Mixed Messages: 'Mixed Race' Representations in Film

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ABSTRACT

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The growing interest in issues pertaining to mixed race identities and
communities, as well as a surge in films with mixed race characters has prompted this
examination of representations of mixed race characters in film from the 1950s to the
present. The study consists of an analysis of selected films, including *Guess Who's
Coming to Dinner, Jungle Fever, Dr. No, Showboat* and *Rabbit Proof Fence*, and situates
this analysis within a historical framework based on the particular context in which each
film was set and/or made.

The value in studying 'mixed race' representations in film lies in the reflection it
provides of significant moments in 'mixed race' histories, and in the portrayal of cultural
imaginings of people of 'mixed race.' By examining these representations, this thesis
traces the development of 'mixed race' terminology, interrogates the history of anti-
miscegenation law in the United States, and explores the sociological and commonsense
views of 'mixed race' maladjustment in the early 1900s.

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Introduction

The Personal and the Political

"What are you?" It is a question I have heard often. Not "Who are you?" I think

"Who" would be better somehow, softer, less accusatory. There are many ways in which

I could answer this question. I could give my name, my age, my place of birth, but

usually the person asking the question doesn't want to know any of these things. They

look at me with curious eyes and want to know about my unusual features: slightly

slanted eyes, olive skin, jet black hair. They want to know my race. Over the years,

particularly during adolescence, my answer varied. The possibilities would roll off my

tongue: Half White, Half Jewish, Half Canadian, Half Russian, and always Half

Japanese. And their responses would also vary, sometimes surprise, sometimes a nod,

often they would tell me their own background. "Oh, I thought you were Native

American, like me." Or "I thought maybe you were Chilean. My neighbour is from

Chile."

But in recent years, the question has come less frequently. Perhaps people have

stopped caring so much about the racial background of acquaintances. Or perhaps my

face has hardened to these questions from strangers. And my response, the one that had

changed so much in the past, has finally begun to stay static. I say, "My father is Jewish-

Canadian and my mother is Japanese." By defining myself in terms of my parents I can

distance myself from this type of classification and avoid defining myself in parts, 'half'

this and 'half' something else.

This stability is in some ways related to the development of what is being called the 'mixed race' movement, a movement I am indirectly a part of. Although I have never joined one of the organizations that are said to comprise this movement (like Project RACE or Eurasian Nation), I believe in its central tenet of creating awareness around 'mixed race' issues such as self-identification, visibility and invisibility, and belonging. The 'mixed race' movement began as a grass roots initiative, motivated by the desire of interracial couples to connect with others in similar circumstances. They wanted to share their stories, feel accepted, and support others. The movement grew to encompass their multiracial children as well, and eventually led to political action. Project RACE (Reclassify All Children Equally) and AMEA (Association of Multiethnic Americans) both lobbied to change the census questionnaire, to allow for more than one racial category to be checked. The ability to check one box or more in the race category was included in the 2000 US census (Brown & Douglass 2003).

Helping to fuel the growing momentum of this movement is the term 'mixed race' itself. Even though my self-identification and experience as a person of 'mixed race' may change depending on external circumstances: location, language issues, and may even depend on the weather (when my skin turns a darker shade in the summer, the "What are you?" question pops up with more frequency), 'mixed race' allows me to feel included in a 'whole' category, not simply half and half. 'Mixed race' is a term that has faced some resistance, and there are those who prefer not to use it. Because it incorporates some of the ideas that have perpetuated racism, some people believe that the term may perpetuate racial stereotypes and essentialization (see Tizard & Phoenix, 1993). While recognizing that creating further distinctions between people based on 'race' may

seem counter-productive, it is important to recognize that for many people, 'mixed race' as a category of identity is more about inclusion than exclusion. Personally, it helps me to talk about my own experiences, and indeed makes me feel part of a community, however poorly defined. Academically, it allows me to talk about issues that may be common to people of 'mixed race,' about a group of people that have faced various challenges in both the past and present in terms of legislated racism, visibility and invisibility in the media, and belonging. In recognition of the problematic foundations of the term 'mixed race' (discussed further in Chapter One), I use quotation marks around the term throughout the thesis.

In the past, I have found myself trying to fit into discreet categories of identity, often leading to a sense of isolation. It wasn't until quite recently that I realized that some of this isolation came from a lack of representations in the media of people of 'mixed race.' And when I did stumble on forms of media that incorporated 'mixed race' people as central characters, they were done so in very problematic ways. In adolescence, I read a few books where characters of 'mixed race' were integrated into the plot. For example, in William Faulkner's (1967) *Light in August*, Joe Christmas wrestles with his 'mixed race' heritage (half Black, half White) and ultimately meets his demise after 'passing' as a White man. In *Servants of Culture: the Symbolic Role of Mixed Race Asians in American Discourse*, Cynthia L. Nakashima (2001) discusses several mixed Asian characters as represented in American literature of the 1920s. In books and stories like *Seed of the Sun* (1921) by Wallace Irwin, *The Daughter of Huang Chow* (1922) by Sax Rohmer, and *Kimono* (1921) by John Paris, Eurasian characters led troubled lives, plagued by their 'mixed race' heritage. Growing up as a woman of 'mixed race,' I

noticed the general absence of 'mixed race' characters in TV, film and literature, and so when they were included, I instinctively took note.

Recently, no doubt fueled in part by the 'mixed race' movement as well as the growing 'mixed race' population, there has been a keener interest in 'mixed race' issues in the general public. This has resulted in real and practical change, such as the changes made to the ways in which people are able to respond to race questions in the American census (Morning, 2003). This growing interest, a reflection of the necessity to change conceptions of 'pure' racial categories, may be partially responsible for the recent surge in the portrayal of 'mixed race' characters in mainstream film. In the years 2002 and 2003 alone, several notable films included subplots specifically concerning characters of 'mixed race,' such as *The Hot Chick* (2002), *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (2002), and *Kill Bill: Volume 1* (2003). These films suggest that issues of 'mixed race' identity are being overtly incorporated in varying degrees into pop culture awareness, while also highlighting the relative lack of representation in earlier films.

The film that initially inspired this thesis topic was *Rabbit Proof Fence* (2002). As I watched this film, I felt a sort of kinship with the three main characters, Molly, Daisy, and Gracie. I was particularly struck with how personally I related to several of the scenes. The three 'half-caste' girls had embarked on a journey back to their aboriginal hometown, Jigalong, after being taken away from their families and placed in residential schools by the Australian government. Although their story is far from anything I experienced growing up as a person of 'mixed race' in Canada and Japan, there were aspects that reminded me of my personal experiences in trying to negotiate my own 'mixed race' identity.

On some level this kind of identification happens with most films one watches. There is some commonality or bond that makes people relate to the characters they see on screen. As Ella Shohat and Robert Stam (1994) write in *Unthinking Eurocentrism*, the media plays an important role in the formation of identity: "By experiencing community with people never actually seen, consumers of electronic media can be affected by traditions to which they have no ancestral connection" (347). People may identify with filmic characters based on gender, sexuality, religious affiliation, race, class or any other number of factors. However, my experience of connection while watching *Rabbit Proof Fence* struck me as something different. It was different because it was the first time I felt a connection with characters in a film explicitly because of the characters were 'mixed race.' Other films I had seen such as the *Art of Woo* (2002) and *Secrets and Lies* (1996) involved 'mixed race' characters but race issues were either brushed aside or viewed from the other characters' perspectives. This was the first time I had seen a movie where 'mixed race' was central to the plot, portrayed in a complex way, and in a way where I could recognize some of my own experiences in the film. The story told in *Rabbit Proof Fence* is certainly not *my* story, but I can recognize myself in the some of the characters and situations as they negotiate their 'mixed race' identity. So although the context of the story was largely unrelated to my own, the film raised several questions about 'mixed race' characters in film that I have used as a starting point for this thesis. What are the unique issues of identity that are explored through the inclusion of multiracial or biracial characters in mainstream films? And what are the issues when they are excluded? How do these representations vary, and how have they changed over time?

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Context is important when analyzing any piece of work, and context is one of the reasons I have chosen to introduce this thesis with some of the personal experiences I've described above. I believe that it is important to situate myself both academically and personally in a particular context, as I will in turn be doing with the films I have chosen to analyze. My personal experiences as someone who identifies as 'mixed race' partially informs the choices of the films I have selected and the ways in which I analyze them. That is something that cannot be helped; everyone speaks based on their own experiences, which includes their lived experiences as well as their academic research.

It is not that I am sharing these anecdotes so as to claim a sort of authenticity or authority, although I am aware that this may be one of the consequences. I am weary of this type of authority because it may in fact undermine the discussion of the films. The authority that may come from writing from a somewhat personal or autobiographical point of view (as discussed in Ang, 2001) could act to flatten the arguments by making them too personal rather than political. For this reason, I would like to point out the political in the personal and personal in the political (Chang, 2003; Omi & Winant, 1986). The very act of saying, "I am mixed race," is both personal and political. The authority that comes from 'speaking as' (Spivak, 1990) a person of 'mixed race' is flawed. It rests upon erroneous assumptions about identity and experience, as if the only way one can talk about a given topic is to experience it first hand or at least by close contact. This kind of thinking has been particularly problematic in a 'mixed race' context. People of 'mixed race' have often been told that because they are 'only half' Black or Chinese or Native American etc., they cannot draw on their own experiences to speak 'on behalf' of or simply as a member of a particular group. This is a double-edged sword. It

frees some people from the burden of representation while at the same time acting to alienate and isolate those very same people. If one is to measure a person on a scale of authenticity, the person of 'mixed race,' in most contexts, only falls half-way along the continuum. For this reason, I am weary of capitalizing on this type of authority, but realize that it may be one of the consequences of explaining the viewpoint from which this research was begun.

One of the aims of this thesis is to bridge the gap between two academic areas that I believe are necessarily connected, the relatively new critical mixed race studies, and the more established media studies. The value in studying 'mixed race' representations in film lies in the reflection it provides of significant moments in 'mixed race' histories, and in the portrayal of cultural imaginings of people of 'mixed race.' Film, and media in general, plays a role in forming one's beliefs about gender roles, racial stereotypes, and social hierarchies. In *Feminist Media Studies,* Liesbet Van Zoonen (1994) uses a modified version of Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model to discuss the ways in which media meaning is produced during stages of both production and consumption (i.e. encoding and decoding), as well as in the media text itself. As Van Zoonen writes:

> A crucial feature of the 'encoding/decoding' model is that media discourse is supposed to be produced by media institutions and audiences at the same time, not as an activity of single institutions or individuals but as a social process embedded in existing power and discursive formations (p. 8).

It is not that films teach one on how to view the world, but rather, film provides a way for existing stereotypes and beliefs to be brought to life and shone onto a screen, and then in turn be interpreted by individual audiences. People are not simply passive vehicles who are filled from the outside-in from what they see on TV and in the movies. The importance of film as a means of cultural production, cultural reflection, and cultural

negotiation should not be underestimated. As Stuart Hall (1997) writes, there are complex

systems of representation that are used in communication practices across cultures and

the media comprises one part of this system. (The importance of film as a producer of

cultural meaning is discussed further in Chapter One.)

Within the field of race and representation, there has been some limited theorizing

about 'mixed race' representations. However, these analyses are often a footnote to the

central issues of that particular study (for example, see Dyer, 1997 or Bogle, 1973),

generally focused on representations of 'full' races. Certain racial mixes have

commanded more attention than others and consequently have been portrayed with more

frequency. Most of the existing literature has focused on these groups, usually

Black/White mixes. For this reason, I have tried to choose films that incorporate various

different racial mixes, such as 'mixed race' Chinese/White American, and 'mixed race'

Aborigine/White Australian. By doing this I am not implying that all people of 'mixed

race' share the same experiences or history or that certain groups have not experienced

more hardship or discrimination than others. However, there are some consistencies in

their representations, such as the characteristic of identity confusion and a sense of not

belonging. The person of 'mixed race' occupies an ambiguous place in the hierarchy of

racial representation, often taking on all the unflattering characteristics from the

stereotypes that underlie representations of their 'full-blooded' counterparts.

This thesis will explore a range of films that incorporate 'mixed race' characters

into their plots. Chapter One, entitled *Racial Classification: New Terms, Old Problems*,

acts as an introduction to the main concepts and terms used throughout the thesis. A large

part of this chapter is a general discussion of 'mixed race' as a term, the development of a

mixed race movement, and the importance of 'mixed race' representations in film. The concept of 'race' itself is problematic and the existence of distinct racial groups, whether based on genetic or cultural factors, is one that has been debated for centuries. Some people argue that creating a new term for racial categorization such as 'mixed race' validates such forms of classification. It may act to reinforce beliefs that race is a category that has some basis in science and fact, and is a division that should be used to classify people. Racial categories imply separation, distinction, and difference. The term 'mixed race' may further complicate matters by adding more separation and distinction. However, I believe that this complication is necessary in order to move towards a society that will become less and less consumed by race matters. By challenging the basic ideas about racial purity and division, 'mixed race' can act to subvert the hierarchical categorization of race.

The textual analysis of the films begins in the following chapters. Throughout the chapters, I have done my best to choose a range of films that I feel cover the most territory, and have tried to ground these films within their own particular contexts. The films I have selected are: *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (1967), *Jungle Fever* (1991), *Showboat* (1951), *Dr. No* (1963), *Love is a Many-Splendored Thing* (1955), *Kill Bill: Volume 1* (2003), and *Rabbit Proof Fence* (2002). The chapters follow a progression that is contingent on the way in which 'mixed race' characters are present in the films, starting with an indirect presence, to presence through 'mixed race' stereotypes, and then presence through grounded history. By indirect presence, I am referring to movies that incorporate dialogues about people of 'mixed race,' where 'mixed race' characters are rarely seen or heard in the film. Stereotypical representations, on the other hand, directly

portray people of 'mixed race' in the film but in ways that reflect problematic constructions of 'mixed race' characters. Films that are grounded in a specific history represent narrative reconstructions of historical events. Although they may be personal stories, the larger framework of these stories is based on recorded histories.

Chapter Two, *The Missing Biracial Child in Hollywood*, focuses on films that incorporate characters of 'mixed race' through indirect presence. People of 'mixed race' have historically (in North America and Britain) been talked about and around, rather than talked to and with. For example, sociological and psychological studies in the last half-century have tried to focus on identity formation in children of 'mixed race.' However, the conductors of the study focused on the impressions of people in contact with the children (like parents and teachers) as opposed to the children themselves (Wilson, 1987). The active aversion to interracial relationships in the past frames the children of these relationships in a troubling light. Given the context of anti-miscegenation laws present in the United States until 1967, the anxiety caused by interracial *relationships* suggests that this anxiety was more accurately a manifestation of the fear of interracial *reproduction.* In this chapter, I will focus on two key films that have looked at interracial relationships, but that danced around the issue of the children of these relationships: *Guess Who's Coming For Dinner* (1967) and *Jungle Fever* (1991). In these films, biracial/multiracial children are discussed but rarely seen. They loom as a threat, and are used in arguments against these relationships. I believe that this indirect presence of 'mixed race' characters reflects the historic invisibility of 'mixed race' individuals, while helping to solidify the outdated and ideologically laden idea of 'pure' or 'undiluted' races.

In Chapter Three, *Confused Villains and Lost Martyrs*, I discuss some of the stereotypical portrayals of 'mixed race' characters. The person of 'mixed race' is often seen as 'out of place' and confused (Mahtani, 2002). These characteristics manifest themselves in the portrayal of people of 'mixed race' as either villains or martyrs. The dualistic nature of these stereotypes helps reflect the racial binaries that are embedded in the way in which Western society conceptualizes race. In order to look at these stereotypes, several films will be analyzed. I will be focusing both on early films like *Dr. No* (1963), *Showboat* (1951), and *Love is a Many Splendored Thing* (1955), and more recent ones such as *Kill Bill: Volume 1* (2003). At a time when representations of 'mixed race people are relatively rare, the abundance of stereotypical characters speaks volumes about how people of 'mixed race' have been seen by society. I have, however, kept in mind some of the limits of an approach to analyzing films based on stereotypes (Shohat & Stam 1994). Even when characters in a film are highly stereotypical, there are more often than not nuances and subtleties that make each character more complex than it may first appear. The stereotypes of the villain and martyr are used as a starting point for a more in depth analysis incorporating the contexts in which the films were made.

Chapter Four, *Familiar Strangers: Finding Identity and Community in Film* focuses primarily on *Rabbit Proof Fence*, which tells the story of three young 'half-caste' children traveling home after being forcibly separated from their families and placed in a government-run residential school. This is a film that is grounded in a specific Australian Aborigine history. The screenplay was adapted from the book written by Doris Pilkington (1996) based on the true story of her mother, Molly. It is a film that is important in its portrayal of institutionalized racism, the issue of assimilation, and community. In the

film, 'mixed race' children were seen as a tool that would lead to the eventual extinction of the Native Australian population. By breeding 'half-caste' Aborigines with White Australians, the Australian government aimed for the Aborigine population's eventual extinction. People of 'mixed race' were viewed as an instrument in a strategy of eugenics. They were seen as a means to an end, that end being pure Whiteness. The government of Australia was allowed to act as legal guardian for the children, able to take them away from their families, to order them to stop speaking their native language, and to place them with 'good White families.' This was a strategy used in Canada as well with Native Canadians (Fournier & Crey, 1997). This film is used to focus on the issue of 'mixed race' communities and the emergence of a panethnic multiracial identity.

Chapter Four brings the progression of 'mixed race' representation from indirect presence, presence through stereotype, and presence through grounded history to its end. Lastly, the Conclusion, *'Mixed Race' Futures*, brings the previous chapters together, exploring the significance of these films and acts to unify the different arguments made throughout the chapters. It is also where the eventual goal of this project is discussed more specifically. The overarching aim of the thesis is to bridge two academic areas that I believe are necessarily connected: media studies and critical mixed race studies. As a burgeoning field, critical mixed race studies is growing both out of and into other disciplines, such as race studies, sociology, and anthropology. The importance of media in shaping and reflecting individual and collective identities makes it an area that must be incorporated into critical mixed race studies. *Mixed Messages: 'Mixed Race' Representations in Film* is intended as an exploratory work and as a contribution to an

existing dialogue about race and representation in film. I hope that it lays the groundwork

for more research in this area and stimulates discussion across disciplines.

Chapter One

New Terms, Old Problems

Terminology regarding the intermixing of races originally grew from the fiction

of racial purity, incorporating false ideas about the biological incompatibility of races.

The aim of this chapter is to introduce the key terms and issues that will be discussed

throughout the thesis. Before launching into an analysis of the chosen films, terms such

as 'race' and 'mixed race' need to be examined. Because these concepts are far from

neutral or value-free, I aim to explore the terms by first looking briefly at their histories,

their evolution, and their present contexts. The 'mixed race' movement, as well as the

growing academic field of critical mixed race studies, have grown from these histories

and cannot be engaged with unless these pasts are acknowledged.

The chapter is divided into three sections. The first is an exploration of

terminology concerning people of 'mixed race.' This terminology is rooted in the ways in

which people of 'mixed race' have been historically conceptualized. In this section,

colonial concerns surrounding people of 'mixed race' are explored as one area where

people of 'mixed race' were viewed as biologically inferior and psychologically troubled.

The second section is concerned with present articulations of 'mixed race' discourses,

focusing on the development of a 'mixed race' movement and the emerging academic

field of critical mixed race studies. In order to lay the contextual groundwork for the film

analysis to follow in the coming chapters, the latter portion of the chapter will look

briefly at the ways in which race in general has been studied in relation to its

representation in film.

The Historical Fictions of Race

The concept of 'race' has been debated since the term's inception in the 1500s. The debates have crisscrossed across several disciplines, including biology, psychology, sociology, and genetics. Although only a brief history of race theory will be explored here (see Gates, 1997 or Gregory & Sanjek, 1994 for a more in depth history), it is important to discuss race discourse before launching into the more recent 'mixed race' discourse. Although no resolutions will be suggested, by incorporating a 'mixed race' perspective a different way to frame and analyze this debate is explored.

The very concept of 'race' is problematic. The existence of distinct racial groups, whether based on biological or cultural factors, is one that has been debated since the 16th century. It is now largely accepted that race is an ideological construction. But until the mid 1900s, categories of race were thought to be rooted in sound scientific findings which supported the need for categorical racial separation (Root, 2003).

