

Border Crossings: Passing and Other[ed] Strategic Performances of Race
in African American and Chicana/o Literatures

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Abstract

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This project begins with an analysis of racial passing narratives, and considers the ways that the genre provides a useful deconstructive tool to better understand essence-based productions of race and racial authenticity within Chicana/o assimilation narratives. Through their critical exploration of the performative aspects of race, passing novels expose the fissures within these essentialist logics and in so doing they lodge their protest against the conditions under which passing could occur.

I explore the ways that writers and artists have strategically used genre, knowing that readers will approach the text with a set of expectations, only to complicate the narrative while still operating within its formal conventions. This project maps strategic manipulations of genre as the primary tool to produce racial identities or exploit preexisting notions of race and gender with the aim to

resist marginalization. I focus on the political discursive practices within both genres that judge passing and assimilation at the level of the individual. Such judgments stem from in-group policing that defines group belonging on the basis of racial or ethnic authenticity, rooted in notions of folk culture.

This dissertation combines multiple artistic forms including literature, visual culture and theater. I begin with an analysis of Frances E.W. Harper's *Iola Leroy* (1892), which I place in dialogue with W.E.B. Du Bois's 1900 Paris Exposition Photo Exhibition, "The American Negro," and Currier & Ives 1870s/80s comic lithograph series, *Darktown*. I then shift the disciplinary vantage to Chicana/o texts including María Amparo Ruiz de Burton's *Who Would Have Thought It?* (1872), El Teatro Campesino's *acto*, *Los Vendidos* (1967), and Américo Paredes' novel, *George Washington Gómez* (1990).

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Dedication

For my family, past and present, on whose shoulders I stand...
and for Meredith, whom half of the time I detest, and the other half I am indebted.

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INTRODUCTION

“American is a land of masking jokers. We wear the mask for purposes of aggression as well as for defense; when we are projecting the future and preserving the past. In short, the motives behind the mask are as numerous as the ambiguities the mask conceals.”
 -Ralph Ellison¹

“Just as tricksters redefine American culture, they reinvent narrative form. The trickster’s medium is words. A parodist, joker, liar, con-artist, and storyteller, the trickster fabricates believable illusions with words—and thus becomes author and embodiment of a fluid, flexible, and politically radical narrative form.”
 -Jeanne Rosier Smith²

Border Crossings: Passing and Other(ed) Strategic Performances of Race in African American and U.S. Chicana/o Literature begins with an analysis of racial passing narratives, and considers the ways that the genre provides a useful deconstructive tool to better understand essence-based productions of race and racial authenticity. Through their critical exploration of the performative aspects of race, passing novels expose the fissures within these essentialist logics and in so doing they lodge their protest against the conditions under which passing could occur. While the passing genre at once reveals the constructedness of race, it also demonstrates the persistent beliefs that race is product of Nature—and these expectations provide the opportunity for a successful pass. The comparison between “reading” race on the body and the operations of literary genre stem from shared practices. Both train readers to recognize and label what they see before them by providing the taxonomic hallmarks to view the object of study as stable and a product of Nature instead of ideology. Genre first trains readers to recognize familiar patterns through scripted tropes and literary devices, but it also trains readers to expect these patterns as unspoken contractual recompense between writer and reader. Stated another way, the pleasure in reading genre fiction comes from the payoff of getting exactly what one expects.

¹ Ralph Ellison, *Shadow and Act* (1965), pg. 55.

² *Writing Tricksters: Mythic Gambols in American Ethnic Literature*, pg. 11

This project is interested in the ways that writers and artists have strategically used genre, knowing that readers will approach the text with a set of expectations, only to complicate the narrative while still operating within its formal conventions. These are acts of literary “signifying” in which “one writer repeats another’s structure... but [fills it] with a ludicrous or incongruous content” (Gates 693). The literary form as pastiche is repurposed in order to advance a counter-hegemonic political agenda. This project maps strategic manipulations of genre as the primary tool to produce racial identities or exploit preexisting notions of race with the aim to resist marginalization. Moreover, this analysis is attuned to discursive methods that cross genres or within liminal, interstitial spaces, in order to produce race within a messy tableau of multiple identity formations, each in flux as subject position vying for social enfranchisement. In particular, this project focuses on shifting socio-legal formations of U.S. Mexican-ness as they converge with the black-white color line since the U.S.-Mexican War, 1846-1848. It analyses a large swath of competing representations of race across multiple forms including novels, plays, political and lithographic cartoons, and photographs, spanning the 1830s through 1990. My project makes its methodological intervention into the fields of literary and comparative American Ethnic studies through a sustained engagement with racial passing narratives. These narratives provide an interpretive framework to understand assimilation³ politics as they take root within the Chicano Movement of the 1960s and linger into the present.

³ My use of the term “assimilation” is mostly in line with Emma Pérez’ definition, which she reframes in terms of diaspora: “Leaving home because the socioeconomic conditions there force migration, thus traveling to a host country/region that may offer some economic and political reprieve, but at the same time racism and discrimination, compels these new cultural survivors to be as creative as possible as they move through power” (81). I also view assimilation as coercive, two-way process between the host/dominant culture and othered subjects that is limited for people of color. However, I situate assimilation within diaspora because of the temporal dimensions and performative aspects shift over generations. This rethinking in terms of diaspora certainly accounts for the moment of border crossing and racialized power relations under capitalism and patriarchy. It also provides methods of resistance against coercive cultural “erasure.” The questions I ask in this project, however, take into account subjectivities that understand themselves as properly belonging within the nation—they do not “leav[e] home” unless metaphorically, as they already are home. There is no option but “to live inside with a difference” (83). For

Acts of passing and assimilation are not an intuitive match given that they involve bodies that are racially-coded and read in contradictory ways. Each is anchored to its distinct sets of geo-historical factors—passing in relation to slavery and Jim Crow segregation; assimilation in relation to figures once alien, now partially-enfranchised, yet nevertheless relegated to margins of U.S. society. In terms of race, passing begins a physical embodiment indistinguishable from dominant the group, whereas assimilation begins with the assumption of difference, but that difference is shed or minimized in order to move closer to the core. Stated another way, in a U.S. context, bodies that can pass for white must appear white, whereas bodies that are pressured to assimilate—at least since the mid-twentieth century onward—generally tend to be those that are racially overdetermined and cannot pass for white. Despite these differences in embodiment, however, the two processes overlap: they are both self-fashionings that develop as a strategic response to U.S. white supremacy, the denial of full citizenship rights, and the resulting de facto exclusionary practices that block access to social institutions and economic resources. I argue that both processes are linked by their performative responses to systemic coercion. Although they operate within and, hence, sustain dominant racial logics, they also siphon resources⁴ that enable the subject’s survival under a racially-ordered state regime—which is why my analysis emphasizes the economic ceilings that spur both acts. To this point, my analysis focuses on the economic crises in communities of color spurred by racial capitalism, restricted access to resources, and race-based labor stratification, and focuses on the systemic, economic motivations

temporal dimensions of assimilation, I turn to Juan Bruce-Novoa, “Dialogical Strategies, Monological Goals,” which accounts for the temporal erasures ascribed to assimilation processes as a result of Chicano nationalism, its unifying master narratives, and policing of group belonging. Additionally, my focus on assimilation focuses on the realms of cultural and state-sponsored institutions, while recognizing that for racialized subjects, full abstracted citizenship remains inaccessible.

⁴ To demonstrate this, I turn to Louis Chude-Sokei’s example of Bert Williams in *The Last Darky*, in which Williams uses the economic gains of his black-on-black minstrel performance in order to foster the creative talents of early Harlem Renaissance artists (27). See footnote 93 for a more detailed account.

that fuel passing and assimilation rather than the deficiencies of treacherous individuals.⁵ While both acts are the products of separate histories, this project aims to show that that these histories do overlap, that U.S. racial productions are often cross-constituting, and that these intersections reveal moments where both groups are the result of the same hegemonic forces.

This project focuses on another similarity that makes the passing genre a useful analytic for reading assimilation narratives. I focus on the political discursive practices within both genres that judge passing and assimilation at the level of the individual. Such judgments stem from in-group policing that defines group belonging on the basis of racial or ethnic authenticity, rooted in notions of folk culture.⁶ Therefore, characters that choose to cross the color line or to adapt to dominant institutional codes of behavior are frequently met with accusations of racial self-hatred, group betrayal, and individual treachery, often understood within misogynistic terms. As the texts suggest, the authenticity and loyalty discourses I analyze reify existing notions of race, and individuals are forced to perform within these scripts as a strategy to survive these subjugating forces—a tactic which Emma Pérez describes in similar context as “interstitial moves for survival” (81). As such, this analysis is equally invested in parsing out the injuries inflicted by dominant U.S. hegemony in addition to a secondary counter-hegemony via in-group policing practices, ironically enacted in the name of liberation.

While my project investigates multiple types of strategic performance—passing as the most popularly represented in U.S. literature—it must be made clear that this project makes no claim for a progressive politics of passing, nor does it claim that the actual act of passing (as opposed to the artistic representation of it) can function as a viable form of mass protest. Other critics of racial passing have already noted that the act must remain undetected if it is to succeed;

⁵ Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*.

⁶ J. Martin Favor, E. Patrick Johnson, Sonnet Retman, Miles Orvell.

therefore, its inability to announce itself prevents it from making open political gestures.⁷ As a result, any political analysis that this project can offer in regard to racial passing must restrict itself to identifying the political work that the genre itself performs, or to an exploration of how the passer may use his/her access to privileged institutions to support a progressive political agenda. This support can take the form of financial patronage, or can provide the insider's knowledge of "where to drop the bombs."⁸ This project asks whether the *material* gains of an act so unpalatable to many can enable later acts of resistance, even if the original act of passing ultimately reaffirms white supremacy within a dominant U.S. imaginary. It complicates current conversations by considering the temporal dimensions of strategically-deployed racial masquerade—often the sowing of seeds for future reaping—whose benefits are rendered invisible within a critical discourse that can only see the instantaneous crossing of lines.

To this end, my material analysis is related to existing debates around the politics of representation insofar as the material rewards are gained at the expense of positive public image from the subaltern perspective. These texts encourage us to look beyond dead-end analysis that understands representation in simplistic "good" or "bad" terms. Instead, they ask readers to grapple with the cultural and political work that multidimensional representation—simultaneously positive in one respect and negative in another—does in specific times and places. It is precisely because my analysis comes so many generations after the pioneering debates around positive representation in literature, art, film and later television,⁹ that I have the

⁷ Amy Robinson, Phillip Brian Harper.

⁸ This line is paraphrased from Junot Díaz's lecture at the University of Washington on October 22, 2013. In context, Díaz spoke from the position of a man within patriarchal societies. Díaz argues that men are not able to operate as feminists to the same degree as women because male privilege will always compromise their efforts. However, as an ally, men sympathetic to a feminist cause are uniquely positioned to draw a map that shows his feminist allies exactly where to drop the bombs.

⁹ I refer most pointedly to the debate between W. E. B. Du Bois and Alain Locke regarding the uses of art as propaganda versus art "for its own sake." Du Bois argues for need for positive depictions of black life and accomplishments as a cultural arm of African American uplift. See Du Bois, "Criteria of Negro Art." (1926).

privilege to build upon this legacy. This project seeks to complicate these debates by assuming a different vantage all together in order to view them afresh. Recognizing that representational debates have overwhelmingly made topics like passing or black-blackface minstrelsy objects of derision since the Harlem Renaissance, I believe that the fields of literary and ethnic studies stand to gain by reconsidering these acts in less absolute terms. While they still elicit strong reactions because of the harm they do to public image, I follow the lead of women of color feminist scholars who carve out differential spaces that allow for alternative interpretive possibilities.¹⁰ Reading within these differential spaces allows for the ambiguity of subversive work emerging from a performance that by all accounts would appear on the surface to be accommodationist. This scholarship locates performance strategies and acts of narrative signifying that destabilize the logics upon which they are predicated. While not all of the performance methods I discuss in this project are overtly subversive, all at least are strategic, and I endeavor to parse out the moments when the various performances are enacted to access resources, or towards a desired representation. What this means is that some of these performances will bear the hallmarks of non-threatening conservatism in order to conceal the purpose of the performance—to garner resources that can be redirected down the road towards a progressive agenda, as evidenced in my chapter three reading of *Los Vendidos* the use of strategic brownface through the subversive deployment of stereotypical stock characters. In other words, as the *acto* demonstrates, a trickster-like performance does not announce its con ahead of time. I hope to demonstrate that while these performances on the surface may appear like accommodationism or conservatism, the actors who deploy them conform to “acceptable”

¹⁰Daphne Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent* (2006); Soyica Diggs Colbert, *The African American Theatrical Body: Reception, Performance, and the Stage* (2011); Cherise Smith, *Enacting Others: Politics of Identity in Eleanor Antin, Nikki S. Lee, Adrian Piper, and Anna Deavere Smith* (2011)

parameters in order to remain undetected.¹¹ Once positioned, the performer can turn this location toward the subversive advantage at a later point.

Chapter one begins with the passing genre proper and Frances E. W. Harper's 1892 African American uplift novel, *Iola Leroy; or, Shadows Uplifted*, which I read against the backdrop of W. E. B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington's notorious feud over assimilationist¹² versus accommodationist representational politics. In the first half of the chapter, I discuss two types of strategic racial performance: performances of scripted whiteness through passing, and conspicuous shows of black respectability. I position *Iola Leroy* as an anti-passing novel written in the style of Lydia Maria Child's 1867 tragic mulatta passing narrative, *A Romance of the Republic*. *Iola Leroy* overturns the passing novel's narrative formula through its refusal-to-pass trope, which I argue Harper uses in order to emphasize racial solidarity and to showcase carefully-performed black female respectability in line with Hazel Carby's analysis of the Black Clubwomen's movements. I argue that Harper uses the "refusal-to-pass" trope as a readable sign of upstanding character—Iola is unwilling to pass as the heroines of Child's text do, even when to do so would be advantageous.¹³

¹¹ In his analysis of Houston Baker on Booker T. Washington, Louis Chude-Sokei refers to performing behind an "accommodationist mask" (*The Last Darky 77*), which is consistent with my use of Lauren Berlant and Houston Baker in chapter one to discuss racial prosthetics and the minstrel mask.

¹² Although modern day readers generally do not associate Du Bois with assimilationist politics because of the unpalatable savor of today's usage, assimilationism in a turn-of-the-twentieth-century context connotes a protest of systemic racial exclusions and a full, aggressive unseating of white privilege through infiltration into dominant American (white) institutions on terms of racial equality. Today's usage focuses on the coercive aspects of forced cultural loss, however, its usage in African American uplift—which Chude-Sokei call "assimilative nationalism" (99)—recognizes a willing adoption of performative markers of middle-class, gendered respectability as displayed by the talented tenth.

¹³ See Sonnet Retman, *Real Folks* (2011), on "signifying ethnography" and "modernist burlesque." My notion of conspicuous performance of respectability falls somewhere between Retman's two concepts. It signifies within ethnography, but not to comic end. I would also consider it a burlesque of respectability in its conspicuous performance and its strategy of drawing attention to itself, but it does so within the terms of realism. It is not burlesque in a grotesque or absurd way. Such in interpretation would only reify "whiteness as property." Rather, it is burlesque in its excessive performativity, attuned to multiple dimensions of spectatorship and meticulous self-fashioning.

The latter half of chapter one explores competing visual logics as the mode of argumentation around race towards the end of the nineteenth century. I place *Iola Leroy* in dialogue with W. E. B. Du Bois's 1900 Paris Exhibition photos as a meticulously-curated visual racial collection produced for the purpose of racial uplift. Du Bois's exhibit demonstrates the achievements of the Talented Tenth in the decades after emancipation. Within the context of the World's Fair's feats of human achievement, yet simultaneously against the backdrop of ethnographic racial spectacle, Du Bois's exhibit argues for African American social enfranchisement into the U.S. mainstream. I argue that he uses photographic realism, retooling this scientific medium as the foil to social Darwinism as suggested by so-called "human zoos" and popular race science. In the conclusion of chapter one, I contrast Du Bois's images with Currier & Ives's 1870s through 1880s comic lithograph series, *Darktown*, as exemplars of the type of grotesque racial violence produced through visual satire that Du Bois sought to refute by way of photographic realism. I use the *Darktown* images to demonstrate that racial violence is not just mimetically captured within art—it is also produced and disseminated there. I argue that these comics were consumed by white audiences looking to recuperate their threatened social capital during Reconstruction, and they achieve this by enacting revenge fantasies on visages of black bodies. I demonstrate that these images perform a social function akin to twentieth-century lynching photographs, but that the violence within these cartoons was dismissed due to the tenor of its "comic" vehicle.

In chapter two I perform a close reading of María Amparo Ruiz de Burton's 1872 novel, *Who Would Have Thought It?* This chapter establishes the genre conventions and reading practices that Ruiz de Burton invokes and subverts in her hybrid-genre narrative. I argue that, at its core, *Who Would Have Thought It?* is an inverted captivity narrative with formal elements of

the gothic novel and passing narrative, and rife with racial tropes from the minstrel stage—each used to lay bare the hypocrisies of U.S. attitudes towards disenfranchised *Californios* from the mid-to-late nineteenth century. I argue that Ruiz de Burton, like Harper, invokes genre deliberately to break with narrative convention and to jar her audience through a strategic defamiliarization of the genres' usual outcomes. Although Ruiz de Burton still delivers customary tropes like the marriage plot and the Cult of True Womanhood, she politicizes them by positioning her Civil War-era Catholic, Spanish-Mexican protagonist, Lola Medina, as morally and culturally superior to her Protestant New England captors.

This chapter interrogates the oppositional racial formations that occur within the microcosm of a single New England household, mapping Anglo-Saxons and Mexicans of “pure Spanish blood” against lesser Irish, black, *mestizo*, and “savage” Indian peoples. Additionally, I attend to Ruiz de Burton’s allegorical critique of U.S. imperialism, which she achieves through Catholic and Protestant role reversals and a refutation of the so-called “black legend.” Her allegory deploys the sentimental trope of unprotected womanhood and conjures the visage of the lecherous gothic monk which she inverts through the Protestant minister, Reverend Hackwell, who attempts to seduce Lola and trap her and her wealth in marriage. Through this reversal, Ruiz de Burton precariously positions Alta California’s landed *hacendado* gentry within the U.S. nation-state after the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo. I focus on Ruiz de Burton’s early use of intermarriage, taxonomies of Spanish whiteness, and New Spain’s colonial *gente de razón* citizenship practices as strategies to defend against social disenfranchisement and juridical land confiscations by Anglo-Americans during the California land grab.

In chapter three, I use racial passing as a critical framework to locate the gendered contours of assimilation and notions of racial treason in two of El Teatro Campesino’s *actos*. I

argue that misogynistic and homophobic logics fuel ideas of ethnic solidarity in this moment. Such logics are used to establish an “authentic” core and script recognizable signifiers of group belonging. I focus on two plays—“Los Vendidos” (1967) and “La Conquista de Mexico” (1968)—to describe El Teatro Campesino’s use of La Malinche as a signpost of race betrayal used to coalesce a collective Chicano identity around its shared derision of Malinche and discursively-similar assimilated “Mexican-American” *vendidos*.

I deploy a Chicana¹⁴ feminist hermeneutic in my recovery of La Malinche while rooting my analysis in theories of passing. Specifically, I cite Valerie Smith’s observation of passing narratives—namely, that those who pass are accused of wanting to be white instead of wanting to be rich. I compare discourses of passing and assimilation, noting that both are steeped in race loyalty/betrayal logics that foreclose interpretations of either act being performed out of the desire for social mobility rather than shame over one’s race. I argue that these exclusionary discursive practices consolidate monolithic identity formations at the expense of marginally-positioned members of communities, including the women who are either vilified or written out of Chicano-centered histories entirely. I demonstrate that similar to the gendered consequences of passing, *malinchismo* and assimilation discourses also punish women as irretrievable race defectors with innate flaws, whereas men who commit comparable acts are given leeway, and often enfolded back into the community once they have realized the error of their ways.

Chapters four and five conclude my dissertation with extended close readings of Américo Paredes’s novel, *George Washington Gómez*, written in the 1930s, but not published until 1990.

¹⁴ I use the term “Chicana” as a political and cultural designation that begins with premise that culture and its signifiers are in constant flux (Stuart Hall, 213; Rosa Linda Fregoso, 31). I situate my use of the term within a tradition of cultural and political resistance to U.S. hegemony coming out of the 1960s (Michelle Habell-Pallán, 8; Laura Pérez, 12), but also in relation to an additional level of resistance and scholarship emerging in the 1980s in response to in-group counter, sub-hegemonies produced through heteropatriarchy and the logics of machismo, their resulting narrative erasures, and gendered subjugations to male privilege with Mexican culture (Emma Pérez, Maylei Blackwell).

In chapter four I connect multiple threads from my earlier chapters, and continue my comparative analysis of passing and assimilation against the backdrop of “authenticity” politics. I critique in-group policing through prescriptive behavioral codes and authenticity markers—moments when performances cross from what Gayatri Spivak calls “strategic essentialism” into the realm of “gesture politics.” I cite Paredes’s self-proclaimed “proto-Chicano” political designation and his description of LULAC “Mexican-Americans” as “trying to pass as white” as my starting point to argue that *George Washington Gómez*, like *Iola Leroy*, is actually an anti-passing novel that also deploys the refusal-to-pass trope through the protagonist, Guálinto. I argue against critical interpretations that prematurely label Guálinto a *vendido*, thus locking his unwillingness to stand by his friends politically at the end of the novel within the loyalty/betrayal paradigm as an individual act of treachery, rather than as the result of uneven modernity or institutionalized violence vis-à-vis the education system on the Depression-era U.S.-Mexico borderlands. This chapter also revisits frequently analyzed scenes in the novel and re-reads them without the notion of betrayal as the primary mediating filter.

Chapter five comes full circle, returning to “signifying” as a critical strategy. My analysis turns to another form of subversive racial performance, which I term “strategic brownface.” By this I mean moments in the text where Mexican characters strategically playact white-supremacist stereotypes about Mexican-ness for the purpose of siphoning material resources to be redirected towards their progressive political agenda. I focus on the scene in part five when two of Guálinto’s childhood schoolmates, Elodia and Antonio lure white patrons to their restaurant, La Casita Mexicana, under the guise of “authentic” Mexican cuisine and cultural ambiance, but after hours, use the restaurant as a hub to organize politically around a “Spanish” candidate, Mike Osuna. This scene demonstrates concurrent uses of anti-Mexican tropes and the

Spanish fantasy heritage by *mexicanos* for the purpose of infiltrating Jonesville's political machinery.

Finally, in chapter five I further argue that the remnants of nationalism undergirding institutionalized Chicano Studies programs has not allowed many critics to recognize Paredes's proto-feminist arguments throughout *George Washington Gómez*. I return to genre analysis and argue that Paredes repurposes the *corrido* folk ballad into prose form, still towards a liberationist agenda, but that he expands the *corrido*'s traditionally masculinist mode. Through an interstitial, third space analysis I argue that rather than blindly celebrating male privilege, the novel critiques the crippling effects of an outmoded type of masculinity which are unsustainable under the emerging conditions of modernity and racial capitalism. He does this to the point of rendering his novel's only remaining semblance of a *corrido* hero, Lupe, a physical dwarf. Paredes uses the trope of hero-making—the mandate that Guálinto will grow to become “a leader of his people”—against the backdrop of the ghostly *corrido* form in order to question whether Guálinto, despite the privileges lavished upon him, ever had the makings of a leader. I then end chapter five with an intersectional reading of strategic brownface that adds the additional layer of gendered performance. I attend to Elodia's strategically-performed accommodationism as a form of double-talk that requires her to publicly perform traditional femininity and allow men to be the public face of the movement, while she privately occupies a position of leadership. I argue that through his anachronistic sensitivity toward his female characters, Paredes questions the patriarchal wisdom that stunts the development of potential female leaders in a community desperately in need of all its talent.

Considering strategic assimilative performance within the framework of racial masquerade, and exploring its discursive similarities to passing literature ultimately creates

opportunities for readers to shift the terms of their analyses. Chicana feminism allows for a differential mode of analysis that accounts for the seeming contradictions between representation political agenda and economic pragmatism, repositioning both as potential operatives of the same agenda. Using these theories allows us to consider the ways that these two separate racial formations intersect and diverge, and how both ultimately respond to shared systemic forces and cultural pressures.

CHAPTER ONE

“Dese White Folks Don’t Know Eberything”¹⁵: Public Sphere(s) and Racial Performance Strategies in Late Nineteenth-Century Uplift Literature

In *Publics and Counterpublics* Michael Warner states that subaltern counterpublics always retain awareness of their subordinate status in relation to a dominant public. Nowhere is this more evident in American history than race relations in the post-Reconstruction South. The challenge African Americans faced was both practical and ideological, as demonstrated by the well-chronicled feud between Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois—who both championed racial uplift, but bitterly disagreed in terms of strategy. This chapter argues that, regardless of the unsavory “high” and “low” aesthetic politics of respectability underlying these strategies, both men deployed meticulously-calculated vehicles of racial performance intended to reposition African Americans within a dominant white imagination, thereby securing greater access to resources, and removing obstacles to their uplift efforts. I trace the working of such gendered methods of publicity and performance in another vehicle within the black public sphere, the black clubwomen’s movement. Finally, I explore Du Bois’s 1900 Paris World Exposition photography exhibit and Frances E.W. Harper’s *Iola Leroy* as alternative uplift methods that attempt to blur the color line by re-situating bodies easily readable as either black or white within dissonant contexts. In doing so, I re-frame certain uplift narrative strategies as updated iterations of the familiar nineteenth-century gothic mode. I argue that “gothic uplift” at the turn of the century deploys inverted racial performance as a tactical maneuver. It deploys familiar gothic tropes to trigger well-established, unconscious reading practices, thereby priming new affective responses to familiar racialized plots.

¹⁵ Frances E.W. Harper, *Iola Leroy; or, Shadows Uplifted*.

WASHINGTON AND DU BOIS: COMPETING PERFORMANCE STRATEGIES

In his autobiography, *Up from Slavery*, Booker T. Washington chronicles his own struggle as a child born into slavery who rises through the Reconstruction South to triumph over poverty and ignorance through education and, most importantly, labor. Educated at Hampton, a black vocational institution where Washington also works as a janitor to defray the cost of his tuition and board, he eventually becomes an instructor, and establishes a night school program that would enable poor students to labor for the school by day, and to study at night. He later follows this model when he founds Tuskegee. By Washington's logic, the most effective means of black racial uplift in the years following the Civil War is to promote self-reliance by equipping the black masses to earn a living, and to become an integral part of the Southern economy. A pragmatist's approach, it nevertheless falls under scrutiny for its narrow scope and, especially, for the subservient repositioning of the black community within white society. This sets the stage for the famous feud between Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois, both of whom were champions of black uplift in the years following emancipation.

Washington's uplift project at Tuskegee endeavored to raise his students through vocational training which he hoped, in addition to giving them a marketable skill by which to survive, would also instill a strong work ethic, pride of achievement, modesty, and thrift. He hoped to infuse the marketplace with black artisans and laborers whose workmanship would create demand and produce tangible wealth for the black community. He states, "The individual who can do something that the world wants done will, in the end, make his way regardless of his race" (155). In his narrative Washington openly scoffs at those who pursue education solely as a means of avoiding manual labor (a jab at Du Bois's favoring of elite liberal arts education over vocational training). Early in his narrative, he explains that the antebellum master/slave divide

stigmatized labor with a “badge of degradation” (17), understandably fueling the desires of many to receive higher education in order to escape physical labor and avoid being further degraded.

To counter this perception, Washington makes labor mandatory for all Tuskegee students regardless of their family’s financial means. In fact, under his stewardship, the majority of buildings at Tuskegee are built by its students. Washington recalls:

Quite a number of letters came from parents protesting against their children engaging in labour while they were in school. Other parents came to the school to protest in person. Most of the new students brought a written or a verbal request from their parents to the effect that they wanted their children taught nothing but books. The more books, the larger they were, and the longer the titles printed upon them, the better pleased the students and their parents seemed to be. (155-6)

His narrative ultimately demonstrates that Tuskegee began to produce a slew of products (such as bricks, furniture and mattresses) that first financed and supplied the school, but then were purchased by local consumers in preference to those products supplied by more well-known companies. What’s more, he reports that in his travels he frequently encounters alumni throughout the South who make a profitable living and a strong community contribution by the trade skills they acquired as students at Tuskegee. Quite literally, one generation out of slavery, Tuskegee produces black citizens who create the goods and provide the manpower for rebuilding the South.

W. E. B. Du Bois harshly condemns Washington’s strategy because of its inferior repositioning of African American citizens in relation to whites, the ways it establishes the black community as an inadequately educated labor force. Both men represent the interests of a black public sphere—counterpublic to a dominant white public sphere—but they debate the tactical choices that would enable African Americans to gain access to the resources traditionally reserved for the dominant white classes: should the goal of the black public sphere be in the direction of an assimilationist or a quasi-separatist movement? While Du Bois’s approach

entails a full scale infiltration of culture like that set forth by Frederick Douglass—“ultimate assimilation through self-assertion, and on no other terms” (Du Bois 33)—Washington’s much more conservative approach attempts to gain access through the economic infiltration while remaining culturally separate otherwise. Both, however, depend entirely upon the perception of the counterpublic by the dominant public.

Washington’s uplift methodology sets out to prove, as the proverb goes, that “you can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar.” Du Bois, on the other hand, raises the question: at what cost are you ultimately willing to catch those flies? Shelving, for the moment, the distinct educational ideologies that fuel Washington’s and Du Bois’s camps, when both men explore methods of accessing the dominant public sphere, they make deliberate choices as to how to position the black race before a white public. Theorists Lauren Berlant and Houston A. Baker, Jr. offer useful conceptualizations of these methods of social performance. In her essay, “National Brands/National Body: Imitation of Life” Berlant discusses “code-crossing” which she describes as, “borrowing the corporeal logic of an other, or a fantasy of that logic, and adopting, it as a prosthesis” (133). She discusses code-crossing in terms of “wearing” another’s particularity that would enable a different performance and allow the subject to be read (or read oneself) differently. For example, in the case of racial passing, blackness or whiteness can be performed/abstracted depending on whichever prosthesis the person decides to don—granted, of course, that the individual’s physical person is racially ambiguous enough to allow an imaginatively viable code switch. Given conventional notions of race according to skin color, a light-skinned black person can more convincingly perform a light-skinned prosthetic than can someone with dark skin since, in this case, the ability to cross depends on whether the prosthetic being performed is believable to its target audience.

Returning to Booker T. Washington's performative representation strategy, an example of such prosthesis is the "minstrel mask" introduced by Houston A. Baker, Jr. in *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance*. Baker posits that theatrical minstrelsy becomes a prosthetic mask that Washington strategically wore in order to gain the favor of a white audience (already primed by racial bias and prior experience): the white audience not only recognizes this absurdly comic depiction of blacks as a familiar type, but they have come to perceive it as a valid code. According to Baker, "By misappropriating elements from everyday black use, from the vernacular—the commonplace and commonly sensible in Afro-American life—and fashioning them into a comic array, a mask of selective memory, white America fashioned a device that only 'counts' in relationship to the Afro-American systems of sense from which it is appropriated" (21). Thus, the familiar in real life is misappropriated through derisive hyperbole to create a theatrical character or type (the aforementioned "device") that is nevertheless grounded in reality within the white imaginary, and carried into the outside world beyond theater doors. The minstrel mask, therefore, becomes a racial prosthetic which Washington was able to perform before a white audience in order to gain their favor (and access their pocketbooks). Essentially, he is a black man performing a script in a stereotype-derived register that his white audience schematically accepts because it is grounded in familiar tropes and images that they understand as real.

In describing the black communities of his upbringing as well as those surrounding Tuskegee, Washington describes people who are ignorant both in terms of book-learning and personal hygiene. His anecdotes recall a people who steal, are disinclined to work, and who are easily swayed. This depiction hardly paints a positive picture of African Americans left to their own devices after emancipation, but it certainly establishes a starting point from which to begin a

“civilizing effort” modeled after white bourgeois standards. In addition, and probably what many of his critics might consider his worst offense, Washington takes a conciliatory tone rather than one that would demand reparation for the wrongs done to the black race. He panders to a white audience in order to get into their good graces, arguing that despite its cruelties slavery nevertheless instilled “self-help” and “self-reliance” into the slave community while it robbed white slave owners of these same virtues. Washington writes, “The black man got nearly as much out of slavery as the white man did. The hurtful influences of the institution were not by any means confined to the Negro” (17). Washington also flatters the white community by focusing on their support of the Tuskegee school during its infancy, their many significant financial contributions since, and by suggesting that the black community reifies white superiority by gauging black success according to a white measuring stick.

According to Baker, Washington deliberately uses these unflattering black representations as a tactical springboard that would disarm white audiences and present African Americans in a submissive, non-threatening light. Baker explains, “Washington’s narrator not only plays the role of a judiciously southern, post-Reconstruction racist but also supplies a preposterous character direct from minstrelsy to play the darky role in this condemnatory drama” (28). In doing so, Washington generates a conciliatory environment in which both races can co-exist, where blame for past sins is downplayed, and where blacks do not challenge white political authority. Appeasing a group that only asks for vocational training in order to supply basic needs also provides a simple solution to “the Negro question.” In order to advance his agenda, Washington needs to raise funds with which to launch Tuskegee, as well as to safeguard his work by minimizing resistance...and how better to accomplish these goals than by buttering up sympathetic white patrons? The minstrel stereotype fixes the “Negro” well within the

parameters of the white supremacist imagination, therefore framing blacks as deserving of white condescension because they are naturally inferior. Baker adds: “[Washington] struts minstrel stuff so grandly that there is no choice but to lay twenty thousand on him” (41), referring to Andrew Carnegie’s twenty thousand dollar donation to fund Tuskegee’s new library. By donning the minstrel mask, Washington creates an entry point for increased black access into the Southern economy, finding a way to appease the white imagination in a way that an assimilationist’s agenda, like Du Bois’s, could not.

In contrast to Washington, W. E. B. Du Bois advocates the uplift of the black counterpublic through another type of racial performance. Once again, the success of this performance depends entirely upon its reception by the dominant white public. Du Bois performs what I consider a bourgeois prosthetic, playing to all the markers of affluence and ability previously thought to be the exclusive property of whiteness. Whereas the minstrel mask strategically positions African Americans in a comically non-threatening, inferior position along a racial spectrum, a black bourgeois mask is meant to demonstrate black capabilities, and to argue that he is suitable to be viewed on equal footing with a white public, and to receive equal access to education and political rights. Du Bois’s uplift project would eventually subsume the black public sphere once full citizenship is extended to the black community—which could not happen as long as men like Washington insist on perpetuating an image of blacks as unsuitable members of the polity, but the rightful recipients of white charity. According to Du Bois, “Mr. Washington’s programme naturally takes an economic cast, becoming a gospel of Work and Money to such an extent as apparently almost completely to overshadow the higher aims of life” (25). Washington’s manipulation of the minstrel figure, however successful in gaining access to financial resources for the benefit of the black community, becomes especially dangerous in Du

Bois's opinion since the imperial age in which they lived continued to put Anglo-Americans in contact with other "inferior" races, reaffirming the black man's natural placement in a social Darwinian sense below whites, hence, unfit for full citizenship. Whether in the service of securing wealth or social rights, both of these points of view demonstrate how re-framing one's method of public self-representation can strategically determine his preferred entry point into society.

RECUPERATING RESPECTABILITY: CLUBWOMEN AND RACIAL UPLIFT

African American women as a subgroup struggled against a unique set of limitations—a double disenfranchisement¹⁶ based on their race and their gender. In addition to being targeted as racial subjects, African Americans endured a long history of sexual violence compounded with the indignity of being portrayed publicly as licentious and sexually available. However, by adopting a prosthetic of Victorian female respectability, black women were in a unique position to challenge prevailing perceptions of themselves, and to reinscribe meaning onto their bodies as survivors of slavery. Reclaiming black femininity and remaking it under the logic of True Womanhood made possible a collective uplift project rooted in the home and family, rather than in the marketplace. These spheres remain neither separate nor politically innocent. African American Clubwomen claimed domestic space as the site of their political intervention within African American uplift. Likewise, domestic space plays a key role in protecting white privilege by defining national values in opposition to black stereotypes, as my later analysis of Currier & Ives will demonstrate. Instead of pushing specific agendas around gender and class, the black

¹⁶ By "double disenfranchisement" I refer to theories of intersectionality within identity politics furnished by Kimberly Crenshaw (1993) and Valerie Smith (1998) who account for the compounding effects experienced by subjects who occupy multiple categorical positions, but whose unique struggles cannot be accounted for by groups who limit their analyses and political efforts towards solving each of these categories separately, thus further marginalizing these figures at the "intersections" of identity categories.

women's movements of the post-Civil war era tended to take collective form, based on the belief that it was their duty to "lift as [they] climb," and that their individual fates were bound to the uplift of the entire race—not just the "talented tenth."

In "Negotiating and Transforming the Public Sphere: African American Political Life in the Transition from Slavery to Freedom," Elsa Brown describes the active role women took in the black church after the Civil War—one of few sites where the black community could congregate as a public, and where women could voice their opinions. Most notably, Brown describes a communal attitude toward the black vote:

African American women and men understood the vote as a collective, not an individual possession; and furthermore, that African American women, unable to cast a separate vote, viewed African American men's vote as equally theirs...African American women assumed the political rights that came with being a member of the community even though they were denied the political rights they thought should come with being citizens of the state. (128)

This attitude toward a shared vote is indicative that suffrage (and uplift in general) would come as a collective effort, and that women would play a key role in bringing about change. The church and the home—both tied to the domestic realm—fall under women's domain, and were important staging grounds to launch the black women's club movement. The home is the first training ground for instilling morality in children, and teaching virtues that would advance the race. Before this phase of lifting the black race could take place, women first had to be made into suitable teachers.

The clubwomen during this period sought to recuperate African American women's sullied reputations. In particular, black women had to overcome prevalent views of their loose sexual morals—as opposed to the "respectable" (priggish) white women of the late-nineteenth century. The women's clubs launched a movement that would reconstruct black femininity by wearing a prosthetic of respectability, essentially transforming the daughters of ex-slaves into

[dark-skinned] angels in the house. Paula Giddings, author of *Where and When I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America*, describes the challenge of reworking black femininity. According to Giddings, “Black women had to confront and redefine morality and assess its relationship to ‘true womanhood.’ For the prevailing views of the society had not only debased their image, but had also excluded them from the mainstream of the labor force and continued to make them vulnerable to sexual exploitation” (85). In order to reclaim their virtue, black women called upon familiar social convention that would require women of respectability to fall under special “protected” status. Literarily, this is a device, often seen in all varieties of the sentimental novel, which evokes pathos in their audiences by removing a “lady” from her bower-like home life, and hurling her into harm’s way without the luxury of male protection. Black women had to rewrite their histories to evoke similar pathos so that a white audience could recognize them as sexually victimized by slavery and as the ongoing targets of sexual violence. Like *Vanity Fair*’s Becky Sharp who famously claims that she could have been a good woman on five thousand pounds a year, African American women also had to convince their audience that they, too, could have been morally upright had the conditions of slavery allowed them to be.

The first step to removing this stain is to reverse the perception that black women were complicit in their own victimization, and to implicate lascivious white men and negligent white women as jointly to blame. Fannie Barrier Williams—hand selected by a board of “Lady Managers” as a safe choice to speak at the 1893 World Columbian Exposition women’s exhibit—took up this bold task. Williams deploys “protection” rhetoric in order to suggest that on the shared basis of modest womanhood, black virtue deserves the same respect and safeguarding as white virtue. She argues that it is the lack of protection, and not a moral shortcoming, that damns black women to sexual exploitation. Williams strikes her blow when

she identifies the source of sexual violence against black women: “I do not want to disturb the serenity of this conference by suggesting *why* this protection is needed and the kind of men against whom it is needed” (Giddings 86). With this loaded statement she implicates white men as the very scoundrels guilty of preying on innocent black women, and admonishes white women for turning a blind eye. She states that black women’s “own mothers can’t protect them, and White women will not” (Giddings 87), at once challenging the myth of black women’s promiscuity while simultaneously casting doubt over white female respectability that would condone these practices through tacit silence.

By challenging harmful notions of black femininity, the women’s clubs were able to push an uplift project with women as its foundation. Through women’s recuperated moral integrity, the uplift movement could celebrate a resiliency unique to their race, as evidenced through their trials throughout slavery, to adopt a new mask for social performance—an all-important article in, essentially, dressing for the job they wanted—making black women the moral guardians of the black communities in much the same way white women were pigeonholed according to Victorian ideology. This, again, was merely a starting point for women’s influence within the uplift movement. Those sympathetic to Booker T. Washington’s camp certainly viewed this role for women as well within their educational framework. Since Washington’s goal was to instill utility, thrift, modesty, and cleanliness, each of these virtues needed start within the home, and women could receive adequate training to instill these virtues at Tuskegee-type vocational institutions. Along this line Olivia Davidson, Booker T. Washington’s second wife, argued, “We cannot too seriously consider the question of the moral uplifting of our women...for it is of national importance to us. It is with our women that the purity and safety of our families rest, and what our families are, the race will be” (Giddings 99). The pervasiveness of this attitude is

later reflected by the increase in homemaking classes provided to women in order to raise the masses up from so-called ignorance. This is not to suggest, however, that the women's clubs wholeheartedly agreed with Washingtonian uplift methodologies. It merely suggests that they recognized their influence within the domestic sphere as integral to a collective effort to raise the entire race, and that they learned to perform a variation of female respectability specifically tailored to themselves as survivors of enslavement. Furthermore, many women—Frances E. W. Harper among them—viewed their domestic role as a springboard to encourage ambition, a desire for higher education, and to strive for full citizenship in the style of Du Bois.

GOTHIC UPLIFT: POLITICS OF RACIALLY-CODED BODIES ON THE COLOR LINE

My analysis to this point has focused on visibly black-coded bodies. However, the racially-ambiguous figure of the passing genre introduces a number of problems in response to racial performance through the use of prosthetics. A frequent character in uplift literature is the mulatta heroine who refuses to pass so as not to betray the black race. Although this character's racially-ambiguous body does not automatically relegate her to the black race, she nevertheless chooses to align herself with it despite the inevitable hardships. In fact, her body sometimes is completely devoid of physical markers that would code her as "black"—she's often fair-skinned, blonde-haired, and blue-eyed—but she is forthcoming with her self-proclaimed blackness. Because of this dissonance between her phenotypically white, but black-coded body, I argue that the mulatta functions as an updated iteration of the gothic heroine in two ways: first, as a vehicle of identification for a white readership and, secondly, as a spectacular performance of black virtue.

In *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* Hazel Carby's analysis of Frances E.W. Harper's *Iola Leroy* describes the shift of the mulatta as tragic in antebellum representation to an idealized figure in an uplift context. Carby argues, "Historically the mulatto, as a narrative figure, has two primary functions: as a vehicle for an exploration of the relationship between the races and, at the same time, an expression of the relationship between the races" (89). The inability to determine her race according to physical markers allows the mulatta to move undetected between social spheres, and to negotiate between these groups as a physically abstracted go-between. Although this form of passing can be an over-embodiment experience to the individual, creating a hyperawareness of race within the subject, her presence in both realms (to use a cooking metaphor) "tempers" one culture into the other by gaining access where it is otherwise denied. She then is able to negotiate the value systems of both groups, and to find common ground, a psychosocial infiltration of sorts, based on her first hand knowledge of the intimate goings on of each world.

