A RULE OF THUMB:
OBJECTIVITY, RACIAL CLASSIFICATION
AND THE POLITICS OF GENRE

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A DISSERTATION PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

2000
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, I would like to thank David Leverenz. Without David’s willingness to read all my misled ideas and to provide suggestions for their improvement, this project would never have come together. He also gave me invaluable assistance in tightening up and refining my ideas once they were slightly less misled. I thank the other members of my committee – Pamela Gilbert, Debra King, Louise Newman, and Stephanie Smith – for challenging me to see the bigger picture behind my work. John Van Hook helped me find my way around the literary databases at the library. I am grateful to the people at the Charles Chesnutt Special Collection at Fisk University for all their assistance during my week at Fisk. And, finally, I’d like to thank Peggy, who helped me edit and rethink this project at times, and helped me forget all about it at others. Peggy has shared many a celebratory drink as a result of this project, and a fair amount of consolatory ones as well. I’m not sure which group tasted better.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SECTION</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTERS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 INTRODUCTION, “UNDER CONSTRUCTION”: RACIAL DEFINITION</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IN TURN-OF-THE-CENTURY AMERICA</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once Upon a Time: The Fictionalization of Science</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sticks, Stones, and Names: The Metaphor of Race</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What’s In a Name?: Genre and the Politics of Race</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I’m Not Racist, Honest”: The Politics of Interpretation</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 THE “AMALGAMATION” OF SCIENCE AND LITERATURE: IRONY</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AND THE MISCEGENATION TABOO</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A “Trace” of Fear: Mark Twain and the Logic of Miscegenation</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stitching Up the Seams: Hopkins’ Mending of the Reputation</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of Black Women</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irony-ing Out the Difference: Pauline Hopkins’ Scientific “Specimens”</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Sticky Residue of Blood: Hopkins, Miscegenation and Pan-Africanism</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happy Endings?: Narrative Closure and the Comforts of Race</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 THE VEILED TRUTH: OBJECTIVITY, RACE, AND THE ROLE OF LITERATURE</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Manly Scribblers: Art and the Projection of Manhood</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publish or Perish: Racial Prejudgement and the Publishing Community</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, No – Do It Like This: White Authors and the “Race Problem”</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where Do We Go From Here?: Chesnutt and Literary Tradition(s)</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

iii
4 THE SENTIMENTAL DUBOIS: GENRE, RACE AND THE READING PUBLIC ................................................ 144

“You Can’t Handle the Truth”: Fiction and the Planes of Reality .................. 150
Reforming the Truth: Sociology and Philanthropy ........................................ 154
The “True” Beauty of Art: The Transcendence of Culture .......................... 162
Getting High on Art, or “Tears, Idle Tears”: The Aesthetics of Literary Evaluation .................................................. 167
Accessing the “Female Within”: DuBois and the African American Sentimental Tradition ............................................................ 188
And They Live Happily Ever After?: Sentimental Conclusions .................. 197

5 WHO OWNS THE WHIP? CHESNUTT, TOURGÉE, AND RECONSTRUCTION JUSTICE 200

My Name is Everything I Own: Tourgée and the Property of Reputation ..... 207
Sneaky Justice: Chesnutt and the Aesthetics of Subversion .......................... 218
The Same Difference: Chesnutt, Tourgée, and the Plessy Decision .............. 234
Keeping It Real or Making Romance: The Politics of Genre ....................... 238
A Hero’s Welcome (A Romantic Tale): Chesnutt and the Ideal of Leadership ........................................................................ 250

6 CONCLUSION, BLACK MEN THINKING, WHITE MEN JUMPING AND THE HUMAN GENOME PROJECT .................................................. 259

Stand By Me: Battling the “New Racism” ..................................................... 271

WORKS CITED .................................................................................. 274

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH .................................................................. 286
A RULE OF THUMB:
OBJECTIVITY, RACIAL CLASSIFICATION
AND THE POLITICS OF GENRE

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December 2000

Chairman: David Leverenz
Major Department: English

My dissertation examines the turn-of-the-century rhetoric of “truth” and “objectivity” in relation to the era’s obsession with racial definition and categorization. Whether these definitions were based on biology, sociology, psychology or law; whether they opposed or encouraged social equality; and whether they questioned the notion of racial difference itself, they relied almost exclusively on a rhetoric of objectivity. My project attempts to chart how writers of fiction – Charles Chesnutt, W.E.B. DuBois, Frances Harper, Pauline Hopkins, Mark Twain, and Albion Tourgée – borrowed, amended, and rejected these varying notions of truth in order to give their own texts an “objective” authority, particularly as this authority pertained to racial classification.

The claim that turn-of-the-century debates about race hinged on contested definitions of truth is, in itself, no startling revelation. Scholars such as Hazel Carby,
George Fredrickson, Kevin Gaines, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Stephen Jay Gould, Susan Gillman, Sandra Gunning, Evelyn Higginbotham and Eric Lott, just to name a few, have in recent decades contributed significantly to the project of documenting and historicizing the racial dynamics of the period. Yet, the unique ways in which writers of fiction marshal the rhetoric of objectivity to defend, resist, edit, or avoid contemporary racial definitions remain largely unexplored. This study examines how different genres, philosophies and methodologies of writing affect writers' conceptions and treatments of racial “truth.” The study also examines how access to privileged literary communities such as publishing houses and magazines influences the negotiation of racial definitions, how the rhetoric of objectivity can be used to manufacture as well as resist established ideologies of racial difference, and how these negotiations adopt and amend contemporary views of gender and class. By looking closely at the genres with which various authors align themselves, I simultaneously demonstrate how different genres often identify competing sites of authority and contrasting conceptions of Truth.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION: "UNDER CONSTRUCTION" – RACIAL DEFINITION IN TURN-OF-THE-CENTURY AMERICA

You and we are different races. . . . We have a broader difference than exists between any other two races.

– Abraham Lincoln in 1862, explaining to black leaders his support of the removal of African Americans to Africa

We must recognize race as providing sites of dialogic exchange and contestation, since race has constituted a discursive tool for both oppression and liberation.

– Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham

[S]lavery only dogs [the black artist] when he is denied the right to tell the Truth or recognize the ideal of Justice. . . . The white public today demands from its artists, literary and pictorial, racial prejudice which deliberately distorts Truth and Justice, as far as colored races are concerned, and it will pay for no other.

– W.E.B. DuBois

This project examines the turn-of-the-century rhetoric of “truth” and “objectivity” in relation to the era’s obsession with racial definition and categorization. Whether they were based on biology, sociology, psychology or law; whether they relied on polygenetic, monogenetic or cultural theories of racial histories; whether they opposed or encouraged social equality; and whether they questioned the notion of racial difference itself or not, these definitions relied almost exclusively on a rhetoric of objectivity. This study charts

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how writers of fiction borrowed, amended, and rejected these varying notions of truth in order to buttress their own texts with an "objective" authority.

The claim that turn-of-the-century debates about race hinged on contested definitions of truth is in itself no startling revelation. Scholars such as Hazel Carby, George Fredrickson, Kevin Gaines, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Stephen Jay Gould, Susan Gillman, Sandra Gunning, Evelyn Higginbotham, Eric Lott and Claudia Tate have in recent decades contributed significantly to the project of documenting and historicizing the racial dynamics of the period. Yet the unique ways in which writers of fiction marshal the rhetoric of objectivity literarily in order to defend, resist, edit, or avoid contemporary racial definitions remain largely unexplored. This study examines how different literary genres and methodologies affect writers' conception and treatment of racial "truth," how access to privileged literary communities, such as publishing houses and magazines, influences the negotiation of racial definitions, how the rhetoric of objectivity can be used to manufacture as well as resist established ideologies of difference, and how these negotiations adopt and amend contemporary views of gender, race, and class. By looking closely at the genres with which various authors align themselves, I simultaneously demonstrate how different genres identify competing sites of authority and contrasting conceptions of Truth.

Rather than simply exposing the biased logic of turn-of-the-century racist science and/or literature and replacing it with a paradigm that espouses the social constructedness of race, I interrogate what we mean by the "social construction" of race. Through this interrogation I ultimately suggest that as many conflicts about race arise from competing social definitions of race as arise from the clash between the belief in absolute biological
difference and a cultural model of race. When we look at the specific rhetoric underlying claims of the construction of racial identity and racial classification, traditional alignments between the “good guys” – those who work for progress in the nation’s racial dynamic by exposing the cultural basis of racial definition – and the “bad guys” – those who depend upon a biological understanding of race in order to forward a racist agenda – begin to disappear, or at the very least, become extremely fuzzy. Similarly, when we account for the multivalent rhetoric of racial classification, we can no longer easily divide the literature into a “black” camp of progressive social agitators and a “white” camp of oppressive social conservatives. With this said, my project also maintains the belief that racial issues were often divided upon precisely these black and white lines. For example, when examined through their reliance on the rhetoric of objectivity, supposedly “progressive” white liberals exhibit many of the same unexamined assumptions and beliefs as do their racist white counterparts, even as they espouse conflicting values and ideas.

Although at times I deal with very fixed racial notions that resist our critical interest in destabilizing and de-essentializing the “fact” of race, I do so intentionally and for important reasons. First of all, this study’s outlining and documenting of the racial “truths” of the era stand in strict opposition to any belief that racial lines are rigidly fixed or that there exists some essential “whiteness” or “blackness.” At times, these racial lines were maintained precisely to deflect attention from, and destabilize, class and gender lines. In fact, DuBois noted in his sociological writings that race and racist propaganda such as Dixon’s The Clansman were often used to undermine cross-racial labor
movements – a point he also makes in his novel *The Quest of the Silver Fleece*. Rather than “correct” the errors in the definition of race that existed a century ago, this project seeks to identify, chart and unravel the conflicting “attitudes” of racial difference in order to understand “race” in a more historically complex manner.

Even as much of the nation’s literature, legislation, and scientific research served to segregate the races in predictable ways, when we look at the ideologies, politics, and rhetoric behind racial definitions, traditional separations and alignments are no longer so easily maintained. For example, while I discuss how black authors’ publishing possibilities were constrained severely by the era’s dominant social and political powers of the time and how established literary genres fail these writers, I also explore how authors coming from different sides of the race debate often rely on a very similar rhetoric of “truth.” In this study, I juxtapose literary texts authored by black and white writers in an attempt to redraw, or at least reconsider, how we understand the relationship among the rhetoric of objectivity, genre, and the metaphor of racial difference.

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2 In the chapter titled “The Cotton Mill” (a fitting title for a chapter principally about labor issues), John Taylor, the white owner of the cotton mill, says to the all-white labor union, “If you don’t want to work, quit. There are plenty of others, white and black, who want your jobs.” DuBois continues, “The mention of black people as competitors for wages was like a red rag to a bull. ... The result was curious. From two sides, from landlord and white laborer, came renewed oppression of black men” (393). In this novel, DuBois also invokes the African American protagonist Bles Alwyn’s “manhood” – in stem opposition to the effete Southern aristocrat Harry Cresswell – as a means of destabilizing racial difference and establishing lines of difference along class and gender issues.
Once Upon a Time: The Fictionalization of Science

Perhaps the best way to begin an examination of the rhetoric of racial difference is to examine briefly two of the era’s most provocative “race” novels, Thomas Dixon Jr.’s *The Clansman* and Charles Chesnutt’s *The Marrow of Tradition*. Even a cursory glance at these novels’ invocation of the specter of racial classification begins to illuminate how writers used the rhetoric of objectivity in similar ways to advance very dissimilar ideas. These novels’ disparate histories of reception also reveal how ostensibly “objective” aesthetic evaluations of literature often rely on what DuBois terms “racial prejudgement.” While these two texts were judged by the white literary community in terms of their artistic qualities, these judgements both reflect and depend upon existing normative notions of entrenched racial difference.

Dixon’s enormously successful and frankly racist 1905 novel *The Clansman* relied on two of the most inflammatory stereotypes fueling the turn-of-the-century racial debates: the radical, “meddling,” northern politician and the increasingly “uncontrollable” Southern black man. Dixon presented both of these stock characters as threats to the prosperity and stability of the “honest” white South. In order to give credence/legitimacy to his romantic tale of the mythic rejuvenation of the Old South, Dixon leans on the era’s preoccupation with the scientific verification of racial difference. In *The Clansman*, where Reconstruction and its carpetbag supporters – principally the Northern "Commoner" Austin Stoneman – are mercilessly vilified, the African Americans gain control of governmental positions, and immediately abuse their power. Predictably, given Dixon’s racist philosophies, as soon as the regulatory positions of power such as the police chief and Mayor are occupied by African Americans, the white heroine of the
novel, Marion, is raped by "four black brutes," causing her and her mother to jump to their death from the precipice aptly named Lover's Leap. When Ben Cameron finds the house in mysterious silence and the women missing, he immediately searches the premises. Dixon infuses the scene with a formulaic detective rhetoric, replete with "scientific" clues:

At the house he could find no trace of the crime he had suspected. Every room was in perfect order. He searched the yard carefully, and under the cedar by the window he saw the barefoot tracks of a negro. The white man was never born who could make that track. The enormous heel projected backward, and in the hollow of the instep where the dirt would scarcely be touched by an Aryan was the deep wide mark of the African's flat foot. He carefully measured it, brought from an outhouse a box, and fastened it over the spot. (309-10, emphasis added)

Here we see Dixon use the rhetoric of objectivity to forward a very biased racial agenda in a supposedly unbiased manner. The crime is revealed, documented, and partially solved by Ben's ability to discern the assailant's race. Once Ben's measurement of the foot identifies the criminal as a black man, the text precludes the possibility of the scene pointing to anything except a rape/murder. Furthermore, the footprint suggests not only the identity of the attacker, but the barbarity of the African American race in general.

With the "deep wide mark of the African's foot," this clue becomes what one critic terms a "monstrous sign of primitive physical development" (Gunning 34).

Of course one crucial difference between The Clansman and a traditional detective plot is that in this novel the reader has already witnessed the crime, and has identified the criminal, an African American named Gus. Therefore, rather than giving the reader conventional clues concerning the crime, in this instance the detective and scientific discourses serve to legitimate the suspicions of the guilt of black men to "prove" absolute racial difference. Further following a detective style, Dixon introduces
a forensic expert, Dr. Cameron, into the scene. Here we see Dixon manipulate a scientific discourse reminiscent of Sherlock Holmes in order to put a quantifiable biological stamp on his desire to put African Americans "in their place." After one skeptic claims that "there is no trace of [the killer] here," Dr. Cameron uses a microscope – with his "brilliant eyes [that] flashed with a mystic light" – to examine the victims' eyes so that he can see the imprint of the killer (the victims' last images) recorded on the retinas of the deceased. Dr. Cameron explains, "Impressions remain in the brain like words written on paper in invisible ink. So I believe of images in the eye if we can trace them early enough. If no impression were made subsequently on the mother's eye by the light of day, I believe the fire-etched record of this crime can yet be traced" (313, emphasis added).

If the eyes are traditionally the windows to the soul, in this instance they are literally the windows to the brain's memory or "records." Although what the microscopic images reveal remains incomprehensible to the untrained eye – Ben looks into the microscope and sees "nothing" – for Dr. Cameron they leave a scientific "record" that can be used to document the crime and expose the criminal. Not surprisingly, he sees in Mrs. Lenoir's eyes the "bestial figure of a Negro" (313). Here, we see Dixon adopting the mantle of objective science in order to give credence to his use of a racist stereotype, proving its veracity with scientific "Truth." Mrs. Lenoir ("the black" in French) becomes

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3 It is quite possible that the connection to Sherlock Holmes is more than incidental. Arthur Conan Doyle published his first story in 1887, and his most famous mysteries were published in the two decades prior to The Clansman. The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes was first published in 1891-2 and The Hound of the Baskervilles was published in 1901-2. Both books originally appeared serially in The Strand magazine.
the sacrificial victim to the terror of untethered blackness – the image of the black rapist is forever etched on her brain.4

Perhaps Dixon is here responding to arguments, such as those levied by Ida B. Wells, that innocent African Americans have been lynched for fictitious crimes of rape and murder. To counter this logic, he depicts the Ku Klux Klan as just, discerning, and objective vigilantes rather than conniving and insecure tyrants. Instead of simply killing Gus or any black man who is convenient, as white supremacists typically did during that era, Dixon’s Klan kidnaps Gus and takes him to their secret lair in order to further “prove” his guilt.

Once again, in order to document the crime, Dixon relies on a scientific methodology that implicitly advances his racial agenda. Dr. Cameron reemerges, appearing like an "ancient alchemist ready to conduct some daring experiment in the problem of life." Just as alchemists sought to transform commonplace materials into valuable metals, Dr. Cameron will produce the most precious of treasures for the incensed Ku Klux Klan members – irrefutable proof of the guilt of a black rapist. He informs the hooded audience of the case history: "His feet have been measured and they exactly tally with the negro tracks found under the window of the Lenoir cottage... I will not relate to you the scientific experiment which first fixed my suspicion of this man's guilt. My witness could not confirm it, and it might not be to you credible" (321,

4 Interestingly, while le noir translates as “the black” or “blackness” (le is the definite article for a masculine noun), the translation for “negro” is gender specific—le noir for a male and la noire for a female. If we see her name as symbolizing an intrusive African American presence, then we could say that not only does Dixon offer up Mrs. Lenoir’s white “purity” to the rapist, but her femininity as well. Her body is colonized by a black male presence.
emphasis added). With this possible doubt still within the realm of reason (for Dixon the Klan is eminently rational), Dr. Cameron turns to another form of scientific documentation. With his "rigid gaze" he hypnotizes Gus, who confesses to the entire crime, reenacting it to the horror of the audience. With this irrefutable evidence, the Klan is free to kill the rapist with impunity and a clean conscience. Furthermore, when the white aristocracy regains power of the town, Dixon is able to forward this usurpation as a just and divine occurrence. After all, the town has systematically and fairly proven the inability of African Americans to handle positions of authority.

As offensive and irrational as this tale strikes us today, much of the era’s scientific studies came to similar conclusions. Not surprisingly, such “scientific” indications of the potential threat from African Americans became increasingly prevalent as, in the climate of Reconstruction, African Americans began to assume positions of power. In his 1896 book *Traits and Tendencies of the American Negro*, Frederick Hoffman writes, “Rape is only one of the many manifestations of an increasing tendency on the part of the negro to misconstrue personal freedom into personal license, and this tendency, persisted in, must tend towards creating a wider separation of the races” (234, emphasis mine). Coming to a conclusion very similar to Dixon’s, Hoffman argues, with the support of a plethora of statistical evidence, that African Americans remain incapable of responsibly handling anything but subservience – that they need to be controlled in order to maintain a coherent social order.

In both *The Clansman* and Hoffman’s social science, racial difference can be seen clearly in qualitative terms, documenting the “superiority” of white blood. In these most racist of books, science becomes an extremely useful tool. It records essential racial
difference, reveals the "essence" of African American males – their uncontrollable
criminal and sexual desires – and protects violent white supremacists from accusations of
wrongdoing. I have used this example illustratively in order to illuminate the intersection
of the rhetoric of objectivity and racial agenda. My project traces the manipulation of the
rhetoric of truth by members of disparate literary communities in order to reveal some of
the era's implicit and hidden notions of racial difference. I also suggest in the conclusion
that this rhetoric remains very prevalent today, and is used similarly to undergird
contemporary ideas of race. While Dixon's novel may seem kooky to us today, his logic
remains imminently and frighteningly popular and effective.

*The Clansman* built on the success of Dixon's earlier novel *The Leopard's Spots*
(1902), and garnered popularity due as much to its contentious topic as to its perceived
literary merits. An anonymous reviewer for a 1905 edition of the *Bookman* captured the
complex reception of Dixon's novel: "*The Clansman* may be summed up as a very poor
novel, a very ridiculous novel, not a novel at all, yet a novel with a great deal to it" (Clark v).
The comment suggests some of the tensions my project explores. How can a novel be
simultaneously a "very poor novel" and "a novel with a great deal to it"? In this instance,
the reviewer seems to be making a distinction between the craft (execution) of the novel
and its message (politics). While Dixon relied on familiar generic formulae commonly
associated with melodrama, such as peerless heroes and "pure" heroines, sentimental
marriages, and the intrigue of a mysterious murder, he also touched the raw nerve center
of the nation's fears and insecurities about the "race problem." His use of
romance/melodrama only intensified this irritation of the nerve center, since the crude and
violent racial clash stood out against the ancillary plot about the genteel union through two aristocratic marriages of the South and a sympathetic North.

