

Introduction

Mixed Race in Hollywood Film and Media Culture

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According to mixed race novelist Danzy Senna, we have entered the “mulatto millennium.” Other scholars and cultural critics describe it as a new era in which Generation X has passed the baton to “Generation Mix.”¹ This certainly seems to be the case in relation to U.S. film, television, and popular culture since the mid-1990s. If you turn on your television, you might happen upon mixed race actors Vanessa Williams in *Ugly Betty* (2006+), Wentworth Miller in *Prison Break* (2005+), Kristen Kreuk in *Smallville* (2001+), models of various mixed racial backgrounds competing on *America’s Next Top Model* (2003+), or media coverage of mixed race politician Barack Obama. Similarly, you might see Vin Diesel, Keanu Reeves, or Rosario Dawson’s latest film at your local multiplex, hear Mariah Carey talking frankly about her mixed heritage on a talk show, or read about Raquel Welch “coming out” as a mixed race Latina of half Bolivian heritage. Not only has multiraciality, or, in today’s vernacular, being “mixed,” taken on new meaning in U.S. popular culture, but biracial and multiracial models, actors, and film and television characters seem to be everywhere. This is a far cry from decades past, when individuals of mixed racial descent either were not visible or were construed negatively as tragic and/or villainous figures in cinema and other media.

These images and trends are important to unpack and more fully understand, as the history of mixed race representation promises to reveal a great deal not only about the U.S. media industries but also about the

evolution of social norms that historically have divided notions of race in the United States among such discrete categories as white, black, Latino, Asian, Pacific Islander, and American Indian—albeit with the boundaries between these categories always under question. As documented in the work of such scholars as Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, the film, television, and publicity industries that constitute what we think of as “Hollywood” have long been the preserve of stereotypes and social norms about race.² Within this framework, portrayals of interracial romance and of individuals of mixed racial and ethnic heritage have served as powerful totems within filmic story worlds, highlighting and challenging fault lines among racial categories and borders. The publicity that has surrounded actors of mixed racial and ethnic descent similarly is linked to cultural attitudes about racial identities and borders and their evolution. Over the decades the ranks of mixed race stars, once filled by such actors as Nancy Kwan, Anthony Quinn, and Rita Hayworth, have been joined by the likes of Jessica Alba, Jennifer Beals, Keanu Reeves, Halle Berry, and Vin Diesel. Mixed race actors also are increasingly likely to foreground their mixed ethnic background as an element in their publicity today, a sign that biraciality and multiraciality are taking on new meanings.

Despite this rich history and the veritable explosion of multiracial imagery in Hollywood film and media culture today, there has been little published scholarship to date on the history or current representation of mixed race individuals, romance, families, or stars on screen. *Mixed Race Hollywood* takes a first step in this regard. Our contributors, who hail from such academic disciplines as film and media studies, ethnic studies, and literary studies, take up the project of interrogating the portrayal of racial mixing in studies of film, television, the Internet, and other popular culture texts. They explore from diverse vantage points how mixed race individuals, romances, families, and stars have fared in media story lines and star publicity and question the implications of these images and trends. Through this work the authors set precedents for theorizing these topics, as well as laying a foundation for the emergent field of mixed race cultural studies.

Race and Mixed Race: Notes on Terminology

One of the challenges of such a collection is that of terminology. The differing preferred terms with respect to racial formation and identity in various academic disciplines and the slippage between those terms

have provided a challenge in the editing of this anthology. We have chosen in *Mixed Race Hollywood* to utilize the terminology most commonly used in film and media studies. Thus we have, for example, encouraged our authors to use the term “race” without scare quotes (such as used here) as are standard in some other disciplines. We do so with the understanding, however, that we consider race always to be socially constructed and contested. As noted by Michael Omi and Howard Winant, race is not a set of biological categories but a social and political construction³—the boundaries of which, notably, are challenged by mixed race families and individuals. Racial categories remain markers of difference that are experienced in a material way, however. They are the basis of individual identity and often of life experience and opportunity, as well as serving as persistent bases for social stratification. The socially constructed boundaries between so-called racial categories are unstable and have shifted over time, moreover, while other nations have distinctly different racial categories and methods of classification into these categories. Many Latinos are considered white in Latin American countries, for instance, but are racialized as nonwhite in European and Euro-American contexts.

The terms “race” and “ethnicity” will also at times be used in conjunction in this collection. In a U.S. context, ethnicity denotes a set of cultural distinctions that may involve national ancestry, including but not limited to food, language, dress, and other markers. For instance, the “Asian American” racial category encompasses a wide variety of ethnic and national identities, including, for instance, Filipino, Vietnamese, Korean, Thai, Cambodian, Hmong, Laotian, Chinese, Japanese, Pakistani, and Indian. Notions of ethnicity have often been conflated with those of race in this country, however. This is because race historically has been viewed through a black-white binary in the United States, with Latinos, Asian Americans, Pacific Islander Americans, and American Indians holding shifting, uncertain positions along the continuum. But these groups have in fact been racialized—socially constructed as nonwhite. Adding to the potential confusion, according to current U.S. governmental classification, Latinos are racially white, black, or indigenous, and only ethnically Latino. In contrast, people who identify as white, black, Asian American, or American Indian can claim this identity as their race on the census form. Such contradictions reveal unavoidable slippages between the two terms. While the constitution and meaning of racial categories have changed over time, what might be described as *mixed* race has similarly been in