The mulatta is uniquely situated because her fair-skinned body turns her into an object of identification amongst a white female readership—those same women that Williams implicates in her Exposition address—who I believe were primed to read the mulatta's endangerment in the same way they might read of an "unprotected" white woman in a gothic text. According to Carby, "Iola, as mulatta, allowed Harper to use the literary conventions of women's fiction and to draw on ideologies of womanhood in her heroine's fall from security. But the mulatta also enabled Harper to express the relationship between white privilege and black lack of privilege, for her heroine situated her advantages and social position in direct relation to a system of exploitation" (89). Harper first presents Iola as a daughter of a Southern plantation owner, fully in support of slavery prior to the revelation of her pedigree. Harper then turns her into a gothic

heroine whose peril is twofold: first as an unprotected woman out in the world and, second, as a black person from the pre-War years through Reconstruction, therefore, no longer able to claim the protection a white readership would demand for itself. The rhetorical effect of this sort of framing endeavors to diminish racial differences by doubling Iola's white body and prewar sensibilities with the white reader's, and to evoke both sympathy and dread in a white female audience when this unprotected girl, who is so much like themselves, is sold repeatedly on the auction block and passed from man to man. This tactic echoes the clubwomen's recuperation effort by implicating womanhood itself (black or white) as at the mercy of bio-political paternalistic forces. Harper alludes to the gothic captivity narrative in the tradition of Wollstonecraft's *Maria*, and draws the parallel both to slavery, then more broadly to all women's lack of legal autonomy. It is a rhetorical stance that begins with an "I am you" position, likening Iola to her white readership, but then reverses it to a "you are me" subject position that resituates the privileged white woman as also enslaved. By implicating the reader—turning her bower into a cage—Harper deploys an uplift strategy that placates readers as it appears to unite all women, positing civil rights as a universal concern, and not solely an African American one.

This same method to promote self-identification between a white audience and a black subject is masterfully executed in W. E. B. Du Bois's collection of photographs on display in the "American Negro" exhibit at the 1900 Paris Exposition. These photographs represented black Americans across class lines and a range of skin tones, directly challenging the popular Sambo, Zip Coon, and Jim Crow images prevalent in the white imagination—icons that Washington exploits, and which Du Bois refutes because of their scientifically-racist suggestibility of natural white superiority. Among these photographs was a collection of fair-skinned subjects nevertheless coded as black. Like Harper's comparison between Iola and her white readers, Du

Bois provides visual representations of white-skinned African Americans through a seemingly objective, science-based medium that were *not* fictional characters conjured as a sentimental ploy for the advancement of a political cause. They were photographs of flesh-and-blood individuals who embody the racial struggle in America (and whose strategic presentation more stealthily conceals that they, too, are still a sentimental ploy for the advancement of a political cause). As Shawn Michelle Smith argues:

The European or Euro-American viewer who assumes herself to be white would experience a psychological rift in such an identification [with a legally-coded black person], perhaps becoming momentarily conscious of the violent split that establishes white identity. In order to sustain a unified image of the visual signs that constitute superficial whiteness, the white viewer could not help but see self in other. But in this identification is also the unraveling of whiteness as a boundary between self and other, for the image of this white-looking girl is in an archive of ‘Negroes.’ (594)

Confrontation with these images casts doubt over bold pseudoscientific assertions—such as that by Dr. Latrobe in Harper’s *Iola Leroy*—that one with a trained eye could identify racial markers (no matter how subtle) just as one can read criminality on the body.

In another attempt to reframe blackness before a white public, Du Bois introduces photographs of the black middle class. Unlike the images of white-skinned African Americans, this set of images is at first jarring because of the unexpected juxtaposition of fine attire against *black* bodies—which in and of itself ought to pressure viewers to interrogate the root cause of this dissonance. Smith argues that Du Bois complicates these headshot portraits further by suggesting composition similarities to nineteenth-century mugshots. Smith argues that “by replicating the formal characteristics of both the middle-class portrait and the criminal mugshot, Du Bois’s ‘American Negro’ photographs subvert the visual registers and cultural discourses that consolidated white middle-class privilege in opposition to an imagined ‘negro criminality’ at the turn of the century” (582). Smith’s argument reveals a hostile perception that African American

achievement is reached at the expense of the white community. In other words, each dollar the black community acquires is viewed as one *taken* from the pocket of a white person. Therefore, when placing such images before a Parisian audience, Du Bois explicitly makes the connection between the Anglo-American imagination, the rise of a black middle class, and the racist perception of rampant black criminality and incursion. His portraits of black middle class subjects are tantamount to mugshots; they expose the widespread resentment that crimes against the white community are being committed—that black progress is an affront to the “natural” racial order. Du Bois’s methodically-curated exhibit reveals the precarious catch-22 situation of black Americans: to work hard and prosper ultimately implicates one as a thief, yet not to prosper once the bonds of slavery have been broken affirms social Darwinist-informed segregation propaganda—which one might read as akin to captivity. Depicting African Americans in this no-win situation before a foreign audience would also help to dispel the easy interpretation that members of the black middle class were thoughtlessly mimicking whites by self-fashioning their success signifiers after a white bourgeois model. Of course, from an assimilationist perspective, the subaltern appropriation of signifiers viewed by the dominant group as exclusively its own is an effective method of blurring the color line. In this sense, if higher education, virtue, and finery signify citizenship, then the black community must commandeer these signifiers and wear them prosthetically until they become so common that they cease to be the exclusive property of the white community. Likewise, any markers that connote “inferior” black particularity—minstrelsy, for example—must be cast off if the stereotypical images are to be supplanted by more favorable ones, and the color line is to be blurred and eventually erased.

In regard to passing, my earlier analysis contextualized racial ambiguity within the gothic female-captivity tradition. Mulatta bodies in both *Iola Leroy* and Du Bois's photography exhibit are devices intended to evoke sympathy and generate self-identification between a white audience and a black-coded figure. Unfortunately, the mulatta also has the opposite effect. She is a symbol of transgression in an increasingly topsy-turvy world. Understanding the gothic text as one that reveals social anxieties [meta]physically manifested through the emergence of social terrors, the prevalence of the mulatta figure (both in literature and in daily life) reminds readers how easily and frequently the color line *is* crossed. Despite an anti-miscegenation mythology insisted upon by the *Plessy v. Ferguson* verdict—blatant denial in the face of evidence—the existence of the so-called “white negro” not only provides the proof of racial admixture within one generation, but it also indicates a far-reaching practice over multiple generations, readable through a single bloodline. Furthermore, the mulatta's haunting presence reaffirms the need to protect the sanctity of the family if, for no other reason, than to keep white bloodlines “pure” in order to ensure the rightful transmission of property. In “Miscegenation in the Late Nineteenth-Century American Novel,” William Andrews argues:

The ultimate purpose of segregation was to preserve those ‘natural’ barriers between races, without which miscegenation would inevitably occur. To countenance miscegenation or the relaxation of political, economic, or social barriers to it was to threaten the principle of racial purity on which not only Southern race pride but social and political order in the post-war South were based. (306)

The presence of mulatta figures then becomes the tangible reminder that instead of protecting their families, husbands and fathers endangered them by engaging in sexual liaisons that, according to the U.S.'s anti-miscegenation cultural fiction, ought to have been unthinkable.

This negative stigma hanging over mulattos might have been a blow to racial uplift if not for another inversion in passing literature—the white-skinned Negro who refuses to pass out of

responsibility to the race. We see this sentiment expressed by at least four racially ambiguous characters in *Iola Leroy*: Iola, Harry, Robert, and Dr. Latimer. Iola proclaims, “I am not willing to live under a shadow of concealment which I thoroughly hate as if the blood in my veins were an undetected crime of my soul” (Harper 233). This desire to inscribe blackness onto a white body for the purpose of uplift works as a symbol of accomplishment—the “talented tenth” displaying its value before a court of public opinion—as well as an affirmation of black virtue. Meanwhile, Harper wages war on two fronts: she must argue for the capabilities of *all* peoples lumped into the “Negro” category and, she must also dispel rumors that black advancements since emancipation are the result of “white blood” coursing through black veins. On one front, she espouses the need for agents of the “pure” black race to hone and demonstrate their talents and accomplishments: “Every person of unmixed blood who succeeds in any department of literature, art, or science is a living argument for the capability which is on trial before the world” (Harper 199). This is a framing tactic akin to Du Bois’s photographs of dark-skinned African American in finery, but it is one that overtly threatens white privilege and feeds white anxiety. Meanwhile, Harper uses the marriage plot as a device to focus, and then diffuse, the gothic underpinnings of her narrative. The constant threat in Harper’s narrative is not that Iola will suffer a loss of virtue at the hands of a rapist, but that she will be the agent of her own undoing by consenting to an interracial marriage. The opportunity to pass is ever-present in Harper’s narrative—it is even encouraged at several points—but Iola’s refusal to pass is a hyper-conspicuous show of black virtue, respectability, and restraint. It is a counterargument to essentialist stereotypes that would cast her as morally bankrupt, and sexually available. Finally, it is a strategy intended to diffuse the gothicism of passing by extolling the virtues of voluntary blackness in an ongoing binary system.

In a world haunted by mulattos, where physical markers of race do not always appear on the body, and where whites are in constant peril of mixing up with deceitful Negroes who threaten to adulterate pure white blood lines—or to trick white women into reproducing with black men—a mulatto’s voluntary self-identification with the black community restores some semblance of “natural” order. This is another method of white bodies performing blackness for the sake of affecting their perception by a dominant white public. I believe this performance reads partly in a Washingtonian minstrelsy sense—non-threateningly playing the darky. However, I would simultaneously reposition it as a Du Boisian spectacle of virtue, and place this grand unwillingness to betray “the black race” amongst other efforts to perform respectability in the same sort of recuperation effort that challenges scientific racism, rather than playing to it.

Whether in the form of a minstrel mask or a bourgeois one, borrowing prosthetics enables its wearer temporarily to role play in ways their own physical particularity generally would not. If an audience accepts these performances, prosthetics have revolutionary world-making potential. These same challenges faced by the black public sphere at the turn of the century resonate today, and perhaps we can deploy similar tactics in order to work through these problems. If a female presidential candidate needs to don masculine assertiveness to prove her qualification before a public unwilling to accept anything else, then perhaps that is her entry point. If a mixed race U.S. President self-identifies as “African American” on his census form—to the chagrin of those who insist that America is a post-racial society—so much the better for continued uplift. Whatever the situation, as the examples of the past demonstrate, clever manipulation of common perceptions certainly has the ability to reconstitute expectations and ultimately to exceed the performance itself, becoming moments of self-definition and self-determination.

CURRIER & IVES' S DARKTOWN SERIES: RECOVERING WHITE SOCIAL CAPITAL
THROUGH VIOLENT SATIRE

*Currier and Ives did not necessarily picture America as it existed, but rather as it was imagined—how their patrons imagined it to be or to have been, or wanted it to be.*¹⁷

Currier & Ives is best known for their nineteenth-century lithographs depicting sentimental and nostalgic scenes of Americana. Yet, in the mid-1870s, they released their now less-remembered series of racist cartoons known as *Darktown*. Numbering around one hundred prints in total—a small fraction of Currier & Ives’s catalog of over 7,000 lithographs—the *Darktown* series was wildly popular amongst consumers, and drove a disproportionate ratio of total sales (about one-third of the firm’s output by 1884), essentially keeping the company afloat.¹⁸ Directly inspired by Sol Eytinge’s earlier *Blackville* series featured in *Harper’s Weekly*, *Darktown* depicts “comic” scenes of black social mobility gone awry: attempts by African Americans to playact at bourgeois whiteness which inevitably yield disastrous results. However, unlike the *Blackville* series, the bestselling *Darktown* prints were produced and sold for private consumption as inexpensive wall art available to the masses for display in homes, businesses, and social gathering spaces. The content of these images capture the perspective of a dominant U.S. viewing public aimed derisively at African Americans broadly, but targeting upwardly mobile and affluent African Americans specifically.

While contemporary criticism of the *Darktown* images attends to their minstrel origins, what is conspicuously absent is a genealogy that accounts for the intensity of the violence expressed in *Darktown* compared to their less-gruesome antebellum predecessors. Earlier series like Harper’s *Blackville* and E. W. Clay’s *Life in Philadelphia* garner comic tenor by lampooning

¹⁷ Le Beau, “Art in the Parlor,” 34.

¹⁸ See Michael Harris, 62;

black upward mobility, but these series do not announce their violence as *Darktown* does. The blatant white supremacy that underlies the *Darktown* series pervaded the entire nineteenth century—and was articulated in political, legal, and scientific realms—but this series demonstrates a marked tonal shift that moves well beyond a winking antebellum mockery and crosses into the realm of post-Reconstruction-era revenge fantasies. I argue that Currier & Ives’s *Darktown* series, rooted in antebellum minstrel icons, represent the cultural backlash against late-nineteenth-century African-American uplift. I attend to the escalating level of violence expressed through visual culture, and explore the imaginative processes that allow comedy to temper racial violence while using both hand-in-hand towards restoring a white supremacist social order rooted in essential difference.

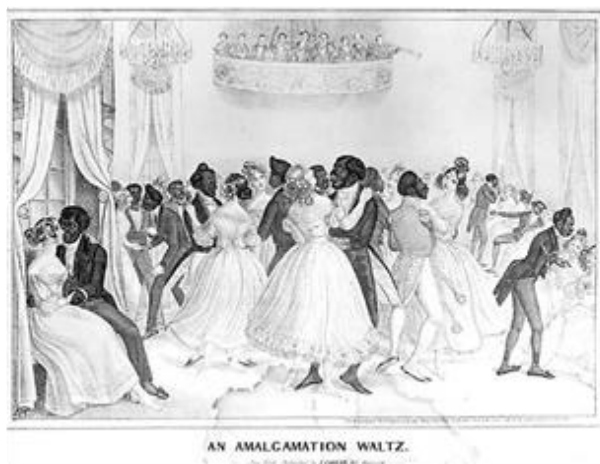
Granted, as images the *Darktown* lithographs cannot enact physical violence. However, they are no less virulent for their “comic” tenor. Racial hatred is imagined before it is enacted, and cultural venues such as Currier & Ives’s prints provided an all-important launching ground for the promulgation of popular racist messages en masse. *Darktown* sustains white-supremacist constructions of race masquerading as “nature,” and they provide the “common sense” racial logics that fuel later acts of physical violence. Despite the seemingly-innocuous spectatorial mode in which they operate, I argue that these prints are akin to visual lynching.¹⁹ They sanction and enact gruesome assaults on dehumanized black bodies as a form of public spectacle, partially for profit and entertainment value. More purposefully, they recuperate threatened white social capital²⁰ in the late-nineteenth and turn of the twentieth centuries. This chapter endeavors to

¹⁹ I would place the cultural work performed by the *Darktown* comics alongside lynching photographs as a social ordering mechanism, as discussed by Jacqueline Goldsby in *A Spectacular Secret: Lynching in American Life and Literature* (2006) and Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (1997).

²⁰ I borrow from Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of social capital as the intangible benefits of social connections, privilege, access, or favorable assumptions about an individual’s tribal affiliations that carries with it the ability to yield further

reframe the work of these images by revealing the role that racist satire plays within a popular cultural imaginary: I argue that it at once functions as an ideological weapon, while simultaneously erasing the mode of the violence it performs by dint of its lighthearted delivery vehicle.

DARKTOWN'S MINSTREL SHOW AND PRINT CULTURE ORIGINS



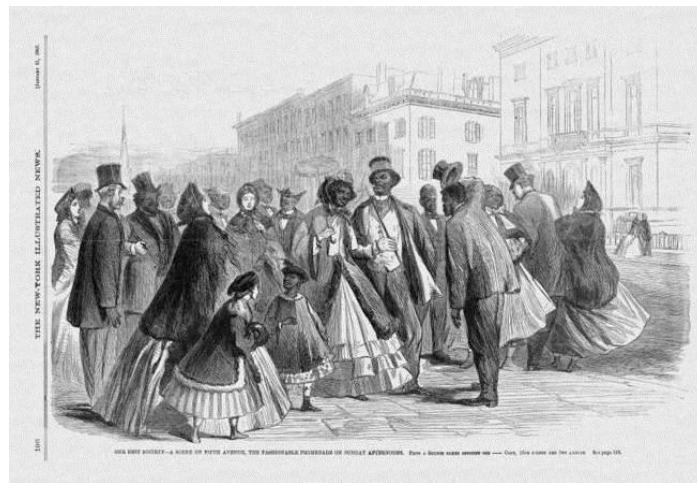
Patterns in racial-visual logics overwhelmingly return to a central nineteenth-century preoccupation: the fear of racial intermixture and the topsy-turvy world that uprooted racial power dynamics threatened to unleash. Anxiety over amalgamation and inadequate racial containment (as embodied in the mulatto population) haunt nineteenth-century racial discourse.²¹ To be clear, these are not concerns derived solely from Southern Plantation societies, but also in response to changes occurring in the north. Edward Williams Clay's 1839 Amalgamation prints,²² which include "An Amalgamation Waltz" and "The Fruits of Amalgamation," deride acts of race mixing. These scenes depict "unnatural" and illicit unions, and they reflect social anxiety toward interracial sex, mixed children, and the blurring of racial boundaries.

privilege or are tradable for other commodities. Cheryl Harris' notion of "whiteness as property" is an exemplar of social capital.

²¹ See Tavia N'Yongo, *The Amalgamation Waltz: Race, Performance, and the Ruses of Memory* (2009).

²² See Elise Lemire, *Miscegenation: Making Race in America* (2002).

Anxieties about intermixture only increased towards the mid-century with the noticeable presence of freely-circulating northern blacks—a portion of whom were becoming financially affluent—compounded by an increasingly vocal abolitionist movement. The fear of an upside-down social order in which “uppity” blacks no longer know their “proper” place manifests itself through the spread of ironic Zip Coon iconography. This minstrel stock character captures the anxieties and outrage—both Northern and Southern—at what would become of an America without racial boundaries. For example, an image in *The New York Illustrated News* entitled “Our Best Society” depicts a scene in which African Americans no longer defer to whites.



This image, printed on January 31, 1863, features a well-dressed African-American couple who stop to greet an acquaintance in the middle of a busy sidewalk on well-to-do Fifth Avenue, forcing white pedestrians from the sidewalk and onto the street. The couple’s young daughter stares down her nose haughtily at a white girl of about the same age, suggesting the hierarchical inversion taking place. Visual representations of African Americans such as the Amalgamation Prints and “Our Best Society” document the social fluctuations occurring from the antebellum period through Reconstruction, and that restabilize themselves to violent effect during the Nadir.

These images reflect the uncertain footing for not-yet white Americans²³ whose own identity formation was in flux. Moreover, the tenor with which they pictorially represent African American bodies signifies a strategy to restabilize tenuous social relations during this transition from slavery to freedom.

Although much of the content of the *Darktown* lithographs focuses on the so-called buffoonery of African Americans, this trope is certainly not unique to Post-Reconstruction arguments about racial essence. This messaging was central to the success of the antebellum minstrel show, and gained fervor postbellum as did the minstrel show itself. Jim Crow and Zip Coon had already gained currency by the early 1830s. They were hallmarks of the minstrel stage whose iconographic representations already circulated through songsters and sheet music illustrations. Jim Crow and Zip Coon represent separate regional and class types, yet their complementary absurdities demonstrated through a visual register the social need for paternalism and racial purity. They helped to coalesce a white working class identity through derisive proof of biological difference²⁴ as well as the social benefits of existing white-supremacist systems. Michael Harris argues that, “Both plantation blacks (Jim Crow, Sambo) and urban dandies (Zip Coon) were caricatured on the stage to indicate that both men were best served by being on the plantation” (54). These stage depictions echo rampant pro-slavery arguments that the black race is improving because of its proximity to superior white influence and, in some cases, a beneficial infusion of “white blood” into the black gene pool.

²³ For more on working class white identity formation in the late-nineteenth/early twentieth centuries see Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*; David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness and Working Toward Whiteness*; Eric Lott, *Love & Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*.

²⁴ Researchers will recognize the often reproduced icons of “Jump Jim Crow,” “Zip Coon,” and “My Long Tail Blue” as relief images from a larger “practical lithograph”—the cover art to the sheet music of “The Crow Quadrilles,” drawn in 1837 by Nathaniel Currier.

Like other visual representation of the time, Currier & Ives's depictions of African Americans followed a pattern of antebellum derision and Civil War sentimentality, ultimately returning to a hyper-resurgence of anti-black parodies that imaginatively confine blackness within safe, biologically-determined boundaries. William Thompson argues:

For many years prior to the war cartoonists exploited the stereotype of the Negro as a buffoon. Directly related to the popularity of the minstrel shows and the basis of Currier and Ives' successful series of 'Darktown Comics,' this image reinforced the widely accepted pictorial stereotype of the Negro as a kinky-haired, thick-lipped, wide-eyed, simian creature who provided endless amusement and mirth. (285)

While Sambo's legacy is always present in the *Darktown* plotlines, a large portion of these prints target black social aspirations and upward mobility through Zip Coon figures whose overreaching ends in disaster. And just as the popularity of the minstrel show continued to grow amongst working class audiences throughout the 1860s, so too did the appetite for lithographs that reaffirmed ideologies of innate racial difference, especially during Reconstruction.

This argument about inferior mental capability can be seen in "A Darktown Lawn Party." This set of prints²⁵ features a party of African American picnic goers dressed in their finery and enjoying one another's company. Off in the distance a bull prepares to charge the crowd. In part two of the sequence, subtitled "A Bully Time," the bull has stampeded the crowd, trampled one woman, gouged another, hurled a rather portly man into the air, busted the crowd, and dispersed the outlying members of the party. The gag in these prints is that the picnic goers are too ignorant to realize that they set up their picnic in a bull pasture. What's more, in their fondness for ostentatious colors, much of their clothing as well as the giant umbrella (intended to protect

²⁵ Most *Darktown* prints are sold as narrative before-and-after companion pieces, presumably for aesthetic balance when displayed as wall art, and probably to increase sales



their skin from the sun's darkening rays²⁶) is a vibrant red—which draws the bull's attention. The prints ultimately relish the idea that the subjects bring this suffering upon themselves.

What we find in the *Darktown* prints is the evolutionary argument that, according to Bryan Le Beau, African Americans even post-emancipation are “completely incapable of advancing beyond their previous condition of servitude to live like ‘civilized whites’” (“African Americans” 71). The “Darktown Lawn Party” prints echo existing arguments that African Americans need paternal supervision—that they benefit from close proximity to more evolved whites and, likewise, that whites run the risk of degeneration by being too intimately connected with blacks. In the end, the imagined threat of wide scale miscegenation and uncontained black mobility required a multi-pronged strategy to allay the fears of a world without the racial order previously provided under slavery. Currier & Ives provided the messaging as well as the ability to use the marketplace to define national belonging as defined through racial opposition.

MARKET(ABLE) VALUES: DIDACTIC CONSUMERISM AND NATIONAL BELONGING

²⁶ Parasols are an ongoing gag in *Darktown* given their function to prevent skin from darkening, and these characters are already dark-skinned.

At the same time as the nation was acclimating to emancipation and recovering from the aftermath of the Civil War, rising industrialization also emphasized consumerism as a marker of national belonging. As manufacturing increasingly moved in the direction of mass production and toward modern consumer culture—away from the home as the primary site of production and into factories—the home assumed a greater social function as a source of moral fortitude. Rising consumer consciousness led to an awakening of “good taste,” demonstrable through the selective consumption and display of mass-produced goods. Currier & Ives played an integral role in furnishing America’s middle-class homes with affordable wall art that announced their core values through conspicuous consumption. They provided an outlet for consumers to voice their ideological worldviews through their purchasing power, and then to put these beliefs on display. According to Le Beau, “Industrialization, urbanization, commercialization, and the development of a taste conscious middle class with discretionary income [...] created a heightened demand for commercial, mass-produced art. And that prepared the way for the wave of lithography that swept the nation, with Currier & Ives as its leaders” (“Art in the Parlor” 20).

In as much as Currier & Ives built the firm’s reputation on wholesome, sentimental, and nostalgic Americana—images overwhelmingly pious, and seemingly devoid of violence—the *Darktown* series was the profitable exception. The vast majority of their general catalog consisted of prints that reflected the tastes of Victorian home life. Currier & Ives’s prescriptive messaging echoed the advice of leading arbiters of taste, circulated in print through popular household manuals such as *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, or the 1869 *American Woman’s Home* by Catherine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe.²⁷ While the bulk of Currier & Ives’s catalog conveyed a romantic tone, intent on reminding Americans in a postbellum time of social healing of the great nation to which they belonged, the *Darktown* prints likewise instructed the American

²⁷ Le Beau, “Art in the Parlor” 19, 31-2.

public; they instilled a sense of unified nationalism through racial difference in a tone that is comical rather than earnestly sentimental. Their comedy reaffirmed republican virtues, demonstrating black unfitness for citizenship through hyperbolic visual logic, thus helping to ameliorate the residual Union-Confederate political divides through their shared civic obligations and oppositional self-identifications against blackness.

While the comic stock images from the minstrel stage played an important role in shaping attitudes towards race, their wide circulation through a variety of print media—illustrated periodicals, broadsides, songsters, handbills, wall art, and a miscellany of related ephemera—increased their ideological reach. Through exaggeration, grotesquerie, and visual violence, the messages contained in *Darktown* are amplified versions of much earlier, deeply-held racial views, made commonplace and exponentially more accessible through Currier & Ives's affordable, mass reproduction techniques. As such, Currier & Ives cannot be charged with creating an entirely new racist messaging; rather, they reflect and foster the anxieties, social debates, scientific logics, and popular white supremacist coping strategies of the time. To this effect, Bryan Le Beau argues that the firm of Currier & Ives does not itself espouse its own racial arguments; they do not attempt overtly to influence the direction of public sentiment in political matters. According to this logic, in the most generous sense, Currier & Ives was completely venal; driven by market forces, supplying the demand for particular messaging that was immensely popular with a growing buying public. Le Beau writes, "These prints demonstrate less an editorial racism on the part of the firm than an indiscriminate instinct for marketable themes—and racism was marketable" (*America Imagined* 216). I would argue, however, that Currier & Ives ought to be held to account, not because they created a new messaging or openly espoused a personally-held ideology, but because their money-making venture nevertheless

compounded existing hostilities, expanded the public forum by spreading existing anti-black sentiments across wide terrain, and inured mass audiences through comedy to visual forms of racial violence that justify racist worldviews and spur cycles of physical violence.

If the postbellum popularity of racist lithography signals a white effort to restabilize the nation's racial hierarchy in the wake of emancipation, it is hardly surprising that a racist cultural backlash would arise Post-Reconstruction, coterminous with the birth of the Ku Klux Klan and the onset of the Nadir. The *Darktown* images represent no less than the cultural arm of a social movement bent on managing racial interrelations and reestablishing the hierarchical structure after Reconstruction upset the familiar power balance. While Currier & Ives can be said not to have driven public sentiment deliberately, they nevertheless played a role in circulating images that fueled racial antagonisms. Their prints perpetuated and reified the white-supremacist logic contained therein. The firm's own motives, which appear to be primarily monetary, nevertheless allowed a forum for this backlash as driven by the marketplace. If, as the epigraph to this essay states, Currier & Ives's images reflect America as their patrons "wanted it to be," then the violence enacted on the image of black bodies, regardless of their comic tenor, represent imaginative revenge fantasies aimed at heightening racial difference as a rationale for a vindictive white supremacy amidst the growing record of success for African Americans during black uplift. If we read the popularity of the *Darktown* series symptomatically—as a mirror index or sorts—what does their popularity reflect about their consumers at the time? What stories did they tell their audience about the world they inhabited that would prompt catalog shoppers and storefront passersby to part with their money in order to hang these images on their walls?

IDEO-VISUAL LOGICS AS CONTAINMENT MECHANISMS

In most cases, the black subject was a reflexive signifier of whiteness functioning like a photographic negative and reversing the prescribed norm for whites.²⁸

As clearly delineated racial geographies began to blur in the second half of the nineteenth century, the mounting fear of miscegenation—always a threat, but even more so without slavery to dictate the terms of racial interrelations—becomes increasingly prevalent in the visual representations of political and scientific discourse. The trajectories of these visual narratives take myriad forms, but most are geared toward re-establishing those tenuous boundaries. Most of Currier & Ives’s postbellum lithographs featuring African Americans take two general forms: 1) nostalgic prints of the antebellum plantation life that depict mutually-beneficial, symbiotic black-white relations with enslaved African Americans as the happy recipients under paternalism—a visual analog to the nostalgic plantation myth;²⁹ 2) Overtly violent visual attacks enacted upon black visages that attempt to reestablish racial boundaries through rhetorics of “natural” differences between blacks and whites. Currier & Ives’s *Darktown* prints represent this second category.

This second category of visually-violent prints can further be parsed into sub-categories. I am primarily interested in those lithographs that use satire as their primary vehicle of argumentation to reiterate popular essence theory integrated into common sense vocabularies. The goal of this particular subset of *Darktown* images is to tap into existing arguments of biological difference as a means to restore a “natural” order: to reassure a viewing public that Nature will step in and keep the races separate when the law through human folly fails to do so.

²⁸ Michael Harris, *Colored Pictures: Race and Visual Representation*, 52.

²⁹ Currier & Ives also sold Reconstruction-era lithographs of Black political leaders, but this category of print is far less representative of the majority of their African American-themed prints.

Currier & Ives's created their fictional site, Darktown, as the locus of socially-upward black aspirations—playacting “whiteness”—that are thwarted because of African American's inability to conquer their own limitations as dictated by Nature itself.

The first of these biological arguments is, in fact, a social argument masked by scientific rhetoric: “taste” as determined by biological essence and in-group preference. The *Darktown* lithographs, chock full of their Zip Coon “darkies” in finery, make fun of black aspirations towards respectability. Through mockery, these prints attempt to lay claim to good taste as a marker of whiteness, thereby making black appropriations of these markers appear unnatural and thoroughly absurd. As Elise Lemire argues, sexual attraction as a matter of good taste in the nineteenth century was already biologized within scientific discourse as a function of Nature. Nature, according to this rationale, instills within species an in-group predilection geared towards self-preservation. As such, intra-racial physical attraction ought to be the norm, whereas attraction across the color line was a perversion of natural law. In her analysis of Dr. Samuel Morton's 1846 “Hybridity of Animals” published in the *American Journal of Science*, Lemire finds that according to Morton, “innate feelings of repugnance are evidence of species distinction.” Lemire concludes, “The corollary here is that those humans without this repugnance are violating the norms of Nature itself, as evidenced by their supposed ‘moral degradation’” (112-3). She adds, “Those who engaged or seemed to want to engage in ‘amalgamation’ were violating not only the precepts of what was termed ‘the faculty of taste,’ but what one scientist [Morton] termed ‘the natural repugnance between individuals of different kinds’ or species” (115-6). According to this scientific logic of sexual attraction, aesthetic judgments of beauty are by extension a matter of natural order. One finds one's own race and the attributes associated with that group attractive as a matter of natural in-group preservation.

Therefore, to judge another group as “ugly” or “grotesque” functions as a social affirmation of one’s own not-belonging to that separate nature category.

It is in this context that the exaggeration of black physical features in the *Darktown* series (such as agape, doughnut-shaped lips)—to the extent of becoming grotesquely non-human—reveals their true function as an imaginative process of consolidating whiteness against hyperbolic, quasi-non-human blackness. Although the images derive their comic value through exaggeration, and they are to be recognized as such, their messaging nevertheless retains its truth-in-advertising, with its roots in accepted biological theories. These comic scenes help to solidify unsuccessful African American attempts to appropriate white markers of good taste as the result of their innate penchant for bad taste. In *Darktown* fine clothes will be ostentatious and ill fitting; activities will run awry; overblown or misused language will reveal a weak intellect; “Nature” will prevail. Ultimately, this derision enables white America to situate its social capital within a biological locus or “sphere of legitimacy,”³⁰ to borrow Pierre’s Bourdieu’s term, setting the standard whereby all other matters of taste are to be judged and, in the case of African American self-presentation, to be found lacking.

Likewise, Cheryl Harris in “Whiteness as Property” describes the formation of whiteness as a category of social capital,³¹ sanctioned by society and protected by defamation law. Harris writes, “Whiteness as the embodiment of white privilege transcended mere belief or preference; it became usable property, the subject of the law’s regard and protection” (110), and good taste, in part, through a process of social exclusion represented the essence around which whiteness coalesced. This speaks to elements of white privilege that move beyond normative, “invisible” functions as described by George Lipsitz. Rather, Harris’s assessment when applied to politics

³⁰ See Pierre Bourdieu, “The Social Definition of Photography,” 177.

³¹ Bourdieu in “Forms of Capital,” 21.

of good taste overtly claim whiteness as the standard of measurement based on biological mandates. I argue that good taste, as a function of whiteness, is cast as a “natural” boundary that excludes African Americans precisely because it is constructed *in opposition* to blackness, thus always precluding it.

Black affluence is easily mocked precisely because, imaginatively speaking, affluence does not “belong” to them. As such, satire—whether caricatured in lithography, upon the minstrel stage, or on the writer’s page—becomes an effective weapon in demonstrating black unfitness for assimilation into mainstream society³² on the basis of natural inferiority as proven by the visual absurdity of “uppity” African Americans putting on airs, or trying to “act white.” In his study of black male bodies in nineteenth-century American sculpture, Michael Hatt describes the work *Darktown* performs in returning upwardly mobile African Americans to their “rightful” place in American society. Hatt writes:

Negroes were well-known for being bumptious and uppity, for ostentatious display, for getting ideas above their station. That is exactly what is at stake here: keeping the free African American in his place. The *Darktown* negroes are stepping outside their class position, trying to behave like the bourgeoisie. This aspiration is clearly beyond the stupid, clumsy and inept characters in the images” (33).

Once good taste becomes naturalized as white property, images of affluent African Americans can either be comically dismissed as mere mimicry, or treated as a socio-economic incursion akin to the threat miscegenation, thereby justifying overt violence as a defensive measure. The two reactions, however, cannot be separated. Even a categorical dismissal of comedic form cannot erase the messages that these images infuse into social discourse. These images, however lighthearted in tone they may appear, nevertheless operate as visually-projective revenge fantasies that fuel public sentiment.

³² See Robert Toll, *Blacking Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth-Century America*.

These images imaginatively enact violence on black bodies, but then displace the source of that violence. Again, these visual arguments are not unique to the *Darktown* prints. Similar comics including E. W. Clay's "Life in Philadelphia" Series had circulated in Philadelphia and London³³ since the 1820s. In plate four of the series, for example, an African American man and woman in elaborate finery greet one another with a cordial exchange. The gentleman asks, "How you find yourself dis hot weader Miss Chloe?" The lady responds, "Pretty well I tank you Mr. Caesar only I *aspire* too much! [my emphasis]" While the malapropism certainly is meant to castigate the couple for putting on airs, it achieves this by mocking what is framed as an absurd situation. However, it is important to recognize the drastic shift from Clay's winking mockery of "bad taste" and overly-ambitious aspirations to the added layer of gruesome, bloody violence that Currier & Ives's *Darktown* series heaped onto this popular comic genre by the 1870s and 1880s.



Biological arguments of weak black intellect and "bad taste" further tended toward theories of atavism, or retrogression, grounded in familiar paternalistic registers that favor self-

³³ Lapsansky, "Afro-Americans and Racism in Jacksonian Philadelphia," 65.

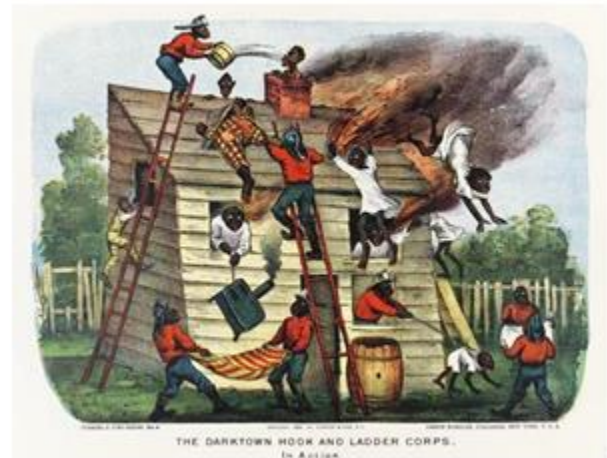
control as the defining attribute of masculinity and humanity alike. The same paternalistic arguments that were used to justify black enslavement are redeployed postbellum through visual images that denaturalize and lampoon black success. The *Darktown* comics are supposedly funny because they depict a racist logic: they argue that black social inferiority is not the result of slavery, but caused by a lesser-evolved biology, and any improvements made by the black race under white paternal supervision will quickly dissolve once African Americans are left to their own devices. For white audiences, the themes of *Darktown* are taken to be funny because they allow the viewer to play out a narrative of African American success that always ends badly; they manifest this tension between black social aspirations and what are seen to be black “natural” limitations. Furthermore, for white audiences the *sight* of African Americans in these preposterous social settings emphasize natural difference by depicting the scenes as no more than role playing, but without an adequate comprehension of the rituals or rationales. According to Hatt:

The rise of retrogressionism, although firmly rooted in antebellum fictions, was very much part of a post-emancipation fear of African American retribution, power, and, perhaps worst of all, integration. Retrogressionist arguments tended to be constructed as more sophisticated forms of the myth about negro imitativeness; while African Americans may take on the identities of bourgeois teachers, rural workers, preachers, politicians, mechanics and so on, they are, in spite of any ostensible socialisation, fundamentally undifferentiable. All are savages. (33)

Hatt further traces the underlying logic of retrogression to the stereotype of African Americans as natural mimics—or “apes” to repeat the double entendre that is too casually tossed around in this body of scholarship—focusing on Josiah Nott’s 1866 *Instinct of Races*, published in the *New Orleans Medical and Surgical Journal*. Nott writes, “The Negro is imitative, social, easily domesticated, and as long as kept in subordination to a higher race, will ape to a certain extent its manners and customs. But the negro rises only to a certain part of imitation [...] as soon as the

race is [...] separated from whites [...] it becomes savage” (Hatt 32). Such arguments are at the core of *Darktown*’s images. This form of imaginative containment within a fictitious, black-run town fulfills the subordination Nott advocates, while creating the illusion that Nature drives this situation rather than the imagination of an artist manifesting onto paper a white-supremacist ideology.

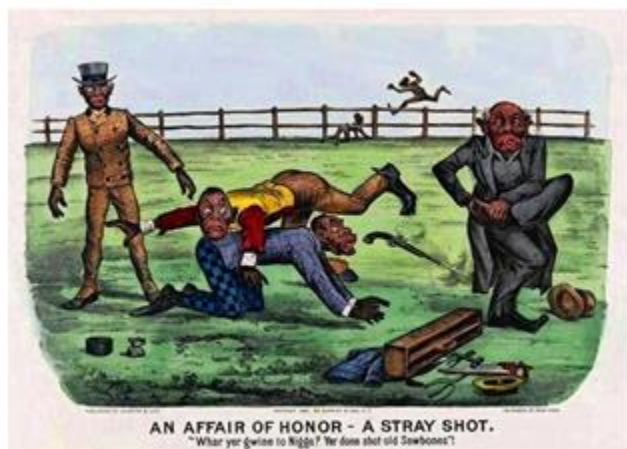
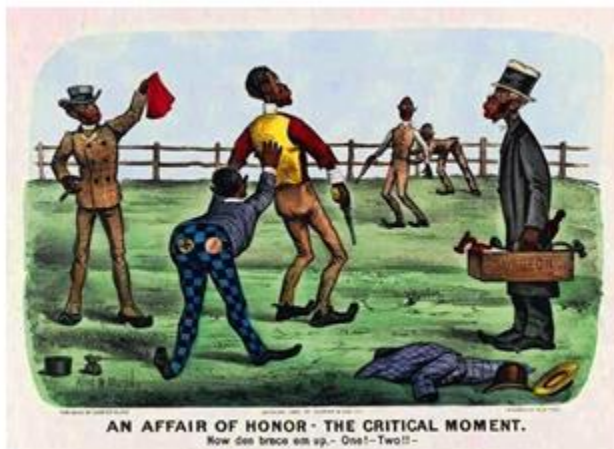
Whereas Currier & Ives’ general catalogue chronicles the bravery and patriotism associated with noble servicemen—firefighters, police, elected officials—when transplanted into Darktown, these same professions revert to buffoonery in their failures to rise to a white standard: juries are crooked, firefighters are inept, politicians favor violence over diplomacy, and baseball players cannot follow their own rules. For example, consider two prints, “The Life of a Fireman” and “The Darktown Hook and Ladder Corps.,” as examples of the same subject matter celebrated when enacted by a white mainstream, and lampooned when performed in within Darktown’s limits. This comparison recalls the logic of paternalism: that a “natural”



tendency toward mimesis can be channeled into productive labor when properly overseen.

Without white supervision, however, African Americans will regress to a state of uncivilized brutes performing tasks beyond their comprehension, and providing boundless material for

fodder. An example of this line of reasoning is present in “An Affair of Honor,” a two-part, before-and-after duel sequence. In the first scene, two reluctant duelers in shoddy and ostentatious dress are pushed by their seconds into dueling position. An unnamed arbitrator and a surgeon, “Ole Sawbones,” stand by. In the second plate—the “after” scene—the first dueler and his second wrestle for the dueling pistol, which has accidentally fired and shot the surgeon. Off in the distance dueler #2 and his second have fled the scene. The prints derive their comedy from the outcome—the shooting of an innocent bystander who is there to attend to the injured. However, the plates are meant to be ironic as neither of the two duelers fighting for to settle the debt of honor wants to be there. Moreover, they appear either not to understand the underlying rationale of the duel, or to comprehend fully the potential danger of the situation. What begins as an attempt at gentlemen’s resolution, in Darktown, ultimately devolves into a common brawl.



As the citizens of Darktown are unable to keep social order within their own community, they appear equally unable to exercise self-restraint—demonstrating a lack of human self-awareness that ought to govern their behavior. A lack of aesthetic judgment is apparent through garish fashion choices, but also in the ill-fit of the clothing. The figure in the double-breasted plaid to the left is particularly interesting; his clothing is cut so closely to the body that his musculature is evident through the cloth. Even covered head-to-toe in his body still announces

its physical strength, which to onlookers further suggests the natural labor function of black bodies. This, too, is framed as a mandate of Nature and racial distinction—imbuing African Americans with a predilection towards ostentation over modesty—a key Christian virtue. On a far more primal level, however, the inhabitants of Darktown are unable to muster enough self-control to keep from injuring themselves through gluttonous food consumption. Food becomes a recurring trope in the *Darktown* lithographs; they simultaneously suggest an animal-like nature that does not know when to stop gorging, just as it reminds viewers of African American inadmissibility to good society on the basis of their animal-like impulses, vulgar etiquette, or complete lack thereof. For example, *Darktown*'s “The Great Oyster Eating Match” deploys



precisely this type of spectacle in order to inflict injury on the figures within the images. What begins as a competition between the Dark Town Cormorant and the Blackville³⁴ Buster ends in feverish, violent gluttony with the Blackville Buster having gorged to the point of splitting himself asunder. What is most striking about this particular pair of prints is that the violence enacted within the scene is attributed to the characters' own lack of self-control. An invisible

³⁴ This is most likely an allusion to *Harper's Weekly*'s Blackville series, a precursor to Currier & Ives's *Darktown* series.

hand pencils the images for an anonymous audience to take delight in, yet the producer and the audience are not implicated in the scene, as the narrative violence is entirely self-inflicted.

