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The Multiracial Option: A Step in the White Direction

Alynia Phillips*

It is estimated that within fifty years, the white race will lose its stronghold as the majority racial group in the United States. In recent years, this prediction has induced anxiety in everyone from lay citizens to conservative politicians. But this prediction may not come to fruition if the definition of whiteness expands as needed. Parallel to this mounting racial anxiety runs a social movement aimed at promoting the classification of mixed race individuals as “multiracial.” Though on its face this classification appears harmless, the reliance on “multiracial” indicates an implicit deracialization of mixed race individuals, and a tacit devaluation of minority heritage. This Note argues that based on the history of racial classifications in the United States and existing motivations to maintain the white majority, the push for a multiracial category functions as a means by which mixed race individuals can join the ranks of whiteness. With mixed race individuals comprising the fastest growing population in the United States, their acceptance into the white race could secure the white majority for decades to come.

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INTRODUCTION

For some, picking a racial category is simple and intuitive. For me, it is nearly impossible; I have yet to come across a classification box that accurately captures my background. If I identify with my mother, I am white—a mix of Swedish and German ethnicities. If I identify with my father, I am black—an ethnically Latina descendant of Africans imported to work in Caribbean sugar plantations.¹ I am mixed race. In this country, how I choose to identify myself is a point of contention and debate.

One of the most pressing racial questions circulating in today’s public discourse is whether or not whites will become a minority in the United States within the next fifty years.² It has been projected that the population of individuals belonging to a racial minority will surpass the white population by 2044.³ But this prediction can come to fruition only if the racial categories we know today remain static over time. Countering the white minority hypothesis, prominent critical race theorist George Yancey argues that the threat of such a power shift will lead the white majority to adopt Asians and Latinos as part of the white race, thereby maintaining its majority.⁴ However, little has been written about the role mixed race individuals will play in the potential redefinition of whiteness.

Throughout U.S. history, mixed race individuals have inhabited a variety of different identities in politics, media, and society at large; this population has been confronted with every sentiment from praise to condemnation.⁵ Recently,

1. See PEW RESEARCH CTR., MULTIRACIAL IN AMERICA: PROUD, DIVERSE AND GROWING IN NUMBERS 1 (2015).

2. DALE MAHARIDGE, THE COMING WHITE MINORITY: CALIFORNIA’S ERUPTIONS AND AMERICA’S FUTURE (1996).

3. SANDRA L. COLBY & JENNIFER M. ORTMAN, U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, PROJECTIONS OF THE SIZE AND COMPOSITION OF THE U.S. POPULATION: 2014 TO 2060, POPULATION ESTIMATES AND PROJECTIONS, CURRENT POPULATION REPORTS 1, 9 (2015), <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2015/demo/p25-1143.pdf> [<https://perma.cc/MVY6-HH3T>]; see also, e.g., Bill Chappell, *For U.S. Children, Minorities Will Be The Majority By 2020, Census Says*, NPR (Mar 4, 2015, 8:05 AM), <http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2015/03/04/390672196/for-u-s-children-minorities-will-be-the-majority-by-2020-census-says> [<https://perma.cc/6HZL-LQZU>] (“By around 2020, more than half of the nation’s children are expected to be part of a minority race or ethnic group.”) (internal quotation marks omitted).

4. GEORGE YANCEY, WHO IS WHITE? LATINOS, ASIANS, AND THE NEW BLACK/NONBLACK DIVIDE 43 (2003); see also *id. passim*.

5. For a history of black/white mixed-race individuals and populations (historically referred to as “mulattos”), see generally STEPHAN TALTY, MULATTO AMERICA: AT THE CROSSROADS OF BLACK AND WHITE CULTURE: A SOCIAL HISTORY (2003). For an overview of mixed race individuals in

this racial subgroup has garnered targeted attention due to growing insecurity about the position of whites in the U.S. racial hierarchy.⁶ This Note examines how the promotion of the use of “multiracial” as a descriptor for all mixed race individuals influences a shift towards whiteness for this population. First, it examines the development and possible ulterior motives of the “multiracial movement.”⁷ Then, it charts the histories of other ethnic groups similarly situated to the contemporary mixed race community that have ultimately secured admission into the white race by assimilating and embracing white superiority. Finally, this Note will consider the potential impact the multiracial movement’s implicit devaluation of minorities might have on mixed race individuals and eventually the racial hierarchy of the United States.

This Note uses the existing and continued push for the addition of the multiracial option to future censuses as a tool to demonstrate the impact this movement has on politics and societal power dynamics. The 2020 U.S. census is close on the horizon. While there have always been changes to the racial categories displayed on the census, it is important to examine the negative effects that these changes may have on the racial stratification of this country.⁸ Adding a multiracial option to the census would further emphasize the racial hierarchy in the United States by demeaning the status of minorities in the public eye and in the private identities of mixed race individuals.

American media, see generally SIKI A. DAGBOVIE-MULLINS, *CROSSING B(L)ACK: MIXED-RACE IDENTITY IN MODERN AMERICAN FICTION AND CULTURE* (2013). Since the inception of the United States, there was a societal fascination surrounding mixed race people, who seemed to straddle a line between two races, but never lost the stain of the detested minority. *E.g.*, John Morgan, *Some Account of a Motley Coloured, or Pye Negro Girl and Mulatto Boy, Exhibited before the Society in the Month of May, 1784, for Their Examination, by Dr. John Morgan, from the History Given of Them by Their Owner Mons. Le Vallois, Dentist of the King of France at Guadaloupe in the West Indies*, in 2 *TRANSACTIONS OF THE AMERICAN PHILOSOPHICAL SOCIETY* 392–95 (1786) (describing the health examination of a mixed-race slave boy in animal-like detail); *see also* NAOMI ZACK, *RACE AND MIXED RACE* (1993) (providing an overview of implications of racial classification for mixed race identity over history).

6. *See* Jeffrey A. Winters, *Minority White*, *HUFFINGTON POST* (Nov. 10, 2016), http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/minority-white_us_5823e6f4b010226241222d [<https://perma.cc/24S2-4MUC>] (discussing how the election of Donald Trump as president demonstrates the anxiety the white population is experiencing as it loses its majority status); *see also* Richard Alba, *Opinion: The Myth of a White Minority*, *N.Y. TIMES* (June 11, 2015), <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/11/opinion/the-myth-of-a-white-minority.html> [<https://perma.cc/NZ3W-EU5Q>] (examining the racial self-identification of mixed race individuals in light of projections predicting an imminent white minority).

7. JARED SEXTON, *AMALGAMATION SCHEMES: ANTIBLACKNESS AND THE CRITIQUE OF MULTIRACIALISM* 45 (2008).

8. *See infra* Part IV; *see also* Sharon M. Lee, *Racial Classifications in the US Census: 1890–1990*, 16 *ETHNIC & RACIAL STUDS.* 75 (1993) (providing a survey of a century of census racial classifications, arguing that classifications reflect preferences for racial purity and white supremacy, as well as misunderstandings of unique ethnic identities).

I.

RELEVANT TERMINOLOGY EXPLAINED

In any examination of race, it is critical to define relevant terms to maintain clarity. To remove this discussion from the jumble of labels society assigns its members, the following distinctions provide a clean lens through which one may scrutinize the multiracial movement.

First, it is important to draw a distinction between *race* and *ethnicity*. These terms are frequently conflated due to the fact that both describe perceived differences between groups of people. Clearer distinctions between race and ethnicity are apparent when these terms are traced back to their origins. The language of *race* was initially developed in the eighteenth century in an effort to use biology to describe difference.⁹ “Ethnicity” became used more frequently as “an alternative to the vocabulary of race” in the early twentieth century.¹⁰ But the term *ethnicity* reinforced the conviction that people were significantly shaped by their descent and culture.¹¹ Additionally, the flexibility of *ethnicity* has historically allowed northern and western Europeans to boast the hierarchical privilege of whiteness, while simultaneously maintaining a cultural identity that might differ from other white counterparts.¹²

This Note will use *race* when speaking about exclusive and distinct categories that exist to enforce the pseudoscience of biological difference indicating superiority: *white* stands as a *race*, juxtaposed against *black*.¹³ Race is broader than ethnicity and is often tied to phenotypically visible differences between people. In contrast, *ethnicity* herein refers more to cultural identities¹⁴: for example, Polish, German, Irish, and Scandinavian are all ethnicities that are traditionally considered part of the white race. These ethnicity-related cultural differences can be—among other things—the type of food traditionally prepared by the ethnicity in question, the social and family values, and religious practices.¹⁵

Historically, *ethnicity* language has allowed some out-groups to gain the privileges typically allotted only to the preferred race.¹⁶ *Ethnicity* language allows for transition, such that a group previously considered a race separate from the privileged race could adopt ethnicity language in order to minimize the

9. Ian F. Haney López, *A Nation of Minorities: Race, Ethnicity, and Reactionary Colorblindness*, 59 STAN. L. REV. 985, 996 (2007).