flux. This is evident in the evolution of terms used to designate multi-racial peoples, many of which appear in the chapters in this anthology. In current usage, “mixed race,” “biracial,” and “multiracial” (or “multi-ethnic”) all are used equally to refer to relationships and individuals of two or more of the socially constructed racial categories of the United States. The topic of mixed racial heritage also has generated a lexicon of terms specific to particular racial and ethnic groups and to distinct time periods in U.S. history. A number of these terms may not be familiar to readers. For instance, the term “mulatto” was in common usage by the antebellum period to refer to individuals of both African and European American ancestry, with the related terms “quadroon” and “octoroon” designating a lesser amount of African heritage. “Mulatto” evoked the social disapprobation of racial mixing in its reference, literally, to the hybrid offspring of a donkey and a horse.⁴ Although it has fallen out of common parlance, superseded by terms that have a more neutral connotation, it continues to be used in media studies and literary studies to describe characters of half-black ancestry depicted in the early part of the twentieth century because of foundational scholarship in these fields that described such characters as “tragic mulattoes.”⁵ Early scholars of the tragic mulatto, or, as more commonly was found, tragic mulatta, described her as a bereft, vulnerable figure because of being caught between two worlds, white and black, to which she could never fully belong.

Another term that is utilized here and is part of the contemporary lexicon of mixed race identity is “hapa.” This word, which emanates from the Hawaiian language, meaning literally “half,” designates someone who is of mixed Hawaiian heritage. Like “mulatto,” “hapa” historically had a negative connotation based on social interdictions about racial mixing. “Hapa” has been appropriated more widely, and with a more neutral meaning, to describe individuals with mixed Asian or Pacific Islander and white heritages. Finally, another culture-specific term that is meaningful to this discussion and that appears in the anthology is the Spanish-language word *mestizaje*, which translates roughly to “mixing,” or, more specifically, racial mixing. The term “mestizo” is derived from *mestizaje*; it has been used historically to refer to Latinos with mixed Spanish or white and indigenous heritage, while more recently it has at times been used to refer to Latinos of any mixed heritage. Sharing in the history of Spanish colonialism, individuals of mixed Filipino and white descent are also called “mestizo.”

Cultural Shifts: From Fears of Miscegenation to "Generation Mix"

The various ways in which racial categories can be contested hint at how mixed race romantic relationships and individuals historically were seen as disrupting and threatening the white/black (and white/nonwhite) racial binary. In the context of slavery, "miscegenation," or the mixing of what were deemed two races, was made illegal through state laws and local covenants. Meanwhile, half-white progeny existed, typically the result of the rape of female slaves by white slave owners. This potential threat to the social order was managed through establishing a "one-drop" rule of race by hypodescent, which deemed anyone with the slightest hint of African heritage, black, and reinforced the boundaries of white citizenship.⁶ Individuals of other mixed heritage, such as those of partial Mexican or American Indian descent, similarly were often categorized, but with less predictability, by hypodescent in many states. Until as late as 1989, in fact, biracial babies were typically assigned the nonwhite race upon classification at birth unless parents intervened for another designation.⁷

The term "passing," signifying an act of pretending to be of only European American ancestry when in fact of partial African or other nonwhite descent, hails from this historical context of the "one-drop" rule. Mixed race individuals, who might have a racially ambiguous appearance, could be motivated to pass for benefits that included education, employment, and housing opportunities. There were risks to such an act, however, including legal covenants against passing. On the other hand, mixed race individuals were and have often been marginalized by nonwhite communities as well. Maria P. P. Root has noted that mixed race Asian Americans have tended to be excluded from Asian American communities as "not Asian enough," for example.⁸

After World War II, race relations underwent considerable transformation. This was the result of a number of developments, including raised awareness of racial discrimination and civil rights activism on the part of individuals and advocacy organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.⁹ The desegregation of schools and other public facilities began or took place at an increased tempo in many cities, and films and television at times addressed the unfair treatment of peoples of color and fears of miscegenation in story lines. These changes laid the groundwork for the civil rights movement in the 1960s that would profoundly affect popular cultural representations of marginalized peoples.

By the 1960s, mixed race couples were more prevalent; Root describes the resulting rise in births of mixed race children as the “biracial baby boom.”¹⁰ This boom, not coincidentally, coincided with related legislation. In 1964, the Civil Rights Act outlawed discrimination based on such factors as race, color, and national origin. Subsequently, the Supreme Court’s decision in *Loving v. Virginia* (1967) overturned remaining state laws against interracial marriage. This decision is often described as inaugurating the boom in biracial families and children. As early as the 1970s, interracial family support groups began to form in cities around the United States and Canada; many ultimately lent their energies to what has been termed the multiracial or mixed race movement. Led largely by parents of mixed race children, the movement has advocated for mixed race and multiethnic children and families and for a reconsideration of racial categories.