The English word 'race' dates back to the 1500s but its volatile meaning and significance has changed drastically over time. It was derived from French where it was usually used in reference to royalty (Augstein, 1996). Its original English meaning was 'class' or 'common descent,' and was closely tied to ideas of nation and nationalism. Biological traits or characteristics had not yet become part of its definition. This changed in the late eighteenth century when scientists began to take a keen interest in taxonomy and the classification of human racial types (Gates, 1997). This interest was fueled by the realization that race theory could be used to justify and encourage prejudices and injustices carried out in the context of colonialism and imperialism. Scientific 'proof'

about the superiority of White races and the inferiority of the darker-skinned races could

be manipulated to justify subordination. Through the nineteenth and early twentieth

century, theories about race spread back and forth from the realm of science and into the

social and cultural arenas, permeating most areas of social interaction. The scientific

backing of previously held prejudices acted to strengthen and validate these prejudices

and allow for what we now readily acknowledge as injustices. Nineteenth century race

theory was used as a justification for slavery and a rationalization for colonialism and

genocide. The shape and size of skulls, the shades and tones of pigmented skin were all

classified and correlated in order to support a hierarchical organization of human racial

categories. In *Race: The Origins of an Idea*, Hanna Augstein (1996) summarizes

nineteenth-century racial theory:

> Nineteenth-century racial theory combines several elements: the first is the notion
> that mankind is divisible into a certain number of 'races' whose characteristics are
> fixed and defy the modifying influences of external circumstances. Secondly, it
> contains the idea that the intellectual and moral capacities may be unevenly
> spread within the various human races. Thirdly, it advocates the notion that
> mental endowments are bound up with certain physiognomical specificities
> which, being defined as racial characteristics, are considered to reveal the inward
> nature of the individual or population in question. In the nineteenth century, this
> basic definition of modern racial theory was accompanied by the idea that 'race'
> was the be-all and end-all of history (pp. x-xi).

Augstein goes on to say that even when the then-emerging field of genetics in the

twentieth century discredited the earlier scientific studies of race, it had become so firmly

ingrained into most social structures around the world that biological proof no longer

mattered to the general public. Not only had race become legislated and enforced by law

(in segregationist and anti-miscegenation legislation), it had been embedded in social

codes of conduct, dictating the spaces that one should and could occupy (Razack, 2002).

Because of this volatile history and the controversies that surround the term, using 'race' as a starting point for one's work can be problematic. As Lola Young (1996) writes in *Fear of the Dark: 'Race', Gender and Sexuality in the Cinema*:

> Working with a concept such as 'race' is fraught with difficulties since although it is held that such a designation has no scientific value but is an ideological construct, racialized discourses are pervasive and have to be engaged with. It is a problem that goes beyond an issue of definition since it affects the way in which identities are formed and social interaction experienced on a day to day basis. Although the division of people into racial categories is often based on the valorization of the primacy of phenotypical features – the visual signifiers of difference – it is generally accepted that biological definitions of 'race' which date back to at least the eighteenth century are spurious. 'Race' is not, then, an objective culture-free designation of difference...(p. 39).

As Young states, even with all its obvious flaws, it is still a concept that must be analyzed and investigated. And although creating more categories of human difference based on this already flawed concept may seem counterintuitive as well as counterproductive, it can actually act as one of the ways in which race is engaged and broken down. Because racial purity is one of the central tenets of historical racial theory, discussions around 'mixed race' can act to challenge and question the very foundations of racial categories.

The impossibility of racial purity, one of the many fictions of race, has plagued those who have tried to uphold the idea of distinct racial categories. Theories of race are directly linked to ideas about sexuality, particularly heterosexuality, and the concern about offspring resulting from the intermixing of races. In the past, colonial desire together with sexual desire produced a "political economy of miscegenation" (Young, 1995, p. 142). In virtually all colonies race-mixing was a concern. For some colonizers, race mixing was seen as an effective colonialist strategy, as a strategy for maintaining control and power. In 1866, Charles Brooke, who wrote *Ten Years in Sarawak,*

speculated that the harsh climate in India would pose numerous problems for the British

settlers. His answer was to encourage 'amalgamation' with the natives, producing an

enlightened race that could withstand the hot Indian weather (as cited in Young, 1995).

People of 'mixed race' were seen simply and coldly as a means to an end, a solution to an

issue as trivial as the weather. In other colonial contexts, race mixing was imagined to be

the downfall of the European colonizers. For example, in British Columbia, Canada,

unions between Native Canadian women and British men were originally thought to be

beneficial for the settlers, easing them into good relations with the colonized. However,

because people of 'mixed race' European settler/ Native American occupied an

ambiguous place in the racial hierarchy, they jeopardized settler claims to land and the

other privileges that came with Whiteness. Consequently, several laws were passed in

which 'Indianness' was defined by the percentage of Native American blood one had

(Mawani, 2002).

During this time, different terminology arose in the attempt to label these racial

mixes. The idea that people of different races could not produce fertile offspring was a

commonly held belief. Terminology regarding the intermixing of races grew from the

fiction of racial purity, incorporating false ideas about the biological incompatibility of

races. For example, the word 'mulatto' derives from the Spanish word for mule, the

infertile animal resulting from the crossbreeding of a horse and a donkey, whose main

purpose has been to carry the weight of others on their backs. The term 'mixed-blood,'

which has been used in reference to 'mixed race' Native Canadians and Americans,

highlights the attempt to define these people by their biological make-up. Lola Young

(1996) writes:

> Expressions of fears for the future purity and superiority of the white 'race' relating to 'miscegenation' and 'race-mixing' were bound to the notion that blood varies from 'race' to 'race' and that the mixing of those bloods is undesirable. These beliefs underpinned the anxiety and fear surrounding interracial sexual relationships that many white people had (p. 48).

Young later writes about the manifestations of these anxieties and fears in the terminology used to discuss the children of these relationships:

> All language related to the conjunction of sexual and racial difference is problematic: miscegenation, mulatto, half-caste, mixed race, interracial and so on all carry with them the stigma of racist discourses, suggesting as they do an acceptance of the precepts of separate, biologically determined racial groups (p. 87).

As Young writes, given their troubled histories and the embedded assumptions, the terminology mentioned above is problematic. However, this does not mean that they should all be discarded. It is possible to reclaim problematic terminology and use it as a tool to question or challenge the original meaning of these expressions.

To avoid some of the problems associated with this terminology, some people have adopted other words in order to describe their experiences: mixed heritage, multiethnic, métis(se), and hybrid to name a few. And although I am not adverse to using these words, I have chosen to employ 'mixed race,' 'multiracial' and 'mixed heritage' as the main terms I'll be using throughout this thesis. It is true that race is a problematic and highly contentious concept, but it is not something that can be softened or hidden by less confrontational terminology. It needs to be discussed within the system and context in which it exists before it can be left behind. Softening the terminology sidesteps the problem. Furthermore, these more neutral sounding terms have their own problems. For example, 'hybridity' has its own problematic past and even though it is largely used to

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denote cultural hybridity in the present, in the past it was firmly rooted in biology and, like 'mulatto,' issues of fertility. Robert Young (1995) writes:

> In the nineteenth century [hybrid] was used to refer to a physiological phenomenon; in the twentieth century it has been reactivated to describe a cultural one. While cultural factors determined its physiological status, the use of hybridity today prompts questions about the ways in which contemporary thinking has broken absolutely with the racialized formulations of the past (p. 6).

Is this break an altogether positive one? Distancing the present from racial theories of the past is a positive as long as the past is still acknowledged. The term 'hybridity' has become a popular catch-all term within the discourse of cultural studies. It is most often used as a qualifier, as in cultural hybridity or linguistic hybridity. But theorists are starting to sound alarms regarding the usefulness of a term that is increasingly used so haphazardly (Ang, 2001). The complexity of the term isn't fully appreciated when used as a qualifier, as a vague adjective to describe an even vaguer noun.

In *Re-Membering 'Race': On Gender, 'Mixed Race' and Family in the English-African Diaspora*, Jayne O. Ifekwunigwe (2001) discusses her choice to use 'mixed race' as opposed to 'métis(se),' a term which she had used in the past. I quote her at length as her rationale for using both these terms is quite nuanced, as well as specifically relevant to this discussion.

> By redeploying [métis(se)] in an English milieux, my intention was to de-centre 'race' as a primary identity marker and to clear space for the interplay of other hierarchically positioned signifiers such as ethnicity, locality, generation, gender and social class....However, though the de-privileging of 'race' remains both an important critical theoretical and research objective, I now believe that the term métis(se) does not sufficiently do this important job. My research has taught me that parents, carers, practitioners, educators, policy makers, academics and 'mixed race' individuals themselves are all hungry for a uniform but not essentialist term which carves out a space for the naming of their specific experiences without necessarily reinscribing and reifying 'race'. Utilising a French-African term in an English context, even if simply for discursive analyses, could be perceived as potentially exoticising and further marginalizing 'mixed race' subjectivities.

...Furthermore, one could argue that partially deflecting attention away from the popular folk concept of 'race' to other forms of identification and stratification diminishes the significant and potent function institutionalized racism plays in the maintenance of privilege and power for some and disadvantage and discrimination for others (pp. 44-45).

My reasons for employing 'mixed race' as a term echo Ifekwunigue's rationale. There should be a uniform term to describe 'mixed race' experiences. The reinscription and reification of race should be avoided, but the significance of race as a social concept should not be underestimated, not discarded, and needs to be investigated. The key in embracing 'mixed race' as an identity lies in recognizing the fluidity that this term can allow. At the very least, it challenges rigidity in racial classification. At most it challenges the very concept of racial categories. I recognize that creating distinctions between people may seem counter-productive, but 'mixed race' is about challenging pre-existing ideas about race and adding more fluidity to racial identification. It challenges basic ideas of race, subverting the hierarchical categorization of race that goes hand in hand with racism.

'Mixed Race' Today

Present day articulations of 'mixed race' identities have changed significantly from the historical constructions explored above. In "What's in a Name? Exploring the Employment of 'Mixed Race' as an Identification," Minelle Mahtani (2002) captures the contradictions and complications of employing 'mixed race' as a category of identity. She writes: "It has been argued that people who identify as 'mixed race' are effectively creating their own cartographies of identity" (p. 472). On the other hand, she explains

that: "At times, the label 'mixed race' suggests a way to articulate a non-categorical identity outside the racialized discourse. As such, it can effectively interrogate the exclusionary operations by which racialized categories are constituted" (p. 476). That is not to say that the category or label of 'mixed race' is not flawed. In order to explore some of the problems, Mahtani spoke with women in the Toronto area that identified as 'mixed race.' In her interviews, her subjects identified some key problems associated with identifying as 'mixed race.' Even those women who employed the term recognized the potential problems. One concern was that it would "subsume differences among the 'mixed race' population" (p. 479). This is one of my concerns as well. In the context of this thesis, I will be looking at several different multiracial representations and am hesitant to generalize too much across these racial lines. However, the rise in various 'mixed race' organizations that comprise the relatively recent 'mixed race' movement suggests that people of 'mixed race' recognize that there are some similarities and shared experiences. As Laurie Mengel (2001) writes: "Multiracial people are creating a panethnic identity which is based on mixedness *per se*" (p. 113). Some of these shared experiences and similarities are seen in the representations of 'mixed race' persons in film.

Another problem identified by Mahtani's subjects is that identifying as 'mixed race' may override other aspects of their identities such as age, class, gender or sexual orientation. This is one of the reasons that it is so important to stress context. 'Mixed race' heritage alone does not comprise one's identity. The characters in the chosen films will be discussed in relation not only to their 'mixed race' heritage but also in regards to other dimensions of their identities, experiences, and the time in which the movie was

made and/or set. Although I have tried to include several different 'mixed race'

characters from different backgrounds, most still are a White/minority mix and some

authors argue that this creates another level in racial hierarchies by excluding those

'mixed race' people whose parents are from two minorities (Mahtani & Moreno, 2001).

Jon Spencer Michaels (1997) in *The New Coloured People*, discusses some

potential flaws with not just the term 'mixed race' but the entire concept. Largely using

South Africa as an example of how racial classification of any sort is unacceptable, he

discusses the drawbacks of continuing this paradigm by adding another category into the

mix, leading to further oppression. Michael's book focuses on one specific example of

'mixed race' experience, one that is rooted in the racist legislation under apartheid. He

writes:

> We must face the stark reality that nowhere in the modern world has the
> recognition of a race of mixed-race peoples resolved the racial problems of that
> society. Rather, splintering coloured peoples into such classifications of "race"
> and "mixed race" has aggravated race relations from the perspective of society's
> oppressed peoples (p. 156).

Michaels' argument overlooks several important issues, one of which I will discuss here.

(For more discussion of Michaels' book, see Spickard, 2003 and Williams-Leon, 2003.)

People of 'mixed race' are not necessarily trying to "resolve racial problems" by claiming

their mixed identity. Rather, they are opening up a discourse that allows people to express

and discuss their lived experiences, which have previously been repressed. Without the

proper vocabulary and a platform from which to speak, they are effectively silenced,

perpetuating their own invisibility. By bringing attention to their own issues, people of

'mixed race' are seen to be detracting from and undermining the solidarity that some

minority groups struggle to maintain (discussed in Spickard, 2003), or act as a

manifestation of a "desire to dilute" their minority heritage (Parker & Song, 2001, p. 7).

Other critics see it as an extension of hypodescent, and charge the 'mixed race'

movement with "fighting essentialism with essentialism" (Jones, L. cited in Williams-

Leon, 2003, p. 162). Please note that I use the terms the 'rule of hypodescent' and the

'one- drop of blood rule' interchangeably. Both refer to the legal and social custom of

defining a person's race by the amount of minority blood they have. In order to be

considered White, one had to be 'pure' White. For minority groups, most notably African

Americans, although applied to other groups as well, one drop of non-White blood was

enough to be classified as non-White.

Again, in response to these criticisms about essentialism, it is true that 'mixed

race' as a category of identity may be building upon erroneous foundations, but one of

the purposes for using the term is to point out the flaws of those foundations. It is not

only *possible* to fight essentialism with essentialism, it may be a *necessary* step in getting

at the root of the problem. It is not the *only* step, just one of the steps. Creating more

'mixed race' discourses can be used to challenge the outdated and incorrect notion of

racial purity.

Maria P. P. Root is cited as one of the first academics to focus on 'mixed race'

issues in her scholarly work. In 1996, she wrote the influential *Mixed Race Bill of Rights*

an excerpt of which follows:

> I have the right
> Not to justify my existence in this world
> Not to keep the races separate within me
> Not to be responsible for people's discomfort with my physical ambiguity
> Not to justify my ethnic legitimacy...
>
> I have the right
> To create a vocabulary to communicate about being multiracial (p. 8).

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Root's work not only helped to create a vocabulary to communicate about being multiracial, it also helped to shape and change the existing 'mixed race' discourse. 'Mixed race' discourses have largely been constructed from a particular standpoint, from the outside-in. Colonizers and colonized alike voiced their opinions about race mixing, while people of 'mixed race' were often ostracized by both (Young, 1995). Root helped to change the discourse not so much in terms of its subject matter of 'mixed race' but in terms of the people producing or contributing to this discourse, the people of 'mixed descent' themselves. This is not to say that the only people who can speak about 'mixed race' must be 'mixed race' themselves, nor does it imply that when a person of 'mixed race' speaks, she speaks on behalf of an entire population of 'mixed race' individuals. Rather, it is important to have a multitude of voices, expressing a multiplicity of opinions.

Even though people of 'mixed race' are by no means new, they have been framed this way continuously by various forms of media. For example, the 1993 *Time* Magazine cover that featured a computer generated picture of a 'mixed race' woman. The caption read "The New Face of America." The image of the woman, light-skinned, dark hair, welcoming smile, is distanced from interracial heterosexual relationships because, as the caption explains, the image is computer generated. In the article, the person of 'mixed race' is distanced from any historical context because she is framed as new (see Steeter, 2003 for a lengthier discussion of the *Time* Magazine cover). Ann Morning (2003) discusses the problems with the continual framing of 'mixed race' issues as new. She explains:

Multiracial Americans have often been heralded as "new people" and in fact have been rediscovered as such more than once in the last century....Yet, having populated North American for nearly four centuries, mixed-race people are far from being a recent phenomenon in the United States. Their early presence has been recorded to greater and lesser degrees in legal records, literature, and historical documentation....By obscuring the historic dimensions of American multiraciality – emphasizing its newness but not its oldness – we may run the risk of ignoring lessons that past racial stratification offers for understanding today's outcomes (p. 42).

By continuously framing people of 'mixed race' as new, the historical oppression of people of 'mixed race' remains invisible. Furthermore, it veils the truth that in reality, much larger populations of the United States and Canada are in fact 'mixed race' if the rule of hypodescent is applied stringently. For the purposes of this thesis, people of 'mixed race' are defined as people who self-identify as 'mixed race' and have at least one parent who is a member of a visible minority community.

Visibility has remained a central issue for people of 'mixed race.' People of 'mixed race' are becoming more visible in that they have more flexibility now in choosing a multiracial identity than at any point in history (for a Canadian perspective on this flexibility see Hill, 2001). This is one of the central ways in which 'mixed race' discourses have changed significantly in the last thirty years or so. One major reason for this shift is the development of a 'mixed race' movement. When most people refer to this the 'mixed race' movement, they are generally referring to the many 'mixed race' organizations in the United States that have sprung up in the last thirty years to allow a forum for 'mixed race' issues to be discussed. One of the most important accomplishments of this movement is the change made to the gathering of statistical data regarding race in the American census. In reality, the 'mixed race' movement is

comprised of several movements, focusing on social support, political action, and education (Root, 2003).

Although multiracial organizations started to form in the late 1970s in the United States, they didn't garner mainstream attention until several multiracial groups, most notably, AMEA (Association of MultiEthnic Americans) and Project RACE (Reclassify All Children Equally), mobilized together around the census debate in the 1990s. Both organizations were actively involved in the legislative debate regarding how people of 'mixed race' were to be counted on the census. The roughly seven-year debate focused on what type of classification would most benefit both people of 'mixed race' and the census goals. Eventually, it was decided that a 'check one box or more' option was most suitable. Eventually, AMEA and Project Race split over ideological differences. Project Race preferred to have a single 'Multiracial' category on the census. AMEA disagreed and felt that a 'check one box or more option' would give a clearer picture of the diversity of people of 'mixed race,' and would provide more information for medical researchers. Implications for medical research by including a 'check one box or more' option remains one of AMEAs central concerns. They launched the first national Multiracial Bone Marrow Donor Drive in 1996, where Ramona Douglass, president of AMEA said:

> We are – as an untapped minority – not among those who are counted by local, regional or federal-level agencies that gather racial/ethnic data for medical research purposed and other health-related matter. We are virtually invisible to the medical community statistically, and unless we take this issue to our legislators, the mailbox, and the ballot box, the Census Bureau, the State Capitol and to all the healthcare providers in the country – we will remain at risk and the last to receive accurate, adequate, or equitable medical treatment (qtd in Brown and Douglass, 2003, p. 119).

Issues of visibility, whether in statistics, medical research, or representations in media are crucial to 'mixed race' debates. Academic communities have also begun to mobilize around 'mixed race' issues. Several universities across the United States have incorporated courses that specifically integrate 'mixed race' histories and issues into the core readings and discussions. The development of the academic field of critical mixed race studies in the past twenty years is a crucial step in the continuing drive for visibility of 'mixed race' issues. Classes like Asian Americans of Mixed Heritage, taught at New York University; Biracial and Multiracial Identity in the US, taught at California State University; and Half-Bred Poetics: Cultural Hybridity and the Politics of Race Writing, taught at the University of Calgary are becoming more frequently integrated into various humanities degrees at the undergraduate level. At the moment, critical mixed race studies is largely an offshoot of critical race and ethnicity studies but 'mixed race' issues are also being incorporated into other academic fields as well, including history, sociology, and anthropology.

It is important to recognize both the possibilities and the flaws that go along with 'mixed race.' There may be a time in the future where people reject the term altogether. In fact, hopefully there will be a time when 'mixed race' stops being meaningful because race itself will become unimportant (Zack, 1995). Even though it is problematic and complex (as are most issues when discussing 'race' in general), 'mixed race' cannot be ignored and must be engaged. One way to explore issues of 'mixed race' is by interrogating the ways in which 'mixed race' characters have been portrayed in film.

Capturing Race

The 'mixed race' movement has brought to light many of the issues that people of 'mixed race' have dealt with in both the past and the present. One of these issues is the ways in which people of 'mixed race' have been represented in literature (Nakashima, 2001), television (Hamamoto, 1994), and film (Bogle, 1973). In virtually all of these representations, 'mixed race' characters are portrayed as outsiders, confused about their place and role within the family and society as a whole. The continual framing of the person of 'mixed race' as confused, troubled and out of place by various forms of media helps to solidify common-sense views about 'mixed race' social maladjustment (as discussed in Furedi, 2001, and discussed in further detail in Chapter Three). The role of the media in reinforcing outdated ideas about racial purity can be seen in these problematic portrayals.