10. *Id.* at 1007 (describing how this alternative to race provided more flexibility in defining cultural distinctions).

11. *See, e.g., id.*

12. *Id.* at 1008.

13. *See* YANCEY, *supra* note 4.

14. DAVID R. ROEDIGER, WORKING TOWARD WHITENESS: HOW AMERICA’S IMMIGRANTS BECAME WHITE: THE STRANGE JOURNEY FROM ELLIS ISLAND TO THE SUBURBS 21 (2005) (characterizing ethnicities as “cultur[al] and belief systems”).

15. *See e.g., id.*

16. *See infra* Part IV.

actual importance of the racial difference, until it becomes irrelevant and ethnicity remains the only defining difference.¹⁷ Though groups can shed their racial designations as society allows or promotes, a group contemporaneously recognized on a large scale as a different, minority race may not gain the privilege of the preferred race. The option to join the privileged only applies to groups broadly considered similar enough to abandon any other existing racial classifications.¹⁸ Society can evolve and remove the different racial classifications, but until that happens, the races remain distinct. The distinction between *race* and *ethnicity* is important as it allows people of different ethnicities to join together under one unified and monolithic race. This Note argues that the multiracial *ethnicity* can indeed join the white *race*.

It is important to recognize that both *race* and *ethnicity* are socially constructed classifications.¹⁹ This is one—if not the principal—reason racial and ethnic designations appear so malleable in society. Even in this Note, these terms hold little value when one takes into account the nuances of self-identification. But since this discussion is situated in our contemporary language for classifying different groups of people, it would be nearly impossible to proceed with this analysis without the use of these key terms. The reader of this Note must recognize the futility of *race* and *ethnicity*, but also see how profoundly they affect American society.

In this Note *white* will only be used to describe race. Because this Note focuses on the evolving understanding of what it means to be white, *white* or *whiteness* are employed here in a broader sense than typically defined. The white race is defined by juxtaposition with the “inferior” races and ethnicities.²⁰ Accordingly, whiteness “depends on a demonization of non-Whites so that by comparison Whites are deified.”²¹ This broader definition of *whiteness* allows the white majority to include ethnic groups that are considered minorities today, or were considered minorities at one point in history. However, when referring to individuals of European descent that exhibit a traditionally white phenotype, the term *Caucasian* will be used.

In contrast with *white*, here, the term *minority* refers to African-American or black individuals, Latinos, and any other underrepresented minority that faces similar oppression and societal barriers. Because African Americans and Latinos are the most populous underrepresented minorities in the United States, this

17. *Id.*; see also ROEDIGER, *supra* note 14, at 22 (describing how adopting ethnicity language became “axiomatic” for Jewish intellectuals hoping to abandon the racial inferiority similarly suffered by African Americans).

18. See YANCEY, *supra* note 4, at 46–48 (discussing how African Americans have never been considered assimilated enough to have the opportunity to join the white race).

19. See Ian F. Haney López, *The Social Construction of Race: Some Observations on Illusion, Fabrication, and Choice*, 29 HARV. C.R.-C.L. L. REV. 1, 3–4 (1994).

20. *Id.*

21. IAN F. HANEY LÓPEZ, *WHITE BY LAW: THE LEGAL CONSTRUCTION OF RACE* 130 (2d ed. 2006).

analysis is limited for the most part to these groups. For this reason, *minority* is used in a broad sense, with an emphasis on black and Latino communities. However, because the white race relies on its position relative to the black race, a hefty portion of the analysis will focus on the black race in particular.

The distinction between *multiracial* and *mixed race* is also an essential element of this analysis. These two terms will not be used interchangeably as significant implications flow from each specific term. *Mixed race* describes individuals who have ancestors belonging to two or more races. As an example, I am the daughter of a white mother and a black father: I am mixed race. On the other hand, this Note argues that *multiracial* is a term that purposefully eliminates the room for specificity that the term *mixed race* provides. *Mixed race* as a term indicates explicitly that the holder of this identity exists as a composite of multiple unnamed histories, and in turn begs for specifics. *Multiracial*, especially when used as an alternative to the “check-all-that-apply” classification approach, sanitizes this history and settles for ignorance over specificity. It achieves this goal by unifying an indescribably diverse group of people as one group, rather than allowing each individual to elaborate on their unique identity.²² *Multiracial* is a new ethnic category that likens all mixed race individuals to one another regardless of personal experience and heritage.²³ For this reason, the term *multiracial* is only used herein when referring to some aspect of the multiracial movement or individuals who identify themselves as part of this movement.

The following analysis relies on delicate and discrete understandings of a world we take for granted. Not only can misunderstandings surrounding race breed confusion, but they can also lead to animosity and anxiety when clarity is lost. Building off the basic understanding of the race vocabulary described here, this Note will dive deep into the actions of unlikely advocates and the implications of multiracialism in the context of the American racial hierarchy.

II.

UNMASKING THE PLAYERS IN TODAY’S MULTIRACIAL MOVEMENT

To the undiscerning eye, the multiracial movement seems like any other social movement led by an under-recognized ethnic group to achieve a common goal through political and social action. Upon further examination, the drivers of this movement come from two surprising groups: white mothers and the Republican Party.²⁴ Each of these groups strives to further the multiracial movement in pursuit of different goals, powered by different motives. This Section will explore how the proliferation of the use of the term *multiracial* does

22. See *infra* Part IV.

23. See, e.g., Susan Graham, *Dogs are Mutts; People are Multiracial*, PROJECT RACE (Nov. 21, 2008), http://www.projectrace.com/about_us/archives/from-the-director [https://perma.cc/Q93H-UW53].

24. See *infra* Parts III.A, B.

not alleviate problems experienced by the mixed race community. Instead, it serves as a means by which the white race can be expanded such that the white majority is preserved.

Multiracial advocacy organizations began actively lobbying for formal recognition of the mixed race population in the early 1990s.²⁵ Though the census allowed individuals to select multiple racial categories to accurately capture their identities in 2000 and 2010, advocates for the multiracial classification were not satisfied.²⁶ Today, leaders of the movement remain steadfast in their goal to instate a multiracial census option: a single box that mixed race individuals can check on government forms to identify themselves as *multiracial*. There are many organizations and advocates dedicated to supporting the mixed race community that avoid supporting the multiracial option.²⁷ Therefore, in this Note the term “multiracial movement” refers specifically to advocacy advancing and promoting the addition of a distinct multiracial option on government forms.

History shows that the identity and even the existence of mixed race individuals has been marred in controversy since the inception of the United States.²⁸ Prior to the 1967 Supreme Court ruling in *Loving v. Virginia*, many states outlawed miscegenation, or interracial marriage.²⁹ Even so, in the years leading up to *Loving*, mixed race children were still born—illegitimately, according to the state.³⁰ Slavery provided white male slave owners significant motivation to pursue interracial procreation, because the resulting child would be assigned the mother’s slave status, according to the law of every slave state.³¹

25. Reynolds Farley, *Identifying with Multiple Races: A Social Movement that Succeeded but Failed?*, in *THE CHANGING TERRAIN OF RACE AND ETHNICITY* 123 (Maria Krysan & Amanda E. Lewis eds., 2004); see also SEXTON, *supra* note 7, at 43; *Mixed Race Organizations*, MIXED HERITAGE CTR., http://www.mixedheritagecenter.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1407&Itemid=55 [<https://perma.cc/W7GN-ZJ3S>] (documenting prominent mixed-race and multiracial organizations across the country).

26. Reynolds Farley, *Racial Identities in 2000: The Response to the Multiple-Race Response Option*, in *THE NEW RACE QUESTION: HOW THE CENSUS COUNTS MULTIRACIAL INDIVIDUALS* 33, 35 (Joe Perlmann & Mary C. Waters eds., 2002).

27. See, e.g., Ramona Douglass, *The Evolution of the Multiracial Movement*, MIXED HERITAGE CTR., http://www.mixedheritagecenter.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1224 [<https://perma.cc/AHD2-FEV2>] (describing movement of some multiracial activists away from the multiracial option).

28. Peggy Pascoe, *Miscegenation, Law, Court Cases and Ideologies of “Race,”* in *SEX, LOVE, RACE: CROSSING BOUNDARIES IN NORTH AMERICAN HISTORY* 464 (Martha Hodes ed., 1999) (highlighting miscegenation laws across the country and court cases challenging them prior to *Loving*).

29. See *id.*; *Loving v. Virginia*, 388 U.S. 1, 6 (1967) (“Virginia is now one of 16 States which prohibit and punish marriages on the basis of racial classifications.”).

30. Walter Wadlington, *The Loving Case: Virginia’s Anti-Miscegenation Statute in Historical Perspective*, 52 VA. L. REV. 1189, 1192–93 (1966) (charting Virginia’s anti-miscegenation laws, beginning in 1691 with “An act for suppressing outlying Slaves” which prevented “that abominable mixture and spurious issue which hereafter may increase in this dominion, as well by negroes, mulattoes, and Indians intermarrying with English, or other white women, as by their unlawful accompanying with one another” (quoting 3 Laws of Va. 86–87 (Hening 1823))).