These developments led to the first published scholarship on mixed race identity and experience, particularly in the areas of psychology and sociology. Pioneering works in this regard were Paul Spickard’s *Mixed Blood* (1991), Maria P. P. Root’s edited collections *Racially Mixed People in America* (1992) and *The Multiracial Experience* (1995), and Naomi Zack’s edited anthology *American Mixed Race* (1995). These publications laid an important foundation for subsequent scholarship and greater visibility and awareness of mixed race issues. The first college courses on mixed race identity and issues began to be taught, while support groups for mixed race college students also formed on campuses as diverse as Harvard and the University of California–Santa Cruz.

The number of mixed race youth has continued to increase, as mixed marriages and families are increasingly commonplace. By the late 1990s, organizations advocating for mixed race individuals and families were able to successfully lobby the federal government to change the categories on the census to reflect racial multiplicity. In 2000, respondents had the option for the first time of checking more than one racial category. That year, 6.8 million, or 2.4 percent of respondents, indicated that they belonged to two or more races.¹¹ Given that many multiracial individuals choose to identify themselves by only one ethnic or racial identifier, we can assume that the mixed race population is in fact much larger.

The late 1990s and early 2000s also have witnessed a greater cultural and academic focus on multiraciality.¹² Scholars and cultural critics are debating in particular the implications of the increasing visibility of mixed race in U.S. popular culture and social life. Some, such as Leon E.

Wynter, describe multiraciality as the inevitable solution to racism in this country and argue that race will be nullified in a future when we will all be mixed race.¹³ Other scholars, such as Gloria Anzaldúa in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestizas*, argue that a multiracial or “*mestiza* consciousness” does not negate racialized histories but can revolutionize U.S. race relations if we can embrace the legacy of our multiple heritages. Most scholars, like the contributors to this collection, fall somewhere between the extremes of “color-blind” and “color-focused” interpretations of the increasing *mestizaje* that characterizes the United States in the future.

Hollywood's Response: Mixed Race Relationships on Screen

In 2003, Essie Mae Washington-Williams announced publicly not only that she was mixed race, but that she was the biracial daughter of segregationist Senator Strom Thurmond. This lineage, hidden for many decades, was made public only after Thurmond's death. The silence and secrecy that surrounded Washington-Williams's mixed ancestry serve as a reminder of the continuing deep fears in the United States about miscegenation, as well as ongoing taboos against interracial relationships and marriage.

The evolution of the representation of mixed race relationships in film and television has historically reflected and arguably has also impacted such social attitudes. Newly forming notions of whiteness at the turn of the twentieth century, for example, played into how silent melodramas of the first two decades of the twentieth century portrayed mixed race romances between European Americans and characters of partial American Indian, Asian, or Mexican descent. Such melodramas typically based their dramatic conclusions on last-minute revelations of one or both partners' “real” racial status as based on the “one-drop” rule. Examples include *Ramona*, which was released in multiple film versions, the earliest in 1910.

As the major studios began to form and establish dominance over the industry, film stories based on mixed race romances came under heavier scrutiny. The solidification of notions of whiteness and related taboo against mixed race relationships was addressed with the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America's “Don'ts and Be Carefuls” guide in 1927 and became official with the enforcement of the Production Code in 1934. Under the Production Code, the representation of sexual relations between people of different races was forbidden. The Code in this regard reflected larger legal, social, and cultural interdictions against marriage

between whites and African Americans, and at times between whites and Mexican Americans, Asian Americans, and American Indians, that were reinforced in the U.S. legal arena in this period.

This is not to say that mixed couples were never represented on the screen, particularly given that the Code's stipulations were vague and evaluated by the Production Code Administration on a film-by-film basis. Only a few scholars have engaged in in-depth exploration of Hollywood's portrayal of romantic and sexual relations that crossed inscribed color lines, notable among them Gina Marchetti and Susan Courtney.¹⁴ Both scholars note the deep cultural context that gave rise to anxious portrayals of mixed couples. Needless to say, the Hollywood mixed race couple was typically not allowed a "happily ever after" or depicted marrying or having children, so wary were the studios to suggest any type of positive outcome to the intimate intermingling of the races. Moreover, even as late as the 1960s, these portrayals were often mitigated through casting a white (or half-white) actor to portray the nonwhite character, ensuring that audiences were not viewing *actual* miscegenation on screen. Classic examples include the casting of Natalie Wood as Maria in *West Side Story* (1961) and of Nancy Kwan, of Chinese and Scottish descent, as Suzie in *The World of Suzie Wong* (1960).

As these examples illustrate, mixed relationships that were not classically biracial were not necessarily forbidden by the Production Code but were still circumscribed in ways that reflected social values. For instance, as Marchetti notes, the portrayal of Asian-white relationships evolved in relation to U.S. social and political relationships with Asian countries.¹⁵ U.S. military ventures during World War II brought "exotic" women to the U.S. colonial consciousness, engendering fantasies that were the result of a commingling of heroic nationalism and colonial paternalism. Many World War II films correspondingly made mixed race coupling a major motivation of the plot, following the stereotypes that Asian women are exotic and appealing, the spoils of colonialism. And while mixed Latino and Anglo and American Indian and Anglo relationships are part of the landscape of the Western, notably in such films as *My Darling Clementine* (1946), *High Noon* (1952), and *The Yellow Tomahawk* (1954), they were treated as temporary at best and doomed to end tragically at worst (as in *Duel in the Sun's* infamous double-shooting conclusion).