This same invisible hand phenomenon can also be seen in related racial spectacles popular around the turn of the twentieth century. For example, Itai Vardi describes a similar type of scopophilic pleasure in an article about eating contests—spectacles whose primary function is to provide amusement but, secondarily, to produce social distance between black contestants and white spectators.³⁵ Food consumption is a domain that allows a public exhibition of civilized comportment, which signifies social evolution through ritualized manners and “appetite management” as displays of human restraint over animalistic drives. Racial difference is imagined and reified during these staged events, narrating desired racial-visual logics that play according to familiar tropes and stereotypes. These eating contests, according to Vardi, were as much reinscriptions of racialized power as they were popular amusements. Not only were they geared for white audience, but the viewings “objects” were made to perform to the audience’s expectations: animalistic impulses scripted according to preexisting stereotypes. Operating within a self-fulfilling racial logic, to perform as contestants in eating competitions placed African Americans within familiar narratives of black retrogression, thus restoring the chasm between increasing “savage-like” African-American behavior and white “civilized” culture as the site of good taste, manners, and physical mastery over one’s person. To this effect, one might imagine the infamous battle royale scene in Ellison’s *Invisible Man* in which the young narrator is invited, on the pretense of his academic merit, to deliver a graduation speech before an all-white audience, but then is pressured to fight other young black men in a group brawl for the spectatorial enjoyment of the audience. At this moment, Ellison makes painfully clear the

³⁵ Vardi, “Feeding Race: Eating Contests, the Black Body, and the Social Production of Group Boundaries Through Amusement in Turn of the Twentieth Century America.”

power dynamic between the audience members and a young black man of “recognized” skill whose social function at this moment is interchangeable with any other member of his race. Vardi’s argument complements Michael Hatt’s earlier discussion about black manhood insofar as it reiterates discourses around self-control dating to the antebellum period that emasculate blackness through the Sambo myth. Sambo has no agency of his own, but he happily benefits from the structure provided by his master. While Currier & Ives’s *Darktown* lithographs clearly bear no intention of depicting black men as anything beyond the white-supremacist musings that drove the demand for lithography, these prints nevertheless are squarely within the Currier & Ives’s social mission of imagining America. The marketplace imagined an America prospering by dint of its own self-reliance, hard work, and ingenuity. The *Darktown* images, although seemingly outside of the Currier & Ives canon, do little to chronicle the lives of African Americans as they emerged in the postbellum era. Rather, these images sketch the foil to whiteness, so that whiteness can properly be imagined against these images: “*Darktown*...used the black body in its extreme grotesque definition as a symbol of the coherence of *white* America” (Hatt 34). If *Darktown*’s firefighters are inept, its juries crooked, its baseball players unathletic, they are so as a means to construct their white counterparts as the reverse.

FUNCTIONS OF VISUAL VIOLENCE

Inasmuch as the *Darktown* prints delighted audiences with their particular brand of comedy, or affirmed racial values through “lighthearted” messaging displayed on America’s parlor walls, they also filled a psychological need to restore social order, relieve white anxiety, create biological distance, and to flat-out punish African Americans for incurring on white-only domains. To the extent that Reconstruction enforced African-American rights after the war,

satirical imagery provides a palatable, seemingly innocuous venue to sublimate white Southern outrage at violations to their way of life. For northern white audiences, these images provided a reassuring message that northward-migrating blacks would remain biologically and culturally inferior. And for both audiences, the images helped to combat the evident changes to the world around them and to imagine a world in which their white social capital was not threatened by the rise of the “talented tenth” and the black middle class. What is conspicuously missing in scholarship concerning the *Darktown* series is discussion of the extent to which violence is enacted on black visages. Most critics focus on grotesquerie—the physical attributes of the subjects featured—and some even venture to discuss the dehumanization contained within this messaging, but little attention is paid to the underlying rationale of much of the violence.

While contemporary scholarship recognizes the biological arguments contained within the *Darktown* prints, few critics explore instances of happenstance, or pointless violence deployed for no purpose other than malicious pleasure to be derived during viewing. For example, “A Sharp Rifle” is a particularly jarring set of prints in which a series of missteps align perfectly in order to create the “comic” outcome. In the first print, an African American soldier lies in repose on a straw-filled mattress. He steadies the tip of his rifle between his bare toes.

Meanwhile, a dog sleeps at the foot of the mattress, and a young boy inexplicably decides to empty the entire contents of a whiskey bottle into the soldier’s boot. Off in the distance, a well-dressed woman sits beneath a canopy and surveys the distance through a scope. The second print, “A Sharp Rifle,” shows the outcome of the fired shot, straw and whiskey all brought together at once: the mattress ignites into a maelstrom of flames, and both the soldier and the young boy burn within it. The dog lies dead—presumably shot by the soldier—and the woman off in the distance is smothered beneath the collapsed canopy; it is unclear whether or not she has



survived the accident. This particular set of prints is noteworthy within this “happenstance” category because within a single narrative, “A Sharp Rifle” violently targets all of the nineteenth century’s most protected members of society—women, children, and animals—but for comic effect when directed towards African Americans. Unlike other *Darktown* narratives, this particular set unleashes its wrath on black visages, but the misfortune in this instance is not a direct result of an inferior black biology. Any one of these factors—the dry straw, the whiskey, or the fired shot—on its own posed no threat; they had to come together just so in order for this event to take place. The narrative event is pointless violence enacted, presumably, for amusement alone, or perhaps to suggest that fate will intervene where human behavior transgresses natural boundaries—in this case African Americans attempting to incur on white cultural property.

As a visual practice, these images also provide viewers with an opportunity to corral African Americans into a segregated space at a safe spectatorial distance. They contain the images of otherwise free-roaming African Americans within restrictive black bodies, as imagined according to white supremacist logics: even if African Americans may circulate freely after emancipation, they nevertheless remain imprisoned by their limited natures, as visibly

marked by their black bodies. Viewers are able to derive a form of scopophilic pleasure³⁶ when viewing black bodies within the context as one might prefer to imagine them—away from white society—and Currier & Ives provided that vehicle. Furthermore, in the wake of emancipation and increasing black mobility, audiences can rest assured that the races are naturally self-segregating, thus allaying ever-present fears of miscegenation. *Darktown* is, after all, a town comprised entirely of dark-skinned black folks—no mulattoes here (such might undermine arguments of black essence at work)—who suffer through their own misdirection, or at the hands of Nature.

Unlike lynching or rape, the underlying mechanics of the violence perpetrated against African Americans by Currier & Ives is concealed by satire as an “innocent” vehicle. African Americans in *Darktown* do not suffer at white hands. According to the visual narratives, they suffer as a result of their own innate inferiority or by divine providence. Although these images execute revenge fantasies equally gruesome and as imaginatively perverse as actual lynching, this form of visual lynching is concealed by the tenor of its delivery—a process which replicates white-supremacist power structures through the social sanctioning and circulation of racial violence in America’s most public domains: merchant shops and private homes. Moreover, while the *Darktown* prints do not invent new racial logics—they merely reproduce arguments that already pervade the nineteenth century—Currier & Ives certainly played an important role in amplifying these logics and promulgating the messages through affordable mass production. They ought not to be absolved completely of their complicity in prompting further violence. Currier & Ives helped to shape racist thought in the late-nineteenth century in the service of national reconciliation and the preservation of a white republic, and they reaped financial rewards for their enterprise. As *Darktown* can attest, comic images, however innocent they may

³⁶ Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.”

appear, play an important didactic and reaffirming ideological function. They helped white Americans envision the nation as many wanted it to be, and reassured their viewers that in the end, despite rapid social change and the topsy-turvy world emerging from these disruptions, Nature will prevail.

CHAPTER 2

“Ain’t that patriotism and Christian Faith for you?”: María Amparo Ruiz de Burton
Writes *Californios* into the Literary U.S. Body Politic

As much as we, Chicano/a scholars and our allies, would like to read Ruiz de Burton as a prototypical Chicana feminist, resistance fighter, in-your-face Abraham Lincoln basher, and go-to-hell Supreme Court critic, she was none of these.
—José F. Aranda, Jr., “Contradictory Impulses”

“María A. Ruiz de Burton wrote a protest novel not from a general Mexican American point of view but, rather, from an aristocratic Mexican American point of view—and this contrasts sharply with protest novels written later during the Chicano movement.”
—Manuel M. Rodríguez

Chicano studies scholars struggle to reconcile the Northern Mexican landed gentry within a field that at its core has been invested in working-class and mestizo identity politics. The matter is how to create a literary genealogy that includes nineteenth-century Mexican-American writers who self-identify as neither working-class, nor mixed-race. What do scholars of Chicano studies—and American studies more broadly—gain by studying antecedents whose claim for national inclusion are based on the insistence of their pure white bloodlines and good breeding, but whose disenfranchisement nevertheless helps give rise to the field? María Amparo Ruiz de Burton’s 1872 novel, *Who Would Have Thought It?* presents such a problem.

Since its recovery and republication in 1995, scholars rightly place *Who Would Have Thought It?* within the context of U.S. nationalist and expansionist imperial projects. However, the extent to which this novel protests these projects while being simultaneously complicit within them is up for debate. Ruiz de Burton criticizes the U.S. nation-building machine that affected her personally, by this, I mean legal and pro-monopoly economic policies that protected the rights of Anglo-American squatters who overran her property, crippled her business ventures, and engaged her in expensive, decades-long legal battles over the legitimacy of her land titles. Ultimately, she died penniless and dispossessed of Rancho Jamul, nearly one thousand acres in

San Diego Country. For these reasons—and while still recognizing the complicated position from which Ruiz de Burton wrote—important Chicano scholars including Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita, José David Saldívar, and Marcial González represent her writing as an anti-racist, subaltern, anti-capitalist, or proletarian protest poetics. I wish to expand the current understanding of Ruiz de Burton's role within a Chicana/o canon by: 1) positioning her writing within a Chicana/o literary genealogy even if her politics do not position her as a precursor to twentieth-century Chicano political struggles and 2) to recognize the historical specificity of her claim to whiteness and to recognize the precedent this creates for divergent methods of resistance from the 1930s onward.

My analysis of the text is more in line with scholars including José Aranda, Jr., Jesse Alemán, John González, and Manuel Rodríguez who position Ruiz de Burton not as a subaltern subject but as a woman of elite status who advocated within the U.S.'s highest social and juridical circles in defense of her privilege, even as she was gradually being stripped of it. She does not protest the incorporation of California into the U.S. so much as she decries the U.S.'s inability or obstinate refusal to recognize California's preexisting race and class stratifications, which diminish her social rank and capital under U.S. governance. I argue that rather than contorting her into a progenitor of Chicano struggles and a spokesperson for all nineteenth-century Mexican Americans—which is how she may ultimately be remembered despite her objections to being lumped in with non-white *Californios*—it is important to recognize that she occupied a nebulous space in late-nineteenth-century society that was marginalized, yet privileged, racialized, yet racist.

In an effort to bridge these two views of Ruiz de Burton, Marcial González uses Marxist analysis to place her, as a *Californiana*, within a Chicano literary genealogy as a victim of

capitalist accumulation and the proletarianization of Mexican Americans after 1848. González writes, “if a Californio-Chicano literary genealogy exists, it does not emerge exclusively from a common ‘resistance’ to racism and class exploitation, but equally, and in some cases perhaps more so, from a common desire to be included within the democratic institutions of American capitalism” (M. González 56). González recognizes Ruiz de Burton’s privileged class position, and suggest that by all indications she operated within a system of racial capital, not in opposition to it. However, he also suggests that she shared a common resistance “to racism and class exploitation” in line with political efforts of Chicana/o activists today. By contrast, I argue that race and class exploitation formed the foundation of Ruiz de Burton’s privilege, formed within the Spanish colonial *sistema de castas* and geo-specifically carried over from the California mission and hacienda systems.

What González inadvertently describes here is Ruiz de Burton’s desire to assimilate into the upper tiers of U.S. social and economic systems after the U.S. acquisition of formerly Mexican territories—which is a major divergence from most twentieth-century Chicano protest narratives. While González argues that her novels protests the proletarianization of Mexican Americans, I warn readers not to conflate all nineteenth-century Mexican Americans peoples into a monolith, but instead to recognize that any protest her novels offer is solely for the benefit of her class. She advocated for the inclusion of elite *Californios* based on their fitness to participate in civil society as cultivated, *gente de razón*, and for herself in particular as a “Spanish American.” Indeed, many in this group claimed unadulterated white blood lines. Her argument does not extend to laboring *mestizos*—and certainly not to *indios*, whether classified as *de razón* or *sin razón*³⁷—both of whom would have ranked beneath her in status, prior to the

³⁷ Saldaña-Portillo, 145-6. To be *gente de razón* (people of reason) was a requirement for citizenship within Colonial Mexican society, and subordinated race to the possession of reason. For example, Afro-Mexicans if free,

conquest of California, and whom she largely ignores in her novels unless it is to insult them by oppositional gesture.

Put differently, her resistance to the proletarianization of Mexican Americans extended only far enough to protest the inclusion of elite *Californios* like herself within the post-1848 racialization process that turned most Mexican Americans into a race-based laboring class by the turn of the twentieth century. As José Aranda reminds us, “she represents a group of elite individuals who resisted their social and class demotion after 1848 but nevertheless had more in common with their conquerors than they were willing to acknowledge” (“Contradictory Impulses” 555). Although it is tempting to read Ruiz de Burton’s corpus of work through the lens of U.S. territorial occupation, it is perhaps helpful to reimagine this moment—at least from her perspective—as the “merger” of two colonial forces.³⁸ Her novel does not concern itself with the fates of all *Californios*; it depicts the *Californio* aristocracy battling on cultural terrain in order to vie for their positions under “new management.”

Aranda’s analysis further reminds us that Ruiz de Burton stands at the center of an ongoing debate within Chicano studies that resurfaces when placing the Spanish colonial elite—whether *peninsulares* or *criollos*³⁹—and their descendants into the field. The recovery of a figure like Ruiz de Burton, according to Aranda, has “reactivated a long-standing debate about the heterogeneity of Mexican American culture and history and its relation to left-activist

and while always lowest on the racial hierarchy, could nevertheless be citizens based their recognition of Spanish sovereignty, and their being neither heathen nor savage.

³⁸ In 1799 Francisco Goya published a collection of prints, *Los Caprichos*, which depict eighty comic and grotesque sketches of eighteenth-century Spanish folly. Among them is print number sixty-two, *¡Quién lo Creyera!* (*Who Would Have Thought It?*), that depicts two witches battling to their death as they hurl down a vast, shadowy pit, oblivious that they are both about to be pounced upon by demons. This print allegorically mocks warring nation-states that are so engrossed in their feud that they cannot see that they are destroying themselves in the process. In this regard, one might read Ruiz de Burton’s novel, *Who Would Have Thought It?*, as a critique of the human folly (specifically, the Spanish-descended aristocrats of New Spain’s northern frontier) that have been left unprotected throughout the ongoing political clashes between the U.S. and Spain, and then again between the U.S. and Mexico.

³⁹ Both *peninsulares* and *criollos* within the Spanish colonial *sistema de castas* are pure blooded Spaniards who differ by location of birth: *peninsulares* are born in Spain and transplanted to New Spain, whereas *criollos* are born in New Spain.

politics, and questioned anew the idea that Mexican Americans have always been proletarian in character” (“Contradictory Impulses” 553). When Marcial González makes the broad, conciliatory attempt to demonstrate her protest against the “proletarianization of Mexican Americans,” and to place her within a Chicano literary genealogy as a result of her shared protest, he discursively situates her at the end of the racialization process instead of at the beginning of it. To suggest that she shared political sympathy with twentieth-century Chicanos solely because both suffered under the same disenfranchising processes implies an anachronistic “*raza*”-sounding ethnic identification that she would probably not have appreciated. Spanish *Californios* ultimately would become Mexican American as we understand this ethnic category today; however, at the time of her writing this process was not yet complete. Her novels actually show little inclination to protest the proletarianization of Mexican Americans assuming this category is comprised exclusively of *mestizo* ex-Mexican nationals. Her effort, instead, is to prevent the racialization of elite *Californios* alongside *mestizos* into Mexican Americans so that *Californios* would not be included as part of the proletarianization process that González describes. Curiously, the burning question that is undergirds these analyses, but is not blatantly asked, is whether or not Ruiz de Burton was “actually” white, and on what grounds this might be determined? By her own account, the terms that she used to describe *Californios* were “Spanish,” “Spano-Americans,” and “native Californians” (M. González, 47).

These debates point to a problem of dissonance: *how* and *by whom* are Mexican Americans imagined in the nineteenth century versus a vastly different twenty-first century readership with disparate identity categories available to mediate their interpretations? González runs the risk of reifying the racial logic that comes at the end of the process he’s describing; however, we cannot place Ruiz de Burton as a member of a group that has not yet come into

being—especially when her inclusion within this racial formation is the very process she is fighting to prevent. I argue that this second vantage—that which, based on its own political investments, attempts to depict her as a proto-Chicana—denies Ruiz de Burton’s persistent claim to whiteness. To use concepts such as the “Spanish fantasy heritage,”⁴⁰ “hacienda syndrome,”⁴¹ or the “Caucasian cloak,”⁴² to infer that she was not actually white ignores the nineteenth-century racial logic that would have recognized her ethnic Iberian whiteness and permitted Ruiz de Burton’s 1849 intermarriage to a high-ranking Anglo-American military officer as a tolerated form of amalgamation.⁴³ Chicano Studies scholars are well aware of the legal maneuverings that the Spanish fantasy heritage enabled in the twentieth century, and have rightly demonstrated that these concepts, like Ruiz de Burton’s novels, ultimately functioned by sustaining white supremacist logics. However, dismissing her Spanish (white) racial identification ignores the different temporally and regionally specific racial formations that she negotiated in her own day. Moreover, interpreting her protest through a twenty-first century racial analytic misconstrues rapidly-changing racial formations that her writing participates in. As whiteness studies scholars remind us, whiteness is not a static category; it undergoes turbulent cycles of cultural negotiation and violent backlash throughout the period that Ruiz de Burton writes, and continues to shift well into the present day.⁴⁴

My analysis recognizes that a twenty-first-century vantage point readily accepts “whiteness” as a consolidated and generic racial category. Modern day usage of the term abstracts Anglo-Saxon specificity even while continuing to privilege it, and while incorporating

⁴⁰ Carey McWilliams, 37.

⁴¹ Raymund Paredes, “The Evolution of Chicano Literature” (1982).

⁴² Ariela Gross, “The Caucasian Cloak” (2006-7).

⁴³ Tomás Almaguer, 58. Almaguer notes the antimiscegenation statutes in California that permitted ethnic intermarriage between Anglos and elite-class Mexican Americans, but still prohibited intermarriage between Anglos and blacks, Indians, or Asian immigrants.

⁴⁴ Lori Harrison-Kahan, *The White Negress: Literature, Minstrelsy, and the Black-Jewish Imaginary* (2011).

and downplaying the specificity of the less desirable ethnic whites enfolded within its dominion. From a nineteenth-century vantage, Iberian whiteness would have been one of several white races, even if it carried far less prestige in the United States than Anglo-Saxonism. Unlike white ethnics that survived that consolidation process into “whiteness,” the same is not true for *Californios*. Despite the tenuous protections that their legal whiteness promised, Mexican-descended Americans across multiple U.S. geographical regions suffered under de facto racial segregation. This lived reality makes it hard to imagine that the occasional claim to Mexican whiteness could be deemed legitimate instead of merely a political ploy to leverage Mexican American legal status against black non-citizenship—but this is a history that has not yet fully unfolded at the time that Ruiz de Burton was writing. We therefore must not forget that she lived in a time that recognized multiple white “races,” however unequal, and that a small segment of *Californios* clung dearly to the legitimacy of their *sangre azul* ([pure Spanish] blue blood) or their being *blanco puro* (pure white)—as opposed to having purchased their whiteness from the Spanish crown⁴⁵—as the racial basis of their claim to social rank.⁴⁶

A twentieth-century Chicano political positioning might have difficulty receiving Ruiz de Burton on her own racial terms and would classify a text like *Who Would Have Thought It?* as a passing novel. To be clear, inasmuch as this project is invested in exploring the passing genre and other(ed) strategic performances of race, I do not consider *Who Would Have Thought It?* a novel about racial passing so much as it is a novel that evokes the hallmarks of the racial passing novel towards a strategic recuperation of Spanish whiteness for Reconstruction-era readers. Put differently, Ruiz de Burton does not try to pass her protagonist, Lola, off as white so much as she argues that Lola genuinely *is* white—and a culturally-superior form of whiteness at that—and, as

⁴⁵ This is a colonial practice in New Spain called “*gracias al sacar*,” which will be discussed in a later in this chapter. See Haas, 31, and Alemán, “Citizenship” 10-2, and “Thank God” 100-3.

⁴⁶ Lisbeth Haas, 31.

such, she deserves to be incorporated into her rightful position of prominence within the U.S. body politic. The notion of Spanish whiteness, however, was a tough sell to a nineteenth-century U.S. readership, given the prevalent understanding that Mexicans were a “mongrel” race, a popular representation that abounded in the 1830s and ’40s American literary imaginary through sensational pamphlet literature, military reconnaissance expedition reports,⁴⁷ travelogues, and Mexican-American war correspondence, then taken up again in the 1860s by Southern writers such as Augusta Evans to help the Confederacy gain cultural leverage in opposition alien Mexicanness as just one form of unassimilable racial otherness.

In order to write against these negative depictions that increasingly included *Californios*, Ruiz de Burton had to rely on the literary tools at her disposal to persuade her readers to recognize that Lola—reared in Indian captivity and first introduced in blackface—is actually white. While the boom in racial passing novels wouldn’t begin until the 1890s, by 1872 popular literature with passing-related storylines already existed. Many of these centered on abolitionist “tragic mulatta” storylines, including Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852) and Child’s *A Romance of the Republic* (1867), but were used towards very different racial politics than Ruiz de Burton’s.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, the trope of passing is still useful in *Who Would Have Thought It?* in order to clarify Lola’s racial make-up to an audience that has primarily been exposed to mongrelized representations of Mexicans. Rather than begin with the premise that the central figure is a person of color who passes for white, Ruiz de Burton begins with the premise that Lola *is* white. Ruiz de Burton then reverses the direction of the pass to reaffirm that Lola is only

⁴⁷ Lieutenant William H. Emory, *Notes of a Military Reconnaissance* (1848) documents his topographical survey of the of the Southwestern territories during the U.S.-Mexican War, and in addition to his scientific measurements of the climate he also provides his observations of the native peoples, their customs and shortcomings.

⁴⁸ See Eve Raimon, *The “Tragic Mulatta” Revisited* and Teresa Zackodnik, *The Mulatta and the Politics of Race* for analyses of the political uses of the tragic mulatta figure in literature and for a historiography of legal racial discourse around miscegenation and racial admixture.

being passed off as non-white and that, like many *Californios*, Lola's racial composition is being misread because of the limited categories that people in the U.S. have available to think about race. Once Ruiz de Burton establishes Lola's whiteness, she can then define the proper place for this specific form of whiteness against the complex tapestry of race, ethnicity, class, and religion already present in New England society, and in the U.S. more broadly.

This study takes a novel view by exploring Ruiz de Burton's composite use of literary genre as the vehicle to render visible the hypocrisies she sees in American society: its self-concept against its stratifications, expansionist bloodlust, and venality. From her vantage point as elite, yet racially-dispossessed Spanish gentlewoman, in a strategic intermarriage to an Anglo-American Union officer, Colonel Henry S. Burton—and, thus, privy to multiple goings on, spanning California's land grab to Washington D.C.'s parlor society—Ruiz de Burton crafts scathing commentary by invoking and subverting popular genre expectations. She takes liberties with the conventions of the captivity narrative, the sentimental marriage plot, the “passing” novel, and sensational and gothic anti-Catholicism, while conspicuously avoiding the one racialized nineteenth-century genre that connects all the others: the slave narrative.

Through role reversal she inverts the U.S.'s narrative position against its imagined imperial foe, Spain, thereby juxtaposing Spanish good breeding against American crudeness. In addition to her manipulation of literary genre, Ruiz de Burton reaches into her transcultural bag of tricks, invoking racial logics remnant from Colonial Spanish rule—*gente de razón* (people of reason), *limpieza de sangre* (blood purity), and against essentialist Anglo renderings of Spanish cruelty within *la leyenda negra* (the Black Legend). However, she deploys these logics within distinctly U.S. geopolitical and literary contexts in order to argue for the enfranchisement of California's landed gentry on the basis of their fitness to participate as citizens in a republic. She

appropriates the genre conventions of popular fiction to define the terms under which her American readers must fully comprehend their imperial dispossession of elite Spanish-*Californios*, who she casts as racially equal, if not culturally and morally superior. She then recasts the “unprotected” Spanish gentlewoman—her protagonist, Lola—as the ideal of white womanhood, suffering at the hands of her New England captors, the Norval family. In this case, however, Lola exerts *her* moral influence through her impending intermarriage to the Norvals’ only son, Julian, and allegorically to the U.S. nation-state by extension. She redraws the geopolitical map and the color lines with which the U.S. reestablishes its class, racial, and cultural citizenship requirements to include elite *Californios* under the shifting terms produced by the Civil War and in the midst of Reconstruction.

ENTER LOLA, “THAT HORRID LITTLE BLACK THING!”

“I think that Lola, instead of being a *burden* to us, will be a great acquisition.”
-Dr. Norval, *Who Would Have Thought It?*

“By the time the little girl is twenty, she will be very rich, and people wouldn’t dare call her Indian or nigger even if she were, which she is *not*.”
-Dr. Norval, *Who Would Have Thought It?*

Set against the backdrop of the U.S. Civil War, *Who Would Have Thought It?* begins with the return of Dr. Norval, a travelling amateur geologist, to his New England home after a four-year expedition to the U.S. Southwest. In addition to the mysterious wagon load of boxes that Dr. Norval brings back from his expedition, he also returns with a more curious specimen: a young “nigger girl” named Lola, who he claims as his charge and new addition to the Norval household. In his telling of how Lola came to be under his care, he recounts the Indian captivity of Lola’s mother—Doña María Teresa Almenara de Medina, a Spanish-Mexican gentlewoman, who was abducted from her family’s Sonora hacienda during an 1846 Apache raid, sold to a

Mohave tribe, and wedded to their chief. Although Doña María was “insulted” by savages, the narrative is clear on the point of Lola’s parentage—Doña María was already pregnant at the time of her abduction and Lola was born just five months into her mother’s captivity; thus “pure Spanish blood” courses through Lola’s veins (28). Dr. Norval further explains that the Mohave chief “blackened” Doña María and Lola’s skin with dyes in order to prevent their rescue. Dr. Norval then describes the contents of the mysterious boxes he brought back from his expedition: western gold and uncut precious stones—diamonds, emeralds, rubies, and opals—that Doña María collected from the banks of the Colorado River, and that she hid away to provide for Lola in the event of her rescue. Lola, it turns out, is a wealthy heiress. Thus, Ruiz de Burton begins her novel by removing ten-year-old Lola from Indian captivity, and placing her in an ever more precarious captivity—that of a wealthy, unprotected, “black”-skinned, Spanish Catholic transported to New England, where she is surrounded by Protestant social climbers.

Ruiz de Burton weaves a convoluted and satirical marriage plot impelled by the question of Lola’s fitness for “good” society—a dilemma ultimately remedied by the lightening of her skin, and the deepening of her pocketbook. She begins her story by complicating the standard Anglo-American captivity narrative, placing a Spanish heroine in the role usually occupied by an Anglo woman within the U.S. captivity narrative tradition. Then, on the heels of this first captivity narrative, she inverts the racial casting in a second captivity narrative, transporting a “blackened” Lola off to cold New England peopled by vehemently racist abolitionists. This cultural inversion of the captivity narrative also carries over into religious discourse. Catholicism is directly invoked as the dark “other” by the Protestant “black legend,” and as the uncanny precursor to Protestantism prior to the Reformation. What is most striking about Ruiz de Burton’s narrative strategy is her use of these reversals to critique U.S. Anglo society while

simultaneously deploying these tropes to form affiliation with Spanish-*Californios*. Based on their shared whiteness and fitness to participate as full citizens, she makes her case for the inclusion of California's landed gentry into decent society. In the end, the question she really begs is whether vulgar New England hypocrites, despite their new money and military might, are worthy of Lola.

PARLOR ROOM POLITICS: MAKING RACE THROUGH INTIMATE SPACE

Who Would Have Thought It? is especially interesting because of its messy racial, class, and religious convergences. Unlike other nineteenth-century novels, this text does not concentrate on one binary at a time. Rather, it brings together many identity categories all at once. In this way, it demonstrates the ways in which multiple groups vied for social position and manufactured their political identities in opposition to one another. The novel already must contend with the issues of abolition, northern industrial labor, and the Civil War. Lola's arrival to the Norval home further complicates the narrative by inserting racialized manifest destiny and gender politics within the novel's already complicated lines of inquiry. The Norval household, operating as a microcosm of U.S. social upheaval, becomes a nexus of racial, religious, and political antagonism.

From the moment of Lola's arrival, Mrs. Norval frets over how and where to integrate Lola—that “horrid little black thing,” as she is referred to—into the hierarchical structure of the household. This problem resonates with the so-called “Mexican Question” which, like so many of the other “questions” of the nineteenth century, must resolve how to integrate newly-formed Mexican-Americans into the social fabric of the U.S. body politic. Lola is immediately greeted as an object of curiosity and disgust. Never once is it presumed that she enters the Norval home

on equal footing with the family. Within the opening pages, and under a single roof, Ruiz de Burton conjures and disavows the numerous racial categories with which Lola, as the daughter of Mexican nationals, could potentially and injuriously be identified by a U.S audience. She's Mexican, but is that closer to black or Indian within the U.S.'s available racial categories? Readers might be quick to assume that, judging by her looks, she certainly isn't white. However, Dr. Norval immediately establishes that Lola is neither black nor Indian, and leaves no room for question that she is high-born. He racially identifies her as "pure" Spanish; she actually turns out to be half Spanish and half Austrian⁴⁹ (28). This emphasizes her European pedigree, unadulterated by the taint of Indian and black admixtures within *mestizaje*. Moreover, it makes clear that Lola, even if not Anglo, is not to be relegated to the status of black or Indian peoples. Mrs. Norval, a staunch Presbyterian abolitionist who, by her own admission "[hates] foreigners and papists" (92), plans to supplement their modest household income by outsourcing Lola as a servant. Dr. Norval intervenes and asserts that Lola, based on her bloodline (and, presumably, her wealth), will rank equally with the family members. In his final attempt to disabuse Mrs. Norval of the notion that Lola is anything but white, he asserts: "Once and for all, let me tell you that the blood of that child is as good as, *or better* than, yours or mine; that she is neither an Indian nor a negro child and that, unless you wish to doubt my word, my veracity, you will not permit yourself or anybody else to think her such" (25).

The novel is clearly invested in establishing Lola's position once transplanted to New England and, by extension, in determining the position that *Californios* will occupy within the U.S after 1848. In this regard, I agree with Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita's observation that while the novel addresses racism, slavery remains in the background (xviii). From the earliest

⁴⁹ This Austrian admixture explains Don Luis Medina's support in chapter XLIII of Austrian Prince Maximilian monarchical claims to colonial rule Mexican over Mexico.

moments in the text, Ruiz de Burton invokes blackness and abolitionism; she deploys them as useful tropes, but the actual institution of slavery does not factor significantly into the novel. This observation is only problematic if one positions Ruiz de Burton as subaltern and assumes that her goal was to protest racism, as many twenty-first century critics argue. The novel, however, does not suggest that this was her goal. On the contrary, all indications are that she used dominant U.S. racial discourse to her advantage, manipulating anti-black sentiment in order to gain entry, secure Lola's rank, and protect her own social capital in the process. She achieves this by unseating New England Protestant privilege through a literary, racially-impelled version of the children's game, "King of the Hill," once again pitting Anglo and Spanish colonial powers in competition for cultural dominance.

Racism does not appear to be a problem in *Who Would Have Thought It?* unless *Californios* suffer because of it. In fact, landed *Californios* generally benefited from racialized labor practices begun during the California mission era, and refigured under the hacienda system.⁵⁰ Critics frequently cite Mrs. Cackle's infamous line to suggest that the novel launches a broad anti-racist critique. Mrs. Cackle proclaims: "To me they are all alike—Indians, Mexicans, or Californians—they are all horrid" (11). Rather than conclude, however, that this is a criticism of Anglo-American racism in general, this line serves two functions, neither of which is anti-racist. First, it undermines Northern abolitionism as a righteous cause by depicting northerners as racist and hypocritical; it is further proof of their "low" quality that they do not live by their own espoused values. Racism is not the problem here—hypocrisy is. Secondly, Mrs. Cackle's statement simply indicates that she, like so many other war-profiteering *nouveau riche*, does not possess a developed taste sensibility that would enable her to distinguish between blue-blooded

⁵⁰ Lisbeth Haas describes labor stratifications that varied by race under the hacienda system. While she describes some opportunity for mobility within this system and the occasional outlier, occupations tended to be determined racially.

aristocrats and “savages” when confronted by either. Neither of these readings of Mrs. Cackles statement challenges the racism launched at Indian or Mexicans, but it does suggest that Californians do not belong in the same category. White supremacy is still a functioning logic, but it challenges the hierarchical relegation of *Californios* below vulgar and perceptively blunt *nouveau riche* like the Cackles, despite their Anglo-Saxon roots. In both of these readings, white supremacy is never challenged; it is assumed. The question becomes which form of whiteness deserves the greater privilege. This juxtaposition is used as a tool to lower the social capital held by Protestant New Englanders in order to carve out a niche for Lola, and to display her cultural superiority in relief from people like the Cackles and Norvals.

The opening scene in the Norvals’s parlor places Lola in the position of the racialized object undergoing visual scrutiny. She does not speak. She is not directly engaged. Rather, she is viewed and regarded in the third person as the type of ethnographic showpiece⁵¹ that was so popular at the time of the novel’s writing—she is literally staged as a piece of Southwestern fauna retrieved during Dr. Norval’s geological expedition. But before she “becomes” white later in the scene, she functions in the parlor as the screen onto which the Norval women project their racial fantasies—an ocular power play akin to Laura Mulvey’s “scopophilia.” In this case, the pleasure is derived by shoring up the Norvals’s whiteness and class status through the viewing of a live “black” specimen in their very own sitting parlor. In this regard, Lola’s blackface serves the same speculative function that occurs upon the minstrel stage when a white audience gazes upon a white blackface performer. It is no coincidence that Ruiz de Burton places Lola in blackface at the center of a visual tableau reminiscent of the minstrel stage when the purpose of the minstrel mask was to deride blackness in order to affirm the whiteness of the person under the mask.

⁵¹ Corby, “Ethnographic Showcases” (1993); Bogdan, “When the Exotic Becomes A Show” (2008).

Ruiz de Burton performs precisely this maneuver: she reaffirms Lola's whiteness in contrast to the blackface that Lola is forced to wear, while also raising Lola above the women in the Norval household. Lola judges the Norval women as too "low" to be worthy of direct address and, as a result, she remains silent. While this scene establishes Lola's superior breeding in contrast to the Norvals' unguarded speech, it also reveals the hypocrisy between the Norval's demonstrated racism and their espoused northern abolitionism. Although Lola is too refined to engage overtly in these racial politics, the effect is nevertheless achieved through the visual staging and pleasure-inducing racializations produced through the viewing spectacle itself. While the Norvals attempt to shore up their rank and privilege as the spectators in the scene, Lola triumphs—even in blackface. By refusing to engage, she allows the Norval women to reveal their base qualities; Lola comes across as the most prudent and refined of the women present. This, in turn, emphasizes the prosthetic qualities of the blackness that is foisted on her, and amplifies the disparity between her temporary appearance and her rightful social position.

This black-centered visual tableau, however, is not the only time in the novel that Ruiz de Burton invokes the blackface minstrelsy in order to destabilize Protestant New England and Anglo-Saxon privilege in the U.S. Later in the novel she invokes minstrelsy yet again through a familiar trope—the burlesque love triangle—but replaces the black stock characters with New Englanders. This love triangle lampoons the unfettered male aggression of two rivals in competition for the same undesirable woman. For example, "Coal Black Rose,"⁵² features Sambo (an illiterate *nouveau riche* Zip Coon figure) and Cuffee (working class, whose free status is questioned) who fight for the affection of Rose. In *Who Would Have Thought It?* the triangle involves Mrs. Norval's youngest brother, Isaac, whose "most lamentable penchant for gallantry" gets in the way of his professional advancement. Isaac and Congressman Le Grand

⁵² Lott, 133.

Gunn engage in “a most ignominious fistfight” over the attentions of the lovely Lucinda, a quadroon “lady of the demimonde” (58-9). Like “Coal Black Rose” that mocks Sambo’s airs and challenges Cuffee’s free status, Le Grand Gunn uses his political clout to block Isaac’s prisoner exchange after being captured by the Confederate Army, thus securing Lucinda’s attentions for the time being. Again, moments like these appear insignificant to the larger narrative plot, but they perform heavy lifting in terms of the novel’s racial politics. Ruiz de Burton renders ironic that Lola’s fitness for good society should be questioned, or that she should be scrutinized like a slave on the auction block and held in captivity, while two of the North’s “finest” gentlemen engage in public brawls over the attentions of a mixed-race prostitute.

From the moment of Lola’s introduction, Ruiz de Burton engages in a black-white color line epistemology, and strategically uses anti-black tropes in order to wrest social New England privilege. In so doing she attempts to reinsert a viable form of *Californio* whiteness into the U.S. racial imaginary and to restore *Californio* privilege on the basis of the bloodlines and cultivation. At the end of the parlor scene, the family finally retires for the evening. Behind closed doors Dr. and Mrs. Norval continue to argue over Lola’s placement within the household. Meanwhile, Lola has already been sent to spend her first night in the house with the Norval’s two Irish Catholic maids. This is an inconspicuous moment in the overall trajectory of the narrative, but it is quite telling in terms of the way the novel depicts its myriad and interrelated racial configurations. Although one might be tempted to imagine an automatic affiliation based on their shared Catholic faith and social marginalization by Anglo-Americans, this does not turn out to be the case. Instead, their relationship is akin to the mid-century racial antagonisms between working class Irish immigrants who identified in opposition to free northern blacks despite their

shared labor interests.⁵³ As Jesse Alemán notes, “The narrative must still negotiate the anti-Catholicism of the Protestant Northeast, where the influx of Irish immigrants created a host of alternative Anglo American anxieties regarding ‘savagery.’ Thus, Ruiz de Burton must also work to distance white Mexican Catholics from the Irish Catholic maids Lola encounters in the Norval house” (“Thank God” 103). This tension becomes apparent when readers learn that, “Lola had refused to share the bed with either of the two servants, and both had resented the refusal as the most grievous insult” (30). At this moment, both Lola and the Irish maids mutually reject one another, each clinging to her class and racial superiority, but the novel supports Lola’s claim. While the maids remain offended by the slight, Lola’s objection is a result of her taste sensibilities. Ruiz de Burton uses the maids’ unrefined conduct and unwashed bodies in order to trigger Lola’s revulsion of them. This distaste, as Elise Lemire reminds us, is a biological indication of Lola’s racial difference, but her refusal to share intimate space willingly with her inferiors is further sign of a proper upbringing. Not only does Lola run the risk of being mistaken as non-white—both as a Spanish-*Californiana* and in blackface—but she further runs the risk of social demotion by being branded a “papist” and then being lumped in with the Irish on religious grounds.

At this moment, despite her blackened skin, Ruiz de Burton distances Lola from mid-century Irish Catholics and positions her as the servants’ superior in breeding, education, and manner—even after a lifetime spent in Indian captivity. Ruiz de Burton further emphasizes the servile status of the Irish maids by contrasting Lola’s perfect English to the maids’ low dialect. For example, the cook says [referring to Lola], “Niggers ain’t my most particliest admirashun, I

⁵³ David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (1991), Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (1995), Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (1999), Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (1995)

can tell ye, no more nor toads nor cateypillars. Haith! I think, on the whole, I prefer the cateypillars, as a more dacent sorty of baste” (30). Even though the cook at this moment mistakes Lola for black and expresses *her* disdain, the readers’ scorn is redirected at the cook because of her crude speech. In the end, Lola prefers to spend her first night under the Norval roof sleeping in the hallway with the family dog, rather than share a bed with the Irish Catholic maids, but likewise having also been rejected by the Irish maids for being perceived as black.

Despite their mutual rejections, again, Lola’s superior breeding provides cover. Even in captivity, Lola’s mother was careful to educate her daughter with the refinements of a gentlewoman, which Lola would require upon her return to “civilization.” As a result, Lola feels disgust towards the Irish women and the many grimy and “blackened” objects that Lola associates with the Irish—black stockings, blackened pillows, and shoes “like two dead crows” (31). In the effort to reaffirm Spanish whiteness, Ruiz de Burton alludes to the Northern working-class Irish’s perceived status alongside free blacks. Popular amalgamated terms such as “smoked Irishman”⁵⁴ to refer to blacks and “white slaves”⁵⁵ to refer to the Irish suggest as much. By bringing this comparison to the forefront, Ruiz de Burton reminds her reader of that blackness, slave labor, and the Irish occupy a shared sphere, and in so doing she positions Spanishness in opposition to all three. Ironically, in her second novel, *The Squatter and the Don* (1885), Ruiz de Burton calls for a “redeemer” who will emancipate the “white slaves of California,” () but this only further supports the idea that slavery and racism are only problems insofar as they threaten *California* capital. One might consider this move alongside tragic mulatta narratives that are not so much pro-African American or anti-slavery as they are sympathetic to the plight of a well-bred white (appearing) woman who faces these trials.

⁵⁴ Eric Lott, 95.

⁵⁵ Roediger, “Chapter 4.” *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (1991).

