to more severe and more rigid social barriers with a reified blackness, self-evidently the most ‘different’ of all racial ‘differences’, as the only possible answer.

The ongoing and intense profusion of racism in American social life has imprinted some of the scholarship that confronts this problem with a number of problematic tendencies. I will now turn to discuss how racism and multiethnic relations have been treated in the existing literature and to delineate those points where I would make an intervention.

1.5 Theorising race and racism in a multiethnic context

The questions with which I frame this study involve engaging in a number of important debates about the meaning and history of race and racism. In the Methodology section, I will give a fuller account of how I employ these terms within my own analysis. Here I will consider how scholars have conceptualized racism, and in particular the manner in which Mexicans and other non-black, non-white groups fit into the American social landscape. This necessarily requires a close examination of the way that scholars have understood ‘blackness’ and, perhaps especially, ‘whiteness’ in the multiethnic context. As I will discuss, though many scholars readily recognise the need for nuanced and particular studies of how racism has shaped the experiences of different groups, the ways in which many still conceptualise an axiomatic and fundamental divide between whiteness and ‘of colorness’ have hindered this undertaking.

While I will make a more thorough account of my theoretical framework in the Methodology chapter, here I will signal a few of its key components. Pervasive inequality in the Western world along racially constructed lines and the histories of European led conquest, slavery, genocide and colonialism which have produced it can make the existence of race seem not only important but determinant. Yet precisely

because its role may seem so common sense it is critical for scholars to remember that race is a product rather than a force of history. As Guillaumin writes:

The notion of race corresponds to an ideological analysis of social relationships and not to categories existing as concrete physical objects. In other words, there is no such thing as race in itself, but only the notion of race which is a product of industrial societies, of social relationships interpreted in racial terms.⁴⁷

As I will elaborate later, while attempting to emphasize the ongoing power of racism in American society, much American writing has tended to reify race, noting its socially constructed nature but nevertheless using it as a central concept of analysis. As a number of scholars have noted, this tendency is symptomatic of the fact that much historical and sociological writing has failed to make a proper distinction between race and racism. Robert Miles, for example, writes:

[The use of race as an active subject] obscures the active construction of the social world by those people who articulate racism and by those who engage in exclusionary practices consistent with racism. Our object of analysis, the active determinant of exclusion and disadvantage, is therefore not physical difference in itself, but the attribution of significance to certain patterns of or the imagined assertion of, difference and the use of that process of signification to structure social relationships.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Colette Guillaumin, "The Idea of Race and Its Elevation to Autonomous Scientific and Legal Status (1980)," in *Racism, Sexism, Power, and Ideology* (London: Routledge, 1995), 87.

⁴⁸ Robert Miles and Malcolm Brown, *Racism*, 2nd ed. / Robert Miles and Malcolm Brown. ed. (London: Routledge, 2003), 139.

Fields has similarly observed that the chronic substitution of race for racism ‘transforms the act of a subject into an attribute of the object. Disguised as “race,” racism becomes something Afro-Americans are, rather than something racists do.’⁴⁹

Though racism can be said to have an analytical validity that race does not, it too must be understood as a product of history. As Fields writes:

Only if race is defined as innate and natural prejudice of color does its invocation as a historical explanation do more than repeat the question by way of answer. And there an insurmountable problem arises: since race is not genetically programmed, racial prejudice cannot be genetically programmed either but, like race itself, must arise historically.⁵⁰

Indeed as we shall see throughout the following chapters, the prejudice of white people, understood as instinctual and unavoidable, has been the almost constant ideological partner-in-crime of ‘black difference.’ The comment of one African American in the early 19th century on the American Colonization Society’s plans to solve the problems of slavery by purging all black people from the republic succinctly captured this fact: ‘They cannot indeed use force. That is out of the question. But they harp so much on “inferiority,” “prejudice,” “distinction” and what not, that there will no alternative be left us but to fall in with their plans.’⁵¹ As I will discuss momentarily, the emphasis on ‘white supremacy’ in much American literature tends to reify racism as an innate quality of white people and also as an independently causal force, whose presence requires no explanation.

As noted, an often-cited reason for retaining race as a central analytical concept, and this is a matter I will return to in the Conclusion, is the sense that doing so necessitates disavowing the ferocity with which racism continues to shape American lives. Particularly when approaching the histories of Latinos and other non-

⁴⁹ Barbara J. Fields, "Of Rogues and Geldings," *The American Historical Review* 108, no. 5 (2003): 1397-98.

⁵⁰ Fields, "Slavery, Race and Ideology in the United States of America," 101.

⁵¹ Litwack, *North of Slavery. The Negro in the Free States, 1790-1860*, 26.

black, non-white peoples, scholars have expressed the idea that treating them as other than ‘races’ with ‘racial’ concerns, interests, and problems, would deny these groups’ experiences of racism. Ian Haney-López, while aware of the reifying dangers inherent using race as an analytical concept, argues that it is still vital to the proper analysis of the Latino experience. He argues that in America the treatment of those supposed to be racially different has been more degradingly and severely oppressive than the treatment of those understood to be merely culturally or ethnically different:

It is on the basis of race that groups in the United States have been subject to the deepest prejudices, to exclusion and denigration across the range of social interactions, to state-sanctioned segregation and humiliation. In comparison to ethnic antagonisms, the flames of racial hatred in the United States have been stoked higher and have seared deeper. They have been fuelled to such levels by beliefs stressing the innateness, not simply the cultural significance, of superior and inferior identities.⁵²

Substituting an ethnic vocabulary for a racial one, he concludes, risks obscuring the conditions that Latinos have faced and denying the extent to which they have been marked as non-white.⁵³ Though Haney-López stresses the socially constructed nature of race, he here seems to suggest that perception of innate difference *causes* oppression, that ‘the flames of racial hatred’ produce segregation and denigration. Further by suggesting that racially justified oppression necessarily ‘sears deeper’ than ‘ethnic antagonisms,’ he residually maintains the logic of those who unquestioningly believe in ‘races’ as natural entities that the unbridgeable differences between them instinctually produce conflict and inequity. Compare for example, Haney-López’s analysis with that offered in the introduction to the Chicago Committee on Race Relation’s study of the 1919 Chicago riots:

⁵² *Ibid.*, 108-09.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 106.

The relation of whites and Negroes in the United States is our most grave and perplexing domestic problem. It involves not only a difference of race - which as to many immigrant races have been happily overcome - but wider and more manifest differences in color and physical features. These make an easy and natural basis for distinctions, discriminations, and antipathies arising from the instinct of each race to preserve its type.⁵⁴

In the Commission's version of events, elemental differences produce instinctual 'antipathies.' In Haney-López's version of events, the belief in elemental differences produces 'exclusion and denigration.' In both versions difference, real or perceived, is the very *basis* of social relations. This assertion, and the concomitant notion that conflicts between innately different groups, or groups supposed to be so, are more severe than others, is reminiscent of Winthrop Jordan's argument that Africans' blackness was a prerequisite to their enslavement. Underlying all of these ideas is the assumption that humans are more cruel to those who are or whom they perceive to be radically different from themselves, as if, as Guillaumin points out, difference exists *in itself* outside of the social relations which give it meaning. So while Haney-López denies that racial difference is real in biological terms, he does not move beyond the fundamental supposition that it is an active agent 'asserting itself' in social relations; he merely restates this idea in social constructionist terms. Of course social actors themselves may have understood the divisions between themselves and European immigrants and Mexicans and blacks in different terms. The problem is that scholars sometimes accept such reasoning and its racial postulations at face value, rather than examining how and why different groups are understood in different ways.

As I will discuss in the Methodology section, my approach to the study of racism has been guided by what Stuart Hall calls the 'two cardinal premises of Marx's method':

⁵⁴ Chicago Commission on Race Relations, "The Negro in Chicago: A Study of Race Relations and a Race Riot," (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1922), xxiii.

[T]he materialist premise – that the analysis of political and ideological structures must be grounded in their material conditions of existence; and the historical premise – that the specific forms of these relations cannot be deduced, a priori, from this level but must be made historically specific “by supplying those further delineations which explain their *differentiae sp.*”⁵⁵

The second premise of this approach clearly lends itself to the comparative nature of this thesis. On a more fundamental level, I believe that examining racism within the intricacy of historically specific relations in which it arises is critical in avoiding some of the difficulties outlined here.

1.6 Conceptualising other ‘Others’

Given the salience of slavery and anti-black racism to the development of American concepts of democracy, labor, freedom and citizenship, a subject I will return to in Chapter Three, it is logical that American scholarship has also been shaped by them. As Ralph Ellison observed in his 1944 review of *An American Dilemma*, ‘Since its inception, American social science has been closely bound with American Negro destiny.’⁵⁶ It is no surprise then, that American scholars would attempt to understand encounters with new groups of people in terms of the so-called ‘Negro problem.’ Traditionally, the copious amount of research on African American history has often tended to obscure rather than illuminate the Mexican experience. Chicano scholars have argued that the American focus on the division between black and white, and its preoccupation with the ‘Negro problem’ has resulted in the distortion if not outright neglect of Mexican American history. Alex Saragoza, for example, writes that ‘Chicanos and other peoples of color continue to be subordinated to and/or subsumed in the historical trajectory of Blacks... The history of African

⁵⁵ Stuart Hall, "Race, Articulation, and Societies Structured in Dominance," in *Black British Cultural Studies: A Reader* (1996), 322.

⁵⁶ Ralph Ellison, "An American Dilemma: A Review.," in *The Death of White Sociology : Essays on Race and Culture*, ed. Joyce A. Ladner (Baltimore, Md.: Black Classic, 1998), 83.

Americans continues to be the essential reference point in the acknowledgment of race in United States history.’⁵⁷ Lamenting the ongoing absence of a classic work of ‘comparative ‘race relations’ for the western United States, Tomás Almaguer similarly writes: ‘It appears that most sociologists share the general public sentiment that race relations... are primarily a black/white phenomenon and that other racial/ethnic patterns are either of secondary importance...or merely reflect extensions of black/white patterns.’⁵⁸ As these comments illustrate, criticism of the historical and sociological neglect of Mexican Americans has focused particularly on what is seen as the limited conceptualization of race in American scholarship, but has not rejected the analytical concept of race in itself.

Other Latino scholars argue that American scholars need to be more inclusive, to recognize the unique histories and identities of other racial groups neither black nor white. Legal scholar Juan Perea fully articulates the complaint against what he terms the ‘Black/White binary paradigm of race.’ Defined as ‘the conception that race in America consists, either exclusively or primarily, of only two constituent racial groups,’ this paradigm, he argues, orders ‘racial discourse and legitimacy,’ marginalising non-black minorities by excluding them from discussions of race and social policy pertaining to race and by ignoring their experiences of racism and their struggles for civil rights.⁵⁹ Perea’s insistence on the need for particularised understandings of the experiences of non-white and non-black groups is important, but the focus on racial ‘legitimacy’ problematically equates scholarly and political recognition with racial recognition.

Perea’s critique also begins to illustrate another obstructive tendency within some of the literature. He writes: ‘mutual and particularized understandings of racism as it affects all people of color [have] the potential to enhance our abilities to understand each other and join together to fight the common evil of racism.’⁶⁰ Of course, politically speaking, encouraging different communities to join together to fight racism is a worthwhile task. What becomes slightly more complicated in

⁵⁷Alex M. Saragoza, "Recent Chicano Historiography: An Interpretive Essay," *Aztlan* 19, no. 1 (1990), 3-4.

⁵⁸ Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines : The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California*, 215-16, supra 4.

⁵⁹ Juan F. Perea, "The Black/White Binary Paradigm of Race: The "Normal Science" Of American Racial Thought," *California Law Review* 85(1997). 1219, 1215

⁶⁰ Juan F. Perea, "The Black/White Binary Paradigm of Race: The "Normal Science" Of American Racial Thought," *California Law Review* 85(1997): 1213.

analytical terms is the conceptualisation of racism ‘as it affects all people of color’ and racism as the ‘common evil.’ There is a distinct tension between arriving at ‘particularized’ understandings of different peoples’ experiences and still homogenizing them as products of the same American racism. Such readings often implicitly reassert a reformulated binary model of whites and non-whites.

An effect of this conceptualisation is that it assumes a moral, political and existential commonality between these groups that obscures the more complex reality. In her work on the historical multiethnic relations of the South and Southwest, Nancy Hewitt describes a system of domination, in which ‘economically and politically powerful whites...insist on biracial categories as the bedrock of U.S. society.’⁶¹ Later she writes, ‘By distributing rights and resources according to a rigid biracialism, “whites” in power have been able to sustain their privileges and to nurture internecine struggles among all those categorized as “others.”’⁶² The following passage from Jean Stefanie and Richard Delgado’s *Introduction to Critical Race Theory*, ironically a critique of ‘binary thinking’, demonstrates the failure of white supremacy theorizing to account for the complicated nature of social division in a multi-ethnic context:

Black-white or any other kind of binary thinking can also cause a minority group to go along with a recurring ploy in which Caucasians select a particular group – usually a small non-threatening one – to serve as tokens and overseers of the others. Minorities who fall into this trap hope to gain status, while the whites can tell themselves that they are not racist because they have employed a certain number of suitably grateful minorities as

⁶¹ Stephanie Cole, Alison M. Parker, and Laura F. Edwards, *Beyond Black & White : Race, Ethnicity, and Gender in the U.S. South and Southwest*, 1st ed. ed. (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2004), xiii.

⁶² *Ibid.*, xxviii. Reading Hewitt’s account one might be forgiven for thinking that black and white have been the only racial categories recognized in American history. Though in some states in some historical periods there have been only two racial categories, this has not generally been true where there have been sizeable populations of other non-European ethnic groups. The US Census, for example, added categories for Chinese and Indians (Native Americans) in 1860, for Japanese in 1870 and ‘Hindus’, Koreans, and Filipinos in 1910. Fifteen states had laws outlawing marriage between whites and Asians (often listed as ‘Orientals’, ‘Mongolians’ or ‘Malays’), a clear indication that more ‘inclusive’ systems of racial classification have not been any more beneficial than the dichotomous variety. Campbell Gibson and Kay Jung, "Historical Census Statistics on Population Totals by Race, 1790 to 1990, and by Hispanic Origin, 1970 to 1990, for the United States, Regions, Divisions and States," ed. US Census Bureau Population Department, Working Paper Series No. 56 (Washington DC, 2002). Pauli Murray, *States' Laws on Race and Color* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1997).

supervisors and directors of human relations...Will minority groups learn to put aside narrow nationalism and binary thinking and work jointly to confront the forces that suppress them all?⁶³

The suggestion that there is an intrinsic basis for solidarity among non-whites, as long as they are astute enough to recognise it, fails to address the fact that some groups may genuinely materially benefit from the disadvantage of other groups and may pursue strategies that validate or even enhance that disadvantage out of simple pragmatism rather than because they were duped into by 'Caucasian' ploys. This is problematic on a number of counts: it assumes that resisting all forms of racism is necessarily in the immediate interest of all minorities which is simply not always the case. Thus while purporting to recognise multiple experiences, many theorists nevertheless assume that all those grouped under the people of colour rubric are suppressed by the same forces. At the crux of Stefancic and Delgado's claim is the suggestion that whites are always disingenuously and deviously distinguishing between different non-whites in order to subordinate all of them. In other words if whites treat one group differently than another it is with conspiratorial ulterior motives, not because they genuinely perceive the two in different ways or have distinct material interests in different relationships. The assumption is that whites must necessarily be racist towards all non-whites at all times, with white racism determining all relations between whites and non-whites as well as the disputes between non-whites themselves.

1.7 Whiteness, motor of racism

Accordingly, while many scholars rightly insist that the experiences of different racialised groups have been distinct, by placing them within a white/not-white or people of colour framework there is a presumption that relations between white people and each group 'of colour' follow the same pattern. Stefancic and Delgado, for example, posit that 'whiteness, acknowledged or not has been a norm

⁶³ Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction* (New York ; London: New York University Press, 2001), 73.

against which other races are judged.’⁶⁴ In *White by Law*, Haney-López takes this somewhat further, writing: ‘Whites...stand at the powerful vortex of race in the United States; Whiteness is the source and maintaining force of the systems of meaning that position some as superior and others as subordinate.’⁶⁵ He describes the process in which those systems of meaning are created as follows: ‘For each negative characteristic ascribed to people of color, an equal but opposite characteristic is attributed to Whites...Whites fashion an identity for themselves that is the positive mirror image of the negative identity imposed on people of color.’⁶⁶ The for-every-action-there-is-an-equal-and-opposite-reaction theory of whiteness and non-whiteness fails to capture the sometimes subtly and sometimes quite strikingly distinct ways in which the otherness of African Americans and Mexican Americans were constituted in relation to white Americans. In legal, vernacular and symbolic terms, we will see in the chapters to come that blackness and whiteness were constructed as both separate and mutually exclusive. Indeed in the law of several states as I will discuss in Chapter Four, whites were defined as anyone who was not included within the definition of Negro. By the same token, in those states and elsewhere, one could, legally speaking at least, be white and also Mexican. In this and other important ways, I will show in the follow chapters, the relationship between Mexicanness and whiteness was far more vacillating. The fact that whiteness does not remain constant but is constituted in different ways in different relations illustrates the problem with conceptualising it as the ‘vortex’ and ‘maintaining force’ of race. Furthermore, supposing that there is any ‘maintaining force’ of race that cuts across different instances of racism makes it difficult to truly treat each instance as specific.

1.8 The generalisation of blackness as racialness

The assumption that all white and not-white relations are structured in essentially the same manner leads to problematic collapses between black and not-white. For example, Haney-López relates an anecdote from Andrew Hacker’s *Two Nations: Black and White, Separate, Hostile and Unequal* in which white college

⁶⁴ *Critical White Studies: Looking Behind the Mirror* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997), 1.

⁶⁵ Ian Haney-López, *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 31.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 29.

students were asked how much money they would have to be paid to live the remainder of their lives as black people. The majority of them answered they would ask for \$1 million per year, or around \$50 million in total. Haney-López writes: '[I]t is a metaphor that testifies to the immense value Whites attach to White identity.'⁶⁷ This is a telling example of how even scholars of Latino studies – a field in which the critique of the black-white binary has so long been established – can so easily conflate and interchange the concepts of 'not-black' and 'white.' What the above anecdote relates is how the students' would measure the cost of being black, not the worth of 'white identity' as such; they were not asked how much they would have to be paid to give up 'whiteness' but to be black specifically. If the students were asked how much they would have to be paid to live as Asian Americans, for example, their answers might be quite different. (And their answers would certainly be different if they were basing them upon factors such as each group's relative earning power and access to higher education.⁶⁸)

In another instance illustrating how the conditions of African Americans are carelessly used to make arguments about general 'racial' conditions, Haney-López points to the fact that in 1980, 75% of white marriages involved some degree of '[European] ethnic boundary crossing,' but only 0.1% of non-Hispanic white people married black partners in order to demonstrate that the 'dividing lines in our society continue to be drawn between races, not ethnic groups.'⁶⁹ He does not comment on the fact, however, that among the groups he refers to as non-white races, *only* African Americans had such low intermarriage rates with white people. In California, Mexican Americans, in fact, have married white partners in considerable numbers in both the 19th and 20th centuries, a point of contrast I will discuss more thoroughly in Chapter Four.⁷⁰ Conflicting with the intention of establishing the specificity of the

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 140.

⁶⁸ Recent research carried out by the Pew Research Center found that 'Asian Americans are the highest-income, best- educated and fastest-growing racial group in the United States.' The results of the Pew survey also found that Asians Americans were 'more satisfied than the general public with their lives, finances and the direction of the country.' Pew Social and Demographic Trends, "The Rise of Asian Americans," (Washington D.C.: Pew Research Center, 2012), 1. There are, of course, differences in these measures between the various ethnic groups that fall under the umbrella term 'Asian American,' but time does not permit a detailed examination of this.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 119.

⁷⁰ Asian Americans were frequently included in anti-miscegenation statutes and thus legally prohibited from marrying white people until the mid-20th century when such laws began to be repealed. By the second half of the 20th century, their rates of intermarriage with white Americans changed considerably. For example, in 1990, 42.7% of Japanese American men and 51% of Japanese American women married white people. As Haney-López's statistic demonstrates, black-white marriages

history of each group is the seeming assumption that particular aspects of the black and white relations are 'racial' and therefore generalisable to other racial relations.

These conflation are readily observed in the now axiomatic notion that the Irish 'became white' in America. Because this idea and the field of whiteness studies more generally have so dramatically impacted the theorising of race and racism, it is important to take a moment here to consider these arguments. Furthermore those writing about Mexican Americans have readily applied the logic established in these arguments to the multiethnic relations of the Southwest. Examining the arguments of David Roedgier, Noel Ignatiev and others, historian Eric Arnesen points out that these scholars treat 'racially inferior' and 'not white' as interchangeable, fundamentally mischaracterising the racial rhetoric of the day. The racial discourses utilised against the Irish, and later utilised against immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe, did not hinge upon a white and non-white binary but upon the racial divisions between European groups, casting undesirables as distinct and inferior *white races*.⁷¹ Some scholars have also mischaracterized the actual conditions the Irish confronted in their early years in America. Noel Ignatiev claims, for example, that when the Irish first began arriving in large numbers in the 19th century 'it was not so obvious...that they would in fact be admitted to all the rights of whites and granted all the privileges of citizenship.'⁷² This idea seems to have taken hold among other scholars. In their introduction to *Critical White Studies*, Jean Stefancic and Richard Delgado, for example, write that that 'The Irish...were at first not considered white but given a status similar to that of Negroes.'⁷³ An audience member at an American Studies conference I attended took this even further stating that 'when Italians and Irish first came they were classified as black.' As Arnesen points out, such assertions have no historical basis: upon naturalisation, Irish immigrants were granted all the rights that citizenship entailed, including, critically, the franchise.⁷⁴ These assumptions reflect the manner in which oppression and the perception of racial difference can be read as both a negation of whiteness and/or an attribution of blackness. They also illustrate the importance of closely reading racial discourses and of distinguishing between

remained exceptionally low well after the end of anti-miscegenation law. Zhenchao Qian, Sampson Lee Blair, and Stacey D. Ruf, "Asian American Interracial and Interethnic Marriages: Differences by Education and Nativity," *International Migration Review* 35, no. 2 (2001): 568.

⁷¹ Arnesen, "Whiteness and the Historians' Imagination," 16-17.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 14.

⁷³ Delgado and Stefancic, *Critical White Studies: Looking Behind the Mirror*, xvii.

⁷⁴ Arnesen, "Whiteness and the Historians' Imagination," 14.

discursive invocations of race and institutional enforcements of racial status. If some factions of Americans disparaged the Irish by comparing them to blacks, and this has also been true of other groups, for example the Chinese, it is an entirely different matter to suppose that the Irish were actually subject to the same social and legal practices as black people, or even that their detractors actually believed they were not white, much less black.⁷⁵ As already noted, a careful examination of how ideological constructions relate to social practices and historical, material conditions is essential.

1.9 Inflations and conflations of whiteness

Concomitant with the assumption that segregation, in the rigid form which has been imposed on African Americans, is the product of racial difference or white supremacy, is the notion that when such conditions are not imposed on a marginalised ethnic group, such an absence signals the group's acceptance as 'white.' Just as the conditions of blackness can be assumed to be general to all non-whites, causing as I suggested a moment ago, false equivalence to be drawn between black and not-white, here there is a conflation between not-black and white. In a notable example, Andrew Hacker has suggested that Latinos and Asians are essentially 'whites-in-waiting.'⁷⁶ As I will discuss in Chapter Five, some scholars have applied logic similar to Hacker's to interpret the greater spatial mobility of Mexicans and Asians than African Americans in Los Angeles and other American cities, asserting that the ability of the former groups to buy homes in suburban neighbourhoods demonstrates necessarily that white people accepted them as fellow whites. There are a number of problems, though, with the 'whites-in-waiting' formulation. As Juan Perea points out, is its suggestion that only black people have been subject to 'real' racism.⁷⁷ Linda Alcoff has also rejects this idea, asserting that it fails 'to recognize the complexity by which people can be

⁷⁵ For an account of the manner in which the imagery of anti-black racism was applied to the Chinese in California, see: Dan Caldwell, "The Negroization of the Chinese Stereotype in California," *Southern California Quarterly* 53, no. 2 (1971).

⁷⁶ Perea, "The Black/White Binary Paradigm of Race: The "Normal Science" Of American Racial Thought," 1223. Andrew Hacker, *Two Nations: Black and White, Separate, Hostile, Unequal* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1995)

⁷⁷ Perea, "The Black/White Binary Paradigm of Race: The "Normal Science" Of American Racial Thought," 1223.

vilified.’⁷⁸ Importantly, however, while these authors reject the notion that Latinos and other non-black minorities are on their way to ‘becoming white’ and also the conflation of blackness with oppression, they seem to implicitly accept the other half of the formulation – that meaningful assimilation or social advancement depends upon ‘achieving’ whiteness. Alcoff’s argument, for example, seeks to differentiate Latinos and Asian Americans from groups ‘who have had “success” in becoming white, namely Jews and Irish, by delineating what she refers to as the different axes of racism that operate against people of colour who are not black. While she readily illustrates that Latinos, Asians and other non-black groups have been racially characterised in specific ways, she reinforces the notion that integrated whiteness and marginalised of-colourness are the only ontological possibilities.

Latino/as and Asian Americans share with other people of color...having to continually face vicious and demeaning stereotyping along with language, education, health care, housing and employment discrimination, and being the target of random identity based violence and murder (random only in the sense that any Mexican farm laborer or Asian American or Arab American or African American or Jewish person would do).⁷⁹

The emphasis on Latinos and Asians as seemingly permanently excluded by racism does not take into account the ways in which many members of these groups have assimilated from the margins into the mainstream and how their conditions have meaningfully changed over time. Such generalisations across time and group experience are problematic, as Alcoff herself recognises elsewhere. The following passage might well describe the situation of Asian Americans in the 19th and early 20th centuries but how well does it apply today?

A brief examination of the experiences of Chinese Americans across time is illustrative. Charlotte Brooks writes that beginning in the 1870s, approximately 30

⁷⁸ Linda Martín Alcoff, "Latinos/as, Asian Americans, and the Black-White Binary," *The Journal of Ethics* 7, no. 1 (2003): 21.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

years before the segregation of African Americans became common in the cities of the North, Chinese Americans were subject to deliberate systematic actions to restrict their spatial mobility and maintain their residential isolation. In 1930 their isolation index in San Francisco, the historic capital of virulent anti-Chinese racism, was 70%.⁸⁰ In 1980, the isolation index of Asian Americans was 23% in San Francisco, and only 4% nationally, reflecting, perhaps, both the unique history of that city and the large Asian population there.⁸¹ While Chinese were legally prohibited from marrying white people in California and many other places in the United States in the early 20th century, by the end of it, 33% of Chinese American men and 44.9% of Chinese American women married white people.⁸² As Chinese are still commonly thought of as racially distinct to white people, and remain legally classified as such, we cannot attribute these changes to some epiphany among Americans that Chinese are actually white. It also cannot be because Chinese are seen as less foreign than before as three-quarters of Chinese American adults are foreign-born.⁸³ We must root these shifts in changing material and geopolitical conditions. Not least of these changes is the economic positioning of Chinese immigrants. Nineteenth century Chinese immigrants came largely as low-wage labourers. In contrast, in 2010, 45.4% of Chinese immigrants had a bachelor's degree or higher. One-quarter of authorised Chinese immigrants in that year received green cards through employers.⁸⁴ This also sets Chinese immigrants notably apart from Mexican immigrants, who still largely come to work as unskilled labourers. In 2012, 60% of Chinese Americans owned a house and had median annual incomes higher than the general population and the white population in particular.⁸⁵ While, as Alcoff and others show, Asian Americans may continue to experience racism, the nature of that racism and its impacts have necessarily changed. The Chinese experience vividly undermines the idea that 'whiteness' is requisite for social integration and economic advancement and

⁸⁰ Charlotte Brooks, *Alien Neighbors, Foreign Friends : Asian Americans, Housing, and the Transformation of Urban California* (Chicago: University Presses Marketing, 2009), 13, 250.

⁸¹ Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton, "Trends in Residential Segregation of Blacks, Hispanics, and Asians: 1970-1980.," *American Sociological Association* 52, no. 6 (December 1987): 814.

⁸² Zhenchao Qian, Sampson Lee Blair, and Stacey D. Ruf, "Asian American Interracial and Interethnic Marriages: Differences by Education and Nativity," *International Migration Review* 35, no. 2 (2001): 568.

⁸³ Pew, "The Rise of Asian Americans," 38.

⁸⁴ Kristen McCabe, "Chinese Immigrants in the United States," *Migration Information Source* (2012), <http://www.migrationinformation.org/USFocus/display.cfm?id=876#20>.

⁸⁵ Pew, "The Rise of Asian Americans," 39.

demonstrates the problems of occlusion involved in using the metaphor of ‘whiteness’ to describe such processes.

A number of scholars who would almost certainly reject Hacker’s particular binarism employ a version of the formula. In an observation of critical importance for the arguments laid out in this thesis, Arnesen notes that a number of scholars equate ‘social ranking with racial ranking and powerless with racialization...superimposing concepts of whiteness onto countless developments.’⁸⁶ These equations rely on an over inflated and considerably slippery concept of whiteness. Arnesen writes: ‘Whiteness is, variously, a metaphor for power, a proxy for racially distributed material benefits, a synonym for “white supremacy,” an epistemological stance defined by power, a position of invisibility and ignorance, a set of beliefs about racial “Others” and oneself.’⁸⁷ Fields makes a similar criticism of whiteness scholars who interpret social conflicts as contests over ‘whiteness’: ‘Exclusion from whiteness, they seem to assume, must account for any breach of solidarity. If a white man snubs another or calls him a hard name, let alone exploits or disfranchises him, the point at issue is bound to be the victim’s racial bona fides.’⁸⁸ Though Fields and Arnesen refer to works written about European ethnic groups, the sorts of arguments they critique have been readily taken up in some literature examining Mexican American history and the Southwestern social landscape more generally. As we will see at various points in the following chapters, in such analyses social actors are understood to be motivated by the desire to defend, protect, claim, negotiate or assert their whiteness, notably, as I will discuss in the Methodology section, without any direct textual evidence for such ideas. The problem here is that the complexity of a whole range of social markers, including class, and interactions are interpreted to hinge upon whiteness.

The critique here is not to suggest that racial discourses have not infiltrated and informed other sorts of discourses emerging to explain why some people were wealthy or powerful and others were not. Eugenics, of course, is an excellent example of this, attributing every conceivable social problem to biological

⁸⁶ Arnesen, "Whiteness and the Historians' Imagination," 24.

⁸⁷ Eric Arnesen, "Whiteness and the Historians' Imagination," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 60(2001): 9.

⁸⁸ Barbara J. Fields, "Whiteness, Racism and Identity," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 60(2001): 53.

shortcomings. Their quest for 'racial hygiene' did not only focus on non-white people but the 'defective' and 'socially inadequate,' including the disabled, the supposedly unintelligent, and the poor.⁸⁹ But importantly in attributing such intrinsic racial defects to these people, eugenicists did not claim that they were not white. The problem with the assumptions described here is the series of conflation they make between inequality, race and not-whiteness (and sometimes 'blackness'). The perceived inferiority or actual social inequality of different social groups has not always been understood in terms that are exclusively, or even partially, racial. Often when such conditions have been understood in racial terms, such as the various racial 'defectives' of eugenicists or the degraded 'Celtic race' of anti-Irish campaigners, these terms were not necessarily formulated within a white or not-white binary. Furthermore, explanatory appeals to whiteness by those exercising power over others have only been prominent in certain times and places. To make this a general process is to obscure the variation and texture of racial discourse.

1.10 'Inserting mark and name'

There is a further conceptual contradiction that plagues interpretations that treat white identity as the perceived objective of various social relations and power struggles. This can be observed in the work of Linda Gordon. She writes:

For most twentieth-century American whites, whiteness as a racial identity was invisible because they considered themselves simply, the norm, like some aboriginal groups who called themselves "the people." Because "whites" had greater power, they labeled, described, and understood "nonwhites" as departures from the standard or, worse, specifically marked as inferior.⁹⁰

Several paragraphs down, a subtle but distinct shift can be observed:

⁸⁹ See for example, Harry H. Laughlin, "The Socially Inadequate: How Shall We Designate and Sort Them?," *American Journal of Sociology* 27, no. 1 (1921).

⁹⁰ Gordon, *The Great Arizona Orphan Abduction*, 103 - 04.

Part of what made the West a land of opportunity was the chance to become white. But throughout most of the Southwest, especially Texas and California, the chance was denied to Mexicans; whites made them nonwhite. The circularity of this racial definition was, of course, the essence of the process: those secure as whites got to say who else could be white.⁹¹

The first passage suggests that white racial identity was invisible and the power of whites was realised in marking others as distinct or inferior. In the next passage this process is described as whites '[getting] to say who else could be white.' As the process shifts from marking difference to marking whiteness, the concept of whiteness shifts from that which is 'invisible' and unconscious to that which is salient and central.

It might seem that marking racial otherness and marking the norm of racial 'whiteness' are equivalent processes. Treating them in this manner, however, overlooks the fundamental asymmetry, as Fields describes it, of American racism. White and black, though frequently thought of as mirror opposites, are not ideologically constructed through the same processes. Where blackness has been marked, scrutinized, legislated, defined and confined, the key characteristics of whiteness have been, as Fields notes, its 'unmarked, unnamed status,' 'seeming normativity,' 'structured invisibility,' and 'false universality.' While blackness is constantly made visible, the contours of whiteness are often only tangible against the boundaries of that which it excludes. Guillaumin also describes this imbalance, arguing that racisms arising in egalitarian societies are uniquely 'altero-referential': 'A fundamental trait of such a system is the occultation of the Self, of which people have no spontaneous awareness; there is no sense of belonging to a specific group, so the group itself always remains outside the frame of reference, is never referred to as a group.' An 'obsession with the Other,' she notes, 'remains [the] dominant

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 104.

characteristic' of such racisms.⁹² The problem then, as Fields points out, is that 'rather than explor[ing] what the absence of a mark or name means,' whiteness scholarship 'insists upon inserting mark and name.'⁹³ While scholars using the whiteness analytic helpfully challenge the usually unspoken treatment of whiteness as normative, their interpretations often transmute its constituent qualities. Even when historical actors were as actively preoccupied with something called 'whiteness' as the scholars studying them, our investigations still necessarily need to focus upon the conditions and relations which made such a construction possible and relevant to these people, rather than the construction itself.

1.11 'Peculiar to the white race'

Skepticism about the analytical use of the whiteness concept or more generally of analytical frameworks that interpret social, political and economic problems using racial terms does not signal an unawareness of the fact that the European conquest of the Americas, the transatlantic slave trade, the colonization of Asia and Africa and the neo-imperialism which causes ongoing misery in much of the global South have materially benefited Europeans at the expense of those in their paths. (And of course the economic and social history of the United States, comprised of the settlement of Europeans extracting labour from African slaves and later exploiting that of Chinese, Mexicans, Filipinos and others to develop lands taken from indigenous Americans, can hardly be separated from these global trajectories.) Clearly colonialism and capitalism have given both nourishment to the development of the race concept and a purpose to it, ensuring its entrenchment in politics, philosophy and culture. As Omi and Winant have observed: '[J]ust as the noise of the "big bang" still resonates through the universe, so the overdetermined construction of the world "civilization" as a product of the rise of Europe and the subjugation of the rest of us, still defines the race concept.'⁹⁴ In response to this history, in his work *The Racial Contract*, Charles W. Mills, argues the necessity of a 'global theoretical framework for situating discussions of race and white racism', stating that 'White supremacy is the unnamed

⁹² Colette Guillaumin, "The Specific Characteristics of Racist Ideology (1972)," in *Racism, Sexism, Power and Ideology* (London: Routledge, 1995), 51-52.

⁹³ Fields, "Whiteness, Racism and Identity," 51.

⁹⁴ Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States : From the 1960s to the 1990s*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 1994), 62.

political system that has made the modern world what it is today.⁹⁵ Here we would do well to remember C.L.R. James's caution that 'to think of imperialism in terms of race is disastrous. But to neglect the racial factor as merely incidental is an error only less grave than to make it fundamental.'⁹⁶ While recognising the role of racism in imperialist projects, we must also be careful not to lapse into viewing modern history as a white conspiracy for global domination. Antonia Darder and Rodolfo Torres's critique of white supremacy as a theoretical concept applied to American society is equally relevant to the concept's global application:

Theories of racism based on racialized ideas of "white supremacy" ... anchor racialized inequality to the nature of white people and the psychological influence of "white ideology" on both "whites" and "blacks" rather than to the complex nature of historically constituted social relations of power and their material consequences.⁹⁷

The limitations of using racial/colour terminology to attempt to explain relations of power (which have often been distorted and obscured by the same) quickly become apparent. Mills, for example, writes that the 'astonishing historical record of European atrocity against nonwhites, which quantitatively and qualitatively, in numbers and horrific detail, cumulatively dwarfs all other kinds of ethnically/racially motivated massacres put together.'⁹⁸ Certainly contemplating the millions and millions killed and physically or spiritually maimed in the appropriation and excavations of European empire building is astonishing. It is difficult to grasp the depth of misery that those numbers represent. Yet the very description of such events as 'racially motivated' suggests that belief in their superiority or the belief in others' inferiority *instigated* these events, a reading which threatens to simplify these complex struggles for power, land and resources into a primal conspiracy that can be explained by the racial proclivities of Europeans and their descendents. As Mills

⁹⁵ Charles W. Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1997), 1-2.

⁹⁶ C. L. R. James and James Walvin, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (London: Penguin, 2001), 283.

⁹⁷ Antonia Darder and Rodolfo D. Torres, *After Race: Racism after Multiculturalism* (New York: New York University Press, 2004), 112.

⁹⁸ Mills, *The Racial Contract*, 98.

himself points out, Hitler linked the Nazi programme to the previous European conquest of India and the Americas. The ‘economically privileged supremacy of the white race over the rest of the world,’ Hitler claimed, must be understood in relation to ‘a political concept of supremacy which has been peculiar to the white race as a natural phenomenon.’⁹⁹ Mills cites this claim to support his argument that there are important epistemological and technical linkages between different instances of white domination. However, the fact that fascists have explained their political programmes by pointing to the peculiar natural qualities of the white race should alert us to the need to question the meaning of these links carefully. Precisely because they are so readily apparent, it becomes important to ask what becomes obscured by their salience and what complexities are overlooked in the neat division they seem to draw.

1.11 Looking forward

The analytical approaches that I have outlined here – understanding race as the basis of the most deep social divisions; homogenising the experiences of all non-whites as the products of white racism; asserting whiteness as the ‘maintaining force’ of race and a structural constant in all relations with non-white others; and interpreting multiple interactions of inequality in terms of race and whiteness – all exemplify the problems inherent in addressing questions of social, political and economic power in a racial idiom. They are often dependent, if only implicitly, upon the same essential pillars of the racial ideology they seek to examine –prejudice and difference. At the root of these approaches is the conceptualisation of race as determinant of social fact. In the Methodology chapter which follows, I will more clearly outline the alternative approach with which I have framed this project.

The thesis will then proceed as follows. After an initial consideration of the manner in which slavery shaped understandings of Mexican immigration as a social and economic phenomenon and how the vocabulary of anti-black racism provided a ready language for describing the perceived Mexican Problem, I will examine how the domination of slavery and that of conquest and labour exploitation engendered quite distinct ideologies. I will then trace these contrasting circumstances, and their

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 105-06.

ideological footprints, in three empirical areas: how black and Mexican people in America have been inversely defined within the regime of racial classification and anti-miscegenation law; how black and Mexican difference was spatially imposed in practice and how the particular circumstances of each group's presence in the city of Los Angeles came to be reflected in distinct ideological constructions; and finally, how patterns of mob violence and urban rioting, and the segregatory practices of the World War II military reflected and reinforced substantially different social boundaries around each group. In the conclusion, I will return to consider some of the key theoretical issues raised here, and their political consequences, in context of the arguments that have been put forth in the thesis.

2. Methodology

In this chapter, I will discuss the empirical and theoretical methodology upon which this thesis is built and how my approach to the research material and my conceptual approach with regard to the nature of race and racism have mutually informed and been informed one by the other. I will also describe some of the main elements of the archive on which the analysis is based and how each of these has been considered. There are three fundamental principles that theoretically structure this thesis. Firstly, that race is an ideology, a social vocabulary through which people make sense of the world in which they live. Secondly, as such it should not be treated as a trans-historical, inevitable or elemental feature of social life but must arise from particular material conditions, in a manner necessarily specific in time and place. Finally, neither race nor racism can explain social phenomena but must themselves be explained. This thesis is essentially an exploration of these principles applied within a particular historical field. Accordingly, rather than searching empirical materials for ‘proof’ of racism, essentially interpreting the evidence through already established convictions about the workings of race, racism and ‘whiteness’, I have examined these materials as ethnographic texts, asking what kinds of discourses and practices are being produced within them. Neither the theoretical or empirical approach adopted here are particularly novel. However, as I will argue here and throughout this work, they have been frequently disregarded, particularly within the field of Mexican American studies.

2.1 Race as ideology and racism without alibi

The existence of race as a natural or biological entity is now roundly rejected in sociological and historical scholarship. One cannot open a book on the subjects covered here without finding the perfunctory disclaimer that, though the author uses the term, this is not meant to indicate biological race but rather race (or ‘race’) the social construction. The widespread acknowledgement of the social origin of race, however, by no means indicates a shared agreement as to its meaning or function. In many cases, however, authors seem to imagine that, as Barbara Fields complains, this recognition of the social origin of race is in itself somehow a conclusion to such

questions, rather than merely a starting point.¹⁰⁰ Bob Carter makes an essential point when he writes that we must ‘point beyond the commonplace truth that “races are socially constructed”, a task fundamental to a social science concerned with the explanation of race ideas, racism and exclusionary practice.’¹⁰¹ Many authors seem to assume that the requisite rejection of race as a biological reality in the beginning of their work gives them a free pass, without any further thought, to evoke race as an active subject or endlessly flexible adjective and adverb, attached to all manner of object and activity, throughout the remainder of their work. A frequent result of such usage, as I will discuss further later, is that it treats race in much the same way as if it were an essential, natural reality.

The theoretical starting point of this approach, the treatment of race as an ideological construct, has been highly unpopular among many American scholars of race and racism. I will take a moment to discuss here how I understand the term ideology, as its use has been frequently misunderstood. Fields’s description of ideology, in particular, has been imminently useful. She writes:

Ideology is best understood as the descriptive vocabulary of day-to-day existence, through which people make rough sense of the social reality that they live and create from day to day...It is the interpretation in thought of the social relations through which they constantly create and re-create their collective being, in all the varied forms their collective being may assume: family, clan, tribe, nation, class, party, business enterprise, church, army, club, and so on. As such, ideologies are not delusions but real, as real as the social relations for which they

¹⁰⁰ In her usual understated style, Fields commented in a lecture: ‘I am so tired of being cited as having argued in a much cited article in the *New Left Review* that race is socially constructed. If another person tells me I said that I will go ballistic. The implication that such a truism, which is readily available to a German Shepherd dog or even to a Golden Retriever, would be a conclusion to a scholarly article I suppose for a starting point seems to me very insulting.’ Barbara J. Fields, "Presentation Given by Historian Barbara J. Fields at A "School" For the Producers of Race (Edited Transcript)," *Race - The Power of an Illusion*(2001), http://www.pbs.org/race/000_About/002_04-background-02-02.htm.

¹⁰¹ Bob Carter, "'Dangerous Phrases': Realism, 'Race', and Social Science," *Journal of Critical Realism* (2007): 8.

stand.¹⁰²

There are a number of points worth clarifying at this point, as the some of the key objections to the conceptualisation of race as ideology have been based upon a mischaracterisation of the argument. Michael Omi and Howard Winant, whose racial formation theory I will consider momentarily, have described arguments such as Fields's as an assertion that race is 'merely an illusion, an ideological construct utilized to manipulate, divide, and deceive,' the Scylla to the Charybdis of racial essentialism, between which their theory, of course, steers us to safety.¹⁰³ However, the argument that conceptualising race as an ideology is equivalent to claiming that it exists only an illusion or 'false consciousness' is simply misleading, a caricature of Marxian analysis rather than an engagement with it.¹⁰⁴ As the passage cited above shows, Fields clearly affirms the reality of race as a social fact and the rooting of ideology within people's own experience of their everyday life. The suggestion then that ideology is a kind of a trick 'utilized to manipulate' thus misses the central principle of Fields's description of ideology. It cannot be, she insists, 'hand[ed] down like an old garment, pass[ed] on like a germ, spread like a rumor, or impos[ed] like a code of dress or etiquette' precisely because an 'ideology must be constantly created and verified in social life; if it is not, it dies.'¹⁰⁵

Since the 1986 publication of their work *Racial Formation in the United States*, Omi and Winant have had, as noted, a significant influence over American theorising of race and racism and thus merit particular consideration here. While their work helpfully emphasises the historically contingent nature of racial categories, it also has some critical shortcomings. Positioning themselves between a dichotomy of race interpreted as illusion or essence, they present race as 'a *fundamental* axis of social organization' which analytically cannot be treated 'epiphenomenally or [subsumed] within a supposedly more fundamental category.'¹⁰⁶ They argue that 'the longevity of the race concept, and the enormous number of effects race-thinking (and race-acting)

¹⁰² Barbara J. Fields, "Slavery, Race and Ideology in the United States of America," *New Left Review* 181, no. May-June (1990): 109-10.

¹⁰³ Michael Omi and Howard Winant, "On the Theoretical Status of the Concept of Race," in *Race, Identity, and Representation in Education*, ed. Cameron McCarthy and Warren Crichlow (New York: Routledge, 1993), 3.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁰⁵ Fields, "Slavery, Race and Ideology in the United States of America," 110, 12.

¹⁰⁶ Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 1994), 13.

have produced, guarantee that race will remain a feature of social reality' and, relatedly, that in everyday life, race is a 'nearly indissoluble part of our identities.'¹⁰⁷ Omi and Winant's conception of race makes it an active and inescapable determinate of social relationships, behaviour and history; race is 'a *guaranteed*' feature of social life. In their account, race becomes not only a social reality but, once set in motion, a self-propelling force, not only present, but omnipresent:

[R]ace is present in every institution, every relationship, every individual. This is the case not only for the way society is organized-spatially, culturally, in terms of stratification, etc.-but also for our perceptions and understandings of personal experience...[W]e are compelled to think racially, to use the racial categories and meaning systems into which we have been socialized. Despite exhortations both sincere and hypocritical, it is not possible or even desirable to be 'color-blind.'¹⁰⁸

Thus while readings of race as an ideology place its creation and recreation firmly within the field of social relations, within the discourse and action of real people, in racial formation theory, race is indissoluble, guaranteed, and compulsory.

While Omi and Winant are undoubtedly correct that widespread belief in race is real and the effects of this belief are undoubtedly also real, the problem comes in their jump from this indisputable point to the insistence that in order to take the ongoing social reality of race seriously, one must treat it as axiomatic. In rejecting the idea that race is ideology, they cite 'W.I. Thomas's famous dictum that if people "define situations as real they are real in their consequences."¹⁰⁹ However acknowledging the reality of such consequences in no way demands uncritical acceptance of the manner in which social actors define them. Here Loic Wacquant's criticism that much current scholarship on race is marred by a 'continual *barter*

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*,5.

¹⁰⁸ *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s*, 159.

¹⁰⁹ "On the Theoretical Status of the Concept of Race," 5.

between folk and analytic notions... [an] uncontrolled conflation of social and sociological understandings of race’ is well-worth considering. He writes:

With precious few exceptions, students of “race” have *accepted lay preconstructions* of the phenomena. They have been content to tackle “race” in the manner in which it has been constituted as a “social problem” in reality itself. Worse yet: they have taken over as tools of analysis the reified products of the ethnoracial struggles of the past.¹¹⁰

The presence of race demands a thorough interrogation. In this regard, Collette Guillaumin writes:

The fact that such relationships are thought of as racial by those concerned (and sometimes this is as true of the oppressed as of the oppressors) is a social fact, and it ought to be examined as carefully and skeptically as any other explanation offered by a society of its own mechanisms. Such explanations can only refer to a particular time and place.¹¹¹

The impetus within the Marxist approach is not to dismiss race as merely false consciousness with no basis in reality or to ignore the devastating impact of racism in our societies, but to examine the conditions, problems and relationships which make particular manifestations of race possible. There are no ‘eternal categories’ of race or sex which exist outside of the relations which ‘create and crystallize’ them.¹¹² “‘Race,’ as Wacquant concludes, ‘cannot be both object and tool of analysis, *explanandum* and

¹¹⁰ Loic J.D. Wacquant, "For an Analytic of Racial Domination," *Political Power and Social Theory* 11(1997): 222.

¹¹¹ Colette Guillaumin, "The Idea of Race and Its Elevation to Autonomous Scientific and Legal Status (1980)," in *Racism, Sexism, Power, and Ideology* (London: Routledge, 1995), 61.

¹¹² 87

explanas.¹¹³ Race, in other words, cannot explain its own presence or anything else, but is that which must itself be explained.

This material premise, that analysis of political and ideological structures must be grounded in their ‘material conditions of existence,’ is often read as necessarily being reductive or as rigidly ‘privileging’ class. This reading is informed by the understanding of ideology as ‘false consciousness’, that which, as Foucault asserts, ‘like it or not...always stands in virtual opposition to something else which is supposed to count as truth.’¹¹⁴ Often criticism of Marxist analysis seems to assume that as race is ‘false’ and class is ‘real’ the latter is believed to simply produce the former. Natalia Molina exhibits such standard criticism, which in its brevity also demonstrates the extent to which such thinking is largely taken as an article of faith in much current American scholarship dealing with racism and ethnic relations. Noting that the position of Mexicans in Los Angeles declined during the Depression she then warns, ‘[b]ut we must be careful not to assume that the quality of race relations rises and falls with the state of the economy.’¹¹⁵ Here it is useful to consider Hall’s discussion of the relationship between ideology and social relations:

The analysis is no longer organized around the distinction between the “real” and the “false”...The relations in which people exist are the “real relations” which the categories and concepts they use help them to grasp and articulate in thought. But - and here we may be on a route contrary to emphasis from that which ‘materialism’ is usually associated - the economic relations themselves cannot prescribe a single, fixed and unalterable way of conceptualizing it.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ Wacquant, "For an Analytic of Racial Domination," 224.

¹¹⁴ Michel Foucault and Paul Rabinow, *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 60.

¹¹⁵ Natalia Molina, *Fit to Be Citizens? : Public Health and Race in Los Angeles, 1879-1939* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 232.

¹¹⁶ Stuart Hall, "The Problem of Ideology: Marxism without Guarantees," *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 10, no. 2 (1986): 38.

The ‘falseness’ or ‘distortion’ of ideology, Stuart Hall writes, is more helpfully thought of in terms of its ‘partialness’, its ‘one-sidedness.’¹¹⁷ As such, ideological explanations of a social relation can never provide a picture of them that is ‘concrete and whole’ or offer a ‘complete grasp of all the different relations of which [it] is composed, and of the many determinations which form its conditions of existence.’¹¹⁸

Despite the fact that Molina cites Fields’s essay in her warning against arguments which ‘privilege class’, Fields herself has little time for the ‘the meaningless task of deciding whether race is more or less “basic” to historical explanation than other—and similarly reified—categories,’ an exercise she likens to trying to determine in the abstract whether the numerator or denominator is more vital to understanding a fraction.¹¹⁹ The real task, she writes, is in defining and specifying each part, ‘recognizing their difference as well as their relationship and their joint indispensability to the result.’¹²⁰ Thus, distinguishing analytically between class and race does not imply ‘privileging’ the former. The relationship is complex, enmeshed and contingent not the simplistic, one-directional correspondence supposed in the straw-man formulation of a ‘race relations’ that simply ‘rises and falls with the economy.’ The insistence that race cannot be explained in the abstract, that is, outside of the social relations in which it is given meaning, that its emergence must be understood and interrogated within specific material conditions, in fact, militates against the more prevalent approach in social sciences which treats race, class, gender, sexuality and other ‘categories of identity’ or ‘differences’ as self-contained generic elements with consistent properties and values which, in their presence or absence, combine to produce particular conditions and subjectivities.

Integral to the refusal to treat race, or racism for that matter, as abstraction, is the emphasis on the historical specificity of social conditions in different contexts and thus the specificity of the racisms which emerge within them. Hall is again instructive. He insists upon the necessity of beginning any analysis of racism from a ‘rigorous application’ of historical specificity. ‘Racism is not dealt with as a general feature of human societies, but with historically-specific racisms. Beginning with an assumption of difference, of specificity rather than of a unitary, trans- historical or

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 38.

¹¹⁹ Fields, "Slavery, Race and Ideology in the United States of America," 100 n12.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

universal “structure.””¹²¹ Thus, though in ‘common sense’ different racisms may ‘appear to be variants of the same thing,’ we cannot ‘[extrapolate] a common and universal structure to racism, which remains essentially the same, outside of its specific historical location.’¹²² We treat different racisms as variants of the same substance ‘at our peril’, he writes, precisely because allowing racism to take on the universal, transhistorical character compels us dangerously toward accepting the ‘alibi’ of ‘appeals to human nature’ which would attribute ‘racism-in-general to some universal functioning of individual psychology – the ‘racial itch’, the ‘race instinct.’¹²³

The historical specificity of different instances of racism and different meanings of race is not controversial. Omi and Winant, rejecting analyses they term as racial objectivism, emphasize the historically contingent, shifting and contended nature of racial categories. Nonetheless, the ‘racial itch’ is latent in the implied universality of their treatment of race as a guaranteed, autonomous and ‘fundamental’; race may change shape but it is already and always present. Its presence thus requires delineation but not explanation. In fact, crucially, we find that, just as in the claims of less savory theorists, race is determinate. Mathew Frye Jacobson’s assertion, for example, that ‘Race and races are American history’ sounds uncomfortably similar to the Robert Knox school of historical theory, which asserts that ‘in human history race is everything.’¹²⁴ Of course, I do not suggest that their work is morally or scientifically equivalent. I merely wish to suggest that our scholarship on racism has been stymied by an inability to move fully beyond explanations predicated, either explicitly or implicitly upon notions of, a ‘racial itch.’

The refusal to accept race as ‘alive’ in its own right, or as a universal feature of human life, does not require us to insist that race is created completely anew in each new historical and spatial context, or to argue that because there are and must be differences in the work that different racisms do, and within the contexts in which they arise, there are not also important continuities in both practice and discourse across time and space. In fact, as I have argued in the Introduction, one cannot

¹²¹ Stuart Hall, "Race, Articulation, and Societies Structured in Dominance," in *Black British Cultural Studies: A Reader* (1996), 336.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 337.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 339, 38.

¹²⁴ Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color : European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 11. Robert Knox, *The Races of Men: A Fragment* (Philadelphia: Lea & Blanchard, 1850), 10.

understand the racial ideologies present in, for example, 1943 Los Angeles, without looking outward both temporally and geographically. Further, though I insist that the Negro Problem and the Mexican Problem were necessarily distinct in conception and effect, as we will see throughout the chapters that follow, these different problems were not understood or managed in isolation.

How does one, then, trace these continuities and overlaps without treating them as transhistorical certainties? Ideologies seem to take on a life of their own, Fields writes, ‘in that, providing a ready-made vocabulary for the interpretation of new experience, they subtly (and sometimes grossly) prejudge the content of the interpretation.’ However, the relationship between new experience and ideological vocabularies is a ‘constantly reciprocal.’ Therefore, the vocabulary can only stay alive ‘to the degree that it names things people know, and...to the extent that these things are ritually verified in day-to-day social practice.’¹²⁵ While the analysis within the following chapters seeks to root particular distinctions in the ideological positioning of Mexican and African Americans over a relatively broad period to specific origins, I have endeavored to also ground these positions in the concrete finiteness of local conditions in Los Angeles in particular moments. The assumption here is not that the social vocabularies produced within slavery, and within the conquest of the Southwest and the later mass appropriation of Mexican labour emerged and then ossified into structuring pillars of American social life but that certain elements of these vocabularies continued to be applied to and practically verified within changing circumstances.

