“Founding Mothers:” White Mothers of Biracial Children in the Multiracial Movement (1979-2000)

by

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INTRODUCTION: INTERROGATING MULTIRACIAL ADVOCACY

In early November 2010, I interrupted my junior semester abroad in Lima, Peru, to attend the Critical Mixed Race Studies Conference hosted by DePaul University in Chicago. I had been asked to participate in a roundtable discussion regarding the student forum I co-created and co-taught the fall semester of my sophomore year at Wesleyan University entitled, “Mixed Heritage Identity in Contemporary America.” After speaking only Spanish for three months, I found myself clumsy and thick-tongued in English as I attempted to describe my experience as a student facilitator and my involvement with mixed race activism. Later in the day, DePaul featured another roundtable entitled, “Community-Based Multiracial Movements: Learning from the Past, Looking toward the Future.” Representatives from multiracial organizations MAVIN; Swirl, Inc.; Mixed Roots Film & Literary Festival; Multiracial Americans of Southern California (MASC); Lovingday.org; and Biracial Family Network (BFN) Chicago led the discussion. I have been involved with mixed heritage politics since the age of fifteen, when I was an intern at Seattle’s MAVIN Foundation, a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization that deals specifically with mixed heritage issues. I was already aware of the history of the Multiracial Movement and some of its internal tensions. It was not until I attended the DePaul roundtable, however, that I began to question some of the movement’s more unusual historical characteristics.

The roundtable format was fairly open. Jenee Jahn, president of MAVIN, posed a series of questions to the other featured representatives and then welcomed questions from the roundtable’s attendees. One woman in the audience asked the
organizations’ representatives how they felt the history of the Multiracial Movement had impacted the current state of mixed race politics. Robin Tillmon, the multiracial president of BFN Chicago, began her response by pointing to an older white woman in the back of the room and saying, “Well, first, we have to thank women like Irene Carr, who took the first steps to form organizations like Biracial Family Network and put multiracial issues out there for the public to see.” The room full of mixed heritage activists and allies burst into thunderous applause and whistles. Carr smiled and inclined her head graciously. I clapped along, but was internally stunned by the overwhelmingly positive response Tillmon’s statement had generated. In the history of the Multiracial Movement, white mothers of biracial children created and ran the very first organizations to campaign for multiracial interests. While it is thus understandable to thank “founding mothers” like Carr, no one appeared to acknowledge the specter of racial ventriloquism—when one racial group, particularly a more privileged group, speaks for another racial group’s needs and interests—that such white female leadership raises. Furthermore, no one explicitly acknowledged that this particular feature of the Multiracial Movement distinguishes it from all other American ethnic power movements. The Multiracial Movement is the only ethnic power movement started for a minority group by non-group members (in this case, white women). I was intrigued both by the multiracial activists’ response to Carr, and by this facet of the Multiracial Movement’s history.

In light of my experience at DePaul, I wanted to examine the questions: What “external” socio-historic and “internal” psychological and emotional factors led to the strong involvement of white mothers of biracial black-white children in the
Multiracial Movement, and how did these factors influence the ways in which the women engaged in multiracial politics (if at all), up until multiracial recognition on the 2000 census?

Note: Census 2000 was the first census on which American citizens could “mark one or more” racial backgrounds. This change in racial data tabulation was the result of years of campaigning on the part of multiracial organizations (organizations founded for and by mixed race people) and interracial family organizations (organizations founded and run primarily by white mothers of biracial children for multiracial interests). Census 2000 was a major focus of the Multiracial Movement and mixed race politics.

The Multiracial Movement

In the framework of this thesis, I define the Multiracial Movement as beginning in 1979 with the founding of the very first interracial family organization, Interracial/Intercultural Pride (I-Pride) in California’s Bay Area. A collective of monoracial parents of biracial children banded together to create a social space that would address the unique experiences of interracially married adults and their multiracial children. Although I-Pride began as a social organization, eventually the exchange of parenting grievances and advice naturally segued into political action. Members became politically involved to combat common parenting issues such as racial classification for multiracial children on school and medical forms.

After I-Pride set the precedent, between 1980 and 2000, over sixty interracial family groups were founded across the nation. Dissatisfaction with “check one only” racial classification on federal and state forms was an overarching commonality
between groups, and eventually set the stage for the Multiracial Movement’s focus on multiracial recognition on the 2000 census, which is at the heart of this thesis.

Among the multiracial literature reviewed for this senior thesis, scholars such as Heather Dalmage, Kimberly DaCosta, and Eric Hamako use Cynthia Nakashima’s definition of the Multiracial Movement, which seeks to encompass all of the movement’s diverse parts. Nakashima asserts that the Multiracial Movement was a coalition of

“community organizations, campus groups, magazines and newsletters, academic research and writing, university courses, creative expression, and political activism – all created and done by mixed-race individuals and members of interracial families, with the purpose of voicing their own experiences, opinions, issues, and interests.”¹ (Author’s emphasis)

This thesis focuses specifically on interracial family organizations involved in the Multiracial Movement, though Nakashima emphasizes the academic and public nature that defined the movement it in its later years (mid to late 90s) in her work.

The Multiracial Movement was composed of many different activists with diverse interests. Scholars, white mothers of multiracial children, conservative politicians, conservative multiracials, liberal multiracials, and monoracial civil rights organizations all participated in the national struggle over multiracial recognition in the mid to late 90s. The federal government’s Office of Management and Budget (OMB) planned to redefine racial categories for the 2000 census; interracial family groups and multiracial activists jumped at the opportunity to gain formal racial recognition.

The pre-movement socio-political climate (1970s, 80s and 90s) was marked by an increase in federal racial data collection as part of anti-discrimination legislation passed during Lyndon B. Johnson’s Great Society programs in the 1960s, a heightened racial awareness and minority racial group solidarity after the 1970s ethnic power movements (Black Power, Red Power, Brown Power, and Yellow Power), and more equal interracial interaction in a desegregated public sphere. This environment was at once both favorable and hostile towards interracial unions and multiracial children. On the one hand, black-white interracial marriage increased 300% from 1970 to 2000 alone. Increased racial equality allowed more egalitarian interracial partnerships, which, in turn, produced children more likely to feel equal kinship to both of their parents and thus identify multiracially. On the other hand, due to the heightened emphasis on racial pride and solidarity within minority groups, interracial unions were often viewed as racial betrayals by both white and non-white communities. White mothers—primarily of black-white biracial children—founded interracial family groups like I-Pride to create “safe spaces” in which both parents and children could socialize with people with whom they identified.

Eventually, white mothers of biracial children in interracial family groups began to actively campaign for multiracial recognition on local school and hospital forms. Gradually, the politics of recognition moved to the forefront of multiracial advocacy, and eventually led to both interracial family and multiracial groups’ lobbying the federal government for formal recognition on the 2000 census.

Methodology

In this senior thesis, I use the words “mixed race,” “multiracial,” and “mixed heritage” interchangeably to describe individuals of two or more federally defined racial or ethnic backgrounds: Hispanic/Latin@, White, Black/African American, Asian, Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian, and Native American/Alaska Native. I also distinguish between interracial (between races), transracial (across races), multiracial (of multiple races), biracial (of two races), and monoracial (of a single race).

To address my multi-part research question, I began by investigating each aspect of it separately. Although I hypothesized that the emotional and psychological experiences of interracially married white women in the 1970s and 80s played a role in their involvement with multiracial politics, I did not want to assume that there was a link between the two. I began to investigate whiteness theory to develop a theoretical framework for my analysis of the women’s racial identities, particularly focusing on the work of Ruth Frankenberg, George Lipsitz, Mab Segrest, and David Roediger. I also examined psychological studies on white racial identity formation, particularly Janet Helms’s white racial identity development (WRID) model, to gain a sense of what a “normative” white racial identity entails (see Appendix VII for Helms’s model). I then turned to psychological and sociological studies by scholars Margaret O’Donoghue and Terri Ann Karis on the specific racial identity development of white mothers of biracial black-white children, some of whom were involved in interracial family groups, but most of whom were not.

In this senior thesis, I focus specifically on mothers of black-white biracial children. While the Multiracial Movement encompassed a wide range of multiracial
activists, the original interracial family groups to campaign for multiracial interests were disproportionately founded and attended by white mothers of black-white biracial children.\textsuperscript{3} Thus, these women are the subjects of my research.

I discovered that involvement in interracial relationships and families affected how white women broadly viewed themselves and their racial identities. Their racial identities and process of racial identity formation differed greatly from the processes outlined by the Whiteness Studies scholars I had first read. Based on Karis and O’Donoghue’s studies, I outlined trends of white mothers of biracial children’s racial identity development, then extrapolated this data to white mothers of biracial black-white children involved in the Multiracial Movement. My analysis operates under the assumption that interracially married white women in the 1970s, 80s and 90s developed certain common ways of coping with racial issues, regardless of whether or not they chose to become involved with multiracial politics. To substantiate my work, I also consulted Heather Dalmage’s article, “Protecting racial comfort, protecting white privilege,” which focuses specifically on the racial identity construction of white mothers involved in interracial family groups.\textsuperscript{4}

While scholars like O’Donoghue and Karis have investigated the racial identity development of white mothers of biracial black-white children, none have situated this information in the trajectory of the Multiracial Movement. Similarly, numerous scholars (Rainier Spencer, Kim M. Williams, Kimberly DaCosta, and Eric

\begin{footnotes}
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Hamako, for example) have researched and criticized the role of white mothers in the Multiracial Movement, but failed to account for white women’s racial identity development or position as mothers. I seek to nuance these scholars’ criticism by investigating how both personal racial identity formation and the institution of family affected white mothers’ political choices during the Multiracial Movement. My senior thesis serves as the link between both scholarly bodies of work in an attempt to complicate the dominant discourses of Critical Mixed Race Studies that alternately vilify or glorify the contributions of white “founding mothers” to multiracial politics.

To ensure that my decision to link the racial experiences of white mothers of biracial children interviewed by Karis, Dalmage and O’Donoghue to white mothers involved in multiracial politics was accurate, I personally interviewed two original members of I-Pride as well as the founder and current president of another interracial family group, Project Reclassify All Children Equally (Project RACE). I conducted semi-structured interviews with the goal of learning more about the history of the organizations the women participated in and how each became involved in multiracial politics (see Appendices II-VI for interview transcripts, and Appendix I for the permission form used in each interview).

Throughout this senior thesis, I use testimonies from my own interviewees as well as those of women interviewed in studies by Karis, Dalmage, and O’Donoghue to support my arguments. I treat interviews and interview material as oral histories: qualitative rather than quantitative data. I focus specifically on the group Project RACE and its founder, Susan Graham, to illustrate the ways in which Graham’s racial identity informed her political decisions. Project RACE was one of the only
intraracial family groups to maintain its white female leadership into the Census 2000 “race debate” over multiracial recognition. Graham championed a standalone “Multiracial” racial category over a “mark one or more” option advocated by multiracial collective, AMEA (Association of Multi-Ethnic Americans). She, in particular, has been censured by monoracial civil rights groups like the NAACP, multiracial scholars and activists alike. I complicate such criticism by foregrounding material from my interviews with Graham in my last chapter.

Chapter Outline

In Chapter 1, “The Multiracial Movement,” I chronicle the history of the Multiracial Movement from 1979-2000, focusing specifically on the role of intraracial family organizations within the movement. I reveal the tensions between different players within the movement, such as AMEA and Project RACE, as well as the tension between multiracial activists and monoracial civil rights groups. I briefly outline the pre-Multiracial Movement socio-political history that set the foundations for Census 2000 and formal multiracial recognition to become the movement’s cornerstones. I argue that focusing on multiracial politics of recognition limited the movement’s potential for radical change.

Chapter 2 is entitled, “Founding Mothers: A Study in White Privilege,” and tracks the various ways in which being part of an interracial relationship or family altered the way white women in the 1970s-90s perceived themselves and the world. I situate white women’s political involvement in a historical context that favors monoracial families and emphasizes racial belonging as an important aspect of healthy childrearing. Moreover, I link white mothers’ campaigning for multiracials to
separate spheres ideology and sentimental politics. I assert that the coping mechanisms white mothers of biracial children employed to deal with being an interracially married white woman in the 1970s-90s ultimately resulted in the formation of interracial family groups and participation in multiracial politics that unwittingly attempted to regain racially privileged experiences and status.

In Chapter 3, entitled “Whiteness And Privilege In The Multiracial Movement – Project RACE as Case Study,” I examine the ways in which white female involvement led to the movement’s focus on multiracial politics of recognition, and the ways in which these politics of recognition ultimately limited the movement’s potential. I connect the arguments I have laid out in my first two chapters through the example of Project RACE, and elaborate on the history of the Multiracial Movement discussed in Chapter 1. Susan Graham did groundbreaking political work as the head of Project RACE, and facilitated the entry of multiracial politics into the OMB’s discussion of changing racial categories for Census 2000. However, her politics remained grounded in a perspective of white privilege. The political alliances she made and her unwillingness to sympathize with monoracial civil rights groups’ concerns lost her the support both of monoracial people of color and multiracial activists.
CHAPTER 1: THE MULTIRACIAL MOVEMENT

Attempting to define the Multiracial Movement and its objectives proves difficult. Although all nationalist racial movements have been pluralistic and diverse—the Black Power movement encompassing Caribbean, African, African American and Latin American constituents, for example—the Multiracial Movement is obvious in its diversity. Many opponents of the movement, including the NAACP and other civil liberties organizations, claimed that such a diverse group of people could not possibly have common experiences or political objectives. As George Lipsitz states, however, all identity-based movements incorporate diverse experiences into “a political body capable of collective action.” Given the way race functions in America as a great congealer of diverse and inherently pluralistic identities under single monoracial labels, it could be argued that all federally defined racial groups are technically as diverse as a “multiracial” group. Using the same logic, however, it could also be argued that because the government did not recognize multiracials as a single group, multiracial identities remained discrete, preventing the formation of a unified community even in the face of shared racial experiences. One of the great schisms in the Multiracial Movement occurred over this very tension. One faction within the movement, represented by the coalition of interracial groups under the Association of MultiEthnic Americans (AMEA), ultimately advocated for a racial

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6 Ibid., 40.
classification option that permitted multiracial people to check more than one race box on the 2000 census. This option recognized multiraciality by allowing affiliation with multiple existing monoracial groups, rather than designating “Multiracial” as another single identity option. Project RACE (Reclassify All Children Equally) preferred a standalone “Multiracial” category in addition to monoracial labels; Project RACE’s founder and constituents believed having multiracial-specific terminology would help create a distinct multiracial community.

Due to the socio-political advantages of formal racial recognition, racial classification became a key objective of the Multiracial Movement. After interracial and multiracial organizations successfully lobbied for multiracial recognition on local school and hospital forms, multiracial recognition on Census 2000 became one of the movement’s primary goals. Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor claims, “Non or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being.” Activists hoped that recognition on Census 2000 would formally legitimize pluralistic multiracial identities as whole and complex, rather than incomplete or confused versions of monoracial identities as they were generally thought of at the time. For example, multiracial children were

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9 Some of the potential benefits of official racial recognition include a strong, socially and politically identifiable racial community, race-specific federal policy and benefits (in healthcare and economic aid, for example), and identity legitimization. Only the standalone “Multiracial” option would yield the same advantages for a multiracial population. The “mark one or more” philosophy that AMEA and the federal government ultimately adopted did not have the same potential.
presumed to be particularly “at risk” for substance abuse and violence because they
were seen as pathologically conflicted about their identity.11 Dominant psychological
theories concerning multirace played into tragic mulatto12 stereotypes. One aspect of
the Multiracial Movement, not to be discussed in this thesis, was formed primarily of
psychologists and academics (Maria P.P. Root, for example) who sought to challenge
and complicate such stereotypes. Ultimately, their work—eagerly sought out and
supported by AMEA—helped to legitimize the multiracial politics of recognition in
the public eye.

Among the multiracial literature reviewed for this senior thesis, scholars such as
Heather Dalmage, Kimberly DaCosta, and Eric Hamako define the Multiracial
Movement according to Cynthia Nakashima’s work, which seeks to encompass all of
the movement’s diverse parts. Nakashima asserts that the Multiracial Movement was
a coalition of

“…community organizations, campus groups, magazines and newsletters, academic
research and writing, university courses, creative expression, and political activism –
all created and done by mixed-race individuals and members of interracial families,
with the purpose of voicing their own experiences, opinions, issues, and interests.”13

(Author’s emphasis)

11 Tracy Harachi Yoonsun Choi, Mary Gillmore, Richard Catalano, "Are Multiracial
Adolescents at Greater Risk? Comparisons of Rates, Patterns, and Correlates of
Substance Use and Violence between Monoracial and Multiracial Adolescents,”
12 The tragic mulatto stereotype refers to a social and literary stereotype established in
the 19th century. Often the mulatto character assumed him or herself to be white, but
upon discovering his or her black ancestry, was ousted from white society and
underwent a crisis of identity often resulting in suicide or madness. Another version
of the stereotype involves a mulatto who willfully passes for white and betrays his or
her black family, a practice that eventually results in similarly tragic ends.
13 Cynthia Nakashima, "Voices from the Movement: Approaches to Multiraciality,”
The Multiracial Experience: Racial Borders as the New Frontier, ed. Maria P.P. Root
This thesis focuses specifically on interracial family organizations involved in the Multiracial Movement and their founding members.

Interracial family groups founded and run by white mothers of biracial (primarily black-white) children brought multiracial issues to the forefront of public consciousness. The first group to specifically address multiracial issues, Interracial/Intercultural Pride (I-Pride), was founded in the Bay Area in 1979 by a collective of white women in interracial relationships. Biracial Family Network (BFN) Chicago (1980),14 Interracial Family Circle (IFC) (1984) in Washington D.C., and Multiracial Americans of Southern California (MASC) (1986)15 were only a few of the many interracial family organizations founded by white mothers that quickly followed suit.

Originally, interracial family groups were social sites. Their goal was to provide a “safe space” for their constituents’ biracial children, and to exchange information about multiracial-friendly schools, parks, daycares, and shopping locales.16 The early groups’ greatest political aspirations were to change racial tabulation in local school districts to include a “Multiracial” or “Interracial” box for their children.17 The focus on racial classification arose organically, according to interviewee Mandy (last name not disclosed), one of the original members of I-Pride. She initially claimed that I-

17 Douglass, "Evolution of Multiracial Organizations: Where We Have Been and Where We Are Going," 117.
Pride was a completely social organization, denying that members discussed political issues: “I’m not sure the parents did that much talking about it.” When asked about I-Pride’s later political involvement in the Census 2000 debates over federal multiracial recognition, however, Mandy amended her previous statement: “I don’t remember how it came up, but [racial classification] was something we did talk about. That was something we did worry about…”

Eventually, multiracial politics came to revolve around the Census 2000 as a major vehicle for political action. The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) planned to redefine racial categories for the 2000 census, and multiracial activists jumped at the opportunity to assert a united group identity. However, as mixed heritage peoples joined in the movement’s discussions of multiracial identity, they often disagreed with both the white women previously at the forefront of multiracial politics—founders and original members of interracial family groups like I-Pride and BFN—and each other. Thus was born the Census 2000 “race debate:” if the census were to allow multiracial people to self-identify, how would they do it, and how would the results be tabulated? Two main options eventually emerged to answer this question: a “mark one or more” option under an “Interracial” or “Multiracial” umbrella category, similar to how Latin@ ethnicity is currently tabulated, or a standalone “Multiracial” category. The census debate exacerbated internal tensions already existing in the movement between its different players: conservative multiracials, liberal multiracials and white mothers of biracial children.

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Pre-history of the Multiracial Movement

Ethnic mixing in America pre-dates even European colonialism: first nation peoples intermarried and intermixed with the flux of intertribal conquest and cultural exchange. For example, Aztec, Incan and Mayan empires expanded by absorbing smaller indigenous tribes; the Iroquois Confederacy admitted new members from conquered nations via the running of the gauntlet and intermarriage. With the advent of European colonization and African slavery in the 17th century, multirace—as we would define it today—emerged in America. This original colonial mixing, however, was most commonly the result of unions between white men and women of color, and was often the function of rape, exploitative relationships and servitude.19 Children born from interracial unions assumed the race of the non-white parent, as well as their lower social caste. Throughout American history, there were brief periods of time during which interracial sex and marriage were legally permitted.20 In general, however, interracial unions were illegal until the passing of Loving v. Virginia in 1967. Due to longstanding anti-miscegenation (anti-racial mixing) laws and sentiment, multiracial Americans often did not or could not identify with their multiple heritages. It was not until the implementation of civil rights legislation, desegregation, and the ethnic power movements of the 1970s that mixed heritage individuals could publicly lay claim to their pluralistic racial identities.

20 Ibid., 14.
Historical events preceding the Multiracial Movement set policy precedents for the movement’s central focus on multiracial recognition on public forms, especially the census. Largely in response to civil rights agitation, changing legal and federal policy in the 1960s brought racial data collection and self-identification to the forefront of American social reality. President Lyndon B. Johnson’s Great Society programs in the 1960s increased the frequency with which racial data was collected. The 1964 Civil Rights Act, 1965 Voting Rights Act, and Housing Act of 1968 sought to increase racial equality by redistributing wealth and power to disenfranchised minorities. The acts not only increased the public’s racial consciousness, but regularly forced Americans to declare their racial background on public forms. In 1960, the government released the first census in which American residents could select their own race. Previously, it had been census-takers’ responsibility to designate and record Americans’ racial identities. The old method often yielded results that did not match Americans’ social realities because census takers relied on phenotype to guide racial assessment. Census 1960 legitimized self-identification as an accurate and acceptable method of racial data collection.

In 1967, the Supreme Court case Loving v. Virginia legalized interracial marriage after an eight-year legal battle between the Lovings, an interracial couple

22 Ibid.
24 Ibid.
from Virginia, and their state legislature. Although *Loving v. Virginia* was a landmark victory for racial equality and civil rights, state constitutions still contained laws prohibiting interracial marriage until 2000.25

The 1960s and 70s also marked a period of decreased assimilation and an increased emphasis on racial difference. The cultural nationalist nature of ethnic power movements (Black Power, Red Power, Yellow Power, Brown Power) emphasized distance and difference from whiteness as positive qualities to be celebrated and cultivated.26 Assimilation or identification with whiteness was viewed as cowing to racist hegemonic structures.27 Coalitions between activists of color in California sought radical change through redistribution of wealth and the autonomous expressions of identity.28 Black Power in particular placed racial identity at the center of public awareness, violently opposing racist structures and oppressive policies. Activists of color, briefly unified, preached solidarity within each racial group.29 In some circles, like the Black Panthers, increasingly strict definitions of racial authenticity alienated or resulted in the ousting of certain group members.30 Racial identity was presumed to be associated with political beliefs and group loyalty. A lack of racial identity implied lack of a social existence or place.31

26 DaCosta, "Multiracial Identity: From Personal Problem to Public Issue,” 77.
28 Ibid., 17.
29 DaCosta, "Multiracial Identity: From Personal Problem to Public Issue,” 77.
31 DaCosta, "Multiracial Identity: From Personal Problem to Public Issue,” 80.
Meanwhile, thanks to desegregation and successful civil rights legislation, people of color and white people interacted more often in the public sphere, and on more equal footing. Such changing racial and political dynamics caused an increase in interracial marriages. The number of black/white pairings alone grew 300% from 1970 to 2000.\(^{32}\) The context of interracial marriages also changed. The increased racial egalitarianism spawned by the racial movements of the 1960s and 70s markedly decreased the power imbalance between partners of different races. Within this marital and social environment, more multiracial children began to feel equal kinship with both of their parents.\(^{33}\) A sense of equal kinship led to a sense of equal racial identification, thus giving rise to a generation that would identify multiracially.\(^{34}\)

**First Steps Towards a Movement: Interracial Family Organizations**

White mothers of biracial children founded interracial organizations in response to their changing social environment and the perceived needs of their children. As Margaret O’Donoghue discovered in her work on white mothers’ socialization of biracial black-white children: “… they [the mothers] engaged in mixed race community building by either forming or joining multiracial organizations. In this sense they were strategic or even “aggressive” in ensuring that their children were part of a multiracial community.”\(^{35}\) Interracial organizations originally focused on creating a healthy environment for multiracial children,

\(^{32}\) Williams, "From Civil Rights to the Multiracial Movement,” 91.  
\(^{33}\) DaCosta, "Multiracial Identity: From Personal Problem to Public Issue,” 77.  
\(^{34}\) Williams, "From Civil Rights to the Multiracial Movement,” 69.  
\(^{35}\) Margaret O’Donoghue, "White Mothers Negotiating Race and Ethnicity in the Mothering of Biracial Black-White Adolescents," *Journal of ethnic and cultural diversity in social work* 14.3 (2005), 146.
particularly by locating multiracial-friendly living areas, shops, vacation spots, professionals and information.\(^{36}\) White mothers of biracial children served almost exclusively as the founders, members, and directors of such organizations.\(^{37,38}\)

A few of the original groups included I-Pride (now iPride) in San Francisco, Biracial Family Network (BFN) in Chicago, Interracial Family Circle (IFC) in Washington D.C., Multiracial Americans of Southern California (MASC) in Los Angeles, Project Reclassify All Children Equally (Project RACE) in Roswell, Georgia (though founder Susan Graham moved to California later, and the organization followed), and the Association of Multi-Ethnic Americans (AMEA), the first multiracial collective,\(^{39}\) in Tucson.\(^{40}\)

I-Pride is the oldest interracial family organization, founded in 1979 by a collective of interracial couples with multiracial children in the Bay Area. Although multiracial activists Nancy Brown and Ramona Douglass (neither directly involved with I-Pride) claim that I-Pride’s original mission was to install a “Multiracial” race


\(^{38}\) There is no explicit data tallying the number of interracial family groups founded by white women. However, the composition of the first multiethnic collective, AMEA, serves as an indicator of the prevalence of white female leadership in interracial organizations. Of AMEA’s fourteen charter groups, white mothers founded thirteen and a half: MASC was co-founded by a white mother of biracial children and a multiracial adult.