While maneuvering to represent Lola's Catholicism as an advantage, Ruiz de Burton nevertheless manages to circumvent any low connection that is implied between Lola and the Irish Catholics on the grounds of her wealth and breeding. This comparison to the Irish also enables a strategic inversion of colonial Spain's *gracias al sacar* practices, which allowed mixed-raced colonial Mexicans to purchase their whiteness from the Spanish crown. As alluded to earlier, the so-called "Caucasian cloak" and "Spanish fantasy heritage" imply that Mexican American claims to whiteness were false, or grounded in a tenuous claim to Spanish ancestry that, for convenience alone, allowed the U.S. to annex northern Mexico while technically upholding its pre-Fourteenth Amendment whites-only citizenship policies. This allowed the U.S. to sustain its belief that Mexico mongrelized its citizen-class, whereas the U.S. did not engage in such practices. However, as the novel demonstrates, despite her black-coded body the revelation of Lola's wealth immediately secures her equal footing in the Norval household as a ward instead of servant, as money siphoned from Lola's inheritance enables the Norvals' entry into elite social circles. Lola's physical attractiveness and desirability as a potential mate continue to increase over the years as the skin dye eventually fades. The fact, however, that Lola's wealth alone secures her position in the Norval household suggests that the U.S., like most empires, is willing to overlook an unfavorable taint when riches are concerned. Jesse Alemán states as much in his observation:

Enacting in miniature the history of Spanish colonization of the Americas, Doña Theresa uses the wealth she gains from indigenous exploitation to rescue (*sacar*) Lola from the threat of Indian identity [...] Doña Theresa's Spanish/Mexican caste system allows Lola to 'purchase' her whiteness from Northern bankers rather than from the Spanish Crown, as was usually the case with the *gracias al sacar* process. ("Thank God" 103)

At this moment, Ruiz de Burton places her young protagonist within competing mid-nineteenth century discourses undergirded by nativism and expansionist concerns over the fate of U.S.

republican government—concerns about annexing Mexican territories and admitting members of a “mongrel” race not fit for full citizenship into the nation. However, she also demonstrates Lola’s fitness by distinguishing her Spanish whiteness and class standing from the domestic U.S. Irish and black communities. Meanwhile, she simultaneously deploys Mexico’s *gente de razón* (people of reason) criteria, which qualified Mexicans for citizenship on the basis of not being “savage.”⁵⁶ Through these multiple oppositional formations, Ruiz de Burton securely restores Lola’s footing as a white gentlewoman. Moreover, in her distancing of Lola from the vulgar masses, Ruiz de Burton goes a step further to position Lola above the New England Anglo-Saxon middle class, as represented by characters like the Norvals’ eldest daughter, Ruth, who puts on airs despite the family’s want of capital and social rank. In an earlier scene, the narrative brings the two girls’ breeding into stark relief when Lola refuses to engage Ruth. Ruth assumes that, as Mexican, Lola must not speak English—which permits Ruth to speak freely. Dr. Norval finally reveals that Lola does, in fact, speak fluent English, but that “not liking [Ruth’s] manner, she disdains to answer [Ruth’s] question” (20), thus demonstrating Lola’s proud demeanor in contrast to Ruth’s vulgarity. This conspicuous show of dignity clearly positions Lola as the better of the two girls. Once Lola’s superior breeding is established, she becomes the novel’s exemplar of feminine grace and propriety, the more suitable representative of the Cult of True Womanhood—and not despite her Catholicism, but, in part, because of it.

So while the issue of slavery remains obscured in the text—unless it is alluded to as a ploy to evoke sympathy for white womanhood as in the parlor scene—racism is central to the novel’s functioning. Ruiz de Burton intersperses minstrel tropes like Lola’s temporary blackface

⁵⁶ Leticia Garza-Falcón, *Gente Decente: A Borderlands Response to the Rhetorics of Dominance* (1998), *Genealogical Fictions: Limpieza de Sangre, Religion, and Gender in Colonial Mexico* (2008), and María Josephina Saldaña-Portillo, “‘Wavering on the Horizon of Social Being’: The Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo and the Legacy of Its Racial Character in Américo Paredes’s George Washington Gómez” (2004).

and the love triangle in order to juxtapose Lola with her Northern “superiors.” Lola’s refusal to mix with the Irish contrasts Isaac and Le Grand Gunn’s eager miscegenation; Lola’s pure blood lines and chastity stand out against Lucinda’s blood-mixture and sexual availability. Riffing off Mulvey’s “male gaze,” Eric Lott playfully coins the term, “pale gaze,” which he defines as “a ferocious investment in demystifying and domesticating black power in white fantasy by projecting vulgar black types as spectacular objects of white men’s looking” (153). In the parlor scene, Ruiz de Burton ultimately produces a similar scopophilia for her readership by re-casting the black role with New England players and the white role with Lola. She situates the Norval women amongst vulgar New England types as spectatorial objects for her readership’s ridicule. In so doing, she demystifies the Puritan ethos at the center of the American creation myth.

THE ANGEL IN THE [HUT]: CAPTIVITY, DOMESTICITY, AND TRUE WOMANHOOD

“Where the domestic novel appears turned most inward to the private sphere of female interiority, we often find subjectivity scripted by narratives of nation and empire”
—Amy Kaplan, “Manifest Domesticity”

It has become critical commonplace to locate *Who Would Have Thought It?* within the genre of the captivity narrative. Given that the text literally begins with the abduction of Doña Theresa, whose harrowing Indian captivity is transcribed on her deathbed into a physical text, this frequent observation makes sense. It is not enough that Ruiz de Burton provides the oral telling of an Indian captivity to launch her novel; she then goes to lengths to provide a physical artifact—a textual captivity narrative to perform the political work of the genre and to launch the meta-analysis of her novel. Much of this work is done sentimentally, possibly sensationally, despite her narrator’s ironic distaste for the “popular sort of *artifice* freely employed by ‘*sensational*’ novelists (155). That said, she nevertheless makes full use of the pathos and

voyeuristic titillation inherent to the genre, and then pushes the formal limits of the captivity narrative's imagined possibilities through dripping sarcasm. At the heart of the captivity narrative is the desire to cohere national values through a religious framework, and to articulate this budding "new world" identity through stories that threaten gendered reproduction.⁵⁷ Ruiz de Burton certainly achieves both in her re-imagining of the genre while further managing to loosen New England's Protestant stronghold as the nation's moral core. The latter is no easy feat given the captivity narrative's intimate connections to New England Puritanism as one of the nation's earliest and most widely-circulated literary forms.

A small handful of critics including Beth Fisher, Julie Ruiz, and Andrea Tinnemeyer recognize that the remainder of *Who Would Have Thought It?* functions allegorically as Lola's captivity amongst Protestant New Englanders, and have teased out the work that the genre performs in advancing Ruiz de Burton's satire when set in this specific geographical region. Fisher, for example, inverts the popular American stereotypes about Mexicans, and notes Ruiz de Burton's use of familiar captivity narrative tropes to suggest that Mexico's northern frontier (the "civilized" culture in this allegory) is under attack by both Indian and Yankee "savages" ("Captive Mexicana" 61). Anne Goldman further notes Ruiz de Burton's parody of the U.S.'s mythic Puritan origins⁵⁸ when Goldman draws attention to Ruiz de Burton's snarky treatment of American holidays: "It was the anniversary of some great day in New England [...] some great day in which the Pilgrim fathers had done some one of their wonderful deeds. They had either embarked, or landed, or burnt a witch, or whipped a woman at the pillory, on just such a day" (reprinted in Goldman, "Blue-Eyed Mexican" 63). In addition to mocking New England's celebration of its own anti-feminism and arrogant mundaneness, this passage becomes all the

⁵⁷ Tinnemeyer, 4.

⁵⁸ Slotkin, 1-24.

more interesting in conversation with Andrea Tinnemeyer's observation in *Identity Politics of the Captivity Narrative After 1848* that, "Tales of brutal torture and death, similar to [Increase] Mather's use of the black legend to distance the Puritan colonial project from its Spanish predecessor, were circulated to testify to the exceptionalism of the United States in its colonial endeavors to remove American Indians and to annex one third of Mexico" (xiii).

It is not too much to suggest, then, given Ruiz de Burton's apparent awareness of captivity narrative tropes, that she would have recognized Puritan anti-Spanish propaganda as foundational to the U.S.'s self-concept throughout its documented "errand into the wilderness."⁵⁹ Therefore, her inversion of the captivity narrative is, in part, reclamation of the Spanish colonial system that produced her. It also recognizes that the Puritan mythos in U.S. culture is the necessary site of her intervention—that she must deconstruct this privilege before she can hope to implement an alternative exemplar of female piety and decorum. If we factor out all we know in hindsight about the events affecting Mexican Americans since the turn of the twentieth century, this novel reads much less like a subaltern protest narrative than it does another installment of the centuries-long struggle between Anglo-Protestant and Spanish-Catholic imperialisms, joined together politically by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, but also culturally and militarily as a sort of imagined community forged by the shared nuisance of Indian raiders onto their frontier territories. In this instance, the case for social parity is being made by a descendant of Spain to an overwhelmingly Anglo-American audience, and under the rule of a nation-state that uses the black-white color line as its dominant racial logic.

Ruiz de Burton's challenge, then, is not solely to undermine New England Protestantism and to carve a niche for Spanish Catholics within this U.S. body politic, but to engage U.S. racial

⁵⁹ Slotkin, 20-1 for background on the "improvements" that Puritan religious leaders made to captivity narratives for use in jeremiads and revival sermons.

politics amidst the tumult of Southern Reconstruction. She makes no attempt to subvert the black-white color line; rather, her goal is to ensure that Spanish *Californios* end up on the “white” side of it. Her goal is to ensure that the U.S., in its effort to place Mexican Americans along its binary racial spectrum, does not “brownwash” all of colonial Spain’s racial categories under the *sistema de castas* into a single Mexican race, and she will achieve this on cultural terrain: through showy performances of Spanish-*Californio* impeccable breeding, and by insisting on unadulterated white bloodlines as both a fact and a birthright for some *Californios*, not a “fantasy heritage.”

Much of her narrative is vested in loosening Anglo-American women’s stronghold on ideal womanhood, and recasting Spanish Catholics Lola and Doña Theresa as alternative exemplars of female whiteness. For example, what readers of captivity narratives find so terrifying yet titillating are the looming threat of miscegenation and the question of whether a woman, once held in captivity, can return to good society. As so often is the case in nineteenth-century fiction, the defiled woman, “fallen” and no longer a viable member of respectable society, dies as a result of her injury. Her inability to survive the affront functions as proof of her delicate femininity. We see this structural parallel at the beginning of *Who Would Have Thought It?* with the honorable death of Doña Theresa, who languishes in a hut near the banks of the Colorado river rather than bring shame upon her husband and father by returning to Mexico in her “insulted” state. Through this sentimental death trope, Ruiz de Burton situates Spanish-Mexican womanhood within the same discursive terms established by the Victorian Cult of True Womanhood, and in opposition to black womanhood—like Lucinda, able to survive sexual degradation—as described by Hazel Carby’s famous critique.⁶⁰ At the end of the novel, when

⁶⁰ Compare to Hazel Carby’s argument in *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (1989) which describes an oppositionally-related racially-gendered logic. Carby critiques the

Doña Theresa's husband and father in Mexico finally receive word of her death nearly twenty years after her abduction, the two bereaved gentlemen grieve beneath a painting of her that seems to utter: "Do not weep for me. Do not mourn. I am an angel now. I was always pure, for my soul did not sin, although I was insulted by a savage. I was a martyr; now an angel" (202). Through this sentimental tribute and conspicuous martyrdom, Ruiz de Burton is able to position Doña Theresa within a literary tradition of female respectability, and to transmit the same noble qualities and to Lola.

Inasmuch as *Who Would Have Thought It?* relies on gendered norms and genre convention, one cannot understate the extent to which female propriety, pride, and good taste undergird Ruiz de Burton's argument for *Californio* inclusion as fully-participating U.S citizens, replete with its protections and privileges. This method of displaying female respectability resonates with the uplift strategy deployed by the African American Clubwomen discussed in my previous chapter. However, rather than attempting to demonstrate that womanly virtue is not an exclusive form of white social capital—"whiteness as property" to borrow Cheryl Harris's term—Ruiz de Burton works under the opposite premise. She uses propriety and good taste not only as proof of Lola's whiteness, but as further proof that the noble blood that courses through Lola's veins is the stuff of natural-born aristocrats. As Anne Goldman notes, "'America' in this text parodies Anglo American versions of 'Mexico'; it is crude and uncouth. America is peopled by barbarians who don't care when they miss the spittoon bucket and social climbers whose first contact with high culture send them into a tailspin of uncontrolled sensuality. In Ruiz de Burton's novel, aesthetes belong in Mexico; New England, by contrast, is home for the vulgar" ("Blue-Eyed Mexican" 73). Ruiz de Burton stages *Who Would Have Thought It?* on two

narrative implication that slave woman are less refined than white women and better suited to hard manual labor because slave women do not die from sexual assault, as is regularly depicted in sentimental narratives about fallen white women.

domestic fronts where she engages in intra-white cultural politics, where Lola defeats Protestant New England on their turf, but her terms.

In this respect, Ruiz de Burton invokes the “domestic” in terms of feminized home spaces as well as within U.S. national boundaries. As a satirical novel of “manners,” *Who Would Have Thought It?* operates squarely within the gendered poetics of what Amy Kaplan calls “Manifest Domesticity,” but with one important distinction. The woman within the domestic sphere still reproduces citizens and domesticates foreign and “savage” peoples within her domain,⁶¹ but in Ruiz de Burton’s telling, it is Lola who exerts her superior influence over coarse, scheming New Englanders instead of being the foreign element to be tamed by the Norval women. This is not to suggest, that Ruiz de Burton depicts all Anglo-Americans as crass; she specifically treats New England Protestants in this manner—Bostonians and New Yorkers, particularly—as representative of the North in her novel about the Civil War.

Like *Californios*, she represents Southerners as victims of Northern barbarism, and treats Southern agrarian plantation societies analogously to her own hacienda system, both systems resting on a foundation of white privilege and racialized labor. Jesse Alemán suggests that the greatest irony of the novel’s social critique is that it “comes back on itself, despite the novel’s attempt to forget the neo-colonial history and racism of Hispanos in the Southwest” (“Citizenship 16). I believe that the novel would only attempt a forgetting of this history if, in fact, it ever imagined *Californios* as a race-inclusive society across class and labor. Instead, the novel assumes that as U.S. nationals *Californios* would nevertheless uphold the racial stratifications inherited from the mission and hacienda systems even if *Californio* society

⁶¹ Kaplan, 588-91.

previously allowed for a more nuanced and racially-permissive understanding of whiteness.⁶² Even after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo granted legal protections to Mexican Americans. As Tomás Almaguer points out, only the elite actually benefited from these rights: “Although technically entitled to these same rights, members of the Mexican working class were never viewed by Anglos as political equals of the old *ranchero* elite. Despite being eligible for citizenship rights, the Mexican working class was not afforded any better treatment than other racialized groups in the state” (57).

Rather than Ruiz de Burton forgetting Hispanos’ “neo-colonial history and racism” in the sense of erasure, the only forgetting here is in not stating the obvious—her presupposition of racial stratification as a common-sense given. That white *Californios* occupied a higher social position than *mestizo* laborers is less forgotten than never questioned since it is so commonplace that it does not warrant mentioning. This distinction only requires reminding after these groups eventually become racialized into a single proletarianized labor force. At the time, however, , this “natural” race-based stratifications separating these groups provides a cultural link between elite *Californios* under the hacienda system to Southern plantation whites. As Jesse Alemán further notes:

[Raymund] Paredes’s ‘hacienda syndrome’ is not a flippant analogy—it likens Mexican American writers to Southern whites, whose constructed position of white racial power rested on the reality and legacy of black slavery. The alternative georacial cartography Paredes invokes challenges the subaltern strain of Chicano/a studies by seeing whiteness as the link between the cultures of Southern slavery and the Spanish/Mexican colonial history in the Southwest. (“Thank God” 97)

⁶² Lisbeth Haas, 30-1, describes whiteness as a category in California that originally meant “Spaniard” as a signification of whiteness, but grew into a wealth and comportment-based gradient system between aristocrats and laboring *indios*. While whiteness could encapsulate people with some blood mixture, it was very much a class-dependent. She nevertheless emphasizes that those who could still claim *limpieza de sangre* (blood purity) would still rely on that as part of their claim to rank.

Ruiz de Burton writes in the middle of Reconstruction, when the goal is to enfold the ex-Confederacy back into the fabric of the nation. If whiteness provides the connecting thread between these two cultures, then Ruiz de Burton is using this connection to the South to enfold white *Californios* within the purview of Reconstruction and to resist the de facto racialization process of all Mexican Americans into non-whites. “By invoking its pre-1848 (genteel) class and (white/Spanish) racial and caste identities through its narrative recovery of hacienda community,” Vincent Pérez argues, “the Californio elite at the same time imagines a future place for itself within the newly ascendant white nation of the post-Reconstruction period” (28).

Such comparisons complicate the notion that Ruiz de Burton considers herself as part of a non-white Mexican American racial group. Even though she and her descendants may ultimately have succumbed to the proletarianization process that Marcial González describes, we must remember that her class grew wealthy from the proletarianization of mestizos and *indios* already long underway before Anglo-Americans entered the scene, and that these race-based class stratifications fueled her sense of kinship with the occupied South. Moreover, as Ruiz de Burton attempts to privilege *Californiana* womanhood, she does so in direct reply to writers like Augusta Evans who attempts the same maneuver for Southern womanhood in opposition to Mexican women.⁶³ Rather than pit elite *Californianas* against Southern women, Ruiz de Burton (who, as a side note, shared an intimate friendship with Jefferson and Varina Davis) uses their similarities as the grounds for enfranchisement under Reconstruction.

Lastly, these perceived similarities between the hacienda system and Southern plantation culture might further explain Ruiz de Burton’s conspicuous silence on the subject of slavery. As we have seen, she certainly had no qualms in expressing anti-black sentiment, but to invoke African American slavery or the slave narrative directly would undermine her goal of attacking

⁶³ Suzanne Bost, 652.

hypocritical northern abolitionists. When she finally does directly bring up slavery in *Who Would Have Thought It?*, it is to suggest that white citizens are “slaves” to an oppressive federal government, such as the scene in which Julian scolds President Lincoln (241). Likewise, her rhetorical mention of the “white slaves” of California in *The Squatter and the Don* is, once again, a tactic that allows her to insist on the whiteness of *Californios* through allusion to the South, vanquished and enslaved by northern policies (344). Her inversions of popular nineteenth-century genres—direct invocation of the captivity narrative, passing narrative, sentimentalism and sensationalism alongside allusions to blackface minstrelsy and careful avoidance of the slave narrative—while vast, are methodical, and always work towards affirming *Californio* whiteness and high culture.

GOTHICISM AND ANTI-CATHOLICISM

“Hackwell was in her opinion a very strict Presbyterian minister of the old school,’ a good hater of all other sects—particularly popery [...] If he had been any other denomination or less strict a Presbyterian, [Mrs. Norval] would not have tolerated him” (136)

From the outset of the novel, Ruiz de Burton plays with conventions of multiple literary genres. She invokes the captivity narrative, suggests the possibility of racial passing through Lola’s dyed skin, and pens Doña Theresa’s sentimental death. The most strategic narrative inversions, however, involve gothic and sensational tropes with which her nineteenth-century readers would have been well versed. Inasmuch as *Who Would Have Thought It?* attempts to position Spanish-*Californios* favorably within existing U.S. racial schemes, and distances *Californios* from the Irish through anti-black tropes and on cultural terms, Ruiz de Burton must recover *Californios* further still by addressing head-on the rampant anti-Catholic sentiment of the time. She had to debunk the myth that Catholics were unfit for a republican form of government since their

allegiance is always to the Pope, which she accomplishes through a hyperbolic re-writing of the black legend—an essentialist Anglo-Protestant rendering of Spanish cruelty and treachery. However, as we have seen in her handling of *True Womanhood*, she reverses the character roles, placing Spanish Catholics in the position of moral superiority and reassigns all loathsome attributes to New England Protestants. These genre inversions provide the reader with what Jane Thompkins calls “cultural shorthand,”⁶⁴ providing the didactic cues needed to interpret the text according to the author’s design. Specifically, she makes extensive use of the seduction plot by conjuring the familiar figure of the lascivious gothic monk, who she reinvents in the form of a Presbyterian minister, the Reverend John Hackwell.

Whereas gothic and sensation novels such as Maria Monk’s 1836 *Awful Disclosures* reveal the lurid goings on behind monastery and convent walls—and spurred such popularity that, by 1860, its sales figures placed it second only to *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*⁶⁵—Ruiz de Burton’s narrative flips the religious roles, casting a Presbyterian minister (the most staunch descendants of New England’s Calvinist doctrine) as the sexually-predatory aggressor, while making Lola’s convent boarding school her only place of refuge (101). Ruiz de Burton responds to popular depictions of Catholics in nineteenth-century conduct literature that sensationalized Catholics as depraved and dangerous to the moral fabric of the nation. Sandra Frink describes popular depictions of Catholic religious figures that helped reaffirm a Protestant-centered U.S. national imaginary. According to Frink, “these texts juxtaposed the sanctity of the Protestant domestic sphere, believed to be the bedrock of the nation’s virtue and democracy, against that of the Catholic ‘family,’ deemed to be sexually deviant, tyrannical, and corrupt” (239). These novels

⁶⁴ Jane Thompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860* (1986).

⁶⁵ Sandra Frink, “Women, the Family, and the Fate of the Nation in American Anti-Catholic Narratives, 1830-1860” (2009).

accomplish this through storylines and stock characters as Frink describes in the following passage:

Nuns rejected the proper role of women by refusing to marry and have children and by becoming active in the public sphere through their charitable institutions and schools. Far more dangerous, however, were the debased sexual activities presumably engaged in by nuns and priests. Celibate and ensconced within the walls of the convents and monasteries, they developed unhealthy, perverse, and licentious sexual appetites and practices (245)

Well aware of these popular stereotypes, through a clever role reversal, Ruiz de Burton uses the “cultural shorthand” of these stock characters to cast Lola as the damsel threatened by a cleric who deliberately chooses to become a Presbyterian reverend instead of a Catholic priest because, in Hackwell’s own words, ““Imagine what a loss that would have been to the ladies!”” (44)

Through this reversal, and coupled with her earlier racial productions, Ruiz de Burton is able to wrest away Mrs. Norval’s claim to ideal Protestant womanhood, and transfer it to Lola. Ruiz de Burton still plays to the narrative conventions, but uses them towards her goal of supplanting New England womanhood with *Californiana* womanhood. This comes to pass early in the narrative when Dr. Norval is forced to flee the U.S. at the onset of the Civil War because of the North’s intolerance of his democratic political sympathies. During his extended absence, the family in error receives notice of his death, leaving Lola—already astonishingly wealthy and increasingly beautiful as the skin dye fades—without her male protector. Mrs. Norval thereafter assumes the role of Lola’s legal guardian and steward over her finances, which Mrs. Norval spends freely on an ostentatious new mansion in New York, and the purchase of her own daughters’ entry into society through a narrative *gracias al sacar* inversion.

At this point, the novel follows Hackwell’s repeated attempts to trap Lola and her wealth by marriage. His most direct access to Lola is through her guardian, Mrs. Norval, the “stately madam” that he was sure he could make “tremble like a girl anytime he pleased” (123). Until

this point in the narrative, Mrs. Norval has been the most self-disciplined, austere, and respected woman in her parish. Now, despite the unconfirmed news of her husband's death, and Hackwell's knowing that Norval is actually alive, Hackwell seduces Mrs. Norval and tricks her into a bigamous marriage. This plotline echoes another popular anti-Catholic literary trope: the husband-wife-priest love triangle⁶⁶ that wedges Rome within sacred marriage bonds, and recalls the novel's earlier illicit love triangle involving the quadroom, Lucinda. This reimagining, however, inserts the scheming Reverend Hackwell into the Norvals' marriage bed. He continues to pursue Lola even as he seduces Mrs. Norval. What's more, this seduction plot demonstrates that, unlike Catholics accused of unthinking loyalty to Rome, Mrs. Norval is actually the figure least able to participate in republican government because of her blind devotion to the ex-Presbyterian divine. Her reason no longer belongs to her. In other words, she ceases to behave as *gente de razón*.

Even while knowingly engaged in a bigamous marriage, Hackwell still plots until the end of the novel to abduct Lola, take her aboard a steamship to Cuba where he will force her to marry him. He ultimately fails in his pursuit when Isaac figures out that Lola is the child in Doña Theresa's manuscript, and helps Lola's father retrieve her from New York and take her back to Mexico—but not without a dramatic diversion to evade Hackwell's abduction scheme! The novel ends with Lola's return to Mexico, the Civil War in its final year, and the promise that Julian will rejoin Lola within one month after the war's end. Lola's convent has cloistered her away from the illicit goings on under the Norval roof. Virtue intact, she emerges from her captivity as the exemplar of True Womanhood, and with the prospect of a mutually-beneficial cross-cultural match. Patriarchy is restored with the woman in her proper place, and the post-

⁶⁶ Susan Griffin, *Anti-Catholicism and Nineteenth-Century Literature* (2004).

1848 transnational allegory is complete as dispossessed Lola resumes a dignified position within the familial structure spanning both nation states.

By appropriating and inverting popular nineteenth-century genre conventions, Ruiz de Burton undermines much of the dominant political rhetoric that was used to disenfranchise U.S. Mexicans despite treaty protections. She circumvents nativist discourse⁶⁷ that questions whether a “mongrel” race can fully participate in a republican form of government by racially producing Lola as not being from that mongrel race at all. Lola is white, and her suitability for good society is evident through the breeding she displays in contrast to the Irish, Blacks, and “savage” Indians. Moreover, Ruiz de Burton undercuts Protestant New England’s imaginative stronghold on U.S. moral integrity by casting the Norvals and their surrounding community as hypocrites, simultaneously imagining Catholicism in the morally-superior position within gothic and sensational narrative structures. In the end, while Lola’s identity production remains problematic for critics hoping to place Ruiz de Burton as a progenitor of Chicano literature, this text demonstrates a fraught resistance strategy based tenuously on early Spanish claims to whiteness and through strategic intermarriage that couples Lola to Julian, and northern Mexico to the patriarchal U.S. nation-state.

⁶⁷ John Pinheiro, “ ‘Religion Without Restriction’: Anti-Catholicism, All Mexico, and the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo” (2003).

CHAPTER 3

Access, Assimilation, Anti-Feminism: Malinchismo in the Cultural Production of El Teatro Campesino's *Los Vendidos*, 1965-1978

1965 through 1978 mark the early years of El Teatro Campesino (the farmworkers' theater). Within this period, according to Yolanda Broyles González, the teatro's affiliation with the United Farm Workers was at its height. This marks the period prior to the theater's "mainstreaming" with the production of *Zoot Suit* at the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles (167). Under the direction of Luis Valdez, the teatro emerged as "a union tool for organizing, fund-raising, and politicizing" (Broyles-González xii). It operated as a cultural complement to the organizing efforts against California agribusiness, garnering its effect through grassroots guerilla performance tactics. Its earliest form was called the "*acto*"—a hybrid of form that brought together community-based improvisation, Mexican vaudeville, and the rasquache aesthetic of the *carpa* (traveling tent theater).⁶⁸ These *actos* were often impromptu performances on the backs of flatbed trucks intended to rally political support of the farmworkers in the fields through instantly recognizable cultural tropes, stock characters, and oftentimes signs worn around the neck that literally label the character for expediency.

While El Teatro Campesino's deployed its early *actos* towards multiple goals—garnering support for the union, anti-war movements, and espousing traditional family values in response to burgeoning Chicana feminism—this chapter is focuses primarily on the latter, while remaining attuned to the teatro's treatment of the interconnections between all three. Specifically, I look at their 1967 *acto*, *Los Vendidos* ("the sell-outs"), for its anti-feminist allusions to La Malinche as a tool to create political unity through the audience's shared derision of Mexico's most defamed "race betrayer," the woman accused of selling out her people to Cortéz and enabling the conquest

⁶⁸ See Broyles-González, 7-58; Michelle Habell-Pallán, 37-40; Jorge Huerta, *Chicano Theater: Themes and Forms*.

of Mexico. Through this analysis, I identify how the teatro's method of relying heavily on cultural shorthand (instantly identifiable tropes and myths) not only reifies normative patriarchal leadership through familial structures, but also continues the ongoing erasures of Chicanas contributions, including females leaders like Dolores Huerta, Chicana feminists,⁶⁹ and the emerging middle-class Chicanas/os, from historical records. My analysis returns to discursive strategies that police group-belonging through cultural production, namely, the development of mythologies via theatrical representations that conceal outliers and define the terms of group belonging and authenticity. I attend to the *acto*'s treatment of its main "sell-out," Miss Jimenez, which, on the one hand, will not permit her to act as a middle-class, educated agent, nor, on the other hand, allow her metaphorically to function as a white feminist analog. Rather, the *acto* insists on embodying Miss Jimenez as ethnically Mexican and a cultural insider in order to heighten her branding as a race-betraying union buster who attempts to wear a racial prosthesis that is odds with her essence, according to the prescriptive logic within Chicano nationalism. As such, I return to racial passing as a lens that uses these discursive practices to voice protest against hegemonic institutional exclusions while simultaneously policing the behaviors of in-group members who step out of line.

Ongoing scholarship continues to complicate existing interpretations of "passing," reimagining and deploying it within numerous alternative contexts. Passing has proved to be a useful analytic tool for scholars whose work seeks to destabilize and complicate rigid binary systems that dominate multiple discourses. In addition to its racial applications, passing has recently been used as an analytic tool in the study of gender and sexuality, intersex groups, class, religion, and migration. This chapter seeks to explore passing as a point of entry into yet another

⁶⁹ Maylei Blackwell, *Chicana Power!: Contested Histories of Feminism in the Chicano Movement* (2011).

domain: assimilation.⁷⁰ This chapter defines assimilation in its most pared-down sociological sense: the shedding of an original culture in favor of an adopted host culture, prompted by unequal power relations, coercion, and the desire of the peripheral group to move closer to the center of power.⁷¹ The term, however, is fraught with centuries of struggle and resentment. This analysis attempts to move beyond the affective dialectic of race loyalty and betrayal that so frequently overtakes the critical discourse about assimilation processes. It compares the logic of passing with the logic of assimilation, exploring their underlying mechanics and inducements. The affective dialectic around assimilation, in part, becomes the object of this analysis to better understand how that judgment is strategically deployed in the service of creating in-group political solidarity, often at the expense of women.

While passing is, in and of itself, a fascinating process to explore, this is a study of genre. Although passing in the United States is most frequently regarded as an African American phenomenon, performed in response to slavery and Jim Crow segregation, I believe the elements that make passing both possible and sometimes necessary in many ways mirror the hallmarks of much early Mexican-American and later Chicano assimilation narratives. This paper argues that passing—as a typically African American literary genre—provides a valuable framework through which to interrogate the politics of cultural assimilation in multiple ethnic contexts. I explore the resonances between in-group judgments of assimilation and passing, and I build off of Valerie Smith’s argument in *Not Just Race, Not Just Gender: Black Feminist Readings* that women who pass are punished far more harshly than men, often rendering women inassimilable

⁷⁰ Not coincidentally, Broyles-González’s analysis of El Teatro Campesino equates assimilation with passing when she describes early Mexican American actors who succumb to the pressure to “pass” by adopting a Euroamerican stage identity (170). According to Broyles-González, it is only after the protest movements of the 1960 and 70s and the “mainstreaming” of Mexican Americans in the media that enabled certain performers to “come out.” The point is that this pairing of passing and assimilation (as acts of “inauthenticity”) predates my analysis, already expressing shared attitudes towards both acts.

⁷¹ See Emma Pérez, *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History* (1999); Olivier Zunz, et.al. “American History and the Changing Meaning of Assimilation,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 4.2 (1985).

back into the fold of their home communities once having passed as white. In so doing, both judgments demonstrate a systemic inclination to deny women agency, and this ultimately makes women the easy butt of jokes and targets of violence. This logic locks proponents of assimilationist politics (male or female) within an effeminized linguistic register in order to pit their views unfavorably against masculine nationalist tropes. In so doing, it positions men as rightful leaders and justifies the “accessory” roles to which women are relegated in uplift and civil rights movements.

To suggest that cultural assimilation—“Americanization” for the purposes of this argument—is akin to racial passing is problematic and possibly offensive for the reason that it implies an unsavory element of self-abnegation or shame-induced indoctrination. Such an interpretation certainly mirrors critiques of passing that assume the passer has internalized a race-based self-hatred and, in effect, passes out of the desire to be white rather than in response to coercive systemic forces. Likewise, such logic would also indicate that the person attempting to assimilate into dominant American culture does so out of a desire to cast off his/her cultural affiliations—a suggestion that almost certainly is cause for offense. To complicate this hypothesis, I once again turn to Valerie Smith, who opens an interpretive space to recognize passing as prompted by the desire for social mobility rather than fueled by internalized racism. She notes that “people identify the passing person as wanting to be white, not wanting to be rich” (36). Through this distinction, Smith transforms the conversation that surrounds passing from one based in representational identity politics to one that explores strategies for marginalized people to gain access to economic resources and gate-kept, whites-only social domains. In the spirit of Smith’s statement, I return to the passing genre and to uplift movements, to challenge the “betrayal” rhetoric so often used to condemn acts of passing, whether subversive or not, and

recognize that not all battles are manifestly fought under the banner of representation,. This project explores how subversive performances of race—strategically playing to racist stereotypes—when viewed in relation to issues of economic access, can be re-imagined in the service of social enfranchisement, however harmful this proposition may appear to those invested in public image. As the “cultural arm” of the Chicano movement, El Teatro Campesino employs precisely this ideological narrative framing.

Luis Valdez’s El Teatro Campesino production of *Los Vendidos*—which in colloquial usage translates to “The Sell-Outs”—provides a rich terrain through which to consider the peculiar response to what by all rights ought to be recognized as “brownface.” This judgment, however, is staved off by a single saving grace: the comically counter-hegemonic undertones of the text. Just as racial passing narratives expose the transactional relationship between a passer and a dupe—revealing a set of negotiations between performers and audiences and/or reading publics—passing also demonstrates that scripts and performances are viable insofar as inscribed bodily codes will permit. Generally speaking, an audience must read a body as white in order for a person to pass as white. Likewise, a body must register as brown in order for a brownface performance (however hyperbolic) to be accepted as authentic by a dupe audience. As described by Amy Robinson in “It Takes One to Know One: Passing and Communities of Common Interest,” passing requires a series of performance negotiations between a performer and multiple audiences. Robinson’s model identifies three key players in “the pass”: the passer (performer), the dupe (audience), and the in-group clairvoyant (audience). In this model, the in-group clairvoyant is a member of the passer’s same group of origin who is privy to the tell-tale signs of the pass—signs which the dupe mistakenly accepts as authentic. In this triangulation, passing reveals both the fissures in taxonomic practices and hypodescent logic while exposing the

contradictions, denials, and anxieties that arise because a person *can* pass. When the categories fail, in-group loyalty betrayal often provide the discursive logic that rearticulates passing as a shame-induced crime against the community.

Operating within a similar framework, *Los Vendedos* stages assimilation as a performance transaction that uses readable cues of “American-ness” to suggest the extent to which a subject has sold out his/her cultural heritage in order to fit into “gabacho”⁷² society, while simultaneously suggesting that subversive “brownface,” when performed for the purpose of economic gain, is a perfectly viable strategy so long as the performer is male and that he retain his sociopolitical Chicano allegiance throughout his subversive con. *Los Vendedos* provides an example of racial masquerade that harshly condemns the “sell-out” form of Mexican assimilation as comparable to a racial white-washing, social climbing and community abandonment. Here, assimilation functions similarly to racial passing—both are acts of desperation that are nevertheless despised. There are two major comparisons to the passing genre that I draw to *Los Vendedos*: first, people pass in response to the socioeconomic disenfranchisement—because they need to find a way to survive in a racist culture that bars them from equal opportunity; second, in the sense that passing is judged as a form of betrayal. Even though it is understood as an act spurred by necessity—a need to survive in a race-fueled zero-sum game, and even though the passer might be pitied or even envied, the passer is also reviled as a race defector, and ultimately condemned.

⁷² “Gabacho” is a pejorative term which historically refers specifically to a Frenchman, but in common usage it is generic, derogatory slang for white.

Los Vendidos opens in Honest Sancho's⁷³ Used Mexican Lot and Mexican Curio Shop, where Miss JIM-enez (not Jiménez, JIM-enez), an employee of Governor Reagan's administration, goes in search of a "Mexican-type": a brown face that the administration can use during photo ops, to give political speeches, and to plant in the audience at political rallies and fundraising events. Sancho takes Miss JIM-enez down the line, showing her each of his standard robot models—all over-the-top exemplars of popular Mexican cultural media stereotypes. The play derives its humor through the suggestion to a largely working-class Chicano audience that mainstream America views Mexicans as sub-human (i.e. the "robot" metaphor that underscores his primary labor function), as well as through an ironic juxtaposition of the robots's "upkeep" instructions, which resonate alarmingly with the actual treatments that human laborers receive under these same working conditions. For example, the first robot model is the hard-working Mexican farm worker who "loves his patrones" (42). Sancho calls him the "Volkswagon of Mexicans" because he is so economical that "One plate of beans and tortillas will keep him going all day...that and chile, plenty of chile," (42-3) invoking the cheap diet on which many *campesinos* must subsist. In terms of unit "storage," Sancho replies:

You know these new farm labor camps our Honorable Governor Reagan has built out by Parlier or Raisin City? They were designed with our model in mind. Five, six, seven, even ten in one of those shacks will give you no trouble at all. You can also put him in old barns, old cars, riverbanks. You can leave him in the field overnight with no worry! (43)

The play uses its ironic thrust to incite its largely working-class Chicano audience members to rally around a collective political identity that does not include the likes of Miss JIM-enez. She, after all, represents Governor Reagan's administration, its anti-union policies, and its targeting of undocumented immigrant labor. What's more, the act registers its scorn for Reagan's policies

⁷³ "Sancho" is slang for the smarmy man-on-the-side who is sleeping with another man's wife (and probably drinking his beer). "Sancho" is akin to "Jody," or the WWII "Joe the Grinder" figure, in southern African-American slang.

by voicing them through an *agringada* turncoat who attempts to purchase her admission into dominant institutional structures by selling out her people. Just as the audience is primed to reject her cultural and political leanings, so too does Miss JIM-enez as the political “establishment” surrogate reject the farm worker model because he is not bilingual.

Next, Sancho shows Miss JIM-enez the new 1969 Johnny Pachuco model that does everything necessary for city life: he steals, knife fights, dances to “Angel Baby,” and resists arrest (44). This city-dweller model runs on “hamburgers, Taco Bell, Lucky Lager, Thunderbird wine, yesca....” (45). Unlike the farm worker, the Johnny Pachuco model is bilingual. When asked to speak on command he shouts, “Fuck- you!” which the audience is told he learned in American schools, and which is also where he also picked up his “inferiority complex” (44). According to Sancho, he is also a great ‘scape goat...the LAPD just bought twenty of him to train their rookie cops on” (46). In the end, the quality that makes the Johnny Pachuco model self-sufficient in the urban setting—that he “liberates” (which is code for “steals”)—is the same reason why Miss JIM-enez rejects this model. She exclaims, “No, no, no! We can’t have any more thieves in the State Administration” (46).

Sancho then shows his third model to Miss JIM-enez: the standard *Revolucionario*, or the Early California Bandit type who “rides horses, stays in the mountains, crosses deserts, plains rivers, leads revolutions, follows revolutions, kills, can be killed, and serves as a martyr or a hero” (46). He basically serves any function that requires pistol-waving Mexican nationalist icon circa 1910. He even acts in any film or TV commercial that needs a stereotypical bandito or Latin lover type. Sancho cues the *Revolucionario* to woo Miss JIM-enez, which she finds “rather nice” (47). Despite his sexual prowess, like the others, Miss JIM-enez ultimately rejects

the Revolucionario model based on his place of “manufacture”: made in Mexico. To suit the needs of Governor Reagan’s administration, the proper model must be made in America.

Finally, Sancho brings his most recent addition onto the sales floor. This final model is the fully-assimilated Mexican-American—called “Eric García”—who is by far the most expensive model because of the enormous expense through which he is produced. Sancho says, “He is built exactly like our Anglo models, except that he comes in a variety of darker shades...He is bilingual, college educated, ambitious! Say the word ‘acculturate’ and he accelerates. He is intelligent, well-mannered, and clean” (48)—which audiences are to infer as qualities alien to Mexicans (or at least according to a Chicano audience’s assessment of the Anglo-American imaginary⁷⁴). The Eric García model is programmed to eat Mexican food at opportune moments, but too much will damage his system. Moreover, the assimilated Mexican-American model is also programmed to deliver political speeches, which is especially appealing to a representative of the Governor’s office. When prompted to speak, all of the other “robots” spew impassioned anti-establishment rhetoric, which Miss JIM-enez fails to understand, as she *claims* not to understand Spanish. When asked to deliver a speech, Eric recites: “The problems of the Mexican American stem from one thing and one thing only; he’s stupid. He’s uneducated. He needs to stay in school. He needs to be ambitious, forward-looking, harder-working. He needs to think American, American, American, American, American! God bless America! God bless America!” (49)...at which point he short circuits, and Sancho rushes to shut him off.

Clearly, the Mexican-American model is intended as the foil to the three other types that resist assimilation because of their seemingly incompatible, “un-American” qualities. The Mexican-American “type” is so valuable (politically speaking) because he has been “broken,” undergone a “successful” seasoning into American abstraction, except for his brown skin

⁷⁴ See W.E.B. Du Bois’s “veil” metaphor in “Of Our Spiritual Strivings”

through which he derives his political capital. Unlike the previous models, the Mexican American is *not* economical. The Eric García model, according to Sancho, is so expensive because they had to “melt down two pachucos, a farmworker and three gabachos” (50) to make him—which if we deconstruct the racial alchemy of this formula, it sounds like just the right blend of whiteness to make him acceptable to his American audience, tempered by a dash of hard worker, urban savvy, citizenship, and language acquisition—to create a white-washed yes-man that retains just enough of a “Mexican” appearance to serve his token function: the perfect multicultural front man for photo-ops at the Governor’s rally. He is the quintessential Booker T. Washington-esque Chicano, in essence telling other Chicanos to cast down their buckets where they are. Even his name (deceptively) suggests he represents the blending of cultures, but, as María Saldaña-Portillo suggests, the juxtaposition of an Anglo first name coupled with a Spanish surname represents an “unlivable subject position” (“Wavering” 155)—an uneasy negotiation that Miss JIM-enez actively attempts to conceal each time a hint of her own *mexicana* heritage accidentally escapes her command. As the pronunciation of her name shows, despite her physical appearance, she postures herself without ethnic markers—a show of “whiteness demonstrations” to borrow María Carla Sánchez’s term⁷⁵—that make her a better fit for her position in Governor Reagan’s administration. For example, the first time she sees how quickly the farm worker picks grapes she exclaims: “Chihuahua...I mean, goodness, he sure is a hard worker” (42). In that initial “¡Chihuahua!” she reveals an instinctive response, carefully constrained under a trained composure. Furthermore, when Sancho merely points out that the farmworker model is picking grapes, she responds by saying, “Oh, I wouldn’t know” (42)—as if

⁷⁵ Sánchez discusses conspicuous performances of European-ness by Mexicans of Spanish descent for conquering Anglos (after 1848) in order to demonstrate their commonalities. I appropriate Sánchez’s term to denote a performance of shared culture in the context of an “assimilated” Mexican American into mainstream American culture.

the simple recognition of a person picking grapes would automatically blow her cover and expose her “rightful” place—belonging to the class of grape-picker from whom she so desperately distances herself. The audience is immediately primed to recognize the “Eric García” robot model as the male counterpoint to Miss JIM-enez herself, and to view his speech and manner as a denial of his cultural heritage.

As the title of the play indicates, “Los Vendidos”—literally translated as “the sold” is a direct reference to the robot types up for sale at Sancho’s Curiosity Shop, and also suggestive of Chicanos’ long history of exploited Mexican labor capital, as well as a political identity that was created through the transaction of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo negotiations. The title, however, is also a double entendre, with a far more prevalent colloquial usage that translates to “the sell-outs.” It is through this second translation of the title that the ending of the play garners its full effect, positioning Miss JIM-enez as a fully-cognizant, disloyal actor, rather than a helpless subject position being acted upon. After she “purchases” the Mexican American (much as she herself has willingly offered herself up for social purchase in the interest of her economic and political affiliations), the Eric García model malfunctions, spewing liberationist rhetoric and, to Miss JIM-enez’s horror, this is *not* covered under warranty, at which point she flees in terror, forfeiting her hefty payment. As the play’s final twist, once Miss JIM-enez is gone, and Sancho safely has Governor Reagan’s non-refundable fifteen thousand dollars safely in hand, the audience learns that the four robot models are actually real human beings play-acting popular Mexican stereotypes, and in a narrative twist, that Sancho is a robot, “passed” off as human in order to facilitate the con game.