2.2 Approaching the field

In this section I will explain how the broad theoretical principles outlined above have been practiced in this thesis. First, I will discuss how I came to define and refine my research question, and then I will describe how these principles shaped my reading and application of empirical evidence.

Finding the question

¹²⁵ Barbara Fields, "Ideology and Race in American History," in *Region, Race, and Reconstruction: Essays in Honor of C. Vann Woodward*, ed. J. Morgan Kousser and James M. McPherson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 153.

I was only superficially familiar of the theoretical approach I have outlined here before beginning my thesis. The processes of shaping my research question, and later carrying out the research itself, raised issues which caused me to visit and revisit the literature, however, deepening my understanding of and conviction in the necessity of this theoretical approach. Originally I had planned to begin my empirical investigation in the turmoil of 1943 and to extend the trajectory forward into the 1960s. With naivety characteristic of someone beginning their first research project, I planned to discuss each group's experience of oppression in these periods and also how the Mexican community's strategies of cultural and political resistance, culminating in the Chicano movement, were informed by the politics of black power and the Civil Rights Movement. Coming from a background of activism, studying the movements of this period, whose mythology, I had, so to speak, been politically raised on, seemed something like a duty. Two things happened during my initial reading that caused me to reroute. First of all, I found that the Chicano movement is an exceedingly popular topic in Chicano studies (unsurprisingly as the latter owes its existence to the former) and that in particular the influence of black politics was by no means unexplored territory.

Concomitantly, I became aware that the fundamental question that I wanted to investigate was why such striking differences existed in the treatment of black and Mexican Americans. When the groups' experiences were compared in the literature, the focus was usually on commonalities. That the scholarly emphasis has been more regularly placed on 'shared history' of the groups is reflected in the reviews applauding Neil Foley's recent work, *Quest for Equality: the Failed Promise of Black-Brown Solidarity*, which explores the notable disinterest of World War II Mexican American activists in making common cause with African Americans, as 'brave,' 'provocative' and 'path breaking.'¹²⁶ As I began to investigate these differences that seemed so salient in the 20th century— in classification, in spatial management and in experiences of collective violence, I found that I needed to look farther back in history to understand them. Short excursions into the early 20th century, and into the 19th, for 'background' information thus became more and more extensive. I realized that in the argument I was building, the discussion of slavery, the conquest of the Southwest and the mass immigration of the early 20th century would have to be central and sustained.

¹²⁶ Neil Foley, "Quest for Equality: The Failed Promise of Black-Brown Solidarity," (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010). The reviews cited are printed on the back cover.

The question then became not why are these differences there but how did these differences ‘arise historically’? The distinction is important. The first version reflects an assumption, one that I certainly began with, if only implicitly, that the differences are in themselves irregular, that the expected function, the purpose, of ‘white racism’ was to mark and exclude nonwhites.

The premise from which I work in my analysis that distinct anti-black and anti-Mexican racisms had to be understood as arising each within specific historical conditions was developed through practical as well as theoretical imperatives, with each strengthening the resolve of the other. The basic principle which I first gleaned from the theory - that race could not be produced either by the internal properties of those it marked or some inexplicable drive in those who did the marking - helped to reorient my empirical journey backwards. In turn the practical process of research itself, of needing to know why a certain law was passed, how a certain practice emerged, what came before it, and so on, gave me a deeper and more direct understanding of the theoretical propositions.

2.3 In the archive

During the obligatory introductory conversation of PhD students in which each must exchange descriptions of their yet-to-be-written theses, a fellow student once laughed good-naturedly at me when I told her that my research was archival and said, ‘Oh so you’re one of those that don’t like people then?’ The image of the archival researcher sitting in silence with boxes of dusty paper in the quiet of a library is not entirely misplaced. It is very dusty and very quiet. But at the same time, in the archive one finds nothing but people. And how could it be otherwise? Where else do they imagine the papers to have come from? Archival work can feel intensely personal but disconcertingly so as the interaction is one directional. The people whose correspondence you are examining, the ones who wrote the reports you are reading, who scribbled the little handwritten notes that you are try to decipher in the margins of letters, whose badly placed coffee cup left the stain you trace with your fingers, these are people who could never have conceived of your existence. Spending day after day immersed in the content of these boxes, is something like being a ghost in a room full of people who cannot see or hear you.

Yet while the interaction with the subject is indeed different from that which occurs in person, it requires the same sorts of caution and sensitivity as dealing with living subjects. As Ben Gidley notes: ‘[J]ust as ethnographic interviews are never completely transparent windows into present social reality, archived documentary sources are never perfect windows into the past.’¹²⁷ Rather, as Paul Atkinson and Amanda Coffey assert, they are “social facts”, in that they are produced, shared and used in socially organized ways... They construct particular kinds of representations with their own conventions.’¹²⁸ The focus of textual ethnographic research, then, is upon how such texts are socially organized, how, as Gidley puts it, they produce particular discourses, rather than how factually accurate they are. Accordingly, I have primarily examined the textual evidence here asking how race is being created and verified within these documents and within the practices they document. In this regard, the theoretical stance that positions race as a social fact which must be continually created, rather than a permanent, if shifting, and determinative fixture of human relations, very much integrates with this methodological imperative, as both place an emphasis on production.

The question of whether the kind of evidence I consider in this thesis is ‘objectively’ true is perhaps more nuanced than it might first seem. Plainly, I have not read these texts with the expectation that they provide an objective picture of the reality they refer to—such a reading would certainly strain the credulity of most people as many of the texts I consider are blatantly racist by today’s standards. It remains far easier, however, to read these sorts of texts and, while, of course, rejecting their racist claims, nevertheless accept the racism itself as an objective fact. For example, if a speaker says that American employers pay Mexican immigrants low wages because they are racially degraded, we obviously would not accept this as ‘proof’ that Mexicans were in fact inherently degraded. But neither can we uncritically accept it as proof that Americans paid Mexicans less because they believed them to be racially inferior. The text can only reveal how the speaker understood and chose to represent the situation to a particular audience. Even an official text with legal consequence, for example a miscegenation statute, remains

¹²⁷ Ben Gidley, "Doing Historical and Documentary Research," in *Researching Society and Culture*, ed. Clive Seal (London: Sage Publications Ltd., 2012), 271.

¹²⁸ Paul Atkinson and Amanda Coffey, "Analysing Documentary Realities," in *Qualitative Research: Theory, Practice and Method*, ed. David Silverman (London: Sage Publications, 2004), 58.

socially produced, and cannot be treated as ‘firm evidence of what they report.’¹²⁹ While a law of course must be treated with different considerations than, say, the opinions expressed in a newspaper editorial, it still cannot be thought of as a ‘transparent representation’ of reality. Though its dictates may be enforced, they cannot be supposed to represent day-to-day practice nor can the reasoning they promulgate be supposed to represent the thinking of all the people whose lives the law impacts.

The importance of the theoretical and methodological principles I have discussed, each carefully insisting upon the partiality of social fact, has been illustrated to me, for better and for worse, in the work of others. The more experienced I became conducting my own primary source research, the more problematic I began to find the racial interpretations of events and relations in some contemporary scholarly work. I will discuss specific examples of this in the following chapters but here I would like to take a moment to discuss some relevant practical points. Just as the experience of doing research has changed the way that I read so has this re-reading informed the way that I use and interpret evidence.

In this regard I have found historian Eric Arnesen’s critique of whiteness studies literature useful. Though the essay focuses on this particular subset of literature, the methodological weaknesses he identifies are more broadly applicable and raise important cautions for those carrying out historical research. Among his criticisms is the argument that the ‘imperative of racial reductionism’ leads some whiteness scholars to become historical “alchemists”...transforming the meaning of a variety of historical events into example after example of purported whiteness.’¹³⁰ In doing so, Arnesen complains, these historians ‘assume the role of interpreter, translating the nineteenth-century vernacular of race and group inferiority into the late twentieth-century idiom of whiteness.’¹³¹ Within this process, the multiple considerations of the commentators themselves are lost in translation. While the secondary works considered in this thesis do not share the fundamental lack of primary research for which Arnesen castigates the historians in his essay, the problem of scholars interpreting a specific historical vernacular into their own modern idiom of race does

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ Eric. Arnesen, "Whiteness and the Historians' Imagination.," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 60(2001): 24, 5.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 13.

emerge, as I will discuss at several points in the chapters to come, with authors imposing their own terms and accent, so to speak, onto the language of their subject.

This problem often manifests in authors making psychoanalytic conclusions about their subjects unsupported by the evidence upon which they draw. In a brief but representative example of problematic attribution of psychological motivations to a subject, steeped in racial assumptions, Luis Alvarez discusses a 1944 incident involving a Mexican American soldier on furlough in Los Angeles. On the third day of his leave, the young man encountered several police officers on his way home from a shoeshine stand. One officer, a Mexican American, apparently took a dislike to the soldier and proceeded to viciously beat him in front of his mother, sister and neighbours. Alvarez writes: 'Just as membership in the armed forces signaled national belonging, a brutal beating at the hands of city police marked nonwhite youth's public performance of their racial identity as threatening to white hegemony.'¹³² He does not specify how the beaten soldier had been 'performing' his racial identity, but openly speculates that perhaps the Mexican American officer initiated the violence to 'win his white partner's approval.'¹³³ According to his footnotes, Alvarez accessed the soldier's statement from the same archive that I did. Apparently he either missed or dismissed the statement of man's sister, which was in the same folder. In her account of the incident she states: 'One of the three cops in the car, the driver I think it was said, "Ah come on, leave him alone, let's go." But Miranda the Mexican cop didn't pay attention to him, he just kept on hitting him, just kept on beating him.'¹³⁴ In this case the sister's statement readily illustrates the danger in assuming that we can treat the endlessly complex workings of the minds of actual living people, as if, like characters in a novel, they exist to illustrate particular themes and conflicts.

Another problematic tendency Arnesen identifies within some whiteness literature that is generally useful to consider here is the use of vague grammatical constructions in analysis. Examining the claims of some historians that Polish and Italian immigrants and their children 'were constructed' as 'not-quite-white' during the 1930s and 40s, Arnesen argues that the use of the passive voice allows these scholars to 'evade the necessary task of identifying the active agents denying or

¹³² Luis Alvarez, *The Power of the Zoot: Youth Culture and Resistance During World War II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 27.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ Aurora Maldonado, "Statement Regarding Assault on Peter Maldonado, November, 23, 1944," in *Manuel Ruiz Papers* (Stanford: Special Collections Department, Green Library, Stanford University, Undated).

qualifying these groups' whiteness...lessening the need to square assertions of not-quite-whiteness with the countless examples to the contrary.'¹³⁵ The passive voice construction thus leaves critical questions unanswered: 'If it was by no means clear that the new immigrants were white, *to whom* was this not clear? If it was not obvious on which side of the color line they fell, *to whom* was this not obvious?'¹³⁶ Supposedly broad processes are identified but without attributing specific actions or language to specific actors and speakers. The variegated and complicated ways in which people did describe these immigrants is homogenised into the terminology and concepts the scholar imposes. To avoid bold but anachronistic translation in favour of more cautious analysis, I have endeavored to be sensitive and alert to the language of the texts and to convey the richness of nuance and complexity of their social vocabularies, as well as the multiple uneven effects of the practices to which these vocabularies were tied. To this end, I directly quote exact wording that the subjects use rather than condensing it or conflating it into my own terms. I have also been careful to contextualise the evidence that I present - noting the speaker, and his or her importance in their locality, as well as the situation in which the comments were made.

In a further effort to avoid sliding into unsupportable generalisations, I have largely avoided using the popular term 'racialise.' The term is frequently cited as analytically useful in a way that 'race' or 'racial' are not, as it denotes a process, rather than an object or inherent property, and thus signals that racial meaning is created and imposed.¹³⁷ However, while the etymologically transformation from noun or adjective into verb is useful, applied in the empirical field it can unhelpfully suggest that there is some standard process in which races are made. The attempt to contain or condense what must necessarily be complex, multiple and specific historical processes into one term lends itself to simplification and generalisation. Echoing Arnesen's criticism of the passive voice construction, Fields critiques the amorphousness of the racialisation concept that makes it at once widely applicable and potentially problematic as a tool of analysis:

¹³⁵ Arnesen, "Whiteness and the Historians' Imagination.," 19-20.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ See for example: Lawrence A. Blum, *I'm Not a Racist, But...: The Moral Quandary of Race* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), 160. Darder and Torres, *After Race: Racism after Multiculturalism*, 13.

What, exactly, do scientists, immigration officials, ballot reformers, intelligence testers, newspaper cartoonists, employers and potential employers, WASP snobs, and middle- and working- class nativists do when they racialize immigrants? The question itself is part of the answer: Not all racializers do the same thing when they racialize.¹³⁸

I do not wish to argue that the term is inherently problematic, merely that it can be tricky to manage well within the realm of empirical research, and I leave its use to other, more experienced scholars. In the instances in this thesis when I have started to use the term, I have instead opted to describe specific processes and outcomes.

Finally, another methodological danger Arnesen identifies which I have kept in mind here is a disregard for ‘ambiguity’ and ‘counter-discourse.’¹³⁹ Though the scholars he critiques uniformly reject transhistorical readings of race, their analyses seem to suppose that only a few empirical examples are ‘sufficient evidence for making vast claims across much time and place.’¹⁴⁰ As I will discuss in more detail in the following chapters, some of the literature dealing with the empirical ground covered here tends towards readings that treat particular racist views or practices as monolithic. I have tried, then, as much as possible, to present the multiple and often contradictory discourses of the anti-black and anti-Mexican ideologies which inflect the different texts I have examined and to examine a multiplicity of different kinds of texts within each discussion. In this I have tried to draw insight from the ways in which these texts may contradict or confirm each other, asking what can be learned from the multifaceted and conflicting picture they create when put into context.

¹³⁸ Barbara J. Fields, "Whiteness, Racism and Identity," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 60(2001). 50

¹³⁹ Arnesen, "Whiteness and the Historians' Imagination.," 24.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 26.

2.4 The Materials

I have utilised quite a wide range of primary materials, in part because the thesis considers multiple empirical examples. At the beginning of each chapter, I detail the specific sources of evidence used in that discussion. I will take a moment here, however, to discuss some general types of materials I have used and the special considerations they each present.

The majority of my archival materials have come from the following collections: the Manuel Ruiz Jr. Papers, Edward Quevedo Papers and Ernesto Galarza Papers, all of which are housed at Stanford University, as well as the Richard Griswold del Castillo Papers, housed at the Chicano Studies Library at the University of California Los Angeles. For my study of residential segregation in Los Angeles, I examined the records of the Governor's Commission on the Watts Riots, housed at Bancroft Library at University California Berkeley. Finally, I also requested and received various materials in the post from archives I was not able to visit in person, most notably numerous FBI reports from the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library in Hyde Park, New York.

Government and official documents

My archival research focused on primarily 'official' or government documents, including but not limited to hearings transcripts, most notably the transcripts of a series of Congressional hearings on Mexican immigration, various kinds of reports, both published and confidential, produced by different government bodies, most notably a series of confidential investigative 'Racial Conditions' reports written by FBI field agents during World War II, and correspondence between different governmental institutions. In addition to the documents which I have obtained through archival sources, I have also made use of published collections of primary materials, of particular note here are Pauli Murray's compilation of state laws on race and colour and Morris J. MacGregor and Bernard C. McNalty's epic thirteen volume compilation of military documents pertaining to black soldiers ranging from the Revolutionary War to the War in Vietnam.¹⁴¹

¹⁴¹ Pauli Murray, *States' Laws on Race and Color* (Athens, Ga. ; London: University of Georgia Press, 1997); Morris J. MacGregor and Bernard C. Nalty, eds., *Blacks in the United States Armed Forces*:

As noted, my reliance on official documents should not signal that I imagine these texts to either dictate or even to reflect in whole the racial ideologies of the general public. The relationship between officials and institutions and the rest of society is far from straightforward. As Carter explains, critical realists recognise that the manner in which ‘the parts of a social system gelled together...was an analytically distinct issue from how agents and actors living within that system made sense of it.’¹⁴² For example, a government may enact policies to actively recruit cheap migrant labour to meet the demands of industry, but such policies may simultaneously allow migrant workers to be targeted by other workers as illegitimate outsiders. (This of course has certainly been the case with Mexican immigrants in different periods of US history.) Thus, what Carter terms as ‘system integration’ and ‘social integration’ may well be ‘out of synch’ or even pull in entirely different directions.¹⁴³ My interest, however, is not to attempt to enumerate racist beliefs and activities in their entirety during this time period but to trace these specific practices of segregation which worked to exclude Mexican and African Americans. As we will see in the following chapters, the official position, for example, of both the federal government and the state of California that Mexicans were ‘white’ persons, was often contradicted in the informal practices that marked them as separate. In other situations, formal and informal practices reinforced each other, either directly or indirectly, as we will see in the following chapters. In any case, the general point can be made that there can be no firmly presumed relationship between the different parts of a society.

I will say a few words about my use of official transcripts here, as I have used them extensively and because they have some novel features as primary source material. In addition to the aforementioned congressional hearings, I have also used the transcript of the debates which took place during the state of California’s first constitutional convention, those of a series of hearings to discuss the pressures of mass war-related migration to Los Angeles during World War II, and those of the California Supreme Court case in which the state’s anti-miscegenation statute was overturned. When one thinks of official documents, one tends to imagine the impersonal, formal language of institutional officialdom. As Ben Gidley notes, such

Basic Documents, XIII vols., vol. Volume V: Black Soldiers in World War II (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 1977).

¹⁴² Carter, "'Dangerous Phrases': Realism, 'Race', and Social Science." 6

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

documents often employ a 'linguistic register' that evokes 'facticity' - 'the sense of neutral, objective truth that we associate with bureaucracy,' which makes their content seem both natural and unquestionable.¹⁴⁴ This is certainly the kind of tone present, for example, in some of the published statements or reports that I encountered. However, in the transcripts, I was surprised to find something very different.

Far from the carefully crafted neutrality of written documents, these are effectively *spoken* documents. The proceedings they have captured follow particular protocols and rituals of formality, as one would expect with government hearings. Yet, while not a conversation occurring 'in the wild' so to speak, these transcripts explicitly capture the social interactions other kinds of documents might obscure in production. While, of course, one must assume that many of the participants, the witnesses and committee members, had often prepared their speeches, arguments and questions and so on in advance of their utterance, due to the 'live' quality of the event the discourse cannot be entirely controlled or predicted. Though we are 'hearing' the transcript both blind and deaf, we nevertheless retain some of the emotive texture of the events, the indication of '[LAUGHTER]' or the urging of one participant to the others to compose themselves during the heat of the debate, for example. Reading through the course of the transcripts, in all the various exchanges, the reactions and counter-reactions, the grandstanding, the verbal fumbling and backtracking, we get a sense not just of the participants' personalities, but also the different sorts of ways in which racial 'facts' are evoked and utilised in discussion. With this in mind, I have often quoted them at length to attempt to convey some of this texture. Finally these transcripts are rich sources in that they document a multiplicity of contemporary views; the transcript of the hearings on immigration, for example, contains the voices of senators, scientists, labour leaders, industrialists, academics and others, offering glimpses of the diverse forms of racial logic, ranging from the supposedly scientific to the colloquial, that informed official practices.

Newspapers, magazines and other media

I have included a number of media sources in the archive for this project. I have examined mainstream newspapers, mainly from Los Angeles but from other

¹⁴⁴ Gidley, "Doing Historical and Documentary Research," 274.

cities as well, primarily for coverage of the 1943 riots, discussed in Chapter 5, and what were perceived to be wartime ‘racial issues’ more generally. Of course these newspaper and magazine articles do not reflect a particular uniform or monolithic racial ideology any more than the institutional documents I discussed above. As documents created for public consumption, however, they can provide a useful window into how particular issues were popularly discussed –or at least how the reporters and editors gauged their readership’s understanding of them.

The terminology and references used to convey these issues is therefore particularly illustrative. The inflammatory coverage of the Zoot Suit Riots, by the Los Angeles press is now quite notorious and has been discussed by a number of authors.¹⁴⁵ However news stories from outside of those particularly bad months, and the consideration of this coverage in comparison to the coverage of riots involving African Americans in other cities, reveal a more complex picture of how Mexicans were represented in regional and national media. Indeed, images of Mexicans as patriotic citizens and soldiers also emerged. I have looked, rather, for what such contradictions tell us about the specific social positioning of Mexican Americans and the nature of the barriers erected around them. The question is why particular accounts were offered at particular times and what particular public sentiments were being appealed to with these different angles on the ‘minority problem.’

Personal papers, campaigning materials, autobiography

I have also utilised documents of Mexican and black community organisations and publications, produced, on the whole, by middle class elements of each group, rather than the more numerous poor and working class sections of the communities. This was not a matter of design but circumstance. The lack of recorded material left behind by working class, every-day people will always be a source of frustration for those curious about the past. Chicano historians have always been careful to emphasise the middle-class orientation of such WWII Mexican American community leaders as the attorney and activist Manuel Ruiz, whose archived papers at Berkeley are a significant source of primary material for historians of the period. While the views and strategies of this more privileged class (or, for that matter, any other faction

¹⁴⁵ Eduardo Pagan gives a well-considered account of the relationship between media coverage and police activity during the period which resulted in the perception of a delinquency crisis. Eduardo Obregón Pagán, *Murder at the Sleepy Lagoon : Zoot Suits, Race, and Riot in Wartime L.A* (Chapel Hill, N.C. ; London: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

of the group) clearly should not be understood as representative of the entire Mexican population, properly contextualised they nonetheless offer interesting clues about the social positioning of Mexicans in the US, to which they responded. A student newspaper called the *Mexican Voice*, created by a YMCA sponsored group of Mexican youth has also been a valuable source, capturing the voices of Mexican college students. The mixture of ethnic pride and American patriotism, condemnation of discrimination but firm focus on ‘self-improvement’ within their articles complicates readings that characterise this generation’s politics as self-denying bargaining for ‘whiteness.’

In terms of African American voices, most of the sources I use which could be characterized as political texts or texts primarily intended for black communities are not locally produced. Two valuable sources of information on the black community in Los Angeles that I do utilize include the city’s primary black newspaper, the *California Eagle*, and the transcripts of an oral history interview with civil rights attorney, judge and activist, Loren Miller. In terms of national black figures and organizations, I have utilised the writings of such figures as Walter White, W.E.B. Dubois, and Ida Wells. The propaganda materials and publications of the NAACP and the March on Washington Movement have been helpful, particularly with regard to military segregation.

Being its targets obviously gave black and Mexican communities a particular kind of expertise on the operation of segregation. Thus the kinds of documents described above are highly informative. It should be noted at the outset, however, that this thesis is not primarily concerned with the political responses of these two groups to oppression or the multiple and complex ways in which those within these groups understood their own identities. My primary concern here is to examine the ways in which racial difference was created and enforced in these particular historical contexts; thus though I continually describe the social positioning of black and Mexican Americans, a subject on which of course black and Mexican Americans were entirely familiar, the focus here is on the actions and discourses of white Americans – with which blacks and Mexicans were also painfully familiar. My consideration, then, of the ways in which black and Mexican people resisted segregation is limited to what these forms of resistance tell about the conditions which necessitated it.

2.5 A note on terminology

Mexican and Mexican American

There are a multitude of terms used to refer to people of Mexican descent living in the United States – among the most common are Hispanic, Chicano, Latino, Mexican American, or simply Mexican. In the earlier years of the twentieth century the more unwieldy Americans of Latin descent, or Spanish Speaking Americans were also used in some quarters. As I discuss Mexicans exclusively, pan-ethnic terms like Latino or Hispanic lack precision and would imply a false generality if used in this context. It should go without saying that the experiences of other Latino groups in the United States, for example Puerto Ricans or Cubans, have been entirely distinct to the Mexican experience and absolutely cannot be generalised. While Chicano refers specifically to those of Mexican descent, it is a term with a specific political and historical usage, having only become popularised in the 1960s and then among some sectors of the Mexican American population, most notably young people, activists, nationalists and others with left-leaning politics. Though the term is widely used enough now to appear on the Census, it retains particular political connotations and is not used universally.

Thus I use the terms Mexican and Mexican American in this thesis. Mexican American, a designation often rejected by those referring to themselves as Chicanos, has often been associated with the assimilationist politics of early middle-class activists, who were eager to assert their American patriotism. I use it here strictly as an ethnic description to indicate a person of Mexican ancestry born, raised or living in the United States. Differentiating between Mexicans and Mexican Americans in the Southwest is often a nebulous task. In some of the empirical material I examine, for example the Congressional debates on Mexican immigration discussed in the following chapter, the focus is clearly on recently arrived Mexican immigrants. The primary materials dealing with the 1943 Zoot Suit Riots, the discourse clearly focused on individuals who were most definitely Mexican Americans born in the United States and often emphasised this fact. But much of the time a clear distinction is impossible to make. Individuals born in both countries lived in the same communities and families. Many of those born in Mexico but living most of their lives in the United States did not apply for American citizenship. Furthermore the population was in constant flux, with new immigrants arriving and some returning. Crucially

muddying the waters, both Mexican Americans and other Americans often referred to the former simply as ‘Mexicans.’ I therefore sometimes use Mexican as a general term for people of Mexican ethnicity rather than to distinguish from those that were American citizens.

African American and black

I use the term African American, again, as a descriptive ethnic designator. Of course the term, denoting a whole continent, cannot be said to be strictly parallel to terms such as Mexican American or Chinese American, as a British man once admonished me when I used all of these terms to describe the diverse population of the Californian city I had recently moved from. However for historical reasons that should be obvious, the narrowing of the ‘African’ in African American into specific national or ethnic designations is not possible. For the period considered in this thesis, African Americans would have referred to themselves primarily as ‘Negroes’ and would, generally speaking, have considered the term ‘black’ to be offensive. Nevertheless, I use the term, which, like Chicano, became popularised within a particular historical moment and was used with specific political intent, because, unlike Chicano, it has now come into almost universal usage. While I sometimes use black as an ethnic term interchangeable with African American, I also use it as the term ‘blackness’ to refer to the ideological construction, the conglomerate of innate and usually troubling qualities which white (and other) Americans attributed to African Americans, and not, of course, to indicate actual African American culture or society.

Ethnic, racial or racialised?

I refer to African, Mexican and white Americans, as ethnic, ancestral or social groups. There has been a concern among some scholars, expressed perhaps with the most theoretical nuance by Ian Haney-López as cited in the Introduction, that choosing not to use a racial vocabulary for the analysis of the Latinos in the United States obscures the oppressive conditions which has shaped their existence as a group per se. He ‘advocates using racial language to highlight *ideas* of fundamental Latino/a difference, and the way those ideas have been socially and legally structured; it urges such language in order repudiate, not to imply, the existence of a distinct Latino/a

nature.¹⁴⁶ I will return to address this argument more fully in my conclusion. For now it will suffice to say that I find the argument that we can only adequately repudiate notions of fundamental difference by referring to groups in the same language which asserted such notions rather confounding. My approach is more direct. I do not believe there are races so I do not refer to groups of people as such. As a second point, in any case, no one term can adequately capture in itself the entire complexity of a people's history.¹⁴⁷ This is what sustained analysis is for.

Furthermore, continually referring to a people as a race all too effectively pumps lifeblood into the idea that there are inherently separate classes of humans whose innate differences require sociological attention. In particular, African Americans continue to be unquestioningly treated as a 'race.' As Fields notes:

"Race" appears in the titles of an ever-growing number of scholarly books and articles as a euphemism for slavery, disfranchisement, segregation, lynching, mass murder, and related historical atrocities; or as an unintentionally belittling shorthand for "persons of African descent and anything pertaining to them."¹⁴⁸

Many scholars compound this problem by employing the terms 'racial' and 'ethnic' in a fairly haphazard fashion. The same works will refer to Mexicans, for example, as a racial group, then as an ethnic group and then at other times when describing a situation involving multiple groups, for instance, Mexican, Japanese and African Americans, they will refer to 'racial and ethnic groups'. Who is racial and who is ethnic in such formations and how this is determined is never specified or explained but there are distinct if unintended consequences. In attempting to differentiate levels of oppression and exclusion with terms that are then inconsistently applied, we simply

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 70.

¹⁴⁷ Novelist Zora Neale Hurston eloquently made a similar point: 'There is no *The Negro* here. Our lives are so diversified, internal attitudes so varied, appearances and capabilities so different, that there is no possible classification so catholic that it will cover us all, except My People! My people!' Cited in: Christine B. Hickman, "The Devil and the One Drop Rule: Racial Categories, African Americans and the U.S. Census," *Michigan Law Review* 95, no. 5 (1997): 1220.

¹⁴⁸ Barbara J. Fields, "Of Rogues and Geldings," *The American Historical Review* 108, no. 5 (2003): 1399.

reinforce the idea that different types of people are marked by varying degrees of difference, and black people are always the 'racial' type. As Fields comments, 'A sense of peoplehood, nationhood or comradeship in struggle may be available to others; but, for persons of African descent, all reduce to race, a life sentence for them and their issue in perpetuity.'¹⁴⁹

Many scholars promote the use of term 'racialised' as an appropriate substitute for 'racial' to describe groups of people. While I agree that it is a far more useful term, it is not without its own problems, as I have noted above. As a label for groups of people, it indicates that the group in question has been treated or thought of as a race and thus they are 'racialised.' However, ideologies attached to social divisions do not always neatly separate the markers - biology, culture, nationality, ethnicity, color, race, etc- that scholars employ to define them. People outside the academy - be they 'regular' working people, government officials, politicians, or community leaders - don't make the same distinctions that theorists do. Rather they employ discourses which often contain one or more of these markers, sometimes expressed explicitly and definitively, perhaps more often in a manner that is only half coherent, confused and either tangled or implicit with other notions. The question of whether Mexicans have been cast primarily as an ethnic group by various actors or primarily as a racial group during their American history seems by design to demand a response which overrides the motley, oscillating and often contradictory manner in which ideas about Mexicans as a problematic presence have been voiced and have shifted in response to various circumstances. I feel the term 'racialised', as it denotes specifically the imposition of supposed racial difference, tends to erase and homogenize this complexity. I do not argue that 'ethnicity' captures it – again, I do not think we can expect any one term to do that kind of work. However, as a general term, 'ethnic group' does not signal an attempt.

In this vein, Mario Barrera offers a thought provoking critique of the 'racialized minority' concept. Noting, as others have, the problematic inflation of the race in much scholarship, Barrera writes:

[D]epicting oneself and others in hierarchical terms is
a generalized process, whether the conflict be ethnic,

¹⁴⁹ Fields, "Whiteness, Racism and Identity," 49-50.

national, class, or whatever. Nothing in this is particularly “racial,” and it went on long before it became fashionable in the nineteenth century to characterize human beings in biological terms.¹⁵⁰

He argues ethnicity is a more useful term for peoplehood than race, one which is ‘not burdened with the freight of history and not nearly so subject to misinterpretation.’¹⁵¹ Drawing on the work of Fredrik Barth, Thomas Eriksen and Richard Jenkins, among others, Barrera treats ethnicity as the product of a relationship rather than the attribute of a particular group, whose existence as such ‘depends on the maintenance of a boundary.’¹⁵² However there is no specified ideology necessarily implied in the production of the boundary, as with ‘racialisation.’ The ethnicity framework, Barrera suggests, provides more room for differentiation and comparison, and includes racial discourses as a subset, emphasizing their specificity.¹⁵³

2.6 A note on the politics of comparison

It should be noted explicitly that this work is not an attempt at comparing Black History and Mexican/Chicano History generally, nor do I want to claim that the rather narrow areas upon which I focus are representative of those histories in their temporal or geographic entirety. Even within the relatively limited confines of the Southwest, very different conditions prevailed, for example, in Texas and California, or even in San Francisco in the north of the state and Los Angeles in the south. My intention is to examine specific instances of classification and segregation as applied to these two groups of people in these specific moments in Los Angeles, though within the broader historical and spatial context that made them possible.

Finally, it is perhaps necessary to state that in comparing the manner in which these two groups have been degraded and oppressed, I have no wish to engage in

¹⁵⁰ Mario Barrera, "Are Latinos a Racialized Minority?," *Sociological Perspectives* 51, no. 2 (2008): 314.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 320.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 314.

what some have termed the ‘Oppression Olympics’¹⁵⁴ Presumably in an attempt to demonstrate the often-overlooked extent to which racist oppression has afflicted non-black minorities, Tomás Almaguer employs the problematic strategy of measuring the suffering of these groups against the paradigmatic suffering of African Americans. In regards to the violence inflicted on Native Americans by European Americans in the early years of California’s statehood, he makes the following ill-considered claim:

California’s white population retained the most barbaric claim one person can hold over another: the right to murder with impunity. Even the horrors of slavery - where one man retained another as personal chattel - pale in comparison to the wanton, state-sanctioned destruction of a people and their culture. By 1880, an estimated eight thousand Native American men, women, and children had died violently at the hands of white Americans.¹⁵⁵

Considering the many millions of Africans and their descendants kidnapped, murdered, maimed, beaten, robbed and raped during slavery, such macabre mathematics don’t add up either quantitatively or qualitatively. But there is a deeper problem with such comparisons in terms of scholarly investigation. As well as being divisive and inflammatory, the practice of ranking evils is an analytical dead-end. Making emotive assessments about which practice was worse detracts from the fundamental question of why particular practices were employed at particular times to particular groups. My intention in comparing the experiences of these two groups is that considering them together brings some of their specificity into relief. The purpose in delineating their specificity is not to establish which experience of oppression has been more painful but to pose some interventions in the ways that we have approached the study of inequality, namely the danger in treating, even implicitly, the ‘difference’ of not-whiteness or the ‘arrogance’ of whiteness as a cause of racism and conflict. I will return to these issues in my conclusion.

¹⁵⁴ Elizabeth Sutherland Martínez, *De Colores Means All of Us: Latina Views for a Multi-Colored Century*, 1st ed. (Cambridge: South End Press, 1998), 5.

¹⁵⁵ Tomás Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines : The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 108.

2.7 Conclusion

There are a number of key principles then which provide the foundation for this research. Race is a product rather than a producer of social relations. Thus the critical eye of analysis must focus on those practices through which race is given social reality. However, just as race cannot be conceived of as natural or explanatory fact, neither can racism. The study of racially based inequality and oppression must resist the tendency to attribute all to the power of a timeless and amorphous American racism. It demands the consideration of the full complexity of social factors in any given historical moment in a manner which does not reduce all, ultimately, to white supremacy, or become unnecessarily mesmerised by the (always intricate and contradictory) imagery of racialism, accepting its claims at face value and attributing various aspects of difference with powers of causation. The examination of the social positioning of different groups, and relationship between them, must be established empirically. The research process demands caution and delicacy. Historical documents are socially produced facts, partial and constructed, rather than transparent and objective. To examine the processes within them, we must read them sensitively and describe them in a language that is specific and sharply delineated.

The conclusions here have been made to describe where and how the remainder of the thesis begins. As Hall writes: ‘One must start, then, from the concrete historical “work” which racism accomplished under specific historical conditions.’¹⁵⁶ It is precisely here that we will begin in the next chapter.

¹⁵⁶ Hall, "Race, Articulation, and Societies Structured in Dominance," 338.

3. Mexicans and African Americans in the Shadows of Slavery

In this chapter, I will examine how both slavery and the so-called Negro problem shaped the discursive field for Mexicans immigrating to the United States in the early 20th century. Like the appropriation of African as slaves, the exploitation of Mexican immigrants destabilized the nation's principle of social quality and exposed its inherent economic inequality. The widespread use of Mexican manual labour was therefore interpreted by many in racial terms explicitly delineated through the historically established ideological constructions of slavery and blackness we began to examine in the Introduction. I ask, then, how did the country's history of slavery and entrenched anti-black racism inform emerging constructions of 'the Mexican' in the early 20th century, particularly during this period of growing dependence on Mexican labour? We will see that despite important points of conceptual overlap, there were many important historical points of divergence, both in the circumstances in which Africans and Mexicans became American populations, and, consequentially, the ways in which they were imagined as such. At least in part, these divergences illustrate the rupture between slavery and the exploitation of manual labour, as I will explore in the second half of this chapter. If the historical importance of slavery established blackness as a primary American social division, the unique institutional practices of slavery also fundamentally shaped the ideological construction of racial blackness. Slavery was not just a more extreme method of labour appropriation; it demanded particular methods in order to be maintained, 'institutional procedures,' as Moses Finley put it, to distinguish those human beings who were property from those who were not.¹ Contrasting with the utter and ongoing deracination of slavery and the stigma it imposed, the complex intertwining legacies of conquest and immigration cultivated 'Mexican' as a far more amorphous and variegated social category. I will examine how the material differences between the enslavement and exploitation of Africans and Mexicans respectively shaped the ways that each group became defined as 'natural' and social populations.

In my examination of these questions, it is important to note that the methodological aim of this chapter is not a direct historical comparison of like materials, so to speak. Rather than examining contemporary discourses on black

¹ M. I. Finley, *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology* (London: Chatto and Windus Ltd, 1980), 95.

people and Mexicans, I examine the historical moments in which each group came to be considered as a social problem, interpreted in racial terms. Further, the very different nature of the introduction of Mexican and African peoples into the United States has left two very different archival bodies. While individuals from all sectors of society, including prominent intellectuals like Jefferson and Alexis de Tocqueville, whose works I draw upon here, examined the problem of slavery and thus black people, there was a distinct dearth of scholarly work focusing on the Mexican experience in America until the 1960s.² In the late 1920s, when the first great wave of 20th century Mexican immigration became an issue of national debate, it was a debate dominated by politicians, immigration activists and business interests. The transcripts of a series of Congressional hearings to consider a proposed bill to restrict ‘Western Hemisphere’ immigration provide a rich empirical ground for this chapter. Despite the geographically broad remit of the bill, it is the figure of ‘the Mexican’ that dominates the discussion recorded in the transcripts, some 1, 500 pages. They provide an excellent composite resource, documenting the testimonies of public officials from various Southwest localities, concerned citizens, lawmakers, agriculturalists, industrialists and other employers of Mexican labour, activists, eugencists and other self-appointed ‘experts’ on race and immigration. The transcripts also provide diverse types of discourse - both prepared formal statements submitted to the committee as well as the off-the-cuff banter and heat of the moment arguments of the participants - the words uttered so long ago by men long dead are here suspended in type on the page. Their overtly political discussion differs from the intellectual reflection of Jefferson and Tocqueville, which assumes a scholarly air of objectivity. Though the texts are incongruent in time and type, however, they are not unrelated in the ideological work that they do.

3.1 Toxic ground: Slavery and the Mexican immigration debate

The first group of Mexicans to become Americans, those essentially expropriated by the Mexican American War, were remarkably few in number,

² Accordingly, in the introduction to their comprehensive landmark study of Mexican Americans in the Southwest, Leo Greber, Ralph C. Guzman, and Joan W. Moore noted, ‘This book is part of the current discovery of Mexican Americans in the United States.’ *The Mexican-American People: The Nation's Second Largest Minority*, [by] Leo Grebler, Joan W. Moore, Ralph C. Guzman [with Others] (New York: Free Press; London: Collier-Macmillan, 1970), 3.

considering the vastness of the territory.³ The overwhelming majority of Mexican Americans first became such through immigration rather than conquest during the 1910s and 20s, pushed forward by the chaos of the Mexican revolution and pulled forward by American demands for labour. The ravenous demand for labour reflected that on the northern side of the border social lines were also being redrawn. Firstly, in 1924, in a fit of nationalism stoked by World War I, and after years of lobbying by nativists and eugenicists, the United States passed legislation to effectively end European immigration. Strict quotas were set in place to maintain the nation's delicate racial balance in favour of Northwestern Europeans thereby protecting the national bloodstream from the unassimilable 'swarms' of Southern and Eastern European 'new immigrants'.⁴ The same legislation also indirectly curtailed Japanese immigration, once an important labour source in California.⁵ Secondly, beginning around World War I, the first large exodus of African Americans fled the South, with its newly hatched Jim Crow laws, heading for the cities in the North where the war, and later the new immigration legislation, increased demands for labour. In 1920, there were nearly one and half million blacks in the North, a number which had roughly trebled since 1870.⁶ While the number of blacks arriving in the Southwest, where most Mexican immigrants remained, was negligible, as we will see, the spectre of black migration once again made a considerable impact on the region's politics.⁷

While the restriction on European and Asian immigration created a greater demand for Mexican labour in the Southwest, it had also fertilized a toxic discursive ground. 'It was the misfortune of the Mexican,' sociologist Ruth Tuck observed of the period in 1946, 'to enter the United States at a time when we were indulging in a national orgy of racist philosophy.'⁸ The new science of eugenics, using a distorted

³ Richard Nostrand writes that the 1850 census for the entire Southwest counted a little more than 80,000 newly American Mexicans. He asserts that this was almost certainly and undercount and estimates that there were at least 100,000. "The Hispano Homeland," (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), 19.

⁴ For the decisive historical account of early 20th century nativism, see: John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994).

⁵ Mae Ngai, "The Architecture of Race in American Immigration Law: A Reexamination of the Immigration Act of 1924," *The Journal of American History* 86, no. 1 (1999): 80-81.

⁶ Joseph A. Hill, "The Recent Northward Migration of the Negro (*Opportunity Magazine*, April 1924)," in *Up South: Stories, Studies and Letters of This Century's African-American Migrations*, ed. Malaika Adero (New York: The New Press, 1993), 24.

⁷ For an interesting examination of Los Angeles's small black community in the first decades of the twentieth century, see: Douglas Flamming, *Bound for Freedom: Black Los Angeles in Jim Crow America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

⁸ Ruth D. Tuck, *Not with the Fist. Mexican-Americans in a Southwest City* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1946), 50.

biology as its apparatus, took the essential logic of race – that nature determined social facts – to caricatured and violent extremes. Until being discredited by its association with the Nazis, Eugenics was widely seen as a fully acceptable means of improving heredity through science, and was embraced across the political spectrum by scientists, social reformers, medical officials and intellectuals alike. It was ‘not so much a clear set of scientific principles as a “modern” way of talking about social problems in biologizing terms’ that could be utilized by politicians or scientists to forward all manner of interests or beliefs.⁹ Despite its emphasis on modernity and improvement, it was dread obsession with degeneracy that characterized the leading works of American eugenicists like Madison Grant and Lothrop Stoddard whose very titles - *The Passing of the Great Race*, *The Rising Tide of Color Against White World Supremacy* - evoked apocolypse.

While Grant was primarily concerned in the aforementioned with the hordes of supposedly unassimilable, inferior races of Europe inundating American shores, after the successful passage of the 1924 Immigration Act, which effectively halted southern and eastern European immigration, Stoddard intensified his focus on the ‘color line.’ Though continuing to denigrate the ‘new immigrant’- ‘Alpine’ and ‘Mediterranean’ ‘aliens’- in his 1927 work *Re-Forging America*, he outlines an explicitly binary model of American society: ‘We have only one social division that can be termed “caste.” That is the color-line, drawn between the white and non-white elements of our population.’¹⁰ Inferior European immigrants could be racially assimilated with time and effort, but this ‘most emphatically does not apply to non-white immigrants, like the Chinese, Japanese, or Mexicans; neither does it apply to the large resident negro element which has been a tragic anomaly from our earliest times.’¹¹ Though primarily concerned with blacks (‘the negro is the only non-white element which constitutes a serious problem’), Stoddard furnished a fairly thorough analysis of Mexican immigration. Lamenting the fact that the end of cheap labour from Europe led some sectors of American industry to turn to Mexico, he writes: ‘The Mexican “peon” (Indian, or mixed-breed) is a poverty-stricken, ignorant, primitive creature, with strong muscles and with just enough brains to obey orders and produce

⁹ Frank Dikotter, "Race Culture: Recent Perspectives on the History of Eugenics," *The American Historical Review* 103, no. 2 (1998): 467-68.

¹⁰ Lothrop Stoddard, *Re-Forging America: The Story of Our Nationhood* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1927), 376.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 257.

profits under competent direction.’¹² ‘Such a being,’ he concluded, ‘profoundly alien in blood, ideals, and outlook, can be only a destructive element in our national life. The Mexican must be kept out if grave dangers are to be averted.’¹³ Many citizens, particularly unionists and small farmers unable to compete with large growers using immigrant labourers, shared such views. In 1926, Texas Congressman John C. Box introduced a bill to place Mexican immigration under the quota system, the first of repeated and repeatedly unsuccessful attempts.¹⁴ For the next several years, federal lawmakers held a series of hearings in which to consider ‘Western Hemisphere’ - ie. Mexican - immigration.

Nearly a century before the hearings took place, in his now classic examination of American democracy, Tocqueville had declared:

The most formidable evil threatening the future of the United States is the presence of the blacks on their soil. From whatever angle one sets out to inquire into the present embarrassments or future dangers facing the United States, one is almost always brought up against this basic fact.¹⁵

His prediction indeed anticipated the extent to which blackness would remain a powerful and salient ideological lexicon through which to interpret new problems and dangers. During these hearings, the history of slavery and the presence of African Americans, usually spoken of in the singular figure of ‘the Negro’, the always male, generic representative of the black population, were frequently used as instruments with which to orient the figure of ‘the Mexican’ and the meaning of ‘his’ coming. Six decades after its abolition, slavery was universally viewed in these particularly antagonistic debates as terrible mistake. Both sides likewise continually spoke of ‘the Negro’ element, that ‘tragic anomaly’, as a regret, even when expressing sympathy or concern. Examining the different ways in which those on each side of the debate on

¹² *Ibid.*, 214.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 216.

¹⁴ Abraham Hoffman gives a useful summary of Box’s various bills and their legislative fate. Abraham Hoffman, "Unwanted Mexican Americans in the Great Depression: Repatriation Pressures, 1929-1939," (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1974), 26-30.

¹⁵ Alexis De Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 313.

Mexican immigration employed anti-black rhetoric, which ranged from the urgent exhortations and scientific analyses of ‘true believers’ and ‘experts’ to the more casual traditions of ‘laypeople’ to the cynical manipulation of lobbyists, reveals a great deal about how racism was employed as an explanatory mechanism in this public discourse as well as how the legacy of slavery shaped the discursive field.

3.2 ‘Has the past no parallel in the way of the slave cargoes from Africa?’¹⁶

For those opposed to Mexican (and other) immigration, ‘cheap labor’ was conceptualized as interchangeable with slavery. The statement of Henry Ward, a representative of the Immigration Restriction League of Boston, exemplifies the typical manner in which restrictionists historically framed the problem they claimed Mexicans posed:

Here, again, we have in contact the two opposing motives that have so long contended in the history of our industrial development. One wants to get the quickest possible dollar results from the cheapest possible labor. The other looks beyond the immediate dollar, and says that we must not invest in strange and alien kinds of citizenship for the sake of those immediate dollar results. After slavery had been paid for, the exploited European promised the most immediate dollar results... Shall we now merely substitute the Mexican peon, with his indefinite powers of multiplication, for southern and eastern European cheap labor? Must our civilization forever rest on that sort of foundation?¹⁷

¹⁶ U.S. Congress, "Immigration from Countries of the Western Hemisphere: Hearings," ed. Committee on Immigration and Naturalization (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1928), 16.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 15.

What was being evoked in such discourse was as sentimental as it was intellectual. And such comparisons were more concerned with discursively linking the meaning of the two systems than with fine historical details. Indeed even as slavery was being cited as the predecessor of ‘peon labor’, contemporary concerns about the latter also directly shaped the manner in which slavery was construed. Texas congressman John C. Box, the sponsor and fervently anti-Mexican champion of the restriction bill, described slavery in terms that took considerable license with historical fact in order to position it as a mirror of the current debate:

Cheap labor, labor that it was said the white man would not do, caused the blacks and slavery to enter. Following inevitably came strife, war, sectionalism, and a whole brood of curses. A big race problem remains. These things were all wrapped up in cheap black labor and slavery.¹⁸

Of course, the idea that white men should or would not do certain kinds of work developed only after slavery was well established (and the indentured servitude of whites was abolished). Clearly, however, the utility of the linkage is in its ability to conjure the ‘inevitable’ strife, war and other ‘curses’ associated with slavery in the minds of many and apply them to Mexican immigration.

While immigration restrictionists often actively critiqued the greed of large-scale employers whose capitalist greed threatened to entrench a ‘new class of permanent “coolie” labor’, they understood this class as a fixed element, imported by capitalists precisely because of its abject nature, rather than a class whose conditions were being created by the importation.¹⁹ ‘Coolies’ and ‘peons’ did not become so through exploitation but were recruited because they were already innately exploitable. Within the nexus of qualities that anti-Mexican discourses focused upon, poverty and oppression were often at the centre. The statement presented to the

¹⁸ Box was also particularly eager to establish that the impending Mexican problem was not limited to the Southwest, where most of the immigrants were concentrated, but would spread across the whole country. Thus he made the interesting assertion that it was not originally Southerners who brought the ‘black from Africa over here to do cheap labor’ but ‘the black drifted South’ when Northerners found they couldn’t use him in their factories. *Ibid.*, 41-42.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 15.

Committee by the bill's sponsors, Box and Ohio congressman Thomas A. Jenkins, read: 'The most ignorant, most oppressed, and poorest people of that country, composing its peon class, are furnishing almost the entire volume of Mexican immigration.'²⁰ Ward's description of Mexicans was typical; they made 'good "raw" laborers' as they were 'peace-loving, docile, and obedient.' However

They know and care little or nothing about sanitation; they live huddled together in shacks or freight cars and, in increasing numbers, in congested "Mexican quarters," on the outskirts of western and southwestern cities, without proper sanitary facilities. They are prone to disease and their death rate from tuberculosis is high.²¹

Intellectual treatises of slavery, like those of Jefferson and Tocqueville, often appraised both the internal, innate inferiority of blacks as well as the degrading conditions to which the institution subjected them. Motivated toward a more immediately tangible goal and armed with a scientific doctrine that confidently biologised the entire social world, those agitating for the restriction of Mexican immigration were much less reflective in this regard. These qualities – being poor, unsanitary, disease ridden and oppressed - were understood as racial, that is as fixed traits. The external conditions in which they lived and the terms upon which they worked were presented as physical manifestations of the Mexicans' race, featuring as centrally and frequently, if not more so, in anti-Mexican discourse as their 'Amer-Indian' ancestry. Mexicans, the arguments suggested, were not made poor by conditions imposed upon them but rather they carried poverty, like tuberculosis, within them – and they carried it to the United States to the detriment of white people.

While Ward and others blamed employers for not being willing to pay 'adequate wages on which an American can support himself and his family in decency and comfort', the willingness of the Mexicans to work for less - like their predilection for shacks and susceptibility to disease- was understood as a congenital

²⁰ U.S. Congress, "Hearings before the Committee on Immigration and Naturalization: Immigration from the Western Hemisphere," (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1930), 406-07.

²¹ Congress, "Immigration from Countries of the Western Hemisphere: Hearings," 14.

failure.²² And like slaves, they degraded the status and well-being of white labour with their very presence: ‘No self-respecting white laborer can compete with a Mexican peon, who works for a small wage and exists in poverty and wretchedness.’

²³ The perceived impact of peon labour on the American workforce is illustrated in the following exchange between two members of the Committee on Immigration and Naturalization overseeing the hearings. The first speaker is a congressman from California, Arthur M. Free. Like others opposing restriction, Free repeatedly voiced his insistence that ‘white fellows’ would not do the labour for which employers required Mexicans.

Mr. Free. Take the stoop work. I refer to such work as picking berries and taking care of vegetable gardens, and I am also referring to the railroad work. Will the white fellows do those sorts of work?

Mr. Box. Some of them will and some of them will not. Many of them will not go and work with a bunch of Mexicans and be kicked about as the Mexicans are kicked about. The companies like to have men they can treat as they treat the Mexicans.²⁴

Whatever Box’s image of a white field worker, untainted by the deforming presence of cheap Mexican labour, might have been, others were much less romantic. The white ‘transient’ labour in his state, a congressman from North Dakota commented ‘has not always been the very finest type of American manhood...they are generally called “hoboes.”’²⁵ Box’s argument thus refracted criticism of the inherent exploitation of capitalist relations into anxiety about racial properties. Mexicans were understood to distort labour both symbolically and materially - their willingness to submit, to be ‘kicked around’ infected the relation between employer and hired labourer, inciting the employer to unwholesome domination.

²² *Ibid.*, 15.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 74.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 546, 49.

Mexican immigration, like slavery before it, thus made the tension between the nation's inherent economic inequality and its principle of social equality more conspicuous. Some proponents of Mexican labour suggested that the use of Mexican labour both reflected and enabled the social mobility of 'our Americans, who are being educated away from hard work.'²⁶ A representative of the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad commented that if the supply of foreign labour was cut off, it could undermine the 'process whereby an American boy born in circumstances of poverty...can still look forward with the aspiration that he may some day be President of the United States... We will have destroyed the thing that makes us different from the European, who has no such chance.'²⁷ Predictably, restrictionists and eugenicists argued that the presence of Mexicans, as 'a race, walking about below the rest of us,' as Box put it, corrupted the nation's social as well as economic well-being. 'The country was organized on the idea of equality of man,' he insisted, 'and its institutions can not survive with any other principle running through its life in any large way.'²⁸ An administrator at a Colorado high school similarly told researcher Paul S. Taylor that the influx of Mexican workers presented a dilemma that could only be solved through 'amalgamation', an 'absolutely repulsive' proposition, or the creation of a caste system. The latter of which 'will be worse upon us, the aristocracy, than upon the Mexicans in their serfdom. We would be sacrificing the ideals which our fathers worked so hard to establish and preserve.'²⁹ For such thinkers, equality could only survive in the presence of those who were already equal; the presence of those who were endogenously serfs (like the slaves before them) would pollute American democracy by fermenting the poison of inequality within it.

3.3 'The cancer of the South'

Unsurprisingly, the restrictionist discourse which likened Mexican immigration to slavery, also conceptualized the social and economic problems that immigration was thought to present as a 'race problem' immediately congruous to the

²⁶ Committee on Immigration, United States Senate, *Restriction of Western Hemisphere Immigration*, First Session, 1928, 76.

²⁷ "Immigration from Countries of the Western Hemisphere: Hearings," 418.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 44.

²⁹ Mark Reisler, *By the Sweat of Their Brow: Mexican Immigrant Labor in the United States, 1900-1940* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1976), 164.

country's notorious 'Negro problem.' In his testimony to the Committee, Roy L. Garis, an associate professor of Economics at Vanderbilt University, cast the potential Mexican problem in apocalyptic proportions. The American people must realize, he insisted, that more than the profits of the cotton industry and beet growers were at stake:

The problem is immeasurably greater and broader than that. It is whether we shall preserve the Southwest as a future home for millions of the white race or permit this vast region to continue to be used as it now is being used, as a dumping ground for the human hordes of poverty stricken peon Indians of Mexico. We must decide now before it is too late whether we wish the complete Mexicanization of this section of our country with all which that implies - enormous decreases in the value of all property...the creation of a race problem that will dwarf the negro problem of the South - and the practical destruction, at least for centuries, of all that is worthwhile in our white civilization.³⁰

Interestingly, proponents of Mexican immigration also invoked the 'Negro problem' in their arguments. They repeatedly countered the charges of restrictionists by asserting Mexican immigration as a *solution* to the 'Negro race problem' and its potential emergence in the Southwest, rather than a new manifestation of it. A report submitted to the Committee on behalf of the California Agricultural Legislative Committee read:

Shall [the] Negro race problem be spread more widely?
... The American negro we all know. Are we
Americans, with a full knowledge of the very serious
racial problems which he has brought to the South and

³⁰ Congress, "Hearings before the Committee on Immigration and Naturalization: Immigration from the Western Hemisphere." 435.

other parts of America, willing deliberately to spread him over the rest of the country in ever-increasing numbers?³¹

In contrast to the restrictionists who made no distinction in the (un)desirability of Mexican and other non-European ethnic groups, the racial arguments presented by those dependent on Mexican labour actively sought to distinguish Mexicans from black people as well as other supposedly deleterious ethnic groups. Unlike the Japanese, the California Agricultural Legislative Committee claimed, who soon wanted to buy land and go into business for himself, the Mexican did not have this ambition, and, ‘consequently, is a far more desirable person to have around, for he will work for other people.’³² The President of the Los Angeles Times Co., Harry Chandler, was particularly eager to make the case for the Mexican as the ‘lesser of evils’: ‘we are a thousand times better off with Mexicans than Filipinos or yellow negroes from Porto Rico.’³³ The latter two alternatives to the peon, ‘the quarrelsome and aggressive’ Filipino and the ‘degraded’ ‘Porto’ Rican, Chandler repeatedly asserted, ‘would be a problem, and a terrible menace.’³⁴ Even though Chandler made little distinction in terms of rank between blacks and Filipinos, within the broader range of race types and conglomerate system of comparisons that Californians engaged, it is often clear that the established tradition of anti-black racism ideologically weighted the discursive figure of the Negro a bit differently, a bit more heavily than newer, less numerous minorities within these debates. If the Filipino ‘would make [a problem] if we brought him in’, there was nothing conditional, in the eyes of these men, about the problem the Negro ‘has made.’³⁵ It is quite telling that Chandler and other pro-Mexican speakers routinely referred to Puerto Ricans as ‘Porto Rican negroes’ in order to emphasise their undesirability. Similarly, some of those opposing Mexican immigration occasionally highlighted African ancestry as an ingredient in the Mexican’s ‘mongrel’ heritage. A congressman from Ohio, for

³¹ *Ibid.*, 238.