\(^{39}\) AMEA was a collective composed of fourteen charter members, each an interracial family organization headed by a multiracial activist (instead of a white mother). It was the first organization founded for and by multiracial people.

\(^{40}\) Douglass, "Evolution of Multiracial Organizations: Where We Have Been and Where We Are Going," 112.
category in Berkley schools in the 1980s, my primary research suggests that I-Pride developed a political focus later in its history. Two of the original members of I-Pride, Mandy and a mother who preferred to remain anonymous, asserted in telephone interviews that I-Pride was originally a social and educational group. Mandy, white adoptive mother of two biracial children and one of the early members of I-Pride, stated that I-Pride was largely social, though the parents did dispute the use of the “Other” racial category on school forms. The anonymous interviewee served as the coordinator for I-Pride’s multiracial child playgroup. Her involvement included attending multiracial parties, campouts, play dates and educational forums.

Subsequent interracial family organizations initially modeled themselves after I-Pride. Irene Carr, founder of Biracial Family Network (BFN) Chicago, explained how she became involved in multiracial politics: “I had heard about I-Pride in California so I wrote to them and they gave me tips on how to get the group started. In September 1980 there were six women, each was a mother of biracial children, and we’ve evolved since,” (author’s emphasis). Politically active white women’s husbands were generally less involved with interracial groups. Interviewees Mandy, the anonymous I-Pride member, and Susan Graham stated that their husbands were not as invested in multiracial politics as they were. The anonymous interviewee was actually divorced from her husband when she first joined I-Pride; Mandy and Susan

41 Ibid.
Graham claimed that while their husbands were supportive of the women’s participation in interracial organizations, they remained otherwise uninvolved.

Irene Carr founded BFN Chicago in 1980 as a parental support group. BFN had four affiliate organizations, each providing activities for interracial families such as potlucks, picnics, parenting groups, and adult social groups.\(^{46}\) BFN, I-Pride, and Multiracial Americans of Southern California (MASC) served as the original support networks that worked to destigmatize the idea of multiracial identities and publicly interracial families.\(^{47}\) According to scholar-activist, Heather Dalmage, however, as soon as BFN began to advocate for a “Multiracial” race category on Chicago school forms and become increasingly political, it also began to alienate some of its members.\(^{48}\) This was not an uncommon occurrence. A small New Jersey interracial group, Getting Interracial Families Together (GIFT), also disbanded after certain group members began to advocate for political action and made the others uncomfortable.\(^{49}\)

As demonstrated by certain members in BFN and GIFT, not all participants in interracial family groups were politically minded. Some women merely sought to provide a social space in which their children would feel like they belonged. They were not interested in issues of race on a larger scale, but, as mothers, wished to

\(^{46}\) Douglass, "Evolution of Multiracial Organizations: Where We Have Been and Where We Are Going," 113-114.
\(^{47}\) DaCosta, "Multiracial Identity: From Personal Problem to Public Issue," 73.
\(^{49}\) Ibid., 138.
provide a support network for their children. Many women in interracial family organizations used the organization as a resource for their children’s racial socialization. Many of I-Pride’s original programs included multiracial camping trips, holiday parties, and children’s playgroups.

However, some interracial family organizations like Project RACE, created in 1991 by white mothers Susan Graham & Chris Ashe, were founded with an explicitly political bent. Project RACE formed in response to political pressures from the Census Bureau and Georgia state educational system. Susan Graham’s biracial son was classified as white on the census because, prior to 2000, multiracial children automatically took the race of the mother due to the Census Bureau’s opinion that “in cases like these, we always know who the mother is, but not who the father is,” and black at school, based on the teacher’s “knowledge and observation of [the boy].” Graham was incensed by the racist sentiment behind both the census and the Georgia school’s assessment of her son’s racial background: one suggested that biracial children were parented by loose women, rather than “legitimate” pairings of committed spouses or partners, while the other assumed that racial background could be determined by behavioral observation and appearance. As a result of these incidents, Graham founded Project RACE in 1991. She lobbied successfully in 1992 and 1994 for a “Multiracial” category in Ohio and Illinois school districts. Under

53 Ibid.
Graham’s leadership, the organization’s main focus eventually became the creation of a stand-alone “Multiracial” category nationwide.\textsuperscript{54}

**AMEA, Project RACE and Multiracial Activism**

By the late 1980s, mixed heritage activists in interracial family organizations had assumed leadership roles within their groups. In 1988, these activists founded the first major multiracial organization created expressly for and by multiracials. To clarify: in this thesis, I distinguish between multiracial organizations and interracial family organizations. Multiracial organizations were founded for and by multiracial people, while interracial family organizations were founded primarily by white mothers of biracial children to provide resources for interracial families. The new multiracial organization was a coalition of fourteen existing interracial family groups such as I-Pride, BFN and MASC (then run or co-managed by multiracial activists Carlos Fernández, Ramona Douglass, and Levonne Gaddy, respectively) under the name AMEA: Association of MultiEthnic Americans. AMEA’s first president, I-Pride’s Carlos Fernández, asserted that AMEA was an educational organization. Its mission was to “promote positive awareness of interracial and multiethnic people and families.”\textsuperscript{55} After the 1990 census, the Office of Management and Budget began to conduct meetings to discuss changing the racial categories for Census 2000.\textsuperscript{56} In light of this opportunity, in its first seven years, AMEA attempted to gain 501(c)3 status, testified before Congress about expanding racial data collection to include

\textsuperscript{54} Douglass, "Evolution of Multiracial Organizations: Where We Have Been and Where We Are Going,” 116.
\textsuperscript{55} Douglass, "The Evolution of the Multiracial Movement,” 14.
\textsuperscript{56} Dalmage, The Politics of Multiracialism: Challenging Racial Thinking, 144.
multiracials, and attempted to create an education and legal advisory board for the
government concerning multiracial rights.57

Project RACE, another major player in public discussions of multiracial
identity and classification,58 and AMEA had different general solutions to the “census
debate.” Originally, both groups wanted to include a “Multiracial” or “Interracial”
category on the 2000 Census and other federal forms. AMEA preferred that
multiracial tabulation be similar to that of Latin@s, with “Multiracial” serving as an
umbrella category under which people could designate their specific heritages using
the existing racial options.59 This format would allow for the political recognition of a
multiracial community both independent of and in conjunction with multiple, self-
identified racial identities. In contrast, Project RACE advocated a standalone
“Multiracial” category as an addition to the existing racial options. However, to gain
more political force as a “unified” multiracial front in the fight for federal multiracial
recognition, AMEA vice president, Ramona Douglass, and Susan Graham set aside
their differences to forge a strategic political alliance.60 In 1993, AMEA and Project
RACE testified together at Congressional Hearings on Race and Ethnic Standards.

Even though many multiracial organizations and activists did not support a
standalone “Multiracial” category, Project RACE was truly at the forefront of the
Multiracial Movement’s agitation in Washington D.C. 61 In 1992, Chris Ashe, co-
founder of Project RACE (who quickly handed leadership over to Graham after she

58 Douglass, "Evolution of Multiracial Organizations: Where We Have Been and
Where We Are Going,” 118.
60 Douglass, "The Evolution of the Multiracial Movement,” 15.
61 Ibid.
had “business, and other obligations, [and] kind of faded out of it,” 62), contacted her Ohio representative William L. Mallory, Sr. to put “Multiracial” on Ohio school forms. Supportive of Project RACE’s mission, Mallory worked as Project RACE’s liaison. He facilitated the group’s participation in the OMB Census talks through his friend Tom Sawyer, who was the head of the Committee on the Post Office and Civil Service, one of the committees working on the 2000 Census. Susan Graham explained, “Mallory said, “We’ve had these women in Ohio and Georgia, and you’re going to be having hearings about the 2000 census soon, and we’d like them to participate.” So Tom Sawyer invited us to Washington.” 63 Graham was asked to represent the multiracial community at the National Academy of Sciences in 1994. 64 It was she who invited AMEA to participate in the initial Congressional Hearings to which she alone had been summoned. 65 Only later (in 1995) was Ramona Douglass, then the second multiracial president of AMEA, appointed to the 2000 Census Advisory Committee. 66

Unfortunately, multiracial recognition, particularly as advocated by Project RACE with a single “Multiracial” box, aligned with conservative political interests. The Reagan administration (1981-1989) forwarded a “colorblind” agenda that extended into the first Bush presidency (1989-1993). “Colorblindness” was a theory that advocated for an American meritocracy in which race was not figuratively “seen”

63 Ibid
64 Douglass, ”The Evolution of the Multiracial Movement,” 16.
66 Douglass, ”The Evolution of the Multiracial Movement,” 15.
or governmentally tabulated. “Colorblindness” thus undermined the corrective measures of affirmative action against institutionalized racism. Implicit in “colorblind” theory was the idea that affirmative action was enabling “less capable” people of color to unjustly “beat out” their white competitors in the job and educational markets. Having a “Multiracial” category that did not allow for affiliation with pre-existing racial groups would decrease the number of people in each minority racial category. The government would therefore allot fewer resources to civil rights programs and race-based aid. Conservative politicians took advantage of this possibility, while monoracial civil rights organizations like the NAACP, National Urban League (NUL), National Council of La Raza (NCLR, a Chicano group) feared and opposed it. Conservative allies of the Multiracial Movement include Ward Connerly and Newt Gingrich, both of whom worked with Susan Graham and Project RACE. Gingrich was actually Graham’s congressman in the mid-90s, which is why she originally sought his support. Graham acknowledged that Gingrich and her political views were not the same, but indicated that she still appreciated his role in the movement: “He was very good to us [Project RACE], and when we had to go back to Washington—we went the first time when my son was eight, so that must have been in ‘93, and went back in ‘97 when he was twelve—and by that time, Newt had said he would come out and testify for us. I know that Newt’s agenda is not the

68 Ibid., 4.
69 Douglass, "Evolution of Multiracial Organizations: Where We Have Been and Where We Are Going,” 120.
same as our agenda, but that’s okay, because we both want to get to the same place.”

National organizations that promoted racial minority interests were thus largely opposed to multiracial recognition. In 1997, NAACP representative Harold McDougall attended a Congressional hearing to express the NAACP’s opinion that including multiracials on the census would make discrimination harder to track. The National Council of La Raza (NCLR) claimed that a multiracial category would “dilute” minority count and the decrease the effectiveness of the Voting Rights Act. According to Susan Graham, a Native American group expressed similar concerns that multiracial recognition (as a standalone category) would weaken their political power.

To combat the disapproval of monoracial civil liberties groups, AMEA formed strategic alliances with academics investigating the politics of race and identity, like psychologist Maria P.P. Root. They hoped that academic allies would legitimize the movement’s objectives in the view of the greater public, but particularly in the view of monoracial organizations.

AMEA and Project RACE also sought to legitimize multiracial identities by emphasizing multiracial medical issues, like blood and tissue diseases for which

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72 Williams, "From Civil Rights to the Multiracial Movement,” 85.
74 DaCosta, "Multiracial Identity: From Personal Problem to Public Issue,” 72.
75 Douglass, "Evolution of Multiracial Organizations: Where We Have Been and Where We Are Going,” 119.
bone marrow donors must be of the same ethnic makeup as the patient. Susan Graham continues to pursue multiracial medical interests today, arguing that multirace can potentially fatally complicate race-based prescription dosage. She advocates for multiracial medical testing: “I think it’s wrong that multiracial people are not included. They should naturally be included in studies so that we know what their medical risks are… Ramona Douglass went into the hospital once for surgery, and they gave her too much anesthesia based on her race.” AMEA was more hesitant to engage in discussions of race-based medicine, but still promoted the benefits of expanding racial considerations in healthcare. Douglass stated: “Flagging multiracial/multiethnic individuals would at least prompt healthcare professionals to look beyond surface appearances and ask more detailed questions on ethnic origin and medical history.” As a result of Project RACE and AMEA’s combined efforts, the American Medical Association publicly endorsed a “mark one or more” option for multiracial recognition on the Census 2000.

In yet another attempt to increase the Multiracial Movement’s legitimacy in the public eye, multiracial advocates and activists used civil rights rhetoric and forms of protest even though monoracial civil rights organizations opposed the movement. On July 20, 1996, Charles Byrd, author of *Interracial Voice* online magazine, and a collection of inter- and multiracial organizations coordinated the Multiracial Solidarity March on Washington, D.C. Byrd claimed that the Multiracial Movement

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77 Ibid.
78 Douglass, "Evolution of Multiracial Organizations: Where We Have Been and Where We Are Going,” 120.
79 Ibid.
had been largely abstract until the march, which he heralded as “a precedent-setting event.”

Graham agreed that the movement had been fairly diffuse before the late 90s, but retrospectively commented, “[Charles Byrd] had the march in Washington, where only 200 people showed up. That’s not a million march anywhere. We were all kind of struggling in different ways.”

A second solidarity march was organized in 1997 in Los Angeles. While both marches were indeed small in comparison to Civil Rights era solidarity marches, for the public, seeing hundreds of diversely mixed multiracials march together under a shared racial identity had a powerful effect. The marches also showed the government that conceptions of race were changing in a way that necessitated political acknowledgement. Many of the grievances made against the movement by monoracial civil liberties groups had revolved around the argument that multiracials shared no common identity. Byrd’s march proved them to be mistaken. As Jill Olumide writes: “Groups have often come into being through the exclusion of certain categories of people who slowly come to recognize their commonality.”

The major unifying commonality between multiracial people was their general exclusion from monoracial communities. Similar to how colorism—discrimination based on an individual’s skin color—affects diverse peoples of African heritage, providing a common social experience that allows them to identify as

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82 Williams, "From Civil Rights to the Multiracial Movement,” 95.
“black,” exclusion from monoracial groups and identities generally characterizes the “multiracial experience.”

**Census 2000**

On July 7, 1997, interracial family organization and AMEA charter member, I-Pride hosted the Third Multiracial Leadership Summit in Oakland, California to discuss the need to gain support of civil liberties organizations that had opposed the “Multiracial” category. It was here that the underlying tensions between AMEA, multiracial-led interracial organizations, and Project RACE came to a head.

Multiracial activists had long been unhappy with Graham’s leadership and involvement in the census debates. Susan Graham acknowledged (and still acknowledges) the oddity of being a white woman leading an organization that campaigns for multiracial rights, but even in the face of multiracial activists’ support of a “mark one or more” census option, she refused to surrender the “Multiracial” label. Her stubbornness at the Summit provoked emotional responses from its multiracial attendees who felt that Graham, as a white mother, did not have the right to speak on behalf of all multiracial people. According to Nancy Brown, co-founder of MASC and a white mother of biracial children, “one of [the] guests, a multiracial psychologist from Los Angeles, abruptly left the conference, not really sure who was in charge: the multiracial adult leaders or one interracially married parent of a multiracial child trying to define multiracial identity for everyone according to personal bias.”

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85 Douglass, "Evolution of Multiracial Organizations: Where We Have Been and Where We Are Going,” 121.
After the Third Summit, the federal government’s Interagency Committees for the Review of Race and Ethnic Standards endorsed AMEA’s revised “mark one or more” racial option without the “Multiracial” label. Project RACE revoked its endorsement of the new system, breaking its ties with AMEA altogether and thus allowing AMEA to forge stronger bonds with civil rights organizations. Under the new system, racial data could be tabulated without any monoracial group “losing numbers,” and multiracials were not forced to deny their complete heritage.

**Post-Census 2000**

After the Census 2000 victory, the Multiracial Movement once again became diffuse and unguided. From 1980-2000, over sixty interracial family and multiracial groups formed across the nation. After 2000, many of the organizations stopped holding regular meetings, and some even disbanded. I-Pride, the first interracial family organization, went nearly dormant after its work with AMEA. Mandy, an interviewee from the original members of I-Pride, claims that the original members’ children outgrew the organization. AMEA still exists, though not as the national powerhouse it once was; its charter members focus on local issues.

In November 2010, DePaul University organized the first Critical Mixed Race Studies Conference in hopes of redirecting the movement and unifying different multiracial and interracial family organizations around the country. The results, however, were inconclusive. Census 2000 was a landmark victory for the multiracial community at large. Now, once again, there exist a range of opinions about what the

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86 Douglass, "Evolution of Multiracial Organizations: Where We Have Been and Where We Are Going ,” 122.
most important issues for mixed heritage people are. Some organizations, like Loving Day, \(^{88}\) hope to bolster multiracials as a unified racial community by actively creating common racial experiences. However well intentioned, these efforts seem contrived. Instead of recognizing and emphasizing the common racial experiences \(^{89}\) that already exist among mixed heritage peoples to strengthen community, organizations like Loving Day attempt to build community as if they are uncertain that one already exists. While their efforts have small enclaves of followers throughout the country, there is no longer a widespread push towards a new goal in multiracial activism.

The Multiracial Movement was unique in many ways that ultimately undermined it. Although multiracial activists sought to model the movement after the Civil Rights and ethnic power movements, because it was started by organizations founded by white women in a time of “colorblind” multiculturalism, the Multiracial Movement did not have the same radical foundation. Interracial family organizations’ social focus and/or unwillingness to engage with issues of race similarly prevented widespread national change that the ethnic power movements of the 1970s accomplished. By conservatively focusing on the politics of recognition as a manifestation of greater issues of race dynamics and identity politics that surround multiraciality (narrow definitions of race and racial authenticity and the purposeful

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\(^{88}\) Loving Day, founded by Ken Tanabe, a multiracial American living in New York, celebrates the passing of *Loving v. Virginia* every June 12\(^{th}\), and provides resources to families and organizations around the nation hoping to host Loving Day celebrations of their own. They hope to combat racism through education and interracial community building.

\(^{89}\) Common experiences include, as stated before, exclusion from monoracial groups, partial or multiple racial affiliation with different monoracial groups, multiple cultural affiliations, and being tested for racial authenticity by monoracial groups and individuals.
construction of racial boundaries, for example), the Multiracial Movement could only solve the smaller problem. Instead of using multiraciality as a way to provoke a public examination of racial construction and racial “authenticity,” the Multiracial Movement only addressed racial tabulation and the formal acknowledgement of multiracial identities. In the next chapter, I argue that these limitations were due, in part, to the fact that white mothers and their interracial family groups established political foundations that were grounded in white perceptions of race and identity.
CHAPTER 2: FOUNDING MOTHERS - A STUDY IN WHITE PRIVILEGE

This chapter will address the questions: What “internal” factors (emotional, psychological forces, versus “external” socio-historic) pressures led to white mothers’ involvement in the Multiracial Movement, and how did these factors influence the ways in which they chose to participate in the movement (projects, organizations, advocacy)? Using sociological and psychological studies from the 1990s and early 2000s on the identity development of white mothers of black-white biracial children, I track trends of racial self-identification and attitudes toward transracial parenting. I extrapolate my findings from the women interviewed in these studies to the white mothers involved in the Multiracial Movement. I then analyze the greater trends of identity and parenting in the context of multiracial advocacy and political involvement. By doing so, I hope to illuminate the role emotional and psychological experiences played in white mothers’ political actions.

The white women at the forefront of multiracial politics were forced together by socio-historical pressures and experiences unique to interracially married white mothers in the 1970s, 80s and 90s. Many of these experiences centered upon white women and their families’ racial identities. In general, as white women entered into interracial relationships following Loving v. Virginia, they rapidly discovered the painful reality of racism through the experiences of their spouses and children of color.

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90 Transracial parenting refers to parenting across racial lines, as is the case with monoracial parents of multiracial children or adoptive parents who are not of the same race as their children.
Feeling unsure of how to parent transracially, some white mothers founded the first interracial family organizations to provide social support for interracial families and biracial children. As an anonymous I-Pride interviewee states, “The purpose [of I-Pride] was for the children to be around other biracial children and interracial families, and for me to learn about parenting mixed race children.” The first organizations were overwhelmingly social in focus. As time progressed, however, exchanging parental advice also led to shared grievances about multiracial children’s monoracial designation on school forms, eventually prompting political campaigns for changing racial data tabulation.

Being in an interracial relationship radically altered these white women’s perception of the world and themselves. Interracial relationships provoked a sudden awareness of white privilege—special advantages white people receive based on their race and skin color—and racial status, leading to a redefinition of self along racial lines. White women in interracial relationships utilized different coping mechanisms in this redefinition, some of which were more problematic than others. In the end, the decision to become involved with interracial family organizations and multiracial politics stemmed from a shift in white women’s racial realities and a changing sense of personal, racial identity. This chapter examines how white mothers’ shifting identities and race-based concerns led to political action that inadvertently reproduced and reaffirmed their white privilege.

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93 White privilege also is inherently tied to white normativity, in which the privileges, cultural behaviors and advantageous position white people hold in society are assumed to be “normal,” and unrelated to race.
Throughout the Multiracial Movement, conservative politicians, multi-ethnic collectives, multiracial activists and scholars have alternately censured and congratulated interracial organizations and their white female founders. Both appreciative and condemnatory readings of white women’s involvement in the Multiracial Movement, however, lack nuance. To unquestioningly embrace the political actions of the organizations’ white leaders ignores the specter of “racial ventriloquism” (members of a privileged racial group speaking as the arbiter of the needs of another, less privileged group in the public sphere) or paternalism that such actions raise. Conversely, to single-mindedly criticize white “founding mothers” as ventriloquists or, more commonly, as women attempting to regain white privilege through multiracial politics, does not acknowledge the women’s position as mothers. Though white women articulating and advocating for the interests of a (yet) silent racial minority group may seem inherently paternalistic, the relationship of biological dependency between white advocate and “victim” of color complicate this particular case.

The institution of family was central to both the founding of interracial organizations and white women’s subsequent participation in multiracial politics. Although white women involved in interracial family organizations were well intentioned and family-oriented, they were unable to disown their racial privilege

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94 Interviewees from interracial family groups such as I-Pride, Biracial Family Network (BFN), Project Reclassify All Children Equally (Project RACE), and Interracial Family Circle (IFC) all specifically state that their organizations provided support for interracial families, were founded to learn how to raise multiracial children or to provide them with a racial community, or were founded because of an incident that “threatened” their children, as was the case with Project RACE, described in Chapter 1.
enough to critically engage with broader issues of race and racism. Ultimately, this inability prevented the Multiracial Movement from progressing beyond the politics of identity recognition, a topic I will further explore in Chapter 3.