In the end the audience is left with humans passing for robots, a robot passing as human—orchestrated in trickster-like fashion, play-acting multiple forms of “brownface” for the

sake of pulling one over on the white folks (or at least the surrogate representative of the white establishment within the play), and securing valuable resources that otherwise would be blocked from unsavory, “un-American” types. We are also left with one Chicana attempting to enact an upwardly mobile assimilationist conception of what Chicanos could achieve if only they would cast off their pesky Mexican-ness. This posture resonates almost verbatim with Article nine of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo which mandates that Mexican people in the newly acquired Southwestern U.S. territory “shall not preserve the character of the citizens of the Mexican Republic” (“Wavering” 138-9). The audience is left to recognize this men’s trickery as an ingenious inversion and exploitation of the very stereotypes that have for so long fueled social, political, and economic disenfranchisement. Moreover, audience members are left to mull over Miss Jim-enez’s tenuous positioning within Reagan’s conservative administration—tokenized and tolerated while performing the administration’s dirty work, yet left with an uncertain fate should she fail in her task. In another word play, Miss-Jimenez (the title sell-out) stands to be sold-out by her employer the moment she ceases to be useful. Much as the passer in African American literature manipulates the public’s belief in discrete racial categories and readable visual markers of race, so the men of *Los Vendidos*—of whom we still know next to nothing—are able to form a lucrative enterprise without themselves having to fall into the stereotypes, or to sacrifice their ethnic pride for a sell-out “American” political self-representation by becoming actual Eric Garcías. Like the trickster, the proverbial underdog gets his due by outwitting a more formidable opponent, even if at the end of the day, he is the only one privy to the con he has pulled off. And, the dupe is none the wiser. Sadly, the power dynamic has shifted only as far as the trickster’s recent gains will carry him, and the perceived legitimacy of the “brownface” image is yet again reified in the dominant imaginary as represented through Miss JIM-enez.

SIN VERGÜENZAS⁷⁶: ANTI-FEMINIST HUMOR IN *LOS VENDIDOS*

“I don’t sense within our culture the same fear of a man betraying our race. It is the woman who is the object of our contempt.”
 -Cherríe Moraga⁷⁷

Just as *Los Vendidos* garners its comic effect through the presentation of hyperbolic stereotypes played before a predominantly Chicano audience—poking fun at the lived experience of double consciousness—the play pulls off its greatest comic feat at the expense of the only female character. Again, my reading runs parallel to Valerie Smith’s analysis of passing narratives by examining the economic motives at the center of these narratives, rather than the putative desire “to be white.” While both of these imperatives are present in *Los Vendidos*, deployed to different ends, it is the character that is trying to perform whiteness, Miss JIM-enez, that is treated as the title’s “sell-out” while the male masqueraders are revered as heroes in the best trickster sense. My interest in passing as a reading strategy for *Los Vendidos* is not only to underscore the discursive similarities between the passing and assimilation narratives, but also to tease out the gendering of these narratives in their attempts to rally group support. In *Los Vendidos*, we encounter a masculinist identity politics produced at the expense of gender equality. Ultimately, assimilation, like passing, presents no challenge to the status quo since both processes in a U.S. context uphold a white supremacist logic that historically conflates American-ness with white citizenship. I am more concerned with the ways that both discourses are gendered. Specifically, I am most intrigued by the plots twists in *Los Vendidos* that enable—even valorize—strategic brownface performance by men who seek to capitalize on racist assumptions, while at the same time maligning a woman for also strategically performing a racial

⁷⁶ Translates to “shameless women.” To be “*sin vergüenza*” covers a spectrum of immodest or “indecent” behaviors.

⁷⁷ “A Long Line of Vendidas” (95).

identity for economic gain, yet branding her performance as both authentically shame-based and treacherous. In so doing, this act is complicit in a pattern of erasing Chicanas from leadership roles, while also suggesting the folly of stepping outside of traditional heteropatriarchal familial structures. Not to erase figures like Dolores Huerta would disrupt a male-defined union narrative as well as the leadership structures within governmental institutions. These figures are far more easily dismissed through fodder than accounted for as an emergent, alternative leadership model that goes against the traditional family structure.

Critics of *Los Vendedos* almost unanimously peg Miss JIM-enez as the focal sell-out in the play. Unlike the racially ambiguous passing figure whose “unmarked” body betrays no sign of black ancestry, Miss JIM-enez visibly reads as *mexicana*—which precludes her as a passing figure, and visually positions her as some sort of “inauthentic” or counterfeit bourgeois aspirant. Sancho immediately recognizes her as “una Chicana,” only to be corrected through her over-the-top insistence that she does not speak Spanish as well as through her affected diction and mannerisms. He enters into an uneasy negotiation, figuring how best to proceed with this obviously Mexican-descended woman who is vested in popular adherence to Mexican stereotypes as a distancing instrument for her own assimilation.

Within the first moments of the play, Valdez reifies a collective Chicano identity that is both proletarian and culturally-based, suggesting that certain behaviors and domains are alien to Chicano people, and that aspiring to gain entry to these so-called “white domains” represents cultural loss and community betrayal. This premise is problematic insofar as it upholds a self-segregating practice that conflates upward social mobility with a loss of heritage—which fits the model Valerie Smith calls into question: that to pass/assimilate is a sign that the person *wants* to be white, rather than that the person simply wants access to economic opportunity. Furthermore,

this concept of group self-identification precludes assimilation as a resistance strategy that can be used toward group advancement, while it also ignores common code-switching practices familiar to minority people well versed in a myriad of everyday performances of race necessary for survival in a white supremacist society. In *Los Vendidos* discontinuous male passing⁷⁸ builds toward a collective uplift goal whereas assimilation, as mocked through Miss JIM-enez and the Mexican-American robot she most closely resembles, represents self-interest, a permanent lifestyle choice, and cultural abandonment. We should not lose site of the fact that Miss JIM-enez is the only female among five male characters; within the play, her race and class betrayal (as a representative of Governor Reagan's administration) is conflated with her gender.

My interest in Miss JIM-enez's character derives from an obvious question: why is *she* not the suitable brown face for Governor Reagan's public relations machine? Given the anti-feminist history of El Teatro Campesino,⁷⁹ one might imagine that a woman cast as the Governor's flunkee is a natural fit: the comic effect of the male stereotypes is heightened by her position as a white surrogate easily wooed by the so-called "Latin-lover," just as she simultaneously acts as the *mexicana* who has been seduced by white culture and right-wing politics. Given El Teatro Campesino's nationalist leanings, a woman would not have been an appropriate representative of upward mobility, a believable authority figure, an emblem of the American Dream, or a viable threat to the socioeconomic structure of American society at the period. The outside world, according to the logic of the play, is not the proper place for a "decent" woman. Women like Miss JIM-enez, who roam freely without the protection of a male

⁷⁸ Arthé Anthony, "'Lost Boundaries': Passing in Segregated New Orleans," defines "continuous passing" as a permanent crossing of the color-line in which the passer cuts off all ties to his/her past and disappears into white society. "Discontinuous" passing, conversely, is temporary passing in which a person passes for white usually for financial gain—in order to gain access to employment opportunities that would be blocked otherwise—but then crosses back to live as a member of their community of origin.

⁷⁹ See Yolanda Broyles-González, *El Teatro Campesino: Theatre in the Chicano Movement* (Chapter 3) for first-hand testimonials of sexism in the organization, as well as Valdez's limited use of stereotypical female characters which Broyles-González describes as "accessory" or "peripheral" to the central male roles.

family member, run the risk of being branded “putas” (whores) by both men and women alike. As a character, Governor Reagan’s secretary is not solely fodder for a critique of free market politics—a man could have filled that role. The secretary’s primary role, as suggested by the play’s title, is to cohere a masculinist political block around cultural solidarity. *Los Vendidos* achieves this by alluding to Mexico’s most popularly notorious race betrayer: La Malinche.⁸⁰

Until her recent reclamation by Chicana feminist scholars⁸¹, Malinche has been a frequent target of misogyny, an easy scapegoat, the symbolic embodiment of the historical trauma of the Conquest narrative (*La Chingada*⁸²). She served a mythical function as one of just two female icons (Malinche and Guadalupe) on whom all Mexican female social roles descend. Few critics stopped to interrogate the coercive material conditions that compromised her, leading to her collaboration with Cortés. Few critics stopped to reassign blame to those who sold *her* out. Just as Malinche has borne the cultural stigma of race betrayal (to be called a Malinche in colloquial usage connotes deceit or treachery) and provides an oppositional rallying post, Miss JIM-enez also serves this function.

Miss JIM-enez’s character consolidates a working-class Chicano political identity around United Farm Workers’s interests: her “treacherous” womanhood is the vehicle for achieving this goal. Within the play, she reifies the cultural gender norms through which this collective identity

⁸⁰ La Malinche, or Malintzin, was one of twenty Nahuatl women gifted as slaves to Hernán de Cortés in 1519. She traditionally has been condemned as a betrayer of her race for serving the intermediary function of interpreter between the Spaniards and native peoples, thus facilitating the conquest of Mexico (colloquially referred to “La Chingada”). At the same time, she is regarded as the symbolic mother of the Mexican people, having been taken by Cortés as a concubine and borne the first racially-hybrid mestizo. Generally, however, the term “Malinche” is intended to connote treachery and sexual fallenness.

⁸¹ See Romero and Harris, *Feminism, Nation, and Myth: La Malinche*; Cypress, *La Malinche in Mexican Literature*, Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*; Cherríe Moraga, “A Long Line of Vendidas”; Norma Alarcón, “Chicana’s Feminist Literature: A Re-Vision through Malintzin/ or Malintzin: Putting Flesh Back on the Object”; Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano, “The Female Subject in Chicano Theatre: Sexuality, ‘Race,’ and Class.”

⁸² Octavio Paz’s metaphorical interpretation of the conquest of Mexico through the verb “chingar” is excerpted in Yarbro-Bejarano’s article: “Chingar...is to do violence to another, i.e., rape. The verb is masculine, active, cruel: it stings, wounds, gashes stains.... The person who suffers this action is passive, inert, and open, in contrast to the active, aggressive, and closed person who inflicts it. The chingón is the macho, the male; he rips open the chingada, the female, who is pure passivity, defenseless against the exterior world” (393).

is constructed. According to Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano in her article, “The Female Subject in Chicano Theatre: Sexuality, ‘Race,’ and Class”:

While some activists, writers, and theatre groups called for a materialist analysis of the economic exploitation of Chicanos as a class, the main tendency was that of cultural nationalism. Cultural nationalism located the oppositional relationship between Chicanos and dominant society in the cultural arena rather than in class identity...[Cultural nationalism] led to a static view of culture, including the uncritical affirmation of the family and gender roles. Cultural nationalism fostered a mystification of racial identity and an ahistorical idealization of pre-Columbian cultures in a myth of origins. (390)

Had *Los Vendidos* simply provided a materialist critique geared in the interests of farm workers (or all laborers), the role of Governor Reagan’s secretary could have been conceived of as either male or Anglo. Instead, the play alludes to a shared mythology around the conquest of Mexico and the formation of Chicanos as part of a larger mestizo race of people consolidated through the treachery of a “bad” woman. Such is the uncomplicated, and immediately recognizable 1967 iteration of La Malinche in the character of Miss JIM-enez. Consistent with these cultural mythologies, female cast members of El Teatro Campesino frequently complained of the underdeveloped female stock characters in the Teatro’s *Actos*. Women were limited to flat characters—either “good” women or “bad” women, and these designations were frequently the projections of a male-dominated ideology.

Providing a similar interpretive framework, in his introduction to *Appropriating Blackness*, E. Patrick Johnson discusses white appropriations of “blackness” as a stable trope that advances a white agenda. He writes, “When white Americans essentialize blackness...they often do so in ways that maintain ‘whiteness’ as the master trope of purity, supremacy, and entitlement, as a ubiquitous, fixed, unifying signifier that seems invisible” (4). This observation applies to any hegemonic relationship wherein those in power control the means of representation. We might recall how earlier Victorian notions of the “Angel in the House”

versus the “fallen woman” ultimately serve to protect male property interests. Likewise, Chicanas must contend with pre-Columbian mythology appropriated by a male-driven *movimiento*, wielded under a banner of cultural cohesion. Within this mythology, Chicanas have two behavioral models available to them: La Virgen de Guadalupe as the feminine ideal, and La Malinche for everyone else who falls short of this ideal.

While El Teatro Campesino waged a representational battle to give voice to Chicanos, the women within “el movimiento” struggled against similar hegemonic forces to those that invent Mexican stereotypes as an instrument for labor subjugation. Yet this form of hegemony might be described as intracultural and intraracial within the group and its focus on gender. In “Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation” Stuart Hall, via Franz Fanon, critiques racialized forms of hegemonic inscription that use representation as the foundation of colonial control. Rather than succumbing to “essence” rhetoric, Hall describes cultural identities as constantly in transition:

Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialized past, [cultural identities] are subject to the continuous ‘play’ of history, culture, and power. Far from being grounded in a mere ‘recovery’ of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and positioned within, the narratives of the past. (213)

Bent on recovering a static notion of the past, El Teatro Campesino, attempted to coalesce an entire political collective by restoring a fixed mythology of an *indigenismo*-rooted essence, replete with traditional gender norms. As a result, the writing of caricatured women’s roles fed into a romanticized past so that “Chicano culture as a whole [could be] exalted in opposition to Anglo-American culture, which was perceived as materialist and impersonal. Such an emphasis was important in creating a sense of cultural pride to counter the years of lived experience in a society permeated with degrading stereotypes of Mexicans” (Yarbro-Bejarano 390). Yet

Chicano culture found its most impactful representation through its virtuous women best extolled through its most poignant religious national icon, La Virgen de Guadalupe, and through the collective condemnation of women who compromise this standard. This ideology is clearly expressed through the cultural work of El Teatro Campesino: “The dominance of narrative form in the work of Valdez and El Teatro Campesino reinforced the power relations already created by sexual difference in the representation of the active male subject and the passive female Other, bound in loving servitude through *La Virgen* or in fall sexuality through *La Malinche*” (Yarbro-Bejarano 395). Parallel to Fanon’s observation about effective hegemony through “inner compulsion and subjective conformation to the norm” (Hall 213) in Valdez’s theater, Chicanas were expected to self-regulate by willingly accepting this gender ideology, and playing a Virgen/Malinche dichotomy.

Audiences can still recognize the legacy of antifeminist *malinchismo* in the Chicano movement’s cultural production vis-à-vis the persistent casting of Governor Reagan’s secretary as a woman. More recent productions of the play feature the “assimilated Mexican-American” robot in Sancho’s shop as women—presumably because in today’s so-called post-race, post-gender, post-affirmative action political environment, a woman in this role garners *more* public relations capital than she would have in 1967. Although the male “robot” characters could all conceivably be played by women in drag (and on occasion have been) and the Mexican-American “type” in a modern day setting can be re-imagined as a female character, the role of the Governor’s secretary **MUST** be played by woman, at least in a heteronormative performance of the text, in order for the primary gag in the play to succeed. Like La Malinche, the secretary functions as the female intermediary who “betrays” her people and continues to bear the burden of representing sexual fallenness. Like La Malinche, the secretary role *must* be a seducible

character. My reading is one fueled by Chicano gender biases that position Miss JIM-enez as perceived to be more readily seduced because she is a woman, and not a “proper” Mexican-American woman, at that. Not simply because she works for Governor Reagan—but because she works at all—Miss JIM-enez has already shown her proclivity to be led astray, and this feeble mindedness makes her the perfect dupe for “Honest” Sancho’s con. By leaving her home and entering the workforce, she has fallen prey to forces beyond her comprehension, including what is ultimately judged as her selling out of her people for pure political and economic gain. Despite the later re-castings that take place within this play—cross-dressing actresses who play the male characters, or re-gendering the assimilated Mexican-American robot as a female character—the Governor’s secretary must remain female for her to immediately and unproblematically conjure the Malinche trope.

Her gender makes her easy fodder, and her character—the only female in the original version of the play—is met with derision. She is not an object of pity. She does not read as a victim. She is the butt of a joke. Brief glimpses into Miss JIM-enez’s psyche reveal that she *does* speak Spanish, and that she instinctively responds to shock with Spanish interjections (that *¡Chihuahua!* moment), but she keeps her early socialization under tight control because of the external pressures she must appease in order to ensure her access to citizenship benefits—rights that *machismo* within the Chicano movement and traditional Mexican culture would deny her, simply because of her gender.

Miss JIM-enez occupies this same role of scapegoat in *Los Vendedos*. If her character suggests a penchant for seduction, like La Malinche, the implication is that she easily turns her back against her own people and seduces a white colonizer for her own individual gain. This interpretive move reflects a particular vantage point that completely disregards the factors that

would force her down such a path. It is taken for granted that she is acting alone in her treachery, according to an American individualist model instead of a Chicano collectivist one. In her role, she is not an agent as much as she is a delegate, but within the context of the play, she, like Malinche, bears the burden of representing the entirety of forces that work against nationalist Chicano interests. To present a more nuanced depiction of Miss JIM-enez would compromise the humor in the play which depends on an easy condemnation of La Malinche as the innately corrupt “bad” woman, and in no way interrogates the male-supremacist ideology (*machismo*) that not only underscores the Chicano movement, but Chicano culture at large. As Broyles-Gonzalez notes in *El Teatro Campesino: Theater in the Chicano Movement*:

A prime manifestation of that ideology is the inability to accept women beyond their biological roles: wife/mother/lover. It is a form of blindness that prevents many from perceiving the vast spectrum of experiences that in reality make up womanhood. The virgin/whore dichotomization of women is the distorted projection of male supremacist ideology. Maintenance of male power *needs* a fragmented (i.e. nonthreatening) image of women. (144)

This sentiment is echoed by artist Cherríe Moraga who ironically positions herself as a “*vendida*” in her essay, “A Long Line of Vendidas.” In this case, however, Moraga suggests that she is a *vendida* simply for advocating women’s interests in a male-dominated culture that praises the long-suffering woman (according the Guadalupe trope) who puts the needs of men before her own, and who rears her daughters in the same tradition. This mandate for female self-sacrifice is echoed by both Broyles-González and Yarbrow-Bejarano who note that women who attempt to raise their concerns within the Chicano movement are accused to being “divisive” or labeled “malinchistas” for succumbing to feminism, which is branded a false white bourgeois consciousness (against which Chicano identity is constructed). This same sentiment is easily recognizable in black nationalist politics that would force women into support positions in order

to advance a masculinist agenda that positions itself as representing collective interests.⁸³

However, unlike the subduing of a so-called “Sapphire,”⁸⁴ female submission is already built into Mexican culture and reified by Chicano nationalist appropriations of *indigenismo* tropes of La Malinche (treachery) and La Virgen de Guadalupe (ideal womanhood).

Beyond her instant recognizability as a Malinche figure, Miss JIM-enez also functions as the cultural backdrop against which the exemplary actions of the male characters stand out. In one sense, the play is revolutionary for its re-appropriation of the Mexican stereotypes that for so long have fueled the subjugation of Chicanos. Through the robot trope—a reclamation of the same racial tools that have fueled the ongoing conquest of Mexico for nearly five hundred years—the men become heroes by exploding the stereotypes through absurdist humor. They perform the stereotypical racial script that enables them to “pass for Mexican” and dupe the “establishment” representative. Miss JIM-enez, however, provides an example of an unsuccessful “pass” because she is attempting to playact a character that her physical particularity bars her from believably playing: the role of abstract bourgeois American citizen. The audience is expected to realize that such aspirations are both futile and foolhardy given that full citizenship is exclusive “white property.”⁸⁵ A bourgeois “Mexican-American” is peripheral at best and, according to this premise, must sell-out in order to even achieve second-class status. This collective laughable moment serves to unite the audience in its recognition that they (as a cohesive unit) are not the white bourgeoisie, nor should they aspire to such ideals, as to do so would betray their cultural group identity. The play succeeds in reifying a cultural identity binary that pits Chicano and Anglo interests in opposition. It anchors competing nationalist registers within a masculinized discourse that effeminizes the transitional space between discrete

⁸³ See Elaine Brown, *A Taste of Power*, for her account of anti-feminism in the Black Panther Party.

⁸⁴ Stereotype of a rude, domineering, loud, sometimes violent black woman.

⁸⁵ See Cheryl Harris, “Whiteness as Property.”

Anglo-American and Chicano identity categories. This zone where assimilation would occur becomes the site where feminized treachery in myriad forms resides. The audience not only recognizes Miss JIM-enez's "whiteness demonstration" in her effort to assimilate, but they deride her for attempting to adopt cultural markers that do not rightfully belong to her. In forcing the audience to consent to this judgment—what is authentically *mexicano* versus "American"—the play succeeds in reifying a nationalist logic that provides no overlap or permissible middle ground between the categories.

The obvious limitation to using Robinson's passing model as an interpretive tool for *Los Vendidos* is that unlike passing, which requires the passer to inhabit a racially-ambiguous or white-coded body, Miss JIM-enez's overdetermined brown body marks her as Mexican, which only serves to heighten the audience's incredulity at a Chicana that aspires to be "white" in a racist society that systematically precludes her. Presumably, Miss JIM-enez would stand out in a racially-homogenous Administration. On stage, she stands out against a visual tableau of similar brown-coded bodies because of her *woman's* body. Nevertheless, Robinson's model positions both Sancho (as the figure who immediately pegs Miss JIM-enez as "una Chicana") as well as the theater's viewing audience as in-group clairvoyants. Even if the audience is not privy to the plot twist at the end, both Sancho and the audience can see through Miss JIM-enez's performance of "abstract" personhood. Sancho is also able to use his ability to recognize the apparatus of assimilation at work, then to exploit Miss JIM-enez's insecurity about not being demonstrably "American" enough—made visible through her whiteness demonstrations—to trap her into a sale. He entices her by *widening* the chasm between her self-ascribed, individual positionality⁸⁶ within the Governor's Administration and the collective identity of "Othered"

⁸⁶ I use the term "positionality" of cultural identity following Stuart Hall's description as the "unstable points of identification or suture, which are made within the discourses of history and culture" (213).

Chicanos as imagined through the Mexican robots; he uses her preoccupation with class and “American” cultural markers to signify her not-Chicana-ness—which is intended to delight the audience through its preposterousness. Despite her airs and protests, for the audience Miss JIM-enez always reads as *mexicana*, and an easily identifiable type: *vendida*.

Returning to Valerie Smith’s intersectional reading of passing narratives, Smith makes a distinction between narratives of male versus female passing that directly resonates with the disparity of male and female motives in *Los Vendidos*. Smith writes:

While the logic of these texts for the most part condemns passing as a strategy for resisting racism, in fact, several actually use this racialized politic specifically to restrain the options and behavior of black women. Passing male characters can either be re-educated and returned to the bosom of home and community to uplift the race, or they can remain in the white world and be constructed with some measure of condescension, ambivalence, or even approval. Passing women characters, on the other hand, are either re-educated and returned to the bosom of home and community, or they receive some extreme form of punishment such as death or the sacrifice of a loved one. (39)

These gender disparities in passing narratives are very much at play in the competing versions of racial performance present in *Los Vendidos*. Whereas Miss JIM-enez, by the play’s end, is thoroughly mocked and ridiculed as the worst of sell-outs because of her earnest attempt to integrate into mainstream American society (an “alien” self-fashioning), the male figures that perpetuate the stereotypes for financial gain are celebrated as heroes of the community—the type of outlaws (or tricksters) for whom *corridos*⁸⁷ are written—who successfully pull one over on “the system” and live to fight another day. The female passer/ assimilationist, in effect, is exiled from her community for her unpardonable willingness to don non-Chicano markers—education and bourgeois taste—while the men passing for “inauthentic” versions of Mexican-ness remain safely contained in their lower ordained tiers, hustling for a living, but not for a moment accused

⁸⁷ Corridos are Mexican folk ballads and a form of oral culture, typically about an outlaw/vigilante—an innocent male figure forced into heroic action as the result of an oppressive, colonial action against he or his family.

of the worst possible offense: wanting to be white. The four men reify the virulent stereotypes before an audience (Sancho's customers) all-too-willing to recognize the legitimacy of such images. Then, they are valorized for having done as much. The Governor is tricked out of his \$15,000 with \$3,000 going to each participant, another \$3,000 set aside to reinvest in the enterprise, and a solitary *vendida* is "deservingly" set up to take the fall. Like other so-called race traitors who attempt to shed the markers associated with their race, such as language,⁸⁸ or who are ostracized for not performing according to an "authentic" racial script determined by the lived experience of the in-group, Miss JIM-enez is also condemned as a traitor for her dis-identification with "authentic" class signifiers and her cultural disarticulation of "decency" in a woman.

Miss JIM-enez is so easily dismissed as the butt of a joke. She is a *vendida*. Enough said. Yet I would argue that even the character of Sancho, whose role in the play is to broker Mexican labor, is exonerated by the play's end, leaving Miss JIM-enez alone holding the proverbial "bag"—which has been emptied after the con. Before the final plot twist is revealed, Sancho is already depicted as a jovial sort of fellow. In the performer-audience transaction he serves up irony, which makes him likable. For an audience versed in *Caló* (Chicano slang), the first introduction to the play—set in "Honest Sancho's Used Mexican Lot and Mexican Curio Shop"—should already register as problematic. The concept of an "honest" Sancho is an oxymoron. It can hardly be a surprise that Sancho's primary negotiations would be with an immoral, sexually-loose Malinche figure. After all, who else would a so-called "*puta vendida*"⁸⁹

⁸⁸ E. Patrick Johnson discusses a "crisis" involving black vernacular versus Standard English as signifiers of racial solidarity. He writes, "There exists a crisis of blackness involving language that remains a permanent schism in identity politics... Talking 'white' is equivalent to speaking Standard English and talking 'black' is equivalent to speaking in the black vernacular... The black American who either chooses not to or simply cannot speak in the (black) vernacular is cast as a traitor to the race—indeed, as 'white'" (5).

⁸⁹ "Sell-out whore."

turn to when attempting to sell-out her people than the “Sancho” with whom unfaithful women cavort? The play’s ending, however, reclaims Sancho as either an unwitting innocent in the transaction, or as a heroic character: a man who uses a woman’s corrupt nature against her for the benefit of the collective. He has laid a trap for Malinche to fall into; the woman is sacrificed so that the community might benefit. Such an interpretation is consistent with Smith’s assessment of gender disparity in passing narratives. Moreover, the act conveniently disposes of a female type that, unless dealt with, could threaten the male-centered leaderships model within Chicano nationalism. Miss Jim-enez must be villified, easily-led- astray *vendida* union buster in order to elide the presence of progressive, pro-union, Chicana middle-class leaders that are being written out of history and themselves condemned as cultural traitors. Conversely, the men who pass by donning “brownface” masks are valorized for operating safely within the confines of economic access, and for working together for the benefit of collective interests. Miss JIM-enez—who arguably is also performing a character with the goal of economic access—is *not* positioned as such within the stage production. She is framed as “wanting to be white,” not “wanting to be rich,” and as such deserves the community’s derision instead of being enfolded back into the community as men who “cross the line,” including a “Sancho,” can be. She behaves in a manner that threatens the values of the entire community through feminine indecency.

By the play’s end, *Los Vendidos* achieves its multiple goals: through humor, the audience rallies around a political cause while solidifying a collective cultural identity steeped in a recovered indigenous mythology that justifies a paternal gender organization at its core. The Chicano movement can march onward without the fear of women dividing its ranks with white bourgeois concerns that benefit only a handful, and contaminate the purity of the culture. The

masculinist agenda that claims to represent *una raza unida* can continue to serve its primary beneficiaries: Chicano men. Women who threaten these narratives will be written out of leadership roles, relegated within dominant histories to accessory positions, or cast as a threat to the core values of family and community, and to the survival of the race.

CHAPTER 4

Gringos, Rinches, “Spaniards,” and the *Vendido* Sanavabiches Who Love Them:
Strategic Assimilative Performance in Américo Paredes’s *George Washington Gómez*

“I definitely see the concerns that I had in the 1930s and 1940s reflected in the writings of the 1960s and 1970s... in a desire to identify, to go from one extreme to another. First, mexican-americanos were ashamed of their Indian origins, and so they wanted to be Spaniards. Now, they all wanted to be Aztecs and identify with Cuauhtémoc, roasted feet and all. [laughter]”
-Américo Paredes⁹⁰

In this chapter, I explore the debates around Mexican American/Chicano identity and representation that emerged in the 1930s and 40s, and came to full fruition in the 1960s with Chicano nationalism. Américo Paredes’s novel, *George Washington Gómez* (1990) and its accompanying critical reflections are particularly useful texts through which to analyze this ideological genesis, as they are uniquely situated both before and after the Chicano movement. In close readings of the novel and the literary criticism surrounding it, I explore the prevailing discursive terms that have delimited many interpretations of the novel. I argue that much of the scholarship around the novel reflects over-determined narratives of race betrayal. However, unlike late-nineteenth-century African American uplift strategies that offered conspicuous performances of bourgeois, hetero-patriarchal gender roles often through consumerism and taste politics, the mobility paradigms reflected by *George Washington Gómez* scholarship enact proletarian-based normative imperatives of a now institutionalized, Chicano nationalism.

To begin, this analysis must distinguish between two separate yet intertwined matters. The first is concerned with representational politics within a social imaginary—how will society view peoples of Mexican descent living in the U.S., and how will these perceptions influence opportunities for upward mobility? Moreover, what criteria will these groups use to assess their own members given the political stakes at hand? When a text like *George Washington Gómez* is

⁹⁰ R. Saldívar, *Borderlands of Culture*, 135.

inserted into a representational politics debate and a loyalty/betrayal logic is the operating analytic, of course any identity performance remotely resembling assimilation leaves a bad taste in the mouth. How could it not? How could the protagonist, Guálinto, read as anything but *vendido*? Likewise, how could Miss Jim-enez or her fully-assimilated “Mexican American”⁹¹ male counterpart not be read as “race betrayers,” the butt of El Teatro Campesino’s jokes? The binary logic forecloses any other possible interpretation. This chapter, however, takes up a second matter that is not foregrounded by representational politics. It asks whether strategic assimilative performance can ever serve a progressive politics.

To answer this question, I return to theories of racial masquerade which I discuss in chapter three. These theories provide a useful framework for thinking about assimilative performance as a form of racial masquerade akin, albeit not identical to passing. To begin, passing theorists very clearly articulate that large-scale passing is neither a viable resistance strategy, nor is it politically progressive despite its ability to circumvent institutional barriers. While passing narratives provide a useful *critical* tool to expose the faulty essence-based logics that produce these barriers, as Amy Robinson and Phillip Brian Harper remind us, the act of passing is only successful so long as it goes completely undetected—which eliminates its potential for political subversion.⁹² It can only challenge notions of biological inferiority if the passer announces him- or herself, at which point it ceases to constitute a successful pass. Moreover, the successful pass, while providing individual access to resources, only functions by convincingly performing whiteness and denigrating blackness as its defining binary opposite.

⁹¹ “Mexican-American” and “Chicano” within my analysis of *George Washington Gómez* are historically specific terms growing out of the 1930s and parallel the rise of the middle class and conservative assimilationist organizations like LULAC. These terms today do not convey the same meaning they might have up through the 1960s. However, by the 1960s (as exemplified through *Los Vendidos*) the term “Mexican-American” from a Chicano political standpoint is a pejorative terms that connotes an assimilationist positioning, often in opposition to Mexican migrants and the laboring class.

⁹² Harper, 382.

While passing provides access, it does so by reifying the white supremacist logics that police the color line and ultimately replicates the conditions that initiated the need to pass in the first place.

In this context, my analysis makes no claim for a progressive politics of assimilation on representational grounds. Rather, the question that this analysis raises is whether assimilative performance as a non-threatening, undetected form of racial masquerade can carry *material* benefits—whether one can position oneself within dominant institutions—as a Trojan horse of sorts—and siphon material resources which can be redirected toward progressive agendas.⁹³

Through my reading of *George Washington Gómez*, I explore the potential for these types of material gains as suggested by Paredes in addition to ways that these possibilities have been critically overlooked precisely because of the discursive limits imposed by the loyalty/betrayal framing paradigm.

CROSSING THE LINE: AUTHENTICITY POLITICS AND IN-GROUP POLICING

Written between 1936 and 1940, but not published until 1990, the novel reflects Paredes's proto-Chicano nationalist sentiments as they were shaped in his youth living in the Depression-era U.S.-Mexico borderlands. Despite its late publication, the novel was not altered to reflect Paredes's actual lived experience or his leanings of late adulthood. As such, *George Washington Gómez* is uniquely situated to reflect this moment of cultural transition from pre- to

⁹³ Louis Chude-Sokei's, *The Last Ducky*, provides an in-depth case study of turn-of-century West Indian minstrel performer, Bert Williams, who remains contentious figure to this day. The section of Chude-Sokei's analysis that is particularly useful as a framework for my reading of *George Washington Gómez* is in the discussion of Williams' life off stage. Specifically, Chude-Sokei recounts that Williams used his celebrity and economic resources to provide the staging ground for what ultimately would give rise to segments of the Harlem Renaissance. He ran a benevolent association called the "Frogs" whose mission was to promote education of black achievements and to "establish an archival collection of literary, historical, social, and political materials for a theatrical library in a clubhouse that was built later at 111 West 132nd Street" (27). While Williams is often villified for performing in blackface (however subtly subversive these performances might have been) and accused of perpetuating harmful images of blackness, the financial gains from his performance ultimately nurtured a generation of artists able to voice their protests openly.

post-nationalism. Its delayed publication and critical reception since the 1990s provides insight into how the legacy of the Chicano movement shaped the attitudes of Chicano Studies scholars, providing the lens through which many critics judge the assimilation process as described through young Guálinto's life.

George Washington Gómez tells the story of a young boy, nicknamed Guálinto, as he grows into young adulthood in a segregated Texas-Mexico border town during the years spanning the Great Depression. The novel follows Guálinto's trials within schools systemically designed to weed out *mexicanos* in order to reproduce a cheap labor force—he ultimately becomes one of only four *mexicanos* who graduate from the local high school. In addition to its central gendered and intergenerational themes, the novel captures the fragmentation that Guálinto grapples with, being culturally and ethnically Mexican in Texas while still a proud legal and patriotic U.S. citizen. What's more, he's a sandy-haired, blue-eyed güerrito,⁹⁴ which means that he's under constant scrutiny, forced to prove his authenticity and loyalty to his *mexicano* schoolmates. Meanwhile, he is reared under the family mandate that he will grow up to become a great man—a leader of his people. As such, he is subject to conflicting hails, and struggles to find his place in the community without the guidance of role models who understand the struggle of being caught between two worlds. Most of the male role models he has before him represent facets of the *corrido*⁹⁵ masculinity, and while the novel invokes—even celebrates to an extent—*corrido* themes and narrative structures, it labors to show that the hyper-masculinist *corrido* model is no longer sufficient to resist the forces in modernizing Texas.

⁹⁴ A little boy with fair coloring.

⁹⁵ *Corridos* are Mexican folk ballads popular through the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. The male protagonists of the ballads are best exemplified by “The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez,” the object of analysis in Paredes's most famous piece of writing, *With His Pistol in His Hand*. These ballads are songs that celebrate resistance fighters—usually peaceful, common, working men, who are goaded by injustice into their fight and inevitable martyrdom.

With the benefit of hindsight, many critics have rightfully come to recognize the novel's critique of systemic attempts at cultural genocide achieved through assimilationist policies. When seen through the eyes of young Guálinto Gómez, the transition into adulthood becomes a period of reckoning; he must determine how best to serve his community and fulfill his family's mandate to become "a leader of his people" in a rapidly-modernizing homeland that can no longer sustain the romantic *corrido* exemplars of his youth. The novel captures the ambivalence he struggles with, feeling both a part of and apart from his Jonesville *mexicano* community. Given its 1990 publication date, Paredes's readers approach this text well after the first wave of Chicano movement of the 1960s, but its complex legacy leaves its imprint on critical interpretations as many readers engage the text through institutionalized programs born of these struggles.

While forever indebted to the pioneers of Chicano Studies, a considerable legacy of women and queer of color critics since have worked to identify the limits of nationalist discourse and have expanded the field to include a multitude of voices once silenced for fear that they might fragment a unified front. The call for a mythical homeland, for essence-based politics, and appeals to an "authentic core" are less prevalent. As a result, Ethnic Studies attempt to reclaim the breadth of experiences that have been marginalized, excluded or ignored in earlier efforts to produce a monolithic notion of Chicano identity through which to rally the collective.⁹⁶ Despite—or perhaps because of—the social, economic and political gains made by Chicanas/os since the 1960s, a palpable level of unease regarding group authenticity lingers. As a case in point, one can observe the many Chicano academics who have struggled to gain entry into dominant systems of higher education and by their toil have achieved a level of class mobility, yet still struggle to reconcile these gains against the proletarian ideals of a Chicano identity

⁹⁶ E. Patrick Johnson, *Appropriating Blackness*.

formation rooted in 1960s political and class struggle. Even the term “Chicano” remains a contested site given that its semiotic re-appropriation in the 1960s provided a unifying designation for the “excluded” masses, in Norma Alarcón’s words, separate from the few “who had found a place for themselves in Anglo-America” and “measured the distance between [the two groups]” (248). Thus, the 1960s designation “Chicano” begins as an overdetermined signifier of group allegiance, replete with class-based exclusions underlying its terms of membership.

My concern here is not simply to rehash old debates, or to privilege one side over the other. Rather, my aim is to analyze the manner in which stories of group belonging have been told and to explore the underlying political mandates that provide the interpretive logics. I am less concerned with the mechanics of assimilation than I am with the assimilation politics that anchor a racial loyalty/betrayal paradigm, and that position the act of assimilation as a matter of treasonous individual choice. In this regard, what I find interesting in Alarcon’s analysis is that women and queer activists since the 1980s have successfully written themselves back into the history and transformed the “Chicano” signifier into more inclusive “Chicana/o” and “Chican@” forms. However, given that the signifiers have this history of being contingent on *both* political and class affiliation, the terms in more recent years have not been able to account comfortably for the increasing numbers of middle class Mexican Americans who retain their political sympathies with other Chicana/os, without slipping back into the language of authenticity, loyalty, and betrayal for having carved out an economic niche within “Anglo-America.” The type of retrospective analysis I provide in my readings of texts from the 1930 through the 1960s is only possible because of the inroads made by Chicana feminist scholars since the 1980s. Their

efforts to push the definitional boundaries of these signifiers into more inclusive terms based on shared political sentiments and less on scripted cultural markers or class identifiers.

I turn to Chicana feminist theory in order to read *George Washington Gómez* afresh—as a method of inclusion and multiplicity that can further divest lingering nationalist scripts of group belonging of their hold on a collective imaginary, as this is not the only viable script. Instead, I focus on multiple performance strategies as potential opportunities for collective advancement. For the sake of clarity, while this chapter recognizes the progressive potential of assimilative performance within dominant structures and institutions, it does not express the “joys” of selling out, nor does it promote whitewashing (*agringarse*) as a means to U.S. social enfranchisement. Rather, while this analysis seeks to address the issue of Chicano class mobility, it limits its analysis to those who share a progressive politics still grounded in the interests of the “excluded” that Alarcón identifies. As its starting point, this analysis seeks to expose a logic premised on “authenticity” and to critique the marginalization through rigid in-group policing practices. It exposes processes of essence-based political identity formations as scripted performance, and locates this script as the production site of the “sell-out” category that obstructs cross-class Chicano coalitional possibilities. The need for such an imperative escalates as peoples of color increasingly gain entry into the U.S. institutions and are met with the harsh reality that despite having “found a place for themselves in Anglo-America,” these too remain sites of racial marginalization and labor exploitation, obscured by celebrations of colorblindness and the seeming “evidence” of neoliberal exceptionalism.

As much I offer my own interpretations of the novel, my reading of *George Washington Gómez* also flags instances within the body of critical scholarship that appear to operate (even if only momentarily) through a loyalty/betrayal paradigm. It is also important to note that the

critics I cite at these moments are predominantly feminist scholars that could scarcely be mistaken for throwback nationalists. It is precisely because these peculiar moments appear in the work of such progressive critics that I argue that the influence Chicano nationalism's authenticity politics still permeates the field in subtle, perhaps unrecognized ways, and remains a mediating factor in our cultural analyses. In order to resist this urge, read the novel in terms of an individual character's identity formation, but also as a subject formation at the hands of an entire community that helps to produce him. Rather than simply labeling Guálinto a *vendido*, my reading asks whether the plot developments in part five of the novel could be as much a result of the community's distrust of Guálinto, their constant questioning of his authenticity and regular loyalty tests, which he is forced to pass time and again. If by the novel's end Guálinto is positioned on the brink of becoming *vendido* as many critics infer, is it possible that this is not the result of individual treachery, but the result of the sum forces that prevent him from ever feeling fully at ease amongst Jonesville *mexicanos*? Might this be his effort to put an end to the challenges to his ethnic authenticity?

In calling into question the loyalty/betrayal logic, this study follows Juan Bruce Novoa's analysis of assimilation politics in "Dialogical Strategies, Monological Goals: Chicano Literature" in its recognition that colonial processes have already occurred and continue to occur, and that in this historical aftermath, *mexicanos* exist within the United States to myriad degrees along a spectrum of assimilation (or "acculturation" when that term is appropriate). Many were born into households in which nationalist proletarianism or *indigenismo* did not provide the operating markers of identity. As such, they are made to feel inadequate or inauthentic for not relating to a prescriptive identity script. Among them are those who might nevertheless identify as politically progressive and whose goals are directly aligned with the most diehard Chicano

revolutionary, regardless of the banners under which they perform their identities. Many are unaware of the historical rift that produced the two opposing Chicano and “Mexican-American”⁹⁷ factions.⁹⁸

Bruce-Novoa identifies three strategic political maneuvers executed, in part, through Chicano literature. First, he recognizes the drive to establish a unifying narrative that would provide U.S. Mexicans with shared, scripted markers of in-group belonging formed in opposition to an imagined monolithic Anglo-U.S. mainstream. He writes:

To convert the people of Mexican descent residing in the United States into a cohesive nationalistic group was a necessary first step for any concerted action by Chicano activists. It was not a simple matter, but one that required the development of strategies in which centrifugal and centripetal forces could be created and then directed. Inner harmony and union had to be produced, while simultaneously provoking an attitude of difference based on that inner union which could be turned into opposition to the exterior other, the majority of the U.S. Society. (225)

Secondly, early Chicano activists had to sustain this collective identity by creating cultural distance between Chicanos and mainstream U.S. society. Rather than allow for a transcultural, gradient space between two cultural poles, early nationalists solidified the cultural boundaries, codified a highly-scripted “authentic core” of Chicano identity. The new discourse reimagined the assimilation process as more similar to “passing”—framed around a solitary figure’s decision to cross a color line instead of operate within a liminal space rather than to acted upon by a pre-existing, contextually-specific set of circumstances. This is a radical reframing of assimilation as a process of personal choice, rather than generational transformation; it erases the temporal “transition zone” and “reduc[es] the space and duration of the gradual transition to a thin line

⁹⁷ For this analysis, anytime the phrase “Mexican-American[s]” appears in quotation marks, it connotes a derisive label applied to the segment of U.S. middle-class citizens of Mexican descent who do not self-identify with Chicano nationalism or proletarian-based identity politics, but instead advocate for full assimilation into dominant U.S. institutions. As an example, readers may recall the stereotype of the “fully assimilated Mexican-American” that is lampooned in “Los Vendidos” as well as the figure of Miss Jimenez.