I have chosen to focus on film as opposed to other types of media for several reasons. Visual media play a special role in western culture, privileging those people who have the power to make the images that help to mold and shape representations of the Other, and it is a way in which 'race' is captured and made explicit. As Lola Young (1996) writes:

> The important roles which photographic and cinematic imagery played in the construction of difference is connected to the privileging of the visual in western culture. ....Thus seeing is not only linked to 'believing' but also to 'knowing'. This is important because through this, the film camera —when it is used as an extension of the imperial/anthropological eyes – may be characterized as an instrument of the power and control of the Other (p. 50).

Young's idea of power and control of the Other is important when looking at representations of 'mixed race' characters. The Other in Young's case is not only people of 'mixed race' but also those people who engage in interracial heterosexual relationships. By engaging in interracial relationships, these couples may be alienated from or ostracized by their families and communities.

The presence of 'mixed race' characters whether indirect, stereotypical, or grounded in a specific history reveal much about power structures and issues of control. By indirect presence, I am referring to movies that incorporate dialogues about people of 'mixed race' without the characters actually being seen or heard in the film. For example, in many films that incorporate storylines about interracial heterosexual relationships, the children of those relationships are discussed, often in a negative way, and as a reason to end the relationship. Stereotypical representations, on the other hand, directly portray people of 'mixed race' in the film but in ways that reflect problematic constructions of 'mixed race' characters, incorporating commonsense views about 'mixed race' maladjustment. Films that are grounded in a specific history represent narrative reconstructions of historical events. For example, many holocaust films (like *The Pianist*, 2002) are based on personal reconstructions and reflections of historically documented events. Although they may be personal stories, the larger framework of these stories are based on recorded histories.

The structure of power within racial hierarchies is disrupted by people of 'mixed race,' and 'mixed race' characters in various films reflect the unease that is caused by this disruption. By portraying the person of 'mixed race' as confused, tragic, and/or villainous, these films reinforce dominant discourse about 'mixed race' maladjustment.

They frame children of 'mixed race' as necessarily confused and portray them as never fully fitting into a society that valorizes the false notion of pure racial categories. As Paul Gilroy (2002) writes: "Different people are certainly hated and feared, but the timely antipathy against them is nothing compared with the hatred turned toward the greater menace of the half-different and the particularly familiar. To be mixed is to have been party to a great betrayal" (p. 106). This initial betrayal on the part of those who engage in interracial relationships leads to further betrayal as the characters of 'mixed race' struggle to fit into discreet categories of identity, almost always with tragic results.

I am not claiming that film instructs one about how to view the world, but rather, film provides a way for existing myths and stereotypes to be brought to life and shone onto a screen. There is a reciprocal relationship between film (or media) and identity. The hypodermic needle model of media communication, where audiences passively accept messages encoded during production, doesn't capture the complexity of potential negotiated and oppositional readings of film practiced by spectators and audiences.

Films are an important way in which ideologies are visually portrayed, where history is often re-written, and hierarchies of race, gender, class, and sexuality are imposed or challenged. There is no such thing as 'just a movie.' As bell hooks (1996) writes in her introduction to *Reel to Real: Race, Sex, and Class at the Movies*, they may also help to create a dialogue where important issues can be discussed. She writes:

> Whether we like it or not cinema assumes a pedagogical role in the lives of many people. It may not be the intent of a filmmaker to teach audiences anything, but that does not mean that lessons are not learned...Movies not only provide a narrative for specific discourses of race, sex, and class, they provide a shared experience, a common starting point from which diverse audiences can dialogue about these charged issues (p. 2).

As hooks states, film can play a pedagogical role in the lives of people who may not even be aware of this role.

Media plays a role in forming one's beliefs about gender roles, racial stereotypes, and social hierarchies. As Liesbet Van Zoonen (1994) writes, "Mass media produce and reproduce collective memories, desires, hopes and fears, and thus perform a similar function as myths in earlier centuries" (p. 37). The myth of the morally and physically weak person of 'mixed race' in reflected and strengthened in the films discussed in Chapter Two and Three. As we now know, racial categories are social constructions, they have as Robert Chang (2003) writes, "been created or constructed by human agents and human institutions through specific and diffuse enactments of power" (p. 173). These enactments of power include representations of racial groups by mainstream media. Dominant discourses are reflected in various forms of media and help to maintain the status quo. However, it is important to recognize that the media is a "negotiable site of interaction and struggle" (Shohat & Stam, 1994, p. 347). Negotiated and oppositional readings of film will be discussed further in Chapter Four, *Familiar Strangers: Finding Identity and History in Film.*

In the following chapters of this thesis, I will be looking at several films that I believe cover a range of 'mixed race' experiences. These films, including *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner, Dr. No, Kill Bill: Volume 1*, and *Rabbit Proof Fence*, will be used as a starting point to discuss the historical contexts during the time these movies were filmed and/or set. 'Mixed race' characters occupy an ambiguous space in the racial hierarchies made explicit in the films. Much of the recent writing about 'mixed race' identities, bodies, enumeration, and representation has focused on the newness of this movement.

And although it may be true that the movement is relatively new, people of 'mixed race' have long been a thorn in the side of racial hierarchies (Morning, 2003). A discussion of the experiences and challenges faced by people of 'mixed race' provides a platform from which one can explore distinct moments in history. This history can and should be explored through film representations incorporating theories explored in both critical mixed race studies and media studies.

Chapter Two

The Missing Biracial Child in Hollywood

This chapter aims to analyze the incorporation of 'mixed race' characters through

their indirect presence in films, such as *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (1967) and

Jungle Fever (1996), and to explain those portrayals within a history of legal and social

stigmatization. In these films, characters of 'mixed race' are discussed, usually in a

negative light, but they are seldom seen or heard, resulting in what I have identified as an

'indirect presence.' These films demonstrate not only the historical legal invisibility of

people of 'mixed race,' imposed through the rule of hypodescent, but also their

inaudibility, their lack of a voice, enforced through social stigmatization.

Socially, the biracial child has long been missing, buried under a tangle of legal

definitions and rules about racial classification. By 'missing,' I mean that the child of two

parents of different 'races' has historically been forbidden from choosing or claiming a

'mixed race' identity. The rule of hypodescent allowed for (and in many ways, still

allows for) a form of identity theft, leaving the person of 'mixed race' stranded at the

border of belonging. The question, "What about the children?" has plagued people in

interracial relationships, insinuating that their children will face particular hardships

based on their 'mixed heritage.' This question and the implication embedded within it is

cited as one of the motivating factors in the initial organizations of interracial and 'mixed

race' community groups. One of the central tenets of the 'mixed race' movement is the

right to choose, the right to define one's own identity, whether it be to identify as

wholly one race, or multiracially, or both through different experiences and situations in

one's lifetime (Root, 1996). The 'mixed race' movement asserts that categories of race are not mutually exclusive or pure, and they are not as rigid as many people assume.

The missing biracial child is reflected and portrayed in several mainstream films that involve interracial relationships. The two principal films examined in this chapter are *Guess Who's Coming To Dinner* and *Jungle Fever*. In these contexts, 'missing' takes on a double meaning. As mentioned above, the 'mixed race' child had long been unable to socially express a 'mixed race' identity, thereby nullifying the mere possibility of a 'mixed race' identity. In the context of the films discussed in this chapter, the multiracial child is doubly hidden, because 'mixed race' children are discussed but not rarely seen. Aside from one character in *Jungle Fever*, Drew, characters of 'mixed race' are absent even though one of the central themes of both these films is the anxiety caused by interracial relationships and interracial reproduction. The futures of 'mixed race' children are considered by others without allowing the 'mixed race' child a voice to speculate about his/her own future.

The submersion of ethnicity is a common phenomenon in mainstream cinema. As Shohat and Stam (1994) write, "Although issues of race and ethnicity are culturally omnipresent, we have been arguing, they have often been filmically submerged. This textual repression exists on a continuum with the repression of race in other areas" (p. 220). As Shohat and Stam communicate, the repression of race in film reflects the repression of race in auxiliary domains. For people of 'mixed race,' these areas are abundant. For example, until the year 2000, the United States census only allowed one to choose one box in the race category. Also, school registration forms and medical records often privilege discreet racial categories (Tashiro, 2001). Expressions of 'mixed race'

identities have been repressed in various forms, particularly through legislation and social stigmatization.

Through legislation, pseudo-scientific studies, family and social politics, and media representations, people of 'mixed race' have had their identities constructed from the outside in. In other words, their identities were largely decided on by others and then imposed. Negotiation of one's own identity, on one's own terms was and still can be extremely difficult. From early legal definitions of 'mixed race' to the current 'mixed race' movement, the issue of definition has proved crucial to the discourse of 'mixed race.' The first legal judgments based specifically on racial mixture set both legal and social precedents. These judgments were based on prevailing racist ideologies and racial hierarchies, helping to formulate the various incarnations and reincarnations of 'mixed race' definitions, identities, and discourses.

Although *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* and *Jungle Fever* deal with similar themes, different approaches are taken to unraveling the prejudices that face people involved in interracial relationships. In both cases, these prejudices reflect the active fear of miscegenation and the production of 'mixed race' children. These prejudices are rooted in the ways in which 'mixed race' identities have been imagined in the past through legislated racism, social stigmas, and erroneous scientific studies. The first half of this chapter provides the legal and social background from which the films were made by looking at the history of anti-miscegenation laws in the United States. The impact of the rule of hypodescent has played an immeasurable role in the discourses of both 'race' and 'mixed race.' And although the rule of hypodescent has been questioned with more frequency, the lived experiences of people of 'mixed race' still reflect the aftermath of

the one-drop of blood rule. The latter half of the chapter focuses on how these lived

experiences are reflected and reinforced by the media. After briefly discussing early

representations of interracial affairs and films that focused on 'passing,' I will then move

on to discuss *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* and *Jungle Fever,* framing them within this

particular history.

The Legacy of a Troubled History

The term 'miscegenation' was coined in 1864 to mean sex between different

races. Originally used in a pamphlet meant to discredit Abraham Lincoln's stance on race

issues, the pamphlet fed into the fear of racial blending (Gaines, 2001). In terms of

legislation, 'miscegenation' was largely used in relation to sexual unions or marriages

between people of different races. But well before there was a word for it, there were

laws prohibiting these unions. The first American statute explicitly forbidding interracial

sex was passed in Maryland in 1661, making unions between White women and Black

men a criminal act. In *Representing Miscegenation Law*, Eva Saks (2003) writes about

the dubious history of this first statute:

> Unlike most British colonial law, the miscegenation statute had no English
> statutory or common law precedents…The statute's genealogy instead included
> moral and economic concerns: moral concerns of the parent country, England,
> which stemmed from the popular white mythology that blacks descended from
> Ham of Genesis and that their blackness was a punishment for sexual excess;
> economic concerns of Maryland and the Chesapeake Bay, where marriage
> between a white woman and a black slave would produce legally free children,
> thereby depriving the slave owner of potential slaves – a reduction in the stream
> of future earnings capitalized in the black body (p. 11).

As Saks writes, United States laws against miscegenation partially focused on the

economic concerns of slave owners. These economic concerns usually masked racist social concerns. Note that the law specifies that it is White women and Black men who are forbidden from interracial liaisons. This helped prevent mulatto children from being born free while allowing White men to engage in sexual relations, or rape, Black women. In this respect, the economic concerns of slave owners in the reproduction of slaves fueled the gendered and racial specifics of the anti-miscegenation laws of this time. In other words, concerns about interracial *relationships* were largely concerns about interracial *reproduction*. The children of these unions were thought of as a great social evil who could potentially upset the existing structure of power built upon the notion of race. And once these children occurred, more serious problems were thought to follow. For how could these children possibly fit into the discreet racial categories that were so taken for granted? It was thought that children of 'mixed race' would be both psychologically and physically inferior (Young, 1995).

Although there was much debate about the classification of people of 'mixed race,' it was the "set of rights and privileges that accompanied the classification" (Higginbothan & Kopytoff, 2003, pp. 14-15) that were truly important. Legal definitions of people of 'mixed race,' the most lengthy history of which is reflected in the one-drop of blood rule for American Blacks, was largely used as a tool to ensure economic and social benefits to slave owners during that time. With one short sentence in the Virginia case of *In Re Mulatto* in 1656, a precedent was set that a person of mixed Black/White ancestry would be considered 'Black' by law. In *The Devil and the "One Drop" Rule*, Christine Hickman (2003) writes:

> Although the opinion consists of a single sentence, and we know of no supporting record to illuminate the facts of the case, its logic constructs the American view of

racial mixture between Black and White that has endured for over three hundred years. *In Re Mulatto* in its entirety states: "Mulatto held to be a slave and appeal taken." Without discussion or debate, the court thus apparently articulated the first judicial expression of the rule of hypodescent. Implicit in its opinion is the finding that the litigant was of both African and European descent, but the court found that the European ancestry made no legally significant difference at all, and the holding is likely to have severed whatever ties this racial hybrid had with his European ancestry. In fact, it was the African ancestry that both defined his status and determined his fate (p. 105).

As Hickman describes, the desire to decide one's own way to identify was taken from the individual, and this responsibility and privilege was placed into the hands of the court.

During the early 1900s, the rule of hypodescent and anti-miscegenation laws in the United States were applied to Native Americans, Chinese, Japanese and Filipino immigrants as well (Volp, 2003). In each case, it was Whiteness that was deemed to need protection against the immoral and degenerate Other. Often, economic concerns were used as an excuse or cover for the social concerns that were at the root of these prejudices. For example, what was called the 'Chinese problem' in California was based on the anxiety that low-cost Chinese immigrant workers would take jobs from White Americans. Underneath this anxiety lay the deeper fear that Chinese labourers, with their lascivious behaviour, would seduce White women. As Leti Volp (2003) writes:

> John Miller, a state delegate, speculated that the "lowest most vile and degraded" of the white race were most likely to amalgamate with the Chinese, resulting in a "hybrid of the most despicable, a mongrel of the most detestable that has ever afflicted the earth." Miscegenation was presented as a public health concern, for Chinese were assumed by most of the delegates to be full of "filth and disease." Some argued that American institutions and culture would be overwhelmed by the habits of people thought to be sexually promiscuous, perverse, lascivious, and immoral (pp. 86-87).

The fear and prejudice that Volp describes is not isolated to the United States. In Canada, the early 1900s saw laws governing where and how Chinese men could come into contact with White women. When the Saskatchewan legislature passed the *Act to Prevent the*

Employment of Female Labour in Certain Capacities in 1912, it forbid "any white woman or girl to reside or lodge in or to work in…[any] place of business or amusement owned, kept or managed by a Japanese, Chinaman or other Oriental person" (qtd. in Walker, 1997, p. 51). Underpinning these laws was the fear of racial mixing, and the purity of White women in particular lay at the crux of these fears.

Even after miscegenation laws were finally eradicated from American law books with the *Loving v. Virginia* case in 1967, where it was decreed that restricting marriage choices based on race was unconstitutional, concerns about the offspring of these unions remained at the forefront of race discourses. The question, "What about the children?" is one that has plagued interracial partners through the years. Asked by concerned parents, friends, and schoolteachers, it is assumed that the children of interracial relationships will face specific hardships. The children won't belong, they will be teased or rejected by either side of their family, they will have problems identifying with either parent, with siblings who look different from them, and have difficulty fitting in with friends. In the 1920s and 1930s, there were studies in sociology and psychology that reinforced these claims. These studies found that straddling racial lines "inevitably resulted in self-hatred and internal conflict" (Tizard & Phoenix, 1993, p. 158). They also suggested that 'mixed race' children would be socially maladjusted and face hardship because of their racial background. Scholars speculated that this was due to either of two factors: biologically, the children inherited the worst traits from both the parents, or societies' systematic racism would eventually lead to a troubled life for those people that did not fit neatly into socially designated definitions of race.

Some British studies in the early 1900s found that children of White mothers and Black fathers grew up in a sexually charged environment. In fact, many studies linked miscegenation with immoral, oversexed behavior, comparing White women who partnered with Black men to prostitutes (Furedi, 2001). Anxieties in White communities often involved not only race concerns but crossed over into areas of class and gender as well. White women in the working classes were seen as even more susceptible to Black men, and there was concern that the working classes were responsible for most race-mixing. White women were seen as easy victims to the stereotype of the Black male's aggressive sexuality. Black women were also thought of as highly sexual but not nearly as aggressive and therefore less threatening while still remaining exotic. There was not nearly as much stigma associated with White men partnering with Black women (Furedi, 2001).

The reasons behind the "What about the children?" question have changed throughout the years. It was first rooted in a concern for the welfare of society, an expression of disgust at the potential degeneration of Whiteness. Ideas of purity were deeply connected to the concept of Whiteness. People of other races did not have to be 'pure' in order to be Black, Indian, Chinese, etc. But in order to claim the privileges that came with Whiteness, one had to be 'pure,' no mixing of blood would be permitted. But with the Civil Rights movement this began to change. The focus of the question, "What about the children?" moved from concerns about White society to concerns about the 'mixed race' children more directly. These concerns rest in the recognition of the racist society in which we live. People who ask this question often believe that these children will not be accepted into a society where racial hierarchies are so firmly established.

Even when one recognizes the social construction of race, it is hard to disentangle years of racist history from the ways in which one views and navigates racialized social relationships.

Representing the Legacy

Media representations of people of 'mixed race' reflect the historical trajectory described above, and it is against this historical backdrop that films dealing with interracial dating and marriage are situated. The legal prohibitions against interracial sexual relationships, as well as the social enforcement of these prohibitions including the violent lynchings of the early 1900s in the southern United States, frames the children of these relationships in a troubling light. This history of stigmatization, which has been so deeply rooted in society through legislation, now disproven scientific findings, and social and psychological studies has been represented in the media in various ways. From D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), the portrayal of interracial sexual relationships has been represented as immoral, often violent, and undoubtedly doomed. Despite provoking outrage and protest against its explicitly racist themes, *The Birth of a Nation* is one of the highest grossing films of all time. With this film, some of the most lasting African American stereotypical representations were established, one of which was the 'tragic mulatto' (Bogle,1973).

The mulatto character in cinema has often been portrayed as confused about his/her racial background, resulting in grim consequences. Early representations of the tragic mulatto character were incorporated into the plots of 'passing' films, where light-

skinned Blacks passed for White. Films that focus on passing, like *God's Stepchildren* (1938), *Showboat* (1951), and *Imitation of Life* (1959) portray the troubled stories of men and women who have tried to hide their imposed identities for ones they assert as their own.

In some situations, passing can be subversive, shaking the foundations in which racial, gendered and class distinctions are made; in others, it can act to reinforce these same foundations (Sanchez & Schlossberg, 2001). Although not articulated as such, these films that focus on passing are part of the historical stigmatization of people of 'mixed race,' a reflection of the one-drop of blood rule. The transgressions involved in passing are portrayed in film as duplicitous and deceitful, as an inward and outward lie of the worst kind, a betrayal to oneself, to one's family, and to society in general. For example, in *Imitation of Life*, Sarah Jane (Susan Kohner) plays the light-skinned daughter of dark-skinned Annie (Juanita Moore). From a young age, she expresses her desire to be White. She finds it hard to understand why she is seen by others as Black, when her skin is so pale. She decides her mother's presence is to blame and vows to leave her. In her adolescence she has a White boyfriend who finds out that she is passing for White, and in response he brutally beats her. As an adult she runs away from home and becomes an exotic dancer. When her mother dies before they can reconcile, she returns home, shattered by guilt for rejecting her mother and her 'true' Black identity. Passing films hinge on the idea that race is in one's blood, and as the rule of hypodescent prescribes, one drop of Black blood is enough to categorize one as Black.

One of the central issues in passing films is the 'mixed race' body itself and the ways in which it can be read. Passing films portray the 'mixed race' body as a site that

perplexes. Skin that is too pale or too dark, eyes that are too round or too narrow, a nose

that is too flat or too pronounced, in combinations that cause confusion marks the person

of 'mixed race' as different, or in Paul Gilroy's (2000) words as being "party to a great

betrayal" (p. 106). Compartmentalization of physical, racial characteristics leads to the

fragmentation of the 'mixed race' body. As Laurie Mengal (2001) writes: "Pathologies of

ill-fitting body parts and psychological deviancy have been attributed to the alleged

incompatibility of different racial types coursing throughout a fragmented body" (pp.