Altered Perspectives, Shifting Identities

As Whites, when we walk out, we’re just assuming everyone will accept us. And as an interracial couple, you suddenly realize they don’t, and you’ve never had these experiences before, and they’re ugly and traumatic, and they’ll shock you.

- Candace (last name not disclosed)⁹⁵

Once you join a family of another ethnic background, you become that. And I think that certainly in my dealings with other people concerning my children, I would have the same concerns as someone, you know, of a Black background. Because that’s what my children are; that’s the mixture they are. I think you enter another ethnic background.

- Anonymous Testimonial⁹⁶

These two quotations are drawn from Heather Dalmage’s and Margaret O’Donoghue’s studies on the racial identity of white women in heterosexual white-black interracial relationships. Again, in this chapter, I use evidence from studies like Dalmage’s and O’Donoghue’s to broadly understand the racial experiences of interracially married white women who became involved in multiracial politics. I infer from the data compiled by scholars such as Terri Ann Karis, Dalmage, and O’Donoghue that interracially married white women in the 80s and 90s had certain common experiences, concerns and forms of identity expression. My analysis in this chapter thus operates under the assumption that the interracially married white

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mothers of black-white biracial children in interracial groups had similar experiences and ways of self-identifying.

Being part of an interracial family profoundly changes white women’s perception of reality and personal identity by suddenly increasing their racial awareness. For example, until Dalmage’s interviewee, Candace, entered into an interracial relationship, she was unaware of her white privilege. Her relationship introduced her to the realities of racism, making her suddenly aware of her racial privilege (“As Whites… we’re just assuming everyone will accept us. And as an interracial couple, you suddenly realize they don’t…”). Candace not only suggests that entering into an interracial relationship served as the catalyst for her sudden racial self-awareness, but that this awareness was unpleasant and even painful: “ugly and traumatic.” Her statement, “As Whites… we’re just assuming everyone will accept us,” also implies that whiteness is inherently connected to a privileged and naïve racial experience. By linking whiteness to racial privilege and naïveté, Candace suggests that experiences that challenge such racial naïveté and privilege also challenge women’s connection to whiteness. The anonymous interviewee in the second quotation supports this argument. After she becomes part of an interracial family, the interviewee changes her racial identity from white to black. Instead of claiming that an awareness of privilege altered her sense of identity, however, she credits her emotional bonds to her family. Her experience suggests that family connection, too, is a driving force in racial self-identification for interracially married white women.
The social climate around the time the Multiracial Movement began (1979) placed increased pressure on interracial families and interracially involved partners. After the ethnic power movements of the 1970s (Black Power, Red Power, Brown Power, Yellow Power) ended, nearly all racial groups viewed interracial relationships between white people and people of color as inherently problematic. While interracial marriage was illegal in many states prior to the 1967 *Loving v. Virginia* Supreme Court case, opposition to interracial unions came predominantly from white Americans who sought to protect white “purity.”*97* The 1970s ethnic power movements altered constructions of family and the importance of racial group belonging in American culture.*98* The movements placed more emphasis on racial loyalty and solidarity among minority groups. This, however, also made such groups increasingly hostile towards interracial—particularly black and white—love. Experiences associated with this widespread public disapproval incited white mothers of biracial children to political action in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

In a social and political environment hostile towards interracial unions, the institution of family served as both catalyst and vessel for white women’s racial discomfort and indignation that ultimately led to the Multiracial Movement. Both introductory quotations exemplify the ways in which interracial families serve (and served) as the gateway to white women’s first experiences with racism and racial identity politics. The anonymous woman in the second quotation expresses a

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fundamental change of racial identity based upon and expressed through her familial connections with black people. Candace’s involvement in an interracial relationship and subsequent awareness of her white privilege, on the other hand, provoke a state of racial shock. She explicitly conveys the psychologically jarring experience of becoming aware of her racial privilege: “you’ve never had these [racist] experiences before, and they’re ugly and traumatic, and they’ll shock you.” By entering into an interracial relationship, she loses the protection white privilege provides, and the assumption that she will be uniformly accepted.99 The relationship effectively catapults her into racial awareness (“you suddenly realize…”), permanently altering the way she views the world and herself.

One way to understand white women’s participation in multiracial politics is through the loss of the protective racial community of whiteness that the intermarried women in O’Donoghue and Dalmage’s studies describe. After entering interracial relationships, white female interviewees could not avoid or ignore racism as they once did. They subsequently engaged in a process that J. Faulkner calls armoring: “Developing specific cognitive and behavioral techniques that promote physical and emotional self-care in the face of racist encounters.”100 The armoring mechanisms white women commonly employ—changing personal racial or ethnic identities and/or campaigning for their multiracial children’s rights—resulted in the Multiracial Movement. Even as they strove to cope with their lessened racial

privilege, by utilizing these armoring mechanisms, white mothers of biracial children in the Multiracial Movement only reaffirmed it.

**Race and Family: Locating Interracial Relationships**

American culture racializes the institution of the family. The association of appearance and relation, phenotypic sharing between biological kin, “defines the parameters of a ‘normal’ family.”

In the case of interracial families, however, multiracial children may or may not share phenotypic traits of both parents. Not only does this lead people to racially identify multiracial children differently from one or both of their parents, but it also prevents people who delineate family by physical similarity from accepting interracial families’ normalcy.

Furthermore, dominant American culture historically delegitimizes black-white interracial families. Since the days of slavery, hypodescent prohibited family ties across racial lines. At that time, marking mixed heritage African Americans as black, no matter how many white relatives they had, also assigned them to a race-specific lower social class. There were few opportunities to bridge racial or class divides. Later, anti-miscegenation laws that persisted until the *Loving v. Virginia* Supreme Court case in 1967 (and even afterwards: there were still anti-miscegenation ordinances on state constitutions until 2000) prevented the formation of legally legitimate interracial families.104

102 Hypodescent is also known as the “one-drop rule.” It dictates that if an individual has one drop or more of black blood in their racial background, they are socially and culturally considered black, regardless of physical appearance.
104 Ibid., 26.
Race is also closely linked and compared to family in American culture. Racial classification has historically been based on supposed phenotypic similarities between individuals, which helps inform race’s false biological basis. After the 1960s and 70s racial power movements, however, racial group membership came to resemble a different kind of family: groups named racial “brothers” and “sisters,” emphasized group loyalty, and tested racial authenticity before admitting new members. People of the same race assumed (and were assumed) to have more in common with and be more closely related to each other than to members of other races.

Nationalistic definitions of race and community promoted endogamy, even after Loving v. Virginia waived legal barriers to interracial marriage. Minority racial groups especially asserted social pressure to create biological and social kinship networks that were exclusively monoracial or, at the very least, non-white. This social pressure then informed dominant parenting attitudes of the time. Social workers’ outlook on transracial adoption (adoption in which the adoptive parents and child are of different races) illuminates this fact. In 1997, the National Association for Social Workers (NASW) stated:

> An effort to maintain a child’s identity and her or his ethnic heritage should prevail in all services and placement actions that involve children in foster care and adoption programs… The recruitment of and placement with adoptive parents from each relevant ethnic or racial group should be available to meet the needs of the children.

Even though the document from which this quote was taken was written years after the racial power movements had ended, the NASW clearly conveys the degree to

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105 Ibid., 29.
106 Ibid.
which racial solidarity and belonging were thought to be necessary to a child’s upbringing (“to meet the needs of the children”).

In this racial context, black-white interracial families violated both racialized and racial conceptions of family. The immediate biological families of both romantic parties often cut ties with their interracially married offspring. Women interviewed in separate studies by Karis, O’Donoghue, and Dalmage claimed that their parents and siblings refused to maintain contact with them after they married interracially.108 Their black husbands expressed similar difficulties, particularly with female relatives.109 Even if their family members eventually became supportive, both partners stated that their parents and siblings initially expressed disapproval of or tried to stop the marriage.110

Interracial families challenged the presumed physical likeness of family members and the importance of maintaining racial group loyalty. When a woman left her racial kinship of whiteness to marry a black man, both of them were generally perceived to have betrayed their racial communities.111 Often, their racial families punished this betrayal by excluding them from racial kinship. As Karis’s interviewee, “Debbie,” stated, “White men thought you were sort of slutty… older [White] people thought, “Oh my gosh, that’s awful that they’re together,” and things like that.”112

Another Karis interviewee, who remains anonymous, expressed a similar sentiment: “... the way I was perceived, I think, by a lot of [white] people, was... of being lower class and not– as being loose or being... promiscuous or whatnot.”\textsuperscript{113} Class privilege was also a significant factor in the Multiracial Movement. Most of the mothers involved in interracial family organizations were middle and upper-middle class educated women married to equally educated men.\textsuperscript{114} When asked if there were any overarching commonalities between I-Pride members, Mandy, one of I-Pride’s original members and Board Treasurer quickly responded, “Yes. They were at least middle class. At least. And at least one partner in each pair was college educated.”\textsuperscript{115}

Class played a central role in the discrimination interracially married white women experienced and their involvement in interracial family organizations. Stereotyping and discriminatory treatment of such women often had to do with assumptions of being lower class simply by virtue of their interracial relationship. For example, Susan Graham, founder of Project RACE, threw herself into multiracial politics after the Census Bureau asserted that mothers of multiracial children could not be trusted to know who the father of their children was.\textsuperscript{116} In general, the hostility interracially married white women received from the greater white community had to do with class-based stereotypes. Interestingly, lower class white women in interracial relationships did not advocate for multiracial rights, or join or found interracial family

\textsuperscript{113} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{115} Mandy. Interview by Alicia Castagno. Personal interview. January 20, 2012.
\textsuperscript{116} Graham, Susan. Interview by Alicia Castagno. Telephone interview. November 11, 2011.
groups, though they may have had similar racial experiences. Class privilege allowed only certain white women to express their opinions and gain access to institutions and people that would help them achieve the social change they desired. In general, being stereotyped and discriminated against by the white community forced white women in interracial relationships to abandon that community.

Although one aspect of white privilege is that it allows white people to see themselves and each other as individuals instead of similar members of a racial group, it is ironically white racial group membership that provides this luxury. As exemplified by Karis’s interviewees who bemoan how other white people treat them (“[they] thought you were sort of slutty”), white women in interracial relationships lose access to the white racial community and the accompanying privilege of being seen as individuals. Instead, they become members of the stereotyped group of supposedly similar characters: “white women who date black men.” Experiencing this racial discrimination and stereotyping resulted in a growing racial awareness that caused many white women in interracial relationships (both those involved in multiracial politics and those uninvolved) to interpret situations and events through an increasingly racial lens. Often, the “raced” comments of these women among exclusively white company were perceived as off-putting and overly sensitive. Not only did white women in interracial relationships lose access to white racial

\[117\] Ibid., 196.
\[118\] Ibid., 159.
\[119\] “Raced” is a term used by Karis to describe the inscription of race upon or within a statement or experience.
communities, but they often ousted themselves after feeling too uncomfortable in all-white environments.\footnote{120}

Another way to interpret the women’s growing discomfort in normative white environments, Karis argues, is the blurring of private and public spheres that is typical for people of color but uncommon for white experiences. Separate spheres ideology was consolidated in 19\(^{th}\) century Britain, and divides the world into gendered public and private spheres. White privilege maintains separate sphere ideology by protecting the private sphere and upholding it as a safe place, free from outside (public sphere) influence.\footnote{121} White normativity—the portrayal of white culture and whiteness as the norm and “normal”—then naturalizes this separateness and right to safety in the minds of white Americans.\footnote{122} People of color, on the other hand, do not have the privilege of discrete public and private spheres; race and class issues permeate both the home and public spaces.\footnote{123} Thus, for white women, interracial relationships blur the distinction between supposedly separate spheres by bringing racial politics and race into the home. While the institution of marriage is supposedly built upon reciprocal relations, whiteness and blackness in the home necessarily introduce dynamics of racial hierarchy and superiority.\footnote{124} Even if an interracial couple manages to ignore race relations in their domestic life, multiracial

\footnote{120} Ibid., 196.  
\footnote{122} Karis, "Racial Identity Constructions of White Women in Heterosexual Black-White Interracial Relationships,” 129.  
\footnote{123} Ibid., 177.  
\footnote{124} Ibid., 132.
children often ask race-related questions that force parents to engage with racial issues in the private sphere.\(^{125}\)

The blurring of separate spheres destabilizes what white women previously experienced as safe and private. White women both reviewed and personally interviewed for this essay indicated that they felt their private sphere was invaded and violated by race politics and racism after they became involved in interracial relationships. For instance, Susan Graham founded Project RACE after both the Census Bureau and her local school district would not allow her to racially identify her son as she did at home.\(^{126}\) She interpreted racial politics entering and disrupting her private sphere as a threatening wrong to be righted. The main goal of Project RACE has been to force the public sphere to respect the right of mixed heritage people to racially self-identify instead of invading and threatening their private sphere by imposing monoracial labels on them.\(^{127}\) However, in Karis’s study of the racial identity construction of interracially married white women, her interviewee “Joan” embraced a less racially privileged reality after being married to her black husband for over ten years, and acknowledges that the idea of distinct public and private spheres is an illusion:

I would argue that for everybody in this world what happens in other aspects of your life, outside the doors of your home, affects you… of course that [external stuff] affects whatever domestic arrangements you might have. Since

\(^{127}\) Ibid.
race does have an enormous impact on our lives in America, I would say that’s how it enters your home, too.\textsuperscript{128}

Many white women further lose racial comfort and privilege when they appear in public with their interracial, black-white families. Common experiences of white women in interracial relationships include being harassed by the police, experiencing hostility from strangers, and having their parental legitimacy publicly questioned.\textsuperscript{129} Due to the stereotypes attributed to white wives of black men from both black and white racial communities, Karis and O’Donoghue’s interviewees revealed that they feel unsafe in public. They thus obtain a “doubly other,” “outsider within” identity: they are publicly identified as white, yet no longer felt comfortable in white environments and experience less privilege than their monoracially paired white counterparts. Karis’s interviewees “Annie” and “Bridget” illustrate this liminal identity: “I’m quite white. I’m not typical white, but I’m quite white,”\textsuperscript{130} “I’m white in contrast to black. I’m not just white as white.”\textsuperscript{131} White women in interracial relationships are still white, but no longer normative. For this reason, as well as others, white women in the late 70s, 80s and 90s formed interracial family groups to create social environments in which they felt more comfortable. Women both interviewed and reviewed for this essay claimed that they felt most comfortable in multiracial, multicultural settings.\textsuperscript{132, 133}

\textsuperscript{129} O’Donoghue, "Racial and Ethnic Identity Development in White Mothers of Biracial, Black-White Children," 81.
\textsuperscript{130} Karis, "Racial Identity Constructions of White Women in Heterosexual Black-White Interracial Relationships," 134.
\textsuperscript{131} Ibid., 144.
\textsuperscript{132} Mandy. Interview by Alicia Castagno. Telephone interview. October 28, 2011.
White Racial Identity Development

Because her experience of race and racism is rooted in her relational connection, as well as in the skin color she embodies, she is partially exempt from the oppression faced by those she loves. At the same time, because she sees how racism hurts the people she loves, racism becomes consciously relevant in her life.

-Terri Ann Karis^134

White racial identity is greatly challenged by involvement in interracial relationships and families. White women in interracial relationships do not have a normative white identity. Their non-privileged experiences and familial connections give them a unique outlook that is uncommon for white people (“I’m not typical white,” says “Annie”).^135 The anonymous woman quoted at the beginning of this chapter suggests that being part of an interracial family completely transformed her racial identity from white to black. White women who feel similarly changed by their families seek to reconcile their external whiteness with their internal feelings of otherness in a variety of ways. Essentialized notions of race and the limited ways in which to articulate racial experiences and identities outside of a black-white dichotomy make it difficult for white women in interracial black-white relationships to accurately label themselves. In spite of this difficulty, interracially married white women generally adhere to specific trends of racial self-identification. Both broadly and in the context of interracial organizations, women alternately self-identify as

raceless; define themselves by ethnic background instead of by race; think of
dthemselves as multiracial, women of color, or black; or claim to be racial liasons – as
Karis says, “outsiders within.” Many of white women’s articulations of non-
normative identities, however, remain inherently and unwittingly tied to white
privilege. These ties to privilege remained unbroken as inter racially married white
women became involved in multiracial politics, resulting in a very circumscribed
racial movement.

_Understanding Whiteness and Racial Exceptionalism_

White women in interracial relationships experience racial exceptionalism due
to their non-normative white identity: much of their racial experience no longer aligns
with the greater characteristics of whiteness. For example, Katz and Ivey (1977)
interviewed white subjects who were either single or in monoracial pairings about
how they racially categorized themselves and received answers such as “Italian,”
“English,” “Catholic,” and “Jewish.” They concluded, “White people do not see
themselves as White.”\(^{136}\) This conclusion is supported by the work of Robert Terry,
one of the first scholars to investigate the negative effects of racism on white people.
Terry asserts, “To be white in America is not to have to think about it. Except for
hard-core racial supremacists, the meaning of being White is having the choice of
attending to or ignoring one’s own Whiteness.”\(^{137}\) White women in interracial
relationships, however, are made excruciatingly aware of their whiteness. Racial

\(^{136}\) Judy Katz and Allen Ivey, "White Awareness: Handbook for Anti-Racism

\(^{137}\) Robert W. Terry, "The Negative Impact on White Values," _Impacts of Racism on
White Americans_, ed. Benjamin P. Bowser and Raymond G. Hunt (Beverly Hills:
Sage Press, 1981), 120.
consciousness permeates both public and private spheres. This increased awareness distances interracially involved white women from a “typical” white racial experience and from their racial community.

Due to their exclusion from white kinship and community, however, many white women in interracial relationships feel they are no longer fully white, or that they are raceless. Dalmage asserts that some women believe that they no longer benefit from whiteness and its symbolic advantage, while others may view their decision to enter an interracial relationship as a renunciation of whiteness and white privilege.\(^\text{138}\) One of Dalmage’s anonymous interviewees conveys this latter sentiment, “I was proud that I could be the first in the group that I hung out with in college to be in an interracial marriage… I was progressive enough to have a black boyfriend.”\(^\text{139}\) Since white women in interracial relationships do gain intimate access to communities of color and can be greatly affected by racial discrimination, their racial experience loses some of the comfort and racial naïveté whiteness provides. White privilege is directly linked to feeling entitled to safety and comfort.\(^\text{140}\) It is thus understandable that a loss of racial privilege could seem like a loss of white racial identity. However, this is not necessarily the case.

George Lipsitz, in *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* (2006), argues, “Whiteness is invested in, like property, but it is also a means of accumulating property and keeping from others.


\(^{140}\) Ibid., 204.
While one can possess one’s investments, one can also be possessed by them… the artificial construction of whiteness almost always comes to possess white people themselves unless they develop antiracist identities, unless they disinvest and divest themselves of their investments in white supremacy.”

Lipsitz’s assertion that white people must come to develop antiracist identities parallels the ultimate stage of development in many psychological models of white racial identity development (see Appendix VII). Conversely, Cross’s 1987 Black Racial Identity Development (BRID) theory involves different stages of coming to terms with racial and ethnic identity, particularly emphasizing self-esteem and reference-group (racial group) orientation. Phinney (1996) and Sue and Sue (1990), other BRID models, emphasize a progression from conformity, dissonance, resistance and immersion, and introspection to integrative awareness and racial pride. In contrast to white racial identity development (WRID) models that call for a rejection of both racism and affiliation with the dominant group, BRID prioritizes self-esteem and racial group belonging. Most WRID models assert that there exists no positive white racial identity outside of recognizing how white privilege informs white social reality. Racial group belonging is unimportant for white people, according to WRID theorists, though essential to forming a healthy black identity according to BRID theorists (a perspective substantiated by the National Association of Social Workers excerpt quoted earlier in the chapter). However, evidence from interviews with white women in interracial relationships illustrates the degree to which white racial group


belonging affects the women’s racial identities. Women expressed that they were ostracized not only by their immediate families for their interracial involvement, but also publicly criticized by and excluded from the white community. Part of this hostility may be due to the historically based fears and stereotypes of black men “making off with” white women. The loss of racial community belonging produces varied responses in interracially married white women; the most extreme perhaps (like the anonymous interviewee at the chapter’s beginning) is claiming a black identity.

The power to choose a racial identity, however, is only afforded to those in the position of highest racial power. Claiming a black identity is not the same as asserting an antiracist identity by disinvesting in white supremacy and its benefits. The very ability to engage in racial choice relies upon and perpetuates white privilege. Asserting a black or non-black person of color identity is thus an expression of such privilege. Being racially aware does not unmake whiteness, although it does alter a white person’s racial experience. Regardless of their relations’ racial background,

143 O'Donoghue, "Racial and Ethnic Identity Development in White Mothers of Biracial, Black-White Children,” 76.
145 White men jealously guarded whiteness and white “purity” by policing white women’s sexuality. Black men were viewed as sexual threats to white women, partially because they were assumed to be more animalistic and sexually driven than white men. Many lynchings and violent hate crimes directed against black men had to do with their presumed attention towards a white woman. The case of Emmett Till, a fourteen-year-old black boy brutally tortured and murdered in Mississippi after supposedly whistling at or inappropriately approaching a white woman, keenly illustrates this painful legacy.
white people receive tangible benefits from the symbolic advantage of their race.\textsuperscript{147} When a white woman is separated from her interracial family, she continues to receive benefits of white privilege. Moreover, experiencing “rebound racism”—the indirect effects of racism directed toward a non-white partner\textsuperscript{148} (to be discussed later)—and stereotyping as a “white woman who dates black men” is not the same as experiencing direct racism. The damage racism exacts upon white people is not the same damage that racism exacts upon people of color. As Mab Segrest states in her essay “The Souls of White Folks,”

\begin{quote}
White allies of people of color have been targets of racism – of physical attacks, social ostracism, economic deprivation. But whites as whites have not been lynched, enslaved, had lands stolen, suffered forced relocation onto reservations, had reserved for us the most difficult labor at the lowest wage, been bombarded by dehumanizing messages and ideologies, and so on ad nauseam.\textsuperscript{149}
\end{quote}

Non-white racial identities are fundamentally connected to histories of oppression and exploitation for the sake of maintaining white dominance, just as white identities are fundamentally tied to the histories and practices that maintain[ed] this imbalance of power. Self-assigning a non-white racial identity without experiencing continuously the associated and sometimes painful legacy of non-white peoples in the U.S. is an act of white privilege.

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{148} Heather Dalmage, \textit{Tripping on the Color Line: Black-White Multiracial Families in a Racially Divided World}, 66.
\item \textsuperscript{149} Mab Segrest, "The Souls of White Folks," \textit{The Making and Unmaking of Whiteness}, ed. B. Brander Rasmussen et al. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 44.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
Another response to the experiences associated with being in an interracial relationship is for some white mothers to foreground a European ethnic identity. Bailey names this phenomenon “unreflective detours to white ethnicity.”\textsuperscript{150} This trend illustrates two specific ways white women may cope with being in an interracial relationship. One way is to remain largely unchanged in the way they perceive race but to seek to assert racial exceptionalism by claiming an ethnic identity. The other is to attempt to escape white guilt after experiencing the negative affects of white supremacy on their families. Margaret O’Donoghue’s 2005 study of the ethnic identity of white mothers of biracial children widely demonstrated this latter trend.

Karis also found that white women in interracial relationships would instinctively answer with an ethnicity when asked, “How do you racially self-identify?”\textsuperscript{151} (Author’s emphasis). Her interviewees’ responses actually echo those of the single or monoracially partnered white subjects interviewed by Katz and Ivey in 1977. By opting to identify with a European identity, some white women reveal that they continue to view whiteness as normative, raceless and cultureless, even after marrying interracially and having biracial children. Margaret O’Donoghue’s 2004 study, "Racial and Ethnic Identity Development in White Mothers of Biracial, Black-White Children" clearly illustrates this point. O’Donoghue’s research reveals that her interracially married interviewees (some of whom were involved in interracial family groups, though not the ones explicitly discussed in this thesis) commonly raise their


\textsuperscript{151} Karis, "Racial Identity Constructions of White Women in Heterosexual Black-White Interracial Relationships,” 3.
children to identify as black, because they view whiteness as cultureless.\textsuperscript{152}

According to O’Donoghue, the women have “a somewhat unconscious understanding that the traditions that they, the mothers, could provide were either “just American,” or not something their children needed to incorporate into their identities.”\textsuperscript{153}

O’Donoghue’s commentary and her interviewees’ childrearing choices exemplify the fact that some white women conceive of whiteness as normative, “just American.”