⁹⁸ See Louis Mendoza’s chapter on GWG for a more detailed account of the rise of LULAC, and the early rift between Chicanos and Mexican Americans.

crossed instantaneously (228). In other words, this radical reimagining of assimilation does not allow one to be in transition over time (or even over generations) and instead makes the process an instantaneous one without any retention of the original culture. Finally, by establishing an “authentic” cultural center according to a unifying master narrative—a “tribal orientation” as Bruce-Novoa refers to it—and by establishing the perimeter which members were not allowed to cross, Chicanos could police those closest to the boundary:

This tribal orientation lends itself to hierarchical structures. Those who occupy the cultural center serve as models of authenticity and have the power to impose loyalty tests on all participants within the space, long established or newly arrived. By eliminating the transition zone, they can censure the slightest divergence from the rules and impose strict obedience. Members continually have to check their behavior against the cultural paradigm; similarity is conceived of as proximity to the *axis mundi* and distance from the enemy. Those who inhabit the periphery of the circle, nearest the enemy, as well as those who straddle the border and openly incarnate the assimilation process—biologically or culturally—are always suspected of treason. (229)

Erasing the transition zone and scripting the authenticity markers reifies the perception that all acts of assimilation are individual acts of treachery in the same way that Malinche is said to have chosen to betray her own people. It is no surprise, then, that the same misogynistic language deployed against Chicana feminists within *malinchismo* is also used to effeminize assimilated “Mexican Americans.” I argue that to reify this illusion of choice—to continue to brand people “loyal” or “disloyal” according to this unifying master narrative—ultimately pits brother against sister, parent against child, and obscures the original cause of these ruptures. It stigmatizes and marginalizes certain groups, produces glass ceilings for others, all the while framing the matter as an individual choice rather than a systemic outcome. Chicanos and Mexican Americans fall into a blame game over cultural representation—the proper way to demonstrate/perform one’s allegiance—much the same as once-interned Japanese American WWII vets and so-called “no-no boys” continue to feud to the present, rather than focus on the source of their in-group

antagonisms: a false option of whether people either born in the U.S. or who have deeply-established roots here will choose to be American or Japanese depending on their responses to the loyalty questionnaire.

Despite the facts that the same discursive weapon is launched against both groups, and while Chicana/o feminist scholars trained in the wake of nationalist politics repeatedly and passionately attempt to recover Malinche, the same effort is not so easily made to exculpate “assimilated” Mexican Americans. Moreover, remaining locked within a betrayal/loyalty logic does not permit us to consider how those positioned within dominant institutions potentially occupy strategic positions from which to advance progressive agendas—at least not without invoking arguments posited by early LULACers that privilege American cultural and legal citizenship status, and construct Mexican American-ness oppositionally against migrant unassimilability.⁹⁹ Chicana/o advocates potentially foreclose all together the possibility of forging strategic alliances or positioning sympathizers within dominant institutions because of old, yet persistent, identity politics antagonisms. Assimilated Mexican Americans remain an easy scapegoat, especially when a vocal subset with conservative leanings comprises a much-sought after (if highly unrepresentative) punditry for the likes of Fox News. A term like “assimilation”—which to this very moment remains highly-charged, contested, overdetermined, and fraught with emotional baggage—when conflated with “selling out” implies a sense of individual choice. Within a Chicano nationalist agenda, it connotes self-interested treachery over the collective needs of an imagined *raza unida*, and is therefore ripe for the metaphorical overlay of the *malinchismo* and *vendido* tropes, the sentiments they pique, and the judgments they elicit.

⁹⁹ David Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity*, pgs. 79-95.

This analysis cautions against reifying temporal and gradient erasures that create the illusion of an “authentic core” that defines itself irreconcilably from dominant U.S. institutions. Such an account ignores the coercive structural imperatives that force assimilation, reproduce white privilege, and render its structural origins invisible. A betrayal narrative is far too simple an explanation for these social forces, and only reifies static notions of racial authenticity as somehow apart from the messy workings of capital. To this effect, J. Martin Favor warns that:

Positing too concrete bonds between authenticity, culture, color, and class risks reliance on a vision of identity so dependent on marginality as its legitimizing feature that it can never effectively deconstruct the center, which, in turn, may hold the margins to be inauthentic. By relying too heavily on a critique launched from the margins, we risk never being able to dismantle those margins without wholly erasing ourselves. (9)

My reading of *George Washington Gómez* begins with the assumption that an infiltration into the center of U.S. privilege does not necessarily indicate an untethering from the margin. Instead, this back-and-forth movement between the periphery and core blurs the demarcation that separates the two spaces and protects the interests of the core. By restoring this gradient transition zone, I invoke borderlands theory and effectually enact Gloria Anzaldúa’s notion of *nepantla* by tolerating the ambiguities and contradictions that coexist in this space. This reading recognizes assimilation as a process that occurs over generations within a liminal space that one is often born into. It is not a matter of individual choice or a sign of personal defect as *vendido* narrative structures would have readers conclude. To become *agringado* does not involve a threshold that one crosses suddenly, haphazardly, or forever; there is no such threshold. And while elements of choice might be inferred through personal representational strategies by dint of the masks individuals must wear to ensure social viability, one’s true affiliations are seldom evident through one’s mode of representation (as any faculty member who has had to shelve certain projects until earning tenure is well aware).

This analysis de-centers individual choice as the predominant logic underlying the plot. Instead, I read *George Washington Gómez* as the story of the sum forces that produced George G. Gómez—a combination of subject-fragmenting modernity in tandem with incompatible Anglo-American and *mexicano* cultural imperatives. As much as the plot appears to hinge on the individual choices of the protagonist, Paredes painstakingly chronicles the external pressures that direct Guálinto's decision-making processes: the obligations foisted on him at his birth that delimit his options, the allegiances he is repeatedly forced to prove as a result of his fair physical appearance, and the ambivalence which plagues him at the novel's end. I am particularly interested in exploring the tensions brought to relief by Paredes's narrative framing. While *George Washington Gómez* certainly produces a proto-Chicano aesthetic cohesion, the novel is critical of myriad injuries caused as a result of that singular identity formation. Ultimately, the novel does not deliver a decisive condemnation of Guálinto for failing to become a "leader of his people" as many critics infer. Instead, the novel raises the question of whether Jonesville *mexicanos* were foolhardy to pit their hopes on a subject who, despite his gender and family's local political cachet, lacks leadership potential. The novel also suggests that the community would be wise to utilize talent from a broader pool that includes women as well as community members strategically positioned within dominant U.S. systems.

This study builds on the existing body of Chicano literary scholarship around this text, but also relies upon theories of performance, strategic brownface, and "passing." I identify moments in the novel that could be mistaken for selling out if read according to an authenticity script or through loyalty/betrayal logic. I argue that these acts of strategic brownface run a gamut ranging from acts of individual survival at one end all the way to subversive acts of collective advancement at the other extreme. Moreover, I argue that similar moments of racial

performance are judged by separate standards depending on whether or not the performer's group loyalty is in question. The behaviors that lead many to conclude that George is a *vendido* are also performed, permitted or never even noticed when enacted by characters like Feliciano and Elodia whose ethnic loyalty is never called into question. These characters are in no danger of registering *vendido* and, therefore, their actions are not held up to the same degree of scrutiny or derision as George G. Gómez by the novel's end. Reading *George Washington Gómez* through a loyalty/betrayal lens fixes the reader in a dichotomy that stymies other readings of the text, readings that might draw upon Paredes's underexplored early career proto-feminism (which I discuss in chapter five). This interpretive practice forecloses potential strategic alliances that could arise across various groups of U.S. *mexicanos*. Continuing to stigmatize assimilation as a form of shame-induced cultural betrayal forecloses the possibility of strategic political alliances with potential allies that advantageously are versed in dominant registers and institutional practices. By focusing on this aspect of the novel alone occludes Paredes' call not to squeeze out much needed talent for the sake of upholding the illusion of an "authentic" core of *mexicano* culture exemplified through *corridor* masculinity.

GUÁLINTO'S RECURRING DREAM: KILLING COMANCHES IN THE RE-WRITING OF THE BATTLE OF SAN JACINTO

Most readings of *George Washington Gómez* focus on two moments: 1) the scene early in the text when Guálinto receives his name; and 2) Guálinto's recurring dream at the novel's end. This analysis attends to the latter. Within this dream sequence, several critics focus on the historical un-writing of the U.S. war with Mexico. Some focus on the racial implications and coalitional resistance to U.S. imperialism. Others, still, provide symptomatic readings of the dream and what it reveals about Guálinto's conflicted state at the novel's conclusion. While José

Saldívar argues for Guálinto's embrace of the *mestizo* working class (at least immediately prior to his going away to college), others arrive at the opposite conclusion when he returns to Jonesville as "George G. Gómez." Such interpretations posit that George is ashamed of his *mestizo* working-class roots, and that this is the impetus for his choice to assimilate. My analysis takes up those readings that identify the dream as a symptom of the shame George feels toward his *mestizo* origins. This shame, after all, is the underlying premise that fuels *vendido* stigmas.

Primed to read him as *vendido* at the end of the novel, critics must account for the seeming contradictions of a man whose nightly dreams are filled with images of himself as a warrior-like leader of his people in contrast to the man of his waking life, written off as a turncoat, the epitome of the very figures he annihilates in his dreams. In his dream, George reverts to the Guálinto of his childhood and travels back in time, prior to the U.S. invasion of Mexico, when he can lead a coalitional army against combined U.S. military forces, thus preventing the fulfillment of U.S. manifest destiny. Aided by anachronistic technologies he appropriates from his oppressors, within his dream—to borrow Audre Lorde's metaphor—Guálinto uses the master's tools to dismantle the master's house. The most frequently excerpted portion of the dream sequence reads as follows:

He would imagine he was living in his great-grandfather's time, when the Americans first began to encroach on the northern provinces of the new Republic of Mexico. Reacting against the central government's inefficiency and corruption, he would organize rancheros into a fighting militia and train them by using them to exterminate the Comanches. Then, with the aid of generals like Urrea, he would extend his influence to the Mexican army. He would discover the revolver before Samuel Colt, as well as the hand grenade and a modern style of portable mortar. In his daydreams he built a modern arms factory at Laredo, doing it all in great detail, until he had an enormous, well-trained army that included Irishmen and escaped American Negro slaves. Finally, he would defeat not only the army of the United States but its navy as well. We would reconquer all the territory west of the Mississippi River and recover Florida as well. (282)

As one might expect, many analyses hone in on select portions of this paragraph as dictated by the needs of their particular thematic readings, thereby displacing specific details from the broader narrative context. In Louis Mendoza's interpretation of the dream, for example, he echoes Josie Saldaña-Portillo's claim that George reawakens daily to affirm his decision to align himself with Anglo-Americans on the basis of a *gente de razón* (people of reason) logic. Mendoza writes, "In George's unconscious reinscription of colonial power, Native Americans must remain an enemy force who need to be eradicated [...] This genocidal imperative in George's 'mother-loving dream' suggests an unreconciled ambivalence toward, if not open hostility against, his own *mestizaje*" (158). In this analysis, Mendoza pinpoints the moment in George's dream when he trains his militia by exterminating Comanches to suggest a hierarchical privileging of the "civilized" over the "savage" reminiscent of colonial Mexico's qualifications for citizenship.

While many peoples of Mexican descent have a long history of privileging or even fabricating their "Spanish" bloodlines to conceal their *indio* roots, George's assimilation is not predicated on such concealment. He never attempts to pass as white—Anglo-American or Spanish—or to assume an identity that is anything but American in nationality and border-Mexican in ethnicity. The problematic facet of George's identity is that it does not abide by a sanctioned script of Mexican authenticity through which spectators in Jonesville and readers of Paredes's text can recognize an overt performance of racial in-group allegiance. The interpretation that Guálinto kills Comanches in his dream as a symptom of *indio* shame is more indicative of lingering *indigenismo* within Chicano nationalism that attempt to undo Spanish privilege within *mestizaje*. One would be foolhardy even to attempt to deny that *gente de razón* logic is maintained in contrast to inassimilable Indian savagery; that is its defining oppositional

binary. However, George's dream is tribe-specific and purposeful. He does not kill Indians indiscriminately; he kills Comanches. He does not suppress Indians at large in favor of a Spanish-Mexican-ness that would make him admissible into dominant U.S. society.

Rather, this targeting of Comanches plays into a specific un-writing of Texas-Mexico borderlands history. In his 2008 study, *The Comanche Empire*, Pekka Hämäläinen explains the role that decades of Comanche raids played in facilitating the U.S. military invasion into Mexico. Hämäläinen describes U.S. invasion into northern Mexico as follows:

When the U.S. Army marched south of the Rio Grande in 1846, Comanches had already turned vast segments of Mexico's heartland into an economically underdeveloped, politically fragmented, and psychologically shattered world that was ripe for conquest by Americans, who, in a sense, came to occupy what was a vanquished hinterland of Greater Comanchería. In northern Mexico, U.S. imperialism was the direct heir to Comanche imperialism. (358)

By re-reading the Comanche killings in George's dream within this historical context, the killings suddenly become tactical maneuver than a sign of racial shame. A knee-jerk *vendido* reading would identify anti-*indio* sentiment at work in George's dream. However, within the specific geo-historical context of the Texas borderlands, the killing of Comanches advances a narrative re-writing of the U.S. military invasion into northern Mexico. To clarify, my reading does not suggest that that George's dream re-envision a Jonesville that is happily secured to the bosom of the Mexican motherland, having never been invaded by the U.S. To the contrary, the dream suggests a geopolitical recuperation of borderland interests, with equal animosity expressed toward both U.S. and Mexican nation-states. Guálinto does not reverse the U.S. invasion in order to imagine Mexican national belonging as a solution to borderland issues. While his dream does restore the greater Southwestern U.S.-Mexico borderlands region to the Mexican nation-state, it also recognizes and punishes the Mexican central government's corruption.

Indeed, *Tejanos*, like the *Californios* of Ruiz de Burton's critique, had already been long disenfranchised by the Mexican central government at the time of the U.S. invasion. As Hämäläinen explain, "The centralist regime that assumed power in 1835 had never taken the Indian threat seriously and had actually reduced the armaments and manpower of local militias to weaker state power, effectively abandoning the north to the mercy of Indian raiders. So when the distressed Mexico City appealed to the northerners in 1846 and 1847, many refused to fight against the Americans" (236). In keeping with Hämäläinen's analysis, the dream describes entire communities in the border regions left unprotected by the Mexican central government, and for this reason, George's dream enacts its revenge on a government that left his people ripe for U.S. conquest. Here readers might recall the opening qualifier in Paredes's sentence about killing Comanches: "Reacting against the central government's inefficiency and corruption..." (282). The assertion that Comanche killing indicates shame removes this specific act of Indian killing from this strategic military context. George's fantasy of Comanche killing is in direct response to neglect by the Mexican government—not a general disdain for Indians.

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the dream sequence, one must read its chronology in its entirety. Although the aforementioned excerpt has received the lion's share of critical attention, less is paid to the opening two paragraphs of the chapter, which outline in greater detail the history being overwritten by the dream:

He is lying on his stomach at the summit of a hill, watching through a spy glass. The battle of San Jacinto has just ended with the rout of Santa Anna's forces and the capture of the dictator in his underwear. The wild horde of land pirates that form Sam Houston's command have satisfied their blood lust on the Mexican wounded and are now gathering in triumph. The time has come. He gives the command.

There is a barrage of mortar fire from behind the hill, and out of the woods come wave after wave of *rancheros*, superbly mounted and carrying sabers and revolvers. They are followed by ranks of Mexican soldiers dressed in simple brown uniforms but carrying revolving rifles and hand grenades. He already

knows what is to follow. Carnage. Houston is easily captured. Santa Anna is joyous at what he thinks is his deliverance. But his joy does not last long. He is immediately hanged. The Yucatecan traitor, Lorenzo de Zavala, will meet the same fate soon after. Texas and the Southwest will remain forever Mexican. (281)

As much as George's dream is a response to U.S. expansionism, this oft-neglected passage demonstrates that the dream in its broader context is overwhelmingly specific to the geopolitical interests of the borderlands region, Texas in particular.

The historical significance of Guálinto's dream set at the time of his grandfather—1835-1848 as José Saldívar notes in *Border Matters*—is that these years mark the emergence of U.S. empire, and the period that not only ceded the entire border region and Oregon territory to the U.S., but, in Saldívar's words, "created a group of second-class citizens within the belly of the beast" (45). This early portion of Guálinto's dream rewrites the outcome of the Battle of San Jacinto, the final battle of the Texas Revolution which destroyed General Santa Anna's army and enabled Texas to secede from Mexico in 1836. Guálinto's revision resumes its narrative at the moment of Santa Anna's defeat and capture. However, his dream does not preserve the Mexican army, serve Mexican nationalist interests, nor does it deliver Santa Anna. Rather than intervene or bolster the Mexican army's cause, Guálinto watches the battle through a spy glass, and keeps his militia at bay until Santa Anna and his troops have been exhausted. The roughly 700 Mexican deaths and additional capture of 700 of Santa Anna's men still occur at the hands of Sam Houston's "wild horde of land pirates." After all, the decision to defer action until the battle's end serves border region interests more than supporting a negligent Mexican central government. Guálinto's actions are methodical. This portion of the dream prevents the borderlands subsumption by U.S. invaders while also divesting the Mexican central government of its corrupt leadership.

Whereas the historical Santa Anna is captured by the U.S. army and discovered despite trying to conceal his identity by donning the uniform of a common soldier, the Santa Anna in Guálinto's dream is humiliated after being captured in his underwear—most likely an allusion to popular rumors that at the onset of the battle, Santa Anna was in the midst of one of his many sexual dalliances, quite literally depicting him as being caught with his pants down. Rather than sending Santa Anna back to Mexico City in shame and, ultimately, into exile in accordance with historical records, Guálinto's militia hangs Santa Anna once and for all, thus preventing him from emerging from exile in 1846, and again overtaking the Mexican central government during the U.S.-Mexican War. Likewise, Guálinto's dream also sees to the execution of the "traitor" Lorenzo de Zavala, the Texas secessionist diplomat whose *empresario* grants enabled the migration of 500 Anglo-American families into Texas in 1829, and who after the Battle of San Jacinto was sent to accompany Santa Anna back to Mexico City where, in accordance with the Treaties of Velasco, he was to persuade the central government officially to recognize Texas as a sovereign nation.

Guálinto's dream, however, does not end with the vanquishing of Sam Houston's and Santa Anna's armies at the Battle of San Jacinto. That is merely the starting point. In his dream, he reclaims all of the territories west of the Mississippi as well as Florida, and restores them as part of Northern Mexico, but under vastly secured political circumstances. His dream rearranges the global military chessboard that originally left the border region vulnerable to continued imperial threats. By reclaiming transcontinental lands from Florida to Oregon, Guálinto's militia of common rancheros takes back all of the territories bartered away by Spain to the U.S. in the 1819 Adams-Onís Treaty,¹⁰⁰ the negotiations that set the ideological stage for the Monroe

¹⁰⁰ See *John Quincy Adams and the American Global Empire* (1992) for a biographical analysis of the Adams-Onís Treaty.

Doctrine, Roosevelt Corollary, the Spanish-American War, and the establishment of the U.S. military presence throughout the Pacific. The fates of Oregon, Texas, and Florida were all intimately tied up in the negotiations, and Florida was the main bargaining chip held by Spain. We must remember that the sale of Florida was the “carrot” that Spain dangled in front of the U.S. in order to forestall U.S. intervention on behalf of the multiple anti-Spanish colonial insurgencies throughout New Spain. By reclaiming Florida, Guálinto’s militia removes the incentive for alliance between the fading Spanish and burgeoning U.S. empires.

Guálinto’s imaginative reclamation of Spanish Florida is also important for several reasons. Most significantly, it forestalls U.S. westward expansion and the onset of the Indian Wars, which would continue to ravage the borderlands region for decades. Secondly, Spanish Florida provides a coalitional exemplar; at this time it is a haven for refugee black slaves living amongst Seminole Indians. This is a pattern repeated in Texas with the integration of escaped slaves into several East Texas Indians tribes. Notably, like Guálinto—accused of killing Comanche Indians for shame of his *mestizo* heritage—black slaves also fought against raiding Comanches who frequently killed slaves during their raids, and sold black captives to slaveholding Indian tribes.¹⁰¹ Guálinto’s coalitional army, however, specifically fights in the interests of the borderlands region. It is comprised of well-trained rancheros, escaped American Negro slaves, as well as Irishmen—which likely alludes to Irish settlers of San Patricio, often condemned in popular Texas histories as “traitors” for maintaining good relationship with the Mexican neighbors and fighting alongside them during the Texas Revolution.¹⁰² While this dream scenario conjures illusions of a borderlands coalitional utopia, again, these racial alliances strategically function to the benefit of Jonesville Mexicans. These alliances rewrite the history

¹⁰¹ See *Black Texans: A History of African Americans in Texas, 1528-1995*.

¹⁰² See *Land!: Irish Pioneers in Mexican and Revolutionary Texas*.

of booming land speculation, economic development, and commercial trade between Anglo-Texans and the U.S. after the Texas Revolution. Operating as an independent republic as of 1836 meant that Texas no longer had to abide by Mexico's 1830 anti-slavery laws. Without the legal mandate, slavery increased exponentially in Texas after the Revolution, growing from a slave population of roughly 5,000 in 1836 to 250,000 in 1865. Moreover, Irish immigrants, once loyal to Mexico as their adopted nation, overwhelmingly shifted their sympathies in support of the Texas Republic, in response to their suffering in Refugio and during the Goliad Massacre. Guálinto's dream prevents Anglo-Texas from benefitting militarily through an alliance with the Irish and economically through black slave labor.

The narrative trajectory of the dream in its myriad iterations remains constant in its goal to imagine an existence for Jonesville that is independent of U.S. occupation, and that still honors *mexicano* culture without the political disenfranchisement and neglect experienced at the hands of Mexico's central government. Through his revisionist dream, Guálinto imagines for the Mexicotexans of his waking life the conditions and possibility of geosocial autonomy, which ultimately his dreams can never adequately provide. This dream conjures no motherland romance; it does not suggest that simply restoring the border region to Mexico will solve the problem of Jonesville's Mexicotexan population. To be sure, George's recurring dream offers no satisfying solution to the predicament of Mexicotexans. This is precisely why he repeatedly awakens from this dream with feelings of "emptiness," "futility," and "irritation" (282), as well as the reason why Paredes's metaphor of Mexicotexan identity as a "checkerboard of consciousness" accurately conveys a fragmented subject, longing for cohesion. However, his dream can never produce the circumstances that would allow a cohesive *mexicano* self to exist

on the U.S. side of the borderlands, and so he sets out night after night to imagine an alternative history that might produce this result.

His dream consistently strives to undermine U.S. imperialism, and to provide Mexico with adequate leadership. Although Guálinto hangs Santa Anna in his dream, he retains General Urrea, touted even by U.S. historians as the most competent military figure of the Texas Revolution, and who famously defied Santa Anna's orders indiscriminately to kill Texan prisoners in the Goliad Massacre. Guálinto also destroys the U.S. Navy, without which the U.S. could not have captured Mexico City, or expanded into the Pacific. Readers, thus, are left with two competing scenarios: the dream world that Guálinto imagines, and the conscious reality he must navigate and within which he seeks opportunities for social inclusion. If Guálinto's dream reveals anything about his internal state, it shows his persistent belief that his best chance at social enfranchisement will be forged through strategic alliances with multiple groups working toward a unified cause, and not through exclusionary identity politics that would reduce him to *vendido*.

GUÁLINTO'S "EMBRACE" OF *CONJUNTO*: AN INCOMPLETE RESPONSE TO THE HAIL

"His mother and his uncle had never wanted him to waste his time on after-school jobs. Other boys in the Dos Ventidós shined shoes and sold papers when they were barefoot kids, but not Guálinto. His mother didn't want him to grow up the way they did, she said"¹⁰³

After following Guálinto through the trials of his Jonesville upbringing, Paredes's narrative makes a chronological leap between parts four and five. Part four ends at the moment when Guálinto, disenchanted with Mexico-Texan life on the borderlands, resolves to go to university, determined somehow to fulfill his destiny to become a leader of his people. Part five,

¹⁰³ Paredes, *George Washington Gómez*, 200.

however, notoriously begins with the return of Guálinto, now “George G. Gomez,”¹⁰⁴ to Jonesville many years later, a law school graduate, secretly enlisted as a U.S. Army counterintelligence officer, and with a pregnant Anglo-American wife in tow. What’s more, George’s wife, Ellen, is the daughter of a former Texan Ranger. Not surprisingly, part five often leads readers to the conclusion that, in the end, Guálinto sold out—assimilated fully into mainstream hegemonic U.S. culture.

By the end of the novel, George has made several untoward gestures and comments about the community of people with whom he no longer outwardly identifies. He refused to help his former classmates with “Mike” Osuna’s campaign to run for mayor of Jonesville. He relinquishes his inheritance rights on his uncle Feliciano’s farmland—a small parcel of borderland terrain that, through a lifetime of toil and scraping, Feliciano wrested from Anglo-American ownership to sustain his family through *la Chilla* (the Great Depression). In one moment in another instance, as Ellen meets Carmen’s children—“little Indians” as George calls them because of their dark skin—he is quick to show Ellen the photographs of Maruca’s blue-eyed, light-haired, half-white children. By the novel’s end, Guálinto’s transformation into a whitewashed (*agringado*) fully-assimilated “Mexican American” appears complete. Not only is he systemically integrated, but, moreover, he appears to be thoroughly inculcated into a shame-based affiliation with dominant Anglo-American culture, favoring their signifiers over anything that connotes Mexican backwardness.

Guálinto’s return as “George” cues to the reader two separate yet interconnected judgments that, whether accurate or not, help to coalesce a monolithic proto-Chicano borderlands

¹⁰⁴ Throughout my analysis of GWG part V, I will distinguish between “George” and “Guálinto” as two separate personas. “George” refers specifically to his affected, assimilated performance at the end of part five. “Guálinto” in part V signifies either the person within his dream, a set of sentiments and ambivalences reminiscent of his youth, or a psychic interiority that is segmented from his adult, public self-fashioning.

identity around in-group markers: 1) Guálinto's choice to assimilate into dominant state apparatuses¹⁰⁵ signals a desire for enfranchisement into Anglo-American power regimes; 2) His choice to assimilate is a sign of cultural betrayal—that he shifts his loyalty from the Texas-Mexicans of his youth to the Anglo-American compatriots of his adult life. Recalling Valerie Smith's question about passing narratives—namely, her questioning of why those who “pass” are accused of wanting to be white, and instead of wanting to be rich—one might also question why assimilation narratives similarly characterize those subjects who integrate themselves into hegemonic power systems as primarily driven by cultural shame rather than social mobility, materialism or greed. Likewise, one might also question why the temporality of the assimilation process is treated as the crossing of a threshold—a moment of choice instead of a process that often takes generations to complete.¹⁰⁶ Working within a collectivist narrative paradigm, Paredes conflates these two judgments, foreclosing the possibility that a *mexicano* like Guálinto could be positioned within Anglo-U.S. power structures and still retain an allegiance to his people.

One might note the frequency with which critics describe Guálinto's treachery as a foregone conclusion despite the fact that at novel's end—in the most technical sense—he has not yet begun his new job, nor provided counterintelligence against Jonesville *mexicanos*. At the novel's end, all readers know definitively is that he has no plans to stay long-term in Jonesville, that he has accepted a post that prevents him from engaging in political activity, and that he voices some unsavory comments about Mexican backwardness. At the same time, sentiments are not actions.

¹⁰⁵ Borrowing Louis Althusser's terminology, George becomes part of a repressive state apparatus (the military), as well as operating within several dominant ideological state apparatuses (grammar school, institutions of higher education, and the (Anglo) family he marries into.

¹⁰⁶ On this question of temporality, cite J. Martin Favor's introduction to *Authentic Blackness* and his nuanced commentary on class fluidity and generational imperatives.

Several critics describe the “George” who returns to Jonesville as irretrievably lost or having already sold out his people rather than being positioned on the brink of the next phase in his life.¹⁰⁷ In so doing—and perhaps unconsciously—critics attach to George’s actions what appear to be judgments about ethnic loyalty closely linked to Chicano identity politics. The baseline example is Louis Mendoza’s description of George’s “tragic fate” (146)—which one might only describe as “tragic” if assuming an anti-assimilationist stance, as does the *corrido* tradition—which provides the framing logic of Mendoza’s analysis. Mendoza writes, “George’s tragic flaw, his pursuit of knowledge from institutions of higher learning as a quest for social power and his subsequent development as an antihero of his community of origin, is not his individual failure but a result of a social system that failed to recognize the role of the university in reproducing stratified social relations” (154). While placing blame on the community’s failure and not solely on George, Mendoza clearly seeks to identify what went wrong by the novel’s end. Again, Mendoza’s analysis operates within the formal context of *corrido* heroism, which enables him to offer such a judgment as long as George’s actions are being held to the *corrido* standard. Certainly, if he is held to the example of *corrido* heroism, then certainly George’s choices fail the test of loyalty to the group he is meant through folkloric tradition to unify—or, apparently, still to unify in reader’s shared judgments of his *vendido* shortcomings.

These judgments are nevertheless symptomatic of disciplinary reading practices that reveal an anti-assimilationist, genealogical bent remnant of earlier identity politics rifts beginning in the 1930s and 40s, and reaching their height during the Chicano movement of the 1960s. For example, in her groundbreaking queer feminist reading of *George Washington Gomez*, Sandra Soto describes the “George” of part five as being depicted in “near caricature form” (114), and as having been “led astray” by his college experiences (Soto 117). But to read

¹⁰⁷ J. Martin Favor, *Authentic Blackness*.

him as a cliché of assimilation or to conclude that he has been “led astray” presupposes a value system that enables an interpretation of him as either ridiculous or fallen. Likewise, while writing in the context of Articles nine and eleven of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo,¹⁰⁸ Saldaña-Portillo describes Guálinto as waking each morning from his recurring “utopian” dream to re-make the conscious decision to align himself with Anglo-Americans: “And so every day, George G. Gomez, assimilated and light-skinned, wakes from his dream identity to live a life of quiet desperation as a first lieutenant of counterintelligence who must disavow his seditious and savage ‘Indian’ friends in order to save himself” (158). In Saldaña-Portillo’s interpretation, not only does Guálinto assimilate, but he bases his motives on shame of Indian savagery, which he ultimately ascribes to his family and friends, and from which he makes the calculated choice to distance himself. This analysis presents him as “assimilated”—past tense: undergone and completed, rather than in process.

I call attention to these moments not necessarily to disagree with these scholars. Rather, I cite the handful of scholars whose analyses of *George Washington Gómez* I most thoroughly engage. These moments help us to flag the underlying premises many readings of this text. In accepting without question the casual accusation that Guálinto is *vendido*, we run the risk of: 1) failing to interrogate or even acknowledge the ideological stance that forms the judgment; 2) not recognizing how a blind acceptance of this judgments reifies *vendido* logics¹⁰⁹ built into now-institutionalized programs of study; 3) never questioning whether these political tests of loyalty are useful in our current moment. Stated another way, these many years later, in our efforts to

¹⁰⁸ Article nine required that Mexicans newly incorporated into the U.S. not retain their Mexican character (138); Article eleven describes the U.S. government’s plan to use “restraint” against “savage tribes” of the newly-acquired territories, implying a racial distinction between Mexicans as “gente de razón” and, thus, at a comparable level of cultivation as U.S. Anglos and, therefore, deserving of the same protections against “savage tribes” against whom they racially distance themselves (140-1).

¹⁰⁹ Maylei Black uses the term “vendida logic” in *¡Chicana Power!: Contested Histories of Feminism in the Chicano Movement* (2011).

expand upon the pioneering work of Chicano Studies, which ideological premises do we question, and which do we still leave unchallenged? Chicana feminists, particularly Chicana queer scholars, have worked tirelessly to give voice to marginalized women, long suffering under stigmas of *malinchismo* and *vendida* logics, continually accused of splitting apart the movement to pursue selfish agendas. This chapter asks the following: who else do these *vendido* logics continue to stigmatize and exclude from possible coalitional alliances on the basis of lingering notions of racial authenticity? As we sort through the lived legacy of 1960s Chicano politics, can we ask these questions or do generational and gendered differences continue to grate against old wounds, making certain in-group coalitions impossible?

It seems a matter of common agreement within institutionalized Chicano Studies that assimilation is always negative. Therefore, we code related processes with more reciprocal and resistant terms like “acculturation” and “transculturation”¹¹⁰ that do not emphasize one’s loyalty, as the fraught term “assimilation” does. Despite the fact that these terms all describe degrees of transition from one’s culture of origin into a host culture, and they all signify processes of cultural loss, where the terms differ is in the intentions they presume. “Acculturation” and “transculturation” benefit from their implied incompleteness; they imply a desire not to change and not simply an inability to become fully incorporated. As such, critics regard them as survival strategies or even forms of resistance. They allow for a more fluid understanding of identities and do not suffer the same temporal erasures that reconstitute assimilation as both instant and individual. Conversely, “assimilation” presumes a complete transition that is based on one’s willingness to leave their culture of origin and to join the host culture—a transition that, in practice, for certain groups can never be fully achieved since physical and linguistic markers remain too overdetermined to fall within “abstract” citizen subjectivity. But it is the presumed

¹¹⁰ See individual entries in *Key Terms in Latino/a Cultural and Literary Studies*.

desire to assimilate that is being judged here, even if the actual subject can never reach full assimilation, thereby remaining closer to acculturation by definition. Whereas “acculturation” indicates the adoption of some host-cultural customs and “transculturation” involved reciprocal influence, neither process threatens the host culture’s dominance, as both exist on the periphery.

For the like of George G. Gómez, full social integration into mainstream U.S. culture in the 1930s is impossible—but that is not the issue. The question so often raised is: will he or will he not betray his people? I am uncomfortable framing the question this way. Given the power imbalances that characterize U.S. race relations and taking into account that assimilation is a coercive effect of hegemony, to brand assimilation an act of betrayal begins to sound alarmingly like blaming the victim. Assimilation and betrayal are not coterminous. Therefore, my reading reassesses the matter from a different vantage, and seeks alternative possibilities. I ask: How is Guálinto structurally situated to serve his community from within—as an institutional occupant?

While my own reading of *George Washington Gómez* ultimately does condemn Guálinto for his attitude toward “Mexicotexans” in part five, I also self-consciously recognizes the disciplinary and political biases that fuel my judgment. Moreover, while this analysis acknowledges Paredes’s proto-Chicano sympathies at the time of its writing, and that these political sympathies still resonate for many at the time of publication, my reading also recognizes a Paredes’s sensitivity to the nuance of a proto-Chicano subject formation on the basis of racial performance and exclusionary politics. *George Washington Gómez* does not simply tell the story of a borderlands Mexicotexan who chooses to assimilate; it tells the story of a young man who in many ways is squeezed out of his community and then condemned as a traitor. Unlike the other characters of the novel, he is left with no viable place to exist in his world—at least not on the

terms of his community's expectations of him—and he must therefore exist outside of the community.

As such, I grapple with José Saldívar's reading of one scene in the novel, specifically, the moment when he attributes to Américo Paredes—and not to his own individual reading of the text—that Guálinto's proper place is “with his local mestizo/a working-class,” using *conjunto* music as a trope to delineate ethnic solidarity (46-7). However, as readers are aware, by the novel's end Guálinto has left this so-called “proper” place. I explore this particular critical moment at length because, Saldívar's reading undoubtedly raises the stakes for comprehending the end of the novel. It renders Guálinto's impending fall all the more treacherous. Saldívar observes:

In a wonderful scene near the novel's end, young Guálinto relishes his mestizo/a working-class culture by dancing to the local accordion-driven *conjunto* music of South Texas. ‘The music,’ Paredes writes, ‘was a fast shrieking polka, played so fast that the time was barely recognizable. The men streamed in and took the girls out on the floor, where they danced furiously in a hop-step-skip fashion. The little house trembled on the slender foundations to the scraping and stomping.’ [...] Here Paredes dramatizes that, for Chicanos, *norteño* music is synonymous with a vernacular working-class consciousness. In Guálinto's embrace of *conjunto*, he subtly shows how his hero's place (late in the novel) was with his local mestizo/a working class—‘not the Spaniards like the Osunas’. (*Border Matters* 46-7)

My reading differs from Saldívar's insofar as I do not agree that Guálinto ever “relishes” his mestizo/a working-class culture or is able to “embrace” *conjunto* music as his own. Paredes's description of this moment—even within the excerpt cited by Saldívar—registers drunkenness, frenzy, and disorientation. While Guálinto perhaps is able to recognize *conjunto* music as a marker of ethnic solidarity during this quinceañera scene, far from embracing his belonging to it, he never feels at ease. In my reading, we witness Guálinto's begrudging recognition that he will never feel that he fully belongs to this group, no matter how much he might want to, and this

unresolved tension between longing and estrangement is precisely what impels him toward assimilation.

At this moment, Guálinto undergoes a psychological moment of crisis, part of an ongoing downward spiral in which he tries on a new, violent persona for size. Immediately before entering the *baile*, he has just stabbed Chucho Vázquez during a knife fight. Chucho insulted Guálinto's "big-bellied" sister, Maruca (illegitimately pregnant by local Anglo boy, Buddy Goodnam)—and Guálinto's entire family, by extension—for being too "highsassiety" (240). Guálinto has never been to a *baile* before, as neither his uncle Feliciano nor his mother approve of them (241), which in itself signals the family's self-conscious social removal from the type of folks who attend such *bailes*. We see this same concern for "decency" early in the novel when the family first arrives in Jonesville. Feliciano conceals from Maria that, while he has gone inside the local cantina to inquire after a job (where decent women and children may not enter lest they compromise their reputations), their wagon has been hitched at the home of Doña Tina, the local barmaid, who graciously offers them refreshments and a resting place after their long journey. Guálinto stumbles across the *baile* during a period of turmoil. His ambitions and familial pressures push him toward Anglo-dominated institutions of learning where members of the Mexicotexan community are systematically winnowed out, and where he faces constant loyalty tests in which he must deliberately and repeatedly choose to align himself with *mexicanos*—and not with the so-called "Spaniards," including his girlfriend, Maria Elena Osuna.

Despite having grown up poor in the Dos Ventidós, Guálinto's family fancies itself as being of a certain quality distinguishable from the "bad people, rowdies, and tough characters" (61) that define the neighborhood. Guálinto is reared by an uncle whom other Jonesville *mexicanos* respectfully defer to as "Don" Feliciano: higher-ranking Feliciano need not return the

compliment. They imagine themselves as the type of family who can produce a leader of their people, and readers must remember that the crux of Guálinto's identity formation is the assumed incompatibility of the multiple subject positions he nevertheless occupies. Guálinto is poor, but he is "highsassiety." He self-identifies as Mexican, but he is teased as a child for being "*güero* and *gringo*" (59), mistaken in early adulthood for white. He is disgusted by the racist Jonesville school system, but it is the site of his successes where he surpasses the Anglos he so resents—people like the Goodnams whom his family, despite their financial and educational achievements, remains powerless to vindicate themselves against. So when blood-splattered Guálinto enters the *baile*—he himself cut by Chucho Vázquez's insult about Maruca and Buddy Goodnam—Guálinto searches for affiliation that is not "highsassiety." He goes slumming. He tries on for size the lifestyle of the "bad people, rowdies, and tough characters" from which, at his family's behest, he has spent a lifetime distancing himself. Although being a "rowdy" we are told is the pride of the Dos Ventidós, Guálinto never fits comfortably into this role, and at this moment when he seeks independence from the pressures of his adolescence, he rebels.

While at the *baile* he momentarily entertains the thought of a romantic union with Mercedes thus assuming his place with the mestizo/a working-class—a move that might offer a reprieve from the mounting expectations of his family and community. However, his descriptions of the scene are very primal, full of "unwashed," "acrid," and "sexual" smells and tastes that are not unpleasant, but are nevertheless unfamiliar and "not for him" (243). Intoxicated by the *mezcal*, by Mercedes's lingering perfume on his clothes, or by the "Strange pictures filling the empty spaces of his loneliness" (247), he resolves to marry Mercedes and to cast his lot with the kindly people he meets at the *baile*. Yet, in the end, he never returns. Guálinto's alignment with the *mexicanos* at the *baile* is far from the embrace of a birthright; it is

the momentary entertaining or resignation to a “simpler”—possibly even base (by his family’s standards)—lifestyle where he has already paid his admission with the end of a bloody knife. Constantly having to choose between self-identifying as Mexican instead of Spanish or, worse yet, passing for white, the prospect of marrying Mercedes offers a way out. However, he spends his entire time at the party uncertain that he belongs there, and even if he momentarily “relishes” the idea of belonging to this group, once he leaves, he immediately returns to his usual estrangement from them—a chasm that only widens days later when he murders one of the last remaining *corrido* warriors, his uncle Lupe, thus “metaphorically killing a Mexican heritage he never fully comprehended” (Saldaña-Portillo 155).

The problem that narrative identifies here is Gualinto’s position as both insider and outsider within a community that defines its cultural boundaries by these markers. A successful response to the *conjunto* hail would not result in the dissonance he experiences in this scene. This scene suggests multi-levels of intraethnic cultural difference that financial capital cannot account for. Gualinto’s problem here is that he believes in an authentic and cohesive *mexicano* identity, and he wants to be able to give himself over to the hail that promises to restore cohesion, but that ultimately can offer no such resolution. At most it can only reaffirm his insider-outsider status in relation to the dominant core, and Guálinto must search elsewhere for belonging.

CHAPTER 5:

With His Pistol in Her Hand: Race, Gender, and Strategic Accommodationism
in *George Washington Gómez*

“The members of an ethnic or racial minority, deprived of material goods and sophisticated technology, rely on their wits to survive in an oppressive society. Their key advantage over their adversaries is greater understanding. The tricksters know their enemy intimately, while the oppressors, thinking in stereotypes, know little of theirs.”
-Raymund Paredes¹¹¹

“There are ways in which authenticating discourse enables marginalized people to counter oppressive representations of themselves. The key here is to be cognizant of the arbitrariness of authenticity, the ways in which it carries with it the dangers of foreclosing the possibilities of cultural exchange and understanding”
-E. Patrick Johnson¹¹²

At least twice on record, Gayatri Spivak has expressed regret in having posited her concept “strategic essentialism,” not so much because she has moved away from her initial views, but because of the frequency with which the “strategic” portion of her concept has fallen to the wayside.¹¹³ She critiques the misuses through which her initial offering have been taken up and contorted into legitimized essentialisms that cross into the realm of “gesture politics.” Her initial rendering of strategic essentialism intended to interrogate essentialisms as imaginary—the historiographical products of particular moments that generally serve the interests of dominant master narratives—but also to recognize instances when essentialist renderings can be deployed tactically by the subaltern group toward a liberationist goal. Despite the diversity that exists within various affinity groups, Spivak describes instances when the myth of a shared essence nevertheless can be deployed to strategic ends. Given a group’s awareness that an outsider mainstream does not always recognize in-group diversity (or has a vested interest in not recognizing it), this misrecognition—the belief in a biological essence—creates the

¹¹¹ Paredes, “The Evolution of Chicano Literature,” pg. 75.