100-101). The 'mixed race' body as a signifier of interracial desire and sexuality mark it

as a site of confusion and mistrust. This ambiguity and confusion pointed towards the

'mixed race' body can result in violence, as seen in Sarah Jane's boyfriend's violent

reaction to her racial betrayal in *Imitation of Life*. In reality, crossing the racial lines in

the same manner could result in violent lynchings as carried out in the American South in

the later nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

In terms of physical appearance, the 'mixed race' body can occupy a space on the

margins, often times at the edge of multiples margins. Reading racial phenotypic features

is just one of the ways in which essentialization defines categories of identity. Skin

colour is one of the most obvious of these essential characteristics. As Jane Gaines (2001)

writes in her discussion of early race movies:

> [R]ace movies seemed encouraging and approving of white-likeness and in their
> light-skinned casting seemed to constitute one big advertisement for race
> effacement. Like the interracial sexual unions that have "automatically"
> assimilated peoples over time, race movies produced the "light brights" or light-
> skinned idea, a vision of both what the entire culture would look like if it were to
> become racially mixed through breeding and what it could look like if
> assimilation were taken at its word. Thus it is that the paradox of assimilation is
> dramatized in passing: the message to blacks was that you should become white-
> like in every way but not so white that you disappeared as a black (p. 134).

As Gaines notes, passing films and race films in general, involve a complex politics of casting. Casting Black characters with light-skinned 'mixed race' actors not only reinforces the one-drop of blood rule but also has implications for standards of beauty, where dominant notions of attractive physical characteristics prevail. In most cases, the character who *passes* is found out or discovered in a dramatic fashion and faces harsh emotional consequences. These consequences can include rejection by loved ones, as we see with the character, Julie (Ava Gardner) in *Showboat* (1951); or cruel physical punishment as with Sarah Jane in *Imitation of Life*; or even death, as with the title character in *Sapphire* (1959). By continuously framing these stories as tragic, rigid categories of racial identity are reinforced, and the multiracial child is buried further under layers of racial essentialism.

The submersion of the 'mixed race' body into rigid racial categories, as illustrated in passing films, perpetuates its invisibility. The metaphor of submersion is particularly apt here as the person of 'mixed race' is often portrayed as engulfed by emotional confusion, caused in part by a physical appearance that is ambiguous in terms of race. Although many films include a cast of actors and characters from many different racial backgrounds, they often avoid explicitly discussing race, projecting an artificial environment where racism has ceased to exist. As mentioned earlier, Shohat and Stam (1994) refer to these reflections in film as a form of a submerged ethnicity, where the issue of race, although muted or absent on the surface, exists in the undertones of cinema. Passing films are one genre in which the issue of race is brought to the forefront, however, 'mixed race' identities are still submerged under the pure racial categories prescribed in these films.

Aside from passing films, characters of 'mixed race' are rarely incorporated into mainstream films and when they are, they are still often portrayed as tragic. Chapter Three discusses these tragic representations further, using films like *Showboat*, *Dr. No*, and *Love is a Many-Splendored Thing* to discuss these stereotypical portrayals. Although mainstream Hollywood films are broaching the topic of interracial dating and relationships, they remain distinct from films that incorporate characters of 'mixed race.' In her article: "The Family Changes Colour: Interracial Families in Contemporary Hollywood Film," Nicola Evens writes:

> For mainstream films to be considering interracial relationships at all is a departure. When it comes to race Hollywood has toed the colour line, producing either all-black films, or white-cast films with token representation of African-Americans. The rare instances in which interracial relations occur are designed to be temporary, or to end tragically. Even the black and white buddy movie, the most popular format for including interraciality, typically suppresses or evades racial issues (p. 272).

In many films that focus on interracial sexual relationships, the potential future children loom as a threat, and are used in arguments against these relationships. In this way, the children of 'mixed race' are indirectly present, largely talked about but not to or with. This indirect presence of 'mixed race' characters reflects the historic invisibility of 'mixed race' individuals, while helping to solidify the outdated idea of 'pure' or 'undiluted' races. The history of identity imposition outlined in the first half of this chapter manifests itself in the ways in which children of 'mixed race' are often perceived, as confused and troubled. Both groundbreaking in different ways, *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* and *Jungle Fever* reflect these histories.

The two films, although both dealing with interracial relationships, take different approaches to the portrayal of both sexuality and family, issues central to the historical

context of legislated codes of racial mixing. In *Unlikely Couples: Movie Romance as Social Criticism*, Thomas Wartenberg (1999) writes:

> Where *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* was predicated on the possibility of a color-blind society, *Jungle Fever's* use of the forbidden fruit narrative makes sense precisely because it sees racism as intractable, impossible to eliminate. In the climate of late 1960s racial activism, *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* attempted to vindicate liberal integrationism by showing that white Americans could rise even to the challenge of intermarriage. At the beginning of the 1990s, *Jungle Fever* sees such faith as illusory: White America, it says, is and always will be racist (p. 143).

As Wartenberg writes, the social and political climate in which each film was made and released played a large role in both the themes and styles of the films.

In 1967, the Civil Rights movement made a crucial step forward. It was the year of *Loving v Virginia*, the landmark case that deemed anti-miscegenation laws unconstitutional. Richard Loving and Mildred Jeter were married in 1958. The couple drove from their home in rural Central Point, Virginia to Washington, D.C. to avoid the anti-miscegenation laws in place in Virginia. When they returned to Virginia, the couple was charged with unlawful cohabitation and for violating Virginia's Racial Integrity Act. They were found guilty and forced to move out of state (Pratt, 2003). The case eventually made it to the Supreme Court and in reading the decision, Mr. Chief Justice Warren (2003) said:

> The fact that Virginia prohibits only interracial marriages involving white persons demonstrates that the racial classifications must stand on their own justification, as measures designed to maintain White Supremacy. We have consistently denied the constitutionality of measures which restrict the rights and citizens on account of race. There can be no doubt that restricting the freedom to marry solely because of racial classifications violates the central meaning of the Equal Protection Clause. These convictions must be reversed. *It is so ordered* (p. 63).

There were sixteen other states at the time that had anti-miscegenation laws still on the law books. After the *Loving v. Virginia* case, they had to be amended or removed, and the Civil Rights movement could claim another victory.

The same year that marked this momentous change to legal anti-miscegenation history saw the release of Stanley Kramer's *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*. The film tells the story of Dr. John Prentice (Sidney Poitier) and Joanna Drayton (Katherine Houghton) as they tell their respective parents that they have fallen in love and plan to marry. John is a successful, honorable Black doctor. Joanna is the White daughter of Mr. Drayton (Spencer Tracy) and Christina Drayton (Katherine Hepburn). The film largely focuses on Mr. Drayton's reaction to his daughter's engagement. Mr. Drayton has always prided himself on his liberal values and on educating his daughter against race prejudice. But he finds himself torn on the subject of his daughter's impending wedding. John's parents (played by Roy Glen and Beah Richards) fly into San Francisco to meet their new future daughter-in-law and are shocked to meet the White Joanna and her White family. John's father is also against the relationship and both fathers struggle with how to persuade their children not to get married.

Guess Who's Coming to Dinner begins with a shot of an airplane landing in San Francisco. In the background, one hears Jacqueline Fontaine's voice singing *The Glory of Love*.

> You've got to give a little, take a little and let your poor heart break a little.
> That's the story of, that's the glory of love.
> As long as there's the two of us, we've got the world and all it's charms.
> And when the world is through with us, we've got each other's arms.

Because compromise is seen as one of the central ways in which racial conflicts can be resolved, the metaphor of giving and taking is seen throughout the film. However, by

focusing on the giving and taking of this compromise, the history of injustices and prejudices is made a secondary issue, one that is relatively easily eluded in the film. Both families are making compromises, but the power to decide is ultimately given to the White patriarchal figure of Mathew Drayton.

In the opening sequences, the happy couple can be seen kissing in the rearview mirror of a taxicab as the indifferent driver takes John and his fiancée, Joanna to Joanna's family home. This mediated introduction, viewed through the reflection in the mirror, to the couples' physical intimacy in their kiss sets the tone for the rest of the film in terms of the couples' sexual relationship (Wartenberg, 1999). This illustrates how anxieties about interracial relationships were in part fueled by concerns about interracial sex and hence interracial reproduction. Joanna later explains to her relieved-looking mother that the couple has not yet had sex. The issue of sexuality is kept at arm's length, a reflection of the social mores of the period as well as an indication of the taboo nature of interracial sexuality.

The central focus of much of the film is on Joanna's father's concerns and rationalizations about his daughter's involvement in an interracial relationship. Matthew Drayton is a publisher who has a history of espousing liberal views and values to his family, and finds himself challenged by his daughter's new relationship and her intention to marry. In one scene, Joanna's mother, Christina, lectures her husband on the lessons they taught Joanna as a child, indirectly calling her husband a hypocrite.

> We've told her it was wrong to believe that the white people were somehow essentially superior to the black people, or the brown or the red or the yellow ones for that matter. People who thought that way were wrong to think that way, sometimes hateful, usually stupid, but always wrong. That's what we said and when we said it, we did not add "but don't ever fall in love with a coloured man."

In this scene, Christina is the voice of liberal reason while her husband, although not overtly racist, expresses his concern about the kind of life his daughter could have with a Black man. After having his secretary do a background check on Dr. Prentice, he finds that Dr. Prentice is a much respected, intelligent doctor whose work Mr. Drayton deems noble and worthy. At this point, it does not sway his decision about forbidding the marriage. However, one could speculate that it would have been a very different film if Dr. Prentice were not a respected doctor. As Stam and Spence (1999) write, "*Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (directed by Stanley Kramer), as its title suggests, invites an elite black into the club of the truly human, but always on white terms" (p. 241).

Mr. Prentice, John's father, also expresses concern about his son's choice for a future bride. Both mothers are more accepting of the relationship, emphasizing the importance of romantic love, reminiscing about their own respective courtships. But by far the character most vocally and bluntly against this relationship is Tilly (played by Isabel Sanford), the Drayton family's Black housekeeper. While watching the couple interact on the outdoor patio, she says: "Civil rights is one thing. This here is something else." And later: "I don't want to see a member of my own race getting above himself."

It's true that there has been opposition to interracial relationships from all sides of the colour line, but by attributing the most racist comments and views to Tilly, the White liberal can pat himself/herself on the back as the more progressive, while portraying the person of colour as the outright racist. In reality, as evidenced by horrific lynchings in the United States in the late 19th and early 20th century, it has largely been Whites who have brutally reacted with violence to these unions (Holden-Smith, 2003). In comparison to Tilly, the jovial Monsignor Ryan, an old family friend expresses nothing but delight at

the mention of the expected nuptials. Although he initially expresses some surprise about

the relationship, mostly because it was so sudden, he is quick to embrace it. This is

particularly ironic given the role of the church in perpetuating the stereotype of the

primitive Other. Since the 1800s, Christian theology has been exploited in order to

support ideas of White Supremacy and brutal colonial rule (Young, 1995). Monsignor

Ryan's character is one instance of the ways in which history is blanched in the attempt

to portray an ethnic utopia on screen.

The discussion moves specifically to 'mixed race' children when Mr. Drayton

asks Dr. Prentice about his future plans. The two men sit on the Drayton family terrace

and look out over the San Francisco skyline while Joanna and her mother get ready for

dinner upstairs. They have been discussing work, music, family, when Mr. Drayton face

suddenly becomes serious.

> Mr. Drayton: "Have you given any thought to the problems your children are going to have?
>
> Dr. Prentice: "Yes, and they'll have some. And we'll have the children. Otherwise I don't know what you'd call it but you couldn't call it a marriage."
>
> Mr. Drayton: "Is that the way Joey [Joanna] feels?"
>
> Dr. Prentice: "She feels that every single one of our children will be the president of the United States and they'll all have colorful administrations."

Mr. Drayton looks incredulously at Dr. Prentice.

> Dr. Prentice: "Well, you made her Mr. Drayton. I just met her in Hawaii."
>
> Mr. Drayton: "How do you feel about that problem?"
>
> Dr. Prentice: "Frankly, I think your daughter is a bit optimistic. I'd settle for secretary of state."

Both Mr. Drayton and Dr. Prentice recognize that the couple's 'mixed race' children would face particular problems and hardships. Neither can offer any solutions, but Dr. Prentice's attitude suggests that the possibility of those hardships is not enough to dissuade the couple from their relationship or having children. Mr. Drayton is more skeptical. In this scene, we see that the aversion to this interracial relationship is due, at least in part, to an aversion to interracial reproduction.

Although *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* tried to break stereotypes about interracial relationships, in some ways it acted to strengthen them. African Americans were expected to excel in a society that has been acting against them for centuries, and only those few who did excel would be accepted into White circles of privilege. The advancements made in the quest for racial equality during the civil rights movement manifested itself in the optimism seen in the concluding scenes of *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, where Mr. Drayton accepts his future son in law into the family. He preaches:

> But you do know, I'm sure you know, what you're up against. There will be a 100 million people right here in this country who will be shocked and offended and appalled by the two of you…You can try to ignore those people, or you can feel sorry for them and for their prejudices and their bigotry and their blind hatred and stupid fears, but where necessary you'll just have to cling tight to each other and say, "screw all those people."

Mr. Drayton proselytizes both to his guests and to the audience. The film projects the possibility of an ethnic utopia, where the elite Blacks mix with the elite Whites. This is an example of what Shohat and Stam (1994) call a "consolatory representation" where racial harmony is only possible onscreen. They elaborate: "The challenge, however, is to translate the utopian energies behind these consolatory representations of ethnic harmony into the necessary mobilization for structural change that alone can make racial equality a

quotidian reality" (p. 236). The quotidian reality in 1967 was very different from what was being shown onscreen.

Because the central focus of the film is on the reaction of Johanna's family, the people with the ability to right the past are again the White elite and powerful. *Jungle Fever*, on the other hand, with its harsh realism is used to focus on the prejudices and violence that these attitudes have provoked. It is far less optimistic, portraying a sexual relationship that causes an uproar in the lives of the main characters and their two communities. The upheaval is essentially resolved when that relationship ends, and the two lovers accept that their relationship could never work.

In comparison to *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, *Jungle Fever*, released in 1991, was made in a very different political and social climate. Only one year before the Rodney King riots in Los Angeles, *Jungle Fever* speaks about interracial relationships and racial violence with a pessimism that is characteristic of many Spike Lee films. Whereas *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* keeps the issue of interracial sexuality at bay, Lee brings it to the forefront as an integral aspect to the development of the story and characters. In marked difference to the lighthearted opening sequences of *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, *Jungle Fever* begins with Stevie Wonder's song of the same title, quickly introducing some of the major themes of the film.

> I've got jungle fever, she's got jungle fever
> We've got jungle fever, we're in love
> She's gone Black-boy crazy, I've gone White-girl hazy
> Ain't no thinking maybe, we're in love
>
> She can't love me, I can't love her
> Cause they say we're the wrong color
> Staring, gloating, laughing, looking
> Like we've done something wrong

In contrast to the themes of romance and compromise in the opening sequences and song choice in *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, *Jungle Fever* begins by introducing both sexuality and racism in the first few moments of the film. As Stevie Wonder sings, the credits are displayed on screen in the form of street signs. Along with the names of the cast and crew, other benign street signs are displayed like "No Standing" and "Permit Only." These are interspersed with more noxious signs, like "No Niggers" and "Harlem: A Guinea Free Zone." Because they are shown in the form of unassuming and non-threatening street signs, they are integrated as simply a part of daily life.

In commenting on *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, Spike Lee has said that the film "was white liberal b.s.". But he also recognized that "You have to look at it in the context of when [*Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*] came out. This film came out in the sixties, during the whole civil rights movement. At that time, it was a great advance for black people in the cinema" (qtd. in Mitchell, 2002, p. 44). Indeed the climate into which *Jungle Fever* was released was very different. The strides that had been made in the civil rights movements in the 1950s and 1960s, although extremely significant and with far-reaching consequences, seemed in the past. Only one year after *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* was released, Dr. Martin Luther King was assassinated; and with the death of a great leader, the Civil Rights movement lost some of its momentum, and moved from a focus on civil rights to black power (Cashman, 1991). After the turbulent 70s, the 80s saw a rise in political conservatism. Under the presidency of Ronald Reagan from 1981-1989, social programs benefiting the poorest in the nation were cut back. It was against the backdrop of this political conservatism, a migration of middle class Whites out of

inner cities and into the suburbs, debates about affirmative action, and a rising concern

about 'reverse discrimination' that *Jungle Fever* was released.

Even though anti-miscegenation laws were stricken from American law books in

1967, people in interracial relationships continued to be stigmatized and alienated from

their families and/or communities. *Jungle Fever* portrays this complex form of alienation

by following the story of two lovers, Flipper Purify (Wesley Snipes) and Angie Tucci

(Annabella Sciorra). The film is rich in complex characters and subplots and in order to

contain the discussion of the multifaceted and varied issues explored in *Jungle Fever*,

I've chosen to focus on a few scenes in particular. These scenes best show how racialized

discourses are apparent in representations of interracial couples, and how they are

manifested in filmic discussions about the prospect of 'mixed race' children.

Flipper Purify is a successful African American architect who lives in Harlem

with his wife, Drew (Lonette McKee), and daughter, Ming (Veronica Timbers). Angie

Tucci is an Italian American secretary who has just started working for Flipper. After

several shared dinners at the office, Flipper and Angie begin their affair in a scene that is

sexually explicit and racy. The repercussions of their affair are fast and devastating.

When Flipper's wife, Drew finds out about her husband's infidelity, she promptly throws

his clothes and belongings out of their apartment window. In response to Flipper's

desperate yells of "I can explain," she screams, "Explain a fucking White bitch?!" The

fact that his mistress is White is doubly insulting to Drew, who is herself 'mixed race'

Black and White, although she identifies as Black. As humiliating as this public scene is

for Flipper, Angie faces more violent consequences. Her father brutally beats her while

screaming, "I didn't raise you to be with no nigger. I'd rather you be a mass murderer or

a child molester than to fuck a black nigger." In response to their families' reactions,

Angie and Flipper leave their homes and move in together.

In the emotionally charged scene where Flipper attempts to reconcile with his

wife by bringing flowers to her workplace, the two begin to discuss the implications of

Flipper's affair in terms of the colour line.

> Drew: "Well, I guess I just wasn't light enough for you, Flipper. You had to eventually go get yourself a White girl didn't you?...I told you what happened to me when I was growing up. I've explained to you. I poured my heart out. I told you how they called me high yellow, yellow bitch, white honkey, honkey white, White nigger, nigger white, octoroon, quadroon, half-breed, mongrel..."

And a few moments later:

> Drew: "Don't you know white people hate Black people because they're not Black. They can't relate."
>
> Flipper: "Look, Drew. Did your White father hate your Black mother?"
>
> Drew: "Are you talking about my family?"
>
> Flipper: "See this is what I'm saying to you: color's got you fucked up too."
>
> Drew: "Maybe it has, maybe it has. Maybe that's why this hurts me so much."

Drew voices one of the ironies of racial logic. Because of the one-drop blood of

rule, Drew identifies as Black. But she was still teased because of her racial background,

not fully accepted by either side, accused of receiving special treatment, included in

White privilege, while still being subjected to racial slurs and racism against African

Americans. The politics of skin colour, not just in terms of Black and White but also in

terms of light-skin Black and dark-skin Black are apparent throughout the film. At the

end of the scene, Drew stands her ground and Flipper returns to Angie and their new

apartment.

In both dialogue and style, *Jungle Fever* is blunt. The film doesn't dance around

the issue of sexuality and racism and makes their link explicit, invoking a forbidden fruit

narrative. Racial violence is also one of the film's key issues. In one scene, Angie and

Flipper playfully wrestle outside their apartment. The police pull up to the scene in a

dramatic fashion, their proverbial guns blazing. They claim to have received a call that an

African American man was attempting to rape a White woman. Violent hypersexuality

has often been attributed to Black men and many violent lynchings were perpetrated

under the guise of protecting White womanhood (Cashman, 1991).

In one of the final scenes between Angie and Flipper, they discuss the possibility

of children.

Angie asks: "What about children?" to which Flipper responds: "No, no, no,
that's not going to happen."

Flipper: "No half Black, half White babies for me. No.

Angie: "Aren't Drew and Vera mulattos? Their skin is lighter than mine."

Flipper: "No octoroon, quadroon, mulatto babies. No."

Angie: "Don't you have a daughter who's got White blood in her?"

Flipper: "Yah, so what? At least in my eyes, Drew and Ming are Black. They look
Black, they act Black, so they are Black. And it's hard just being Black out here.
A lot of times the mixed kids they come out all mixed up, a bunch of mixed nuts."

Angie: "You know you're not that much different from my family."

Flipper: "Well your family is racist."

Angie: "What is this stuff you're talking now?"