The taboo against the portrayal of mixed race relationships, particularly those that ended in marriage or other positive outcomes, began to shift with the waning of the Production Code in the 1950s and the overturning

of antimiscegenation laws in the United States in 1967. In *Sayonara*, for instance, evolving attitudes are reflected in the determination of Major Lloyd Gruver (played by Marlon Brando) to marry a Japanese woman despite the army's interdiction against such unions.

Since then, as noted earlier, the number of mixed race couples and families in this country has grown exponentially. Similarly, we have witnessed a blossoming of portrayals of mixed race relationships in film and television that conclude on a neutral or positive note. Such romances were the central focus of such films as *Sayonara* (1957), *My Geisha* (1962), and *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (1967), while more recent examples include *Jungle Fever* (1991), *The Joy Luck Club* (1993), *Made in America* (1993), *Fools Rush In* (1997), and *Save the Last Dance* (2001). Television also has witnessed a variety of positive portrayals since such groundbreaking series as *I Love Lucy* (1951–57), *The Courtship of Eddie's Father* (1969–72), and *The Jeffersons* (1975–85) showcased bicultural and mixed race couples among their regular cast of characters. More recently we have seen mixed race relationships explored in relation to such issues as immigration, class, sexual orientation, and nationality, as in the films *Mississippi Masala* (1991), *The Wedding Banquet* (1993), *Lone Star* (1996), and *Chutney Popcorn* (1999) and in the television series *The L Word* (2004+).

Mixed Race Characters: A Movement from Tragic to Heroic

The spate of diverse and generally positive characterizations of mixed race figures in film and television today demonstrates a dramatic evolution as well. As noted earlier, many of the first mixed race film characters were sympathetic but tragic figures whose lives turned on the discovery of their mixed racial status. More negative portrayals soon followed, moreover, the lineage of which is often traced to D. W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* (1915).

Birth of a Nation, based on Thomas Dixon's novels *The Clansman* and *The Leopard's Spots*, is a historical fiction of social relations after the Civil War and, as the title suggests, a major foundational fiction of the United States. Some of the earliest film images of mixed race individuals as treacherous, doomed figures that embody the worst characteristics associated with each race in the U.S. consciousness can be traced to this film. These foreboding images of the mixed race figure reflected pseudoscientific ideas about racial mixing that circulated during the era of slavery.

These ideas emanated from a biological argument called “hybrid degeneracy” that continued to have social impact until the 1930s.¹⁶ According to the theory of hybrid degeneracy, racially mixed peoples were emotionally unstable, irrational, and biologically inferior to the “pure” races of their parents. These ideas held sway in the public, which believed that mixed race individuals were the source of social unrest due to an unhappy combination of ambition and racial degeneracy. Indeed, this is the case in *Birth of a Nation*, in which the mixed race character, Silas Lynch—whose very name inscribes the narrative imperative to eliminate him—has self-confidence considered beyond his lot, combined with all the features of racial degeneracy: rapaciousness, immorality, criminality, and moral and emotional instability. In the template the film created, mulatto men are criminal degenerates while racially mixed women are deceitful and sexually promiscuous; and both are threats to proper white society that must be eliminated or marginalized. In his seminal study of African American representation in film, Donald Bogle borrowed the term coined by literary scholars in describing these characters as tragic mulattoes.

Since then, as Bogle and others have documented, the mulatto character became a staple of classical film whose presence was sure to elicit the emotions of tragedy and melodrama.¹⁷ Tragic mulatta characters, or “light-skinned” black characters that arguably are symbolic stand-ins for mulattas, such as featured in *Imitation of Life* (1934 and 1959), *Showboat* (1951), and *Pinky* (1949), continued the precedent of mixed race figures characterized as mentally unstable at best, and deceptive and selfish at worst. All find their paths to happiness and fulfillment stymied within the course of the narrative.

Mixed race American Indian and Latino characters in classical film similarly tended to reflect negative beliefs regarding the emotional and mental stability of mixed race individuals, as well as U.S. policy and cultural attitudes toward native peoples and immigrants. Not coincidentally, the depiction of mixed American Indians and Latinos is most prevalent in the Western genre. For example, such characters appear in *The Searchers* (1956) and *Duel in the Sun* (1946). In contrast, mixed Asian American and white relationships have been more visible than mixed Asian characters in film for the symbolic political alliances they suggest.¹⁸

In more recent decades, mixed race characters have enjoyed more nuanced and typically more positive representations in film and television. In contrast to the eras of only tragic and shameful *mestizaje*, such figures have been represented alternately as neutral, ordinary, positive, or even

heroic. Multiracial action heroes in fact have become a trend in their own right. Such figures often continue to serve as ethnic enigmas but are also now associated with notions of cultural mastery and other positive characteristics.¹⁹ Vin Diesel, Dwayne Johnson (*The Rock*), Keanu Reeves, and Jessica Alba are a few of the actors of mixed racial heritage whose recent careers have been boosted by their portrayal of such enigmatic and heroic figures. Perhaps unsurprisingly, several chapters in this collection address these actors, given their emblematic significance as reflections of contemporary discourses on mixed race.