If *The Clansman* has interest for us today, its chief value may be in its fusion of a “moonlight and roses” melodrama with a vicious race hatred. While this combination seems odd, it reveals much about the era’s racial *Zeitgeist*. Though the novel was not considered a literary masterpiece by its reviewers, neither was it considered particularly inappropriate or offensive to an alarmingly large percentage of the nation’s white population – “liberal” and “conservative.” U.S. Representative Edgar Crumpacker had earlier declared that Dixon’s *The Leopard’s Spots* “ought to be read by every man in America” (H. Chesnutt 181), an opinion apparently shared by much of white society. Later, in 1915 Dixon help convert *The Clansman* into a script for one of the nation’s earliest and most popular motion pictures, D.W. Griffith’s *The Birth of a Nation*. The movie adaptation of Dixon’s work was so popular, in fact, that the NAACP fought to have it censored for decades after its release (Lewis, *W.E.B. DuBois* 506).5

If Dixon used the rhetoric of objectivity to forward his thesis of the inherent danger and bestiality of African American men, then Charles Chesnutt sought to access an alternate site of objectivity/truth in his fictional response to the logic of absolute, biological racial difference, his 1901 novel *The Marrow of Tradition*. For Chesnutt, a “realistic” depiction of the nation’s racist policies would expose the fallacies,

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5 President Woodrow Wilson, after seeing a private screening of the movie in 1915, commented that the movie was “like writing history with lightning” and “all so terribly true” (cited in Lewis, *W.E.B. DuBois* 506).
assumptions, and lies within Dixonesque depictions of the nation’s racial dynamic. If Dixon and similar turn-of-the-century racist writers sought to give their racist diatribes an air of truth by relying on contemporary “empirical” science, then Chesnutt sought to expose the half-truths and illogical foundations holding up the nation’s perception of the difference between the races.

After experiencing an unprecedented amount of success writing within (and revising) the plantation literary tradition with his conjure tales, by 1900 Charles Chesnutt had become alarmed by the frequency of, and the respect given to, racist policy-makers and writers such as Congressman Edgar Crumpacker and Dixon. As Chesnutt would later write, “Thomas Dixon was writing the Negro down industriously and with marked popular success. Thomas Nelson Page [a leading member of the plantation school of literature] was disguising the harshness of slavery under the mask of sentiment” (cited in Heermance 19). For Chesnutt, the respect given to Dixon’s work required immediate attention and rebuttal. Writing to Crumpacker about the correlation between “Negro rights” and the corruption of “pure” white blood in Dixon’s *The Leopard’s Spots*, Chesnutt exclaims,

There has always been a great deal of Southern claptrap about the disastrous results that would follow the intermingling of blood. Such intermingling as there has been, and there has been a great deal, has been done with the entire consent

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6 Chesnutt describes his book in a 1901 letter to Booker T. Washington: “It discusses... miscegenation, lynching, disfranchisement, separate cars, and the struggles for professional and social progress in an unfriendly environment... It is, in a word, our side of the Negro question” (Chesnutt, *To Be an Author* 160).

7 Before he became a fiction writer, Dixon served as a member of the North Carolina state legislature from 1884 to 1886 and as a Baptist minister from 1886 to 1899 (Clark xiii).
and cheerful cooperation of the white race, and I am unable to see any disastrous results that have followed so far.” (cited in Keller 236)

While this letter was written in 1902, one year after the publication of Chesnutt’s *Marrow of Tradition*, we can see *Marrow* espousing this very attitude, and as such responding to the views of people such as Dixon.

While *Marrow* met with some critical resistance, as Chapter Three discusses, what Chesnutt found most perplexing and disappointing was the relative apathy towards his novel. Despite an aggressive advertising campaign by Houghton, Mifflin & Co. that included window displays in prominent bookstores across the country, and despite the critical attention it received in certain literary circles, *Marrow* failed to make an impact on the American commercial market (Andrews 205). Chesnutt clearly linked his novel to the tradition of protest novels in America, and for the book to accomplish this goal it had to have a large public readership. Before the book was released, Chesnutt wrote to Houghton Mifflin, “If *The Marrow of Tradition* can become lodged in the popular mind as the legitimate successor of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and the *Fool’s Errand* as depicting an epoch in our national history, it will make the fortune of the book and incidentally of the author, which would be very gratifying” (*To Be an Author* 162). Where Stowe fought against slavery and Tourgée condemned the repealing of Reconstruction legislation, Chesnutt hoped to fight against the logic espoused by Dixon, Crumpacker, et al that suggested turn-of-the-century America was entering into a new era of “negro

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8 Chesnutt entered into correspondence to voice his indignation at Crumpacker’s public declarations that Dixon’s work was extremely valuable as an example of the frightening racial dynamics in the post-Reconstruction.
domination,” a domination that needed to be met with swift and decisive reactions from the white community.

The disparate receptions of Dixon’s and Chesnutt’s novels suggest the shifting grounds of evaluation applied to works of literature coming from those in different social positions. Dixon’s *The Clansman* remained valuable to a white readership because of the horrible “truths” it told about the evolving racial dynamics in the South. Chesnutt’s novel, on the other hand, according to the *Cleveland World*, “teems with fine writing and a masterly handling of incident, yet it is a wanton attack upon something that the South holds as sacred” (To Be an Author 166). The fact that Dixon’s book remained popular in both the North and South and Chesnutt’s novel met a cold reception in both sections of the country suggests that racial opinions, especially when dealing with touchy subjects such as miscegenation and “social equality,” were not nearly as divided along regional lines as we might think.

**Sticks, Stones, and Names: The Metaphor of Race**

In her essay, “African-American Women’s History and the Metalanguage of Race,” Evelyn Higginbotham argues that race “serves as a ‘global sign,’ a ‘metalanguage,’ since it speaks about and lends meaning to a host of terms and expressions, to myriad aspects of life that would otherwise fall outside the referential domain of race. . . . Race not only tends to subsume other sets of social relations, namely gender and class, but it blurs and disguises, suppresses and negates its own complex interplay with the very social relations it envelopes” (95). For Higginbotham, this “metalanguage” influences the way that we make value judgements, for example what is
“good” hair and what are “correct” speech patterns. In short, race is such a powerful metaphor because it affects the manner in which we see everything, not just topics that overtly deal with “race.” I argue that the “metalanguage of race” specifically influences scientific and literary discourses by creating or reflecting a racial prejudgement that filters into “empirical” studies that claim to provide objective examination. In so doing, it racializes bodies and stigmatizes race in a way that often suppresses (or mutes) other demarcations of difference, such as gender and class.

Of course, labeling race as a sign or metaphor hardly does away with the troubling issues one encounters when discussing race in modern, or postmodern, society. For, if race is a sign, then it would seem people designate different signifiers to this sign, even as we admit the relationship between these two is unreliable or nonexistent. Even if we agree that race is a social construct, there seem to be a variety of opinions about which materials will be used in its construction. Is race an ethnic identity? Is it a destructive tool of oppression? Is it undergirded and enabled by implied class relations? Or is it some diaphanous mixture of all the above? If it is a mixture, which ratio do we use in the combination? The answers we get to these questions depend upon who you ask, and the circumstances and audience in which they are asked.

In their book *Racial Formation in the United States*, Michael Omi and Howard Winant claim that there are three rough “paradigms” through which race has been discussed in the past several decades: ethnicity, class and nation. While Omi and Winant do not claim that these paradigms are exhaustive or absolute, they “do think that they embrace the vast bulk of [racial theories] and demarcate the major lines of debate” (11). I briefly outline these paradigms in order to show the multivalent nature of the discourse
behind the social construction of race. According to Omi and Winant, the ethnicity theory arose from the 1920s response to biological essentialism, where race “was equated with distinct heredity characteristics.” This paradigm adopted the concept of cultural pluralism espoused by sociologist Horace Kallen, and became “an insurgent theory which suggested that race was a social category” (15). In other words, the term “ethnicity” served to recuperate discussions of difference in a way that removed this discussion from racist attempts to assert absolute racial separation. This ethnicity paradigm evolved into what is now commonly referred to as multiculturalism.

For Omi and Winant, the class paradigm tends to “explain race by reference to economic processes, understood in the standard sense of the creation and use of material resources” (24). They develop this idea by outlining three approaches to a class theory of race. The “market relations” approach challenges the neoclassical notion of economics that avoids race by focusing on “taste for discrimination,” monopolistic practices, and disruptive state practices. The stratification theory focuses on the social distribution of resources and often “detaches ‘class’ (i.e., status) categories from racial ones. Finally, the class conflict theory recognizes “the existence of racial oppression, but regard(s) class divisions as the fundamental source of exploitation in society” (24-29).

Finally, Omi and Winant outline the “nation paradigm” of race. This paradigm primarily encompasses the ascension of black nationalism: “The rise and popularity of black nationalism initiated an intense theoretical and strategic debate about the nature of racism and the future of black politics in the U.S.” (36). Although it emerges from a long history of black nationalist impulses, the nation-based theory “is fundamentally rooted in the dynamics of colonialism.” This paradigm relies on “organizations and movements
uniformly composed of the ‘colonized’ . . . the need for ‘cultural autonomy’ to permit the development of . . . unique characteristics . . . [and] the necessity of ‘national liberation’ to uproot colonial heritage and restructure society on a non-racial basis” (36-38).

I introduce these theories of racial definition in order to emphasize that while most modern scholars agree that race is best conceived of as a social construct, we get a very different view of race depending on how we construct it. It is not my intention to declare my “colors” and side with a particular paradigm. Instead, I would like to suggest that many of the tensions in black literature and racialized political thought arise in part from conflicting theories of race – not necessarily crude conflicts between biological and social racial definitions, but between competing versions of the social constructedness of race. For example, much of the contemporary debate about Charles Chesnutt, like the roller-coaster history of his reception, seems to emanate from whether one ascribes to him an ethnicity, class or national paradigm of race. From an ethnicity perspective, we can see Chesnutt manipulating black cultural history and practices to undermine white forms of writing – or “signifyin(g)” on them, in Gates’ language – and, in so doing, exposes the illogical basis of biological definitions of race. If we see Chesnutt adopting a class-based paradigm, we could claim he implies that class exploitation creates racial inequalities/inferiority, and therefore that upper-class African Americans deserve to be placed with other upper-class Americans. From this perspective, one would figure Chesnutt as an assimilationist: if class inequalities would disappear, so would racism and eventually race. Chesnutt certainly believed in the social construction of race, but what he chose to do with that belief remains very much up to debate.
Rather than solve these discrepancies, in this project I explore them as tensions, not merely as they affect us as readers today, but as they influenced the literary choices and strategies that African American and white American writers made a hundred years ago. As Omi and Winant mention, a fairly coherent sense of black nationalism can be found at least as early as DuBois’ *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903). Yet, one could read DuBois’ classic text through the ethnicity and class paradigms just as easily and just as fruitfully. This fact does not suggest a problem with Omi’s and Winant’s argument. Instead, it shows the multilayered richness of black texts from this era. It also demonstrates what Higginbotham has called “the multiple determinations that make race such a complex lived social reality” (35). These “multiple determinations” make it entirely possible to invoke all three of Omi’s and Winant’s paradigms simultaneously, on different levels and in different registers, a possibility that they do not deny.

Henry Louis Gates writes that “[r]ace is the ultimate trope of difference because it is so very arbitrary in its application” (*Introduction* 5). This very arbitrariness in selecting from the multitudinous meanings of race makes it such a dangerous and stubborn metaphor. Its strength lies in its elusiveness, its adaptability. To this degree, the ascendance of our current belief in the social constructions of race over the belief in its biological “truth” has made racism, through race’s very illusiveness, increasingly hard to identify and combat. For if race has become in our society increasingly invisible, it is still very much there. Gates reminds us that race “has become a trope of ultimate, irreducible difference between cultures, linguistic groups, or adherents of specific belief systems – which more often than not – also have fundamentally opposed economic interests” (5). In order to understand more fully how this trope has functioned and
functions today, we need to reconstruct historical conceptions of differing discourses of "truth," even as we show these differences to be fraught with contradictions. In short, it becomes increasingly necessary to document and historicize turn-of-the-century "truths" (including racial "truths") to reconstruct the racial, literary, and social dynamics of the period before we can adequately expose these views as limiting and seek alternative perspectives.

In his thoughtful analysis of antebellum minstrelsy, Eric Lott claims that "the minstrel tradition is still too present for us to take antiracist critiques of it for granted." Instead, he argues, "we must better historicize the minstrel show, for in fact we remain ignorant of exactly what its antebellum political range happened to be" (35). I believe this contention to be true of racial classification more generally. Rather than simply glossing over the racist and racialist attitudes of turn-of-the-century America, or using what Lott calls "outmoded antiracist strategies of reversal and inversion," we need to examine the ways in which race became fixed as a metaphor of difference, recognizing how this metaphor shifted throughout time. So, while this project takes for granted the contention of Higginbotham, Omi and Winant, and Gates that race is a trope, a discursive tool, and a social construct, we must also explore in detail the historical perception of its rootedness and concreteness. Rather than striving to be a definitive analysis of the "the multiple determinations that make race such a complex lived social reality" (Higginbotham 35), this study seeks to contribute to an ancillary process of discovery. The rhetoric of objectivity and Truth stands as one of the "multiple determinations" of the era's conception of race and racial classification. In examining how that rhetoric became
so prominent, I demonstrate how the binary constructions behind the rhetoric of both “truth” and “race” ultimately undermine themselves.

Since the marshaling of race by turn-of-the-century authors often reflects very static definitions of racial categories, we run the risk of replicating turn-of-the-century racial binaries by arguing that white authors construct racist or racialist definitions that black authors resist or subvert. In response to Gates’ challenge to explore how racial differences influence literary texts, Tzvetan Todorov recognizes the danger and asks, “[I]f ‘racial differences’ do not exist, how can they possibly influence literary texts” (371)? Gates uses the enviable advantages of being the editor of their debate to get in the last word: “Todorov is being disingenuous here, and is guilty of shallow thinking about a serious problem of all theorists of so-called ‘noncanonical’ literatures. Todorov attempts nothing less than a neo-colonial recuperation of the sense of difference upon which a truly new criticism of world literature must be granted” (“Talking That Talk” 404-5). Gates explains that he pursues not absolute racial difference, but attitudes about racial difference, “how attitudes toward [pointed or purported] racial differences generate and structure texts by us and about us” (405). While Gates’ response speaks to a critical imperative with which I agree, the debate shows the uncertain definitions and applications of “race,” even among those that agree about its social construction.

The concept of literary access helps to explain how authors in different social positions responded to rigid racial classification through the medium of fiction. In his book *Cultures of Letters*, Richard Brodhead argues that an examination of the scenes of reading and writing “offers to recognize the reality of literature’s different availability but also to understand that difference historically, as a culturally mediated historical product”
(115). Such an analysis would necessitate “a systematic asking by what means and by what virtue of what circumstances different potential authors have been able to lay claim to different powers in the literary realm” (109-110). What avenues of access are closed to certain writers because of culturally determined preconceptions, restrictions, or opinions? How do these writers respond to such pressures? In what ways do they resist these pressures, and how are they complicit with them?

While Brodhead focuses primarily on the cultural situations that influence the scenes of writing [“no one comes to authorship out of nowhere” (183)], I apply this idea of literary access more directly to the scenes of reading – the ways the reception and acceptance of works are influenced by a host of cultural and racial preconceptions. Combining Brodhead’s notion of “literary access” with an attention to the history of reception of African American writers suggests an alternative means of looking at how literature reflects the racially obsessed culture in which it is enmeshed, the manner in which the turn-of-the-century literary and cultural expectations condition how literary access/acceptance become racially coded. I examine the white literary establishment’s reception of “race writing” in order to reveal how its expectations of literature and what qualifies as literature are racially determined. This racial prejudgement does not necessarily depend upon a crude racism that disavows literary contributions by African Americans, but upon the more subtle way in which one’s understanding of racial boundaries and characteristics influences his/her aesthetic evaluation of literary texts that depict non-white subjects.
What's In a Name?: Genre and the Politics of Race

I specifically explore the issues I have thus far raised through a juxtaposition of works of black authors and white authors, men and women, works that were popular at the time of their release and those that were largely ignored. I discuss at length the fiction of Mark Twain, Pauline Hopkins, Charles Chesnutt, William Dean Howells, W.E.B. DuBois, Frances Harper, and Albion Tourgée, attempting to reconstruct the historical specificities of their interaction with, and espousal of, theories of race and the nation’s racial dynamic. While these authors may seem to be odd bed-fellows in one sense, they all enter into the contemporary field that has at times been labeled “racial literature.” In her essay, “The Mulatto, Tragic or Triumphant? The Nineteenth-Century American Race Melodrama,” Susan Gillman attempts to provide a rationale for the modern tendency to discuss these authors together. To do so, she invents a new genre, which she terms “the American race melodrama”: “Encompassing literary, sociological, and scientific texts by both black and white writers,” Gillman writes, “the race melodrama focuses broadly on the situation of the black family – almost always of an interracial genealogy – and specifically on the issue of ‘race mixture,’ as a means of negotiating the social tensions surrounding the formation of racial, national, and sexual identity in the post-Reconstruction years” (222).

Gillman attempts to recuperate the term “melodrama” from the pejorative associations of a didactic and formulaic literary form, “flat” literary characters, and an avoidance of “serious social criticism.” She explains, “Far... from providing simply the sense of order associated with the formulaic conclusion of the melodrama, the race melodrama acknowledges, even embraces, everything that is most unsettling about this
period and its cultural expression” (223). Although I balk at Gillman’s attempt to create theoretical room for her new genre by dismissing the “formulaic conclusion” of traditional melodrama – a move that minimizes the complexity of other texts labeled as melodramatic – I agree that these texts can and should be grouped together because they all negotiate the tensions “surrounding racial, national, and sexual identity.”

Even so, my study expends much energy attempting to show how generic categories repeatedly fail to make sense. When we look closely at what we mean by a genre, whether it be realism, sentimentalism, romance, or melodrama, the definitions become increasingly murky and contradictory. If, for example, realism supposedly represents a harsher look at the “real facts” of American culture, why is it dismissed by proponents of naturalism as “tea-party” drama? Ultimately, any genre, no matter how revised and refined, limits our reading and understanding of texts by giving us a filter through which to view them. In this regard, Gillman’s “race melodrama” ultimately proves no more helpful than earlier conceptions of genre.

Yet genre remains a very central aspect of this study, as my title would suggest, because to examine what genres meant to the authors remains a valuable line of inquiry. If writers believed they were writing in a particular genre, as Chesnutt did with realism in his later writings, what does this belief reveal about the authors’ perception of the stakes involved in their projects and the desired effects that these projects would have on the reading public? What can we learn, for example, by noticing that DuBois’ novel The Quest of the Silver Fleece unfolds along the lines of what has been termed a sentimental format? How does this “sentimental” text relate to, and influence our understanding of, his “empirical” scientific texts?
In Chapter 2, “The ‘Amalgamation’ of Science and Literature: Irony and the Miscegenation Taboo,” I examine the rhetoric of racial “purity,” its basis in scientific theories of race, and how Pauline Hopkins and Mark Twain incorporate and resist these theories within their turn-of-the-century fiction. In this process I point towards some of the literary possibilities and limitations of social commentary coming from very different societal positions. How would someone occupying Mark Twain’s social space have a different relationship to the rhetoric of racist science than someone occupying the social position of Pauline Hopkins, even as both authors seek to criticize this rhetoric? This chapter suggests that Twain and Hopkins ultimately rely on very similar notions of miscegenation as a trope of social disorder to make their not-so-similar declarations about the nation’s “race problem.”

In Chapter 3, entitled “The Veiled Truth: Objectivity, Race and the Role of Literature,” I continue my exploration into race and class as influences on authors’ publishing possibilities, by demonstrating how an author’s preconceived societal position and race condition his/her reception by the literary establishment. As his journals, letters, and novels all demonstrate, Charles Chesnutt understood literature as a means of resisting the static and predetermined social status of African Americans. While he attempts to redefine constricting racial definitions, in his novels The House Behind the Cedars and The Marrow of Tradition Chesnutt relies on a masculinized rhetoric of Truth (through a faith in Howellsian realism) that is closely aligned with the scientific discourse of racial classification discussed in Chapter 2. Scientific discourse marshals racial difference, and racializes bodies in a way that often fends off (or mutes) other demarcations of difference, such as gender and class. As Higginbotham puts it, “Race not only tends to subsume
other sets of social relations, namely, gender and class, but it blurs and disguises, suppresses and negates its own complex interplay with the very social relations it envelops” (255). For this reason, Chesnutt perceives the need to adopt a competing rhetoric of “Truth” in order to establish a solid foundation for his claims of racial equality.

