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Only Skin Deep?:
Identity and the Constitution of the Mixed-Race Subject
by
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A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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Abstract

Building upon theorisations of a variety of disciplines and authors, this project explores the various ways in which the mixed-race subject has been constituted. It contends that neither biological nor social constructions of race are reliable explanations of racial identity, as each perpetuates a particularistic interpretation of how identities are formulated in accordance with hidden frameworks of social power that have shaped, and continue to shape, our discursive and vernacular understandings of 'race'. A specific focus on multiraciality allows a critical analysis of 'race' and racial identity, introducing previously underutilised variables in the equation including aesthetics, appearance, recognition, belonging, and human agency. In considering both constructions, this focus on the mixed-race subject demonstrates the inherent constructed-ness of 'race' and the epistemological violence carried in its wake. Though non-essentialist interpretations of racial identity may be problematic, they also hold promise for a reformulation of identity and difference as it pertains to monoracial and multiracial identities alike, allowing us the discursive space to reopen the dialogue on 'race'.

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To the monkeycats, who make me laugh;

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To the Thompson army, for creating a mixed-race 'race' whose community acceptance was based on not fitting in anywhere, being disliked by both dominant and subjugated racial groups...and sarcasm.

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Chapter One:

Introduction

Identity. It is conscious and subconscious, deliberate and involuntary, aggregated and unavoidable. Identity can connect, divide or even destroy lives, as it and the forces that sustain and protect it have done throughout human history. Identity transgresses the disciplinary boundaries among law, politics, biology, psychology and sociology, dancing on top of fence posts while each discipline struggles to claim knowledge of identity formation, development, construction and maintenance as its own. As far as we know the concept of identity – in its most fundamental definition, meaning a sense of connectivity among otherwise segregated individuals through the signification of various commonalities – has played a role in our lives from the time of Aristotle. Yet identity is extremely relative; it changes in accordance with the events and circumstances that surround it and has grown more complicated and convoluted with the advent of the modern era:

The discourse of self is distinctively modern, and modernity distinctively linked to the discourse of self, not just because of the cognitive and moral weight attached to selves and self-identity. Modern concerns with identity stem also from ways in which modernity has made identity distinctively problematic. It is not simply – or even clearly the case – that it matters more to us than to our forebears to be who we are. Rather, it is much harder for us to establish who we are and maintain this own identity satisfactorily in our lives and in the recognition of others.¹

Problematic and complicated though it may be, identity is fundamental. It is what binds us together through our common humanity, and is often at the heart of what threatens to tear us apart as the factions of our identity – race, gender, sexuality, religion, class, language, age, ability – become more important as dividends than humanity is as the quotient. As

¹ Craig Calhoun, *Critical Social Theory* (Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, 1995) p. 194.

Paul Gilroy points out, "Identity is always bounded and particular. It marks out the divisions and subsets in our social lives and helps to define the boundaries of our uneven, local attempts to make sense of the world. No one ever speaks of a human identity."²

How can something so fundamental to our lives be so ambivalent? In his book *Identity/Difference*, philosopher William Connolly argues that difference is built into the very logic of identity and the construction of otherness readily insinuates itself into that logic.³ He argues:

An identity is established in relation to a series of differences that have become socially recognized. These differences are essential to its being. If they did not coexist as differences, it would not exist in its distinctness and solidity. Entrenched in this indispensable relation is another set of tendencies, themselves in need of exploration, to congeal established identities into fixed forms, thought and lived as if their structure expressed the true order of things. When these pressures prevail, the maintenance of one identity (or field of identities) involves the conversion of some differences into otherness, into evil, or one of its numerous surrogates. Identity requires difference in order to be, and it converts difference into otherness in order to secure its own self-certainty.⁴

Otherness, it seems, is key to identity. Yet difference does not necessarily have to lead to Otherness - it is the normative judgements that often coincide with perceptions of difference that morph what may be seemingly innocent differences among competing identities into otherness. The Different becomes the Other when moralities and behavioural traits are deemed to be not simply an alternative perception, but rather *wrong* or *evil* interpretations when compared to the "true" dominant identities. We define

² Paul Gilroy, *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000) p. 98.

³ William Connolly, *Identity/Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002) p. 9.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

ourselves through that which we are not – and the Other becomes not just different, not just another version of ourselves, but the antithesis of ourselves. Diametric characteristics – good and evil, right and wrong, just and villainous – cannot operate with middle ground. Identity and difference both depend upon the boundaries they construct, imaginary and arbitrary though they may be. This is what Foucault has deemed to be the paradox of identity: identity is constituted through the personal experiences of an individual, but is also unavoidably a product of ‘otherness’.⁵ We reconcile our own being(s) through a system that places other humans within the same paradigms of identity we have created with only ourselves in mind. Identity traits are non-transferable among people and as a result *difference* – different social positions, different genders, different races, different beliefs – becomes the embodiment of the human condition. The world around us is always partially Other.

The sheer power of identity, especially in its relation to difference, exclusion and otherness, cannot be overstated. Identity is ‘normal’ (in the sense that it is unavoidably formed through an unconscious process) and absolutely integral to being, yet in any circumstance it has the potential to both conglomerate and divide simultaneously. This in and of itself is not necessarily problematic, for identity is also the means through which we may exercise our common humanity. Identity becomes more dangerous, however, when specific commonalities and differences are used to create criteria for the separation of ‘us’ from ‘them’:

⁵ Karlis Racevskis, “Michel Foucault, Rameau’s Nephew and the Question of Identity,” *The Final Foucault*, eds. James Bernauer and David Rasmussen (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1988) p. 21.

When identity refers to an indelible mark or code somehow written into the bodies of its carriers, otherness can only be a threat. Identity is latent destiny. Seen or unseen, on the surface of the body or buried deep in its cells, identity forever sets one group apart from others who lack the particular, chosen traits that become the basis of typology and comparative evaluation. No longer a site for the affirmation of subjectivity and autonomy, identity mutates. Its motion reveals a deep desire for mechanical solidarity, seriality, and hypersimilarity. The scope for individual agency dwindles and then disappears. People become bearers of the differences that the rhetoric of absolute identity invents and then invites them to celebrate.⁶

Identity and difference are especially significant when the demarcation of the 'like' from the 'unlike' is founded within the corporeal bodies of individual subjects. In these cases the demarcation and exclusion of the other, it seems, becomes inevitable.

This project will examine the paradoxical, antithetical and convoluted nature of identity through a specific focus on one of its intriguing points of application: the construction of multiracial identities. In 2000, 2.6% of Americans – over six million people – identified as being 'mixed-race'.⁷ While the Canadian census does not include a specific 'mixed-race' category, over 73,000 identified as being a 'multiple visible minority' in 2001 – and yet this number does not even account for the number of Canadians whose racial heritage is made of up of 'visible minority' and 'Caucasian.' This population is growing - some call it the "biracial baby boom" – and has been predicted to "change the face of North America."⁸ However, mixed-race people threaten more than just the current physical appearance of North American societies; identity formation and the classification systems it relies upon also become significantly more convoluted when

⁶ Paul Gilroy, *op. cit.*, pp. 103-104.

⁷ Herman L. DeBose, "Introduction," *New Faces in a Changing America: Multiracial Identity in the 21st Century*, eds. Herman L. DeBose and Loretta I. Winters (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2003).

⁸ *Id.*

considered through the lens of the mixed-race subject. In order to understand the processes through which the mixed-race subject is constituted, it is first necessary to consider the various constructions of 'race' and the means by which these constructions have permeated vernacular conceptualisations of identity formation.

From its creation within humanity's *logos*, 'race' has referred to those perceived, constituted and labelled as 'other'. Identity and difference inhere in the very concept of 'race',⁹ making 'race' "not just a part – an aspect – of the modern world, but emblematic of it."¹⁰ Racial identity is more than simply externally or internally ascribed attributes of a particular individual or group; 'race' encompasses deep intrinsic feelings of self and belonging, "often defining the 'I' by placing it against a background of 'we'."¹¹ Like other identity factions such as gender, class and sexual orientation, 'race' and its relationship to identity and difference are the signifiers of a deeper-seated struggle involving the acquisition, control and maintenance of social power. In 1975, Michel Foucault lectured on this very point at the Collège de France:

The discourse of race struggle...will be recentred and will become the discourse of power itself. It will become the discourse of a centred, centralized and centralizing power. It will become the discourse of a battle that has to be waged not between races, but by a race that is portrayed as the one true race, the race that holds power and is entitled to define the norm, and against those who deviate from that norm, against those who pose a threat to biological heritage. At this point, we have all those biological racist discourses of degeneracy, but also all those institutions within the social body which make the discourse of race struggle function as a principle of exclusion and segregation and, ultimately, as a way of normalizing society. At this point, the

⁹ David Theo Goldberg, *Racist Culture: Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1993) p. 51.

¹⁰ David Theo Goldberg, "Racial Rule," *Relocating Postcolonialism*, eds. David Theo Goldberg and Ato Quayson (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002) p. 97.

¹¹ Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Anthony Kwame Appiah, "Editor's Intro: Multiplying Identities," *Identities*, eds. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Anthony Kwame Appiah (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995) p. 3.

discourse...abandons its basic formulation...it is no longer: 'We have to defend ourselves against society,' but 'We have to defend society against all the biological threats posed by the other race, the subrace, the counterrace that we are, despite ourselves, bringing into existence.'....This is the internal racism of permanent purification, and it will become one of the basic dimensions of social normalization.¹²

As Foucault notes, race and power are intrinsically linked, weaving a tapestry that involves not only identity and difference, but exclusion, segregation, law, truth, institutionalisation and normalisation.

'Race' has become one of the foremost societal manifestations of identity and difference. Historically, when Europeans set out to 'discover' (and conquer) the world, they brought with them legally, politically and socially enshrined perceptions that there were biological and cognitive differences among races, which were not only distinct and autonomous from one another but also could and should be organised into a hierarchy of humanity, with the 'White' race on top and other races perpetually and indefinitely lagging behind. In its contemporary form, 'race' is widely perceived as a socially constructed phenomenon. Race, this perception argues, is created and maintained through the existence of specific spatial, temporal, sociological, cultural and political factors. In effect, race is not '*real*' – historical racism was the means through which societies were typically organised into hierarchies of domination and subjugation. In his book *Racist Culture*, David Theo Goldberg elaborates on the consequences of these two constructions of race and racial difference:

¹² Michel Foucault, *Society Must be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-76*, trans. David Macey, eds., Francois Ewald and Alessandro Fontana (New York: Picador, 2003) pp. 61-62.

Explanations of race and racialized phenomena...have tended to reflect two general forms. The first accepts the standard biological sense of race as subspecies genetically interpreted, of race as natural kind. It attempts to explain relations between real racial groups so interpreted...by reducing the racialized phenomena to underlying social (or in some cases biological) terms or relations....Where these underlying levels are seen as biological, they are read as biological kinship or common gene pool. By contrast, the other explanatory paradigm gives no independent content to the notion of race. It takes race as a social kind and interprets appeals to race as nothing other than recourse to social considerations and relations, again, like class or culture. If the first paradigm reifies race as an unquestioned biological given, the second conceives race and racial characterization of social relations as ghostlike.¹³

As Goldberg mentions, both the biological and social constructions of race are inherently problematic. These two constructions are also not necessarily isolated from one another, nor are they mutually exclusive in terms of their prominence in discourse and society. Though the biological construction of race has been marginalised within the social sciences as evidence of historical racism, many academics (Phillipe Rushton of the University of Western Ontario among them) still argue that there are immutable biological differences among races which may predict their cognitive and intellectual potential (or lack thereof). The social construction of race is more widely accepted in contemporary times, yet social scientists struggle with the impact that advancements in the natural sciences – namely genetics – have on the argument that ‘race’ is not founded in biology.

These two paradigms of ‘race’ - its biological construction and social construction - are fundamentally conceptualisations of “the subject” and the means by which the racial subject is or has been constituted. Processes of subject formation are far from static - the conceptualisation of the subject itself has changed obliquely over time; in fact, Stuart Hall has identified three major “shifts” in thinking about and around the subject. “The

¹³ David Theo Goldberg, *Racist Culture*, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

Enlightenment Subject,” he argues, “was based on a conception of the human person as a fully centred, unified, individual...whose ‘centre’ consisted of an inner core which first emerged when the subject was born, and unfolded with it, while remaining essentially the same - continuous or ‘identical’ with itself - throughout the individual’s existence. The essential centre of the self was a person’s identity.”¹⁴ In what Hall calls the “modern era,” the nature of the subject changed to reflect the growing complexities thereof:

The notion of the sociological subject reflected...the awareness that this inner core of the subject was not autonomous and self-sufficient, but was formed in relation to ‘significant others’, who mediated to the subject the values, meanings and symbols - the culture - of the worlds he/she inhabited...identity is formed in the ‘interaction’ between self and society. The subject still has an inner core or essence that is ‘the real me’, but this is formed and modified in a continuous dialogue with the cultural worlds ‘outside’ and the identities which they offer. Identity, in this sociological conception, bridges the gap between the ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ - between the personal and public worlds....Identity thus stitches...the subject into the structure. It stabilizes both subjects and the cultural worlds they inhabit, making both reciprocally more unified and predictable.¹⁵

From this reading, comparisons (though they may be far from perfect) may be drawn between these shifting notions of the subject and the biological and social constructions of race, the two dominant ‘race’ paradigms of the modern era. Though the timing of these comparisons may be inaccurate - for example, the biological construction of race well outlasted the Enlightenment, with its social acceptance reaching well into the second half of the twentieth century - other similarities are striking. The static, monolithic interpretation of the identity of the Enlightenment Subject is reminiscent of the biological construction of race’s absolute reliance on unalterable biological determinants, while the

¹⁴ Stuart Hall, “The Question of Cultural Identity.” *Modernity*, eds. S. Hall, D. Held, D. Hubert and K. Thompson (Oxford & Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1996) p. 597.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 597-598.

broader yet still problematic sociological subject parallels the social construction of race and its dependency on essentialism.

Much of this project, both explicitly and implicitly, will analyse the formation of subjects - specifically the formation of the mixed-race subject, the processes through which it is created and maintained. Moreover, it will discuss the various formulations of the subject within both the biological and social constructions of 'race', identifying the challenges that the mixed-race subject poses to these differing conceptualisations of racial identities. This focus on the formulation of racial subjects will demonstrate that two key components exist within either construction of race, across time and place, and society. Firstly, racial identities are constructed, constituted, formulated. There are processes that exist just below the surface of our beings in conjunction with our normalised existences which aid and abet identity formation. In the case of racial identity, for example, identities may be formed through reference to biology or society, or in the case of class position via a multiplicity of factors involving ancestry, education, ability, tradition, heritage or convenience. Karlis Racevskis notes that "the process through which subjects and their identities are constituted is one that is deeply ingrained in culture, one that is immanent in the dominant epistemological mode of the modern period..."¹⁶ *Identities are formed* – they are not instilled within our souls from birth. Secondly, identities – and racial identities in particular – rely on systems and modes of classification; that which separates the like from the unlike, the self from the other, us from them. It was in this context that Franz Fanon, who some argue is the creator of post-colonial theory, asked,

¹⁶ Karlis Racevskis, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

“Where am I to be classified? Or, if you prefer, tucked away?”¹⁷ Though these categorical determinants vary widely through time and space (the definition of ‘Black’ in the United States differs from its definition anywhere else in the world), *classification and categorisation are always present when identities are at issue*. These two facets of identity (construction and categorisation) work in conjunction with one another and cannot be considered in isolation. Together, they allow subjects to identify, recognise and be recognised along racial lines. This dual process is perhaps so obvious that it is often overlooked – it makes racial identity formation simple, normalised, unquestioned.

This normalised racial logic has become so embedded in society that it is indeed difficult to even comprehend a world without ‘races’. The legacy of race was once maintained and enforced through the law and state power; a powerful mechanism used throughout the world by dominant races to control other, supposedly inferior, ‘races’. In Canada, at least, (most) of the laws created with racial purity and segregation in mind have long been revoked or rewritten. However, racial constitution and classification live on through social normalisation, a variety of processes formulated in part by the law and inherently connected to hierarchisation, measurement and appraisal:

In its technical sense, the term normalization does not refer to the production of objects that all conform to a type. Rather, it involves ‘providing reference documents for the resolution of standard technical and commercial problems that recur in the course of interchange between economic, technical, scientific and social partners.’ Normalization, then, is less a question of making products conform to a standard than it is of reaching an understanding with regard to the choice of a model....Normalization is thus the

¹⁷ Franz Fanon, “The Fact of Blackness,” *Anatomy of Racism*, ed. David Theo Goldberg (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990) p. 111.

production of norms, standards for measurement and comparison, and rules of judgement.¹⁸

Though law and normalisation often work in conjunction, Francois Ewald rightly points out that in some cases, there is no need to impose law on the living in order to ensure the standardisation and regularity of their social behaviours.¹⁹ Likewise, racial logic – that is, when rationality dictates that there are such things as distinct ‘races’ – has become normalised and simplistic. It is difficult, if not highly improbable, to imagine a world without races, though not necessarily impossible. More than five hundred years ago, Columbus sailed the ocean blue and discovered not just a new world, but a world of otherness. As Robert Williams Jr. explains in *The American Indian in Western Legal Thought*, the conquerors brought their beliefs, religion(s) and conceptions of what was “true” - and hence “right” - with them to the New World. Upon encountering those with beliefs, religions and conceptions that were different than theirs, the conquerors used normative values to label different ‘races’ as Other - evil, wrong, and in great need of European and Christian direction and domination.²⁰ After centuries of indoctrination, ‘race’ has become one of the standard measurements of identity and difference.

However, the discourse of normalised racial logic is exposed as fundamentally flawed – or, illogical if you will – when considered through the perspective of a growing mixed-race population in North America. Mixed-race identities are a unique and under-

¹⁸ Francois Ewald, “Norms, Discipline and the Law,” *Representations*, No. 30, Special Issue: *Law and the Order of Culture* (Spring, 1990): p. 148.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

²⁰ Robert A. Williams, Jr., *The American Indian in Western Legal Thought: Discourses of Conquest* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

utilised approach in discussions of identity; through a consideration of multiraciality, racial categories, no matter how many or how few, are no longer clear and divided classificatory lines amongst racial groups – if they ever truly were. This, of course, causes one to question not only the means by which these racial categories have become normalised in discourse and society, but also the manner in which racial categories have maintained their power and prominence well into the twenty-first century. Likewise, the multiracial experience unseats the previously stagnant process of identity constitution: if one is born ‘Asian,’ then (s)he identifies racially as Asian in either of the biological and social constructions of race. But what if one is born of a Black mother and an Asian father? Multiraciality complicates the constitution of racial identities by introducing previously underutilised variables in the equation, including aesthetics, appearance, culture, recognition, belonging, and human agency.

As such, the theoretical question driving this project asks how, exactly, have mixed-race identities been formed historically and contemporarily in North America and in what ways can a reevaluation and reformulation of the discursive construction of multiraciality contribute to or clarify the complexities of identity formation? It will be my argument that such an inquiry will demonstrate four interconnected points: first, it will expose the existence of hidden frameworks of social power which permeate and perpetuate the formation of racial identities. Though specific laws have long been revoked and social norms marginalised, our vernacular understandings of racial identity are a testament to the permanency and power that these historical laws and social norms hold over North American societies. Secondly, it will demonstrate the theoretical relevance of

analysing identity formation as a dual process that involves two separate, yet equally relevant and mutually dependent factors: the construction of racial identity in accordance with the discursive norms of contemporary society and the classification systems that dictate the criteria against which one's race is to be measured and decided. Thirdly, it will reveal the inherent constructed-ness, inadequacy and perhaps even the absurdity of relying on 'race' as a mechanism of dividing and classifying humanity into discrete categories. Finally, it will emphasise the need to reformulate the ways in which we think about and discuss race, racial identity and racial classifications in order to move beyond the historical stigma associated with biological racial determinants and to more fully incorporate multiraciality and the mixed-race subject into discourses of identity and difference.

A demography that includes mixed-race people is obviously not a new phenomenon, as racial mixing is as old as colonisation - or older, depending on one's definition of 'race'. In contemporary times, however, mixed-race people are a growing population; a population that is now able to self-identify and become more prominent in society than ever before in the history of humanity. History, it will be shown, has rarely smiled upon the mixed-race phenomenon, as the very choice to identify as mixed race, we must remember, was a right never afforded to the generations of multiracial subjects that have come before us. In accordance with this growing population, there is a growing body of literature that considers the multiracial experience and the unique circumstances of and challenges faced by mixed-race people. Though this literature is a step in the right direction, it is far from substantial, comprehensive or compelling. As Abby Ferber points

out in her essay “Exploring the Social Construction of Race,” the majority of literature on interracial relationships and interracial people falls into two general categories: historical and sociological/socio-psychological. The historical literature explores the history of laws regarding miscegenation, definitions of multiracial individuals, attitudes towards and patterns of intermarriage, achievements, experiences, and treatment of multiracial individuals, and comparison of these factors in various countries, while the majority of the sociological theories focus on discovering those elements of social structure and culture that shape rates and patterns of interracial and interethnic relationships.²¹ This literature is mostly the offspring of critical race theory and cultural studies, two realms of academia that have been highly successful in exploring racial identity and yet, as will be discussed further in Chapter Two, have rarely delved into multiraciality and/or the constitution of the mixed-race subject. The challenge, therefore, is to reconsider the politics of (racial) identity by examining the unique circumstances of multiracial identity formation in the ultimate hopes of contributing a new perspective to contemporary academic theorisations involving the creation, manifestation and maintenance of ‘identity’ and ‘difference’ in North American societies.

In this project, I consider the theoretical nature and implications of multiraciality without referring to any ‘mixed-race’ combination in particular. With that being said, however, there are several significant points that also must be taken into account. First, multiraciality seems to only become a contentious issue with considering the ‘mixing’ of

²¹ Abby L. Ferber, “Exploring the Social Construction of Race: Sociology and the Study of Interracial Relationships,” *American Mixed Race: the Culture of Microdiversity*, ed. Naomi Zack (London: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1995) p. 156.

White/non-White 'races'. As Maria Root argues, "persons born to two parents of colour of different racial backgrounds are rendered invisible in...discussions of multiracial identity."²² As will be argued in subsequent chapters, the current discursive focus on multiracial people of partial European heritage is demonstrative of the connection between multiracial identity, social power and processes of domination and subjugation. Secondly, because most of the 'mixed-race' literature is from the United States, the construction of multiraciality is often depicted as a Black/White issue, largely due to the historical relations these groups have experienced. Though I will attempt to avoid this limiting aspect of the current discourse, I also recognise that I am bound to a certain extent by the foci of the current literature on this subject. Thirdly, there is a problem with using examples and illustrations from the United States and applying them to the 'mixed-race experience' in any other country. It must be stated from the outset that this is not my intention; again, to a certain extent I am limited to the literature on both race and mixed-race, which emerges largely from scholars studying racial identities in America and, to a lesser extent, Great Britain. However, the theoretical implications of multiracial identities transgress national boundaries and I intend to focus more on these impacts and their consequences in the theoretical discussions of identity formation than on the practical consequences of being mixed-race in any country in particular. Fourthly, it is also important to note that although I will briefly touch on multiraciality as it relates to First Nations peoples in Canada, a comprehensive discussion of Métis, Aboriginal peoples and

²² Maria P.P. Root, "The Multiracial Contribution to the Browning of America," *American Mixed Race: The Culture of Microdiversity*, ed. Naomi Zack (London: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1995) p. 233.

First Nations membership issues – though highly warranted and long overdue – is well beyond the parameters of this particular project. Finally, I recognise that multiraciality in South Africa, as one of the only countries in the world with an identifiable and socially recognised mixed-race ‘race’ (coloureds), brings an entirely new dimensions to the arguments made in this project. However, the scope and content of this project is solely focussed on the constitution of the mixed-race subject in North America, specifically in Canada and the United States.

The research methodology utilised in the chapters that follow relies on no one theory in isolation. In attempting to paint a picture of the formulation of mixed-race identities, I have considered a broad range of literature and discourses which transgress disciplinary boundaries in order to situate my project within the larger debates surrounding the construction of racial identities. This means of engaging in a substantial discussion, though theoretically diverse, is necessary in order to fully describe and analyse the formation of mixed-race identities. Thus, this project borrows heavily from literature within cultural studies, critical race theory, the politics of identity and the politics of recognition. Chapter Two will set out a theoretical framework from which a case surrounding the construction of multiraciality can be built, emphasising the theoretical problems encountered in such an endeavour. Chapter Three will focus on the biological construction of race in order to determine the means by which the existence of the mixed-race subject is negated and positioned to a state of liminality through a reliance on biological criteria. Chapter Four will then consider the social construction of race, arguing that the contemporary formation of multiraciality through this construction still works to

reify seemingly segregated and distinct racial categories and naturalise the concept of 'race,' and, further, will discuss the role that the social recognition of racial identities plays in constituting the mixed-race subject. The final Chapter will build upon the theoretical issues and problems identified with the constitution of the mixed-race subject in previous chapters and will suggest a genealogical and non-essentialist approach for the reformulation multiracial identities.

Chapter Two:

Theoretical Framework

When the world becomes inexplicable, as it is prone to do in these increasingly complex and convoluted times, we rely on theory to guide us through what we cannot see at point blank range. Theory is our bird's eye view; a way of escaping our inherent and eternal subjectivity as human beings with limited experiences during our short lifetimes. Though theory may not always be universally applicable or all-encompassing, it still provides at least partial explanations for the wonders and tragedies - and all those phenomena in between - of the practical consequences of everyday life. Especially within the social sciences theory is not only necessary, but integral to understanding human interaction. We cannot reverse time to discover the nature of humanity before Leviathan, but we can hypothesise about what it would be like, given our current circumstances and our (re)actions to and because of them.

How does one build a theoretical case surrounding the constructions of multiraciality? An obvious first step is to recognise that we are not alone in such an endeavour. Explorations of mixed-race identity are mostly a product of the last decade, yet the theoretical underpinnings and implications of such an inquiry spans the centuries - across the constructed boundaries of both discipline and geography. This chapter will explore some of the theoretical foundations of the constitution of multiraciality, identifying the complications encountered through and within the collision between theory and practice when discussing the origins, formulations and negations of human identities. The overall purpose of this thesis is to explore these issues with the practical realisation that the theoretical problems and paradoxes identified cannot necessarily be solved within the limits of these pages. Taking inspiration from William Connolly's assertion in

Identity/Difference, I contend that “it is better to expose than to suppress...and placing a second bet that a counter-ontological projection may open up productive possibilities of reflection in this domain.”¹

Identity and Cultural Studies

Race and racial identity are prevalent throughout many disciplines, though none more so than the realm of ‘cultural studies’, which often includes critical race and post-colonial theory and diaspora studies. In his book *Introducing Cultural Studies*, Ziauddin Sadr identifies five characteristics of this field: cultural studies aims to examine its subject matter in terms of cultural practices and their relation to power; it has the objective of understanding culture in all its complex forms and of analysing the social and political context in which culture manifests itself; it is both the object of study and the location of political criticism and action; it attempts to expose and reconcile the division of knowledge, to overcome the split between tacit (cultural knowledge) and objective (universal) forms of knowledge; and it has a commitment to a moral evaluation of modern society and to a radical line of political action.² Cultural studies is further considered an element of the “critical theory” mode of inquiry, a general term coined for the theoretical developments within the social sciences and humanities, including Marxist theory (the Frankfurt school), postmodernist and poststructuralist theory, psychoanalytic theory, semiotic and linguistic theory, queer theory, gender studies and cultural studies.³

¹ William Connolly, *Identity/Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002) p. 13.