These recent roles are part of an overall boom in the casting of mixed race actors in contemporary film and television, as noted at the onset of this introduction. It cannot be determined how audiences “read” these actors and models with respect to notions of race and ethnicity, however, particularly if they portray characters coded as white. As the contributors of this collection underscore, Hollywood traditions of whiteness also continue to serve as potent frames of understanding, even in films and other media texts that foreground mixed race actors and/or a multicultural aesthetic.

Clearly, mixed race imagery has been an enduring and powerful trope of U.S. culture, deployed to convey popular conceptions about national identity, social norms, and political entitlement. While this history and these trends leave more questions than answers, there is much to learn. By beginning to document and interrogate this evolution in Hollywood film and media culture, the contributors to this collection explore these patterns and rethink normative discourses about the representation of race and racial categories. Many argue that the multiracial individual has increasingly become, paradoxically, the racially overdetermined and indeterminate symbol of an “American” multiracial democracy. In addition, they make a clear case for the need to reinterrogate everything we thought we knew about racial and ethnic representation to better apprehend the meanings of these phenomena in film, television, and popular culture.

The Structure of the Book

For ease of comprehension and to encourage various lines of scholarly inquiry, this anthology is arranged into thematic sections that hone in on major areas of scholarship within mixed race film and media studies. These include (1) mixed race representation and imagined national

identities; (2) norms of miscegenation and the portrayal of mixed race romances and families; (3) Hollywood genres and the evolving representation of mixed race; and (4) biracial and multiracial characters and stars in film and media culture.

I

As noted earlier, in classical Hollywood film, mixed race characters typically upset fictions of social order and coherence; in the process they played a major role in how these narratives imagined the United States as a nation in which race was clearly demarcated and white dominance “made sense.” While recent decades have brought about an evolution in the portrayal of mixed race, notions of nation and racial identity continue to be constructed and underscored in such portrayals. In the opening part of the anthology, “Miscegenation: Mixed Race and the Imagined Nation,” contributors J. E. Smyth, Camilla Fojas, and Lisa Nakamura explore the role of mixed race in the construction of national identity in popular culture texts, from classical Hollywood films to sites of visual and digital culture.

In “Classical Hollywood and the Filmic Writing of Interracial History, 1931–1939,” J. E. Smyth examines the representation of the mixed race woman within the context of U.S. literature and film history. She traces the adaptation of female characters from the novels that became templates of Hollywood’s portrayal of mixed race. These novels, including Edna Ferber’s *Cimarron*, Helen Hunt Jackson’s *Ramona*, and Margaret Mitchell’s *Gone with the Wind*, inspired such films as *Cimarron* (1931), *Call Her Savage* (1932), *Ramona* (four versions, 1910–36), *Jezebel* (1938), and *Gone with the Wind* (1939). Smyth ultimately argues for a more nuanced interpretation of the racial and sexual discourses circulating in film between 1931 and 1939.

In the next chapter, Camilla Fojas explores another aspect of the construction of U.S. social norms with respect to mixed race through an analysis of classic Westerns that take place on or near U.S. borders. In “Mixed Race Frontiers: Border Westerns and the Limits of ‘America,’” Fojas explores the indefinite nationality and social status of mixed race Native American and Latino characters in the post–Civil War era Westerns *Duel in the Sun* (1946) and *Rio Lobo* (1970). Westerns are notorious for presenting Native Americans and Mexicans as racialized outsiders and social problems, an association that circulated during and after the Civil War; less common is the depiction of racially ambiguous or mixed characters with divided loyalties. Fojas argues that in *Duel in the Sun* and *Rio*

Lobo, multiracial characters provide crucial opportunities for representing the reunification of a nation in conflict, and that their social integration represents not just the possibility of national reunification but the potential for U.S. dominance on a world scale.

Lisa Nakamura moves the exploration of mixed race and U.S. identities to the Internet in “Mixedfolks.com: ‘Ethnic Ambiguity,’ Celebrity Outing, and the Internet.” In her study, Nakamura focuses on how “closeted” mixed race stars are viewed by fans, particularly through one Web site’s construction of a “mixed folks” identity community centered on celebrity mixed race outing. She notes that while the recent vogue for ethnically ambiguous actors might seem a blessing to the multitudes of mixed race actors looking for work, this creates an ironic situation for actors who pass all too well as white. Web sites like Mixedfolks.com attempt to resolve this dilemma by listing actors, musicians, and other mixed race celebrities and connecting them to their “hidden” racial backgrounds, thus outing performers such as Dean Cain (Asian), Jennifer Beals and Vin Diesel (African American), and Madeleine Stowe and Lynda Carter (Latina). Nakamura posits that the site identifies racial heritage as a source of inspiration and identification that must be made to “represent,” despite performers’ disavowal or failure to acknowledge a nonwhite racial identity.