31. See *Sexuality, Race, and Violence in Slavery and Freedom*, in *MAJOR PROBLEMS IN THE HISTORY OF AMERICAN SEXUALITY* 142 (Kathy Peiss ed., 2002). Under the slavery doctrine *partus*

This allowed white slaveholders to rape female slaves indiscriminately in the interest of creating new human chattel.³² After the abolition of slavery, interracial sex became less profitable. But, in accordance with the one-drop rule, the 1930 census recognized mixed race individuals with black ancestors as black only.³³ This was the status quo until 2000.³⁴

A. *White Mothers as Racial Ventriloquists*

Advocates in the multiracial movement boast that their actions are geared towards providing mixed race individuals with the “correct terminology for who they are.”³⁵ Project RACE (Reclassifying All Children Equally) was established in 1991 with this goal in mind.³⁶ Susan Graham, a Caucasian woman married to a black man with two mixed race children, founded Project RACE.³⁷ Graham became intensely frustrated whenever she was required to identify the race of her children, and refused to settle for any one racial category, arguing “nobody can tell me my children are more black than white.”³⁸ After struggling to select a race for her children in the 1990 census, Graham channeled her frustration into founding Project RACE along with Chris Ashe—another Caucasian mother of mixed race children.³⁹ Led by Graham, Project RACE soon began actively lobbying for a new census category for mixed race individuals leading up to the 2000 census.⁴⁰ Graham and her supporters began working to raise awareness of

sequitur ventrem (Latin for “the child follows the mother”), “children inherited their status as enslaved or free from their mother.” Adrienne Davis, *Don’t Let Nobody Bother Yo’ Principle: The Sexual Economy of American Slavery*, in *SISTER CIRCLE: BLACK WOMEN AND WORK* 103, 108 (Sharon Harley ed., 2002).

32. Davis, *supra* note 31, at 108.

33. With the exception of a period between 1850 and 1910 when the census included a “mulatto” category in an effort to refine data collection, individuals with black ancestors were expected to identify as black on the census. In 1920, however, the mulatto category disappeared and any “person of mixed blood [was] classified according to the nonwhite racial strain.” Christine B. Hickman, *The Devil and the One Drop Rule: Racial Categories, African Americans, and the U.S. Census*, 95 MICH. L. REV. 1161, 1183, 1187 (1997).

34. Alaina R. Walker, *Choosing to Be Multiracial in America: The Sociopolitical Implications of the ‘Check All That Apply’ Approach to Race in the 2000 U.S. Census*, 21 BERKELEY LA RAZA L.J. 61, 65–66 (2011).

35. *Project RACE History*, PROJECT RACE, http://www.projectrace.com/about_us/our_history/project-race [https://perma.cc/6M48-5D7A].

36. *Id.*

37. Susan Graham, *Multiracial Identity for the Year 2000 Census*, CSPAN (May 30, 1998), www.c-span.org/video/?106489-1/multiracial-identity-year-2000-census [https://perma.cc/BL4B-VJLR].

38. Paul Spickard, *Does Multiraciality Lighten? Me-Too Ethnicity and the Whiteness Trap*, in *NEW FACES IN A CHANGING AMERICA: MULTIRACIAL IDENTITY IN THE 21ST CENTURY* 289, 294 (Herman L. DeBose & Loretta I. Winters eds., 2003).

39. Ramona E. Douglass & Nancy G. Brown, *Evolution of Multiracial Organizations: Where We Have Been and Where We Are Going*, in *NEW FACES IN A CHANGING AMERICA: MULTIRACIAL IDENTITY IN THE 21ST CENTURY*, *supra* note 38, at 111, 116.

40. PROJECT RACE, *supra* note 35; *see also* Farley, *supra* note 26, at 35–36 (outlining lobbying efforts of Graham and Project Race).

the “psychological damage that is done to children when they are forced to identify with only the mother’s or only their father’s race.”⁴¹ Project RACE succeeded in motivating “Ohio, Illinois and Georgia to add ‘multiracial’ as a category in state-mandated data collections.”⁴² Over the course of her advocacy, Graham has forged valuable partnerships with allies like conservative activist and author Charles Byrd and Republican Congressman Newt Gingrich.⁴³

One interesting facet of this multiracial movement is that it is heavily focused on mixed race families and youth.⁴⁴ Today, Project RACE includes the subdivisions of Project RACE Teen and Project RACE Kids, led by youth across the country.⁴⁵ Caucasian mothers of these youth, like Susan Graham and Chris Ashe, are often fervent advocates for the multiracial option.⁴⁶ When mixed race adults are surveyed they convey that their experiences are vastly different depending on their background, and are more likely to identify with certain aspects of different races than a singular unified multiracial identity.⁴⁷ But repeatedly, white mothers continue to promote multiracialism.

Susan Graham and Chris Ashe are by no means the only Caucasian women who founded multiracial organizations on behalf of their mixed race children. In fact, “[r]esearch has shown that multiracial organizations are disproportionately attended and directed by white parents, particularly white mothers” of mixed race children.⁴⁸ In 1980, Irene Car—a Caucasian mother in Chicago—joined together with five other mothers of biracial children to found the Biracial Family Network (BFN).⁴⁹ BFN is now one of the oldest multiracial organizations in the

41. Farley, *supra* note 25, at 129.

42. *Id.*

43. *Id.* at 130; Spickard, *supra* note 38, at 294.

44. *See infra* notes 45, 50.

45. *Project RACE Teens*, PROJECT RACE, http://www.projectrace.com/about_us/our_history/teen-project-race [https://perma.cc/AM45-V2W3]; *Project RACE Kids*, PROJECT RACE, <http://www.projectrace.com/category/pr-kids> [https://perma.cc/XF95-N5DH].

46. *See* Susan Graham, *Dogs are Mutts, From the Director*, PROJECT RACE (Nov. 21, 2008), http://www.projectrace.com/about_us/archives/from-the-director [https://perma.cc/X2QR-425N]; *see also, e.g.*, Monica Foust et al., *How to Catch a Moonbeam: A Mixed-Methods Approach to Understanding Ethnic Socialization Processes in Ethnically Diverse Families*, in HANDBOOK OF RACE, RACISM, AND THE DEVELOPING CHILD 264 (Clark McKown & Stephen M. Quintana eds., 2007) (noting the involvement of Caucasian mothers in the multiracial movement); Steven R. Holloway et al., *Place, Scale and the Racial Claims Made for Multiracial Children in the 1990 US Census*, 32 ETHNIC & RACIAL STUD. 522 (2009) (same).

47. PEW RESEARCH CTR., *supra* note 1, at 5.

48. Heather Dalmage, *Protecting Racial Comfort, Protecting White Privilege*, in THE POLITICS OF MULTIRACIALISM: CHALLENGING RACIAL THINKING 203 (Heather M. Dalmage ed., 2004); *see also* Tanya Katerí Hernández, “Multiracial” Discourse: Racial Classifications in an Era of Colorblind Jurisprudence, in MIXED RACE AMERICA AND THE LAW: A READER 205–06 (Kevin R. Johnson ed., 2003) (referring to “White parents who predominate among the [multiracial movement’s] spokespersons”).

49. Douglass & Brown, *supra* note 39, at 112; *Biracial Family Network*, MIXED HERITAGE CTR.,

country.⁵⁰ Six years later, Nancy Brown—a Caucasian mother of two mixed race children—became the founding president of Multiracial Americans of Southern California (MASC).⁵¹ Both BFN and MASC “are notable because of their impact on the movement.”⁵² Still, Project RACE has surpassed these and other multiracial organizations as the leader of the fight for the multiracial option.⁵³ The fact that white mothers with mixed race children are at the forefront of this movement raises questions about who the multiracial movement is designed to benefit.

White mothers who support the multiracial option cite myriad reasons for doing so. For one, they hope, as Susan Graham does, to achieve “appropriate inclusion of multiracial people on any forms that require racial identification.”⁵⁴ They also point to a desire to inspire pride in their children, in the face of the negative history of the one-drop rule.⁵⁵ The aspiration to reclassify their mixed race children relies on their yearning to provide their children with a more privileged position than the marginalized minority—a desire motivated by traditional cultural common sense.⁵⁶

Regardless of explicit motivations, the result of the excessive involvement of white mothers in leading the multiracial movement smacks of “racial ventriloquism.”⁵⁷ Racial ventriloquism is the act of one, usually more privileged, racial group speaking on behalf of another marginalized racial group.⁵⁸ By taking up the baton for the multiracial movement themselves, Caucasian mothers are ventriloquizing—speaking for their mixed race children. This perceived racial ventriloquism has caused issues for the multiracial movement in the past.⁵⁹ During the Third Multiracial Leadership Summit, held in Oakland, California, in 1997, a mixed race psychologist in attendance “abruptly left the conference,” because it was troublingly unclear “who was in charge: the multiracial adult

http://www.mixedheritagecenter.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=721&Itemid=29 [<https://perma.cc/WN5C-DWLE>].