³² *Ibid.*, 233.

³³ *Ibid.*, 64 – 65.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 65, 68, 69.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 61.

example, described the Mexican's 'unfortunate' ancestry as 'one... which promises little - a mixture of native Indian with West Indian negro and Spaniard.'³⁶

Numerous Californian employers reiterated this differentiation of blackness as especially undesirable in their testimonies before the hearings committee. R. Goodspeed of the California Orchard Co., for example, in describing the Mexican's desirability as a labourer, qualified his opinions by stating: 'To date we have tried out every form of transient labor except the negro.'³⁷ The absence of black labour in the state didn't stop Californians from perceiving it as a potential menace, illustrating the uniquely ubiquitous national saturation of anti-black ideology. Even Americans from parts of the country with small black populations or none at all felt that they knew exactly what the presence of that population would entail, it could quite literally go without saying. A lettuce farmer, explaining his objection to potential Puerto Rican labour stated: 'You know what the problem is. I don't have to tell you about the negro problem and I don't want to discuss it. But the Mexican is our best bet.'³⁸ Fred Bixby, a cattle rancher from California, whose testimony was fairly remarkable for its genuine defense of Mexican labourers, sharpened this defense by contrasting his Mexican employees with phantom black people:

Here is a point I want to bring out: You were talking concerning the negroes...I have a family - three of them are girls. Ever since they were that high [indicating] I have had them out on the range, riding the range with Mexicans, and they have been just as safe as if they had been with me...Do you suppose we would send them out with a bunch of negroes? We would never think of such a thing...I do not want a bunch of negroes out in my country.³⁹

Due to the wide availability of other flexible labour sources in the Southwest, the agricultural nature of much of the state's work, and the distance of the state from the South, it seems unlikely that it would ever have become a magnet for black Southern

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 419.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 233.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 211.

³⁹ *Restriction of Western Hemisphere Immigration*, 30.

migrants akin to the industrial centres of the North during the early 20th century. The fact that, nevertheless, these Californians attempted to politically justify their use of Mexican labor against the prospect of a black alternative speaks to the national salience of anti-black racism.

The following exchange between Ralph Taylor, Executive Secretary of the California Legislative Committee, and Box illustrates the manner in which each side of the Mexican debate evoked slavery to support its argument. Box addresses a lengthy statement to Taylor in which he reminds him that they are ‘treading in the steps that men have been walking in for over a hundred years.’ Urging Taylor to remember that the ‘great race question’ being created in California would be left to all of their children he stated: ‘All the strife that we had for 50 years before the Civil War, in which most of us in that country lost everything that our fathers would have left for us, we have reaped as the consequences of a great race question...It has been a blight on the whole country.’ While Box clearly sought to place these events within annals of American history, the immediacy and emotion with which he evokes the problems of slavery also reminds us that, however remote slavery might seem to us in the early 21st century, at this point in the early 20th, it had only been 65 years since Emancipation - Box’s father was a Confederate soldier.⁴⁰

Taylor shrewdly countered Box’s sentimental appeal by emphasizing slavery, and by extension the ‘great race problem’, as exclusively *black* phenomena:

Mr. Taylor. Well, Judge Box, no man could have made a better argument in behalf of the thing that I am trying to get over to this committee than you have. You never heard anyone at that time...when they were discussing whether they should bring in African negroes or not, saying that it was necessary to bring in the African negro in order to protect this Nation from a social menace.

Mr. Box. No; they said it was necessary to keep from destroying the industry.

⁴⁰ Congress, "Immigration from Countries of the Western Hemisphere: Hearings," 41.

Mr. Taylor. It was an economic situation.

Mr. Box. That is what the gentleman said.

Mr. Taylor. That is only part of it, and a small part of it at that.

Mr. Box. Your part of it is: "If you don't bring this ruinous element of population in here to do this work, we are going to bring in another element that will."

Mr. Taylor. No; we do not say that at all. What we say is that this population that we are asking be permitted to come in here is not a ruinous element of population at all, but that if you do exclude them you will force us to bring in an element of population that is extremely ruinous. You know the cancer that is in the South because of the situation that you described a moment ago. Would you have that spread over the rest of the United States?

Mr. Box. No; it is because I love your country just as much almost as I do my own that I do not want it over that country. That is exactly why.⁴¹

Several points stand out in this exchange. We see that both Taylor and Box personify the strife of slavery as the black population itself; here the ruinous effects of the Civil War are seen to be embodied in black people themselves - a 'ruinous element of population,' a 'cancer.' Most importantly, we see an explicit example of the push and pull effect of anti-black ideology in its application to other groups. Each man insists that he is talking about the same thing as the other - preserving the country from 'racial' menace- but they have taken opposite stances. Box presents Mexican

⁴¹ Congress, "Hearings before the Committee on Immigration and Naturalization: Immigration from the Western Hemisphere," 221-22. Here Box uses the term 'country' interchangeably with 'region.' The participants frequently used the term in this manner.

immigration as a repetition of the country's original sin, equating slavery and cheap labour, the Mexican and the black. Taylor insists that Mexican labor is the only viable means of saving the Southwest from the 'cancer' of the African American (or the 'Porto Rican negro').

In either case, blackness, and in particular blackness as the symbol of slavery, stands apart in ideological importance from that which it is compared. Even when a line was drawn between the white race and all others, Mexicanness, or Filipinoness and Japaneseness was never on the same plane as blackness. Though they might overlap, they were never the same. The figure of the Mexican or the Filipino was never fully interchangeable with the figure of the Negro. If one could argue in the early 20th century that the Mexican was 'like the Negro', a figure and a presence whose meaning was firmly historically established, one could not similarly argue that the Negro was 'like the Filipino' or 'like the Mexican' with the same effect. In the process of bifurcation which racial designation performed, the splitting between the unmarked and the marked, the norm and the abnorm, the us and the them, blackness would remain a definitive point of reference in America, against which the position of other groups could be established. Even when, in one of the more hysterical pieces of anti-Mexican rhetoric, Garis warned that 'the human hordes of poverty stricken peon Indians of Mexico' would create in the Southwest a 'race problem that will dwarf the negro problem of the South', the 'negro problem' is ideologically confirmed as the baseline of the marked and the abnorm. Whether such comparisons aimed at establishing the degradation of Mexicans or their harmlessness, they simultaneously confirmed and entrenched a conceptualisation of African Americans as a 'ruinous element.'

3.4 On Aliens, Natal and National

As we have seen, those conceptualizing the 'Mexican problem' in the early 20th century drew direct and ominous parallels between slavery and 'cheap' or 'peon' labour; accordingly their evaluations of Mexicans as a racial population was similarly informed by well-established anti-black discourse. The use of Mexican immigrant labour, like slavery, was seen to distort labour relations and to erode the foundation of equality on which American society was based. Here it is useful to consider Orlando

Patterson's insightful argument that in slaveholding societies the presence of the enslaved did not so much cause contempt for labour, as was commonly asserted - and here we are specifically concerned with labour performed for others - but that it *exposed* the demeaning nature of it, and undermined the very idea of a 'free' labour force.⁴² 'The use of personally dominated individuals for the production and reproduction of wealth exposed the reality behind the so-called free labor. The labourer came to see his work for others for what it really was - alienation from the means of production and exploitation by the employer.'⁴³ Yet, as with blackness and 'like blackness', though the gap between slavery and the 'slavery-like' conditions of other forms of exploitative labour relations might sometimes narrow considerably, the ideological depth between them was nevertheless frequently profound. Slavery was not just a more extreme method of labour appropriation - it demanded particular methods in order to be maintained. Moses Finley describes this with precision: 'If a slave is a property with a soul, a nonperson and yet indubitably a biological human being, institutional procedures are to be expected that will degrade and undermine his humanity and so distinguish him from human beings who are not property.'⁴⁴

A primary difference between slavery and other forms of compulsory or exploited labour is readily apparent - slavery commodified the labourer themselves, rather than simply their labour power.⁴⁵ As such, the power of master over slave was total. This alone, however, is insufficient as a definitive characteristic, considering that, in the colonial American context, masters had almost equal power over white indentured servants, whom they could buy, sell, whip, and beat at will.⁴⁶ Only slaves, however, passed their status onto their children, *ad infinitum*. This inheritability is both epitome and function of what Orlando Patterson calls the slave's 'natal alienation.' A constituent element of slavery, Patterson argues, is not just that it renders the slave powerless but that it also severs the individual's right to legitimate social ties, excising them from the social order, except as their master's possession, and even placing them outside of the order of human time: 'Alienated from all "rights" or claims of birth, he ceased to belong in his own right to any legitimate

⁴² Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 34.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 33-34.

⁴⁴ M. I. Finley, *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology* (London: Chatto and Windus Ltd, 1980), 95.

⁴⁵ Finley, *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology*, 74 - 75.

⁴⁶ Barbara J. Fields, "Slavery, Race and Ideology in the United States of America," *New Left Review* 181, no. May-June (1990): 102.

social order. All slaves experienced, at the very least, a secular excommunication.⁴⁷ Slaves were uprooted from their homeland in the event of becoming enslaved, but their totalizing deracination was an ongoing process. This is not to suggest, of course, that slaves did not forge social relationships, that they did not build communities or have friendships and families, or create cultures which sought to retain a sense of their ancestral heritage; it is that these relationships had no official recognition. For slaves, 'unlike other persons,' reaching for the past or for the related living 'meant struggling with and penetrating the iron curtain of the master, his community, his laws, his policemen or patrollers, and his heritage.'⁴⁸

In broad terms slavery severed a people from homeland and history and in fine strokes it rendered the individual ties of family utterly violable. In addition to denying the slave any authority to act as a public person, slavery also denied the normal relations of authority within families. Parents had no claim to their children, relationships between partners were not considered marriages, and, individuals could be removed from their communities of kinship at any time. Tocqueville's comments on the impact of slavery upon Africans and their descendants in the United States captures the exactness of the term natal alienation, and also the ferocity of the alienation it described: 'The Negro is a slave from birth. What am I saying? He is often sold in his mother's belly and begins, so to say, to be a slave before he is born.'⁴⁹ In dissolving the validity of the normal web of social, political and familial relations that made a human a person, slavery even rendered the physical, uterine link between mother and infant officially null and void. And yet inherent in these processes, as Finley points out and as discussed in the last chapter, was an ambiguity. Slaves could be branded as cattle and legally construed as a property, but even the man holding the branding iron (and perhaps especially him) necessarily remained aware that slaves were people and could think, act, obey or rebel.⁵⁰ The severity with which the enslaved were alienated, and the central ambiguity their condition entailed -

⁴⁷ Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 5.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* Though Patterson makes explicit his recognition that slaves did have a social life of their own, his usage of the term 'social death' to describe the condition of enslavement nevertheless seems to undermine this fact, making it a problematic and in some ways unhelpful term. For discussion of the social and cultural lives of American slaves, see, for example: Sidney W. Mintz and Richard Price, "The Birth of African-American Culture: An Anthropological Perspective," (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992); Eugene D. Genovese, "Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made," (New York: Random House, 1976).

⁴⁹ De Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 292.

⁵⁰ Finley, *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology*, 95.

an ambiguity rendered particularly disturbing within the context of American democracy - could not but have profound effects on the manner in which slaves and free black people were approached practically and conceptually.

Despite the discursive bind woven between immigrants and slaves by some, the circumstances under which Mexican workers were exploited were fundamentally different than those under which African Americans were enslaved. The maintenance of Mexicans as a labour source required and produced their poverty and marginalisation, but this did not entail the secular ‘excommunication’ of slavery. It did not demand the dissolution of social ties, nor the degradation of middle and upper class Mexicans, nor the *legal* assignation of racial difference. The deracination of slaves rendered them in the eyes of some as essentially nationless, as Tocqueville described the American slave: ‘Ceasing to belong to Africa, he has acquired no right to the blessings of Europe; he is left in suspense between two societies and isolated between two peoples, sold by one and repudiated by the other.’⁵¹ Discursive and legal constructions of Mexican immigrants, on the other hand, were informed, in ways that were both legitimating and damning, by the proximity of Mexico. And, crucially, though the processes of expropriation or exodus which brought them to America (or America to them) kept many early Mexican Americans and later Mexican immigrants on the margins of the American social body and though they may have experienced a profound sense of homelessness and loss, neither the early Mexican - Americans nor later Mexican immigrants lost the political rights entailed in nationality. In short, Mexicans might have been aliens - but they were national aliens.

3.5 Family, Work and Honour

‘Our labour is not cheap’

Ralph Taylor, the ever adroit defender of Mexican immigration, gave an interesting response when challenged by a member of the Committee with the following question: ‘Would not the adoption of your argument lead us to the national problem with the Mexicans just as great as we have today with the negroes?’ ‘Senator,’ he replied, ‘I should say, no; for this very fundamental reason: When the

⁵¹ De Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 292.

negro was brought in here he was brought in as a slave; he was brought in as manifestly the cheapest kind of cheap labor. He was absolutely at the control, body and soul, of his master.⁵² On the other hand, Taylor later asserted in the discussion, the Mexican ‘does not present the problem you illustrate with negroes, because he gets the very highest wage that is secured by agricultural labor anywhere in the United States.’⁵³ Taylor also emphasized that Mexicans were paid the same wage as Americans, throughout the Southwest.⁵⁴ Subtly but crucially, Taylor shifts from differentiating slavery and immigrant labour as distinct systems with particular practices and instead distinguishes ‘the Mexican’ from ‘negroes’ – the implicit suggestion being that the payment of equal wages demonstrates some intrinsic difference between the two populations which results in a different response to them from white people.

Proponents of Mexican immigration, both from California and other regions, continually attempted to establish that Mexican labour was not degraded or cheap labour, insisting in the hearings that Mexicans were not paid less than white men but would simply do the work white men would not do, whether for racial reasons or otherwise. The representatives of large-scale Californian agriculture interests continually asserted that they paid the highest agricultural wages in the country. The manager of the Western Growers Protective Association insisted:

Our labor is not cheap. The Congressman here has asked me this question whether it is cheap...in the cantaloupe fields in the Imperial Valley last year I had Mexican pickers who were picking cantaloupes on a crate basis, making \$22.50 a day, and white labor lying out under the palm trees in the parks, refusing to work.⁵⁵

E.E. McInnis, the General Solicitor of the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad Co., a Chicago based company which employed largely Mexican labour, insisted that ‘this

⁵² *Restriction of Western Hemisphere Immigration*, 79-80.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 80.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁵⁵ Congress, "Hearings before the Committee on Immigration and Naturalization: Immigration from the Western Hemisphere," 241.

itinerant labor is no new thing in the economic structure of the United States' and rejected the charge, much to Judge Box's chagrin, that Mexicans employed by the railroad had lower living standards than their white counterparts, as well as the suggestion that his company used Mexican labour in order to pay cheaper wages. 'Of course,' he stated, 'we concede that we do not deliberately pay more money for labor than we have to pay for it. That would not be good business or good patriotism.'⁵⁶

While McInnis was largely pragmatic in his arguments, others were more emotive. In order to emphasize that Mexican labour was not degraded, cheap labour, their most ardent defenders, Fred Bixby, the Californian rancher mentioned previously, testified that on his ranch '[t]he Mexicans and the white men work together, eat at the table together, play cards together and associate together, and if a white man says he will not work with Mexicans that gentleman is fired, because the Mexican is better than the white man.'⁵⁷ Another rancher similarly claimed that 'white men and Mexicans work side by side... and I never differentiated or made any distinction between the two.'⁵⁸ Natalia Molina has commented that within these hearings, '[b]oth groups supported and opposed Mexican immigrants for the same reason: they represented low-wage exploitable labor.'⁵⁹ While industrialists and agriculturalists may have desired Mexican immigration precisely for this reason, they often took pains to insist otherwise. While the testimonies of the two ranchers considered above suggest that they felt genuine respect for their Mexican workers, no doubt this type of rhetoric was largely used by employers in order to deflect accusations that their practices were destructive to the well-being of American workers. In any case, whatever the veracity of these claims and whether or not they resonated with the public in a meaningful way, the fact that employers attempted to emphasise the fairness of immigrant labour, marks an important fork in the ideological road between slavery and low-paid labour.

The paid, even if menial, often stigmatised and backbreaking employment of Mexicans allowed for at least the possibility honour to be attributed to their work, as the testimonies above begin to suggest. Though the figures of both the field labourer and the slave evoke suffering and domination, it is striking that the Mexican farm

⁵⁶ "Immigration from Countries of the Western Hemisphere: Hearings," 402, 20.

⁵⁷ *Restriction of Western Hemisphere Immigration*, 27.

⁵⁸ "Immigration from Countries of the Western Hemisphere: Hearings," 371.

⁵⁹ Natalia Molina, *Fit to Be Citizens? : Public Health and Race in Los Angeles, 1879-1939* (Berkeley, Calif. ; London: University of California Press, 2006), 118.

worker became one of the most prominent and powerful symbols to be taken up by the movement for Mexican American civil rights. While much of the political Chicano artwork from the mid and late 20th century depicted farm workers marching or brandishing the '*huelga*' ('strike') signs, such works also frequently depicted them working in the fields. While imagery might be present to suggest the oppressive conditions under which these people laboured, the work itself is depicted as dignified, a source strength and pride. The *Plan Espiritual del Aztlán*, a manifesto of Chicano nationalism, for example, stated: 'Aztlán belongs to those who plan the seeds, water the fields, and gather the crops, and not to foreign Europeans.'⁶⁰ In an illustration of this flexibility of the Mexican worker archetype in scholarly discourse, in their history of America's mass deportation of Mexicans and Mexican Americans during the Depression, two Chicano historians write: 'Mexican workers were also bitterly resented [by the American Federation of Labor] because they were preferred by employers over Anglo workers. The reason for the preference was that Mexicans were loyal, worked harder, and did better work.'⁶¹ Though they explicitly critique the anti-Mexican racism so pervasively spouted by white people during the era, here they uncritically present these perceived qualities of Mexican workers as fact, citing the opinions of 'Anglo' employers as evidence. In sharp contrast, as the slave's labor *only* enriched the master, it is unambiguously a product, and symbol, of the slave's domination, and *only* in resistance, rebellion or escape can the slave be easily romanticized as heroic or noble. This is epitomized in the famous passage of Frederick Douglass's autobiography in which he describes beating his master in a physical struggle, 'I was nothing before – I was a man now.'⁶²

*'What father when he is a slave?'*⁶³

In both the pro-Mexican immigration discourse of the 1920s and 30s, with its condescending racialism, and the political discourse of later civil rights activists and

⁶⁰ Shifra M. Goldman, "The Iconography of Chicano Self-Determination: Race, Ethnicity, and Class," *Art Journal* 49, no. 2 (1990): 173. Aztlán was the name given to the legendary homeland in Aztec myth from which they migrated to present day Mexico City. It was adopted by the Chicano movement as a term to refer to the Southwestern lands appropriated by the United States to reclaim the territory as Chicano homeland.

⁶¹ Francisco E. Balderrama and Raymond Rodriguez, *Decade of Betrayal: Mexican Repatriation in the 1930s*, Rev. ed. ed. (Albuquerque, N.M.: University of New Mexico Press, 2006), 68.

⁶² Frederick Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (New York, New York: Collier Books, 1962), 143.

⁶³ Finley, *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology*, 75.

militants, the figure of the Mexican worker was often tightly interlinked with the image of the Mexican family.⁶⁴ As with plantation slavery, the agricultural industry of the early 20th century utilized the labour of children as well as adults. ‘The Mexican family,’ as a recent historical work put it, ‘became the preferred work unit for agricultural contractors in literally every state in the Union.’⁶⁵ While the legal dissolution of family bonds among the enslaved prompted an ideological dissolution of their supposed moral capacity to form such bonds, the salience of large Mexican families, and the widespread employment of the Mexican family as ‘a work unit,’ led to quite different kinds of ideological constructions. Eugenicists and immigration restrictionists saw something sinister in the Mexican family. Charles M. Goethe, founder of the Eugenic Society of Northern California, pleaded his case with the characteristically doom-saying pseudo-scientific authority of the Eugenics movement. The ‘Mexican-Amerind fecundity’ Goethe warned, ‘under American sanitation would speed the exhaustion of our food supply.’⁶⁶ On the other hand, if the large Mexican family made an easy target, especially during the hardship of the Depression, the Mexican’s perceived innate inclination towards large families could also be cast in approving ideological terms. Illustrating a typical – and typically patronizing – example of the former, C.B. Hudspeth, a Congressman from Texas, testified at the hearings on Mexican immigration that:

Anybody who knows the Mexican knows of his love for his children. There is no question about that. He will deprive himself of a tortilla, a bowl of Chili con carne, or anything else in order to feed his children. They are a home-loving people, and, of course, that certainly would commend them to me and I know it will to you gentlemen.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ See, for example, the mural in San Diego’s Chicano Park entitled ‘*Leyes (La Familia)*.’ Here a shirtless, muscular farm worker outstretches his arms in a Christ-like but distinctly powerful pose. In front of him, protected by span of his arms, are his wife, in workers’ overalls, and their son. It can be viewed on the Chicano Park website. Chicano Park Steering Committee, “Chicano Park, Murals,” <http://chicano-park.com/cpmap.html>.

⁶⁵ Balderrama and Rodriguez, *Decade of Betrayal: Mexican Repatriation in the 1930s*, 45.

⁶⁶ Congress, “Immigration from Countries of the Western Hemisphere: Hearings,” 92-93.

⁶⁷ “Immigration from Countries of the Western Hemisphere: Hearings,” 126-27.

The most eager propagandisers of Mexican immigration even insinuated that because the Mexican came with his family he would not pose a threat to American women. To emphasise the beneficial traits of the Mexican, Ralph H. Taylor drew an alarming image of the Filipinos, who because of immigration restrictions largely entered the United States as single men: 'the Filipino, far away from home, without a family, and with well-developed social aspirations and reeking with disease, is a very definite menace to the American blood-stream.'⁶⁸

Most importantly, the linkage of labour and family allows nobility to be attributed to the labourer because he works to support his family. Because of the totalizing domination and appropriation of slavery, a romantic image of the slave is only possible in a racist discursive schema. The slave, of course, in the eyes of those who enslaved him, had no family to support. His toil, as a product of his condition, reinforced a dual emasculation, the loss of ownership of self and the loss of male authority over woman and child. In 1965, Daniel Moynihan (in)famously placed the dysfunctional Negro family at the heart of the 'tangle of pathology' strangling Negro society, a unit of sub-normality whose matriarchal head both reflected and reproduced the black man's crippled masculinity and morality. Moynihan rooted the problem in slavery, seemingly assuming, like Tocqueville and others, that slave owners' power to break the family bonds of their slaves created an actual inability in slaves and their descendants to create such bonds: 'It was by destroying the Negro family under slavery that white America broke the will of the Negro people.'⁶⁹ In contrast, the preeminent stereotype of the Mexican family held by 20th century social workers and researchers alike featured a domineering husband who 'wielded unassailable authority' and a 'wife was viewed as the docile spouse who undying devotion to her family bordered on sainthood.'⁷⁰ The view of the Mexican family emphasises the Mexicans' backward traditionalism and un-American lack of modern sensibility; however, in contrast to perceptions of black licentiousness and aberrant gendering, this distortion caricatures the Mexican's 'moral personality' rather than denies it.⁷¹

⁶⁸ "Hearings before the Committee on Immigration and Naturalization: Immigration from the Western Hemisphere," 238.

⁶⁹ Daniel Moynihan, "The Negro Family: The Case for National Action," ed. United States Department of Labor Office of Policy Planning and Research (1965). See Herbert G. Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925* for a counter-argument.

⁷⁰ Balderrama and Rodriguez, *Decade of Betrayal: Mexican Repatriation in the 1930s*, 43.

⁷¹ Frank Tannenbaum contrasts slavery in the United States to that in Latin America: 'The demise of the sanctity of marriage had become absolute, and the Negro had lost his moral personality. Legally he was a chattel under the law, and in practice an animal to be bred for the market. The logic of the

As I will discuss in the next chapter, whereas Mexicans and whites not infrequently intermarried in the Southwest, the denial of the slave's ability to form legitimate social ties reverberated before and after emancipation in the widespread legal prohibition of black people to make legitimate matrimonial ties with white people.

3.6 As Marked Populations

Color and other 'qualifications'

When, as discussed in the Introduction, Jefferson posed the question, 'And is this difference of no importance?' in his contemplation on the problems of slavery, he did not do so rhetorically. After the initial reflection on 'the seat and cause' of the negro's blackness, his discursive dissection of the black body continued: they have less hair; less kidney secretions but greater glandular secretion ('which gives them a very strong and disagreeable odour'); they require less sleep; they are more 'ardent in desire, but unattuned to the finer sensations and sentiments of love'; and, a claim which reverberates so plainly with a master's willful and self-serving distortion, 'their griefs are transient.'⁷² Jefferson's observations are formulated in a scientific vernacular clearly specific to historical period in which he became such a prominent figure. Yet the discursive emphasis on slaves as physical beings is hardly new. Finley notes that in Ancient Greece the word '*soma*' - literally 'body' - was used for 'slave' if another meaning was not indicated by a qualifying adjective. The Greeks even coined the word '*andrapoda*' or 'man-footed being' to refer to slaves on the model of '*tetrapoda*', the term for four legged animals.⁷³ The day-to-day commercial activity of slavery also necessitated that the enslaved be explicitly evaluated by their physical properties. Perhaps no other image captures the violence to personhood that slavery inflicted as that of the auction block and prospective bidders examining the naked bodies of the enslaved. Of course, the commodification of human beings

situation worked itself out in time, but in the process the moral personality of the slave as a human being became completely obscured. It is no wonder that the right of redemption was seemingly nonexistent and the opportunity for manumission greatly restricted.' Frank Tannenbaum, *Slave and Citizen* (Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 1992), 82. Moynihan drew heavily on Tannenbaum's work to make his case about the deteriorated Negro family. Tannenbaum, however, does not make the claim that the loss of moral personality in white eyes resulted in the actual loss of morality in black people themselves.

⁷² Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (Richmond, VA: J. W. Randolph, 1853), 150.

⁷³ M. I. Finley, "Was Greek Civilization Based on Slave Labour?," *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 8, no. 2 (1959): 146.

required ongoing management to accentuate the status of their bodies as property and to refute their personhood. Succinctly capturing the effect of these procedures, Greek orator Demosthenes observed that the most distinguishing trait of the slave is that he ‘is answerable with his body for all offences.’⁷⁴

It is commonsensical that free people contemplating slaves should focus on their physical traits – particularly in the American context where the homeland of the slaves in question, which might otherwise provide ethnic or cultural reference points for disparagement of the enslaved as a people, was an ocean away. This is highlighted by the manner in which Europeans and colonial Americans contemplated Native Americans in the same period. While in the 18th century thinkers in Europe and America were intensely preoccupied with the Africans’ color, there was no comparable focus on the appearance of Native Americans in the contemplations of them as a race during at this time. Not only did they not focus on somatic distinctions between themselves and Native Americans but they actively downplayed them. Jordan writes: ‘[Wh]ite men both in Europe and America belittled the importance of [the Indian’s] “tawny” complexion or used it merely as a foil for proving certain points about the Negro’s blackness. Most writers, moreover, saw the Indian as naturally and innately lighter than he was in fact.’⁷⁵ Though Enlightenment thinkers such as Jefferson pondered the biological source of African color, it was commonly believed that Indians used bear grease or other materials to darken themselves.⁷⁶ Of these different approaches to the two peoples, Jordan remarks, seemingly with some surprise, ‘[I]t is arresting that the colonists did not consider Indians as being in any sense pale replicas of Negroes.’⁷⁷ Of course, such a formulation would only be possible if the meaning of difference was fixed outside of social relations rather than determined within them.

The emphasis on blackness as not only important but permanent is also important to consider. The permanence of blackness has seemed obvious to observers for several centuries. Long before Leonel Castillo, the Mexican American activist we met in the introduction commented that ‘The Negro cannot escape his color,’ in the late 18th and early 19th century, the more vital and entrenched slavery became to

⁷⁴ Finley, *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology*, 93.

⁷⁵ Winthrop D. Jordan, *White over Black: American Attitudes toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (Williamsburg, Virginia: University of North Carolina Press, 1968), 241.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 162.

national life, the more Americans began to remark upon the immutability of blackness.⁷⁸ A prominent Virginian, Thomas R. Dew made the typical remark that ‘the emancipated black carries a mark which no time can erase; he forever wears the indelible symbol of his inferior condition; the *Ethiopian cannot change his skin, nor the leopard his spots.*’⁷⁹ Such observations of course ignore the utter mutability of phenotypical traits such as colour across time, and quite short periods of time at that. Even as Americans such as James Madison proclaimed that ‘difference and colour must be considered as permanent and insuperable’, the complexions of those populating their plantations suggested that it was not colour but slavery that should be considered insuperable.⁸⁰ Indeed as early as the American Revolution there were slaves completely white in appearance, a substantial number of whom, one must presume, were the children and grandchildren of their owners.⁸¹ One wonders what Jordan would say provided slave owners with ‘the mental margin’ for keeping such people - individuals who not only shared the same skin colour as them but in all probability a family resemblance as well - in bondage. Patterson, noting the speed with which ‘miscegenation’ erases phenotypical distinction, further points out that even in the course of an individual lifetime somatic traits are not as static as one might suppose and that the imagined contrast between ‘black’ and ‘white’ is not nearly so black and white as this opposing terminology suggests.

Color, despite its initially dramatic impact, is in fact a rather weak basis of ranked differences in interracial societies...For one thing, the range of color differences among whites and among blacks is greater than is normally thought...The differences diminish even more when we take into account the permanent

⁷⁸ Leonel J. Castillo, "Inter-Minority Relations. a Presentation Delivered at the Mexican American, a New Focus on Opportunity. Testimony Presented at the Cabinet Committee Hearings on Mexican American Affairs, El Paso, Texas. October 26-28, 1967. Inter-Agency Committee on Mexican American Affairs, Washington D.C.," in *Ernesto Galarza Papers* (Stanford: Special Collections Archive, Stanford University, 1967), 7.

⁷⁹ Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny : The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge, Mass. ; London: Harvard University Press, 1981), 122.

⁸⁰ Jordan, *White over Black : American Attitudes toward the Negro, 1550-1812*, 552.

⁸¹ F. James Davis, *Who Is Black? : One Nation's Definition* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991), 48-49.

suntan acquired by most whites working in the tropics.⁸²

That the somatic variation of African peoples flattened in the eyes of the slaveholders into ‘that eternal monotony...that immovable veil of black’ is as much evidence of the relationship between them as the flattening of Africans’ ethnic and cultural differences.⁸³

‘What we ordinarily call “peons”’

It is interesting to consider that no color term came into general usage to refer to Mexicans parallel to those used to describe and/or degrade African Americans. The most common appellations, Negro, black, colored, as well as epithets like ‘nigger’ (a bastardization of the Spanish *negro*) and ‘darky’ are all terms which define the subject through reference to color.⁸⁴ Generally speaking, Mexicans were not referred to as ‘browns’ either in terms of appellation or description. The ‘Brown Pride’ slogan popular among Chicano nationalists in the 1960s never held universal appeal in the Mexican American community. Even today, Mexicans are still much more likely to be referred to, by themselves and others, with terms suggesting national or regional origin, language or culture than colour - Latino, Hispanic, Mexican American and Chicano are the most common. In telling contrast, it was not until the late 20th century that the term African American, parallel to terms like Irish American or Mexican American, which links black people in America to a cultural and geographical origin, emerged in general usage as an alternative to racial terminology which categorized them by colour. In the early 20th century, at the height of public acceptance for explicitly racist discourse, Lothrop Stoddard’s reference to Mexicans as ‘little brown peons’ in *Re-forging America* stands out as somewhat unique.⁸⁵ The most common terms used as epithets for Mexicans – ‘peon’ and ‘greaser,’ and simply

⁸² Patterson argues that hair type became a more critical marker of servility than skin colour, a fact that has had a lasting impact upon New World black cultures. Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 61.

⁸³ Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, 149.

⁸⁴ As a colour term, white operates in an inverse fashion to ‘black’ in the American context. ‘White’ was often used interchangeably with ‘American’, something inconceivable with the terms ‘black’, ‘Negro’, or ‘colored.’ Where ‘black’ marks difference, ‘white’ signifies a norm, an ‘absence’ of mark. Significantly, Mexicans were counter posed against white Americans as ‘Mexicans’ rather than as ‘browns.’

⁸⁵ Stoddard, *Re-Forging America: The Story of Our Nationhood*, 214. Box read this passage aloud in the Hearings. Congress, "Immigration from Countries of the Western Hemisphere: Hearings," 28.

‘Mexican,’ which was often used pejoratively - were not centered on their phenotypical traits. McWilliams suggests that the 19th century etymology of ‘greaser’ is linked to occupations Mexicans held in the Southwest. One of his sources cites the fact that Mexicans were employed to grease the axels of wagon wheels, another that they loaded greasy cowhides onto ships when the hide and tallow trade was prominent in California. In both cases, these occupations were considered contemptible.⁸⁶

Similarly peon is a term borrowed from Spanish, originally used to describe the system of unfree labor into which the Spanish forced the indigenous peoples in their New World Empire. The term, therefore, signifies Indian ancestry as well as an economic class. John Box, the haranguing anti-Mexican congressman we met earlier, described the intertwining distinctions of class and ancestry for his fellow committee members in the hearings on Mexican immigration.

The ruling white classes of Mexico, numbering comparatively few, whatever their numbers are, do not migrate. There is another large class of people of Mexico who are sometimes called ‘greasers’ and other unfriendly names, the great bulk of them are what we ordinarily call ‘peons,’ and from this class we are getting this great migration. It is a bad racial element, gentlemen, to speak frankly without unkindness.⁸⁷

The Chairman of the hearings asked another Texan, a farmer testifying before the committee against the bill, if the Mexicans who picked cotton in his region were of the ‘Indian type.’ The man replied, ‘Yes sir; what we call in that country “greasers,” dark, dark Mexicans. We never see any white Mexicans coming over to labor that I know of.’⁸⁸ Clearly, the terms peon and greaser, and ‘Mexican’ itself came to *connote* phenotype and what was understood to be a particular racial type to those who used these words. But, critically, they were not terms that directly derived from reference to skin color or other phenotypical feature and they never came to be rivaled by such

⁸⁶ McWilliams. Carey McWilliams, *North from Mexico : The Spanish-Speaking People of the United States* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1948), 115. Others suggest that the term refers to Mexicans’ hair. Linda Martín Alcoff, "Latinos/as, Asian Americans, and the Black-White Binary," *The Journal of Ethics* 7, no. 1 (2003): 22.

⁸⁷ Congress, "Immigration from Countries of the Western Hemisphere: Hearings," 43.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 334.

terms. Further, as we have seen, the indigenous ancestry of Mexicans, the source of their brown skin, was ideologically ambivalent. As I will discuss further in the next chapter, while the racist discourse of nativists and eugenicists condemned ‘peons’ as a racial menace, others described this Indian ancestry as a basis of their compatibility within American society.

Even explicitly racial anti-Mexican discourses rarely focused on the physically ethnic characteristics of Mexican people. Therefore Natalia Molina’s claim that ‘[w]ith the cessation of the flow of southern and eastern European immigrants, brownness came to signify the most important new threat to racial hegemony’ is somewhat misleading.⁸⁹ Mexicanness did indeed become perceived by many as a racial threat; but Mexicanness was not primarily signified as ‘brownness.’ Occasionally proponents of Mexican immigration claimed that their dark skin made them better equipped to work in the high temperatures of Southwestern agricultural fields but on the whole Mexicans’ color was only infrequently referred to in the hearings. Instead of skin color, popular anti-Mexican rhetoric emphasized Mexicans’ perceived poverty (as if intrinsic rather than conditional), dirtiness, backwardness, and ignoble character traits – docility, stupidity etc.⁹⁰ The letter of one Texas citizen neatly sums up the usual complaints: ‘[T]hey can be driven almost like slaves, will live in barns, sheds, or tents, and are exceedingly insanitary, illiterate, treacherous and undesirable as citizens.’⁹¹ The rhetoric of those presuming a scientific air at the height of the Eugenics period often particularly emphasized Mexicans as carriers of disease, particularly tuberculosis.

The lack of fixation on Mexicans’ colour, even when they clearly thought of as racially inferior, suggests that the American preoccupation with the appearance and parts of the black body was not just a process of racism generally but generated specifically in the mixture of race ideology and the composite practices of slavery which constructed enslaved people as only biologically human, bodies to be utilized,

⁸⁹ Molina, *Fit to Be Citizens?: Public Health and Race in Los Angeles, 1879-1939*, 119.

⁹⁰ In 1960, researchers cited Mexicans’ ‘lower-class character’ as central to discrimination against them in an analysis itself reproducing stereotypical constructions: ‘Poverty and cultural traits seem to be dominant factors also in the segregation of Mexican-Americans in the Southwest. Not only are the Mexican-Americans one of the most impoverished groups in the country but their cultural tradition of rural Mexico also seems to handicap them in the competitive struggle. As a group, they have seemingly lacked drive for achievement.’ Davis McEntire, *Residence and Race: Final and Comprehensive Report to the Commission on Race and Housing* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960), 69.

⁹¹ Congress, “Immigration from Countries of the Western Hemisphere: Hearings,” 48.

and critically, bodies whose bonded condition in a revolutionarily democratic society begged some fundamental questions. Illustrating the difference between ‘natal aliens’ and national aliens, unlike Africans and their descendants who in America became ‘blacks’ and ‘Negros’, their disenfranchisement rendered, in ideological terms, as a function of physical type, Mexicans’ exclusion from mainstream society manifested in the fact that they remained, in the eyes of many other Americans, Mexicans.

3.7 In national and geographic terms

‘The existing condition of Mexico’

The fact that Mexicans remained Mexicans (a designation often applied directly in contradistinction to American) highlights the fact that while they were often portrayed as aliens, they were aliens who came from somewhere and that somewhere remained central to the portrayal. Writing in the 1940s, sociologist Ruth Tuck commented that

If there is anything which distinguishes public thinking about the Mexican and his descendents in the Southwest it is confusion and contradiction. From one point of view, he is merely a late immigrant, encountering the usual immigrant difficulties. From another point of view, he represents the people from whom the area was taken away; he is a descendent of the conquered. For those suckled on the Madison Grant philosophy, he is a member of an inferior race.⁹²

Unlike more recent sociologists who argue whether the Mexican experience has been ‘racial’ or ‘ethnic’, Tuck recognized that these various perceptions could and did exist simultaneously. The conquest of northern Mexico and the exploitation of Mexican labour encouraged the twin degradation of Mexicans as a race and Mexico as a nation. The speaker from the Boston Immigration Restriction League whose testimony was discussed earlier pointed to both slavery and supposedly inferior state of the Mexican

⁹² Tuck, *Not with the Fist. Mexican-Americans in a Southwest City*, 51.

nation as warnings against Mexican immigration: 'Importing thousands of Mexicans is one way to fill up a country, but is it the right way?...Has the past no parallel in the way of the slave cargoes from Africa? Has the present no lesson in the existing condition of Mexico?''⁹³ Others pointed to the political upheaval in Mexico as proof that its people were an instable population element.⁹⁴

Yet Mexico remained a nation state and a neighbor, no matter how much some might disparage it. Unlike the geographically and discursively distant 'Africa', Mexico was a place that many Americans had been to, and a place with which both the government and individual citizens had economic, social and political relations. The geopolitical relationship between the two countries continually impacted upon Mexicans' social and legal position in the United States, as we will see throughout these chapters. Exemplifying this fact, within the hearings on immigration restriction, the question of whether the Mexican government would be offended by the passage of a restriction bill was a common topic of debate.⁹⁵ As I will discuss in the next chapter, the fact of Mexico's status as a sovereign republic ensured Mexicans remaining in the Southwest after annexation the right to full US citizenship after the Mexican American war, as well as their racial categorization as 'white.'

The proximity of Mexico and the United States consistently shaped the discourse around Mexican immigration, just as it shaped, of course, the tides of immigration itself. Unlike European immigrants who had to pay the expense of crossing the ocean, Box pointed out, 'Mexico's masses have only to tramp to the border.'⁹⁶ The relationship between the Southwestern United States and Mexico was not built around a hermetic border between two discrete historical, cultural and political entities (no matter how militarized the border may have become more recently). When Garis warned of the 'Mexicanization' of the Southwest, he described not just an inundation of immigrant hordes but a re-conquest led by the vanquished: 'Once again [the Mexican] sees himself in control of the land - not by military power but by a peaceful invasion; the victory of which will be more effective than that of any possible army that could assault us from the South.'⁹⁷ The term

⁹³ Congress, "Immigration from Countries of the Western Hemisphere: Hearings," 16.

⁹⁴ "Hearings before the Committee on Immigration and Naturalization: Immigration from the Western Hemisphere," 205-06.

⁹⁵ For one such example, see: *Restriction of Western Hemisphere Immigration*, 24.

⁹⁶ "Immigration from Countries of the Western Hemisphere: Hearings," 78.

⁹⁷ "Hearings before the Committee on Immigration and Naturalization: Immigration from the Western Hemisphere," 435.

‘Mexicanization’, meant to describe a process that could happen or was happening due to unchecked immigration, very much simplified the overlapping cultural and historical complexity of the Southwest. Harry Chandler, explaining California’s supposedly tolerant affinity for its Mexican population explained: ‘Our traditions and background are mostly Mexican, and all of the old timers who came to the vicinity of Los Angeles and lived with the Mexicans and knew them, had a little different attitude toward them than the rest of the Americans would have naturally.’⁹⁸ The inequality between the two nations in terms of military and economic strength created an uneven terrain for Mexicans in the United States, whose rights were official in guarantee but not necessarily guaranteed to be respected in practice. Similarly, as we will see in later chapters, the historic mesh of settlement, conquest and movement created an equally uneven discursive terrain from which the Mexican could be romanticized or repudiated, cast as foreign or familiar.

‘Not in the hyphenated class’

As the widespread use of exploited Mexican workers reinforced chauvinistic American views of Mexico, the deracination of American slaves had profound effects on the manner in which American colonists and Europeans alike came to view African people generally. As David Brion Davis notes, the fieldwork, so to speak, on which Enlightenment figures like Voltaire, Kant and Hume largely based their racist suppositions about Africans, was the evidence gathered through New World slavery.⁹⁹ As millions of slaves were uprooted from the different geographical and cultural spaces of the African continent, Europeans and Americans discursively uprooted Africa itself from civilization and history, constructing it as a ceaselessly primitive and dark mass. That the degraded conditions of Africans in the Americas served as an intellectual basis from which to degrade the entire continent from which they were taken is evident in Jefferson’s *Notes*. He prefaces his survey of black people’s racial capabilities with the assertion that he would consider them in the American context as ‘it would be unfair to follow them to Africa for this investigation.’¹⁰⁰

However, while references might be made to Africa in both colloquial and scientific racism, the image of the American Negro was that of the outsider from

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁹⁹ David Brion Davis, *Inhuman Bondage : The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 75.

¹⁰⁰ Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, 151.

within, rather than a national foreigner. Jordan discusses how the starkly different terms upon which Europeans interacted with American indigenous peoples and their African slaves impacted the manner in which they came to understand each group. Indian tribes remained entities outside of colonial society, and as groups with whom hostile relations might bring about armed conflict, they maintained in colonial eyes ‘the quality of nationality, a quality which Englishmen admired in themselves and expected in other peoples.’ On the other hand, all Africans were subdued into an ‘eminently governable sub-nation.’ The ethnic, cultural, and linguistic differences between them were ignored and forcibly subdued.¹⁰¹ The deracination of slavery, which many Americans believed left the enslaved without cultural, social or familial ties, instigated an ideological understanding of African Americans as utterly racial, in the new scientific sense of the word –a group to be defined biologically, rather than culturally or ethnically. As Jordan notes, ‘Negro nations became Negro people.’

The comments of Eugenicist Harry Laughlin during the immigration hearings capture how this image of the outsider within continued to be created in 20th century discourse: ‘The American negro is not in the hyphenated class. He is a black man in the United States without cultural or institutional contacts with any other country.’¹⁰² Laughlin’s analysis of the situation draws attention to a commonly observed contradiction in American society. Black people were not foreigners; they were fully American and yet fully placed on the outside of society. They were aliens who had nowhere else to go (as the utter impracticality of the American Colonization Society’s plans vividly illustrated). Rather than differentiate them from the foreigner, the very Americanness of black people often accentuated their exclusion. If the continuing salience of blackness as a social division eased the incorporation of a succession of different immigrants into the social body, it is also true that this continual ‘melting’ of immigrant groups serves to highlight the conspicuous exclusion of blacks after centuries of being American. Both sides of the process ideologically reinforced their estrangement as something innate. The quagmire logic of segregation reasoned that the mores maintaining the social separateness of black people were in themselves evidence of black people’s innate incompatibility with American society, thus the more separate they became the more innate the difference seemed, continually justifying ever more rigorous separation. Unlike the immigrant who was

¹⁰¹ Jordan, *White over Black : American Attitudes toward the Negro, 1550-1812*, 49.

¹⁰² Congress, "Immigration from Countries of the Western Hemisphere: Hearings," 715.

perceived to be excluded because of his or her language, strange and ‘backward’ culture, and foreign birth, the source of seemingly perpetual black ostracism seemed as though it *must* be physically racial, and was often talked about in biological terms. Laughlin, for example, stated:

However inassimilable the negro is in race, he has, so far as he has been able, adopted our institutions, our language, religions, and essential laws and customs, but the contrast in blood between the northwestern European settlers and the African negroes is so great that racial assimilation is impossible.¹⁰³

While poverty, nationality, language and culture are all qualities which can signify race, blackness was perceived as a quality that, unlike any of these others, was utterly indelible and, again, unlike the others, was understood primarily and predominately as racial and only incidentally as a marker of class or culture.

3.8 As citizens

‘Excluded from civilized Governments and the family of nations’

The status of slave was fundamentally antithetical to that of citizen. The rituals and practice of slavery, however, did not only disenfranchise the slave but problematised the freedom of free black people. In the South the free black person’s freedom was imagined as an incendiary, threatening to ignite the desire for freedom in the enslaved and thus insurrection; in the free states, the free black person’s status as Negro – a person who, if not actually slave, was of the *enslaveable* type - was imagined to corrode the sanctity of labour and the operation of democracy. A Virginia representative in the 1787 Constitutional Convention described the threat the free black person represented: ‘[T]hey are themselves perpetual monuments of discontent, and firebrands to the other class of their own color. And if the time ever came when the flames of servile war enwrap this Union in a general blaze, perhaps we may have

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 704.

to look to them as the primary cause of such horrors.’¹⁰⁴ If in the slave states the free black was a ‘monument of discontent,’ they blighted the free states with their abjection. Tocqueville noted that while the slave, with ‘his degraded intelligence’ ‘peacefully enjoys all the privileges of his humiliation,’ the free black in the North, ‘often feels independence as a heavier burden than slavery itself.’ ‘Freedom,’ he concluded, echoing the sentiment of many of his contemporaries, ‘leads him to destruction.’¹⁰⁵ In the one context, the free black person leaked the danger freedom, in the other, the degradation of slavery. In either narrative, freedom and blackness could be construed as incompatible and even combustible.

The bind between free black people and slaves was not only an ideological problem but a legal one. Many states had long passed laws circumscribing the rights of free black people, but it was not until the 1857 Supreme Court case of *Dred Scott v. Sandford* that the federal government legally inscribed and nationalized black people’s status as non-citizens.¹⁰⁶ Setting up the fundamental incompatibility between slavery and citizenship, Chief Justice Taney described the problem at stake:

The question is simply this: Can a negro, whose ancestors were imported into this country, and sold as slaves, become a member of the political community...and as such become entitled to all the rights, and privileges, and immunities, guaranteed...to the citizen?¹⁰⁷

As a legal argument, Taney’s treatise on black inferiority did not rest upon the sort of scientific/medical observations that Jefferson’s did. Taney’s argument aimed to establish that black inferiority was – on principle – legally and constitutionally ingrained. As such he argued that black people were never intended by the authors of the Constitution to be included within its ‘we, the people’¹⁰⁸ His reasoning slipped revealingly between racial and legal-historical justifications. Reflecting upon the consequences of constitutionally enshrined black citizenship, Taney wrote: If ‘persons

¹⁰⁴ Leon Frank Litwack, *North of Slavery. The Negro in the Free States, 1790-1860* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 37.

¹⁰⁵ De Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 293.

¹⁰⁶ Litwack, *North of Slavery. The Negro in the Free States, 1790-1860*, 31.

¹⁰⁷ Paul Finkelman, *Dred Scott V. Sandford: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford Books, 1997), 57-58.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 58.

of the negro race' were recognized as citizens they would be able to cross state lines and enter any state when they pleased, 'without pass or passport', they would have 'full liberty of speech in public', they would be able to bear arms and hold meetings. 'And all of this,' he wrote, 'would be done in the face of the subject race of the same color, both free and slaves, and inevitably producing discontent and insubordination among them, and endangering the peace and safety of the State.'¹⁰⁹

He further pointed to the numerous laws passed in various localities before and after the Revolution and the ratification of the Constitution dictating that blacks could not exercise civil and political rights on an equal basis with white people. It was impossible to believe that those who made such laws could have considered 'fellow-citizens and members of the sovereignty, a class of beings whom they had thus stigmatized...and upon whom they had impressed such deep and enduring marks of inferiority and degradation.'¹¹⁰

Admitting that the language of the Declaration of Independence, with its insistence that 'all men' were created equal and endowed with 'inalienable rights,' 'would seem to indicate the whole of human family', he argued that it must nevertheless be understood that 'the enslaved African race' were not intended to be included.¹¹¹ His reasoning is fairly amusing for the modern reader. If the men who framed the Declaration of Independence, he argued, *had* meant to include all of humanity, then their conduct 'would have been utterly and flagrantly inconsistent with the principles they asserted.'¹¹² Therefore because the 'great men' who made the declaration were 'incapable of asserting principles inconsistent with those on which they were acting', it was then perfectly clear that blacks were not included but had 'by common consent, had been excluded from civilized Governments and the family of nations, and doomed to slavery.'¹¹³ Buttressing his central argument that Americans had imposed a stigma of degradation upon the people they had enslaved, thereby signifying their inferiority, Taney postulates that the absolute integrity of the Founding Fathers demanded the conclusion that 'the unhappy black race were separated from the white by indelible marks, and laws long before established, and

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 67.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 66.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 63.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

were never thought of or spoken of except as property, and when the claims of the owner or the profit of the trader were supposed to need protection.’¹¹⁴

Taney’s argument that for earlier Americans black inferiority ‘was regarded as an axiom in morals as well as in politics, which no one thought of disputing’ and which men ‘in every grade and position in society’ habitually acted upon without doubt was entirely a-historical.¹¹⁵ Many in the North and some in the South, as noted, directly and explicitly linked the colonies’ struggle for freedom with anti-slavery rhetoric and action.^{116 117} It would also seem that Taney had not read *Notes on the State of Virginia*, or at least not all of it. In a passage subsequent to his treatise on black bodies and inferiority, Jefferson described the unfortunate affects of slavery upon masters and slaves, writing:

And with what execration should the statesman be loaded, who permitting one-half the citizens thus to trample on the rights of the other, transforms those into despots, and these into enemies, destroys the morals of the one part, and the *amor patriae* of the other... And can the liberties of a nation be thought secure when we have removed their only firm basis, a conviction in the minds of the people that these liberties are of the gift of God? That they are not to be violated but with his wrath?¹¹⁸

Not only does Jefferson actually refer to slaves in this passage as citizens, a definition that is only possible when slavery is being presented as an evil, he suggests that the violation of their liberty will incur the wrath of God. Taney’s argument captures the evolution of anti-black ideology, its powers of simplification increasing in direct relation to its claims of self-evidence. The complexities and contradictions of 18th century intellectual, moral and political struggles with the meaning of slavery and freedom are here fermented into simple statements of fact– ‘doomed to slavery’, blacks ‘were never thought of or spoken of except as property.’ His own insistence

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 61.

¹¹⁶ Litwack, *North of Slavery. The Negro in the Free States, 1790-1860*, 9.

¹¹⁷ Henry N. Sherwood, "Early Negro Deportation Projects," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 2, no. 4 (1916): 485-86

¹¹⁸ Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, 174-75.

that the equality of free black people would endanger the peace and safety of the State, and so could not have been intended in the Constitution undermines this very claim. People did not worry about their livestock rebelling, after all. Just as Jefferson's anxiety undermines the historical basis of Taney's argument, his confidence that blacks, by legal and racial definition, were obviously excluded from the rights of citizenship was confuted by the outrage that the *Dred Scott* decision caused in some quarters. Several Northern states immediately moved to nullify the ruling; and, of course, after the Civil War, African Americans were universally granted citizenship.¹¹⁹ Nevertheless, the decision, and the myriad of state laws preceding it, are historically unique in legally extirpating a native-born population of people from the American political body, a fact which reflects the specificity of the social conditions and social subjects produced in the context of slavery.

'A patient, docile, law-abiding people'

In the mid-19th century, as both Southern slavery and the drive for territorial expansion into Indian lands seemed inevitable, the phrase Manifest Destiny became shorthand for a collection of popular discourses that the American 'Anglo Saxon' race was destined to rule the continent, while the inferior races in its path were destined to extinction or subordination. Manifest Destiny rhetoric surged during the 1846-1848 war with Mexico, in which American forces invaded the neighbouring republic and annexed half of its territory. Describing what he termed as the 'dismemberment of Mexico, anti-war commentator Abiel Abbot Livermore wrote in 1849: 'We have, in sober fact, been educating ourselves for a considerable time for just such issues as have lately been developed. Our treatment of both the red man and the black man, has habituated us to "feel our power, and forget right."'”¹²⁰

In the build up to the war and throughout its duration, the Mexican people were cast as a wretched and inferior race, incapable of making use of their own lands. Above all, they were constantly referred to as a mongrel race, with their shortcomings commonly located in the 'sickening mixture,' as one newspaper put it, of their ancestry. An Ohio congressman described the 'sad compound of Spanish, English, Indian, and negro bloods...resulting, it is said, in the production of a slothful,

¹¹⁹ Litwack, *North of Slavery. The Negro in the Free States, 1790-1860*, 63.

¹²⁰ Abiel Abbot Livermore, *The War with Mexico Reviewed* (Boston: American Peace Society, 1850), 11.

indolent, ignorant race of beings.¹²¹ While some argued, particularly at the beginning of the war, that Americans would liberate a Mexican people suppressed by their corrupt government and gift them with the seeds of democracy, it was more popularly asserted that Mexicans were incapable of participating in democratic government. Arguments about the danger inherent in absorbing the racially polluted, fundamentally inassimilable Mexican population came to be even more vehemently expressed in Congress as the war drew to a close and debates began about how much of Mexican territory should be annexed - with some calling for the annexation of the entire country, rather than just the sparsely populated northern territory. In 1848, John C. Calhoun asked his fellow Senators:

Are you, any of you, willing that your States should be governed by these twenty-odd Mexican States, with a population of about only one million of your blood, and two or three millions of mixed blood, better, informed, all the rest pure Indians, a mixed blood equally ignorant and unfit for liberty, impure races, not as good as the Cherokees or Choctaws? We made a great mistake, sir, when we suppose that all people are capable of self-government.¹²²

In the end, the war was about land and not races. Like slavery, conquest was a process of appropriation by force. But in this case the ground of struggle was far more equal and while the expropriation of Mexican lands rendered the people upon it, in many senses, aliens in their own homes, it did so in quite different terms. After all the clamour about Mexican inferiority and incapacity for democracy, the treaty which ended the war, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, stated that residents of the annexed territory who opted to remain 'shall be incorporated into the Union of the United States, and be admitted at the proper time... to the enjoyment of all the rights of

¹²¹ Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny : The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism*, 239-40.