For these women, belatedly identifying with a European ethnic identity allows them to sidestep this normativity by conflating race and culture. Certain white women—both those involved in interracial family organizations and those uninvolved—feel unable to contribute cultural knowledge to their children if they claim a white identity. To regain culture, they identify ethnically. By labeling whiteness as normal, “just American,” however, these white mothers also perpetuate white normativity and the racist structures that support it.

On the other hand, some white mothers emphasize a European ethnic identity to disown white guilt and more strongly align themselves with people of color through a “minority experience.” This armoring method, however, obscures the fact that non-Anglo-Saxon Europeans’ racial experience in the United States is based on a rejection of minority status. In his book, \textit{The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class}, David R. Roediger criticizes working class whites for abandoning class solidarity and equal rights advocacy in favor of

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[\textsuperscript{152}] O'Donoghue, "Racial and Ethnic Identity Development in White Mothers of Biracial, Black-White Children,” 74.
\item[\textsuperscript{153}] Ibid., 75.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
maintaining their whiteness and privilege. The same criticism applies to white people of European backgrounds who were typically discriminated against (for example: Irish, Italian, or Polish), and occupied the lower socio-economic sectors until the post-World War II era. Non-Western European immigrants and their descendants gained cultural power by claiming white racial status. This history undermines women’s attempts to use European ethnic identities to disown white privilege. Similar to self-identifying as a person of color, identifying with a European ethnic background does not prevent women from receiving racial privilege when separated from their interracial families.

The fundamental commonality between these different constructions of identity by white women in interracial relationships has been a disavowal of a [completely] white racial identity. Based on the data collected by Karis, Dalmage, O’Donoghue on general trends among racial identity of white mothers of biracial children, this rejection manifests itself in the form of self-identifying as a person of color, emphasizing European ethnic identities, or claiming to be “less white.” I argue that white privilege forms the grounds upon which these claims to identity are founded, largely due to the self-selecting nature of these women’s adjusted racial identities—again, a privilege only granted those of highest racial status—and their inability to recognize the ways in which racial privilege still affects them regardless of how they choose to self-identify.

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Extending the general trends from white mothers of biracial children (some of whom were involved in interracial family organizations and some who were not) interviewed by Karis, Dalmage and O’Donoghue to white mothers of biracial children explicitly involved in multiracial politics, I infer that white mothers’ participation in multiracial politics is connected to their personal identity and the lens of white privilege through which they viewed their biracial children’s reality.

**White Racial Identity and Interracial Family Organizations**

For the white mothers who founded key organizations in the Multiracial Movement, white privilege shaped not only their constructions of identity but also their political involvement. Heather Dalmage posits that the interracial family groups that started the dialogue around mixed heritage identity were merely support groups for white women who were experiencing what Ruth Frankenberg refers to as “rebound racism” for the first time.\(^{155}\) Frankenberg defines rebound racism as “a force that owes its existence and direction to an earlier aim and impact, yet retains enough force to wound.”\(^{156}\) Essentially, “rebound racism” refers to a white person indirectly experiencing the effects of racism and/or racial discrimination directed against a non-white (in this case, black) partner. For example, a non-white partner unjustly kept from job promotion would detrimentally affect the couple’s financial health, though the white partner would not directly experience racism. Similarly, if a classmate called a mixed heritage child a racial slur at school, the anger or empathy a


white mother would feel would be a reaction to the racism inflicted on her child. She, independently, does not experience racism. Attempting to escape these uncomfortable racial experiences by forming a support group of like-minded white women replicates the racial safety and comfort associated with white privilege.

At the start of the Multiracial Movement, few white mothers of biracial children made serious efforts to reach out to communities of color, choosing instead to form or join interracial family organizations.\textsuperscript{157}  \textsuperscript{158} Dalmage’s interviewee, Evelyn, mother of two black-white biracial children and member of an unspecified interracial family organization, illustrates this point as she explains her reasons for joining an interracial group: “… I don’t have many opportunities [to engage with black people] and my partner doesn’t provide me with any.”\textsuperscript{159} In the beginning, interracial family groups were seen as a training ground for white parents (particularly mothers) to discuss racial issues.\textsuperscript{160} O’Donoghue’s interviewee, Debbie, elaborates, “As White people, we haven’t had this subtle training on race for the first twenty years of life. I have no mechanisms for dealing with this. Getting together with other families provides the training.”\textsuperscript{161}

Both Evelyn and Debbie’s testimonials expose their unrelinquished white privilege. Evelyn expects her partner to provide her with opportunities to meet black

\textsuperscript{157} Margaret O'Donoghue, "White Mothers Negotiating Race and Ethnicity in the Mothering of Biracial Black-White Adolescents," \textit{Journal of ethnic and cultural diversity in social work} 14.3 (2005), 150.
\textsuperscript{158} Dalmage, \textit{Tripping on the Color Line: Black-White Multiracial Families in a Racially Divided World}, 67.
\textsuperscript{159} Dalmage, "Protecting Racial Comfort, Protecting White Privilege,” 207.
\textsuperscript{160} O'Donoghue, "White Mothers Negotiating Race and Ethnicity in the Mothering of Biracial Black-White Adolescents,” 149.
\textsuperscript{161} Ibid.,150.
people. She reproduces her privileged status and “right” to racial comfort by demanding that she be granted access to non-white communities without doing any work or engaging personally with people of color. Her racially unreflexive stance reveals her continued reliance upon racial privilege. Debbie, though slightly more reflexive (“I have no mechanisms for dealing with [race]”), also does not turn to communities of color for her racial training. Instead, she depends upon a group of other intermarriage-ally married white women to educate her about the ins and outs of race.  

The black husbands of politically active white mothers were notably uninvolved with interracial family groups. Due to such lack of involvement, women such as Evelyn and Debbie were not actually interacting with people of color in such groups, except perhaps on certain social occasions. The groups, rather than challenging white privilege, helped preserve it.

Many of these women also seemed to regard involvement in interracial family groups as a way to create spaces of privilege for their biracial children akin to those experienced by white children. White mothers’ desire to shield their children from racism, to provide a space in which a biracial child could “feel like he belonged and had people he could relate to,” greatly informed the formation of such groups.

Irene Carr, founder of Biracial Family Network, an interracial family group in

162 Although white mothers of biracial children could indeed educate other white mothers of biracial children, Debbie’s statement implies that she wishes to learn about race rather than parenting: “I have no mechanisms for this.”
166 Ibid.
Chicago, claimed that her son was the reason she originally founded the group.\textsuperscript{167} Mandy, I-Pride member and adoptive mother of two biracial children, also expressed that she joined I-Pride to give her son a racial community. This sentiment further conveys the socio-historic emphasis placed on racial group belonging.\textsuperscript{168} Interracial organizations with a social bent, like BFN and I-Pride, worked to oppose race and racial issues invading private spheres. Mandy claimed, “[I-Pride] was just for the kids, so they could see kids that were like them… people tell you that kids don’t notice racial difference for a long time, and maybe that’s true, but my son was aware after a time that all of the kids in his school but him were white.”\textsuperscript{169} For so many interracial couples who had lost contact with their extended family, interracial family organizations could also provide new kinship networks for their children.

Groups like Susan Graham’s Project RACE, however, which were founded by white mothers but run with an expressly political bent, defended multiracial rights in the public sphere. Social organizations like I-Pride and BFN also eventually became politically involved. White mothers actively campaigned for their children’s equal rights, specifically focusing on changing racial labels on school forms and Census data collection to include a “Multiracial” category. The founding mothers of multiracial politics did not turn to adult people of mixed heritage or their mixed heritage children to direct their political course. Their organizations aimed to protect and re-separate private and public spheres and normalize multiracial identities by gaining official federal recognition of a “Multiracial” category and establishing a

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{168}] Mandy. Interview by Alicia Castagno. Telephone interview. October 28, 2011.
\item[\textsuperscript{169}] Ibid.
\end{itemize}
[multi]racial community. Their goals reveal, however, that white mothers sought to replicate the privileged and normative existence of whiteness for their children of color.

Although some scholars criticize politically active white mothers of biracial children for solely focusing on multiraciality and ignoring greater issues of racism out of race-based ignorance, this is not necessarily the case. As established in the previous discussion of separate spheres, many white mothers perceive the family as a private, personal institution. Politically involved white mothers were not necessarily ignorant of issues broadly relevant to communities of color, but rather cared about their family and their children’s racial “safety” instead of greater issues of racism. While eliminating threats to their children’s racial existence, their actions may have supported anti-racist groups or sentiment. However, their involvement in multiracial politics did not necessitate knowledge of or commitment to anti-racist issues. Susan Graham candidly admitted that while she was a trailblazer in multiracial politics, she had never researched critical race theory or racism. She focused instead on learning the ins and outs of politics, so that she could institute political change that would increase her children’s racial normativity.

Some white mothers of biracial children, as previously stated, self-identify as black or biracial. By doing so, they mistake their personal racial experience and feelings for those of their children and black and/or multiracial communities. These particular white mothers’ “racial ventriloquism” and collapsing of racial identities strongly aligns their role in the Multiracial Movement with sentimental politics.

**Flesh and Blood: Complicating Sentimental Politics**

The political actions of white mothers of biracial black-white children in the Multiracial Movement sit firmly within a tradition of sentimental discourse in U.S. politics, which set a political precedent for white women to campaign on behalf of black people in the public sphere. Whether intentionally or no, white mothers of black-white biracial children slipped easily into established discourses of sentimental politics.

Sentimental discourses became prominent in the writings of 19th century white female abolitionists. As Karen Sánchez-Eppler writes, these white female abolitionists tended to use emotional appeals to collapse difference and conflate their white female bodies with slave bodies. Sentimental tradition as a whole is based on the ideology of an equal and unified humanity rather than structurally separated and unequal groups. Sentimental politics thus rely on the idea of collective but individually experienced pain as a unifying force, using what Lauren Berlant terms “conventions of excess”—melodrama and romance, for example—to express “true” (read: universal) desires and suffering.\(^1\) The appropriation of difference and the use of confused identification to express personal desire, however, “necessarily involves distortion, mistranslation, and misrecognition” of the appropriated body/identity.\(^2\) Berlant states: “… sentimental politics are being performed whenever putatively suprapolitical affects or affect-saturated institutions (like the nation or the family) are

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\(^1\) Laura Berlant, "Poor Eliza," *American Literature* 70.3 (1998), 637.
\(^2\) Ibid., 639.
proposed as universalist solutions to structural racial, sexual, or intercultural antagonism, “173 (author’s emphasis).

Unfortunately, in the Multiracial Movement, it was the institution of family that facilitated white mothers’ appropriation of difference and slippage of identity. One such slippage would be racially identifying as black or biracial. As can be seen in the various studies of white mothers of biracial children’s racial identity development, some interracially married white women justify their attempts to disown a white identity by citing their non-white familial relations (“Because that’s what my children are,”). However, by conflating empathy and love for their children with the child’s racial identity, mothers who advocated for their children’s rights in the Multiracial Movement unwittingly reproduced the sentimental tradition. Because they did not fully disown or disengage from their white privilege, these white mothers could not dismiss their whiteness. Even if they wished to relinquish it, their physical markers labeled them as white in the public sphere, where institutionalized racism ensured that they continued to receive the benefits of whiteness.

While sentimental politics do have the power to create great institutional and social change (Lauren Berlant acknowledges the international popularity and force of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s Uncle Tom’s Cabin in the abolitionist movement), Sánchez-Eppler asserts that sentimental politics and sentimental narratives necessarily

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173 Ibid., 638.
175 Berlant, "Poor Eliza," 639.
function through stereotypes.\textsuperscript{176} Because sentimental politics must always be performed on behalf of someone else, emotional excess is necessary to mask (or, in the minds of sentimental politicians, transcend) difference. Berlant claims, “in order to benefit from the therapeutic promises of sentimental discourse you must imagine yourself with someone else’s stress, pain, or humiliated identity.”\textsuperscript{177} The “someone else”—a group identity—is thus simplified and essentialized (stereotyped) to make the appropriation of his or her emotion and identity easier. In the case of white mothers in the Multiracial Movement, it is perhaps even easier to adopt the racialized other’s emotional burden, since the “other” is a being with whom she has shared emotional experiences, and whom she perceives as directly of her flesh.

Sánchez-Eppler’s analysis of sentimental politics places a great deal of emphasis on the role of physical bodies and flesh in silencing the experiences of black slaves during abolition.\textsuperscript{178} By co-opting black bodies and black political interests as their own through an excess of supposed similarity and emotional “connection,” white female abolitionists erased the important differences between black slave experiences and their own, effectively silencing black voices. The women reduced slaves to mere bodies, with and upon which they could transcribe specific political meaning, even as they sought to prove the personhood of blacks and women outside of their mere (and politically excluded) bodies. In the case of interracial motherhood, however, the distinction between racialized bodies and their flesh is not so clear.

\textsuperscript{177} Berlant, "Poor Eliza," 648.  
What racially could be classified as “distinct flesh”—that of the multiracial child and white mother—is not distinct. Family flesh is biologically connected and shared, complicating in this case the identification of white women with black bodies.

Abolition and White Female Advocacy: A Brief History of Sentimental Politics

In the 1830s, feminist politics and abolitionist politics converged. White women and non-white peoples were classified as politically bodiless groups with questionable personhood within the social and governmental framework of the 19th century. Politically-minded white women such as Sarah and Angela Grimké, two of the first female abolitionists, likened the body of the slave to that of the disenfranchised white female on the basis of their absorbable, denied personhood. Women were politically absorbed into the power of their male relatives, while slaves were absorbed into the power of their masters. Feminists of the time likened womanhood to slave bonds even though, as Sánchez-Eppler notes, “such pairings generally tend toward asymmetry and exploitation.” By conflating white women with slaves, female abolitionists destroyed the difference between the two groups’ lived experiences, and thus did not allow questioning of the hegemonic structures that made the two experiences distinct (racism and class/caste-ism). Moreover, the conflation of a subjugated female experience with a subjugated slave experience gave rise to the idea that the improvement of one body would necessarily also lead to the improvement of the other. Not only was this a false conclusion, but it further

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179 Ibid., 1.
180 Ibid., 9.
181 Ibid., 15.
182 Ibid., 20.
183 Ibid.
strengthened the harmful collapsing of slave and white female bodies, silencing black perspectives.

Sánchez-Eppler argues that “[t]ransformed from a silent site of oppression into a symbol of that oppression, the [black] body becomes within feminist abolitionist discourse a means of gaining rhetorical force.”\textsuperscript{184} As a symbol, however, the body is still silent. Meanings are transcribed across that body for political ends, yet it remains silent. White mothers of biracial children similarly focused on the bodies of their children to protest the discomfort of a racially liminal identity. Like the body of the politically and culturally disenfranchised slave, the body of the politically and culturally disenfranchised child is easily malleable for political ends.

For white women to give voice to the silenced body of the slave is an articulation of their own rights.\textsuperscript{185} Similarly, campaigning for multiracial rights is an articulation of a mother’s right to advocate for her child. In both cases, however, the disenfranchised slave and the disenfranchised child do not have the opportunity to exercise similar rights of their own; they remain disenfranchised. Paradoxically, by speaking for black and multiracial subjects, both the female abolitionists and white mothers of multiracial children prevented the very thing they claimed to desire: a social and political “voice” for the subjects of their campaigns.

Female abolitionist discourse likened women’s political actions to the Biblical image of Martha removing stone from Lazarus’s grave.\textsuperscript{186} Angela Grimké stated: “Our business is to take away the stone which has covered up the dead body of our

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\textsuperscript{184} Ibid., 18.  \\
\textsuperscript{185} Ibid., 19.  \\
\textsuperscript{186} Ibid., 2.  
\end{flushleft}
brother… to stand by the negro’s grave in humble faith and holy hope, waiting to hear the life-giving commando of “Lazarus, come forth.”\textsuperscript{187} Her use of “our business” indicates that political action against slavery is a not only white woman’s moral duty, but also her right. The image of “the negro” as Lazarus further implies that “the negro” plays no part in the political movement, but merely acts as symbol. His psychological presence is markedly absent even though his physical body remains. Although Grimké portrays the relationship between white women and black slave as being so connected as to be siblings (literally indicating a shared flesh and obscured difference), the context of the image indicates that “the negro” is a passive force upon whom and for whom actions are committed. Grimké’s metaphor actually bolsters the paternalistic power relationship between whites and blacks and undermines her desired message of solidarity. When white mothers of biracial children use a similar argument, however, it is complicated by the fact that, like Lazarus and Martha but unlike white female abolitionists and black slaves, they are related to the black body for which they advocate. Family and blood ties muddle hierarchical racial relationships.

Although it is not necessarily an act of white privilege for white mothers to campaign for the rights of their biracial children, the white founders of organizations such as I-Pride, BFN, and Project RACE advocated for the needs of multiracials as a racial group. Though well intentioned, this advocacy echoes the paternalism of sentimental politics. Paternalism is not always problematic in this context: children under eighteen years of age are financial and political dependents. It is a parent’s

\textsuperscript{187} Ibid.
right and responsibility to protect her children until they are of age. However, as was the issue in the AMEA/Project RACE split in 1997, multiracial adults and white mothers of biracial children did not always agree on the course of action to be taken for multiracial interests in general. Tensions at the Third Summit in 1997 arose because multiracial activists felt that Susan Graham was pursuing her own interests rather than those of the multiracial adults.

When white mothers of biracial children engage in “racial ventriloquism” or use empathy to legitimize a woman of color or biracial identity, they ignore distinct racial privileges and experiences afforded to white people. Even as they seek to escape whiteness by self-identifying as non-white, their inability to disinvest in its unique privileges simply reproduces such privilege. Racial choice is in itself a racial privilege. Another poignant example of some white women’s inability to disinvest in white privilege is white mothers’ attempts to reclaim spaces of privilege and normativity for their children through multiracial politics, specifically the politics of recognition. Instead of critically engaging with broader racial issues, many white mothers in the Multiracial Movement addressed race only insofar as it affected their family and personal comfort. Many cited family as the impetus for a transformation in racial self-identity. By exploiting family connection as a justification to collapse racial difference, however, these same women not only fail to engage with racism on a wide scale, but they also leave no room for others to challenge racist structures or hegemony; interracial family becomes a solution to racism. Susan Graham states, “If we allow people to say that they are multiracial, that is the only way to get rid of race. Because if you think about the way society is going, one day everyone is going to be
multiracial, and you want to do away with one race being against another race, that’s
the way you’re going to do it.” This prevailing sentiment, rooted in racial naïveté,
aligned some multiracial advocacy with the conservative colorblindness and
multiculturalism of politicians like Newt Gingrich and Ward Connerly, and
discredited multiracial politics in the eyes of civil rights groups. In the end, the
multiple failures on the part of white mothers of biracial children to disinvest in white
supremacy resulted in a multiracial politics that could never fully separate itself from
its foundations in white privilege, and could never achieve the widespread, radical
change of the ethnic power movements that preceded it.

188 Graham, Susan. Interview by Alicia Castagno. Telephone interview. November
12, 2011.
CHAPTER 3: WHITENESS AND PRIVILEGE IN THE MULTIRACIAL MOVEMENT - PROJECT RACE AS CASE STUDY

This chapter critically engages with the ways in which interracially involved white mothers’ racial identity and perspective informed their political actions in the Multiracial Movement. I use Project RACE and Susan Graham as a case study to illustrate the connections between racial identity and specific forms of multiracial advocacy, and to nuance the scathing criticism Graham often receives from other scholars of Critical Mixed Race Studies. I had the good fortune to interview Graham on two separate occasions, and I integrate primary source material throughout my analysis of Project RACE and Graham’s involvement in the Multiracial Movement.

In general, politically active white mothers of biracial children attempted to reclaim the white privileged-based separateness of public and private spheres by politically normalizing a multiracial identity for their children. This reclamation expressed itself through focusing particularly on federal recognition of multiracial people. Focusing on the politics of recognition, however, prevented the Multiracial Movement from expanding beyond federal acknowledgement. By not widely engaging with the greater issues of race and racism that multiraciality potentially illuminates, the movement was circumscribed to racial data collection and government recognition of a multiracial community.

Complicating the Multiracial Politics of Recognition

Much of interracial family organizations’ initial political action was geared toward achieving multiracial recognition on local school forms. The Multiracial Movement’s central focus on the politics of recognition stemmed from this original advocacy. Although multiracial politics of recognition proved to be limiting to the
movement, they did more broadly have the potential for positive and meaningful change. Multiracial advocates followed in the footsteps of white mothers in interracial family groups and largely sought multiracial recognition independent of pre-existing racial groups. Much of the rhetoric employed by multiracial activists at the start of the movement included phrases like “I’m not white and I’m not black – I’m multiracial.”\textsuperscript{189} This denial of federally acknowledged racial identities alienated monoracial civil rights organizations and their constituents, preventing them from sympathizing with the “multiracial cause.”\textsuperscript{190} Many dissenters of the Multiracial Movement assumed that “multiracial” inherently referred to people with a “white plus some other race” racial background. They viewed multiracials as people of color who sought to deny non-white—especially black—identity.\textsuperscript{191} White mothers of biracial children in interracial family groups did not help this impression by campaigning for their children’s recognition as exclusively multiracial instead of actively celebrating the children’s non-white heritage.

In interviews with Karis, O’Donoghue and Dalmage, some white mothers of black-white biracial children suggested that they felt hurt if their child identified as black. They felt left out of their own families. One of Karis’s interviewees, “Veronica,” expressed some sadness about the racial distance she felt from her

\textsuperscript{189} Not an "Other", dir. PBS, perf. Charles Byrd Paul Solman, Linda Jacobsen, Orlando Patterson, PBS, 1997.
\textsuperscript{190} Ibid.
biracial children: “When they [my children] come in here, I’m the different one…”

Advocating for a multiracial category and the acceptance of multiracial identities allowed women like “Veronica” to lay claim to their children and bridge the racial gap between mother and child, even though some multiracial children did not identify as such. Original I-Pride member Mandy’s adopted multiracial son, Eric, for example, currently identifies as black. Mandy stated that she was unsure how to racially classify Eric when she filled out his school and medical forms during his childhood. Like “Veronica,” she expressed some regret that he chose to identify monoracially. As a transracially adoptive mother, however, she had already expected a parent-child racial gap and did not take it as a personal slight: “I do recognize, though, that my son has had racial experiences that make him identify more as being black. He’s had to figure it out on his own.”

Standalone multiracial recognition or a “Multiracial” umbrella category, rather than the “mark one or more” format that the government ultimately adopted, however, could have potentially provoked a widespread critical examination of race and racism in the United States. It could have created a multiracial racial community, allowing a wide variety of individuals of diverse backgrounds with ties to different monoracial groups to connect. Such interracial coalition and obvious diversity within a single racial group could have led to examining existing monoracial racial groups for equal diversity, complicating the way race is socially constructed and culturally maintained. Similarly, investigating the identity preferences of mixed heritage

peoples who did/do not identify as multiracial (Barack Obama, for example) could have further complicated discussions of race and identity. Not all people of mixed heritage identify as such, for a variety of personal and political reasons. Some white “plus some other race” multiracial people, in fact, actively opposed multiracial recognition during the Multiracial Movement.\(^{194}\) They felt, as the monoracial civil rights groups did, that multiracials had a social and political responsibility to identify (at least on paper) with their non-white heritage, in order to increase minority group populations on federal record. This viewpoint, however, received some backlash from certain political activists in Multiracial Movement. Susan Graham, head of Project RACE, for example, asserted, “Nobody can tell me my children are more black than white,”\(^{195}\) and actively protested racial labels being thrust upon multiracials, regardless of where those labels came from.