If Chapter 3 demonstrates how Chesnutt relies on notions of a masculinized Truth and the “real” in order to resist contemporary racial definitions, then Chapter 4, entitled “The Sentimental DuBois: Genre, Race, and the Reading Public,” qualifies this statement and explores the generic differences between DuBois’ political/sociological writing and his fiction. This chapter questions conventional definitions of “realism” and “sentimentalism” by exploring DuBois’1911 novel The Quest of the Silver Fleece in the context of “sentimental literature.” Turn-of-the-century writing by black women, specifically Frances Harper, reveals that “sentimental literature” makes some of the same claims as does realism, particularly in speaking for the voiceless, avoiding the trappings of “High Art,” and transcending the limitations of social difference and the status quo. And yet these two “genres” claim to be speaking to very different audiences and registers. What is at stake in DuBois’ and Chesnutt’s claim to be speaking the “real” Truth when the distinctions between realism and sentimentalism are no longer so clear? How do we understand these claims when DuBois’ fiction in many ways appears to be almost formulaically sentimental? How are these lines of inquiry affected when we consider that DuBois and Chesnutt rely on very masculine values in their definitions of “Art,” especially when American sentimental fiction has traditionally and stereotypically been defined as belonging to the sphere of women?
In Chapter 5, "Who Owns the Whip?: Chesnutt, Tourgée, and Reconstruction Justice," I return to the fiction of Chesnutt – this time focusing on his collection *The Wife of His Youth and Other Stories*. This chapter focuses on the notion of objectivity, specifically legal objectivity and "right reason." Reconstruction lawyer and fiction writer Albion Tourgée once claimed, "Justice is pictured blind and her daughter, the law, ought at least to be color-blind." I examine the concept of legal objectivity by looking at the paradoxical relationship between the writings of Tourgée and Chesnutt. It is well known that Tourgée sparked Chesnutt's career as a writer. However, if we consider Tourgée's line of argumentation as the chief defense lawyer in *Plessy v. Ferguson* and his ideas of justice in *A Fool's Errand*, we can see that Chesnutt's collection *The Wife of His Youth and Other Stories* challenges the very tenets upon which Tourgée's political convictions rest. Especially in "The Web of Circumstance," Chesnutt contests the Enlightenment belief in a "blind" or, in this case, "color-blind" legal system to which Tourgée so devoutly clung.

My Conclusion, Chapter 6, entitled "Black Men Thinking, White Men Jumping and the Human Genome Project," brings back into focus the many disparate issues surrounding racial definition and the rhetoric of objectivity explored in this study by examining how they are still relevant today. The turn-of-the-century debate surrounding objectivity and scientific discourses on race remains particularly important today because as George Levine puts it, "'scientific realism' remains alive" (14). By exploring how the rhetoric of objectivity continues to hold its sway in our collective imagination, whether through new scientific "discoveries," such as *The Bell Curve*, or the logical consequences of the Human Genome Project, I argue that such "scientific" modes of racial classification
as craniology, racial eugenics, and biological essentialism are not as much of a memory as we wish them to be.

"I'm Not Racist, Honest": The Politics of Interpretation

One of the principal problems with a project like this is that in constructing my argument about the fallacies inherent in "truth" claims, I simply add my version of the "truth" to the mix. My study, like almost all academic work, implies that it reveals the "true" or "right" analysis of the contestable material with which I've been wrestling, even if it ends up being the "truth of truth's absence." On one level, the nature of constructing an academic argument lends itself to such a discourse of truth. Certainly I understand that my argument presents only one interpretation of the materials and ideas I've collected, that many others will develop and have developed competing arguments, and that this disagreement questions the idea of absolute truth. Even so, I find the contradiction within constructing my "truth" about the failure of the rhetoric of truth unsettling.

One way of resisting this truth-telling is to recognize and admit my own stakes in this project. Without a doubt, my position as a white male writing about race and gender issues complicates my relation to a discourse of truth about these subjects; I am always open to the charge that I'm an outsider, or the ultimate insider, who just "doesn't get it." While I don't believe African Americans have an inherent ability to "get it" and white people never can, I do think my "race" matters, and influences the manner in which I construct my argument. To deny this and to claim I'm developing a "color-blind" argument would only reinforce the logic I attempt to work against in this project. First of all, it would replicate the rhetoric of color-blindness, and the attendant implication of an
unmediated access to the “real” story, that I seek to contest. Secondly, it would suggest that race is a condition that applies only to people of color – that my position as a white American doesn’t influence my work, while my argument shows how African Americans’ positions in society affect their work.

In his book Negotiating Difference, Michael Awkward asks, “[h]ow does race direct, influence, or dictate the process of interpreting both black texts and Western theories? Is there a politics of interpretation that is determined or controlled by race in ways that can be compared to the ideologically informed readings of, for example, white American feminist critics?” Awkward asks these questions to explore “the impact of categories of difference such as race and gender have upon the interpretive and artistic processes” (25). If my study claims to deal with these issues as they affect turn-of-the-century “interpretive and artistic processes,” it would be disingenuous to proceed as if these categories of difference – what Awkward calls “positionality” – do not affect my own argument.

Of course, it proves to be monumentally more difficult to discover one’s own assumptions and biases than to uncover those of other people. Nonetheless, I will provide a brief personal history of my interest in African American literature as an attempt to provide at least a glimpse into my stakes in this project. When I was in middle school and high school in Knoxville, Tennessee, in the 1980s, I attended very integrated schools, principally consisting of white, black, and Asian kids. As anyone familiar with the city would know, Knoxville is very segregated racially. In fact, one white supremacist leader recently pronounced it one of the last bastions of white society left in the South. So, this integration came primarily from an aggressive busing program. From my perspective as a
white student, the busing was by and large a success. There were not huge, impassable racial rifts in the school, although divisions definitely existed. I developed friendships with a number of black students, friendships that continued well past my high school days. I do not bring up this fact to demonstrate that by virtue of my friends, I can prove I’m not racist. Some of the most acutely racist moments I witnessed at school happened between “friends.” Rather, I mention this because with a few exceptions, during high school these friendships never extended outside school. On Friday, I would say goodbye to Renée, Jonée, and Mark as they got on the bus or in their parents’ cars, and I wouldn’t see them until Monday morning.

What strikes me most about this situation is that at the time it didn’t seem that unusual. It was just “the way things were.” It wasn’t as if I wouldn’t have enjoyed seeing them over the weekend, or that our parents would have objected. It just didn’t happen. I have often thought about this dynamic recently. I wonder, for example, if it felt to my African American friends as if “it just didn’t happen.” Or did it feel to them that there were certain barriers other than the geographical distance between our homes that would not make meeting on the weekends appropriate or feasible? In some ways, this segregation seems to be one of the most virulent forms of racial separation, not because it reveals anything overtly racist on any of our parts. Rather, it shows how internalized and invisible the idea of racial difference becomes. My friends and I didn’t avoid each other because of “race.” But, it seems to me now that race was the chief reason we never went for pizza, or played ball, or went to the movies on the weekends.

In college, I began studying African American literature for two reasons. First, the classes I took in African American literature seemed to “matter”; they seemed to deal
with issues that affected my negotiation of society. (I see now that this has as much to do with the teachers as it did the subjects.) We had discussions about situations that I dealt with daily. Undoubtedly, these classes gave me the interpretive skills and perspective that allowed me to understand my relationship with my high school friends in a more complex manner. Second, the literature affected me more deeply than anything I had read until that point. I still remember shaking with intensity – and not with the caffeine overdose that in college was often the cause – as I first read *Native Son* by Richard Wright. That book taught me how deep the ideas of racial difference and racism ran. I suddenly understood to some extent the looks I received when I traveled for sporting events to Austin East and Rule high schools, the schools from which my black friends were bused. I ended up writing my senior thesis on the writing of Richard Wright. I believe this project taught me more about myself than it did about Richard Wright, or literature, or academic writing.

As I studied black literature in college and graduate school, I was trained by a number of leading scholars of African American writing. These scholars trained me in the analysis of African American literature, and I learned many of the interpretive tools that I use in this study. In a graduate seminar titled “Reading Black Women Writing,” Mae Henderson assigned a paper topic requiring that we examine one of the novels we had read in class from a *black feminist perspective*. Suddenly, I was uncertain. Could I, the only white male in the class, write a black feminist critique? Could I become a black feminist? While I had read the same criticism as everybody else in the class, and while I had a deeper background in the reading than many of the other students, and despite the fact that I felt I understood the theory that we’d studied, I wasn’t sure that I could provide
a black feminist reading. When I went to her office with these insecurities/fears, Dr. Henderson told me that she had trained me and taught me the skills necessary to write such a paper, that I had the requisite tools to write it. But, at the same time, she brought up the concept of "positionality" – that in her opinion my position as a white male did, in fact, matter. My task, as she presented it, was to negotiate these conflicting aspects of the assignments.

In some ways, this study serves as a continuation of that assignment. I feel that, due to my training and research, I can write about African American literature without reproducing the white critical tendency to enter the field as, in Houston Baker’s words, a “superordinate authorit[y]” (84). On the other hand, I am wary of Awkward’s reminder of the racialized stakes behind what Gates’ calls racial “attitudes” and what we might call perspective. Awkward writes, “I believe we must concede that a white critic is differently invested in Afro-American texts than a black critic because of what Sue-Ellen Case terms ‘racial privilege,’ which is characterized by a lack of ‘experience of racial oppression’ . . . . Even in self-reflexive white critical acts, racial privilege may create interpretive obstacles or, more important, points of resistance that color, in racially motivated ways, the effects of an exploration of blackness” (60).9 I agree whole-heartedly with Awkward here, and this acknowledgment has made my work on this project extremely uncomfortable and, at the same time, absolutely essential.

9 Later in the text, Awkward more pessimistically adds, “[I]nterpretive differences between white and black critics may result. . . from a desire on the part of the former to limit, circumscribe, or otherwise control the range of black discourse in order that this discourse can be made to act in accordance with existing caucacentric formulations of race and difference” (85).
I have striven as meticulously as I can to avoid the assumptions that arise from my position as a white male scholar writing about black literature. Nonetheless, perhaps the potential for “interpretive obstacles” and “points of resistance” in my work means I can never be an “authority” on African American literature. While I feel free to write about black texts, perhaps African American scholars should be the primary ones to judge this writing and point out its blind-spots and “racial prej judgment,” to echo DuBois’ quote in the epigraph. But, even so, I hope it continues a dialogue that will illuminate intellectual affinities as well as disparities. I also hope that if fifteen years from now, my daughter doesn’t spend the weekend with her school friends, it won’t be because that is “just the way things are.”
CHAPTER 2
THE “AMALGAMATION” OF SCIENCE AND LITERATURE: IRONY AND THE MISCEGENATION TABOO

Rape is only one of the many manifestations of an increasing tendency on the part of the negro to misconstrue personal freedom into personal license, and this tendency, persisted in, must tend towards creating a wider separation of the races.

- Frederick Hoffman

Emancipation has done much, but time and moral training among the white men of the South are the only cures for concubinage.

- Pauline Hopkins

**America in 1885. (Negro supremacy – the whites under foot.)**

- Mark Twain

In the final decades of the nineteenth century, the tenor of the discourse surrounding racial politics and race in general changed dramatically. Not only had much of the Reconstruction legislation been repealed, but new means of discussing race empirically were being created. While by this time phrenology and similar mid-century scientific theories of racial classification had been largely discounted, new theories arose to reestablish the comparative differences between races that phrenology, and earlier the lineage of slavery, initially affirmed. The debate surrounding these issues intensified as disciplines such as criminal anthropology sought for the first time to evaluate and identify the biology and heredity of criminals. Since this research into heredity unsurprisingly

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1 Citations for the epigraph are as follows: 1) Frederick Hoffman, Race Traits and Tendencies of the American Negro, pg. 234; 2) Pauline Hopkins, Contending Forces, pg. 332; 3) Mark Twain, Journals and Notebooks, Vol. III.
hinged on racial difference, reformers used pseudo-scientific “discoveries” to reexamine the social and legal systems in terms of the ramifications that biology would have on racialized human behavior (Gould 17). If criminal activity proved to be more pronounced in certain races, as many scientists theorized, then the legal system and social codes would have to be adapted to reflect this difference.

As a result of the search for the biological underpinnings of racial traits, the body and the power to define and categorize the body, rather than traditional notions of ancestry, became a key site of contestation in the debate over racial classification. That is to say, the debate often revolved around whether or not racial identity could be revealed through an empirical examination of the body, and often individual body parts. In short, as it became increasingly difficult in social situations to determine race, these discourses that purported to demonstrate veracity gained cultural legitimacy because they seemed to resolve (or at least address) the question of racial identity/identification. Two novels, *Pudd'nhead Wilson* (1894) by Mark Twain and *Contending Forces* (1900) by Pauline Hopkins, entered into this debate by invoking the rhetoric behind contemporary scientific discourses of racial classification.

In this chapter, I will argue that by turning our attention to the use of scientific rhetoric in these texts, we can see how Twain and Hopkins deal explicitly and implicitly

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2 In an attempt to contest the value given to, and strength of, this rhetoric, the groups responsible for challenging Jim Crow segregation in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) intentionally chose a very light-skinned man with African American ancestry, Homer Plessy, to be arrested in the “whites only” train car. The prosecuting attorneys hoped that such a move would prove the impossibility of determining race in such a situation. For a more detailed examination of this case in relation to Charles Chesnutt’s concept of Justice and the United States’ judicial system, see Chapter Three of this work.
with one of the era’s most threatening and unspeakable topics — miscegenation.

Although Twain satirizes some of the time’s racial hysteria, his reliance on Wilson’s “scientics” of fingerprinting to establish the “truth” about Tom Driscoll’s ancestry exposes his reluctance to deal in any substantive way with the topic of miscegenation and its attendant suggestion of “social equality.” As Twain does, Pauline Hopkins mobilizes the rhetoric of scientific racial classification to explore the racial dynamics of the period. However, Hopkins makes ironic use of the key terms and concepts of scientific discourse — such as the distinction between biological “traits” and cultural “tendencies” — to resist the racist conclusions of this science and to illuminate the social anxieties surrounding the nation’s obsession with racial and sexual identity.

Nancy Stepan and Sander Gilman have pointed out that irony ultimately proved ineffective for many late nineteenth century authors writing from “disadvantaged and problematic positions. . . because [it] did not fit the depersonalized, nonauthorial style of modern science” (83). As modern science gained a more authoritative position in American culture, and as much of this science was tied more firmly to racial classification, scientific claims could be “effectively rebutted,” in the words of Stepan and Gilman, only by competing scientific discourses. Obviously, marginalized voices such as Hopkins could not easily enter into these fields. If irony often proved impotent in the face of the authority of science because it was either missed by the dominant public or it was dismissed as bitter and inappropriate, and black women were largely excluded from the scientific community, how then could a writer like Hopkins create a text that would “faithfully portray the inmost thoughts and feelings of the Negro with all the fire and
romance which lie dormant in our history,” to quote Hopkins’ preface (14, emphasis in original)?

Hopkins’ mention of the dormant nature of this fire and romance illuminates the vexed nature of her project. After all, these aspects of African American culture remained dormant in large part due to the desires and prejudices of a politics that also served to buttress the scientific classification of race. If “fire” proves to be dangerous and “romance” causes one to drop his/her defenses, then we can see the white community’s reluctance to touch either one of these aspects of African American culture. Furthermore, racist science often attempted to negate – by claiming they did not exist – these types of “feelings” within the black community.

In this paper I use the term “irony” when discussing Hopkins’ text, because irony creates a linguistic space for contesting established norms by suggesting a fundamental incongruity or duplicity which leads to multiple interpretations. Because it fragments or divides its topic, irony can be used to destabilize, or at least question, culturally established structures of meaning. If Stepan and Gilman argue that irony proved largely ineffective, I would claim that it remained one of the few tools available to writers of color who sought to argue against rigid social and political norms. While this irony may have been missed or ignored by the dominant society, surely it served a vital purpose to the African American readership who doubtlessly “got” it. This idea of multiple audiences seems to be at the heart of Henry Louis Gates’ notion of a double-voiced discourse, one that speaks to two audiences and in two registers simultaneously. In fact, we could take it one step further and suggest that writers such as Hopkins depended upon the white community’s misreading of the irony. As Gates claims, “Free of the white
person’s gaze, black people created their own unique vernacular structures and relished in the double play that these forms bore to white forms” (xxiv). While Gates’ figuration does not allow us to recognize Hopkins’ struggle with the internalization of white racist pronouncements of racial difference, it does illuminate her strategy of resistance against dominant racial paradigms.

At times, Hopkins’ critique of racial classification seems to share much with Twain’s dismantling of racial categories in *Pudd’nhead Wilson*. Both authors, after all, expose the illogical foundations upon which claims of racial difference are based. However, this chapter argues that while Twain and Hopkins both use irony/satire to critique turn-of-the-century racial hysteria, this use is inevitably affected by their positions in a racist and sexist society – Twain as a prominent and well-liked white male and Hopkins as a relatively obscure (except in African American circles) black woman.

Nineteenth-century American society (specifically white society) was undoubtedly more inclined to accept Mark Twain criticizing the nation’s obsessions than it would Pauline Hopkins. For this reason, I will use the word “satire” when discussing Twain, as opposed to Hopkins’ irony, in order to distinguish between the stakes for Twain and Hopkins in writing a parodic critique of society. In *Pudd’nhead Wilson* Twain freely satirizes the nation’s racial dynamics from the position of a famous writer known for his

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3 In much the same way, our society tends to chuckle, and nod our collective head, at Dave Barry’s satirical comments on, for example, our nation’s technological obsession and the resulting labor dynamics, but we dismiss as unruly comments from the labor unions or from strident minority factions. Obviously, I understand that there are numerous substantial differences between Twain and Barry, but I do think the fact that their satire is “loved” by American society does to some degree depend upon their position as relatively comfortable white men. This comfort allows these men to poke fun at certain aspects of our society without questioning their foundations.
indecorous observations of American culture. Because of his position as a respected if iconoclastic white author, Twain can satirize the “fiction” of racial classification while using the discourse of scientific ethnology without deeply alarming his audience or undermining significantly the more deeply-ingrained social codes behind this discourse, such as de facto segregation and the miscegenation taboo. I do not wish to digress into a lengthy philosophical discussion about the difference between satire and irony. Instead, I use these terms simply to recognize and turn our attention to the different reception their parodic commentaries would encounter. In short, although both Twain’s satire and Hopkins’ irony critique the logic of post-Reconstruction racial classification, they do so in different registers.\(^4\)

\(^4\) To see the importance of the difference between what I’m calling irony and satire in the context of public reaction one need only to compare the response to Hopkins’ book with that of the black journalist Alexander Manly’s notorious 1898 reply to Rebecca Latimer Felton’s speech on lynching. In this speech Manly uses what I have termed “satire” to attack the logic of Felton’s argument for need of increased lynching to protect “woman’s dearest possession.” Manly counters Felton by suggesting that white men should: guard their women more closely. . . thus giving no opportunity for the human fiend, be he white or black. . . Every negro lynched is called a Big Burly Black Brute, when, in fact, many of those who have been dealt with had white men for their fathers, and were not only not black and burly, but were sufficiently attractive for white girls of culture and refinement to fall in love with them, as is very well known to all. (cited in Sundquist 411-12)

While Manly addresses the same topics as do Hopkins (miscegenation and the rape of black women) and Twain (consensual sexual relations across racial lines), the white press used Manly’s article as a call-to-action for reestablishing white supremacy in political, social, and economic arenas. Although there are doubtless many reasons why Manly’s article was vilified and Hopkins’ text was not (in fact, it was barely noticed by the white community), one can see the ways in which the different rhetorical routes taken by these writers, and the white response to their critiques of racist dogma, affect their reception.
A “Trace” of Fear: Mark Twain and the Logic of Miscegenation

In *Pudd’nhead Wilson* Twain initially satirizes the discourse of racial purity through his use of an overly-determined conception of inherited “blood.” From the beginning of the text, the narrator informs the reader of the biracial “blood” of the principal enslaved characters. This sardonic observer of the events of Dawson’s Landing meticulously (and a bit facetiously) breaks down the characters’ lineage according to their racialized ancestry, emphasizing the fact that Roxana is one-sixteenth “black,” and as Roxana herself claims "thirty-one parts o’ her son are “white” (109). This information provides a frame of reference to help clarify the intricate relationships between the characters in the novel and emphasizes the extent that miscegenation was a reality in the pre-Emancipation South. It also evokes the terminology of the legal racial classification of the 1890s. As with the "one-drop" theories, whereby a person is labeled black by virtue of any identifiably black ancestors at all, Roxana and her son Tom are overwhelmingly “white,” both in terms of ancestry and appearance – Roxana's “one sixteenth” does not show (29), while Tom is successfully switched with a "white" boy, Chambers. However, by a "fiction of law and custom" (29), society defines both characters as black.