² Ziauddin Sadr, *Introducing Cultural Studies* (New York: Icon Books, 1999) [as cited from http://irdis.com/gliavar/cultural_studies] site accessed 05 January 2005.

³ [http://wikipedia.org/wiki/critical_theory] Site accessed 05 January 2005.

Generally speaking, all varieties of critical theory are concerned with (but are by no means limited to) questions of identity: the processes through which identities are developed, the ways in which cultural institutions are used to shape identities, and the means that societies utilise to dictate which identities are accepted as “normal” and which are marginalised and denied privileges.⁴

The development of theoretical reflection on racial identity has therefore been far from linear. Cultural studies, critical theory, postmodernism, poststructuralism and the methodological tools they utilise (i.e. deconstruction within postmodernism and critical race theory within cultural studies) all work in conjunction (and sometimes in contradiction) in order to inform our conceptions of a particular social phenomenon. For example, the foundations of critical race theory can be found in the works of Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman during the mid-1970's as an attempt to “understand and come to grips with the more subtle, but just as deeply entrenched, varieties of racism that characterize our times.”⁵ Largely indebted to critical legal studies, critical race theory explores the normalisation of racism in law and society. Post-colonial theory also explores notions of race, though it does so quite differently than critical race theory. For example, many argue that post-colonial theory began with Edward Said's *Orientalism*⁶, in which he relies a great deal on Foucauldian theory to

...bring together a great variety of Western texts...under the heading of a single discourse, namely Orientalism. What unites these texts is the forms of knowledge they

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, “Introduction,” *Critical Race Theory: The Cutting Edge*, 2nd edition, eds. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000) p. xvi.

⁶ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978).

produce about their object of study - the Orient - and the power relations which are thereby involved. Discourses operate as self-policing regimes, establishing their own categories of truth...and simultaneously encouraging the production of certain kinds of statements or texts...as well as discouraging or rejecting those which violate the norms of that particular discourse.⁷

As such, though post-colonial theory and critical race theory are both considered crucial aspects of the more substantial discourse of cultural studies, the two dialogues rely on different theoretical legacies in order to analyse the contemporary formulation of 'race'.

The theoretical concerns with identity are not limited to the discourse of cultural studies, which it is most often and most immediately linked to. The problematic of identity and identity formation cannot be contained by disciplinary boundaries, and is readily connected to all realms of 'critical theory', including feminism, queer theory, post-colonialist, (post)modern and (post)structural thought. The trajectory of cultural studies, however, has been and continues to be widely enveloped by issues related to identity; namely, the meaning and substance of cultural or racial identities, the implications of the (mis)recognition of these identities, and the wider implications that the constitution of identified subjects holds for society at large. In his essay "Identity and Cultural Studies,"⁸ Lawrence Grossberg argues that most discourses which concern themselves with these and other issues fall under one of two models of the production of identities and differences. The first model is widely known as "essentialism", strategic or otherwise, as it perceives that identities contain some intrinsic or essential element defined through common origin

⁷ Peter Childs and Patrick Williams, *An Introduction to Post-Colonial Theory* (London: Prentice Hall, 1997) p. 99.

⁸ Lawrence Grossberg, "Identity and Cultural Studies: Is That All There Is?" *Questions of Cultural Identity*, eds. Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (London: Sage Publications, 1996).

and/or common experience. Herein, “struggling against existing constructions of a particular identity takes the form of contesting negative images with positive ones, and of trying to discover the ‘authentic’ and ‘original’ content of identity.”⁹ In contrast, the second model emphasises the multiplicity of identities within a single agent and the constant and unavoidable interaction amongst them. As Grossberg states, “identities are always relational and incomplete, in process. Any identity depends upon its difference from, its negation of, some other term, even as the identity of the latter term depends upon its difference from the former.”¹⁰

Grossberg’s analysis is both helpful and insightful, though I believe it necessary to further illustrate the tension between theory and practice. As indicated in the previous chapter, identity construction, through whichever model, figure, or combination of each, is always bound to the methods of classification that reinforce and maintain distinct identities. Though the various processes through which identities are constituted are theoretically linked to discourses of power, normalisation and the relationship between politics, law and society, it is even more obvious that the means by which identity theory is mutated into practice occurs through humanity’s apparent need to categorise, classify and delineate the like from the unlike. As David Theo Goldberg writes,

The coherence of the racist project, then, is a function of the preconceptual elements that have structured racist dispositions. These include classification and order, value and hierarchy, differentiation and identity, discrimination and identification, exclusion and domination, subjection and subjugation, entitlement and restriction, and in a general way, violence and violation.¹¹

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ David Theo Goldberg, “The Social Formation of Racist Discourse,” *Anatomy of Racism*, ed. David Theo Goldberg (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990) p. 301.

More often than not, Goldberg's "preconceptual elements" function as mechanisms of both law and society. Indeed, it is not a leap of logic to argue that identity construction and classification are inextricably connected to the law and modes of governing a particular society - either directly, through the enactment of state laws or regulations, or indirectly through the development of societal norms and patterns of 'acceptable' behaviour. As I intend to demonstrate through examinations of both the biological construction of race (Chapter Three) and the social construction of race (Chapter Four), there is a definite theoretical relevance to thinking about identity in this way.

Racial Identity

Within the broader schema of cultural studies, the subsection of literature that attempts to theorise of the formation, maintenance and implications of particular racial identities remains a vast collection of material from a variety of sources. Each author and theory build upon the theories of their predecessors in the hopes of exploring and explaining racial identity and its relationship to the state, power, law and society. This section will examine the theories put forth by a selected number of leaders in this field: Michael Omi and Howard Winant's theory of racial formation; David Theo Goldberg's conception of racial knowledge; Stuart Hall's insightful analysis of culture and identity; and Paul Gilroy's controversial writing, *Against Race*.

To begin with, Michael Omi and Howard Winant's *Racial Formation in the United States*¹², is among the most referenced works that considers the place of race in

¹² Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: from the 1960s to the 1990s*, 2nd Edition (New York: Routledge, 1994).

contemporary American society. Beginning their chapter on “Racial Formation” by juxtaposing essentialism with illusionism (meaning the most extreme form of social construction that would view race as a mere illusion), the authors argue that race is neither; but is in fact a complex of social meanings under constant (re)transformation. Race is defined as “a concept which signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies,” a process in which the selection of biologically based human characteristics is highly social and historical.¹³ This perspective is key to their subsequent theory of racial formation, “a sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed and destroyed...racial formation is a process of historically situated *projects* in which human bodies and social structures are represented and organized. [Racial formation] is linked to the evolution of hegemony, the way in which society is organized and ruled.”¹⁴

By analysing race and racial identity in this manner, Omi and Winant intrinsically link race to law, the state and society - the crucial sites that race’s power and existence is operationalised. Society and its institutions, they argue, are suffused with racial projects to which we are all inescapably subjected:

This racial ‘subjection’ is quintessentially ideological. Everybody learns some combination, some version, of the rules of racial classification, and of her own racial identity, often without obvious teaching or conscious inculcation. Thus are we inserted in a comprehensively racialized social structure. Race becomes ‘common sense’ - a way of comprehending, explaining, and acting in the world. A vast web of racial projects mediate between the discursive or representational means in which race is identified and signified on the one hand, and the institutional and organizational forms

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 55-56. [emphasis in original]

in which it is routinized and standardized on the other. These projects are the heart of the racial formation process.¹⁵

Race, they argue, must be located in social, structural, and historical contexts. Their interpretation of race - as a process of signification - opens substantial space for the examination of race and its relationship to society. The common sense of race is, in fact, an (indirect) mode of governance; laws and state action are not necessary for societal confirmation of social norms. In this case, the "production and adherence" to the common sense of racial ideology is indicative of American society's consent to being ruled by the (il)logic of racial formation.

Omi and Winant's belief that racial projects are infused into both state and society illustrate important aspects of racial identity formation which are key to comprehending the significance of mixed-race identity. In applying their conceptualisations to the mixed-race experience, it becomes clear that there is an epistemological power in attaching specific meanings to concepts. In his follow-up book to the first edition of *Racial Conditions*, Howard Winant writes that "the main task facing racial theory today, in fact, is no longer to critique the seemingly 'natural' or 'commonsense' concept of race - although that effort has not by any means been entirely completed. Rather, the central significance is to focus attention on the continuing significance and changing meaning of race."¹⁶ The significance and changing meaning of race is a necessary focal point for all racial identities, true, but is especially significant for mixed-race identities; this project

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

¹⁶ Howard Winant, *Racial Conditions: Politics, Theory, Comparisons* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994) p. 14.

will demonstrate that the significance of race and the changes that it undergoes is often in adherence to existing monoracial categories and conceptualisations of identity. Omi and Winant question how specific meanings are connected with 'race' and discuss the processes through which these meanings change over time. Therein lies the rub; it is not 'race' itself that is threatened by new, multiracial conceptualisations of identity, rather it is the definitions and meanings inherent in the concept of 'race' that are brought into question by mixed-race identities. This project contends that a focus on multiraciality illustrates the constructed-ness of 'race' itself, and hence brings to light the contestability of the meanings 'race' carries in its wake. Mixed-race identities challenge the need for a collective racial base through which individuals can experience 'belonging', they illustrate the detrimental consequences of being positioned outside both dominant and subjugated racial groups, they demonstrate that the social construction of 'race' relies on modes of categorisation created in an age of biological determinism. Omi and Winant's identification of the power of meanings allows this project to utilise multiraciality to highlight the contemporary meanings that inhere in the conceptualisation of race as *monorace* - and the danger thereof.

In a work that considers the connection between race and liberalism, David Theo Goldberg's *Racist Culture: Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning*¹⁷ traces the development of race and racism from the Enlightenment to contemporary times, arguing that although race is a socially constructed phenomenon the history of its biological

¹⁷ David Theo Goldberg, *Racist Culture: Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1993).

creation cannot be avoided. He contends that racial naturalism is being replaced by racial historicism, which still acts to reify the construct itself, thereby codifying biological racism into the institutions of law and politics. Thus, 'race' is not simply a consequence of the modern world, but is "emblematic" of it:

Thus the 'constructedness' of race, about which so much has been made in recent racial theorizing, is more complex than most contemporary analyses all too glibly make out. For modern racial order...is as much 'discovered' as it is (re)produced; it is as deeply the 'product' of some presumed laws of nature as the outcome of law's imperiousness.¹⁸

In effect, Goldberg is able to reconsider contemporary notions and language(s) of 'race' in order to demonstrate the biological hierarchical premises about humankind that will always shadow this terminology. Goldberg argues that there is an inherent paradox in liberalism's interpretation of modernity: "as modernity commits itself progressively to idealized principles of liberty, equality and fraternity, as it increasingly insists on the moral irrelevance of race, there is a multiplication of racial identities and the sets of exclusions they prompt and rationalize, enable and sustain."¹⁹

Goldberg further argues that modernity and the liberal traditions attached to its formulations are enabled through the discursive formation he identifies as "racial knowledge". Relying on Foucault's theory that knowledge produces and is produced by the ordering of differences (a key element to Foucault's writings on the relationship

¹⁸ David Theo Goldberg, "Racial Rule," *Relocating Postcolonialism*, eds. David Theo Goldberg and Ato Quayson (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002) p. 97.

¹⁹ David Theo Goldberg, *Racist Culture*, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

between power and knowledge, which will be discussed later), he theorises that racial knowledge is formed by a dual process:

It is dependent upon - it appropriates as its own mode of expression, its premises, and the limits of its determinations - those of established scientific fields of the day, especially anthropology, natural history and biology. This scientific cloak of racial knowledge, its formal character and seeming universality, imparts authority and legitimation to it....At the same time, racial knowledge...is able to do this because it has been historically integral to the emergence of these authoritative scientific fields. Race has been a basic categorical object, in some cases a founding focus of scientific analysis in these various domains.²⁰

Here, race is linked to the production of scientific and social scientific knowledge throughout the modern era. A leap of faith is not necessary in order for Goldberg to argue that this knowledge has been integral to the State - in terms of its designs, ideology and function. Goldberg reminds us that though the modern era may be over *per se*, its legacy is still rampant in our continued use of racial knowledge and the discourses - both scientific and non - that perpetuate it.

Though this project will not explicitly consider the theoretical impacts of modernity on the constitution of the mixed-race subject, Goldberg's analysis is significant to this discussion for its connection of the principles of modernity - and hence, the biological construction of race - to the contemporary formulations of racial identity. Though some contend that the biological construction of race is nothing more than historical racism, Goldberg maintains that it has and continues to shape our understandings of racial identity even in the twenty-first century. In applying Goldberg's insights to the construction of multiraciality, we discover that 'race' today - that is, the

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

social construction of race - is still dangerously disguised in biological terms. As will be further explored in Chapters Three and Four, multiraciality challenges the categories that racial identities are currently defined through. Though racial mixing has occurred continuously since the beginnings of colonisation, 'mixed-race' is only beginning to emerge as a valid racial identity in North America and is still largely devoid of the social recognition that identities require in order to be incorporated into 'racial knowledge'. The monoracial demarcation of identities has a powerful hold over the modes of classification that reinforce them, and therefore defining mixed-race identities against a standard of monoraciality will always be problematic for reformulating multiraciality as a credible, as opposed to deviant, identity choice. Even in the social construction of race, racial identities defined in essentialist terms consider different racial groups to be discrete and separate. Mixed-race challenges the racial knowledge of the impermeable boundaries among races, questioning the validity or necessity of conceptualising race in broad strokes without any 'grey areas' in between.

Stuart Hall is one of the world's leading academics in the area of cultural theory. In much of his work, including his notable essays on the "Black Diaspora," he has avoided the reification of racial boundaries by shifting discussions of identity away from the concept of 'race' and towards 'culture' and sometimes 'ethnicity'. Therein, he has argued for the "end of the innocent notion of the essential black subject," recognising

...the extraordinary diversity of subject positions, social experiences and cultural identities which compose the category 'black'; that is, the recognition that 'black' is essentially a politically and culturally constructed category, which cannot be grounded in a set of fixed trans-cultural or transcendental racial categories and which therefore has no guarantee in nature.... This inevitably entails a weakening or fading of the notion that 'race' or some composite notion of race around the term black will either

guarantee the effectivity of any cultural practice or determine in any final sense its aesthetic value.²¹

In this and other works, Hall argues for a non-essentialist interpretation of cultural identity. He calls the essentializing moment “weak because it naturalizes and dehistoricizes difference, mistaking what is historical and cultural for what is natural, biological and genetic.”²²

Hall uses non-essentialism combined with deconstructionist tendencies most often linked with the work of Jacques Derrida to problematise the concept of cultural identity. Derrida uses the term *différance* as a way to disturb those terms and concepts that are often believed to be settled in specific interpretations. In “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” Hall uses a similar methodology to reconsider the (re)positioning of Caribbean cultural identities, in effect demonstrating that

Practices of representation always implicate the positions from which we speak or write - positions of enunciation. What recent theories of enunciation suggest is that, though we speak, so to say ‘in our own name’, of ourselves and from our own experience, nevertheless who speaks, and the subject who is spoken of, are never identical, never exactly in the same place. Identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, we should think, instead, of identity as a ‘production’ which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation. This view problematises the very authority and authenticity to which the term ‘cultural identity’ lays claim.²³

²¹ Stuart Hall, “New Ethnicities,” *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, eds. David Morley and Juan-Hsing Chen (London and New York: Routledge, 1996) pp. 442-443.

²² Stuart Hall, “What is this ‘Black’ in Black Popular Culture?” *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, eds. David Morley and Juan-Hsing Chen (London and New York: Routledge, 1996) p. 472.

²³ Stuart Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. J. Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990) p. 222.

By focussing on the fluidity of 'identity,' Hall challenges the notion that culture lies outside of and is unchanged by history. Rather than perceiving culture as a fundamental mark on our inner spirits, he argues that it is a positioned and positioning set of relations, shaped by discourse, history, knowledge and society. Through such a line of argumentation, Hall logically asserts that the politics of identity is "always a politics of position".²⁴

Hall's conceptualisation of identity as a process and its maintenance and stabilisation as a positioning are both important to our discussion of multiraciality. By perceiving 'race' as a mode of positioning combined with the construct itself, we become aware of the deeply political nature of the formulation of racial identities. Mixed-race identities are no exception to this; in Chapter Three I will argue that an interpretation of multiraciality through the biological construction of race positions the mixed-race subject in a state of liminality - being neither here nor there. This positioning is not an accident of history, rather it is a result of the set of relations that emerge through social processes, including the creation and maintenance of norms, discourses, knowledges and regimes of truth. In the case of the mixed-race subject Hall's perception of racial positioning is especially tenacious - mixed-race people are not simply positioned on the periphery of racial groups (though this happens in some cases), but are often placed within a constructed hierarchy of 'races' that defines multiraciality as liminal, with mixed-race people being neither members of the dominant group nor subjugated groups. Hall's call for the "end of the innocent notion of the essential black subject" is also an important

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 226.

contribution for building a theoretical case through which the mixed-race subject can be analysed. Though many have argued for non-essentialist interpretations of identities in recent decades, Hall's connection to the "innocence" of essentialism is strongly connected to his view that racial identities are 'positioned' and hence, is highly applicable to multiracial identities. Illustrating the problems associated with the essentialist interpretations of mixed-race identities within the biological and social constructions of race, Chapters Three and Four both contend that essentialism is a violent means through which 'races' are given definitions and permanent, fixed characteristics. When these characteristics encompass negative normative statements, as occurs in the case of multiraciality, the essentialist construction of 'mixed-race' becomes perceived as an invalid identity choice, often perpetuating the social misrecognition of these identities. Hall's call for non-essentialist interpretations of racial identity is key to the reformulation of mixed-race identities.

Finally, in his controversial book *Against Race*, Paul Gilroy proposes not just the mere deconstruction of 'race' as a ideological concept, but its eradication from contemporary discourses. He argues that eliminating 'race' is necessary in order to more fully examine other theories of "cosmopolitan histories and transcultural experiences" which are currently masked by the "histories of extremity associated with raciology's brutal reasoning".²⁵ In its fundamentally fallible way, race overshadows the obviousness of human commonality:

²⁵ Paul Gilroy, *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000) p. 7.

Whether it is articulated in the more specialized tongues of biological science and pseudo-science or in a vernacular idiom of culture and common sense, the term 'race' conjures up a peculiarly resistant variety of natural difference. It stands outside of, and in opposition to, most attempts to render it secondary to the overwhelming sameness that overdetermines social relationships between people and continually betrays the tragic predicaments of their common species life. The undervalued power of this crushingly obvious, almost banal human sameness, so close and basically invariant that it regularly passes unremarked upon, also confirms that the crisis of raciology reasoning presents an important opportunity where it points toward the possibility of leaving 'race' behind, of setting aside its disabling use as we move out of the time in which it could have been expected to make sense.²⁶

In effect, Gilroy argues that if we can agree, in these supposedly postmodern times, that race is nothing more than a social construct, nothing more than a regime of truth and knowledge left over from centuries past, then we must discard it as a phenomenon which maintains a tenacious hold over our lives and societies. The flaw in Gilroy's argument, which he acknowledges, is the (em)powered nature of racial identities, especially for those once oppressed minority groups who have now turned 'race' into an icon of pride. However, he argues that this elimination is a necessary evil, in spite of how controversial, contentious and outlandish such a proposition may seem:

I am alive to all the ironies of my position. I understand that taking antipathy toward 'race' beyond the unstable equilibrium represented by my liberal use of scare quotes might be viewed as a betrayal....I think that our perilous predicament, in the midst of a political and technological sea-change that somehow strengthens ethnic absolutism and primordialism, demands a dramatic and radical response. This must step away from the pious ritual in which we always agree that 'race' is invented but are then required to defer to its embeddedness in the world and to accept that the demand for justice requires us nevertheless innocently to enter the political arenas it helps to mark out.²⁷

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

Gilroy's crisis of raciology, "the lore that brings the virtual realities of 'race' to dismal and destructive life,"²⁸ is in the wide-spread denunciation of 'race' as a dangerously constructed concept combined simultaneously with the trajectory of popular culture, government policies, and cultural and ideological work that makes it more prominent and prevalent than ever before. Gilroy's work reminds us to keep "the founding *absurdity* of race as a principle of power, differentiation and classification...persistently, obstinately in view."²⁹

Though this project does not share Gilroy's bold assertion that 'race' should be abolished, it does take heed of Gilroy's rationale for coming to that conclusion. Like Gilroy's analysis, a specific focus on the constitution of the mixed-race subject demonstrates the constructedness of 'race', and yes, perhaps even the absurdity of continuing to rely on a mode of categorisation that is so intrinsically linked to discourses of power and domination. Upon analysis, multiraciality illustrates that vernacular conceptualisations of racial identity are often clothed in monoracial terms, thereby calling the paradigm of what Gilroy calls "raciology" into question. In partially adopting Gilroy's thesis, however, this project departs from Gilroy's blanket assertion that 'race' should be abolished. Though the mixed-race subject often lacks the racial collectivity through which racialised subjects find coherence and strength, it must also be recognised that there is an empowering nature to 'race', as evidenced by the civil rights movements of the 1960s which recaptured 'race' and attempted to redefine the concept in positive terms. This

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

project seeks to reformulate the construction of mixed-race identities in discourse through a non-essentialist interpretation of identity, recognising that while there may be logic in Gilroy's assertions, writing ourselves out of race may not be possible at this point in history. The more urgent task at hand, then, becomes to reconsider multiraciality and recast it in a positive light, rather than label this identity choice as the end of race as we know it.

The theoretical legacies of Omi and Winant, Goldberg, Hall and Gilroy do not exist in isolation; rather, their works build upon the contributions made by the others - and many others like them - in order to examine the role of 'race' in law and societies writ large. The literature on the formation of racial identities is large and growing rapidly, and as new authors and new interpretations enter the field of play, new insights into the relevance of 'race' in contemporary societies (though the role of 'race' in the U.S. and to a lesser extent, Britain, often monopolise discussions) emerge. As such, and like most other theories that have not closed their doors to (re)interpretation, there will never be a single, unified or comprehensive 'theoretical framework' from which discussions of racial identities can be analysed. There lies an inherent danger in drawing from this broad range of literature to consider the construction of mixed-race identities, as the scope of this project is limited and therefore can not possibly examine all aspects of what all theorists have written on the means through which racial identities are formed. However, I contend that engaging with this multiplicity in order to situate mixed-race identities more fully in the field of cultural studies is necessary. Each author illustrates important facets of the foundation upon which the mixed-race story can be built, examined and analysed.

Thus, these key thinkers within the politics of racial identity have provided a broad range of theoretical insights from which this project may begin to consider the complexities of racial identity formation. Collectively, they demonstrate the complex nature of race and racial identity and warn of the dangers of using ‘race’ as a mechanism through which humanity can be divided and classified. From their compelling and sometimes contrasting interpretations of the intricacies of racial identity, we may take several crucial lessons: race is, above all else, a constructed phenomena, formed by deliberate social and historical processes of the modern era; identity and difference are fundamental to the concept of race, and more often than not it is used to delineate the ‘like’ from the ‘unlike’; the means by which racial boundaries are formed and maintained is far from a coincidence of history and time - the formation of knowledge, the maintenance of the socially elite and powerful and the universality of particular regime(s) of truth are integral to the continuance of racial discourses; and though it may not be apparent at first glance, race and its relationship to law, the state and society is far from a neutral, universalistic phenomenon.

The brilliance of these and other students of cultural theory is undeniable. Yet, within these otherwise compelling formulations, there is little discussion of mixed-race identity; it is often treated as a mere footnote in a thousand page anthology. True, many of the concepts that cultural theorists create and define are applicable to the constitution of the mixed-race subject; for example, Homi Bhabha’s notion of “hybridity” - which will be discussed further in Chapter Five - can be utilised to explore the positioning of multiracials on the periphery or outside of monoracially defined groups. However, while “hybridity”

and the writings of Hall, Goldberg, Gilroy, Omi and Winant are highly applicable to understanding the constructions of mixed-race identity, these writings themselves rarely identify multiraciality in and of itself as a valid issue through which racial identity can be explored. In spite of the absence of explicit references to mixed-race identities in these theories, there are several logical conclusions that may explain its conspicuous absence. This absence is not necessarily a malicious or purposeful attempt to negate the existence of the mixed-race subject and his or her specific socio-cultural environment, rather, it is a matter of socio-historical circumstance. The last of the miscegenation laws prohibiting interracial marriage in the southern United States were repealed in 1967, and thus the 'mixed-race' population is fairly novel in terms of its social *identifiability*. Social taboos surrounding the production of 'mixed' children are (slowly and haltingly) disintegrating. In other words, *our generation is one of the first wherein mixed-race people can legally, socially and culturally identify as such*. Given that the discourse of cultural studies itself only emerged in the 1970's as the remnants of the social movements of the 1960's, it is not surprising that theorists would first attempt to tackle the seemingly more pressing issues of racial equality, affirmative action, racist culture and its relationship to law and society. Furthermore, and most importantly, the aforementioned words of William Connolly must give us pause. Discourse and theory will never be complete - there is no 'end game' within critical theory. Our task is to continue to discuss, to be critical and to be criticised in the humble goal of continuing the dialogues of generations past, not to seek answers or solutions but to seek more complicated questions and expand the great, never-ending search for knowledge.

Mixed-Race Identity

Until the 1990's the mixed-race experience was rarely mentioned in the literature on racial identity, except as an aside or within the context of the impacts of miscegenation laws during the Jim Crow era. As Abby Ferber points out in her essay, "Exploring the Social Construction of Race: Sociology and the Study of Interracial Relationships," the mid-nineties saw an increase in the (still limited) literature on the multiracial experience,³⁰ though much of it is lacking in the more substantial and theoretical discussions of mixed-race identity within the context of the politics of identity. During the latter half of that decade, however, more and more literature began to emerge on the 'multiracial experience'. This discourse is well represented by the works of Naomi Zack and Maria Root, two of the leading experts on this topic. Though their approaches and content vary, both focus their analysis on mixed-race identities; from the historical roots of miscegenation laws, blood quantum requirements and the fear of racial pollution to the contemporary struggles of mixed-race people to find acknowledged, recognised and accepted dual or multiple racial identities.

In her book *Race and Mixed Race*, Naomi Zack uses philosophical methodology to criticise the logic of racial classification systems in the United States. She concludes by advocating, much like Paul Gilroy, for what can best be described as the elimination of 'race'. Since the scientific logic of 'race' itself was long ago determined to be unfounded,

³⁰ Abby L. Ferber, "Exploring the Social Construction of Race: Sociology and the Study of Interracial Relationships," *American Mixed Race: The Culture of Microdiversity*, ed. Naomi Zack (London: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1995) p. 156.

then the adherence to any racial identity - mixed, pure or otherwise - can only be made in ignorance.³¹ Along the same lines, she later proposes in her essay "Life After Race" that

...we write ourselves out of race as a means of constructing racelessness or removing the constructions of race. And our language itself, at least English, underscores such a move. The European word for race - in the sense of genealogical forebears - is a homonym of the word for a written mark, namely 'line'. That is, given that race has no objective biological foundation, one must look to language for its origins and undoing.³²

Zack's position is significant in that it is the first major work to examine the construction of mixed-race identity. Zack's philosophical methodology leads her to conclude that since mixed-race identities demonstrate the existence of 'grey areas' in between discrete races, racial identity itself can never be completely described in essentialist terms and reifying the concept of 'race' itself should be avoided. I have labelled this particular line of reasoning 'the elimination of race' because of its (perhaps overzealous) contention that since race is nothing more than a social construct, and a dangerous and violent one at that, then we should no longer rely on it even in purely vernacular circumstances. As will be demonstrated in Chapters Four and Five, though this suggestion has merit, its practical implementation is more complicated than the cessation of the term itself. My project departs from Zack by more fully considering the constitution of the mixed-race subject through the biological and social constructions of race and introducing variables into the equation that Zack fails to consider; namely, the mixed-race positioning in liminality, the

³¹ Naomi Zack, *Race and Mixed Race* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993).