The dominant American political climate during the early days of the movement was largely receptive to any cause that might promote and legitimize “colorblindness.” For example, Graham and conservative multiracial activists like Charles Byrd, black-white biracial author of the webzine, *Interracial Voice*, who railed against the black community’s fears of losing numbers and advocated for a standalone “Multiracial” category,\(^{196}\) were specifically focused upon by the federal


\(^{195}\) Ibid.

\(^{196}\) In a radio interview with PBS in 1997, following the OMB’s decision to endorse a “mark one or more” racial classification option on the 2000 Census, Charles Byrd remarked, “I think this fear of hurting the official minority communities is really nonsense because if they lose "numbers," due to the establishment of a multiracial
government and media\textsuperscript{197} because their political views supported “colorblind” multiculturalism.

Graham and Project RACE pushed to the forefront of the movement, focusing specifically on courting the media and campaigning for standalone multiracial recognition. Unwittingly, with its political success, white leader and conservative allies like Gingrich and Connerly, Project RACE became the unrepresentative representative of the Multiracial Movement and its activists in the public sphere. Multiracial activists within the movement presented a united front, but many did not get along with Graham or approve of her involvement.\textsuperscript{198} Ramona Douglass, for example, second president of AMEA, and Graham collaborated to represent multiracial interests in Washington, D.C. They had a falling out, however, after Douglass cooperated with the NAACP to abandon the “Multiracial” terminology on the 2000 census. Graham recalls, “[the NAACP said,] “We need to have people put in the black category, we need to build bridges and drop the multiracial category.” And Ramona said “ok” and that was the last time we spoke (laughs).”\textsuperscript{199} Much of the movement’s dissent came from monoracial minority groups responding negatively to standalone multiracial recognition and Graham’s conservative allies. On the other

\textsuperscript{197} Not an "Other", dir. PBS.
\textsuperscript{199} Graham, Susan. Interview by Alicia Castagno. Telephone interview. October 11, 2011.
hand, much of the movement’s successes were only possible due to Graham’s political trailblazing and the government’s receptiveness to her political views. Graham, though exceptional in her perseverance as a white leader of a multiracial group and her refusal to give up the standalone “Multiracial” category, serves as a representative case study of the ways in which white women’s racial experiences and identity informed their participation in the Multiracial Movement.

**Project RACE**

I took a lot of heat for being the mother of multiracial children, because I’m not multiracial. I’ve taken a lot of heat for this.

- Susan Graham, Co-Founder and President of Project RACE

Critical Mixed Race Studies scholars, critical race theorists, and multiracial activists have criticized Project RACE throughout the Multiracial Movement for its sustained white leadership, its refusal to renounce a standalone “Multiracial” race category, and Susan Graham’s conservative political allies. While other groups founded by white mothers of biracial children eventually ceded control of their organizations to multiracial adults, Graham still maintains control over Project RACE. Because of this, she is criticized while the other white founders of interracial family groups are not. Furthermore, due to her great successes in Washington—for it was she who truly brought multiracial recognition to D.C.—and her continued involvement in multiracial politics after many groups disbanded post-Census 2000, Graham is often vilified in multiracial literature as the epitome of all that is problematic within the Multiracial Movement. Both anti-multiracial scholars like Rainier Spencer and scholars who research multiraciality in a positive way harshly

Spencer writes: “Graham employs hypodescent in a selective manner in order to assert a multiracial identity for a child who is no more racially mixed than her [African American] father… Graham makes clear that acceptance of biological race as a reality, and the deployment of a selective hypodescent, are primary foundations of the multiracial argument as currently constituted.”\footnote{Rainier Spencer, "Assessing Multiracial Identity Theory and Politics: The Challenge of Hypodescent," \textit{Ethnicities} 4.3 (2004), 371.}

Unlike Spencer, Kim M. Williams does not criticize multiracial identity politics. She does, however, specifically lambast Graham:

Susan Graham did not respond to the [anti-multiracial] NAACP address, probably because she held out hope that, through the “Tiger Woods Bill” (H.R. 830), she had found a way to avoid dealing with the venerated civil rights organization altogether. (At her home in 1998, I noticed a photograph of Graham and Newt Gingrich on the living room wall…)\footnote{Graham denied the existence of such a photograph in our personal interview. She said that Williams’s publisher contacted her to check that this particular detail was accurate, but did not listen to her response. See Appendix V.} …Susan Graham of Project RACE cared primarily about getting a multiracial category on the census; if this adversely affected civil rights enforcement efforts, so be it.\footnote{Kim M. Williams, \textit{Mark One or More: Civil Rights in Multiracial America} (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 92-93.}

It is easy to come to this same critical interpretation of Graham and Project RACE by relying on secondary sources alone. However, personally interviewing Graham was an enlightening experience. While it is true that Project RACE aligned itself with conservative politicians, and that Graham has yet to relinquish the “Multiracial” category or her leadership of the organization, she is a passionate and thoughtful
activist. Her actions reveal her ignorance of racial theory and racial history, but her decisions have complex back-stories that make her choices seem more reasonable than multiracial scholars and activists often portray them to be.

**Beginnings**

Graham founded Project RACE in 1991 in response to institutionalized racism on the census and in her son’s primary school. As mentioned in Chapter 1, when Graham contacted the Census Bureau to ask how to racially identify her son, the representative told her to assign him the race of his mother because “in cases like these, we always know who the mother is, but not who the father is.”\(^{205}\) This sentiment echoes the reactions that the greater white community had towards white women in interracial relationships: both the Census Bureau and white community viewed interracial relationships and biracial children as figuratively and/or literally illegitimate, product of a woman’s sexual promiscuity rather than love and partnership. Graham’s incident with the census made her revisit her son’s school to check on racial tabulation there. While the school administrators had previously told her that she did not have to disclose her son’s racial background, when Graham asked to see his records, the kindergarten teacher had marked his race as “Black” on the first day of school. When asked why she had chosen a black identity for the boy, the teacher justified her decision based on “the knowledge and observation of [Graham’s] son.”\(^{206}\) Graham was so incensed by the school and Census Bureau’s policies that she immediately launched into political action.


\(^{206}\) Ibid.
Carlos Fernández, president of I-Pride and AMEA at the time (1991), helped Graham connect with, in Graham’s words, “a mom in Ohio who was also as upset as I was, and she wanted to do something politically to change it…”207 I interpret Graham and the other mother, Chris Ashe’s, extreme indignation as a sign of racial privilege as well as a mother’s desire to “protect” her child. Ashe and Graham’s strong reactions to the Census policy suggest that they were not accustomed to racial stereotyping (in this case, stereotypes of interracially married mothers) or externally imposed racial labels. People of color in the United States have been subjected to both, which could explain why both women’s husbands—and husbands of color throughout the Multiracial Movement—were notably uninvolved in multiracial advocacy: they were not shocked by the racial stereotyping of their multiracial children or interracially married spouses. Even multiracial activists in AMEA were dismissive of both women’s reaction to the issue: “[AMEA] introduced [Susan Graham to Chris Ashe], and they kind of discounted her, like she was trying to do something political, but they didn’t want to get involved.”208 This, however, may have been because multiracial activists were hoping to distance themselves from white mothers of biracial children and create an independent political voice.

As of 1994, AMEA president Carlos Fernández wanted to prioritize building multiracial community as the Multiracial Movement’s new goal.209 He felt that with the existence of over sixty multiracial and interracial groups nationwide, multiracial

207 Ibid.
208 Ibid.
consciousness had already been established. Though AMEA’s constituents independently worked to expand racial classification, it had not yet become a major group goal; AMEA’s focus on changing Office of Management and Budget racial standards occurred over a year later. Graham and Ashe’s political focus and potential volatility were not something Fernández supported. Moreover, according to Graham, many people of color, including multiracial activists and scholars, did not believe that she could change the way the federal government conceived of or tabulated race.

Graham recalled, “When we first started Project RACE, Carlos Fernández [AMEA President] didn’t think it was going to work, said, “We’ll stay separate.” … one of the academics in the area said, “Susan, you will never get the government to change the way they think about race.” And I said, “You know what? I’m a mom, I’m going to be here in ten years, and I want to do this. I can always try again.” We’ve got to try.” Project RACE was officially founded as a 501(c)3 organization in 1991.

Constituents of the newly formed Project RACE were racially and class diverse, says Graham, but overwhelmingly female: “There are about ten women who were around when we started Project Race, and I don’t remember even one man.” When asked why she thought that advocacy in the Multiracial Movement was similarly skewed, Graham responded, “I think women are more naturally advocates for some reason. Look at MADD, it’s women, and it’s moms, and it’s sisters. Sometimes we can just relate better to women, there’s just not that little edge of

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210 Ibid.
212 Ibid.
213 Ibid.
214 Ibid.
power struggle there that you have with a man.” Interestingly, Graham credits the collaborative nature of the initial interracial family groups within the Multiracial Movement to their being run by women (“we can just relate better”). Indeed, many of the first organizations’ leaders were in constant contact with one another to exchange ideas and plan new groups. In the process of trying to get Project RACE 501(c)3 certified and politically organized, Graham also found a female support network of political mentors and allies in her son’s school Parent-Teacher Association. She states, “Anyone who thinks the PTA is a group of moms who cook cookies and do bake sales is wrong – they are a huge legislative force. They gave me all the information I needed [to get politically involved]… it took three years to pass the legislation in Georgia, and they were with me the whole time.”

Graham’s alliance with the PTA exemplifies the centrality of separate spheres ideology and white privilege to her multiracial advocacy. As discussed in Chapter 2, Graham viewed publicly imposed racial labels on her child’s private identity to be threatening and offensive. The PTA is a domestic institution that mediates

\[218\] Ibid.
\[219\] “Domestic” in this sense refers to Laura Wexler’s association of gender, race, class and the historical production of “domestic” images and spaces in her book, Tender Violence. Domestic production in turn reproduces imperialist dynamics. The PTA is a female gendered, domestic institution. Women, perceived authorities of the private sphere, make up most of its participants. Housewives and women of higher socio-economic standing whose families do not need their financial support may take more active roles within the PTA than their working mother counterparts.
between the two spheres: parents represent the interests of private families while teachers represent the will of a public institution. Graham’s white privileged perspective again facilitated her indignation at the blurring of supposedly separate public and private spheres. Her reliance on the PTA to help her re-separate and sanctify the two spheres reveals that her framework for interpreting racial events was still constrained by white privileged expectations. White privilege supports right to private sphere safety while white normativity—the portrayal of white culture and whiteness as “normal”—naturalizes the separation of public and private spheres in the minds of white Americans.221

Chris Ashe was responsible for Project RACE’s first political victory and, according to Graham, “the first legislation for multiracial children in the country.”222 Ashe knew the speaker of the house in Ohio, William L. Mallory, Sr. Mallory Sr. was a black politician with multiracial grandchildren, and supported Project RACE’s political mission. Thanks to his collaboration with Ashe and Graham, the Ohio legislature placed a “Multiracial” option on school forms. After this small victory, Graham stated, “We decided to start [developing Project RACE] locally: our public schools, our neighborhood.”223 Ashe and Graham also began to court the media in a pointed attempt to increase multiracial awareness and create a political support base. Graham explained Project RACE’s early success and media attention: “We had our

223 Ibid.
ducks in a row, once we figured out what the ducks were. This was all before everybody was on the Internet. We started tooting our horn, doing media, doing PR... We used the media very well. It [multiracial recognition] was new; it was something people hadn’t talked about it before.”

In general, mothers advocating for their children’s multiracial rights drew public attention to the actions of groups like Project RACE. Emotion and sentimentality were at the core of initial public interest; the mothers’ strong involvement made the Multiracial Movement seem linked to defending the rights of the American family in addition to purely racial issues. Moreover, Project RACE’s platform of formal multiracial recognition attracted the interest of both “colorblind” conservatives and monoracial civil rights organizations, placing it at the center of media attention. Chris Ashe eventually had to abandon Project RACE, but not before her Ohio representative, William L. Mallory, Sr., and his friend, Tom Sawyer, head of the Committee on the Post Office and Civil Service in Washington, invited Project RACE to participate in a federal panel discussing new racial standards for the 2000 Census.

*Project RACE and the Census 2000 “Race Debate”*

The government made one demand of Susan Graham in light of her invitation to the panel in Washington, D.C.: Project RACE was required to choose a single term to represent their multiracial constituents. Graham recalls, “we put out a questionnaire to our members, listing all the different terms,” and said if you have to pick one,

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224 Ibid.
225 Different key players throughout the Multiracial Movement used different terms to describe themselves. AMEA originally wanted “multiethnic.” Charles Byrd, author of
what would it be? A lot of people said they’d really like “biracial,” but “multiracial” would be more inclusive. So we said ok, this is what our contingency wants. That’s why we went with the “Multiracial” box.”226 Moreover, Project RACE was the only inter- or multiracial organization invited to speak on the government panel. Tom Sawyer, Project RACE’s ally in D.C., asked if Graham wished to invite anyone to join her. Even though AMEA president, Carlos Fernández, had been unsupportive of Graham, Ashe and Project RACE, Graham requested that he, Edwin Darden (an educational law attorney and AMEA supporter), and her son accompany her. Along with an ally already in the government, Major Marvin Arnold (a sympathetic representative of the Walter Reed Institute of Army Research), Graham stated, “that was our basic panel, and that’s when I think they started to take us very seriously.”227

After the panel, Graham’s congressman and Speaker of the House of Representatives, Newt Gingrich, who Graham had contacted when she was searching for political guidance two years earlier, finally agreed to meet with her. Graham gave Gingrich a ten-minute presentation on multiracial recognition, and “he thought about it for about 30 seconds and said “You know, this is the right thing to do for kids,”

Interracial Voice, preferred the term “Interracial.” White and Asian-specific group, Hapa Issues Forum (HIF) in California advocated for “Hapa.” Though the term was originally a derogatory Hawaiian word to describe people of mixed white and Native Hawaiian heritage (the full phrase hapa haole meaning half foreigner/outsider), it was appropriated by multiracial Asians living in Hawai‘i (and later, the continental U.S.) to refer to themselves. Others preferred “biracial,” while proponents of “mixed heritage,” like MAVIN Foundation in Seattle, sought to encompass a variety of similar cultural experiences that were not necessarily defined by multirace (multiethnic, multicultural, and transracially monoracial people, for example). 226 Graham, Susan. Interview by Alicia Castagno. Telephone interview. November 11, 2011. 227 Graham, Susan. Interview by Alicia Castagno. Telephone interview. November 11, 2011.
turned to his assistant and said, “We’re going to help Mrs. Graham.” Both multi-
and monoracial activists of color have chastised Graham for her alliance with
have also berated Graham for her multiple conservative alliances. In her
defense, she stated:

You know, I’m a lobbyist, and will dance with whoever signs my dance card. I
don’t care if they’re black, white, blue, green, Democrat, Republican; if they want
to help us, they’ll help us. I took a lot of heat for siding with Gingrich. …on the
other hand, he did help us. He put us in a much better bargaining position. I don’t
agree with a lot of the things Newt Gingrich believes in, but he was my
congressman, and he helped us a lot.

While Graham’s explanation clarifies her position and choice of political
allies, it also illustrates her racial naïveté and privilege. The criticism she received
both during and after her participation in the discussions surrounding Census 2000
did not affect her decision to ally with Gingrich. The people who disagreed with her
decisions were people of color—multiracials and monoracials alike—who better
understood the implications of siding with a conservative politician like Gingrich.
Monoracials like Harold McDougall, Director of the Washington Bureau of the
NAACP, and scholar Rainier Spencer took Graham’s political alliance as proof that

228 Ibid.
229 Kim M. Williams, "From Civil Rights to the Multiracial Movement," New Faces
in a Changing America: Multiracial Identity in the 21st Century, ed. Herman L.
95.
230 Heather Dalmage, Kim M. Williams, and Ramona Douglass are some of the few
Critical Mixed Race Studies scholars and activists to have decried Graham’s alliance
with conservative politicians like Newt Gingrich and Ward Connerly. Rainier
Spencer similarly lambasts Graham in his book, Spurious Issues: Race and
231 Graham, Susan. Interview by Alicia Castagno. Telephone interview. November
12, 2011.
multiracial recognition supported conservative “colorblindness” and anti-affirmative action politics.\textsuperscript{232,233}

Graham seems not to comprehend that her alliance with Gingrich also allied multiracial politics with his goals of conservative “colorblindness.” In the quotation above, Graham naïvely believes that whoever wants to support her cause may do so (“if they want to help us, they’ll help us”), and that the supporting party’s motives should not or do not affect the integrity of her proposal for multiracial recognition. Her statement suggests that she does not believe that she is “tainted by association,” or that her alliance puts her in a dangerous position of political reciprocity. This is ironic, considering that Graham justified Project RACE’s refusal to accept government grants by stating that she did not wish to be put at a disadvantage when lobbying for multiracial recognition: “It put you in a situation where we were fighting the government, the Census Bureau, the OMB, and if we took money from the federal government, that could compromise us. It had already happened to other groups.”\textsuperscript{234}

Although Gingrich was Graham’s congressman, and thus had a professional responsibility to represent her in the federal government regardless of either party’s personal politics, Graham did not apply the same logic to seeking his help as she did to the government grants. Monoracial civil rights groups and advocates, on the other hand, did worry about reciprocal political relationships between groups like Project

\textsuperscript{232} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{233} Multiracial Identity, dir. Brian Chinhema, Bullfrog Films, 2011.
\textsuperscript{234} Graham, Susan. Interview by Alicia Castagno. Telephone interview. November 11, 2011.
RACE and conservative politicians. These conservative “false allies” to multiracial interests bolstered more convincing criticism of the movement in general.\(^{235}\)

Shortly after the government panel and Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich’s endorsement of formal multiracial recognition, the National Academy of Sciences invited Graham to another meeting regarding the 2000 census. She assumed that the activists and allies she invited to the initial panel would also be attending. When Graham arrived in Washington, however, she was once again the only invitee representing multiracial interests. At the meeting, “it was mostly OMB people, they’d invited some other folks; huge room, huge table, and there I was with Marvin [Arnold, the educational law attorney sympathetic to multiracial issues in D.C.].”\(^{236}\)

The fact that Graham was singled out twice by the federal government to represent multiracial interests suggests that the government had specific political interests to maintain within the discussion of changing racial data tabulation, and that they intended to pursue a multiracial ally that supported those same interests. Graham’s support of a standalone “Multiracial” category aligned “multiracial interests” with “colorblindness” and the construction of a national narrative of post-racial America. Indeed, many of Project RACE’s supporters in the public—as can be seen in the public comments left on online news and opinion articles written about Project RACE or by Susan Graham—support multiracial recognition because it gives


the illusion of shifting into a post-racial American society.\textsuperscript{237} Graham personally does not believe in “colorblindness,” and is uncomfortable with the post-racial comments she receives in response to her current writing as head of Project RACE: “The Internet has changed a whole lot about the movement, because people can blog immediately… Re-blog, and then it’s all, “The only race is the human race, we should all be colorblind,” and I always breathe a sigh of relief when the comments are closed.”\textsuperscript{238} This personal belief, however, did not prevent her from, as Rainier Spencer asserts, “being taken advantage of by “colorblind” politicians.”\textsuperscript{239}

Yet another way to interpret the federal government’s selecting Project RACE as the representative for multiracial interests is that the trend of white mothers campaigning for the rights of their children’s racial group reproduced sentimental politics. Sentimental politics are comfortable terrain for the dominant power structure. As in the time of abolition, during the Multiracial Movement, upper class white women advocated for political change to help “victims” of color. The women’s message of the sentimental universality of the human experience again lent itself well to creating a national narrative of post-race “colorblindness.” Furthermore, the mothers’ protectiveness and self-sacrifice on behalf of their children are qualities typically ascribed to good mothering in American culture,\textsuperscript{240} and thus similarly bolstered an accepted American cultural narrative rather than breaking with

\textsuperscript{238} Graham, Susan. Interview by Alicia Castagno. Telephone interview. November 12, 2011.
\textsuperscript{239} Multiracial Identity, dir. Chinhema.
established traditions as multiracial-led organizations might have done. The political leverage white female leaders were able to attain based on their racial and class privilege also granted them greater access to the government than multiracial organizations’ more racially-based concerns and less advantaged social status.

Graham was increasingly called upon to attend hearings and conferences regarding the OMB’s decision for Census 2000 racial categorization, and began to make regular trips to Washington. Her consistent involvement irked both multiracial activists—especially male multiracial activists, Graham asserts—and monoracial civil rights groups, who took particular issue with her dogged commitment to the standalone “Multiracial” category. According to Graham, Director of the Washington Bureau of the NAACP, Harold McDougall’s job was to work exclusively against multiracial recognition in Washington D.C. She, like some other key players in the Multiracial Movement such as Charles Byrd, was frustrated by monoracial civil rights organizations’ resistance to multiracial recognition. She could not sympathize with their concerns of losing political power in numbers. Graham reflected, “My issue was that when the NAACP said, “We’re going to lose numbers,” my son was considered black at school, white on the census, and multiracial at home. Most of us mothers were white, and the Census took the race of the mother, so they [the NAACP] would actually gain half a person [if they used the umbrella multiracial format]! We weren’t taking numbers away.”

242 Ibid.
This political caveat has not been taken into account in much of the academic criticism Graham received for her unwillingness to give up the “Multiracial” category. Although I seek to challenge and bring nuance to such criticism, it is true that Graham did not fully comprehend the NAACP’s concern. She did not understand that their worry over losing numbers was not just in reference to black-white biracials, but also to black people who would seek to disown a black identity. Because most black people descending from African slaves in colonial America are inherently “multiracial,” the NAACP worried that some would check the “Multiracial” box in an attempt to free themselves of the social and cultural stigma of being black in the United States or simply to maintain statistical “accuracy.”

Although Graham views herself as racially exceptional (to be discussed shortly), her failure to comprehend the racial politics behind the NAACP’s position clearly conveys her white privileged point of view and her lack of engagement with issues of race and racism outside of multiracial recognition.

Graham was called back to Washington by Sally Katzen, Deputy Director for Management of the Office Of Management and Budget, in response to a Native

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243 After the violence of slavery and later, the socio-politically enforced subjugation of black people within the U.S., many African Americans today have some white ancestry. On the other hand, many also have or claim to have partial Native American heritage after coalitions and intermarriage between Native American nations and African slaves took place.
American group that had urged the OMB to reject the “Multiracial” category. Graham stated that Katzen tried to relate her son’s pluralistic religious background to the racial background of Graham’s son, who was also present: “[Katzen] said, “Oh, I have a son who has different religions – his father is Jewish and I’m Christian, so I understand this.” And here I was thinking, uh, no, you don’t get it. She said, “He has both Hanukah and Christmas, isn’t that wonderful?” (laughs).” Graham’s recounting of this exchange exemplifies Graham’s personal investment in her racial exceptionalism. Graham distances herself from Katzen—a white woman with a normative racial identity and experience—by mocking her (“… isn’t that wonderful?” (laughs)) and portraying her as racially ignorant (“Uh, no, you don’t get it”). Graham’s incredulity and effort to distinguish between Katzen, who does actually experience some form of multiculturalism within her family, and herself suggests that Graham views herself differently from other white women. Her dismissive attitude towards Katzen actually suggests feelings of superiority in her racial exceptionalism.

Moreover, Graham was similarly disdainful of the incident for which Katzen had called her to Washington. Graham recounted, “[Sally Katzen] told me that Native Americans had come to her crying and said, “Please don’t do this, we’ll lose numbers, don’t do the Multiracial category,” and that was pretty much why she wanted me to come to Washington, just to hear that story.” Although it is not clear from the language Graham employed whether she is disdainful of Katzen or of the

247 Ibid.
248 Ibid.
Native American group protesting multiracial recognition, her tone in our interview implied that both irked her. Her argument against the NAACP was somewhat valid considering the census’s racial tabulation policies, but her inability to view another racial group’s dissent with a different perspective again reveals her lack of racial consciousness.