¹¹² Johnson, *Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity*, pg. 3.

¹¹³ See Spivak’s interviews in *Differences* (1989) and *Boundary 2* (Summer, 1993).

possibility for coalition under a unified banner. Although Spivak in no way argues for the validity of essentialist stereotypes, she knows that some audiences will readily accept the myth of a monolith, and that a shared-heritage narrative can be a powerful rallying tool.

This strategy, while heavily-steeped in Marxist, poststructuralist and, ultimately, deconstructionist theories, is particularly useful for scholars invested in racial performance and rhetorical analysis. I am most interested in her eventual negation of strategic essentialism; in those instances when it ceases to be a strategic performance and crosses over into codified script. What Spivak advocates is a trickster scenario—without actually reifying essentialist dogma, she recognizes the mobilizing power of essence-based myth and allegory. She describes a series of interactions between performers and their audiences in which the performers exploit their audience's readiness to believe in racial essence. However, they must perform the scripted "essence"—and this is key—*without* the performers themselves buying the product they are peddling. In this sense, the problem with notions of authentic racial identity is that it unifies multiple subsets of a group under a consolidating moniker. The danger for Spivak is that what was originally conceived of as prosthesis often turns prescriptive: it becomes a marker of "authenticity," and becomes coded as a script to be performed to the exclusion of many.

Building on Spivak's theory of strategic essentialism, I posit a related performance strategy which I argue is a hallmark of many assimilation and uplift narratives—strategic black/brownface. While Spivak describes a process of unifying multiple different sects within a single subaltern group under a common banner for the purposes of a shared sociopolitical agenda, strategic brownface describes a scenario in which a dominant audience's belief in biological essence is the basis of their vulnerability. A savvy performer can exploit the viewer's expectations by delivering exactly what the audience expects, however disingenuous the

performance might be to the self-concept of the subject enacting the performance. This process often involves a gross pandering to preexisting stereotypes in order to position oneself as familiar and non-threatening, thus gaining access to mainstream institutions, albeit in a marginal, usually inferior, space within the dominant culture. Once admitted, however marginally, as long as the brownface performer maintains the illusion of being non-threatening, he or she is able to siphon assets away from the dominant core and potentially to use these assets towards progressive political purposes. The gains tend to be small; they pose no serious threat to the status quo. However, such acts have tangible benefits insofar as they may ensure the immediate survival of the performer and immediate beneficiaries when social obstacles would otherwise preclude access all together. Naturally, this begs the question of the cost at which these gains are to be made, and this brings us full circle to the struggle of representational cultural politics. Such performances reinscribe notions of racialized property as Cheryl Harris describes. To this charge I must concede that strategic brownface, like racial passing when viewed through the lens of representation politics can only do harm; it offers no protest whatsoever by playing to the status quo. Instead, as strategic brownface can never announce itself, it must remain indistinguishable from assimilation in order to access the material gains. While I must further acknowledge that strategic brownface is not always enacted for progressive purposes—that many individuals perform it for completely self-interested purposes—this study suggests that on occasion it can be performed so that the material gains can finance legible acts of political protest. In the case of *George Washington Gómez*, the complementary relationship that I suggest between overt protest figure and strategic brownface pragmatist can be seen in the brothers Lupe and Feliciano.

This analysis of *George Washington Gómez* identifies moments of strategic brownface in which Paredes's characters play to Mexican stereotypes, concealing their sociopolitical agendas

from their Anglo-Texan viewing publics in order to gain access to economic resources to be used in the service of collective Jonesville *mexicano* mobilization efforts. I position strategic brownface against both racial passing and assimilation as processes that operate by similar performance mechanics. Neither passing nor strategic brownface allow the opportunity to announce their subversive agendas if such agendas. To be clear, I do not take the position that all acts of strategic brownface, passing, or assimilation are subversive acts, nor do I argue the reverse: that acts of racial masquerade, passing, or assimilation are acts of betrayal or even rooted in shame. Rather, my analysis recognizes the rhetorical terms through which these acts have overwhelmingly been debated. I seek to expand the conversation beyond representation as its defining parameters to consider pragmatically the material benefits that these performance strategies might yield.

Granted, within the context of representational politics, these immediate yields come at too dear of a cost. But if the terms of the argument shift—if the goal is not focused entirely on how the group is perceived within a dominant social imaginary, but how access to resources can ultimately facilitate a social movement—the potential benefits of such strategic performances come into focus. If, however, the discourse around such actions remains steeped in a loyalty-betrayal discourse, offering no alternative subject positions, the reader is left little choice but to judge these performances as treacherous acts. Restricted by this paradigm, to act beyond a codified loyalty script would only invite in-group censure.

In the case of *George Washington Gómez*, such censure comes in the form of an accusation, of not being “Mexican enough” or “trying to be white” because of the individual’s willingness (always framed as an individual shortcoming) to adopt alien cultural markers. However, the remaining markers that connote in-group belonging are those that also signify

marginalized status: deployed in opposition, they have come to mark cultural pride. Thus, to accept these markers willingly as signs of “authenticity” and of one’s loyalty upholds a behavioral cycle that reproduces marginalization. As J. Martin Favor observes, “Notions of authentic difference may be useful, but they are flawed. They require a reconstruction of [...] ‘race’ that mirrors in its exclusivity of their definitions the kind of essentialism they were originally intended to overcome” (20). Likewise, E. Patrick Johnson describes this tension amongst African American communities through the example of black vernacular speech. Johnson writes, “There exists a crisis of blackness involving language that remains a permanent schism in identity politics...Talking ‘white’ is equivalent to speaking Standard English and talking ‘black’ is equivalent to speaking in the black vernacular...The black American who either chooses not to or simply cannot speak in the (black) vernacular is cast as a traitor to the race—indeed, as ‘white’” (5). This example demonstrates the limitations of loyalty-betrayal discourse in providing performable markers that grant access to mainstream institutions when, as George Lipsitz describes, those institutions have systemically insulated themselves against foreign incursion.¹¹⁴ This point once again resonates with Valerie Smith’s de-privileging of the loyalty-betrayal logic within the passing genre to redirect the spotlight on the underlying workings of racial capitalism. While Smith does not suggest a subversive politics of passing, she correctly identifies the preoccupation with race betrayal that monopolizes much of the discussion of passing without adequate consideration of the coercive, widespread systemic elements that prompt it. So I ask, like the passer accused of race defection, why is the assimilated Mexican-American’s motivation also attributed to the desire to be white rather than the desire to be rich? Moreover, what are the advancement opportunities that this discursive framing forecloses?

¹¹⁴ See Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness*.

This critical fixation on a loyalty-betrayal paradigm becomes more apparent through the novel's comparison between Guálinto and his two uncles, and against the masculine ideal established through the *corrido* tradition. I argue that none of these men successfully manage to live up to the *corrido* hero standard and that such strivings ultimately do more harm than good in the rapidly modernizing Texas borderland. However, despite their shortcomings, Feliciano and Lupe are judged far less harshly than Guálinto because their masculinity remains legible and registers "loyal" according to the *corrido* precedent. Moreover, both Feliciano's and Lupe's actions operate within a collective framework, whereas Guálinto's goes against the *corrido* model in that it appears to be completely self-interested. Within the *corrido* genre, the didactic focus remains steadfastly on the interests of the collective despite the ballad's narrative focus on a solitary hero. As Ramón Saldívar describes, the *corrido* is "a product of an integrated community sharing a working-class world view and values, there is no place for the idiosyncratic, for an individual perspective that stands totally outside of communal concerns. No individual life, even that of the hero, may be regarded as uniquely different from the fate of the community as a whole" (*Chicano Narrative* 36). According to this understanding, Guálinto's offense is that he appears to act in his own interests, separate from the community.

Américo Paredes wrote *George Washington Gómez* at the historical moment when Chicano and Mexican-American identity politics were becoming coded into performable scripts. In many ways, the novel captures the budding sentiments that some thirty years later would coalesce into full-fledged Chicano nationalism, but it also captures the diversity and stratifications within Jonesville's Mexicotexan society. *George Washington Gómez* reveals a particular set of ideological beliefs very much in line with later *chicanismo* and *indigenismo*. Chicano critics reading this text after 1990 recognize this text as a progenitor of a Chicano

literary genealogy; however, I believe that the text also reveals many issues that were still unresolved at the time of the writing. The ending of the novel remains disappointing for many readers, but not necessarily problematic. What promises to be a narrative about the making of a hero, to many, turns out to be the making of a *vendido*—and both interpretations play precisely to the loyalty paradigm.

In an interview with Ramón Saldívar,¹¹⁵ Paredes responds to his readers' disappointment at the novel's ending. Paredes describes his initial rationale for leaving the original 1930s manuscript unchanged when he finally published it in 1990. Moreover, he describes the narrative gap between parts four and five as an imaginative necessity. Part four ends with Guálinto about to leave Jonesville and attend university. However, Paredes himself had not yet left Brownsville, nor had he attended university. He did not yet possess the experience to write in detail precisely what would have happened to Guálinto in Austin that transformed the formerly ardent Anglo-hater at the end of part four into the so-called "*vendido sanavabiche*"¹¹⁶ who returns to Jonesville with an Anglo wife after attending law school and taking a job with a Washington D.C. "company."

Paredes had originally planned *George Washington Gómez* to be a two-volume work, but he did not return to the manuscript until 1990 at which time he decided to preserve it as an artifact—a record of the internal *mexicano* rifts that were emerging during his young adulthood. Paredes notes, "Remember that the 1930s and 1940s was the time of the emergence of the Latin middle class and the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC). I tried to represent through Guálinto Gómez how members of the new middle class were trying hard to assimilate, to

¹¹⁵ See chapter two, Ramón Saldívar, *The Borderlands of Culture: Américo Paredes and the Transnational Imaginary* (2006).

¹¹⁶ Elodia accuses George of being a "*vendido sanavabiche*" after he refuses to work on Mike Osuna's campaign for Jonesville political office (293).

pass as ‘white,’ to bring up their children as monolingual English speakers” (*Borderlands* 123). In his original plan, Paredes intended to redeem Guálinto. Guálinto would come to see the error of his ways and assume his rightful position as the leader of his people. Volume two, however, never came to pass and, as a result, Guálinto returns to Jonesville forever on the brink of assimilating completely. However, as already noted, at the end of the novel Guálinto expresses the sentiments of a *vendido*, and need only begin his work as a spy and sever ties with his family in order to complete the transformation. Paredes leaves his protagonist wavering on a precipice, but, according to Paredes’s own words, at the end of part five Guálinto was still redeemable. In the absence of volume two, however, readers are left to infer the fall that Paredes had never intended.

If some readers are left feeling either disappointed or ambivalent, perhaps it is because *George Washington Gómez* remains palpably unfinished. As readers, we do not know what Guálinto experienced in Austin—those details remained concealed within the unnarrated “black box.” What readers do know is that whatever Guálinto’s experiences were, they further distanced him from his fellow Jonesville *mexicanos*. Those experiences, however, did not drive the initial wedge. Guálinto leaves Jonesville feeling equally out of place amongst both Anglos and *mexicanos*, and already disillusioned by his own family. The novel rhetorically invokes the epic romance of the *corrido* tradition and generates genre-appropriate reader expectations, but it then garners its tragic poignancy through the contrast between the heroic archetype that readers are primed to expect and antihero the novel finally delivers.

As an alternative reading, I would like to consider reactions to the ending of *George Washington Gómez* with two possible interpretive scenarios. First, consider this narrative as a story about community. Rather than fixate on whether or not Guálinto will betray his people,

thus assuming that the problem lies with Guálinto and his individual failings, I argue that *George Washington Gómez* can be just as easily read as the story of a community that, through its strict adherence to code and performable script, ultimately leaves one of its members no viable position within the community. Secondly, I argue that the text suggests potentially new heroic forms that stray from the *corrido* model, but that are not innately opposed to strategically situating *mexicano* community members within mainstream institutional structures, as the political campaign at the novel's end suggests. As much as the novel laments a romanticized moment that has passed, and details the limitations of the old *corrido* model and its effectiveness in modernizing Texas, the subversive legacy of the *corrido* hero prevails in subtler and more inclusive forms that emerge to meet the needs of the changing social climate.

Rather than reading *George Washington Gómez* as a narrative about passing—of Guálinto trying to become white—the novel can alternatively be read as a story about a Mexico-Texan who does not perform to his community's racial script or gender norms, and ultimately seeks acceptance amongst Anglo-Texans who do not question the authenticity of his particular type of Mexican-ness. According to Guálinto's own racial self-identifications throughout the text, this remains consistently an anti-passing novel in which the protagonist repeatedly refuses to pass. This can only be read as a passing narrative if it is read through the loyalty-betrayal lens, positioning assimilation as the signifier of all things “inauthentic” according to a prescriptive performance of belonging. Reading *George Washington Gómez* as a passing novel would validate the existence of unifying *mexicano* essence, and place limits on what is possible for *mexicanos* policed by one another into remaining on the margins of U.S. society. Rather than perform to this script, Guálinto removes himself from his childhood community. Amongst Anglo-Americans Guálinto is allowed to be more himself than amongst Jonesville *mexicanos*

because, for example, once understood to be “Meskin” by Ellen and her family, little else needs to be known. There is little danger of Ellen’s father, a former Texas Ranger, accusing George of not being Mexican enough. Unlike Guálinto’s childhood friends who constantly subject him to loyalty tests—always suspecting that Guálinto will capitalize on his fair looks and his family’s slight economic privilege, and pass himself off as “Spanish”—George’s racist father-in-law sees no nuance amongst Mexicans and simply allows Guálinto to be Mexican on his own terms.

This analysis attempts to disabuse readers altogether of the notion that George ever attempts to pass himself off as white—especially with so much evidence to the contrary. Paredes’s physical descriptions of Guálinto from his infancy through his young adulthood describe his blue eyes and light brown hair. Early on, he is mistaken as a *gringo* baby, and mocked by Mexican schoolchildren for being *güerro*¹¹⁷. This pattern of being read as phenotypically white recurs throughout the remainder of the text, and had he ever intended to pass as white, he had ample opportunity to do so. Paredes writes at least two scenes in which Guálinto could have passed, but overtly refuses to do so: the classroom altercation with Ed Garloc over Mexican criminality,¹¹⁸ and the evening the Mexican students were turned away from *La Casa Mexicana*, to which I will return at the end of this chapter. Moreover, the legal changing of his name provided an ideal opportunity to permanently cross the color line had that ever been his intention. At each turn, however, he resists being read as white and openly proclaims his Mexican heritage—he even rejects being labeled “Spanish” like the Osunas, as it would connote both racial and class distance from his friends. His actions to this point have been consistently in solidarity with working-class *mexicanos*. This is clearly not a case of his inability to pass; Guálinto adamantly refuses to do so.

¹¹⁷ Colloquial term, often pejorative, that connotes being “light-skinned,” perhaps culturally “whitewashed,” or both.

¹¹⁸ Paredes, 160.

Because of his appearance, Guálinto is repeatedly required to prove his loyalty in ways the other Mexican characters aren't, and he consistently passes these loyalty tests. However, because he *can* pass, for readers, the expectation looms that he *will* pass—and these repeated tests and expectations grate on him and fuel his desire to extricate himself from the situation. In the end, had George ever intended to disappear across the color line, he might have opted legally to adopt a less Spanish-sounding surname instead of simply changing his middle initial. Despite his unsavory remarks towards Jonesville Mexicans at the end of the novel, George G. Gómez nevertheless fashions his public persona as Mexican, even if it is not in a form that his more openly resistant family and childhood friends can embrace.

Paredes's quotation about the emerging Mexican-American middle class trying to "pass" as white is particularly telling of an increasingly polarized stance against assimilation during the 1930s and 40s. Paredes reflects from his post-*movimiento* vantage in the 1990s. As a self-acknowledged "proto-Chicano,"¹¹⁹ Paredes positions assimilation comparatively to passing, already saddled with its own stigmas of race shame, selfish individualism, and community betrayal—and as already described, the two acts are not altogether dissimilar. Just as people who pass are so commonly labeled "race defectors," Paredes's comparison registers a similar censure for *mexicanos* who cross a cultural color line by trying to act "white." Both acts attempt to move the marginalized subject closer to the center of dominant culture. The challenge in this comparison is to unsaddle acts of passing and assimilation from the emotional baggage that discourses around these acts incite. As long as these acts are automatically explained by a shame-logic, the possibility to deploy either strategically diminishes.

¹¹⁹ Ramón Saldívar, *Borderlands of Culture*, 134.

Passing and assimilation at their most foundational level are acts of cultural transition: the shedding of one culture in favor of another.¹²⁰ While passing requires a physiognomy that is indistinguishable from the mainstream culture (“white” in the case of the U.S.), and full assimilation is a process that historically has been attainable primarily by people also with white coded bodies, partial or incomplete assimilation has been achievable for some people of color. Both passing and assimilation operate through performance—by adopting the behavioral script of the dominant culture. The extent to which the subject can enmesh him/herself in dominant culture is contextually specific to the period and region, but the processes themselves are nearly identical and, as such, both are subject to judgment on the grounds of in-group loyalty over socioeconomic pragmatism.

Readers need not justify Guálinto’s professional aspirations, nor absolve him of his attitude shift at the novel’s end. This analysis makes no attempt to do so. However, this chapter emphatically points out that the narrative structure, by Paredes’ own admission, sets the stage for Guálinto’s ultimate redemption. Paredes creates the possibility for Guálinto to emerge heroically in new form. The seemingly-*agringado* George who returns to Jonesville has adopted a new performance code that facilitates his success in Anglo-dominated pre-war America. Readers can only assume that George must have simpered and pandered his way into his “master’s” good graces, to borrow Uncle Feliciano’s phrase. The novel ends with George’s refusal to work on Mike Osuna’s mayoral campaign, which further contributes to the impression that George sold out. For George’s friends and ex-schoolmates, his new self-fashioning epitomizes the mainstream establishment positioning that their political designs hope to uproot. As such, he cannot be trusted. While this might be a logical conclusion for George’s schoolmates to reach,

¹²⁰ Cite a sociological source here to provide a satisfactory definition of assimilation.

the third-person narration provides additional information in order to halt hasty judgments about George's impending betrayal.

The information given to George's audience and the information given to Paredes's readers differ in important ways. Readers are given the additional knowledge that George's job as an army spy prevents him from engaging in local politics, and that he must protect his "cover." For readers to conclude that George's attitude can be accepted at face value too easily ignores the circumstances under which he espouses these views. Readers know that he cannot reveal his position as a counterintelligence office and that he must keep secrets. Although the narrative trajectory moves George in the direction of becoming *vendido*, the novel concludes with George on the brink of betrayal—yet many critics read his impending fall as a forgone conclusion. Whereas George's unwitting ex-schoolmates have no reason not to believe him, Paredes's readers are given enough information to suspend their judgment. This is not to suggest that the assessment ultimately would have been incorrect in volume two, but simply that there is not enough information provided to conclude with any degree of certainty what George would do with his new institutional "insider" status. Paredes casts enough doubt to warrant ambivalence—or uncertainty at the very least.

STRATEGIC INTRA-ETHNIC COALITION

Consider the possibility that Paredes actually had seen volume two to completion. In this scenario, George could have been situated ideally in the strategic brownface position I described earlier. He could have managed to play the "Good Mexican" stereotype¹²¹ well enough not to register as a threat and to gain access to education and financial resources. In the "come to realize" [the error of his ways] scenario that Paredes ultimately found too sentimental, George

¹²¹ Keller—*Hispanics and United States Film: An Overview and Handbook*--check his genealogy of the term

could have been well positioned to help his people, possibly even to assume the leadership role foisted on him since birth. However, in this scenario, he would achieve this by operating *within* the system instead of resisting from without. The question, then, becomes whether or not his community would have trusted a seemingly whitewashed *mexicano*, or whether they would have jumped to the conclusion that anyone who appears to assimilate—even if only performed discontinuously for access purposes—must also hold political beliefs that are antagonistic to a proletarian-based liberation movement.¹²² Could a seemingly “assimilated,” middle-class person of color with progressive politics be permitted to work toward a collective proletarian agenda, or will distrust of an institutional positioning preclude in-group, cross-class coalitional possibilities? Is the expectation that George will help with the Mike Osuna campaign simply the most recent test of his loyalty?

In this scenario, one must question how George would have performed his position once allied to Jonesville *mexicanos*. Would he have fought guns blazing against the dominant culture to which he has labored to ingratiate himself all his adult life, or might he have adopted a more covert method of subversion, operating from within? Granted, speculative inquiry is a poor substitute for the actual text. However, the questions raised by this speculative moment tie directly to the multiple forms of identity performance, assimilation, resistance, and loyalty that Paredes broaches through his minor characters. These overt versus covert models already exist within the novel, but the degree to which they register as treachery is subject to how each character measures as authentically *mexicano* and, hence, trustworthy. I argue that *George Washington Gómez* simultaneously chronicles two related but irreconcilable tensions: first, it documents the emerging sociopolitical rift in the 1930s and 40s between assimilationist groups

¹²² Cite Ken Warren here. Ultimately, this paper will critique masculine-based freedom movements and argue that the masculinist paradigm celebrated in the corrido that attempts to raise Guálinto is ultimately to blame for the failure.

such LULAC against the proto-Chicanos with whom Paredes aligns himself; secondly, he calls for the need to adapt to modernization, but neither emerging faction (“Mexican-American” nor Chicano) can produce a viable hero. As a result, Paredes defaults recursively to a loyalty-betrayal paradigm that celebrates romantic, tragic martyrs with impeccable integrity and no chance of helping Jonesville advance in any sustainable way. What this analysis attempts to point out is that these tensions, which even today remain unreconciled, elicit a different response when actions similar to George’s are enacted by characters whose loyalty isn’t questioned. I argue that several characters in the novel perform strategic brownface, but because their loyalty is never questioned, their performances are deemed wily, perhaps heroic, instead of treacherous.

Consider the mayoral campaign that prompts Elodia’s derisive inflection in calling out “Ge-orge” in order to emphasize his assimilated “*vendido*” posturing. At this moment the deliberate use of names becomes a source of tension—especially the withholding of a once-familiar nickname—as signifiers of group belonging or estrangement. This moment is the turning point when Guálinto becomes “George” to his schoolmates, their assumption that his allegiance is distinct from theirs, that he is no longer one of them. Meanwhile, factor that the purpose of the meeting is to support “Mike” Osuna’s mayoral candidacy. No longer the “Miguelito” or “Miguel” Osuna of their childhood, Mike Osuna, as readers will recall, is a wealthy Jonesville “Spaniard” and brother to “Mary Helen” Osuna, (formerly “Maria Elena,” Guálinto’s high school girlfriend). Mike Osuna is the same character who tormented young Guálinto for having *manteca* (shortening) in his hair. He is the same fourth-grade bully who picked a fight with first-grade Guálinto, but in lieu of the paddling that Guálinto received, Miguel Osuna had the weight of a affluent father behind him. He is dismissed with a lecture since, according to the school Principal, “you just didn’t paddle Mr. Osuna’s boy” (130).

In this scene, Elodia casts her accusation through the over-inflected “Ge-orge,” ironically, at a meeting to support “Mike” Osuna’s campaign. How, exactly, did Mike Osuna become a prospective political leader for Jonesville *mexicanos*?¹²³ Paredes reminds his readers that “Spanish-speaking people in the Southwest are divided into two categories: poor Mexicans and rich Spaniards” (196). Have Jonesville *mexicanos* forgotten that Mike Osuna up until this moment had not been one of them—that he’s not Mexican? While his family might at one time have been Mexican, they have not been Mexican for two generations. Mike Osuna is now the heir to a wealthy “Spanish” businessman. He is a child of privilege—at least in comparison to “poor Mexicans” who have not yet amassed enough wealth also to become “Spanish.” Have Jonesville *mexicanos* forgotten that the Osuna wealth grew through land speculation and business dealings with Anglo-Texans that diminished the remaining *mexicano* community, or might Paredes peculiar pick for mayoral candidate actually suggest the need for strategic representation and, perhaps, cross-class coalition between so-called Jonesville “Spaniards” and *mexicanos* who ought to share political interests? Might this indicate the limits of “Spanish” assimilation, while simultaneously suggesting that the legibility of “Spaniards” as a non-threatening caste in Jonesville is useful staging ground for advancing ulterior political motives? “Mike” Osuna is just the front man, and they look to Guálinto to serve this same function.

So much of Paredes’ narrative focuses on the antagonisms between Anglo-Texans and Mexico-Texans, and secondarily on the tensions between “wealthy Spaniards” and “poor Mexicans” in Jonesville. Because the focus is overwhelmingly on these two dynamics, the relationship between Anglo-Texans and so-called “Spaniards” goes largely unexplored. Paredes never describes Jonesville’s “wealthy Spaniards” as being from Spain proper. He uses this term

¹²³ This suggests a similar political strategy to the dynamics of the New Negro uplift movement, fashioned after a gendered leadership model, but also replete with its problems. This is key to the intersectional, gendered form of brownface that Elodia is forced to wear in order to enact her leadership role through male conduits.

as a way to connote race defection through assimilation and upward economic mobility by way of the Spanish fantasy heritage. He is painstakingly clear that Jonesville Mexicans and “Spaniards” are the same ethnic group, separated by class and, presumably, by loyalty. The presumption, then, is that “Spaniards” are Mexicans who *do* attempt to pass as white insofar as Spanish-ness remains a marginal form of whiteness. Yet, self-fashioned “Spanish-ness” in a U.S. context does not carry the same social capital as Anglo-whiteness. To be sure, Jonesville “Spaniards” enjoy a degree of economic and political security not shared by local *mexicanos*, but the purpose of assuming this “Spanish” label is to gain social equality with Anglo-whites. Stated plainly, Mexicans claims to “Spanish-ness” linger as a gimmick to enable social enfranchisement—as a “Caucasian Cloak” to borrow Ariel Gross’s term,¹²⁴ that *legally* defines Spanish-Mexicans as racially-white, even if social parity is never achieved in practice.

The narrative choice to make Mike Osuna the *mexicano*-supported mayoral candidate indicates the marginal status of so-called “Spaniards” amongst Anglo-Texans, and potentially calls for cross-class coalition toward a shared political goal. This narrative turn also suggests that Jonesville’s “Spanish” community does not possess the clout or social capital to make one of its members a viable candidate amongst Anglo voters. Spanish-ness is still not Anglo-whiteness. Paredes suggests that the Jonesville “Spanish” community remains racially linked to the *mexicano* community within the Anglo-Texan imaginary, and both classes must cast their lots together if either group is to break the hold of Anglo political power in Jonesville. Readers need not assume Paredes’s forgiveness of *agringado* Mexican-American posturing or associated acts of assimilation, but he does imply the need to form coalitions for the sake of achieving common

¹²⁴ See Ariel J. Gross, “‘The Caucasian Cloak’: Mexican Americans and the Politics of Whiteness in the Twentieth-Century Southwest,” *The Georgetown Law Review*, and chapter eight of *What Blood Won’t Tell: A History of Race on Trial in America* (2008).

interests. At the end of the novel, nothing is known about Mike Osuna; readers know only that a handful of Jonesville *mexicanos* throw their support behind him. We might ask why George's acts towards assimilation seem so reprehensible in comparison to Mike Osuna's. Can readers infer that Mike Osuna's Anglicized name is only a political ploy to make him less threatening to a mainstream voting public (in strategic brownface fashion), that he's playing the non-threatening, assimilated posture? If the use of a whitened name is not a political ploy, is his assimilation more palatable because his loyalty is not in question, or perhaps is he both reprehensible and useful?

RECOGNIZNG THE LIMITS OF CORRIDO MASCULINITY

To enact George's change of heart through open resistance would have followed a traditional *corrido* model. Through his analysis the ballad of Gregorio Cortez,¹²⁵ and perhaps more so than any other Chicano studies scholar, Paredes demonstrates that the *corrido* narrative wields immense symbolic power¹²⁶ and functions as a cultural rallying tool for its audience. Beyond its symbolic power, the *corrido* form—and cultural production at large—can mobilize audiences toward political action. While *George Washington Gómez* certainly reinvents the *corrido* ballad in prose form, Paredes does not simply reproduce a romance of masculine heroics. He considers the limitations of implementing the *corrido*'s gendered scripts in 1930s Texas, and provides several characters who embody elements of the *corrido* hero, but who reach their viable limits within this socio-historical context of Texas modernity. I argue that the myriad masculinities provided in *George Washington Gómez* suggest that *corrido* masculinity can only survive in fragmented form, dispersed across multiple subject positions. Speaking pragmatically,

¹²⁵ Paredes, *With His Pistol in His Hand* (1958).

¹²⁶ See Ramón Saldívar, *Chicano Narrative: The Dialectics of Difference*.

a prototypical *corrido* hero cannot exist in his previous iteration under the conditions of modernity¹²⁷ and, as such, cannot offer a viable resistance strategy without adapting. This is precisely why the call for “a leader of [the] people” cannot reproduce the archetype. The call for a unitary *corrido* hero is doomed to fail, just as Guálinto’s recurring dream is doomed to yield no satisfactory resolution. To demonstrate the tension that Paredes suggests, I point to the competing romance and pragmatism most pointedly contrasted through Guálinto’s uncles, Feliciano and Lupe.

Although critics point to Paredes’s use of the *corrido* hero as a central trope against which to measure Guálinto’s development, and Ramón Saldívar goes so far as to identify Feliciano as “the true inheritor of the warrior tradition” (*Borderlands of Culture* 161), I argue that Paredes offers no unitary representative of this legacy in *George Washington Gómez*. For all of Paredes’s allusions to the *corrido* hero, he uses this figure to demonstrate the crippling effects of uncompromising pride and unsustainable mode of masculinity within *mexicano* culture. Feliciano’s brother, Lupe, comes closest in action to the *corrido* exemplar, but Paredes suggests that Lupe’s romantic vigilantism ultimately is self-indulgent and reckless. He fights, to be sure, but the cost is that he must live in exile across the border, leaving his mother and younger siblings to fend for themselves amongst the enemy. By contrast, Feliciano’s life course is determined in response to his brother’s actions. Whereas Lupe fought openly, Feliciano is saddled by the responsibilities that befell him for Lupe’s absence. Lupe’s seditious retaliation, while wielding enormous symbolic cache, leaves him no livable position on the U.S. side of the border; his heroism is “dwarfed” by the U.S. imperial machine that men like Lupe are helpless to

¹²⁷ This is the same issue that Stephen Crane takes up in “The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky” (1898) through the character of Scratchy Wilson, a remnant U.S. western frontier hero whose once-heralded renegade antics now make him a social menace after the closing of the frontier. While Paredes does not suggest that the *corrido* hero outlives his usefulness, he suggests that the resistant spirit of the *corrido* needs to adapt to the changing needs of modernity.

prevent. All the hero retains in the face of impending U.S. domination of the borderlands is an exquisite martyrdom to be elegized in the *corrido* form.

After the *corrido* hero's inevitable demise, someone else must pick up the pieces. Men like Feliciano exist in the interstices between heroic war theater, and go uncelebrated. Paredes recognizes that the traditional *corrido* hero is already lost, and the ballad laments the impending fall of the overpowered hero, which he suggests metaphorically by making the character Lupe a dwarf. Feliciano, on the other hand, is the type of man who does not have the luxury to die heroically. He bears the burden of taking care of the people who survive the *corrido* hero, and this burden is compounded when Guálinto accuses Feliciano of cowardice for not fighting alongside Lupe. As Ramón Saldívar reminds, "Paredes's novel situates us in the midst of this historical scenario, taking its tone [...] not from the celebration of the tragic *corrido* hero, doomed to honorable but certain defeat with his pistol in his hand, but from the pathos of those innocents from whom was exacted the cost of defeat" ("Borderlands " 277). In contrast to Lupe's dwarfed size, Feliciano was built for survival—to endure the hardships that would safeguard the people around him:

The kind of work Feliciano and his fellow Mexicans did made old men out of boys in their teens. But he had weathered all those years because for some reason he had been born strong. Big for a Mexican at least, almost six feet tall, lean and large-boned. His parents' oldest and biggest child out of the sixteen his mother had brought forth. Only two others survived—María, small and slender, and Lupe, a dwarf. Bigger than most, he thought, but perhaps for him life had been harder than for most. (263)

Feliciano's life, far from being a romantic epic, becomes a life of strategic negotiation and pride-swallowing compromise. Guálinto is unable to forgive Feliciano for being a coward—for running off to Monterey instead of avenging Gumersindo's murder and riding with Lupe during the De La Peña uprising. In Guálinto's mind, Lupe remains the masculine ideal of bravery and

open resistance while Feliciano deserves to be scorned for absconding across the border during the action. Reared in an environment with strict adherence to scripted masculinity, Guálinto cannot envision Feliciano's actions as anything but cowardice, and Feliciano plummets in Guálinto's estimation. Later, through Juan Rubio's account of Feliciano's whereabouts during the uprising, Guálinto learns that Feliciano actually had ridden with Lupe, but that he concealed his involvement for the sake of the family: “ ‘Only a few people know he wasn't in Monterey during that time. If the Gringos had known he would have been dead long ago, or in prison. And no telling what would have become of you and the rest of your family’ ” (278). Juan Rubio proceeds to tell Guálinto about the murder of his own father and three brothers by *rinches*, and about the old *gringo* who took him in—an affiliation for which Lupe intended to kill Juan Rubio had Feliciano not intervened. Like many of the people in Jonesville at that time, Juan Rubio remained in Feliciano's charge from that moment onward. Juan Rubio adds, “ ‘Your uncle Feliciano is a brave man. And very kind and generous too. Your uncle Lupe, if you will permit my saying, was a wicked man. There is much you should know, and since Don Feliciano won't tell you I will’ ” (278).

While Lupe leads his band of *sediciosos* and then disappears for his lifetime safely *en el otro lado*,¹²⁸ Feliciano toils to take care of his family and neighbors. He forms strategic alliances that pique his conscience, but he silences his pride for the sake of the greater good. Feliciano's first job upon his arrival in Jonesville is tending bar at *El Danubio Azul* for the same man who rescues Feliciano, Maria, and the children from a threatening gang of deputized “cowhands” masquerading as *rinches*. Serving drinks to Anglo soldiers—no better than *rinches* in Feliciano's view—is galling: “Swallowing hate and pride, Feliciano went to one of the barrels and drew six mugs of beer. He must not give himself away, he told himself. For his sister's sake, for

¹²⁸ On the other side (of the U.S.-Mexico border).

Gumersindo's son" (42). The alliance with Judge Norris, however, enabled the family to gain its footing. Beyond his work at the bar, Feliciano earned additional income by organizing *mexicano* voters for Judge Norris's Blue Party. With his earnings he helps to purchase for María and the children the family's first permanent home. He also provides for neighbors, including a struggling widow named Vera and her two little boys (42). It is revealed later in the novel that Vera is the abandoned wife of "El Negro" (one of Lupe's *sediciosos* from part I), who returns to Mexico during the uprising, and who now runs an illegal transborder smuggling operation. As thanks for Feliciano's generosity to his family, El Negro offers Feliciano a slice of the operation, which Feliciano uses to increase the family's land holdings, and to save for Guálinto's future education. Unlike Lupe's heroic escapades, with so many responsibilities, Feliciano makes his choices deliberately, even if those decisions are made with reservation. Feliciano laments:

As he drove his buggy back to Jonesville, he thought somewhat sadly about the paths his life had taken in the past few years. From cowhand to seditionist and raider, from there to bartender for Gringo soldiers he had been shooting at a few months earlier. Soon after, a ward heeler whose job was to herd his own people into voting booths for the benefit of Gringo political bosses. And now party to a smuggling operation. Nothing to be proud of. But his nephew was getting close to school age, and Feliciano needed money, much money. (82)

Readers may certainly agree with interpretations of Feliciano as a "*corrido* warrior veteran"¹²⁹— at least insofar as he spent a portion of his youth riding with Lupe and his *sediciosos*. However, Feliciano does not represent the archetypal hero of a bygone order. For the remainder of the novel Feliciano enacts a much quieter form of heroic resistance: he helps his community to endure. He does not represent a heroic exemplar frozen in time; that is the position held by Lupe. Instead, Feliciano demonstrates a lofty ability to adapt to changing conditions that is only achievable if one refuses to ascribe to a rigid *corrido* model of heroics.

¹²⁹ Monika Kaup, "The Architecture of Ethnicity in Chicano Literature," 373.

Despite the practical good Feliciano does for his family and neighbors, he is no *corrido* hero. Feliciano has no such luxury. Paredes emphasizes this point again toward the end of the novel in Feliciano's refusal to avenge the family's honor after the discovery of Maruca's illegitimate pregnancy. Feliciano fantasizes about *corrido* style antics that would restore the family's good name, but the reality of such actions would do more harm than good. At most, Feliciano attempts to reason with Buddy Goodnam's father, and to appeal to Martín Goodnam's sense of honor. Feliciano reflects on Lupe's freedom to avenge Gumersindo's death, but recognizes that his individual masculine pride must yield to his more pressing family responsibilities even in matters of honor: "Feliciano had once thought of doing something very much the same with Martín Goodnam. Shoot him and then die in a gunfight with the police. But then there was María and her children. Always, there was María and her children" (279). Again, because Guálinto is trained to judge his uncle's manhood in terms of a *corrido* exemplar, Guálinto concludes that Feliciano is not a man. He would much prefer to have been reared by a "real" man like Lupe.

Through this contrast between Lupe and Feliciano, Paredes positions his readers to recognize the quiet heroism of Feliciano's self-sacrifice against Lupe's recklessness and lack of accountability. Meanwhile, all that makes Lupe manly, according to the *corrido* model, is denied Feliciano. No epic romances will be written for Feliciano. Not even his own nephew—his surrogate son—recognizes his honorable sacrifices. Through his celebration of Feliciano, I believe Paredes opens up new ways of understanding the *corrido*'s galvanizing potential when adapted to the particular situation. This is a model that brings together romantic and pragmatic forms of resistance as complements. Paredes ultimately constructs Feliciano as one of the most complex and heroic characters in his novel. However, Paredes simultaneously demonstrates the

injurious aspects of *corrido* gender indoctrination; Guálinto's unyielding concept of masculinity drives a wedge between him and Feliciano. Moreover, for readers Feliciano remains a character of impeccable integrity despite the number questionable decisions and strategic compromises. He learned how to use the "Good Mexican" stereotype to his advantage—spent a lifetime "not giv[ing] himself away"—yet because his intentions register as loyal to the community, readers do not hold him to the same standard as Guálinto.

A GENDERED READING OF *GEORGE WASHINGTON GÓMEZ*

"The strength of our families never came from domination.
It has only endured in spite of it—like our women."
-Cherie Moraga¹³⁰

Inasmuch as Paredes demonstrates the crippling influence of *corrido* masculinity on his characters, we might also consider the fates of his supporting female characters. After all, *George Washington Gómez* is a novel about community and the collective efforts that go into the production of a hero. It invokes the formal attributes of the archetypal-masculine *corrido* ballad in the service of a literary prose form that interrogates the very tropes, underlying cultural assumptions, and performance practices of the genre it references. When Ramón Saldívar describes the *corrido* as an "emplotted form of disillusion and loss" ("Borderlands" 288) he recognizes that in its very structure, the narrative focus is on a poignant and doomed hero whose world can no longer sustain him. This changing world forces its inhabitants either to adapt to new conditions, or to die in their effort to cling to the old ways. The latter impulse fuels the *corrido* romance. While attuned to the symbolic power of the *corrido* as an important cultural signifier, Paredes is also sensitive to the gender limitations this myth imposes. Although the early work for which he is most famous explores masculine forms, Paredes demonstrates through

¹³⁰ Cherie Moraga, "We Fight Back with Our Families." *Loving in the War Years*, pg. 103.

George Washington Gómez his keen sensitivity to the struggles of women trained to live in the shadows of their men, and he suggests that Mexico-Texan survival will require tapping into alternative talent pools.

While the bulk of *corridos* are written by men, about men, and in most circumstances performed by for male audiences,¹³¹ *George Washington Gómez* significantly departs from this tunnel vision. The novel is conspicuously pro-woman in its detail, even if those narrative moments—which echo the lives of the women they represent—appear tangentially to the male-centered dirge. While the narrative is structured as a *corrido*-inspired bildungsroman adaptation, a story of generational and racial conflict, Paredes is careful never to obscure the positive or negative roles that women play in molding the title protagonist. Paredes’s women, however stifled, are never invisible. Paredes peppers the text with fleeting narrative asides that do little to move the main plotline along, but that create contrast between the collective making of a male hero against the unmaking of women with equal (if not greater) potential. In these moments, Paredes questions whether the cost at which *mexicano* masculinity is produced justifies the sacrifices women are taught to endure so that their males can play “men.”

In this vein, Sandra Soto argues that “Guálinto finally fails at becoming a ‘leader of his people’ precisely because his grooming to be a leader is diametrical to the subjectification of [his sisters] Maruca and Carmen” (120). While my analysis recognizes the sacrifices that Guálinto’s sisters are forced to endure, it diverts from Soto’s premise that Maruca and Carmen’s subjugation is the reason for Guálinto’s failure. Rather, I argue that Paredes laments the waste of

¹³¹ See JH McDowell, “The Mexican Corrido: Formula and Theme in a Ballad Tradition” (1972); Américo Paredes, “The Mexican Corrido: Its Rise and Fall,” Jose Limón, *Mexican Ballads, Chicano Poems: History and Influence in Mexican-American Social Poetry* (1992); Ramón Saldivar, “Borderlands of Culture: Américo Paredes’s *George Washington Gómez* and Chicano Literature at the End of the Twentieth Century” (1993) and chapter ___ of *Chicano Narrative: The Dialectics of Difference* (1990) and María Herrera-Sobek, *The Mexican Corrido: A Feminist Analysis* (1990).

female talent in the Jonesville *mexicano* community in its effort to elevate men who lack the qualities that many of these women demonstrate. This does not imply a cause and effect relationship between women's subjugation and male ineptitude so much as it questions the ideological wisdom within patriarchy that stifles talented women in favor of already inept men, and the implication that women are partly to blame for their contribution in producing men with terminal, often paralyzing cases of what I term "mijito syndrome."¹³²

In Ramón Saldívar's study of *With His Pistol in His Hand*, Saldívar traces a narrative pattern of Chicano letters with male-focused themes back to the *corrido*—a stronghold that lasts until the emergence of the Chicana feminist critics and artists in the 1980s. Saldívar writes, "The link between the *corrido* and Chicano narrative forms helps explain the widely recognized male-centered themes and values of many of the Chicano novels, short stories, and autobiographies of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s" (*Chicano Narrative* 39). While I certainly agree with Saldívar's premise, I argue that Américo Paredes is an exception to this rule despite being known as the author of the most lauded study of *corrido* heroism in the Chicano canon. Much of Paredes's later published writing demonstrates feminist sympathies not likely to have been recognized during his early-to-mid career given the content of the work he published in this time period. *George Washington Gómez*, however, provides a unique glimpse into Paredes's proto-feminism¹³³ as a record produced in 1936, but not published until well after the height of Chicano nationalism. Fortunately, with its late publication in 1990, readers could approach the

¹³² "Mijito" is a contraction that combines "mi" (my) and "hijito" (little son). I use this term "mijito syndrome" to refer to the phenomenon of fully grown men who are unequipped either emotionally or in terms of useful skill sets to care for themselves. This is the result of having been served by their mother and/or sisters to the extent that they never had to learn to do much for themselves. It involves elements of having been petted and adored simply for being male, and connotes a hierarchical production of masculinity in opposition to subservient domestic (women's) work. The term "mijito syndrome" simply provides a label for the process that Cherie Moraga described long ago in her essay, "A Long Line of Vendidas."