In the first half of the book, Twain seems to advance the notion that race is a social construction, that environment (training) determines the “racial” characteristics that are so often attributed to heredity. Soon after Roxy switches Chambers and Tom, the reader sees the effect that environment has on the two boys: “Tom got all the petting, Chambers got none. Tom got all the delicacies, Chambers got mush and milk, and clabber without sugar. In consequence Tom was a sickly child and Chambers wasn’t.
Tom was ‘fractious,’ as Roxy called it, and overbearing; Chambers was meek and docile” (41). Here, Twain clearly appears to be taking issue with the rhetoric of inherited racial traits that was so prevalent in the 1890s. He remarks with irony that “by the fiction created by [Roxy], [her son] was her master.” This satirical reevaluation of the rhetoric of biological difference that so pervaded the era’s scientific discussions of racial classification is a potentially radical one, calling into question the foundational logic of the society’s institutional racism.5

Many scholars have commented on Twain’s exposure of this legal “fiction” – the ways in which he demonstrates the cultural construction of racial identity. For example, in her illuminating essay “Sure Identifiers: Race, Science, and the Law in Pudd’nhead Wilson,” Susan Gillman states, “For Twain the apparent precision implied by minute fractional divisions (one-sixteenth, one thirty-second) only underscores their disjunction from reality” (“Identifiers” 90). By reading this “fiction” of law and custom alongside the murder plot in which Tom becomes both “property (an extension of the master’s will) and nonproperty (in that he can be tried for very willful, antisocial acts, such as murder)” Gillman concludes that Twain undermines absolute racial categories. In Pudd’nhead Wilson, “[t]hose categories are not biologically fixed but rather culturally determined” (90). Similarly focusing on Wilson’s line of argumentation in the climactic court case, Eric Sundquist argues that “Wilson’s triumphant display of Tom’s identity as a ‘negro

5 For some salient examples of the scientific theories of the time, see Daniel Aaron’s “The ‘Inky Curse’: Miscegenation in the White Literary Imagination,” George Frederickson’s The Black Image in the White Mind, Stephen Jay Gould’s “Politics of Evolution,” John Haller, Jr.’s Outcasts from Evolution, Frederick Hoffman’s Race Traits and Tendencies, and chapter five of James Kinney’s Amalgamation.
and slave' shows . . . that those two categories are social constructions that have been wrongly construed as natural” (252). Thus, Sundquist builds his argument around the idea that Twain “subverted the category of instinct and portrayed race as a role” (231).6

Gillman and Sundquist expertly illuminate Twain's satirizing of the era's rhetoric of racial essentialism. However, I would claim that, while Twain may uncover the fictive nature of racial identity, he does not ultimately delegitimate this fiction as these critics claim. By having Wilson's science ultimately “reveal” Tom's status as an African American and a slave, Pudd'nhead Wilson suggests that racial classification may be hard to identify, but it nonetheless remains. As one critic phrases it, “People may appear to be equal, [the novel] says, but they are really not” (Jehlen 50). In short, although Twain may want to claim that racial classification is a fiction that depends upon training and role-playing, it appears to be a fabrication that he is finally unable to dismiss. Or to put it another way, while Twain seems interested in illuminating the absurdity of the racial dynamics in pre-Emancipation America (and by extension the 1890s), he ultimately shies away from the logical consequences of a raceless society.7

6 For several differing interpretations of Twain's racial theories in Pudd’nhead Wilson, including Gillman's and Sundquist's, see Mark Twain's Pudd’nhead Wilson: Race, Conflict, and Culture, edited by Susan Gillman and Forrest Robinson.

7 Here I differ from the argument advanced by Brook Thomas in his article “Tragedies of Race, Training, Birth, and Communities of Competent Pudd’neads.” While I follow his lead in reconstructing the novel's engagement of the logic of “one-drop” theories of race, I part with Thomas with his assertion that Twain does not reconstruct the prevailing societal order at the end of the text. He writes, “For both Twain and Roxy, tragedy replaces comedy/farce because of cultural circumstances beyond their control. The traditional plot of European comedy in which confusion over identity disrupts a hierarchical order that is restored when true identity is revealed does not seem to work in democratic America—at least not when the confusion of identity involves race” (754). While I do not wish to claim that this ending makes Twain's novel a comedy, when
In keeping with the era’s scientific attempt to document physically identifiable racial characteristics, Wilson’s quest to measure empirically fingerprints shifts the debate and determination of individual identity firmly onto one’s physical characteristics. While a person’s “true race” may be nearly invisible, and constructed socially, his/her body contains subtle clues which proclaim his/her racial identity. In this text, the hand (through Wilson's fingerprinting) initially works to accentuate one's embodiment – to forge the connection between personal identity and the body's physicality. Throughout the story, Wilson industriously circulates throughout Dawson's Landing, collecting fingerprints of all the townspeople. From Judge Driscoll to Roxana's infant, Wilson "records," identifies, and stores all the fingerprints identically, as a chronicle of each subject's unchanging individuality. This new science of fingerprinting sought to insure one's individuality, as Francis Galton explains in his 1892 *Finger Prints*: "To fix the human personality, to give to each human being an identity, an individuality that can be depended upon with certainty, lasting, unchangeable, always recognizable and easily adduced, this appears to be in the largest sense the aim of the new method" (cited in Gillman, “Identifiers” 98).

Whatever Galton claims to be "in the largest sense" the goal of fingerprinting, he also believed that some universal racial traits could be discerned in his new science. Although he ultimately admitted that his method could not indicate "Race and Temperament," he initially believed that essential racial characteristics, such as "intelligence," could be identified in fingerprints (“Identifiers” 100). In this instance, we

Tom’s “true identity” – his status as “black” slave – is revealed he is “sold down the river” and the “correct” hierarchy is reestablished.
see society's unquestioned belief in the hierarchical distribution of intelligence amongst the races influencing Galton's "objective" science. His theory that racial characteristics would show up in fingerprints did not come from his scientific research; it came from his preconceptions. Fittingly, after completing his work on fingerprints, Galton went on to become one of the leading proponents of eugenics, which strove for a "progressive breeding" and "an improved society" (Sundquist 251-2).

The idea that intelligence is an empirically identifiable racial trait also proves crucial to the political milieu of the era. Twain was writing Pudd'nhead Wilson at a time when the scientific community was linking political rights to racial abilities/traits. If Galton's assumption of racial difference ultimately compromised his scientific accuracy (as he eventually admitted), this science nonetheless undergirded and legitimated racist social policy. In 1890, four years before Pudd'nhead Wilson was published, D.G. Brinton wrote,

The adult who retains the more numerous fetal, infantile or simian traits, is unquestionably inferior to him whose development has progressed beyond them. . . . Measured by these criteria, the European or white race stands at the head of the list, the African or negro at its foot. . . . All parts of the body have been minutely scanned, measured, and weighed, in order to erect a science of the comparative anatomy of the races.” (cited in Gould, Mismeasure 21-22)

At the end of this passage Brinton is talking about quantitatively categorizing individual bodies in order to develop a racial hierarchy – scanning, measuring, and weighing bodies in order to create ethnological distinctions between races. While such a claim demonstrates the perceived scientific value of one's physical measurements, perhaps we could turn our attention to Brinton's earlier metaphorical invocation of the body – the European stands at the "head" and the negro at the "foot" – to claim that such a racial
science has severe implications for the body politic. If African Americans are linked through their bodies with children, with their "infantile or simian traits," then they can, like children, be denied political rights, a political voice, and due process. In short, physical traits, such as the flat foot, become loaded signifiers for claims of the inferiority of the black population, which places them "naturally" at (under?) the "foot" of society.

Although fingerprinting and eugenics begin to enter the discursive fields of the scientific community dominated by the likes of Brinton at the turn of the century, Twain anachronistically places Wilson's fingerprinting "scientistics" in the 1840s. We can see this move as Twain's way of dealing cautiously with the volatile subject of miscegenation by placing it at a historically safe distance, where the reality of "race mixing" was undeniable but the rules governing it clearly determined – the offspring would generally be remanded to slavery. In this way, he remains free to explore the subject of racial classification in a contained way without opening up the questions of racial identity that so disturbed the white public of the 1890s.

As the science of fingerprinting can be linked to eugenics through Galton, perhaps it is no coincidence that Twain describes Wilson's project in terms that resonate with past eugenic endeavors. Wilson's science, while it claims to reveal one's personal identity, actually serves to classify the townspeople of Dawson's Landing according to race. When Goading Wilson about his fingerprints, Tom quips, "Here they don't give shucks for his scientistics, and they call his skull a notion factory... he'll make his mark someday – fingermark" (81-2). By calling attention to Wilson's "skull" in the context of the science of classification, especially racial classification, the narrative invokes ideas of phrenology, a "science" that measured the skull in hopes of establishing, like Galton's
fingerprints, an essential and quantifiable racial difference. By the 1890s phrenology was largely understood as a pseudo-science of "notions," rather than a legitimate method of distinguishing the races. By the 1890s phrenology was largely understood as a pseudo-science of "notions," rather than a legitimate method of distinguishing the races. At the time Twain was writing *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, Galton's fingerprinting had surpassed this obsolete science. Fittingly, Wilson will "make his mark" through a science that, in the context of the book, discerns a person's "appropriate" place in society. In this context, fingerprinting performs the task that phrenology was unable to do. Wilson's "records" ultimately indicate precisely this racial classification. The fingerprints, which should establish individual identity apart from racial identity, actually prove and solidify racial distinctions.

If Twain exposes the "fiction" of racial classification, his book only strengthens the force of this fiction by having Wilson discover and reveal scientifically Tom's black ancestry, thus casting him back into his "place"—slavery. In this light, Roxy's switching of the children (a potentially subversive act of racial mixing) is canceled by Wilson's science. Before he is caught and labeled as "black," Tom confidently gloats in what he

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8 While I have used the term "pseudo-science" to identify the changing scientific sensibilities of the late nineteenth century (the ways in which scientific theories of classification were debunked and supported), we should also keep in mind Stepan's and Gilman's claim that scientists have historically used this term to ignore the political ramifications of their theories, particularly with regard to racial difference. They write, "[C]alling scientific racism a pseudoscience. . . allows scientists to refuse to confront the issue of the inherently political nature of much of the biological and human sciences, and to ignore the problem of the persistence of racial metaphors of inferiority in the sciences of today" (76).

9 Myra Jehlen argues similarly that Wilson "counters, then surpasses Roxy's authority" (53). For Jehlen, Wilson, by asserting a "godlike authority," reestablishes white patriarchy, although Twain does not relish this restoration of the status quo. She writes, "This is a familiar dilemma in his works, which frequently end, as does *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, in a stalemate between radical criticism and an implicit conservatism expressed in the refusal, or the inability, to imagine significant change" (52-55).
believes to be his flawless murder of Judge Driscoll: "All the detectives on Earth couldn't trace me now" (142). "There's not even the faintest suggestion of a trace left" (150).

Although Tom is alluding to how expertly he covered his tracks during the murder, the word "trace" hints at how closely this trial hinges on racial purity and classification. For in the context of the book there are several ways he may be traced. Firstly, one could trace his lineage as Roxana does,

My great-great-great-gran'father en yo' great-great-great-great-gran'father was Old Cap'n John Smith, de highest blood dat Ole Virginny every turned out, en his great-great-gran'mother, or somers along back dah, was Pocahontas de Injun queen, en her husban' was a nigger king outen Africa. (109)

Secondly, one could identify the "trace" of "black" blood that denies him the entitlements of aristocratic whiteness; lastly, one could trace the lines of his fingerprint (as Wilson does with the pantograph). All three examples, though different in methodology, come to the same conclusion – that Tom is "black" and "belongs" with the black community.

Although Tom feels his crime is flawless, Wilson eventually uncovers his crime in these ways.

In the concluding courtroom scene, Tom – ironically the most skeptical heckler of Wilson's "black magic" (85) – is betrayed by his body (hand), and is revealed to be a "black" imposter. Earlier in the text, when Tom receives his first up-close demonstration of Wilson's science, he exclaims in horror, "Why, a man's own hand is his deadliest enemy. . . a man's own hand keeps a record of the deepest and fatalest secrets of his life, and is treacherously ready to expose him to any black magic stranger that comes along" (84-5, emphasis mine). On a literal level, this quote acts as foreshadowing, ironically commenting on Tom's ultimate downfall. If we look at the quote in terms of the rhetoric
of racial purity we have been exploring, however, it also indicates a more subtle aspect of Twain's novel. Tom's body (hand) is uncontrollable, unable to hide his "blackness." As he comments in the courtroom, "A body can't win every time; you'll hang somebody yet" (152, emphasis mine). His uncontrollable body (hand), with the prodding of a science of classification, has revealed his essential blackness, his invisible drop of black blood. At the end of Pudd'nhead Wilson, Twain seems to be saying that even if race is ultimately a social construction, white society needs the fabrication of absolute racial difference to indulge its fantasies of racial purity.

After Wilson's triumph at the trial, he loses the nickname Pudd'nhead, as Dawson Landing "came to serenade Wilson... for all his sentences were golden, now, all were marvelous" (165). Even as Twain satirizes the flippant reactions of the community, his text seems to share its relief. Perhaps we can see Dawson Landing's post-trial exaltation of Wilson as the end of Twain's satire, as the citizenry finally realizes the value of Wilson's "scientifics" to the maintenance of social order. We can see a similar hesitancy to undermine established social roles on Twain's part in A Connecticut Yankee at King Arthur's Court. Indeed, in both Connecticut Yankee and Pudd'nhead Wilson, Twain reverses the roles of slave and master – suggesting the arbitrary nature of these distinctions – but both novels seem uneasy with this reversal and finally re-establish the "appropriate" hierarchy at the end.10

10 Both books also look back historically to eras of forced servitude/slavery, but have very real connections to Twain's own time, including details of post-slavery America. (Pudd'nhead Wilson contains Galton's fingerprinting, which wasn't developed until the 1870s, while Connecticut Yankee focuses on late nineteenth-century labor issues and industrialization, but places them in the time of King Arthur's Court.) For a discussion of Connecticut Yankee in connection to post-Emancipation America, see Richard
Needless to say, two inevitable casualties of a raceless society, even a theoretical one, would be the taboo against miscegenation and the strictly-enforced segregation that served the white elite power structure. After all, the miscegenation taboo and the attendant slogan of “social equality” served as crucial lynchpins holding together the entire scaffolding of “white supremacist ideology” (Gaines 58). When we examine Twain’s commentary on the “fiction” of racial categories not in terms of his discussion of slavery’s inconsistencies/contradictions from the distance of fifty years, but in terms of the logical extension of these inconsistencies – i.e., miscegenation in the 1890s, we see a very different side of Twain’s satire.

Although the very plot of Pudd’nhead Wilson seems to demand attention to the topic of miscegenation, Twain never addresses the issue in any substantive way. All of the “race mixing” in Twain’s narrative occurs well before the opening of the book. We learn second-hand of Roxana’s relationship with Colonel Burleigh Essex of “ole Virginny stock” (73). From the scant details that Twain provides, we learn that Roxana remains proud of her association with Colonel Essex, with Tom apparently the result of a consensual affair between slave and master. This history removes the topic of miscegenation from all but the distant memory of Twain’s text, thus displacing it from the center of the narrative. It also implies that, even during slavery, miscegenation was a harmless and mutual display of affection and/or passion. Whereas the reality of miscegenation for the overwhelming majority of the enslaved community was the institutional rape of black women by white masters, as critics such as Hazel Carby, Ann Slotkin’s article, “Mark Twain’s Frontier, Hank Morgan’s Last Stand.” Here, he argues that Morgan functions in the novel as a Reconstruction carpetbagger.
ducille, Kevin Gaines, and Sandra Gunning have pointed out, for Twain it remains a harmless and perhaps even tender meeting of a passionate slave and her obliging master – an image we will see that Hopkins emphatically challenges. In fact, with the exception of Percy Driscoll, who indirectly threatens to sell her child, Roxana almost unanimously supports the white aristocrats as noble and gentlemanly leaders.

Even if we bracket Twain’s avoidance of the “amalgamation” that resulted in the birth of Tom, the text has other moments when the topic of miscegenation is conspicuously absent. While Pudd’nhead Wilson has undergone numerous and mercurial reevaluations, critics have consistently returned to the manner in which Twain invokes and satirizes the sentimental romance. We could take issue with the idea of sentimentalism as a stable genre – the ways in which it elides disparate textual strategies within a static transhistorical category and excludes others. Even if we leave aside the critical problems that this genre raises, we would expect a novel dealing with traditional sentimental plots, even a satire of the convention, to deal with one of the genre’s most established tropes – the marriage plot. For example, even as Charles Chesnutt challenges and satirizes the notion of the Southern romance as filtered through Sir Walter Scott in his bitingly ironic and condemnatory novel The House Behind the Cedars (1900), he advances his critique of Southern honor in terms of its marriage customs and the miscegenation taboo.

Similarly, if Twain mocks the conventions of the romance in Pudd’nhead Wilson, he would seemingly have to address one of its most crucial themes – love and marriage.11

11 For a compelling discussion of the ways in which the literary conventions of love and marriage are racially inflected, and particularly how these conventions are reproduced and
Certainly, Tom Driscoll, as a young and apparently financially "set" aristocrat, would seem to fit perfectly into this role. However, Twain does not mention any romantic interludes, amorous intentions, or desires on Tom's part at all; to do so would be to position the topic of miscegenation firmly at the center of the novel. Because Tom is a slave switched with the "true" aristocrat, any mention of love or marriage would inevitably lead to the accidental mixing of the races. Twain seems to balk at this possibility – the threat of inadvertent miscegenation. Instead of finding a suitable "mate" either in Dawson's Landing or his bachelor haunts in St. Louis, Tom falls in love with a pursuit that is traditionally segregated along gender lines – gambling. In fact, Tom rarely even speaks to a white woman. If Twain critiques the "fiction" of racial science, he rigorously maintains the social customs which this science buttresses.

Given the political connections that marriage conventionally provides in "romance" texts, such as familial alliances and social introductions, Twain's failure to deal openly with the subject of miscegenation allows his text to bolster the political and economic status quo. After all, while both Roxana, as a mistress of a member of the Virginia aristocracy, and Tom, as a slave adopting the position of the master, have the potential to forge economic, social and political connections across racial lines, Twain snubs the radical possibilities inherent in the theme of miscegenation, and instead prefers to dabble in a temporary racial confusion, one that is clearly rectified by the end of the

altered in turn-of-the-century black women's fiction, see the introduction and first chapter of Ann DuCille's The Coupling Convention. She writes, "[W]hile the marriage plot has been coded as white, female, and European, its relationship to the African American novel has always been highly political. Making unconventional use of conventional literary forms, early black writers appropriated for their own emancipatory purposes both the genre of the novel and the structure of the marriage plot" (3).
Daniel Aaron claims that we can understand Twain's reticence on the subject of miscegenation by placing him in a tradition of white Southern authors, which for Aaron means white Southern male authors. We must understand that while Northern writers, according to Aaron, "had no first hand knowledge of interracial unions, Southern writers did. Miscegenation for them was a fact of life enmeshed in family history." Given Twain's Southern background, "his reluctance to speak candidly about miscegenation is understandable" (178-79). Not only does Aaron's assertion excuse Twain's omissions by placing them in the context of Southern codes of gentlemanly honor and decorum – "Mark Twain confined his comments on sexual matters to the smoking room" – it also obscures the political ramifications of Twain's decision to render miscegenation unspeakable. However, as his 1885 journal entry on race relations which reads "**America in 1885. (Negro supremacy—the whites under foot.)" demonstrates, Twain was clearly not immune to the hysteria surrounding the changing racial dynamics.