Around this time in the Multiracial Movement (mid-90s), several important tensions began to arise between its key players. One was the growing disagreement between multiracial groups like AMEA that sought to reconcile multiracial interests with civil rights’ groups concerns, and Project RACE. The other was between female and male multiracial activists. In our interview, Susan Graham addressed both of these conflicts in one statement:

A lot of what happened between all that time is that a lot of the men wanted to take over Project RACE. [They thought] I wasn’t doing the right job or whatever and I said, no, that’s not going to happen. We had a meeting with women in the movement, not necessarily mothers, [but] monoracial, multiracial, mothers and single women, where we discussed what was going on, and what was going on with the men… we decided if the men kept pushing us, we were just going to ignore them and keep doing our own thing.²⁴⁹

Even the solidarity between female activists, however, fractured along racial lines. Ramona Douglass, a multiracial activist originally representing Biracial Family Network, became the president of AMEA late in 1994. Graham, Project RACE, and other inter- and multiracial groups that had previously preferred to remain separate from AMEA such as Hapa Issues Forum (HIF) then publicly allied with AMEA as multiracial recognition gained political force. However, Douglass and Graham

eventually split after Douglass sided with monoracial civil rights groups and gave up the “Multiracial” label on the census. Graham recalls, “I was with Ramona Douglass when she took a call from the NAACP. Harold McDougall… basically did the “this is kind of funny that these people want a category, and they’re all black…we need to have people put in the black category, we need to build bridges and drop the “Multiracial” category.” And Ramona said “ok” and that was the last time we spoke (laughs).”

This “betrayal” set the tone for relations between Project RACE and the organizations in the Multiracial Movement that were willing to compromise on the “Multiracial” terminology with federal recognition. As discussed in Chapter 1, Project RACE formally broke with AMEA and its charter members after the Third Multiracial Leadership Summit in Oakland in July 1997. Susan Graham would not endorse a racial tabulation option for Census 2000 that did not include the “appropriate” terminology. She stated, “I’ve always kept in mind what our membership said, and they said “multiracial.”…This was one of our goals, that if we’re going to use this term, we’re going to get it into public usage.”

Graham’s response reveals that it was her unique position as a white advocate for multiracial rights that made her so unyielding. She felt that she had to remain faithful to her constituents (“I’ve always kept in mind what our membership said”),

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250 Ibid.
particularly because she did not have the same racial experience they did.\textsuperscript{253} In this case, however, Graham’s acute consciousness of the difference between her constituents’ and her racial experiences made her feel unable to adjust her position on multiracial recognition (i.e. the “Multiracial” label).

While Graham’s position is understandable and her loyalty to Project RACE’s members is commendable, her unyielding stance estranged her from other multiracial activists. Project RACE was different from and stood against many of the other multiracial organizations involved in the Multiracial Movement. For example, nearly all of the other interracial family organizations had already turned over their leadership to adult multiracials at the time of the census “race debate,” yet Graham maintained her leadership. Some multiracial activists felt she should step down. In our interview, Graham, unprompted, commented upon this topic: “I got a lot of heat for being a white woman, not a multiracial woman, and people thought Project RACE should be headed by a multiracial person. We had a huge range of people. [My leadership] was fine with the Filipino-white multiracial people who are a great part of my contingency…”\textsuperscript{254} She explained that she had hoped that her children or the past presidents of Teen Project RACE (founded by her son, Ryan, in 1999) would eventually take over, but they have pursued other careers.\textsuperscript{255}

Graham’s white leadership, her conservative allies, unyielding position in the census “race debate,” and lack of racial reflexivity distinguished the Project RACE within the movement, but not necessarily outside of it. Project RACE’s political

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success made it into one of the most publicly recognized participants in the Multiracial Movement. Project RACE thus became an unrepresentative representative of multiracial people and their interests in the public eye. When questioned about the racial aspect of her activism, however, Graham uncomfortably admitted that while she has researched the ins and outs of political lobbying, she has not done the same with race or race theory: “We didn’t go that far.”\footnote{Ibid.} Her failure to investigate race and racial politics reveals that she maintains a white privileged perspective in which she may advocate and lobby for racial issues without actually researching issues of race.

In the end, although Project RACE’s political advocacy facilitated other multiracial groups’ participation in the OMB discussions for the 2000 census, Graham was eventually shut out of the process. Her position as a white woman campaigning for multiracial interests proved to be unappealing to too many, and her uncompromising stance distanced her from more flexible multiracial groups. The political alliances she made and her unwillingness to sympathize with monoracial civil rights groups’ concerns lost her the support both of monoracial people of color and multiracial activists. Graham’s passion and loyalty to the original racial designation voted upon by her constituents served her well in the public sphere, but her continual reliance on white privileged forms of advocacy and expression were her political undoing. Although Project RACE remains one of the more active inter- or multiracial organizations in the U.S. (many dissipated after the 2000 census victory), it also still remains connected to a white privileged perspective and racially unreflexive forms of advocacy.

\footnote{Ibid.}
CONCLUSION: THE THWARTED UTOPIAN POTENTIAL OF MULTIRACIAL POLITICS

The white mothers who founded the Multiracial Movement were faced with unique racial challenges and experiences that ultimately resulted in political action. Unwittingly, their white racial identity informed the ways in which they chose to advocate for multiracial rights. As I explained in my first chapter, the original interracial family groups—whose purpose was to racially socialize white women and their biracial children, and to create an environment in which “race didn’t matter”—unconsciously attempted to reproduce racially privileged experiences of white childhood for multiracial children. Later, interracial family groups’ initial efforts to gain multiracial recognition on public forms eventually led to their placing identity recognition at the heart of the Multiracial Movement.

Because those same interracial groups did not engage with broader issues of race and racism, however, the Multiracial Movement’s participants did not advocate for radical change outside of expanding racial data tabulation. Multiracialism has the potential to provoke important discussions about the ways in which race is socially constructed and reinforced. However, white mothers in interracial family organizations only sought to learn enough about race to provide adequate racial socialization for their children. For white mothers of children of color, becoming involved in an interracial family organization was a good way to bridge the

racial divide between mother and child. Their goal was not necessarily to grapple with larger issues of race, but to racially educate themselves enough to fulfill their duties as a mother. As Karis’s interviewee “Cynthia” stated:

Having black children and being in the position of having to defend them… it broadens one’s perceptions… as someone who’s holding little children, for whom one is responsible, by the hand… you have to become aware of the defenses that are required on the part of a black person, in order to teach your children, in order to protect them.

“Cynthia” does not suggest that she is concerned about the fact that black people in general must protect and defend themselves in the face of racism. Rather, she indicates that because her children rely on her for protection (“in order to protect them”), she must broaden her racial awareness to adequately assume “the position of having to defend them” as their mother.

Other academic criticism of interracial family organizations similarly castigates the white women in leadership roles for failing or refusing to engage with racial issues. Supporting the views of other scholars such as Terri Ann Karis and Margaret O’Donoghue, Heather Dalmage posits: “… this is the inherent flaw of the multiracial family organizations: the very groups able to elucidate the dynamics of racism avoid these issues for fear of creating boundaries and exclusions and thus falling apart.”

Interracial family groups’ white female leaders had already set the course for multiracial advocacy by the time that mixed heritage adults took over leadership in

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organizations founded by white women (such as Carlos Fernández in I-Pride and Ramona Douglass in BFN). The groups’ missions and connections with similarly focused interracial groups around the country had already been established. Although some mixed heritage adults did seek to expand multiracial politics to include a more critical examination of race (most notably Douglass’s attempts to reconcile multiracial recognition with monoracial civil rights groups’ interests, and the academic work of Maria P.P. Root), the movement would not be swayed from its original track. The original groups and their white female founders had already created a dominant multiracial discourse in the public sphere, and multiracial activists who deviated from this discourse were largely ignored by the media and general public.

Because the first organizations to advocate for multiracial interests were founded by white women in interracial relationships, discussions of multiraciality were often constrained by the assumption that “multiracial” inherently implied a “white plus some other race” racial mixture. Non-white multiracials were often excluded from groups’ discussion of multiracial needs, further empowering civil rights activists to chastise the movement and its players for ignoring racial issues and attempting to escape non-white identities.

Public discussions of multiracial identity used the rhetoric employed by interracial family groups—particularly the term “multiracial,” as advocated by Susan Graham—to discuss multiraciality and, as a result, similarly excluded non-white multiracials. For example, some monoracial critics of the Multiracial Movement like

the NAACP not only assumed that multiracials were part white,\(^{263}\) but, when referring to the dangers of multiracial recognition, implied that they conceived of “multiracial” (when not racially identified) as black and white.\(^{264}\) This trend suggests that because the majority of white mother agitators’ children were black and white, their interracial groups’ strong focus on black-white biracial rights shaped popular conceptions of multiraciality.

Although much of American anxiety over racial mixing has historically centered around white and black pairings,\(^{265}\) had the founders of the multiracial movement been more inclusive in their discussions of multiraciality, subsequent dialogue would also have had to expand past white-black, white “plus some other race” limitations. This expansion, in turn, would have necessarily led to larger questions of racial construction and racial authenticity. Whiteness, as discussed in Chapter 2, is often conceived of as normative and cultureless. Therefore, white “plus some other race” multiracials are often viewed as “diluted” forms of non-white races and cultures, or “tainted” white people. Colorism generally becomes involved in such discussions of multiraciality, in addition to racism. However, if non-white multiracials were to be included in discussions of multiraciality, in some cases, colorism would equally affect all members of the interracial family. Cultural

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prejudices between non-white races would thus be left visible, unobstructed by issues of color, allowing the public to break out of the simplified white versus non-white racial dynamic typically investigated in discussions of interracial tensions. Cultural hybridity would also be more clearly evident when one of the multiracial individual’s races is not deemed normative and cultureless, illuminating the complexity of racial identity construction and the distinction between race and culture. However, since the discourse established by white mothers’ interracial organizations continues to cause non-white multiracials to be excluded or unwittingly forgotten in discussions of multiraciality, this important complication of racial identity construction and race has yet to occur.

Scholars of Critical Mixed Race Studies have been heavy-handed with criticism of Susan Graham and other white mothers involved in multiracial politics while failing to account for their position as mothers and the unique pressures associated with being an interracially married white woman in the 1970s and 80s. When situated in the appropriate socio-historic context of losing racial privilege and renegotiating notions of self along racial lines, the widespread phenomenon of white mothers’ founding of interracial organizations gains greater clarity. Based on my primary and secondary research, however, the racial identity of these “founding mothers” did influence the ways in which they chose to engage in multiracial politics. Their inability to fully break free of their white privilege ultimately grounded founding mothers’ multiracial politics in privileged notions of racial safety, separate spheres ideology, and— in Graham’s case in particular—racially unreflexive forms of advocacy.
Appendix I

Sample Interview Permission Form*

Alicia Castagno
acastagno@wesleyan.edu

I, ____________________, understand that I am being interviewed for an ethnographic section of the research project conducted by Alicia Castagno for her senior thesis at Wesleyan University. I agree to let her use the interview to write her thesis. It will not be used for any other purpose. I have been informed that if I become uncomfortable at any time during the interview, I do not have to answer questions or I can ask to have the tape or video recorder (if used) turned off. I am aware that I can request that a pseudonym be used. I understand that by signing this form, I give permission for the interview to be used for the purposes stated above.

Do you agree to participate in the interview YES NO
Can the interview be recorded (video or audio)? YES NO
Should a pseudonym be used? YES NO
Signed:

_________________________________________________________________________

Date: ____________________

* The interviewees’ signed permission forms were not included in this thesis to protect the privacy of my two interviewees who preferred to withhold identifying information, including handwriting.
Appendix II

TRANSCRIPT OF:

Telephone interview with Mandy (last name not disclosed) – I-Pride

10/28/11 7:00 P.M. EST

BEGIN TRANSCRIPTION:

ALICIA: When and why did you become involved with I-Pride?

MANDY: Well, my husband and I were an older couple. We’re both white. We really wanted children – we ended up adopting two black-white biracial children. My son was born in 1983, and we got involved with I-Pride by 1985. We were very clear that wanted him [our son] to… well, let me explain.

We decided that we wanted to adopt a child and went to a fancy adoption lawyer (both my husband and I were older at this time), and he told us, “Do you– would you be willing to take a child that is racially mixed or of color?” and we said of course. He knew it wouldn’t take long to find such a child. [My son] Eric had too young a mother and a named birth father; they were no longer getting along, the father was living in an automobile and working part time at Sears. The mother had custody of Eric, but she wanted to give him up and keep partying or whatever it was she was doing. She was fifteen.

Eric was fourteen months old when we adopted him and he had been with us some number of months when we get a call from her [his birth mother] and… We’d had to send an obligatory letter to the birth father asking if he wanted the child, and he did. We nearly collapsed. The social worker said that they were going to come and take [Eric] away, and we were devastated. But our lawyer said that given the fact that the mom had made the decision [to give Eric up for adoption], we asked her [if Eric should go back to his father], and she said absolutely not, she did not want the father to have Eric, she’d just as soon take him back herself. It was a two year court battle; we wanted to give the father a chance to get his life together and with our background in civil rights, we didn’t want to get in the way of a young man’s time with his child. We told him, “We want you to play a part in his life. We’re not taking him away forever.”

We’ve contacted him a couple times, but he has kids from before and after [Eric], and he hasn’t been responsive. Eric has shown no interest in connecting with him. He says that he’s grateful for being adopted.

[Eric’s] birth mother’s family is white and Latina, and all females. The birth grandmother had four daughters, none married, all of them taken care of by her. There were no men, no male people to be found anywhere in their in their environment.

[Eric] had a wonderful childhood. He grew up in the countryside and had a lot of opportunities, and now he’s in his twenties and training to be a nurse! He went to a small school, K-8, with its own school district, set in a Redwood forest … it was really a great place.
I don’t know that his racial identity was such a thing for him when he was very young. At one point, though, he looked at the school photo and said, “I’m the only dark person at the school.”

Later, two kids came to the school, two males, who were African American, and he gravitated toward them and was best friends with them for a long time. I have no idea what it feels like to be seen as an African American or a part African American person; [Eric] doesn’t identify that way.

We wanted to make sure he was around other kids he could identify with; our social worker was white and married to a black man at the time and told us bout I-Pride, even though I never saw her at the meetings.

I think Eric was very comfortable and very happy as a young kid thanks to I-Pride. He went to a lot of holiday functions and camping trips that they put on.

It wasn’t particularly common to be biracial back then. There may have been one other black family in small town we lived in, but it wasn’t very diverse.

ALICIA: You mentioned holiday parties and camping trips. What sort of projects or activities did I-Pride do?

MANDY: It was mostly social stuff. It was at a time (in the mid 80s) when it was not that common, even in the Berkley/Oakland area, it was not that common to see mixed marriages.

Now you walk down the street, and half the kids you see are biracial (laughs). We got together at a time where it was helpful for the parents—not all of us were adoptive parents, a lot were in mixed marriages—it was helpful to be around people who were going through same sorts of things, like what race do you mark on the school forms.

I-Pride was actually called upon by the Census people [for Census 2000] to discuss changes on the race form. We were objecting to the “Other” category.

I’m really glad they [I-Pride] existed when the kids were little. Four years later we had adopted our daughter, we ended up taking her to the I-Pride Christmas party right after we’d adopted her, and everyone was so excited to see her and see our family.

As time went by, not only did our kids—the core group’s kids—our kids got older and became teenagers, they didn’t want to hang out with I-Pride families, or their families in general, so I-Pride kind of died off. Then there was a later group with toddlers, and there used to be a playgroup, but I’m not sure what they’re doing now. I think the last Christmas party my son Eric went to would’ve been when he was eight.

Another adoptive couple … were responsible for us finding our daughter: they had adopted a boy and a girl within a year of each other, biracial kids, and the father was a stay at home dad got a phone call one day asking if he was interested in another child and he said “Oh, no!” They couldn’t adopt another child, even though they wanted to. You know how it is when kids are so little. So he called us, and that’s how we adopted our second child, our daughter Sophia.

ALICIA: Were there other adoptive parents in I-Pride?
MANDY: It was almost half and half adopted and mixed marriage… Maybe it leaned more toward birth parents, having the kids, more than adopted parents, but there definitely were adoptive parents involved.

ALICIA: Were there any differences between the issues adoptive parents and birth parents had?

MANDY: Um, I’m not sure the parents did that much talking about it [issues]. We just felt comfortable with each other, and the kids felt comfortable. We didn’t talk much about our personal lives or problems.

ALICIA: How did I-Pride become involved with the 2000 Census race debate?

MANDY: I don’t remember how it came up, but that was something we did talk about, that was something we did worry about, and where [race forms] said “Other,” I would say what [my children] were.

I disagreed with our orig– I’ve always felt my kids should identify themselves as biracial as opposed to saying “I’m Black,” even though society says they’re black. I absolutely disagree with that. My social worker, who was interracially married and also had biracial children, told me that they’re going to, they’ve got to identify as black, because if they’re out on the basketball court, that’s what they’ll be identified as.

I always wanted them [my children]… when people asked them “What are you?” I thought it was important to say, “I’m half black and half white” or “I’m racially mixed.” I think they should be proud of both parts of themselves.

ALICIA: How do they self-identify? Did they agree with that?

MANDY: I think they embraced that, but as I say, my son in particular, because he is clearly African American (my daughter is sometimes confused for Hispanic; people don’t know what she is), I think he sees himself more, maybe because of the way he’s treated– I don’t know how he’s treated to tell you the truth, but I think he sees himself as more African American.

ALICIA: There are some white mothers of mixed children or white women in interracial relationships that do not wholly identify as white, or claim a non-white identity because they feel that they are also in a racially liminal place. Does that resonate with you?

MANDY: (Flounders, long pause) It doesn’t resonate with me at all. I mean, I have my own mix of things. I’m German-English on the one side, and my mother is a Russian Jew. I see myself as Jewish, I see myself as all those things, but I never gotten mixed up in terms of whether I’m part African American; it’s just never been an issue for me… I don’t even know if I can think of people [who would identify that way]… well I guess I could… that’s kind of a wild idea (laughs).
I want to say also that I can’t speak for a lot of other white people. My background is from left wing people, politically involved people, so just all of this goes along with that … it just seems right, it doesn’t seem at all odd. I could imagine definitely in some cases, I know a white woman—a single mom with kids from Haiti—and I wouldn’t be surprised if she had some kind of those issue—things. But it just seemed, when the lawyer said do you mind [if you adopt a mixed race child or a child of color], “Of course not!” Whereas there might be some white people who need to think about that question, do some soul searching to see whether they should adopt a child of color.

It was a non-issue for me, or for my husband as well, maybe we should have [questioned]. As I say, we did not like getting in a battle with [Eric’s] father so… I guess that’s the end of that thought (laughs).

ALICIA: Did you have any similar difficulties with your daughter’s adoption?

MANDY: My daughter has developed a relationship with her birth father in Wisconsin, and both my kids’ birth moms died. My daughter’s birth mom, who was white… when we met the birth mother, she was about a month away from having the child. One of the things I asked her was if there were any drugs involved, or anything that would give us more trouble, because our past experience with court system was so difficult. She told us there would be no problem with the birth father, she got him to write off on it fairly quickly, and that was fine. Ultimately we did learn that the mother was a very serious alcoholic and had been drinking throughout her pregnancy, and as a result, my daughter has some fetal alcohol syndrome and has struggled really hard with learning disabilities. But she is unusual in that she’s never given up: she was valedictorian of her high school class. She has a great work ethic.

Her birth mother claimed that she didn’t know she was pregnant, because she’d had false negatives on two pregnancy tests. Sophia was two weeks premature… We stayed in touch with the mom as long as she was alive. Sophia was eight when she died. We never called her birth mother her birth mom; we just referred to her by name. [After her birth mother died] Sophia can’t recall at the time—and neither can I—if she knew this was her birth mother.

ALICIA: You’ve mentioned that I-Pride was involved with the race debate surrounding Census 2000. Was it always politically involved?

MANDY: I-Pride was clearly more of a social group of people getting together and being a comfortable environment in a time when it was relatively sort of new to be part of a mixed family.

ALICIA: Was it uncomfortable, then, to be a mixed family during that time?

MANDY: No, no no no, it [I-Pride] was just for the kids, so they could see kids that were like them. People tell you that kids don’t notice that [racial difference] for along
time, and maybe that’s true, but my son was aware after a time that all of the kids in his school but him were white.

I’m sure the kids felt comfortable. There would be a Christmas party and there’d be a lot of African American and white people. Not a lot of Asians, surprisingly. I’m aware of it now, when I go into another person’s home and 99% of the people are white, and there’s one black couple. Our household has always been more mixed than that, and not just because of our kids.

We were involved with American Civil Service Committee in high school, which was pretty diverse. A lot white people don’t mingle a lot with people of color.

ALICIA: Do you think people with biracial children or white people in interracial relationships mingle more?

MANDY: I think they do! I think they have to.

ALICIA: Do you have an opinion, one way or the other, on the idea of colorblindness?

MANDY: I think there’s a time when I would’ve said that I didn’t see color. I think I’d say more now that I do. I live in Oakland, and I live right on the edge of one of the most violent sections of the city. My particular neighborhood is racially mixed and gender mixed and there are gay people and Asian people. Then nine blocks down the street from me, it’s majority African American with lots of drug dealing and gunshots. As a sixty-seven year old white woman, I think about it. If an African American person is walking down the street and I haven’t seen them before, I am watchful, and I have to be realistic about that.

You were asking me just in general about that argument. As I’ve grown older, reality just is that people see people of color and have certain biases built into that stuff. I feel like I have to admit that, whereas ten years ago I might not have.

I was not involved with the census, but I was on the I-Pride board: I was the treasurer. I remember being there when the [Census] discussion came up, there were—oh, you should look up __________ (anonymous interviewee). She’s maybe even one of the founders of I-Pride and her family foundation… she has two biracial kids and her family foundation funded and gave a lot of money to I-Pride, she was one of the main people involved with the Census.

I’m not sure. By 1988, 1989, we weren’t involved with that [I-Pride/Census 2000].
Appendix III

TRANSCRIPT OF:

Interview with Mandy (last name not disclosed) – I-Pride

1/20/12 3:00 P.M. PST

BEGIN TRANSCRIPTION:

MANDY: Did you get a hold of _______ [anonymous interviewee]?

ALICIA: Yes, but she said she wasn’t involved with Census 2000. She said that she just organized a playgroup for the kids.

MANDY: Oh yeah, I guess I remember that. You know, her parents started a foundation that financed I-Pride and bunch of other mixed race-related projects, at the hospital and so on.

ALICIA: Really? That’s great. Were they an interracial couple?

MANDY: No, no. They’re white. But they’ve given a lot of money, now that they have biracial grandkids. Now, will you remind me of the scope of your project? What is this about exactly? It’s been a while since we last spoke.

ALICIA: I am researching the role of white mothers of biracial children in the Multiracial Movement, particularly through their involvement in organizations like I-Pride. I’m interested in seeing what internal personal factors prompted them to become involved in multiracial politics, and what socio-historic factors pushed them into political action.

MANDY: Oh, okay. Well, I-Pride was primarily white mothers – mostly white women married to black men. We had two black women in the group. And then of course there were the adoptive parents like me and my husband. I-Pride, like I may have said, was mostly social. We had holiday parties and camping trips and get-togethers. I was on the Board. As the Treasurer, I did bookkeeping mostly. I-Pride was created in a time when it was unusual to be biracial or in an interracial relationship.

ALICIA: Do you think being unusual made it difficult?

MANDY: Um, no… Not necessarily. I don’t remember anyone giving my family weird looks in public. You know, if it was me or my husband alone with our kids, someone could always assume that the other partner was black. But even when we were together, I don’t remember it being an issue.
ALICIA: You’ve said that I-Pride was mainly a social organization, but that you and your husband were politically involved with civil rights organizations prior to joining. Were there other politically active people in I-Pride?

MANDY: Yes. There was one older couple in particular, I don’t even think they had a child in I-Pride, but they got together before *Loving* went through, so they remembered how hard it was before. I know someone whose parents had to get married in Mexico because interracial marriage was still illegal.