¹²² David J. Weber, *Foreigners in Their Native Land : Historical Roots of the Mexican Americans*, 30th anniversary pbk. ed. ed. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2003), 137.

citizens of the United States.’¹²³ Those who remained but did not declare their intention to remain Mexican citizens were ‘considered to have elected to become citizens of the United States.’¹²⁴ Mexicans, like Indians, thus became a minority whose rights were safeguarded by treaty.¹²⁵ Unlike the treaties made with Indian tribes, however, this treaty was with the government of a nation state. The situation underscores the fact that despite the racialist excesses of politicians’ posturing, and that however inferior Mexicans and superior Anglo Saxons were supposed to be, war grew tiresome and Mexicans had to be dealt with as subjects of a sovereign nation. Thus, unlike Native and African Americans, with whom Mexicans were linked in much of the period’s racial discourse, Mexicans, despite their discursive treatment as an indolent, mongrel race, were given - at least on paper - the full rights of citizenship, including, the right to vote, from the very beginning of their incorporation into the American state.

In the early 20th century, Mexican immigrants maintained the right to apply for citizenship, unlike certain groups of Asian immigrants who were declared ineligible on racial grounds.¹²⁶ While it is no doubt the case that a considerable (but considerably variable) rupture between legal and actual social equality has always characterized the Mexican American experience, historians have sometimes treated American racism towards Mexicans as overly monolithic. Author of a widely read work on early 20th century Mexican immigration, Mark Reiser, for example, argues:

While they differed sharply over the consequences of the Mexican’s role in the economy, both opponents and proponents of Mexican immigration were in complete accord on the Mexican’s racial inferiority. As a result antirestrictionists found it impossible to contend that

¹²³ Convention California. Constitutional and J. Ross Browne, *Report of the Debates in the Convention of California, on the Formation of the State Constitution, in September and October, 1849* (Washington: Printed by John T. Towers, 1850), 62.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ McWilliams, *North from Mexico : The Spanish-Speaking People of the United States*, 103.

¹²⁶ For a fuller description of the experience of Asian immigrants in early 20th century American see: Ngai, "The Architecture of Race in American Immigration Law: A Reexamination of the Immigration Act of 1924."

America's melting pot could mold the "peon" into a worthwhile citizen.¹²⁷

He concludes, then, that '[f]rom the Anglo perspective, the immigrant from south of the border was always the peon laborer and never the potential citizen.'¹²⁸ His conclusion echoes that which sociologist Emory Bogardus arrived at in 1930: 'Americans as a class still treat Mexican immigrants as laborers and not as full-fledged human beings and potential citizens.'¹²⁹ Bogardus found that many Mexican immigrants were reluctant to apply for citizenship, though they could, in part because of their Mexican patriotism but also because of American racism. As one such immigrant told him, 'What is the use? They will call me a dirty greaser anyway.'¹³⁰ Yet, however they were ideologically constructed in anti-Mexican rhetoric and however individual white people viewed them, it remains true that in legal fact, in the early 20th century, Mexicans *were* citizens and potential citizens.

This is reflected within the discourse of the immigration debate. In contradiction to Reisler's statement, actually the figures of the manual labourer and the citizen were incongruous but not mutually exclusive. The testimony of numerous witnesses in the hearings on Mexican immigration undermines the proposition that Mexican immigrants were 'never' viewed as citizens from the 'Anglo perspective'. One letter-writing citizen, for example, stated that Mexicans 'are very desirable and peaceful citizens, not in any way antagonistic to the United States.'¹³¹ Many of these assertions, it is true, highlighted Mexicans' desirability as citizens due to their 'docile' and 'law-abiding' nature, rather than, say, their intellectual vigour or enterprise. Others vouching for Mexicans' potential as citizens based their recommendation on the contentedness of Mexicans to remain separate. For example, the vice president of a Colorado sugar company commented:

A good deal of concern is shown as to the desirability of the Mexican as a citizen or resident. Having lived

¹²⁷ Reisler, *By the Sweat of Their Brow: Mexican Immigrant Labor in the United States, 1900-1940*, 182.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 144.

¹²⁹ Emory S. Bogardus, "The Mexican Immigrant and Segregation," *The American Journal of Sociology* 36, no. 1 (1930): 80.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 78.

¹³¹ Congress, "Immigration from Countries of the Western Hemisphere: Hearings," 770.

among them for 20 years, I feel qualified to make a statement in this regard....My observation has been that the Mexican people are a patient, docile and law-abiding people who are content to conduct their own community life apart from other races.¹³²

In addition to not presenting a threat of ‘mongrelization,’ he added that it was unlikely that ‘the Mexican will interfere in the more skilled trades - he lacks the inclination if not the ingenuity to do this kind of work.’¹³³ These kinds of statements remind us of the danger of mechanistic readings of racism; clearly, the ideological ascription of racial inferiority does not always to the same conclusions. A number of witnesses explicitly described Mexicans as both racial inferiors and good citizens.

Another tactic used to defend Mexicans as citizens was to point to the example of the earliest Mexican Americans, those who became Americans after the annexation of the Southwest, and their descendants. Joseph Mansfield, a Congressional representative of Texas stated: ‘The Mexican there has been a pretty good, loyal citizen, those who are natives.’¹³⁴ Mansfield reminded the committee that the first vice president of Texas (when it declared its sovereignty from Mexico) was a Mexican and that there were a number of prominent Mexicans in the struggle for Texan independence. The success of the first American Mexicans became a recurrent theme in the arguments of proponents of Mexican immigration. While the desirability of Mexicans as equal citizens was never at the forefront of the pro-immigrant lobby’s artillery, the linkage between the supposedly nomadic Mexican immigrants and these Mexican American citizens opened space even within discourses premised primarily on Mexican difference to hint at the possibility of social incorporation.¹³⁵ A.C. Hardison, a representative of the California Grange and Farmers Union’ and Vice President of the Santa Paula Citrus Fruit Association, made the usual statements about Mexicans ‘naturally’ returning to Mexico and performing the labour that ‘our people’ wouldn’t do, the staples of the pro-Mexican lobby. When asked directly if the Mexican was ‘assimilable’ as ‘valuable an addition to our future as the English,

¹³² *Restriction of Western Hemisphere Immigration*, 136-37

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 137.

¹³⁴ "Immigration from Countries of the Western Hemisphere: Hearings," 625.

¹³⁵ "Hearings before the Committee on Immigration and Naturalization: Immigration from the Western Hemisphere," 236.

German or French’, Hardison answered that he thought Mexicans were ‘rather slowly assimilable,’ adding:

We can only judge by experience. The amount of assimilation of the type of Mexican that has come in in recent years has been very limited and not enough years have passed for a sound conclusion to be drawn. But the older type of Mexicans, that is, those of California, Arizona, and in fact, all of that country, which at one time was Mexico, have been a very desirable class of people. They to-day hold many very prominent positions and compare well with any of the types that have been admitted.¹³⁶

Such examples illustrate the very different circumstances of slavery and conquest. Incorporated as a defeated people Mexican citizens nonetheless became American citizens, an elite among whom retained prominence in the new social landscape. Though the historical precedent of ethnic Mexicans’ right to full American citizenship was often undermined in practice, it could never be meaningless.¹³⁷

Restrictionists dismissed this ‘loud praise of our own Mexican and Spanish-blooded citizenship,’ as Box put it, arguing that the people referred to were of mostly Spanish blood and therefore an entirely ‘different type’ to the peon.¹³⁸ However, this discursive distancing of the two groups by restrictionists reveals another important distinction in the positioning of blacks and Mexicans in America. As we saw in the previous section, the linkage between free and enslaved black people served to ideologically chain and legally restrict those free of slavery, laying the foundation for the 20th century laws of classification and segregation which applied to all people marked as black, regardless of their colour or class. On the other hand, from the time of the annexation, social stratifications among ethnic Mexicans were tied to vastly

¹³⁶ *Restriction of Western Hemisphere Immigration*, 49-50.

¹³⁷ For a thorough account of the complex relationship between Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants in the early 20th century, see David G. Gutierrez, *Walls and Mirrors : Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants and the Politics of Ethnicity* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1995).

¹³⁸ Congress, "Immigration from Countries of the Western Hemisphere: Hearings," 791. *Restriction of Western Hemisphere Immigration*, 49

different powers of assimilation. As Ernesto Galarza, Herman Gallegos and Julian Samora noted in 1970:

The centuries of brutal social affronts that humiliated equally the Negro sharecropper, the Negro businessman, the Negro laborer and the Negro intellectual, solidifying them emotionally if not tactically, were the mainspring of their current revolt. In Mexican-American society this has not been so.¹³⁹

The mark of 'Mexicanness', a racially constructed category but also a formal nationality, was far more flexible than that of 'Negro.' Defined most immediately by their poverty and the menial labour they performed, as suggested in the way peon and Mexican were used interchangeably in anti-Mexican discourse, those Mexicans (the so-called 'higher type' Mexican¹⁴⁰) who were not poor and did not perform such labour often escaped the confines of segregation.

3.10 Conclusion: Legacies of slavery, legacies of conquest

Natal and national alienation resulted from and in turn helped to cultivate distinct social relations. Though anti-Mexican ideologues continually compared 'cheap' or 'peon' labour to slavery, and though both institutions functioned through exploitation, there was a chasm between them that had considerable ideological impact. While both forms of appropriation marked their subject as racially degraded, unlike the enslaved, Mexican immigrant labourers maintained their rights as social beings. Though their 'alien' nationality came to be discursively saturated with derogatory racial meanings, it also had definitive political and historical significance. The processes of commodification and the regime of ongoing deracination that the institution of slavery entailed emphasized the enslaved as a physical being (as a 'soma') and denied him/her legitimate social and political agency, excluding them, in

¹³⁹ Ernesto Galarza, Herman E. Gallegos, and Julian Samora, *Mexican-Americans in the South-West*, 2nd ed. ed. (Santa Barbara: McNally and Loftin, 1970), 63.

¹⁴⁰ Congress, "Immigration from Countries of the Western Hemisphere: Hearings," 427.

the eyes of some, 'from the family of nations.' I will now examine how these fundamental historical and ideological differences can be traced three empirical fields.

4. Racial Classification and Miscegenation Law: African and Mexican Americans in the 'Negro' and 'White'

In this chapter, I will examine the circumstances under which Africans and Mexicans respectively came to be racially classified in the United States. While, as we have seen, both groups came into the country as subjected populations, the nature of subjugation in each case resulted in contrasting conceptual and legal approaches to them as groups of people. Importantly, though both the Mexican and the African American were at times conceived of as innately separate from white people, only the African American social position was legislated as such, a fact glaringly apparent in the country's vast network of anti-miscegenation laws and the development of the 'one-drop rule.' Through these laws, black and white were constructed not simply as separate but opposing racial entities. On the other hand, as we will see, while Mexican Americans were often treated as a distinct racial group, they were legally categorized as whites, despite their non-white 'blood', a fact which both reflected and enabled a practical and discursive confluence between the two groups. Some recent scholars, like earlier observers, continue to believe that the 'indeterminate' ancestry of Mexicans, often construed as a mongrel and racially ambiguous people, prevented their caste position from 'solidifying'. However, the starkly contrasting manner in which black people and Mexicans, both peoples of mixed ancestry, were legally defined and managed illustrates that racial categorization in the United States in this period did not, as is often assumed, attempt to accurately mark natural boundaries between 'pure' ancestral groupings. Rather, categorization was administered to assign social meaning and consequences to certain kinds of ancestry – a process that was neither consistent nor accurate in biological terms. The examination here suggests that, despite the traditional emphasis on white purity in American racial discourse, and in particular, Eugenics doctrines, legal racial practices were geared more heavily towards formalising black separateness than policing the white bloodstream. Furthermore, this meticulous delineation of blackness as a race informed the legal and ideological positioning of Mexican Americans from the time the United States forcibly annexed its first Mexican population in 1848.

To examine the construction of Mexican, white and black as practical and legal categories, as well as their relation to each other, I will discuss several different

historical moments. I will base this examination on a range of primary sources, including the 1849 transcript of California's first Constitutional Convention, the 1928 and 1930 transcripts of the Congressional hearings on Mexican immigration; and the documents of the 1948 California Supreme Court case in which the state's miscegenation statute was overturned – a case centred on the right of a black man and a Mexican woman to marry.

4.1 'The result is confusion'

Again reflecting upon the American technique 'for handling colored, or partly colored persons,' Max S. Handman, the Texan sociologist quoted in the introductory chapter, commented, 'The Mexican presents shades of color ranging from that of the negro - although no negro features - to that of the white. The result is confusion.'¹ Yet, Americans designated as black, as we shall soon see in more detail, also presented 'shades of color ranging from that of the negro...to that of the white', but they were technically marked and handled in a manner which suffered no confusion. In her thoughtful analysis of the overturning of anti-miscegenation law in California, a historical moment discussed at the end of this chapter, Dara Orenstein argues that Mexicans' mixed ancestry and resultant racial ambiguity undermined 'the viability of race-making in California.' She writes: 'Mexicans' status never solidified because, to quote Secretary of Labor James Davis... "it would be impossible for the most learned and experienced ethnologist or anthropologist to classify or determine their racial origin.'² She further suggests that Mexican mixedness undermined 'the viability of race making' generally in California. Gregory Rodriguez makes a similar argument in *Mongrels, Orphans and Bastards*, writing that the mixed ancestry of inhabitants in the annexed Mexican territories 'would...defy the American racial system. Too powerless and too few in number to present a serious challenge to Anglo racial logic, Mexican Americans would nonetheless never fit neatly into a hierarchical racial order based on purity.'³ These arguments are based on two problematic assumptions.

¹Max Sylvius Handman, "The Mexican Immigrant in Texas," *Southwestern Political and Social Science Quarterly* 7(1926): 149.

²Dara Orenstein, "Void for Vagueness: Mexicans and the Collapse of Miscegenation Law in California," *The Pacific Historical Review* 74, no. 3 (2005): 406.

³Gregory Rodriguez, *Mongrels, Bastards, Orphans and Vagabonds: Mexican Immigration and the Future of Race in America*, 1st ed. ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 2007), 97.

Firstly, they presume that American systems of racial classification have been designed to create boundaries between accurately defined ancestral groups, essentially taking at face value the binary's claim that whites are really white and blacks are really black.

Crucially such arguments ignore the fact that, like Mexicans, African Americans are also a group of vastly mixed ancestry. At least three-fourths of African Americans, and possibly as many as 90%, have European ancestry, and as many as a quarter have Native American ancestry.⁴ Neither Orenstein nor Lopez attempt to explain why the mixed ancestry of Mexicans should prove any more resistant to classification than the mixed ancestry of African Americans. Such assumptions indirectly reify notions of 'black difference.' They also implicitly accept the basic racist logic that, as Collette Guillaumin puts it, 'physical characteristics are the cause of social relationships.'⁵ While it is no doubt true that, from a historical perspective, the treatment of some people of mixed ancestry in the United States can highlight the inconsistencies of racist discourse, the idea that mixed people *necessarily* upset the functioning of regimes of racial classification assumes that such regimes require consistency to function. Clearly, whether strategies are applied to calculate and solidify racial ambiguity - indeed whether it is even perceived as such at all - is contingent upon the historical and social context. To understand how and why the respective ancestry of Mexicans and African Americans came to be defined and managed so differently we must examine the conditions in which it was given meaning.

To do this I will begin with a consideration of how Mexicans' legal whiteness came to be established in the 19th century and how the so-called one-drop rule ossified in increasingly stringent classification laws of the late 19th and early 20th century. From there I will examine the broader conceptual and practical relationships which were established between black and white as social entities, on the one hand, and Mexican and white, on the other. As I will discuss, the phenomenon of 'passing' and the proliferation of miscegenation statutes which formalised black social separateness with a pseudo-biological rationale illustrate the unique manner in which blackness was constructed as separate and irrevocably - even physically - incompatible with

⁴ F. James Davis, *Who Is Black? : One Nation's Definition* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991), 21.

⁵ Colette Guillaumin, "The Idea of Race and Its Elevation to Autonomous Scientific and Legal Status (1980)," in *Racism, Sexism, Power, and Ideology* (London: Routledge, 1995), 80.

whiteness. In contrast, I will examine the fact that though Mexicans were commonly believed to be racially inferior, such ideas coexisted alongside romantic discourses which emphasised, rather than nullified, Mexicans' European ancestry; and while marriage between Mexicans and whites was often frowned upon, it was never illegal. This latter point, and the stark contrast it forms with the African American experience, is embodied in the transcripts of *Perez v. Lippold*, in which the fundamental asymmetry of racial classification is laid bare.

4.2 'A sickening mixture': Mexicans and legal whiteness

Mr. MacGregor. You say a Mexican is not white.

Mr. Box. That is a question we have been debating here for a long time, and on which we have not yet come to any sound conclusion.⁶

As we have seen in the Congressional hearings on Mexican immigration, whether the Mexican was racially inferior to the American was largely evident to the committee and most of the witnesses. The above exchange, between two members of the hearing committee debating whether Mexicans were racially eligible for American citizenship, reveals however that though the Mexicans' supposedly inherent inferiority was evident, their official status in terms of racial classification was murkier. As discussed in the last chapter, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo guaranteed Mexicans remaining in the territory appropriated by the United States the rights of citizenship. This act had a significant consequence. Since at that time under the 1790 Naturalization Act, only white people could become citizens, Mexicans were classified as whites. This status was legally challenged later in the 19th century when a Mexican man of indigenous phenotype named Ricardo Rodriguez applied to become an American citizen in Texas. In the aftermath of the Civil War, eligibility to citizenship had widened to include white people and people of African descent. As Rodriguez, described as a 'copper-colored man', seemed to be neither, officials denied his application. In the trial that ensued, the federal court ruled that the treaty

⁶ U.S. Congress, "Immigration from Countries of the Western Hemisphere: Hearings," ed. Committee on Immigration and Naturalization (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1928), 715.

agreement between the United States and Mexico must be upheld and that ‘native Mexicans, whatever may be their status from the standpoint of ethnologist, are eligible for citizenship and may be individually naturalized.’⁷ In effect, Mexicans were classed as white not because of their ancestry or colour but because they had already been given citizenship rights. Hence their ancestry did not determine their citizenship; rather the formal delineations of their social status determined their formal race categorization.

The social meaning of ‘white’ and ‘Mexican’ in early California became a matter of formal discussion in 1849, when delegates from around the newly acquired territory convened to draft a constitution for the new state. The transcript of the debates of these proceedings gives a good deal of insight into the interplay between delegates’ concepts of white, black, Indian and Mexican, and the manner in which these concepts were differentially weighted and defined. Particularly important is the debate on suffrage. It was agreed that ‘every white male citizen of the United States’ would be given the right of suffrage but what to do with original inhabitants of California, which included Mexican citizens, whose legal transformation to American citizens had not yet been processed, as well as large numbers of North American Indians, was more perplexing. One delegate worried that ‘the meaning of the word white’ was not well understood in California, and that the wording ‘white male citizen of the United States’ was not ‘sufficiently explicit’ and ‘did not cover enough ground.’⁸ He feared that it could be used to deny Mexicans the franchise, and proposed adding ‘all male citizens of Mexico’ to the article.⁹ In response, another delegate proposed that such an addition should stipulate ‘all white male citizens of Mexico.’¹⁰ One of the convention’s ethnically Mexican delegates, Pablo de la Guerra, asserted that, in this case,

it should be perfectly understood in the first place,
what is the true signification of the word “white.”

Many citizens of California have received from nature

⁷ Mark Reisler, *By the Sweat of Their Brow: Mexican Immigrant Labor in the United States, 1900-1940* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1976), 120-21.

⁸ California Constitutional Convention and J. Ross Browne, *Report of the Debates in the Convention of California, on the Formation of the State Constitution, in September and October, 1849* (Washington: Printed by John T. Towers, 1850), 62.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 61.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 63.

a very dark skin; nevertheless, there are among them men who have heretofore been allowed to vote, and not only that, but to fill the highest public offices. It would be very unjust to deprive them of the privilege of citizens merely because nature had not made them white. But if, by the word “white,” it was intended to exclude the African race, then it was correct and satisfactory.’¹¹

C.T. Botts, the delegate who had proposed specifying that only white Mexican men should be allowed to vote, agreed with de la Guerra, clarifying that he

had no objection to color, except so far as it indicated the inferior races of mankind. He would be perfectly willing to use any words which would exclude the African and Indian races. It was in this sense the word white had been understood and used. His only objection was to exclude those objectionable races - not objectionable for their color, but for what that color indicates.¹²

As the debate continued, other delegates proposed that instead of using the word ‘white’ as a qualifier of inclusion, they could specify who was to be excluded, proposing that instead of the word ‘white’ they could insert the language ‘Indians, Africans and the descendants of Africans excepted.’¹³ The debate here illustrates that for these men the function of the word white was not necessarily to denote ‘pure’ European ancestry but to denote the exclusion of particular ‘objectionable’ elements.

This is even more apparent in the fact that delegates explicitly stipulated ‘the descendants of Indians’ should not be added to the list of exceptions. There seemed to be unanimous agreement that Mexican men, despite being of mixed Indian and European heritage should be included in the franchise. The debate, rather, centred on

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.* Note that some of the transcript was recorded in third person.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 65.

which ‘full-blood’ Indians could be included, reflected in the position of delegate Kimball H. Dimmick:

Those Indians who have become civilized...should be allowed the elective franchise; and as for the mixed race, descended from the Indians and Spaniards, he certainly was in favor of permitting them to enjoy the right of suffrage as liberally as any American citizen. It is no objection to them that they have Indian blood in their veins. Some of the most honorable and distinguished families in Virginia are descended from the Indian race. It was the proudest boast on the floor of Congress of one of Virginia’s greatest statesman, that he had Indian blood in his veins. At the same time, it is absolutely necessary to embody in this Constitution such a restriction as will prevent the wild tribes from voting.¹⁴

A few delegates even insisted that all Indians should be entitled to vote, and that ‘they should not be classed with Africans’ or ‘drag[ged]...down to the level of slaves.’¹⁵ The differential view of Indians was reflected in the final language of the constitution. After initially adopting the exclusionary language, in the final instance, delegates went back to the previous proposal, and voted to grant suffrage to all white male citizens of the United States and all white male citizens of Mexico, but they also stated nothing in the constitution should be seen to prevent the legislature from later enfranchising Indians if they should see fit.¹⁶

While the language of the law stipulated that only white Mexicans could vote, no formal apparatus was set in place to distinguish which Mexicans were white and which were not. In contrast, in 1850, the state passed legislation which barred blacks, mulattos and Indians from testifying against white people, clarifying that a mulatto was a person of 1/8 or more African descent and an Indian a person with ½ or more

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 67.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 70.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, Appendix iv.

Indian descent.¹⁷ Judging by the convention debates, legally sifting out those Mexicans of pure European ancestry was never a priority. All of the delegates who spoke on the matter, even those most firmly in favour of Indian disenfranchisement, indicated that they believed Mexican citizens of mixed Indian heritage to be entitled to the vote - it was not a matter of contention. As Almaguer notes of early Californian society, 'although Mexicans were legally accorded the same rights as free white persons, actual extension of these privileges to all segments of this population was quite another matter.'¹⁸ This contradiction between *de facto* equality afforded by legal classification as whites and *de jure* inferiority would remain firmly in place for the next century. Nevertheless, the citizenship rights guaranteed to Mexicans by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and the failure of lawmakers to introduce a formal mechanism to distinguish between white and non-white Mexicans meant that all Mexicans came under a kind of default 'white' classification. This is evident in the fact that Mexicans who remained in the newly annexed territory were classified as whites by the Census. The 1850 Census had only three 'color' categories: white, black and, for the first time in the country's census history, mulatto.¹⁹ However, Mexicans continued to be counted as white in subsequent censuses, even as separate categories were added for Chinese and American Indians in 1860, and for Japanese in 1870.²⁰ The Mexican legal situation, then, was in some ways the inverse of the one-drop rule used to define blackness, which I will discuss at greater length in the next section. Whereas individuals with a fraction of African ancestry were legally classed as black, even Mexicans with a predominance of indigenous ancestry were legally classified as white.

¹⁷ *Perez V Lippold*, 198 P.2d 17, 32 Cal. 2d 711, Majority Opinion, 10 (1948).

¹⁸ Tomas Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines : The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California* (Berkeley ; London: University of California Press, 1994), 57.

¹⁹ Christine B. Hickman observes that the decision to count mulattoes was motivated by the desire to gather data in order to test scientific theories of mulatto degeneracy. "The Devil and the One Drop Rule: Racial Categories, African Americans and the U.S. Census," *Michigan Law Review* 95, no. 5 (March, 1997): 1184.

²⁰ Campbell J. Gibson and Emily Lennon, "Historical Census Statistics on the Foreign-Born Population of the United States: 1850 - 1990," *US Census Bureau, Population Division*(February 1999), Table 8. A separate Mexican category was added to the 1930 census but abandoned in the 1940 census after lobbying from the Mexican government and Mexican American community leaders. Michael Aaron Calderon-Zaks, "Constructing the 'Mexican Race': Racial Formation and Empire Building, 1884-1940" (Binghamton University, State University of New York, 2008), 62.

4.3 The One-drop Rule: white Blacks, black Whites, and the law of hypo-descent

During the Convention's debate around whether to use 'white' as a term of inclusion or to stipulate 'Indians and Africans and the descendants of Africans' as exceptions, a delegate favouring the former asked, 'What is meant by the descendant of an Indian, or the descendant of a negro? Did the gentleman who offered the proposition mean to say that a man who has the least taint of Indian or negro blood shall not vote?'²¹ The man posed the question rhetorically, to highlight the impracticality of the term 'descendant.' Yet the seeds of the logic which would base entitlements to rights precisely on the 'least taint of negro blood' were already apparent in debate: another delegate stated that 'if an Indian is more than half Indian, he is an Indian; if he is more than half white, he is white. With respect to Africans...all after the fourth generation are considered white in most States.'²² The greater longevity with which African 'blood' was legally construed to definitively mark the individual in comparison to Indian 'blood' had been established since colonial times.²³ However, beginning in the mid-19th century, this evolved into one of the defining features of American racialism -the so-called 'one-drop rule', which held that anybody with any African ancestry whatsoever was black.

As important as this rule came to be in organizing social lines, it is important to remember that it was not always so. Prior to the emergence of the one-drop rule, most states' statutes found any person with less than 1/8, or occasionally 1/4, African ancestry to be white. Court cases from the colonial period through the nineteenth century reveal that appearance and social association (whether the individual had social ties with white people or black), though not formally encoded in law, were also used to make legal determinations of race. Frank Sweet has found that of 19 appellate cases from colonial times until 1829, 15 of these were decided by appearance—that is those who looked to be European were ruled to be white and those who did not were ruled to be black.²⁴ Often all three determinants would have to be in place for a person to be socially, as well as legally, accepted as white. Such questions did not impact a

²¹ California Constitutional Convention and Browne, *Report of the Debates in the Convention of California, on the Formation of the State Constitution, in September and October, 1849*, 72.

²² *Ibid.*, 73.

²³ Winthrop D. Jordan, *White over Black: American Attitudes toward the Negro, 1550-1812* ([S.l.]: Univ. of North Carolina P., 1968), 163.

²⁴ Frank K. Sweet, *Legal History of the Color Line: The Rise and Triumph of the One-Drop Rule* (Palm Coast, FL: Backintyme, 2005), 169-71.

person's slave status, as this was determined matrilineally, *ad infinitum*, and not by colour (which is not to say that they were unrelated).

Sweet argues that the notion of 'invisible blackness' - the idea that an individual with African ancestry might be 'white-looking' but 'really black' - did not appear in American legal or popular culture (measured through a survey of journals, diaries and literature) until after 1830. Before that time, travel accounts, for example, referred to 'white slaves' rather than 'white-looking' slaves or slaves who may try to 'pass for white', as became the custom later in the century. English travel writer John Ferdinand Dalziel Smyth wrote in the 1770s of 'female slaves who are now become white by their mixture' and, in the 1830s, Reverend Francis Hawley of Connecticut wrote, 'It is so common for the female slaves to have white children, that little or nothing is ever said about it.'²⁵ Furthermore, in some regions of the South, a three tier social system prevailed whereby mulattos, or 'free people of color', constituted an intermediary position for generations. In both South Carolina and Louisiana there were large communities of free 'people of color' who were granted more social and legal privileges than black people. In Louisiana Civil Code of 1808, free people of colour were prohibited from marrying either white or black people.²⁶ These groups were looked to by the white population, with whom they shared ties of kinship, to help control the large number of black slaves as well as the smaller number of free blacks. A state legislative investigation into the 1822 failed insurrection plot of black freedman Denmark Vesey pointed out the advantages of having a mulatto 'buffer group'.²⁷

By the 1850s however, increasingly pressured to defend the institution of slavery, fearful of abolitionists' plots and more slave insurrections like Nat Turner's deadly rebellion of 1831, racial lines hardened and mulattos lost the rights that had distinguished them from blacks. At the same time, in the North where slavery had uniformly been abolished by 1830, racial lines had also hardened into a comprehensive system of segregation backed by legal and extra legal codes employed to maintain black people's social and political inferiority.²⁸ In the late 19th and early 20th century, when Jim Crow rose from the ashes of Reconstruction, legal

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 304.

²⁶ Davis, *Who Is Black? : One Nation's Definition*, 34-36.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 35.

²⁸ C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow. Third Revised Edition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 18.

mechanisms for marking and maintaining the increasingly hyperbolic boundaries around blackness were put into place in many localities and were also legitimated by the federal government. In 1922, Madison Grant wrote his often-quoted formulation of hypo-descent:

Whether we like to admit it or not, the result of the mixture of two races, in the long run, gives us a race reverting to the more ancient, generalized and lower type. The cross between a white man and an Indian is an Indian; the cross between a white man and a Negro is a Negro; the cross between any of the three European races and a Jew is a Jew.²⁹

However, primarily only in regards to black people was this rule widely legalized.

In 1913, WEB DuBois wrote in the NAACP's *Fourth Annual Report*: 'The past year has been characterized by a flood of discriminatory legislation – anti-intermarriage bills, "Jim Crow" bills, segregation ordinances in cities and segregation in the federal departments at Washington. Everywhere we have witnessed efforts to officialize caste.'³⁰ Of course, the officialising of black caste necessarily called into question who was black. The question arose on a national scale in the landmark Supreme Court case of *Plessy v Ferguson*. Homer Plessy challenged his removal from the 'white' car of the East Louisiana Railway passenger train citing the fact that he was seven-eighths white and 'that the mixture of colored blood is not discernible in him.' Therefore, he was 'entitled to every recognition, right, privilege, and immunity secured to the citizens of the United States of the white race.'³¹ The court, however, ruled that neither his appearance nor ancestry exempted him from being relegated to the 'colored' section of the train. Thus when the Supreme Court officially legitimated the principle of 'separate but equal' it also legitimated the rule of hypo-descent, verifying blackness as a consequential social mark even in the absence of the supposedly definitive physical mark. In the decades after *Plessy*, many states, in the

²⁹ Madison Grant, *The Passing of the Great Race; or, the Racial Basis of European History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936), 18.

³⁰ Albert Ernest Jenks, "The Legal Status of Negro-White Amalgamation in the United States," *The American Journal of Sociology* 21, no. 5 (1916): 670.

³¹ Charles A. Lofgren, *The Plessy Case: A Legal-Historical Interpretation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 55.

South but also in the West, saw fit to define exactly who was a Negro, or to generationally extend previous definitions. These state laws, as one author noted in 1916, were 'far from agreement as to what a so-called negro is.'³² If they differed in their calculations of blood fractions and generations, however, none of them defined being 'black' or 'Negro' as a physically visible condition and all of them allowed for persons of primarily European ancestry to be relegated to black caste.

Reflecting the essential asymmetry of American racial classification, in only a handful of states was 'whiteness' defined. During the 1920s, the height of Jim Crow and also the height of the influence of the American Eugenics movement, Georgia and Virginia, adopted laws which defined whiteness by contradistinction- a white person was anyone without a trace of African or more than 1/16th Indian ancestry in Virginia or, in Georgia, a trace of African, west Indian, Asiatic Indian, Mongolian, Japanese, or Chinese blood. In these states, non-white groups were lumped together into a category termed in Virginia 'colored' and in Georgia 'people of color.'³³ Three other states, Arkansas, Oklahoma and Texas, however, employed a definition of whiteness in contradistinction specifically to blackness.³⁴ The Texas law, for example, first defines a Negro as 'anyone of African descent from third generation inclusive, even if one ancestor from every generation was white' and then stipulates that 'any person not included in the foregoing definition is deemed a white person within the meaning of this law.'³⁵ On the whole, state legislation on racial classification was primarily concerned with who was to be considered black, either through stipulating the number of generations across which African ancestry was definitive or by including such terms as mulatto, quadroon and octoroon. Only a handful of states gave similar racial potency to ancestry other than 'Negro' or 'African' by specifying fractions of ancestry or mixture.³⁶ In this sense, it cannot be said that mixture was incomprehensible within the dominant schema of race, but that this schema was

³² Jenks, "The Legal Status of Negro-White Amalgamation in the United States," 670.

³³ I use Pauli Murray's compilation of state laws as the source for this discussion. Originally published in 1950 it provides the full text of race related legislation from all 48 states (then the totality of the United States) and a number of city ordinances. *States' Laws on Race and Color* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1997). The information cited for the Georgia and Virginia laws can be found on pages 90 and 479 respectively. A Mississippi's statute on educational segregation used the term 'colored race' to embrace 'all other races' except Caucasian, 237. The Virginia law is discussed further in note 83 in this chapter.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 39-40, 356, 444.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 444.

³⁶ Oregon, Nebraska, Mississippi and South Carolina had laws specifying fractions of Asian or Indian ancestry. *Ibid.*, 263, 385, 246.

entirely responsive to it. Mixture was not denied but was meticulously defined and administrated. The network of laws and practices developed to enforce black caste in the Jim Crow era give full empirical credence to this view. Mixture did not rupture the machinery of classification but demanded it become ever more prolific and precise.

When Jefferson wrote that the slaves, when freed, must be ‘removed beyond the reach of mixture,’ Jefferson had envisioned that colonisation would accomplish this removal rather than ghettos and partitioned water fountains. Nevertheless, that he should have written these words and then allegedly fathered children with his own slave – a slave who had been simultaneously the property and the half sister of his dead wife illustrates what perhaps fuelled the very hyperbole with which Americans later policed the boundaries around blackness, and that is the very impossibility of such supposedly natural boundaries in the first place. In fact when the one-drop rule became the predominant means of determining who was black and who was not, it was white people (people who believed themselves to be white, not those ‘passing’ as white) who were most often directly targeted by the one-drop laws in the court system.³⁷ The reality of centuries of mixing was that thousands of white people were unsure of their ancestry. In *Black Reconstruction*, W.E.B. Du Bois relates the following story from Louisiana: ‘Not long ago, when a prominent white man of a certain parish was “accused” of Negro blood, the court house, with all its vital records, was burned down that night.’³⁸ The ‘one-drop’ rule was based upon the fact of this mixture; if the ‘natural’ boundary between the groups was perceived to be a stable one, if pure racial groupings were really imagined to exist, such rules would be unnecessary.

4.4 ‘Mexicans are Mexicans, just as all blacks are Negroes’: ‘passing’ and infra-group differences

The different quality of the social boundaries erected around black people and Mexicans respectively is reflected in the treatment of infra-group differences. While people with various fractions of African ancestry were designated to one legal

³⁷ Sweet, *Legal History of the Color Line: The Rise and Triumph of the One-Drop Rule*, 421.

³⁸ W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America 1860 - 1880* (New York: The Free Press, 1992), 453.

category, differences between ‘Mulattoes’ and ‘Negros’ were also often contemplated. Though ‘black’ and ‘white’ certainly formed unambiguously binary poles in which many Americans understood race, this is not to say that Americans were unaware that many black people had ‘white blood.’ Madison Grant, examining this fact in ‘scientific’ terms, wrote that ‘evidence’ proved that ‘intelligence and ability of a colored person are in pretty direct proportion to the amount of white blood he has.’³⁹ However, even explicitly racist anti-Mexican discourse recognized some Mexicans as white. As we have already seen, black people could be ‘white-looking’ but not white. Grant’s description of the ‘pass-for-white’ illustrates such thinking. ‘The “pass-for-white” does so purely by virtue of his physical characteristics which approximate those of his white ancestors. His intellectual and emotional traits may insidiously go back to his black ancestry and may be brought into the White race in this way.’⁴⁰

Passing, as a collection of practices and processes, intentional and unintentional, permanent and transitory, by which black people of European phenotype were taken for white, was without direct parallel in the experiences of other non-European American minorities; only blackness was constructed legally and socially in such a manner as to contain individuals even after its physical manifestations were imperceptible. As St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton outlined in 1945, ““passing” was, in its very nature, a surreptitious act.”⁴¹ The key mechanism of passing was one of complete exchange in identification, reflecting the particular oppositional relationship between black and white. Passing reflected, again, that one could not be white and also black (though they could be black ‘with some white blood’ or even a white Negro, whose blackness was invisible). For those deciding to live permanently as white people it meant ‘sociological suicide, to be reborn on the white side of the color-line.’⁴² It involved not only severing all social ties with the community of one’s birth but also losing educational records and work references.⁴³ Illustrating the hardened nature of the divide between black and white is the fact that white people wishing to maintain social relations with black people also sometimes

³⁹ Madison Grant, *The Conquest of a Continent; or, the Expansion of the Races in America* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1933), 283-84.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 285.

⁴¹ St Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton, *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City*, Rev. and enl. ed. ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 129.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 167.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 163.

passed as black, either to evade legal restrictions or social reprobation. In his memoirs, rhythm and blues bandleader Johnny Otis describes passing as black (specifically as ‘Louisiana Creole’) in order to marry his black wife, after they were initially denied a marriage license. He also relates an incident in which he passed as black in order to enter a ‘Colored Only’ Count Basie performance during the 1939 San Francisco World Fair. After telling the policeman at the door that he was ‘colored’, and the cousin of his black friend, the man called over a fellow officer who happened to be from Mississippi. Otis describes the exchange:

“Let me see your fingernails, boy.”

He examined my nails with a professional, almost scientific, authority.

“Yeah, he’s a nigra...let him in.”⁴⁴

Interestingly, Drake and Cayton noted that the Midwestern white community resented and feared intermarriage much more than ‘passing’, although the latter was much more common and involved many more people. ‘Perhaps,’ they suggest, ‘this is because passing leaves intact the fundamental principle of segregation, and at the same time provides a method of escape for those who have arrived at a state of biological whiteness which to some extent actually embarrasses the maintenance of racial barriers.’⁴⁵ The fact that passing was more likely to bring insidious drops of ‘black blood’ into white veins but intermarriage was viewed as more problematic suggests that, at least in some social environments, the maintenance of social separation of blacks and whites was fundamentally more important than abstract notions of white racial purity.

While distinctions were sometimes made between white Mexicans and ‘greasers’, Spanish or Latin type Mexicans and Indian types, frequently Americans were not entirely discerning about the pedigree of the Mexicans in their community. An author in 1921 commented, ‘[T]he word Mexican is used to indicate race, not a citizen or subject of that country...Mexicans...are “Mexicans” just as all blacks are

⁴⁴ Johnny Otis, *Listen to the Lambs* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 16-17.

⁴⁵ Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis : A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City*, 129-30.

Negroes.’⁴⁶ This common understanding of the term is exemplified in an exchange which took place in the immigration hearings in 1928, in which the Committee chairman again asked a witness which ‘type’ of Mexicans he was referring to.

The Chairman. Now, those that are graduating in the eighth grade and the higher schools, are they of the Latin type or more of the Indian type, or are you able to say?

Mr. Bandeen. Well, they are just the Mexicans.

The Chairman. Just the usual run?

Mr Bandeen. Just the usual run.⁴⁷

However, despite the fact that ‘Mexican’ came to be used as a blanket racial category, it is also true that, as discussed in the previous chapter, the ability of individual Mexicans to escape the confines of segregation were greatly differentiated by factors such as class, colour, educational level, and English language ability. By contrast, though African Americans comprised a group of people greatly disparate classes, phenotypes, culture and experience, they were all subject to the barriers of segregation. Furthermore, because it was a term denoting nationality, even if not always used as such, Mexican was seen to encompass a population of different races (not one race with variant amounts of ‘white blood’). Even explicitly anti-Mexican rhetoric allowed that some Mexicans were white people (not ‘pass-for-whites’ or ‘white-looking’ people.)

Some scholars have used the term ‘passing’ to describe the ability of some Mexican Americans escape prejudice. Rodolfo Acuña, for example, writes: ‘[i]t has been easier for lighter-skinned Mexicans in L.A. to pass - to move and to live where they wanted. Euroamericans made exceptions for them.’⁴⁸ As Jerry Gonzalez notes in his study of Mexican American mid-20th century settlement in Los Angeles suburbs,

⁴⁶ James L. Slayden, "Some Observations on Mexican Immigration," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 93, no. 121-126 (1921): 125.

⁴⁷ Congress, "Immigration from Countries of the Western Hemisphere: Hearings," 353.

⁴⁸ Rodolfo F. Acuña, *Anything but Mexican: Chicanos in Contemporary Los Angeles* (London: Verso, 1995), p. xii.

spatial assimilation often meant presenting one's Mexican heritage as 'Spanish.'⁴⁹ But such processes were historically distinct from those undertaken by black people who 'passed' as white. When Mexicans called themselves Spanish, or when others referred to them as such, the act was not one of complete substitution, so much as euphemism. Whereas known black ancestry negated whiteness, in both legal and social terms, the relationship between 'Spanish' and 'Mexican' was quite different. The former was often treated as a more palatable version of the latter. Social worker and author Beatrice Griffith commented in 1948 that even when Mexican Americans identified as Mexican, 'well-meaning' white Americans might insist upon their 'Spanishness': "Mexican? Oh, but you're so smart and all...you're not like those other Mexicans." Or, "Come on, you know you're Spanish. I'm going to call you that anyway."⁵⁰ Manuel de la Raza, the editor of a student newspaper called the *Mexican Voice* published in the late 1930s and early 1940s, described the relationship between the two terms, citing what he called the 'discouraging' trend in which both Mexicans and others referred to successful Mexicans as 'Spanish.' 'Oft-times when people who are curious of our national descent because of our complexion or our name ask us, "Are you Spanish?" They really mean to ask us, "Are you Mexican?" They are afraid to do so because they think it is not polite or that they are paying us a compliment.'⁵¹ He noted that the distinction was meant to mark differences in phenotype, but only among other qualities, in particular, class:

The inference is that only the talented, the law-abiding, the part-Mexican, the fair-complexioned, the professionals and the tradesmen are "Spanish." The drunkards, the delinquents, the very dark, the manual laborers, the pachucos, the criminals and those in the lower socio-economic scale are the Mexicans. If you don't consider this an insult, then you don't have any pride in your background!⁵²

⁴⁹ Jerry Gonzales, "'A Place in the Sun': Mexican Americans, Race, and the Suburbanization of Los Angeles 1940 - 1980" (University of Southern California, 2009), 78 - 9.

⁵⁰ Beatrice Winston Griffith, *American Me* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, Cambridge, 1948), 236-37.

⁵¹ Manuel De La Raza, "Famous Last Words," *Mexican Voice* 1943, 8.

⁵² *Ibid.*

The use of the distinction, he noted, was often in a bid on behalf of politicians or the press to show deference to the ‘better group’ of Mexicans and was made generally by white people and Mexicans alike.⁵³

Here it is important to note how tightly linked were the class and perceived racial difference of Mexican Americans. Unlike the caste line between white and black, which politically tied upper-class black people to the black poor, upper-class Mexicans were far more able to assimilate into American society. De la Raza lamented the lost leadership of those who ‘have broken away from our group and who call themselves “Spanish-American or assorted other Latin nomenclatures”’: ‘For all they know, if they were poor, regardless of how many generations they had been here they would be just “plain Mexican.”’⁵⁴ So unlike the passing of black people, which depended upon the belief that the passing person was white, and therefore not black, the transformation of Mexican into Spanish or ‘other Latin nomenclatures’ did not entirely obliterate the Mexican identity but coyly ameliorated it, distancing the individual from the connotations of exploitation, delinquency and racial difference associated with the Mexican group as a whole. The ‘Spanish’ mechanism was one of discursive hyper-descent, elevating the mixed individual to the status of their ‘higher’ elements. Importantly, such discursive transformations did not represent a permanent or total rupture. In contrast to the prominent white man in Louisiana who burned the court house down when he was ‘accused’ of having Negro blood, in the 1940s Carey McWilliams noted that the Los Angeles Sheriff, Eugene Biscaluz ‘made much fuss over his Latin blood,’ and made a show of identifying himself with the Mexican people on Cinco de Mayo and the Sixteenth of September.⁵⁵

4.5 Anti-miscegenation law and the ‘intention of permanency’

The very different relationship between white and Mexican and black and white as social and legal categories is further illustrated in the regime of miscegenation statutes with which racial classification laws were so intimately intertwined. In 1928, when Harry Laughlin testified before the congressional committee on Immigration and Naturalization with regard to Mexican immigration,

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Carey McWilliams, *North from Mexico : The Spanish-Speaking People of the United States* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1948), 234.

he presented a thorough historical report of the nation's race problems and the approaches necessary to meet them. In a section of his report titled '*Mate selection and Race Perpetuity*', Laughlin stated:

Mate selection is the key to the nonwhite problem in America. So long as race crosses are not made between the women of the dominant races and the men of the so-called lower races, and the fertility of the better-class women of the dominant races remains high, the dominant races are secure. But if the time ever comes when men with a small fraction of colored blood could readily find mates among the white women, the gates would be thrown open to a final radical race mixture of the whole population. The racial integrity of the white races would be jeopardized. The perpetuity of the American race and consequently of American institutions depends upon the virtue and fecundity of American women.⁵⁶

(Interestingly, by specifying that relations between white women and nonwhite men were dangerous, Laughlin's formulation remained curiously silent on the 'race mixture' produced by the illicit sexual relations between black women and white men, a pattern repeated in the majority of anti-miscegenation statutes.) While Laughlin talks about the white race and non-white races, it is important to note that, as within laws of classification, not all 'non-whites' were legislated equally when it came to miscegenation law. This fact highlights again that while the ideas about human hierarchy and biology presented in the racialist doctrines Eugenics resonated with both lawmakers and everyday people, providing a terminology through which to interpret, rationalize and engineer social relations, even at the height of their momentum, not all perceived racial boundaries they proposed were encoded into law or even into practice.

By the mid-forties, thirty states out of forty-eight had anti-miscegenation statutes. All of them outlawed the marriage between whites and black people, five also outlawed marriage between whites and Indians and fifteen between whites and

⁵⁶ Congress, "Immigration from Countries of the Western Hemisphere: Hearings," 709.

Chinese, Japanese and or 'Malays' (Filipinos).⁵⁷ These laws were usually very thorough when it came to ancestry, either through adding terms such as mulatto, quadroon, and octoroon or by specifying the specific fraction, or trace, of 'blood' which made someone a Negro. In only a few states, were non-black groups given the same level of specification.⁵⁸ Legislation barring blacks from marrying outside their group, like other Jim Crow laws, served the very practical purpose of 'officializing caste' as NAACP officials Oswald Garrison Villard and W.E.B. DuBois put it in 1913. Given their special link with concepts of blood, heredity, and breeding, these statutes also had a particular power to suggest biological difference. In a formal note of protest sent to legislatures of states seeking to expand or create such laws, Garrison Villard and DuBois wrote, 'We oppose it for the physical reason that to prohibit such intermarriage would be publicly to acknowledge that black blood is a physical taint, something no self-respecting colored man and woman can be asked to admit.'⁵⁹

The banning of blacks from marrying into the majority society, Gunnar Myrdal noted, signified that the 'boundary between Negro and white is not simply a class line which can be successfully crossed' with education or economic advancement. It was 'fixed' and 'erected with the intention of permanency.'⁶⁰ Myrdal commented that 'refusal to consider amalgamation' was the 'common denominator' in 'the [Negro] problem.'⁶¹ However we should exercise caution when assuming that anti-miscegenation doctrines and practices, or segregation generally, were driven by a 'concern for race purity' or an instinctual abhorrence of 'black blood.' As black political leaders frequently noted, miscegenation statutes didn't stop 'amalgamation' they only delegitimized it, to the detriment of black women with whom white men entered into sexual relations.⁶² The thinness of race purity and amalgamation concerns to explain segregation is further exposed in the well-known fact that most lynchings in the South were not justified by allegations of rape, though the practice of lynching

⁵⁷ Murray, *States' Laws on Race and Color*, 18. Eight other states had once had miscegenation statutes barring marriage between whites and blacks but had repealed them in the 19th century. *Perez V Lippold*. Dissenting Opinion, 29.

⁵⁸ Laws in Nebraska, Oregon, Georgia and Mississippi defined various groups of Asian descent through the same level of specification as African descent. *States' Laws on Race and Color*, 263, 385, 206, 46.

⁵⁹ Jenks, "The Legal Status of Negro-White Amalgamation in the United States," 670. The 'moral reason' given by the NAACP for rejecting miscegenation statutes was the fact that they left black women and girls vulnerable to sexual exploitation.

⁶⁰ Gunnar Myrdal and Sissela Bok, *An American Dilemma : The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2002), 58.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² See, for example, Jenks, "The Legal Status of Negro-White Amalgamation in the United States."

was publicly vaunted as protecting white women against back rapists. As Fields has observed: 'A commonplace that few stop to examine holds that people are more readily oppressed when they are already perceived as inferior by nature. The reverse is more to the point. People are more readily perceived as inferior by nature when they are already seen as oppressed.'⁶³ It is not surprising, then, that the increasing grip of segregation reflected in the ghettos in Northern and Western cities and the intricate partitioning all social spaces in the South, which denied black people social, economic and political rights, should also bring with it the legal marking of blood and the policing of formal reproductive relations between the castes. By both formalizing the social separateness of black and white people and also suggesting their inherent physical incompatibility, miscegenation law had the unique ability to rationalize the caste inequality imbedded within a supposedly democratic society.

Reflecting the discursive centrality of 'miscegenation', justification of different forms of segregation was often conveyed with explicit or implicit reference to sexual mixing. Both the sexual and spatial sanctity of whiteness from black incursions were key cornerstones of the spectre of 'social equality.' This seemingly innocuous phrase, as St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton outline in their work *Black Metropolis*, became a common scare-phrase for 'exciting fear and distrust of the Negro'.⁶⁴ The following excerpt from the 1919 *Property Owner's Journal* quoted in *Black Metropolis* is instructive:

The Negro is unwilling to resume his status of other years; he is exalting himself with idiotic ideas on *social equality*. Only a few days ago Attorney General Palmer informed the Senate of the nation of the Negroes' boldest and most impudent ambition, sex equality. From the Negro viewpoint sex equality, according to Mr. Palmer, is not seen as the equality of men and women; it is the assertion by the Negro of a right to marry any person whom he chooses regardless of color... Where the trouble

⁶³ Barbara J. Fields, "Slavery, Race and Ideology in the United States of America," *New Left Review* 181, no. May-June (1990): 106.

⁶⁴ Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis : A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City*, 116.

lies is in the fact that the Department of Justice has observed an organized tendency on the part of the Negro to regard themselves in such a light as to permit their idea to become a universal ambition of the Negro race. As a corollary to their ambition on sex equality, it is not strange that they are attempting to force their presence as neighbors on the whites...'⁶⁵

Unlike other narratives of upward social mobility contained in the much-loved cliché of the American Dream in which immigrant is transformed into citizen, pauper is transformed into successful entrepreneur, transcendence between white and black caste is deemed unnatural and unholy. Having defined wide swathes of life as social, and therefore private, the 'social equality' narrative, then, reads desires for better housing and opportunity as an aggressive, even perverse, desire to invade and impose, 'interpret[ing] every effort,' Herman Long and Charles Johnson noted in 1947, 'to escape from intolerable conditions as a shameful desire to "live with white people."'⁶⁶ This tendency to discuss the integration of black people with sexually suggestive terms was exemplified in the investigative hearings on the impact of war-related congestion in Los Angeles, which we will return to in more detail in the next chapter. When a union representative suggested that 20,000 units of new housing were urgently needed in the city, a Congressman on the hearings committee asked him:

Mr. MOTT. [S]ay they put up these 20, 000 additional housing projects which you recommend, do you believe it is a proper policy to allow those to be occupied promiscuously by white people and the new influx of Negro population, or do you think there should be some segregation?⁶⁷

⁶⁵ *Black Metropolis : A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City*, 119.

⁶⁶ Herman H. and Johnson Long and Charles Spurgeon Johnson, *People Vs. Property. Race Restrictive Covenants in Housing* (pp. ix. 107. Fisk University Press: Nashville, 1947), 8.

⁶⁷ Subcommittee of the Committee on Naval Affairs, *Investigation of Congested Areas: Los Angeles - Long Beach Area, Calif. November 10, 11, 12, and 13, 1943.*, First Session, 1943, 1860.

The language used by the Government to describe its policy of segregating the armed forces during the 1940s is another telling case: ‘The policy of the War Department is not to intermingle colored and white enlisted personnel in the same regimental organizations.’⁶⁸ Like the congressman’s description of potential integration as ‘promiscuous’ in the first example, the word ‘intermingle’ is highly evocative; indeed the word itself is a synonym for ‘amalgamation.’

Interestingly, one author in the early 20th century used the metaphor of amalgamation with very different effect to describe the spatial and culture mixture of the ‘Spanish’ and American which made Los Angeles distinctive. Reflecting the discourse discussed in the previous chapter which romanticized California’s ‘Spanish’ history, sociologist and social reformer Dana Bartlett wrote in 1907:

The amalgamation of races is producing a new and splendid type. Here is a people within whose veins runs the red blood of the hardy Northmen. They are possessed of the push and the stir of the great Eastern cities, and have also the romantic and poetic temperament of the Spanish life in which they share, together with the love of nature and of the beautiful that characterized the early settlers. The out-of-door life, the mission residence, the bungalow, are but the outward expression of the inner thought. Here as in no other city, you can hear the song of the siren mingled with the music of mission bells.⁶⁹

Of course, Bartlett is referring to culture and architecture rather than bodies and blood. However the manner in which amalgamation is here celebrated as ‘romantic and poetic’, entirely distinct from the manner in which amalgamation is discussed with regard to the black spatial presence, as a dread threat to intimacy and freedom, is revealing of the general ambivalence toward American and Mexican ‘intermixture’ apparent since the Mexican-American war. While the dominant rhetoric of the war

⁶⁸ Memorandum, The Adjutant General to commanding Generals of all Armies, Corps Areas and Departments, and Chiefs of Arms and Services, 16 October 1940, subject: War Department policy in regard to Negroes. Morris J. MacGregor and Bernard C. Nalty, eds., *Blacks in the Military: Essential Documents* (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1981), 32.