Stitching Up the Seams: Hopkins' Mending of the Reputation of Black Women

If Mark Twain initially satirizes the "fiction" of racial categories, but ultimately keeps them firmly in place by eschewing the topic of miscegenation, then in Contending Forces Pauline Hopkins seems to refocus traditional depictions of racial difference, ironically commenting on them, in order to magnify the illogical foundations of the science of racial classification and segregation more generally. As I mentioned earlier, Hopkins' use of irony depends upon its covert or understated nature to advance its commentary. While Hopkins challenges many of the racialist assumptions which gird the
traditional figuration of a race hierarchy, her text superficially seems to support the scientific rhetoric of an absolute disparity between the races. Certainly, if we do not recognize Hopkins’ ironic use of scientific discourse, some of her descriptions of the “white blood” of the "superior race" are hard to read for contemporary readers looking for a liberatory message in Hopkins’ work. As Richard Yarborough comments in his introduction to Contending Forces, "we must reluctantly conclude that in striving to convince the skeptical white reader that 'valuable specimens' like Will and Dora do exist, Hopkins never challenges the basic assumption that races can be ranked qualitatively" (xxxvi). While Yarborough’s comment turns our attention to Hopkins’ engagement with the topic of miscegenation, I believe Hopkins provides an ironic commentary on the scientific discourse of racial classification that does in fact challenge the basic assumption that races can be ranked qualitatively.

As I mentioned earlier, Stepan and Gilman see satire, wit, and irony – for their purposes these terms are interchangeable – as inadequate tools for a strategy of resistance to the authority of scientific racism. These critics suggest that the most effective response to this racism resided in what they term a “recontextualization” of scientific data. By meeting scientists on their own terms, “recontextualization” resulted in new interpretations, new narratives of self and identity, which amounted to a scientific counterdiscourse” (95). Since we have already seen the difficulties that members of a marginal community had in publicly mounting such a challenge, it is not surprising that all of the evidence that Stepan and Gilman cite as successful African American
“recontextualization” of scientific racism comes exclusively from black males. While these critics point out the obstacles Miller and DuBois overcame, surely black women faced sterner tests. We could certainly ask whether Pauline Hopkins could have published vitriolic manifestos attacking the scientific analysis of African Americans, as did Du Bois.

Whereas Wilson’s “scientifcs” render visible the invisible but unalterable physical racial determiners on the bodies of Twain’s “white” and “black” characters, Hopkins relocates the debate surrounding the corporeality of difference by turning the issue inward (beneath the skin) with the trope of racialized blood. *Contending Forces* contains two distinct storylines and eras, which merge at the novel’s end. The book begins in 1800 in Bermuda with Charles Montfort claiming he is moving his family and his slaves to the States to avoid the increasing British pressures on slavery. Montfort claims that after he becomes financially set, he plans to manumit his slaves and retire to England. Once settled in North Carolina, Montfort discovers that his plan to free his slaves does not sit well with the Southern white population. The tension between Montfort and the U.S. slaveholders increases until his supposed friend, Anson Pollock, orchestrates the murder of Montfort and the whipping of his wife, Grace. Unable to endure the disgrace, Grace drowns herself in the local sound. Due to research that points to Grace’s alleged “black blood,” their children, Charles and Jesse, become slaves.

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12 Stepan and Gilman mention Dr. Kelly Miller’s critique of Fredrick Hoffman’s *Race Traits and Tendencies of the American Negro* and W.E.B. DuBois’ “The Conservation of Races” and *The Health and Physique of the Negro American* as texts that successfully reject the interpretations of dominant scientific discourses (93-99).
The second half of the story follows Dora and Will Smith, and their mother Ma Smith, as they run a turn-of-the-twentieth-century boarding house in Boston. A beautiful Southern mulatta, Sappho Clark, shows up at the boarding house, becoming close friends with Dora, and attracting the interest of every young male, including Will. We eventually discover that, while in New Orleans, Sappho, known then as Mabelle Beaubean, was kidnapped by white folks jealous of her father’s successful store. She was then “sold” into “service” at a brothel, where she became pregnant. After she escaped from the brothel she gave her child to a convent and reinvented herself in Boston, changing her name to Sappho Clark. When John Langley, a friend of Will’s and Dora’s betrothed, discovers her history, he attempts to blackmail Sappho into sleeping with him. The Smith family discovers this plan and Dora and Will break off associations with Langley, but not before Sappho, who has recently accepted Will’s proposal of marriage, leaves without a trace and hides herself in New Orleans. The Smith family look for her in vain; after graduating from Harvard, Will goes dejectedly off to Heidelberg to continue his studies, and Dora marries her childhood sweetheart, Dr. Lewis, and moves with him to the South.¹³

The two stories merge and the novel comes to a conclusion as we learn that the mulatto Smiths are direct descendants of the Englishman Charles Montfort, who is the grandson of Charles and Grace Montfort, and as such they are entitled to a large sum of money. They also discover that Langley is an ancestor of Anson Pollock, thus confirming, through the novel’s neo-Lamarckian philosophy, his degenerate character.

¹³ Hopkins gives Will a biography and a philosophical perspective that has much in common with that of W.E.B. DuBois, while Dr. Lewis runs a Southern industrial school, and is clearly meant to represent the philosophy of Booker T. Washington.
Dora and Dr. Lewis settle in New Orleans, where Will finds Sappho while visiting. Will and Sappho marry, and Alphonse, Sappho’s child, joins them in what the book suggests can only develop into a close-knit and happy family. And, fitting with the novel’s moral economy, John Langley freezes to death alone in a greedy attempt to find gold in Alaska.

Hopkins attempted to pitch this story of “mixed” blood lines to both black and white audiences. *Contending Forces* was aggressively advertised in the *Colored American Magazine*, a periodical over which Hopkins was serving as editor, and was touted “the greatest race book of the year” (Peterson 177). In 1903, Hopkins wrote in a letter to Cornelia Condict, claiming, “My stories are definitely planned to show the obstacles persistently placed in our paths by a dominant race to subjugate us spiritually” (Shockley 25). Despite this “radical” agenda and Hopkins’ close ties with the *Colored American Magazine*, the novel was clearly targeted to white audiences as well. Two advertisements in the magazine claimed the novel was a “book that will not only appeal strongly to the race everywhere, but will have a large sale among the whites” (Peterson 177); and, similarly, “The book will certainly create a sensation among a certain class of ‘whites’ at the south, as well as awaken a general interest among our race, not only in this country, but throughout the world” (Shockley 25).

Perhaps this two-sided agenda of the novel – to serve both as a radical tale of subjugation and as a best-seller among white audiences – can explain Hopkins’ complex relationship to the era’s scientific rhetoric. Writing about what he terms Hopkins’ “self-contradictory narrator,” Thomas Cassidy states, “[Hopkins’] white audience, she apparently hopes, will be comforted and flattered by [the novel’s] non-threatening
reassurances of [the] general superiority [of the white race]; her black audience will understand her double-voicedness and will find the other scenes of portrayal of black life to be worth their patience" (664). While such a figuration begins to account for some of Hopkins' troubling rhetoric of a racial hierarchy, I would claim that we do not need to look to separate scenes, or bracket off certain quotations, in order to see Hopkins' dual objectives. They occur, I would argue, within the book simultaneously.

In short, the book juxtaposes what I will call her intercommunal message aimed at comforting, and eliciting empathy from, the white community and an intracommunal expression of the unity and progress of the black community designed to inspire and educate the black community. Perhaps the best place to see these two registers at work would be the chapter entitled "The Sewing-Circle." In this chapter, and in the related section on the American Colored League, Hopkins presents an alternative vision of the African American race, one that exists outside the domain of science's cold glare and relies on a different site of authority than does science. Mrs. Willis directs the sewing circle, and Hopkins describes her as a "shrewd woman" who outmatches "subtle businessmen" with "her apparent womanly weakness and charming simplicity" (144). Under Mrs. Willis' direction, the sewing circle represents the values of the black woman's club movement. As Hopkins explains, "the first business of the meeting was to go over events of interest to the Negro race which had transpired during the week throughout the country" (143).

In this context, the sewing circle functions much like a teach-in, as informed individuals teach others about injustices committed against and triumphs within the
African American community. We might think of this as the *intracommunal* function of the sewing circle. Hopkins explains that the work of Mrs. Willis and other like-minded black women “bore glorious fruit in the formation of clubs of colored women banded together for charity, for study, for every reason under God’s glorious heavens that can better the condition of mankind” (147). This rhetoric of uplift was meant to inspire and educate, to provide examples and patterns of success to “striving” black women. Hopkins’ inclusion of “study” in this list of activities is crucial to the rhetoric of uplift: “Describing a group struggle for freedom and social advancement,” writes Gaines, “uplift also suggests that African Americans have, with an almost religious fervor, regarded education as the key to liberation” (1). By claiming that the women had “banded together” for a unified purpose, Hopkins emphasized the *intracommunal* role that the club movement played in her notion of uplift.

Even as she advances this vision of a tight-knit group of women assembled for the purpose of education, the lessons learned at the sewing circle seem to be pitched at white readers, as well as members of the black clubs. Mrs. Willis opens the meeting by turning the women’s attention to the “great cause of the evolution of true womanhood” and “the place which the virtuous woman occupies in upbuilding the race” (146, 148). In short, the women are being educated about Victorian womanliness/purity. Mrs. Willis explains, “it will rest with you and your children to refute the charges brought against us as to our moral irresponsibility, and the low moral standard maintained by us in comparison with other races” (148). While Hopkins clearly sees this idea of true womanhood as a valuable one for all black women, the manner in which she presents this message seems aimed at
the white readership in order to convince them that their stereotypes of licentious black womanhood are just that – false and damning stereotypes. In this “lesson,” Hopkins, through Mrs. Willis, directly contradicts the legacy of a racist science that constructs black women as inherently sexual beings.14 While not invoking the rhetoric of science, this “moral” message directly confronts its findings.

This lesson, then, would be her intercommunal message, designed to educate/convince white readers of their erroneous beliefs. Hopkins presents us with the roots of these scientific conclusions, roots that disprove them. Mrs. Willis informs us, “Travelers tell us that the native African woman is impregnable in her virtue” (149). Slavery, then, and the institutional rape of black women before and after Emancipation become the base of the rumors of black women’s licentiousness. To be sure, the sewing circle forwards a paradigm of womanhood that closely mirrors what Gaines terms, “the Victorian myth of women’s moral superiority” (142).15

Black women, Hopkins implies, “naturally” contain the same desire for purity as do white women. The difference for Hopkins, and this constitutes the basis of her

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14 For an in-depth examination of the scientific obsession with black female sexuality, see Sander Gilman’s "Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine, and Literature."

15 To see a clearer example of how black women writers used Victorian notions of femininity to advance the cause of African American women’s uplift, look at Anna Julia Cooper’s “Womanhood a Vital Element in the Regeneration and Progress of a Race.” In this essay, originally read before the “colored clergy” of the Protestant Episcopal Church, Cooper asks the clergy, “Will not the aid of the Church be given to prepare our girls in head, heart, and hand for the duties and responsibilities that await the intelligent wife, the Christian mother, the earnest, virtuous, helpful woman, at once both the lever and the fulcrum for uplifting the race?” (Cooper 568).
intercommunal message, is that, due to white men’s actions, black women have been
denied the ability to pursue and fulfill this desire. For this reason Hopkins presents a
redefined, relative notion of purity that has much in common with that of Harriet Jacobs.
Responding to Sappho’s fears about black women being blamed by God – and we could
add the white community also – for their illegitimacy, Mrs. Willis answers, “I believe that
we shall not be held responsible for wrongs which we have unconsciously committed, or
which we have committed under compulsion. We are virtuous or non-virtuous only when
we have a choice under temptation” (140, emphasis in original). Hopkins appeals to the
broader issue of morality to circumvent science’s tendency to reduce African American
women to their bodies, including bodily measurements, and bodily urges. While her
appeal to a moral standard may appear a subjective concept tied to religiosity today,
Hopkins seeks to align her morality to similar claims that yoke morality and respectable
humanity. In other words, to be moral, in the era’s conception of the term, is to be fully
human in the eyes of society, an elusive goal for turn-of-the-century African Americans.
Fitting under the mantle of morality not only gets one into heaven; it allows one to take
part in American society. When in 1872 Charles Loring Brace refers to the “moral and
fortunate classes” who direct and govern American society (Trachtenberg xiii), he defines
the very communities in which racialist science claimed African Americans did not
belong. Race science asserted that African Americans were not “fit” for handling
positions of power; morality became a powerful tool for blacks to prove they were.

The myth of black women’s licentiousness, Hopkins argues, stems from three
causes: 1) erroneous reports and lies about African American women’s sexual morés; 2)
the white community's denying the black populace the opportunity for education and a stable social structure that enable the practice of "purity"—thus leading to unconscious "wrongs"; and 3) the rape of black women by white women, as in Sappho's example—"wrongs" committed "under compulsion." While providing an intracommunal paradigm of uplift education, Hopkins' example of the sewing circle simultaneously presents an intercommunal declaration of the connections between the rhetoric of purity and the oppression of black women. In the words of Gaines, "the proverbial sanctity of white womanhood was intertwined with the moral devaluation of black women, all of which abetted the terroristic component of white supremacy, and the dispossession of blacks, practiced in the name of 'civilization'" (149).

Ironic Out the Difference: Pauline Hopkins' Scientific "Specimens"

Without a doubt, one of the most deleterious prongs of the racist discourse of civilization is the rhetoric of scientific racial classification. Hopkins enters into this discourse by describing John Langley, perhaps the "whitest" of the mulatto characters, in terms of the scientific rhetoric so often marshaled to isolate and identify the empirical difference of blackness, which became equated with criminality and inferiority. In fact, Hopkins accounts for Langley's moral delinquency in terms of the racialist pseudo-science of phrenology: "Sensuality was prominent in the phrenological development of his head, although no one of his associates would have called him a libertine. Nevertheless, there it lurked ready to assert itself when the conditions were ripe to call it into action" (226). Here Hopkins invokes phrenology to bind together quantitative
physical attributes with qualitative moral faculty. Relying on a neo-Lamarckian concept of heredity, Hopkins suggests that Langley's licentious behavior is rooted in his biological make-up. Even if his "conditions" (training) allow such behavior to remain latent, it will one day emerge, revealing his "true" degenerate self. In this instance, it appears as though “training” does not supercede heredity. Rather, it merely drapes a facade over Langley's biological "essence." One wonders why Hopkins would give credence to phrenology, a science that both provides so much damaging "evidence" against the black populace and inevitably calls into question the very sorts of reevaluations of African Americans in which Hopkins so ardently partakes.

Recalling how intrinsically phrenology was related to racial classification and racist characterizations of African Americans, as well as Hopkins' comments on the superiority of the white race, one might assume that what John Langley lacks is a quantity of "white blood" that would push him further up the evolutionary chain-of-being – and presumably alter his cranial dimensions. Indeed, Hopkins says as much earlier in the text. As she argues against white skeptics who doubt the plausibility of morally-refined African Americans, she states, "We do not allow for the infusion of white blood, which became pretty generally distributed in the inferior black race during the existence of slavery.... Surely the Negro race must be productive of some valuable specimens, if only from the infusion which amalgamation with a superior race must eventually bring" (87, emphasis mine). While this quotation surely served to jab at an uneasy white audience, reminding them of how often white masters procreated with (raped) their slaves, the statement troubles the modern reader even more. If extended to its logical extreme, this
quote suggests that the institutional rape of black women ultimately benefitted African Americans, that this rape "infused" positive qualities into their illegitimate off-spring, helping to "uplift" the race.

Susan Gillman reads this passage as proof of Hopkins' belief in the value of miscegenation as a tool of racial uplift. She writes, "Countering the one-drop ideology of miscegenation law, the narrator now asks how the infusion of blood from the 'superior' race could result in anything other than a superior 'specimen' that would affirm the scientific law of evolution. She extends the logic of the post-Darwinian 'blood mixture' arguments to their logical extreme: the production of an evolved Negro race" (Gillman, "Occult" 78). To come to this conclusion, however, one must fail to take into account Hopkins' ironic commentary on the entire scientific discourse concerning miscegenation.

Even as this passage seems to undermine her goal to "raise the stigma of degradation from my race" (13), by suggesting its improvement through miscegenation Hopkins cleverly aligns the rhetoric of the quotation with that of white observers in a way that unsettles the biological essentialism it initially advances. The "if only" in this passage acts as an ironic qualifier that distances its meaning from the narrator. The sentence could be re-phrased as follows: "The Negro race undoubtedly produces people who cannot be characterized as 'inferior.' This fact cannot be disputed, even if one must resort to the logic of improvement through amalgamation (a logic which this book clearly demonstrates to be unnecessary)." While I have been quite liberal in my transcription, I have been so in order to demonstrate the careful manner in which Hopkins formulates her argument. The scientific term "specimens," used to describe "uplifted" African
Americans, further aligns the reader with a white audience as Hopkins adopts the rhetoric of biological classification. Indeed, we as readers become the white scientist who studies, charts, and classifies the African American populace, accounting for different "specimens" within the species, presumably to provide empirical evidence of a polygenetic separation of the races. The "surely" which begins the sentence only serves to heighten the irony of the passage. Hopkins seems to suggest that the debate over whether or not "Negroes" are capable of producing "valuable specimens" comes from the same, or at least a similar, inane source as the attempt to determine whether "white blood" helps or harms the African American population. Through her use of irony in this passage, Hopkins clearly refrains from using miscegenation as a tool for upward mobility. After all, in order to claim that lighter-skinned African Americans were more equipped to fight the battles of uplift, one would have to fall back on the scientific reasoning which Hopkins resists.

Perhaps we can further understand the ways in which Hopkins reconfigures the discourse of science by looking at two more instances where Hopkins discusses phrenology and "pure" blood lines. Before her comments about Langley's phrenological deficiencies, Hopkins writes,

Superstition is supposed to be part of the Negro's heritage... In these days of palmistry, phrenology, card-reading, mind-reading, lucky pigs, rabbit's feet worn on the watch-chain for luck, and four-leaved clover encased in crystal and silver for the same reason, who shall say that the Negro has not lost his monopoly of one great racial characteristic? (198-99)

In this instance, phrenology, rather than a "rational" science of measurements and research, is lumped in with various other "superstitions." In Hopkins' formulation,
phrenology, like lucky "rabbit’s feet," may be valuable to the believer “proving” his/her own notion of truth, but it does not reveal absolute truth, as science traditionally purports to do. While she labels superstition as “one great racial characteristic,” she attributes it to the “Negro’s heritage.” The term “heritage” is more comprehensive than traditional scientific terms of racial difference, suggesting not only biologically innate traits, but the influence of cultural traditions and customs as well. By blurring the lines between race and ethnicity, between traits and tendencies, between biology and culture – lines so crucial to the logic of scientific racism, Hopkins suggests the subjectivity and cultural relativity of traditional racial classifications, even as she uses them. Although science may purport to reveal the “Truth,” Hopkins implies that the scientific discourse surrounding racial “traits and tendencies” withstands interrogation no better than does fortune-telling. In giving the science of racial classification an ambiguous position within her text, she weakens the scientific discourse that so vilifies African Americans.

This notion of “traits” and “tendencies” resonated deeply in turn-of-the-century American culture, as debates raged around which “racial characteristics” could be considered “traits” (inherited) and which could be seen as “tendencies” (learned/cultural). Fredrick Hoffman provides the most salient example with his study, *Race Traits and Tendencies of the American Negro* (1896). In this book Hoffman seeks to isolate empirically fundamental African American characteristics. Not surprisingly he fails, although he attributes this failure to miscegenation, rather than considering the role of acculturation or questioning the validity of racial categories. He writes, “The [African American] race is so hopelessly mixed that it is difficult to arrive at a clear definition” of
what is meant by the category of "colored" (177). Whether or not Hopkins was aware of this book, which appeared four years prior to Contending Forces, she indubitably plays with the rhetoric of Hoffman and like scientists. In light of Hoffman's attempt to isolate the "racial traits and tendencies of the Negro," Hopkins' comment that the "Negro" may have "lost his monopoly of one great racial characteristic" (superstition) seems all the more ironic. In this instance, Hopkins isolates the lynchpin of scientific discourse – the distinction between biological "race" and cultural "ethnicity" – in a manner that unsettles what these terms signify.

If we recall Hopkins' earlier comments about the superiority of "white blood," when we find out that Langley is hurt by "a bad mixture of blood," we might naturally assume that his African ancestry is what damages his biological worth. Not so – at this point, Hopkins subtly alters the discourse of racial difference. While his black ancestors may have benefitted from the infusion of white blood, Langley's white blood proves to be his shortcoming:

Natural instinct for good had been perverted by a mixture of "cracker" blood of the lowest type of his father's side with whatever God-saving quality that might have been loaned the Negro by pitying nature. This blood, while it gave him the pleasant features of the Caucasian race, vitiated his moral nature and left it stranded high and dry on the shore of blind ignorance. (221)

In a dramatic reversal of previous discussions of white and black blood, Hopkins condemns Langley's "cracker" blood, his "white trash" ancestry. Her use of the idea of "cracker" blood, like her use of the term "heritage," undermines the dichotomies upon which scientists such as Hoffman depended. Nevertheless, her reliance on the rhetoric of blood aligns her text with the racist science that she contests. This contradiction or
tension shows how deep the belief in the authority of science ran. Even as Hopkins tries to undermine this authority through her ironic mention of "cracker blood," she internalizes the concept upon which racist science depended — the idea of privileged blood.