³² Naomi Zack, "Life After Race," *American Mixed Race: The Culture of Microdiversity*, ed. Naomi Zack (London: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1995) p. 301.

role of social recognition, the consequences of both imposed and self-identity and the benefits and limits of non-essentialism.

At the same time Zack utilised philosophical logic to paradoxically suggest a model for the elimination of race, Maria Root combines narratives of multiracial experiences with a method loosely based on the deconstructionism of cultural studies to advocate for the societal acceptance and recognition for mixed-race people and their dual and/or multiple racial heritages. In more than one example of her work, Root attempts to tie the historical use of racial language to the contemporary positioning of multiracial people in society. In her discussion of hypodescent, or the 'one-drop rule,' she argues that while the legacy of hypodescent "shaped the normative process of racial identity development for people monoracially identified, these same historical forces virtually negate the existence of the multiracial person contemporarily."³³ In many of her works, Root focusses on the more practical elements of the multiracial experience; namely, narratives of not 'fitting in', appearing to be racially ambiguous, and struggling to gain social acceptance in a given or multiple racial group(s) that perceive(s) mixed-ness as a great betrayal. Though narrative is a useful methodology to explore the consequences of being mixed-race, this project concerns itself more with the theoretical implications the various constructions of multiraciality hold for our understandings of identity and difference. As such, Root's focus on the practical elements of mixed-race identity serve as

³³ Maria P. P. Root, "The Multiracial Contribution to the Browning of America," *American Mixed Race: The Culture of Microdiversity*, ed. Naomi Zack (London: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1995) p. 232

an excellent springboard from which this project may begin to discuss the theory driving the practice (and vice versa).

In a limited sense, this literature provides a background analysis for the larger questions that this project strives to illuminate. It elaborates on the liminal positioning of multiracial individuals, struggles with the biological and social constructions of race and attempts to move beyond the notion of 'essential' racial categories. However, more often than not this academic struggle simply ends with the call for an acceptance of a 'mixed-race' category in the U.S. census (officially incorporated in 2000), or the development of a positive reconstruction of multiracial identity, one which escapes the homogenising tendencies of characterising each mixed-race person as a "tragic figure relegated to a marginal, anomic existence."³⁴ Be that as it may, the next section will elaborate on what I perceive to be some of the key weaknesses of this literature, and will explore the crucial theoretical legacy of Michel Foucault, which offers new ways of thinking for analyses of the (de)construction of the mixed-race subject. After all, as unique and novel as the theorisations of multiraciality may seem, we must not take for granted the substantial contributions that have been made in other areas closely related to cultural studies, such as postmodernist and poststructuralist thought.

A Reformulation of (Multi)Racial Identity Theory

I would like to contend that the extent to which the current literature on multiraciality engages with theories proposed by those who analyse the formation of racial

³⁴ Maria P. P. Root, "Within, Between and Beyond Race," *Racially Mixed People in America* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1992) p. 10.

identities and the broader discourse of the politics of identity (and difference) is lacking. I believe that this (mis)recognition of mixed-race identities occurs in part because of the discourse's current emphasis on narratives, activism and practical experiences. While these endeavours are highly relevant and important (let us not forget that cultural studies emerged from 1960's activism, which advocated (among other things) the social rights of racial minorities) they fail to seriously embrace the theoretical implications of identity and difference.

The theoretical problematic of identity, racial identity and their relationship to law, the state and society have been laid out in many forms throughout various discourses. The challenge here is not to form a coherent edifice of mixed-race identity by building theory upon theory, issue upon issue, but instead to use multiple aspects of the discursive formation of identity and difference - in whatever form or theorisation it may take - to problematise our current understanding of identity as it relates to race and mixed-race. In undertaking such a task, it is necessary to give due credit to the lessons learned in the body of literature examined in the preceding sections. Their strengths must be operationalised, their weaknesses identified and adjusted.

A logical first step in utilising critical analysis to engage with the unique circumstances of the constitution of mixed-race identity is to acknowledge the theoretical implications that the writings of Michel Foucault hold for the formulation of racial identities. Foucault had much to say about power, knowledge and their effects, musing retrospectively in one of his last works before his death, "When I think back now, I ask myself what else it was that I was talking about in *Madness and Civilisation* or *The Birth*

of the Clinic, but power? Yet I'm perfectly aware that I scarcely ever used the word and never had a field of analyses at my disposal."³⁵ Aside from devoting most of his lectures from January to March 1976 at the Collège de France to the subject of racism, however, he was "curiously circumspect about the ways in which [power] has operated in the areas of race and colonialism."³⁶ However, there are connections to be made between Foucault's many and varied theorisations about truth, power and knowledge and the politics of identity and difference. Like Foucault's conceptions of power and knowledge, identity discourse is not simply a struggle involving only state power over society (though it does, in fact, have a role to play). In essence, constructions of 'race' and racial identity are manifested through societal relations, in the capillaries of civilisation and as such I would contend that many of Foucault's discussions bring to light the fundamentally complex nature of racial identity, the most significant of which are his theorisations of disciplinary power, biopolitics, genealogy and power, knowledge and truth.

Disciplinary power is fundamentally concerned with the assurance of a cohesive social body.³⁷ Within strict limits of "the tolerated," disciplinary power establishes careful hierarchies and separations, excluding differences that do not meet institutional requirements while simultaneously constituting subjects within specific systems of difference³⁸. In *Madness and Civilisation*, Foucault realises that the divide between reason

³⁵ Michel Foucault, "Truth and Power," *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980) p. 115.

³⁶ Robert Young, "Foucault on Race and Colonialism," *New Formations* 25 (1995): P. 57.

³⁷ Michel Foucault, "Two Lectures," *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980) p. 96.

³⁸ Roman Coles, *Self/Power/Other: Political Theory and Dialogical Ethics* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1992) pp. 57-58.

and madness - between the similar and the different - had authorised “the disciplinization of forms of knowledge as a condition for dominating, and even silencing, the Other.”³⁹

The themes of alterity, difference and the constitution of the Other runs through

Foucault’s work, as his studies on insane asylums, prisons and sexuality illustrate:

In Foucault’s texts...we find offered a way of experiencing and externalizing alterity, and come to recognize that those who have been absented from the practice of historical narrative have empowered the story that has been told. Yet the move to resituate the Other and to propose that discourse permits the articulation of a field consisting of a variety of subject positions, questions narrative’s claims to representation and closure. Any consideration of the status of the Other...invariably calls into question the construction of narrative itself as the privileged story line of subjectivity and the unfolding of consciousness in time.⁴⁰

Alterity and difference are familiar concepts and crucial elements in the politics of racial identity. As David Theo Goldberg points out, “as much as the modern state has been about anything...it has been about increasingly sophisticated forms of techniques of racial formation, power and exclusion,”⁴¹ with biology powering the separation of the inferior and the superior in racial discourse.⁴²

Foucault argues that this disciplinary power leads to a “normalising society,” in which the norm is grounded, analysed and specified in order to become prescriptive. The discourse of right is overtaken by “the discourse of him who sets forth the norm, of him who engages in surveillance, who undertakes to distinguish the normal from the

³⁹ H.D. Harootunian, “Foucault, Genealogy, History: The Pursuit of Otherness,” *After Foucault: Humanistic Knowledge, Postmodern Challenges*, ed. Jonathan Arac (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1988) p. 116.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

⁴¹ David Theo Goldberg, “Racial Rule,” *op. cit.*, p. 82.

⁴² Stuart Hall, “New Ethnicities,” *op. cit.*, p. 444.

abnormal...”⁴³ The normalising discourse is intrinsically bound, in Foucault’s view, with power and power relations; what was once “habit” eventually became an entire ethic to which people were required to subject themselves. Through the norm, power is concealed and given out to society at large.⁴⁴

In contrast to disciplinary power, Foucault refers to “the sum of the disciplines, institutions, techniques and discourses that develop to track, survey, regulate and make more productive both individual bodies and populations”⁴⁵ as “biopower”. He describes disciplinary power and biopower - and elsewhere, governmentality - as the basic forms from which power over life has evolved. He writes that bio-politics is a series of interventions and regulatory controls, “focused on the species body, the body imbued with the mechanics of life and serving as the basis of the biological processes: propagation, births and mortality, the level of health, life expectancy and longevity, with all the conditions that can cause these to vary.”⁴⁶ Biopower does not exclude disciplinary power, but in fact integrates, modifies and infiltrates it, embedding itself in existing disciplinary techniques.⁴⁷

By linking biopower to the exercise of power over the body, Foucault’s conceptions are illuminating for discussions of ‘race’ and racial identity. Biopower is addressed not to “man-as-body” but to “man-as-species,” with the domain of biopolitics

⁴³ Michel Foucault, “Power and Norm: Notes,” *Power, Truth, Strategy*, eds. Meghan Morris and Paul Patton (Sydney: Feral Publications, 1979) p. 66.

⁴⁴ *Id.*

⁴⁵ Romand Coles, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

⁴⁶ Michel Foucault, “The Right of Death and Power over Life (from *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*)” *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rainbow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984) pp. 261-262.

⁴⁷ Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the College de France, 1975-76*, trans. David Macey. Eds. Francois Ewald and Alessandro Fontana (New York: Picador, 2003) p. 242.

controlling “relations between the human race, or human beings insofar as they are living beings, and their environment, the milieu in which they live.”⁴⁸ Foucault believes that the relationship between biopower and race manifest through racism:

...racism does make the relationship of war...function in a way that is completely new and that is quite compatible with the exercise of biopower...racism makes it possible to establish a relationship between my life and the death of the other that is...a biological-type relationship: ‘The more inferior species die out, the more abnormal individuals are eliminated, the fewer degenerates there will be in the species as a whole, and the more I - as a species rather than individual - can live, the stronger I will be, the more vigorous I will be. I will be able to proliferate. The fact that the other dies does not simply mean that I live in the sense that his death guarantees my safety; the death of the other, the death of the bad race, of the inferior race (or the degenerate, or the abnormal) is something that will make life in general healthier: healthier and purer.’⁴⁹

Foucault further argues that biopower produces its own knowledge and truth, commenting that Social Darwinism “naturally became within a few years during the nineteenth century not simply a way of transcribing a political discourse into biological terms, and not simply a way of dressing up a political discourse in scientific clothing, but a real way of thinking.”⁵⁰

In Foucault’s later works, beginning with the *History of Sexuality*, he became interested in what he termed “subjectivisation” or the procedure by which the subject is constituted. Arguing that there is no such thing as a neutral subject,⁵¹ Foucault steers his analyses away from the all-encompassing notion of a collective Leviathan. He argues:

Rather than ask ourselves how the sovereign appears to us in his lofty isolation, we should try to discover how it is that subjects are gradually, progressively, really and materially constituted through a multiplicity of organisms, forces, energies, materials,

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 244-245.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 255.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 256-257.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

desires, thoughts, etc...rather than worry about the problem of the central spirit, I believe that we must attempt to study the myriad of bodies which are constituted as peripheral *subjects* as a result of the effects of power.⁵²

In this sense, the subject is not randomly created; it is carefully constituted by relations or forces that are often not in the control of either the individual or the State. Even if subjects are self-constituted in an active fashion, the individual does not invent or devise these “practices of the self”. Patterns and various relations are imposed on the subject in accordance with certain types of knowledges and discourses.

Racial identity makes Foucault’s emphasis on the how of power (rather than the who) all the more significant and applicable. As Foucault once observed, “the relations of power are perhaps among the best hidden things in the social body.”⁵³ Though it must be acknowledged that the impact of racial identity in contemporary society may not be an effect of power, Foucault further reveals:

The bourgeoisie is not interested in the mad, but is interested in power over the mad; the bourgeoisie is not interested in the sexuality of children, but is interested in the system of power that controls the sexuality of children. The bourgeoisie does not give a damn about delinquents, or about how they are punished or rehabilitated, as that is of no great economic interest. On the other hand, the set of mechanisms whereby delinquents are controlled, kept track of, punished and reformed does generate a bourgeoisie interest that functions within the economic-political system as a whole.⁵⁴

Along the same lines, then, racial identity itself may not be important or significant to some, but the maintenance of the dividing lines that (continue to) exist between separated and segregated races are very much the interest of the race that vies to remain on top of

⁵² Michel Foucault, “Two Lectures,” *op. cit.*, pp. 97-98. [emphasis in original]

⁵³ Michel Foucault, “An Aesthetics of Existence,” *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings, 1977-1984*, trans. Alan Sheridan et al., ed. Lawrence D. Kritzman (New York and London: Routledge, 1988) p. 118.

⁵⁴ Michel Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

the hierarchy it has constructed. Hence the creation of racial subjects is fundamentally constituted by forces that are not readily seen by the naked eye. Power relies on knowledge and truth, and despite all evidence to the contrary, the discourse of identity portrays races as being socially (if not biologically or genetically) distinct from one another. Through his revival of subjugated knowledges, his discussions of madness and reason, and his identification of the relationship between power, knowledge and truth, Foucault “attempted to show that the practices and understandings we perceive to be are (at least in part) products of conflicts for power in which the hegemonic powers have sought not only to produce certain utilizable forms of being and eliminate others, but to reduce the expression of conflict with others to silence as well.”⁵⁵ Foucault points out that by studying power in the capillaries, at its extreme points of application, we can observe the violence that discourse imposes on reality.

Foucault’s writings are so complex and varied that they at times can seem overwhelming. When racial identity is injected into a Foucauldian equation, his methodologies and paradigmatic approaches to discipline, power, knowledge, truth, and normalisation allow us to reconsider conventional interpretations of the (in)significance of race. As will be demonstrated in subsequent chapters, Foucault’s greatest concerns, his quest to aid in our comprehension of the nature of power and the roles of regimes of truth and normalisation in a given society, inhere in the historical and contemporary constructions of the mixed-race subject.

⁵⁵ Romand Coles, *op. cit.*, pp. 86-97.

Like other critical theorists, our task now is to adapt and utilise these theoretical tools to expose, deconstruct and analyse. The theoretical foundations provided by cultural theorists like Hall, Gilroy, Goldberg, Omi and Winant, the emergence of a discourse specifically concerned with multiraciality because of efforts by Zack and Root, and Foucault's undeniable contribution to critical theory in general are instruments of exploration. Through these and other writings, it is possible to craft a niche from which we may launch an inquiry into the nature of racial identity, and, more specifically, the manner in which multiraciality is and has been constructed.

Chapter Three:

The Biological Construction of Multiraciality

"...I am already being dissected under white eyes, the only real eyes. I am fixed. Having adjusted to their microtomes, they objectively cut away slices of my reality. I am laid bare. I feel, I see in those white faces that it is not a new man who has come in, but in a new kind of man, a new genus. Why, it's a Negro!"¹

*My old man's a white old man
And my old mother's black.
If I ever cursed my old white man
I take my curses back.*

*If I ever cursed my old black mother
And wished she were in hell,
I'm sorry for that evil wish
And now I wish her well.*

*My old man died in a fine big house.
My ma died in a shack.
I wonder where I'm gonna die,
Being neither white nor black?²*

In 1958, Hannah Arendt observed that plurality is basic to the human condition. We are all distinct from one another and strive to achieve social recognition of our distinctiveness while simultaneously using our 'distinctive commonalities' as the basis for distinguishing particular groups comprised of individuals with similar characteristics. Though the categories of identity into which the world may be divided may, quite possibly, be infinite - categories based, for example, on race, age, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, blood type, eye colour, etc. - as Craig Calhoun writes, "a crucial common denominator is the recognition of a new kind of stress on identity, that is, on the notion that the self is integrally being and consciousness, name and voice."³

¹ Frantz Fanon, "The Fact of Blackness," *Anatomy of Racism*, ed. David Theo Goldberg (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990) p. 112.

² Langston Hughes, "Cross," *Selected Poems by Langston Hughes*. Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1926.

³ Craig Calhoun, "Social Theory and the Politics of Identity," *Social Theory and the Politics of Identity*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1994) pp. 9-10.

In the context of this project, notions of racial identity and difference are of particular interest, though it should be duly noted that racial identity can never be fully considered without the necessary intersections of other categories, including class, gender and sexuality; focussing solely on 'race' results in a partial, incomplete and impoverished account of the world. Given the scope, extent and purpose of this project, however, this exclusionary focus is necessary. The meaning of what we understand as 'race' itself has shifted over time. 'Race' today does not bear the same meaning as it has in times past, and, more importantly, there still remains contention to this day over the origins, impacts and significance of 'race'. From the second half of the twentieth century onwards, 'race' has been tied almost exclusively to skin colour (with some notable exceptions that will be elaborated upon shortly), yet the historical notion of a 'race problem' once referred to something quite different:

Briefly expressed, the problem was that, or so it was thought, the [British] colonies were spatial sites where members of different 'races' (Caucasian, White, African, Hindoo [*sic*], Mongoloid, Celts: the language to name these supposed 'races' varied enormously) met and where their 'natures' (to civilize, to fight, to be lazy, to progress, to drink, to engage in sexual perversions, etc.) interacted, often with tragic consequences. This language of 'race' was usually anchored in the signification of certain forms of somatic difference (skin colour, facial characteristics, body shape and size, eye colour, skull shape) which were interpreted as the physical marks which accompanied, and which in some unexplained way determined, the 'nature' of those so marked.⁴

This tendency of using physiological and morphological traits to delineate seemingly distinct and separate 'races' is the epitome of the biological construction of race,

⁴ Robert Miles and Rudy Torres, "Does 'Race' Matter? Transatlantic Perspectives on Racism after 'Race Relations'," *Re-Situating Identities: The Politics of Ethnicity, Race and Culture*, eds. Vered Amit-Talai and Caroline Knowles (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1996) p. 27.

dominant from the sixteenth century until the mid-twentieth century in North America, with effects that resonate still even today.⁵

As Michel Foucault points out, from the sixteenth century onwards the binary rift in Western society did not manifest through differences between distinct races, but instead was the result of the division of a single, human race into a superrace and a subrace.⁶ Historically, Europeans sought to distinguish themselves from the racialised Others by invoking notions of biologically natural and cognitive superiority, which later became vested not simply in terms of an objective method of distinguishment but more significantly in the 'common sense' perceptions that races could and should be ordered in a specific hierarchy as dictated by this supposed superiority. James F. Davis argues that the ideology of biological racialism consists of five key beliefs, all of which scientists now generally agree to be false:

The first of these beliefs is that some races are physically superior to others and that they can be ranked from strongest to weakest based on differences in longevity and rates of selected diseases...the second key belief in racist ideology is that some races are mentally superior to others and that the races can be ranked from most intelligent to least intelligent....The third key belief is that race causes culture, that each inbred population has a distinct culture that is genetically transmitted along with physical traits....The fourth key belief is that race determines temperamental dispositions of individuals, a view based on crude stereotypes of the personalities in ethnic groups....The fifth basic belief in racist ideology is that racial mixing lowers biological quality. It is not surprising that people consider miscegenation dangerous when they also believe that physical, mental and behavioural traits are all tied to racial hierarchy,

⁵ Though I will often describe the use and prominence of the biological construction of race in the past tense, it is important to note that there are some scientists, psychologists and social scientists currently writing and arguing that race and racial differences are, in fact, a matter of biology. See, for example, the work of the University of Western Ontario psychologist Phillipe Rushton, *Race, Evolution and Behaviour: a Life History Perspective* (1995) and Richard J. Herrnstein, *The Bell Curve* (1994).

⁶ Michel Foucault, *Society Must be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-76*, trans. David Macey. Eds. Francois Ewald and Alessandro Fontana (New York: Picador, 2003) p. 61.

and when they make the value judgement that their own culture is far superior to others.⁷

These five beliefs form the basis of the biological construction of race. These beliefs in biological differences between races are integrally, not incidentally, connected to the perception of multiraciality as problematic, the exception to the rule instead of a norm(alcy). Race as a matter of biology in and of itself is not racist *per se* - in *Against Race*, Paul Gilroy extensively argues that there is a distinct difference to be made between biology as a matter of blood (and hence the *transfusion* of racial characteristics) and genetic composition, traits and heritage.⁸ We all inherit particular genes from our parents - regardless of 'race' - which determine our own individual genetic code and makeup to a certain extent. However, the regression of genetics into biology and blood and their connection to normative assumptions about the morality or potential of a particular 'race' is of concern.

Normative values placed on particular assertions and stereotypes change difference, an innocent notion in and of itself, to Otherness. When deconstructed and analysed, discussions of the biological construction of race always involve implicit formulations of a racial order implying immutable racial hierarchies:

The discourse of racism does not consist simply in descriptive representations of others. It includes a set of hypothetical premises about human kinds (e.g. the 'great chain of being,' classificatory hierarchies, etc.) and about the differences between them (both mental and physical). It involves a class of ethical choices (e.g. domination and subjugation, entitlement and restriction, disrespect and abuse). And it incorporates a set

⁷ James F. Davis, *Who is Black?: One Nation's Definition* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991) pp. 23-25.

⁸ Paul Gilroy, *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000) pp. 19-21.

of institutional regulations, directions, and pedagogic models (e.g. apartheid, separate development, educational institutions, choice of educational and bureaucratic language) Norms or prescriptions for behaviour are contextually circumscribed by specific hypotheses, ethical choices, regulations, and models.⁹

This tenet of racial ideology is crucial to the analysis that follows on the construction of the mixed-race subject. This line of reasoning must give us pause: social taboos surrounding interracial marriages surely exist, and we would be ignorant to assume otherwise. But *why*? Why does it matter the colour of the skin of the person with whom your mother, brother, sister, relative or child is married? Why is it even an issue? Why do we notice the colour of someone's skin at all? The answer(s) to these questions may not be found amid these pages, but there remains an important insight to be relayed: we notice 'race' today because, once upon a time not so long ago, much of North American society truly and genuinely perceived there to be biological differences among races. These biological differences were far from objective in nature - they were used to discriminate, to segregate, to classify and, most importantly, to create a hierarchy of humanity, filled with normative judgements about, and degradation and subjugation of, the lower race, the subspecies, the Other. Mixed-race was truly just that: a mixed-ness of segregated races, the (obscene and highly scandalous) interruption of a solidified and timeless social hierarchy.

Through its biological construction, race is reduced to a natural phenomenon and identity is defined "in a peculiarly corporeal way: one's identity is rooted in one's

⁹ David Theo Goldberg, "The Social Formation of Racist Discourse," *Anatomy of Racism*, ed. David Theo Goldberg (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990) p. 300.

embodiment as a black body.”¹⁰ The identification and classification of the physical appearance and biological makeup of bodies is a form of power through which the biological construction of race manifests itself or is manifested by those who dominate the social body; Foucault realised this point all too well when he wrote, “I believe the great fantasy is the idea of a social body constituted by the universality of individual wills. Now the phenomenon of the social body is the effect of not a consensus but of the materiality of power operating on the very bodies of individuals.”¹¹ Power is corporeally instantiated, at least to some extent, through the bodies of individuals¹² by utilising “disciplines, institutions, techniques, and discourses that develop to track, survey, constitute, regulate and most importantly make more productive both individual bodies and populations”¹³ – an aspect of “biopower”, discussed in the previous chapter. Or, in Foucault’s words:

Now I think we see something new emerging in the second half of the eighteenth century: a new technology of power, but this time it is not disciplinary. This technology of power does not exclude the former, does not exclude disciplinary technology, but it does dovetail into it, integrate it, modify it to some extent, and above all, use it by sort of infiltrating it, embedding itself in existing disciplinary techniques....Unlike discipline, which is used to address bodies, the new nondisciplinary power is applied not to man-as-body but to the living man, to man-as-living-being: ultimately...to man-as-species....So after a first seizure of power over the body in an individualizing mode, we have a second seizure of power that is not individualizing but...massifying....After the anatomo-politics of the human body established in the course of the eighteenth century, we have, at the end of that century, the emergence of something that is no longer an anatomo-politics of the human body, but what I would call a “biopolitics” of the human race.¹⁴

¹⁰ Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Kwame Anthony Appiah, “Editor’s Intro: Multiplying Identities,” *Identities*, Eds. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Kwame Anthony Appiah (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995) p. 3.

¹¹ Michel Foucault, “Body/Power,” *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980) p. 55.

¹² Michel Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

¹³ Romand Coles, *Self/Power/Other: Political Theory and Dialogical Ethics* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1992) p. 56.

¹⁴ Michel Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*, *op. cit.*, pp. 242-243.

Biopolitics, through which power over bodies - or biopower - operates, concerns itself with man-as-species, with whole populations and their regulation, segregation and control. Biopolitics perceives "the population as a political problem, as a problem that is at once scientific and political, as a biological problem and as power's problem."¹⁵

What is important to note here is Foucault's insightful understanding of the ways in which individuals are controlled and regulated through power exercised on or over their bodies. Such power is not interiorised within the individual's consciousness; the network of biopower is one "...inside which we can recognise ourselves and lose ourselves at one and the same time."¹⁶ Relations of power inhere within the destiny of bodies themselves, and are intrinsically linked to the establishment and maintenance of social hierarchies - by the State on one hand and the social body itself on the other - designed to exclude the mad, the homosexual, the racialised Other:

...the rudiments of anatomo- and bio-politics, created in the eighteenth century as techniques of power present at every level of the social body and utilized by very diverse institutions (the family, the army, schools and the police, individual medicine and the administration of collective bodies)...acted as factors of segregation and social hierarchization, exerting their influence on the respective forces of both these movements, guaranteeing relations of domination and effects of hegemony.¹⁷

Though Foucault also contends that "nothing in man - not even his body - is sufficiently stable to serve as the basis for self-recognition or for understanding of other men,"¹⁸ this

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 245.

¹⁶ Michel Foucault, "Interview with Lucette Finas," *Power, Truth, Strategy*, eds. Meghan Morris and Paul Patton (Sydney: Feral Publications, 1979) pp. 69-70.

¹⁷ Michel Foucault, "The Right of Death and Power Over Life (from *The History of Sexuality, Volume I*)" *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rainbow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984) p. 263.

¹⁸ Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche. Genealogy, History," *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rainbow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984) pp. 87-88.

assertion demonstrates the inherent danger in using biology, biopolitics and biopower to control populations. Along these same lines, the writings of Franz Fanon haunt contemporary analyses of racial identity; in "The Fact of Blackness," he writes, "the real world challenged my claims. In the white world the man of color encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema. Consciousness of the body is solely a negating activity. It is a third-person consciousness. The body is surrounded by an atmosphere of certain uncertainty."¹⁹

The relations of power exercised and instantiated through the corporeal body - Foucault's articulations of biopower and biopolitics - inhere in the biological construction of race and both the historical and contemporary constitution of the mixed-race subject. 'Race' is a battle of biology - natural selection, Social Darwinism and theories which attempt to place normative interpretations and hence judgements on the unalterable biological differences which separate the like from unlike, the superior from inferior, coined in terms of the sheer power of racial purity and the subsequent quests for social domination of one race over others:

...war is about two things: it is not simply a matter of destroying a political adversary, but of destroying the enemy race, of destroying that [sort] of biological threat that those people over there represent to our race. In one sense, this is of course no more than a biological extrapolation from the theme of the political enemy. But there is more to it than that. In the nineteenth century - and this is completely new - war will be seen not only as a way of improving one's own race by eliminating the enemy race (in accordance with the themes of natural selection and the struggle for existence), but also as a way of regenerating one's own race. As more and more of our number die, the race to which we belong will become all the purer.²⁰

¹⁹ Frantz Fanon, "The Fact of Blackness," *op. cit.*, p. 109.