⁶⁹ Dana W. Bartlett, *The Better City: A Sociological Study of a Modern City* (Los Angeles: The Neuner Press Company, 1907), 21.

had condemned Mexicans as unable or unfit to politically and biologically assimilate, in some pro-war circles it was asserted that whatever remained of the Mexican population after conquest could be genetically absorbed. An 1847 article in the *Democratic Review* argued that American soldiers could be a racially regenerative force in occupied Mexican territory.⁷⁰ After the war, dime store novels and newspapers published stories featuring love stories between American soldiers and Mexican heroines, as Shelly Streeby argues, symbolically recasting the war of brute conquest into a romantic adventure.⁷¹ In the early 20th century, Mexican movie stars like Dolores Del Rio, Ramon Navarro and Lupe Velez, though stereotyped and exoticised, appeared in films as the love interests of white men and women, something that would have been unthinkable for black actors.⁷²

4.6 Mexicans and intermarriage: 'Good melting pot material'

Mexicans, as legal whites, were subject to miscegenation laws, only in so far as they were technically barred from marrying the non-white groups specified in such statutes. In 20th century Los Angeles, despite low economic status, the rate of Mexican intermarriage with whites remained high throughout the 20th century.⁷³ The legality and relatively high incidence of Mexican and white intermarriage does mean that such liaisons were socially acceptable. Though not a primary concern, the subject of intermarriage between Mexicans and whites was occasionally raised in the Congressional Hearings on Mexican immigration. In a section of his report to the Committee entitled, 'Intermarriage between Whites and Mexicans, and Mexicans and Negroes', Senator Box construed the threat Mexicans presented in the way of intermarriage as not simply polluting the white race but of corroding the barrier between whites and blacks:

⁷⁰ Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny : The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge, Mass. ; London: Harvard University Press, 1981), 244.

⁷¹ Shelley Streeby, *American Sensations : Class, Empire, and the Production of Popular Culture* (Berkeley ; London: University of California Press, 2002), 132.

⁷² See: Alicia Rodriguez-Estrada, "Dolores Del Rio and Lupe Velez: Images on and Off the Screen, 1925 - 1944," in *Writing the Range: Race, Class and Culture in the Women's West*, ed. Elizabeth Jameson and Susan Armitage (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997).

⁷³ Constantine Panunzio, "Intermarriage in Los Angeles, 1924-33," *American Journal of Sociology* 47, no. 5 (1942): 692-93.

No other alien people entering America have created freer channels for blood intermixture through intermarriage than do these Mexicans with whom black and white races intermarry to a limited extent. White and negro race stocks can not be kept separate when both intermarry, even to the limited extent of a few thousand instances, with some hundreds of thousands or millions and increasing numbers of Mexican immigrants.⁷⁴

Box reasoned that Mexicans' 'Caucasian blood' (of Spanish and 'other stocks') facilitated their liaisons with whites; meanwhile, that the 'humbler classes of the Mexicans' were 'basically Indian' with a 'strain of negro blood' derived from African slaves facilitated their intermarriage with Negroes. 'Such a situation,' he concluded, 'will make the blood of all three races flow back and forth between them in a distressing process of mongrelization.'⁷⁵ The fact that Box construed the threat that Mexicans posed to the American bloodstream in these terms is revealing. It was not simply that they would mix with whites, he argues, but that they would cross-contaminate whites with blackness. It seems probable that Box included black people in his description of the 'distressing process of mongrelization' because the rhetorical threat of Mexican intermixture alone could not stoke up fears for white purity in the same manner as the spectre of black blood. When John Garner sought to distinguish the Mexican from the Negro problem with the assertion that 'You cannot assimilate that race,' the Senator he was speaking to shot back: 'That is true. You would be better off if you could not assimilate the Mexicans.'⁷⁶ His pessimistic comment suggests that he was aware of a distinct ambiguity when it came to Mexicans and 'assimilation.'

The pro-Mexican immigration lobby was equally aware of it. In a section of their submission to the immigration hearings entitled, 'No Race Problem Ethnically', the California Agricultural Legislative Committee insisted that Mexicans were not a

⁷⁴ U.S. Congress, "Hearings before the Committee on Immigration and Naturalization: Immigration from the Western Hemisphere," (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1930), 410.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ Committee on Immigration, United States Senate, *Restriction of Western Hemisphere Immigration*, First Session, 1928, 22.

‘menace to the American bloodstream’ because they did not intermarry with Americans (‘except in rare instances’). ‘However,’ the report continued, ‘any charge that a mixture of this kind is incompatible is not born out by the facts. We must remember that these Mexicans are Indians, and we have in our own Nation one outstanding example in the case of our Vice President, who is of Indian blood.’⁷⁷ The president of the *Los Angeles Times*, Harry Chandler, also took up this theme: ‘Every American knows, who is familiar with the Indian character, Indian blood has never degraded our citizenship. An American who has a little Indian blood in his veins is generally proud of it.’⁷⁸ Their comments reflect the fact that despite suffering centuries of genocide and dispossession, biological lines of differentiation had been drawn much less stringently around American Indians. Contrary to Grant’s doctrine, ‘the cross between an Indian and a white man’ was not always, at least not perpetually, an Indian.⁷⁹ In the early years of the nation, sometimes ‘amalgamation’ with Indians had even been encouraged. While Jefferson insisted that the freed slaves should be ‘removed beyond the reach of mixture’, he expressed great hope that Indians and whites would ‘blend together, to intermix, and become one people.’⁸⁰ The distinction again highlights that the stringency of classification and containment of black ‘blood’ was not so much a practice of racism generally, but rather the specific historical outgrowth of racially encoded slavery.

The fact that legally sanctioned, supposedly biological lines were not drawn around Mexicans as a people, even though they were economically exploited and socially degraded, was something that did not escape Mexican American community leaders. The middle class spokespeople of the Mexican American community made every effort to assert that Mexicans were an immigrant group and not a separate racial

⁷⁷ "Hearings before the Committee on Immigration and Naturalization: Immigration from the Western Hemisphere," 236.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁷⁹ The difference is vividly illustrated in the perhaps one of the most notorious pieces of race legislation in American history, Virginia’s Racial Integrity Act. Devised under the supervision of Grant and other eugenicists, the Act took the fairly rare move of defining who was a white person. While the racial apostles wanted the definition to be limited to any person with no trace of colored blood such a definition was not politically palatable to the rest of the state. Many elite Virginia families, for example, traced their ancestry to the union between Pocahontas and John Smith. Thus the ‘Pocahontas Exception’ was introduced to the act to ensure that the legislature passed it. After some tinkering, this stipulated that persons with 1/16th or less Indian blood were white persons. Richard B. Sherman, "The Last Stand: The Fight for Racial Integrity in Virginia in the 1920s," *Journal of Southern History* 54, no. 1 (1988).

⁸⁰ Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (Richmond, VA: J. W. Randolph, 1853), 270; Jordan, *White over Black : American Attitudes toward the Negro, 1550-1812*, 192.

group. 'The unadjustment [sic] of the American of Mexican extraction is one of custom, culture and language,' Manuel Ruiz, a lawyer and community activist in Los Angeles wrote in 1945, 'None of these impediments to integration are insurmountable or of a permanent nature. They are transitory.'⁸¹ He asserted that, like the Irish, Italians or Poles, the Mexicans were 'good melting pot material.'⁸² Downplaying tensions between Mexicans and Americans in both countries, he commented: 'Handsome American lads go right on courting beautiful señoritas, and the result is that Conchita, Pepita and Claudito O'Toole, are in the offing to perpetuate our ever increasing close kinship.'⁸³ Discussing the 'fundamentally unscientific approach' of 'promoters of group antagonisms' to thwart Mexican Americans, Ruiz wrote:

When this beast seeks to classify [the Mexican] upon a distinct racial basis, he retorts that his situation is simply one of national origin and language difficulty, the same as was that of the Irishman, the Italian, or the Pole, now fully intigrated (sic) into the community. He points to the constant and commonplace intermarriage between families of Mexican extraction with families of Anglo-American background in support of his premise.⁸⁴

Ruiz's suggestion here seems to be that intermarriage *proved* that Mexicans and Anglo-Americans were not racially distinct. If the figure of little 'Claudito O'Toole' represented the ongoing process of Mexican integration, he also embodied another 'fact' which Ruiz constantly insisted upon: the problems and prejudice experienced by Mexicans in America were not the result of natural, physical differences in type. 'We do [have our problems],' he wrote, 'but they are not to be confused with those of our negro citizens.' The Coordinating Council for Latin American Youth, of which Ruiz was Secretary, went so far as to adopt a resolution insisting that 'the social adjustment and integration of American citizens of Mexican ancestry be dealt with upon a basis of cultural and economic background and not inter-racial

⁸¹ Manuel Ruiz, "Is the Racial Problem Being Solved, Typescript of Radio Address Broadcast June 24, 1945," in *Manuel Ruiz Jr Papers* (Palo Alto: Stanford, 1945), 1.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 3.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

differentiation.⁸⁵ As the perception of racial difference was linked to permanent and rigorous marginalisation, Ruiz was keen to deny both sides of the equation - that Mexicans were either permanently different or that they experienced severe marginalisation.

Later scholars have interpreted such notions, which dominated Mexican American politics for the first half of the 20th century, as misguided at best. Chicano historian Rudolfo Acuña suggests that Mexicans and Latinos who identify as white have irrationally internalized dominant society's racism and are thus suffering from a 'false consciousness.'⁸⁶ Neil Foley, who has written extensively about Mexican Americans and their categorization as white, makes a more sophisticated argument but one that remains problematic. Middle class Mexican American activists, he writes, 'constructed new identities as "Spanish American" or "Latin American" in order to arrogate to themselves the privileges of whiteness routinely denied to Mexicans, Blacks, Chinese, and Indians.'⁸⁷ The use of the term 'arrogate' - to take without justification - suggest that, like Acuña, Foley also characterizes Mexicans' description of themselves as white as inherently false. He further argues that a central component of the 'new' white identities was racism: 'Growing numbers of middle-class Mexican Americans thus made Faustian bargains that offered them inclusion within whiteness provided that they subsumed their ethnic identities under their newly acquired White racial identity and its core value of White supremacy.'⁸⁸ Like some of the literature discussed in the Introduction, the argument here sounds distinctly conspiratorial. One can almost imagine Mexican Americans attending furtive meetings to take the sacred vows of White Supremacy and learn the secret white people's handshake.

Of course Foley is right to recognize that anti-black racism shaped Mexican American responses to their own plight in often-explicit ways. This was particularly visible in Jim Crow Texas where segregation was rigidly delineated in law against

⁸⁵ Coordinating Council for Latin American Youth., "Unpublished Resolution Unanimously Adopted by the Coordinating Council for Latin American Youth," in *Manuel Ruiz Papers* (Stanford: Special Collections Department, Green Library, Stanford University, Undated 1940s), 1.

⁸⁶ Rodolfo Acuña, *Anything but Mexican: Chicanos in Contemporary Los Angeles* (London: Verso, 1995), 8.

⁸⁷ Neil Foley, "Becoming Hispanic: Mexican Americans and the Faustian Pact with Whiteness," in *Reflexiones: New Directions in Mexican American Studies*, ed. Neil Foley (Austin: CMAS Books, 1997), 55.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 63.

black people and was frequently wielded in practice against (legally white) Mexicans as well.⁸⁹ But he reads these responses in purely racial terms, placing whiteness, rather than power, at the centre of the process. We see two interrelated and faulty assumptions in Foley's reasoning. In the first statement, he suggests that in describing themselves as white Mexican Americans wanted to 'arrogate' white privileges. Perhaps in Texan Jim Crow society, civil rights were understood by many as 'white' rights; consistently describing them in such terms in scholarly analysis, however, tends to suggest that it was the 'lure of whiteness,' as Foley puts it, whiteness in the abstract, that primarily motivated these Mexicans rather than the desire for basic civil rights and lives free of discrimination.⁹⁰ Secondly, the assertion that they adopted white supremacy in exchange for inclusion in 'whiteness' suggests Mexican Americans' not infrequent expressions of anti-black racism did not reflect their own understanding of the social world but were merely mimicry of what white did genuinely, performed either in delusion or under duress. Thus while Foley confronts the uncomfortable history of the anti-black stance adopted socially and politically by some also oppressed 'people of color', racism, remains essentially 'white' in his analysis.

It is important to recognize, first of all, that for at least some of these Mexican Americans, insistence on their 'whiteness' was not a denial of Mexicanness. The theme of Mexican pride was continually emphasized in the *Mexican Voice*, sometimes explicitly celebrating the indigenous aspect of Mexican heritage. Deriding the 'countless' boys who answered the question of 'What are you?' with 'Spanish', an article published in 1938, titled 'Are We Proud of Being Mexican?' insisted:

A Mexican must be a Mexican. His heritage of rich Aztec and Spanish blood has provided him with characteristics born of a high cultural civilization. When this rich background has been tempered with the fires of the Anglo-Saxon understanding and

⁸⁹ Recall that, as discussed earlier, in Texas all those without African ancestry were defined as white. Foley also notes this point. *Ibid.*, 61-62.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 66.

enlightenment, you will have something which will be
the envy of all.⁹¹

Interestingly, while the papers' young contributors consistently rejected the euphemistic description of Mexicans as Spanish, they also consistently insisted upon their people's designation as 'white' and 'Caucasian.' In the September 1938 issue of *Mexican Voice* Manuel De la Raza related an incident he witnessed in which one 'American of Mexican descent (Shall we call him a Mexican to save time?)' was ridiculed by his peers for giving his 'color' as 'white' instead of 'Mexican' on his social security card application. De la Raza related the young man's 'laudable' response:

Mexican is no color, nor race! Mexican is a
nationality...I have white blood in my veins, as well
as red. I couldn't sign this card as Indian because
I'm not. The only alternative is to sign it white."⁹²

This anecdote highlights a particularly important point about Mexicans and whiteness. The young man openly acknowledges his indigenous heritage and, as de la Raza points out, the young man did not intend to deny his Mexican heritage. That his friends assumed that this was the case suggests 'Mexican' and 'white' were not commonly understood to be compatible. Yet the young man's explanation for his choice also shows that not all Americans in the 1930s understood 'white' in the terms of eugenicists and neither was the 'claiming' of white identity an ascription to 'white supremacy'. The lesson that de la Raza draws for the reader from this anecdote further reveals how at least some Mexicans understood the white category.

Let's take it this way: an Australian may not be a
bushman; a native of South Africa is not always one
of negroid blood. All right then, saying we are
Americans doesn't mean we are not of Mexican
descent: Even the Americans of other descents know

⁹¹ Manuel Ceja, "Are We Proud of Being Mexicans," *Mexican Voice* August, 1938, 9.

⁹² Manuel De La Raza, "Nosotros," *Mexican Voice* September, 1938, 14-15.

this. So, next time anyone asks you what you are, say, 'I'm an American.' If he questions further, say, 'I'm an American of Mexican descent.'⁹³

Critically, while the young man's friends had laughed at him for calling himself 'white', de la Raza slips from 'white' to 'American' in his discussion of the incident – 'saying we are American does not mean we are not of Mexican descent.' The slippage suggests that, for de la Raza, 'white' was interchangeable with American, that rather than representing the mark of the racial elite, it represented the state of being *unmarked*, of simply being American. 'White' did not negate Mexican but the placement of Mexican within the white classification represented a negation of the stigma of difference imposed upon Mexicans.

Like Ruiz, de la Raza also perceived Mexican political interests to be distinct from those of black people. In another article, he explicitly expresses admiration for black political leadership, spirit and solidarity and suggests Mexicans should emulate them. In the same article, however, he relates that he rejected the suggestion of a black friend that the two groups could fight segregation together: 'Why should one of Mexican descent join forces with colored people to fight segregation? We're of a totally different race. We're of the same white race that segregates us.'⁹⁴ While some Mexicans no doubt held racist views of black people, attempts to politically emphasize their whiteness and thus racial sameness, perhaps better said, their *non-racialness*, and distance themselves from black people and thus a racially differentiated social position reflect, primarily, an understanding of the manner in which American society ideologically linked difference and domination.

4.7 'What is a Negro?': Perez v. Lippold and California's miscegenation statute

The reluctance of some Mexican Americans activists to ally themselves politically with black people - and thus a position of formally racialised subordination - is mirrored more broadly in the fact that despite their many shared circumstances, the rate of intermarriage between Mexicans and blacks remained low throughout the

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ Manuel de la Raza, "Negroes Prove Worth Despite Historical Tale of Opposition," *Mexican Voice* 1938, 14.

20th century (and continues to do so⁹⁵). A study of the years between 1924-33 found that 1,287 Mexican intermarriages were with native born whites and only one was with a black person.⁹⁶ In 1958 and 1959, 2,669 were with whites and 54 were with blacks.⁹⁷ Though technically illegal, one might suppose that given the low status of Mexicans, officials would turn a blind eye to such marriages - no doubt this did occur. However, in 1947 when Andrea Perez, a Mexican American woman (of *mestiza* appearance) and Sylvester Davis, an African American man, applied to the Los Angeles County Clerk's office for a marriage license, they were refused on the grounds that white people could not marry black people. They acquired an attorney and the case, *Perez v. Lippold*, became the one in which the California Supreme Court overturned the state's anti-miscegenation statute. According to Dara Orenstein, those who knew her say that Perez thought of herself as Mexican and referred to herself as such.⁹⁸ Yet all of the court documents referred to Perez as a white woman and no mention of her Mexican heritage, much less challenge to her status as a 'white' person, is made. Furthermore, her Mexican ancestry, while occasionally alluded to by reporters, was not a *focus* of press coverage of the case. Interestingly, the Los Angeles Spanish language newspaper *La Opinion* referred to Perez simply as a white woman in its coverage of the case, making no mention of her heritage, a fact which suggests that the paper did not sense that the issue raised in the case was one of great interest to its readership, the city's Mexican community, as such.⁹⁹ The *Los Angeles Tribune* referred to Perez as Mexican, noting that the group were classified as white by law, but did not elaborate on either fact.¹⁰⁰

If the *Perez* case demonstrates the impact of World War II on the country's thought, politics and etiquette with regards to the idea of race, it also demonstrates

⁹⁵ A recent study of second, third and fourth generation Mexican Americans found that none of the sample group were married to black people. Eighteen, 32 and 38 percent from each generation respectively were married to whites. Edward Eric Telles and Vilma Ortiz, *Generations of Exclusion: Mexican Americans, Assimilation, and Race* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2008), 176.

⁹⁶ Panunzio, "Intermarriage in Los Angeles, 1924-33," 692-693.

⁹⁷ Frank G. Mittlebach, Joan W. Moore, and Ronald McDaniel, "Advance Report 6: Intermarriage of Mexican Americans," in *Mexican American Study Project* (Los Angeles: University of California Los Angeles, 1963), 14. The increase between the periods probably reflects both post WWII increase in the city's black population and perhaps the 1948 decriminalization of white and black marriages, discussed below.

⁹⁸ Orenstein, "Void for Vagueness: Mexicans and the Collapse of Miscegenation Law in California," 394.

⁹⁹ UP, "Pueden Casarse Los Negros Con Los Blancos," *La Opinion*, 2 October 1948.

¹⁰⁰ Orenstein, "Void for Vagueness: Mexicans and the Collapse of Miscegenation Law in California," 403.

how entrenched the bedrock of American racialism remained - even when challenged by the changing intellectual tide. The various arguments set out in the case by both the lawyers and the Justices fully capture the incipient shift from scientific racism to anthropological race neutral egalitarianism.¹⁰¹ Daniel Marshall, Perez and Davis's attorney, compared the language of a precedent case upholding anti-miscegenation law, *State vs. Tutty*, to passages from *Mein Kampf*, emphasizing the link of racialism with Nazism, and thus un-Americanism.¹⁰² The resonance between miscegenation law and Nazism did not escape the counsel for Los Angeles County, Charles Stanley, but this did not stop him from basing his arguments to uphold the statute on the theory of white superiority. He told the court in his oral argument: 'I do not like to say it or to tie myself in with "Mein Kampf"- but it has been shown that the white race is superior physically and mentally to the black race.'¹⁰³

Hedging his bets, he divided his argument into 'medical and biological considerations' and 'sociological considerations', offering as evidence a mélange of 19th century studies on black racial traits, the work of Charles Davenport and other eugenicists, contemporary newspaper articles about 'race' related social problems, and even, to top it all off, a quote from the Bible. Rather paradoxically, he argued that whites were adverse to blacks as evidence that the two should not be allowed to marry, citing the residential segregation in Californian cities as proof: 'whites resent it when the Negroes try to invade the white neighborhoods, and do all in their power to enforce race restrictions.'¹⁰⁴ While Stanley presented 'evidence' that, among other points, mulattos were sterile, cross-breeds were degenerate and that blacks had high morbidity rates and were susceptible to disease, Traynor argued the absurdity of racial classification itself. The following exchange between them illustrates the rather surreal collision of disparate paradigms:

Mr. Justice Traynor: It might help to explain the statute, what it means. What is a Negro?

Mr. Stanley: We have not the benefit of any judicial interpretation. The statute states that a white cannot

¹⁰¹ For more a full analysis of this shift, see Peggy Pascoe, "Miscegenation Law, Court Cases, and Ideologies Of "Race" In Twentieth-Century America," *Journal of American History* 83, no. 1 (1996).

¹⁰² *Perez V Lippold*, Oral Argument in Support of Petition, 13.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, Oral Argument on Behalf of Respondent, 7.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, Respondent's Brief in Opposition to Writ of Mandate, 106.

marry a Negro, which can be construed to mean a full-blooded Negro, since the statute also says mulatto, Mongolian, or Malay.

Mr. Justice Traynor: What is a mulatto? One-sixteenth blood?

Mr. Stanley: Certainly states have seen fit to state what a mulatto is.

Mr. Justice Traynor: If there is 1/8 blood, can they marry? If you can marry with 1/8, why not with 1/16, 1/32, 1/64? And then don't you get into the ridiculous position where a Negro cannot marry anybody? If he is white, he cannot marry black, or if he is black, he cannot marry white.

Mr. Stanley: I agree that it would be better for the Legislature to lay down an exact amount of blood, but I do not think that the statute should be declared unconstitutional as indefinite on this ground.

Mr. Justice Traynor: That is something anthropologists have not been able to furnish, although they say generally that there is no such thing as race.

Mr. Stanley: I would not say that anthropologists have said that generally, except such statements for sensational purposes.

Mr. Justice Traynor: Now, would you say that Professor Wooten [sic] of Harvard was a sensationalist? The crucial question is how can a county clerk determine who are Negroes and who are whites?¹⁰⁵

In the only discussion of Mexicans in the case file, Traynor uses their example as one of many to pick apart the perceived illogic of the law and its deficiencies. A particular irritation for him was the statute's incompleteness.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, Oral Argument on Behalf of Respondent, 3-4.

Civil Code section 60 like most miscegenation statutes prohibits marriages only between ‘white persons’ and members of certain other so-called races. Although section 60 is more inclusive than most miscegenation statutes, it does not include ‘Indians’ or ‘Hindus’; nor does it set up ‘Mexicans’ as a separate category, although some authorities consider Mexico to be populated at least in part by persons who are a mixture of ‘white’ and ‘Indian.’ Thus, ‘white persons’ may marry persons who would be considered other than white by respondent’s authorities, and all other ‘races’ may intermarry freely...the section does not prevent the mixing of ‘white’ and ‘colored’ blood. It permits marriages not only between Caucasians and others of darker pigmentation, such as Indians, Hindus, and Mexicans, but between persons of mixed ancestry including white.¹⁰⁶

He found fault with the asymmetry which came from allowing marriages between persons of mixed ancestry, pointing out someone of mixed white and Mongolian ancestry could marry a full blooded Mongolian, and that a Mulatto - someone of 7/8 white ancestry - could marry a Negro.¹⁰⁷ He further complained that the terms that were provided were left undefined. While the California Civil Code provided at least a definition, if an unsatisfactory one, in Traynor’s opinion for mulatto, ‘even more uncertainty surrounds the meaning of the terms ‘white persons, ‘Mongolians,’ and ‘members of the Malay race.’ Whether through strategy or genuine pedantry, Traynor effectively ignored the historical and social facts that underwrote the statute, namely the differential treatment of African ancestry well established throughout the nation in both law and practice. For while he argued the law did not effectively stop marriage between whites and non-whites, in fact *that was never its stated purpose*. The lack of a definition for the term ‘white’ and the irrelevance of Andrea Perez’s non-European ancestry to the proceedings demonstrate that what was at stake was not the purity of

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, Majority Opinion, 26-27.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, Majority Opinion, 13-14.

the white race but the official boundary isolating the groups named in the statute. That the isolation of African Americans in particular was important to those defending the statute is suggested by the fact that all of the evidence presented was focused on blacks rather than ‘Mongols’ or ‘Malays.’

In her analysis of the *Perez* case, Dara Orenstein argues that Mexicans’ mixed ancestry ‘destabilized the legal apparatus of *de jure* segregation in California’, a fact, she claims, is reflected in Traynor’s conclusion that the anti-miscegenation statute was too vague to be enforceable.¹⁰⁸ However, in terms of the *Perez* decision, Traynor explicitly pointed to the absurdity of hypodescent as applied to persons of mixed black and white ancestry, and when he spoke about people of mixed ancestry he could have just as easily been referring to Sylvester Davis as Andrea Perez. As we can see when reading the moment during the trial when Traynor demanded to know how a mere county clerk could determine who were the whites and who were the negroes, unlike other Americans (scholars included), Traynor found even the supposedly firm poles of race utterly ambiguous. In any case, as we have seen, mixed ancestry has certainly posed no problem at all for ‘the legal apparatus of segregation’-the Supreme Court was not fazed by Homer Plessy’s mixed heritage when it upheld the constitutionality of the ‘separate but equal’ doctrine. Rather than explaining social relations in terms of ‘coloredness’ or ‘partly-coloredness’, in ancestry or mixtures thereof, we must look to the historical circumstances in which those things were perceived and given meaning in the first place.

4.8 Conclusion: Caste and ‘semi-caste,’ or, The black man rides Jim Crow in Georgia

In his conversation with an imaginary white friend, W.E.B. DuBois examines ‘white’ and ‘black’ as both genetically impossible but crushingly real. DuBois, related by blood to whites, was not ‘black,’ his friend insisted. As ‘yellow blood and black blood has deluged Europe in days past even more than America yesterday,’ neither was the friend ‘white,’ DuBois shot back. How then, the friend eventually demands, can DuBois speak of belonging to a group, if, as he ‘maliciously’ charges, ‘there are no races and we are all so horribly mixed’:

¹⁰⁸ Orenstein, "Void for Vagueness: Mexicans and the Collapse of Miscegenation Law in California," 406.

‘[W]hat is this group; and how do you differentiate it; and how can you call it ‘black’ when you admit it is not black?’

‘I recognize it quite easily and with full legal sanction; the black man is a person who must ride ‘Jim Crow’ in Georgia.’¹⁰⁹

DuBois’s ‘conversation’ helps to elucidate why Americans, who came to accept without thought that people of all colours could be black, should be confused by the same displays of heterogeneity within Mexicans. The Jim Crow car in Georgia, and the wider legal and social apparatus of segregation, gave a definitive meaning to blackness; it formed a hard, tangible edge around those it was designed to contain. The social and legal meaning of blackness, its *opposition* to whiteness, was unambiguous. Once the mark of blackness was identified upon a physically white person, its meaning remained unambiguous. On the other hand, it was not clear if the Mexican was a person who should ride ‘Jim Crow’ should they venture into Georgia. It was not clear in Texas. Handman supported his assertion that the range of Mexican pigmentation caused confusion with the description of an incident he witnessed: ‘A Mexican girl enters a street car and sits down among whites and the conductor tells her to sit among the negroes. She refuses on the ground that she is “no nigger.”’¹¹⁰ As Handman observed, in American society there was ‘a place for the Negro and a place for the white man.’¹¹¹ Mexicans, on the other hand, were neither clearly equal nor totally subordinated. Without a fixed place in which to ferment and congeal, the discursive meanings attached to the colours and types of Mexican people were shifting and variegated. It was not so much that the physical or cultural heterogeneity of Mexicanness caused confusion as the porousness and unevenness of the boundaries demarcating it. Unlike racial blackness, rooted in the slavery at the dark heart of the democratic republic, Mexicanness, as a social and historical presence, did not demand

¹⁰⁹ W.E.B. DuBois, *Dusk of Dawn: Toward the Autobiography of a Race Concept* (Piscataway, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2009), 152-53.

¹¹⁰ Handman, "The Mexican Immigrant in Texas," 37-38.

¹¹¹ Max Sylvius Handman, "Economic Reasons for the Coming of the Mexican Immigrant," *American Journal of Sociology* 35(1930): 609-10.

rigid, universal social containment and an attendant machinery with which to be sorted and defined.

The uniquely meticulous biologising of the 'Negro problem' was the specific result of slavery in an egalitarian society. The extensive network of miscegenation laws, underwritten by the one-drop rule, were the result of both centuries of 'race mixing' and the continuing inequality between the descendants of slaves and all others - a social fact to which miscegenation laws gave a biological rationale. On the other hand, the annexation of Mexican territory and the American dependence on Mexican labour demanded the social and economic subordination of Mexican workers in America. But Mexico was also a nation, and America's relationship with the Mexican government demanded making overtures towards formal equality. To assume that Americans would have automatically wanted to relegate Mexicans to an officially encoded inferior racial status and would have done so except for some logistical obstacle - like their mixed ancestry - is to assume that 'white supremacy' or 'white purity' was an end unto itself. Yet, the lack of definition given to whiteness, the granting of 'white status' to 'mongrel' Mexicans and its denial to white 'Negroes', suggests that whiteness as a legal and social entity was considerably diffuse. Far more clearly defined, in both law and social practice, were the barriers delineating, and separating, blackness.

5. 'The Golden Era is Before Us': Building the Walls of the Los Angeles Ghetto

In this chapter I will examine how the black and Mexican difference was spatially imposed in practice and how the distinct circumstances of each group's presence in the city of Los Angeles came to be reflected in particular ideological constructions. Los Angeles provides a rich empirical example for a number of reasons. By the mid 20th century, it had roughly equal populations of Mexicans and African Americans. Though both groups faced discrimination and restrictions on their spatial mobility, the demographic map of the city, viewed across the axis of both time and space, has been shifting and uneven. One such shift, the rapid eruption of the black ghetto in the years following World War II, abruptly marks the different manner in which these two groups have been spatially managed and imagined, undermining the idea that racism creates a rupture between white and non-white.

I will argue that the city's jagged social landscape, relatively flexible in some places at some times and unyieldingly rigid in others, captures something far more complex. In tracing the contours of this landscape, the trajectories of Mexican and African Americans within it are discursively shaped within the familiar themes of permanence and transience, of discordance and compatibility, both reflecting and confirming each group's perceived place (or lack of place) in American society. In a sense, the boundaries erected in Los Angeles through practices of residential segregation spatially map those created through the schema of classificatory and anti-miscegenation laws, as discussed in the last chapter. Although 'Caucasians only' was a recurrent discursive refrain, it was African Americans, rather than whites, around whom spatial barriers were most forcefully reinforced.

The discussion in this chapter will draw from a number of primary sources which reveal how public officials and private interest groups thought about and acted upon the presence of black, Mexican and other minority Americans at various points in the 20th century. Among the sources I rely on most heavily are the 1849 transcript of California's Constitutional Convention; a 1927 statewide survey of California's real estate boards which asked agents how they managed the 'color line' in their localities; the 1928 and 1930 transcripts of congressional debates on Mexican immigration; a 1930 report compiled by then governor of California C.C. Young's 'Mexican Fact-Finding Committee'; and the transcripts of a series of investigative

hearings on war-related congestion, convened before a subcommittee of the House of Representatives' Committee on Naval Affairs in the mid-1940s, in which public officials expressed copious anxiety about the West Coast's incoming Negro migration.

5.1 'For White People Only' and the evolution of Watts

In 1927, the California Real Estate Association undertook a survey among local realty boards of cities and small towns across the state. The survey was designed to assess the threat 'color' posed to the state's property values. It asked the heads of local Real Estate boards if there were segregated districts in their area, and asked how these were maintained, with specific regard to Chinese, Japanese, Negroes, and Mexicans. The survey responses make quite remarkable reading and starkly reveal some important points. Firstly, the perceived necessity of segregation was entirely self-evident to the respondents. There was no discussion whether segregation was a good idea or not but how it could be best achieved and maintained; the 'undoubted impact of race on property values,' as one respondent put it, framed both the questions that CREA asked and the answers that local realtors gave. In fact, realtors viewed it as their professional and ethical duty to ensure that white neighbourhoods remained so. As one respondent put it: 'If the real estate operator uses common sense and good judgment untainted by extreme selfishness or avarice, he will offer [non-whites] only properties in neighborhoods inhabited by the races above and save himself trouble and worry.'¹ Several respondents refer to those agents who do sell to non-whites as 'unscrupulous' and one suggests that such individuals have their licenses revoked.²

The second point important to make here is that, overwhelmingly, the responses indicate little differentiation in the perceived importance of segregating the four groups in question. There were a few exceptions. The Oakland Board responded

¹ California Real Estate Association, "Questionnaires from California Real Estate Agents Concerning Attitudes and Practices Regarding Segregation and Housing," in *Survey of Race Relations* (Palo Alto: Hoover Institution, Stanford University, 1927), Stockton survey. Despite the piety these agents profess as they discuss their motivation to segregation, it is a fact that the real estate industry made considerable economic gains from enforcing and manipulating a residential colour line. See the first chapter of *American Apartheid* for a discussion of how real estate agents directly profited from creating segregated black neighbourhoods. Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton, *American Apartheid : Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

² *Ibid.*, Responses from Los Angeles and Monrovia.

that ‘some sections were restricted to colored and all others to all non-Caucasians.’³ The questionnaire from Pomona seems to imply that Mexicans and Negroes, but not Japanese, were subject to restrictions. Occasionally other ethnic groups were mentioned as undesirables: Italians, Greeks and members of the ‘Turkish empire’ were so selected. The representative of the Santa Monica Real Estate Board wrote in his covering letter: ‘Personally I place the Latin races, [sic] in exactly the same category as the color line. The Spanish, French, Italian and the Grecians too are to my way of thinking of most objectionable type...there is no such thing as the finer qualities demanded by American citizenship apparent in them.’⁴ Further and importantly as I will discuss at length later in this chapter, respondents did differentiate in their characterization of the ‘colored’ groups – while Mexicans and Japanese were mostly cast as pliant, black people were often seen as actively menacing the sanctity of spatial boundaries. Nevertheless, there is striking uniformity through the questionnaires in indicating that if any of the four groups identified by CREA - Chinese, Japanese, Mexican, or Negro - were present in a community, they were subject to intentional residential separation. Commenting in the beginning of his letter that ‘our colored people, while very limited in number in San Jose, are scattered and should be placed in a segregated area,’ the respondent from San Jose went on to write:

I believe that the State Association would do a wonderful work if they could appoint a commissioner to work with the State of California to place the various nationalities and people of Africian [sic] decent [sic], even though citizens of the United States in segregated areas.⁵

In the resulting article (‘Color Question in California Reveals Many Problems’) published in the July, 1927 edition of its magazine, *California Real Estate*, the association noted: ‘Most of these cities have already had foresight enough to provide subdivision restrictions and community agreements of owners to maintain an “All

³ *Ibid.*, Response from Oakland Real Estate Board, covering letter.

⁴ *Ibid.*, Response from Santa Monica Real Estate Board, covering letter.

⁵ *Ibid.*, Response from San Jose Realty Board.

Caucasian” district where colored races cannot encroach on territory already settled or being settled by the white race.’⁶

From the vantage point of the 1927 survey, then, it would seem that the most salient ideological division, a division being materially constructed in the cities and towns of California, was the separation of ‘white’ from those deemed to be ‘non-white.’ This is neatly encapsulated in the response from the San Pedro Realty Board to the question of whether there are ‘segregated sections in your locality based on the color line.’ ‘The only segregated sections we have,’ their response reads, ‘are those which are for white people only.’⁷ However, when we expand our view temporally, taking in the fuller scope of the 20th century, the landscape is shaped by cracks and chasms much more varied, much more jagged than a simple line between ‘Caucasians’ and ‘colored races.’

This fact was starkly illustrated in 1965 in the South Los Angeles ghetto of Watts. In August of that year, residents of the deeply deprived, socially and economically isolated neighbourhood violently protested their containment. They threw stones, bottles and bricks at police and looted and burned the property of the merchants who made a living from the community but did not live there. The city police and later the National Guard worked with lethal determination to suppress these activities.⁸ After several days of unrest, thirty-four people were dead.⁹ The neighbourhood which lay in smoldering ruins, under curfew and armed surveillance of the National Guard, was not a compound of non-Caucasians; it was nearly 90% black.¹⁰ A year later, the author compiling a confidential investigative report on the area for the NAACP wrote: ‘This Los Angeles ghetto has more of the characteristics

⁶ Serena Preusser, "Color Question in California Reveals Many Problems," *California Real Estate* 1927, 35.

⁷ California Real Estate Association, "Questionnaires from California Real Estate Agents Concerning Attitudes and Practices Regarding Segregation and Housing," Response from San Pedro Realty Board.

⁸ For an extensive historical analysis of the riots, see Gerald Horne, *Fire This Time: The Watts Uprising and the 1960s* (Charlottesville ; London: University Press of Virginia, 1995).

⁹ John A. McCone, *Violence in the City: An End or a Beginning? A Report by the Governor's Commission on the Los Angeles Riots* (Los Angeles: State of California, 1965), 23.

¹⁰ Franklyn. Rabow, "Watts: A History of Deprivation," in *Records of the Governor's Commission of the Los Angeles Riots, 1965 August - December*. (Berkeley: Bancroft Library, University of California Berkeley, 1965), 27.

of a concentration camp.’¹¹ And in terms of its absolute social, physical and economic isolation, there were no Mexican, Chinese, or Japanese Watts equivalents.

But this camp was little more than 20 years old when its inmates set it alight. On the dawn of World War II, the population of Watts was evenly split among Mexicans, blacks and working class whites. By 1947, as black newcomers from the South poured into Los Angeles - and as the whites and then the Mexicans departed - Watts was roughly 80% black.¹² Researchers commissioned in that year by the American Council for Race Relations to examine racial tensions in Los Angeles wrote that ‘there is some evidence that Watts has been selected by powerful interests as an area of Negro segregation and that the sites for the public housing projects were not uninfluenced by this consideration.’¹³ While these government sanctioned practices kept the flood of black migrants who came to the city during the war and afterwards penned into Watts and two other areas, an exodus of both white and Mexican residents from Watts saw the black population become even more isolated.¹⁴ The population shift did not occur without tension. The American Council report noted that both whites and Mexicans reacted with hostility to their new black neighbours.

The tension between the incoming Negroes and the Mexicans occurs principally in the older, more settled sections of Watts. It is in these sections that returning Mexican veterans, resentful over the striking changes which have occurred during their absence, have in some cases threatened to band together to expel the Negro invaders from the community.¹⁵

There is no record, however, that they actually did anything - other than leave. Their departure, apparently, did not go unnoticed by the black community. A Watts resident named Frieta Shaw told the Governor’s Commission on the riots: ‘Mexicans get an

¹¹ "Summer Task Force - Watts, a Confidential Report Submitted to the Naacp," in *National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Region I, Records, 1942-1986* (Berkeley: Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1966), 1.

¹² Lloyd H. Fisher, *The Problem of Violence: Observations on Race Conflict in Los Angeles* (Chicago: American Council on Race Relations, 1947), 7.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

education, the thing they do is move away from the area where they have lived and move over some place else and they are no longer Mexicans. They are Spanish-speaking people.’¹⁶

On the one hand, the story of Watts adheres to the familiar pattern of ghetto formation throughout the nation as a whole; black migrants were forced into increasingly cramped and dilapidated neighbourhoods through a mixture of legal and extra legal methods. As California civil rights attorney Loren Miller told the Governor’s Commission on the Los Angeles Riots, ‘The modern urban Negro ghetto is the product of intricate interplay of popular prejudice and governmental action.’¹⁷ Importantly, its demographic evolution also reflects the regionally specific ethnic complexity of 20th century California, and it captures – in tangible detail - the qualitative difference between the lines built to protect ‘Caucasians’ and the far more rigid lines drawn to contain ‘Negros’ within Los Angeles’s striking mix of sprawling suburban growth and quarantine.

To begin to understand how Mexicans were able to leave Watts and why black people were not, I will look at the manner in which the presence of Mexicans and blacks was configured, both spatially and discursively, on the map of Los Angeles in the early 20th century. I will then consider how large-scale black migration to the city in the 1940s drastically saw that map reconfigured and the broader interplay of regional and national discourses that this shift reflected. Finally I will trace how the conditions of slavery and migrant labour fundamentally shaped the manner in which the presence of each group was conceptualised by white Americans. To foreground my examination, however, I will consider how other scholars have addressed the highly asymmetrical legacy of multiethnic residential segregation.

5.2 After Watts: Some theoretical reflection

In 1966, a year after the Watts riots, the Chicano novelist Jose Antonio Villarreal wrote a two-part profile of the city’s Mexican American population for the

¹⁶ Josh Sides, *L.A. City Limits : African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 111-12.

¹⁷ Loren Miller, "Relationship of Racial Residential Segregation to Los Angeles Riots (Prepared for Presentation to Governor's Commission, Los Angeles, California, October 7, 1965)," in *Records of the Governor's Commission of the Los Angeles Riots, 1965 August - December*. (Berkeley: Bancroft Library, University of California Berkeley, 1965), 9.

Los Angeles Times' *West* magazine, in which he described the nascent Mexican American middle class.

A large group of citizens of Mexican descent in the medium-income level are apathetic simply because they do not now know discrimination. They have been able to assimilate, yet retain a part of the culture of their fathers...Many are ex-GIs, or children of ex-GIs. Like their lower-middle class Anglo neighbors, they may not even be interested in voting, although in traditional American spirit they will be vaguely disturbed about taxation and the size of government. They are usually buying their homes and share with most of their Anglo friends the fear that the Negro may come into their neighborhood and depreciate values. But, while they fear he may move into the house next door, they know the Negro will never come into their lives.¹⁸

While poor education, police brutality, and limited economic prospects stunted the lives of Mexican poor and working classes, the ability of lower-middle and middle-class Mexicans to move into suburban neighbourhoods ensured there would be no Mexican Watts. That the Latinos who participated in the 1992 Los Angeles Uprisings were overwhelmingly recent immigrants, unlike their black counterparts, again highlights the spatial mobility of earlier generations of Mexicans. Though linked in both mainstream and radical political discourses in the late 1960s, research undertaken in 1965 by the Mexican American Study Project found that, strikingly, in Los Angeles as well as most other cities throughout the Southwest, Mexicans were not only less segregated from whites than blacks were, but they were also more isolated from blacks than they were from whites.¹⁹

Such facts have prompted Massey and Denton to conclude that for Mexican immigrants, like European immigrants in earlier years, 'U.S. cities served as vehicles

¹⁸ José Antonio Villarreal, "Mexican Americans in Upheaval," *West* September 18, 1966, 24-25.

¹⁹ Frank G. Mittlebach and Joan W. Moore, "Advance Report 4: Residential Segregation in the Urban Southwest," in *Mexican-American Study Project* (Los Angeles: University of California Los Angeles, 1965), 16.

for integration, economic advancement, and, ultimately assimilation into American life.’²⁰ While it is undoubtedly true that Mexicans experienced far less isolation than African Americans, it would be a mistake to think that they were seamlessly assimilated into Southwestern cities. In his thesis on Mexican American experiences in Los Angeles suburbs, Jerry Gonzales writes that middle class Mexicans faced ‘a schizophrenic racial geography characterized by both open hostility and relative acceptance.’²¹ Real estate agents could and did still refuse to sell homes to Mexicans and white neighbours might still respond to Mexican newcomers with hostility. In 1955, a Los Angeles County real estate board expelled two of its members for selling homes to families deemed to be ‘a clear detriment to property values.’ One family was of Italian and Spanish descent and the other was Mexican American.²² But despite frequent moments of continuing hostility, the relative spatial and social mobility of Mexicans is clearly apparent on the map. The suburbs surrounding the south central city were home to 9,000 Mexican Americans in 1960 but less than 70 blacks. Forty-seven thousand Mexican Americans lived in farther outlying suburbs, compared to only 1,100 black Americans.²³ It is important, as well, to consider not just the relative pervasiveness of the exclusion that each group faced but the qualitative differences in method. The record left by vigilantes in later decades spelled out this differentiation in graphic terms. In the 1960s, sociologist Alphonso Pinkney found that out of 95 ‘violent housing incidents’ registered with the Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations between 1950 and 1959, 70 of the crimes were committed against blacks, 9 against Japanese, 6 against Mexicans and 1 against Chinese.²⁴

Reflecting on the unevenness of segregation applied across America’s multi-ethnic social terrain, in 1987, Massey and Denton observed:

The high degree of black residential segregation, and its relative imperviousness to socioeconomic influences,

²⁰ Massey and Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass*, 18.

²¹ Jerry Gonzales, "‘A Place in the Sun’: Mexican Americans, Race, and the Suburbanization of Los Angeles 1940 - 1980" (University of Southern California, 2009), 89.

²² Davis McEntire, *Residence and Race: Final and Comprehensive Report to the Commission on Race and Housing* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960), 241.

²³ Sides, *L.A. City Limits: African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present*, 110.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 111. Sides suggests that the remaining incidents probably targeted Jews.

suggest that race continues to be a fundamental cleavage in American society. Yet...[i]t is not race that matters, but black race...Blacks are apparently viewed by white Americans as qualitatively different and, by implication, less desirable as neighbors, than members of other racial or ethnic groups.²⁵

But how and why does 'black race' matter? The ambiguity of race as a conceptual term has led to some considerable problems in the analysis of residential segregation. As I will discuss, American race ideologies have postulated since the early 19th century that the natural divide between blacks and whites has generated the 'prejudice' of the latter and, judging by the analyses they offer to explain the considerable variance with which the tentacles of residential segregation have gripped different non-white groups, a number of current scholars seemingly continue to accept white prejudice, and in particular white prejudice towards black Americans, as an elemental, and self-evident, factor in social relations.

That 'there is no evidence that Mexican American families awoke in the middle of the night to burning crosses, arson, or lynch mobs like African Americans did across the country', for Gonzales is due to the fact that 'white attitudes towards [Mexicans] proved more favorable than towards African Americans.'²⁶ Sides similarly argues that the differing residential mobility of blacks and Mexicans reflected 'white attitudes towards each group.'²⁷ Attributing the more stringent and violent segregation imposed upon black people to 'white attitudes' is tautological. That white people generally had more negative attitudes to black people does not explain why they more aggressively and violently fought to keep black people out of their neighbourhoods; the 'attitudes' and the actions are parts of the same phenomenon and neither can explain itself or its counterpart.

Elaborating on this difference in white attitudes toward each group, Sides discusses a survey Pinkney carried out with white residents of an anonymous Southern California suburb which found that they were generally more amenable to

²⁵Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton, "Trends in Residential Segregation of Blacks, Hispanics, and Asians: 1970-1980.," *American Sociological Association* 52, no. 6 (December 1987): 823.

²⁶ Gonzales, " 'A Place in the Sun': Mexican Americans, Race, and the Suburbanization of Los Angeles 1940 - 1980", 34.

²⁷ Sides, *L.A. City Limits: African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present*, 110.

the integration of Mexicans. The survey asked the respondents to indicate their willingness to engage in various social situations with Mexicans and African Americans. Forty-five percent of whites questioned, for example, said that they would be willing to live next door to a Mexican, compared to only 23 percent who would live next to a black neighbour. Citing the results of this survey, as well as the housing vigilantes' overwhelming focus on African Americans and the 'more timid campaign of exclusion' against Mexicans, Sides writes:

If whites had come to think of Mexican Americans as white or near-white, there is evidence that some Mexican Americans themselves adopted that new identity. Although the most striking development in postwar Mexican American history was the rise of the Chicano movement, which embraced Mexican ancestry, other Mexican Americans simply considered themselves white.²⁸

It is hard to see how Sides reaches the conclusion that white or Mexican people had come to think of Mexican Americans as 'white or near white' from this evidence, as this is not what the survey respondents said or even what they were asked. With regard to Mexican Americans' view of themselves, the suggestion that the considerable numbers of Mexicans who did not participate in the Chicano movement did not 'embrace' their ancestry but 'simply considered themselves white' is a vast oversimplification. Indeed in his reflection on the new suburban Mexican Americans, José Antonio Villarreal commented: '[T]hey know they are Mexican. And, with a smugness that would never permit them to deny it, call themselves Mexican.'²⁹ With regard to white Americans' views of Mexicans, Sides's assumption seems to be that their tepid acceptance of and lack of violence towards Mexican Americans as neighbours necessarily indicates a belief that Mexicans were white.

In his study of American 'sundown towns', small towns and suburbs which, beginning in the period after Reconstruction, adopted an overt policy of prohibiting black residence under threat of violence, James W. Loewen also asserts that the

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 111.

²⁹ Villarreal, "Mexican Americans in Upheaval."

presence of Asians and Latinos in such places means that they are becoming white. He claims that '[t]oday, "white" may be incorporating most Asian, Pacific, Mexican, and affluent Native Americans. Certainly their acceptance in sundown towns implies as much.'³⁰ He defines sundown towns as 'any organized jurisdiction that for decades kept African Americans or other groups from living in it and was thus 'all-white' on purpose', yet adds that in his reckoning 'an all-white town may include nonblack minorities.'³¹ Again, Loewen solves this apparent contradiction- that nonwhite people live in 'all-white' towns - by deducing that Asians, Native Americans and Latinos are now 'white.' The simpler and more accurate solution would be to change the description of a sundown town from an 'all-white town' to a 'town which excludes African Americans.'³² The difference is not just a matter of semantics but forms the basis for key assumptions about the working of racism.

Despite recent emphasis on the multiplicity of racisms and the necessity of recognizing the distinct histories of different ethnic groups, it seems that scholars often seem to assume that the presence of racism or the ascription of racial difference must necessarily lead to particular outcomes. Relatedly, as discussed in the Introduction chapter, though scholars have long argued the inapplicability of the black experience as a generic historical model in which the experiences of other non-European minorities can be neatly interpreted, it is still often implicitly treated in this manner. Thus when the experiences of Mexicans and others diverge markedly from that of African Americans, such divergences are understood to illustrate that Mexicans must have ceased to be 'non-whites,' as white racism, seemingly envisioned as a constant and primordial force, dictates that the plight of 'non-whites' is that of permanent exclusion. Such analyses distort a complex set of multi-ethnic social relations to fit within the same simplistic binary to which they pose such a considerable challenge.

The problem, I believe, lies in placing whiteness as the central point of conceptual reference. Tellingly, though Loewen explicitly cites the critical importance of slavery in shaping the hierarchy of power relations, he still treats 'whiteness' as the

³⁰ James W. Loewen, *Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism* (New York: New Press, 2005), 512 n312.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

³² If a town excluded Chinese but allowed African Americans to settle there (Loewen found one such example) I doubt any one would refer to this as an 'all-white' town rather than as a town which excludes Chinese. There is not the same tendency to generalize the Chinese experience as the prototypical 'race relationship'.

underpinning concept. So in addressing the question of why African Americans have been the targets of such universal spatial exclusion, Loewen writes that that uniquely among caste minorities (here he includes Native, Mexican and African Americans),

whites encountered African Americans *primarily* as slaves for almost 250 years. White racism therefore became first and foremost a rationale for African slavery. That is why America's "*real non-whites*," if you will, have for centuries been its African Americans.'³³

And herein lies the problem – slavery did not make African Americans the '*real non-whites*' but gave rise to some very potent ideological understandings, and legal constructions, of *blackness*. The difference here is crucial. While these constructions of blackness have certainly served to shape and inform those applied to other ethnic groups in the United States, as we have seen in the case of Mexicans, the relations that each construction comes to reflect and reinforce are necessarily specific. So while African slavery very much informed ideas about other forms of exploited labour, and provided a descriptive schema to apply to other oppressed social groupings, the anti-black racism that arose from slavery did not and could not either explain or determine the relations between other groups.

As the CREA survey attests, a broad distinction was made between white Americans and 'non-Caucasians.' But the spatial histories of Mexicans and blacks in Los Angeles graphically reflect that this broad division manifest in specific ways in the mesh of legal and ideological formations that each group's distinct conditions within the American social body gave rise to. It is to these distinct conditions which I will now turn.

5.3 The 'Mexican Colony'

In 1930 an investigative report was compiled by then governor of California C.C. Young's 'Mexican Fact-Finding Committee.' The committee was composed of the state's Director of the Department Industrial Relations, Director of the

³³ *Ibid.*,138.

Department of Social Welfare and the Director of the Department of Agriculture and described their aim as not simply the study of Mexicans but ‘Mexican problems.’³⁴ Written in a tone of cool neutrality, there is no doubt that the problems being described are those that the Mexican was perceived to pose to American society, rather than the problems Mexicans faced in America. Noting that the Mexican, like other ‘foreign-speaking immigrants’, tended to live in ‘colonies, retaining his traditions and a mode of life not always satisfactory to his American neighbors’, the Governor’s report cited a combination of cultural, economic and social factors:

The tendency of the Mexican to live in a racial group is strengthened by several conditions. On arrival he seldom speaks English and consequently is dependent upon the Spanish-speaking group for adjustment to his new environment. The Mexican commonly performs unskilled and consequently low-paid work, so that his choice as to quarters is restricted. In Mexico the laboring classes have been used to very simple living with only the most primitive sanitation, and owners are naturally reluctant to rent their buildings to Mexican tenants if others can be found. In addition, there exists a prejudice against the Mexican which manifests itself in the common classification of the Mexican as “not white.”³⁵

The authors of the report note that Mexicans were often named in restrictive covenant agreements, barring them purchasing or occupying homes in particular districts. Many other analyses placed a great deal more emphasis on Mexicans as agents of their own colonization. The state’s real estate agents seemed to understand that Mexicans’ poor living conditions reflected the latter’s own low standards. The respondent from the Stockton Realty Board similarly wrote: ‘Mexicans...naturally gather in the poorer neighborhoods where others of a similar class are already located and where it makes

³⁴ Will J. French, G. H. Hecke, and Anna L. Saylor, "Mexicans in California, Report of Governor C.C. Young's Mexican Fact-Finding Committee," (San Francisco, California: State of California, 1930), 12, 14.

³⁵ *Ibid.*,176.

little difference to anyone who becomes his next door neighbor.³⁶ The 'Color Line' article which summarized the results of the statewide survey reported: 'Mexicans do not wish to force themselves into the better districts and when improvements are made they usually leave for a poorer district.'³⁷ Mexicans, then, in the minds of real estate agents, not only 'naturally' gathered in poor areas they also sought out new areas of poverty if the conditions in their existing area were improved. Of course these agents were not so convinced their ideological claims that they neglected to put legal mechanisms in place to prevent Mexican 'encroachment' lest the latter forget their penchant for poverty.

The 'typical' Mexican residence within these colonies was a tenement like collection of one and two room dwellings built around a shared water supply and outdoor toilet. With the first great wave of Mexican immigration, Belvedere, an unincorporated section of the eastside became an established area of Mexican settlement. The 1930 investigative report of California Governor C.C. Young's Mexican Fact-Finding Committee reported that the Belvedere district was

just beyond they city limits and was built up without regard to the proper requirements for sanitation in congested districts. Two, and sometimes three, shacks are built upon one very small lot, leaving little unoccupied space. The shacks are flimsy shells, usually constructed of scrap lumber, old boxes, or other salvage.'³⁸

Inspectors from the Los Angeles County Health Department in 1928 made a survey of conditions in 'Mexican districts.' They compiled their findings into an unpublished report entitled 'The Mexican as a Health Problem.' In their inspection of Maravilla Park in Belvedere, they rated most of the dwellings as 'mere shacks', and found that more than half had poor light and ventilation. Only 10 out of 317 homes inspected had flush toilets. On the 'home index score card', the tool of measurement used to rate

³⁶ California Real Estate Association, "Questionnaires from California Real Estate Agents Concerning Attitudes and Practices Regarding Segregation and Housing," Response from Stockton Realt Estate Board, covering letter.

³⁷ Preusser, "Color Question in California Reveals Many Problems," 61.