Writing three decades earlier than both Hopkins and Hoffman, Sanford Hunt, a surgeon in the United States Volunteers, wondered how physiological difference influences, or is influenced by, "civilizing" education. In his 1867 article "The Negro as a Soldier" in the Quarterly Journal of Psychology, Hunt states, "Between the two races, the problem is: Does the large brain by its own impulses create education, civilization and refinement, or do education, civilization and refinement create a large brain?" (cited in Haller 32). For Hunt, the best way to answer this query was to examine the poor white population:

This problem might be solved by a series of researches in the weight of brain of the poor whites of the south, known as "sand hillers," "low-down people," or "crackers." With them civilization has retrograded. They came of a good stock originally, but have degenerated into an idle, ignorant and physically and mentally degraded people. Their general aspect would indicate small brains. If they are small, it is due to the absence of educational influences." (32)

Hunt's suggestion opens up the very possibilities that Hoffman's study tries to foreclose, namely that physical difference could be culturally determined and independent of race. Just as Hunt's introduction of the Southern "cracker" calls into question the methodology of scientists such as Hoffman, so too does Hopkins' invocation of Langley's "cracker" blood resist the discourse of biological essentialism, at least as it pertains to race.

Commenting on Hopkins' depiction of Langley's inherited evil nature, Ann duCille argues that Langley serves as an example of the "era's preoccupation with
heredity and genetics.” For duCille Langley produces a “polemic of identity” in which “the implication of evil (like intelligence) is heredity and both class and race-determined” (40). Although duCille perceptively focuses on the issue of “heredity and genetics,” it seems to me that this passage, alongside earlier discussions of the superiority of “white blood,” renders ambiguous the distinctions upon which theories of racial classification rest. In this instance, Hopkins’ blood qualifications seem to rest much more firmly on notions of class, gentility, and honor, than on staunch racial difference. To claim that Langley’s “cracker” blood harms him undermines the entire register of racist white discourse surrounding the races, even as it replicates its theoretical and rhetorical structures, such as blood as an identifiable marker of difference.

At a time where the discourse surrounding “Negro education” was centered around the issue of moral training and moral capability, Hopkins suggests that it is often white people who lack the moral faculty that comes from “pure” blood lines. Or to put it another way, she articulates a moral universe in which character is defined by issues of class that transcend racial lines. Hazel Carby attributes Langley’s loathsome demeanor to precisely such class issues. For Carby, Hopkins “re-created in Langley a representative figure of the ‘Gilded Age,’ manipulating and monopolizing unbridled power” (139). Certainly, Langley’s search for unimaginable wealth in the Klondike and his eventual death in a blizzard there would seem to support such a reading. Not only does this scenario evince a fable-like morality about the evils of greed, a “tendency” Hopkins generally aligns with the white populace, Langley literally dies in an overpowering storm of whiteness.
These implications of class-based morality open up troubling issues of their own. In this rather covert commentary on the cultural underpinnings of racial definition, Hopkins disables, or at least deflects, claims of the inherent inferiority of African Americans. In fact, for Carby this reevaluation proves to be one of the chief messages of the book. She claims that Hopkins “attempted to demonstrate the importance of social, political, and economic interests in determining human behavior in order to negate contemporary propositions of the danger of the degeneracy of a social group through its amalgamation with another” (140). Carby’s argument that Hopkins sought to disarm the perceived threat of mulatto degeneracy is a valuable one. The “mixed-blood” heroes in *Contending Forces* – Sappho, Will, and Dora – provide Hopkins the opportunity to envision alliances across racial borders, an idea that would be anathema to the majority of the most vocal scientists of racial classification, even if these alliances must be formed outside of the particular racist ideology of the United States.

While Hopkins may use the topic of miscegenation in order to suggest an alliance between black and white characters, however, she emphasizes the fact that this “mixing” generally comes from the rape of a black woman. If Twain describes a consensual union between a slave, Roxy, and a slave-holder, Colonel Essex, then Hopkins’ text serves as a chilling reminder of the harsher realities of “race mixing.” At the beginning of the text, when Mr. Montfort threatens to manumit his slaves, the local white men kill him and torture his wife, Grace, in a ritualized manner that Hazel Carby calls a metaphoric rape (Carby 132). Seeing this beating in terms of a rape as Carby suggests allows the reader to
understand the ways in which for Hopkins sexual and racial dynamics become intertwined. Hopkins writes,

In those days, if accused of aiding slaves in a revolt, a white man stood no more chance than a Negro accused of the same crime. He forfeited life and property. This power of the law Anson Pollock has invoked [and] had used Bill Sampson’s suggestion of black blood in Mrs. Montfort, to further his scheme for possessing her. (70)

The perceived threat of miscegenation – Mrs. Montfort’s “black blood” – becomes Anson Pollock’s excuse in his quest to “possess” Grace Montfort. In this instance, Pollock invokes the issue of race to dominate her sexually. Or to put it another way, Hopkins demonstrates the manner in which for women labeled as “black” racial threats become inextricably connected with sexual abuse. Furthermore, Pollock expresses, and acts upon, this desire to “possess” her precisely at the moment when he is contesting the patriarchal power of Montfort, specifically his legal and social right to free his slaves. Grace Montfort’s “black streak,” which is never confirmed or dismissed in the text, denies her the protection of white womanhood, and her skin serves as a visible reminder of miscegenation, connecting her with what Pollock terms a slave revolt. Carby states, “The actual and figurative ravishing of ‘grace’ at the hand of Southern brutality established the link that Hopkins believed existed between the violent act of rape and its specific political use as a device of terrorism” (132).

Whereas Carby attributes this “rape” to “the possibility that Grace Montfort was black,” it seems to me that in this instance the issue involves the possibility that she was black and white. As a symbol of a violation of the miscegenation taboo, Grace Montfort represented the social equality – or to use terminology more consistent with pre-
Emancipation America – the freeing of slaves, that the racist Anson Pollock was so adamantly resisting. As one critic puts it, “Using rape in place of ‘passing’ as a figure for the relations between the races, Hopkins self-consciously underscores the ways in which the white American imagination had linked sexuality to racial identity and had, moreover, figured a racial ‘threat’ in sexual terms” (McCullough 25).

Like Twain, Hopkins explores contemporary issues about miscegenation by placing them within the system of slavery. Whereas Twain does so in a manner which displaces the ramifications of this issue for 1890s racial politics, Hopkins’ text invites a discussion of the ways in which miscegenation signifies the rape of black women after Emancipation. In short, she emphasizes the continuity of the exploitation of African American women within a racist patriarchal structure. She say as much in the preface to Contending Forces: “The atrocities of the acts committed one hundred years ago are duplicated today, when slavery is supposed to no longer exist” (15). In this regard, the Emancipation Proclamation has not accomplished much. Sappho’s kidnaping, rape, and impregnation at the hands of her father’s white half-brother refocuses the topic of miscegenation firmly on the defenseless position African American women held in post-Emancipation America. Clearly, there exists no legal system in which to prosecute the rape of a black women, and no space in the social register for a pregnant unmarried African American to occupy other than the stereotypical lascivious black woman.

Even Sappho’s name aligns her superficially with this stereotype. As Sandra Gunning points out, in some 1890s male artist circles, the figure of the Greek Sappho came to represent “a sexual hedonist with a darkened face ‘burned under the sun of
passion” (101). Sappho Clark and her bastard son are seen by the male-determined society as symbolically dead, “burned under the sun of passion.” In fact, after Sappho is raped, her father leaves her in a convent, claiming that she died there “when her child was born” (261, emphasis in the text). If society has no symbolic space for a raped black women, then we see her father contributing to her silencing/death. Nonetheless, while society may not recognize the institutional rape of black women and the ways in which these women responded, Hopkins details Sappho’s successful life after “death” as a reminder of the fact that African American women persevered in the face of societal disavowal.

Although Sappho, Will, and Dora function in Hopkins’ text as the “mixed-race” heroes, as the noble characters that will help to uplift the African American populace, we must not too hastily conclude that Hopkins uses the trope of miscegenation as a means of promoting equality for the lighter-skinned African Americans. Critics have made much out of Will Smith’s “white” appearance, suggesting that his physical appearance of whiteness makes him a more suitable leader of the uplift movement. For example, Lois Lamphere Brown argues that “our attention is directed to the visual signs of Smith’s physical form, and Hopkins proposes that his appearance is proof of whiteness” (67). Brown cites Hopkins’ comment that his hair had “just a tinge of crispness to denote the existence of Negro blood” as proof that the narrator emphasizes his whiteness in order to displace the African background that would align him with the text’s darker characters (66). However, we must also consider that John Langley was “very fair” and “his hair had no indication of Negro blood in its waves” (70). If whiteness is the standard by
which mulattos are seen in the text as worthy to promote the goals of uplift, then we must conclude that Langley would be the text’s messiah. Clearly, Hopkins is not using the notion of miscegenation as a signal of racial progress in such an uncomplicated manner.

For even as Hopkins uses the trope of miscegenation in order to destabilize the rhetoric of biological essentialism that led to racial classification, she observes the cultural value of “light-skinned” mulattos. That is to say, while she ironically undermines the very foundation that scientists relied on to construct their hierarchy of the races, she is acutely aware of the societal advantages provided lighter-skinned mulattos such as Will Smith. Even as Smith announces, “Miscegenation, either lawful or unlawful, we do not want. The Negro dwells less on such a social cataclysm than any other race” (264, emphasis in text), Hopkins uses miscegenation to suggest precisely the type of “social equality” that Smith denies in this speech. While Hopkins resists the logic of racial difference and the implications of the erosion of these differences by way of “race-mixing” – after all, to use miscegenation as a symbol of progress is to fall into the dichotomy of racial exclusivity against which Hopkins fights – she nonetheless implements the trope of miscegenation to highlight and indict the American racial hysteria that motivates precisely these debates.

Her condemnation of American racial politics intensifies at the conclusion of the novel, and we finally see miscegenation forging the type of cross-racial bonds that Hopkins suggests throughout the book. As the book concludes, Will, Sappho, her child Alphonse, Dora and Ma Smith finally reunite with their lost white relatives. This ending suggests a utopia of racial harmony, one in which the gap of racial difference is bridged.
Hopkins tempers this utopia by reminding us of the scathing racism still present in America. In this respect, nothing has changed; the Smiths must leave the country to recognize, and be recognized by, their white English relatives. The novel concludes with Will and Dora watching the shoreline of the United States, and presumably the racial essentialism therein, disappear: “They stood on the deck that night long after the others had retired to their staterooms, watching the receding shores with hearts filled with emotion too deep for words.” Hopkins suggests here that the racial dynamics that she has been ironically commenting upon, and the scientific discourse that girds these dynamics, are particular to the United States. Certainly, she is not alone in this contention. As several critics have noted, the empirical attempts to document “separate and unequal” racial origins, to use Gillman’s term, through the theory of polygenesis is a fundamentally American pursuit (Fredrickson 74, Gould, Mismeasure 42, and Gillman, “Occult” 68). Perhaps, then, we could say that, for Hopkins, while irony may be able to unsettle the terms of the scientific discourse it critiques, it can never defeat them. Like the African American expatriate presence in Paris several decades later, Hopkins’ heroes must leave the United States to escape its constricting racial delineations.

The Sticky Residue of Blood: Hopkins, Miscegenation and Pan-Africanism

If Contending Forces uses irony and the trope of miscegenation to call into question the fundamental logic behind scientific theories of racial classification, Hopkins’ novel Of One Blood, serialized in 1902-03 in the Colored American Magazine, combats this classification by providing alternative scientific paradigms that allow for a broader
conception of race. *Of One Blood* is a quirky novel, one that deals with mysticism, occult sciences, pan-African unity, and the results of miscegenation. On one level, in this novel, Hopkins seems to utilize Stepan’s and Gilman’s ideas about “scientific counterdiscourse.” In *Of One Blood*, Hopkins looks to the alternative science of occult phenomena to invert the idea of racial hierarchy. While today we don’t tend to think of the occult – particularly as it appears in late-night TV advertisements for 1-900 numbers offering over-the-phone psychic readings – as affiliated with rigorous scientific study, Susan Gillman reminds us that “the phrase ‘occult science’ was regularly used at the time” that *Of One Blood* was published (“Occult” 62). Gillman demonstrates the value given to the occult science by quoting the mission statement of the Society for Psychical Research, which claimed to examine “without prejudice or prepossession and in a scientific spirit, those faculties of man, real or supposed, which appear to be inexplicable on any generally recognized hypothesis” (62). This statement reveals nicely some of the value Hopkins might have seen in yoking the occult to contemporary racial debates. First of all, psychical research, as defined in this quote, seeks to explore what is inexplicable in traditional scientific contexts. In other words, it seeks to destabilize the ossified and “objective” Truth of modern science, and to expose this Truth as emanating from “prejudice[d]” and “prepossesse[d]” perspectives. Such an idea seems perfectly suited to Stepan’s and Gilman’s notion of a “recontextualization” of scientific methodology that would result in new interpretations of, and new ways of seeing, racial difference (95).

Before we examine how Hopkins seeks to destabilize the rhetoric of racialized science, I will provide a brief synopsis of *Of One Blood*. The book begins in the lab of a
lonely Harvard medical student, Reuel Briggs, who is, unbeknownst to his colleagues, of African descent – he is passing as white. The book opens with Reuel working tirelessly on a scientific experiment involving the connection between “personal magnetism” and “the reanimation of the body after seeming death” (464). Convinced by his friend Aubrey Livingston to take a break from his studies, Reuel joins some friends and goes to a club, where he hears a black woman singing “in a grand minor cadence that told of deliverance from bondage and homage to God for his wonderful aid” (453). Becoming entranced with the voice, which fell “in celestial showers of silver that passed all conceptions,” Reuel inquires about her and learns that the jubilee singer’s name is Dianthe Lusk.

Shortly after this outing, Reuel attends a “Hallow-Eve” party, where the guests visit a haunted house one by one. When Reuel goes to the house, he sees Dianthe, who replies to Reuel’s offer of assistance: “You can help me, but not now; tomorrow” (461). The next day, Dianthe shows up at the hospital in a coma, or dead as the other doctors pronounce her, after being in a train wreck. Using his as-of-yet untested theories, Reuel resuscitates Dianthe, but she has amnesia and cannot remember her identity, which Reuel withholds for her “protection.” At this point, Dianthe adopts the social position of a white woman. Reuel nurses her back to health, and she becomes attached to and dependent upon him. After she regains her health, they marry. However, Reuel worries about being able to provide financially for Dianthe, and at the urging of Aubrey accepts a position with an expedition to discover wealth in the ruins of Ethiopia. Leaving Dianthe in the care of Aubrey, Reuel departs for Africa immediately.
When Reuel’s party comes to the ruins of the ancient city of Telassar, the “queen city” of the Meroe civilization, which the book presents as the cradle of all civilization, he learns through a letter that Aubrey has acted as a traitor, and that Dianthe is dead. After a short period of mourning, he recklessly explores the hidden city, for he has lost his will to live. While in the caves of the mountains, he is kidnapped by the city’s inhabitants, who have been living in secrecy, thanks to the shelter of a virtually unpassable swamp and desert, for 6000 years in the opulent and lush lands surrounding the pyramids. In this hidden city, the civilization’s leaders inform Reuel informed that he is Ergamenes, the long awaited savior of the Ethiopian peoples, the destined leader who will “begin the restoration of Ethiopia” and free it from the “scourge” of the “white stranger” (555). While the water-lily birthmark on his breast identifies Reuel as the messiah, his knowledge and belief in the occult powers make him exceedingly qualified for the job. We learn from the current leader Ai – John the Baptist to Reuel’s Jesus – that the Telassaran people have mastered the powers of occult and mysticism; in fact, “it was the shadow of Ethiopia’s power” (558), a power that has not yet been attained by so-called “modern” culture.

As the future king of Ethiopia, Reuel naturally becomes paired with the city’s queen, Candace, who “reminded him strongly of Dianthe” (568). Their marriage is quickly arranged. However, before the ceremony, Reuel learns through divination – he looks at a mystical disk that tells the future and the past – that Dianthe is not dead, that Aubrey had faked her death, kidnapped her, and killed his own fiancée, Molly, in order to take Dianthe as his wife. If Candace’s Dido-like temptations temporarily distract our
Aeneas-like hero, he now understands his purpose; he returns to the United States, accompanied by Ai, to exact revenge on Aubrey and save Dianthe. While he proves too late to save Dianthe after she drinks poison intended for Aubrey, he casts a spell which causes Aubrey to kill himself in the same manner that he murdered Molly.

Throughout the text, Reuel is guided by his muse, an apparition named Mira. We eventually learn from an old "voodoo doctor," Aunt Hannah, who was living outside Boston in a "typical Southern cabin," that a slave concubine named Mira was the mother of Dianthe and Reuel — they are brother and sister! Furthermore, their slave-owning father was the same as Aubrey's — he is their half-brother! Using this plot twist as an opportunity to comment on the logic of miscegenation, Hopkins writes, "The slogan of the hour is 'Keep the Negro down!' but who is clear enough in vision to decide who hath black blood and who hath it not? ... No man can draw the dividing line between the two races, for they are both of one blood!" (607).

After exacting his revenge on Aubrey, Reuel takes Aunt Hannah, his grandmother as it turns out, and returns to his throne in Telassar, where he is "united" with Candace. The novel ends with an uncustomary narrative diatribe condemning prejudice and greed in modern society and lauding the omniscient plan of God: "To our human intelligence these truths depicted in this feeble work may seem terrible — even horrible. But who shall judge the handiwork of God, the Great Craftsman! Caste prejudice, race pride, boundless wealth, scintillating intellects refined by all the arts of the intellectual world, are but puppets in His hand, for His promises stand, and He will prove His words, 'Of one blood have I made all races of men'" (621).
Perhaps seeking to establish a scientific “counterdiscourse” that refigures the relationship between the races, *Of One Blood* immediately legitimizes “alternative” science and places it at the center of its narrative. Hopkins does not present Reuel’s intense studying of the occult, of mesmeric forces and personal magnetism, as a hindrance to his scientific reputation in America. In fact, his classmates at Harvard “all voted him a genius in his scientific studies” (445) and in “brain diseases he was an authority” (462). As I mentioned earlier, this focus on the “inexplicable” ends up saving Dianthe’s life and in the process establishes a scientifically-verifiable precedent:

“Advancing far afield in the mysterious regions of science, [Reuel] has stumbled upon the solution of one of life’s problems: *the reanimation of the body after seeming death*” (464, emphasis in original). When Reuel explains that he has been able to bring Dianthe “back to life” because of his understanding of “volatile magnetism,” a traditional surgeon quips, “Your theory smacks of the supernatural, Dr. Briggs, charlatanism, or dreams of lunacy. . . We leave such assertions to quacks, generally, for the time of miracles is past.” Reuel quietly responds, “The supernatural presides over man’s formation always.” So in command of his science and his words is Reuel that he quickly converts the skeptical masses: “There radiated from the speaker the potent presence of a truthful mind, a pure, unselfish nature, and that inborn dignity which repels the shafts of lower minds as ocean’s waves absorb the drops of rain” (469-70). Through Reuel’s conversion of his scientific colleagues, Hopkins aligns the alternative occult sciences with a “potent,” “truthful mind” and an “inborn dignity.”
While this synopsis clearly allows us to see how Hopkins attempts to destabilize the accepted “truths” of science, we don’t yet see how this applies specifically to theories of racial difference. For this, we must wait until Reuel travels to Africa. Just as Reuel denies his “drop of black blood” – he passes as white – until he goes to Africa and embraces his heritage, so too is Reuel’s occult science presented as a Western science, albeit one that strays far from the mainstream, until Reuel discovers its roots and refinement in the supposedly “primitive” Meroe civilization. In Ethiopia we learn that his expertise in mysticism comes more from his “inborn” African ancestry than his studying of Western occult scientists, such as Alfred Binet.16

He has carefully hidden his Ethiopian extraction from the knowledge of the world. It was a tradition among those who had known him in childhood that he was descended from a race of African kings. He remembered his mother well. From her he has inherited his mysticism and his occult powers. The nature of the mystic within him was, then, but a dreamlike devotion to the spirit that had swayed his ancestors; it was the shadow of Ethiopia’s power. (558)

This quotation immediately shifts our understanding of the role of mysticism in the text.