²⁰ Michel Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*, *op. cit.*, p. 257.

Here, it is critical to remember that evolutionism - social evolutionism, that is - was not simply a political discourse which utilised scientific premises and disguised power relations of the dominators and dominated, but was rather a real way of thinking, perceiving, and rationalising colonial relations, racial discourse and the expulsion of alterity from the social body. When this construction is combined with methods of categorising humanity according to biological, physiological and morphological racial differences, the unavoidable result was a genuine belief in a regime of biological superiority and the absolute and critical need for social domination based on this doctrine of natural and inherited superiority.

The racial classification developed during and after the colonial era ordered races into a system which claimed to identify behaviour expectations and human potential, and hence carried with it an implication for a hierarchy of humankind. As will later be demonstrated, this biologically driven hierarchy had severe consequences for the mixed-race subject, as “the most important thing about races was the boundaries between them. If races were pure (or had once been), and if one were a member of the race at the top, then it was essential to maintain the boundaries that defined one’s superiority, to keep people from the lower categories from slipping surreptitiously upward.”²¹ Inherent in the design of racial boundaries was the deliberate attempt to separate inferior and superior races, to discourage and legally enshrine principles of purity within the paradigm of dominance - social, political, and biological. It is in this context that Foucault points out

²¹ Paul R. Spickhard, “The Illogic of American Racial Categories,” *Racially Mixed People in America*, ed. Maria P.P. Root (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1992) p. 15.

the unequivocal role of law and the State: they are more than just instruments that one race used or uses against another, as “the State is, and must be, the protector of the integrity, the superiority, and the purity of the race. The idea of racial purity, with all its monistic, Statist and biological implications: that is what replaces the idea of the race struggle.”²²

All this is to say that the implications, the sheer and inescapable consequences of the biological construction of race, as outdated as it may seem, cannot be underestimated. Racial discourse began with a foundation built upon the bodies, blood and skin of human beings. The manifestation of social power as exercised over bodies is disconcerting; it implies that identity is inherent in our exterior appearances, our physical traits and physiological heritages. This is a relentlessly predefined, predetermined and bounded existence. Biology utilised in this manner constructs the racialised Other in corporeality, solidifying identity and difference in normative terms; the issue becomes not that the Other is different than us, but that the Other is different than us and since we are pure and superior, they are a pollutant to the social fabric of our nation. David Theo Goldberg elaborates on this very point, arguing:

Corporeal properties furnish also the metaphorical medium for distinguishing the pure from the impure, the diseased from the clean and acceptable, the included from the excluded. Classification of differences determines order. Hierarchy is established on the basis of a value of purity - whether interpreted biologically (in terms of ‘blood’ or ‘genes’), hygienically (in terms, for instance, of body odor), culturally (for example, language as signifying the evolution of thought patterns and rational capacity), or even environmentally (character, like nose shape and size, are determined by climate). Impurity, dirt, disease and pollution are expressed as functions of the transgression of classificatory categories, as too are danger and the breakdown of order.²³

²² Michel Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

²³ David Theo Goldberg, “The Social Formation of Racist Discourse,” *op. cit.*, p. 306

These facets of the biological construction of race - hierarchy, classificatory regimes, purity, racial essentialism, hidden frameworks which mask biopower as individual or social will - are all connected in an interdependent web of racial discourse, driven by presumed differences in the biological composition of racialised individuals.

As I alluded earlier, the couching of racial identity in these terms had and continues to have explicit ramifications for the constitution of the mixed-race subject. Such a statement by no means is intended to diminish the effects of biopolitics and its discursive, legal and social echoes for monoracial individuals and groups; it is to say, however, that an all-encompassing theoretical model identifying the racialised discourses rampant during the reign of the biological construction of race is insufficient as a means through which we can begin to deconstruct the historical, legal and contemporary constitution of multiraciality. Racial classification was utilised as a mechanism of social domination, perpetuated by both law and society in order to preserve the power - both political and social - held by 'Whites'. In recent literature on racial identity, grandiose statements like this are a common occurrence. As will be demonstrated in the sections that follow, however, racial classification and its sociological, political, legal and demographical implications carry a whole new meaning when considered through the lens of multiraciality. Being 'mixed' epitomised the complexities of identity formation and the problematic of social recognition, and continues to do so:

When national and ethnic identities are represented and projected as pure, exposure to difference threatens them with dilution and compromises their prized purities with the ever-present possibility of contamination. Crossing as mixture and movement must be

guarded against. New hatreds and violence arise not, as they did in the past, from supposedly reliable anthropological knowledge of the identity and difference of the Other but from the novel problem of not being able to locate the Other's difference in the common-sense lexicon of alterity. Different people are certainly hated and feared, but the timely antipathy against them is nothing compared with the new hatreds turned toward the greater menace of the half-different and partially familiar. To have mixed is to have been party to a great betrayal. Any unsettling of traces of hybridity must be excised from the tidy, bleached-out zones of impossibly pure culture.²⁴

Biological racialism is a misleading perception, guised in terms of naturalisation, fixity and temporality. Driven by a belief in biological and cognitive differences among distinct peoples, 'race' carries violence and chaos in its wake, identifying not for the sake of providing individuals with a stable sense of belonging or social recognition, nor for the critical nature of self-identity itself, but for the purposes of segregation, hierarchisation, domination and the violent demarcation of the racialised Other.

It is my contention that when race is conceptualised in terms of biological imperatives, it relegates multiracial individuals to a state of liminality - being neither 'here' nor 'there'. Simply put, liminality (derived from the Latin term *limen*, meaning 'boundary' or 'threshold'), is not simply about being outside a given border, but is the state of being neither inside nor outside a space, place, or race - a state of being neither here nor there. The concept of liminality finds its origins in anthropology, wherein scholars such as Arnold Van Gennep²⁵ and Victor Turner²⁶ have used it to describe the whole realm of ritual. Specifically, Turner identifies liminality as not just a thin line which provides the boundaries between one phase and the next, but an expanded zone in which

²⁴ Paul Gilroy, *Against Race*, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

²⁵ See Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960)

²⁶ See Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine, 1969)

liminals may spend an extended period of transition. In this anthropological sense, liminality may involve namelessness, absence of property, nakedness, minimised distinctions of gender, rank and wealth, humility, silence, acceptance of pain, images of death and rebirth, and a sense of camaraderie with fellow liminals.²⁷ Another example of liminality in this context is found in ethnographical studies of the rights associated with the initiation of adolescent boys into manhood among indigenous peoples:

The important point to note is that there is a 'betwixt and between' phase - where the boy is no longer a boy but not yet a man. This is the 'liminal' phase. In such initiation rights - and one could equally think of Western equivalents such as attendance at boarding school, or entry into a secret society such as the Freemasons - there is a period (whether protracted or quite brief) where the candidate is stripped of status. The ordeals and discipline imposed by the initiators further create the homogeneity of the social status.²⁸

From anthropology, the concept of liminality passed into literary studies, originally used to describe indeterminate states or stages, but then later morphing into a concept which seeks to describe transgressions and individuals who are neither here nor there - in a temporary or permanent state of flux. A classic example can be found in *King Lear*, when the chief protagonist has finally become divested of his role of the king and father, tears off his clothing and enters into his hovel, emerging the next morning a changed person.²⁹

Liminality does not entail a normative character; it is neither a positive nor negative space. It is ambiguity, flux, nothingness. It is nomadic subjectivity, homelessness

²⁷ Linda Woolbridge and Roland Anderson, "Liminality," *Encyclopaedia of Contemporary Literary Theory: Approaches, Scholars, Terms*, ed. Irena R. Makaryk (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993) p. 578.

²⁸ Bob Trubshaw, "The Metaphors and Rituals of Place and Time - an Introduction to Liminality," *At the Edge* [<http://www.indigogroup.co.uk/edge/liminal.htm>] Site accessed 10 November 2003.

²⁹ Linda Woolridge and Ronald Anderson, *op. cit.*, p. 579.

and a denial of adequate or accurate recognition. It speaks not to the potential of human agency. It is more than being on the periphery of the periphery; liminality indicates a state that is, quite literally, a negation. On a map which could detail the centre against the periphery, liminals have been regulated to an entirely different page. It is not necessarily good or evil - it is simply an unbounded and *fundamentally different* existence.

Yet, we know that identity formation is a crucial and necessary process of the development of the 'self'. In the case of mixed-race people, while liminality itself may represent a placeless neutrality, or perhaps even an exceptional uniqueness, in reality it can also represent a painful reminder of being denied a racial or cultural sense of belonging:

In cultures defined by racialized identities and divided by racial hierarchies, mixed white-nonwhite persons face an unresolvable status ambiguity. They are rejected by the dominant race as impure and therefore inferior, but also disliked by the oppressed race for their privileges of closer association with domination. Thus, the mixed-race person had been denied that social recognition of the self that Hegel understood as necessarily constitutive of self-consciousness and full self-development. For those of us who could pass, our community acceptance was always at the price of misrecognition and the troubling knowledge that our social self was grounded in a lie.³⁰

Within the politics of identity, then, liminality is not an individual choice of racelessness. The underlying theme of the analysis which follows emphasises the explicit *positioning* of mixed-race people into a state of liminality through any reliance on biologically formed racial identities. With that being said, however, there are two weaknesses to such a line of reasoning: first of all, as liminality is the state of being neither here nor there, its application to the politics of racial identity infers that there are, in fact, such things or

³⁰ Linda Alcoff, "Mestizo Identity," *American Mixed Race: The Culture of Microdiversity*, ed. Naomi Zack (London: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1995) p. 259.

places as 'here' and 'there'. In the context of racial identity, liminality encompasses an inherent categorisation associated with race and racial discourse. In other words, in classifying multiracial people as liminals, that is, existing in that grey area between one or more races, such an argument assumes that there is such a thing as 'race' - whether it be biologically, socially, or otherwise constructed. Secondly, giving this state of ambiguity a label like 'liminality' indicates a sense of cohesiveness - that all multiracial individuals have something in common, and have the potential to create a new mixed-race *race*, as it were. However, I believe, and will attempt to demonstrate, that this assumption is as dangerously misleading as 'race' itself. If liminality were to be indicative of a cohesive group identity, we would find that the only thing multiracial individuals have in common is their difference from prescribed racial categories and groups. Most racial groups find their coherence and strength in a collectivity - a combined social or cultural identity that reproduces a sense of belonging and mutual recognition amongst group members. However, multiraciality is fundamentally different - and this is key: *there is no mixed-race collectivity* in North America. Aside from immediate family groups, multiraciality is inherently an individualistic racial identity. There are some exceptions, of course, such as the Métis of Canada, who have formed their own distinct collective and cultural identity from their French and Aboriginal ancestry, and the Coloureds in South Africa. Yet even the existence of these groups cannot deny that there is no all-encompassing mixed-race 'race' through which other mixed-race people can find the 'belonging' afforded to other racial groups. This in and of itself is quite significant; the standard sense of ethnic and

cultural belonging that often coincides with racial categories and communities is noticeably and purposefully absent.

These problems aside, the application of liminal theory to this discussion is previously unexplored, yet highly relevant. Though this theory may implicitly naturalise the concept of race, it is also a useful mechanism for its de(con)struction. Moreover, in utilising liminality and multiraciality to reconsider the biological construction of racial identity this chapter will demonstrate the dangers - and perhaps even absurdity - of using 'race' as a (natural) means through which humanity can be divided and separated.

The biological conception of race renders multiracial people in a state of liminality by the negation of the concept or possibility of interracial relationships or mixed offspring. Historically, societies that incorporated the biological typology of racial reasoning were "literally marked, and marked only, in broad strokes of black and white,"³¹ to the exclusion of all others. Therefore, through an examination of the manifestation of the biological construction of race in discourses of racial aesthetics and racial bloodlines, this section will emphasise that, in this context, the mixed-race subject is constructed, constituted and positioned as liminal by the societal rejection of his/her dual or multiple racial heritage(s), identities and parentage.

Racial Aesthetics

Literally, aesthetic perspectives are concerned with beauty and the application of beauty. Today, mixed-race people are considered to be among the most beautiful people

³¹ David Theo Goldberg, "Made in the USA," *American Mixed Race: The Culture of Microdiversity*, ed. Naomi Zack (London: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1995) p. 239.

on the planet (i.e. Halle Berry, Tiger Woods et al.), whether it be because of their particular skin tone, their supposed 'exotic' appearances or their racial ambiguity. A positive interpretation of mixed-race aesthetics is nonetheless a double-edged sword - the contemporary fascination with mixed appearances begs the question of why these aesthetics are considered beautiful, exotic and intriguing. To answer such a complex question, I take heed of Franz Fanon's observations: "I sit down at the fire and I become aware of my uniform. I had not seen it. It is indeed ugly. I stop there, for who can tell me what beauty is?"³² Indeed, instead of questioning why mixed-race individuals are considered "beautiful", a more relevant and insightful question asks who it is, exactly, that defines "beauty"? There are theories that suggest the mixed-race subject is considered aesthetically pleasing only because of his or her closer association with the dominant race than monoracials; appealing racial aesthetics are formed in the likeness of those in power. In the case of a Black-White biracial individual, blackness still carries an inescapable social stigma:

It is best to be absolutely clear that the ubiquity and prominence currently accorded to exceptionally beautiful and glamorous but nonetheless racialized bodies do nothing to change the everyday forms of racial hierarchy. The historic associations of blackness with inhumanity, brutality, crime, idleness, excessive threatening fertility, and so on remain undisturbed. But the appearance of a rich visual culture that allows blackness to be beautiful also feeds a fundamental lack of confidence in the power of the body to hold the boundaries of racial difference in place. It creates anxiety about older racial hierarchies that made that revolutionary idea of black beauty oxymoronic, just as it requires us to forget the political movement that made its acknowledgement imperative. It is as though these images of nonwhite beauty, grace and style somehow make a matter of 'race' secondary, particularly when they are lit, filtered, textured, and toned in ways that challenge the increasingly baffled observer's sense of where racial boundaries might fall. In this anxious setting, new hatreds are created not by the

³² Frantz Fanon, "The Fact of Blackness," *op. cit.*, p. 111.

ruthless enforcement of stable racial categories, but from a disturbing inability to maintain them.³³

This positive interpretation of mixed-race aesthetics, contentious and potentially harmful though it may be, is a recent phenomena - a bi-product of the (very) late twentieth century. For example, in Alex Haley's final and unfinished work, *Queen*,³⁴ he fictionalised the life of his paternal grandmother, the "illegitimate" and unacknowledged daughter of slaveholder James Jackson and one of his female slaves, Easter. In this story, based on both history and fiction combined, Queen's early years are filled with anguish as she longs to know who her father was, and later realises that he was none other than her master. After the American Civil War and the subsequent abolition of slavery, Queen was cast out from her known world, accepted by neither former slaves nor whites because of the 'exoticness' of her aesthetic appearance.³⁵

By placing an emphasis on aesthetics and appearance, the biological construction of race denies the existence of mixed-race individuals. Since the beginnings of colonisation, Europeans have relied on the differences in physical features among races to classify, categorise, and legitimise domination. The size and slope of a Black's forehead was evidence enough for Europeans to assume that the cognitive abilities of Africans was inferior to their own. Even in late nineteenth century Canada, those with dark skin were refused entry to the country on the basis that the climate was too cold. The belief in

³³ Paul Gilroy, *Against Race*, op. cit., p. 22.

³⁴ Alex Haley and David Stevens, *Alex Haley's Queen*, (Avon Books, 1994).

³⁵ [http://wikipedia.org/wiki/Queen:The_Story_of_an_American_Family] Site accessed 22 January 2005.

immutable biological differences thus powered the separation of the inferior and the superior in racial discourse.³⁶ The concerns over mixed-race people were therefore multiple:

The concerns over race increasingly became those about the nature and discipline, aesthetics and morality of public space, about who can be seen where and in what capacity. Thus, the moral panic over miscegenation was driven not simply by the disturbed imaginary of mixed sex, with the feared moral degeneracy of black bodies consorting with white, though it was clearly that. Increasingly, such panic was expressed as anxiety regarding mixed offspring, and so the makeup and look, the peopling of and demographic power over public space.³⁷

With society divided in broad strokes of black and white, any instance of racial mixing was deemed to be a threat to the purity of the white race. Multiracial children thus represented more than the disregard for a social taboo; bi/multiracial children were evidence of the mixing of races and the pollution of the purity of both races, for, as Naomi Zack points out, “because race always means pure race, the opposite of race is not racelessness but racial impurity...”³⁸ Indeed, if foundational concepts of identity and difference are founded on notions of purity and coherence, mixed race people will perpetually represent the skeletons in the closets (or bedrooms) of society. As Linda Alcoff writes, multiracial people “are turned away from as if from an unpleasant sight, the

³⁶ Stuart Hall, “New Ethnicities” *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, eds., David Morley and Juan-Hsing Chen (London and New York: Routledge, 1996) p. 444.

³⁷ David Theo Goldberg, “States of Whiteness” *Between Law and Culture: Relocating Legal Studies*, eds., David Theo Goldberg, Michael Musheno and Lisa Bower (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001) p. 179.

³⁸ Naomi Zack, “Life After Race” *American Mixed Race: The Culture of Microdiversity*, ed. Naomi Zack (London: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1995) p. 301.

sight and mark of an unclean copulation, the product of a taboo, the sign of racial impurity, cultural dilution, colonial aggression, or even emasculation.”³⁹

During the reign of the biological construction of race, at birth children were always classified as the same race as whichever parent was non-white (at least, in the United States). In *Colour Coded: A Legal History of Racism in Canada: 1900-1950*, Constance Backhouse’s research into the 1901 Canadian census reveals that the nation was to be racially classified as being either white, red, black or yellow. She notes that “missing was the colour brown, which was sometimes also linked to race, but including it would have mucked up the short-form letter categories, leaving two ‘b’s’ in a polyglot of confusion.”⁴⁰ Canadian census-takers were instructed that “only pure races will be classified as white; the children begotten of marriages between whites and any one of the other races will be classed as red, black or yellow...irrespective of the degree of colour.”⁴¹ As Backhouse concludes, the only thing that was eminently clear within the census was that notions of colour and race were inseparably intertwined. This mode of categorisation indicated that the acknowledgement of mixed-race people and identities posed a threat to the dominant white race. Notions of racial purity seem to apply only to keeping European superiority pristine and unscathed:

The combined effect of hypodescent, beliefs in racial purity, and the social distance between whites and blacks contributes to understanding why the discussion of multiraciality is largely viewed as a black-white issue....Subsequently, persons of racially mixed heritage of European descent may experience the ‘squeeze of oppression’ between these two ‘warring’ factions; persons born to two parents of color

³⁹ Linda Alcoff, *op. cit.*, p. 260.

⁴⁰ Constance Backhouse, *Colour Coded: A Legal History of Racism in Canada: 1900-1950* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999) p. 3.

⁴¹ *Id.*

of different racial backgrounds are rendered invisible in the media discussions of multiracial identity.⁴²

As Root points out, the aesthetic concern over mixed race involved only the appearance of multiracial people with partial European heritage. Before the abolition of slavery in the United States, slave owners feared that the offspring of black slave women raped by slave masters would attempt to claim the rights of their European heritage, thus providing yet another justification for denying the existence of racial mixing. After the U.S. civil war the concern shifted to one of economic prowess; the boundaries among races had to become solidified (through rules of hypodescent and miscegenation) because since slavery could no longer delineate between the dominant and subjugated, an entrenched mechanism was required to keep 'White' pure and privileged.

Though a powerful legal paradigm dictated the racial identities of mixed-race children as 'nonwhite' from birth, the phenomenon of 'passing' erupted while miscegenation laws were firmly still in place. Herein, the politics of identity collides with its alter ego - social recognition. Classified as mulatto, quadroon or octoroon, a large segment of society's recognition of the mixed-race offspring of interracial relationships was assigned in accordance with skin pigmentation and other morphological tell-tale signs of racial identity, including hair texture and facial features. The lighter one's skin happened to be, the finer his or her hair was, the further away from a "Black" racial designation he or she could move, the less stigmatisation from dominant society (s)he

⁴² Maria P.P. Root, "The Multiracial Contribution to the Browning of America" *American Mixed Race: The Culture of Microdiversity*, ed., Naomi Zack (London: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1995) p. 233.

faced. As such, 'passing' always refers to 'passing as White'. The 'passing' phenomenon reinforces racial aesthetics as one of the means through which the biological construction of race was able to negate the existence of multiraciality. If a multiracial person could pass for white and gain access to economic and social opportunities denied to people of colour, self-identifying as such was never a solidification of mixed-race heritage. It was a forced denial borne from the necessity to identify as *something*; again, the broad strokes of black and white left no room for anything that was both simultaneously.

Racial aesthetics is, above all else, a mode of observing the body. As Foucault's conceptualisations of biopower have illustrated, "relations of power are able to pass materially into the very destiny of bodies without even having to be relayed by the representation of subjects."⁴³ Biological characteristics are instead morphological characteristics. If these traits are not instantly identifiable as belonging to a particular racial group, multiracial people again find themselves relegated to liminality. They are bombarded with questions of, "what are you? No, what are you really?" as a result of their aesthetic ambiguity. It is crucial to recall, however, that this is a positioned and relativistic ambiguity; it is only because of aesthetic precepts that certain morphological characteristics are regulated according to racial difference. Thus, Fanon's writings again give us pause: "The Jew is disliked from the moment he is tracked down. But in my case everything takes on a new guise. I am given no chance. I am overdetermined from

⁴³ Michel Foucault, "Interview with Lucette Finas," *Power, Truth, Strategy, op. cit.*, pp. 69-70.

without. I am the slave not of the 'idea' that others have of me but of my own appearance."⁴⁴

Racial Bloodlines

In 1892 Homer Plessy, a legally classified octoroon (someone of 7/8 Caucasian ancestry and 1/8 African American ancestry) bought a first-class ticket for the train from New Orleans to Covington, Louisiana and was arrested for violating a state statute which required separate accommodations for whites and blacks on railway cars. His case, *Plessy v. Ferguson*,⁴⁵ unsuccessfully challenged this particular Jim Crow law, yet spoke volumes to the definitions of 'white', 'black', and hence mixed-race identities in the United States:

The U.S. Supreme Court quickly dispensed with Plessy's contention that because he was only one-eighth Negro and could pass as a white he was entitled to ride in the seats reserved for whites. Without ruling directly on the definition of a Negro, the Supreme Court briefly took what is called 'judicial notice' of what it assumed to be common knowledge: that a Negro or black is any person with any black ancestry.⁴⁶

The court's decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* is significant for several reasons, though its demarcation of racial bloodlines as a signifier of racial identity is especially important for comprehending the constitution of the mixed-race subject through the biological construction of race. In this instance, racial aesthetics seemed to be trumped by blood and the supposed transfusion of racial identity through it. Though Plessy could 'pass' as white, it mattered not; he was one-eighth black, and that was black enough to not be white.

⁴⁴ Franz Fanon, "The Fact of Blackness," *op. cit.*, p. 112.

⁴⁵ *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163 U.S. 537 (1896)

⁴⁶ James F. Davis, *Who is Black?*, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

In its biological construction, bloodlines and blood quantum become the measure of race. Plessy's troubles on the Louisiana railway were far from an isolated incident, as the rules of "hypodescent," or the "one-drop rule" dictated that any person with a drop of black blood was racially black in the eyes of the law, becoming the legal manifestation of centuries of effort to preserve the purity of 'white blood'. However, while the legacy of hypodescent "shaped the normative process of racial identity development for people monoracially identified, these same historical forces virtually negate the existence of the multiracial person contemporarily."⁴⁷ As with aesthetics, mixed race people are deposited in an existence of liminality by virtue of the denial that such a mixing of bloodlines would result in a person with 'essences' from both races.

The one-drop rule is an obvious example of racial essentialism and the subsequent misrepresentations that often flow from it. The Aristotelian doctrine of essence suggests that every substance possesses an essence, which inherently connects it with things that are similar while delineating it from variance. This philosophical doctrine was long abandoned by the nineteenth century, as no scientist had ever observed or measured an essence – of anything.⁴⁸ However, in terms of biological differences among races, essences were determinants of a hierarchy with the white race at the top:

Each race was (unempirically) held to have an 'essence' or 'genius' that was present in every one of its individual members in such a way that this essence was transmitted through human blood over subsequent generations. That alchemy of racial essence entailed that in any case of 'mixture' between high and low, the 'essence' of the 'lower'

⁴⁷ Maria P P. Root, "The Multiracial Contribution to the Browning of America," *op. cit.*, p. 232.

⁴⁸ Naomi Zack, "Life After Race," *op. cit.*, p. 302.

race always predominated in the offspring. That is, racial essentialism supported the one drop rule.⁴⁹

When race is conceived in terms of intrinsic biological differences, blood quantum becomes the legal determinant of race. The connection between blood and racial purity is further evidenced by legal requirements that attempted to categorise races based on blood requirements – hence the coinage of terms like mulatto, quadroon and octoroon to describe mixed-race people of combined African and European descent in the Southern United States well into the twentieth century. Here, the classificatory regimes that governed racial identity consisted of far more than innocent labels attributed to identities; these classifications were inherent in and transmitted through blood, making racial identity immutable, naturalised, fixed for all eternity. This stagnation of racial identity throughout one's life was (and continues to be) problematic, as it held (and holds) severe legalised and normalised consequences for racialised subjects. Let us not forget that through the biological construction of race, labels, categorisations and classifications coincided with assumptions about one's intelligence, human potential and very place in both the world and the “natural hierarchy” of humanity. In the racial regime guided by differences in blood, those who started from behind in this great race against a hierarchy built upon racial classifications were forever destined to remain behind:

...at the root of the oppression of multiracial people have been the tendencies to classify people ordinally and to resist changing the classification system if only a few people do not fit in. Rules of hypodescent and subsequent evidence of the internalization of these rules has allowed America's racial classification system to remain largely unchallenged until recently. Thus oppression does not reside in our observations of phenotypic differences but in the deep imprint left by hierarchical

⁴⁹ *Id.*

thinking that, unfortunately, has also been internalized by people of color.⁵⁰

Racial classification systems are thus imposed, not negotiated. The question of bloodlines, like aesthetics, was a one-sided affair. With only one drop of 'black blood,' a mixed race person was (legally and socially) considered to be black, yet no amount of 'white blood' would ever allow the multiracial individual to attain the privileges and persona of whiteness. Cecile Lawrence calls this biased standard of blood quantum two-faced hypocrisy:

Why is it two-faced hypocrisy? On the one hand, the dominant culture says you are less than ideal because you have a drop of 'black' in you, or a 'touch of the tar brush' in your ancestry, and no amount of 'white' blood is good or strong enough to outweigh that stain. On the other hand, that same dominant culture also says that the more 'white' blood you have in you, the closer to the 'white' ideal you are, the more we will let you into positions and maybe our houses, but you and your progeny can never attain the ideal status of 'white-ness'.⁵¹

With race conceived as differences of blood, the goal of the preservation of the purity of the European bloodline became embedded in both law and society. When race is constructed in terms of biology, racial essentialism and blood quantum are hierarchical methodologies aimed at maintaining the purity of the white race through the denial of the existence of the very concept of multiraciality. Though there is a danger of depending solely on the hypodescent model from the United States, it is a useful tool to demonstrate

⁵⁰ Maria P. P. Root, "From Shortcuts to Solutions," *Racially Mixed People in America*, ed. Maria P.P. Root (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1992) pp. 342-343.