Angie points out one of the ironies of race theory by noting that Drew and Vera, who

both identify as Black, have lighter skin than her. Throughout the film, Angie is

continuously referred to as White by the other characters: "White lady," "White bitch," etc. This is ironic given that Italian American immigrants have been historically racialized as ethnic and non-White. In "Grey Shades, Black Tones: Italian Americans, Race and Racism in American Film," Canade Sautman (2002) interrogates the ways in which Whiteness has been inscribed on the Italian American body, highlighting the historical newness of this racial conception. He writes that when Italian immigrants first starting coming to America in large numbers in the early 1900s, they "were not considered 'really' white, and if not actually black, shaded to black" (p. 23). Sautman goes on to discuss Spike Lee's representation of Italian Americans in films like *Do the Right Thing* (1989), *Summer of Sam* (1998), and *Jungle Fever* writing that the director aims to remind audiences about the "dubious whiteness of Italians…and their problematic inscription in the ideology of whiteness" (p. 23). By extension, Lee is questioning the concept of Whiteness in general as a social construction, and the scale on which it exists. In *Jungle Fever*, Italian Americans are conceptualized as White because they are interacting with African Americans.

Flipper's attitude in the above scene is one of the legacies of the rule of hypodescent. His aversion to 'mixed race' children is one way in which the ideologies of anti-miscegenation laws have become internalized. Even though his wife is 'mixed race,' he believes that 'mixed race' children are "mixed up," not quite accepted, and confused. Flipper recognizes that it is not skin colour alone that designates one's race, because it's not just that his wife and daughter look Black (although Angie questions this), he states that they "act Black" as well and so "are Black." To Angie, his remarks remind her of her own family's racism. After this scene, Flipper wakes up to find that Angie has left him

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and he is alone in the apartment. In the end, Angie returns to her family in Bensonhurst and Flipper returns to Harlem, back to their respective segregated communities.

The final scenes in both *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* and *Jungle Fever* each encapsulate their starkly different representations of race relations. The last scene in *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* takes place after Matthew Drayton decides to allow his daughter's marriage. The film ends with the two families sitting down to an amiable dinner, the situation neatly resolved. In stark contrast, *Jungle Fever* ends with Flipper being approached by a young Black girl who propositions him in exchange for money. The final scene is a close-up on Flipper Purify as he suddenly clutches the girl and screams an anguished and drawn out, "No," into the sky. The scream is in response to the problems he sees in his community: the drugs, the exploitation of young, Black women, racist persecution from the police, and public policy that doesn't help the people most in need. It can be seen as a cry of helplessness, or one of strength and resistance. This final scream is left for the viewer to interpret, hanging in the air like a challenge.

It is important to recognize that it is not solely race that is constructed as categorical, and that gender, class, and sexuality also play roles in the identities of the characters discussed in this chapter. These aspects of identity do not exist independently from each other and although I have chosen to focus on issues of race in this thesis, other dimensions of identity should be interrogated as well in filmic representations (for example, in the work of Liesbet Van Zoonen, 1994 and Richard Dyer, 1984). In both *Jungle Fever* and *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, it is Black men and White women who are involved in the primary interracial relationships. This is due in part to the importance placed on issues of purity and White womanhood, as well as the stereotype of

the Black male as sexually aggressive. This is a pattern seen in other films involving interracial relationships of different racial backgrounds including older films like *The Bitter Tea of General Yen* (1933), and more recently, *East is East* (1999), where the man is the Other race, and the female love interest is White.

Through indirect presence in film, people of 'mixed race' are further denied the ability of being seen and heard. This indirect presence is firmly rooted in a history of legal and social alienation, where people of 'mixed race' were submerged in rigid categories of identity. The character of Drew in *Jungle Fever* is particularly interesting in this context because her struggle with trying to fit into these discreet categories is voiced through her discussions with Flipper and her friends who try to lend support as her marriage is breaks apart. Even though she identifies as African American, she voices the difficulties and problems with identifying as wholly one race.

In the following chapter, I will look at filmic reflections of people of 'mixed race' through stereotypical representations. In films like *Dr. No* (1963) and *Showboat*, a 'mixed race' identity is asserted. Unfortunately, this assertion is contextualized in such a way as to highlight the troubled lives of the person of 'mixed race.' These troubling representations are used as a platform to explore the issues of belonging and identity formation in a 'mixed race' context, interrogating sociological and psychological studies of the 1900s that focused on people of 'mixed race.' At a time when representations of people of 'mixed race' are relatively rare, the abundance of stereotypical characters speaks volumes about how people of 'mixed race' have been characterized by dominant discourses of race as represented in film.

Chapter Three

Stereotypical Representations: Confused Villains and Lost Martyrs

In chapter two, I focused on the 'missing' biracial child, using scenes that focused on the discussion of 'mixed race' children in relation to interracial relationships as a platform to discuss legal and social impositions of pure racial categories. The films analyzed, *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* and *Jungle Fever*, reflected the belief that children of interracial relationships will face unavoidable hardships, leading to a troubled life. In *Jungle Fever* in particular, we saw that storylines incorporating 'mixed race' characters bring several complex issues to the forefront. The 'mixed race' character, Drew, although self-identified as African American, raises some of the ironies and complexities of 'mixed race' identity formation and issues of belonging.

It is this thread that I would like to continue in Chapter Three. In this chapter, I look at several films that incorporate examples of these troubled 'mixed race' characters. *Showboat* (1951) and *Dr. No* (1963) both incorporate characters that are explicitly of 'mixed race,' and in each case, the characters reflect the common sense and sociological views of 'mixed race' maladjustment, a view that has dominated 'mixed race' discourses for decades. Two films that lend further support are *Love is a Many-Spendored Thing* (1955) and the more recent film, *Kill Bill Volume 1* (2003). The aim of this chapter is to examine the presence of people of 'mixed race' in film through stereotypical representations, moving the analysis forward from indirect presence in film to presence through stereotypical portrayals. In these films, the person of 'mixed race' is represented

as inherently villainous or destined for martyrdom, where the straddling of racial borders is situated as a cause of confusion, disorder, and/or deviancy.

The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section is devoted to an exploration of the origins and processes of stereotyping. In order to understand the motivations, implications, and strategies involved in stereotypical representation, it is first necessary to explore the nature of stereotypes and stereotyping in general. The second section looks more specifically at stereotypes of people of 'mixed race' by examining the research conducted in psychology and sociology regarding identity formation in children of 'mixed race.' Where legal history was a central point of interest in the social background to the films explored in Chapter Two, this section of Chapter Three uses the research done in psychological and sociological studies conducted in the early to mid 1900s as one context from which to view films that incorporate 'mixed race' stereotypes. The final section will begin with a discussion of some of the merits and difficulties involved in academic explorations of stereotypical representations in film. The remainder of the chapter will analyze the four films mentioned above as examples of stereotypical reflections of dominant discourses surrounding miscegenation and people of 'mixed race.'

Stereotypes as Communication

The issue of stereotypes, their origins, their influences, and their meanings are contentious. The word itself originates in the field of typography, where 'stereotype' referred to "text cast into rigid form for the purposes of repetitive use" (Pickering, 2001, p. 9). Instead of repeatedly typing out certain often used phrases, the typographers would

call upon his store of these stereotypes to save time and energy. Through the nineteenth

century, its meaning and associations evolved into something more abstract. Walter

Lippmann (1922) is credited with associating the term with its present meaning, equating

stereotypes to "pictures in our heads," or ideas we call upon when interpreting particular

human characteristics, like skin colour. Lippmann posited several reasons why people

rely on stereotypes, one of which was simple efficiency. But he argues that this desire for

efficiency was underwritten by a more powerful desire, that of maintaining the status quo

and existing social hierarchies. He writes:

> A pattern of stereotypes is not neutral. It is not merely a way of substituting order
> for the great blooming, buzzing confusion of reality. It is not merely a short cut. It
> is all these things and something more. It is the guarantee of our self-respect; it is
> the projection upon the world of our own sense of our own value, our own
> position and our own rights. The stereotypes are, therefore, highly charged with
> the feelings that are attached to them. They are the fortress of our tradition, and
> behind its defenses we can continue to feel ourselves safe in the position we
> occupy (p. 96).

Lippmann recognized that stereotypes were far from impartial, and they provided one

means of maintaining the safety of one's societal position. Although stereotypes may be

protean in nature (Gilman, 1985), they impose a sense of stability to personality traits

correlated with physical characteristics that truly have no order. These stereotypes have

proven to be as rigid as the original print casts used by typographers. (Please note that for

the purposes of this thesis, I am focusing specifically on racial stereotypes. For views on

other types of stereotypes, see Genevieve Lloyd, 1993, Van Zoonen, 1994, or Stangor,

2000.)

In the context of the study of filmic representations, the textual origins of the

word 'stereotype' is particularly fitting. It is by looking at texts (where text is understood

in a broad sense that includes film, magazines, advertisements, etc.) that stereotypes

move from the abstract to the more concrete. As Sander Gilman (1985) writes in

Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race, and Madness: "[I]t is within

texts that we can best examine our representations of the world through our articulation

of what seems, on the most superficial level, the rigid structures of the stereotype" (p.

16). As Gilman later notes, every society in every time has had stereotypes, and these

stereotypes have been reflected in various forms of media. Long before there was a word

for it, the act of overgeneralizing about a given group of people based on their physical

characteristics has acted as a powerful form of communication.

Despite the large amounts of quantitative and qualitative research done in the

area, there is still considerable debate about the nature of stereotypes (Berg, 2002). Some

theorists argue that stereotypes fill a natural need for order and cannot be eradicated (see

Stangor, 2000). Others argue that although categorization is natural and necessary,

stereotyping is not (Lester, 1996). Stereotypes, or more specifically stereotyping, for it is

the active and repetitive deed of stereotyping that is important in this context, is a

powerful form of communication. This communication is fundamentally rooted, whether

consciously or unconsciously, in structures of power. Stereotypes help maintain the status

quo, allowing those in power to remain in power, and to keep those lacking power from

rectifying this imbalance.

Stereotyping functions on two levels: mental or psychological, and physical or

practical. Psychologically, stereotypes act as a mental shortcut, saving valuable time and

energy in organizing one's environment, a kind of economy of the mind. Psychologists

hypothesize that stereotyping stems from a natural tendency to categorize one's

environment. To some extent, it is necessary for people to categorize aspects of the

world, to create mental short-cuts in order to organize their environment into a meaningful order or structure. If each time we saw an object or animal and had to assess and reassess its characteristics in order to know what its use, value, purpose, or relationship to oneself it had, daily life would be exhausting. Categorization fulfills a basic need for order and stereotypes stem from this need to categorize (Pickering, 2001). Stereotypes, however, differ from simple categorization because they are value-laden; stereotypes are saturated with positive and negative connotations. (Although some theorists would argue that all stereotypes are inherently negative. See Wu, 2002.)

Practically, stereotypes allow for certain hierarchies of power to remain stable, thus benefiting a select few. These benefits may be both psychological and economic. By maintaining the status quo, those in power re-affirm that they *deserve* to be in power while reaping the financial benefits from that power. In this case, those people in power are generally White, upper class males. These benefits may be in the form of access to a cheap labour pool, better education, and more career choices. Conversely, those people who are stereotyped as irresponsible, unintelligent, and/or primitive, are treated accordingly and are denied access to jobs or promotions, education, etc. The issue of power is crucial in any discussion of stereotypes. As Michael Pickering (2001) explains in *Stereotyping*:

> Stereotyping imparts a sense of fixedness to the homogenized images it disseminates. It attempts to establish an attributed characteristic as natural and given in ways inseparable from the relations of power and domination through which it operates. If a social group or category is stereotyped as inherently lazy, stupid, childish or dishonest, the ascription acts not only as a marker of deviancy, making it marginal to the moral order, but also as a revalidation of that which it is measured against and found wanting. This twofold movement is integral to the ways in which stereotypes function as a form of social control (p. 5).

Stereotypes are used in order to make judgments about a person's character based on

superficial traits that logically have no bearing on one's personality or integrity. How

then do people make the cognitive leap from categories to stereotypes? In his work on

Latino representations in film, Charles Ramirez Berg (2002) addresses this question. He

writes:

> I believe two crucial elements need to be added to plain category-making [to
> advance them to stereotypes]. One is ethnocentrism, classically defined as the
> "view of things in which one's own group is the center of everything, and all
> others are scaled or rated with reference to it." Adhering to the circular logic of
> stereotyping, the outgroup ("Them") is compared to the standard defined by the
> in-group ("Us"). By this measure, and not surprisingly, "They" are always
> incomplete and imperfect. The second necessary ingredient that transforms
> neutral categorization into discriminatory practice is prejudice: judging Others as
> innately inferior based on ethnocentrically determined difference (pp. 14-15).

As Berg writes, ethnocentrism and prejudice are in turn supported by systems that

perpetuate in-group and out-group distinctions. Legal history (as discussed in Chapter

Two) has shown us how laws regarding immigration, school segregation, voting rights,

and rules about whom one can marry have all, at one time or another, acted to preserve

the divisions of people into distinct in and out groups based on categories of race, gender,

and/or sexuality. Stereotypes support these systems of power and imbalance.

It is important to note that there is a distinction between personal in and out

groups and collective or societal in and out-groups. The difference between the two is

crucial, particularly when studying stereotypical representations in the media. For

example, one might belong to a particular racial group, like African American. Perhaps

this person lives in an area where she is surrounded by people of the same race and feels

part of this in-group. Then, she goes to see a film, where the in-group on screen is clearly

Anglo American, and the out-group is her own racial group. She may recognize her place

in the larger American context as an outsider, and become aware of what Du Bois and

Fanon call "double consciousness" (as discussed in Rony, 1996). She becomes acutely

aware not only of her self-perception but also of the ways in which others may perceive

her, as Other. (This of course is not the only possible reaction to the film as there are

many ways in which one can read a film and place oneself in relation to it.) In *Black Skin,*

White Masks, Fanon (1967) writes about his experience of sitting in a darkened theatre,

where he waits to see his own image reflected back to him. He explains:

> I cannot go to a film without seeing myself. I wait for me. In the interval, just
> before the film starts, I wait for me. The people in the theatre are watching me,
> examining me, waiting for me. A Negro groom is going to appear. My heart
> makes my head swim (p. 140).

Fanon interrogates how Black spectators relate to the characters they see on screen. In the

case of colonialist adventure films like the Tarzan series, who can and does the Black

spectator relate to: the gallant explorer or the primitive savage? (as discussed in Rony,

1996). The process of double-consciousness is a continuous Othering of the self. It

recognizes the power of the gaze, distinguishing one's own self from the image that

others project. As Charles Taylor (1992) writes concerning the politics of recognition:

> The thesis is that our identity is partly shaped by recognition of others, and so a
> person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or
> society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or
> contemptible picture of themselves. Nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict
> harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and
> reduced mode of being (p. 25).

How then does recognition, nonrecognition and misrecognition affect people of 'mixed

race'? With so little representation in film, the person of 'mixed race' is made invisible.

In cases where characters of 'mixed race' are present in film, they are often represented

in stereotypical ways, further marginalizing the person of 'mixed race.'

It is also important to understand that all racial stereotypes do not exist on an even plain, that stereotypes themselves are organized hierarchically. As Shohat and Stam write in *Unthinking Eurocentrism*, "While all negative stereotypes are hurtful, they do not all exercise the same power in the world" (p. 183). The effects of stereotyping on a certain group may range from feeling uncomfortable to provoking violence. In this chapter, I am discussing the representations of people of 'mixed race' from various backgrounds. My intent is not to flatten these representations and their histories into one argument, but rather to contextualize each one and recognize the similarities that exist in the ways in which 'mixed race' people have been historically imagined.

The emergence of theories of stereotyping logically coincided with a monumental change occurring in the way in which race theory was articulated. The 1900s saw a shift in biological to cultural conceptions of race. Academic interests in racial hybridity reflected this change. In the early 1900s, the anxieties caused by the person of 'mixed race,' based on fears regarding issues of racial and sexual purity, prompted new interest in the disciplines of psychology and sociology. Where previous academic interest resided in the study of biological hybridity and 'mixed race,' the early 1900s saw a shift in academic interest to the social sciences. This shift was a reflection of a larger transformation that occurred in the way in which race was understood. As more and more so-called scientific studies were recognized as strongly ethnocentrically biased, racial theories that had allowed for the injustices of slavery, segregation, and discrimination were being challenged (Furedi, 2001). The emerging field of genetics shone new light onto the erroneous beliefs about distinct human races. Consequently, the scholars in the social sciences took a renewed interest in the ways in which people were categorized into

these racial groups. For if observable racial differences weren't based on genetic or biological factors, then where did these differences (in IQ, athleticism, sociability etc.) arise? Social scientists posited that they were based on cultural differences, such as family life, educational practices, and mental and social development, hence moving racial theory away from the sciences and into the realm of psychological and sociological inquiry. The importance of personality testing and theories about identity formation in the mid 1900s occupies an essential position in the historical constructions of the person of 'mixed race.'

Sociological and Psychological Constructions of 'Mixed Race' Identities

In the past, people of 'mixed race' have captivated scientists concerned with biological aspects of race mixing. They have been used in arguments to support prevalent race theories in the 1800s including biological arguments about infertility, lower IQs, and increased sexuality. The turn of the century saw a surge in scientific studies within the doomed field of eugenics, that flawed branch of science that attempted to take the 'natural' out of natural selection. Eugenicists, such as the movement's founder, Sir Francis Galton, argued vehemently against "hybrid degeneration" (Tizard & Pheonix 1993, p. 20). But as the foundation of eugenics was shown to be flawed and the movement began to fall out of fashion, particularly after the horrors of the holocaust came to light, race theory moved from the sciences to the humanities.

The person of 'mixed race' brought to light several anxieties that permeated American society. Concerns about both race and sexuality became encapsulated by the

hypothesis that the person of 'mixed race' occupied a marginal space. With an influx of immigrants in the United States, more attention was paid to the transgression of borders (whether they were physical, cultural, religious, sexual, or racial) and academic interest in these border crossers grew (see Sanchez & Schlossberg, 2001). Marginal spaces, occupied by those who didn't or couldn't conform to cultural norms aroused apprehension from those who feared these new marginal men would challenge the existing hierarchies of power. As the scientific support for nineteenth century race theory eroded, White privilege became more and more precarious (Furedi, 2001).

The children of interracial relationships were of particular interest for psychologists and sociologists as they occupied one such marginal space, where several emerging sociological theories could be explored. One theory involved the concept of the marginal man, where it was hypothesized that his precarious stance along cultural or racial borders could lead to confusion and doubt. This uncertainty could then lead to troubling manifestations like low self-esteem and delinquency (Stonequist, 1937). Theories that linked marginality and delinquency fueled a surge in studies that focused on interviews with children of 'mixed race' and people in their immediate environment such as parents, friends, and teachers.

One influential work of this time was *The Marginal Man*, written by sociologist Everett Stonequist (1937). Stonequist wrote specifically about the personality traits, particularly the problematic ones, that people who straddled cultural and racial borders exhibited. He believed that the person of 'mixed race' was the prototypical marginal man and although Stonequist was at times sympathetic to the subjects in his book, he

concluded that marginal men would be unavoidably psychologically troubled. He

elaborates:

> The marginal situation produces excessive self-consciousness and race-
> consciousness. The individual is conscious of his anomalous position between the
> two cultures and his attention is repeatedly focused upon each group attitude and
> his relationship to it. This continual calling in question of his racial status
> naturally turns his attention upon himself to an excessive degree. He becomes a
> problem to himself and supersensitive about his racial connections. He may wish
> that he belonged to some other race; and may, by a kind of psychological
> introjection, despise himself as the dominant race despises him (p. 148).

Stonequist goes on to talk about problems such as inferiority complexes and excessive

egocentrism. He attributes these problems to the marginal man himself, and although he

recounts troubling environmental factors that may have contributed to these

psychological difficulties, Stonequist places blame squarely on the shoulders of the

marginal man. He thus avoids discussing the violent colonial acts, like rape and forced

segregation, and race discrimination, in relation to employment or education options, that

may have acted as the source of these problems (Furedi, 2001).

As the social position of new immigrants and of the African American population

changed and improved, people in positions of power became anxious about the future of

White privilege and White racial purity. Part of this anxiety derived from the partial

erasure of physical boundaries by people of 'mixed race.' As Anne Wilson (1987) writes:

"Where two groups are hierarchically arranged and where physical differences are used

as a 'marker' to delineate the boundary, the group which has greater access to privilege

and reward will fight hard to preserve the status quo" (p. 7). These markers include skin

colour, hair colour and texture, eye shape, etc. As more and more of these physical

boundaries were crossed, the more rigidly the rule of hypodescent was imposed. For

example, there were several legal cases in the American south in the late 1800s where the

court was given the power to decide who could claim what racial identity. People who were accused of 'passing' for White were brought to court where the judge decided who was White and who was Black depending not on their phenotypic appearance, but on a careful examination of their racial ancestry (Gross, 2003). Because of 'mixed race' phenotypic racial ambiguity, the courts had to enforce the rule of hypodescent with more vigilance.