First of all, rather than attributing Reuel’s proficiency in the occult to his tireless and

16 Alfred Binet (1857-1911) was a French psychologist specializing in the study and quantification of intelligence. Early in his career, Binet was a proponent of craniometry, although by the time Hopkins was writing Of One Blood, he had proclaimed craniometry unreliable and distanced himself from the field of study (Entine 163-4). Denise Fallon explains Binet’s connection to the “occult sciences”: “Binet worked with [Jean-Martin] Charcot and [Charles] Fere at the Salpetriere, a famous Parisian hospital, where he absorbed the theories of his teachers in regards to hypnosis, hysteria and abnormal psychology. During the following seven years, he continuously demonstrated his loyalty in defending Charcot’s doctrines on hypnotic transfer and polarization.” Binet eventually split with Charcot’s work, due in large part to his inability to disregard the counterattacks levied by J.R.L. Delboeuf and the Nancy School (Fallon).
"lonely" study at Harvard, it emanates from his connection, through his mother, with a "race of African kings." To emphasize this point, Hopkins invokes the discourse of science that debated whether "traits" (heredity) or "tendencies" (environment) create racial difference. In this case, Reuel "inherited" his mysticism; it was his "nature." If racialist scientists such as Hoffman traditionally yoked "inherited" deficiencies with African inferiority and degeneracy, then Hopkins inverts the hierarchy, while retaining the same vocabulary of absolute biological difference.

Gillman claims that Hopkins attempts to "join the two mystical traditions, the Western and the African, under the rubric of 'the abstract science of occultism'": "The novel . . . twins rather than opposes Euro-American science and African spiritualism, offering different traditions or systems of the occult as the syncretic meeting ground between the two civilizations" (72). While this twinning doubtlessly occurs in the text, it seems to me that Hopkins does not seek to show the syncretic relationship between Africa and Euro-American traditions. Rather, Of One Blood posits African mysticism as the originary source of subsequent Euro-American forms of occult. Just as Thoreau uses the metaphor of a stream emanating from a spring in order to suggest we must travel upstream to get the "pure" spiritual powers, Hopkins suggests that American forms of mysticism are both diluted and polluted. We must return to Africa to learn/experience the powers of "pure" occult science. As Reuel listens to Ai talk about the refinement of the occult power in Meroe, he "was awed into silence. He could say nothing, and listened to Ai's learned remarks with a reverence that approached almost to worship before this proof of his supernatural powers. What would the professors of Harvard have said to
this, he asked himself. In the heart of Africa was a knowledge of science that all the wealth and learning of modern times could not emulate” (576). All the King’s horses and all the King’s men couldn’t recreate Africa’s splendor again.

When Reuel discovers this connection, he finally becomes able to accept his African ancestry and quit passing for white. Presented with the cultural sophistication of the people of Telassar, Reuel will never again hide his “Ethiopian extraction” or his sense of connection with the African peoples. He “felt keenly now the fact that he had played the coward’s part in hiding his origin” (560). In this scene, Hopkins not only inverts the racial hierarchy generally associated with scientific advancement, but she also connects the ability to claim and recognize one’s marginalized heritage with the dismantling of traditional figurations of racial difference. As Carby notes, the novel “is an early fictional response to the philosophy of Pan-Africanism in the United States” ("Introduction" xlv).

Gillman also notices the novel’s Pan-Africanist impulse and seems to imply that Hopkins’ “multivalent Ethiopianism” espouses an ideology that prefigures the “black is beautiful” slogan that would gain so much currency two decades later during the Harlem Renaissance. In other words, Hopkins’ focus on blood lines and ancestry resists traditional racist hierarchies that are generally associated with the rhetoric of biological difference. She writes, “Hopkins enlists the polygenetic affirmation of separate racial origins but counters its assumption of ‘black’ inferiority” (66). While the text superficially supports such a reading, Hopkins’ vision of an Ethiopia-based sense of heritage becomes increasingly complicated when we examine the role that Reuel plays as King of Telassar. Even the fact that the savior of Ethiopia will be an American man who
was passing for white at Harvard University begins to muddle the claim that the novel subverts black/white, Africa/America figurations of superiority and inferiority.

In fact, in the first description that we get of Reuel, Hopkins emphasizes his whiteness, and his European features: “His head was that of an athlete, with close-set ears, and covered with an abundance of black hair, straight and closely cut, thick and smooth; the nose was the aristocratic feature, although nearly spoiled by broad nostrils, of this remarkable young man; his skin was white, but of a tint suggesting olive, an almost sallow color which is a mark of strong, melancholic temperaments” (443-44). With all the racist stereotypes swirling around the turn of the century about African Americans’ “thick lips” and “flat noses,” we might wonder why Hopkins describes her Ethiopian savior as having a nose, his “aristocratic feature,” that was “nearly spoiled” by broad nostrils. Furthermore, his skin is described as “white.” Even if we acknowledge its “olive” tint, the addition of the descriptor “sallow” undermines this nod to a darker complexion. While Hopkins’ use of “sallow” serves on one hand to emphasize Reuel’s sickly countenance – he spends too much time studying his books – in this context it suggests an absence of color, an odd description of an African king. It appears as though it is Reuel’s “European” features that raise him above the crowd. On one hand, Hopkins challenges racist figurations by privileging Ethiopia over Western culture. On the other, she still relies on Western notions of superiority even as she counters this superiority. Or, as Gaines puts it more generally, “Hopkins’ use of ‘race’ cuts both ways, both resisting and replicating racist mythologies” (434).
Even though she hauntingly renders the "minor cadences" of African American spirituals as the star of the Fisk Jubilee singers, Dianthe is described with similar characteristics of refinement and beauty: "She was not in any way the preconceived idea of a Negro. Fair as the fairest woman in the hall, with wavy bands of chestnut hair, melting eyes of brown, soft as those of childhood" (433). Is this the "polygenetic affirmation of separate racial origins" that Gillman lauds? On one hand, these descriptions seem to attempt to invoke contemporary notions of heroes and heroines. Claudia Tate and Hazel Carby have expertly demonstrated how Hopkins and Frances Harper adopted and adapted normative turn-of-the-century gender constructions, including "white" bourgeois notions of purity and beauty, in order to create tales of "heroic virtue" that would avoid the "tragic consequences of excessive passion" usually attributed to black women (Tate 172). However, in Of One Blood something else seems to be going on. After all, Reuel – and Dianthe through her reincarnation as Candace – supposedly represent not the epitome of American bourgeois refinement, but an African alternative to Western concepts of beauty and Truth. Why, we might ask, does Hopkins emphasize Reuel’s and Dianthe’s whiteness, even as she connects them to an African civilization that predates European culture?

Carby claims that these descriptions disappear once Reuel goes to Ethiopia and accepts his African heritage. She writes, "Concomitant with Hopkins’ desire to advocate an identification with an African heritage was the need to confront Western ideologies of beauty. Candace . . . appeared as a reincarnation of Dianthe, but was ‘bronze,’ not white. Their union was intended to ‘give the world a dynasty of dark-skinned rulers, whose
destiny should restore the prestige of an ancient people’” (Reconstructing Womanhood 159). Ever the perceptive reader, Carby complicates her argument by claiming that the “idealization of black beauty within the text was classic in its pretensions rather than African . . . [P]rofiles and bone structure remained Athenian” (159). Even so, it seems odd that a book that disparages the devaluation of those of the “darker hue” by those of a “fair hue” chooses light-skinned heroes, even if they are eventually given a “bronze” tan. In fact, Hopkins describes Candace’s beauty and value, while presented as Ethiopian, in distinctly Euro-American terms, perhaps showing her reliance on uplift ideology’s notion of refinement. Candace appears to us as the epitome of turn-of-the-century Western womanhood: “Her loveliness was absolutely and ideally perfect. Her attitude of unstudied grace accorded well with the seriousness in her face; she seemed the embodiment of all chastity” (569). This description, with its hagiographic invocation of “grace” and “chastity,” could just as easily refer to a queen of England as it does to Hopkins’ alternative African queen.

Reuel’s qualities as the “king of Ethiopia” prove more telling. While his knowledge and command of mysticism garner respect in the Meroean people, his espousal of Western values signal to the Africans his ability to rule. Early in his first visit to Telassar, the Ethiopian leaders explain to Reuel their religious views: “Our religion is a belief in One Supreme Being, the center of action in all nature. He distributed a portion of Himself at an early age to the care of man who has attained the highest development of any of His terrestrial creatures. We call this ever-living faculty or soul Ego” (562). After listening to the explanation of this decidedly Eastern religion, Reuel asks, “What of the
Son of man? Do you not know the necessity of belief in the Holy Trinity? Have not your Sages brought you the need in the belief in God’s Son?” With this question, one can imagine Reuel placing quotation marks around the word “Sages.” When the abashed Telassarans ask in what Reuel/Ergamenes believes, he states, “In Jesus Christ, the Son of God,” to which the natives respond “O Ergamenes, your belief shall be ours; we have no will but yours. Deign to teach your subjects.” The section concludes with Reuel ruminating on his new-found purpose: “When at last Reuel closed his eyes in slumber, it was with a feeling of greater responsibility and humility than he had ever experienced. Who was he that so high a destiny as lay before him should be thrust upon his shoulders?” (563).

We see here how deep the currents of the Euro-American discourse of Civilization run. Even as she seeks to present African culture as equally advanced and cultured as American society, Hopkins creates an Egyptian king who proselytizes the African people under the banner of the Holy Trinity. We are thrown back into the paradigm of the American Christian missionaries converting the African barbarians. So, while Hopkins seeks to destabilize traditional notions of racial difference, she ultimately relies on a Western framework to do so. Reuel’s value as the leader of the African nation becomes his ability to make them better Christians. After this exchange, the leaders of Meroe immediately pay homage not to the “One Supreme Being,” but to the blessed “Trinity” (571, 573). As the book ends, Reuel returns to Telassar and dedicates himself to a mission of uplift, as the role of a member of DuBois’ “talented tenth” helping to raise the ignorant masses: “There he spends his days teaching his people all that he has learned in
years of contact with modern culture. United to Candace, his days glide peacefully by in

good works” (621).17

For Gaines, this ending represents Hopkins’ “assimilationist perspective.” He
explains, “Hopkins’ elite, Western vision of African heathenism was meant to enhance

17 As Carby nicely turns our attentions to Hopkins’ reliance on Mediterranean forms of
beauty and culture, so too could we read this book as a rewriting of the Mediterranean
epic. Certainly, Reuel’s adventures have much in common with Aeneas’ journey, as he
must acquire the skills and knowledge to become an appropriate leader of his people. In
The Aeneid, Virgil describes Aeneas’ destiny (as related by Anchises):

Roman, remember by your strength to rule
Earth’s peoples -- for your arts are to be these:
To pacify, to impose the rule of law,
To spare the conquered, battle down the proud. (VI, 1152-1154)

Aeneas’ “arts” involve the pacifying and conquering of new nations. While Hopkins
temper such a view quite a bit – Reuel is not to conquer the Ethiopians exactly – we
nonetheless learn that his role as leader is to, among other things, inculcate Christian
ethics into their society. In doing so, Reuel initially seems to suggest the “twinning” of
American and Ethiopian cultures that Gillman describes (72). He will teach them of
“modern culture,” while they will teach him the profundity of the Meroe civilization. In
this respect, Hopkins’ text seems to once again invoke Virgil’s epic. In describing the
interaction between the Ausonian (Latin) people with the Teucrians, Virgil announces:

Let both nations, both unconquered, both
Subject to equal laws, commit themselves
to an eternal union. (XII, 257-9)

Just as Reuel’s union of cultures ultimately seems to replace the African value system
with a Christian ethics, however, Virgil establishes an unequivocal hierarchy of status and
autonomy:

Ausonion folk will keep
Their fathers’ language and their way of life,
And, that being so, their name: The Teucrians
Will mingle and be submerged, incorporated. (XII, 1131-34, emphasis added)

What we see in Of One Blood is nothing less than the “submerging” and “incorporating”
of African values and spirituality to a “wiser” American sensibility. Hopkins seems more
than willing to create a tension between American and African science and, at times, she
posits African science as superior to Western materialism. When it comes to religion,
however, Hopkins asserts an imperialist version of Christianity closely aligned with the
18th century colonialist “conversions” of the dark continent. This contradiction between
the superiority of certain African customs and the “truth” of Christianity remains
unresolved throughout the text.
black Americans' race pride, but at the expense of the autonomy of African peoples, whose cultures and histories remained a blank page for imaginary conquest" (435).

While this imperialist ethos certainly exists in *Of One Blood*, my focus on the novel's scientific rhetoric of mysticism attempts to complicate this idea by showing how this "assimilationist perspective" exists concomitantly with a more "revolutionary" stance that depicted African science and culture as foundational, as superior to Western materialism. These two impulses do not merge (or "twin" in Gillman's language); rather, they are in constant tension with each other, a tension which the book seems unable to resolve. Or perhaps we could say the vexed nature of these issues makes the dichotomy of assimilation/revolution less tenable, less able to account for the multiple meanings of civilization and racial heritage in Hopkins' text.

Gaines further sees *Of One Blood* as "part of a broader tendency among marginalized racial, religious, and gender minorities who used the idea of civilization at the turn of the century to give credence to their own aspirations of status, power, and influence" (435). For Gaines, Hopkins' reliance on the "male persona as scientific expert" exemplifies her deferral "to the black community's assumptions of male leadership" and to the rhetoric of a male-dominated Western civilization more generally (434). Such a deferral to male leadership seems odd, particularly if we keep in mind that *Contending Forces* so assiduously resists a male-centered narrative. In fact, Tate looks at the marriage convention in the novels of Hopkins and Harper more generally in order to argue that these writers resist the limiting effects of male leadership: "Rather than adopt the dominant society's stringent ideology of male superiority, the idealized family
discourse in the domestic novels of post-Reconstruction black women emphasizes a compassionate companionship among spouses and what we late-twentieth-century readers would probably regard as relative spousal equality” (149).

Why, then, would Hopkins so readily defer to male superiority in Of One Blood? It seems to me that she makes Reuel the novel’s protagonist in order to critique the colonialist/imperialist desire, which she does figure as a masculine ideal. After all, it is an all-male expedition that goes to Ethiopia to steal the riches of the Meroean civilization – Reuel leaves his vulnerable wife, Dianthe, behind.18 When Reuel is first captured by the Telassarans, Ai condemingly asks him, “Are you, too, one of those who seek for hidden treasure” (546)? As Ai tells of the fall of the Ethiopian dynasty several thousand centuries ago, the explanation for this fall resounds with the language used to excoriate zealous nineteenth-century colonial pursuits: “Stiff-necked, haughty, no conscience but that of intellect, awed not by God’s laws, worshiping Mammon, sensual, unbelieving, God has punished us as he promised in the beginning” (558). So, while this speech

18 The novel presents this abandonment in much the same way as does another prominent turn-of-the-century black woman activist, Anna Julia Cooper. In her speech, “Womanhood a Vital Element in Regeneration and Progress of a Race,” Cooper states that the Christian Church has failed to “protect and elevate women” (556). To present her vision of a properly functioning society, Cooper merges the example of Jesus Christ, who was “never too far to come down to and touch the life of the lowest in days the darkest” (557) with the Feudal system of medieval “chivalry” which “no institution has more sensibly magnified and elevated woman’s position in society” (556). While such a call for chivalric protection, whether it come from a reformed Church or Hopkins’ male heroes, may seem dated today, we should put both Cooper’s and Hopkins’ call for protection within the larger context of the institutional rape of black women. Certainly, black women needed protection from some part of society, a protection that the white community and the legal system, as an extension of that community, had consistently proven unwilling to give.
initially functions in the novel as a justification of the “extinction” of Ethiopian culture, surely the anti-greed message would reverberate with contemporary readers well-versed in the spoils of nineteenth-century imperialism.

Whenever Hopkins presents the misdirected lust for wealth and material gain in the novel, she always associates it with male characters, and the masculine ego. In a book that so ardently attempts to realign traditional definitions of race, perhaps we could say that for Hopkins greed becomes a masculine value that transcends racial boundaries. If Of One Blood presents Reuel as a hero, he remains an ambiguous one. After all, the novel ends with the reminder that “the shadows of great sins darken [Reuel’s] life” (621) – that he chose material prosperity through colonial raiding over the “protection” of his sickly wife. Rather than claim that Hopkins defers to male leadership in the novel, as Gaines argues, we can say instead that she uses a central male character to illustrate the damning effects of a masculinized Western imperialism. From this perspective, the book ends with Reuel learning the most valuable of lessons: “He views... with serious apprehension, the advance of mighty nations penetrating the dark, mysterious forests of his native land. ‘Where will it stop?’ he sadly questions. ‘What will the end be’” (621)?

Happy Endings?: Narrative Closure and the Comforts of Race

As in Contending Forces, Hopkins creates a Utopian community at the end of Of One Blood. Also as in Contending Forces, Hopkins places this Utopia outside the reaches of American racism. In both books, she seems unable to envision an idealized future upon American soil. If the United States in Hopkins’ novels represents gradual
progress and some modicum of hope, it always remains an uncomfortable place, one in which African Americans must tread lightly. Herein lies one of the fundamental discrepancies between Hopkins’ use of irony and alternative forms of racial definitions and Twain’s satire of the nation’s racial morés. Although Twain satirizes many of the same issues which Hopkins refigures and upon which she comments ironically, for Twain such a critique does not entail an elemental reconceptualization of American society; it merely points out its foibles and inconsistencies, while retaining its basic values and structures. Or to put it another way, Twain shakes things up, but reinstates a comfortable America where all the white people can go to sleep at night feeling assured that their blood is pure and the blacks are “in their place.” To be sure, Pudd’nhead Wilson and his “scientics” are certainly not the novel’s heroes, and Wilson’s calendar, which runs in epigraph form at the beginning of each chapter, creates a more detached and cynical observer of the goings-on at Dawson’s Landing than we get in the text.19 Even so, for all its tensions, its uncomfortable and awkward moments, *Pudd’nhead Wilson* ends up in a place that is very comfortable for a white readership uneasy about the consequences of miscegenation.

19 Brook Thomas takes this idea further and suggests that Twain consciously forces the reader to question the rhetoric of scientific objectivity. He writes, “If Pudd’nhead makes fingerprints legible, Twain makes visible the cultural narrative in which Pudd’nhead’s scientific professionalism objectively helps to restore order temporarily disrupted by a black woman’s attempt to advance her son. Insofar as our society continues to grant authority to Pudd’nhead’s scientifically trained professionalism, Twain’s narrative invites us to scrutinize its accepted standards of reasonableness even if it offers no guarantee as to what the results of that scrutiny will be” (780-81).
Hopkins, on the other hand, reaches for something much deeper. Because she understands so lucidly the authority of racist scientific discourse, the power it has to define and circumscribe the African American body and by extension the African American body politic, she uses a narration that superficially acknowledges contemporary scientific theory and contemporary notions of Beauty and Worth. In so doing, she seems to adopt what Stepan and Gilman call “the most pernicious effect of racial science”—the “internalization” of its values and norms (89). When we look at her use of irony, however, we see that she undermines this superficial complicity with the racist theories by opening up possibilities, creating multiple meanings, and blurring the lines between the categories that buttress the science of difference. Perhaps Stepan and Gilman are correct in asserting that the use of irony was not ultimately an effective tool to resist racist science. But we should also ask: what other possibilities did black women writers of the era have? Certainly the fact that Ida B. Wells was run out of Memphis for publishing her “empirical” studies of lynching suggests that open defiance or “counterdiscourse” was not particularly effective either.

When Hopkins does present a counterdiscourse with her occult science, it is veiled within a mystical/spiritual overtones. These overtones were not generally considered to be scientific or empirical by a turn-of-the-century reading public. As a result, they were not likely to be construed as threatening in the same way that “traditional” empiricism would. This fact says more about the limited and limiting “acceptable” registers of protest for black women writers of fiction and science than it does about a failure to choose an appropriate medium of resistance. If the scientific
discourse of the 1890s depended upon supposedly empirical measurements of the body to affirm racial difference, we could say that Hopkins introduces a variety of alternately calibrated measuring sticks that, if nothing else, complicated the nation’s search for racial truth.
CHAPTER 3
THE VEILED TRUTH: OBJECTIVITY, RACE AND THE ROLE OF LITERATURE

All subjective ideas become more distinct, palpable and strong by the habit of rendering them objective. . . . This weapon can be potent in the hands of the bigot and fanatic or in the hands of the liberal and enlightened.