⁵¹ Cecile Ann Lawrence, "Racelessness," *American Mixed Race: The Culture of Microdiversity*, ed. Naomi Zack (London: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1995) p. 28.

the means by which the mixed-race subject is (liminally) constituted through an emphasis on bloodlines.

As race and identity are historically linked to notions of purity and coherence, multiracial people often represent racial pollution, dirtiness and contamination through the mixing of the hierarchy of racial essences. Interestingly enough, contemporary popular culture has become aware of this embedded notion of racial purity, as demonstrated by J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series. Therein, the wizarding world is in the midst of an internal war, in which the antagonist wishes to allow only those with pure-blooded wizarding ancestry to practise magic. Here, those characters born to "Muggle" (non-magical) parents or those with half-wizard, half-Muggle parentage are representative of multiraciality. Keeping with the connotation of the impurity and dirtiness that multiracial people represent, Rowling uses the word "Mudblood" as a slur designating Muggle-born wizards:

'It's about the most insulting thing he could think of,' said Ron. 'Mudblood's a really foul name for someone who was Muggle-born – you know, non-magic parents. There are some wizards – like Malfoy's family – who think they're better than everyone else because they're what people call pure-blood....I mean, the rest of us know it doesn't make any difference at all. Look at Neville Longbottom – he's pure-blood and he can hardly stand a cauldron the right way up. It's a disgusting thing to call someone. Dirty blood, see....It's mad.'⁵²

Rowling's literary connection between 'dirty blood' and concepts of purity in the magical world are telling of the experience of multiracial people in the real world. When race becomes naturalised through biological constructions and an emphasis on bloodlines, the

⁵² J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (Vancouver: Raincoast Books, 2000) p. 89.

mixing of races represents a pollution of supposedly segregated and distinct races. The deeply gendered character of racial subjection is revealed through the emphasis of the purity of blood, as “miscegenation prompts the fear of degeneracy or cultural and physical pollution, the bringing down of the superior by socialising with the inferior.”⁵³

The importance that hypodescent places on ancestry and bloodlines thus make it impossible for the multiracial individual to be anything other than a member of the non-white dimension of his or her racial identity. For those who could physically ‘pass’ for white, laws prohibiting miscegenation and inflexible rules about the determination of one’s race at birth (and in accordance with the one-drop rule in the United States) functioned to deny the existence of mixed-race people. In the eyes of those who dominated society, “the fine distinction of mixed-race formation scarcely hid the disgenic fear of sanguinary pollution: ‘Mixed bloods’ were considered as potentially polluting of the body politic as ‘full blooded blacks’.”⁵⁴ As such, those with mixed-race ancestry were effectively erased from the national memory; as far as most were concerned, mixed-race was the same as ‘not white’, with little or no room for variance between this diametric opposition. The identities of multiracial people were condemned to a state of liminality, as society at large refused to acknowledge the duality or plurality of racial identities.

Multiraciality, Law and Society

Through the biological construction of race, Foucault’s theorisations of biopower and biopolitics collide with the practical elements of the multiracial experience.

⁵³ David Theo Goldberg, “Racial Rule” *Relocating Postcolonialism*, eds. David Theo Goldberg and Ato Quayson (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000) p. 91.

⁵⁴ David Theo Goldberg, “Made in the USA,” *op. cit.*, p. 241.

Biopolitics, as a way of regulating and controlling populations through power exercised over bodies, forms the larger umbrella of social power through which race as defined by biological difference manifests and gains prominence:

...it will be a counterhistory in the sense that it adopts a biologico-medical perspective and crushes the historical dimension that was present in this discourse. You thus see the appearance of what will become actual racism. This racism takes over and reconverts the form and function of the discourse on the race struggle, but distorts them, and it will be characterized by the fact that the theme of historical war - with its battles, its invasions, its lootings, its victories and its defeats - will be replaced by the postevolutionist theme of the struggle for existence. It is no longer a battle in the sense that a warrior would understand the term, but a struggle in the biological sense: the differentiation of species, natural selection, and the survival of the fittest species. Similarly, the theme of the binary society which is divided into two races or two groups with different languages, laws and so on will be replaced by that of a society that is, in contrast, biologically monist.⁵⁵

The connection between Foucault's biopower and the emergence and maintenance of the constitution of racial subjects in biological terminology was not an accident of history. Race, like truth (as Foucault was fond of saying), is a thing of this world. Classification systems which relied on biological raciology were created and implemented in collaboration with both law and society. Multiraciality was positioned into a state of liminality, not coincidentally posited there without purpose.

The most obvious example of the link between multiraciality and the deliberate actions of dominant society to negate the existence of the mixed-race subject can be found in the entrenchment of miscegenation laws (prohibiting interracial marriages) in the Southern United States post-slavery until the last of them were repealed less than 40 years ago. The history of miscegenation laws transcend the United States itself, with the first

⁵⁵ Michel Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

laws coming into effect in the colony of Virginia in 1662, proclaiming any sexual intercourse between a white and a black to be twice as evil as fornication between two whites.⁵⁶ Indeed, the very character of miscegenation laws were deeply gendered; in fact, a century later the Ku Klux Klan fronted itself as the protector of the 'purity of white womanhood' and in (falsely) claiming to do so "became a major force in the extralegal support of the norms (rules) of the system."⁵⁷ Miscegenation, the Jim Crow system and the rule of hypodescent required strict adherence to segregation even in close personal (and especially sexual) relationships. The perceived necessity surrounding these laws are directly correlated to the fear of multiraciality and the degradation and pollution of pure white bloodlines; even in locations where no such laws existed, the fear still remained.:

Racial naturalists almost always have been committed to anti-miscegenation laws. For the naturalist, miscegenation prompts the fear of degeneracy or cultural and physical pollution, the bringing down of the superior by socializing with the inferior....Racial historicists, by contrast, might...frown socially upon mixed-race partners and offspring though not necessarily preclude their possibility legally. Here, racial taboos on intermarriage or miscegenation mirrored inter-class taboos. As such, they were (to be) socially discouraged rather than legislatively precluded.⁵⁸

In the northern United States and Canada during the nineteenth century, where miscegenation laws were either non-existent or not as prominent as in the Southern States, social taboos still discouraged legally sanctioned interracial relationships - and were rather successful in doing so. As Foucault's writings remind us, the law is only one means through which a society can be successfully governed; often the sheer power of social

⁵⁶ James F. Davis, *Who is Black?*, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

⁵⁸ David Theo Goldberg, "Racial Rule," *op. cit.*, p. 91.

norms are sufficient to ensure adherence to a strict social code of behavioural conduct, both in and outside of personal relationships.

Mixed-race people represented the explicit disobedience of these laws and norms, but the perception of multiraciality as the pollution and degradation of the body politic elicited a more fundamental concern than that. Mixed-ness was a threat; a threat to the white slave owners who refused to acknowledge parentage of mulatto children for fear of future claims of rights to estates and privileged status, a threat to maintaining the illusion of segregated and distinct races, a threat to society at large for blatantly unveiling the fallacies in preservation of racial hierarchies. In short, the fear of acknowledging multiraciality, of bringing mixed-race people back from their banished state of liminality, centred around the preservation of the social power of dominant (white) society:

Part of the function of the 'one-drop rule'...was to preserve the purity of White society, and thereby limit access to economic (and political) control by people other than Whites. When a relationship exists of economic dependency by one group on another group, an interracial or interethnic background may be stigmatized because it represents a threat to the controlling group's power.⁵⁹

The stigmatization of mixed-race people took many forms. Aside from the legal negation of their existence (and coinciding banishment to liminality), those who had the aesthetic features of more than one race were perceived as societal pollution; miscegenation was seen to "lower the stock" of both parent races. Though mulattoes, quadroons and octoroons were once perceived to have "greater potential than full blooded Blacks," during the Jim Crow era when segregation emerged to maintain the social and economic

⁵⁹ Robin L. Miller, "The Human Ecology of Multiracial Identity," *Racially Mixed People in America*, ed. Maria P. P. Root (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1992) p. 26.

distance between African Americans and whites that slavery could no longer necessitate, “biracial people began to be viewed as shifty and untrustworthy.”⁶⁰ The multiple affiliations with various racial groups threatened a dominant regime of monoraciality and the (seemingly) clear boundaries among biologically defined races therein. Berzon’s (1978) study of the mulatto in American fiction exemplifies this negative characterisation; her evidence demonstrates how the “tragic mulatto” is often cast as “irrational, moody, and completely tormented by his or her ‘racial disharmony,’ ‘clash of blood’ and ‘unstable genetic constitution,’ typically dying while still young.”⁶¹

There is a discernable difference between this project’s contention that mixed-race people are placed in a state of liminality through the biological construction of race and the concept of the “tragic mulatto”. As has been previously argued, liminality itself is neither inherently positive nor negative; as a state of being it carries with it no such precept of normative characterisation. Identity and difference, in and of themselves do not necessarily coincide with the constitution of Otherness. *It is the intentional positioning of the mixed-race subject through coercive means* - namely, law, societal norms or other consequences of identity and difference acted upon by particular individuals or groups - that morph the objective framework of racial differences into a normative paradigm which racialises the ‘Others’. Ironically enough, both objective and normative frameworks collided with the introduction of the category of “Other” into the U.S. census in 1910:

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁶¹ Cynthia L. Nakashima, “An Invisible Monster: The Creation and Denial of Mixed-Race People in America,” *Racially Mixed People in America*, ed. Maria P. P. Root (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1992) p. 167.

Anyone not falling into the established census categories was to be marked as 'other,' and his or her race (assuming of course that it was identifiable) to be listed there. The reintroduced definitions to distinguish 'black' from 'mulatto' shifted. They began visibly to reflect the struggle to balance blackness with the self-evident effects of miscegenation. Thus, the category 'black' now 'included all persons who are evidently full-blooded negroes,' while 'negro include[d] all persons having some proportion or traceable proof of negro blood.' In keeping with the common comprehension of race but serving also to cement it, race was conceived (in a confused mix of the literal and metaphorical) as blood, a confusion that necessitated reducing the basis of distinction between 'black' and 'negro' to nothing more than the enumerator's perception.⁶²

Here, the power of law in its ability to define racial subjects is demonstrated. Multiracials *become* liminals; they are constructed and constituted as such through legal and non-legal mechanisms. The measure of one's race as defined through an emphasis on racial aesthetics or blood, through these biologically driven imperatives, altered the ability of mixed-race people to legally and socially identify as such. In effect, these identities were negated through biopower - identities were categorised or eliminated in a deliberate attempt to regulate and govern the social, economic relations of the population. Difference became otherness, and the mixed-race subject was thus positioned into a state of liminality.

For the most part, the biological construction of race is disregarded in contemporary times as evidence of historical racism. As time went on it became clear that this line of argumentation had no evidentiary support and was scientifically inaccurate. However, as James F. Davis argues, it is the social and legal definition of 'Black' that has counted, not the lack of scientific evidence within the biological construction of race.⁶³

⁶² David Theo Goldberg, *Racial Subjects: Writing on Race in America* (New York: Routledge, 1997) p. 41.

⁶³ James F. Davis, *Who is Black?*, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

Assumed biological realities have severe social consequences, including the spread of beliefs about the hierarchies of 'race' and the problematic of interracial mixing:

What, then, after this extended review of the science of 'race,' are we left with by way of understanding? With the decisive conclusion, certainly, that 'race' is *not* wholly and completely determined by biology, but is only partially so. Even then biology does not *determine* 'race', but in complex interplay with environmental, cultural, and social factors provides certain boundary conditions and possibilities that affect raciation and the development of 'geographic' races. In addition, the definition of 'race' is partially political, partly cultural. Nor does the modern conceptual terrain of evolution provide scientifically secure access to race-determining biological, cultural, social developmental complexes distributed among various groups that fix a group's rank-ordered place on an ascending 'great chain of being'. Racial categories are fundamentally social in nature and rest on shifting sands of biological heterogeneity. The biological aspects of 'race' are conscripted into projects of cultural, political and social construction. 'Race' is a *social* formation.⁶⁴

The next chapter will discuss the more contemporary, social construction of racial identities. This is not to imply, however, that the implications of the biological construction of race have been wholly expunged from "race thinking". Though many argue that race is a social construction, biology inheres in this conceptualisation; we can never escape the origins of raciology, nor can we take for granted the normative judgements that the biological construction of race introduced to the discursive and vernacular formulations of racial identity. The contemporary adherence to the idea of 'race' - socially constructed though it may be - is a testament to the power and permanency of its biological construction; a paradigm has dominated Western interpretations of racial identity for centuries longer than race as a social formation has. The assumptions that biological differences were connected to behaviour, to morality, to

⁶⁴ Lucius Outlaw, "Toward a Critical Theory of 'Race'," *Anatomy of Racism*, ed. David Theo Goldberg (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990) p. 68.

the possibility of human potential - these change difference to otherness and add normative judgements to what could have been harmless attempts at categorisation. And it is the demarcation of the "Other" in racial terms that negates the existence of the mixed-race subject and banishes him or her into a state of liminality through the biological construction of race.

Chapter Four:

The Social Construction of Multiraciality

*"Who are you, what are you, where are you from, no, where are you really from, where are your parents from, are your grandparents American? Are you from here, what's your background, what's your nationality, where do you live? Are you black, are you white, do you speak Spanish? Are you really white, are you really black? Are you Puerto Rican, are you half and half, are you biracial, multiracial, interracial, transracial, racially unknown, race neutral, colourless, colour blind, down with the rat race or the human race? Who are you? Where are you coming from? Who are your people?"*¹

Most authors in the social sciences have proposed that there is little or no biological basis in race; beyond all else it should be viewed as a social construction. This revelation occurred both in the natural and social sciences, the latter of which was spurred when critical theory began to be applied to examine the process of racial identity formation in the mid-twentieth century. As this chapter will demonstrate, however, the biological and social constructions of race are not mutually exclusive and therefore cannot be considered in isolation from one another. In spite of the wide acceptance of race as a social construct, the concept itself still retains partial adherence to its original foundation in biology. The biological construction of race dominated relations among supposedly distinct, segregated and ordered races for over 400 years and a few decades of social theory - impressive and substantial though that theory may be - cannot undo the irreparable epistemological violence done during the pre-modern and modern eras.² More recent endeavours have identified 'race' as a socio-political construct, created through specific temporal, spatial

¹ Lisa Jones, "Is Biracial Enough? Or, what's this about a multiracial category on the census: a conversation," *Bulletproof Diva: Tales of Race, Sex and Hair* (New York: Anchor, 1994) pp. 53-66.

² As Victoria Bromley writes, though there is contention over the concept of 'violence,' generally speaking it can be divided into two specific types - direct and structural - with 'epistemological violence' falling into the latter category: "Direct violence entails the use of intended and direct physical force by one actor against another. Structural violence comprises both intended and unintended violence as a result of the impact of social structures, and, therefore, the resulting violence is said to be indirect. Indirect violence is embedded in the social, historical and political structures which define and order societies. As such, violence can be understood in terms of the discursive practices which authorize exclusions based on class, race, ethnicity, gender, age, ability or sexual orientation." See Victoria Bromley, "Human Security, Gendered Violence, and Women's Rights: Lives on the line in the US-Mexican Borderlands," Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation (Ottawa: Carleton University, 2002) p. 33-34.

and historical circumstances and maintained through various mechanisms of social power.

Along these same lines, Foucault speaks of 'races' emerging through a historical-political divide:

...the term 'race' is not pinned to a stable biological meaning. And yet the word is not completely free-floating. Ultimately, it designates a certain historio-political divide. It is no doubt wide, but it is relatively stable. One might say - and this does say - that the two races exist whenever one writes the history of two groups which do not, at least to begin with, have the same language, or in many cases, the same religion. The two groups form a unity and a single polity only as a result of wars, invasions, victories, and defeats, or in other words, acts of violence. The only link between them is the link established by the violence of war. And finally, we can say that two races exist when there are two groups which, although they coexist, have not become mixed because of differences, dissymmetries, and barriers created by privilege, customs and rights, the distribution of wealth, or the way in which power is exercised.³

As Foucault rightly argues, violence inheres in any conceptualisation of race, and most specifically the formation of racial discourse itself. Race was borne from violence, and not just the typical violence one envisions as the exercise of brute force - State, military, police, civil or otherwise - of a dominant group over a subordinate group. There exists a deeper, more epistemological violence in the social processes that establish the conditions through which one group can emerge as dominant, and thereby possesses the power required to label, suppress and subordinate other groups. Violence is integral to each one of these steps of domination, and in the context of what Foucault labels as 'the race struggle' an imposed label is inherently dangerous; it homogenizes whatever diverse differences may exist within the labelled group. Furthermore, as was stressed in the previous chapter, it is not necessarily identity and difference that incite the tendency to

³ Michel Foucault, *Society Must be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-76*, trans. David Macey, eds., Francois Ewald and Alessandro Fontana (New York: Picador, 2003) p. 77.

create a hierarchy of races, but the normative judgements that so easily flow when that which distinguishes identities from one another are preyed upon by the dominating force, turning what could have been innocent differences into the stigma of the Other.

A social conceptualisation of race at first glance seems to alleviate some of the most damaging concerns surrounding the biological construction of race. Blood is no longer the measure of one's race; in accepting race within a socio-political paradigm, theories of the roles of and interrelationships among race, ethnicity, and culture replace the rules of hypodescent. James F. Davis explains the differences between the three thus:

...races are categories of human beings based on average differences in physical traits that are transmitted by the genes and not by blood. Culture is a shared pattern of behaviour and beliefs that are learned and transmitted through social communication. An ethnic group is a group with a sense of cultural identity, such as Czech or Jewish Americans, but it may also be a racially distinctive group. A group that is racially distinctive in a society may be an ethnic group as well, but not necessarily.⁴

Using race, culture and ethnicity as intersecting forms of identity, race becomes a 'lived experience' - though postmodernists may argue that the concept itself does not refer to something 'real', it is perceived as real because of our reliance on the idea of race, and society's inability to break away from racist ideologies. As Howard Winant reminds us, it is necessary to recall W.I. Thomas's famous dictum that if people define situations as real, they are real in their consequences.⁵

The idea of race as a social construction has significantly expanded contemporary conceptions of racial identity and difference. When compared to race as a biological

⁴ James F. Davis, *Who is Black?: One Nation's Definition* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991) p. 18.

⁵ Howard Winant, *Racial Conditions: Politics, Theory, Comparisons* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994) p. 16.

notion, theories which hold race to be a social formation are positively progressive; they are able to move the discourse away from biological determinism. In terms of subject formation, the social construction of race identifies “sociological subjects,” which Stuart Hall argues is representative of a fundamental shift away from the “Enlightenment subject”. In effect, subject-identities are no longer conceptualised as the monolithic and static interpretation of the Enlightenment subject, but are instead recognised as the product of negotiations and interactions of the inner core or essence of the self with the social. However, this story is far from over. An examination of the social construction of race, specifically viewed through the lens of the mixed-race subject, confirms that a strict adherence to this discourse as an unproblematic interpretation of racial identity is dangerously and indeed violently, misleading. Such a sweeping contention will come as no surprise to the well-versed reader in racial discourse; one need not refer to multiraciality in order to discern the problems that have emerged with and through perceiving race as a social construction. At their best, “social constructionist arguments will challenge ‘essentialist’ notions that individual persons can have singular, integral altogether harmonious, and unproblematic identities,”⁶ yet more often than not they fail valiantly in the attempt to alter both academic and vernacular understandings of identity. Essentialist notions - that identities are reducible to natural and fixed ‘essences’ - remain firmly planted not only in discourses that concern racial identity, but also those of gender, nations, classes and sexual orientations. Essentialist interpretations of race have become ubiquitous. David Theo Goldberg adds that

⁶ Craig Calhoun, *Critical Social Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1995) p. 198.

Race has become a touchstone. Sewn over the centuries into the seams of the social fabric, the idea of race (or, really, the ideas, for they are multiple) furnishes the terms around and through which a complex of social hopes, fears, anxieties, resentments, aspirations, self-elevations, and identities gets to be articulated.⁷

Indeed, the tendency to essentialise race, racial identities and racial experiences is one of the most prominent critiques of social constructionist theories. Academics have attempted to rectify this concern through non-essentialist interpretations of race, which, though still problematic, have merit for the politics of identity and difference itself, and will be discussed further in the next chapter.

Yet, the social construction of race is more fundamentally problematic than critiques of essentialism would lead us to believe. The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate that a specified focus on mixed race identities brings to light other foundational inconsistencies within such an approach. A critique of social constructionist arguments through this viewpoint leads the discussion back to where it began - within notions of identity, difference and recognition. William Connolly argues that identity depends on difference in order to exist, and that the “second problem of evil” lies in attempting to establish the security of a particular identity without establishing difference - and hence other identities - as evil, irrational, or Other.⁸ In the latter, securing a particular identity involves the negation of all others, in that “the constellation of constructed others becomes both essential to the truth of the powerful identity and a threat

⁷ David Theo Goldberg, *Racial Subjects: Writing on Race in America* (New York: Routledge, 1997) p. 8.

⁸ William Connolly, *Identity/Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002) p. 8. [emphasis in original]

to it. The threat is posed not merely by the *actions* the other might take to injure or defeat the true identity but by the very visibility and mode of *being* as other.” This proposition is crucial to understanding the contemporary construction of multiraciality. Connolly’s mention of a ‘true identity’ is significant for those of mixed-race heritage, for how can it be possible to achieve social recognition of the fluidity, the possibility of multiplicity and the pure ephemerality of racial identities when this recognition has, for so very long, been based on essentialist assumptions within a dominant regime of truth? Furthermore, Connolly’s argument of the “very visibility and mode of being as other” allows us the discursive space to begin to question why multiraciality has only recently begun to emerge within the politics of identity as a fertile breeding ground for critical analysis. Racial mixing is surely as old as colonisation, or older, depending on one’s definition of ‘race’; why, nearly forty years after the abolition of miscegenation laws are mixed-race identities only beginning to achieve social recognition, and limited recognition at that?

Both these important observations will be discussed further in the pages that follow. First, the relevance of Foucauldian theory, specifically Foucault’s theorisations of truth, power and knowledge, bring to light important insights about the nature of racial categories and the means by which they have, and will continue to maintain their contemporary prominence in discourse and practice. Secondly, I will problematise two tenets of monoracial identity: essentialism and the reification of distinct racial categories as they pertain to the constitution of the mixed-race subject, demonstrating that the formulation of multiraciality within the contemporary discourse on racial identity is in great need of contemplation anew. As Howard Winant argues, rather than critiquing the

'natural' or 'common-sense' concept of race, our task must be to focus on the significance and changing meaning of race itself.⁹ With that in mind, the specific task of this chapter is to dissect the means through which the mixed-race subject is constituted within the social construction of race. This task relies on several key contentions: herein I will argue that 'race,' even when conceived as a social construction, is misleading; that 'race' functions through a complex relationship of norms, truth, power and discourse; that the social recognition of racial identities emerges as a key element of identity formation through a specific focus on muliraciality; and, most importantly, that transgressive identities, such as mixed-race, pose a threat to both dominant and subjugated monoracial identities, and as such the notion of 'policing the boundaries' between and among 'races' is considered all the more crucial for the survival of contemporary racial categories. In this project, therefore, I contend that viewing 'race' through the lens of multiraciality is a relevant and enlightening means through which we can examine the significance and changing meaning of 'race' in its social construction.

Foucault, Norms, Truth, Discourse and the Mixed-Race Subject

The social construction of race - its existence, its creation, its various and multiple manifestations, its undeniable consequences - are fundamentally a matter of social power. At first glance, a contention about the relationship between power and race may seem more applicable to the biological construction of race and its consequences - Social Darwinism and the theory of natural selection applied to human beings, the implication that humanity can be ordered into a hierarchy of races, the belief in rules of hypodescent,

⁹ Howard Winant, *Racial Conditions*, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

the dangers of cross-race contamination and the negation of mixed-race identities. Yet, the many theorisations of Foucault, when applied to racial identity, suggest that power must be involved in the constitution of the racial subject - even when this constitution is based on socio-political and historical factors. Foucault reminds us that power is never completely a negative and dominating force:

...this is a wholly negative, narrow, skeletal conception of power....If power were never anything but repressive, if it never had anything to do but say no, do you really think one would be brought to obey it? What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't weigh on us as a force that says no, but it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge and produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression.¹⁰

In Foucault's view, power is not simply a force exercised over individuals and society; it permeates social interaction and produces subjects and discourses. It creates knowledge and attempts to create and maintain a monopoly over truth, thereby regulating the actions - and sometimes the very identities - of individuals and groups. The very process in which meanings and labels are fixed in either discursive formulations or vernacular understandings is demonstrative of the ability of power to function implicitly behind a veil of normality. Yet, providing particular concepts, individual identities or peoples their respective definitions is a powerful tool, indeed, as the demarcation of the racialised Other demonstrates. Romand Coles points out that specifying differences among groups of people is followed by the obliteration of otherness, since "as specified, difference is

¹⁰ Michel Foucault, "Truth and Power," *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980) p. 119.

specie-fied; made to appear on the basis of differentiations within commonalities that are considered to be more fundamental.”¹¹

I have argued previously that it is normative judgements that allow difference to morph into otherness, a significant demonstration of the ability of social power to create particular meanings which become fixed in both time and space. Normalisation is a key element of this process, constituting some objects while purposefully excluding others:

The function of the normalizing gaze and the penalties that accompanied [*sic*] it is to constitute certain actions, attitudes and abilities and to exclude others. The norm functions to narrow the range of acceptable heterogeneity in a radical fashion as it excludes the abnormal and perverse. Yet within an accepted range, the gaze also identifies, orders, and indeed helps constitute differences. Foucault summarises: ‘In a sense, the power of normalization imposes homogeneity; but it individualizes by making it possible to measure gaps, to determine levels, to fix specialities and to render the differences by fitting them one to another’.¹²

There is no singular and easily identified means by which norms are produced and entrenched in the language of the social. However, normalisation itself is more than an objective process of historical circumstance; power is inherent in the act of normalisation, through and through. Power operates through normalisation without its typically expected (dominating) character; power, in this sense, is not a force of state - or law - imposed domination, nor does it hold a traditional or specified system of penalties for non-adherence. Here, power operates implicitly, disguised well as it creates and maintains social norms, and hence whatever particular social order is dictated by those norms. Normalisation is characterised “by an implicit logic that allows power to reflect upon its

¹¹ Romand Coles, *Self/Power/Other: Political Theory and Dialogical Ethics* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1992) pp. 78-79.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 57.

own strategies and clearly define its objects.”¹³ Law may often function as an instrument of power, but is not absolutely necessary in order to procure a specific degree and form of social order.