³⁸ French, Hecke, and Saylor, "Mexicans in California, Report of Governor C.C. Young's Mexican Fact-Finding Committee," 177.

home conditions, the Mexican homes averaged a 'decidedly poor' 8.3, compared to the standard score of 25.³⁹

In addition to the larger settlements around and within Los Angeles, throughout Southern California, McWilliams estimated that of the Mexicans who lived in Southern California outside of Los Angeles, as many as 80% lived in what were referred to as *colonias* (colonies) or labor camps, usually just on the edge of the town proper.⁴⁰ Being 'just beyond the city limits', many of these areas were 'unincorporated'. This quite revealing term was used to refer to their separateness from the municipal body. As such many of these areas were not provided with basic municipal services, such as garbage collection or water. In the cases of labour camps, families were dependent upon company employers to provide such facilities with predictable results.⁴¹ In other places, they were forced to purchase water from private owners at rates higher than those paid in town.⁴² These disadvantageous spatial circumstances, which reinforced Mexicans' social separateness and economic vulnerability, were not, as McWilliams pointed out, a neutral or chance occurrence:

It would be misleading... to convey the impression that the location of the *colonias* was accidental or that it has been determined by the natural play of social forces. On the contrary, there is a sense in which it would be accurate to say that the location of the *colonias* has been carefully planned. Located *at just sufficiently* inconvenient distances from the parent community, it naturally became most convenient to establish separate schools and to minimize civic conveniences in the satellite *colonia*.⁴³

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 178.

⁴⁰ Carey McWilliams, *North from Mexico: The Spanish-Speaking People of the United States* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1948), 218.

⁴¹ French, Hecke, and Saylor, "Mexicans in California, Report of Governor C.C. Young's Mexican Fact-Finding Committee," 179.

⁴² McWilliams, *North from Mexico: The Spanish-Speaking People of the United States*, 218.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 218-19. For an in-depth study of the social, residential and school segregation in one Southern California town, see: Martha Menchaca, *The Mexican Outsiders: A Community History of Marginalization and Discrimination in California* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1995).

The physical configuration of Mexican settlements in relation to official communities in geographical space thus both reflected and produced particular social relations.

5.4 Black Los Angeles

While we have seen that Californians were fond of rhetorically evoking the menace of ‘the Negro’ during the debate on Mexican immigration, in the early part of the 20th century the state’s small black population actually lived in conditions that were relatively good when compared to the housing of blacks in other regions in the country or to that of Mexicans in Los Angeles. As illustrated in the responses to the CREA survey, the use of restrictive covenants put definite boundaries into place which crippled the residential mobility of black Angelenos. There were, however, some important contrasts between the Californian city and the urban areas of the Midwest and East Coast. The spacious, sprawling nature of the city, and the wide availability of land, meant that even though restricted, many black people in city could own homes with yards, rather than find themselves stuffed into tenements as in the more compact, dense cities of the North. The amount of black migrants entering Los Angeles in the Great Migration era increased the small black population seven times over - yet because they were only a fraction of explosive over-all growth in the city, the percentage of blacks to the general population remained roughly the same. A number of early black settlers who made the expensive journey to the West Coast from the South were necessarily middle class and came with money saved up. While restricted in the city’s job market, a fact exacerbated by the presence of other, more numerous minorities whom were often given preference in manual labor and manufacturing positions, blacks were nevertheless able to participate in the area’s real estate boom. Many purchased homes and investment properties. The Central Avenue region of the city became the heart of the black community. This area, however, was also decidedly multi-ethnic, home to Italians, Jews, Mexicans and Japanese; there were only a few blocks in which black people formed a majority of residents. After visiting the city in 1913, WEB DuBois wrote in the *Crisis* that Los Angeles’s black

community were 'without a doubt the most beautifully housed group of colored people in the United States.'⁴⁴

The difference in the housing of blacks and Mexicans reflected, in part, different economic and social circumstances under which the two populations came to Los Angeles in the early 20th century. These circumstances also contributed to the ideological distinctions Californians made between Mexicans and blacks as threats to 'all American' space. As discussed previously, within the CREA surveys Mexicans were understood to acquiesce in their separation. However, whereas Mexicans were seen as pliant, black people were described by the real estate agents as pushy and manipulative. The article published in the CREA magazine made this comparison explicit: Mexicans 'do not try to force themselves where they are not wanted; but negroes, it is held, seem anxious to get into a white district to command a big price to leave.'⁴⁵ Different agents had different reactions to black attempts to enter white areas. The representative of Ontario commented, 'It is true occasionally that some negro would like to buy outside the district, but we have not experienced any real problem.'⁴⁶ Other representatives were less relaxed. The agent from San Francisco, himself a transplant from Mississippi, opined that the 'Western negro does not know his place. The Mexicans can be well handled, and are quite reliable, but not so the negroes. A big question is ahead, so we just as well prepare for it.'⁴⁷ Echoing this ominous tone, an agent from Los Angeles, urging that the State revoke the licenses of brokers who sold or rented property in white areas to 'persons of African, Mongolian or Japanese blood', stated: 'This race question is fraught with social and economic peril, owing to the rabid propaganda of the negro race.'⁴⁸

The reaction to the attempts of black people to leave their 'districts' contrasts sharply with the brief mention the CREA article makes of the mobility of other 'foreigners.' Describing San Francisco the article states: 'Chinatown, the Italian Quarter, Russian, etc, districts are quite well defined and only when these people become more prosperous and wish to move in a more educated group, do they leave

⁴⁴ Douglas Flamming, *Bound for Freedom : Black Los Angeles in Jim Crow America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 51.

⁴⁵ Preusser, "Color Question in California Reveals Many Problems," 61.

⁴⁶ California Real Estate Association, "Questionnaires from California Real Estate Agents Concerning Attitudes and Practices Regarding Segregation and Housing," Response from Ontario Real Estate Board, covering letter.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, Response from San Francisco Real Estate Board, covering letter.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, Response from Home Protective League (Los Angeles), covering letter.

their own circle.’⁴⁹ The brief passage does not indicate explicitly that this shifting of people from ‘their own circle’ is acceptable but it is certainly not identified as a menace or even an annoyance. Rather, here the desire to move ‘in a more educated group’ seems to be a logical consequence. That there is no comparable concern about ‘foreigners’ trying to buy their way out of segregated districts supports the assertions of scholars that immigrant groups have been able to escape slums and residential isolation as their socio-economic capital improves, whereas the mechanisms of segregation have applied to black people of all classes.⁵⁰ None of the real estate agents made mention of Mexicans problematically attempting to ‘encroach’ on white areas or ‘leave their own circle.’ While the fact that few Mexican immigrants in 1927 had the economic ability to purchase homes in middle class or affluent areas undoubtedly contributed to this lack of anxiety over ‘pushy’ Mexicans transgressing boundaries, it also suggests that the Mexicanness of upper and middle class individuals was viewed as quite a different quality than that of the poor labouring immigrant.

Ricardo Romo writes in his history of East Los Angeles that residential hostility was directed largely at the Mexican poor and working class, rather than those who achieved the ‘“proper” class’. He points out that wealthy Mexican refugees, the former elite of the Porfirio Diaz regime overthrown during the 1915 revolution, and Mexican movie stars like Dolores del Rio and Ramon Novarro settled in upper class neighbourhoods on the city’s white west-side. The *Los Angeles Times* noted that ‘Mexican *senoritas*’ mixed with the city’s upper crust on West Adams Boulevard.⁵¹ It is telling to contrast this with Hattie McDaniel’s experience in the West Adams Heights neighborhood several decades later. In 1945 white residents of the neighbourhood, in which McDaniel and several other black celebrities had purchased homes, took court action in an attempt enforce a turn-of-the-century restrictive covenant barring ‘non-Caucasians.’ The case was thrown out by the judge, who became the first in the country to rule that such restrictions violated the Fourteenth Amendment.⁵² Repeating a familiar pattern, however, following the judge’s ruling

⁴⁹ Preusser, "Color Question in California Reveals Many Problems," 35.

⁵⁰ Herman H. Long and Charles S. Johnson, *People Vs. Property. Race Restrictive Covenants in Housing* (pp. ix. 107. Fisk University Press: Nashville, 1947), 2.

⁵¹ Ricardo Romo, *East Los Angeles : History of a Barrio* (Austin: Texas U.P., 1983), 85.

⁵² Carey McWilliams, "The Evolution of Sugar Hill," *Script* 1949, 30.

the neighborhood became majority black as many white residents quickly moved out.⁵³

5.5 'Racial Problem Headaches'

The constructions of the pushy Negro and the pliant Mexican reflect several interconnected processes. Mexicans' classificatory status as white might allow them to circumvent 'Caucasian Only restrictions' and fair skinned Mexicans in particular could distance themselves from anti-Mexican prejudice by describing themselves as 'Spanish'. But, as Gonzales points out, there was no 'hard and fast rule' with regard to Mexican skin color and assimilability.⁵⁴ Some restrictive covenants were worded in order to exclude Mexicans rather than to include only Caucasians. In one case, in fact, it seems that Professor Manuel Servin, whose book about Mexican American GIs is a source of discussion in the following chapter, was able to purchase a mansion in South Pasadena in the early 60s despite an anti-Mexican restrictive covenant because he was perceived to be a Native American.⁵⁵ Further undermining the idea that Mexican integration either signaled or was enabled by their acceptance as white people is the fact that Japanese and Chinese Americans, phenotypically distinct from white people and unequivocally categorized as a 'non-Caucasian' race, had even greater success in integrating white neighbourhoods than Mexicans in the second half of the 20th century. Their 'white' classification is just one reflection of the fact that Mexicans faced less rigid, less comprehensive barriers than African Americans and as such the mark of 'Mexicanness' was more ambiguous, shifting with class and status.

As discussed in the first chapter, slavery had marked both free and enslaved black people as anomalous within the America's supposedly democratic social body, fomenting blackness as a distinction often more salient than those of class and culture. On the other hand, the assimilation of middle and upper class Mexicans in the Southwest did not similarly endanger the exploitation of Mexican labour. Thus the

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 30-31. McWilliams describes 'an extraordinary costume party' some of the neighbourhood's remaining old residents hosted when it became clear that the 'Negroes could not be kept out.' Guests 'came to the party in blackface, rigged out in "Negro" costumes as cotton pickers, minstrels, Negro "mammies," and so forth.' Photographs of the party were printed in local society pages.

⁵⁴ Gonzales, "A Place in the Sun': Mexican Americans, Race, and the Suburbanization of Los Angeles 1940 - 1980", 78.

⁵⁵ Loewen, *Sundown Towns : A Hidden Dimension of American Racism*, 75.

social degradation of Mexicans in the Southwest, as Ernesto Galarza, Herman Gallegos and Julian Samora noted in 1970, impacted different sections of the Mexican population very unevenly.⁵⁶ If one could deduce that Mexicans faced fewer barriers because they were less marked by stigma, the reverse is also true. The mutually constitutive relationship of ‘difference’ and social and spatial restriction is neatly captured – with the familiar descriptions of Mexican docility and black aggression – in a World War II era FBI report into the ‘racial conditions’ of Los Angeles’s Spanish speaking population. Frederick E. Roderick, the agent who wrote the report noted that the ‘special problems’ created by the influx of Mexicans to the city since the war should be ‘considered as temporary.’ This is because, Roderick asserted, unlike Negroes, ‘[t]he Mexicans tend naturally toward segregation and do not aspire to invade the social and business circles where they are not constantly seen just to test the various degrees of racial tolerance.’⁵⁷ The less entrenched level of spatial and social restriction faced by Mexicans was cited by the report’s author as if evidence of Mexicans’ greater inherent acceptability:

There are no California state laws or legal ordinances which discriminate against the Mexicans or impose upon their liberties. The Mexicans, legally and practically speaking, have all the privileges of the theatres, churches, restaurants, transportation facilities, and public utilities, and have not caused the racial problem headaches as have the Negroes.⁵⁸

Whereas the uniform and widely applied spatial restriction of African Americans constantly reproduced the stigma of difference, the resultant ghettos reaffirming the perceived need for separation, the relative spatial acceptance of Mexicans and their presence in suburbs minimised the extent to which they were viewed as a menace. In other words, Mexicans were not seen as pushy, constantly aspiring to ‘invade’ because, unlike middle class African Americans attempting to escape residential confines, they did not have to push quite so hard.

⁵⁶ Ernesto Galarza, Herman E. Gallegos, and Julian Samora, *Mexican-Americans in the South-West*, 2nd ed. ed. (Santa Barbara: McNally and Loftin, 1970). 63.

⁵⁷ Federal Bureau of Investigations, "Racial Conditions (Spanish-Mexican Activities) in Los Angeles Field Division," in *Richard Griswold del Castillo Papers* (Los Angeles: Chicano Studies Research Library, University of California Los Angeles, 1944), 14.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

The discursive juxtaposition of aggressive blacks and docile Mexicans again emerged in the aftermath of Watts, a context in which its false premise is so readily exposed. In 1965, the Governor's Commission on the Los Angeles riots made a point of stating in the covering letter to their report on Watts that the Mexican American community faced 'similarly disadvantageous' circumstances which demanded 'equally urgent treatment.' 'That the Mexican-American community did not riot is to its credit,' they noted.⁵⁹ They were not alone in insisting that the Mexican-American community's lack of rioting was 'to its credit.' Four leading Mexican American organizations issued a statement to the President in which they demanded that Mexican American poverty, 'swept under the carpet' by the focus on Watts, also be investigated. To support their demands they pointed out, none too subtly, that 'the Hispanic and Mexican-American citizen subscribes to the proposition that old wrongs and new fears cannot justify breaking the law and has refused in any organized manner to participate in civil disobedience [sic] manifestations.'⁶⁰ José Antonio Villarreal similarly commented that unlike 'the oppressed Negro [who] can spontaneously erupt in violence,' it was 'improbable that the Mexican community will ever break into riot, although it is possible and some zealous militants wish that it would happen.'⁶¹ Of course, as none of these commentators acknowledges, black and Mexican American communities in Los Angeles might have indeed shared many 'similarly disadvantageous' circumstances, but they did not share the one circumstance - residential quarantine - that led the unrest in Watts, as the absence of Mexican families there readily attested to. Neglecting this difference, these commentators construe the riots as resulting, at least in part, from the special properties of the Negro, prone to 'spontaneous' eruption, rather than the special conditions to which black people were subject.

5.6 'Dire results' as the walls of the ghetto emerge

⁵⁹ McCone, *Violence in the City: An End or a Beginning? A Report by the Governor's Commission on the Los Angeles Riots*, 5.

⁶⁰ Eduardo Quevedo et al., "Open Resolution Directed to the President of the United States and Executive Departments and Agencies, by National Hispanic and Mexican-American Organizations on Civil Disobedience and Riot Investigations.," in *Eduardo Quevedo Papers*. (Stanford: Special Collections Department, Green Library, Stanford University., 1965). 1.

⁶¹ Villarreal, "Mexican Americans in Upheaval," 46-47.

When the Subcommittee of the House of Representatives Committee on Naval Affairs conducted a series of hearings around the nation to investigate the problems arising out of wartime congestion in urban areas, 'Negro in-migration' was at the top of concerns in Los Angeles. Deputy Mayor Orville Caldwell's primary concern was that the Committee urge the War Manpower Commission to stop recruiting blacks for Southern California's manpower shortage.⁶² He devoted half of his two-page statement to the committee to the 'problem' of Southern Negroes being drawn to the city by the war industries.⁶³ He described the conditions in the area now called Bronzeville, christened as such after African Americans desperate for housing moved into the forcibly abandoned properties of Little Tokyo:

I urge that your committee take enough time from your hearings to walk through the former Little Tokyo, just a few blocks from the Federal Building. Here you will see life as no human is expected to endure it... If in-migration is not stopped until such time as these people can be properly absorbed into the community, dire results will ensue.⁶⁴

Black migration was raised again and again throughout the hearings: the chief of police reported the vast increase of black crime, noting 'the extreme overcrowding in areas largely inhabited by Negroes has been the chief contributing factor to this aggravated condition.'⁶⁵ The representative from the Health Department testified that one of their 'greatest problems' was the public health hazard presented by the black migrants 'they have no knowledge of health, that is, of living in a community of this sort. They have never been vaccinated; they know nothing about sanitation.'⁶⁶ The Navy presented statistics comparing venereal disease rates among 'white and colored personnel.'⁶⁷

⁶² Subcommittee of the Committee on Naval Affairs, *Investigation of Congested Areas: Los Angeles - Long Beach Area, Calif. November 10, 11, 12, and 13, 1943.*, First Session, 1943, 1761.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 1770.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 1776-1777.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 2030.

A decade and a half earlier, when Californians used the figurative Negro during the debates on Mexican immigration, more than anything they pointed to 'his' absence. 'The Negro' they professed to feel threatened by was the potential Negro, the one who may come if the Mexican was shut out: 'Well, but we do not want the Negro there,' as Congressman Free repeatedly insisted. The actual black population already 'there' featured not at all in the discussion. California's small pre World War II black population did not seem to greatly trouble the state's white population. In the 1927 survey of real estate agents, bar the occasional doomsayer, the tone of responses with regard to African Americans (and other racial undesirables) was confident: the 'color line' was being safely maintained. But when thousands of black migrants arrived in the city within the span of several years, the focus upon them became acute. At the end of 1943 the black population of Los Angeles was estimated at 100,000. In 1940 it had been under 64,000 and in 1930 it had been less than 40,000. At the peak of this migration, in July of 1943, police records indicated that more than 10,000 black migrants in that single month.⁶⁸ It is essential to note that black migrants were only a small part of the overall flood of migrants that inundated the city and housing shortages were city-wide. Many white migrants arrived from the South with the same poor, rural and uneducated background as the black migrants were perceived to have. The discursive focus on the black migrants and the manner in which the stigma of race upon them was physically recreated in spatial practice reflects the fact that migration was not the path to a wholly new start; anti-black ideology had already considerably shaped the Californian landscape they entered, as I will discuss more thoroughly momentarily.

Though housing shortages were widespread, only black migrants were restricted to looking for housing in the areas already established as the 'Negro district.' As Caldwell's testimony indicates, these areas became increasingly claustrophobic. In this regard, it was hardly 'unusual' that the native black residents of Los Angeles Caldwell referred to as opposing black migration would want to resist an inundation of a pariah class of people being pushed into neighbourhoods which they themselves would have little chance of escaping. The officials agonizing about the crime and disease that overcrowding was breeding in the Negro district did not reflect upon the fact that the existence of a Negro district was directly creating the

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*,1761.

problems which concerned them, but neither did they champion segregation in such explicit terms as the state's real estate agents in their 1927 survey. Caldwell prefaced his report with an appeal that the problem 'should be considered in an unbiased and sincere manner and from a nonracial aspect.'⁶⁹ The desire to appear unbiased signals a definitive shift in public discourse with regard to race. The war against Hitler made rhetoric about protecting the 'white race' unseemly. However, Caldwell quickly conceded the pretence of his 'nonracial' rhetoric when mildly challenged by James W. Mott, a congressman from Oregon and one of the Subcommittee members:

Mr Mott: I know you would like to approach this diplomatically, and everybody else should, and you think it should be considered in an unbiased and sincere manner and from a nonracial aspect. If your problem is a racial problem, how can you approach it from a non-racial aspect?

Mr Caldwell: Mr. Mott, I perhaps did not use the exact wording there.

Mr Mott: Here is a huge metropolitan community, which, prior to the war production program, had comparatively no Negroes. Now they have brought in here a Negro population comprised of the low-intellect type. You are going to have a Negro problem such as you have never had before and which they city is not used to and which you say you cannot take care of. What is your suggestion? I know you have made a very deep study of this. You are very much interested and very much concerned. Now what do you think the Federal Government ought to do about it? Stop sending them?

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

Mr. Caldwell: Definitely so.

Mr. Mott: I do too. As a member of the committee, I am going to vote for its recommendation.⁷⁰

5.7 'Our Location and our way of life': the broader discursive geography

Though no such distinctions were reflected in practical, spatial terms, Deputy Mayor Caldwell continually distinguished between Western and Southern Negroes in his presentation, perhaps as part of his bid to take a 'non-racial' approach or perhaps in order to avoid provoking the city's black community. In any case, the manner in which the new black migrants were differentiated from both the Mexican and the 'Western Negro...born and bred here' is revealing in this regard. Caldwell testified that the city was working with a 'colored committee of 'very, very fine gentlemen', 'born and educated here' to investigate the 'problem of the Deep South Negro', but unfortunately these very, very fine gentlemen were unfamiliar with this different type of Negro. Used to hard work in cotton fields, Caldwell commented, the migrants did not know what to do with themselves now that they were more lucratively employed in California's war industry: 'They get liquored up, stuff themselves with marijuana, and then they become a serious problem. And from the housing standpoint, we haven't the facilities to take care of them.'⁷¹ In another moment of his testimony, Caldwell reflected on the unique ethnic make-up of the city. In this exchange with several committee members, Caldwell positions the Southern black migrant in contrast to both Mexicans and native black residents.

Mr. Caldwell. We are a rather unusual city. We have the largest Mexican population in the United States, and the second largest Mexican population, next to Mexico City, which is first.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*,1765.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*,1763-1764.

Mr. Mott. You have been dealing with Mexicans for 50 years; isn't that so?

Mr. Caldwell. That's right, and they are fitting into our location and our way of life.

Mr. Izac. They are part of your community?

Mr. Caldwell. That is right. The Negro born here also fits in. In Venice, when they had two mass meetings objecting to the Negroes, the Negroes who live there appeared at that meeting in protest against bringing this new project into the area, which is rather unusual.⁷²

This is one of only a handful of references to Mexicans in the hearing. (Another is a brief reference to the prevalence of tuberculosis among the city's Mexican community.) Though occurring a mere five months after the Zoot Suit Riots, disturbances which themselves followed months of anti-Mexican hysteria in the press, the 'pachuco problem' did not arise in any of the testimony given by various local officials and nothing was said about Mexican migrants contributing to the city's congestion. Though Caldwell insists that 'the Negro born here also fits in' the comparison reflects that the relationship of each group to the social and cultural space of the city is historically quite different. The large population of Mexicans fit with 'our location and way of life.' Neither speaker referred to them as Mexican-Americans or some other way to indicate that many of these people were American-born. Local Mexicans were not differentiated from Mexico Mexicans. Mexicans remain Mexicans, part of the region's colourful historical background and/or a silent workforce. In contrast, when the city's small black community, 'born and bred here' is differentiated from the 'Southern Negro', the 'fitting in' of the local black population is used to highlight the incompatibility of the growing and already more numerous population of 'Southern Negroes'. The particular cultural and historical

⁷² *Ibid.*,1765.

regional relationship between Mexico and the Southwest could confirm a place for Mexicans in California, even if a distinctly subordinate place; both local historical tradition and the broader national tradition to which it was tied emphasised blacks as anomalous and undesirable.

Despite the fact that Mexican colonies around southern California were kept carefully separate and often condemned as pits of backwardness and disease (for example the Governor's report on Mexicans stated: 'These settlements are sources of constant annoyance to the localities'⁷³ the Mexican presence in the city was often portrayed in much prettier terms. Though white residents of the city were not eager to share their living spaces with Mexicans, the consumption of the state's Old California 'fantasy heritage', as McWilliams referred to it, in the form of 'Spanish' food, architecture and entertainment was more popular.⁷⁴ Many saw the Spanish heritage of the state's Mexican past as an essential component to the city's character. In his ebullient 1907 analysis of Los Angeles, Dana Bartlett described this mixture of the 'Spanish life', with its 'romantic and poetic temperament' and the 'red blood of the hardy Northmen', 'possessed of the push and the stir of the great Easter cities': 'The out-of-door life, the mission residence, the bungalow, are but the outward expression of the inner thought. Here as in no other city, you can hear the song of the siren mingled with the music of mission bells.'⁷⁵ Social worker and academic Karl de Schweinitz also reflected upon the Mexican cultural influence in the city, as well as the role of the Mexican people:

To the Mexican Los Angeles owes much. The drudgery of county and city has been his. He has handled the pick and the shovel, he has been the harvester. Upon his labor the prosperity of Southern California in large part rests. The charm and the fascination that distinguishes Los Angeles among American cities is largely his. Gardens and

⁷³ French, Hecke, and Saylor, "Mexicans in California, Report of Governor C.C. Young's Mexican Fact-Finding Committee," 179.

⁷⁴ McWilliams, *North from Mexico: The Spanish-Speaking People of the United States*, 35.

⁷⁵ Dana W. Bartlett, *The Better City: A Sociological Study of a Modern City* (Los Angeles: The Neuner Press Company, 1907), 21.

homes, streets and parks show the influence of Latin-American culture.⁷⁶

Though the particular history of conquest and later the wide-scale use of Mexicans for manual labour engendered a particular perception that Mexicans ‘belonged’ in the Southwest, that belonging was often manifest in explicitly subordinated terms. The terms on which Mexicans ‘[fit] into our location and our way of life’ often relegated them to part of a romantic scenery and manual labour.

Though the situations are distinct in important ways, the concentration of Mexicans in the Southwest and that of blacks in the South both led to narratives of place and belonging which confirmed and reinforced each group’s domination. Before the Civil Rights movement changed the narrative considerably, in the early 20th century the association of blacks with the South often included the idea that the South was the most fitting place for them and that white Southerners had a particular expertise when it came to the Negro. A speaker in the Hearings on Mexican immigration drew a direct parallel between the Negro in the South and the Mexican in the West.

I think no one but a Southerner can handle a Negro. We tried to be good to them, but we did not know how. We were clumsy at it, and I think the people of the North have the same attitude toward the Mexicans. But we of that Southwest - we are neither North nor South; we are Westerners - we know the Mexican; we know how to please him and how to get him to please us.⁷⁷

Madison Grant made a similar observation of black people in the South:

The Southerners understand how to treat the Negro
– with firmness and with kindness – and the

⁷⁶ William Deverell, *Whitewashed Adobe: The Rise of Los Angeles and the Remaking of Its Mexican Past* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, Ltd., 2004), 129.

⁷⁷ Committee on Immigration, United States Senate, *Restriction of Western Hemisphere Immigration*, First Session, 1928, 148.

Negroes are liked below the Mason and Dixon line so long as they keep their proper relation to the whites, but in the North the blocks of Negroes in the large cities, migrating from the South, have introduced new complications, which are certain to produce trouble in the future, especially if Communist propaganda makes headway among them.⁷⁸

Grant's observation that while Negroes 'fit' in the South they are misfits in other regions begins to reveal an absolutely critical distinction in each group's historical trajectory. Though vague notions of Mexico as a backward inferior place or the Mexican as an inferior type might be present, Mexicans remained largely anonymous outside of the Southwest. Ignacio Lopez, a Mexican American community leader and publisher of the Spanish language newspaper *El Espectador*, wrote in 1946 that he was often tempted to tell the returning Mexican American GI's to settle in another part of the United States: 'There are places where there is no prejudice against the Mexican-American, and where they could keep for the rest of their lives the precious feeling of integration and belonging.'⁷⁹ McWilliams similarly noted that in the midwestern cities which received only small amounts of Mexican immigration, that Mexicans were far more integrated. He stated that it was a 'forgone conclusion that the northern Mexican settlements will have largely vanished in another generation.'⁸⁰ Most tellingly, he pointed to the fact that unlike in the Southwest, where ethnic Mexicans often employed such terms as 'Mexican-Americans', 'Americans of Latin-American extraction,' and 'Spanish Speaking Americans', in the Midwest, Mexicans simply called themselves 'Mexicans'. In Detroit, the term 'Mexican' was not used as a slur as it was in the Southwest.⁸¹

⁷⁸ Madison Grant, *The Conquest of a Continent; or, the Expansion of the Races in America* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1933), 282-83.

⁷⁹ Ignacio Lopez, "Introduction," in *Not with the Fist* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1946), ix.

⁸⁰ McWilliams, *North from Mexico: The Spanish-Speaking People of the United States*, 223. The huge increase in Mexican immigration and the spread of that immigration to every part of the United States in the late 20th and early 21st century has considerably changed the picture. The figure of the 'illegal alien' has become an intense focus of national and regional politics since the latter part of the 20th century.

⁸¹ *North from Mexico: The Spanish-Speaking People of the United States*, 222.

In sharp distinction, while black people were overwhelmingly located in the South until the migrations of the early and mid 20th century, anti-black ideology was thoroughly nationalized, a fact reflected in discourse, law and practice, by mid 19th century. As such while clear and important differences distinguish social relations in every region and local area, the construction of the ghetto in Los Angeles, and the anti-black racism in California which this construction both reflected and regenerated, can only be understood within a national context. For one thing, Los Angeles was uniquely tied to other regions of the country not only politically, culturally and economically but also genealogically. Unlike other parts of the country filled in large part by European immigrants, California became a 'land of opportunity' for transplanted Americans. From the late 19th century and the first third of the 20th, Americans born outside of California made up three quarters of the city's demographic growth. These people, from Kansas, Illinois, Missouri and other states, brought their beliefs and experiences with them, which informed the way they carved their new social landscape. This is captured in the response to the CREA survey from the small Californian town of Orland, reporting a population of 1, 700, 'mostly from the north and the middle west':

Dont [sic] know as I can give you any information of value as to the Color situation that prevails in many places in this State. We free [sic] from that trouble up to the present time and we have from the beginning [sic] discouraged colored settlements here.⁸²

The responses of white Californians to black migration were not *a priori* but were underwritten by a well-defined and deeply entrenched field of anti-black discourse, ritual and law. Whereas Mexicans' historical anonymity in places outside of the Southwest could aid their assimilation, slavery and its aftermath ensured a nationally entrenched tradition of blackness as destructive and discordant, reflected in a pervasive national pattern of exclusion and isolation.

⁸² California Real Estate Association, "Questionnaires from California Real Estate Agents Concerning Attitudes and Practices Regarding Segregation and Housing." Response from Orland Real Estate Board, covering letter.

5.8 'Like an incubus of darkness': the historical trajectory of blackness as discordance

Though this pattern did not manifest in the urban isolation of black people until the early 20th century when large numbers of black migrants began to enter northern cities, the ideological construction of black people as out of place, and disturbingly so, in the American social body emerged much earlier. As we have seen with the plans of St. George Tucker the desire to be rid of and/or politically and socially neutralize slaves and the free black people associated with them was rooted in the very real practical problems that slavery entailed. Unlike Tucker, the American Colonization Society, founded in 1816 by a number of illustrious American citizens from various states, heavily employed racial logic to make its case. They painted a disturbing picture of the country's free blacks:

[I]ntroduced among us by violence, notoriously ignorant, degraded and miserable, mentally diseased, brokenspirited, acted upon by no motive to honourable exertions, scarcely reached in their debasement by the heavenly light, the freedmen wander unsettled and unbefriended through our land, or sit indolent, abject and sorrowful, by the streams which witness their captivity.⁸³

To those promoting colonization, it was not just that the free black was degraded, however; it was that this condition pointed to their ultimate incompatibility with the American environment. The existing social inequality among white and black people was imagined to demonstrate not just black inferiority but that an unbridgeable chasm existed between the two groups.⁸⁴ Therefore, while white people's apparently natural prejudice toward black people was unfortunate, the prejudice was only a symptom of the real problem, which was the adverse presence of black people. Thus, the

⁸³ Leon Frank Litwack, *North of Slavery. The Negro in the Free States, 1790-1860* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 21.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 21-22.

Colonization Society reasoned, if black people were sent back to Africa, not only would they be happier, but slavery could be done away with, prejudice would wither and the country could take its place in the world as “the great moral and political light-house.”⁸⁵ As noted in the Introduction, one black critic of the colonization plans recognized that these references to white prejudice and black difference were tightly linked expressions of the same ideology: ‘They cannot indeed use force. That is out of the question. But they harp so much on “inferiority”, “prejudice,” “distinction” and what not, that there will no alternative be left us but to fall in with their plans.’⁸⁶ Despite their professed sympathy for black people, the Society consistently eschewed supporting any laws which might improve their condition, arguing, apparently without any awareness of the grim irony, that giving the freedmen equal rights would only become an obstacle in the path of their removal and would ‘chain them to us.’⁸⁷

The ideology of black people as source of both economic and social trouble contoured the American expansion. As Tocqueville noted, anti-black sentiment was strongest in the western states which had never known slavery. The founders and legislatures of many of these new states, including California, debated means by which blacks could be permanently spatially excluded. Foreshadowing Deputy Mayor Caldwell’s anxiety about the impact of ‘Negro immigration,’ a little less than a century earlier, in California’s Constitutional Convention delegates debated whether they should also move to outlaw the entrance of free blacks. Like Caldwell or those men promoting the use of Mexican labour, these men were not concerned with the state’s existing population of black people, ‘not sufficient in number to be a disadvantage to the community,’ but primarily about the ‘herds of emancipated slaves’ they imagined might be transported to California by former owners wishing to put them to work in the gold mines.⁸⁸ A delegate named McCarver put forward a proposal that the Convention should instruct the State’s legislature to ‘pass such laws as will effectually prohibit free persons of color from immigrating to and settling in this State, and to effectually prevent the owners of slaves from bringing them into this State for the purposes of setting them free.’⁸⁹ Arguing the necessity of his proposal,

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 26

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁸⁸ California Constitutional Convention and J. Ross Browne, *Report of the Debates in the Convention of California, on the Formation of the State Constitution, in September and October, 1849*

(Washington: Printed by John T. Towers, 1850), 144.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 137.

McCarver insisted, ‘No population that could be brought within the limits of our Territory could be more repugnant to the feelings of the people, or injurious to the prosperity of the community, than free negroes.’⁹⁰

Many of the reasons presented for wanting to exclude the free black people and newly freed slaves (these groups were sometimes discussed in distinct terms but more often were lumped together) were grounded in day-to-day practicalities and informed by stock prejudice of black people as a debased population– they would not know how to take care of themselves, would turn to stealing as they had in other settlements of free blacks, and of course the familiar argument that they would ‘degrade white labor’ and relatedly that ‘fearful collisions’ would be produced when white men were forced into competition with blacks in the mines.⁹¹ At other points, blackness was conceptualized in near hysterical terms. Supporting the proposal, Oliver M. Wozencraft described the potential immigration free blacks, as we saw in the Introduction, not merely as undesirable but a force of destruction, ‘an incubus of darkness.’⁹² The conclusion to his speech is particularly telling. He invokes California as a kind of promised land, a new Eden for American ideals, and the conflict brewing in the ‘old states’ as a dark warning:

The future, to us, is more promising than that of any State that has ever applied for admission into the Union. The golden era is before us in all its glittering splendor... We must throw aside all the weights and clogs that have fettered society elsewhere... That the negro race is out of his social sphere, and becomes a discordant element when among the Caucasian race, no one can doubt. You have but to take a retrospective view, and you need not extend your vision beyond our own land to be satisfied of this fact. Look at our once happy republic, now a contentious, antagonistical, discordant people. The Northern people see, and feel, and know, that the black population is an evil in the

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 147.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 138.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 49.

land, and although they have admitted them to many of the rights of citizenship, the admixture has acted in the political economy as a foreign, poisonous substance, producing the same effect as in physical economy-derangement, disease, and, if not removed, *death*. Let us be warned - let us avoid an evil of such magnitude.⁹³

Despite the phobic, pseudo-religious imagery, Wozencraft appeals directly to the common sense and experience of his audience; his description of black people as a 'poisonous substance' draws its power from 'what we know...to be so,' 'what we have witnessed.' Many of these men spoke directly from their life experiences, using their regional backgrounds to qualify their statements. Men from slaveholding states spoke of the institution's 'baneful influence' and men from free states claimed to have witnessed firsthand that free blacks were 'an idle, worthless, and depraved population'.⁹⁴ Delegates also referred, often without presenting any actual evidence, to the passage of similar prohibitory regulations in other states. In this sense, the debate illustrates that racism was not the product of abstract hatred or some other irrational psychological reaction. Nor was it a mysteriously self-propelling (autonomous) force. The rising conflict over slavery 'in our once happy republic' and the continuing fact of black inequality outside of slavery gave resonance to the construction of black population as a 'foreign, poisonous substance.' Such explanations would not have carried any weight if they were not seemingly confirmed in personal experience and wider social mores. We see the same mechanism at work in the debate that underpinned the logic of the American Colonization Society and Judge Taney in his Dred Scott opinion. The subjection and rejection of black people in custom and law was seen to confirm black incompatibility and inferiority and, importantly, to demand action in California.

The fact that these men in California declared free black people a 'poison' did not predetermine that a century later their descendants would forcefully reconfigure Los Angeles's urban space to create a ghetto when black migration finally arrived. However, the long roots of the tradition by which black people had been marked, ritually and sometimes legally, as troublesome and anomalous laid the ground for

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 49-50.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 144.

such actions, providing its logic, its problems and solutions, and seemingly confirming their reformation as ‘the way it is and has always been.’ It is important to remember Fields’s assertion that ideologies cannot be handed down or passed on, but ‘must be constantly created and verified in social life.’⁹⁵ ‘The ritual repetition of the appropriate social behavior makes for the continuity of ideology, not the “handing down” of the appropriate “attitudes”.’⁹⁶ The alienation of black people from and within social and physical spaces of American life was not dictated at one particular point in the past and from then on predetermined. Rather it was created, recreated, verified and confirmed in different places and times through distinct but mutually reinforcing practices and processes at different levels of society. Whereas Mexicans’ historical anonymity in places outside of the Southwest could aid their assimilation, slavery and its aftermath ensured a nationally entrenched tradition of blackness as destructive and discordant, reflected in a pervasive national pattern of exclusion and isolation.

5.9 ‘The Mexican has a “homing instinct”’

In examining how Mexicans were understood as a presence within California’s social space and how they were practically handed within its physical space, it is important to consider the construction of the Mexican as nomadic and transitory population. In the debates about Mexican immigration whether Mexicans returned seasonally to Mexico became a critical point of contention. Pro-Mexican lobbyists asserted that Mexicans’ presence was transitory, that they could do the necessary labour as they passed through while never becoming problematically lodged within the social body. This claim reflects the unique historical circumstances of Mexicans in the American Southwest, which supporters of Mexican immigration attempted to capitalize on in their arguments. In a passage that has since been frequently quoted by scholars of Mexican American studies, the Secretary of the United States Beet Sugar Association stated

⁹⁵ Barbara J. Fields, "Slavery, Race and Ideology in the United States of America," *New Left Review* 181, no. May-June (1990): 112.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 113.

It has been asserted that there are millions of Mexicans now in the United States, and that while they mostly enter for seasonal agricultural work many of them eventually drift to the cities, becoming a menace to American labor and causing a serious social problem. While this may be true to a limited extent, we believe the statements regarding this condition have been very much exaggerated. The experience of the beet-sugar producers and sugar-beet farmers is that, as a general rule, the Mexican has a "homing instinct"; that he loves his country; and even though he remain in this country for several years, the hope and expectation of returning to his homeland is always uppermost in his mind.⁹⁷

Because the line between Mexico and the United States was physically non-existent and politically fairly open in the early 20th century, Mexican labourers were able to pass back and forth between the two countries in a manner that would have been impossible for European or Asian immigrants. However the frequency with which they did so was greatly exaggerated by pro-Mexican immigration lobbyists. While there was a unique level of spatial mobility among Mexican Americans, within the United States, the idea that they were nomads returning to Mexico was false.⁹⁸ Further, if the fact that Mexicans lived in camps and makeshift colonies seemed to demonstrate that they were not a permanent population to be incorporated into the state's social fabric, the fact that many of the camps and *colonias* were permanent settlements belied these assumptions. Investigators who interviewed the residents of Hicks Camp in Southern California in the early 1940s found that the 65 individuals questioned had been in the US between 12 and 42 years. More than a quarter of them had been born in the United States.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ U.S. Congress, "Immigration from Countries of the Western Hemisphere: Hearings," ed. Committee on Immigration and Naturalization (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1928), 448.

⁹⁸ Romo, *East Los Angeles : History of a Barrio*, 86-87.

⁹⁹ "Tabulation of Facts on Conditions Existent in Hick's Mexican Camp" Special Mexican Relations Committee, "Report of Special Committee on Problems of Mexican Youth of the 1942 Grand Jury of

Another highlighted feature in the lobbyist's construction of Mexicans as impermanent was - in the event that their 'homing instinct' were to fail - the unique ease with which Mexicans could be deported. In a section titled 'Shall the Negro Problem be Spread More Widely' in report they submitted to the Committee on Immigration and Naturalization during the hearings on Mexican immigration, the California Agricultural Legislative Committee stated:

The Mexican...has very little tendency to shift to the cities except for such periods as he may have no work. The Mexican is closer home and can, and does, return there sooner or later in large numbers, whereas the task of returning negroes is much greater and almost impossible in the case of Porto Ricans and Filipinos. The American negro, the Porto Rican negro, and the Filipinos can not be deported if they prove later to be a crime menace. The Mexican can be. It seems to us, therefore, that beyond question the Mexican is the safest source of common labor and that until some way can be found to safeguard the country from the other menaces mentioned he should be permitted to enter as heretofore.¹⁰⁰

The truth of these claims, made in 1930 on the brink of the Depression, were illustrated over the course of the next decade as an estimated one million Mexicans and ethnically Mexican American citizens were deported, often forcibly, to Mexico.

This largely apocryphal construction of Mexicans as a transient and thus harmless population was in part a response to allegations that Mexicans, like the black population with whom immigration restrictionists, eugenicists and others so often compared them, would form a permanent race problem, 'a barnacle' in the 'great

Los Angeles County," in *Manuel Ruiz Papers, MO295* (Palo Alto: Department of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries, 1942), 12.

¹⁰⁰ U.S. Congress, "Hearings before the Committee on Immigration and Naturalization: Immigration from the Western Hemipshere," (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1930), 238.

melting pot' as one man described Box's fears.¹⁰¹ The emphasis on Mexicans as temporary and if necessary *removable* was meant to distinguish Mexicans from a black population characterized by its irreparable permanence. Though colonization was never a viable plan to begin with, its apparent failure seemed to verify the confounding nature of the black presence. Urging support for the prohibition of free blacks in California, a delegate named Stuart from the state of Maryland, whose nativity to that state, he believed, gave him a unique 'right to speak on the subject of free Negroes,' described the failure of Maryland's taxpayer funded colonization project. 'I grieve to touch upon the sufferings of her citizens, under the evils to which they were subjected. It is in vain that they attempted to remove the difficulty by colonization. It was found to be, like the old saying,' he concluded, 'bailing the ocean with a ladle.'¹⁰² Eighty years later, Madison Grant similarly reflected regretfully that deportation, which had been considered as a 'possible remedy' to problem of black people's presence 'by some of the wisest statesmen', would have 'involved only a fraction of the cost of the Civil War'.¹⁰³ The irony is that these policies and projects designed to 'solve' the Negro problem by the removal or containment black people, rather than through the eradication of inequality, continually recreated it by maintaining and further entrenching the 'difference' it proposed to manage.

5.10 Conclusion: On colonisation and *colonias*

In this examination of the ways in which the presence of Mexicans and African Americans has been conceptualized and manipulated within the Los Angeles landscape, I have attempted to show that incarnations of racism can only exist in the interplay between specific circumstances and the schema of social interactions within them. In Los Angeles we can map two distinct histories of domination, the legacies of conquest and international immigration and slavery and intra-national migration. From the appropriation of Mexican land and labour on which California was built, seemingly contradictory constructions emerged of Mexicans as both foreign and

¹⁰¹ Congress, "Immigration from Countries of the Western Hemisphere: Hearings," 368.

¹⁰² California Constitutional Convention and Browne, *Report of the Debates in the Convention of California, on the Formation of the State Constitution, in September and October, 1849*, 146.

¹⁰³ Grant, *The Conquest of a Continent; or, the Expansion of the Races in America*, 285 - 86.

familiar, a presence both transient and separate, yet integral to the location's scenic background and economic foundation. This availability of Mexican labour, as we have seen, informed some Californians' construction of the Negro as an undesirable menace, just as the nationally perceived 'Negro problem' - really the problem of slavery and its aftermath - informed 'positive' constructions of Mexicans as nomads silently passing through the social body. To be sure these were not the only ways in which these two groups were imagined either nationally or in California; these particular discursive constructions, however, highlight some of the crucial distinctions in historical circumstance that shaped the city's map. The unique ways in which the imagery of colonisation became associated with each group epitomizes these distinctions. While colonisation was proposed as a means of extirpating African Americans from the American social body entirely, the fact many Mexicans and Mexican Americans lived in camps and colonies, 'unincorporated' from the towns and cities which they outlay seemingly confirmed their supposed, and desired, transience within it. The former promoted the removal of what it construed as a social tumour, while the latter portrayed a benign symbiosis with a useful, but separate, entity.

In practice, the exploitation of paid labourers did not demand the same social ruptures around either the labourer, or those of associated with them, that slavery did. Because their poverty was the trait which most heavily signified the racial difference of Mexicans, who primarily entered the state as manual labourers, the mark of Mexicanness as degraded and undesirable, imposed plainly on those living in the colonies of shacks punctuating the southern California landscape, was less consistently imposed upon middle class Mexicans moving into the suburbs. In contrast to the regionally contained relationship between Americans and Mexicans in the Southwest, the centrality of the problem of slavery to America as a nation established the ideological Negro as a social menace and, above all, a 'discordant element' in California nearly a century before black people even entered the state in significant numbers. As we saw in the debates on Mexican immigration and those within the state's constitutional convention, the discourse was shaped by the desired absence of blackness, focusing on Negro that must be prevented rather than the Negro already there. In these moments we see how many of the Americans who settled California during the 19th and 20th laid the ideological foundation in their new social landscape, 'in all its glittering splendor,' for the foundations of the ghetto.

6. In Blood and Violence: The Zoot Suit Riots and the World War II military

The final empirical chapter of this thesis, I will examine the anti-Mexican riots that erupted in Los Angeles in June of 1943 against the backdrop of other instances of collective violence that occurred that summer. I will contextualise my consideration of the riots with an examination of the very different treatment of black and Mexican American men in the World War II armed forces, a subject which has not been examined in any depth in the much of the current literature on the riots. Examining the ways in which each group was positioned within the realm of honorific military violence as well as how they were marked by mob violence on the home front reveals important points of distinction that have been both neglected and distorted in the ‘racial’ analysis of recent scholarship. While a number of scholars assume that largely the same racial policies and imagery, if slightly different in degree, were applied to Mexicans and blacks in this period, we see that not only were the two groups were handled and understood in strikingly different terms, so too was ‘whiteness’ imagined quite differently in relation to the black and Mexican ‘other.’

I will examine a number of primary materials in this discussion, including internal military documents and letters written by both soldiers and civilians during the war years. I will also draw heavily on the coverage of these events in local and national media as well as a series of investigations of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, compiled as ‘Racial Conditions’ reports. During the war, the FBI submitted these reports to the White House. They examine the possibility of Axis infiltration in black and other minority communities, the presence of Communist agitation, local socio-economic conditions and incidents of unrest. Though purporting to be about ‘racial conditions,’ they are largely focused on conditions in black communities around the country. The FBI, and J. Edgar Hoover, in particular, had long been preoccupied with the activities of African Americans. Since the spate of anti-black violence that followed World War I, under Hoover’s direction, ‘Negro Activities’ became a permanent part of the weekly intelligence reports the Bureau compiled for Washington and American embassies abroad.¹ Tellingly, while the Los Angeles Field Division reported on both Mexican and black communities, reports

¹ Mark Ellis, "J. Edgar Hoover and The ‘Red Summer’ Of 1919" *Journal of American Studies* 28, no. 1 (1994): 40.

from other Southwest cities with large Mexican populations, focus solely on black people.²

6.1 The Riots: A brief historical and historiographical overview

In the summer of 1943 riots erupted in Los Angeles after many months of police crackdowns on Mexican American youth and sensationalized media coverage of Mexican juvenile delinquency.³ These stories fixated on so-called zoot suiters, or ‘*pachucos*’-Mexican-American youth who had adopted and adapted the zoot suit fashion, also referred to as ‘drapes’ or the ‘drape shape’, first popularized by black youth in Harlem. In a spiral of escalation, the repressive policing of Mexican Americans provided the media fodder for stories about zoot-suit crime, which they printed in an exaggerated and salacious manner. The crime wave stories ironically convinced the public that the police were not in control, thus generating pressure for even heavier handed policing tactics.⁴ For their part, Mexican American youth were straining at the bounds of segregation. Beatrice Griffith’s informants told her that police regularly harassed and arrested Mexicans deemed to be ‘out of [their] district’.⁵ A 1943 letter written by a young man named Arthur Barela tells of one such incident. He and some friends were arrested after trouble erupted at one of the city’s beaches. After appearing in court, the charges against them were dismissed, but not, apparently, before the judge lectured them about the ‘grave problem’ posed by Mexican boys. Barela was sufficiently moved to write a letter to the judge, which captures the spatial restrictions imposed upon Mexican youth.

We had nothing to do with any riot or any fighting.
The cops picked us up, pushed us around, made fun of
our clothes, grabbed some of us by the hair and said
they’d give us a haircut...Ever since I can remember

² I examined the reports from the Field Divisions in El Paso, Houston, San Antonio, San Diego and San Francisco.

³ Los Angeles Committee for American Unity, "Unpublished Communication to Governor's Special Committee on Los Angeles Emergency, June 11, 1943," in *Manuel Ruiz Papers* (Stanford: Special Collections Department, Green Library, Stanford University, 1943), 2.

⁴ Manuel. Ruiz, "Latin-American Juvenile Delinquency in Los Angeles: Bomb or Bubble!," in *Manuel Ruiz Papers* (Stanford: Special Collections Department, Green Library, Stanford University, 1942), 2; Escobar, *Race, Police, and the Making of a Political Identity : Mexican Americans and the Los Angeles Police Department, 1900-1945*. 199.

⁵ Griffith, *American Me*, 204-06.

I've been pushed around and called names because I'm a Mexican. I was born in this country. Like you said I have the same rights and privileges of other Americans... We're tired of being told we can't go to this show or that dance hall because we're Mexican or that we better not be seen on the beach front, or that we can't wear draped pants or have our hair cut the way we want to.⁶

At the same time, tensions were building from the presence of the fifty thousand servicemen entering the city every weekend. Numerous civilian complaints were registered with military officials, ranging from sexual harassment to assault and property damage.⁷ Referring to the same problem in San Diego, a councilman from that city stated in a written complaint to the Navy Commandant for Southern California that soldiers, sailors and marines had a 'derogatory attitude' towards civilians and that they frequently 'insulted and vilified' members of the public.⁸ Many civilians might be willing to just "grin and bear it", as the councilman put it. But in Mexican neighbourhoods in Los Angeles that stood between downtown and the Naval base, and were thus being flooded with servicemen, some local youth took a different stance. Servicemen complained that they were frequently taunted, cursed at, ridiculed, stoned, and sometimes attacked and robbed by Mexican youth in zoot suits. Some of these young men also harassed women visiting their boyfriends or husbands at the base.⁹ As months went on clashes between the two groups increased. The barrage of stories in the press depicting Mexicans as depraved gangsters on a rampage against law and order no doubt gave the anecdotes and rumours spread among servicemen in Southern California a sense of crisis. One serviceman stationed at a flying school in Victorville happened to be friends with Manuel Ruiz and wrote

⁶ Alfred Barela, "Letter to Honorable Arthur S. Guerin, May 21, 1943," in *Manuel Ruiz Papers* (Palo Alto, California: Special Collections Department, Green Library, Stanford University, 1943), 1.

⁷ Eduardo Obregón Pagán, *Murder at the Sleepy Lagoon: Zoot Suits, Race, and Riot in Wartime L.A.* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 158, 66.

⁸ Charles Calhoun Dail, "Letter to Rear Admiral David W. Bagley, Commandant, Eleventh Naval District, Re: Navy Attacks on Civilians, June 10, 1943," in *Richard Griswold del Castillo Papers* (Los Angeles: Chicano Studies Research Center, University of California Los Angeles, 1943).

⁹ Griffith, *American Me*, 19. See also: Pagán, *Murder at the Sleepy Lagoon : Zoot Suits, Race, and Riot in Wartime L.A.*, 151-61.

him a letter that captures the self-righteous fury with which he and his friends responded to such stories:

I'll be damned if my buddies and I want to fight and defend the rights of our countries while overseas, when just as great, if not greater an enemy is right at our door step, committing rape, murder, and endangering the lives of our loved ones.¹⁰

On June 3, many servicemen decided to take the 'pachuco problem' into their own hands. Over the following week, they stormed Mexican neighbourhoods and downtown Los Angeles looking for zoot-suiters. They pulled Mexican boys, and also some African Americans, out of streetcars, cinemas and bars to beat them and strip them of their zoot suits, if the victim was in fact wearing one. They were soon joined by servicemen from all over Southern California so that by June 7th the mob had grown to include more than 1,000 soldiers, sailors and civilians. Their antics were actively supported by much of the public and encouraged by the press, who lauded the servicemen's activities and printed the details of street corners where further 'action' might be expected.¹¹

When the mobs had trouble finding actual zoot-suiters, they simply attacked whatever Mexican males they could find. The novelist Chester Himes, who lived in Los Angeles at the time, bitterly described the reaction of the city's 'nazi-minded citizenry' towards the 'stormtrooper' antics of the servicemen in an editorial for the NAACP's magazine *The Crisis*: 'As long as the servicemen were getting the best of the fight, attacking and stripping, beating and molesting, all dark-skinned people who wore zoot-suits or what might have been taken for zoot-suits, regardless of whether they were pachuos [sic], war workers, juveniles, or invalids, everyone seemed happy.'¹² Many of their victims were in fact adolescents, a fact one young Mexican American named Rudy Sanchez, remarked upon in a letter he wrote shortly after the riots: 'When the sailors of the United States of America beat up twelve and thirteen

¹⁰ Anonymous, "Unpublished Letter to Manuel Ruiz from Johnny," in *Manuel Ruiz Papers* (Stanford: Special Collections Department, Green Library, Stanford University, 1943).

¹¹ McWilliams, *North from Mexico: The Spanish-Speaking People of the United States*, 245-248.

¹² Chester Himes, "Zoot Suit Riots Are Race Riots," in *Black on Black: "Baby Sister" And Selected Writings* (London: Joseph, 1975), 225.

year old kids of the same Country just because their [sic] Mexicans, you can imagine how brave they must be.¹³ The worst injury of the riots was sustained by a black defense worker. He stepped out to buy a few magazines and was on his way home when he was attacked by a mob of 75 servicemen, one of whom gouged his eye out with a knife. He was not wearing a zoot suit.¹⁴ Throughout the rioting, the police followed the servicemen passively through the city, waiting as they completed their assault, and then arrested the victims.¹⁵

6.2 'But for the grace of god, we go'¹⁶

The unrest in Los Angeles was just one instance of disorder that occurred in the United States during the summer of 1943 and the war years more generally. Between 1940 and 1944, there is record of at least 18 major incidents of racial violence in American cities and towns.¹⁷ Luis Alvarez points out in his recent work on youth zoot suit culture and resistance that these riots should not be read as isolated incidents.¹⁸ The war vastly disrupted the social order, putting it quite literally in flux as millions of civilians and military personnel migrated for labour and service. These migrations brought with them considerable pressures on resources and created new social dynamics. In Detroit, newly arrived black and white Southerners vied in competition for jobs and housing. Both civilians and servicemen joined in the fray when the city exploded in rioting. In Harlem the rumor that a black soldier on leave had been murdered by a white police officer sparked massive protests from residents and African American servicemen in the area.¹⁹ In Beaumont, a Texas town whose population was swollen with new shipyard workers, a mob of white men and women gathered in front of the local police station unsuccessfully demanding access to a black man accused of assaulting a white woman, after which they burned and looted

¹³ Rudy Sanchez, "Unpublished Letter, June 6, 1943," in *Eduardo Quevedo Papers* (Stanford: Special Collections Department, Green Library, Stanford University, 1943).

¹⁴ Los Angeles Committee for American Unity, "Unpublished Communication to Governor's Special Committee on Los Angeles Emergency, June 11, 1943," 3.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁶ Loren Miller, "Oral History Interview with Lawrence B. De Graaf," in *African American History Collection* (California State University Fullerton: Center for Oral and Public History, 1967), 33.

¹⁷ Warren. Schaich, "A Relationship between Collective Racial Violence and War," *The Journal of Black Studies* 5, no. 4 (June, 1975): 379.

¹⁸ Luis Alvarez, *The Power of the Zoot: Youth Culture and Resistance During World War II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 200.