50. MIXED HERITAGE CTR., *supra* note 49; see Douglass & Brown, *supra* note 39, at 161.

51. *Speakers Bureau*, MASC, <http://www.mascsite.org/speakers-bureau> [<https://perma.cc/KE5P-HQUH>]; *A Brief History Of MASC*, MASC, <http://www.mascsite.org/about/history> [<https://perma.cc/WDH5-X2LQ>].

52. Douglass & Brown, *supra* note 39, at 112.

53. See, e.g., Susan Garaham, *MASC Did What?*, PROJECT RACE (Nov. 7, 2016), <http://www.projectrace.com/masc-did-what> [<https://perma.cc/DW5F-H6VC>].

54. *Our Mission*, PROJECT RACE, http://www.projectrace.com/about_us/our-mission [<https://perma.cc/4T9G-UBRG>].

55. See Spickard, *supra* note 38, at 294; Graham, *supra* note 46.

56. Dalmage, *supra* note 48, at 203.

57. JENNIFER GLASER, *BORROWED VOICES: WRITING AND RACIAL VENTRILOQUISM IN THE JEWISH AMERICAN IMAGINATION passim* (2016).

58. *Id.* (discussing how racial ventriloquism became a repeated occurrence in Jewish literature and film); see also ERIC LOTT, *LOVE AND THEFT: BLACKFACE MINSTRELSY AND THE AMERICAN WORKING CLASS 102* (1993) (using black face as an example of prominent racial ventriloquism in the United States).

59. See, e.g., Douglass & Brown, *supra* note 39, at 121.

leaders or one interracial married parent of a multiracial child trying to define multiracial identity for everyone according to personal bias.”⁶⁰

Despite the problematic nature of their advocacy, Graham and her supporters and allies push forward. They admittedly “favor no racial classifications at all”; “eradication of all racial classification” would be “true progress” in the eyes of the multiracial movement.⁶¹ But until that is possible, multiracials must be recognized because they “embod[y] America’s best chance to clean up race relations.”⁶² In effect, the multiracial movement’s advocacy functions “implicitly . . . as a mechanism for moving toward[s] a color-blind society that will effectuate racial equality.”⁶³ Until then, the movement continues to seek appropriate classification for mixed race individuals as *multiracial*. Whether this truly benefits mixed race individuals to the extent Graham boasts remains undetermined. For now, the multiracial movement offers white mothers of mixed race children agency and power in defining their children’s identities that they never had before.

B. Republicans as Multiracial Crusaders

Though white mothers initially spearheaded the multiracial movement, the movement has gradually gained notable support from some conservative politicians. In addition to gaining Congressman Newt Gingrich’s “boisterous support” in 1996, Project RACE was able to influence Wisconsin Republican Congressman Tom Petri to push for a bill that would add a multiracial option on the 2000 census.⁶⁴ Leaders in the multiracial movement “never confirmed or denied Republican Party affiliation,” but silently continued to reap the benefits of this “marriage[] of convenience.”⁶⁵ Meanwhile, Republicans continue to crusade for the multiracial option.

Some scholars have identified the tendency of the Republican Party to support the multiracial option as a strategic political maneuver to “dismantle the conceptual machinery for civil rights compliance monitoring.”⁶⁶ It is also true

60. *Id.*

61. Susan Graham, *What Now*, PROJECT RACE (July 8, 2007), http://www.projectrace.com/about_us/archives/from-the-director [<https://perma.cc/BUB2-J5BM>]; Hernández, *supra* note 48, at 206.

62. Hernández, *supra* note 48, at 206.

63. *Id.*

64. Farley, *supra* note 25, at 130; see Kerry Ann Rockquemore, *Deconstructing Tiger Woods: The Promise and the Pitfalls of the Multiracial Identity*, in *THE POLITICS OF MULTIRACIALISM: CHALLENGING RACIAL THINKING* 125 (Heather M. Dalmage ed., 2004).

65. SEXTON, *supra* note 7, at 48.

66. *Id.* at 47; see also, e.g., G. REGINALD DANIEL, *MORE THAN BLACK: MULTIRACIAL IDENTITY & THE NEW RACIAL ORDER* 146 (2010) (noting multiracial activism by Conservatives); KIM M. WILLIAMS, *MARK ONE OR MORE: CIVIL RIGHTS IN MULTIRACIAL AMERICA* 21–22 (2008) (same); Farley, *supra* note 25, at 130; Melissa Nobles, *The Challenge of Census Categorization in the Post-Civil Rights Era*, in *IDENTITY POLITICS IN THE PUBLIC REALM: BRINGING INSTITUTIONS BACK IN* 31, 43 (Avigail Eisenberg & Will Kymlicka 2011) (same).

that Democrats have showed support for the multiracial option in the past.⁶⁷ However, the Republican involvement in the multiracial movement since its inception is noteworthy, even peculiar, given the general aversion to racial discussions in conservative circles and the accompanying strong preference for anticlassification and colorblindness.⁶⁸ Although the multiracial option is not automatically a political issue, there are concerning implications that flow from the motivations that may propel Republicans to support the multiracial option.

In the realm of the politicization of mixed race identity, Republican businessman Ward Connerly emerged as an influential figure early on in the multiracial movement.⁶⁹ Since 1997, Connerly has advocated for the multiracial option.⁷⁰ Connerly has stated he is half white, a quarter black, and a remaining mix of Irish, French, and Choctaw American Indian; he self-identifies as multiracial.⁷¹ During his tenure as a member of the University of California Board of Regents, Connerly became well known for his advocacy for Proposition 209, a law which ended all affirmative action practices in California public institutions.⁷² Since the enactment of Proposition 209 in 1996, Connerly has been successful in establishing similar policies in Washington, Florida, Oklahoma, Michigan, Nebraska, and Arizona.⁷³ Today, Connerly serves as the founding president of the American Civil Rights Institute, a nonprofit that works to eliminate racial classifications wherever they exist.⁷⁴

67. See, e.g., *Bill Votes, A.B. 532 State Agencies: Collection of Data: Race or Ethnic Origin*, CAL. LEGIS. INFO., http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billVotesClient.xhtml?bill_id=201520160AB532 [<https://perma.cc/TL74-VG5H>].

68. E.g., MICHAEL K. BROWN ET AL., *WHITEWASHING RACE: THE MYTH OF A COLOR-BLIND SOCIETY* 85, 166 (2003) (describing Republican campaign to eliminate racial classification in affirmative action); SEXTON, *supra* note 7, at 47–49 (the “spirit of colorblindness was manifest” within the Republican Party). Colorblind policy and rhetoric arose within the Republican Party as early as the Reagan administration. NICHOLAS LAHAM, *THE REAGAN PRESIDENCY AND THE POLITICS OF RACE: IN PURSUIT OF COLORBLIND JUSTICE AND LIMITED GOVERNMENT* 75 (1998); see also DANIEL, *supra* note 66, at 146; WILLIAMS, *supra* note 66, at 43; Farley, *supra* note 25, at 130. All of the cited pieces examine the involvement of Republicans like Tom Petri, Newt Gingrich, and Ward Connerly.

69. *Students, Organizations Testify Against Ward Connerly’s “Multiracial” Checkbox*, CIVILRIGHTS (Nov. 17, 2004), <http://www.civilrights.org/equal-opportunity/connerly/students-organizations-testify-against-ward-connerlys-multiracial-checkbox.html> [<https://perma.cc/Z4GA-39F7>].

70. *News Release: ACRI Criticizes Federal Government’s Rejection of a Multiracial Census Box*, AM. C.R. INST. (July 9, 1997), <https://web.archive.org/web/19980425063608/http://www.acri.org/news/070997.html> [<https://perma.cc/67H5-UQMB>].

71. Jessie Carney Smith et al., *Ward Connerly*, in *ENCYCLOPEDIA OF AFRICAN AMERICAN BUSINESS: A-J* 200 (2006).

72. WARD CONNERLY, *CREATING EQUAL: MY FIGHT AGAINST RACE PREFERENCES* 3 (2000).

73. *Other States*, AM. C.R. INST., <http://acri.org/other-states> [<https://perma.cc/B2YX-YCLU>].

74. *About Mr. Ward Connerly*, AM. C.R. INST., <http://acri.org/about-ward-connerly> [<https://perma.cc/77LX-3PGH>].