I-Pride kind of fizzled out. I think it was when the boys got to be teenagers. They were more involved with their school friends, and didn’t want to attend the holiday parties and things that we used to throw. Also, I think eventually it was no longer odd to be biracial. The reason we started was so that the kids could be around other kids that they looked like and could identify with. Eventually the need for that went down. It was good for the parents, too.

My children, especially in school, grew up in a pretty white environment. When two black boys came to the smaller middle school they attended, my son immediately gravitated toward them. I think it came as a shock to his [white] school buddies who’d been his friends since they were three.

ALICIA: Do you think your children are uncomfortable in all-white environments?

MANDY: No, I don’t think so. I think they’re more comfortable in mixed environments, but I don’t think an all-white environment would make them uncomfortable.

ALICIA: You mentioned that you and your husband had political backgrounds before I-Pride. What exactly were you involved in?

MANDY: My husband worked in Mississippi during and with the Civil Rights Movement. In San Francisco, too. I don’t know how much you know about it, but he helped to integrate the auto dealerships and some of the restaurants that refused to hire black workers and waitresses. We both were involved with the American Friends Service Committee—a Quaker organization—for many years. We also worked on anti-death penalty movements for a long time here in the Bay Area.

I was always surrounded by a mixed group of people. My parents were both members of the Communist Party, in the early days. They had black friends when most other [white] people didn’t. It was in my husband and my nature to be working for other people. We were involved with anti-war protests, too. Both of our upbringings focused on community organizing.

ALICIA: You told me in our last interview that it was your social worker’s suggestion to join I-Pride. I read an article by NASW that stated that at that time a lot of social workers were prioritizing families that matched the race of the child. Was that her professional or her personal suggestion?
MANDY: It was professional. As white people, my husband and I needed to find people that Eric could identify with. What I didn’t agree with, however, was her insisting that Eric should or would identify as black. She said that’s how he’d be recognized, so we should raise him that way. I disagree – I think it is absolutely his right to identify with both the white and the black, if that’s what he wants. I do recognize, though, that my son has had racial experiences that make him identify more as being black. He’s had to figure it out on his own… After middle school, there were two regional high schools the kids could choose from. He picked one, but transferred after one year because there were no other people of color. It wasn’t that he was getting a hard time – he was really popular there. He did capoeira, and people confused it for breakdancing (laughs); they thought it was cool. But he did feel that when he didn’t know an answer in class, he was looked at as “the dumb black kid in the class.” So he transferred to this alternative school with more people of color. But even then, because he came from this different background, a privileged background, he couldn’t totally identify with the black kids who grew up in the ghetto.

We didn’t see our kids as children of color necessarily, but we were sensitive and ensured an accepting environment for them. We’d never go live out somewhere in the Midwest, for example (laughs). In this area, we are what we are.

We lived in Canyon, when the kids were little, for twenty-six years. It was kind of like camping (laughs), out in the woods with the dogs running free and everything. It was safe: we didn’t lock the house or the car doors. It’s quite beautiful; you should visit if you have time. The kids felt very safe: they could walk to school, and if something happened, the neighbors would take care of them. It was a good place to grow up, I think.

(Pause) What is your racial background, exactly?

ALICIA: I’m Asian and white. Chinese and Italian.

MANDY: Oh. Okay. Well, you know, we tried to get Asian and white couples to join I-Pride. We didn’t mean for it to be just black and white, but that’s how it turned out. We set up booths at a community center or something to do recruitment, but you know what happened? They told us that they didn’t identify as interracial families. Kind of turned their noses up at us, actually (laughs).

ALICIA: That’s funny, considering that a lot of mixed heritage activists now are white and Asian. I wonder how those couples feel now that their kids clearly identify differently.

MANDY: Well, it’s like that song by that comic… Lehrer. “Everybody hates everybody,” or something like that. Everyone is going to find something to dislike about everybody. It’s a problem everywhere.

ALICIA: To quickly return to my original question: Was there negative sentiment against transracial adoption at the time you were involved in I-Pride?
MANDY: Yes! There was actually one member of I-Pride, a black man, who was a social worker and was really against white parents adopting transracially. Part of the reason was that black people trying to adopt kids were being passed over for more educated and affluent white families that were also trying to adopt. That was the reason [why NASW prioritized same-race family adoptions]. So black families wouldn’t continue to be passed over.

ALICIA: Were there any commonalities, then, between I-Pride members?

MANDY: Yes. They were at least middle class. At least. And at least one partner in each pair was college educated.

ALICIA: Do you think that being involved in I-Pride was political? Why or why not?

MANDY: I don’t think it was expressly political. The issue on the census, it was also a school issue. What box to check and all that. That was a political thing that we were involved in. Not necessarily I-Pride as an organization, but its members were all fighting for that to change. But there weren’t demonstrations or anything like that that I can remember. My memory is not so great anymore on this subject, sorry. (Pauses) I do remember that we paid someone to run the I-Pride office, but now I can’t imagine what she could have been doing (laughs).
Appendix IV

TRANSCRIPT OF:

Telephone interview with anonymous interviewee – I-Pride

1/29/12 5:00 P.M. PST

BEGIN TRANSCRIPTION:

ALICIA: How and when did you become involved in I-Pride?

ANONYMOUS: I do not remember how I first heard about I-Pride, but it was around 1988 when I joined. I ran a playgroup for the younger kids.

ALICIA: What sorts of activities did you do as a member? Did they have a specific purpose?

ANONYMOUS: I attended parties, campouts, play dates and educational forums. The purpose [of the group] was for the children to be around other biracial children and interracial families, and for me to learn about parenting mixed race children.

ALICIA: How would you characterize I-Pride as an organization?

ANONYMOUS: Nonprofit, grassroots.

ALICIA: Was your husband or partner involved in I-Pride? If so, how?

ANONYMOUS: My ex-husband was not involved. I believe [we] were divorced when I started becoming active in the group.

ALICIA: Do you think I-Pride served your children? If so, how?

ANONYMOUS: It was good for my children to be around other families like theirs. I-Pride was started for political reasons.

ALICIA: How did I-Pride become politically involved?

ANONYMOUS: A group of parents wanted an interracial box on Berkeley school forms. But this was well before I was involved.
Appendix V

TRANSCRIPT OF:

Telephone interview with Susan Graham – Project RACE

11/11/11, 1:30 P.M. EST

BEGIN TRANSCRIPTION:

SUSAN GRAHAM: How did you get involved with multiracial politics?

ALICIA: I was an intern for MAVIN in 2005, and have stayed involved ever since.

SUSAN GRAHAM: Oh, ok. We interacted some with MAVIN during the census debates. Well, we have a lot to talk about. Have you seen the [Project RACE] website?

ALICIA: Yes, I’m just hoping to fill some things in and get your perspective on certain events within the movement. If we start to go on too long and you need to go, please don’t hesitate to let me know! Are you ready to start?

SUSAN GRAHAM: I’m ready.

ALICIA: Great. I’ve read your website but was hoping you could elaborate on the information given there: why did you start Project RACE?

SUSAN GRAHAM: Around 1990, around April, May, June, I received my census form. When I looked at the form, I realized there was no place for my children. I couldn’t check more than one race box and there was not thing I could do. I called the Census Bureau, and I was put on hold again and again. They finally picked up and told me, “The children take the race of the mother.” I asked, “Why arbitrarily the mother and not the father?” And you know what their answer was? They said, “Because in cases like these, we always know who the mother is, but not who the father is.” Well, that incensed me enough to start Project RACE.

We started getting paperwork for the kids’ kindergarten that asked for race, and I couldn’t check more than one box. There was no biracial, multiracial [box], so I called the school about it and they said, “Oh, you don’t have to worry, you don’t have to fill it out. Just don’t fill it out.”

When I ran into the census issue and started to look into it, I asked to see the school forms again – someone had marked my son as “Black.” I asked who had, and they said [it was] the kindergarten teacher on the first day of school. I asked on what basis she had determined what race he was, and they told me that she had checked “Black” based on the, quote, “knowledge and observation of my son.” His father had taken him to school [the first day], and she’d just assumed that he was black. We said, “We want to change that,” and they said, “You can’t, you pick one and it’s done.”
Mostly it was the U.S. Census Bureau, and their reaction that got me started. I started to look into the way it was why it was, to try and change it. I somehow got to Carlos Fernández, who was head of AMEA at the time. Through talking with him, he led me to Chris Ashe, a mom in Ohio who was also as upset as I was, and she wanted to do something politically to change it… They [AMEA] introduced us, and they kind of discounted her, she was trying to do something political, but they didn’t want to get involved.

Chris and I started Project RACE—she knew speaker of the house in the Ohio representatives—his name was [William L.] Mallory [Sr.] and she talked to him about a bill that would put the term “multiracial” on school forms. Being the Speaker of the House, he carried a lot of weight, he had multiracial grandkids, and they [Chris and Mallory] put a bill together and passed it. It was the first legislation for multiracial children in the country.

We decided to start [developing Project RACE] locally: our public schools, our neighborhood.

ALICIA: I noticed that Project RACE was started in Georgia but the headquarters are in California. Can you please explain that to me?

SUSAN GRAHAM: The headquarters go where I go (laughs). Chris has long since—she had business, and other obligations, so she kind of faded out of it and said, “It’s yours if you want it,” and I said, “I’ll keep it!”

It [Project RACE] started in Georgia. One of the first things I did was to contact the PTA—and anyone who thinks the PTA is a group of moms who cook cookies and do bake sales is wrong, they are a huge legislative force—they gave me all the info I needed [to get politically involved].

I was mostly apolitical [before Project RACE], but at our first meeting to form Project RACE, it was in a local suburb of Atlanta, the local legislative head of the PTA was there, and she walked us entirely through how to do this [getting multiracial recognition].

They [the school PTA] were at my side; it took three years to pass the legislation in Georgia, and they were with me the whole time. We [Project RACE] picked up members, around fifty to begin with. From the original members, it grew pretty fast: Atlanta was extremely good; we did a lot when we were there.

The way we bubbled up to Washington D.C. was that Mallory had a good friend in Washington, whose name was actually Tom Sawyer, who was the head of the Committee… I can’t remember the full name. The postal service and something else and Census.

And so since Mallory was friends with Sawyer and one of Sawyer’s things to look at was the census, he [Mallory] went to Sawyer and said, “We’ve had these women in Ohio and Georgia, and you’re going to be having hearings about the 2000 census soon, and we’d like them to participate.” So Tom Sawyer invited us to Washington.

We had our ducks in a row, once we figured out what the ducks were. This was all before everybody was on the Internet. We started tooting our horn, doing media, doing PR… One of the earliest ones we did was NPR in Washington, and the
responses were amazing. We had people joining right and left and calling; it was amazing.

I had written a piece for the *Atlanta Constitution* at the beginning and the response was amazing. I didn’t realize the *Atlanta Constitution* was read as far away as Utah, but the editor called and said, “We’re getting all this mail for you!”

We used the media very well. It [multiracial recognition] was new; it was something people hadn’t talked about it before.

ALICIA: Whom did you work with in Washington?

SUSAN GRAHAM: When we first started Project RACE, Carlos Fernández [AMEA President] didn’t think it was going to work, said, “We’ll stay separate.” But when we were invited to go to Washington—Edwin Darden invited us—[we] called them and said, “Now it’s getting bigger.” When I talked to Tom Sawyer, he said, “Is there anyone you want to invite for the panel?” I said yes, I wanted Carlos there, I wanted Edwin Darden there, we had someone in the government there, Major Marvin Arnold, who was going to be there, my son was going to speak – that was our basic panel, and that’s when I think they started to take us very seriously.

The interracial group of Washington-Virginia area, they were pretty big then—they have since dissipated—we were all there to give our take on it and what we wanted and why we wanted it. It’s in the congressional record, if you want to take a look at it. As a result of that meeting, they convened a meeting at the National Academy of Sciences. And this is what Tom Sawyer… they had so many different sides in this thing. The NAACP showed up against us, they had a whole thing where Arab Americans were trying to get their own thing, long before us. The National Academy of Sciences convened a workshop, where the OMB—Sally Katzen—would preside. We had more hearings after and made decisions after.

What was unusual was that the National Academy of Sciences called me and asked who I’d like to be there, and only myself and Marvin Arnold were invited, and I didn’t know this until the day of. When I got to Washington, I was told we were the only ones invited to this. It was mostly OMB people, they’d invited some other folks; huge room, huge table, and there I was with Marvin. I invited Kathleen Van Reed, my anthropologist friend; I made a phone call and she showed up. It was a really interesting meeting: it was so long and it went on so long ago, I don’t remember what everyone said but one of the things I remember very clearly is that they’d invited someone from the school system in Virginia or in… I can’t remember the city, but [he was] a guy who, like everybody, chummed with and was a superintendent of the schools. And he got up to speak and he spoke and then there was a speaker in between us. (Pause) Let me back up. I had called the superintendent of schools in Fulton County, Georgia and I told him we wanted “Multiracial” on the forms, and he said “it makes sense to me, we’ll do it” and they did it! So we had that with us, to bring to Washington. We had those things under our belt to take with us. So the superintendent got up and joked around, he was laughing about it and all these government people were laughing about it at our kids’ expense. And afterwards he sat down… His name was Deeb Kitchen, such a weird name (laughs), and he was all, “We don’t really have to do this, they can pick a race,” and everyone was patting each
other on the back. And by this time I was pissed. I was really pretty angry. Then I got up and I talked to them, and I don’t think for the whole time I was talking you could hear a pin drop. I talked about the superintendents who got it, and who didn’t get it. And I just told it as I saw it. I finished my speech and went to sit down, and Deeb Kitchen got up and said, “I want to say something. You made absolutely perfect sense to me. I want to say this – we’re going to have Multiracial box and we’re going to have it now.” His getting it kind of turned the meeting around. He was one of our biggest advocates after that. It went smoother in Washington in a lot of areas at that time.

Also, in between that time, I had gone to my representative, well, my congressman at the time happened to be Newt Gingrich. Early on I contacted Newt Gingrich’s office and said, “I need to talk to my congressman.” Two years passed, and finally they called me one afternoon: “Speaker Gingrich can talk to you, you have ten minutes.” “I’m on my way.” I had prepared this booklet, this presentation of what we were trying to do, kind of what you would see on a website now. I had this stuff collected and I kept feeding it information as we got more and more successes. Newt Gingrich walked in with one assistant and asked, “What is this about?” [After we spoke,] he thought about it for about thirty seconds and said, “You know, this is the right thing to do for kids,” turned to his assistant and said, “We’re going to help Mrs. Graham.” I’m not a Republican, but I figured I might as well. He was very good to us, and when we had to go back to Washington—we went the first time when my son was eight, so that must have been in ’93, and went back in ’97 when he was twelve—and by that time, Newt had said he would come out and testify for us. I know that Newt’s agenda is not the same as our agenda, but that’s okay, because we both want to get to the same place. That was the day that he had to shut the government down. The chairman kept saying, “We’re waiting for Speaker Gingrich,” and we’re waiting. He couldn’t come, but he’d prepared a written statement that we did get to hear and was put in the record. The whole experience has given me a really good understanding of what Washington can do and what Washington doesn’t do. In between the hearings, my son and I went back again when he was about nine or ten, and Sally Katzen at OMB wanted to speak with us. And so we went, and we went to Sally Katzen’s office – she had another woman in there, and this other woman and I never got along. When she did meet with us, she said, “Oh, I have a son who has different religions – his father is Jewish and I’m Christian, so I understand this.” And here I was thinking, uh, no, you don’t get it. She said, “He has both Hanukah and Christmas, isn’t that wonderful?” (laughs) She asked someone to go and get some M&Ms for my son—the White House has special M&Ms for kids and families—and told my son how special they were. Meanwhile, Sally Katzen and I were talking, and she told me that Native Americans had come to her crying and said, “Please don’t do this, we’ll lose numbers, don’t do the Multiracial category,” and that was pretty much why she wanted me to come to Washington, just to hear that story. As my son and I were leaving, he looked at me and looked at his M&Ms and said, “I guess all we got out of our trip to Washington was some M&Ms.” It’s been interesting to be the mother of a child who could read situations like that, just get it from the very beginning.
I took a lot of heat for being the mother of multiracial children, because I’m not multiracial. I’ve taken a lot of heat for this. A lot went on until we got to the 2000 census.

ALICIA: Was your husband involved with Project RACE?

SUSAN GRAHAM: [pause] No, this was really my thing. He was interested in what we were doing, but he wasn’t as involved.

ALICIA: What was Project RACE’s original constituency?

SUSAN GRAHAM: The funny thing was, the original constituency wasn’t the moms. The first member was a high school councilor in Wisconsin who wanted to help his students to embrace their heritage. Our second member was a producer for Good Morning America, a beautiful multiracial woman, single, no children; she did a lot for us. Our third member was a black mother of multiracial children.

I get a kick out people who say this [the Multiracial Movement] is run by white mothers who want their kids to be white. Yes I’m white, I’m a mother of multiracial children, but our constituency is diverse.

I think we moms are more active about this – you can say what you want about me, but don’t you dare say anything about my kids.

In fact, there was just an incident in San Francisco. A couple was walking through a public park—she’s black, he’s white, and they have two kids in a stroller—and this guy said something about the kids. And we don’t know what exactly was said, which outraged the mother, so she started dealing with this guy, and he came over and hit her. And then the husband got involved, and a bystander got involved, and a whole thing broke out. In 2011!

We’re [we mothers are] kind of like tigers, and we want to protect our young. And when they’re little and they have no voices, we have to look after them. Now my kids are older and they have their voices and can do whatever they want. They started Teen Project RACE, and we had a national contest to find new presidents after they both went off to college—they all go off to college and we have to find new active teens to continue. I’ve always said this something that is not going to be carried on by the parents, it’s gotta be carried on by the kids.

I just want to say something about the Multiracial Movement today. It’s slowed down a lot, and I have a theory about that. Two things happened, both related to apathy: the 2000 census, we got the ability to check two or more races, so people said “we’re done.” One of the things the OMB had to do was get the other departments on board. Education in particular has still been resisting. The fact that we got the Census Bureau to sign on is just a small step.

The other thing that happened was when Barack Obama got elected – but he self-identifies as black, so he’s not doing what we’re doing. And I don’t say that he shouldn’t identify as black, if that’s what he feels, but he’s done nothing for people who want to identify with all of their heritage.
I think the bigger societal picture on that is that society has become apathetic. The Occupy movement, I think it’s fabulous, because people are stepping up again, and not being apathetic, and getting out there.

People are standing up again and saying, “We can make a change.” I’ll never forget when I started Project RACE and one of the academics in the area said, “Susan, you will never get the government to change the way they think about race.” And I said, “You know what? I’m a mom, I’m going to be here in ten years, and I want to do this. I can always try again.” We’ve got to try.

It’s a continual problem for us. Getting people to join is not a problem for us—we’re on the Internet, and rapidly moving technology—I have to learn it to keep up with everything. Getting people to work is the problem. I had this woman just contact me, she lives in California, and she said that she will do anything to help us and to just give her what we need and she’ll make things happen. I said great, I need help in this area. And she said, “Gee, I can’t do that, give me something else.” Getting people to do it is difficult.

ALICIA: What was Project RACE’s original goal?

SUSAN GRAHAM: The “Multiracial” box was our original goal, but we had to be flexible about that. Those were the years where there was a lot of hostility between the groups, particularly MAVIN, AMEA and Project RACE. There was a meeting when we formed Project RACE, and started to get members. It came directly from Washington that we had to pick a term, just one, and they could deal with the term, but they’d nix the whole thing if we didn’t come up with one word. And so we put out a questionnaire to our members, listing all the different terms, and said if you have to pick one, what would it be. A lot of people said they’d really like “biracial”, but “multiracial” would be more inclusive – so we said ok, this is what our contingency wants. So that’s why we went with the “Multiracial” box, and thought that was the starting point. AMEA was just for– well, so they wanted “multiethnic”, and then wanted “biracial”, and the hapa contingency wanted “hapa” only. It almost turned into a brawl. We said we’re going to stick with what we’re going to stick with, but if we’re going go with an umbrella term on the Census, how about having an umbrella category of “Multiracial.” How about Black/White and Native American/White, whatever, kind of like the Asian category [under which you specify ethnicity after checking off the racial box]? I want to know the entire percentage of the entire population of “Multiracial.” I want to see “Multiracial” in racial data as a solid block so that people see that there is unity, that there is community. I understand that the Census Bureau wants the specific data, but it was important to me to have that term.

I was there; I was with Ramona Douglass when she took a call from NAACP. Harold McDougall was the man who called, and his job was to do away with Project RACE in whatever way he could. It was carried out over C-SPAN, and Harold was the one that basically did the “this is kind of funny that these people want a category, and they’re all black.” I said, “If someone is half Asian and half White, how can you call them black?” “We need to have people put in the black category, we need to
build bridges and drop the multiracial category.” And Ramona said “ok” and that was the last time we spoke. (laughs)

My issue was that when the NAACP said, “We’re going to lose numbers”. My son was considered black at school, white on the census, and multiracial at home. Most of us mothers were white, and the Census took the race of the mother, so they [the NAACP] would actually gain half a person [if they used the umbrella multiracial format]! We weren’t taking numbers away. That’s kind of when things changed with the format. I personally think that the term “multiracial” is important. I think that “Other” means different form my peers. And saying that I’m part of this group and part of this group is ok.

I’ve always felt that my children have three identities: a black identity, a white identity, and a multiracial identity. They identify with certain people, whether it’s Barack Obama or a celebrity because he or she is multiracial. They have three identities, and I don’t think they should discount any one of them.

A lot of teachers say, “Kids come to us and say “What do I put [on the racial information section of school forms], what am I?” and we don’t know what to say to them.” And a lot of teachers come in and say, “I’m multiracial, and when I fill out my staff paperwork and can’t put in multiracial, and it makes me angry.”

We think we’ve found the best solution with this new wording. You can see it on the Project RACE website. I’ve always kept in mind what our membership said, and they said “multiracial.” I think it’s a respectful word, and when you read about Barack Obama, I’ve never read a story about him— reporters never say any other term but “multiracial” [when describing his racial background]. This was one of our goals, that if we’re going to use this term, we’re going to get it into public usage. And in terms of the media and getting this into the media, we succeeded. I don’t use any other term but “multiracial.” We’ve come a long way in getting the term out there. I wish some of the other groups would understand where we’ve come from and why, and I hope that people respect that. There was another group started by another woman in Florida, and I had an idea about Loving Day, where I wanted to do a Loving Day celebration at Disney World, and this woman wanted to do the same thing – so we [Project RACE] backed out, and they ended up not doing it at all. I don’t know what happened there, and I haven’t heard from her or about her since.

I think the 90s and all of the things we’ve done… We’ve been hurt not just by the other groups—they can do their thing and we can do our thing and that’s fine, just like other racial groups—but there have been a few academics who have really, really taken stabs at us. And some people feel like they’re the academics, so they know. Like Rainier Spencer; I think he’s one of the worst. He wrote a whole book that basically is about me and against me. But he can have his opinion; he can speak.

[Pause] The reason that we have what we have on school forms is because we have legislation. I was going back and forth to Sacramento, and we decided to meet with the superintendent of state schools. He was friendly with the representative who had our piece of legislation, and the superintendent said, “Of course I’m for this, how could I not be for this, I think it’s great to have multiracial wording on forms. But first, I want to make sure it’s ok with Washington.” By that time Washington had come out with a crazy system—they called it “How to Manage a National Identity Crisis” or something silly—to implement new racial and ethnicity data; it’s eighty-
eight pages and really eye-opening. On a school form, if you have a two-part question like the Hispanic ethnicity question, if somebody says they are Hispanic, it does not matter what race or races they check. It’s crazy! And the guy [the representative] from California, he was listening on speakerphone and said, “I’ll go to Washington and ask.” They said, “It’s ok, you can put whatever you want on the form.” But we can’t mandate them, because every school district is different, especially in California. One town that has a big Hmong population might have Hmong on their school forms, while another town won’t. It’s up to the districts to get the word out that they’re recommending this [multiracial wording] and that this is acceptable. If we can get the federal government to say ok, if you’re multiracial you can check more than one.
Appendix VI

TRANSCRIPT OF:

Telephone interview with Susan Graham – Project RACE

11/12/11, 2:30 P.M. EST

BEGIN TRANSCRIPTION:

ALICIA: For this interview I have some questions more related to present-day Project RACE and what’s on the website. Your website focuses on medical issues facing multiracial people. Was Project RACE always interested in that?