The production of social norms, though strongly related to behavioural expectations, is also implicated in the social construction of racial identities and is especially significant for understanding the positioning of multiraciality at the margins of racial identities (as well as the spectrum of social recognition of these identities). For, as Francois Ewald points out, norms are fundamentally self-referential:

Just as norms can only exist socially, there can be no such thing as a norm that exists in isolation, for a norm never refers to anything but other norms on which it depends. Norms communicate among themselves, shifting from one level of field of their existence to another according to a kind of modular logic. The norm finds meaning only in relation to other norms: only a norm can provide a normative value for another norm. The paradox of the norm is that before one can exist, there must already be another. If a norm exists, the entire space in which it appears becomes a normative space....When the norm appears, it establishes itself necessarily as an order: the normative order that characterises modern societies.¹⁴

As Ewald eloquently argues, norms cannot exist in isolation; one norm depends on the existence of other norms in order to be. Applied to racial(ised) identities, ‘white’ has historically functioned as the norm against which all other racial identities were to be measured. However, the relative nature of norms is more than this. With ‘white’ as the racial norm, ‘black’, ‘yellow’ or ‘red’ become norms as well, though perhaps the term ‘anti-norm’ might be a more appropriate concept to describe the positioning of non-White identities within the continuum of ‘race’. Non-White identities become normalised

¹³ Francois Ewald, “Norms, Discipline and the Law,” Representations, No. 30, Special Issue: Law and the Order of Culture (Spring, 1990) p. 139.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

through the normalisation of White itself, becoming socially recognised as deviations; in effect, *not normal*. Yet they are normalised as ‘not normal’, essentially entrenching them as unalterable categories with fixed meanings in a specific hierarchy of racial identities. The reification of these normalised racial categories is a key element to the social construction of race and simultaneously positions multiraciality as a deviation from both the norm and the anti-norm - mixed-race people are not ‘White’, but are neither ‘Black’ nor ‘Asian’. This deviance does not automatically make mixed-race identities normalised in themselves; on the contrary, just as the emphasis on racial aesthetics and bloodlines led to mixed-race people being unrecognised and unaccepted by both their “parent races,” the constitution of multiraciality as an exception to both the norm and the anti-norm reinforces the anomalous nature of these identities. Since “normalization is a means of organizing that solidarity which makes each individual the mirror of this fellow,”¹⁵ multiraciality is not only an exception to monoracial categorisation, but is also a deviation of normalised racial identities and the racially ordered organisation of a given society.

Normalisation is not alone in its ability to govern social behaviour; it is dynamically and inextricably intertwined with other forces, including truth, power and discourse. Discursive formulations and Foucault’s notion of ‘regimes of truth’ also ensure that laws are not necessary to ensure regularity and conformity in the social recognition and acceptance of certain identities and the exclusion of others. Power functions on a multiplicity of social planes. Foucault’s insistence that we question the rules according to which certain discursive statements are made is directly correlated to the more significant

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

question of the 'how' - how is it that one particular statement appears within history instead of another? Michele Barrett argues that the latter question is important to comprehend Foucault's conception of discourse, as "it enables us to understand how what is said fits into a network that has its own history and conditions of existence."¹⁶ For Foucault the 'who' of power, that is, the identification of the particular dominating force that makes particular decisions and shapes the central history of a society, must be considered in conjunction with the 'how': the strategies, networks, mechanisms - all the techniques through which decisions are made and put into place. These techniques incorporate discourses of truth:

...in a society such as ours...there are manifold relations of power which permeate, characterise and constitute the social body, and these relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse. There can be no possible exercise of power without a certain economy of discourse of truth which operates through and on the basis of this association. We are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through productions of truth...we are forced to produce the truth that our society demands, of which it had need, in order to function: we *must* speak the truth: we are constrained or condemned to confess or discover the truth. Power never ceases its interrogation, its inquisition, its registration of truth: it institutionalises, professionalises and rewards its pursuit....In another way, we are also subjected to truth in the sense in which it is truth that makes the laws, that produces the true discourse which, at least partially, decides, transmits and itself extends upon the effects of power.¹⁷

Here we begin to conceive aspects of the complex relationship between power, truth and normalisation as they pertain to racial identities. As Foucault says, power is never the monolithic power of the State and its apparatuses; instead it should be considered a

¹⁶ Michele Barrett, *The Politics of Truth: From Marx to Foucault* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991) p. 126.

¹⁷ Michel Foucault, "Two Lectures," *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980) pp. 93-94.

combination of “an organisation based on public right whose principle of articulation is the social body and the delegative status of each citizen” and “a closely linked set of disciplinary coercions whose purpose in fact is to assure the cohesion of this same social body.”¹⁸ Through this combination of the forces of power, subjects are constituted, regulated and monitored. Adopting Foucault’s claim that “individuals are the vehicles of power, and not its points of application,”¹⁹ the articulation of racial identities becomes both a mechanism of power and its end result. There is an inherent power in the fixity of racial categories and identities, and even more so in the misrecognition of mixed-race identities. Again, as Foucault writes, “truth is a thing of this world.” The task, then, in the remainder of this chapter is to analyse how and through what mechanisms the contemporary discourses of race position the mixed-race subject as different and/or Other, in the continued attempt to expose the hidden frameworks of power that shape these understandings.

Problematising the Social Construction of ‘Race’

There is a wealth of literature which discusses the problematic of racial identification. Throughout these varied and multidisciplinary texts, two themes run rampant: the problematisation of both essentialism and the reification of racial categories. The following section will consider each of these in turn, first identifying the main concerns of each as cited in the literature before bringing the discussion back to the constitution of the mixed-race subject. I contend that the problematisation of racial

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

essentialism and the reification of racial categories through a mixed-race lens will provide an unexplored avenue for analysis - most significantly for the consideration of imposed and self-identity, both of which emerge with even more prominence when mixed-race identities are specifically considered.

Multiraciality and Essentialism

One of the most prominent critiques of the social construction of race centres around its tendency to essentialise the experiences of a particular group, much like the biological construction of race reduces race to its 'natural and inherent essences' as represented through the purity of blood. In the context of the social construction of race, racial essentialism is the belief that there is a monolithic "Black Experience" or "Chicano Experience," what Angela Harris calls a "second voice" that "claims to speak for all," mirroring feminist essentialism.²⁰ She further argues that "essentialism is intellectually convenient, and to a certain extent cognitively ingrained...essentialism often appears (especially to white women) as the only alternative to chaos..."²¹ Racial essentialism naturalises race and racial differences, arguing that the 'essences' inherent in the members of a given group are immobile, unchanging and fixed in both time and space. According to Michael Walters, to view race as a social construction is "inevitably, (even if unknowingly or unwillingly) to essentialize it."²² Naturalising 'race' - and hence the discrete racial categories associated with the discursive and 'common sense' formulations

²⁰ Angela Harris, "Race and Essentialism in Feminist Legal Theory," *Critical Race Theory: The Cutting Edge*, ed. R. Delgado (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995) p. 255.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 256.

²² Walter Benn Michaels, "The No-Drop Rule," *Identities*, eds. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Kwame Anthony Appiah (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995) p. 412.

of 'race' - reimposes the hegemony of multiraciality as a mixed-ness to be measured against the standard of being either one 'race' or another. Essentialism possesses a dangerous potential to recreate the problems associated with biologically essentialist racism:

The essentializing moment is weak because it naturalizes and dehistoricizes difference, mistaking what is historical and cultural for what is natural, biological and genetic. The moment the signifier 'black' is torn from its historical, cultural and political embedding and lodged in a biologically constituted racial category, we valorize by inversion, the very ground of the racism we are trying to deconstruct. In addition, as always happens when we naturalize historical categories...we fix that signifier outside of history, outside of change, outside of political intervention.²³

Hall elaborates on a central point of this project: that there is power in meanings.

Essentialising race - socially constructed though it may be - in effect attaches a very particularistic definition to racial identities. It binds these identities - signifiers, as Hall calls them - according to traits that may or may not be socially, culturally or historically accurate. The process of creating and maintaining specific meanings correlated at once to race and racial discourse is the heart of the power of race itself.

At best, the social construction of race challenges the essentialist idea that racial identities are both naturally given or a product of individual will.²⁴ However, Harris's point that essentialism is, to a certain extent, cognitively ingrained is confirmed by Craig Calhoun, who argues that essentialist invocations of race, and a host of other identities, "nonetheless remain common in everyday discourse throughout the world. Pointing to the

²³ Stuart Hall, "What is this 'Black' in Black Popular Culture?" *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, eds. David Morley and Juan-Hsing Chen (London and New York: Routledge, 1996) p. 472.

²⁴ Craig Calhoun, *Critical Social Theory*, *op. cit.*, p. 198.

social and cultural histories by which they have been constructed becomes the main way of trying to challenge the grip these essentialist identities have over us and the problems they create.”²⁵ He further argues that “there is also the risk that the ‘social constructionist’ story will become social determinism, too easily paired with an overly fixed, ‘essentialist’ notion of society or culture.”²⁶ Stubblefield links this potential of essentialism transforming into social determinism to the process of racial identification itself:

Racial identification also presents a practical problem. Racial identification is problematic in terms of labelling because it involves labelling oneself and the people with whom one identifies. This creates the same problem as in any situation. People interact through the filter of the label. They make assumptions about each other.²⁷

In order to counter the violent implications of essentialism and racial labels, we must bring the discussion back to its origins; in other words, we must continue to question the meanings and signifiers attached to specific concepts and ideologies, taking heed of Calhoun’s advice to challenge essentialism by bringing to light forgotten or ignored social and cultural histories. It is my contention that focussing on essentialism as it applies to mixed-race is a valid and often underutilised and unrecognised lens through which such a deconstruction (in the broad sense of the term) may occur.

Essentialist notions of identity are problematic in any context of application. Both feminist and gay/lesbian writers have demonstrated the contentious nature of essentialist invocations, as any facet of identity becomes simplified and reduced to a ‘given’. Instead

²⁵ *Id.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 199.

²⁷ A. Stubblefield, “Racial Identity and Non-Essentialism About Race,” 21 Social Theory and Practice, p. 360.

of being viewed as a continuous process which occurs throughout the duration of one's existence, dependent upon not only a variety of historical, cultural and political factors but also upon one's subjective life experiences as well, in essentialist terms identities are reduced to so-called 'essential' characteristics. Again, it is not necessarily these characteristics themselves that are problematic; it is the solidification and fixity of these tenets as the timeless and unalterable measure of racial identity that morphs a relative and fundamentally ephemeral concept like human identity into naturalised essences. Gayatri Spivak's conception of strategic essentialism - or, the necessity of "risking essentialism" speaks to this point; she argues that essentialism in and of itself can be useful, when employed judiciously. However, she also contends that the reckless incorporation of essentialist notions, leading away from any critical engagement of this trend in identity recognition, bedevils both discourse and society.

However, this viewpoint, that risking essentialism is sometimes necessary in order to achieve social aims and/or goals, is one that can only be exercised in a world of pure and singular races. Essentialism holds a different meaning and fate for the mixed-race subject. Indeed, a focus on the interaction between essentialist invocations of identity and multiraciality brings to light the power inherent in names, labels and most especially the meanings attached to them. For example, recall the discussion in the previous chapter, regarding the mixed-race phenomena of 'passing'. As was argued therein, passing was often not a result of any process of identity formation, rather, because mixed-race identities were relegated to liminality - in other words, since the laws and societal beliefs at the time ensured *that there was no such thing as mixed race* - multiracials were always

expected (and had no choice than) to 'pass' as a member of another (supposedly pure) race.²⁸ The concept of 'passing' itself is shrouded in essentialism:

Passing...is conceptualised as a means of transcending institutional barriers and stigmatization by providing escape from marginality. However, this explanation is based on false assumptions about racial purity. *Passing* is the word used to describe an attempt to achieve acceptability by claiming membership in some desired group while denying other racial elements in oneself thought to be undesirable. The concept of passing uses the imagery of camouflage, of concealing true identity of group membership and gaining false access. Concealment of 'true' identity or group membership is considered as synonymous with compromised integrity and impostorship.²⁹

Bradshaw's explanation that some racial elements are thought to be desirable while others not exemplifies racial essentialism. Characteristics that are linked to race and become explicable only *through* race - or gender, or sexual orientation - are inherently essentialist; they become natural, fixed and immutable. The mixed-race subject's plea to acknowledge the multiple racial affiliations he or she carries with her identity is, again, ignored.

As will be argued in the next chapter, maybe what the world needs is a little more mixed-race, or, at the very least, more phenomena like mixed-race, such as transgenderedness (though the comparison is flawed, it can be made), to facilitate an analysis of essentialism and other concerns such as the reification of racial categories which construct 'race' through and by the social. These transgressive identities pose a threat to monolithic modes of categorising identities; they prove that the boundaries that

²⁸ This statement may seem to contradict the argument made in the previous chapter in which I contended that 'passing' always referred to 'passing as White'. In its vernacular context, this is true. However, my intention here is to illustrate that mixed-race people were always 'passing' in one form or another. With multiraciality unrecognised and deemed illegitimate, any other *imposed* identity will always be a form of 'passing'.

²⁹ Carla K. Bradshaw, "Beauty and the Beast: On Racial Ambiguity," *Racially Mixed People in America*, ed. Maria P.P. Root (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1992) p. 79.

separate races, genders, and sexual orientations are “man-made” - that the borders we have created are unstable and cannot be fixed or secured. The ability to transgress these boundaries, made even more apparent by mixed-race identities, is perceived as dangerous; mixed-race identities make it more difficult for monoracial identities to make arguments in both theory and the ‘real world’. For example, the emergence of the ‘mixed-race’ category in the 2000 U.S. census was opposed by many minority groups who were concerned that an acknowledgement of mixed-race identities would result in decreased minority populations - and hence economic support for their social initiatives.³⁰ Yet is it this ability of transgressive identities to challenge the status quo that make them such an important - and admittedly underutilised - point of analysis for discussing the dangers of racial essentialism.

Even the best of (strategic) essentialist intentions become significantly convoluted through multiraciality. How, pray tell, would strategic essentialism benefit those who identify as mixed-race? It would simply reinforce the monoracial categories on either end of the spectrum, bounding multiraciality as a mixed-ness in the middle, again normalising ‘pure’ racial identities by citing mixed-race as a deviation from the rule. Even if race in some way could be applied without essentialism in its wake, there is only a small separation between race as a social construction and race as a socially deterministic construction, for, as Thornton puts it,

³⁰ Kimberly McClain DaCosta, “Multiracial Identity: From Personal Problem to Public Issue,” *New Faces in a Changing America: Multiracial Identity in the 21st Century*, eds. Herman DeBose and Loretta Winters (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2003) p. 70.

Society defines race as distinctive and homogenous; multiracial people experience it as multidimensional. That background should and must be appreciated in and of itself. But that experience is irrelevant in a social sense. Race is a social and political tool not meant to reflect the range of experience or the diversity found within any group to any great extent. By definition, racial labels are tools used to categorise and to separate and/or exclude. There remains insufficient social justification to exclude multiracials from other groups. While there is experiential rationale for identifying a unique experience, that alone is not reason enough, and does not provide a consistent basis, to describe multiracials as one sort of people.³¹

Thornton brings out an important point here. Race is a social and political tool, within which essentialism functions as a method of condition for the separation between distinct racial groups.

Multiraciality and the Reification of Racial Categories

Essentialism leads us to a second important problematic formulation of 'race' - the tendency of the current discourse and the vernacular, everyday practical consequences of race to reify racial categories and the boundaries among them. 'Race', socially constructed though it may be, is a misleading formulation of identities. The prominence of race today, though the biological basis it once relied upon is no longer an accurate depiction of its contemporary logic, is evidence of its 'staying power'. Racial identity formation has become so integral that it is conscious, subconscious and unconscious:

Modern social subjects have become unselfconscious in establishing racial characteristics. They take for granted the recognition of racial difference: they make racial claims, assert racial truths, assess racial value - in short, create (fabricate) racial knowledge. In this sense, racial knowledge is integral to the common sense, to the articulation, or modernity's self-understanding.³²

³¹ Michael C. Thornton, "Is Multiracial Status Unique? The Personal and Social Experience," *Racially Mixed People in America*, ed. Maria P.P. Root (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1992) p. 325.

³² David Theo Goldberg, *Racial Subjects*, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

This 'racial knowledge' that Goldberg speaks of includes both the construction of racial identities - usually in essentialist terms - and the classificatory regimes which, through both laws and societies, dictate the impermeability of racial categories. Just as construction and classification cannot be considered in isolation, neither can essentialism and the creation and maintenance of discrete racial categories, for the two exist in a complex relationship in which both are dependent upon the other for existence and the power they exert. As Goldberg further argues, "race serves to naturalize the groupings it identifies in its own name. In articulating as natural ways of being in the world and the institutional structures in and through which such ways of being are expressed, race both establishes and rationalizes the order of difference as the law of nature."³³

The ability to fix meanings within and through concepts is inherently linked to power, not unlike Foucault's perception of the power of normalisation and 'truth'. Closely related to both these expressions of social power, however, is the *ability to define the boundaries among the meanings we construct*. Where does 'White' end and 'Black' begin? Not only are the very definitions of 'Black' and 'White' powerful through their connection to particular positions on a hierarchy of colours, but also because there is an explicit power in the ability to define and secure the borders that separate them. This power, Stuart Hall argues, is one of the many mechanisms that allows racism to flourish:

Racism, of course, operates by constructing impassable symbolic boundaries between racially constituted categories, and its typically binary system of representation constantly marks and attempts to fix and naturalize the difference between belonging and otherness. Along this frontier there arises what Gayatri Spivak calls the 'epistemic

³³ David Theo Goldberg, *Racist Culture: Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1993) p. 81.

violence' of the discourse of the Other - of imperialism, the colonized, Orientalism, the exotic, the primitive, the anthropological and the folk lore....However, as Fanon constantly reminded us, the epistemic violence is both outside and inside, and operates by a process of splitting on both sides of the division - in here as well as out there. That is why it is a question, not only of 'black skin,' but of 'Black Skin, White Masks' - the internalization of the self-as-other...racism constructs the black subject: noble savage and violent avenger. And in the doubling, fear and desire double for one another and play across the structure of otherness, complicating its politics.³⁴

Epistemological violence is a matter of both internal and external concern, as Hall confirms, for the reification of race comes from all sides. 'Race' and racial classification are no longer simply (if anything with race can ever be described as 'simple') a matter of domination and subjugation. While the creation of racial categories may be correlated to the biological construction of race and hierarchisation, the legacy of discrete racial categories - and the classification regimes that operationalise them - are maintained by both the dominant and subjugated forces in a given society. Race may be a powerful tool of domination, but since the social movements of the 1960s it has also become representative of the self-empowerment of those on the bottom of the racial ladder. This issue will be explored further in the next chapter, but for current purposes it is important to understand why those like Yehudi Webster argue that 'race' is not a dangerous concept, since, in his opinion, "it is neither race nor racism that bedevils American society, but rather that classification enjoys a privileged status in social studies."³⁵ I contend, however, that identity construction and classification are equally problematic and are exposed as such through a focus on their implications for the mixed-race subject. Thus, while previous analysis has demonstrated the contentious nature of identity construction through

³⁴ Stuart Hall, "New Ethnicities," *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, eds. David Morley and Juan-Hsing Chen (London and New York: Routledge, 1996) p. 445.

³⁵ Yehudi O. Webster, *The Racialization of America*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992) p. 2.

an over-reliance on race, the following analysis will contend that this danger is compounded by a reliance on the boundaries the various constructions of race have fashioned in their own likeness.

All this is to say that the boundaries constructed between races are a locus of violence. Through essentialism, 'race' itself is reproduced as 'natural', as are the lines drawn between essentially different racial identities. By restructuring the discourse to include discussion of multiraciality, we begin to see the problem of taking racial categories at face value, of uncritically assuming that our vernacular references to these categories in the language of the practical do not carry deeper and more significant meanings behind the labels and distinctions themselves. As a category, race is presupposed as the standard against which multiracial peoples are to measure their identity. Discrete racial groups are assumed to exist, as the terminology of *intermarriage* implies. When these categories are framed in the broad strokes of colour, ethnicity and even culture, individuals who identify as mixed-race can never be fully incorporated or acknowledged. They often do not fit in with any racial classification - for contemporary racial classifications always denote *monoracial* categories - nor will a catch-all multiracial category work to uncover the power that 'race' and racial categories possess and exercise. Mixed-race, more than 'pure' races, reminds us that the distinctions we make among groups are more than artificial; they were created through time and with dominating purposes in mind. Racial categories perpetuate multiraciality as a deviation - literally marked as 'Other' in discourse and on the census forms that require one to choose one race or another, instead of 'checking all that apply'. Indeed, even the terms 'mixed-race'

or 'multiracial' work to reinforce the illusionary distinctions among races - 'mixed-race' indicates that there are such things as races which can be divided, segregated and labelled, and, more significantly, that people who are 'mixed' possess identifiable (and possibly essentialist) traits from each parent race. With the very term 'race' (mono, multi or otherwise) comes its reification:

When we think of people in terms of groups based on race, even in terms of non-biological, non-essential groups, we have already reified those groups. By identifying a person as a 'member' of a racial group, we semantically trick ourselves into believing that the group itself is a pre-existing entity...these 'groups' are categories that are constituted through social discourse, rather than material entities that have been named. When we identify someone as a member of a racial group, it is easy to forget that the category represented by the idea of the group was constructed through discourse such as that in which we have just engaged and that our discourse has reinforced the category.³⁶

But, why, exactly, should the reification of racial categories be considered problematic for monoracials and multiracials alike? Even a partial answer to this layered question is multifaceted. First, because while race itself may not be real, its consequences surely are. Leaving strategic essentialism and the positive interpretations of racial identity - at least, for those who identify as a singular racial identity - aside for the moment, we must admit that the deconstruction of race, and hence the illustration of the hidden frameworks of social power that permeate racial discourse, is made all the more difficult to convey when racial categories are constantly being reinforced in 'common-speak'. Secondly, the implications of meanings, of labels and of history cannot be taken lightly; it is impossible to separate contemporary visions of 'race' from its biological emergence and the methods of domination for which it was instituted. Thirdly, if identity is ever to be viewed as one

³⁶ A. Stubblefield, "Racial Identity and Non-Essentialism About Race," *op. cit.*, p. 345.

process among many which all collectively contribute to the development of the self, we cannot rely on stagnant racial categories to take us there. And finally, there is an inherent misrecognition that occurs when identities are reduced to the broad categories in which they are positioned. Recognition is required when we engage in naming, but a blind adherence to categories assumes that the definitions of concepts within these categories are fixed and unchangeable. Identity is a dynamic and complex process, one that, quite possibly, defies any label or category, no matter how broad, encompassing or well-intentioned, they may be.

These two key problematic formulations of 'race' - essentialism and the reification of racial categories - are operationalised through two manifestations of identity: identity as imposed by individuals or societies and self-identification. Though an emphasis has emerged in recent decades on the importance of self-identity, imposed identity certainly cannot be deemed a thing of the past. In many ways self-identity is considered to alleviate many of the problems posed by imposed identity, however, the following section will demonstrate that from the theoretical vantage of multiraciality both these manifestations of identity hold unique consequences for the mixed-race subject and hence will allow us the discursive space to reconsider the processes through which racial identities are constituted.

Imposed Identity

Racial construction and categorisation, at their most fundamental levels, function to segregate seemingly distinct essences from one another. To classify racial identity is to attempt to order society into neat boxes, where identities imposed on individuals by

society forces them into predefined and predetermined categories. Categorisation enables racial differentiation, which more often than not is illustrative of modern racial hierarchies.³⁷ Racial classification always imposes a specific racial identity on the multiracial individual, whether he or she chooses to identify with that particular identity or not. This is reminiscent of the biological construction of race, wherein aesthetics and the physical appearance of the social order - and hence hierarchy - was fundamental to society. The social construction of race may not carry the same social stigma associated with the non-white body as is found in race's biological formulations, but nonetheless places mixed-race persons in a particular racial category in accordance with their physical attributes. This version of essentialism reduces a plurality of racial characteristics and identifiers to a single, immobile and unified designation. Thus, as Walter Michael points out, while the biological construction of race and the one-drop rule resulted in an unwarranted emphasis on biological differences, the social construction of race codifies people's *mistakes* about biological differences.³⁸

Imposed identity is a force strongly related to racial aesthetics, for imposed identity is always externally ascribed. It is how one can be publically categorised at first glance, since "often racial labels become a political tool to measure the strength of identity....It is acceptable to make statements about one's multiple ancestry, but not about identity; a private but not public affirmation of multi heritage is acceptable."³⁹ Racial labels are not innocent methods of classification; rather they are political by nature. As

³⁷ David Theo Goldberg, *Racist Culture*, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

³⁸ Walter Benn Michaels, "The No-Drop Rule," *op. cit.*, p. 410.

³⁹ Michael C. Thornton, "Is Multiracial Status Unique?" *op. cit.*, p. 322.

such, imposed identity usually reinforces the racial categories that have dominated discourses, laws and societies for the past five centuries; in effect, it becomes nearly impossible for imposed racial identities to stray from the historically predetermined boxes of 'Black,' 'White,' 'Yellow,' or 'Red'. Thinking outside the box, it seems, is difficult to inject into the current dominant discourse which prescribes racial identities as singular. As Bradshaw points out:

In societies that attempt to invoke real or perceived differences to determine allocation of resources, race, like gender, is considered an immutable and fundamental characteristic of identity. Yet the racial self-identity of the biracial person is seldom apparent from the physical characteristics alone. Furthermore, the biracial person's racial and self-perception may be more flexible and not easily accounted for by the familiar racial categories. The assumption by other people that physical features are predicative of racial identity is also presumption, because an individual's sense of self is emotionally mediated rather than defined merely by identification with his or her physical attributes.⁴⁰

Imposed identity is clearly problematic for the mixed-race subject. Aside from the previously mentioned argument that racial categories in their current formulation are strongly correlated to essentialist conceptions of 'race' and racial differences, imposed identity often reduces the complex process of human identity formation to a matter of physical characteristics. Biracial singer Amanda Marshall questions the deception inherent in this tendency, asking "what do you see when you see me? You see my long blond hair and the particular way that my lips are shaped, that my body takes, when you talk to me. What do you know when you know me? Don't file me under categories, you're deceived, you don't know me. I'm not only a surface, a country."⁴¹ Imposed identity has inherent

⁴⁰ Carla K. Bradshaw, "Beauty and the Beast," *op. cit.*, p. 82.

⁴¹ Amanda Marshall "Double Agent," *Everybody's Got a Story*, Sony Music, 2001.

reductionist traits; the broad categories under which people are shuffled diminish cultural and ethnic diversities under the rubric of skin colour. Mixed-race, however, illuminates another danger in the categorisation of physical appearance; in classifying peoples according to predetermined and predefined races, the notion of *identifiability* plays a significant role in the process of relegating mixed-race people into particular existing racial categories.