Connerly's support of the multiracial category seems paradoxical given his concerted crusades to eliminate racial categorization across the country.⁷⁵ However, rather than maintaining his stance against all racial categorizations, Connerly has modified his advocacy to support "improv[ing] the existing system" specifically by adding a multiracial option to all government forms.⁷⁶ Testifying before the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights in 2006, Connerly argued that all individuals should have the freedom to self-identity with more than one race.⁷⁷ Interestingly, Connerly never addresses the counter argument that the "freedom" he advocates for was already provided with the implementation of the check-all-that-apply method in the 2000 census.⁷⁸

At the same briefing, other experts came forward to argue "that expression of identity is [not] the proper function of the statistical system" that is the census.⁷⁹ Data gathered from the racial categories on the census are "used to document racial discrimination, leading to new laws and policies to redress systemic racial inequalities."⁸⁰ The addition of a multiracial category could "disaggregate the apparent numbers of . . . discrete minority groups, diluting benefits to which they are entitled as a protected class under civil rights laws and under the Constitution itself."⁸¹ This problem does not occur under the check-all-that-apply method.⁸²

The multiracial option for which Connerly advocates would most likely have a negative impact on anti-discrimination enforcement, similar to the negative effects caused by Connerly's Proposition 209.⁸³ During the campaign, Connerly characterized Proposition 209 as the way to ensure "equal opportunity for the individual, and zero tolerance for discrimination."⁸⁴ He argued that even underrepresented minorities would benefit from the abolition of affirmative action because black and Latino students would no longer have to "endure the nagging question of whether [they are] admitted because of affirmative action."⁸⁵

75. AM. C.R. INST., *supra* note 73.

76. U.S. COMM'N ON CIVIL RIGHTS, RACIAL CATEGORIZATION IN THE 2010 CENSUS 7 (2009).

77. *Id.* at 32–33.

78. *See id.* at 10, 32–33.

79. *Id.* at 6. See the testimonies of Professors Sharon M. Lee and Kenneth Prewitt. *Id.* at 23, 27.

80. *Id.* at 4.

81. *Id.* at 28 n.2 (referring to congressional testimony from the NAACP).

82. "Commissioner Kirsanow asked whether there was any indication that a proliferation of categories might inadvertently result in a dilution of numbers in different political subdivisions for the purposes of Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act. Mr. Kincannon explained that making it possible to report more than one race does not reduce the mention of every race involved. The Census Bureau presents statistics in such a way that it is possible for anyone to determine the total number of people who have indicated they are in a given demographic." *Id.* at 12.

83. Nolan Cabrera et al., *Is "Race-Neutral" Really Race-Neutral?: Disparate Impact Towards Underrepresented Minorities in Post-209 UC System Admissions*, 81 J. HIGHER EDUC. 275, 675–677 (2010).

84. Ward Connerly, *With Liberty and Justice for All*, 560 HERITAGE LECTURES 6 (1996), http://s3.amazonaws.com/thf_media/1996/pdf/hl560.pdf [<https://perma.cc/42SJ-968W>].

85. *Id.* at 5.

In practice, however, Proposition 209 has had devastating effects on the enrollment of underrepresented minorities in both the University of California (UC) and the California State University systems; minority student enrollments “fell dramatically [after Proposition 209] and have yet to return to pre-209 levels.”⁸⁶ What Connerly boasted would promote equality actually stripped universities of the ability to consider the unique and diverse circumstances and perspectives of underrepresented minority students, unfairly devaluing their contribution to the education system.⁸⁷ Connerly effectively disguised a policy that clearly disadvantaged underrepresented majorities and promoted the conservative agenda by using the compelling language of equality and liberty.⁸⁸

Considering Connerly’s history of policy advocacy, his support of the multiracial option suddenly appears less paradoxical. In 2004, Connerly pushed for the inclusion of a multiracial category on UC admission applications.⁸⁹ Administration, students, and mixed race advocacy organizations spoke out in strong opposition to Connerly’s proposal, arguing that a multiracial option would “undermine federal reporting guidelines, and threaten the effectiveness of civil rights research and enforcement.”⁹⁰ This pointed critique identified a subset of issues brought up by the multiracial option, namely, that adding this category would “hamper the [UC’s] efforts to promote diversity,” making it even more difficult to mitigate the effects of Proposition 209.⁹¹ Connerly’s proposal did not pass, but he has continued to support and advocate for a multiracial option since.

Upon closer examination, the promotion of the multiracial option by Ward Connerly, Newt Gingrich, Tom Petri, and other Republicans aligns well with the conservative ideas of colorblindness.⁹² Colorblindness dictates that “people are

86. African-American enrollment in the University of California system fell from 4.3 percent to 3 percent following the implementation of Prop. 209. Latino enrollment fell from 4.4 percent to 3 percent. Cabrera et al., *supra* note 83, at 676–77.

87. Erica Perez, *California Proposition 209: Minority Enrollments Down in UC Schools Despite Diversity Efforts*, HUFFINGTON POST (Feb. 24, 2012), http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/02/24/proposition-209_n_1300122.html [<https://perma.cc/6V9K-3CVW>].

88. George Derek Musgrove, *Good at the Game of Trickology: Proposition 209 and the Struggle for the Historical Memory of the Civil Rights Movement*, SOULS, Summer 1999, at 7–24 (analyzing how Connerly’s reliance on Civil Right Movement rhetoric and invocation of the memory of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. mischaracterized the true function of Prop. 209).

89. *Students, Organizations Testify Against Ward Connerly’s “Multiracial” Checkbox*, CIVILRIGHTS (Nov. 17, 2004), <http://archives.civilrights.org/equal-opportunity/connerly/students-organizations-testify-against-ward-connerlys-multiracial-checkbox.html> [<https://perma.cc/UW38-RRCT>]; Rebecca Trounson, *UC Panel Rejects ‘Multiracial’ Box for Undergrad Application Form*, L.A. TIMES (Nov. 18, 2004), <http://articles.latimes.com/2004/nov/18/local/me-regents18> [<https://perma.cc/8F27-YXS9>].

90. CIVILRIGHTS, *supra* note 89.

91. *Id.*; see Perez, *supra* note 87.

92. TIM WISE, COLORBLIND: THE RISE OF POST-RACIAL POLITICS AND THE RETREAT FROM RACIAL EQUITY 30–40 (2010).

judged by the content of their character and not the color of their skin.”⁹³ Even though colorblindness lends itself to artful and comforting rhetoric, colorblindness has become “the dominant racial ideology as the mechanism[] and practice[] [used] to keep blacks and other racial minorities at the bottom of the well.”⁹⁴ Like Ward Connerly—who argued that the elimination of affirmative action would lead to less discrimination against majority groups—Republican proponents of the multiracial option could possibly see the multiracial category as a way to dissuade the identification of mixed race individuals with their minority heritages by offering a category sanitized of traditional minority racial classification.⁹⁵ If the multiracial category influences mixed race individuals to adopt the philosophy of colorblindness, a side effect could be increased sympathy for conservative ideologies and politics. As a result, the Republican Party could secure votes from a variety of individuals, including individuals who may not have otherwise sympathized with conservative appeals.⁹⁶ Hence, colorblind conservatism could function as a motivator for Republicans to support the multiracial movement.

Another force at work potentially influencing Republican support is “dog whistle politics.” Dog whistle politics is defined as “coded racial appeals that carefully manipulate hostility towards nonwhites.”⁹⁷ For decades Republican politicians have relied on dog-whistle racial appeals to maintain their white voter base by emphasizing white superiority and minority inferiority.⁹⁸ Today, advocates for the multiracial option, like Ward Connerly, use the “dog whistle” of liberty-driven language to distract from the fact that a multiracial option would have harmful effects on efforts to mitigate discrimination in the United States.⁹⁹

There are clandestine motivations behind the tendency of Republicans to vehemently support the multiracial option. Like the case of white mothers, these motivations reveal that adding this new racial classification may not be as beneficial to the mixed race population and other minorities as advocates allege. Though there are a variety of existing critiques of the multiracial option, this Note raises a new one: the multiracial option is a step towards bringing mixed race individuals under the umbrella of whiteness in an effort to preserve the shrinking white majority. Through its subtext, the multiracial movement reveals

93. EDUARDO BONILLA-SILVA, *RACISM WITHOUT RACISTS: COLOR-BLIND RACISM AND THE PERSISTENCE OF RACIAL INEQUALITY IN THE UNITED STATES* 1 (2010).

94. *Id.* at 2–3 (internal quotations omitted).

95. Connerly, *supra* note 84, at 6.

96. Mixed race individuals hold different political beliefs across the board; the group is not a monolith with respect to political ideology. *See, e.g.*, Natalie Masuoka, *Political Attitudes and Ideologies of Multiracial Americans: The Implications of Mixed Race in the United States*, 61 *POL. RES. Q.* 253 (2008); PEW RESEARCH CTR., *supra* note 1, at 81.

97. IAN F. HANEY LÓPEZ, *DOG WHISTLE POLITICS*, at ix (2014).

98. *See id.*; Musgrove, *supra* note 88.

99. HANEY LÓPEZ, *supra* note 97, at ix; *see also* U.S. COMM’N ON CIVIL RIGHTS, *supra* note 76, at 12, 28 n.2 (“[A multiracial category] would render the government unable to track data relating to discrimination, poverty, and other important factors.”).

itself to be more complex than the simple addition of a new ethnic category to the census. Based on the identities and histories of some of the earliest and most passionate advocates in the multiracial movement, it is clear that there is more at stake than liberty of mixed race individuals to select their identities. The supremacy of whiteness is at risk.