Some of the first sociological studies to focus on developmental differences between different races found results that seemed to support theories against race mixing. In his essay, "How Sociology Imagined Mixed Race," Frank Furedi (2001) examines the sociological research relating to 'mixed race' identity formation and social adjustment in the early to mid 1900s. He found that, "A review of the literature on the theme of maladjustment indicates that it soon turned into a sociological condemnation of race mixing. The tendency to psychologise dissent by labeling it as maladjustment dominated the literature" (p. 30). Furedi found the literature overwhelmed with theories about "moral turmoil," confusion, and maladjustment (p. 33).

As marginality became associated with a state of mind, psychologists became more involved in the study of 'mixed race' people, particularly 'mixed race' children. Like sociological research, psychological studies also focused on personality traits. In addition, they generally concentrated on three crucial processes during childhood: racial awareness, racial preference, and racial identification. Psychological studies about racial differences were nothing new, but 'mixed race' children were largely absent from the literature, or only mentioned as a footnote, until the mid-1950s (Gunthorpe, 1998). But as the 'mixed race' population grew in both the United States and in Britain,

psychologists began to take notice. Although the studies conducted had mostly focused

on people of mixed Black/White descent, the psychologists often broadened their

findings to apply to racial mixings in general.

Like sociological studies, psychological studies during this period found higher

levels of maladjustment than in the control groups used. However, these studies often

focused on children who had already been recognized as 'problem children' (Tizard &

Phoenix, 1993). Consequently, psychologists in later studies (in the 1970s and 80s)

discovered these results to be largely unfounded. Children of 'mixed race' showed no

major differences from monoracials in personality traits. In *Mixed Race Children: A*

Study of Identity, Anne Wilson (1987) conducted a study of identity formation in 'mixed

race' children in greater London. In her introduction, she surveys earlier studies of

'mixed identity' in children where she discusses common-sense views about race mixing.

She writes:

> Slowly but surely, biological arguments [prevalent during the second half of the
> twentieth century] against miscegenation were discredited, and the idea that
> black/white unions produced genetically inferior children was abandoned, at least
> by the scientific community. In its place, however, came the 'compassionate
> common-sense' approach, which justified disapproval of intermarriage on the
> grounds of the 'suffering of the children.' It is all very well, went this argument,
> when a couple from different races choose to marry – but what about the
> children? Mixed race children do not choose to be born, it was said, and their
> lives will be fraught with misery because of the vastly different backgrounds of
> their parents (pp. 3-4).

In a review of the psychological studies done in the mid-1900s, Wilson found that they

generally supported this common sense view of 'mixed race' maladjustment. To question

and build upon the previous research, Wilson conducted a study where this common-

sense view is brought into question. In her interviews, she found that "mixed race

children do not necessarily conform to the stereotype of the social misfit, caught between the social worlds of black and white" (p. 176). Tizard and Pheonix (1993) also conducted a study of 'mixed race' identity and adjustment in Britain. Their findings concurred with Wilson's results. They found that children of 'mixed race' had high levels of self-esteem and did not experience abnormal levels of racial identity confusion.

In terms of self-perception and racial recognition, the American study conducted by Clark and Clark is one of the most influential. In 1947, Clark and Clark famously conducted a study where 'Negro' children from Northern and Southern states were asked a series of questions in relation to dolls whose skin colour was identifiable as either white or brown. They found that the majority of the children showed a preference for the white doll, and more importantly, misidentified themselves with the white doll. This study was particularly important as it became influential in the monumental *Brown v Board of Education* (1954) where the Supreme Court ruled to desegregate schools. One criticism of the Clark and Clark study was that there was no attention paid to whether some of their subjects were 'mixed race' (Gunthorpe, 1998). As the rule of hypodescent was still prevalent at the time, all children with one drop of Black blood were considered Black. Logically, those light-skinned Black children, although labeled Black by society may understandably choose the white doll with which to identify. In response to this issue, Wayne Gunthorpe (1998) conducted a study that addressed this oversight. He varied the Clark and Clark technique by including a group of children who identified as 'mixed race.' Gunthorpe also used a wider variety of skin tones for the dolls used in the study. In this slight variation of the Clark study, Gunthorpe found that in general, children who were 'mixed race' did not show any major differences in racial recognition, preference,

and identification in comparison to the monoracial White or Black subjects. His results suggest that the findings of earlier studies may have been flawed, or that times had changed drastically in regards to racial awareness and development in the years between these studies. Most likely, it is a combination of these two factors that can account for his results.

The 'mixed race' representations explored in this chapter reflect the common sense and early sociological theories about the marginal man and the divided self. In these films, the person of 'mixed race' is portrayed as someone with problems of identity confusion and maladjustment. These issues manifest themselves in the Manichean characterization of people of 'mixed race' as the martyr or the villain.

Representing the Stereotypical Other

The long-standing prejudices against racial interbreeding, the legal and social prohibitions of interracial relationships, as well as sociological conceptions of 'mixed race' maladjustment are reflected in the stereotypical representations of people of 'mixed race' in film. As noted in the preceding chapters, the person of 'mixed race' is often seen as 'out of place' and confused (Mahtani, 2002). These characteristics manifest themselves in the portrayal of people of 'mixed race' as both villains and martyrs. Also, the dualistic nature of these stereotypes reflects the racial binaries that are embedded in the way in which our society conceives of race, as either/or categories. At a time when representations of 'mixed race' people were rare, the abundance of stereotypical characters speaks volumes about how people of 'mixed race' have been historically imagined and in turn projected on screen. In this chapter, I will be focusing on four films:

Showboat, *Love is a Many-Splendored Thing*, *Dr. No*, and *Kill Bill: Volume 1*. In the

context of these films, discourses about both race and sexuality are articulated as

inextricably linked. The person of 'mixed race' has provoked unease in relation to issues

of purity in regards to both race and sexuality (Young, 1996), and arouse anxiety because

they often transgress racial borders by appearing racially ambiguous (Wilson, 1987). The

films I have chosen to examine link these central points of anxiety around the person of

'mixed race.'

The previous sections have outlined the complicated issues involved in the

concept of stereotype and the process of stereotyping in general. These concerns are

further complicated when discussing how they are reflected, perpetuated and/or

challenged by various media representations. It is important to note that stereotypes

portrayed in film vary significantly from the stereotypes that exist as abstract images or

concepts in general. In *Latino Images in Film*, Charles Berg (2002) explains:

> "[T]he picture in our heads" kind of stereotype exists in the individual mind,
> whereas the mediated stereotype exists on the screen as a public commodity. The
> individuals' stereotypical mental construct may or may not remain a private
> image; it may or may not travel far beyond the individual or in-group circles; it
> may or may not be the basis for a racist tract. In contrast, the mediated stereotype
> is always public, and in the case of Hollywood cinema, has a global
> reach…Media broadcast the in-group image of the Other indiscriminately, to in-
> group and out-group members alike – whoever sees the film sees the stereotype
> (p. 38).

As Berg points out, the use of stereotypes on an individual level and the integration of

these stereotypes in film, although a somewhat natural extension of personal stereotypes,

operate in different ways. In film, the stereotypes are commodified and displayed for

public consumption indiscriminately. As discussed earlier, stereotypes are never neutral;

and in film, the choices made at several levels of production (such as plot, casting,

lighting, costume, etc.) combine to produce these value-laden representations.

The academic study of stereotypes as represented in film has gone in and out of scholarly fashion. Donald Bogle's groundbreaking work in the 1970s, *Toms, Coons Mulattos, Mammies and Bucks* did an excellent job of exploring the significance of stereotypical representations in film. Since then, there have been many more studies of this kind (for example see Churchill, 1998 and Berg 2002). Studies of stereotypical representations are not confined to the area of racial stereotypes but focus on other dimensions of identity as well (for example, see Dyer, 1997 or Van Zoonen, 1994 for an overview). However, it is also important to be aware of the limits of approaches to film that focus on stereotypical representations. As Shohat and Stam point out, debates about stereotypical representations in film often hinge upon the idea of the 'real,' a concept that is in itself so subjective it is nearly impossible to support. Every critic's idea of reality is different.

'Reality' like 'race' is a social construction (Van Zoonen, 1994). Reality is subjective, and discussions about 'real' representations can lead to a narrow view of the characters and plots. In the same way, debates about positive and negative images are also very subjective. This does not mean that they are not valuable. However, approaches to film must move beyond these concepts and look at the broader contexts in which these films were made. As Shohat and Stam write: "It is not enough to say that art is constructed. We have to ask: Constructed for whom? And in conjunction with which ideologies and discourses?" (p. 180). These are the questions with which the previous chapters of this thesis, and the preceding sections of this chapter have been concerned.

In the analysis to follow I have kept in mind some of the limits of approaches to film based on stereotypes as discussed by Shohat and Stam. Even when characters in a film are highly stereotypical, there are more often than not nuances and subtleties that make each character more complex than it may first appear. For example, the use of irony in some of these representations and possible oppositional readings of these films complicate an approach to film that focuses solely on stereotype. A case in point is the Drew character in *Jungle Fever* as discussed in the previous chapter. She knows that the ways in which she racially identifies may be flawed, and in several scenes she references the irony in the politics of skin colour and identity formation. For the purposes of this chapter, the stereotypes of the villain and martyr are used as filmic representations of the common-sense views of 'mixed race' maladjustment seen in sociological studies of the early 1900s, and as a platform to discuss the broader social contexts in which these films were made.

Stereotypes of people of 'mixed race' revolve around the inner conflict that these people have been perceived to embody. The racial mixing of blood is portrayed as causing confusion about one's place in society, hence leading to a life where one does not fit into any social environment. This manifests itself in two character types: the villain and the martyr. These stereotypes were prevalent in American popular fiction in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. For example, during the Abolitionist movement in the early and mid-1800s, depictions of tragic 'mixed race' characters were frequently used by Abolitionist writers (such as Harriet Beacher Stowe) to paint a sympathetic view of mulatto men and women, which were in turn used to question the practice of slavery (Tizard & Pheonix, 1993). But there were also novels that portrayed 'mixed race'

characters as cruel and villainous, or as Tizard and Pheonix write as "the incarnation of evil, [someone] who combines the worst traits of both races" (p. 15). Film incarnations of these character types brought these stereotypes to the big screen and to larger audiences. For example, D.W. Griffith's epic feature length, *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) includes two mulatto characters, one male and one female, both conniving, greedy, and highly sexualized (See Bogle, 1973 for a more in depth reading on the mulatto characters in *The Birth of a Nation*).

The films I've chosen to explore each have a primary character who is explicitly of 'mixed race' descent. And each exhibits personality traits associated with the common-sense view of 'mixed race' maladjustment. The films provide a rich source for investigations about the ways in which 'mixed race' characters are represented; however, in the interest of being clear and concise, I have chosen a few key scenes from each film to discuss. Please note that although I am discussing the stereotypical representations of several different racial mixes, I am not implying that the historical contexts and circumstances are the same for all; however, there are many similarities in terms of their representations in film and this is my central focus here.

Showboat, directed by George Sidney, is a film adaptation of the play based on the 1926 novel written by Edna Farber. It has been staged countless times over the years as a musical play, and there have been three film versions: 1929, 1936, and 1951. I have chosen to focus on the most recent of these three. The 1951 version of the film is particularly interesting in that two great Hollywood actresses vied for the part of the mulatto character, Julie. White actress Ava Gardner and 'mixed race' actress Lena Horne both wanted the part. Ultimately, the part went to Ava Gardner who won critical acclaim

for her performance. In 1951, Black actors were not often cast in primary roles (Bogle, 1973). At this time, the casting of Lena Horne could have been scandalous to some audiences because of the character's intimate interaction with Julie's husband in the film. (See Gaines, 2001 for more information about early race films, and Knight, 2002 for more information about the politics of casting in musicals in particular.)

The story focuses on a group of traveling performers as they sail up and down the Mississippi on the Cotton Blossom in the late 1800s. The central focus of the movie is the love story between Magnolia Hawks (Kathryn Grayson) and Gaylord Ravanal (Howard Keel). One subplot involves light-skinned Julie Laverne (Ava Gardner), who is revealed early in the film to be passing for White. Her husband Steve (Robert Sterling) is aware of her 'mixed descent' and vows to love her regardless. But through the course of the movie and without much explanation, Steve leaves Julie, which plunges her into a cycle of excessive alcohol consumption and depression. When Gaylord leaves Magnolia destitute, Julie gives up her job singing at a bar in Chicago so that Magnolia can take her job. Magnolia never knows about Julie's sacrifice. Magnolia and Gaylord eventually reconcile on the Cotton Blossom and sail off as a happy family.

The movie begins with the boat's arrival in a town in Mississippi. As the ship pulls into the harbour, we see several shots of smiling, laughing, plantation workers look up from their work in the cotton fields in anticipation. A flood of people rush towards the harbour to greet the traveling group of performers. The 'mixed race' subplot in *Showboat* is introduced early in the film when Pete, the boat's engineer, starts an argument with Julie. He calls her "Zebra gal," suggesting that he knows the secret of her 'mixed race' ancestry. After a scuffle with Julie's husband, Pete goes into town to find the sheriff. The

sheriff comes to the boat to arrest Julie but just before the sheriff arrives, Steve pricks her

finger and in full view of the others in the room, tastes the blood.

> Sheriff: "You've got a miscegenation case aboard…a case of a Negro woman
> married to a White man, a criminal offense in this state…Julie, the records say
> your Pa was White and your Ma Black. Is that right?"

> Julie: "Yes. That's right."

> Sheriff: "You two better get your things."

> Steve: "You wouldn't call a man White whose got Negro blood in him, would
> you?"

> Sheriff: "No, one drop of Black blood makes you Black in these parts."

> Steve: "Well I've got more than a drop in me. …Ask any one of these folks here.
> Everyone of them can swear that I've got Negro blood in me right this minute."

The other characters in the room witness the unveiling of Julie's true identity and are

shocked to discover Julie's "dark secret." The anxiety caused by racial ambiguity and the

crossing of observable markers of race is evident in this scene. Race mixing is prohibited,

and even when it has already occurred, evidenced by Julie's mere presence, further race

mixing (with her White husband Steve) is forbidden. Any dilution of White blood is

strictly outlawed.

In later scenes, we watch Julie's slow degradation. She becomes an alcoholic and

is heartbroken when Steve leaves her. When Gaylord leaves Magnolia destitute, Julie

silently sacrifices her job so Magnolia can support herself. The final shot in the film sees

Julie watch as Magnolia and Steve are reunited and the Cotton Blossom sets sail for its

next destination. Julie is dressed in a shabby cape, but she smiles as the boat sails away

because her sacrifices brought the two lovers back together.

Julie encapsulates the tragic mulatto character described by Donald Bogle:

beautiful, talented and destined for heartache. After she gives up her job, she takes up with an abusive man who threatens her in public and treats her with disdain. Although she was a talented singer and performer, the only talent she has left to trade is her sexuality. (In the theatrical version of *Showboat*, Julie ends up working in a brothel.) The person of 'mixed race,' particularly women of 'mixed race,' are often portrayed as exotic and sexually provocative. (As mentioned earlier, Sarah Jane's character in *Imitation of Life* is a case in point.) As Ann Wilson (1987) writes: "Mixed race children are the result of relationships which whites perceive as highly sexual; for this reason they are often regarded with a mixture of shame, disgust and secret curiosity" (p. 8).

The tragic mulatto character type can be seen in other films of this time as well and not just in representations of Black/White mixes. For example, in the Academy Award-winning film, *Love is a Many-Splendored Thing* (1955), the central Eurasian character struggles to fit into society in Hong Kong. Han Suyin (Jennifer Jones) is a beautiful, respected doctor who falls in love with American journalist, Mark Elliot (William Holden). However, she is destined for heartbreak when her family resists her choices and her career is put on the line. In the end, her lover, who has recently proposed, is killed while covering the war in Korea. At the beginning of the film, she is a strong, successful doctor and by the end, she has lost her job and her lover. The final scene shows Suyin alone and in tears.

The tragic mulatto character is not confined to female representations, or Black/White mixes, and can be seen in television portrayals as well. In *Monitored Peril: Asian Americans and the Politics of TV Representation*, Darrell Hamamoto (1994) discusses the main character in the popular television series, *Kung Fu* (1972-75):

For those members of the television audience who might not tolerate the idea of an Asian beating up white manhood, Kwai Chang Caine [played by David Carradine] was made to be a half-caste, born of an American father and a Chinese mother...As a half-caste, Kwai Chang Caine was condemned to wander aimlessly between two worlds, neither of which fully accepted him. Because of his ambiguous identity, Caine was an Asian American version of the stock "tragic mulatto" figure (p. 60).

As discussed by Hamamoto, the tragic figure of 'mixed race' martyr can be seen across various forms of media (literature, television, and film), and traverses gender lines as well.

At the other end of the stereotypical spectrum is the 'mixed race' villain. The title character in the first James Bond film, *Dr. No*, is half Chinese and half German. At the time of its release in 1962, with the horrors of WWII still relatively fresh in the collective consciousness, and the rising communist threat of Russia and China, the racial mixture of this villain makes a strange kind of racist sense.

Dr. No is the first in the long James Bond series, based on the novels by Ian Fleming. The film introduces us to James Bond, secret agent 007. When Commander Strangways goes missing in Jamaica, Bond is sent to investigate. He discovers through the help of American agent Felix Leiter (Jack Lord) and Jamaican native Quarrel (John Kitzmiller) that there is something strange going on on Crab Key Island, which is owned by Dr. No. When Quarrel and Bond go to Crab Key to investigate, they meet Honey Ryder (Ursula Andres) who becomes Bond's main love interest in the story (even though he has already bedded two other women by this point in the film). On Crab Key, Quarrel is killed by Dr. No's henchmen and Bond and Ryder are taken to Dr. No's headquarters. There they learn of Dr. No's plan for interfering with American missile launches and his eventual goal of world domination. After overcoming several obstacles, Bond finally kills

Dr. No by drowning him in radioactive material. The last we see of Dr. No are his disfigured hands (damaged through his frequent contact with radioactive material) as they try to hold on to anything within reach. Bond and Ryder escape from Crab Key seconds before the island explodes.

Early in the film, Dr. No is referred to as "that Chinese character," and it is said that he runs the island like "a concentration camp." When Dr. No and Bond meet, Dr. No gives more details about his racial background and his entry into a life of crime.

> Bond: "Well, Dr. No, you haven't done badly, considering."
>
> Dr. No: "A handicap is what you make of it. I was the unwanted child of a German missionary and a Chinese girl of good family. Yet I became treasurer of the most powerful criminal society in china
>
> Bond: "It's rare for the Tongs to trust anyone who isn't completely Chinese."
>
> Dr. No: "I doubt they should do so again. I escaped to America with 10 million of their dollars in gold."

When Dr. No and Bond discuss Dr. No's handicap, it is unclear whether they are referring to his disfigured hands or his 'mixed race' heritage. According to some common sense views of 'mixed race' maladjustment, children of interracial relationships were thought to grow up "sickly and effeminate, and that they [would be] inferior in physical development and strength, to the full blood of either race" (qtd. in Traynor, 2003, p. 45). The portrayal of Dr. No as highly intelligent but socially maladjusted and physically disfigured illuminates the central characteristics of the villainous 'mixed race' character. Later in the scene, Bond and Dr. No discuss Dr. No's allegiances.

> Bond: "With your disregard for human life, you must be working for the east."
>
> Dr. No: "East, west, just points on the compass. Each as stupid as the other. I am a member of SPECTRE: Special Executive for Counter Intelligence, Terrorism,

Revenge, Extortion. The four great cornerstones of power headed by the greatest brains in the world.

Bond: "Correction, criminal brains."

Dr. No: "The successful criminal brain is always superior. It has to be."

Bond: "Why become criminal? I'm sure the west would welcome a scientist of your caliber."

Dr. No: "The Americans are fools. I offered my services. They refused. So did the east. Now they can both pay for their mistake."

Although some theorists posit that the conversation about east and west being mere points on a compass was an attempt to de-politicize the film (see Chapman, 2000), an alternative reading of this exchange suggests that this scene is a reflection of Dr. No's inability to fit into either society. It's implied that this inability and feeling of not belonging was a major factor in leading to a life of crime. Here we see the marginal man theory in practice. Dr. No states that he offered his services to both the east and the west and explicitly mentions America's rejection of his offer. His desire for revenge over this rejection is clear.

Dr. No and his henchmen, described as 'Chigros' (half Black, half Chinese) by some critics (Wu, 2002), represent the ethnic Other, whereas Bond represents White, British imperialism. As James Chapman (2000) writes in *Licence to Thrill: A Cultural History of the James Bond* films:

> Bond's intervention in Jamaica saves this colonial outpost form the potentially subversive threat of a sinister secret organization – a reaffirmation of white, British superiority at a time when, in reality, Britain was beating a hasty retreat from empire (Jamaica became independent on 6 August 1962) (p. 78).