¹³³ José Limón in *Mexican Ballads, Chicano Poems* (1992) also recognizes Paredes' proto-feminism; this is in contrast to Ben Olguín's recognition of Paredes' literary hyper-masculinism and anti-feminism in as represented primarily through non-Mexican women.

text untethered by the gender preoccupations within Chicano nationalist discourse. Paredes's readers could engage his text open to the possibilities of latent feminist sympathies, which likely would have been squelched during the 1960s and 1970s. Through his anachronistic sensitivity towards his female characters in *George Washington Gómez*, I argue that Paredes questions the patriarchal wisdom that stunts the development of potential leaders in a community in need of *all* of its talent.

Part of Paredes's skilled gender critique lies in his ability to generate affection for his characters before he lovingly pokes fun at them. He allows the reader to recognize moments of folly as the result of gendering processes. This move situates these absurdities as the byproduct of a collective value system (instead of flawed individuals) that ultimately injures both men and women in its privileging of masculinity. Paredes represents gendering as a process that pigeon-holes individuals into the roles they must play. As an example, I turn to one of the most humorous moments in the narrative—when Feliciano places the down payment on the family's Jonesville home. While this moment could easily be misread as the moment when Feliciano provides a home for María and children, Paredes is careful not to reify a paternalistic narrative structure. Instead, this becomes the moment that the grandmother's life savings provides the principle to put down on a permanent family home. It is a moment that connects three generations, and that places a woman in a central position in the family's prosperity. The humor, however, derives from the peeling away of the macho façade during this transaction.

Readers are told that over her forty-five year marriage, Feliciano's mother squirreled away about \$1.50 per year, leaving a starter fund of \$69.75 to her children at the time of her death. During the transaction, Feliciano takes a single coin out of his pocket, and to his mother's bag of coins he adds the crowning twenty-five cents, rounding off the sum total. Feliciano says,

“That makes seventy dollars even for the down payment on the house and lot” (41). This is an inconspicuous moment in the larger narrative, but it reveals a Mexican cultural dynamic that allows men to accept public credit for the behind-the-scenes labor of the entire family unit.¹³⁴ Because of Feliciano’s twenty-five cents, *he* could make an even \$70.00 deposit on the house—or at least he might have had Faustino not “shook his head” and told Feliciano that “Twenty dollars down is enough” (41). While Faustino’s headshake might simply imply that \$70.00 is an unnecessarily large sum, for some readers that headshake signals a humorous moment of macho audacity. Paredes restores proper credit of the down payment to the grandmother, and does not allow the family’s prosperity to begin with Feliciano; he is made beneficiary to his mother’s legacy, and entrusted as a next generation steward of a pre-existing family vision.

This is just one moment early in the novel where Paredes offers a subtle critique of patriarchy, but it will not be the last. He recognizes how regularly Mexican culture obscures women’s contributions in favor of advancing a unified, male-led cultural narrative. My reading of *George Washington Gómez* builds on the work of Louis Mendoza and Sandra Soto who observe Paredes’s attempts to position women centrally. To their analyses I add that the feminist themes that emerge overtly in Paredes’s later writing—most scathingly through stories like “Marcaria’s Daughter” and “Rebeca” in *The Hammon and the Beans* (1992)—are already evident in his work as early as 1936. From his earliest fiction, Paredes criticizes a paternalistic system that fails its women through its placement of inadequate men in positions of benevolent authority. “Marcaria’s Daughter” and “Rebeca” describe physical abuse, verbal cruelty, and neglect as common practices—aspects of marriage that women are often accused of bringing on themselves, that they must endure in order to safeguard the cohesion of the family structure.

¹³⁴ Compare this moment to Cherríe Moraga’s description of women’s disposable labor: money she made cleaning houses that she would “lend” to her brother, knowing full well that she would never see that money again—*Loving in the War Years*, pg. 84.

This indictment of the self-sacrificing “*aguardar*” mandate, however, is not a late-career development for Paredes. He offers the same criticism in *George Washington Gómez* during the episode that triggers Guálinto’s bout with *susto* (fear sickness). This scene features a group of men sitting around telling ghost stories. Each story (*La Llorona* most famously) deals with an instance of a woman suffering at the hand of the man she must rely on, but who comes back to enact her revenge. Often, tales of this nature would serve a didactic function of teaching women how to behave properly.¹³⁵ In these instances, the women assert themselves. According to Mendoza, “The three stories that the young Guálinto hears address gender relations; they are about men abusing or ignoring women, and cultural allegiance. Thus, whether at the level of the real or the symbolic, intracultural violence is foregrounded” (Mendoza 161). Paredes’s concern with the marginalization of women will become a repeated theme in the novel, which he explores in greatest detail through Guálinto’s sister, Carmen.

Mendoza observes that the development of Guálinto as a prospective hero from the beginning of the narrative is built at the expense of the women in his life.¹³⁶ It is hardly surprising to see patriarchy as the central organizing principle in Guálinto’s family at this time period. What is surprising is Paredes’s frequent acknowledgement of female sacrifice instead of simply dismissing these women as his characters do. From that all-important naming scene at the beginning of the novel to Guálinto’s grooming for higher education, Paredes demonstrates that Guálinto’s success is contingent on the cumulative sacrifices of the women in his life who never truly factor within the family as members of any real consequence. For example, at the beginning of the novel Feliciano congratulates Gumersindo—already the father of two young daughters—on the birth of his first son. Feliciano says, “It’s like the Gringo game where you

¹³⁵ Pérez, Domino Rene; José Limon Tey Diana Rebolledo

¹³⁶ Mendoza, 156.

have strike one, then strike two, and the third time you hit the ball” (13). Likewise, from the moment that Feliciano assumes responsibility for María and her children, fulfilling Gumersindo’s dying wish that Guálinto grow to become a leader of his people, Guálinto’s success becomes the driving force behind Feliciano’s efforts. Paredes writes:

Feliciano must make as much money as he could, at jobs he enjoyed but that sometimes made him doubt whether he was doing the right thing. All for his nephew’s education. The girls did not enter into his plans. They would grow up and marry like all girls did. But for the little boy Feliciano worked and hoped. Guálinto would have to be a learned man in order to help his people. How he would help them Feliciano had no idea, but he knew he must give the boy as much education as he could. (49)

The family’s focus on education, however, extends only as far as its usefulness for producing their desired hero. As Mendoza points out, “The grooming of the male hero occurs at the expense of females. This is evinced most clearly in the decision that Carmen, Guálinto’s sister, withdraw from school and assist her mother in the home, despite her being an exceptionally good student” (Mendoza 156). While this moment certainly demonstrates the hold of patriarchy on the family’s priorities, it is a departure from the *corrido* in the novel’s recognition of female contribution, even if that focus is fleeting. In these moments, Paredes invokes *corrido* heroism in order to raise reader’s expectations, thereby heightening their disappointment in Guálinto as a hero that fails to materialize. Moreover, he exposes the limits of the *corrido*, thus producing a more pragmatic anti-*corrido* narrative that calls for “organic” leaders, including women, who will rise to meet the changing needs of the community.

Paredes emphasizes Guálinto’s shortcomings as a presumptive *corrido* heir apparent against his sibling counterpart, Carmen, whose thwarted potential at one time rivals Guálinto’s. Meanwhile, despite their equal potential, the difference in gendered expectations presages two very different paths: Carmen’s path, like all Mexican girls, will end with marriage and children;

Guálinto, fulfilling his family's mandate, would be nurtured into prominence. Paredes writes, "His mother, his uncle, and *even Carmen* [my emphasis] had come to take it for granted that he would grow up to be a great man as his dead father had wished [...] they agreed that he was not just another boy. He was greatly intelligent, gifted, and destined for wonderful things" (125).

For the narration to stress that "even Carmen" believes in this destiny suggests that she ought to have been granted exemption from perceiving Guálinto's exceptionalism as anything distinct from her own abilities, but that under the weight of gender convention she, too, is recognizes that Guálinto is destined (by permission) for greater things than she. This does not necessarily imply that Carmen believes that he is any more able than she, but that Carmen concedes that she will never match his accomplishments because the expectations and opportunities afforded to him will be denied to her.

In Paredes's frequent contrasting of Guálinto and Carmen, we might note not simply that he makes this point but that he diverts the narrative and *belabors* this point before finally resuming the central storyline. Guálinto's inability and reluctance to become a leader of his people is developed in contrast to the capability that Carmen repeatedly demonstrates. Prior to the scene when the family pressures Carmen into "volunteering" to quit school, Paredes methodically maps out the challenges that Carmen, like Guálinto, has already overcome. However, like women in most Chicano histories, as an accessory character, Carmen's struggle must be inferred while Guálinto's is celebrated. Paredes describes in painstaking detail the Jonesville school system that racially tracks its elementary students into "high" and "low" first and second grades. There is no need for "high" and "low" distinctions after that point since seventy five percent of the Jonesville Mexican student body will have been systematically weeded out by the end of the second grade: "It was a process of not-quite-so-natural selection,

and it did wonders for the school budget, while the few Mexicans who made it through high school did so by clawing their way to the top” (117). Carmen was one of those students (one of very few women) who claws her way through the school system before being forced by her family to give up her dream. Paredes writes, “Guálinto wasn’t the only one excited about the coming school year [...] So was Carmen. She had passed to eighth and would be a freshman in high school. Graduating from high school was one of Carmen’s dreams, and now her dream was coming true. It would be no problem for her. She was very smart and worked *harder* than Guálinto [my emphasis]. She loved to study, to read and to know” (151-2). Unfortunately, Carmen is pressured to drop out in the eighth grade to care for her injured mother. She does not succumb to the pressures of systemic racism but instead to the expectations of her patriarchal culture.

This moment is made even more poignant as Paredes describes the group decision-making process. Maruca, the eldest of the three children, has no particular talent for school. She will quit school and take care of the housework. Carmen—whose gentle manner better suits her to act as her mother’s nurse—will have to quit school as well. According to María, Carmen is “gentle and careful” whereas Maruca is “too hasty and rough” (155). While María does seem concerned that Carmen will have to quit school to act as nurse, ultimately the decision becomes final with Feliciano’s judgment that, ““She already has more education than any woman needs”” (155). The family’s decision also reflects a customary Mexican practice, requiring the youngest daughter to assume responsibility for the care of her aging parents. Paredes, however, is not content to dismiss Carmen’s fate as a matter of common practice. He adds his final affective blow by reminding his reader that Carmen is forced to give up her dream while Guálinto is coddled in his education. While her own education is being curtailed, we are reminded that

Carmen has played an instrumental role in guiding Guálinto's education along. In his attempt to console her, Guálinto says, "Remember when I was little [...] and you used to read to me from your schoolbooks and sometimes you asked uncle Feliciano for money to buy me books you thought I should read? I'll get books for you now. And when I'm in the eighth grade I'll lend you all my schoolbooks. We'll study them together" (155). Readers can infer, however, that Guálinto does not keep this promise. As he surpasses Carmen in educational achievement, he becomes too self-absorbed to recognize her thwarted ambitions. Her domestic function eventually becomes such a commonplace household feature that he can scarcely imagine her in any other capacity. In fact, he regards her attempts at continuing self-education (reading as a means of escape from the drudgery of her life) as a curiosity:

She was a funny one, he thought. She liked to read all kinds of things, especially novels about the strange and mysterious. She would take the Sunday edition of the San Antonio paper and devour the feature section. Then she would retell it in Spanish, almost word for word, to their mother. She would tell her about the Lost Atlantis, of the guessed-at secrets of the Pharaohs, of the latest theories about life on other planets. 'Mama,' she would say, 'isn't it mysterious? Doesn't it make you feel all sad inside to think of such awfully great distances and so many millions of years?' Her voice would trail away, while her dark eyes gazed far off into nothingness. María would nod and stroke her daughter's hair. (222)

While Guálinto ceases to recognize Carmen's sacrifice, Paredes underscores this point time and again, never allowing the reader to do the same. Moreover, Paredes connects Carmen to María, recognizing generations of female sacrifice and suggesting the wasted potential. Carmen becomes the only link to the mysteries of the outside world that María was never allowed to know. Although readers are given fewer glimpses into María's psychic interiority, we are privy to the regret she feels in later life for discouraging the attentions of a suitor so that she might honor her long-dead husband as the grieving widow. Better that she live out her days alone than

diminish the memory of her dead husband. Far from being a patriarchal utopia, *George Washington Gómez* stresses the sacrifice and regret that women suffer under Mexican patriarchy.

The differences between Guálinto and Carmen, however, are not limited solely to the opportunities afforded to each. Paredes also makes Carmen a far more capable character than Guálinto, which Paredes throws into sharp relief in the scene in which the family learns of Maruca's illegitimate pregnancy. This is an important yet under-analyzed moment in the novel that destabilizes many of the gender assumptions about the Gómez/García household. In a brutal scene, ashamed and enraged at having just learned of her daughter's pregnancy, María beats Maruca on the back, head and neck with a wooden barrel stave until the stave splits in half, all the while screaming that her daughter is a *puta* (whore). María threatens to beat Maruca until both she and the baby die. Once spent, María leaves Maruca limp and gasping on the floor, clothing torn, hair disheveled, and with blood streaming down her back. María then turns to Carmen: "She held her by the hair with one hand and slapped her face with the other" (224)—punishment for having known about Maruca, and likely as a preemptive measure to ward off similar indecency.

The remainder of the scene is told from Guálinto's perspective—a description of a seemingly never ending day which he spent dazed and paralyzed, sitting on the kitchen floor. In contrast, Carmen knows to gather clean cloth, alcohol, and the tin bucket. She instructs Guálinto to fetch clean water so that she can nurse Maruca. Later, with Guálinto still in his daze, Carmen has already prepared the evening meal which she delivers to the separate corners of the house. Carmen sends Guálinto again for more water. She washes the dinner dishes and disappears again to Maruca's sickbed. Guálinto, still frozen in the same spot in the kitchen where the day's events transpired, remains dumbstruck late into the night until his mother finally yells from the other

room for him to go to bed. Feliciano returns late that night from his farm and he and María fight over what is to be done about Maruca. When Feliciano storms out of the bedroom Guálinto pretends to be asleep: “Guálinto cowered among the covers, ashamed to let his uncle know he was awake” (226-7). The next morning, Paredes describes an atmosphere so tense that the family members can scarcely acknowledge one another’s presence. Carmen, however, is the sole figure who keeps the entire household running:

[Feliciano and María] did not speak to each other or look directly at anyone. And neither of them looked at Guálinto, as if his presence made them more ashamed of themselves. Guálinto sensed it and it made him even more embarrassed and uncomfortable. Maruca stayed in the Room, hidden from everyone else except Carmen, who seemed less affected by the tense atmosphere than the others. She acted as liaison between the different members of the family, who stood apart from each other, each of them marooned on his own island, separated by desolate feelings of cheapness and degradation [...] It was Carmen who, silently and with eyes lowered, prepared breakfast and called the others when it was ready. (227)

This is a particularly revealing moment into the family dynamic, inconsistent with what one might expect in *mexicano* culture—especially when close attention is paid to who precisely is enforcing the gender norms. These peculiarities, however, are easily overlooked for their subtlety. First, we must frame this episode within the larger narrative context. This is a momentary subplot—tangential to a larger narrative about the making of a male hero—but this subplot like others reveals the inadequacies of the boy in whom the family’s hopes are imbued, which is emphasized in contrast to a sister who quietly leaps into action during a crisis situation. I offer as a reminder that Guálinto at this moment is not a young child—he is in high school, and only slightly younger than Carmen. As I belabor this point, despite the tone of this analysis, I further remind readers that Carmen only appears a handful of times throughout the novel; she functions as a background character—which makes Paredes’s empathy towards her all the more noteworthy. Why offer these asides? What is the purpose of exposing the fissures of a male-

driven narrative unless to explode the myth while continuing to operate within its formal structure? In Paredes's sibling juxtaposition, he constructs Carmen as Guálinto's equal in intellect, and his superior in drive and ability, yet because of their genders, her talents lie in waste as her world becomes ever smaller. Guálinto, meanwhile, nurtured as he is, shows little promise of rising to the expectations placed on him by the family and larger community.

At the end of the pregnancy debacle, Paredes closes the chapter by forcing Carmen into yet another sacrifice. Now she must quit her Saturday job at Woolworth's. Despite having secured much sought-after employment—Paredes has described at length the difficulty Jonesville Mexicans had finding jobs during the Depression—María insists that, “both girls had the instincts of whores and that Carmen should not be walking the streets every Saturday evening” (227). Meanwhile, Guálinto works an after-school job at the Rodríguez grocery store. He does not need to work; Feliciano has set aside enough for the family to scrape by, but Guálinto nevertheless takes a job in order to feel like he is not a burden on his uncle. The cost of this job, however, is dear. It becomes such a drain on his time that his schoolwork suffers and he loses his footing as the class valedictorian, yet he is still permitted to continue. The narrator also shows that the Rodríguezes only hire Guálinto as a prize to display before the community. Before the Depression struck Jonesville, Feliciano ran his own small grocery and was the Rodríguezes's main competition. They hire Guálinto intentionally at below-market rate so that they can lord over Feliciano (a respected member of the community) that his nephew does menial labor for them. Moreover, Guálinto only takes the job in a fit of petulant passive-aggression—to punish Feliciano for not being man enough to avenge the family honor against the Goodnams as he imagines Lupe would have done.

The contrast between Guálinto and Carmen is again stark. Carmen's reputation must be protected in order not to further sully the family's honor as Maruca has done; Carmen is punished preemptively in order to prevent offenses she has not committed. Guálinto, on the other hand, is permitted to take a job that endangers everything the family has worked for, and that diminishes Feliciano's public standing, but despite Guálinto's pattern of questionable choices (which should signal to readers that the community is unwise to pin its hopes on him), Guálinto is permitted to fumble around as a young man learning to navigate the outside world. Women, as Paredes shows, are permitted no such latitude.

Curiously, the patriarch of the Gómez/Garcia household, Feliciano, is not the primary enforcer of these rigid standards—which brings us back to the dramatic explosion around Maruca's pregnancy. In "The Architecture of Ethnicity," Monika Kaup (citing Renato Rosaldo and José Limón) identifies a "nostalgic poetics of 'pastoral patriarchy'" (365) in Paredes's writing on Gregorio Cortéz. *George Washington Gómez*, however, offers a different vision of gender. While the novel certainly explores patriarchy within the *corrido* form, the novel destabilizes the form in its criticism of the crippling effects of patriarchy on both its male and female characters. Kaup describes Feliciano as "the courageous defender of the old order," which is certainly true in terms of his politics and general distrust of Anglo society. However, in this particular scene María and Guálinto are the primary enforcers of gender, whereas Feliciano surprisingly stands his ground and refuses María's demand to cast Maruca out of the house. He invokes his male privilege as the head of the household, but he uses it in defense of Maruca despite the shame that inevitably will befall the family. María has exiled both her daughters to the house's back storeroom, but Feliciano insists that even if the girls are not allowed into the house proper, they will not be turned out and they will still have their bed to sleep in. This

moment reveals that while Feliciano in certain respects might be the defender of the old order—while he might even fantasize about performing so-called “manly” acts of vengeance—Guálinto and María do a far stricter job of policing gender norms within the household.

María’s enforcement of gender propriety is evident. She operates within a top-down patriarchal logic that ultimately restricts what is possible for herself and her daughters, all in the name of female “decency.” These teachings, however, also dictate how her son must operate within this system that he, too, will inherit. As this beating scene demonstrates, it becomes clear that Guálinto is also primed to judge Mexican women according to a virgin-whore dichotomy. Prior to this episode, Guálinto accuses Maruca of behaving “like a common soldier-woman” when she publicly chases Buddy Goodnam, begging him to listen to her (219). At this point readers still do not know that Maruca is pregnant and that Buddy has abandoned her. Maruca attempts to plead with him. Guálinto is enraged by what he perceives as shameless male-chasing. He grabs her by the arm and yells, ““Shut your snout [...] If you had the shame of the cheapest slut you wouldn’t be saying a word”” (220). When the pregnancy is finally revealed and Maruca is beaten, as emotionally overwhelmed as Guálinto becomes, it is important to note that the most harrowing aspect of this moment for Guálinto is not the physical violence—it is hearing his mother curse. Throughout the beating, Guálinto’s concern is not for Maruca; it is for the loss of his mother’s spotlessness. Paredes writes:

The animal sounds coming from his sister filled him with a crushing sense of shame. But it was his mother who sickened him the most. He had never heard her curse before. Nor had he ever thought whether or not she knew about such words. If he had done so, he would have stopped thinking about it immediately, with a sense of impropriety and defilement. Now these words were pouring out of her mouth like a stream of filth.

He wanted to rush in and put his hands over his mother’s twisted, spitting mouth, to rub desperately at her lips, to make them soft and gentle again, to shout at her, ‘Mama, Mama, you are cursing yourself away. You’re not my mother anymore.’

He must crawl away somewhere and hide. He must find some way to cease to exist until this was over. (224)

One might imagine that as the person being beaten, Maruca ought to be the focus of the moment. She is the one who earns the right to want to “crawl away somewhere and hide” and to “cease to exist” until the beating was over. Instead, those feelings belong to Guálinto. Like male-centered *corrido* narratives, even at such a moment the focus moves away from Maruca. Guálinto becomes absorbed in his own misery. He mourns the loss of his idealized mother whose perfection is so tenuous that she can cease to exist with the utterance of common curse words. Just as Guálinto’s gender indoctrination will not permit him to recognize Feliciano as anything but a coward who pales against Lupe’s “heroic” antics, the same rigid gender restrictions force María from her pedestal with one impassioned outburst. They make Carmen better suited to be his servant than his equal. It was not even the beating that challenges Guálinto’s high regard for his mother—it is being forced to acknowledge that she is not pristine, his own personal *Virgen de Guadalupe* stand-in. He could not bear the shame that his mother even knew such language, much less that she could wield it aggressively.

As Paredes’s narrative indicates time and again, those clinging to the past and its outdated methods are doomed just like the *corrido* hero. It is hard to imagine that this message would have been well received at the time of its writing, but one might hope that audiences post-1990 no longer need the crutch of a male-dominated cultural mythology to supply its cohesion. One might expect that the current generation of Chicano Studies scholars is adequately trained to appreciate proto-feminism in a man who, ironically, in his tradition of resistance writing has been compared to the *corrido* heroes he simultaneously honors and scrutinizes. Although *machismo* and the virgin-whore dichotomy linger as gender heuristics within popular Mexican

culture, Paredes again suggests the dangers of naturalizing these behavioral scripts; they compromise the ability to recognize potential leaders when they do emerge organically.

Paredes repeatedly diverts the main storyline, throwing Guálinto into relief against supporting characters of superior skill, courage, and integrity. El Colorado plainly states to Guálinto, “The trouble with you is that you’ve had it too easy” (252). Guálinto has never known the challenges faced by Carmen, Feliciano, El Colorado, Elodia and Antonio Prieto, thus demonstrating the foolhardiness of Jonesville *mexicanos* waiting for Guálinto to grow into their savior. He hasn’t their character. In the end, Paredes demonstrates that many leaders will have to emerge in spite of their cultural training. Paredes later reflects that, “The unexpected leaders would be people like Elodia and Antonio Prieto, the minor characters in the novel. They would lead the way; and lawyer George would be what he was, a follower.”¹³⁷ Ultimately, Paredes demonstrates that Guálinto was simply ill suited to the task he was given, no matter how petted and privileged, or however many women were sacrificed in the attempted making.

“STAGING” RESISTANCE: STRATEGIC BROWNFACE AT *LA CASITA MEXICANA*

The narrative tension culminates in part five of *George Washington Gómez* when Guálinto’s former school chums ask Guálinto to help organize Mike Osuna’s run for Jonesville political office. To this point, my analysis of this scene has focused on Guálinto’s character as framed within the loyalty-betrayal paradigm. However, this scene is more complicated, still, in that this moment ties together many of the overarching critical threads within the project at large. In addition to suggesting the need for intra-racial coalition and for strategically using Mike Osuna as a non-threatening front man, this scene also brings in Paredes’ critique of gender restrictions within a proto-Chicano male leadership model. I argue that Paredes converges

¹³⁷ R. Saldívar interview with Paredes, *Borderlands of Culture*, 123-4.

multiple threads of identity politics within the novel—race, ethnicity, gender, class and performative limitations each—through the figure of Elodia. He demonstrates how Elodia in private holds a prominent leadership role, but must allow men to represent the public face of the movement. Like the character of Carmen and the women of El Teatro Campesino, Paredes renders dissonant Elodia's self-assurance and assertive demeanor against the accessory role she is expected to play publicly, and juxtaposes her talents against less able, yet more privileged, male characters like Guálinto. Moreover, Paredes does not simply dismiss her as a misfit, masculinized woman. Rather, she embodies both strength and femininity, and is able to use these attributes to complement masculinity, not to threaten it.

Through the development of both Elodia's character and the physical space she creates in her restaurant, *La Casita Mexicana*, Paredes suggests the pragmatic necessity of strategic performance—be it brownface or a strategic performance of gender—while simultaneously critiquing the source that produces that necessity. Like the other women in the novel, Elodia plays a minor role. Readers are introduced to her just a handful of times. She is the only girl amongst the four Jonesville *mexicanos* in Guálinto's high school junior class. In fact, Paredes introduces Elodia just six pages after Carmen is forced to drop out of school. To demonstrate the function she plays in the novel, I must string together a sequence of short scenes that contain Elodia, even if they do not necessarily feature her. She makes her first appearance during the argument between Guálinto and Ed Garloc. Garloc's father is a deputy sheriff, which, to the *mexicano* students in the class, is the same as being a *rinche*—a Texas Ranger, one of whom murdered Guálinto's father. When the class discussion inadvertently turns to the topic of the Texas Rangers, Garloc makes the off-handed comment that most Mexicans “like” to break the law. Readers meet Elodia in the very next line through a sudden outburst: “‘Why you, you—!’

half screamed a girl named Elodia, who sat in front of Ed Garloc. She turned around with a lashing of her loose black hair. Her dark face worked angrily. ‘Look at this *pendejo*,’¹³⁸ she exclaimed” (160). Whereas Elodia takes action and responds with the appropriate outrage at Garloc’s accusation—and wields her hair as a metaphorical weapon to boot—Guálinto can only retort “It’s not true, it’s not true!” because he “could think of no argument to refute it” (161). Garloc tries to backpedal by saying to Guálinto, “I didn’t mean you at all...After all, you’re not Mexican, you’re Spanish.” Guálinto responds with, “I’m not Spanish, I’m a Mexican.” (161). The scene ends when Mrs. Barton, the teacher, asks Guálinto and Garloc to apologize to one another. She praises Guálinto for being a “good debater” and reprimands Elodia for her outburst.

Although this scene is easy to overlook within the larger narrative, it serves two functions. First, it bookends the Christmas party scene where Guálinto again proves his allegiance to his *mexicano* classmates. Secondly, it establishes Elodia as a forceful character who wields her femininity (her hair), even while behaving assertively, in defense of her people. This scene introduces an alternative female character that is not relegated exclusively to the domestic sphere; she is the only *mexicana* girl in the junior class who continues to earn an education and who shows the courage to fight those who attempt to oppress her community. Readers meet Elodia again a bit later in the text when the same group of students, now the senior class, plan their graduation party at a nearby restaurant called *La Casa Mexicana*.

This portion of the narrative takes place at the onset of the Great Depression. The high school is unable to finance its own graduation event, so the senior class decides to throw a Christmas party instead, and organize their own fundraiser in order to pay for the party. They throw a Halloween carnival, where the main attraction is Antonio Prieto, a fellow student well-liked for his musical ability, whom they dress as a blind beggar who sings and plays the guitar

¹³⁸ Pejorative slang translating roughly to being an “idiot,” “asshole,” or “dumbass.”

for donations. Not ironically, Antonio Prieto is also the most destitute of the four *mexicano* students; he shows up to school in tattered clothes and struggles to scrape together the fifty cent contribution required of all the party attendees. Guálinto, by contrast, wears a brand new fourteen dollar blue serge suit to the party.

Guálinto and his friends drive thirty five miles to nearby Harlanburg,¹³⁹ to attend the *Christmas* party, which is significant in that the scene enacts in miniature Mexico's *Las Posadas* Christmas celebration.¹⁴⁰ *La Casa Mexicana* "was a fancy stucco building made to resemble a Mexican *jacal*" (171). Every detail was designed to satisfy the patrons' imagining of Mexican authenticity, from the Diego Rivera-inspired wall art to the silver-studded *charro* suits that adorned the live band playing *jazz* music to the waiters dressed to look like Mexican peons.¹⁴¹ Paredes writes, "Whatever the predominantly white citizens of Harlanburg might think of Mexicans as a race, they recognized their potentialities as a source of local color... All in all, *La Casa Mexicana* was as Mexican as it could be without having any Mexicans around" (171). As the class begins to file into the restaurant, the bouncer (dressed as a Mexican bandit) suddenly stops and interrogates Guálinto and his friends. The bouncer first stops the two Shigemara boys, but when he determines that the Shigemaras are "Japs" he decides that "they're O.K." and allows them to enter. The Mexican students, however, are not permitted to enter—with the exception Guálinto's girlfriend, María Elena Osuna, who claims to be Spanish. María Elena attempts to get Guálinto into the restaurant by claiming his whiteness as well. When the bouncer asks Guálinto if he is Mexican, Guálinto answers, "I am." María Elena responds with: "He's not...He's a

¹³⁹ Harlanburg is the fictitious analog to Harlingen, TX, just as Jonesville is the stand-in for Brownsville, TX.

¹⁴⁰ *Las Posadas* is a nine-day Nativity re-enactment. Before staging the manger scene, a long procession repeats Mary and Joseph's act of searching for lodging and being turned away until finally gaining entry. In the case of *George Washington Gómez* this represents the ongoing search for sociopolitical enfranchisement without resolution.

¹⁴¹ See Michelle Habell-Pallán, "From the Shadow of the Spanish Fantasy Heritage" in *Loca Motion: The Travels of Chicana and Latina Popular Culture* (2005) for her analysis of hegemonic power relations re-inscribed through the appropriation and romanticizing of Mexican signifiers. Habell-Pallán's analysis specifically addresses the use of California mission revival in the Padua Hills Institute from the 1930s through 1960s.

Spaniard. Can't you see he's white?" Guálinto releases himself from María Elena's grasp and once again states, "I'm a Mexican" (173). María Elena leaves Guálinto behind to join the party.

Guálinto, despite his ability to pass, stands in solidarity with his friends who, unlike the holy family of *Las Posadas* who eventually find lodging, are turned away from the party. As the group drives back to Jonesville, Paredes punctuates the end of the scene by having Antonio Prieto wail "*El Corrido de Jacinto Treviño*," which is significant in that the *corrido* at this moment successfully achieves the cultural function of the form—it bands the four of them together into a cohesive unit. What's more, Jacinto Treviño provides the rare instance of a *corrido* hero who wins his fight. By comparison, Guálinto leads the charge in this instance, first, in standing with his friends and, secondly, echoed by his screaming of the *grito* during the *corrido* that fortified everyone to composure. From this point onward they refer to themselves as "the four Mexicans," in part to emphasize their non-white identity and denial of the Spanish fantasy heritage. This self-naming also marks their exclusion of María Elena for having abandoned them after invoking her white-privilege, and also for having only dated Guálinto in order to cheat off of his schoolwork. This instance marks two recognitions of Mexican labor exploitation and resistance to both. First, they will no longer allow María Elena to manipulate Guálinto. Secondly, although the party only took place through the exploitation of Antonio Prieto's talent, they get their money back and restore the entire amount to Antonio as compensation for his labor.

The drive from Harlanburg back to Jonesville is interesting for other reasons. The car ride began tense and silent, except for sound of the motor and Elodia's gentle weeping, face buried into her hands. This weeping suggests another dimension to Elodia—a side that is soft, recognizably feminine. She is no caricature of an aberrant, masculinized woman whose

behavior registers as unnatural to a woman, thus reifying what it means to be masculine; she embodies strength in femininity distinct from the other female characters in the novel that are strong in their own right. However, Elodia's plight will not be to suffer passively (*aguandar*). While her weeping may invoke traditional Mexican gendered archetypes, she remains her own agent albeit with limitations. The scene brings together familiar masculinized (the *corrido*) and feminized (the trope of weeping) forms of social protest working together to heal the same injury. While the *corrido* gives them an outlet to express their pain and frustration, by the end of the car ride they have found additional common ground in their shared experiences within the U.S. school system. Orestes tells a joke about racism in the Jonesville schools that breaks the tension. They sublimate their anger with humor, recognizing their uniquely Mexican American plight, which allows them not to get lost in a romance of more happily belonging to Mexico. The thing to note here is that no one leader is singlehandedly responsible for rallying the group. It is a collective effort—one that requires a range of talents, shared duties, and rotation of roles. Elodia's weeping registers their pain; Antonio Prieto's singing gives cohesion to the injustice; Guálinto's defiance and *grito* bring them strength; and Orestes infuses humor. This does not mean, however, that Elodia now is relegated to the role of the weeping woman; just as Guálinto's occasional crying does not permanently effeminize him. This simply indicates that each member of the collective can move between roles because another member will temporarily step in to shoulder the burden.

The Monday after the Christmas party Elodia is back to her role as the leader of the “four Mexicans.” The following week was the mid-year math exam, and Elodia leads the charge against María Elena so that she cannot manipulate Guálinto into letting her cheat off his exam:

The ‘four Mexicans’ arrived as a group, with Elodia in the lead. María Elena was standing inside the door as though undecided where to sit. Elodia told Guálinto,

‘You sit here,’ pointing to a desk surrounded by other empty seats. She sat on his right and Antonio on his left, with Orestes in front of him. María Elena pouted and sat a couple of rows in front of them... Fifteen minutes into the period, María Elena left her seat, turned in her paper, and walked out fighting back her tears. (177-8)

The next time readers encounter Elodia is at the end of the novel, at the meeting to plan Mike Osuna’s campaign. These four snapshots provide a complete inventory of Elodia’s presence in the novel—but perhaps that is the point. She speaks approximately three times, so it is impossible to argue for her centrality within the narrative, but it is not too much to identify the conspicuous void that her absence flags in the text.¹⁴² Why make the point of emphasizing her leadership if only to marginalize to the telling of the master narrative? Perhaps that is the point. These narrative asides are not simple filler. They do not accidentally make their way into the narrative. Rather, they deliberately call attention to the silencing process that elides Elodia’s storyline for the sake of producing the master narrative, just as histories obscure the contributions of women in order to construct their male heroes.¹⁴³ She becomes an accessory instead of the central figure. Were Paredes never to make the point of Elodia’s leadership, he would be complicit in the silencing that the narrative attempts to critique. In a novel about the effort to produce a male leader, Paredes ultimately decides not to pen that ending. He abandons this design and leaves his planned two-volume narrative unresolved after volume one. He says:

I decided that it would have been much too sentimental to give the novel a ‘come-to-realize’ ending, with a reborn Guálinto leading his people in their struggle for social and economic rights. I realized that leaders would emerge unexpectedly. The unexpected leaders would be people like Elodia and Antonio Prieto, the minor characters in the novel. They would lead the way; and lawyer George would be what he was, a follower. (Saldívar, *Borderlands* 123-4)

Instead, readers see how the leadership structure unfolds at the political meeting in contrast to the public face of the movement.

¹⁴² Emma Pérez, *The Decolonial Imaginary*, ; Michel Foucault, “The Archaeology of Knowledge.”

¹⁴³ Mendoza, 167; Soto 96.

Guálinto's brother-in-law, Aquiles, drives Guálinto to the gathering at "Antonio Prieto's place," emphasis placed on male ownership despite who is actually running it. Antonio and Elodia are now married, and they opened a little restaurant-bar, which they call *La Casita Mexicana* in homage to the establishment that turned them away at their high school Christmas party. Antonio and Elodia appropriated the aesthetic model of *La Casa Mexicana*—already an appropriation (bastardization) of Mexican culture—but they stage it as more "authentically" Mexican than *La Casa Mexicana*. Paredes writes, "It was a ridiculous parody of the restaurant-nightclub in Harlanburg. But tourists seemed to like it" (291). As a result, they've taken more than half of *La Casa Mexicana*'s business. *La Casita* appears to be the "real deal" because it is run by Mexicans for a largely tourist clientele. The fact, however, that it is a "parody" suggests that the artful presentation of the establishment is intended to dupe its audience into the believing in its authenticity, thereby strategically deploying a meticulously curated script of Mexican stereotypes designed to prey upon the audience's prejudices. *La Casita* separates white dollars from patrons who would otherwise support the segregated *La Casa Mexicana*.

Despite the face of the establishment, behind closed doors *La Casita* does not pander to its white clientele. It is the organizing site where plans are hatched to infiltrate the established political order, and to bring political representation to Jonesville Mexicans. *La Casita* is the exemplar of strategic brownface—it performs stereotypical Mexican "authenticity" for subversive purposes. It passes itself off in order to use the material gains it diverts towards a subversive goal. While it cannot openly acknowledge its artifice—and hence can offer no public strategy of political representation—what it can do is quietly bolster through pragmatic means the arm of the movement that will publicly effect the desired political changes. It is a covert complement to a radical political agenda.

This strategic function of *La Casita Mexicana* bookends those early description of Feliciano biting his tongue and swallowing his pride while serving drinks to Anglo soldiers at *El Danubio Azul*. He needed to earn money to gain footing for his family, and eventually to use his influence to sustain other Jonesville *mexicanos*, like El Negro's abandoned wife and children, left destitute after the *sedicioso* uprising. On the surface, Feliciano's work might appear questionable. He serves U.S. soldiers, and works as a ward heeler, corralling Mexican votes for an Anglo political boss. However, despite this work, critics of the novel have compared Feliciano to the true inheritor of the *corrido* tradition. This incongruity bumps up against the limits of representational idealism, and implies the need to deploy methods that are not always as they appear. Not every *sedicioso* or sympathizer can openly espouse their revolutionary ideals when hegemonic institutional structures, even if weakened or altered, nevertheless remain intact.¹⁴⁴

Likewise, Elodia is forced to assume a similar strategic posture. When readers encounter her again in this scene, she is serving beer. This marks the second time that the narrative features a woman in the role of barmaid. The first was Doña Tina, the woman who gave shelter refreshment to María and the children when Feliciano first went inside *El Danubio Azul* to inquire about work. Feliciano ultimately decides that Doña Tina as a "good woman," even if not a conventionally "decent" one. Interestingly, her nickname around the neighborhood conveys respect. They call her *La Alazana*, which translates literally to sorrel-colored, but more pointedly connotes a person who is cunning. The narrative provides Doña Tina as a precursor to Elodia; Doña Tina provides an alternative model for thinking about wily, capable women in the narrative who occupy non-traditional roles. At *La Casita*, Antonio's job is to entertain the

¹⁴⁴ Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977-78* (2007).

patrons with his music, but Elodia runs the kitchen and handles the finances. She's the brains behind the operation and, what's more, she appears to be the ringleader of the Osuna campaign.

When it is time to begin the meeting, Elodia, the only woman amongst a "score" of men, takes charge and calls the meeting to order. Noting the Biblical significance within the visual tableau, Guálinto is seated to the immediate right of Elodia, who occupies the central position at the head of the table. Appropriately, Guálinto is positioned as "the son," consistent with his terminal case of *mijito* syndrome. While Elodia runs the meeting, it is important to note that her leadership can only take place in private—that a powerful woman can only wield her authority behind the mask of her front men. The three candidates who group rally behind are all men as the only figures who can viably win an election in Jonesville. However, it is also important to note that, again, Paredes make the effort to show her position, even if she is likely to be written out of the narrative. In keeping with this analysis of strategic brownface in the Osuna campaign, it is also imperative to note that that Elodia is the head of the "executive committee of *Latins* for Osuna" (292, my emphasis). The use of the term "Latins" is extremely important given the historical context of that term's colloquial usage. To this point, "Latin" is only used as a euphemism for Mexican. Paredes himself expresses his views on the term "Latin" in his explanation for why he refused the offer to join LULAC:

I didn't [join LULAC] because I considered *Latin* a kind of 'weasel' word. I told them that I would join them if their organization were called LUMAC, League of United *Mexican* American Citizens. It was my feeling that when Anglos called us 'Latins,' it was because they were avoiding the term *Mexican*, since they didn't want to insult. In Texas, *Mexican* was a dirty word, not to be used in polite company. It was never used except as an insult. So I never joined LULAC. (Saldívar 124-5)

For Guálinto's friends, bent on a radical liberationist political agenda, to adopt the term "Latin" indicates recognition of their target audience as well as the limitations of their representational

strategy. Voters in Jonesville are not likely to rally behind “Mexicans for Osuna,” just as they are unlikely to advance a female candidate in 1930s Texas. Not only would they be likely to harm Osuna’s chances by affiliating him with Mexicans instead of the “Spaniards” amongst whom his family is known in Jonesville, but capitalizing off of the Osunas’ Spanish whiteness offers a degree of protection against racialized violence endemic to people of color who do not keep their place in the Jim Crow south.

While *George Washington Gómez* certainly adapts the *corrido*, which he recognizes as a heroically masculine form, he does not end with an oversimplified celebration or condemnation of *corrido* masculinity. For all its beauty, the form has utility—and Paredes never denies these attributes even as he exposes its limits. The cultural work of the *corrido* cannot be downplayed for its ability to rally people to a cause, but Paredes painstakingly demonstrates the disparity between heroic representation and pragmatic action on the ground. In the drive to produce a male hero within the overarching context of the *corrido*, it is astonishing to see the extent to which Paredes simultaneously recognizes that male privilege—even that embedded within the ballad form—ultimately comes at a political cost when it sacrifices female talent outright. While he certainly does not call for a cultural and gendered revolution, he absolutely recognizes the need within political resistance to utilize the skills that all have to offer. While I ultimately do not believe that Paredes critique in any way calls for an abandoning of the *corrido* or for cultural heteropatriarchy that it represents, I do believe that he recognizes ways that it can adapt and be deployed strategically to suit the political needs of a changing society. Paredes could have very easily have written *George Washington Gómez* as an updated *corrido*, and still shown the problems that mexicanos face including the identity fragmentation characteristic under the conditions of modern capitalism. It becomes all the more noteworthy, then, that he makes the

effort at all to inject a strong female presence into a masculine form. In so doing, Paredes blurs the lines between public and private, male and female spheres out of political necessity, even while maintaining the illusion of tradition. The strategic brownface that he deploys in his novel achieves a pragmatic goal—it destabilizes the status quo even while creating the illusion of upholding it. He recognizes that open protest and strategic assimilative performance operate as two arms of the same movement, and shows that survival requires the ability to combine multiple, often seemingly contradictory, methods of resistance.

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