II

As noted earlier, the depiction of mixed race relationships has undergone dramatic changes over the decades but still is largely underresearched. In “Identity, Taboo, and ‘Spice’: Screening Mixed Race Romance and Families,” Heidi Ardizzone, Robb Hernandez, and Kent A. Ono make contributions in this regard, in chapters that explore the history and contemporary portrayals of interracial romantic and sexual relationships and families in a variety of contexts.

Heidi Ardizzone opens this part with “Catching Up with History: *Night of the Quarter Moon*, the Rhinelander Case, and Interracial Marriage in 1959.” In this chapter, Ardizzone argues that the film typically pinpointed as groundbreaking for its portrayal of interracial romance, *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner* (1967), was preceded by an equally important film eight years prior, Hugo Haas’s *Night of the Quarter Moon* (1959). As she notes, it was the first Hollywood portrayal of an interracial marriage in which no one passes, no one dies or suffers a tragic downfall, and the couple touches passionately. She explores this landmark film in the legal and

social context and in relation to other portrayals of black-white marriage in the 1950s and 1960s, declaring *Night of the Quarter Moon* the first to present interracial marriage as a democratic right.

In “A Window into a Life Uncloseted: ‘Spice Boy’ Imaginings in New Queer Cinema,” Robb Hernandez explores the evolution of cinematic representation of mixed race couples in gay-oriented independent films. He explores how what has been dubbed New Queer Cinema of the 1990s portrayed interracial gay couples in which one partner was Latino in *Billy’s Hollywood Screen Kiss* (1998) and *Trick* (1999), as well as conducting a reception study with Latino gay male viewers to illuminate how they interpreted the pairings in these films. He argues that New Queer Cinema, dominated by white male directors, often deployed a Spice Boy archetype, a pan-Latino exotic other, as the object of desire of the Anglo male. Notably, Hernandez found that Latino gay male viewers who participated in the study uniformly identified with the white protagonists in the films, demonstrating their embeddedness within a “gay marketplace of desire.” He posits that such viewers adopt a disidentificatory position to negotiate mixed raced desire on and off screen.

This is followed by Kent A. Ono’s exploration of a contemporary mixed race family in “The Biracial Subject as Passive Receptacle for Japanese American Memory in *Come See the Paradise*.” In this chapter, Ono focuses in particular on the narrative function of the half-Japanese child in Alan Parker’s film *Come See the Paradise*, released in 1990. Ono asserts that in the film *Mini*, the child of a Japanese American woman and an Irish American man, serves as the witness to a particular Nisei (second-generation Japanese American) scenario, that of the incarceration of Japanese Americans in the United States during World War II. He argues that in this regard *Mini* is both a receptacle for Japanese American memory and the salve that can heal the scarred divide between Japanese America and white American society. Ono asserts that *Mini* otherwise is devoid of agency, however. Her position as a child and the version of history stressed in the story line—which emphasizes the heroism of white men in saving powerless Japanese Americans—construct the biracial subject not only as vulnerable and naïve but also as having no distinct or unique consciousness.

III

Genre criticism offers an important avenue for the examination of mixed race representation and performance. In particular, it offers the

opportunity to explore films and television programs in relation to the social concerns and norms of the era in which they were produced and consumed. As socially constructed racial boundaries have shifted in the United States, so naturally have the representations of race and mixed race in genre films. And as noted by the authors in this part, “Genre, Mixed Race, and Evolving Racial Identities,” certain genres, such as science fiction and action film, have offered particularly fruitful forums for depicting and exploring mixed race and its ramifications.

In “Race Mixing and the Fantastic: Lineages of Identity and Genre in Contemporary Hollywood,” Adam Knee argues that fantasy films have functioned as a significant popular means of working through cultural tensions and aspirations regarding racial and ethnic mixing, given the singular latitude their narratives offer for dramatizing interactions and amalgamations among all manner of beings. In illustration, Knee conducts a comparative analysis of how issues of racial, ethnic, and cultural mixing have been articulated in three films within the realm of the fantastic, the horror film *Jeepers Creepers* (2001), the vampire film *Underworld* (2003), and the cinematic remake of the popular magic-themed television series *Bewitched* (2005).

Jane Park continues the exploration of mixed race and genre in “Virtual Race: The Racially Ambiguous Action Hero in *The Matrix* and *Pitch Black*.” In this chapter, Park examines the role of the racially ambiguous hero in two science fiction action films released at the turn of the millennium: *The Matrix* (1999) and *Pitch Black* (2000). Park explores the popularity of these characters in the context of the history of nonwhite and mixed race actors in Hollywood. She argues that these multiracial representations offer new ways of thinking about racial identity, difference, and discrimination.