III.

AN EVOLUTIONARY HISTORY OF WHITE AMERICA

There can be no superior without an accompanying inferior. Whiteness in the United States depends significantly, if not entirely, on its position relative to blackness.¹⁰⁰ The white race exists as an amalgamation of ethnic subgroups that have previously expressed willingness to assimilate into white America, and to recognize black inferiority. In an interview for TIME Magazine, Toni Morrison theorized that the second word immigrants learned “[w]hen they got off the boat . . . was *nigger*.”¹⁰¹ This is to say that “becoming American is based on an attitude: an exclusion of [blacks].”¹⁰² History demonstrates the same; the key to whiteness for qualified, assimilated ethnic groups is rejection of the oppressed minority.

A. *Bacon’s Rebellion and the Invention of Whiteness*

In the early years of North American colonization there was less of a distinction between the black and white races: blacks and whites of the same economic stature “married each other, ran away with each other, lived as neighbors, [and] liked or disliked each other according to individual personality.”¹⁰³ The racial line and its correlation to black oppression were not distinctly defined prior to Bacon’s Rebellion.¹⁰⁴

In 1676, Caucasian indentured servants and African slaves joined forces to demand an end to bond servitude.¹⁰⁵ “Word of Bacon’s Rebellion spread far and wide” and elites soon recognized the threat an alliance between black slaves and poor whites posed to their “superior status and economic position.”¹⁰⁶ To resolve the social chaos of Bacon’s Rebellion, elites turned to what has now come to be known as a “racial bribe.”¹⁰⁷ Colonial legislatures began “tightening and

100. See YANCEY, *supra* note 4.

101. GURLEEN GREWAL, CIRCLES OF SORROW, LINES OF STRUGGLE: THE NOVELS OF TONI MORRISON 6 (1998).

102. *Id.*

103. Pem Davidson Buck, *Constructing Race, Creating White Privilege, in RACE, CLASS, AND GENDER IN THE UNITED STATES: AN INTEGRATED STUDY* 32–33 (Paula S. Rothenberg ed., 2007).

104. TERRANCE MACMULLAN, HABITS OF WHITENESS 25 (2009).

105. THEODORE W. ALLEN, I THE INVENTION OF THE WHITE RACE 17 (1994).

106. MICHELLE ALEXANDER, THE NEW JIM CROW: MASS INCARNATION IN THE AGE OF COLORBLINDNESS 24 (2010).

107. *Id.* at 25.

lengthening [] African indenture,”¹⁰⁸ meanwhile providing white servants the legal right “to police slaves through slave patrols and militias.”¹⁰⁹ Following Bacon’s Rebellion, “many more slaves were shipped directly from Africa” instead of from the West Indies because Africans were unable to speak English and therefore were “far less likely to form alliances with poor whites.”¹¹⁰ These new laws and practices achieved their purpose, driving a wedge between white servants and black slaves to eliminate the threat of uprising.¹¹¹

It is important to note blacks were indeed subject to harsher conditions than whites even prior to Bacon’s Rebellion.¹¹² But for landless whites, the mere protection from “the worst *negative* effects of elite punishment and interference, such as were inflicted on those of African descent” may not have been enough to distinguish white privilege.¹¹³ After Bacon’s Rebellion, whites of any economic stature were given a new social position—they became state-sanctioned overlords of the mass of black slaves.¹¹⁴

The genetic makeup of members is not what defines the white race. Rather, status in relation to minority cultures is what continues to allow whiteness to expand and impose. In 1790, more than 60 percent of the U.S. population was English; this was the original white majority.¹¹⁵ But as immigrants from other European countries joined the U.S. population, whiteness successfully expanded to include them. As of 2015, the U.S. white majority is estimated at just over 61 percent of the population.¹¹⁶ Today, this majority includes not only English, but also Jews, Italians, Irish, Germans and a plethora of other ethnicities that self-identify as white. This expansion is heavily due to the acceptance of other ethnicities into the privilege of whiteness.

B. Conceptual Frameworks for American Assimilation

Sociologist Milton Gordon has written at great length about American assimilation.¹¹⁷ Gordon identifies three “conceptual models” that seek to explain

108. Buck, *supra* note 103, at 32.

109. ALEXANDER, *supra* note 106, at 25; *see also* LESLIE G. CARR, “COLOR-BLIND” RACISM 25, 54–56 (1997) (explaining that Irish Americans avoided their oppressed position relative to other white groups by inverting “oppressor over oppressed . . . White nation over African American nation”).

110. ALEXANDER, *supra* note 106, at 24.

111. *Id.* at 34.

112. White servants could bear arms and own livestock when black slaves could not. Whites had the right to self-defense and could be subjected to less physical pain than black slaves. Buck, *supra* note 103, at 34.

113. *Id.*

114. ALEXANDER, *supra* note 106, at 25 (identifying Bacon’s Rebellion as the catalyst to using whites as a police force to govern black slaves).

115. YANCEY, *supra* note 4, at 29–30.

116. *Quick Facts: United States*, U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045216/00> [<https://perma.cc/SF2P-L4N>].

117. Milton M. Gordon, *Assimilation in America: Theory and Reality*, 90 DAEDALUS 263 (1961).

how the U.S. population went from mainly English to including a broad base of immigrants: Anglo-conformity, the melting pot, and cultural pluralism.¹¹⁸

Anglo-conformity relies on the assumption that immigrants will maintain English institutions, language, and culture, as well as attitudes including “racial superiority . . . [and] nativist political programs.”¹¹⁹ This pattern of assimilation favors immigrants from northern and western Europe under a “[t]hey are more like us” philosophy.¹²⁰ Gordon identifies Anglo-conformity as “the most prevalent ideology of assimilation goals in America.”¹²¹ Since the beginning, Anglo-conformity has relied on two essential elements of assimilation: abandonment of ancestral ties and subscription to white supremacy.¹²²

Gordon points to “the melting pot” as a newer ideology that gained significant popularity with the publication of the 1908 stage play, *Melting Pot*.¹²³ *Melting Pot* detailed the story of a Jewish immigrant who came to the United States hoping that “this great new continent . . . could melt up all race-differences and vendettas” and “purge and re-create” a people free from individual race and ethnicity.¹²⁴ The main character soliloquizes about the negative state of recent immigrants to Ellis Island, plagued by petty rivalries and harboring individual histories and languages: “But you won’t be long like that, brothers, for these are the fires of God . . . Germans and Frenchmen, Irishmen and Englishmen, Jews and Russians—into the Crucible with you all!”¹²⁵ While the melting pot metaphor provided more room for inclusion in a new and distinct American identity, it still required shedding ancestral identity.¹²⁶

Finally, Gordon identifies cultural pluralism as a trend that existed in American society long before it was defined as a theory of assimilation.¹²⁷ Cultural pluralism is the “appreciative view of the immigrant’s cultural heritage and of its distinctive usefulness both to himself and his adopted country.”¹²⁸ This conceptual framework allows for distinct ethnicities within the American identity more so than any other ideology of assimilation.¹²⁹

The different ideologies used to describe American assimilation are helpful to explain the evolution of the white race in the United States. In some ways, the development of whiteness and the history of American assimilation go hand in

118. *Id.* at 263.

119. *Id.* at 265.

120. *Id.*

121. *Id.* at 266.

122. *Id.* at 265, 268.

123. *Id.* at 272.

124. ISRAEL ZANGWILL, THE MELTING POT 179 (1908), <https://ia800303.us.archive.org/33/items/meltingpotdramai00zanguoft/meltingpotdramai00zanguoft.pdf> [<https://perma.cc/GCR5-EJPR>].

125. Gordon, *supra* note 117, at 273.

126. *Id.*

127. *Id.* at 274.

128. *Id.* at 276.

129. *See id.* at 274–76.

hand. There is a clear connection between assimilation and the acceptance of groups previously considered to be minorities into the white majority.¹³⁰ Race scholars and ethnic historians argue that the more willing minorities are to accept the ideals of white America and assimilate, the quicker they join the white majority.¹³¹ The process of assimilation requires abandonment of cultural difference and the adoption of the most important tenets of white American culture.¹³²

The efficacy of assimilation as an avenue to acceptance into the white race is aided by the idea of ethnicity.¹³³ Law professor and race scholar Ian Haney-López identifies the language of ethnicity as a powerful factor in dissembling the hierarchical divides between members of the white race.¹³⁴ As an example, Haney-López points to Jewish citizens and their embrace of ethnicity language to avoid the discrimination they faced when they were seen as members of a non-white race.¹³⁵ In the early twentieth century, anti-Semitism and “assimilative pressures on immigrants seemed to threaten Jewish survival.”¹³⁶ Jewish scholars looked to European intellectual works that defined “race divisions [as] ‘zoological’ [and] ethnic differences [as] ‘linguistic’ or ‘social’” to reimagine the Jewish identity.¹³⁷ Claiming their “zoological” status as white, Jews were then able to preserve their culture and advocacy for Zionism by utilizing ethnicity as the way to remain Jewish.¹³⁸ Following the same pattern, a variety of ethnicities have been consolidated into the monolithic white race.¹³⁹

Though English-Americans resisted immigration to begin with, northern and western European ethnic groups such as Welsh, Scandinavians, and Germans immigrated to the United States and successfully assimilated while maintaining their ethnic designations.¹⁴⁰ While there is debate over whether these groups were ever considered non-white, these groups were indeed discriminated against until they assimilated, at which point they were freed from this discrimination to a notable extent.¹⁴¹ The acceptance of these ethnic groups into

130. See *infra* Part III.C; see also Gordon, *supra* note 117, at 275 (discussing, as an example, how German immigrants went from being excluded on the basis of their difference, to ultimately joining American society like other immigrant groups).