As Chapman states, the political ideologies underpinning this first Bond film are apparent on several levels: in reference to colonial occupation in the Caribbean, to native Blacks as

subservient to Whites, and ethnic women as exotic, sexual objects to be desired. The person of 'mixed race' as marginal and villainous is an additional context in which colonial discourses are evident. The racial mixtures in *Dr. No* are further stereotyped. As Frank Wu (2002) writes: "Even among mixed race Asians, the part-white Asian is the brains of the operations and the park –black Asians are the brawn" (p. 286).

A more recent example of the villainous 'mixed race' person is Lucy Lui's character, O-ren Ishii in the 2003 box office hit, *Kill Bill: Volume 1* (directed by Quentin Tarantino). O-Ren Ishii's villainy is much more violent and blunt than we see in *Dr. No*. In a memorable scene, O-Ren beheads a leader of a Yakuza (Japanese mafia) gang when he challenges her leadership based her 'mixed race' heritage. At O-Ren's inaugural dinner, Boss Tanaka delivers a diatribe questioning O-Ren's rule. He says, "I speak of the perversion done to this council, which I love, more than my own children, by making a Chinese Jap-American half-breed bitch its leader." O-Ren responds by cutting off his head and stating calmly, "The price you pay for bringing up either my Chinese or American heritage in a negative way is I collect your fuckin' head." She coolly explains that the members of the board should feel comfortable approaching her with any of their concerns, except for anything involving her 'mixed race' descent.

The stereotypical portrayal of characters of 'mixed race' as either the villain or the martyr build upon and add to existing theories of 'mixed race' maladjustment. Even though later psychological findings have brought the earlier findings into doubt, these representations are still perpetuated. The common-sense view was also supported by, and in turn lent support to, the legal restrictions present in anti-miscegenation laws (discussed in Chapter Two).

Each of the films discussed above includes stereotypical representations of a person of 'mixed race.' A discussion of stereotypical representations in film however, must be put into context. As Charles Berg (2002) writes:

> Through the social science lens, stereotyping in film can be seen as a graphic manifestation of the psychosocial process of stereotyping in society in general...The study of representation in the media must be more than simple content analysis, a game of "spotting the stereotype," cataloging it, then bemoaning Hollywood movies for their pernicious imagery...[F]ilm representation needs to be understood within a social and historical context (p. 4).

The representations of people of 'mixed race' are not isolated from the historical contexts in which they were formulated and perpetuated. Also, it must be remembered that there are slippages that occur in these representations, where the characters are shown in a more fully developed or well-rounded way. For example, Han Suyin's character in *Love Is a Many-Splendored Thing* discusses with several characters that she has found strength in her 'mixed race' heritage. However, she ultimately still plays the role of the tragic heroine, alone and heartbroken. These types of stereotypes may become internalized so that the person of 'mixed race' comes to believe that they should be confused about belonging (Taylor, 1992). It should also be noted that the incorporation of stereotypical characters may not necessarily lead to the propagation of these stereotypes. It is quite possible that people will have alternative or oppositional readings of the film, challenging the representations they see on screen (as hooks, 1992 and Rony, 1996 have extensively explored).

It has been the goal of this chapter to look at stereotypical representations of people of 'mixed race' within the context of the common-sense view of 'mixed race' maladjustment, which was originally supported by early sociological and some psychological studies. The following chapter, *Familiar Strangers: Finding Identity and*

History in Film, will focus on representations of 'mixed race' characters that are based in a grounded history using films based on documented true stories. The previous chapters have been building towards Chapter Four where there will be an integration of the legal and social histories described previously. Some of the issues that will be discussed further in Chapter Four are the issue of belonging, 'mixed race' communities, and the possibility of a growing panethnic multiracial identity.

Chapter Four

Familiar Strangers: Finding Identity and History in Film

The chapters have thus far followed a loosely chronological tracing of 'mixed race' histories beginning with the exploration of 'mixed race' terminology, to anti-miscegenation laws from their beginning in the United States in 1661 to their eradication in 1967, through to early 20th century constructions of 'mixed race' maladjustment in sociology and psychology. The chapters have also followed a progression in the exploration of characters of 'mixed race' in film: from an indirect presence, to stereotypical representations, and now to representations through a grounded history. In this chapter, I explore how *Rabbit Proof Fence* (2002) has incorporated the backgrounds explored in the previous chapters into one context. *Rabbit Proof Fence* is a film rooted in the particular history of the Stolen Generation, which is comprised of the thousands of Aborigine children in Australia who were taken from their homes and families and placed in boarding schools and Native settlements. I examine how *Rabbit Proof Fence*, although located within a specific Aborigine Australian context, addresses the general experiences of 'mixed race' identification, leading to an exploration of 'mixed race' communities and a panethnic multiracial identity.

Films that are grounded in a specific history represent narrative reconstructions of historical events. For example, many holocaust films (like *The Pianist*, 2002) are based on personal reconstructions and reflections of historically documented events. Although they may be personal stories, the larger framework of these stories are based on recorded histories. In comparison to the films in the previous chapters, like *Dr. No* and *Guess*

Who's Coming to Dinner, the primary film in this chapter, *Rabbit Proof Fence* is based

on a true story, chronicling the experiences of the young 'half-caste' girl, Molly Craig.

The screenplay, written by Christine Olsen, was adapted from the book of the same title

written by Molly's daughter, Doris Pilkington. Some of the major plot points in the film

have been recorded in official government letters (see Pilkington, 1996). It should be

noted, however, that I am not claiming that films that are grounded in specific histories

are somehow better or should be taken as objective truth. As I mentioned in Chapter

Three, the concept of 'the real' in film is contested. Even when films are based on

historically documented events, the way in which the story unfolds on screen is subject to

several levels of construction, including casting, dialogue, music, lighting, and editing

choices. However, historically grounded films add complexity to the representations of

people of 'mixed race.' By providing context and historical backgrounds to individual

experiences, these films can give a fuller picture of 'mixed race' experiences.

The historical background for *Rabbit Proof Fence* has been documented and

recorded. It is different from the previous films studied in this thesis not only because it is

based on a true story, but because it offers an alternative history of the colonization of

Australia in a distinctly Aborigine voice. Shohat and Stam (1994) explain that this type of

film does not claim to "substitute a pristine 'truth' for European 'lies,' but [rather]

propose[s] counter-truths and counter-narratives informed by an anticolonialist

perspective, reclaiming and reaccentuating the events of the past in a vast project of

remapping and renaming" (p. 249). *Rabbit Proof Fence* provides one alternative voice

and reclaims the history of the Stolen Generation, a history that has at times been hidden

from the public eye as well as outright denied (Haebich, 2000).

Where the other chapters largely focused on the experience of people of 'mixed race' in a North American context, this chapter looks at the situation of the 'half-castes' in Australia. The chapter is divided into three sections. The first focuses on the historical context of the Stolen Generation in general, providing the basic background for this history. Although 'full' Aborigine children were also taken from their families, this chapter will pay special attention to the legislation and policies regarding the treatment of 'half-caste' children. It is an investigation of the practice of using the person of 'mixed race' as a means to an end, that end being Whiteness, and as a tool to aid the reinforcement of White privilege.

The second section explores the specific history of the Stolen Generation as represented by *Rabbit Proof Fence*. Several scenes from the film will be discussed, laying the groundwork for the final section where similarities between the history of the Stolen Generation and the histories of other 'mixed race' populations, will be examined. People of 'mixed race' across various racial backgrounds share more than their 'mixed race' origins, but share certain histories as well. In general, people of 'mixed race' have been framed as a threat to social and economic stability. The manifestations of this anxiety often led to the distinct treatment of and discrimination against people of 'mixed race' across various racial backgrounds.

As I mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, the point of view from which this research topic was chosen was situated within both the personal and the political. In the third and last section of this chapter, I return more directly to the personal, exploring an alternative reading of the film. I propose that the film is not only an Aboriginal film, as it was billed when it was released in 2002, but a 'mixed race' one as well. *Rabbit Proof*

Fence will be used as a platform to explore the development of panethnic multiracial identities.

Naming and Framing the Stolen Generation

In the preceding chapters, I explored the use of 'mixed race' terminology, anti-miscegenation laws, and sociological and psychological theories of 'mixed race' maladjustment. In this section all these histories are woven together and framed within one context. Although much of the previous research explored in this thesis has emphasized an American context, the findings can in some cases be generalized to different 'mixed race' contexts as well. For example, in Australia, children of Aborigine and White Australians were framed in much the same way as mulatto children in the United States. They were seen as a danger to those structures of power based on theories of racial supremacy. As in the United States, much of this threat was based on economical concerns. These children had the potential to claim the privilege of White Australians while straddling racial, cultural, and physical borders. However, it should be noted that overgeneralization runs the risk of glossing over the distinct experiences of people of 'mixed race' in different contexts. Although people of 'mixed race' share certain similarities, they are not a cohesive or undifferentiated group, and their 'mixed race' heritage is only one aspect of their identity (Mahtani, 2002).

As I mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, the film that originally inspired this thesis was *Rabbit Proof Fence*. The children of the Stolen Generation were forbidden from speaking their Native language and taught to forget their indigenous traditions and cultures. The oft-cited goal of these schools was to bring 'civilization' to these children.

They were meant to be educated so that they could find work as domestic servants and farm labourers, positions that were thought by White government officials as immeasureably better than anything they could do if they remained in their aboriginal communities. The government always claimed to be acting in the best interest of the children (McGregor, 1998).

Although both 'full' Aborigine and half-caste children were taken from their homes without the consent of their parents, particular attention was paid to the 'half-caste' child in the early 1900s. Children of mixed ancestry held a special interest by White Australia because they threatened the racial hierarchy where White Australians occupied a space of privilege and where Aborigines were marginalized, often violently, and seen as primitives in need of paternalistic help. In the 1800s and early 1900s in Australia, children of 'mixed race' were seen alternatively as people to be pitied, a potential menace, and/or a necessary evil. There were fears that children of 'mixed race' would procreate with each other leading to an entirely new race, in turn posing a whole new set of problems in Australia. As Russell McGregor (1998) writes in *Imagined Destinies: Aboriginal Australians and the Doomed Race Theory, 1880-1939*:

> It was the threat posed to the ideal of a White Australia, more than any other single factor that fostered fear of a growing half-caste menace. By the 1920s the major source of half-caste increase at the national level was not interbreeding between white and black, but reproduction within half-caste communities....Thus the half-caste problem was, in many ways, distinct from the Aboriginal problem, for only persons of mixed descent posed a threat of this kind to the national ideal [of racial homogeneity and purity] (p. 137).

In this conception of the 'mixed race' problem, half-castes posed a distinct threat to White Australia, where hierarchies of power based on race would become vulnerable. Colonial policy regarding people of 'mixed race' shifted when they began to be

conceptualized as a potential solution to the Aborigine 'problem.' In this latter

conception, people of 'mixed race' were seen as a tool, where they could be bred with

White Australians to eventually 'breed out' the Aborigine population. 'Half-caste'

children were removed from their families and communities to be assimilated and

'civilized.'

Colonial ideas about progress and civilization reflected these racial assimilationist

views and their corresponding policies. In these conceptions, indigenous cultures were

often viewed as a "doomed race" (McGregor, 1998). It was thought that they would

become an inevitable casualty of 'progress.' Either they would assimilate or they would

eventually die out. As Neu and Therrien (2003) write in *Accounting for Genocide*, the

obliteration of indigenous culture was in no way an inevitable consequence of

colonialization. The framing of colonial genocide as merely a 'loss' of one culture in

favour of another is not only inaccurate, it removes responsibility from those people and

systems that encouraged this destruction of culture. They write:

> "[A] loss of indigenous cultures" is not quite an accurate way to put it; rather it is
> a deliberate obliteration. This "loss" is not the inevitable falling away of outworn
> customs in the face of unstoppable modern progress. The fact is that bureaucratic
> mechanisms are employed in the destruction of Indigenous cultures, and
> bureaucrats, with their biases, confusions and intentions, have historically made
> choices and planned ways to undermine, control and in some cases destroy
> targeted populations (p. 8).

Using the 'half-caste' population in Australia as a tool for this racial and cultural

destruction is one example of the bureaucratic mechanisms that Neu and Therrien

discuss.

As with many 'mixed race' populations, naming and defining the children of

interracial White/Aborigine relationships was crucial in trying to maintain the racial

hierarchies that were in place. As discussed in Chapter One, the terminology historically

applied to people of 'mixed race' is problematic. In the Australian/Aborigine context,

people of 'mixed race' were labeled 'half-caste.' As McGregor (1998) explains, the

definition of half-castes went through several stages of change:

> Despite the efforts of bureaucrats, legal draughtsmen and statisticians to define
> the term, 'half-caste' remained a loose category. The 1937 National Missionary
> Conference remarked that 'the name half-caste is used to include people with
> black blood, though not necessarily 50 percent'. Paul Hasluck noted in 1936 that
> the term "half-caste"...'in practice has come to mean almost any person with a
> strain of aboriginal blood who does not pass in the community as a white person'.
> (p. 136).

This loose definition of 'half-caste' aided in the deliberate targeting of Aborigine

communities. Aborigines of 'mixed race' were officially under the care of the Chief

Protector of Aborigines in several states and the Northern Territories in the early 1900s.

He was their legal guardian and was entitled to remove them from their families. The

loose definition of 'half-castes' made them easier prey for removal and relocation.

As in the United States, laws pertaining to anti-miscegenation were passed in

order to limit the production of 'mixed race' children. However, these laws had little

effect. As McGregor (1998) points out "legislation is a poor prophylactic against

fornication," (p. 142) and the population of half-caste children grew significantly in

Australia in the early 1900s. The view of half-caste children as a problem to be solved

was reflected in policies that allowed the removal of these children from their families.

From the standpoint of White Australia, 'half-castes' quickly became an unwanted

population. *Rabbit Proof Fence* focuses on one story where three 'half-castes' girls reject

the assimilationist future projected for them by the Australian government.

As evidenced by the explicit goal of breeding out Aborigines stated in several

documents written by Chief Protector of Aborigines for the Northern Territory in the

1930s (Dr. Cecil Cook), the anxieties about people of 'mixed race' were specifically tied

to the issue of reproduction (Haebich, 2000). As we saw in Chapter Two, anxieties

caused by interracial relationships were often fueled by concerns about interracial

reproduction. For this reason, 'mixed race' women were of particular concern. Because

women were essential in both childbearing and childrearing, 'half-caste' girls were paid

special attention, and were kept under close watch at the settlements and boarding

schools. Because 'mixed race' boys could often find employment, they were thought to

assimilate relatively well. 'Mixed race' girls, however, were harder to employ and were

seen as more likely to "fall victim to male lust" (McGregor, 1998, 154).

Theories of social maladjustment were often used in the rationalizing of these

forced removals. It was hypothesized that 'half-caste' children were the target of teasing

and bullying in Aborigine communities and would suffer low self-esteem as a result.

Echoes of Stonequist's marginal man theories are evident in the conceptions of 'half-

caste' children as weak, immoral, and sickly (as discussed in Haebich, 2000). The

government of Australia used these prejudices against 'half-caste' children as a reason to

remove them from their families. Government officials always claimed to be acting in the

best interest of the children.

Representing the Stolen Generation: Rabbit Proof Fence

Rabbit Proof Fence tells the story of three young 'half-caste' children traveling

home after being taken from their families in the 1930s, an act allowed and encouraged

by the racist policies applied to Aborigine 'half-caste' children. It is a film that is important in its portrayal of institutionalized racism, the issue of assimilation, and the straddling of both figurative and physical borders. The film reflects the prevalent ideology in Australia concerning 'mixed race' children. They were seen as a means to the eventual extinction of the Native Australian population.

Rabbit Proof Fence begins with scenes of everyday life in the Aborigine community, Jigalong. The three central characters, sisters Molly and Daisy (Tianna Sansbury), and cousin Gracie (Laura Monaghan) are well-loved by their mothers and they are learning how to hunt and cook in traditional Aborigine ways. In a heart-wrenching scene, the girls are torn away from their families. Constable Riggs, acting as an officer of the State, points to a piece of paper which proclaims his right to take the girls. As the girls cling to their mothers, he says, "I've come for the three girls. It's the law, Maude. You got no say in it.... Mr. Neville is their legal guardian. I've got the papers. You've got no say in it." The girls are taken to the Moore River Native Settlement where they meet other 'half-caste' children who have been taken from their families as well. While there, they watch as the Chief Protector the Aborigines, Mr. A.O. Neville, (Kenneth Branaugh) inspects some of the children, selecting the lighter skinned ones to be assimilated into White society. He lifts the back of Molly's shirt and simply says, "no." She is not light enough. One of the other girls explains to Molly that the light-skinned 'half-caste' children are smarter, and are able to attend better schools. Shortly after, the three girls escape from the settlement. The remainder of the film follows the girls and their triumphs and losses as they walk the 1200 miles home. It takes them nine weeks.

The title of the film refers to the 1500 mile long fence that was built to keep rabbits away from crops and farms. For the girls, it acts as a path guiding them towards their home. The fence can be seen as a symbol of government policies of the time where division of land and separation of people was seen as an effective problem-solving strategy. The film begins with simple white text on a plain black background:

> For 100 years, the Aboriginal People have resisted the invasion of their lands by white settlers. Now a special law, the Aborigines Act, controls their lives in every detail.

> Mr. A.O. Neville, the Chief Protector of Aborigines, is the legal guardian of every Aborigine in the State of Western Australia. He has the power "to remove every half-caste child" from their family, from anywhere within the state.

The first sound is the voice of a woman speaking in Jigalong, an Aborigine language. As she speaks, the camera pans over a landscape intimidating in its vastness. This landscape remains one the film's central features throughout the film, alternating between both ally and villain. It separates the girls from their home and family, while at the same time aiding them in their journey by hiding them from their pursuers: the police, the Aborigine tracker Moodoo (David Gulpilil), and Constable Riggs (Jason Clarke).

In our first encounter with Molly, the voice-over (Molly's adult voice) explains, "The White people called me half-caste." With this simple sentence, it is made clear from the outset of the movie that the power of naming has been claimed by White Australia. Within these first few minutes of the film, the power structure that existed in Australia at that time is made clear. There is power in naming and it is not in the hands of the named.

Molly's family lives in Jigalong where they survive by a combination of hunting, gathering and collecting rations of rice and flour from the Jigalong depot near their community. Her family is aware of the threat of separation and they are careful to keep their children nearby in the attempt to avoid the long arm of the Chief Protector of Aborigines, Mr. Neville. He has the legal right to remove half-caste children from their homes and place them in settlements in order to train them to enter 'civilised' (read White) communities to look for employment. The rationale behind this practice is explained in a disturbing scene where Mr. Neville gives a presentation to a group of White women whom he is soliciting for financial support for one such Native settlement. He explains in this public presentation what the future holds for the children at the Moore River Native Settlement. They are to work as domestic servants and play an integral part in the "breeding out" of the Aboriginals. He points to a poster with the faces of several generations of Aborigine/White mixes and happily asserts that eventually, the Aborigine will simply go extinct. He explains to his audience:

> As you know, every Aborigine born in this state comes under my control. Notice if you will the half-caste child, and there are an ever-increasing number of them. Now, what is to happen to them? Are we to allow the creation of an unwanted third race? Should the coloureds be encouraged to go back to the Black or should they be advanced to White status and be absorbed in the White population?

His view is clear: the only answer is to breed out the Australian Aborigine.

In this scene, Mr. Neville questions how these 'half-caste' girls are going to fit into society, in this case White Australian society. Having to fit into discreet categories of identity is virtually impossible and this impossibility is reflected in the injustices inflicted on these characters. Mr. Neville's viewpoint is a reflection of the colonial ideas regarding the progress of civilization. As Neu and Therrien (2003) write:

> The annihilation of Indigenous peoples is often considered an inevitable by-product of civilization...Cultural elimination is often, by default, accepted government policy. The welfare of the country as a whole is held aloft as a higher moral good, for which traditional tribal customs must be sacrificed (p. 3).

Native settlements for 'half-caste' children were seen by the Australian government as a step in the direction of "higher moral good," where they would be civilized and eventually assimilated.

Although Molly, Daisy and Gracie are determined to return to their families, some of the children at the Moore River Native Settlement were so young when taken from their families that they have no recollection of them. When Molly asks on of the older girls about the infants at the settlement, she replies, "They got no mothers. Nobody here got any mothers." In response, Molly states, "I got mother." Shortly after, the girls begin their long journey home.

Although the girls are physically lost for some time as they travel home, their determination is unwavering. They break from the stereotype of the lost and confused child of 'mixed race' by holding fast to their own personal sense of belonging and rejecting the future of assimilation proposed by the Australian government. They remain strong-willed, determined and although there are tragic aspects to their story, they are by no means tragic. After nine weeks of walking, two of the three girls return to Jigalong. Gracie is captured along the way and she is never able to return to her family or community. The film ends with the real-life Molly and Daisy (by then in their 70s) walking in the Australian desert, speaking their native language. (Molly has since passed away in January of 2003.) Molly explains that years later she was taken back to Moore River, this time with her two daughters. Again, she walked the 1200 miles back to

Jigalong. This time, carrying her youngest child, Annabelle. Annabelle was eventually

taken from her by Mr. Neville, and Molly was never reunited with her youngest daughter.