This notion of identifiability is key, yet is a monopolised problematic of multiraciality. Mixed-race identities are unique in that racial appearances, and hence identifiability, may be ambiguous. Though notions of 'pure races' - and hence, purely identifiable races - is mythical, the problems associated with inaccurately imposed racial identities becomes more enhanced through multiraciality. In Charles Taylor's famous essay, "The Politics of Recognition," he argues that "our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the *mis*recognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves."⁴² Taylor's thesis is especially applicable to discussions of racial identity. Yet I would argue that in the case of the mixed-race subject, both misrecognition and the absence of recognition are uncontrollable factors in the contemporary formulation of multiraciality. These factors are epistemologically violent both because of the demeaning image of multiraciality often mirrored back through the social refusal to acknowledge mixed race

⁴² Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994) p. 25.

identities and also because this misrecognition often results in an imposed racial identity which is neither accurate nor acceptable to the subject him or herself. Power is vested in labels:

In naming or refusing to name, existence is recognised or refused, meaning and value are assigned or ignored, people and things are elevated or rendered invisible. Once defined, symbolic order has to be maintained, serviced, extended, operationalized. In this sense, the racial Other is nominated into existence. As Said makes clear in his book *Orientalism*, the Other is constituted through the invention of projected knowledge. The practices of naming and knowledge construction tend to deny any meaningful autonomy to those so named and imagined, extending over them power, control, authority and domination.⁴³

Refusing to 'name' - a race, a gender, a sexual orientation, etc. - is equivalent to the failure to grant social recognition. The disavowal of mixed-race identities as a valid formulation of the self is thus a mechanism of domination, keeping the mixed-race subject firmly in its positioned status as inferior and in need of a more coherent, more socially accepted racial identity, which, more often than not tends to be the non-white dimension of the multiracial's 'race'. In effect, what Taylor calls 'equal recognition' can never be achieved by those who identify as mixed-race yet are deemed identifiable as a member of another race, that may or may not accept them into a racial community or culture. As Taylor writes:

On the social plane, the understanding that identities are formed in open dialogue, unshaped by a predefined social script, has made the politics of equal recognition more central and stressful. It has, in fact, considerably raised the stakes. Equal recognition is not just the appropriate mode for a healthy democratic society. Its refusal can inflict damage on those who are denied it, according to a widespread modern view....The projection of an inferior or demeaning image on another can actually distort and oppress, to the extent that the image is internalised. Not only contemporary feminism

⁴³ David Theo Goldberg, *Racial Subjects*, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

but also race relations and discussions of multiculturalism are undergirded by the premise that the withholding of recognition can be a form of oppression.⁴⁴

Imposed identity represents the removal of human agency; it chooses identities for us instead of through us. Identity still remains a social construction, but one that does not require any input from the agent him or herself.

Part and parcel of the misrecognition of (or the refusal to recognise) mixed-race identities is the 'demonisation' of multiraciality as a valid way to self-identify. The individual choice to identify as mixed-race is often seen as a negative and unproductive one; in this context, Maria Root points out that

The normative experiences of fluid identities, situationally defined ethnicity and race, simultaneous identities, or defiance of rules of hypodescent have been interpreted as unhealthy, invariable choices. These declarations of identity that reveal the truth about the illogical racial system are instead viewed as misguided or symptoms of low self-esteem due to internalized racism. The illogical racial system has become so embedded in our social order that it is threatening to suggest that the 'emperor is wearing no clothes'. There has been a society-wide hypnotic induction into believing that race is a pure biological fact.⁴⁵

Placing a negative normative value on mixed-race (and consequently promoting the imposition of monoracial identities on mixed-race peoples to occur) is a matter of the power of race and the norms and hierarchies the reliance on race has created. For how can the racial system maintain its current power if the very existence of mixed-race identities illustrate its fallibility and insufficiency? Imposing singular racial identities on mixed-race people is a means through which the status quo remains firmly entrenched; it ensures that

⁴⁴ Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," *op. cit.*, p. 36

⁴⁵ Maria P.P. Root, "The Multiracial Contribution to the Browning of America," *American Mixed Race: The Culture of Microdiversity*, ed. Naomi Zack (London: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1995) p. 233.

the master's house cannot be brought down with the master's tools.⁴⁶ Ergo, the specific focus on mixed-race identities within the social construction of race highlights the necessity to reformulate the ways in which we think and talk about 'race'.

Self-Identity

At first glance, the notion of self-identity may seem to alleviate some of the more contentious issues associated with the imposition of racial identities within the social construction of race. Just as there is power in the fixing of conceptual meanings, there is also an equally powerful force present in the self-definition of the social subject.

Particularly, in the naming of one's own race:

Just as language furnishes a key for becoming conscious of oneself as distinct from the world, social discourse provides the means for social self-definition. Naming one's own race, on the plane of racial identity, functions similarly to naming oneself at the level of self-consciousness and self-identity. The possibility of the former necessitates self-recognition....Each level of subjection - to authoritative discourses or to racial authority - is established by way of sociolinguistic symbols. These symbols incorporate general rules and taboos that represent The Law; the 'Law of Authority' in general, or the 'Racial Law' in particular. Once internalized, these discursive bodies of law, and others like them, give social definition to the subject.⁴⁷

Though self-identity allows mixed-race people to revel in their internal choices of singular, multiple or combined racial allegiances, the cognitive necessity of social recognition of these choices may very well be purposefully and noticeably absent. As Craig Calhoun points out, "it is much harder for us to establish who we are and maintain

⁴⁶ Audre Lorde, "Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference," eds. A. Kesselman et al., *Women's Images and Realities: A Multicultural Anthology* (London and Toronto: Mayfield Publishing, 1995).

⁴⁷ David Theo Goldberg, "The Social Formation of Racist Discourse," *Anatomy of Racism*, ed. David Theo Goldberg (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990) pp. 309-310.

this identity satisfactorily in our lives and in the recognition of others.”⁴⁸ Self-identity is never fully complete without recognition (and even then, as a process which spans one’s lifetime, can never be *fully* complete at all), and though the ability to identify as a mixed-race person is a tenable option for North Americans, this internal process is often not matched by the external perception or formulation of multiraciality it requires to be fulfilled.

In many ways, Métis are the legalised epitome of mixed-race identities. The result of “intermarriages” between French fur traders and Natives in Canada, the Métis people emerged in the nineteenth century as a distinct people with lineages from both the settlers and Natives, though members of neither group completely. The main difference between the Métis and other multiracials is the former’s acquisition and maintenance of a cohesive group identity; most mixed-race people are denied that sense of belonging to a particular racial group which the Métis have achieved.⁴⁹ Indeed, even in the case of the significant mulatto population in the United States in the nineteenth century, a distinct group identity was not forged by the community membership, undoubtedly due to the legacy of slavery and some of the consequences of the biological construction of race discussed in the previous chapter. Another important difference to note is the codification of Métis rights into Canada’s *Constitution Act*; though the scope of these rights has yet to be fully defined, their inclusion in legislation is strongly connected to the means by which the law constructs Métis identity. This construction, however, is a very recent occurrence - before

⁴⁸ Craig Calhoun, *Critical Social Theory*, *op. cit.*, p. 194.

⁴⁹ Outside of the North American context, however, the Coloureds in South Africa are an example of a mixed-race ‘race’ with a collective group identity.

*R. v. Powley*⁵⁰, both Métis rights and identities had been largely ignored by the Canadian state, in spite the constitutionalisation of their “existing” rights of Aboriginality. In this case, heard by the Supreme Court of Canada in 2003, two Métis were accused of unlawfully hunting moose in the off season, which they claimed they were legally permitted to do through their Métis rights as guaranteed by section 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982*.⁵¹ In its ruling, the Supreme Court of Canada affirmed that Métis rights under section 35 include the right to hunt for food, like the Aboriginal rights of status, non-status and treaty Indians. The court stated that the term Métis did not refer to anyone with partial European and Indian heritage; rather, it was to be associated with “a distinctive peoples who, in addition to their mixed ancestry, developed their own customs, and recognizable group identity separate from their Indian or Inuit and European forebears.”⁵²

Yet, the court also added a critical dimension to its definition of Métis identity, and hence legalised a specific notion of this aspect of Aboriginality. It entrenched self-identification, ancestral connection and the community acceptance of membership in a Métis group as necessary standards of Métis identity, stating:

The verification of a claimant's membership in the relevant contemporary community is crucial, since individuals are only entitled to exercise Métis aboriginal rights by virtue of their ancestral connection to and current membership in a Métis community. Self-

⁵⁰ *R. v. Powley* [2003], 2 S.C.R. 207.

⁵¹ Schedule B, *Canada Act*, 1982, (U.K.) 1982, c.11. Section 35 states:

35. (1) The existing aboriginal and treaty rights of aboriginal peoples of Canada are hereby recognized and affirmed.

(2) In this Act, “aboriginal peoples of Canada” includes the Indian, Inuit and Métis peoples of Canada.

(3) For greater certainty, in subsection (1) “treaty rights” includes rights that now exist by way of land claims agreements or may be so acquired.

(4) Notwithstanding any other provision of this Act, the aboriginal and treaty rights referred to in subsection (1) are guaranteed equally to male and female persons.

⁵² *Powley, op. cit.*

identification, ancestral connection, and community acceptance are factors which define Métis identity for the purpose of claiming Métis rights under s. 35. Absent formal identification, courts will have to ascertain Métis identity on a case-by-case basis taking into account the value of community self-definition, the need for the process of identification to be objectively verifiable and the purpose of the constitutional guarantee.⁵³

The rights and privileges associated with Métis identity explain the court's reasoning for including self-identification and proof of ancestral connection in the construction of legal boundaries around "Métis". The final determinant, that of community acceptance, however, must give us pause. Again, it must be emphasised that though Métis are mixed-race *per se*, the existence of a distinct community, traditions and culture make them unique compared to other multiracials. Their plight is still of significance to this discussion, however, for it contributes to our comprehension of the societal and legal factors involved in the construction of identity in general, and further illustrates that which plagues the recognition of mixed-race identities, specifically.

The Supreme Court placed the onus of proof on the claimant for proving he or she is accepted by a modern Métis community whose continuity provides the legal basis for the claim of rights being made. The Court stated that "the core of community acceptance is past and ongoing participation in a shared culture, in the customs and traditions that constitute a Métis community's identity and distinguish it from other groups."⁵⁴ Likewise, in referring to the legal burden of proof for proving (or disproving) one's identity as "Black," James F. Davis writes that "in the absence of proof of a specific black ancestor, merely being known in the black community has usually been accepted by the courts as

⁵³ *Id.*

⁵⁴ *Id.*

evidence of black ancestry.”⁵⁵ With community acceptance as a legalised measure of racial identity, the process of self-identification seems pointless; for if self-identity is not followed by some form of internal (group) recognition and external (societal, law or state) recognition, an individual’s claimed racial identity cannot be completely fulfilled.

Furthermore, the societal recognition of mixed-race as a valid racial identity cannot be considered the ‘end game’ of the reformulation of multiraciality. The mere recognition of mixed-race is not enough, as “being multiracial in a hierarchical system simply means being just a little less Black and thus a little less subordinate, but does not assure equality with Whites.”⁵⁶ Our task within the social construction of race, therefore, remains to dissect the means through which the subject is constituted; or, in this case, self-constituted. We cannot be led to believe that the power of naming one’s own race, one’s own identity will trump the power currently vested with all these names and identities in the matrix of ‘race’. In Connolly’s words, “...one needs to examine established tactics of self-identity, not so much engaging in self-inquiry into one’s deeper interior as by probing the structures that maintain the plausibility of those configurations, and by analyzing from a perspective that problematizes the certainty of one’s self-identity the effects these structures and tactics have on others.”⁵⁷ The subject may constitute him or herself, however it must be acknowledged that this constitution occurs through social processes and practices that (s)he has had no part in inventing.⁵⁸ The constitution of the subject, then

⁵⁵ James F. Davis, *Who is Black?* *op. cit.*, pp. 8-9.

⁵⁶ Reginald G. Daniels, “Beyond Black and White: The New Multiracial Consciousness,” *Racially Mixed People in America*, ed. Maria P.P. Root (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1992) p. 340.

⁵⁷ William Connolly, *Identity/Difference*, *op. cit.*, pp. 9-10.

⁵⁸ Michel Foucault, “The Ethic of Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom,” *The Final Foucault*, trans. J.D. Gauthier, eds. James Bernauer and David Rasmussen (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1988) p. 11.

is limited to the discursive technologies of the self, as Foucault calls them, which must be reconciled through and against other social practices such as normalisation, regimes of truth and the mechanisms through which power operates and regulates the actions of individuals, groups and societies.

Paul Spickhard reminds us that before the last third of the twentieth century, multiracial individuals did not have the opportunity to choose identities for themselves.⁵⁹ Since then, however, mixed-race self-identity has brought forth claims of both belonging to more than one racial group and the creation of new categories of racial identities. Though there is power in naming and evaluating, multiraciality brings to light the complications associated with even the self-acceptance and promotion of identity in racial terms. The self-invention of mixed-race identity is precarious, since “to write about one’s mixed-race identity is as much to invent oneself or one’s racial group, as to describe them. One invents oneself, on paper, or as part of a theoretical inquiry because outside one’s activities as an intellectual, that is, outside the life of the mind, one has no secure racial existence.”⁶⁰ There is, indeed, a value to naming oneself and hence validating one’s racial existence, though in the case of multiraciality, the one does not necessarily follow the other. There is also, however, a danger in adopting racial labels, and reifying the racial project itself. Incorporating multiraciality as a means of self-identification secures the confines of ‘race’:

⁵⁹ Paul Spickhard, “The Illogic of American Racial Categories,” *Racially Mixed People in America*, ed. Maria P.P. Root (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1992) p. 21.

⁶⁰ Naomi Zack, “Life After Race,” *American Mixed-Race: The Culture of Microdiversity*, ed. Naomi Zack (London: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1995) p. 298.

Social identities belie simplicity, and the simplicity of bureaucratic-statistical requirements simply enforces the racializing imperative of the census and dominant social definition, and does so for political purposes. The general category of 'mixed race' and the specific subcategories of complexity, but cognizing it on (more precisely in) racial terms. Thus, 'mixed race' may seem to capture in most adequate fashion the prevailing demographic heterogeneity, but it does so only by silently fixing in place the racializing project. It naturalizes racial assumption, marking mixed-ness as an aberrant condition, as transgressive, and at the extreme as purity polluting.... Yet at once, and necessarily, reimposes the hegemony of racial duality - of blackness, of whiteness - as the standard, the mixture, of mixed-ness.⁶¹

There is epistemological violence in any racial label, so long as 'race' continues to be construed in essentialist terms reminiscent of the biological construction of race.

Moreover, the solidification of a 'mixed-race' category through which self-identity could occur would be misleading in nature; a new mixed-race classification "would suggest that there is an experience that ties all multiracial people together; any label utilized implies important continuity in experience. If all multiracial people have some basic background in common, what is it and how does it bind them?"⁶² The incorporation of all-encompassing racial labels fails to account for the unique circumstances of multiraciality; it is an individualistically based identity, as opposed to the collective nature of other racial identities. Often the mixed-race person can only identify with the members of his or her family group, as finding another with whom they can identify with along multiple racial lines is unlikely. Moreover, a 'mixed-race' label would be subject to the same essentialising gaze as other racial identities, which is not only discursively dangerous, but also undermines the very nature of multiraciality and the multiple possibilities and allegiances of racial identity carried with it. Indeed, often the only thing mixed-race people

⁶¹ David Theo Goldberg, "Made in the USA," *op. cit.*, p. 243.

⁶² Michael C. Thornton, "Is Multiracial Status Unique?" *op. cit.*, p. 324.

have in common with one another is their social status of being marginalised, ignored or Othered.

Amanda Marshall brings to light another cleft in the self-identification thesis when she sings, “Every time, recognise that who I am to you is not a lie. I don’t have to volunteer and say that I was born a particular way; I’ve got no uniform, I’m camouflaged in any light.”⁶³ Though, from a perspective of self-identification, mixed-race peoples are able to choose their own identity instead of having one imposed upon them, this self-derived identity still must be defined in racial terms. This self-imposition of a racial label works to solidify and naturalise ‘race,’ though the multiracial person typically understands better than most the dangers of assuming race and racial differences are indisputable. To identify the multiracial subject purely in terms of race (and/or gender, for that matter) is to reinvest in the myth of the incontestable similarities and differences in the racial characteristics of each separate racial group.⁶⁴

Self-identification, like imposed identity, (re)creates race as an integral, immutable essence of one’s identity. The subject cannot help but be defined through race, which is now “normalised through modernity’s discursive technologies of subject formation.”⁶⁵ Self-identification appears to provide multiracial people with unprecedented freedom of subjectivity: one is able to choose the racial group(s) with which he or she feels a sense of belonging. However, even the self-determination of one’s own identity is unable to escape the social construction of race:

⁶³ Amanda Marshall, “Double Agent,” *op. cit.*

⁶⁴ A. Stubblefield, “Racial Identity and Non-Essentialism About Race,” *op. cit.*, p. 358.

⁶⁵ David Theo Goldberg, *Racist Culture*, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

Whatever happened to self-identification, including the refusal to identify oneself racially? The denial of such a refusal, literally its abnegation, implies - if it does not presuppose - that race is primary, indeed, a primal category of human classification, one so natural to the human condition that it can be ignored only on pain of self-denial. Underlying the imperative of racial self-identification is the presumption of naturalism: One is expected to identify oneself as what one 'naturally' is....Those resisting literally become the 'new Others'.⁶⁶

Self-identification will continually reproduce race as a natural category, and as a result, the mixed-race subject will continue to be "marginalized within the margins...not being acknowledged as a significant part of the 'others' although one is categorized and oppressed within those broad margins."⁶⁷

Race, no matter which way we may examine it, depends on the exclusionist discourses that it was born of. A multiracial person who identifies as 'mixed' unknowingly reimposes the power and hegemony of the racial project - the same project that constructs multiraciality as a deviation from normalised, singular and static racial identities. This formulation of mixed-race, as it currently exists through the social construction of race, attempts to capture the heterogeneity and plurality of racial identities, yet can only do so by silently fixing racial categories in place. If we can acknowledge that race has been created over time in various ways, all of which involve relationships of power, domination and subjugation, this chapter's specific focus on multiraciality has demonstrated the necessity of recognising that the reification of essentialist racial categories through both imposed and self-identity will hardly result in an increased ability

⁶⁶ David Theo Goldberg, "Made in the USA," *American Mixed Race: The Culture of Microdiversity*, ed. Naomi Zack (London: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1995) pp. 242-243.

⁶⁷ Debra A. Barrath, "Race and Racism," *American Mixed Race: The Culture of Microdiversity*, ed. Naomi Zack (London: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1995) p. 283.

to dismantle these relationships of power responsible for the creation of racialised subjects. That is, as Stubblefield puts it, placing more of an emphasis on 'race' is unlikely to further the end of rendering 'race' insignificant.⁶⁸ We need to revisit the ways we think and talk about race, multiraciality and identity formation.

⁶⁸ A Stubblefield, "Racial Identity and Non-Essentialism About Race," *op. cit.*, p. 344.

Chapter Five:

A Reformulation of Multiraciality

*When my grandmother held me for the very first time,
 She thanked God that I looked like my daddy.
 And I never gave a damn just what she meant,
 But I knew she was a little too happy,
 And now I see:
 You can't change a stubborn mind,
 You can't see the world if your eyes are blind,
 What does it matter anyway?
 In our darkest hour, we're all just shades of grey.'*

'Race' is so helplessly ingrained in social discourse that it has become common sense. In whatever construction it embodies, 'race' is, indeed, one of the foremost societal perceptions of identity and difference. The various manifestations of race, however, are far from innocent incidences of history; within both the biological and social constructions of racial identity, 'race' and the classification systems which keep it firmly rooted in our vernacular conceptions of identity have been discussed as purposeful consequences of the discursive formulation of the concept itself. In other words, race is an incidence of power, exercised through juridical and normalised mechanisms of social thought and practice. The constitution of the mixed-race subject is no exception to this racial logic; rather, a specific focus on multiraciality has illustrated the complexities associated with the process of identity formation - a process which, unfortunately, is bound by the limits of this violent discourse.

Thus, the next logical question in our present line of reasoning must ask where can we go from here. Though the problematisation of 'race' and 'mixed-race' is important to our quest to increase our understanding of identity writ large, a never-ending reliance on deconstruction is problematic in and of itself. We cannot deconstruct concepts into

¹ Amanda Marshall, "Shades of Grey," *Tuesday's Child*, Sony Music, 1999.

oblivion, to the point where the world is nothing more than a figment of our over-active imaginations about which we can do nothing to change and/or improve. Instead, I contend that a reformulation of mixed-race identities is necessary; though it may not provide all the answers we seek, I believe it to be a critical first step to broaden our understandings of racial identity - and, indeed, identity in general - so we can loosen the choke hold that narrower and more confined visions of identity and difference have over the formulations of the racial subject.

This is a daunting endeavour, filled with theoretical contradictions, practical consequences and the danger of inapplicability in the 'real world'. Yet it is not impossible - the conceptualisation of the subject itself has changed obliquely over time - from the Enlightenment subject to the sociological subject - and therefore may do so again in the not-so-distant future. Much of this project, both explicitly and implicitly, has been concerned with the formation of subjects - specifically the formation of the mixed-race subject, the means by which it was and continues to be constituted and the way that 'mixed' subject-identities challenge us to rethink our conceptualisations of 'race' and identity writ large. To begin reformulating these complex issues, a valid starting point lies within the subject itself; or, more accurately, it lies *without* the subject. This is not an entire abandonment of the subject, though some argue that this line of reasoning will inevitably lead to its "death". Rather, in Foucault's terms, it is a 'decentring of the subject' and hence a displacement of the discourses, laws and normalisations that placed it in its precarious position today. Foucault contends that this process may occur through genealogy:

I don't believe that the problem can be solved by historicising the subject as posited by the phenomenologists, fabricating a subject that evolves through the course of history. One has to dispense with the constituent subject, to get rid of the subject itself, that's to say, to arrive at an analysis which can account for the constitution of the subject within a historical framework. And this is what I would call genealogy, that is, a form of history which can account for the constitution of knowledges, discourses, domains of objects, etc., without having to make reference to a subject which is either transcendental in relation to the field of events or runs in its empty sameness through the course of history.²

Just as placing more of an emphasis on race, continuing to reinforce racial categories and reify racial boundaries is unlikely to bring about an end to the discourses that keep the power of 'race' firmly in place, Foucault argues that a focus on the subject without paying heed to the knowledges and discourses that aided and abetted in its creation will continue the cycle of its domination. The task of genealogy, then is "to study the beginning - numberless beginnings, whose faint traces and hints of color are readily seen by a historical eye."³ Genealogical inquiry confirms that "there is no such thing as a neutral subject. We are all inevitably someone's adversary,"⁴ always recalling that "the history of some is not the history of others."⁵

Identity as it is rediscovered through genealogy cannot be an immobile dependence on essential characteristics that the 'self' carries with it throughout the course of its existence. It is "to discover that truth or being does not lie at the root of what we know

² Michel Foucault, "Truth and Power," *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980) p. 117.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

⁴ Michel Foucault, Michel Foucault, *Society Must be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-76*, trans. David Macey, eds., Francois Ewald and Alessandro Fontana (New York: Picador, 2003) p. 51.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

and what we are, but the exteriority of accidents.”⁶ It is through these ‘accidents’ that identity can be formulated - in conjunction with and struggles against subjective experiences, regimes of truth and other subjects in the midst of the same identity formation processes that we find ourselves. Genealogical inquiry cannot lead to a rediscovery of one’s identity; rather, it demonstrates the impossibility of constituting stable subject-identities at all:

The purpose of history, guided by genealogy, is not to discover the roots of our identity, but to commit itself to its dissipation. It does not seek to define our unique threshold of emergence, the homeland to which metaphysicians promise a return; it seeks to make visible all of those discontinuities that cross us....If genealogy in its own right gives rise to questions concerning our native land, native language, or the laws that govern us, its intention is to reveal the heterogeneous systems which, masked by the self, inhibit the formation of any form of identity.⁷

Foucault discovers that there are a multitude of social possibilities that do not fit into carefully fabricated hegemonic identities,⁸ and are thereby forgotten from history. This attempt to desubjugate historical knowledge reinserts difference into the equation - difference as it exists before regimes of truth turn it into otherness. This difference “appears everywhere, unstable, elusive - emblematic of the ineliminable excess through which beings escape from the clutches of identifying thought,”⁹ making it, as Foucault writes, once again possible to think. And it is within this genealogical opening of discursive space that multiraciality can finally find a place to situate itself.

⁶ Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rainbow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984) p. 81.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

⁸ Romand Coles, *Self/Power/Other: Political Theory and Dialogical Ethics*. (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1992) p. 77.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

This (re)formulation of multiraciality is difficult, as all (re)formulations of identity should be. For genealogy reveals the dissonance that makes identity possible - within the chaos, identity as a fluid and ephemeral process can manifest and grow. As Hall writes, we must view identification as a process of articulation - a process that will never properly fit into our constructed understandings of identity as the totality it claims to be.¹⁰ Without this dominating paradigm, we may not only earn the opportunity to reformulate our identities, but also the relationships they are dependent upon:

...what this decentring requires - as the evolution of Foucault's work clearly shows - is not an abandonment or abolition of 'the subject' but a reconceptualisation - thinking it in a new, displaced or decentred position within the paradigm. It seems to be in the attempt to rearticulate the relationship between subjects and discursive practices that the question of identity recurs - or, rather, if one prefers to stress the process of subjectification to discursive practices, and the politics of exclusion which all such subjectification appears to entail, the question of *identification*.¹¹

Within this context, the words of Goldberg, Musheno and Bower make sense - we seek "the death not of the subject this time, but rather of the agent, whoever she may be and wherever she may be found."¹² We now realise that there are other forces at play in the processes of racial identity formation, forces far beyond the control of any one, singular agent. This does not mean we are bound entirely by normalisations, truth regimes and the like; it does, however, require us to critically engage with those discourses that have positioned us on the spectrum of identities based on race, nation, gender, and sexual

¹⁰ Stuart Hall, "Who Needs 'Identity'?" *Questions of Cultural Identity*, eds. Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (London: Sage Publications, 1996) p. 3.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 2 [emphasis in original]

¹² David Theo Goldberg, Michael Musheno and Lisa C. Bower, "Shake Yo' Paradigm: Romantic Longing and Terror in Contemporary Sociolegal Studies," *Between Law and Culture: Relocating Legal Studies*, eds. David Theo Goldberg, Michael Musheno and Lisa C. Bower (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001) p. xiv.

orientation in order to become more aware of how to work with, through and, most importantly, against these forces and reconceptualise our placements within dictated social hierarchies and homogenised identities.

Lawrence Grossberg identifies four main theories within the politics of (racial) identity that seek to decentre the subject: *differance*, fragmentation, hybridity and diaspora. Though the four differ in origin, context, scope and applicability, each seeks to decentre the subject. The Derridian notion of *differance*, for example, is the representation that the subaltern is “an inherent ambiguity or instability at the centre of any formation of language (or identity) which constantly undermines language’s power to define a unified stable identity.”¹³ Similarly, fragmentation “emphasizes the multiplicity of identities and of positions within any apparent identity...Identities are thus always contradictory, made up out of partial fragments.”¹⁴ In linking identities to spatial locations and identifications, diaspora “emphasizes the historically spatial fluidity and intentionality of identity, its articulation to structures of historical movements (whether forced or chosen, necessary or desired).”¹⁵ And, perhaps most significant for discussions of multiraciality, Grossberg uses hybridity to describe different images of “border existences,” that is, wherein the subaltern lives on the border of its constructed identity, “neither one nor the other but...defined by its location in a unique spatial condition which constitutes it as different from either alternative.”¹⁶ The legacies of these theories are crucial for this project, as they

¹³ Lawrence Grossberg, “Identity and Cultural Studies: Is That All There Is?” *Questions of Cultural Identity*, eds. Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (London: Sage Publications, 1996) p. 90.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

serve as the foundations upon which the decentring of the subject can occur in the specific context of racial identity. Therein, identity is conceptualised as a process, not a certainty; fragmented instead of unified; complex, convoluted, complimentary and contrasting instead of fixed, solidified and once-and-for-all. Our task in decentring the mixed-race subject, therefore, is to “remove the fundamental element on which its functioning depends...to invalidate this alibi of an essence and to imagine ‘what the world and thought and truth might be if man did not exist’.”¹⁷ This is the crux of non-essentialist interpretations of racial identity - a theoretical means by which we may reformulate the constitution of the mixed-race subject.