SUSAN GRAHAM: The whole medical aspect came about later than the [racial wording for] schools. We really had no idea when we formed Project RACE about the medical issues. There was a famous baseball player named Rod Carew – he was a black Panamanian, his wife was white, of Russian and Polish heritage, and one of their three daughters came down with lymphoma. They started trying to find a bone marrow donor match; we heard about it, we got a call from the National Marrow Donor Program, they asked if we could have donor drives (this was all in the early 90s). What was interesting there was that Michelle [the daughter with lymphoma]’s two sisters were matches for each other but not for Michelle, and she died. That was the first that we heard of it [multiracial health issues]. Then when I met [anthropologist] Kathleen Van Reed, she really educated me a lot about the science of bone marrow. She kind of jumped in and worked with us. We still haven’t made the impact we need in the medical community. I think it’s wrong that multiracial people are not included; they should naturally be included in studies so that we know what their medical risks are. That goes back to the advocacy thing, and everyone in the movement knows that we have this issue and this problem and we need to grow the pool of donors and yet people are still saying, “We’re done, we don’t have to do anything else.” And I think that what Mixed Marrow is doing is wonderful – we held marrow drives; one year there were seventeen across the country. But its not really what we do, it’s what she [the president of Mixed Marrow] does, and she does it better than we do. If she runs into a hospital form or anything that is a problem, she’ll give it to me, and the bone marrow drives, she does it.

[Pause] There are a couple of things I wanted to tell you, that I thought of just now.

There was a time when Carlos Fernández… James Landrith was in Washington to take care of our goals, but he went off to a whole different thing that didn’t match what we were doing: he started The Multiracial Activist, I don’t know where he was going, he was all over the place. And Charles Byrd, I don’t think anyone got along that great with Charles. He had the march in Washington, where only two hundred people showed up. That’s not a million march anywhere. We were all kind of struggling in different ways; there was a group called A Place For Us that focused on celebrities. A lot of what happened between all that time is that a lot of the
men wanted to take over Project RACE. [They thought] I wasn’t doing the right job or whatever and I said, no, that’s not going to happen. We had meeting with women in the movement, not necessarily mothers, monoracial, multiracial, mothers and single women, where we discussed what was going on, and what was going on with the men. It wouldn’t make a difference for me, but we decided if the men kept pushing us, we were just going to ignore them and keep doing our own thing.

I got a lot of heat for being a white woman, not a multiracial woman, and people thought Project RACE should be headed by a multiracial person. We had a huge range of, a mixed range of people. It [my leadership] was fine with the Filipino-white multiracial people who are a great part of my contingency. There was a lot happening and so many people trying to find their way that we all ended up doing our own thing – I know that MAVIN and AMEA joined up to do their own thing, and now there are other groups that are doing their own thing. I don’t think we’ve really ever been in competition. I think when Maria P.P. Root came out with her Bill of Rights and her books and her writings, and you look at something she’s written and something Spencer’s written, there are totally different issues to look at. She’s wonderful for the multiracial community.

… What were we talking about again? (laughs)

ALICIA: Medical issues.

SUSAN GRAHAM: Oh, right. Kendall Baldwin, the president of Teen Project RACE is going into the medical field, her sister (who was also a president of Teen Project RACE) is now at Harvard, going into anthropology. Kendall wants to go into the medical area, she’ll probably end up at Harvard or Yale anyway; she’s wanting to do more things on the medical front. She and I have exchanged a lot of information; she’s been contacting people and letting the medical community know that this is a huge, huge issue. If a hospital or a clinical trial asks for race, if it’s important for them to ask for race on the basis of diseases or risk related to race or ethnicity, they need to ask about multiracial people.

Ramona Douglass went into the hospital once for surgery, and they gave her too much anesthesia based on her race, but that wasn’t my area of expertise, but there’s a lot of things we don’t know, that we should.

There are about ten women who were around when we started Project RACE, and I don’t remember even one man.

ALICIA: Why do you think it was mostly female?

SUSAN GRAHAM: I think women are more naturally advocates for some reason. Look at MADD: it’s women, and it’s moms, and it’s sisters. Sometimes we can just relate better to women, there’s just not that little edge of power struggle there that you have with a man. Carlos Fernández was instrumental in Berkley adopting “Interracial” on their forms, and he kind of felt like he was the trailblazer and who were we to jump in, he’d done the first thing. He confided in me at the time, because they weren’t a 501(c)3, and I asked why not. And he said because he was doing political lobbying, and I said, wait a minute– I didn’t feel like, “Well, I’m not going
to tell him,” you share what you know. I always got the feeling that he thought he was the first and everyone was lesser than. I was always surprised by people who wanted to take over Project RACE and run with it, especially to turn it into some money-making machine – we don’t charge membership fees, we feel like everyone who needs it should be able to join Project RACE. We are a poor 501(c)3! (Laughs)

Project RACE had decided very early on when we got our 501(c)3, we decided that we were not going to go after government grants, that it was a conflict of interest. It put you in a situation where we were fighting the government, the Census Bureau, the OMB, and if we took money from the federal government, that could compromise us. It had already happened to other groups.

ALICIA: You said that certain people were trying to take over Project RACE. Do you see yourself passing Project RACE on to someone else someday?

SUSAN GRAHAM: I would love to. It has to be the right person at the right time. I’ve always thought that the younger generation is going to carry us on. But apathy hit the world. My children care, but are not in a position to carry on the organization, and I’d love the Teen Project RACE president to do so, but she’s going her own direction. I’d really like to remain a consultant to Project RACE because I think the experience over the twenty years has taught me a heck of a lot, but I have a bit of a different view on what we do and how we do it than a lot of people. I was talking to a gentleman yesterday and I said, “You know, I’m a lobbyist, and will dance with whoever signs my dance card. I don’t care if they’re black, white, blue, green, Democrat, Republican, if they want to help us, they’ll help us.” I took a lot of heat for siding with Gingrich. In Kim Williams’s book, she says that in my living room there’s a picture of me and Newt Gingrich. They fact-checked with me and I said, “Absolutely not,” but they published it anyway! There is no picture of him displayed anywhere in my home. I took a lot of heat for it, but on the other hand, he did help us. He put us in a much better bargaining position. I don’t agree with a lot of the things Newt Gingrich believes in, but he was my congressman, and he helped us a lot.

ALICIA: I think the issue at the time was that Gingrich proposed a policy of “colorblindness.” What do you feel about “colorblindness”?

SUSAN GRAHAM: I personally, strictly a personal observation, I don’t think there’s any such thing as being colorblind. We all see color; I think instead of colorblindness, we should have color sensitivity – we should be sensitive of people who are monoracial or multiracial. Newt is like the guy – what was his name? – who did prop 187 in California that was overturned. I can’t remember his name; he and I have talked and, you know, his whole idea of no affirmative action and nobody gets further than anybody else based on race… I can see the point, and he himself is multiracial, but I explained to him one day that I thought the way to get rid of race – he was trying to do away with race on college admissions forms, he said, “I wouldn’t do what you’re doing, we shouldn’t have race.” I said, “I think that’s the wrong approach because if we allow people to say they’re–” oh right! Ward Connerly. That’s his name. “If we allow people to say that they are multiracial, that is the only way to get
rid of race. Because if you think about the way society is going, one day everyone is going to be multiracial, and you want to do away with one race being against another race, that’s the way you’re going to do it.” And he called me back the next day and said, “Brilliant. I never thought about it that way. Brilliant.”

To me it’s just a logical progression, and that may be the way to do it. Saying that, I have to go back to that it may be important in the medical realm. There are pharmaceuticals where we absolutely know that it says in reacts differently in African Americans – they know that. So why is it not important to know how it would react in some percentage of African American heritage? To me, that is so critical. We’re talking about lives, and saving lives, and dosing medications and all those things so… and every single time I’m published in the newspaper or magazine and the first comment is expected and saying “We’re all just human.” Well, yeah, but where are these medical differences coming from? If I were a medical researcher, I’d be so interested in solving this part of the puzzle, and they just don’t seem interested. We need more medical people allied with Project RACE or MAVIN or Swirl, spreading the word within those communities. I’m not a doctor, and I’m not qualified, so we need those people who are. Kathleen [my anthropologist friend] can and does try to address it in the circles she runs with medically, but not that much is changing and I’m not sure why. I wish I knew. I wish I knew more medical people who could answer that. We’ve dealt with NIH, the National Institute of Health; I spoke with them personally about the terminology used in trials, and they have to start doing that – it’s just a damn long process. It took us three years to pass a bill in one state. It took us ten years, well, probably fifty years total to get the “check more” mandate on the census. So back to that big question of race in itself… I don’t know. I’m not Ward Connerly, coming from his perspective, his proposition was just overturned in California and I didn’t hear from him. You’d think because he loves to be in front of the media, he’d be out there talking about it, but nobody really knows.

Then there are people like Spencer, who is not out there doing anything except spreading his own philosophy, and I’ve never met him! How can he spread all that about my views? And he’ll quote me about things I’ve never said. Accuracy in the media is particularly important. We’ve kind of built this organization using the media, and there is a professor of library science, she was at Florida State University, her name is Alice Robin and she contacted me. She’d done a lot of research in Tallahassee, and she started collecting all our old radio shows and talk shows and print media, and she wanted to eventually do a book on it. She hired my kids to do searches, and the list blew me away – when they started seeing what we’d done… there were over two hundred interviews we’d done.

Sometimes you’re the media darling, and sometimes you’re not. I think it’s been evenly spread throughout the movement. There was a bill that AMEA was behind in 2005, and they had decided to try and pass it. I was contacted by a guy who wasn’t affiliated with AMEA, but he wanted this bill passed. Anyway, this whole thing got rolling, and they passed the first hurdle, the first committee. Project RACE was the only one against it, because it didn’t have the wording we thought was appropriate. They had a list of twenty-five organizations that were for it, including MAVIN, and we were against it. They passed this committee and they had this big press thing on it, and I would never ever, ever have done that. That was the absolute
wrong thing to do, because it helped to tank the bill. You don’t go out to the press and say, “We have a bill!” until it has passed every hurdle, including House and Senate. Ramona may have been involved with that, I don’t know what year she died, but we would have butt heads about that. The Internet has changed a whole lot about the movement, because people can blog immediately. It’s no longer about sending a letter to the editor. Re-blog, and then it’s all, “The only race is the human race, we should all be colorblind,” and I always breathe a sigh of relief when the comments are closed. And everyone feels they can weigh in on it, regardless of their lack of knowledge or expertise. It’s hard to know what’s real and what’s not. In a lot of ways the Internet has helped, because we can reach more people, and automatically catalog our members, which is wonderful. But it was kind of nice when people would send in the membership form with a $5 check attached to it, because it meant they were committed, but things have changed now in our world.

ALICIA: You were against the bill because it didn’t have the “multiracial” language?

SUSAN GRAHAM: That terminology is really important to me. It’s so important… Our bill that we took to Sacramento, we passed every committee, our bill was almost unanimously passed. Anthony Portentino carried our bill—it was interesting—we thought about who we wanted to carry it, and I went through and found that Portentino was carrying a bill for cord blood, so he’d be interested in the medical aspect of our cause, so I called his legislative director, explained what Project RACE was, and said we would like to be a co-supporter on that bill because we also believe in cord blood and it’s so important in the multiracial community. So she [the legislative director] started talking more about Project RACE and what we do, and I said eventually we’re going to need legislation. She said, “My grandchildren are multiracial.” And then she said, “I want to do this, I want to do a bill for Project RACE.” First we wanted to give them something, not just ask. We were a co-sponsor for them, and then let them come up with the idea to help us. Her grandson came out and testified at some of the hearings, and so it [the bill] goes through all of these different hearings, and this is going to sound really egotistical and I don’t mean it to, but one of the best moments of my life was when we went in front of the committee, and then I gave my testimony about the background and what I wanted done, it was all rather quick, and the chairwoman (they kind of sit up high and you know how that goes) and she said, “I’m going to call for a vote on this, and I want to thank you, Mrs. Graham. I’ve been following your work for multiracial children for twenty years.” I get goosebumps, it’s so nice to hear that. And she did help us to get through the other committees. The bill got completely passed, and then it went to the Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger and he didn’t sign it. He said his reason for not signing was that the Department of Education had already agreed to it, so there was no reason for him to agree. Which is the Republican thing… I’ve written pieces that are on the Project RACE website, I can go to the school board in my region, but I’m in the middle of the state. I’m not going to San Diego or San Francisco. I’ll help anybody and everybody, but I’m one person, I can’t go there – and that’s where people need to start advocating. They need to see correct terminology on the forms. But if they don’t, I’m not a traveling salesman; I can’t change their minds. People aren’t advocating and
jumping on the bandwagon, maybe they think we’ve done enough, but I don’t think we have.

ALICIA: You seem to have learned a lot about the political side of things with Project RACE. Have you also devoted time to review racial information or research?

SUSAN GRAHAM (slight discomfort): Um… I’m sorry, I don’t understand the question.

ALICIA: Well, you became politically involved and took the initiative to learn about the ins and outs of political legislation. Did you also learn about race during that time?

SUSAN GRAHAM: No… we didn’t go that far. I think I’ve read every book out there – there was a point where Reggie Daniel was on our advisory board, he was my sounding board. The political part of it, things like Loving Day, I think that is fabulous. But we haven’t gotten that involved with that until recently. That’s not really our thing, though. I think people getting together is important, I think the conferences are important. Did you go to [the Critical Mixed Race Studies Conference at] DePaul?

ALICIA: Yes, I spoke there.

SUSAN GRAHAM: There was one roundtable where they discussed politics, and where we needed to go. And as far as I know, there’s nothing that came out of it. I think it was the academics there and asking, but the activists weren’t there to carry things out.

I think it would be terrific if we could all come together to make a huge statement and push this movement forward for everybody. We don’t have to be one organization to do that, we can do it separately, but I don’t think there’s the interest. How would you get people motivated?

ALICIA: It’s difficult. I think, just like the census question, we’d need an issue around which to organize, and I just don’t see that yet.

SUSAN GRAHAM: It would take one person to go to all of the groups to see what everyone could come up with. I think that’s what the roundtable at the DePaul was supposed to do, but it just didn’t. Someone who can get everyone to a spot where nobody is left out. I think that you can be taught how to deal with the media, and maybe something like that… a lot of people really don’t want to do it, and I think you need to be able to maneuver different ways and answer questions that don’t make you sound like an idiot, like I do right now (laughs). I used to be totally freaked out about public speaking, but that morphed into my debating Harold McDougall and the NAACP on C-SPAN. You just have to get over the stage fright of it, if you have a passion.
Appendix VII

Helms’s White Racial Identity Development (WRID) Model

Understanding the role of racism in white racial identity is critical to understanding white racial identity development models. Most models discuss race typologically. Janet E. Helms’s WRID model was the most commonly referenced in the articles I read on white identity, and was used as a reference in both Karis and O’Donoghue’s studies of inter racially married white women. In Helms’s identity model, she considers individual, institutional and cultural racism as having different degrees of influence during different stages of development. Helms defines institutional racism as the result of legal and political frameworks designed to maintain white supremacy, while cultural racism is the socially normalized, naturalized assumption that white culture is superior to other cultures. Individual racism draws on an individual’s personal beliefs of white superiority and non-white inferiority.266

Since the original publication of Helms’s WRID model in 1990,267 other psychologists and scholars criticized her work for seeming to only allow linear flow from one impermeable stage of development to another.268 Helms then both responded to critics and expanded her model in 1995 with “An Update of Helms’s White and People of Color Racial Identity Development Models.”269 “Stages” of

267 Helms’s model was partially published first in 1984 as part of a study on racial identity and self-actualizing tendencies of white, college-aged subjects.
269 Ibid.
development were changed to “statuses” to indicate that identity development was an interaction between cognitive and emotional processes versus a static psychological destination.\textsuperscript{270} Helms also asserted that an individual could occupy multiple statuses at once, as there was no empirical data to suggest the mutual exclusivity of her original designated stages.\textsuperscript{271} She then introduced the idea of maturation and sophistication within a particular status, triggered by cognitive and emotional complexity within the individual and among race-related environmental stimuli. A person could inhabit various statuses, and exhibit varying degrees of maturation within each status, allowing for a more complex and complete identity model.

Janet Helms’s 1990 WRID model’s initial contact stage/status is characterized by a white individual’s limited and naive or timid interactions with black people.\textsuperscript{272} The white individual continues to unconsciously benefit from institutional and cultural racism, and measures the black people (s)he comes into contact with against stereotypes of black behavior.\textsuperscript{273} Helms claims that comments such as “You don’t act like a Black person,” or “I don’t notice what race a person is” are symptomatic of this initial phase in identity development.\textsuperscript{274} Because the contact status individual is not racially self-reflexive, she continues to retain positive self-esteem. She may retain her contact status as long as she maintains mostly vicarious contact with black people\textsuperscript{275} – that is, contact with black people only through the perceptions of personal

\textsuperscript{270} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{271} Ibid., 183.
\textsuperscript{273} Ibid., 49.
\textsuperscript{274} Ibid., 57.
\textsuperscript{275} Ibid., 57.
acquaintances and/or the media (usually negative) versus direct interpersonal interaction.\textsuperscript{276} When she has had enough direct contact with black people, however, and begins to recognize the existence of racial discrimination, she enters the next phase of identity development: \textit{disintegration}.

It is possible that white mothers of biracial children retain contact status if their only black contacts are their family. Even if they do not stray outside of their racial and family communities, however, they must simultaneously hold (an)other status(es). White women in interracial relationships, as mentioned previously, do experience rebound racism and racial discrimination. They thus understand the existence of such discrimination in the social reality of people of color, unlike a person experiencing only the initial contact status. The persistence of colorblind rhetoric in testimonials of white women in interracial relationships recorded by O’Donoghue\textsuperscript{277} and Dalmage,\textsuperscript{278} however, implies the existence of an enduring ignorance uncomfortably akin to Helms’s “I don’t notice what race a person is” characteristic of this first stage/status.

Helm’s second stage/status of disintegration is characterized by a conflicted consciousness of whiteness and the moral dilemmas associated with being white. Dennis (1981) delineates the most prevalent moral dilemmas of whiteness thus:

\begin{itemize}
  \item[a)] a desire to be a religious or moral person conflicts with the realization that to be white one must treat blacks immorally
\end{itemize}

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{276} Ibid., 54.
\textsuperscript{277} O'Donoghue, "Racial and Ethnic Identity Development in White Mothers of Biracial, Black-White Children."
\end{footnotes}
b) a belief in freedom and democracy conflicts with the existence of racial inequality

c) a desire to demonstrate love and compassion contrasts with a desire to “keep Blacks in their place” (author comment: and thus, also to keep white people in their position of superiority)

d) a desire to treat others with respect contrasts with the belief that black people are not worthy of respect

e) a belief that each individual should be treated and/or awarded privileges based on merit conflicts with the belief that black people should be evaluated as a cohesive group, rather than individuals.279

Such internal conflict brings about a psychological state of what is termed “cognitive dissonance” (internal conflict), characterized by feelings of guilt, depression, helplessness and anxiety.280 In order to minimize these negative emotions and troubled psychological state, white people in the disintegration stage either change behavior (avoidance of racial confrontation), surrounding beliefs (environmental – friends and family) or create new beliefs (colorblindness, for example).281 Their choice of behavior, again, depends on the nature of their interracial contact (vicarious or direct, voluntary or involuntary). Because white mothers of biracial children engage in voluntary, direct contact with people of color, it is unlikely that they maintain this status for long or to any great degree. However, it is also important to note that some white women in interracial relationships do engage in racial

280 Ibid., 59.
281 Ibid.
identification strategies to avoid white guilt and the cognitive dissonance. Forced to repeatedly confront their whiteness in the face of racial discrimination against their non-white families certainly could create intense internal conflict and racial guilt. In this sense, white women in interracial relationships enter into a disintegration state, forming a new belief by assuming an of-color or European ethnic identity.

Helms’s third stage/status, *reintegration*, is defined by the conscious acknowledgement of white identity. Individuals of this status accept the belief that white culture and identity are superior to of-color cultures and identities. They believe that institutional and cultural racism is deserved, and that natural and inherent racial differences give rise to unequal treatment of white and black racial groups.\(^\text{282}\) Guilt and anxiety transform into fear of and anger towards black people. Eventually, however, they begin to question and change their beliefs and thus, their status. It would be extremely difficult for a white woman in an interracial relationship to maintain this status, since it is contingent on creating psychological distance between conceptions of “whites” and “blacks”. Emotional connection is necessary for a relationship, and inherently conflicts with creating such distance.

*Pseudo-independence* is the first status of positive identity formation in Helms’s model. Individuals of this status see how whites wittingly and unwittingly perpetuate racism and are no longer comfortable with a racist identity. They begin to look for a new one. A pseudo-independent person is “apt to [feel] commiseration with Blacks” but can still behave in non-reflexive ways that unwittingly perpetuate racism

\(^{282}\) Ibid., 60.
and a racist belief system. Commiseration or over-identification with black people or a black identity is characteristic of white women in interracial relationships, and very much relevant to the political involvement of white mothers of biracial children in the Multiracial Movement (see Chapter 2). Pseudo-independent people increase their interactions with black people, but because they are not yet self-reflexive, they draw the suspicion of both white and black racial groups. This, too, is true of white women in interracial relationships; many of the first interracial family organizations formed to negotiate a space in which this mutual racial suspicion or hostility was not an issue. This stage creates neither a positive nor negative racial identity. A quest for a better definition of whiteness leads an individual to the next stage of racial identity development: Immersion/Emersion.

During the immersion/emersion status, individuals replace stereotypes with accurate information gained from direct contact with black people. In their racial self-discovery, individuals might seek out biographies and autobiographies written about or by white people undergoing a similar racial transformation, or join white consciousness groups. Helms claims that individuals in the immersion/emersion status often feel emotional catharsis as they release racist belief systems. Though white women in interracial relationships do have intimate and frequent contact with black people, if their relationship to those people is familial, they might not be

283 Ibid., 61.
284 Ibid.
287 Ibid.
288 Ibid.
challenged to think differently about black people as a result of that contact. Because blood ties and family bonds can obscure racial meaning and difference through their deeply personal nature, white women in black families might not think of their families in predominantly racial terms. The “accurate information” they gain from the black people they interact with (their husbands and children) might not be synthesized as information about black people, but as information about their family.

The final status of Helms’s WRID is autonomy. Internalizing a positive definition of white identity, people in this status no longer view race as a threat. It is unclear to me, however, if Helms means race as their own race—whiteness—or race as a potentially threatening concept. Autonomous individuals make an active attempt to learn from other cultural groups and have an increased awareness of other social and structural inequalities such as ageism. The status of autonomy is an ongoing process of self-questioning and rearticulation of identity. Helms claims: “Since [the autonomous individual] no longer reacts out of rigid worldviews, it is possible for him or her to abandon cultural and institutional racism.” I disagree with this conclusion, with the understanding that my opinion then implies that there is no way to disown or escape whiteness. If Helms means to say that an individual who has white self-consciousness, “accurate information” of racial groups, and no longer views race as a threat does not wittingly contribute to institutional or cultural racism, and may even try to undermine it, I agree. However, a white person as a physical body cannot help but to fortify institutional or cultural racism as they serve her,
willingly or no. Her existence draws from founts of privilege and racist ideologies that cannot be un-owned, simply because the structure that keeps such privileges and ideologies in place would require more self-reflexive participants than exist to pull asunder or reverse.

Figure 4.1
Stages and Phases of White Racial Identity Development

Phase 1: Abandonment of Racism

CONTACT → DISINTEGRATION → REINTEGRATION

Phase 2: Defining a Nonracist White Identity

PSEUDO-INDEPENDENCE → IMMERSION/EMERSION → AUTONOMY
Table 4.1 (continued)

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PBS. "Not an "Other"." In *PBS Online Newshour*, edited by PBS. USA: PBS, 1997.