Finding 'Mixed Race' Identity in Rabbit Proof Fence

I began this thesis by talking about the personal and the political. The preceding

chapters have largely been concerned with the political, focusing on the racism

entrenched in legislation regarding miscegenation, the manipulation of scientific and

sociological inquiry, and on the ways in which race theory has changed over the 19th and

20th centuries. These factors have all acted to influence the ways in which people of

'mixed race' have been portrayed in film. Earlier chapters of this thesis have largely been

concerned with dominant ideologies of film production and the dominant readings of

selected films. In their discussion of negotiated film readings, Shohat and Stam (1994)

elaborate on the role of the spectator in the making of meaning through media. They

write: "Neither text nor spectator is a static, preconstituted entity; spectators shape and

are shaped by the cinematic experience within an endless dialogical process" (p. 349).

This section of Chapter Four looks at a film made outside of Hollywood and offers a

personal reading of *Rabbit Proof Fence*, integrating the personal and the political more

directly.

When *Rabbit Proof Fence* was released in 2002, it was billed as an Aboriginal

story. Undoubtedly, it is an Aboriginal story, a filmic representation of one of the many

disturbing incarnations of racist, colonial policy. I propose that the film is not only an

Aboriginal film, but a 'mixed race' one as well, and use the film to explore the

development of what is being called a 'panethnic multiracial identity.'

A panethnic multiracial identity traverses various racial backgrounds and focuses

on 'mixedness' in general as a unifying marker of identity. Laurie Mengel (2001)

elaborates:

> Multiracials are locating a commonality with other multiracial people – regardless
> of their particular racial ancestries – that is different from their groupings with
> monoracials with whom they share a common racial or ethnic ancestry or family
> bond. This commonality functions as a newly emerging ethnic and racial grouping
> based on similar historical continuities and life experiences that transcend
> traditional racial/ethnic categorization. Multiracial people are creating a panethnic
> identity which is based on mixedness *per se* (p. 113).

As Mengel writes, the increasing formation of 'mixed race' networks, which include

political organizations such as AMEA (American MultiEthnic Association) and Project

RACE (Reclassify All Children Equally); university clubs like Cornell's Hapa Club;

conferences like the PanCollegiate Conference on the Mixed Race Experience; as well as

the first magazine targeted towards a 'mixed race' demographic (Mavin Magazine), have

lead to an increasing awareness of both similarities and differences surrounding 'mixed

race' experiences. Just as racial groups of various backgrounds have sought alliances

with people of perceived similar racial backgrounds, forming PanAsian and PanAfrican

organizations, people of 'mixed race' have also begun to network and organize in a

similar fashion. The development of a panethnic multiracial identity has been one of the

driving forces behind the 'mixed race' movement, a movement comprised of various

'mixed race' organizations, such as AMEA and Project Race who have lobbied in the US

for official census recognition and greater awareness and acceptance of 'mixed race'

identities. As discussed in Chapter One, awareness of 'mixed race' issues began as a

grass roots movement and evolved into one that encompassed groups with several

different goals including social support, greater awareness and more visibility (Brown &

Douglass, 2003). The 'mixed race' movement helped to bring to light issues that were

specific to people of 'mixed race,' such as the census as mentioned above, as well as the

matter of historic legal and social invisibility.

As a young woman of 'mixed race' growing up in Vancouver, social invisibility,

although not conceptualized that way at the time, was a frequent concern. I didn't know

many people who identified as 'mixed race' and I often found myself trying to fit into

rigid categories of identity. In my early teens, I remember a sudden interest in Anime

comics (a Japanese style of drawing). "Isn't this what Japanese people like?" I thought. I

was attempting to *perform* my race. "I should study the Torah. Isn't this what Jewish

people do?" But it would inevitably lead to the question, "But what do half Japanese, half

Jewish people do? How is it possible to *be* both, *perform* both, simultaneously?"

Watching *Rabbit Proof Fence* was the first time I actually felt a connection to any

filmic character based on their 'mixed race' ancestry. Initially, I was surprised by this

sense of connection. For how could I, as a 'mixed race' Japanese/Jewish Canadian relate

to this Aborigine/White Australian history? As I sat in the theatre watching the film, I felt

strangely interpellated by story on the screen. Comments I had heard in the past about

people of 'mixed race,' both positive and negative, became salient in my mind: "You

don't *look* Japanese...'Mixed race' kids are the cutest...I'm a mutt...'Mixed race' kids

inherit the best of both worlds...'Mixed race' kids inherit the worst of both

worlds...You're not *really* mixed, are you?"

'Mixed race' had always meant being different. Partially through the feeling of connection to the characters in *Rabbit Proof Fence*, and a new personal awareness of the blossoming 'mixed race' movement, I realized that enough difference eventually led to similarity. People of 'mixed race' could connect on this level of difference, bridging racial backgrounds and connecting through and by being 'mixed.'

Although the film has been called an Aboriginal film, I viewed it as a film about negotiating one's 'mixed race' identity. The three girls find themselves in their particular situation expressly because of their identification by the Australian government as 'half-castes.' I felt a sort of kinship with Molly, Daisy, and Gracie, and although their story is far from anything I experienced growing up as a person of 'mixed race' in Canada and Japan, there were aspects that reminded me of my personal experiences in trying to negotiate my own 'mixed race' identity. It was one of the first times I had seen a film about characters that were explicitly of 'mixed race' heritage. This was the first time I had seen a movie where 'mixed race' issues were central to the plot, portrayed in a complex way, and in a way where I could recognize some of my own experiences in the film. Shohat and Stam elaborate about the importance of media in the formation of identities:

> Identity in the postmodern era is partially shaped by the media. By experiencing community with people never actually seen, consumers of electronic media can be affected by traditions to which they have no ancestral connection. Thus the media can normalize as well as exoticize other cultures, and can even fashion alternative communities and identities (p. 347).

The story told in *Rabbit Proof Fence* is certainly not *my* story, but I can recognize myself in the some of the characters and situations as they negotiate their 'mixed race' identity. Please note that I am in no way claiming this history or trivializing the experiences of the

women this story is based on, or the countless others who were put into similar situations. Rather it was the with the overall impression of the film and with the experience of not fitting into the racial categories prescribed by others with which I can identify, not the specific situations and injustices these characters faced.

After watching *Rabbit Proof Fence* and as I started to do my research for this thesis, I was struck with how many similarities I found in the histories of people of 'mixed race' from a diverse range of backgrounds. In virtually all cases, the identities and categories of where people of 'mixed race' fit into the socially constructed racial hierarchy had been defined by people in power. In the United States, this can be seen most dramatically in the rule of hypodescent, where any 'drop of Black blood' classified one as Black. The idea of trying to quantify race through the use of blood can also be seen in the ways in which indigenous people are categorized in many countries. It was also used in deciding who would be included as Japanese for the purposes of stripping the Japanese of their homes and belongings to be placed in internment camps during WWII (Root, 2003).

Use of the person of 'mixed race' as a tool to reach the colonial goals of racial domination was not isolated to Australia. In Canada, interracial heterosexual relationships were encouraged in order to promote easier relationships between the colonizer (White, male settlers) and the colonized (First Nations women). However, this strategy was short-lived as it was soon discovered that the children of these relationships would pose a new set of problems for the colonizers, mainly related to land claims. In British Columbia, 'mixed race' Aboriginal/White settler individuals occupied an ambiguous and hence threatening space on the racial hierarchy. In "In Between and Out of Place: Mixed-Race

Identity, Liquor, and the Law in British Columbia, 1850-1913," Renisa Mawani (2002) explores this history:

> Mixed-race progeny ambiguously and dangerously bridged the imperial divide by blurring the differences between Native people and white. However, these fears were not merely symbolic or metaphorical, but deeply embedded in material concerns about land. Many whites feared that the growing class of "half-breeds" in the province would not only destabilize racial hierarchies – as mixed-race people were not always easily catalogued by race – but would also undermine European supremacy by posing real geographical implications (p. 50).

Parallels between Mawani's characterization of conceptions of a 'mixed race' threat in Canada and Australia's 'half-caste problem' can easily be drawn. In fact, it is a trend that can be seen in many theories of race mixing involving the colonizer and colonized (Young 1995). People of 'mixed race' were unsettling to those who were in power.

The scene from *Rabbit Proof Fence* where Mr. Neville explains his goal of breeding out the Aboriginals discussed in the previous section has been documented in relation to other 'mixed race' groups as well. These racial assimilationist views and are not exclusive to colonial contexts. In "Servants of Culture: The Symbolic Role of Mixed-Race Asians," Cynthia Nakashima (2001) describes a similar scene to the one in *Rabbit Proof Fence* where scholar Sidney Gulick "offered photographs of people of 50 percent Japanese and 50 percent White heritage next to those of people with 25 percent Japanese and 75 percent White heritage as proof of a gradual shift in Eurasians towards a European phenotype" (p. 39). Again, the person of 'mixed race' is viewed as a means to an end, that end being Whiteness, maintaining a hierarchy of racial supremacy. Although perhaps not as explicitly stated, racial assimilationist views are still held in regards to people of 'mixed race.' Williams-Leon and Nakashima (2001) elaborate about Asian American assimilation and the role of the Eurasian person of 'mixed race.' They write:

[I]ntermarriage with the dominant group, according to assimilationist views, was treated as an important indicator of structural incorporation into mainstream American society. Thus, from this paradigmatic vantage point, multiracial/multiethnic Asian American, especially those with European ancestry have been seen as fulfilling the assimilation promise of becoming a real (deracialized) American (p. 7).

As Williams-Leon and Nakamura state, racial minorities have often been socially and legally excluded. People of 'mixed race' have oscillated between exclusion and inclusion, belonging and not-belonging. In contrast to past constructions of 'mixed race' identities, some of which are explored earlier in this thesis, the person of 'mixed race' is now often celebrated as "pioneers of a racial frontier" (Root, 1996). As discussed in David Parker and Miri Song (2001), the ways in which 'mixed race' people have been conceptualized have followed two major approaches: pathologisation and celebration. In the former, people of 'mixed race' are seen as physically and/or psychologically damaged. In the latter, they are seen as front-runners, traversing previously uncrossed borders. One of the goals of this thesis is to challenge these two extremes, and find some middle ground where people of 'mixed race' signify neither the end of racial strife, nor the beginning of a new era of racial harmony.

A panethnic multiracial identity allows for a multitude of ways to identify. It offers a flexibility that has often been denied to people of 'mixed race.' The historical similarities described in this chapter are part of the reason for the development of a panethnic multiracial identity. Laurie Mengal (2001) elaborates:

Multiracials have been grouping themselves in spite of, and because of, the marginilisation resulting from the dominant White society, interracial groups and monoracial minority communities. In response to the similarities in treatment, policies, voicelessness and stereotypes attributed to mixed race people through common racial constructions and exclusions, individuals of different ethnic backgrounds, interests and political affiliations began to organize around the issue of multiraciality (p. 110).

But, generalization based on a panethnic multiracial identity can be problematic. It's important to keep in mind that this does not mean that all people of 'mixed race' share the same history. For example, people of 'mixed race' in South Africa, or Brazil, or any number of places, have very distinct experiences, as do people whose parents are both members of minority groups. The issue of gender and sexuality add further layers of complexity. As with any panethnic classification, such as PanAsian or PanAfrican, there are slippages in historical similarities and lived experiences. However, a panethnic multiracial identity can lead to the strengthening of the 'mixed race' movement and the development of new 'mixed race' communities.

Through the establishment of 'mixed race' networks through the Internet, magazines like *Mavin* (the first magazine in the US target towards a 'mixed race' demographic), outlets for creative writing, and academic conferences, a 'mixed race' community is loosely forming. Feeling a sense of belonging to a 'mixed race' community does not exclude belonging to other communities based on other aspects of identity. Rather, it supplements the many other facets of one's identity. Asserting a 'mixed race' identity challenges the notions of pure races and racial hierarchies, and panethnic multiracial identity can strengthen these challenges.

Chapter Four marks the end of the analysis of 'mixed race' representations in film, bringing the progression from indirect presence, presence through stereotype, and presence through grounded history to its end. By exploring negotiated readings of *Rabbit Proof Fence*, it is possible to imagine the formation of new communities and identities based on multiraciality over various ethnicities. In the conclusion, *'Mixed Race' Futures*,

I will explore the significance of new articulations of 'mixed race' identities, as well as the need for the integration of critical mixed race studies and media studies. The importance of media in shaping and reflecting individual and collective identities makes it an area that must be incorporated into critical mixed race studies.

Conclusion

'Mixed Race' Futures

The original idea for this thesis was rooted in both the personal and the political. It sprang forward from both a personal desire to write about an area that has been relevant to me in terms of my own experience as both a woman of 'mixed race,' and as a media producer and consumer. Politically, 'mixed race' issues can be used to challenge existing ideas about racial categories and racial purity. It has not been my intention to celebrate 'mixed race' as either an end to racial strife, or as a new beginning to an era of racial freedom and equality. Rather, one goal of this research has been to frame 'mixed race' issues in a different light, without demonizing or celebrating. As discussed by David Parker and Miri Song (2001), pathologisation and celebration have historically been the two major approaches to conceptualizing 'mixed race.' In the former, people of 'mixed race' are seen as confused, disgruntled, and/or weak. In the latter, they are seen as border-crossers, front-runners, and as the personification of multiculturalism. Through the research explored in the previous chapters, one of my intentions has been to find a middle ground between these two extremes.

By tracing a pattern of 'mixed race' representations in film from indirect presence, stereotypical representations, through to presence through grounded history, the chapters have explored specific 'mixed race' histories and experiences. Chapter One began with the investigation of the terminology used in reference to racial mixing and people of 'mixed race,' tracing its troubling history and its more hopeful present. Terms such as 'mulatto' and 'hybrid' allude to the biological definitions of race that have contributed to the rigid categorization of race. However, issues of race cannot and should

not be avoided simply because they are troubling or problematic. It is true that race is a problematic and highly contentious concept, but it is not something that can be softened or hidden by less confrontational terminology. It needs to be discussed within the system and context in which it exists before it can be left behind. At the very least, 'mixed race' challenges rigidity in racial classification. At most it challenges the very concept of racial categories.

Chapter Two explored the history of anti-miscegenation legislation and the rule of hypodescent in the United States. *Jungle Fever* and *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* were used as examples to discuss certain dominant discourses about 'mixed race' children in the context of interracial relationships. These discourses have contributed to anxiety concerning, and prejudice against, the children of interracial relationships. The films were used to show how the troubling history of legal and social theorizing about people of 'mixed race' has become internalized, reflected in the characters' concerns about the problems and hardships these children would face. The question "What about the children?" is still asked of interracial couples planning to start a family. Beneath this question lies the assumption that these children will be confused about their racial background. Even though recent research about the psychological well-being of 'mixed race' children has proven that the 'mixed race' child will not be necessarily confused about his/her identity or suffer low self-esteem (Mahtani, 2001), the stereotype of the maladjusted 'mixed race' child is still prevalent.

Chapter Three focused on stereotypical representations of 'mixed race' characters in film, using films such as *Showboat* and *Dr. No* as a platform to discuss sociological, psychological and common-sense views of 'mixed race' maladjustment. By reflecting

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negative stereotypes of people of 'mixed race,' these films reinforce the notion of the 'mixed race' problem child. These reflections may in turn be internalized, projected, or negotiated by audiences.

Lastly, Chapter Four discussed several of these issues in one context, the Stolen Generation as portrayed in *Rabbit Proof Fence*. As Minelle Mahtani (2001) writes, "the popular discourse is made up of a series of myths which pronounce multiethnic individuals as 'out of place' or having 'no place to call home'" (p. 174). *Rabbit Proof Fence* expresses one context in which 'mixed race' children truly were out of place, not because their families or their communities didn't except them, but because the Australian government took parental rights away from their mothers and *made* them 'out of place.' Chapter Four also explored more recent discourses of 'mixed race' issues by focusing on the issue of a panethnic multiracial identity and its role in the 'mixed race' movement. The development of a panethnic multiracial identity allows for a multitude of ways to identify. It offers a flexibility that has often been denied to people of 'mixed race.' The historical similarities described in Chapter Four are part of the reason for the development of a panethnic multiracial identity.

Although issues concerning people of 'mixed race' have been incorporated into academic disciplines in the past (as discussed in Chapter Three), there has been a recent boom in scholarly interest in 'mixed race' issues. At least one critical change has occurred in the way in which 'mixed race' issues have been incorporated into academic study. Historically, people of 'mixed race' have been studied by those with a vested interest in maintaining racial hierarchies, people who aimed to preserve racial hierarchies and use the person of 'mixed race' as a tool or strategy to do so. Chapter Four explicitly

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focused on one such example: the 'half-caste' child in Australia in the early 1900s. In contrast, present articulations of 'mixed race' identities and issues are being voiced by people of 'mixed race' themselves, and these articulations are often used to challenge existing notions of racial purity and corresponding hierarchical organizations of racial categories. This is not to say that the only people who can speak about 'mixed race' must be 'mixed race' themselves, nor does it imply that when a person of 'mixed race' speaks, she speaks on behalf of an entire population of 'mixed race' individuals. Rather, it is important to have a multitude of voices, expressing a multiplicity of opinions.

'Mixed race' discourses will undoubtedly continue to change in the future. Even as the research for this thesis began, and particularly as it drew to a close, the depth of potential study was apparent, and the need for further research is clear. Research that focuses on the ways in which several axes of identity such as gender, class, and sexuality intersect with 'mixed race' (research Minelle Mahtani has started to undertake in her 2001 study of 'mixed race' women in Toronto) will prove invaluable. Representations in other media incarnations have also begun to be explored and should be investigated further. For example, the increasing trend of advertisers using people of 'mixed race' in their advertising campaigns has sparked some dialogue around standards of beauty and the exoticization of 'mixed race' individuals (for example, see Steeter, 2003). As 'mixed race' discourses continue to evolve, the terminology (as discussed in Chapter One) will also continue to do so. As Miri Song and David Parker (2001) write:

> For now, the term 'mixed race' refers to distinctive experiences which cannot be accommodated within existing frames of reference. These experiences may be too diverse to share a name for too long, too dynamic and dispersed to hold still for sustained political action, but they are undoubtedly too important to dismiss (p. 17).

As Parker and Song write, the future of 'mixed race' discourses is uncertain, but in this present historical moment, is too significant to dismiss. Some scholars are skeptical about the long-term success of 'mixed race' discourses, but recognize that it is an important step in the evolution of race discourse (Zack, 1995).

The important role of the media in perpetuating, shaping, and challenging ideas about people of 'mixed race' is clear. What is unclear is how 'mixed race' discourses will change in the future. Whether a panethnic multiracial identity becomes more prevalent, or 'mixed race' identities splinter into distinctive pockets, awareness of 'mixed race' issues will allow for more fluidity in racial categorization. *Mixed Messages: 'Mixed Race' Representations in Film* is intended as an exploratory work and as a contribution to an existing dialogue about race and representation in film. An examination of filmic representations must be incorporated into 'mixed race' discourses and should be integrated into the emerging field of critical mixed race studies. Although characters of 'mixed race' have been briefly discussed in the field of race and representation, they have largely been a footnote to the larger study of other people of colour. As one way in which discourses are communicated, representations of 'mixed race' people in film (and media in general) should be studied within critical 'mixed race' studies (and other fields where relevant). One of the goals of this thesis has been to begin to fill this gap in the research.

Historically, 'mixed race' *issues* have been framed as 'mixed race' *problems*. By bringing more awareness to 'mixed race' issues it is possible to problematize racial categories that have imposed rigid racial hierarchies. The goals of this research are twofold. One aim is to explore 'mixed race' representations in film, and to bridge two academic fields that I believe are necessarily connected: critical mixed race studies and

media studies. Secondly, my intention has been to bring more awareness to 'mixed race' issues in general and to postulate that the study of media representations are one way in which certain 'mixed race' discourses can be reinforced, questioned and challenged. As Stuart Hall (1996) writes in *Who Needs Identity*? "Precisely because identities are constructed within, not outside, discourse, we need to understand them as produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices, by specific enunciative strategies" (p. 17). Film is one such enunciative strategy. It allows for certain histories, certain dialogues to be seen and voiced. The value in studying 'mixed race' representations in film lies in the reflection it provides of significant moments in 'mixed race' histories, and in the portrayal of cultural imaginings of people of 'mixed race.' These representations are never neutral.

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