131. YANCEY, *supra* note 4, at 29–30; MILTON M. GORDON, ASSIMILATION IN AMERICAN LIFE: THE ROLE OF RACE, RELIGION, AND NATIONAL ORIGINS 62 (1964).

132. YANCEY, *supra* note 4, at 35; RONALD L. LEWIS, WELSH AMERICANS: A HISTORY OF ASSIMILATION IN THE COALFIELDS 307 (2008).

133. Haney López, *supra* note 9, at 1007–08.

134. *Id.*

135. *Id.* at 1007.

136. ROEDIGER, *supra* note 14, at 22.

137. *Id.*

138. *Id.*

139. Haney López, *supra* note 9, at 1008 (“[The white race is] composed of increasingly irrelevant ethnic sub-groups sharing similar histories of struggle and success on America’s shores.”).

140. ROEDIGER, *supra* note 14, at 30. See LEWIS, *supra* note 132, for background on assimilation of Welsh immigrants.

141. YANCEY, *supra* note 4, at 37.

the white race was mutually beneficial for the immigrants and the existing majority. Immigrants who gained acceptance into the white majority were able to avoid discrimination while the white majority was able to maintain its “numerical advantage.”¹⁴² It is this mutual benefit that continues to drive the admission of new ethnic groups into the white majority.

Today, the United States is still a white-majority nation, subconsciously clinging to ideas of Anglo-conformity.¹⁴³ As Milton Gordon identified nearly half a century ago, Anglo-conformity is arguably the most prevalent pattern for assimilation.¹⁴⁴ While ethnicity language helps soften the difference between groups for all assimilation frameworks, Anglo-conformity is interesting because it requires not only similarity, but also adoption of ideas of white supremacy.¹⁴⁵ If assimilation is step one towards whiteness, subscribing to racial superiority is step two.¹⁴⁶

C. *Subscribing to Superiority*

While many groups have gained admission into the white majority using assimilation and ethnicity language, these pathways are “not an option available to all racial groups.”¹⁴⁷ Author and professor of race philosophy George Yancy argues that “[s]lavery interrupted the natural progression of African Americans towards assimilation.”¹⁴⁸ But even after the abolition of slavery, assimilation was still inaccessible for two reasons.¹⁴⁹ First, by the end of the Civil War, “African Americans had been defined as less than human for so long that it was no longer possible to allow them to assimilate.”¹⁵⁰ Second, because whiteness depends on superiority over an inferior “other,” a minority group may only be accepted into the white majority if the minority is willing to recognize the inferiority of this “other.”¹⁵¹ Throughout history, African Americans were repeatedly cast as *that* “other” so much so that some, including Yancy, argue that to be white is simply to *not* be black.¹⁵² Ultimately, this polarizing framework means that to be white is not only to assimilate, but also to identify the existence of white supremacy over at least one racial out-group.¹⁵³

The pattern of assimilation and recognition of supremacy has been followed by multiple ethnicities over American history. During the nineteenth century, although Scandinavian, French, Welsh, German, and many other immigrant

142. *Id.*

143. *See* U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, *supra* note 116; Gordon, *supra* note 117, at 265.

144. Gordon, *supra* note 117, at 266.

145. *See id.*; Haney López, *supra* note 9, at 1008.

146. *See* YANCEY, *supra* note 4.

147. *Id.* at 30, 48.

148. *Id.* at 44.

149. *See id.* at 44–46.

150. *Id.* at 45.

151. NOEL IGNATIEV, HOW THE IRISH BECAME WHITE 37 (2009).

152. *See* YANCEY, *supra* note 4, at 15.

153. *E.g., id.*

groups were able to assimilate successfully and gain acceptance into the white majority, it took Irish immigrants longer to reach this point.¹⁵⁴ Historian Noel Ignatiev argues that the hesitancy of the white majority to accept the Irish was a result of their fraternity with black communities.¹⁵⁵ Between 1815 and 1845, up to a million Irish emigrants relocated to the United States.¹⁵⁶ Early on, the Irish, like other ethnic groups, were oppressed and discriminated against; the inferiority of Irish immigrants was frequently likened to that of blacks.¹⁵⁷ In addition to crowding the cities and prisons, many Irish immigrants became abolitionists, seeking to use their light-skinned privilege to advocate for the freedom of black slaves.¹⁵⁸ Together, Irish and blacks “socialized and occasionally intermarried, and developed a common culture of the lowly.”¹⁵⁹

Irish immigrants had to earn admission into the white majority, and they did so by learning and embracing “the overriding value of white skin.”¹⁶⁰ Eventually, Irish Americans turned their back on their black neighbors and resorted to committing violence against blacks, perpetuating discrimination and participating in “anti-negro riot[s].”¹⁶¹ It was at this point that the Irish finally joined the ranks of whiteness.¹⁶² The acceptance of the Irish as fully white depended not only on assimilation, but also on their “adopt[ion] of an anti-black stance.”¹⁶³

Successful assimilation into the white race benefits the assimilating group by shielding the minority group from oppression. But the price of entry into whiteness is the willingness to recognize white superiority over racial out-groups and the perpetuation of accompanying oppression. George Yancy argues that the crucial step a minority group must take to be granted access to the white majority is acceptance of white supremacy and black inferiority.¹⁶⁴

Though it has not yet come to fruition, Yancy predicts that Latinos and Asians will be able to join the white majority by recognizing black inferiority.¹⁶⁵ Yet Yancy does not speak to the role of mixed race individuals in this system. Under Yancy’s theory, mixed race individuals could gain acceptance to the white majority by recognizing the inferiority of the marginalized minority. Partially assimilated into the white race by birth alone, mixed race individuals are prime

154. IGNATIEV, *supra* note 151, at 4.

155. *Id.* at 37; see also MATTHEW FRYE JACOBSON, *WHITENESS OF A DIFFERENT COLOR: EUROPEAN IMMIGRANTS AND THE ALCHEMY OF RACE* 46 (1998) (discussing Irish involvement with the anti-slavery, abolition movement in Europe and in the United States).

156. IGNATIEV, *supra* note 151, at 45.

157. *Id.* at 49 (“In the early years, Irish were frequently referred to as ‘niggers turned inside out.’”).

158. *Id.* at 60–62.

159. *Id.* at 3.

160. *Id.* at 111.

161. *Id.* at 4, 160.

162. YANCEY, *supra* note 4, at 35.

163. *Id.*

164. *Id.* at 37.

165. *Id.* at 7.

candidates for acceptance into the white majority, especially when compared to Asians and Latinos who remain more removed from white “genetics.”¹⁶⁶ Converting mixed race individuals into part of the white majority may, therefore, be the evolutionary step that precedes Yancy’s ultimate prediction.

In 1910, the U.S. Census formally adopted the “one-drop rule,” specifying that “a person of mixed blood [should be] classified according to the nonwhite racial strain.”¹⁶⁷ The multiracial movement seeks to shift the historical meaning of the one-drop rule in order to “draw a line between Blacks who have White blood . . . and those who do not.”¹⁶⁸ Today, as the white race becomes increasingly anxious about maintaining its majority, the one-drop rule can function in a new and peculiar fashion. In the search for new recruits for the white race, a person bearing one drop of white blood may be easier to embrace than a full-blooded minority. The acceptance of mixed race individuals into the white majority is predicated mainly on their acknowledgement of an inferior “other,” even when this “other” may be in their own DNA.

IV.

MULTIRACIAL EXCEPTIONALISM AND THE “OTHER” WITHIN

The multiracial movement exists, in part, to challenge the one-drop rule. Former Dean at Stanford University Julie Lythcott-Haims recognizes the one-drop rule as a demeaning history, the insult of which can be alleviated by a multiracial category.¹⁶⁹ But accompanying the rejection of the one-drop rule is the implicit rejection of the “nonwhite racial strain.”¹⁷⁰ By refusing to be recognized themselves as a member of the minority race that comprises part of the individual’s identity, that individual is making a statement that they would rather not be a minority; instead, they would rather be something more exceptional. As such, the multiracial movement relies on, and perpetuates, a myth of multiracial exceptionalism.