¹⁹ For a useful historical treatment of the Harlem and Detroit riots, see: L. Alex Swann, "The Harlem and Detroit Riots of 1943: A Comparative Analysis," *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* 16(1971-72).

the black section of town, taking ‘great quantities of clothing, whisky, cigarettes and other property.’²⁰ Alvarez reads these events as part of a ‘larger struggle for dignity and national belonging’, arguing that ‘the riots provided a national stage on which nonwhites and whites – including zoot suiters, shipyard workers, journalists, politicians and other citizens - sparred over who was included equally in the national polity.’²¹ For him and others, including more recent scholars and observers of the events, the riots in Los Angeles and elsewhere during the war were a brutal demonstration of the common positioning of blacks and Mexicans. According to Stuart Cosgrove, ‘The Zoot-Suit Riots sharply revealed a polarization between two youth groups within wartime society: the gangs of predominantly black and Mexican youths who were at the forefront of the zoot-suit subculture, and the predominantly white American servicemen.’²²

The shared burdens and potentially shared interests of the two communities did not escape observers, particularly those with left leaning politics, in the 1940s either. In contrast to other contemporary reports, the report on the riots prepared by the liberal multiethnic coalition the Los Angeles Committee for Civic Unity and an editorial printed in the *People’s Daily World* continually cited both ‘Mexicans and Negroes’ as victims of the rioters. This did not escape the notice of the FBI, who seemed to view both the group’s insistence that the riots were inflected with racism and the likening of Mexican and African Americans as symptomatic of left-wing subversion. A report on ‘Mexican Youth Gangs (“Zoot Suiters”)’ by the Los Angeles Field Division states:

It is noted further that the Communist press and individuals who have interested themselves in this problem who have been found to possess “radical” connections, have always linked the Mexicans and Negroes together in discussing this situation, and it is

²⁰ Federal Bureau of Investigation, "Survey of Racial Conditions in the United States," in *Franklin D. Roosevelt Papers as President, Official File, Justice Department* (Hyde Park, New York: Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, 1943), Houston Field Division, 269 - 71.

²¹ Alvarez, *The Power of the Zoot: Youth Culture and Resistance During World War II*, 231.

²² Stuart Cosgrove, "The Zoot-Suit and Style Warfare," *History Workshop*, vol 18(1984). para 9

observed further that in almost all instances, the riots were referred to as a “race riots.”²³

Most accounts seem to suggest that the rioters primarily attacked Mexican youth. In a later oral history interview, Loren Miller, the prominent Los Angeles attorney and activist discussed in the last chapter, seemed to remember the events as exclusively between Mexicans and servicemen. He stated that during the disorder he heard rumors that the mob was coming toward Twelfth and Central (the heart of the city’s black community), and that he then called the Mayor’s office with a warning. ‘I told them that if anybody came up to Twelfth and Central, somebody was going to get killed, and I didn’t think it was going to be Negroes.’²⁴ The rioters did attack at least a few black individuals they chanced to come across, but, like Miller, Carey McWilliams also suggested that they seemed to find the prospect of engaging more widely with the black community undesirable. He wrote that as the servicemen began heading toward the city’s black neighborhood with their sticks and bricks, they ‘turned around when they learned the Negroes planned a warm reception for them.’²⁵ In any case, however numerous the black victims, as the FBI’s agitated response suggests, ‘linking the Mexican and Negroes together’ was an important means of challenging the institutional racism that underlay the riots. However deep their involvement, Miller stated that the black community was ‘very much incensed’ by the riots. ‘Every Negro’s memory,’ he explained, ‘includes race riots, whether actually or only historically.’²⁶ Given their social position in the city with its troubled relationship with the police, and mindful of the devastating anti-black riots which swept the country two decades earlier, black people felt, Miller stated, ‘They’ll do this to the Mexicans today, and they’ll do this to us tomorrow.’²⁷

Clearly the Zoot Suit Riots and the unrest of 1943 illustrate that there was an important overlap in the ways in which black and Mexican youth were policed, criminalised and contained, as well a marked resonance in the forms of cultural resistance they developed in the face of these forces, both in Los Angeles and

²³ Federal Bureau of Investigation, "Survey of Racial Conditions in the United States," 382.

²⁴ Miller, "Oral History Interview with Lawrence B. De Graaf," 33.

²⁵ McWilliams, *North from Mexico: The Spanish-Speaking People of the United States*, 249.

²⁶ Miller, "Oral History Interview with Lawrence B. De Graaf," 33.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 35.

elsewhere.²⁸ Yet the very history that Miller evokes to explain why black Angelenos were impacted by the Los Angeles riots also draws attention to the ways in which these events differed, conspicuously so, from the other events of 1943 and the broader American history of so-called 'race riots' targeting black communities. Like a number of the riots that occurred during 1919's aptly named Red Summer, the riots in 1943 Detroit were devastating.²⁹ Thirty-one people, twenty-five of them black, were killed in rioting that lasted several days; Police killed seventeen of the black victims. There were two million dollars in property losses.³⁰ In the riots that occurred in Harlem a few weeks later, five people were killed and five million dollars of property damage sustained.³¹ In Beaumont, two people were killed and around fifty people 'were shot, cut and beaten during the melee.'³² In contrast, in Los Angeles, there was little loss of property, few serious injuries and no fatalities, despite the fact that more than 1,000 rioters, most often fully grown military men running in mobs with the consent of the police, hunted out unprotected individuals or small groups, many of whom were adolescents.³³ In this regard, Carey McWilliams's description of the attack on Mexican youth as a "mass lynching" – the term which Gunnar Myrdal describe pogroms like those in 1917 in East St. Louis in which dozens and possibly hundreds of people were murdered by the white mob- is revealing in its distinct inapplicability to the situation.³⁴

Each of these events clearly manifest within specific local conditions. To understand precisely why the outcomes were so different in each area would

²⁸ See, for example, Douglas Henry Daniels, "Los Angeles Zoot: Race 'Riot,' the Pachuco, and Black Music Culture," *Journal of Negro History* 82, no. 2 (Spring, 1997). Also, Alvarez's *Power of the Zoot*. Bruce Tyler makes the interesting observation that black and Mexican American young people shared intra-ethnic generational tensions that drew them to the zoot suit as well as inter-ethnic tensions with mainstream society. He writes: 'Zoot suit youth culture was an affirmation of the liberating aspects of urban life and its superiority over the drudgery poverty and degradation of peonage and share-cropping life of many Mexicans and black people- especially their parents.' Bruce Tyler, "Zoot-Suit Culture and the Black Press," *Journal of American Culture*, vol 17, no. 2 (1994): 23.

²⁹ For a thorough historical analysis of Red Summer, see: Arthur I. Waskow, "From Race Riot to Sit-In: 1919 and the 1960s," (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1967).

³⁰ Harvard Sitkoff, "Racial Militancy and Interracial Violence in the Second World War," *The Journal of American History* 58, no. 3 (1971): 674.

³¹ Swann, "The Harlem and Detroit Riots of 1943: A Comparative Analysis," 88.

³² Federal Bureau of Investigation, "Survey of Racial Conditions in the United States," Houston Field Division, 269 - 71.

³³ Pagan suggests that the small number of wounded suggests that 'young civilians made difficult prey.' While the young men being hunted were familiar with streets and alleyways, the servicemen were not. Pagán, *Murder at the Sleepy Lagoon: Zoot Suits, Race, and Riot in Wartime L.A.*, 180.

³⁴ McWilliams, *North from Mexico: The Spanish-Speaking People of the United States*, 248. Gunnar Myrdal and Sissela Bok, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2002), 566.

necessitate an in-depth examination of each location, which is beyond the scope of this chapter. Yet, as I will now turn to discuss, a close examination of press and law enforcement documents dealing with the Zoot Suit Riots and two of the other riots occurring in the same summer reveals important inconsistencies in the discursive configuration of blacks and Mexicans. These inconsistencies become even more significant, as I will then argue, when considered in context of each group's treatment in the United States military. The zoot-suit, with its extravagant proportions and air of rebellion, was often understood as the antithesis of the service uniform, the very emblem of duty and patriotism. The dichotomous line drawn between non-white zoot suited youth and white servicemen by many in the 1940s - and redrawn by some later scholars - obscures the fact that thousands of black and Mexican American youth served in the military. Black and Mexican servicemen were also present in these events, physically and ideologically, a factor which was crucial to both the unfolding and interpretation of unrest. After examining the institutional practices of the military with regards to black and Mexican men, I will then trace the ideological impact of these practices within the riot discourse. Finally I will consider how these effects were again reinforced within the institutional procedures of wartime blood donation.

6.3 'White women' and women, Negroes and Mexicans: The riots and the discursive configuration of difference

The recent works of three authors dealing with the riots highlight the manner in which white racism and/or whiteness as an existential imperative is often problematically understood to be generalisable across time and space. The claims made in these works are useful to consider as they open a window onto important differences in the manner in which violence between whites and blacks and whites and Mexicans was discussed by law enforcement and also the press in 1943. Luis Alvarez presents the most sustained argument about the role of 'whiteness' in the riots. Having examined hundreds of complaints made by servicemen against zoot suiters to the military police in the months before the Los Angeles riots, Alvarez claims that four major themes can be highlighted: 'the protection of white womanhood, sexuality, military service, and masculinity.' On the relation of these themes, as he understands them, Alvarez writes that 'for many servicemen, their

whiteness and masculinity were inseparable...Being white and masculine stemmed in large part from protecting the presumed virtuosity of their white mothers, wives, girlfriends and sisters from the vulgar, hypersexual, and violent threats posed by nonwhite youths.³⁵ Eduardo Obregon Pagan similarly cites incidents in which zoot-suiters harassed the wives or girlfriends of servicemen. He writes that such incidents stirred the ‘wrath of all white Los Angeles over an imagined assault on white womanhood.’ He goes on to explicitly liken the situation to the Southern context:

As scholars from Ida B. Wells-Barnett to Joel Williamson have ably illustrated, the protection of white womanhood from the black rapist (in this case, brown) was a familiar trope that both male and female whites evoked to justify violence against a racialized individual or an entire community of racialized men.³⁶

Finally, Catherine Ramirez also picks up the ‘white women’ theme. She notes that in the weeks before the rioting, servicemen complained to their superiors about pachucos harassing their female partners and family members.

Then, on June 2, 1943, one day before the riots broke, Los Angeles newspapers reported that a gang of pachucos abducted two young married women in downtown and raped them in a “zoot suit orgy” in nearby Elysian Park. The story was followed by reports that zoot-clad Mexican American men had “insulted,” “molested,” “attacked,” or “raped” white women – in particular, sailors’ wives and girlfriends- and thereby instigated the riots.³⁷

³⁵ Alvarez, *The Power of the Zoot : Youth Culture and Resistance During World War II*, 159.

³⁶ Pagán, *Murder at the Sleepy Lagoon: Zoot Suits, Race, and Riot in Wartime L.A.*, 159.

³⁷ Catherine Sue Ramirez, *The Woman in the Zoot Suit: Gender, Nationalism, and the Cultural Politics of Memory* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 36.

Later she writes, ‘Allegations that pachucos had raped white women...reveal that they were also deemed a threat to the white American home...as symbolized by the body of the white woman.’³⁸

Crucially, while all three authors describe a perceived attack on ‘white womanhood’, not one of them provides direct textual evidence that the alleged victims were referred to as ‘white’ either by the servicemen themselves or the press. The quotes they do provide from primary sources do not identify the women either explicitly or through insinuation as white. The two sentences cited from Ramirez’s work above are particularly illustrative of the manner in which analysis can so easily slip into assumption. As Ramirez footnotes, at least one of the ‘young married women’ attacked in the so-called ‘zoot suit orgy’ had a Spanish surname, as did the majority of her attackers. The press at the time routinely named alleged assailants as well as victims in such stories, and in this instance the victim’s name would have suggested to Los Angeles readers that she was also Mexican. Accordingly, in the passage cited above, Ramirez does not use the word ‘white’ in reference to these particular women. But in the very next sentence she inexplicably comments that the press reported various attacks on ‘white women.’³⁹ The press coverage I have seen, including some of the articles cited by Ramirez, describe women, wives and girlfriends being the victims of zoot suiter attacks. Not one describes attacks on ‘white women.’ For example, and an example that Ramirez also points to, a number of servicemen sent a telegram to the *Los Angeles Daily News* to explain their actions, which was published in that paper on June 9th. ‘Our intent in taking justice in our own hands was not an attempt to instill mob rule but the only desire to insure our wives and families safe passage in the streets.’⁴⁰ Similarly, in an example of private discourse, in his letter to Manuel Ruiz, the serviceman named Johnny who wrote about the ‘enemy’ ‘committing rape, murder, and endangering the lives of our loved ones’ emphasized the ethnicity of the perpetrators, referring to them as ‘these goddamn Mexican punks’ but made no mention of the race of the victims. Noting that the actions of the aforementioned ‘punks’ would result in ‘our men going into L.A.’ and ‘a lot of sorry Mexicans,’ Johnny wrote: ‘I for one would kill any of them that

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 40.

³⁹ Note that while the various descriptive verbs are directly quoted from the newspaper, the term ‘white women’ is not. If the papers cited actually used the term ‘white women,’ one assumes she would quote this directly.

⁴⁰ “Nazis Spur Zoot Suit Riots, June 9,” *Los Angeles Daily News* 1943.

hurt any body I know, soldiers or any of the women I know in L.A.’⁴¹ Again the victims’ relevance is not their whiteness but their social ties to the servicemen.

I do not suggest that the whiteness of the pachucos’ alleged victims, particularly in relation to the not-whiteness of the pachucos themselves, was not at all relevant to those involved. But David W. Stowe’s suggestion that the scholarly preoccupation with whiteness ‘risks dulling the historical imagination by obscuring the other equally important and generally more self-conscious categories...through which people understand and situate themselves’ is useful to keep in mind here.⁴² There simply isn’t the evidence that the rioters were motivated by a desire to protect ‘white womanhood’ as such or that their own ‘whiteness’ was something they were consciously aware of while they were rioting. Imposing these readings anyway veers down the ahistorical path of ‘racial-itch’ analysis. In the passage quoted above, Obregon Pagan refers to two works written specifically about anti-black racism in the South and asserts that the analyses therein apply to the situation of Mexicans in Los Angeles, presumably because both Mexicans and blacks are ‘racialized’ or not white. Despite the (proper) insistence of some scholars that Chicano history cannot be subsumed under the study of the black experience, we see that others suppose the ‘racialness’ of Mexican-white relations means that they are interchangeable with black and white relations. This is readily illustrated in Pagan’s assertion that the ‘brown’ rapist in Los Angeles can be easily substituted for the black rapist in the South. The ‘protection of white womanhood’ theme was specific to a particular time and place, and was evoked within relations that varied considerably even within different localities of the South in different periods. Even if one were examining events occurring in a time and place in which ‘white womanhood’ was common parlance, merely evoking the propaganda of lynching apologists would be insufficient to explain such events or even to fully explain white Southerners’ own understandings of them, as the commonly cited fact that the majority of lynching victims were not even *accused* of rape readily illustrates.⁴³

⁴¹ Anonymous, "Unpublished Letter to Manuel Ruiz from Johnny." The fact that the letter writer was friends with Ruiz, a Mexican man married to a white woman, would certainly not prove that he didn’t feel any hostility to the notion of Mexican men having intimate relationships with white women but it would suggest he didn’t consider *all* such relations to be problematic.

⁴² Cited in: Eric. Arnesen, "Whiteness and the Historians' Imagination," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 60(2001): 25.

⁴³ Apparently touching a nerve, Ida B. Wells was exiled from Tennessee and her printing presses there destroyed for writing in 1892: ‘Nobody in this section of the country believes the old threadbare lie that

The scholars here essentially put words into the mouths of historical subjects, to borrow a phrase from historian Eric Arnesen.⁴⁴ If neither the servicemen nor the mainstream press described attacks on ‘white women’ (or the rioters as ‘white men’) why should we proceed analytically as if they did? Such discrepancies as whether the whiteness of the victims was discussed openly or never mentioned are not minor but in fact provide important clues about the social boundaries that were perceived and enforced. While every social boundary simultaneously marks an inside and an outside, a Self and an Other, these two entities are not necessarily formulated as ideological equivalents, that is to say they do not necessarily occupy the same space or do the same work. It is useful here to remember Colette Guillaumin’s observation that modern racisms are ‘mainly, and centrally, altero-referential. An obsession with the Other remains their dominant characteristic.’⁴⁵ Hating and fearing the figure of the pachuco, conjured as sexually threatening and racially other, is not on its own either the necessary function or proof of a concretely delineated and explicitly embraced whiteness. Assuming that these servicemen acted out of a desire to protect or uphold their whiteness – a thing which they never speak of themselves but which is supposed to be the linchpin of their entire ontology- risks misreading the riots and the manner in which anti-Mexican racism manifest within them.⁴⁶

6.4 Whiteness, invisible and emergent

In this regard, it is useful to compare how ‘Mexican’ and ‘Negro’ were marked in different discourses and also how each was contrapositioned to whiteness. Generally speaking, in the coverage of the Los Angeles riots, and the supposed crisis of juvenile delinquency which preceded them, alleged Mexican suspects were not always explicitly identified as such. In 1956, a pair of sociologists studying the representations of Mexicans in the *Los Angeles Times* during the riots and the ten

Negro men rape white women.’ Ida B. Wells, *The Red Record* (Cirencester: The Echo Library, 2005), 8.

⁴⁴ Arnesen, "Whiteness and the Historians' Imagination," 21.

⁴⁵ Colette Guillaumin, "The Specific Characteristics of Racist Ideology (1972)," in *Racism, Sexism, Power and Ideology* (London: Routledge, 1995), 51.

⁴⁶ Mauricio Mazón offers quite a different psychoanalysis of the rioters. He argues that at a time when initial euphoria and enthusiasm for the war was fading, the ‘symbolic annihilation’ of the pachuco provided Angelenos and the servicemen stationed in the city a means to indulge and exorcise feelings of anxiety and rebellion. ‘The “achievement” of the rioting servicemen and civilians,’ he writes, ‘was a renewed sense of camaraderie, solidarity, and national purpose.’ Mauricio Mazón, *The Zoot-Suit Riots: The Psychology of Symbolic Annihilation* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1984), 93.

years that proceeded them hypothesized that the term ‘Mexican’ became ‘displaced’ by ‘zoot suiter’ and related terms to ‘circumvent’ the ambivalence of the former, with its ‘deeply ingrained’ romantic connotations. The ‘zoot’ terminology, they argued, ‘repackaged’ and magnified the negative themes which had sometimes previously been associated with ‘Mexican’, but ‘evoked none of the imagery of the romantic past. It evoked only the picture of a breed of persons outside the normative order, devoid of morals themselves, and consequently not entitled to fair play and due process.’⁴⁷ However naïve the argument – that omitting the term ‘Mexican’ helped to intensify the ‘crisis character’ of the zooter image – the fact that it could be formulated at all is telling; could a similar argument ever have been formulated about blackness? In fact, the displacement they observed had a more direct origin. The Los Angeles press’s discursive marking of Mexican criminality became a geopolitical matter during the war. Newspapers within Mexico regularly reported on incidents of discrimination against persons of Mexican descent in the United States, highlighting the rather wide gulf between the country’s anti-Nazi rhetoric and the behavior of its citizens at home.⁴⁸ Reflecting a broad concern within the federal government to minimize the publicity of problems that might damage relations with Mexico and America’s reputation in Latin America generally, representatives from the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs urged the city’s newspaper editors to cease their prolific campaign against alleged Mexican delinquency.⁴⁹ Beatrice Griffith wrote that the editors agreed to drop the word ‘Mexican’ in their gang-war stories, but that ‘they soon substituted zootsuiter for Mexican, so the adverse publicity continued as before.’⁵⁰ Through the constellation of ‘zoot’ terms and/or other identifying traits, for example a Spanish surname or reference to the ‘Eastside’, such stories readily communicated the ethnicity of supposed delinquents to their readers.⁵¹ The situation highlights the multivalence of ‘Mexican’, simultaneously nationality and racial marker, as well as the mesh of international and local politics that shaped its usage.

⁴⁷ Ralph H. Turner and Samuel J. Surace, "Zoot-Suiters and Mexicans: Symbols in Crowd Behavior," *American Journal of Sociology*, vol 62, no. 1 (1956): 20.

⁴⁸ A number of articles sent from the American ambassador in Mexico to the State Department along with anxious cover letters are available in the Richard Griswold del Castillo Papers.

⁴⁹ McWilliams, *North from Mexico: The Spanish-Speaking People of the United States*, 237.

⁵⁰ Griffith, *American Me*, 16. Griffith wrote that it was a representative from the Office of War Information who met with the editors and local officials. McWilliams’s identification of the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs seems more likely, given the wealth of documents from that office in the archive pertaining to such concerns.

⁵¹ Turner and Surace, "Zoot-Suiters and Mexicans: Symbols in Crowd Behavior." 19-20

Clearly the power of the federal government to restrain local prejudice had distinct limitations. Nevertheless, the complexity of meaning within the term Mexican, and the political considerations it demanded, contrast with the spurious simplicity affected by the term 'Negro', a supposedly straightforward intrinsic marking. The contrast is reflective of both the political circumstances of natal and national alienation - there was, after all, no foreign government to placate with discursive niceties regarding black people - as well as, and relatedly, their distinct ideological outputs.

An examination of the way the summer's other riots were discussed by media and officials exposes the analytical drawbacks of relying upon generic racial themes. In Beaumont, Texas, after the mob looted the black section of town, leaving it 'literally stamped into the ground,' newspaper coverage around the country consistently racially identified *both* the woman and the accused involved in the incident of alleged sexual assault that instigated the unrest.⁵² The sub-headline of the *New York Times*'s report on the riots, for example, read: 'Negro's attack on woman starts violence in which white man is killed and work at shipyard halted.' If the reader had not already inferred the woman's race, the article's second sentence makes it explicit. 'The riots were precipitated by the rape of a young white woman, the mother of three children.'⁵³ The *Los Angeles Times* similarly reported that the riots started when a 'white woman, mother of three children and wife of a warplant worker, reported that she had been attacked by a Negro who sneaked into her home after she hired him to do some yard work.'⁵⁴ The account filed by the Houston field office in the FBI's 1943 Racial Conditions report also explicitly identifies all actors in the Beaumont drama as whites or Negroes. The agent describes an attack on a nineteen-year-old telephone operator alleged to have occurred before the attack reported by the mother-of-three mentioned above. In the two paragraphs describing the event, the young woman is referred to four times as 'the white girl' and only once as 'the girl.'⁵⁵

Similarly, in the 50-page section of the report discussing 'conditions' in Detroit and the riots there, whites and Negroes are consistently differentiated throughout. Discussions of conflicts in schools, residential areas, workplaces and so on are all

⁵² "Beaumont Officials Suggest Axis Influence May Have Started Race Riots, June 17," *Spokane Daily Chronicle* 1943.

⁵³ "Texas City under Martial Law as Races Clash in Beaumont," *New York Times* 1943.

⁵⁴ "Martial Law Invoked as Race Riots Rage in Texas City, June 17," *Los Angeles Times* 1943.

⁵⁵ Federal Bureau of Investigation, "Survey of Racial Conditions in the United States," 269.

detailed with the racial designation of those involved. It is instructive to compare two excerpts from the report, one discussing the Detroit riots and the other the Los Angeles riots. The excerpt on events in Detroit reads:

The altercation was either between a single white and several Negroes or between a single Negro and several whites...It appears that immediately after the argument began, white people, including sailors, came to the rescue of those whites already engaged, while Negroes assisted their brethren... the word spread like wildfire across the bridge to Belle Isle and many incidents occurred there of a riotous nature. At this point, it should be brought out that reports were received of a group of Negroes on June 20, 1943, snatching lunches from white women and knocking them down. White persons who allegedly attempted to assist these women are said to have been deliberately attacked by other Negroes. It was originally suggested that this was possibly the origin of the trouble.⁵⁶

The excerpt on the Zoot Suit Riots, titled ‘Mexican Youth Gangs (“Zoot Suiters”)', submitted by the Los Angeles Field Division reads:

During the week ending May 25, 1943, three bands of Mexican youths attacked, beat up and stripped four people in the metropolitan area of Los Angeles. These four were civilians. Two had parked their automobile for a few minutes and were soon surrounded by eight Mexicans who attacked them when they got out of the car and cut them with razors...During May other cases were reported of wives of Navy men being robbed and raped by “zoot-suiters” and there were also reports of

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 78.

alleged unprovoked attacks by these “zoot suiters” on lone servicemen. Two servicemen were in hospitals near death, and several others were hospitalized as a result of the attacks.⁵⁷

In the Los Angeles report, there are no ‘white’ people. While ‘Mexicans’ are identified, those with whom they clash are boys, wives, and servicemen and civilians. Unlike the disuse of the term ‘Mexican’ in newspapers, we cannot assume here that the omission of racial description for those clashing with the zoot-suiters is down to wartime politics. In neither the newspapers crowing about the servicemen’s ‘mopping up operations’ nor the confidential probes of the Bureau’s Los Angeles field agent, nor indeed the entirely private and candidly angry letter from Ruiz’s friend, Johnny, was the whiteness of white individuals involved presented as part of the narrative. It is apparently not a ‘fact’ perceived to shape the picture of events, though the alterity of the Mexican youth was drawn into sharp focus, one way or another, in all of the documents. In Detroit, on the other hand, whiteness is boldly delineated throughout in detailed descriptions of interactions between ‘white people, including sailors’ and ‘white persons,’ ‘single whites’ and ‘several whites’ and ‘Negros’.

Interestingly in the one instance I have found in which the press coverage of the Los Angeles riots explicitly racially identifies both the victim and the assailants describes the attack of a ‘white high school student’ by ‘Negroes.’ The *Daily News* article titled ‘Near Martial Law in LA Riot Zones’ is suggestive. It records a number of arrests and clashes, at least some of which seem to have involved individuals of different ethnicities. It identifies individuals as ‘sailors,’ ‘soldiers,’ ‘servicemen,’ and refers to zoot suit ‘gangs’ and ‘hoodlums’. The only instance in which the race of the participants is mentioned, apart from one other individual specified as a ‘Negro zoot suiter,’ is in the following paragraph: ‘Gangsterism in Watts continued into the early hours of today. Twelve Negroes ambushed a 17-year-old white high school student, asked him if he was a "zoot suiter" and when he said "no" the fight started.’⁵⁸ The high-school student’s designation as ‘white’ seems to become relevant in the context of his attack by black assailants. This is an interesting moment because, like the Detroit and Beaumont FBI reports, it signals a subtle but important distinction in the

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 381-382.

⁵⁸ "Near-Martial Law in L.A. Riot Zones, June 9," *Los Angeles Daily News* 1943.

discursive patterns in which Mexicans and Negroes, and white people in relation to them, were configured.

The blackness of an individual was seemingly always salient, and their identification as 'Negro' came first and foremost among other identifiers: 'Negro youth,' 'Negro soldier,' 'Negro zoot-suiter' and, commonly, simply 'a Negro', an object itself rather than a description. In an illustrative example, the *Los Angeles Times* printed a story about a man lynched in Florida next to its coverage of the Beaumont riots. The headline reports the lynching of a 'Negro Murder Suspect.' Those who carried out the lynching and the individual their victim allegedly murdered are referred to as 'white men' and a 'white man' respectively. The lynching victim is referred to simply as 'the Negro', notably not 'the Negro man', his existence as a man, as a person, dissolves in his blackness.⁵⁹ Most importantly, however, for the concerns of this chapter, is that while, generally speaking, blackness is marked and identified and whiteness is silently normative, what we see in these examples is that in the direct interactions between white and black individuals, whiteness emerges and solidifies. One imagines that if the woman who reported being attacked by the unnamed 'Negro' in the Beaumont coverage was in the paper for another reason, for giving blood to the Red Cross for example, she would just be a 'mother of three' or the 'wife of warplant worker.' Just as the high-school student becomes a 'white high-school student' when attacked by 'twelve Negroes', in the discussion of the alleged rape, she becomes not a woman but a 'white woman.' The whiteness of the victim is relevant because of the blackness of the perpetrator; suggesting that to these writers the respective racial designations change the nature of the interaction being reported. It is also interesting to note that such identifications are made explicit in discourses with distinctly different tones. Though both the press and the investigative documents from this period effect a much more neutral tone than similar examples from the World War I era, whose discussions of 'negroes' and 'white' men and women were often marked with alarm and suspicion, the constancy of the differentiation between black and white similarly attests to a vision of eternally separate entities.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ "Negro Murder Suspect Lynched in Florida, June 17," *Los Angeles Times* 1943.

⁶⁰ For a useful discussion of press coverage of the 1919 riots, see: Terry Ann Knopf, "Race, Riots, and Reporting," *Journal of Black Studies* 4, no. 3 (1974). For a discussion of the Justice Department's 'Negro Subversion' files from the same period, which also includes a number of actual primary documents, see, William Cohen, "Riots, Racism and Hysteria: The Response of Federal Investigative Officials to the Race Riots of 1919," *The Massachusetts Review* 13, no. 3 (1972).

6.5 'All races other than negro'

If subtle discursive techniques reflected and quietly reinforced distinctions in the manner in which blacks and Mexicans were ideologically positioned, these positions, and their distinctions, were energetically physically reinforced in the practices of the World War II military. While traditionally participation within the military was seen to transform foreigners into Americans, in important ways, both practically and ideologically, military service only emphasized black people as a problematic, alien and potentially explosive element within the social body – attested to by both Hoover's preoccupation with Negro soldiers and the systematic lynching of black men in uniform during World War I. The treatment of black men within the World War II armed forces is crucial to examine, as an immediate factor of the unrest during 1943 and as a broader embodiment of the history of anti-black violence and subordination. Further the manner in which this practice contrasts with the official integration of Mexicans in the military, despite the segregation they experienced as civilians, offers some important insights into their contradictory social position.

It is interesting that the one factor that perhaps most significantly set black people apart from not only Mexicans but all other Americans during World War II is one upon which recent Chicano scholars of period have shown such a lack of curiosity. Perhaps more than any other empirical instance considered in this work, the neglect and distortion of the difference in the US military's treatment of black and Mexican soldiers illustrates the shortcomings of analysis shaped by a presumed division between whites (particularly where the meaning of whiteness is conflated with white supremacy) and racialized minorities/people of color. This can be witnessed in the three recent works focused on the Zoot Suit Riots discussed in the previous section. In his often-excellent historical treatment of the riots, Pagan describes an incident in which Mexican youth shouted 'Heil Hitler' at some sailors. Pagan suggests that though the gesture could have been a prank, it might have also represented an act of political resistance:

Saluting white American military men as if they were
Nazi soldiers was a bold accusation that Nazi
Germany and the segregated U.S. military, if not race-

conscious American society in general, looked remarkably similar from the vantage point of racialized minorities.⁶¹

Pagan fails to note that it was African Americans only and not ‘racialized minorities’ generally that were segregated in the US military. If he is aware that Mexicans and blacks were handled quite differently by the US military, his statement could be interpreted to suggest that there was a sense of politicized solidarity between the Mexican youth and African Americans strong enough to make Mexicans actively protest the segregation of the latter. I have seen no direct evidence for this and he does not attempt to present any. In *The Woman in the Zoot Suit*, Catherine S. Ramírez also comments that the ‘World War II era Mexican American GI entered a racially segregated military.’⁶² Finally, in *Power of the Zoot*, Alvarez recognizes that military segregation targeted African Americans but seems reluctant to acknowledge that Latinos served in the ‘non-Negro’ ranks, writing ‘Mexican Americans did not experience segregation in the military to the extent African Americans did.’⁶³ The statement implies that Mexican Americans were segregated to some extent. As Alvarez doesn’t provide any elaboration for this claim, or any evidence, it’s hard to know what he is referring to.

In his study examining the several millions of soldiers rejected from active duty during World War II, Eli Ginzberg, an academic consultant to the army, noted, ‘the practice of the Armed Forces and the Selective Service System [is to publish] their data on a Negro-Nonnegro racial basis.’ The term ‘Negro’ referred ‘strictly to the negroid race’, while the term ‘white’ referred to ‘all races other than negroid, e.g. white, Indian, Japanese, Chinese, Asiatic Indians, etc.’⁶⁴ A 1940 memo from an assistant chief of staff stated that ‘trainees of all races other than negro will be assigned [to military units] the same as white trainees.’⁶⁵ Thomas A. Guglielmo notes that after Pearl Harbor, the Army stopped inducting Japanese Americans for a short

⁶¹ Pagán, *Murder at the Sleepy Lagoon : Zoot Suits, Race, and Riot in Wartime L.A.*, 169.

⁶² Ramírez, *The Woman in the Zoot Suit: Gender, Nationalism, and the Cultural Politics of Memory*, 141.

⁶³ Alvarez, *The Power of the Zoot: Youth Culture and Resistance During World War II*, 17.

⁶⁴ Eli Ginzberg, *The Ineffective Soldier: The Lost Divisions. Lessons for Management and the Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), 120.

⁶⁵ Assistant chief of staff memo quoted in Edward S. Shattuck to Campbell C. Johnson, memo, Jan. 22, 1941. Thomas A. Guglielmo, "'Red Cross, Double Cross': Race and America's World War II-Era Blood Donor Service," *Journal of American History* 97, no. 1 (2010): 66.

period, after which most, but not all of them, were placed in all Japanese units. A key distinction, here, however, which I discuss further later, was that the Japanese units were used as combat units, which Roosevelt saw as a propaganda tool.⁶⁶ Similarly, other groups, including Filipinos, Puerto Ricans, and Chinese Americans, were sometimes, but not always, organized into ethnically specific units.⁶⁷ Ginzberg attributes the Negro and non-Negro division of the army to the fact that the other 'races' were numerically insignificant. Certainly it would have been a bureaucratic nightmare to have separate units for every perceived racial group. Crucially, however, if the primary concern had been separating white men from all others, the army could have organized its ranks on a white and nonwhite principle, consolidating all non-European groups into one large non-white group (as the scholars cited above seemed to have assumed).

6.6 Negro troops and the non-Negro Armed Forces

'The Army accepts no doctrine of racial superiority or inferiority.' announced a 1944 pamphlet of the Armed Services. It continued

It may seem inconsistent, therefore, that there is nevertheless a general separation of colored and white units on duty. It is important to understand that separate organization is a matter of practical military expediency and not an indorsement [sic] of beliefs in racial distinction. There must be as little friction within the Army as possible.⁶⁸

During Second World War while segregation stayed in place, but its racist rationale, at least in public documents, began to change. In its 1925 report, citing such facts as

⁶⁶ For a description of the all-Japanese units in combat, see chapter five in Ronald T. Takaki, *Double Victory: A Multicultural History of America in World War II* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co, 2000).

⁶⁷ Guglielmo, "'Red Cross, Double Cross': Race and America's World War II-Era Blood Donor Service," 66. Guglielmo also notes that the Navy refused to accept Japanese Americans throughout the war.

⁶⁸ War Department Pamphlet No. 20-6, 'Command of Negro Troops,' 29 February 1944. Morris J. MacGregor and Bernard C. Nalty, eds., *Blacks in the United States Armed Forces: Basic Documents*, XIII vols., vol. Volume V: Black Soldiers in World War II (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 1977), 319.

the Negro's reduced cranial capacity and their 'rank cowardice in the dark', the Army War College concluded that 'in the process of evolution the American negro has not progressed as far as the other sub-species of the human family' and that military policies should be drafted accordingly.⁶⁹ In contrast, the reasoning presented to defend segregation in the military during its war against Nazism usually involved two key themes. Firstly, that the presence of black men amongst white troops would lower morale and cause antagonism and secondly that the military had to conform to the customs of the county it represented. 'The War Department,' General George C. Marshall stated to reassert the necessity of continued segregation, 'cannot ignore the social relationship between Negroes and whites which has been established by the American people through custom and habit.'⁷⁰ The military was not, as its leadership often claimed, a social laboratory – 'experiments within the army in the solution of social problems,' Marshall asserted, 'are fraught with danger to efficiency, discipline and moral.'⁷¹ Though such rhetoric as that in the *Command of Negro Troops* pamphlet might attempt to distance the practice of segregation from the ideological positions of the World War I era, other documents continued to treat black inferiority as fact, though they were often more noncommittal about its source than their World War I counterparts. Delineating the problems the military needed to 'squarely' face in 'utilizing Negro personnel,' Marshall asserted 'either through lack of education opportunities or other causes the level of intelligence and occupation skill of the Negro population is considerably below that of the white.'⁷² However black difference was conceptualized, the institutional imposition of race upon them meant that black soldiers remained interned but never incorporated within the military body. As a pamphlet from the March Against Washington Movement put it: 'The instant he puts on the uniform of his country, the Negro becomes a deadly plague carrier, to be quarantined, isolated at all costs from his white comrades in arms.'⁷³ Relating perhaps one of the most striking images illustrating the Negro position in the Army, one

⁶⁹ Army War College, "Use of Negro Manpower in War," (Washington DC: United States Army, 1925).

⁷⁰ Memorandum, Chief of Staff for Secretary of War, 1 December, 1941, Subject: Report of Judge William H. Hastie, civilian aide to the secretary of war, dated 22 September 1941. Printed in: Morris J. MacGregor and Bernard C. Nalty, eds., *Blacks in the Military: Essential Documents* (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1981), 115.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ Dwight Macdonald and Nancy Macdonald, "The War's Greatest Scandal: The Story of Jim Crow in Uniform," (New York: March on Washington Movement, 1943), 9.

soldier found that while German prisoners of war could share the 'white' latrines with the rest of the American soldiers, he was obliged to use specially designated 'colored' latrines.⁷⁴

The March on Washington pamphlet gave an apt description of the manner in which the careful distinction of black troops was achieved:

Every one of the half million Negroes now serving in the armed forces is doing so on a Jim Crow basis. Every regiment, every ship, every battery, every flying squadron and medical staff and jeep company is either all white or all colored. The most ingenious planning, the most complicated and voluminous quantities of paper-work, the tireless efforts of thousands of officers are devoted to the great task of keeping apart the two races.⁷⁵

As must be expected, the notion of 'separate but equal' was an ideological ruse rather than a practical reality. For most of the war, the vast majority of black troops were used as laborers rather than combatants. Ulysses Lee notes, 'The proportions of Negroes in the Quartermaster and Engineer Corps increased to the point where it appeared possible that every non-technical unit in those branches would soon be Negro.'⁷⁶ The widespread relegation of black troops to positions of menial labour predictably devastated their morale, instilling them with a sense of hopelessness and detachment from the war effort.⁷⁷ As military officials were reluctant to send black troops overseas for a large part of the war, many black units found themselves being transferred from one domestic training camp to another, subject to constant pointless marching and backbreaking manual tasks. In March 1943, the *Crisis* reported that black troops were being used to shovel snow in Seattle, Washington and Richmond, Virginia. In an even more insulting instance, the army, under pressure from Arizona

⁷⁴ Phillip McGuire, *Taps for a Jim Crow Army: Letters from Black Soldiers in World War II* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1993), 51.

⁷⁵ Macdonald and Macdonald, "The War's Greatest Scandal: The Story of Jim Crow in Uniform," 9.

⁷⁶ Ulysses Lee, *The Employment of Negro Troops* (Washington D.C.: Center of Military History United States Army, 1966), 111. To see how soldiers described these conditions in their own words, see Chapter 3 in McGuire, *Taps for a Jim Crow Army: Letters from Black Soldiers in World War II*.

⁷⁷ MacGregor and Nalty, eds., *Blacks in the Military: Essential Documents*, 104.

senators, had ordered black troops stationed in that state to pick cotton (for free of course) to help make up for the state's shortages in agricultural labour.⁷⁸

'Indications of unrest'

Their unique quarantine within the military was saturated with contradictory ideological interpretations. The racial claims of the Army War College nearly two decades previously that black men scattered under fire, were prone to panic, afraid of the dark, and, significantly, lacked 'aggression' were again put forward at the end of the Second World War in a report by the top commanders (white, of course) of the (black) 92nd Division. It, like the Army War College Report before it, asserted that the black officer failed to make an aggressive troop leader because, 'servility' had been 'bred...for generations' into the Negro race.⁷⁹ Despite all these assertions about supposed black servility, as Charles H. Houston pointed out in a 1943 editorial, military segregation reflected a balancing of fears, chief among them 'the inability to continue to subordinate a Negro population containing large numbers of Negro combat veterans.'⁸⁰ Tellingly, sociologist Howard Odum found that rumors about insurrection and lawlessness among black soldiers permeated the South where many black troops were stationed. His catalogue of wartime race rumors describes one theme of rumors which portrayed military officers as paralyzed by black rebelliousness: 'Negroes were allowed to get away with anything because the officers were afraid of what they would do if an order was given which they did not like.'⁸¹ In one tale, a black soldier refused to forego his Saturday night leave to clean guns as he was ordered. 'The officer knew that he could not do anything about this because if he did the rest of the Negroes would rise up and do something or other...it could not be helped...the Negroes had to be handled with gloves on.'⁸² Malcolm X's autobiography offers an interesting counterpoint to such stories, demonstrating both his awareness of such anxiety and also how to use it to his advantage. In order to evade the draft, X performed for the white Draft Board officials their own nightmare

⁷⁸ "Editorials: Snow Cleaners, Cotton Pickers," *Crisis* 1943.

⁷⁹ Morris J. MacGregor, *Integration of the Armed Forces 1940-1965* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, United States Army, 1981), 101-06.

⁸⁰ Charles H. Houston, "Critical Summary: The Negro in the U.S. Armed Forces in World Wars I and II," *The Journal of Negro Education* 12, no. 3 (1943): 364.

⁸¹ Howard Washington Odum, *Race and Rumors of Race : Challenge to American Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1943), 106.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 107.

caricature. 'The day I went down there,' he writes, 'I costumed like an actor. With my wild zoot-suit I wore the yellow knob-toe shoes, and I frizzed my hair up into a reddish bush of conk.'⁸³ His performance culminates with a psychiatric evaluation, during which he whispers into the psychiatrist's ear, "I want to get sent down South. Organize them nigger soldiers, you dig? Steal us some guns, and kill up crackers!"⁸⁴

Violence was not limited to rumours. By defining and then enforcing both a separate and pathologised population, the 'quarantine' had the effect of reproducing and exaggerating the very conditions for 'friction' it purportedly held in check, continually created the very 'Negro problem' it purported to solve. Black men in uniform during the Second World War, like those in the First, continued to be exposed to violence, facing brutality both within the military and from white civilians and law enforcement.⁸⁵ In North Carolina, 1941, soldiers engaged in a gun battle with white military police; in the same year in Arizona, 43 soldiers went AWOL after persecution by local white people; in Louisiana, in 1942, an altercation between a soldier and a white military police officer, resulted in a riot in which 28 soldiers were shot and 3,000 were arrested.⁸⁶ As the war continued, there was marked shift in the soldiers' response. By 1943, black soldiers were increasingly less willing to put up with injustices and were initiating conflicts rather than bearing their receiving end.⁸⁷ In response to reports of growing tension, the Secretary of War, Henry L. Stimson, created an Advisory Committee on Negro Troop Policies to investigate. Their report reveals the extent of the problem:

Disaffection among Negro soldiers continues to constitute an immediately serious problem. In recent weeks there have been riots of a racial character at Camp Van Dorn, Mississippi; Camp Steward, Georgia; March Field, California; Fort Bliss, Texas; Camp Breckenridge, Kentucky; and at San Luis Obispo, California. At many other stations

⁸³ Malcolm X and Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X. With the Assistance of Alex Haley* (Penguin Books, 2001), 194.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 196.

⁸⁵ On the lynching of black soldiers during World War I, see: Schaich, "A Relationship between Collective Racial Violence and War," 383.

⁸⁶ Macdonald and Macdonald, "The War's Greatest Scandal: The Story of Jim Crow in Uniform," 2-3.

⁸⁷ Lee, *The Employment of Negro Troops*, 366 .

there is a smouldering unrest which is quite likely to erupt at any time.⁸⁸

The black press reported incidents of soldiers battling with white military police, and destroying off and on-base restaurants that refused to serve them. Historian Harold Sitkoff notes that though the war department actively suppressed evidence of black revolt, labelling deaths due such conflicts as ‘combat fatalities’ or ‘motor vehicle accidents,’ ‘army statisticians, nevertheless, reported an unusually high number of casualties suffered by white officers of Negro troops and at least fifty black soldiers killed in race riots in the United States.’⁸⁹

6.6 ‘A chance to belong’

In the 1942 Spring issue of the *Mexican Voice*, Manuel de la Raza discussed the positive impact the war was having on the status of Mexicans, many of them ‘fellows who had never felt American’, who had lived in towns in which local swimming pool had a day reserved for ‘Mexicans’ and in which they were expected to sit on one side of the movie theatre.⁹⁰ ‘It has given many of our shy...inferior feeling Americans of Mexican descent a chance to learn something, a chance to fit into the scheme of things, a chance to belong.’⁹¹ Then, directly after this statement, in a section titled ‘As White’, he writes:

The draft boards and war have also helped in that those of Mexican descent are classed as “white”. In most cases those of Mexican descent had never thought of themselves as “white”. We will never forget the pride that several fellows in our home town experienced when they said “I’m working in a defense plant.”⁹²

⁸⁸ Memorandum, Assistant Secretary of War John J. McCloy for Chief of Staff, 3 July 1943, Subject: Negro troops. Cited in: MacGregor and Nalty, eds., *Blacks in the Military: Essential Documents*, 121.

⁸⁹ Sitkoff, "Racial Militancy and Interracial Violence in the Second World War," 668.

⁹⁰ Manuel De la Raza, "Nosotros," *Mexican Voice* 1942, 8.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*

Like the social and economic prestige of defense work, learning that they were classed as white, *de la Raza* suggests, helped Mexicans participate in and feel a sense of belonging to American society, a sense which comes from being treated ‘like everyone else.’ Yet, despite the ebullient tone, the passage also points to the uncertainty of Mexicans’ inclusion. That both the ‘white’ classification and the opportunities the war presented seemed to come to the Mexican community as something of a revelation underscores how entrenched their social and economic separation was and how accustomed the community had become to it.

De la Raza’s friends were not the only ones who did not realise Mexicans were white. A series of letters between a citizen in Texas, the Secretary of State and the Selective Service System illustrate that the marking of Mexicans as white – essentially their *unmarking* – was far from taken for granted. In 1943, a Texan named D.S. Hernandez wrote to the Under Secretary of State to complain that ‘Americans of Spanish-Indian descent’ were being classified by several local draft boards and army reception centers as ‘Mexicans’ rather than being included in the ‘general “white” classification’. This was something, he wrote, that ‘these Americans bitterly resent...because the term is commonly used throughout the southwest in a derogative sense by individuals who believe in segregating these people in schools and public places.’⁹³ The Secretary of State in turn forwarded the complaint to the National Headquarters of the Selective Service. The Director of that organisation responded that they had issued a directive to State Directors in the Southwest that ‘the term “Mexican” should not be used as a designation for any American citizen.’ The letter noted that due to the nature of the Selective Service System, with its thousands of local boards, ‘it is to be anticipated that there will not be entire compliance with any instruction.’ The Director assured the Secretary of State, however, that local boards were ‘sincerely cooperating’ and that any further complaints of violations should be forwarded.⁹⁴ These letters reflect the very different push and pull between national politics and local practices which informed military policy with regard to Mexicans

⁹³ D.S. Hernandez, "Letter to under Secretary of State, August 20, 1943," in *Richard Griswold del Castillo Papers* (Los Angeles: Chicano Studies Research Library, University of California Los Angeles, 1943).

⁹⁴ Lewis B. Hershey, "Letter to the Secretary of State from the Director of the National Headquarters of the Selective Service System, Subject: Designation "Mexicans" On Selective Service Forms, September 1, 1943," in *Richard Griswold del Castillo Papers* (Los Angeles: Chicano Studies Research Library, University of California Los Angeles, 1943).

than that which shaped the military's 'Negro policy.' While in the latter case, black soldiers were expected to comply with the local practices of race, in the case of Mexicans, local officials were expected to cede their own practices of differentiation to comply with those of the national institution. Of course the official unmarking of Mexicans within the military, like their unmarking in classificatory laws, did not mean that the ideological marks of race were eradicated, only that their differentiation was not deemed to require institutional reification. Both the practices of marking and unmarking in the period had distinct consequences.

While the 'zoot war' discourse of the press positioned the soldier and the pachuco as opposing figures, in fact, Mexican Americans served, died, and were decorated in the war in considerably higher proportion than their presence in the general population.⁹⁵ Carey McWilliams attributed this in part to the lack of Mexican Americans on Southwest draft board, but, in general, Mexican Americans were eager to join the war effort, including those who wore zoot suits.⁹⁶ Rudy Sanchez, the young man who disparaged the bravery of soldiers who beat up adolescents, made this point explicit in his letter: 'There are thousands of former "zoot zuiters" [sic] who are now fighting for Uncle Sam. We the so called "zoot zuiters" want to help win the war.'⁹⁷ The manner in which beliefs about 'delinquent' Mexican youth seeped into the perception of them as fit soldier material is apparent in the following memo from the Los Angeles Field Division of the FBI to the Bureau's director. Apparently responding to Hoover's request for information on the matter, the field agent submitted a brief report on why 'members of the so-called "Pachucos" had not been inducted into the military service.' The agent stated that while newspapers had reported that they were being excluded from service because of their criminal records, the officials he consulted stressed physical defects like tuberculosis and 'low mental conditions'. While the medical officers at the city's largest induction station said that they did not feel Mexicans were rejected at a higher rate than other nationalities, other informants disagreed. One of them stating that

he has pointed out to Mayor Bowron and a
committee with whom he recently met that most of

⁹⁵ Griffith, *American Me*, 264.

⁹⁶ McWilliams, *North from Mexico: The Spanish-Speaking People of the United States*, 259.

⁹⁷ Sanchez, "Unpublished Letter, June 6, 1943."

these Mexican youths are not fit material for the army because of physical disabilities or criminal records and he felt this matter is a local social problem and not one to be shoved off on the army.⁹⁸

Another claimed that ‘nearly all’ of the Mexican young men between the ages of 18 and 20 had been rejected or discharged after induction. Another classified source stated that the majority of Mexicans in this age range not already in the army had been classed 4-F – ‘this classification being for physical, mental or moral reasons.’ Recently local draft boards were taking ‘a much more liberal attitude towards the classification of these Mexican youths, and have been ordering a larger portion of them to report for induction’, the sourced advised, but that even though they are so ordered many of them are not acceptable to the army.⁹⁹ Such views did not arise entirely within the zoot suit hysteria, but were more deeply rooted in ideological understandings of Mexicans as a race. In the previous World War, the conclusion that Mexicans were ‘mentally deficient’ was prominent among the psychiatrists administering testing and also among those who later analysed the data. Based on their sample of 367 Mexicans, they concluded that the group presented a 66.9 per cent ‘rate for mental defect’, even higher, they noted, than the rate they attributed to black people.¹⁰⁰

‘Complete Americans’

It seems likely that some incidents of discrimination against Mexican soldiers would have occurred during training and service, particularly perhaps with white soldiers from the Southwest. A letter from one Mexican soldier, Alvaro Guerrero, to the Mexican Embassy complained that: ‘When we were at the front it didn’t seem to

⁹⁸ Los Angeles Field Division Federal Bureau of Investigations, "Memorandum for the Director, Re: Mexican Youth Gangs, Aka "Zoot-Suiters" And "Pachucos", 11 June 1943," in *Richard Griswold del Castillo Papers* (Los Angeles: Chicano Studies Research Center, University of California Los Angeles, 1943), 1.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁰⁰ Col. Pearce Bailey M.C., Lieut. Col. Frankwood E Williams M.C., and Sergt. Paul O. Komora M.D., *Neuropsychiatry in the United States, Vol. X of the Medical Department of the United States in the World War* (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1929), 220.

matter, whether we were a Mexican, Italian, Greek, etc., but coming back to camp, garrison or rear echelon areas, the prejudice is still there, stronger than ever, and we ask why? Why?’¹⁰¹ However, the overwhelming emphasis in the literature of the period is on the inclusion of the Mexican American within military ranks. Writing about his experiences in the war and that of other Mexican American soldiers, Raul Morin commented that the Mexican-Americans in his training camp ‘picked up a lot of ‘*gabacho*’ (Anglo) buddies.’¹⁰² He asserted that there was ‘never any trace of racial strife in Camp Roberts.’¹⁰³ The equality of participation in the military ranks was frequently discussed in the period’s literature in pointed contrast to the discrimination Mexican soldiers faced at home. Ruth Tuck, for example, wrote that a veteran of the navy told her: ‘The years I spent on the ship are the best ones I ever spent. When you learn to get on with a thousand men and do your work and hold your own without ever hearing “Mexican,” you get on to a lot of things.’¹⁰⁴ In a similar vein, in the introduction to Tuck’s book, Ignacio Lopez wrote: ‘Every Southwest community has in it young men, formerly “little” Americans but who were able to act as complete Americans for the three to four years.’¹⁰⁵

Given Morin’s overt patriotism and desire to establish the Mexican American contribution to the war effort (in order to ‘lessen the few remaining stigmas harbored against Spanish-speaking people’), his flat denial of ‘racial strife’ should perhaps be accepted with caution. Nevertheless, however common experiences like those Alvaro Guerrero alluded to were on the ground, Mexican participation in combat units (in contrast to the concentration of black men in service positions) enabled a positive notion of Mexican masculinity within the dominant culture that drew on some of the traditional, romantic images of Mexicans as dashing and brave. Importantly, this formulation of patriotic Mexican American masculinity was seen to reinforce dominant American society rather than confront it. Griffith writes: ‘The war gave much to the Mexican American soldier. Here he was judged as a man and a fighter.

¹⁰¹B. Alvaro Guerrero, "Letter to Francisco Najera, Mexican Embassy, Re: Discrimination against Soldiers of Mexican Descent, June 20, 1945," in *Ernesto Galarza Papers* (Palo Alto: Special Collections Archive, Green Library, Stanford University., 1945), 1.

¹⁰² Raul Morin, *Among the Valiant: Mexican-Americans in WWII and Korea* (Albambra: Borden Publishing, 1963), 100. Morin’s book was the first full length documentation of the experiences of Mexican American soldiers.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ Ruth D. Tuck, *Not with the Fist. Mexican-Americans in a Southwest City* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1946). 221

¹⁰⁵ Ignacio Lopez, "Introduction," in *Not with the Fist* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1946), ix.

[He] earned the respect that all men give to brave fighters.’¹⁰⁶ The comments of General JM Wainwright, who led a large number of Mexican American soldiers in the Philippines, substantiate her claim: “Almost every unit in the United States army included Mexican American soldiers and they served well ... Anyone would be proud to have served in the same army with these men.”¹⁰⁷ Strikingly, Mexican Americans received more decorations and Medals of Honor proportionately than any other ethnic group.¹⁰⁸ In contrast to Mexican soldiers and also the all-Japanese 98th battalion, which became the most decorated battalion in American history, black soldiers who did serve in combat were excluded from the highest level of national valour awards -- not one African American was awarded a Congressional Medal of Honor during World War II.¹⁰⁹ Black servicemen were not simply excluded from the honorific functions of military service but were also actively and systematically dishonoured: highly disproportionate numbers of black men received stigmatic ‘Section VIII’ discharges which marked them as ‘unfit’ for military service.¹¹⁰

6. 7 Mrs. Abasta’s son and Mexican servicemen in the riot discourse

Ideological ripples of official acceptance of Mexican soldier and quarantine of black soldier permeated interpretations of the zoot suit riots, in both the press and official responses. While both the newspapers and the FBI noted the zoot-suiters’ alleged harassment of the wives and girlfriends of servicemen, there was also discussion of the servicemen’s relations with Mexican-American girls. A number of reports suggested that Mexican boys were jealous and resentful of servicemen pursuing the young women in their communities. Seeking to establish the cause of tension between sailors and pachucos, a *New York Times* article commented that,

¹⁰⁶ Griffith, *American Me*, 265.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 257. Many soldiers of Mexican descent were placed in the Philippines because they spoke Spanish.

¹⁰⁸ Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez, *Mexican Americans and World War II* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005).

¹⁰⁹ In 1997, researchers commissioned by the Army concluded this was due to entrenched institutional racism. Elliott V. Converse III et al., *The Exclusion of Black Soldiers from the Medal of Honor in World War II: The Study Commissioned by the United States Army to Investigate Racial Bias in the Awarding of the Nation's Highest Military Decoration* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1997), 10.