Finally, in “From Blaxploitation to Mixploitation: Male Leads and Changing Mixed Race Identities,” Gregory T. Carter explores connections between Blaxploitation films of the 1970s and contemporary action films that he terms “Mixploitation” through analysis of the careers and public images of three mixed race actors whose careers span two decades, Ron O’Neal, Vin Diesel, and The Rock (Dwayne Johnson). As he notes, Ron O’Neal played the lead in the Blaxploitation classic *Super Fly* (1972). In accordance with the times, his racial makeup was never an issue; he was merely black, even if his physical appearance indicated a mixed racial background. Vin Diesel and The Rock rose to fame two decades later; Carter argues that, in contrast, these stars’ mixed heritage is as central to

their public images as their film roles. In his explication of the changes and constants that connect these two periods and genres, Carter notes that both Blaxploitation and Mixploitation purvey exceptional masculinities for their times, shackle actors with narrow racial identities, and feature unmistakably mixed, (part-) black men, even if the latter genre avoids focus on racial issues.

IV

In the final part, “Generation Mix? Shifting Meanings of Mixed Race Figures,” we compile the work of scholars whose work interrogates the mediated depiction of mixed race characters and actors in film and television. While all discern an evolution of representation since the era of the tragic mulatta, they also uncover ambivalence in contemporary depictions in film and media culture.

Aisha D. Bastiaans revisits the mulatta figure in her contribution, “Detecting Difference in *Devil in a Blue Dress*: The Mulatta Figure, Noir, and the Cinematic Reification of Race.” In her investigation Bastiaans focuses on the character of Daphne Monet, played by biracial actress Jennifer Beals in the film *Devil in a Blue Dress* (1995). She explores Monet’s significance within the context of the neonoir film genre and the 1990s backlash against civil rights gains, as well as the implications of casting Beals in the role of Monet. Bastiaans argues that we, the audience, are detectives who actively participate in decoding the mystery of the mixed race character passing for white. She concludes that the film ultimately reinscribes historical anxieties over post-Civil War race relations, with the mulatta character playing a crucial role in this regard.

While contemporary shifts in representation have provided opportunities for mixed race actors, color lines arguably still exist in Hollywood. In “Mixed Race in Latinowood: Latino Stardom and Ethnic Ambiguity in the Era of *Dark Angels*,” Mary Beltrán examines this phenomenon in relation to stars of partial Latino descent. What are the implications of the popularity of a number of mixed Latino stars with respect to imagined racial borders and notions of what it means to be Latino today? Beltrán takes up this question in an analysis of the career and promotional discourses that have surrounded Jessica Alba (of Mexican, French, and Danish heritage) and Rosario Dawson (of Puerto Rican, Afro-Cuban, Irish, and Native American heritage). As she argues, the two stars’ careers illustrate the media industries’ continued privileging of actors seen as assimilable to standards of

whiteness, while they also demonstrate a confusion regarding how to utilize mixed race performers, and the racialization of even actors who attempt to embrace a multiply-raced identity in their public image.

In “Mixed Race on the Disney Channel: From *Johnnie Tsunami* through *Lizzie McGuire* and Ending with *The Cheetah Girls*,” Angharad N. Valdivia explores the evolution of mixed race figures with regard to how it is manifest on children’s television today. Valdivia presents the results of a comparative analysis of the construction of race and ethnicity in contemporary Disney television programming featuring mixed race characters. These shows and characters include *Johnnie Tsunami* (1999), in which a Hawaiian father forces his son to separate from all things Hawaiian; *The Cheetah Girls* (2003), in which the cheetah print functions as a signifier for mixed race; racially mixed characters in *That’s So Raven!* (2002); and the racially diverse casts of *Lizzie McGuire* (2001) and *Sister, Sister* (1994–99). Through close readings of these shows in relation to Disney’s historical depiction of race, for example, in *Dumbo* (1941) and *Song of the South* (1946), Valdivia ponders the implications of recent televisual reflections on the emotionally loaded conceptions of mixed racial heritage.

Finally, LeiLani Nishime considers the evolution of the mixed race figure in relation to the cinematic storyworld of *The Matrix* trilogy (*The Matrix* [1999], *The Matrix Reloaded* [2003], and *Matrix Revolutions* [2003]) and its Eurasian star, Keanu Reeves. In “*The Matrix* Trilogy, Keanu Reeves, and Multiraciality at the End of Time,” Nishime analyzes representations of bi- and multiraciality in the science fiction trilogy. As she notes, *The Matrix* ends with a monologue by Reeves as the protagonist, Neo, in which he promises that he will show everyone caught in the matrix “a world without rules and controls, without border or boundaries. A world where anything is possible.” This fluid world of possibilities is also the world promised the filmgoer in promotional texts, while Reeves himself provided a visual metaphor for the hybrid future. Nishime argues that the trilogy is unable to ultimately transcend boundaries into a utopic future “without rules and controls,” however. She posits that it instead illustrates the contradictions inherent in current debates wherein fear of the catastrophic results of racial mixing exists at the same time as utopic predictions that racial mixing will make race, and all attendant problems, disappear. Her reading of the popular film trilogy provides a snapshot of the contradictory ways in which mixed race people are represented and repressed, exploited and celebrated in contemporary film.