– Frederick Douglass

Immortality and the Atlantic Monthly are all right in a way, but in order to sustain our mortal part we must have money.

– Charles Chesnutt

I subjected myself to an objective examination, I discovered my blackness, my ethnic characteristics; and I was battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism, racial defects, slave ships, and above all: "Sho’ good eatin’.”

– Frantz Fanon

As Douglass’ quote in the epigraph suggests, turn-of-the-century debates surrounding race and racial categorization hinged in large part on contested definitions of objective truth. While racial definitions were by no means settled in America during this period – in fact the fervor behind racial science existed because of ambiguous or conflicting notions of race – the rhetoric of objectivity depended upon, and contributed to, static racial definitions. These distinctions of racialized “Truth” resonated so fiercely at this time because race served as such an overpowering and overwhelming metaphor of difference. Although racial classification became increasingly fixed during the late nineteenth century as much of the Reconstruction legislation was repealed, the rhetoric

1 Citations for the epigraph are as follows: 1) Stephanie A. Smith, Conceived By Liberty, pg. 131; 2) Charles Chesnutt, Unpublished Letter to Robert E. Park of Tuskegee Institute; 3) Frantz Fanon, Black Skins, White Masks, pg.112.
through which this classification was debated became increasingly complex and multidirectional. Contemporary notions of Truth (such as those found in contemporary descriptions of art and those within scientific discourse) helped both to contest and solidify racial difference.

In this chapter, I examine how Charles Chesnutt attempts to redefine objective truth as well as how the concept of Truth is understood more generally in turn-of-the-century America. This redefinition gives Chesnutt a means of resisting the proclamations of a racialist scientific community which announced that racial difference and a racial hierarchy could be empirically measured and proven. In order to establish a solid foundation on which to base his claims of racial equality, Chesnutt relies on notions of "objective truth" that have much in common with the scientific discourse that he opposes, even as his message and politics are radically different. These revisions, however, met with stern opposition from the publishing community, which had preconceived notions of how race and racial difference should be portrayed in literature.

As Gail Bederman has pointed out in *Manliness and Civilization*, Charlotte Perkins Gilman used the scientific discourse of absolute racial difference to anchor her claim of gender equality (124-150). In 1892 Gilman wrote, "The dominant soul—the clear strong accurate brain, the perfect service of a healthy body—these do not belong to sex—but to race!" While Gilman recognizes the way theories about gender and race mingle

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2 We can think here of the way this science is used to reaffirm racial distinctiveness in the face of claims of racial indeterminacy, such as Booker T. Washington's quip about examining feet on a Jim Crow train to determine one's racial status or Albion Tourgee's line of argumentation in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, which hinged upon the inability to determine—casually or definitively—racial boundaries. For an in-depth look at the *Plessy v. Ferguson* case, see Chapter 5.
together, she draws upon the authority of racial science as a means of deflecting established claims of gender difference. In this instance, Gilman clearly manipulates the metaphor of race in order to destabilize gender lines (at least for white women). As Bederman explains, “feminists like Gilman were marshaling a powerful racist symbol for the cause of white women’s advancement” (142). Here we see how powerful the metaphor of race was, and how it could be invoked as a prominent and overriding marker of difference.

This is not to claim that race negates gender and class concerns – in fact, Chesnutt’s attempt to transcend racial classification through the “Truth” and “hard facts” is founded on very masculine values (a fact that I will return to later in this chapter). However, race often masked these concerns and became a dominant metaphor, social determinant, and positioner. In fact, Chesnutt perceived the necessity to “class off” and remasculinize himself through a rhetoric of Truth because race was such a strong and overriding metaphor that contrasted blackness with a “civilized,” “refined,” and “manly” whiteness. In order to give his declarations of equality a solid foundation, Chesnutt believed it necessary to claim a refined manhood that mirrored that of his white counterparts. In this light, his lines of reasoning function as the inverse of Gilman’s attempt to destabilize gender inequalities through claims of racial alliances with white men. Clearly, African American men who sought recognition from the white community were fighting an uphill battle, as they were faced with proliferating discourses of “civilization,” “education,” and polygenetic evolution that defined “manhood” as an exclusively “white” characteristic and equated opportunity and power with this racialized “manhood.” As Bederman puts it, “[b]y invoking the discourse of civilization in a variety
of contradictory ways, many Americans found a powerfully effective way to link male dominance to white supremacy" (23). By defining masculinity as an exclusively white trait and claiming that black men were not really men at all, these discourses contributed to one of the legacies of slavery – the emasculation of blackness.

In her illuminating essay, "Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book," Hortense Spillers clearly recognizes the historical role that the emasculation of black men had in post-bellum America. Spillers writes that within the system of chattel slavery slave men were not allowed to claim the role of “father” and slave children followed their mother’s role as material property. This particular familial situation produced a dynamic in which the “African-American male has been touched... by the mother, handed by her the ways that he cannot escape, and in ways that the white American male is allowed to temporize by a fatherly reprieve” (479). For Spillers, this situation leads to what we might tentatively call “the law of the Mother – only and precisely because legal enslavement removed the African-American male not so much from sight as from mimetic view as a partner in the prevailing social fiction of the Father’s name, the Father’s law.” In short, African American men have been denied (through slavery and segregation) the symbolics of American manhood with its attendant connections to power and authority.

If we recognize Spillers’ contention that turn-of-the-century African American men were denied the symbolics of an American masculinity and the paternal function, we are then presented the question of how men such as Chesnutt can ground their articulation of the role of the black male intellectual in a society that defines them as impotent/emasculated. Spillers envisions an emancipatory moment in such a definition,
stating "the black American male embodies the only American community of males which has had the specific occasion to learn who the female is within itself. . . It is the heritage of the mother that the African American male must regain as an aspect of his own personhood – the power of 'yes' to the 'female' within" (479-80). While such an idea raises intriguing possibilities from our vantage point today, for Chesnutt the option of reclaiming the maternal powers of personhood fits too snugly into the racist strategy of denying privilege to African American males by disavowing their "manhood," their capacity to handle positions of power. Instead of locating the "female within" himself, Chesnutt chose to focus on projecting a "refined manhood" that relied more on the appearance "without."

As we will see later in the chapter, Chesnutt responded to the rhetoric of emasculated black manhood through a "manly" indignance and anger evident in much of his writing. This anger further demonstrates how constrained the options were for African American writers who sought attention from white audiences. As Chesnutt entered the literary field, the publishing community tended to look for and publish works that contained two types of African American characters: the docile, servile "negroes" that "kept their place" and militant, dangerous "blacks" that threatened the nation's delicate social fabric. Anger on the part of a discerning, educated African American writer was eschewed. As Chesnutt found out in a number of ways, while the publishing community may have encouraged contributions by black writers, it refused virtually all expressions of anger or resentment towards the nation's racial dynamics, no matter how justified or reasoned these sentiments were proven to be. Instead, the publishing community rewarded authors and works that adhered to pre-packaged racial roles and
images (what DuBois termed "racial prejudgement"). We see here the bind in which writers like Chesnutt were trapped. If they reveal an anger at the injustices of the nation, they are seen as threatening or unrealistic. If they refrain from such anger, they are labeled as impotent or unmanly. At least in his writing, Chesnutt attempts to live in the margins between these two categories by invoking the specter of a "refined manhood"—one that denies claims of emasculation, but refrains from threatening a scared white public.

I will use the term "emasculcation" throughout this chapter to describe the ways in which black men were denied the symbolics of American manhood. In one of its multiple meanings, this term can be used to describe literal castration (a particularly apropos association for a discussion of African American manhood when we consider the history of castration during turn-of-the-century lynchings). I will avoid the term "feminization" because, as Stephanie A. Smith points out, this term links victimization with women and designates any agency as masculine, thereby denying all critiques of society not founded on masculine values.³ My use of the term "emasculcation" also seeks to avoid what Hortense Spillers sees as the dominant culture's misnaming of the matriarchal order of African American familial structures: "Such naming is false because the female could not, in fact, claim her child, and false, once again, because 'motherhood' is not perceived in the prevailing social climate as a legitimate procedure of cultural inheritance" (Mama's Baby 479). Chesnutt astutely understood that the battle over how African Americans were being depicted/understood was being waged largely in the

³ For a discussion of the term "feminization" and its relation to notions of black masculinity, see chapter four of Smith's Conceived by Liberty.
scientific community, and that he would have to envision a means of contesting the racial Truth that was being presented within this community.

The Science of Difference: Empirical "Truth" and Racial Classification

The gruesome spectacle of lynching around the turn of the century serves as a perfect metaphor for the gauntlet through which black males were forced to pass. On the one side of the gauntlet was a systematic attempt to emasculate African American men through ritual castration and the redefinition of manhood that equated masculinity with whiteness. On the other loomed the stereotype of the "black beast" and habitual rapist—a vision of hyper-masculine frenzy. In fact, the most common justification for lynchings was the rape of a white woman by a "black beast" who could not control his lustful desires. These two images (emasculated male and hyper-masculine "beast") did not meld together into some lucid vision of black masculinity, nor did they cancel each other out. Instead they represented the ambiguity of turn-of-the-century views of race and gender, ambiguities which made anything but "yessir" passivity a dangerous path for black males.

The clearest examples of the simultaneous emasculation and bestialization of blackness are found within the era's scientific publications. In these "empirical" studies, we clearly see the rhetoric against which Chesnutt fought. In the 1903 volume of the highly respected and aptly-named medical journal *Medicine*, William Lee Howard presents a biological description of the "negro's" penis, claiming that African American

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4 According to the *Chicago Tribune*, between the years 1882 and 1899, 2533 African Americans were lynched. 1892 and 1893 were the peak years, with 241 and 200 lynchings respectively. As Ida B. Wells explains in her analysis of these statistics, less than one-third of the murdered were ever accused of criminal assault (Wells 320).
male genitalia was larger than that of the Caucasian and had "insensitive terminal fibers" (Fredrickson 268). Because these insensitive terminal fibers severely limited genital sensation, the black males could not satisfy their sexual needs, becoming sex-crazed "beasts." Howard's study (and other similar ones) of African American males provided a scientific basis for the deeply-ingrained mythos of the excessive black male sexuality and its consequence – rape. This stereotype of uncontrollable sexuality automatically placed black males outside the definitions of civilized masculinity. In short, this excessive "maleness" that turn-of-the-century science so meticulously charted eliminated African Americans from the confines of a more "refined manhood."

Indeed, time and time again scientists and social scientists focused on what they termed the "aberrant sexuality" of African Americans in order to make their claims about the hierarchal ordering of the races. In his ambitious three-volume work *A Social History of the American Family*, published in 1919, Arthur Calhoun claims that masturbation was excessively prominent among African American children of both sexes, and intercourse for these children began "shortly after or even before puberty" (43), once again suggesting an "unnatural" and unhealthy sexuality. With such a proliferation of images of rampant African American sexuality – images validated by the scientific community – it is not surprising that in 1874 Chesnutt wrote in his journal (in the code of the German language he was learning): "I received yesterday a book for which I sent weeks ago. It is called

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5 For examples of biological discussions of black male sexuality, see Charles Carroll's *The Negro A Beast* and Mark Haller's *Eugenics: Hereditarian Attitudes in American Thought*. For sociological treatment of the topic, see chapters five and eleven of Arthur Calhoun's *A Social History of the American Family*, L.H. Harris' "A Southern Woman's View," Frederick Hoffman's *Race Traits and Tendencies of the American Negro*, and Charles McCord's *The American Negro as a Dependent Defective and Delinquent.*
'The Sexual System and its Disorders.' The largest part is about venery and masturbation, really a bad habit. And if the dear Lord will help me and keep me in my good intentions I will break myself of it. God help me!” (Journals 64). For Chesnutt, masturbation and sexual desire were clearly obstacles which had to be overcome before he could become a refined man. If masturbation was an indication of weakness and a lack of restraint for white teenagers (the presumed audience for the book), it was a stigma of racial difference and uncontrollable carnality for the sixteen-year-old Chesnutt.

For Chesnutt (and many other prominent black male leaders of the era), adherence to a strict Victorian manliness was intimately linked with the debate about whether or not African Americans could keep their bodies under control. The second journal entry he ever recorded was a copying of the self-help manual A Handbook for Home Improvement, written by Samuel Robert Wells. In this journal entry, Chesnutt copies paragraphs on “The Daily Bath,” “The Feet,” “Change of Linen,” “The Nails,” and “Spitting,” ending with his commentary: “These may seem little things, but they have their weight, and will go far in determining the character of the impression we make upon those around us” (40-41). For an African American male trying to move within the racist circles of white intelligentsia and business as the young Chesnutt wished to do, these were not “little things” as Chesnutt suggested, but huge issues that determined whether he was seen as a man or beast. We see here at an early age Chesnutt learning the keys of a performative upper-class whiteness, keys that would help him deny the racist symbolics of black manhood.

Even among those white scientists and academics who claim to oppose the systematic attempt to keep blacks in positions of dependence and "ignorance," what
Calhoun calls the "general suppression of the weaker race" (42), there existed a profound attention to the sexual life and anatomy of African American males and the threat that this life posits for the white population. Calhoun cites William Thomas, who professes to have known "negro men" to lead wives, mothers, and daughters to "the sensuous embraces of white men" (44). Within the larger context of his discussion of African American licentiousness, here Thomas seems to be positing a couple of ideas: 1) that "a negro manhood with decent respect for chaste womanhood does not exist" (44)--that the very conflation of the terms "negro" and "manhood" preclude sexual restraint, and 2) that the black male's "anomalous sexuality" (to invoke Sander Gilman's terminology) is somehow "perverted" to the extent that a black male would be stimulated by "giving" his wife, mother, sister, or daughter to white men--that black male sexuality is irreparably deviant.

Some scientists argued this "immoral" behavior was an intrinsic "race trait" (to invoke Frederick Hoffman's contention). Others said it was one of the consequences of the "conditions of life": "The promiscuous huddling enforced upon the negroes by inadequate housing both in the country and city is responsible for much of the oft cited immorality" (Calhoun 56). What we see in both of these theories is the white perception that black male sexuality is out of control. Whether it involves the high number of "negro abortions" (Calhoun 45), the insensitive terminal fibers on the glans penis, or the early commencement of sexual activity, an African American man's sexuality, his underlying "bestiality," had to be contained. In this light, the scientific records documenting African American "traits and tendencies" reveal more about white fears of black "virility" than they do about the differing race traits. In short, they become cautionary tales used to
define white American family dynamics in contrast to the dysfunctional and degenerate African American family. Avoid these problems, suggests Calhoun, and the white American empire will continue to thrive. Succumb to these tendencies and (by way of a neo-Lamarckian view of genetic adaptation) the future of white American society becomes threatened.6

Such "scientific" indications of African American vitality were so prevalent and the "discoveries" so threatening precisely because black bodies became intertwined with notions of power. It is not surprising that these "objective" texts proliferated in the years during the harshest backlash against Reconstruction. As African Americans were "allowed" more economic and social opportunities during Reconstruction, the white community feared the results of a change in the power structure. In short, African American sexual drives became symbolic of white fears about the uncontrollable escalation of black empowerment. Frederick Hoffman states, "Rape is only one of the many manifestations of an increasing tendency on the part of the negro to misconstrue personal freedom into personal license, and this tendency, persisted in, must tend towards

6 In some ways the rhetoric of racial traits and tendencies has remarkable similarities to the rhetoric surrounding recent episodes of teen violence. Adults identify certain markers of trouble (at times rather arbitrarily), such as black make-up, dyed hair, tattoos, or a fondness for certain types of music, and cautionary tales are developed around these markers to give an illusion of control over the situation. All we need to do, so goes the logic, is keep our eyes out for unusual fingernail polish on our kids and to apply polish remover when it is spotted. In this way, our vigilant actions are able to control teen violence. Like the turn-of-the-century debate on racial traits and tendencies, such a logic serves to create a mentality that it is other people (not us) who have the problem, when in fact it is spurred on by an often unspoken panic that it is in fact "us" that are experiencing a crisis.
creating a wider separation of the races" (234, emphasis mine). Although Hoffman believed that African Americans would eventually become extinct due to generations of the "hereditary transmission of weak constitutions" (177), he supported the common sentiment that, because of their lustful nature, black males were an immediate threat to the stability of American society. The fact that studies such as Hoffman’s claim to be “objective” truths of African American sexuality instead of metaphorical cautionary tales only serves to demonstrate how specious nearly all claims of objectivity truly are. Hoffman’s analysis becomes simply one more piece of the discourse of masculinity which repeatedly claimed that African American men were not capable of becoming real “men” or handling the power entrusted to men.

In order to combat this form of segregation, many black intellectuals used the rhetoric of “refinement” as a class marker to distinguish the elite black male from his more “dangerous” counterparts. For example, in his 1905 article "Educated Colored Men and Women," George Murray argues that while educated white men consistently lacked a "reverence and awe" for white women, "for an educated mixed blood to be deficient in this particular feeling is a high crisis. . . . The aim of [the African American male’s] education is to increase his 'reverence and awe' for white women only, not to educate him at all. . . . We wish to inquire now into the charge that it is the educated colored man who is generally guilty of rape against white women. The language of such a statement constitutes its own refutation and is chiefly valuable for the lack of an intelligible application of the term exhibited by its author, for who under the sun would consider a

7 After reading Hoffman’s text, Booker T. Washington states that he felt as though he had “just finished reading [my] own funeral sermon” (cited in Bay 44).
ravissuer educated” (95)? While Murray’s mocking attitude towards “negro education” complicates this passage, we can nonetheless see how he marshals the discourse of “refinement” in order to deflect charges of black males’ “bestiality.” According to Murray’s logic, educated (black) men simply would not commit rape. He does not deny the validity of the claims of black men raping white women, as does Ida B. Wells; he instead implies that these rapes must have been committed by “ignorant” (black) men. This passage, when coupled with Hoffman’s panic about rape as an extension of increased African American freedom, also demonstrates how “power” may be defined differently. Part of what is at stake in both Hoffman’s and Murray’s writing is the threat of black men’s access to respectable white women. This threat is the principal fear behind the slogan of “social equality” that was used by a scared white public to deny progressive racial policies. While white patriarchy is endangered by the increase of African American political and economic power, its ability to control and protect white womanhood also falls under attack.

While Calhoun perceived himself socially and politically very differently than did Hoffman (and was much more sympathetic to the plight of African Americans), he shares Hoffman’s fear of the intermingling between white women and black men: "Economic equality of this sort [working alongside lower-class white women] brings to the negro man temptation that would be rather unlikely to occur to him if his association was with white ladies of high rank" (37). Calhoun disarms the threat of miscegenation to some degree by imagining that such transgressions only occur with lower-class white women – both black men and “respectable” white women recognize the absolute boundary the separates them. Nonetheless, the threat remains for both Calhoun and Hoffman;
increased risk of sexual transgressions necessarily comes with increased opportunity for the African American subjects. As Calhoun's quotation demonstrates, the white community believed that the only way to contain black licentiousness was by keeping African Americans in a subordinate position to "white [people] of high rank." Indeed, in this instance the African American male's implied class (the implication that all black people are of an inferior class) is justified through a rhetoric that stresses the necessity of his containment. And the justification for this containment is enabled by the rhetoric of science, which forged deeper, more "empirical" evidence of absolute racial difference.

The Manly Scribblers: Art and the Projection of Manhood

As I suggested earlier, Chesnutt enthusiastically looked to a rhetoric of objective truth as a strategy for transcending the stigma of race and the racialized body. If W.E.B. DuBois opined upon the value of a rarified idea of High Art nurtured by the Talented Tenth, Chesnutt saw the "hard facts" of American realism as the method of pursuing "truth." Early in his writing career, Charles Chesnutt heartily believed that realism was the ticket to racial justice. Echoing the rhetoric and tone of William Dean Howells, Chesnutt writes in his journal, "I intend to record my impressions of men and things, and such incidents or conversations which take place within my knowledge" (Journals 126).

Chesnutt seemed to have found a receptive medium in realism for describing the "truth" of the nation's racial dynamics. After all, proponents of realism were certainly not shy about proclaiming their connections to the "truth" of American society. If DuBois sees Beauty and Truth as inextricable links to the eternal, William Dean Howells' conception of the relationship between beauty and truth does not transcend contemporary