¹¹⁰ McGuire, *Taps for a Jim Crow Army : Letters from Black Soldiers in World War II*, 146. On Section VIII discharges, which were also issued to gay men and women, and the defense of both groups in the black press, see: Allan Berube, *Coming out under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War Two* (New York: Free Press, 1990), 233.

according to one version of events, the problems began when ‘a small group of sailors was chatting with a group of young women of Mexican descent.’¹¹¹ The girls’ ‘zootsuited friends’ intervened which then sparked a series of retaliations and counter-retaliations between sailors and zooters. An article printed after the riots in the *Los Angeles Daily News* picked up on this theme, presented a markedly different tone from its presentation of zoot-suiters in previous weeks. The article, titled ‘Mrs. Abasta’s Son was a Zoot Suiter, too’ is distinctly sentimental. It features the photo of a Mexican woman with a sad expression, captioned, ‘Mrs. Mercedes Abasta, Proud of her silver star, seven children and her job’ and another photo of her son in a naval uniform, captioned, ‘Frank Abasta, National Hero. Before extraordinary gallantry, a zoot suit.’¹¹² The article opens with a vignette in which three young sailors are admiring a young woman walking past them. When they see her, they whistle and click their tongues ‘as real soldiers should.’¹¹³ The girl is presumably Mexican-American as she is described as a ‘senorita.’ She smiles at the sailors but walks past them to meet her boyfriend. The boyfriend is wearing a zoot suit. The sailors are disgruntled by this turn of events. After grumbling about the ‘no good pachuco,’ they ‘slouch’ off to their barracks. The author uses this vignette to introduce the reader to Mrs. Abasta, the mother of the zoot-suited boy the ‘senorita’ was going to meet.

The anger of the sailors would be quelled, the author suggests, if they could meet this lady. As it turns out, the zoot-suit the ‘senorita’s’ boyfriend is wearing, once belonged to his older brother, Frankie, ‘who discarded it for a navy uniform, perishing in it to save others.’¹¹⁴ If the sailors had known of Frankie’s heroic sacrifice, and all the work the rest of the Abasta family was doing to support the war, the author writes, ‘[t]hey may have still grumbled because a zoot suiter had the place by her side they wished they had,’ but by the next morning their anger would be forgotten.¹¹⁵ If they visited the family, ‘they would learn as intelligent American soldiers naturally would learn, that a zoot suit, or denim jeans, or war plant uniforms or oldfashioned [sic] black bloomers are not necessarily costumes of crime or robes of character.’¹¹⁶ The

¹¹¹ "Seek Basic Causes of Zoot Fray; Los Angeles, State Officials and Civic Groups Join in Searching Study, June 11," *New York Times* 1943.

¹¹² James Felton, "Mrs. Abasta's Son Was a Zoot Suiter, Too, June 18," *Los Angeles Daily News* 1943, 2.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

zoot suit and the uniform are juxtaposed in a manner which suggest that the problem between the Mexican American youth and soldiers was sartorial, rather than 'racial' -- in other words it was neither prejudice nor even difference. Underneath their various types of clothing, of course, everyone was really the same. Far from presenting the riots as a result of the servicemen's bid to protect whiteness and white women from the lurking menace of Mexican rapists, this article paints a picture of a natural sexual rivalry between groups of young men more alike than they know. The narrative exonerates both Mexican Americans, who were doing their part for the war effort, and soldiers, who were hot-headed and good-hearted. Just as the author seeks to blur the moral distinction between the zoot-suit and the Navy uniform, revealing that they can be and have been worn by the same patriotic individual, here the sexual competition which causes tension between the boys also emphasizes their likeness-- the zoot suited boy and the sailors all want the 'place by the [girl's] side.' The sailors' resentment of the girl's boyfriend places all of them on the same social plane, equals in their competition, the proximity between them strengthened when the zoot-suiter's dead brother is revealed as a fallen war hero.

The *Daily News*, like other local papers and local officials alike, seems to have been particularly eager to demonstrate their lack of anti-Mexicanism in the wake of the riots and the accusations of discrimination and 'race prejudice' which they provoked.¹¹⁷ Manchester Boddy, the paper's editor, printed an editorial on June 11th, one week before the Abasta article, insisting that only a 'ridiculously small percentage of the local Mexican population was involved in the so-called "gang" demonstrations.' While a week previously he had thundered that Los Angeles would no longer be 'terrorized' by 'morons parading as zoot suit hoodlums', he now piously asserted that '[e]very true Californian has an affection for his fellow citizens of Mexican ancestry that is as deep- rooted as the Mexican culture that influences our

¹¹⁷ Eleanor Roosevelt, for example, asserted the opinion that the riots resulted from long-standing anti-Mexican discrimination in the state. Enraged by her 'wild accusations about "race riots" and "race discrimination,"' the Los Angeles Times employed the now time-honoured tradition of counter-accusation, claiming Roosevelt was trying to create 'vicious international racial antagonism.' "Mrs. Roosevelt Blindly Stirs Race Discord, June 18," *Los Angeles Times* 1943. The city's Mayor, Fletcher Bowron submitted an account of the riots to the State Department, assuring them that the 'unseemly exhibitions on our city streets' were not 'prompted by prejudicial or even unfriendly feeling toward the Mexican people.' Fletcher Bowron, "Letter to Mr. Phillip W. Bonsal, Chief, Division of American Republics, State Department, Re: Zoot Suit Riots, August 3, 1943," in *Richard Griswold del Castillo Papers* (Los Angeles: Chicano Studies Research Center, University of California Los Angeles, 1943), 3, 1.

way of living—our architecture, our music—our language and even our food.¹¹⁸ Yet, despite its contrived nature, and perhaps because of it, the Abasta article is highly revealing. Key to the author's is the presentation of the 'senorita', while perhaps exoticised, as a legitimate object of romantic partnership. A similar article featuring a young black woman could not have worked in the same way in 1943. While black women were frequently the target of white men's sexual advances – Chester Himes noted that in Los Angeles a 'lone Negro woman... in a white neighborhood, will get a purely commercial proposal from every third unescorted white man or group of white men' - as we have seen the state's anti-miscegenation statute delegitimized romantic relations between the two.¹¹⁹ A report prepared by the Army War College and presented to the Army's Chief of Staff in 1925 is interesting to consider in context of the Abasta article:

The negro's physical, mental, moral and other psychological characteristics have made it impossible for him to associate socially with any except the lowest class of whites. The only exception to this are the negro concubines who have sometimes attracted men who, except for this association, were considered high class. This social inequality makes the close association of whites and blacks in the military organization inimicable to harmony and efficiency.¹²⁰

While the soldiers' whistling at the senorita, in the Abasta article, is construed to mark them 'as real soldiers,' here white men's association with 'negro concubines' is seen as an exception to their status as 'high class.' The Abasta article romanticizes both the cute senorita and the Mexican-American war hero to call attention to the sameness between Mexican zoot suiters and white soldiers, both of whom fight in the war, both of whom like the same pretty girls. Conversely, the passage here points to the exceptional association between white men and black women to reinforce the

¹¹⁸ 'Morons' passage cited in: Escobar, *Race, Police, and the Making of a Political Identity : Mexican Americans and the Los Angeles Police Department, 1900-1945*. 242, Manchester Boddy, "Views of the News, June 11," *Los Angeles Daily News* 1943.

¹¹⁹ Himes, "Zoot Suit Riots Are Race Riots."

¹²⁰ Army War College, "Use of Negro Manpower in War," 13.

conclusion that the groups' absolute social inequality must necessarily be organisationally enforced in the military.

6.8 Nightsticks and pistols: Black servicemen in the riot discourse

The FBI investigation of the Detroit riots reported that soldiers from the 543rd Quartermaster's Negro Battalion at Fort Custer, Michigan, broke into a warehouse there and loaded 178 rifles and a large quantity of ammunition onto several army trucks. The soldiers were stopped by a sentry as they proceeded down a road 'in the general direction of Detroit.' 'The assumption,' the agent wrote, 'was that they were on their way to Detroit to assist other Negroes there.' Ten of the men were taken into custody to await court-martial for mutiny.¹²¹ In Harlem, the riots began with a conflict between a black soldier and a white police officer. The policeman had been attempting to arrest a black woman for disorderly conduct when the soldier intervened and beat the officer with his own nightstick. The officer shot the soldier and both individuals were taken to the hospital. The New York agent reported that '300 negro civilians and soldiers gathered and demonstrated' and that '[s]hortly thereafter approximately 200 negro soldiers and sailors also demonstrated' in front of the Harlem police station.¹²²

I have found very little evidence indicating whether Mexican American servicemen participated in the Zoot Suit Riots and there is little discussion of the matter in the secondary literature. In his letter describing the riots, Rudy Sanchez wrote that a 'former "zoot zooter" (now a sailor)' came to meeting in which a number of local young men were discussing setting up a youth club with some policemen and local businessmen. The Mexican American sailor brought the warning to his friends that 'fifty sailors were walking and riding around in our neighborhood with sticks, boards, clubs, rocks, and even guns looking for any "zoot zooters" they could find to use their weapons on.'¹²³ Perhaps some Mexican American servicemen did join their civilian friends and relatives in defense and retaliation against the rioters' attack. Importantly, even if this is the case, their participation was not mentioned in either press reports or the reports of the FBI. The invisibility of the ethnic Mexican

¹²¹ Federal Bureau of Investigation, "Survey of Racial Conditions in the United States," 81.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 164.

¹²³ Sanchez, "Unpublished Letter, June 6, 1943."

serviceman in this discourse reflects the general manner in which the theme of Mexican delinquency had far overshadowed the group's vast participation in the military, a fact the Abasta article also attests to. However, the absence of this figure also illustrates that the Mexican soldier, absorbed into the military body in official policy and deployment, did not represent a special source of concern.

In contrast, a series of confidential memos, written by the senior naval patrol officer in Los Angeles, Clarence Fogg, reveal how overlapping anxieties about restless black servicemen and unruly black civilians permeated at least one military official's reading of the Zoot Suit Riots. In the aftermath of the events, the Navy command in Southern California met with local law enforcement officials to begin work on contingency plans to prevent further disruptions. Despite the fact that the June riots primarily involved white servicemen and Mexican youth, the plans focused heavily on the 'Negro Problem.' In two reports issued in July and October, Fogg warned the Navy command of the potential dangers of mutiny among 'colored personnel' and rioting among black civilians, the latter, he claimed, the target of an 'aggressive campaign sponsored by local, state and national representatives of the negro race... founded upon a planned policy of agitation designed to promote unrest and dis-satisfaction.'¹²⁴ Indicating the severity of the perceived threat, Fogg wrote: '...the Shore Patrol teamed with the Army military Policeman, will be necessarily injected into any disorderly situation that arises. It is submitted that disorderly colored service personnel, inclined to riot, will not have the same respect for a night stick as for a pistol.'¹²⁵ As we have seen in the Abasta article, the figure of the Mexican American soldier was used to close the distance between the supposed Mexican rioter and the white serviceman and absolve both of the riots' violence. In contrast, the figure of the black servicemen brings no absolution but only evokes more anxiety. The black serviceman, 'inclined to riot', and the 'negro hoodlum' form an aggregate menace, each magnifying the other's estrangement within the bodies of the military and city, each poised to incite disorder from the margin.

¹²⁴ C.H. Fogg, "Letter from Senior Patrol Officer, Los Angeles, California to Comeleven, San Diego, California, Regarding Hoodlum Attacks on Service Personnel, and Related Negro Problems, Los Angeles, October 16, 1943," in *Record Group 181, Records of Naval Districts and Shore Establishments, Eleventh Naval District, Office of the Commandant, Central Subject Files, 1924-1955* (Riverside, California: National Archives and Records Administration, 1943), 1.

¹²⁵ Mauricio Mazon, "Social Upheaval in World War II: "Zoot Suiters" And Servicemen in Los Angeles, 1943" (University of California Los Angeles, 1976), 192.

6.9 'Negro' and 'American' blood

I will close this chapter with consideration of one final World War II practice that perhaps had a limited material impact upon the lives of black and Mexican Americans but was nonetheless held deep social and political significance: blood donation. Paralleling the manner in which black troops were widely denied the 'right' to spill their blood in combat, the policies of the Red Cross kept black civilians from participating in the patriotic ritual and wartime necessity of blood donation. Like the miscegenation laws that kept 'black' and 'white' blood from mingling in (legitimate) offspring, the blood donation policy kept African Americans' blood quite literally out of non-black bodies. At the beginning of its blood bank scheme, the Red Cross, in agreement with military officials, chose to exclude black donors from the program.¹²⁶ In the face of considerable protest from black organizations they were forced to rethink the policy. James McGee, the Surgeon General of the Army, outlined his understanding of the problem in a memo: 'For reasons not biologically convincing but which are commonly recognized as psychologically important in America, it is not deemed advisable to collect and mix caucasian and negro blood indiscriminately for later administration to members of the military forces.'¹²⁷ McGee clearly considered the only options to be exclusion or segregation, but was reluctant to adopt the latter policy in light of the additional costs and difficulties it would represent, which were not justifiable, he felt, considering 'the relatively small amount of negro blood to be obtained under such a plan.'¹²⁸ The extra costs and administration involved was indeed considerable, because, in the Army's view, it was not simply a matter of keeping the blood in separate bags but required an entirely separate apparatus of collection for black donors. Such a program, McGee noted, would entail 'establishing, in addition to the present chain of blood donor stations, a duplicate chain for the collection of negro blood only...to be processed separately and dispensed for use among negro members of the military establishment.' McGee concluded his memo by acknowledging that the policy of exclusion was being

¹²⁶ Many have noted the irony in the fact that it was Charles Drew, a black surgeon, whose pioneering research made the first blood banks possible. He spoke of his 'sorrow' at the Red Cross's donation apartheid. Spencie Love, *One Blood : The Death and Resurrection of Charles R. Drew* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 158.

¹²⁷ Memorandum, the Surgeon General for Assistant Secretary McCloy, 3 September 1941. MacGregor and Nalty, eds., *Blacks in the United States Armed Forces: Basic Documents*, 138.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 139.

challenged because of the ‘laudable desire...to ensure full expression of the patriotic impulses of American negroes.’ To this end, he suggested:

It seems that the most effective demonstration of negro help in this case may be found in acquiescence in the present program of blood plasma procurement without insistence on the introduction of changes which would result in increased expense and administrative complications.¹²⁹

In other words, rehashing the familiar discourse in which black people were presented as intent on viciously ‘invading’ and imposing themselves, the best thing they could do for the blood drive effort would be to recognise the ‘psychological’ repugnance their blood invoked in others and politely abstain from participation. Eventually, in conjunction with the Army and Navy, the Red Cross agreed to accept black people’s donations on a segregated basis ‘in deference to the wishes of those for whom the plasma is being processed’ so that they ‘may be given plasma from the blood of their own race.’¹³⁰

Critically, African Americans were the only group whose blood was segregated in this manner. As the black press pointed out that, even serums and antitoxins derived from the blood of horses and cows were not deemed to require the special care that ‘black blood’ did.¹³¹ Despite the intensity of anti-Japanese propaganda, which cast Japanese as demonic and subhuman, and the notorious sequestering of Japanese Americans in camps, the blood of Japanese American donors was accepted and left unmarked in Red Cross blood banks.¹³² When a Southern Congressman and others protested the use of Japanese blood, the Red Cross made no attempts to change their policy ‘out of deference’ to the wishes of those who might be receiving transfusions. The Red Cross donor centre in Boston, for example, ‘vigorously defended the policies regarding “patriotic Nisei,” whose blood “is fully as

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 140.

¹³⁰ Foster Rhea Dulles, *The American Red Cross. A History* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1950), 420.

¹³¹ Lee, *The Employment of Negro Troops*, 331-32.

¹³² For a discussion of anti-Japanese propaganda, see: Takaki, *Double Victory: A Multicultural History of America in World War II*, 169.

good as any descendent from the Mayflower.”¹³³ Their defense of Japanese American blood, notably, did not insist that it was the same as the descendants of the Mayflower’s, but ‘as good’- in other words, they insisted on the ‘patriotic’ Nisei’s Americanness, rather than their racial sameness as such. Though perhaps racially different from white Americans, because they were American citizens, as opposed to the murderous, subhuman overseas ‘Japs’ featured in propaganda, their blood was good enough for American soldiers. That this logic did not apply to black Americans, resident in the country much longer than the Japanese and longer than many of the antecedents of white Americans, is striking. The blood donation policy, then, was not premised on scientific notions of racial difference. In fact, as we have seen, officials acknowledged that there was no chemical difference in the blood; rather they emphasized social customs and psychological concerns, treating them, in effect, as unchanging and insurmountable as biological reality. The exclusion and then careful isolation of black people’s blood, as if it were a kind of social toxin, reinforces in quite a literal manner the walls of the segregation quarantine.

On July 2, less than a month after it gleefully reported the ‘great moral lesson’ the servicemen were teaching zoot suiters, the *Los Angeles Times* carried the story, ‘Mexican Group Gives Blood to Aid Victory.’ The article begins: ‘It was Los Angeles Mexican Day yesterday at the Red Cross Blood Bank.’¹³⁴ The Blood Bank’s ‘Mexican Day’ was not the kind of ‘Mexican Day’ Manuel de la Raza referred to which were imposed at the swimming pools in some California localities, and it was not an institutional measure taken by the Red Cross ‘in deference’ to its recipients’ supposed desire for racially appropriate blood. The event was organised by Manuel Ruiz and other ‘leaders in the Mexican colony,’ no doubt as an effort to publicise the patriotism of the Mexican American community in the wake of the riots. The *Los Angeles Times*, like the *Daily News*, seems to have been happy to cooperate in this effort, demonstrating its lack of prejudice with cheerful praise of these ‘Americans of Mexican ancestry.’¹³⁵ In a section of the article subtitled, ‘Some Zoot Suits,’ the author noted of the donors, ‘There were soldiers and defense workers, business and

¹³³ Guglielmo, “Red Cross, Double Cross”: Race and America’s World War II-Era Blood Donor Service,” 74. Nisei is a term which refers to individuals born in the United States to Japanese parents.

¹³⁴ “Zoot Suiters Learn Lesson in Fights with Servicemen, June 7,” *Los Angeles Times* 1943. “Mexican Group Donates Blood to Aid Victory, July 2,” *Los Angeles Times* 1943, 8.

¹³⁵ “Mexican Group Donates Blood to Aid Victory, July 2,” A2.

professional men, attractive young women and dapper young men, some wearing jitterbug suits, but a far cry from those who were precipitated two weeks ago into the limelight of the so-called zoot suit disorders.’ These particular zoot suiters, the author wrote, ‘took occasion to explain that the American-Mexicans, whose fancy was caught by the revolutionary design of the mismatched zoot suit, wear it not as a symbol of group organization but through preference.’ One of the accompanying photographs features one of these zoot suiters standing at the front of the line of donors, speaking to a smiling blonde nurse. Behind him is a young man in uniform. Like the Abasta article considered earlier, this one also juxtaposes the image of the zoot suit and the military uniform in its discussion of Mexican patriotism. ‘Many boys’ from the ‘Mexican colony’, it reminded the reader, ‘have gone to wear the uniform of the United States in combat zones throughout the world.’ Again, discursively enrobing the Mexican in the combatant’s uniform incorporated the Mexican into the lionized ranks of ‘our boys’ and expunged the zoot’s mark of deviancy. The blood being donated reinforced this incorporation in symbolically bodily terms. This is interesting to consider in context of the fact that blood, used interchangeably with the term ‘ancestry’ or ‘descent,’ was often idiomatically configured as a reference point of Mexican difference. The *Daily News* editorial in which Manchester Boddy declared his affection for his ‘fellow citizens of Mexican descent’ also printed a letter from a Mexican American woman complaining about the discrimination faced by ‘those of Mexican blood.’ ‘In schools,’ she wrote, ‘there are all nationalities, but only Mexicans are called by their ancestors’ blood. There are Irish, Jews, English, French, Swedes, etc., but as long as they are born in this country they are Americans.’ With the act of its donation, however, Mexican blood became a vehicle for unification rather than distinction. The Mexican donors lined up to give their pint of blood, the article sang, ‘each in the hope that some day, somewhere, it might save the life of an American fighting on a world battle front.’¹³⁶ Whereas the blood of African Americans was treated as a racial substance, to be collected only for ‘negro members of the military establishment,’ Mexican blood, treated as an indistinguishably human substance, would save the lives of ‘Americans.’

¹³⁶ "Mexican Group Donates Blood to Aid Victory, July 2," 8.

6.10 Conclusion: Unification and Aberration, the imagery of blood and violence

The symbols of violence and blood, evoked as the emblematic images of both national order and duty, on the one hand, and mob disorder and distinction, on the other, perform powerful ideological work. While the former linkage is forged to conjure the essence of self-reliant American citizenship and national unity, the latter conjures the essence of race and its primal divisions. If citizenship was forged in battlefield sacrifice, the brutality of the mob seemed to evidence the primordial conflict never entirely containable between naturally irreconcilable entities, a conception latent in the very term ‘race riot’ and its common 20th century variants ‘race war’ or ‘race clash’. Jefferson’s treatise on black difference anticipated such ideological constructions. Envisioning the cohabitation of former slaves and former masters after abolition, he wrote: ‘[T]he real distinctions nature has made; and many other circumstances, will divide us into parties, and produce convulsions, which will probably never end but in the extermination of one or the other race.’¹³⁷ In the oscillations between these two fields of meaning, we see again, in fine detail, the rift between the processes of national and natal alienation, between the relations of power rooted in conquest and exploitation and those rooted in the slavery of a democratic republic.

The Los Angeles riots, the mobs of white men in uniform beating and stripping Mexican youth in front of cheering crowds and passive police wrote, with ‘blood on the pavements’, the limitations of Mexican Americans’ Americanness.¹³⁸ They may have been ‘born in this country’ but aliens they remained. Those of Mexican blood, as the distraught mother complained in her letter, were defined by their blood, savaged by mobs on the street and condemned as delinquents ‘outside of the moral order.’ But, as we have seen, if blood, the idiom of race and ancestry, and mob violence could mark Mexicans as outsiders, their physical blood, in a Red Cross bag, and the glorified violence of warfare could draw them back in, ideologically and institutionally incorporating them, at least momentarily, as ‘complete Americans,’ officially unmarked, if not entirely equal.

On the other hand, if Mexican could be treated formally ‘as white,’ or ‘non-Negroes’ or ‘Americans all,’ and if ‘whiteness’ remained discursively invisible in the

¹³⁷ Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (Richmond, VA: J. W. Randolph, 1853), 149.

¹³⁸ McWilliams, *North from Mexico: The Spanish-Speaking People of the United States*, 244.

shadows of Mexican deviancy, we have seen that in the war years discourse and practice continually created 'white' and 'negro' as wholly separate and antithetical objects. General Marshal was more insightful than he knew when he insisted the military must continue to enforce the 'social relationship between Negroes and whites which has been established by the American people through custom and habit.' This relationship was continually established in language; as we have seen in the riot discourse, relations between white and black people were thoroughly marked and detailed, lest a reader might mistake the racial designation of the persons involved, and therefore misunderstand the nature of the incident. Mirroring the exhaustive marking of blackness in this written discourse, blackness was marked and separated with equal care and precision in all aspects of military life. These practices provide vivid examples of how the social vocabulary of black race was patterned in utterance and action.

While Mexicans, particularly those flaunting their Mexicanness in a zoot suit, could be treated as 'non-citizens,' as a 'breed of persons outside the normative order, devoid of morals themselves, and consequently not entitled to fair play and due process,' black people, denied participation in unifying implementation of state violence and even from the civilian blood sacrifice, were often constructed not as 'non-citizens' but, as Wacquant observes, as 'anti-citizens,' not simply existing on the outside of the republic, but 'standing over and against it.'¹³⁹ The intensity of anti-black violence throughout the 20th century, the death toll in Detroit contrasting with the limited casualties in Los Angeles, might, on the surface seem to reveal whites' anti-black racism as the visceral product of 'natural' distinctions. What we see in this chapter, however, is how these positions, overlapping but distinct - pachuco and negro hoodlum, serviceman ('of all other races than negro') and 'colored' serviceman, citizen, non-citizen and anti-citizen - were produced and maintained, through practices sometimes deliberately and painstakingly implemented and at other times articulated without reflection.

¹³⁹ Turner and Surace, "Zoot-Suiters and Mexicans: Symbols in Crowd Behavior," 20. Loic Wacquant, "Race as Civic Felony," *International Social Science Journal* 57, no. 183 (2005): 136.

7. Conclusion

7.1 'So that they would never forget they were slaves'

After passing through the *agoge*, promising Spartan youth would complete their apprenticeships by stalking the countryside, hiding themselves during the day, and hunting and killing any helots who came out at night. Spartans were peculiar. Unlike other Greek societies in which military service was a part-time occupation for citizens, Spartiates were full time soldiers. As such they were entirely dependent upon the labour of the population whom they held in bondage - and they took extreme measures to secure it. Maintaining this order was a defensive and offensive matter, particularly given the disparity of numbers between the Spartan elite and the helot masses. The ancient historian Thucydides noted: 'Spartan policy is always mainly governed by the necessity of taking precautions against the helots.'¹ Special locks were designed to keep out any helot who might wish to murder them in their beds. Spartan men habitually removed the arm-band of their shields at home, lest an insurrectionary minded helot find it ready to use and when on military campaigns they carried spears at all times to protect themselves against the helots who accompanied them.² The murder of the helots by Spartan youth was part of a wider range of practices designed to manage that upon which the city both depended and which constantly threatened it. The third century BC historian Myron commented:

They assign to the Helots every shameful task leading to disgrace. For they ordained that each one of them must wear a dogskin cap and wrap himself in skins and receive a stipulated number of beatings every year regardless of any wrongdoing, so that they would never forget they were slaves.³

In addition to these daily rituals, once a year the Spartans would symbolically declare war upon the helots. Because the helots were 'within the city' they had to be

¹ Paul Cartledge, *Sparta and Lakonia: A Regional History 1300 to 362 BC* (London: Routledge, 2002), 211.

² *Ibid.*, 304.

³ *Ibid.*, 305.

continually rendered legal outsiders so that their murder would not bring ritual pollution. All of these measures, as one more recent historian notes, were symbolic and physical means of reaffirming that ‘Helots were not and could not become Spartans.’⁴

It is not because this relationship should be understood as an instance of race or racism that I invoke it here, nor because it correlates except in the most general of terms, with the conditions or positioning of 20th century Mexican or African Americans. I raise the Spartan case because the extinct social relations constituting two peoples long since wiped from the face of the earth present the relationship between symbol and repression, ‘difference’ and ‘prejudice’ in a way that more recent and more familiar relations perhaps cannot. Because none of us have ever seen a dogskin cap much less forced another/ been forced ourselves to wear one, if were we to examine the order of Spartan society, while understanding that such items once had deep social significance, we would not imagine caps or animal pelts to be active historical agents, to have meaning or force outside of that which people invested in them and through them.

No doubt, along with the physical trappings of forced helot inferiority, the Spartans developed a rich social vocabulary to explain why they ruled and why helots laboured, why they were superior and the helots inferior, why murder and violence were necessary to protect what was good and right. But we would not suppose that the Spartans’ peculiar customs and the frequently homicidal contempt the ancient sources report that they exhibited towards their captive population *caused* the exploitative relationship between them. It is not to suggest that the Spartans’ hatred towards and fear of the helots was not real, not viscerally experienced. The helots, too, as we can well imagine, necessarily forged both their own social vocabulary and experienced their condition in physical, visceral, terms. The Greek historian Xenophon said that when in their own company, at the mere mention of the Spartiates, the helots ‘could barely conceal that they would gladly eat them – even raw.’⁵ We would understand, however, that these experiences could not have preceeded the relationship between them but were produced, and must be explained, within it.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*, 306.

7.2 A review of the arguments

This thesis has been an empirical examination of a basic theoretical principle, but one which has a number of analytical implications. Race, whether understood as elemental difference or pathological prejudice, cannot explain anything, but must itself be explained. Here I have argued that the positions of Mexican and African Americans, often thought of by both historical actors and analysts in racial terms, must be understood within their specific historical and material conditions. As such, I have asked how the ideological interpretations of each group's position and their supposed qualities reflect the circumstances of their emergence. Rather than understanding Mexican and African Americans experiences of marking, exclusion and separation as racial problems with racial imperatives (the maintenance or supremacy of whiteness, the degradation of not-whiteness, etc), the very terms which those who have subjected them have offered, I have explored them as practices developed in specific relations of domination and appropriation, which have thus been themselves distinct in origin, implementation and impact.

In Chapter Three, I examined how politicians, academics, and citizens used the country's historical experience with slavery to interpret the use of Mexican labour. While some argued that the Mexican represented another 'ruinous element', a force of racial destruction equal to black slaves, others insisted that Mexicans' racial qualities made them the West's benign alternative to the spread of the South's 'cancer.' I then examined how the fundamentally different relations involved in exploitative but free labour and slavery engendered distinct ideological constructions of blackness and Mexicanness. The natal alienation of slavery, I argued, cast black people as only 'biologically human,' undermining their social, national and political personhood. As national aliens, Mexican immigrants, as exploited but free workers, maintained, in the eyes of Americans, links to family, culture, and nation.

In Chapter Four, I looked at how the two groups were treated very differently in the country's schema of racial classification laws and in the anti-miscegenation laws to which they were tied. While African ancestry, after the end of slavery, was treated something like a social toxin, marking even those with the smallest fraction of it as 'Negro,' the unique circumstances of Mexicans' incorporation into the United States resulted in their dispossession but also their access to the full rights of American citizenship, and by default, their classification as 'white.' Despite the

prominence of Eugenicist discourses of racial mixing and degeneracy in the political debates of the early decades of the 20th century, I argued that the asymmetry of these laws illustrate a greater concern with formalising black separateness than maintaining the purity of whiteness.

I examined the same principle in spatial terms in the shifting demographic map of 20th century Los Angeles in Chapter Five. While each group's marginal social status was maintained and reinforced in spatial terms, in the years after World War II, African Americans were far more contained and isolated than Mexicans. To make sense of this, I examined the contrasting ways in which each group's presence had been historically understood in California. Popular narratives often portrayed California as an amalgamation of cultures and civilizations. However hypocritical such celebrations of the 'fantasy heritage' may have been, they reflected the ideological positioning of at least some Mexicans as culturally and esthetically constituent to the social body. In sharp contrast, from the very inception of Californian statehood, as white Americans moved West from the sectional conflicts and political problems of the black people were imagined as a 'discordant,' undesirable element.⁶

Finally, in Chapter Six, I looked at how the World War II military and the spate of urban violence on the American home-front revealed profound differences in the manner in which blacks and Mexicans were discursively conceptualised and physically managed. Though pachuco youth were constructed as immoral, anti-social criminals, the language of federal law enforcement and local press described their activities in purely altero-referential terms. On the other hand, the language used to describe black people, simultaneously marked blackness and the whiteness it stood in opposition to. This perceived oppositional relationship was bodily enforced in the nation's armed forces, which absorbed Mexicans into the main ranks but held African Americans apart, from the latrines to the blood banks.

There are several important theoretical points that come through from a view of these chapters in their totality. While, as discussed in the introduction, an important move has been made among scholars to insist upon the specificity of the

⁶California Constitutional Convention and J. Ross Browne, *Report of the Debates in the Convention of California, on the Formation of the State Constitution, in September and October, 1849* (Washington: Printed by John T. Towers, 1850), 49-50.

racism afflicting different not-white people in the United States, the retention of race as an analytical concept has resulted in a number of problems, some of which I have attempted to illustrate in the preceding chapters. Though much American scholarship has moved away from the limited black and white framework of ‘race relations’, there is still presumed to be a fundamental divide between white and not-white. This has had a number of consequences that have been evident in the examinations made here, including an often mistaken presumed commonality between what are understood to be ‘racial’ relationships and, relatedly, the problematic treatment of whiteness as ‘the source and maintaining force of the systems of meaning that position some as superior and others as subordinate,’ as Ian Haney López puts it.⁷

Though the authors whose work I have cited in the empirical chapters do not cite Haney López’s formulation, they have in a number of instances placed whiteness at the centre of social conflicts in question. It has been imagined as a key pre-requisite to assimilation. As we saw in Chapter Five, several authors have asserted that Mexicans’ ability to move into the suburbs of Los Angeles illustrates white peoples’ acceptance of them as fellow whites. As we saw in Chapter Six, historians examining the Zoot Suit Riots have explained the servicemen’s behaviour as an effort to defend their whiteness, seemingly imagining whiteness as the definitive source of their identity and social being. To suppose that whiteness is the ‘maintaining force’ of racism, or that white people are primarily and continually motivated by protecting their whiteness and denying or granting it to others necessarily supposes a general structure to racism and thus the relations in which it is present.

What the empirical examples considered here suggest is that, on the contrary, whiteness is an amorphous and frequently intangible entity. In legal terms, as we have seen, while elaborate and meticulous guidelines were often put in place to define blackness and inscribe it in daily life, whiteness was often left undefined. While Mexicans’ legal categorisation as white often did little to secure their equality in practical terms, the legal imposition of blackness was very much enforced in practice. The *Perez* case illustrates the distinction. Andrea Perez’s legal whiteness might not have mattered in other areas of her life. However, as in the examples of riot discourse we have just examined, her whiteness became solid and tangible in juxtaposition with her fiancé’s blackness on their marriage license application. That Perez’s non-

⁷ Ian Haney López, *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 31.

European ancestry never became a matter of explicit discussion during the trial illustrates the fact that the maintenance of black isolation, rather than the protection of whiteness, was far more at stake in the battle to save the state's anti-miscegenation statute. As we have seen, not only in the field of classification law, but in the management of the United States military and of course in the festering geography of Los Angeles, the boundaries erected around black people has been far more durable than those erected around white people.

It is perhaps important to emphasise that I am not making an inverse argument here. I do not wish to claim, in other words, that the construction of blackness fuels American racism generally. Veering toward this sort of logic, the historian John Hope Franklin, the Chairman of President Clinton's Board on Race and Reconciliation, once commented in regard to the racism experienced by Latinos, Asians and others: 'This country cut its eyeteeth on racism with black-white relations...They learned to do this to other people at other times because they'd already become experts. This is the way we started this.'⁸ As noted in the Introduction, many authors have insisted upon the folly in treating the relations of other oppressed groups as secondary 'extensions to black/white relations.'⁹ My point in stressing the uniquely durable boundary around blackness in the United States is precisely that there is no central unifying force to different instances of racism but that each arises in the interplay of particular interests and conditions.

It is indeed the case, as we saw clearly in Chapter Three in the congressional debates on Mexican immigration, that anti-black ideology informed the ideological interpretations of Mexicans and other peoples, and was often directly evoked to draw out supposed similarities and differences in the qualities of each group as well as the conditions under which Mexicans were used as labourers in the country. However, even when each group was subject to seemingly the same discourses and practices, the results were not always the same. If, as we saw in Chapter Five, both blacks and Mexicans were among the 'colored races' California real estate agents endeavored to keep from encroaching 'territory' of the 'white race,' some forty years later few

⁸ Peter Baker, "A Splinter on the Race Advisory Board - First Meeting Yields Divergent Views on Finding 'One America'," *Washington Post* 1997: a4.

⁹ Tomas Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines : The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 215-16, supra 4.

Mexicans remained in the Watts ghetto when it burned.¹⁰ Furthermore while both groups may have been subject to some of the same practices in a particular period, in other aspects of life in the same historical moment, they were treated in starkly different terms. Mexicans could, therefore, with black people have their access to a local swimming pool restricted to one specially designated day during the week, and at the same time be fully integrated into the armed forces while blacks were held apart. These complexities, I believe, show the problems with conceptualising race – whether as the construction of whiteness or blackness – as the ‘maintaining force’ of racism, rather than its product.

The idea that race or the belief in race fuels racism and social division, rather than the other way around, is complicated by the fact that, as we have seen in the several times in this thesis, a commitment to biological or naturally fixed notions of race are by no means necessary for commitment to the social projects of racism. We have seen this from the moment that American anti-black racism began to emerge. As discussed in the Introduction, in 1790, St. George Tucker, ambivalent to doctrines of black people’s inherent inferiority, lobbied simultaneously for the end of slavery and the imposition of civic and social inferiority of the freedmen. To counter the idea that freeing the slaves would require incorporating them, a possibility full of political difficulties, he did not seek to evoke ‘natural science.’ ‘Shall we not,’ he asked, ‘relieve the necessities of the naked diseased beggar, unless we will invite him to a seat at our table; nor afford him shelter from the inclemencies of the night air, unless we admit him also to share our bed?’¹¹ For Tucker, the exclusion of former slaves and those associated with them did not require special scientific justifications – ‘have not men when they enter into a state of society, a right to admit or exclude any description of persons as they think proper?’¹²

As we have just seen, unlike Jefferson’s claimed anxiety about the freed slave ‘staining the blood of his master’ and his assertion that ‘he [must be] removed beyond the reach of mixture’, Surgeon General James McGee did not appeal to ‘difference fixed in nature’ when he insisted that black people’s blood donations must not be

¹⁰ Serena Preusser, "Color Question in California Reveals Many Problems," *California Real Estate* 1927, 35.

¹¹ St. George Tucker, *A Dissertation on Slavery* (Bedford, Massachusetts: Applewood Books, 1796), 89-90.

¹² *Ibid.*, 89.

mixed 'indiscriminately' with that of white people. In fact he explicitly asserted that such separation had no sound biological basis.¹³ As we also saw in the last chapter the army's official rationale for continuing black segregation also explicitly denied 'racial distinctions' but asserted that order could only be maintained by recreating the divisions that existed in American social life. I do not dispute, of course, that many, many people genuinely believed in race and that these beliefs informed their behaviour. I raise these examples to illustrate, however, that at the heart of supposedly racial division is not difference but power; and we should examine these divisions with that in mind. Secondly these examples illustrate that treating race as an inevitable social reality, rather than an innate, natural or biological fact, in no way necessarily disrupts the operation of racist policies.

7.3 Historical particularity and political commonality

There are some political and analytical questions that are important to consider with regard to both the argument that race is an invalid analytical concept and that, relatedly, racisms are specific and distinct. To begin, it is important to state that rejecting race as a motor of social relations, and that racism cannot be envisioned as a general force is not to deny the important epistemological, political and methodical linkages between different instances of racism. Where there are important linkages and overlaps in racist ideologies and the practices from which they emerge as well as those which they inspire, we must understand them in terms primarily of power and not in their own idiom. To suppose that unlike other conflicts of power these are determined by difference necessarily predisposes analysis in way that makes particular aspects of these social relations salient but obscures others which might be equally as important. Drawing out the divergences between the experiences of Mexican and African Americans, or between any other groups, is not to say that political solidarity between marginalised groups is not worth pursuing, or that, for scholars the moments of cultural, political, personal intimacy between them are not worth exploring. I simply suggest that relations between oppressed ethnic groups are just as complex as any other set of relations.

¹³ Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (Richmond, VA: J. W. Randolph, 1853), 155. Memorandum, the Surgeon General for Assistant Secretary McCloy, 3 September 1941. MacGregor and Nalty, eds., *Blacks in the United States Armed Forces: Basic Documents*, 138.

The reluctance to abandon race as an explanatory concept for fear of losing the ability to delineate racism has also been tied to particular political concerns about the relations between groups of colour. Juan Perea, for example, expresses the concern that the paradigmatic emphasis on anti-black racism has led some African American writers to view 'all non-Black minorities as aspiring immigrants, on their way to whiteness, [which] negates both history and the deep-seated racism faced by many Latinos/as. Yet this view allows some Black writers to see Blacks as uniquely victimized by racism.'¹⁴ As cited in the Introduction, Perea asserts 'that mutual and particularized understandings of racism as it affects all people of color has the potential to enhance our abilities to understand each other and join together to fight the common evil of racism.'¹⁵ Chicana activist and writer Elizabeth Martinez similarly suggests that lack of knowledge about Latinos' experiences of racism negatively impacts relations between them and African Americans. She writes:

Sometimes the problem seems so clear. Last year I showed slides of Chicano history to an Oakland high school class with 47 African Americans and three Latino students. The images included lynchings and police beatings of Mexicans and other Latinos, and many years of resistance. At the end one Black student asked, "Seems like we have had a lot of experiences in common - so why can't Blacks and Mexicans get along better?" No answers, but there was the first step: asking the question.¹⁶

I would suggest, however, that emphasising 'shared history' or 'the common evil of racism' is no panacea. The fact that Mexicans and blacks share prisons, prison-like classrooms and heavily policed, heavily deprived urban neighbourhoods in many cities probably gives them an inkling that they share some conditions - as well as a clear view of those that they do not. Recall that after the Watts riots, while some

¹⁴ Juan F. Perea, "The Black/White Binary Paradigm of Race: The "Normal Science" Of American Racial Thought," *California Law Review* 85(1997): 1231-32.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 1213.

¹⁶ Elizabeth Martinez, "Seeing More Than Black and White: Latinos, Racism and the Cultural Divides," *Z Magazine* 7, no. 5 (1994).

Mexican American activists and the Governors' Commission on the Riots suggested that Mexicans shared the same conditions as African Americans, Watts resident Frieta Shaw testified to the Commission that 'Mexicans get an education, the thing they do is move away from the area where they have lived and move over some place else.'¹⁷ Conceptualising 'racism as it affects all people of color', even if such a discussion is particularised and attuned to specificities, cannot change the fact that sometimes these groups have distinctly different interests precisely because there is no 'common' racism.

If the assertion of a common enemy as a political strategy is complicated by the complexity and dissymmetry of these groups' histories, it can also be obstructive as an analytical starting point. Alex Saragoza's critique of the 'Us vs. Them' narrative that has frequently emerged within Chicano historiography is useful to consider:

[T]o stress the overt oppression of Chicanos, and/or their explicit resistance to it, leads only to a partial view of the past and to an incomplete understanding of the historical effects of racism, sexism, and capitalism.¹⁸

Though Saragoza's intervention refers to Chicano historiography specifically, his observation readily applies to other contexts. 'Us vs. them' readings of history homogenise the experiences of 'us,' both across different groups and within them, obscuring differences in the multiple subjective and material positions these many people and individuals occupy. At the same time, they also frequently offer falsely monolithic and shallow understandings of 'them,' the white people identified as oppressors.

Part of the problem is the way that, as Eric Arnesen points out, whiteness is analytically conceptualized in a way that often makes it interchangeable with white

¹⁷ Josh Sides, *L.A. City Limits : African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 111-12.

¹⁸ Alex M. Saragoza, "Recent Chicano Historiography: An Interpretive Essay," *Aztlan* 19, no. 1 (1990), 49-50.

supremacy and a set of beliefs about racial “Others” and oneself.’¹⁹ As we saw in Chapter One, while later historians have asserted that the congressional debates on Mexican immigration uniformly cast Mexicans as degraded peons and never as potential citizens, a number of speakers asserted very different views, many of which affirmed Mexicans’ capacity for citizenship even if the speaker perceived them as unequal to the white Americans. Some speakers referred to Mexicans’ perceived docility and desire to self-segregate in order to describe them as ‘peaceable’ or ‘law-abiding’ citizens. Others did not use such racial qualifications. One Texan congressman asserted that in his district, ‘the Mexican...has been a pretty good, loyal citizen, those who are natives.’ He commented further that ‘[a] high-class Mexican is as good a gentleman as you will find anywhere.’²⁰ The point here is that there is considerable texture and variation to racial ideologies and homogenising them obscures a full examination of the social context in question and the varied and complex interplay of interests and power.

7.4 Whitening power and racialising oppression

The concept of white supremacy or the description of power structures as ‘white’ brings with it the same sorts of problems as those described above. Numerous scholars recognise the risks involved in describing power relations in racial terms. Linda Alcoff, for example, footnotes a disclaimer that her use of the terms ‘white privilege’ and ‘white power structure’ are not meant to signal a belief that all whites are powerful or even that they are all more powerful than all non-whites all of the time.

The ruling elites are mostly white men, but it is mere ideology to believe that this translates into true empowerment for all of the white and or male workers, immigrants, prison population, unemployed, and so forth. The present hierarchy makes use of

¹⁹ Eric Arnesen, "Whiteness and the Historians' Imagination.," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 60(2001): 9.

²⁰ U.S. Congress, "Immigration from Countries of the Western Hemisphere: Hearings," ed. Committee on Immigration and Naturalization (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1928), 583-84.

white supremacist and male supremacist ideology to justify its rule, though it has no interest in truly sharing its power even among these categories.²¹

To begin with I do not believe that it is correct to suggest that the ‘present hierarchy’ justifies its rule with ‘white supremacist’ ideology. Supremacist ideology would be one that evokes the capacities of the powerful as explanation. For example, the mid-nineteenth century Manifest Destiny rhetoric used to justify American expansion argued precisely that white men were destined to rule the continent because of their innate superiority. However even in this moment, when such rhetoric was both widely acceptable and highly popular, it would be a mistake to assume it was ubiquitous. One Senator in 1852 commented:

If anything was wanting to prove that this age is an age of imbecility and false philosophy, it is furnished in this drivel about races. The Anglo-Saxon race and the Celtic race, and this race and that race, seem to be the latest discovery of the present time to account for all moral, social and political phenomena.²²

As much late 20th century scholarship on racism has noted, from the post-Civil Rights era onward, ‘color blindness’ has been a far more salient political discourse in justifying ongoing inequality than overt claims to supremacy. While various political factions use racism to appeal to white people (and others), this is usually evoked to exploit anxiety of or frustration with racially marked others. Themes that could be said to focus on white people themselves are more defensive than offensive, focusing on the imagined victimization of white people rather than their power or supremacy. Describing ruling ideologies as ‘white supremacist’ when they do not assert supremacist principles only inhibits our ability to examine their actual claims and flattens important ideological distinctions.

²¹ Linda Martín Alcoff, "Latinos/as, Asian Americans, and the Black-White Binary," *The Journal of Ethics* 7, no. 1 (2003): 10.

²² Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 249.

In any case, if the power structure is not really structured to be white, then why refer to it that way? Echoing Alcoff's disclaimer, Charles Mills, whose argument that 'White supremacy is the unnamed political system that has made the modern world what it is today' was discussed in the Introduction, writes, '*Whiteness is not really a color at all, but a set of power relations.*'²³ He claims that conceptualising 'white racism' as 'the contingent out come of a particular set of circumstances,' 'decolorizes Whiteness by detaching it from whiteness.'²⁴ In fact, such analytical terminology, in spite of the use of lower and upper case letters, does not 'decolorize Whiteness' it merely 'colorizes' power.

On the other hand, the notion that only the language of race can delineate the experience of racism, as articulated by Ian Haney-López in the Introduction, is equally problematic. While Perea and others have worried that not having 'racial legitimacy' stunts the political participation of Latinos, historically speaking, it has hardly been to the benefit of African Americans to be constantly conceptualised in scientific theory, common sense, and law as a race. The continual conflation of African ancestry and race, furthermore, can hardly be said to have illuminated the workings of racism. On the contrary, it has frequently meant that black people's historical and social experiences, or any sort of conflict or situation involving them, have been understood as racial matters, rooted in their 'difference'. The comments of the Mexican American activist cited in the Introduction capture the operation of racial reduction perfectly: 'The Negro cannot escape his color. He is black.'²⁵ Analyses of racism which depend upon the very terms of explanation that it offers risks continually reasserting those terms in new ways. The fundamental problem in these sorts of arguments is, as Rudolfo Torres and Antonia Darder put it, the refusal to see that the 'denial of "races" does not imply the denial of racism':

The failure to grasp this significant analytical
distinction ultimately stifles the development of a
critical theory of racism, one with the analytical

²³ Charles W. Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca, N.Y. ; London: Cornell University, 1997), 127.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Leonel J. Castillo, "Inter-Minority Relations. a Presentation Delivered at the Mexican American, a New Focus on Opportunity. Testimony Presented at the Cabinet Committee Hearings on Mexican American Affairs, El Paso, Texas. October 26-28, 1967. Inter-Agency Committee on Mexican American Affairs, Washington D.C.," in *Ernesto Galarza Papers* (Stanford: Special Collections Archive, Stanford University, 1967), 7.

depth to free us from a paradigm that explains social subordination (or domination) by the alleged 'nature' of particular populations.²⁶

Though insisting that race is neither essential nor transhistorical, the racial analyses of many contemporary academics reassert the same fundamental characteristics of biologist readings of race. Implicit in the treatment of race as a fundamental and autonomous axis of social organization is the assumption that difference, or reaction to difference, causes social relationships. The rejection of race as an explanatory concept, far from obscuring racism, is better understood as a sustained effort to properly expose it, moving the focus of analysis to disparities in social, economic and political power rather than remaining fixed solely upon the vocabularies of prejudice and difference to which they give life.

7.5 Analysis without race

I vividly remember the first time I heard the idea that race did not exist. I was working as a community organiser in Oakland, California. Our organisation, part of a broader local social justice movement, was founded to build the grassroots leadership of African Americans, Latinos and Asian Americans in economically deprived and socially marginalised neighbourhoods. In the year 2000, we, and other local groups, protested then mayor Jerry Brown's plan to 'revitalise' downtown Oakland, by attracting in '10,000 urban pioneers.' Plans were promoted to encourage private developers to put up expensive housing units downtown and attract new and better people to the city. In our minds, the 'pioneer' metaphor which likened the young professionals braving the wilderness of downtown Oakland to the 19th century image of the intrepid white Americans carving civilization out of a frontier inhabited 'only' by Mexicans and Indians was particularly noxious, though I doubt the symbolism was intentional. The obliviousness of the mayor's office to the connotations, and the clear disregard for the people who already lived in Oakland, people who were black, Latino, Asian, immigrant and poor, made it all the more incensing. On the day in

²⁶ Antonia Darder and Rodolfo D. Torres, *After Race : Racism after Multiculturalism* (New York ; London: New York University Press, 2004), 114.

question, my boss read out an interview Brown had given to a San Francisco newspaper on the matter.

Some people say you're just trying to bring 10,000 white people into the downtown with all these high-priced live-work lofts.

Brown: How do you know what color they are going to be?

Come on, who do you think lives in these lofts?

Brown: Well, that's kind of a stigmatization of nonwhite people. There are African Americans, Chinese, Filipinos and there are white people - and by the way, race is just kind of silly anyway because 99 percent of our DNA is the same.²⁷

I remember listening to this and I remember my reaction: a mixture of incredulity and disgust. What was he talking about, we asked ourselves. What was he talking about DNA for? What did that have to do with anything? These responses reflect a number of points. I had no intellectual reference, at that point, for the idea that race was 'silly' from a biological standpoint. My conviction in the reality of race, at that point a conviction so ingrained I was not even aware of it as a conviction as such, was not based in biology, something about which I had only the vaguest of understandings and no experience with. I, like my coworkers, was incensed by the mayor's reference to DNA because I felt he was obviously using it to subterfuge the fact that the vast majority of the people who would live in the lofts would be white and the vast majority of those displaced would not. I was incensed because I knew that however much DNA we had in common, races were real and there were real differences between us, differences that mattered and that everyone seemed to want to ignore.

²⁷ Phillip Matier and Andrew Ross, "Living Large in Oakland," *SF Gate* (2000), <http://www.sfgate.com/politics/article/Living-Large-in-Oakland-3328759.php#ixzz29w7juszv>.

Though I knew DNA was real, the same way I know Jupiter is somewhere real, I could not see or feel it. The reality of different races, on the other hand, was confirmed everywhere one looked.

Black people and Mexicans lived in poor neighbourhoods. From what I saw either in Oakland or anywhere else I have lived, white people largely did not. Perhaps one of the most striking differences between a West Coast multiethnic city like Oakland and a similarly diverse city like London is the distinct absence of sizeable poor white or working class white communities in the former. Black people and Mexicans were subject to violence and harassment by the police. This fact was made tangible to me during the time I spent working with victims of police brutality. Every case I documented, ranging from minor humiliations to theft and assault to an unarmed man beaten to death by a group of officers in front of a crowd of witnesses, confirmed to me the contempt of the police for people of colour. The fact that not one of the officers in any of these incidents was ever charged with a crime or even suspended confirmed the equal contempt of the city government. The importance of these observable facts, the seemingly clear definitive meaning in them, became magnified as I read more about the rest of the world. It seemed that everywhere one looked on the planet, Europeans or Americans or some other white people were there taking land or life away from people who were not white. To deny race existed, to muse about DNA, was to ignore these differences, and more than that, to deny a whole history in which white people oppressed not-white people, it seemed to me, *because* they weren't white.

I relate this story for a number of reasons. It again reflects the point I made earlier that entrenched beliefs in race do not depend upon notions of biology to carry out the work of essentialism. This story also reflects the complicated relationship between social analysis and social action. As much scholarship on racism in the late 20th and early 21st centuries makes clear, and as this anecdote reflects, one of the ironies of recent politics is that people actively concerned with or affected by racism are often more likely than those disinterested in the matter or even those promoting policies with exclusionary impacts to insist that races are real. If shared history is no easy remedy to the problem of coalition building, telling people committed to social justice that there really are no races does not present itself as a ready means of combating racism. In California, in particular, projects to end the use of racial

categories have been tied to an insidious politics. The University of California system's adoption of 'race-blind' admissions in the late 1990s, for example, caused a staggering drop in the admission of the black and Latino students hobbled by vast structural inequalities in state education.²⁸

Primarily I relate this anecdote to illustrate that race offers explanations that are powerful because they seem so obvious and so readily confirm what we already know, see and feel. It takes rigorous analytical work to look for what is obscured by the 'obvious.' It takes commitment to follow through the principle that race is not intrinsic, that the meanings of the natural signs of race are as contingent as those attributed to dogskin caps, that racism is not a preprogrammed reaction to difference. What do we gain by resisting analyses that resonate with people's experience and often seem to be politically necessary, by rejecting the social vocabulary of whiteness and colour, difference and prejudice that seem to so accurately describe our social world?

It is often supposed that desire to 'move beyond race' is rooted in hopeful naïveté. However, to suppose that a post-race future is one that is more equal, less violent, or more enlightened is to take a rosy view of human relations before the introduction of the modern race idea and also of those aspects of them in which vocabularies of race are not applied. Such notions seem to suppose that 'real' oppression is racial oppression, that the presence of race or racial belief incites people to greater extremes of domination. Again the assumption is that people are brutal to those they believe to be inherent different from them; again we are reminded of Winthrop Jordan's assertion that Africans' blackness was 'prerequisite' to their debasement. But as the helot's dogskin cap should remind us, 'differences' are made, enforced and their meaning reinforced in the practice of social relations.

The argument is not, then, that once race is finally done away with exploitation, division and inequality will end, precisely because race does not cause

²⁸ The race-blind policy has often been seen to benefit Asian students. Asian students make up as much as 50% of the student body in some UC campuses. Some Asian students and academics have charged that a tacit ceiling is applied to Asian admissions at other elite universities in order to keep them below 20%. Implicated universities, including Yale and Harvard, have somewhere around 15% Asian student bodies, or three times the proportion of Asians in the general population. Studies have suggested that in contrast African American students turned away from the UC system have been accepted at these institutions. The complexity of this situation illustrates the difficulty in assuming a 'common' racism impacting all people of colour. Jon Marcus, "Competitive Disadvantage," *Boston.com* (2011), http://www.boston.com/news/education/higher/articles/2011/04/17/high_achieving_asian_americans_are_being_shut_out_of_top_schools/?page=1.

those things to happen but is reinforced through them. Similarly the denial of race as a concept of analysis need not ameliorate our picture of the past. If we suppose that practices of segregation and ideologies of degradation did not arise from racial difference itself but the particular historical and material conditions in which such differences are invented, the picture is not any less painful for its victims. It is only fuller, more intricate, and more complete. It does not deny the presence of racism but rejects the notion that it could have emerged from the colour, qualities or 'capacities' of those upon whom racism fixates. Equally, declining to analyse matters of power in the terminology of race and whiteness does not exonerate social actors of racism but denies them the 'alibi' of race as 'human nature.'²⁹

It has been with this in mind that I have attempted to understand how and why the treatment and discourses applied to Mexican and African Americans could at once seem so similar and yet diverge so fundamentally at critical points. Rather than accepting the explanations of social actors themselves, 'skin and scarf skin', 'partly-coloredness' and inescapable blackness, docility and aggression, I have attempted to root these forms in the distinct historical processes of appropriation and exploitation in which these peoples became Americans and in which America itself has been built.

²⁹ Stuart Hall, "Race, Articulation, and Societies Structured in Dominance," in *Black British Cultural Studies: A Reader* (1996), 338.

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