Through non-essentialism, we realise that identity *must* be more than immutable characteristics. Thus, while essentialism grants inappropriate and excessive meaning to features that are “only skin deep,”¹⁸ a non-essentialist conception of race puts forth the notion that there is no unifying, identifiable essence to a given identity, racially, ethnically, or otherwise defined:

We are not born with a ‘self,’ but rather are composed of a wealth of partial, sometimes contradictory or even antithetical ‘selves’. A unified identity, if such can ever exist, is a product of will, not a common destiny or natural birthright. Thus, consciousness is ‘never fixed, never attained for once and for all’; it is not a final outcome or a biological given, but a process, a constant contradictory state of becoming, in which both social institutions and individual wills are deeply implicated. A multiple consciousness is home to both the first and second voices, and all the voices in between.¹⁹

¹⁷ Karlis Racevskis, “Michel Foucault, Rameau’s Nephew and the Question of Identity,” *The Final Foucault*, eds. James Bernauer and David Rasmussen (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1988) p. 24.

¹⁸ A. Stubblefield, “Racial Identity and Non-Essentialism About Race,” 21 *Social Theory and Practice*, p. 341.

¹⁹ Angela Harris, “Race and Essentialism in Feminist Legal Theory,” *Critical Race Theory: The Cutting Edge*, ed. R. Delgado (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995) p. 254.

Non-essentialism leaves identity formation as a fluid, ephemeral process that may or may not refer to race as a categorical determinant. Stuart Hall has identified non-essentialism as the new direction for cultural studies, marking the end of innocence, or, more specifically, the end of the innocent notion of 'the black subject'. He further argues:

The point is not simply that, since our racial differences do not constitute all of us, we are always different, negotiating different kinds of differences - of gender, of sexuality, of class. It is also that these antagonisms refuse to be neatly aligned; they are simply not reducible to one another; they refuse to coalesce around a single axis of differentiation. We are always in negotiation, not with a single set of oppositions that place us always in the same relation to others, but with a series of different positionalities. Each has for us its point of profound subjective identification. And that is the most difficult thing about this proliferation of the field of identities and antagonisms: they are often dislocating in relation to one another.²⁰

Above all else, non-essentialism brings the complexity of identity to light, striking at core matters of subject formation and conceptualisation. Identity is certainly not monopolised by race, nor does race operate on identity as its singular determinant. As Linda Alcoff argues, "the point here is not that racial identities are misidentified, but that race does not stand alone; race identity is mediated through other factors, political as well as sociological ones."²¹

Non-essentialism does not destroy the possibility of identifying as mixed-race completely, as one might think. Conceptualising 'race' without essences is drastically different than either of its biological or social constructions, but is not impossible; that is, a commitment to non-essentialism does not necessarily lead to the abolishment of 'race' -

²⁰ Stuart Hall, "What is this 'Black' in Black Popular Culture?" *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, eds. David Morley and Juan-Hsing Chen (London and New York: Routledge, 1996) p. 473.

²¹ Linda Alcoff, "Mestizo Identity," *American Mixed Race: The Culture of Microdiversity*, ed. Naomi Zack (London: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1995) p. 274.

or multiraciality - itself. Rather, non-essentialism provides the discursive space necessary to incorporate multiraciality into the politics of identity and difference without relegating these previously marginalised identities to liminality, without encountering the epistemological violence associated with the reification of discrete racial categories and reimposing a construction of race where essential characteristics serve as the determining factors in one's identity. Non-essentialism claims that stability is not needed for identity, and questions whether or not the solidification of any identity is possible:

...this concept of identity does not signal that stable core of the self, unfolding from beginning to end through all the vicissitudes of history without change; the bit of the self which remains always-already 'the same,' identical to itself across time...it accepts that identities are never unified and, in late modern times, intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions. They are subject to a radical historicization, and are constantly in the process of change and transformation.²²

A non-essentialist interpretation of multiraciality demonstrates the flaw in previous essentialised constructions which position mixed-race people within categories of hierarchised racial identities. It recognises that identities are unstable points of identification, "which are made, within the discourses of history and culture. Not an essence, but a *positioning*. Hence, this is always a politics of identity, a politics of position, which has no absolute guarantee in an unproblematic, transcendental 'law of origin'."²³

Recent approaches to the politics of identity have stressed the fragmentation in identity itself, and this is especially applicable for the mixed-race subject as it provides a

²² Stuart Hall, "Who Needs 'Identity'?" *op. cit.*, pp. 3-4.

²³ Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. J. Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990) p. 226. [emphasis in original]

new theoretical means by which its conceptualisation can occur. The multitude of identities that the mixed-race person possesses in different contexts - including internally - fits well with the non-essentialist contention that 'race' cannot be a static, fixed identity. In this context, a reconceptualisation of identity formation is necessary - identities are not created from that stable, static and singular sense of being that espouses essential characteristics, but rather are formulated from a lack of wholeness, the play of identities and differences wherein each compliments and contradicts the other over the course of the subject's lifetime. As Hall writes,

Thus, identity is actually something formed through unconscious processes over time, rather than being innate in consciousness at birth. There is always something 'imaginary' or fantasized about its unity. It always remains incomplete, is always 'in the process,' always 'being formed'....Thus, rather than speaking of identity as a finished thing, we should speak of identification, and see it as an on-going process. Identity arises, not so much from the fullness of identity which is already inside us as individuals, but from a *lack* of wholeness which is 'filled' from *outside us*, by the ways we imagine ourselves to be seen by others.²⁴

As the relative contexts in which identities and differences may manifest change, so too does the subject's identity itself. Indeed, this reminds us of the multitude of identity-choices that the mixed-race subject is often faced with; even within the social construction of race, "it is probable that many have fluid identities that adjust to their immediate surroundings."²⁵ All people - in spite of race, class, gender - are constantly negotiating and renegotiating their identities throughout time. There is no final destination for these identities; in fact, within each given identity lies a host of fragmentations and antagonisms

²⁴ Stuart Hall, Stuart Hall, "The Question of Cultural Identity." *Modernity*, eds. S. Hall, D. Held, D. Hubert and K. Thompson (Oxford & Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1996) p. 608.

²⁵ Robin Miller, "The Human Ecology of Multiracial Identity," *Racially Mixed People in America*, ed. Maria P.P. Root (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1992) p. 33.

that refuse to be neatly aligned. With this conceptualisation of the entirety of identity - or lack thereof - multiraciality is no longer the exception to the normalised rule of racial identities, for such a rule cannot possibly be based on a fluctuating precept. Without these static categories to form norms and norms based on their difference from the original norms, there can be no "Other," for there is no stable "Self" by which the Other is identified. In effect, non-essentialism brings humanity back into the equation.

Yet, there is often a disconnect between critical theory and practice. Today, multiraciality is considered an ubiquitous racial identity. The power and prominence of race has not diminished since the advent of postmodernism's non-essentialist theories of identity and difference, whose emergence is often articulated in the ivory tower of academia, but rarely on the streets of North America. Non-essentialism is a useful concept for the reformulation of both multiraciality and the discourses that produce(d) it, yet it fails to identify how this reformulation can be translated into practice, or "how a politics can be constructed which works with and through difference, which is able to build those forms of solidarity and identification which make common struggle and resistance possible but without suppressing the real heterogeneity of interests and identities..."²⁶ As such, it often makes identity appear as no more than an illusion:

In this sense, identifications belong to the imaginary; they are phantasmatic efforts of alignment, loyalty, ambiguous and cross-corporeal cohabitations, they unsettle the I; they are the sediment of the 'we' in the constitution of any I, the structuring present of alterity in the very formulation of the I. Identifications are never fully and finally made; they are incessantly reconstituted, and, as such, are subject to the volatile logic of

²⁶ Stuart Hall, "New Ethnicities," *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, eds. David Morley and Juan-Hsing Chen (London and New York: Routledge, 1996) p. 444.

iterability. They are that which is constantly marshalled, consolidated, retrenched, contested, and, on occasion, compelled to give way.²⁷

The difficulty in making the “illusionary” principles of non-essentialism more applicable to everyday life is more than a typical problem of the delineation of theory and practice. Rather, our need to continue thinking in essentialist terms strikes at core matters of the conceptualisations of identities. In the case of mixed-race people, they have for so long been searching for that coherent sense of self denied to them in the various constructions of race that essential ways of conceptualising identity seem to be the only option available.

Moreover, as long as the rest of the world is still thinking in essentialist terms, the tangible benefits of perceiving identity as a fluid process are few and far between, for one cannot forget that a significant element within identity formation - essentialist or not - is the social recognition of these identities. While non-essentialism may be able to alter our conceptions of identity itself, it does not negate the need for recognition of these identities, no matter how fluid and fragmented they may be. Linda Alcoff points out that the “nomadic subjectivity” of non-essentialism cannot amend the practical difficulties associated with being mixed-race:

Unfortunately, nomadic subjectivity works no better than assimilationist doctrine to interpellate mixed identity: the nomad self is bounded to no community and represents an absence of identity rather than a multiply entangled identity. This is not the situation of mixed-race peoples who have deep (even if problematic) ties to specific communities; to be a free-floating unbound variable is not the same as being multiply categorized and ostracized by specific racial communities.²⁸

²⁷ Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter* (London: Routledge, 1993) p. 105.

²⁸ Linda Alcoff, “Mestizo Identity,” *op. cit.*, p. 270.

The difficulty of translating non-essentialism into practice brings to light another problem with its conceptualisation. Above, Alcoff rightly points out that mixed-race people often feel strong ties to particular racial communities, just as those who identify with specific 'races' do. Though the intent of non-essentialist interpretations of race is to validate identity formation as a fluid yet fragmented process influenced by the relative contexts of history, culture and society at large, it is often perceived to be ignorant of the value of identities. The deconstruction is critiqued as going too far; non-essentialist literature is accused of obliterating the self - murdering the subject. After identifying the "second problem of evil" as the transformation of difference to otherness, William Connolly rhetorically asks, "is it possible to counter the second problem of evil without eliminating the functions served by identity?"²⁹

Closely related to Connolly's musings is a discourse that has been strongly criticised for ignoring the positive and empowering uses of 'race'. This discourse is the home of strategic essentialists such as Gayatri Spivak, who once again asks, where would we be without a touch of essentialism?³⁰ Though 'race' was - and still is - a powerful tool of domination, it also holds potential for the empowerment of subordinate racial groups, who have reclaimed dominant language and the discourse itself as their own. From a practical point of view, therefore, 'race' is not wholly negative; it is "a positive tool, a source of belonging, mutual help and self-esteem. Racial categories...identify a set of

²⁹ William Connolly, *Identity/Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002) p. 8.

³⁰ As quoted in Stuart Hall, "What is this 'Black' in Black Popular Culture?" *op. cit.*, p. 472.

people with whom to share a sense of identity and common experience.”³¹ Choosing to deconstruct the paradigms of essentialist language, non-essentialism is incompatible with recognising the legitimacy of racial identification for any reason.³² In light of both the embedded nature of essentialism and racial categorisation and the positive possibilities of ‘race’ redefined by those it subordinates, some feminist theorists have abandoned non-essentialism, opting instead for the “strategic essentialism” discussed in the previous chapter. The multiracial version of strategic essentialism is advocated by social movements like Project R.A.C.E (Reclassify All Children Equally), which strives to incorporate mixed-race categories on all census forms used in the American education system and beyond.³³

The biological and social constructions of race, it seems, will continue to hold their prominent places in the psyches and consciences of societies. For, as Paul Gilroy points out, while the demise of ‘race’ is not something to be feared, the concept itself will not be likely given up lightly.³⁴ Yet, between essentialism and non, theory and practice, there must be a happy medium through which multiraciality can exist *within* the discourses of identity as opposed to outside of them or on their peripheries. This “happy medium” refers not to finding a coherent and substantive affirmation - or even comprehension - of the mixed-race subject, but rather tasks us with finding a means by or through which multiraciality can be spoken and thought of as a valid identity choice in

³¹ Paul Spickhard, “The Illogic of American Racial Categories,” *Racially Mixed People in America*, ed. Maria P. P. Root (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1992) p. 19.

³² A. Stubblefield, “Racial Identity and Non-Essentialism About Race,” *op. cit.*, p. 344.

³³ See <http://www.projectrace.com>

³⁴ Paul Gilroy, *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000) p. 12.

both theory and practice, discourse and society. For, above all theoretical rhetoric, we must recognise that while “the mixed-race subject” refers to abstract conceptions of identity and difference, it also represents mixed-race individuals - real people with real lives who experience the real consequences of mixed-race identity. The happy medium is found in exploration rather than reconciliation. Thus, for this task we take heed of Connolly’s insightful challenge to think within the code of the paradox, for attentiveness to ambiguities within identity formation may finally loosen the hold that the monotonic standards of identity have over late modern life.³⁵ The most appropriate response to the politics of identity, Connolly argues, is “not merely to reconsider the structure of some identities generally endorsed today, but to reconsider the way in which individuals and collectivities experience identities invested in them.”³⁶ With all the previously identified criticisms of not only the biological and social constructions of race, but also with the paradigm of non-essentialism, how can we effectively “think within the code of the paradox”? And to what end will this thinking take us?

To some, non-essentialism may seem like a waste of effort; particular racial identities are imposed on *everyone* and is unlikely to stop in the foreseeable future. The violent epistemology of the misrecognition of mixed-race identities will most likely continue, as will the vernacular and discursive interpretation of multiraciality as a deviation from other normalised and supposedly “pure” racial identities. For the multiracial person, questions such as “what are you?” or “where are you *really* from?”

³⁵ William Connolly, *Identity/Difference*, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.160.

will probably remain a daily occurrence, again reaffirming the ambivalent, transgressive and (perceived) problematic nature of mixed-race identity. Yet, I maintain, and will forever do so, that there is hope. The challenge is not to dismantle the concept of 'race', for as Maria Root recognises, eliminating 'race' at this point in history is simply not possible.³⁷ Though we may problematise racial identity for all the assumptions and flaws it possesses, its theoretical deconstruction can do very little for the systemic and substantive racism that plagues North American societies. Our task, therefore, is to rethink "race" and its relation to the politics of identity in the hopes of, once again, keeping the debate open, thinking outside the boxes that require us to check one and only one racial identity that applies, reconceptualising the discourse surrounding the politics of identity in order to bring multiraciality back from the margins to whence it has been assigned. Accepting that essentialism is unavoidable - for the moment - is not admitting defeat in the battle against it. As Craig Calhoun writes:

We cannot really stop thinking at least partially in categories - and therefore in at least something rather like an essentialist manner. Just as Derrida suggests we can never entirely escape from metaphysics however critical we are of it we may become, our task must be to remain seriously self-critical about our invocations of essence and identity. This means among other things paying attention to the agonistic, fractured, problematic aspects of identity. The politics have to be taken seriously. The struggles occasioned by identity politics need to be understood, however, not as simply between those who claim different identities but within each subject as the multiple and contending discourses of our era challenge any of our efforts to attain stable self-recognition or coherent subjectivity.³⁸

³⁷ Maria P.P. Root, "Five Mixed-Race Identities: From Relic to Revolution," *New Faces in a Changing America: Multiracial Identity in the 21st Century*, eds. Herman DeBose and Loretta Winters (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2003) p. 17.

³⁸ Craig Calhoun, *Critical Social Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1995) p. 204.

Just as there is power in 'race' and constructed meanings, I believe there to be an equally formidable power in debate, in the function served by questioning the nature and power of concepts. Calhoun notes that the road forward from the stagnation of contemporary, essentialist discourses lie in "the proliferation of the theoretical and practical tools with which we can confront problems of identity and difference,"³⁹ and while these tools shall never be absolute in scope and applicability, their potential to (re)open the debates surrounding the formation of racial identity and difference is far more than sufficient to render them both useful and crucial.

One of these many tools used to reconsider racial identity, for example, is Bhabha's notion of hybridity. This notion reminds us of multiraciality for its description of border existences, where the subaltern is described by its positioning "in-between". Bhabha contends that hybridity is strongly related to cultural authority:

Strategies of hybridization reveal an estranging movement in the 'authoritative', even authoritarian inscriptions of the cultural sign. At the point at which the precept attempts to objectify itself as a generalized knowledge or a normalizing, hegemonic practice, the hybrid strategy or discourse opens up a space of negotiation where power is unequal but its articulation may be equivocal. Such negotiation is neither assimilation nor collaboration. It makes possible the emergence of an 'interstitial' agency that refuses the binary representation of social antagonism. Hybrid agencies find their voice in a dialectic that does not seek cultural supremacy or sovereignty. They deploy the partial culture from which they emerge to construct visions of community, and versions or historic memory, that give narrative form to the minority positions they occupy; the outside of the inside; the part in the whole.⁴⁰

I believe this project's discussion of multiraciality to be Bhabha's proposition exemplified. My purpose herein has been to utilise a rarely considered vantage point - that

³⁹ *Id.*

⁴⁰ Homi K. Bhabha, "Culture's In-Between," *Questions of Cultural Identity*, eds. Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (London: Sage Publications, 1996) p. 58.

of the mixed-race subject - to open “a space of negotiation” surrounding the construction of racial identities. Indeed, Goldberg identifies mixed-race formation as an ambivalent challenge to the racial condition, tugging “dangerously at the limits of the racializing discourse it at once invokes, straddling ambiguously the sites of double consciousness - in and out of the racializing mode, rejecting as it defines itself in and through racial terms, dismissing as it reifies the racial project.”⁴¹ As I have said before, multiraciality should never be considered the be-all and end-all solution to what Gilroy labels as “raciology,” for even the term “mixed-race” reifies the racial project to a certain extent. However, I would also argue that multiraciality poses a unique challenge to the articulations that have formed race and entrenched it and its hierarchies in their contemporarily privileged positions in our societies.

We have solid grounds for proposing the challenge to rethink race. These bases were present long before the literature on mixed-race identity began to emerge, yet are complimented by multiraciality’s unique circumstances. The current categorisations cannot continue to grasp at their essentialist legacies; as demographics continue to change, issues of ‘belonging’ and ‘recognition’ will surface with more and more force. The argument to incorporate a new “mixed-race” category on census forms, though useful for highlighting the illogical nature of legalised and codified racial categories, will prove to be useless in the struggles to combat racism and to gain social acceptance for those who identify as ‘mixed’. What is required is an open avenue for discussion, for deconstruction

⁴¹ David Theo Goldberg, “Made in the USA,” *American Mixed Race: The Culture of Mictodiversity*, ed. Naomi Zack (London: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1995) p. 254.

and critical analyses to occur. As we write and explore, we may just abandon that “romantic longing for a coherent subject”⁴² and view identities as “questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not ‘who we are’ or ‘where we came from,’ so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves.”⁴³ Really then, in some way we are all mixed - fitting in neither here nor there, striving to gain social acceptance only to find it rooted in misrecognition, searching for that sense of belonging that others seem to take for granted, struggling to find a place somewhere, anywhere, where we can show our true colours - whatever they may be. Only through debate, discussion, contention, controversy, reformulations and rearticulations may we begin to search not for more answers - but more questions.

⁴² David Theo Goldberg, Michael Musheno and Lisa C. Bower, “Shake Yo’ Paradigm: Romantic Longing and Terror in Contemporary Sociolegal Studies,” *op. cit.*, p. xiii.

⁴³ Stuart Hall, “Who Needs ‘Identity’?” *op. cit.*, p. 4.

Chapter Six:

Conclusion

"Now here, you see, it takes all the running you can do, to stay in the same place. If you want to get somewhere else, you must run at least twice as fast as that!"¹

"Who in the world am I? Ah, that's the great puzzle."²

The theoretical question driving this project, that of how the mixed-race subject is constituted in both the biological and social constructions of race, has proven to be much more multifaceted and complex than it seems at first glance. In order to build a theoretical case surrounding multiraciality, it was necessary to rely on a wide range of literature, concerning the constructions of both 'race' and multiraciality. In addition, Foucauldian theory was utilised in order to explore the relationship between racial subjects and societies writ large, as Michel Foucault's many writings on discipline, biopolitics, biopower, truth, knowledge, power, and normalisation proved to be quite applicable to discussions of racial identities. Following trends in cultural studies literature, this project examined the two major constructions of 'race' - biological and social - in order to explore the manner in which multiraciality is formulated within each.

Chapter Three identified the biological construction of race as a set of correlating beliefs: that physiological, morphological and cognitive differences among 'races' exist; that these traits or essences are transmitted through blood; that these differences could be judged; and that distinct and separate 'races' could and should be ordered into a hierarchy of humanity. In this formulation, 'race' is metaphorical of a battle of biology, yet from the sixteenth century onwards the belief in biological differences among races and the necessity of creating and maintaining a racial hierarchy became a real way of thinking.

¹ Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*.

² Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass*.

Thus, the most important thing about 'races' were the boundaries among them; these boundaries were constructed as permanent, impermeable and fundamentally crucial in order to maintain racial hierarchies - and the domination of 'Whites' over other races. Through two manifestations of the biological construction of race - racial aesthetics and bloodlines - the mixed-race subject was relegated to a state of liminality, being neither 'here' nor 'there'. Liminality was not an individual choice of racelessness, but rather was the negation of multiraciality itself. For example, through an emphasis on racial aesthetics, racial mixing was perceived as racial pollution, a threat to the pristine purity of the White race. Society, divided in broad strokes of black and white, negated the possibility that a person could be both simultaneously. The multiracial phenomenon of 'passing' erupted, yet this occurrence was not a solidification of mixed-race identity. Rather, it worked to confirm that individuals were perceived as either black, white, yellow or red, but not any combination of the four. Likewise, with blood quantum as the determinant of racial identity, the legally enshrined rules of hypodescent in parts of the United States dictated that any person with one drop of 'Black blood' was legally and socially 'Black'. Mixed-race people represented racial pollution, dirtiness and contamination - mudbloods, as J.K. Rowling has insightfully pointed out. The biological construction of race's reliance on racial bloodlines relegates multiracial people to a state of liminality, as this construction dictated that mixed-race people could only identify as the non-white dimension of his or her racial identity.

Though the social construction of race does not position the mixed-race subject to a state of liminality, a specific focus on its formulation of multiraciality demonstrates that

it is still inherently problematic. Though the law no longer acts with its oppressive and dominating character (as seen in discussions of the biological construction of race), Foucault's writings remind us that law is not the only means of ensuring a particular standard of social behaviour. Within this construction, 'White' is normalised as the standard measure of identity, against which other monoracial identities are normalised as Other (non-white). Yet mixed-race identities are neither; they are a deviation from both the norm and the anti-norm, and hence the racially ordered organisation of a given society. A focus on multiraciality problematises two tenets of the social construction of race - essentialism and the reification of racial categories. Mixed-race, as a transgressive identity, poses a threat to monolithic, essentialist modes of categorising identities, proving that the boundaries that separate races are man-made; the borders we have created cannot be fixed or secured. Mixed-race also demonstrates the hidden frameworks of social power that permeate these racial borders; the reification of race, even in its social construction, is a locus of epistemological violence when it reproduced as natural, fixed, and once-and-for-all. The social construction of race operates through either imposed or self-identity, yet within both the formulation of multiraciality is problematic. Imposed identities usually reinforce the monoracial categories that have dominated both societies and discourses for the past five centuries. It reduces the complex and never-ending process of identity formation to a matter of physical appearance, for imposed identity is always externally ascribed. For the mixed-race subject, imposed identity is dangerous and violent - it is a matter of both the misrecognition and/or the absence of recognition of mixed-race identities. Though self-identity may seem to alleviate some of the concerns which

surround imposed identity, it is still problematic for the mixed-race subject, as self-identification does not change the need for the social recognition of identities, as the Supreme Court of Canada's test for Métis identity illustrates. Furthermore, identifying as mixed-race still reifies racial knowledge, indicating that there may be a mixed-race 'race' though there is no collective basis to form a mixed-race community in North America - those who identify as mixed-race often have nothing in common, other than not being accepted by various monoracial groups.

In order to reformulate the discursive construction of multiraciality, my project turned again to Michel Foucault, who encourages what he calls the 'decentring of the subject'. Though some contend that this line of reasoning will inevitably lead to the death of the subject, I believe it to rather promote the view that identities are not formed in a vacuum - there are other social processes and powers at play that we must acknowledge and give heed. This decentring of the subject applied to the formulation of racial identities leads to a non-essentialist interpretation of racial identities, in effect arguing that identity is a process of articulation - never complete, never fixed. Non-essentialist interpretations of racial identity provide the discursive space necessary to incorporate multiraciality into the policies of identity without relegating these identities to liminality and without encountering the epistemological violence of essentialism or reification of discrete racial categories. Identity is formed not from the stable sense of self, but rather from the lack of a coherent, whole subject. Yet non-essentialism is not the be-all and end-all solution to the (re)formulation of multiraciality. The problems with non-essentialism are multiple - it does nothing to change practice, the reification of racial categories or racism and it cannot

acknowledge the positive nature of race nor the merits of strategic essentialism. This project maintains, however, that there is hope. Though we cannot 'write ourselves out of race,' our task is to rethink it and to continue to question the premises upon which it relies in an effort to keep the dialogue open.

This project has argued that multiraciality is an untapped resource for theoretical discussions of the politics of (racial) identity. Through this specific focus, much of what theorists in cultural studies and beyond have contended is well applied - identity is far more than the stagnant, 'assigned-at-birth' conception it is often perceived to be. More to the point, though, multiraciality complicates the constitution of racial identities by introducing previously underutilised variables in the equation, including aesthetics, appearance, culture, recognition, belonging, and human agency. These components of identity are significant for those of mixed-race heritage and often represent barriers to acceptance in racially defined groups. This inquiry's focus on the construction of mixed-race identities has demonstrated the continuing role of law and normalisation in the politics of identity; the formulation of multiraciality in both the biological and social constructions of race have shaped our vernacular understandings of racial identity, illustrating the permanency and power of 'race' and racial classification even as we enter the twenty-first century. This project has also exposed the both inherent constructed-ness, inadequacy and perhaps even the absurdity of relying on 'race' as a mechanism of dividing and classifying humanity into categorical determinants and the epistemological violence of racial classifications in general.

Above all else, this project has identified a need to rethink 'race' and racial identity in both word and deed. Though a non-essentialist interpretation of racial identity - or any other determinant of identity, for that matter - is far from unproblematic, I believe it to be a preliminary and crucial step in the right direction. Identity is more than checking a box on a census form. It must be more than that, for why else would it mean so much to so many people? We cannot continue to think through categories created for and by a different era, nor can we be satisfied with constructions of identity that reduce the range of our life experiences to singular, essential descriptions. As with most components of critical theory, this discussion leaves us with more questions than answers. Yet I believe this to be progressive rather than problematic; the purpose of this project was one of exploration and discussion, rather than of prescription. This project is an endeavour to reformulate the discourse on 'race' and identity in contemporary times, for, as Maria Root argues, "we must reopen the dialogue on race. The existence of multiracial people provides a concrete vehicle through which we can explore how times have changed. Despite widespread racism, there is also hope that change is underway."³ Non-essentialism, flawed though it may be, holds the promise of change. We must continue to question the assumptions that society has too long believed to be Truth, (re)opening the discourses on race, mixed-race, identity and difference, as "it *can* be won. There is a politics to be struggled for."⁴ This reformulation of multiraciality contends that

³ Maria P.P. Root, "The Multiracial Contribution to the Browning of America," *American Mixed-Race: The Culture of Microdiversity*, ed. Naomi Zack (London: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1995) p. 236.

⁴ Stuart Hall, "What is this 'Black' in Black Popular Culture?" *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, eds. David Morley and Juan-Hsing Chen (London and New York: Routledge, 1996) p. 474.

characteristics that are 'only skin deep' may just be, in fact, *only* skin deep. After all, as William Connolly puts it, "life exceeds identity."⁵

⁵ William Connolly, *Identity/Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002) p. 170.

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