Multiracial exceptionalism exists in two, related forms.¹⁷¹ On the one hand, mixed race individuals can be considered exceptional because they straddle racial lines and enjoy the “best of both worlds.”¹⁷² On the other hand, exceptionalism derives from the fact that a mixed race individual is “genealogically ‘part’ of some group (usually Whites) that has higher status than

166. GORDON, *supra* note 131, at 123, 206 (intermarriage is stage three on Gordon’s seven stages of assimilation).

167. U.S. DEP’T OF COMMERCE, BUREAU OF THE CENSUS, 3 FOURTEENTH CENSUS OF THE UNITED STATES: 1920, at 10 (1922).

168. Hickman, *supra* note 33, at 1204 (referencing Julie C. Lythcott-Haims, Note, *Where Do Mixed Babies Belong?: Racial Classification in America and Its Implications for Transracial Adoption*, 29 HARV. C.R.-C.L. L. REV. 531, 542 (1994)).

169. Lythcott-Haims, *supra* note 168, at 539.

170. U.S. DEP’T OF COMMERCE, *supra* note 167, at 10.

171. IMANI PERRY, MORE BEAUTIFUL AND MORE TERRIBLE: THE EMBRACE AND TRANSCENDENCE OF RACIAL INEQUALITY IN THE UNITED STATES 143 (2011).

172. *Id.*

the other group or groups to which they belong.”¹⁷³ Both of these considerations elevate the mixed race identity to one of higher status than minority identities.¹⁷⁴ The multiracial option functions to sanction and solidify this exceptionalism.

Leaders in the multiracial movement were unsatisfied with the check-all-that-apply method employed in the 2000 and 2010 censuses. The element that distinguishes the multiracial option from the check-all-that-apply method is a multiracial exceptionalism that identifies being “multiracial” as preferable to being mixed race.¹⁷⁵ Writing on behalf of Project RACE, Susan Graham has aptly articulated this viewpoint, stating:

Many people ask if my son is “mixed,” which doesn’t work for either of us. Isn’t “mixed” the opposite of “pure”? When my son went before congress at the age of eight, he told them, “Puppies are mixed, people are multiracial.” Mutts are also in the mixed breed category.¹⁷⁶

Graham opines that “mixed” is inferior to “multiracial” because it evokes ideals of purity, which is true. By its nature, the term “mixed race” indicates the presence of multiple racial backgrounds in an individual’s identity. In contrast, the term “multiracial” effectively wipes the racial background clean, likening all mixed race individuals to one another and distancing them from their minority backgrounds. Graham advocates for multiracialism because she sees being multiracial as preferable to being a composite of white and minority genes.

It is not only Susan Graham who promotes the ideal of multiracial exceptionalism. In an interview with Oprah Winfrey in 1996, golfer Tiger Woods identified himself as “Cablinasian”—a combination of Caucasian, Black, Indian, and Asian.¹⁷⁷ Woods indicated that he had faced discrimination when labeled by others as black, and therefore identified as multiracial instead.¹⁷⁸ For Woods, the multiracial identity was a way to escape the struggles he saw minorities plagued by; it offered him a way to elevate his social status just by changing his outlook and vocabulary. Woods would rather be a multiracial man than a black man, because multiracial is preferable, while black is deficient. As such, Woods’s advocacy of his own multiracial exceptionalism simultaneously marked his black heritage with a badge of inferiority.

While advocates in the multiracial movement never explicitly indicate distaste for the minority that constitutes part of a mixed race individual, the insistence on the development of a new racial designation inadvertently associates this minority with inferiority. African-American studies professor Jared Saxton argues that the implicit rejection of the black race in multiracial

173. *Id.*

174. *Id.*

175. SEXTON, *supra* note 7, at 2. See *id.* at 24 for discussion of white supremacy and miscegenation.

176. Graham, *supra* note 46.

177. LeiLani Nishime, *The Case for Cablinasian: Multiracial Naming from Plessy to Tiger Woods*, 22 COMM. THEORY 92 *passim* (2012).

178. Rockquemore, *supra* note 64, at 135.

discourse is due to the fact that the multiracial movement casts the black race as the reason for the woes of the multiracial ethnicity.¹⁷⁹ To compensate for these woes, the black race must be rejected and replaced with the multiracial ethnicity. Recognizing the negativity of the black race, and creating distance between black and multiracial alienates the marginalized minority.¹⁸⁰ As Sexton argues, the multiracial movement draws a line between black and multiracial, and allows privileges to one group over the other, similar to what occurred in Bacon's Rebellion.¹⁸¹ By abandoning the black race rather than incorporating the struggle of blacks into the movement for respect for and recognition of mixed race individuals, self-identified multiracials position themselves parallel to the Irish who similarly excluded blacks from their struggle for labor rights.¹⁸²

George Yancy and Noel Ignatiev argue that to become white, a group must first recognize white superiority to black inferiority.¹⁸³ Multiracial exceptionalism assigns mixed race individuals a privilege unavailable to other minorities, elevating them compared to more marginalized ethnicities and races, and making their minority heritage less preferable. The distance multiracial exceptionalism places between the mixed race offspring and their minority relatives reinforces the minorities as the "other" in relation to mixed race individuals. In effect, the multiracial movement encourages mixed race individuals to oppress the minority within them in exchange for a preferred racial category.

Most scholars who examine this effect of the multiracial movement have focused on how multiracialism represents a "negation of blackness," validating Yancy's black/nonblack binary.¹⁸⁴ But today, whiteness depends specifically on the inferiority of a variety of marginalized minority racial groups, especially African Americans and Latinos. Mixed race individuals who have minority racial backgrounds may be supporting this complex of white superiority merely by recognizing the elite station that multiracial exceptionalism offers them and rejecting the demeaned status of the minority race in their DNA. This is one of the most significant steps towards whiteness and it may be accomplished simply through the psychology that goes into checking the "multiracial" box on government forms.

The psychology of multiracial exceptionalism places mixed race individuals on the edge of whiteness. As Irish immigrants were faced with the decision to trade their advocacy for black slaves in exchange for freedom from oppression whiteness provided them, mixed race individuals may have the option to make a similar choice. With over nine million individuals identifying as more

179. JARED SEXTON, *AMALGAMATION SCHEMES, ANTIBLACKNESS AND THE CRITIQUE OF MULTIRACIALISM* 35, 53 (2008).

180. *See supra* note 46 and accompanying text.

181. SEXTON, *supra* note 179, at 35, 53.

182. IGNATIEV, *supra* note 161.

183. YANCEY, *supra* note 4, at 96.

184. SEXTON, *supra* note 179, at 35, 53.

than one race on the 2010 census, the mixed race population represents a significant segment of society.¹⁸⁵ If this population embraces multiracial exceptionalism and takes the next step towards whiteness, its entry into the white majority would have significant effects on society and politics.

The embrace of whiteness by mixed race communities impacts more than the internal considerations of the mixed race individuals themselves. It also could have grave consequences on government efforts to remedy deep systemic discrimination that burdens minorities.¹⁸⁶ Moreover, a movement of mixed race communities towards a more conservative ideology could lend support to policy decisions that ultimately exacerbate the inequality between whites and minorities.¹⁸⁷ The decision to join the multiracial movement and to maintain an image of multiracial exceptionalism has wider implications than many advocates for racial equity consider or imagine.

CONCLUSION

It is not clear whether the multiracial option will ever make it to the U.S. census. Regardless of the ultimate success or failure of the multiracial movement, multiracial exceptionalism does and will continue to have a significant effect on the way race operates in American society. The addition of a multiracial option to the census will not necessarily be the final step before mixed race individuals can be considered white. It is, however, a significant step towards distancing mixed race individuals from their minority race to deracialize this population.

Multiracial exceptionalism as a step towards whiteness also degrades the uniquely valuable position mixed race individuals already enjoy in this country. Through recognizing the validity of all the racial and ethnic components of their identities equally, mixed race individuals have the power to fill gaps and bridge racial divides in a way no other ethnic subgroup can. By distancing mixed race individuals from their minority heritages, the invention of a new multiracial classification eliminates the power mixed race individuals would otherwise have.

Multiracialism conforms well to the American melting pot ideal. Regardless of what minority race is thrown into the cauldron, mixed race individuals can emerge cleansed of any minority inferiority, and free to enjoy the privilege of multiracial exceptionalism. But America *is not* a melting pot. It is a complex mixture of a variety of actors that we constantly try to understand and classify. With the fraught state of race relations in the United States, it is important to recognize the exploitation of racial identity for political gain, and to take steps towards preventing this exploitation whenever possible. In the years

185. Nicholas A. Jones & Jungmiwha Bullock, *The Two or More Races Population: 2010*, 2010 CENSUS BRIEF (Sept. 2012), <https://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-13.pdf> [<https://perma.cc/2PX3-THMS>].

186. See U.S. COMM'N ON CIVIL RIGHTS, *supra* note 76, at 4.

187. See *supra* Part III.B.

to come, the seemingly small choices we make in an effort to classify ourselves and others will ultimately determine whether or not mixed race individuals will be the next ethnicity to become white.