This collection documents the emergence of a new era in the popular cultural depictions of race and racial relations. Mixed race characters and relationships have gained more favorable positions in Hollywood film and media culture, but they have also become more useful to a nationalist portrait of the United States. That is, depictions of multiraciality are often instrumentalized as symbols of the liberal democratic culture of the United States in which the mixing of races and cultures is used to present the United States as a model of multiculturalism and globalism. But the depiction of multiraciality also opens up the possibility for new models of identification, new understandings of race and ethnicity, and new models for racial and ethnic relations. As these chapters indicate, the status of racial mixing is continually changing, and each new cultural representation and media event adds another angle and another level of meaning to the complex history of race and ethnicity in the United States. We hope that this collection will contribute to emerging discourses and discussions of racial mixing and become a template for further work and new studies on the topic.

NOTES

1. Danzy Senna, "The Mulatto Millennium," in *Half and Half*, ed. Claudine O'Hearn (New York: Pantheon, 1998), 12–27. "Generation Mix" was coined by the MAVIN Foundation, a nonprofit organization that advocates for mixed race individuals and families and aims to raise awareness of racial identity issues. See www.mavinfoundation.org.

2. Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London: Routledge, 1994).

3. Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States* (London: Routledge, 1994).

4. Ursula M. Brown, *The Interracial Experience: Growing Up Black/White Racially Mixed in the United States* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2000), 36–37.

5. For more information on tragic mulatto/mulatta figures in nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature, see Suzanne Bost's *Mulattas and Mestizas: Representing Mixed Identities in the Americas, 1850–2000* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2005); and Eva Allegra Raimon, *The Tragic Mulatta Revisited: Race and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Antislavery Fiction* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004).

6. Further information on the enforcement of the "one-drop" rule can be found in Ian F. Haney Lopez, *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race* (New York: NYU Press, 1997).

7. Maria P. P. Root, *The Multiracial Experience: Racial Borders as a Significant Frontier in Race Relations* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1996), xviii.

8. Maria P. P. Root, "Multiracial Asians: Models of Ethnic Identity," in *Race, Identity, and Citizenship: A Reader*, ed. Rodolfo D. Torres, Louis F. Mirón, and Jonathan Xavier Inda (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1999), 158–68.

9. Clint C. Wilson II and Félix Gutiérrez, *Race, Multiculturalism, and the Media* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1995), 87.

10. Root, *The Multiracial Experience*, xiv. As Root notes, the 1960s boom now "practically guarantees that anyone living in a large U.S. city knows someone who is racially mixed."

11. U.S. Census Bureau, "The Two or More Races Population: 2000," November 2001, www.census.gov/prod/2001pubs/c2kbr01-6.pdf.

12. Recent works include—but are not limited to—Ursula M. Brown's *The Interracial Experience*; Rachel F. Moran's *Interracial Intimacy: The Regulation of Race and Romance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Marion Kilson's *Claiming Place: Biracial Young Adults of the Post-Civil Rights Era* (Westport, CT: Bergin and Garvey, 2001); Werner Sollors's *Interracialism: Black-White Inter-marriage in American History, Literature, and Law* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Renee C. Romano's *Race Mixing: Black-White Marriage in Postwar America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003); Jon Michael Spencer's *New Colored People: The Mixed-Race Movement in America* (New York: NYU Press, 2000); and the edited collections *The Sum of Our Parts: Mixed-Heritage Asian Americans* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), ed. Theresa Williams-Leon and Cynthia Nakashima; *'Mixed Race' Studies: A Reader* (London: Routledge, 2004), ed. by Jayne O. Ifekwunigwe; *New Faces in a Changing America: Multiracial Identity in the 21st Century* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2002), ed. Loretta I. Winters and Herman Debose; and *Mixed Race America and the Law: A Reader* (New York: NYU Press, 2003), ed. Kevin R. Johnson.

13. Leon E. Wynter, *American Skin: Pop Culture, Big Business, and the End of White America* (New York: Crown, 2002).

14. Gina Marchetti, *Romance and the "Yellow Peril": Race, Sex, and Discursive Strategies in Hollywood Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Susan Courtney, *Hollywood Fantasies of Miscegenation: Spectacular Narratives of Gender and Race* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).

15. Marchetti, *Romance and the "Yellow Peril."*

16. Brown, *The Interracial Experience*, 37.

17. See Donald Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in Films*, 4th ed. (New York: Continuum, 2001), 9; Jane M. Gaines, *Fire and Desire: Mixed-Race Movies in the Silent Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Freda Scott Giles, "From Melodrama to the Movies: The Tragic Mulatto as a Type Character," in *American Mixed Race: A Culture of Microdiversity*, ed. Naomi Zack (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1995), 64;

Susan Courtney, *Hollywood Fantasies of Miscegenation*; Claudine C. O'Hearn, ed., *Half and Half: Writers on Growing Up Biracial and Bicultural* (New York: Pantheon, 1998);

18. In fact, mixed race Asian actors have typically performed roles as Asians. Some notable examples are Nancy Kwan and more recently Russell Wong.

19. Mary Beltrán, "The New Hollywood Racelessness: Only the Fast, Furious (and Multi-racial) Will Survive," *Cinema Journal* 44, no. 2 (Winter 2005): 50-67; LeiLani Nishime, "The Mulatto Cyborg: Imagining a Multiracial Future," *Cinema Journal* 44, no. 2 (Winter 2005): 34-49.