

Black, Red, and Yellow: Cross-Racial Coalitions and Conflicts in the Early African American Scientific Imagination

Christine Yao, Ph.D.
University College London

ON THE QUESTION OF BIOLOGICAL HUMAN RACES, philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah sums up the current, dominant antiracist attitude simply: “I think there aren’t.”¹ Rigorous genealogies of the histories of race science, along with careful intellectual work tracing the development of racial formations, decouple biology from the social and cultural phenomena of what are now recognized as racialized identities. While shared histories of oppression and resistance may invite the unearthing of cross-racial ties that include the literally familial, the viability of contemporary coalition building, as outlined by Kwame Ture and Charles V. Hamilton in *Black Power*, requires clear assessments of self-interests and of the benefits of alliance, concrete objectives for specific goals and societal change, and attention to the need for self-determination.² Nonetheless, the divide between the realm of the biologically essentialist and the domain of constructed culture has a certain porousness when it comes to metaphor, particularly in discussions of cross-racial and cross-cultural influences and coalition. “So-called ‘mixed race’ children are not the only ones with a claim to multiple heritages. All of us are inheritors of European, African, Native American, and Asian pasts, even if we can’t exactly trace our bloodlines to these continents,” declares historian Robin G. Kelley, both pairing and

¹ Kwame Anthony Appiah, “Race, Culture, Identity: Misunderstood Connections,” in *Color Conscious: The Political Morality of Race*, ed. Kwame Anthony Appiah and Amy Gutmann (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 38.

² Kwame Ture and Charles V. Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1967).

unpairing the associations for effect in order to argue for the dynamism of polyculturalism and against static multiculturalism.³ Taking up Kelley's research on the subversive political implications of these mutual inheritances, Vijay Prashad playfully refers to "our mulatto history," using the formerly biological category for racial hybridity to describe "the long waves of linkage that tie people together in ways we tend to forget."⁴ The legacies of nineteenth-century race science in discussions of cross-racial alliances appear, at most, figurative.

In this essay I will argue for the importance of subverted biological race science to conceptions of Blackness and cross-racial coalition with Natives and Asians in the early Black scientific imagination. Imagining connections with other peoples of color has been a recurring trope within Black political thought. While focused on their articulation of Black Power, Ture and Hamilton frame their discussions with reference to "former African and Asian colonies . . . fighting for the right to control their own natural resources, free from exploitation by Western and American capitalism."⁵ Writing in the post-Bandung Conference era, they echo W. E. B. Du Bois's earlier claim in *The Souls of Black Folk* that "the problem of the color-line" is transnational: "the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea."⁶ Comparative racialization is fundamental to our understanding of antiracism and stems from the emergence of global entanglements of ideology, labor, power, race, and gender that have given rise to modernity. Research in this area requires the imbrication of different fields of scholarship, particularly those often labeled as "area" or "ethnic" studies.⁷ Studies have been devoted to the intersections between peoples of color within and beyond the United States, including the long history of Black-Indigenous connections, which reaches back to colonization,⁸ and Black-Asian affiliations from the Exclusion era onward.⁹ The stakes of this archival work are political and, as critiques by Tamara K. Nopper and Jared Sexton have shown, are vulnerable to simplifying mythologizations that erase frictions and antagonisms (usually based in anti-Blackness) in the utopian call for solidarity among peoples of color.¹⁰ By looking at the writings of early Black

³ Robin D. G. Kelley, "The People in Me," *ColorLines Magazine*, 1999, <http://www.utne.com/politics/the-people-in-me> (accessed November 15, 2016).

⁴ Vijay Prashad, *Everybody Was Kungfu Fighting: Afro-Asian Connections and the Myth of Cultural Purity* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), 61.

⁵ Ture and Hamilton, *Black Power*, 75.

⁶ W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Vintage Books, 1986), 16.

⁷ See Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015).

⁸ See James F. Brooks, ed., *Confounding the Color Line: The Indian-Black Experience in North America* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002); Tiya Miles and Sharon P. Holland, eds., *Crossing Waters, Crossing Worlds: The African Diaspora in Indian Country* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006); William Loren Katz, *Black Indians: A Hidden Heritage* (New York: Atheneum, 1986); Kenneth W. Porter, *The Black Seminoles* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1996).

⁹ See Heike Raphael-Hernandez and Shannon Steen, eds., *AfroAsian Encounters* (New York: New York University Press, 2006); Fred Ho and Bill V. Mullen, eds., *Afro Asia: Revolutionary Political and Cultural Connections between African Americans and Asian Americans* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008); Helen Huran Jun, *Race for Citizenship: Black Orientalism and Asian Uplift from Pre-Emancipation to Neoliberal America* (New York: New York University Press, 2011); Bill Mullen, *Afro-Orientalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004); Rychetta Watkins, *Black Power, Yellow Power, and the Making of Revolutionary Identities* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012); Edlie Wong, *Racial Reconstruction: Black Inclusion, Chinese Exclusion, and the Fictions of Citizenship* (New York: New York University Press, 2015).

¹⁰ See Tamara K. Nopper, "Colorblind Racism and Institutional Actors' Explanation of Korean Immigrant Entrepreneurship," *Critical Sociology* 36, no. 1 (2010): 65–86; Jared Sexton, "Proprieties of Coalition: Blacks, Asians, and the Politics of Policing," *Critical Sociology* 26, no. 1 (2010): 87–108; Jared Sexton, "The Vel of

nationalists, focusing on David Walker's 1829 abolitionist tract *Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World* and touching upon Martin R. Delany's writings, published later in the century, I explore how these thinkers turned to biology as the unlikely site for grounding Blackness and imagining ties to other peoples of color that anticipates future criticisms of multiracialism and naïve calls for crossracial solidarity. Walker and Delany envisioned Black revolution in tandem with transnational cross-racial coalition and conflicts by engaging with debates in biological race science at the very site of the field's emergence in the nineteenth century.

Race science in nineteenth-century America was an uneven amalgam of established and newer disciplines, including natural history, theology, biology, anthropology, sociology, craniology, and environmentalism, and fell into two major theoretical camps: polygenesis, the so-called "American" school of evolutionary science that argued for the separate and immutable nature of the races; and monogenesis, which proposed that humanity descended from a common origin, a hypothesis eventually affirmed by Charles Darwin's theory of evolution.¹¹ Against these elite scientific discourses dominated by white scientists, radical Black thinkers imagined a politicized hybrid of polygenesis and monogenesis as both the biological and metaphorical common ground for a transnational coalition between peoples of color that nonetheless retained essential racial distinctiveness.¹² They took a stand by reworking the terms of evolutionary science in order to link Black, Asian, and Indigenous peoples through a shared biological and affective revolutionary consciousness made manifest in the flesh. Walker's and Delany's work exemplifies what critic Britt Rusert calls "fugitive science," a Black reclaiming of science in the service of freedom that included Afro-Native revisions of race science to articulate political, familial "speculative kinships."¹³ I expand Rusert's concept to explore the ways in which these Black writers undertook this liberatory work in tandem with other peoples of color as part of an early Third World vision of justice and solidarity. Through my intervention into histories of race science, I suggest that underread passages in Walker's pamphlet and Delany's novel demonstrate how early Black thinkers conceived of the political possibilities for coalition and of conflict with other racialized groups by playing with the tensions between polygenetic and monogenetic biological theories. In their attention to Black intersections with Indigenous and Asian peoples, Walker and Delany engage as revolutionary

Slavery: Tracking the Figure of the Unsovereign," *Critical Sociology* 42, nos. 4–5 (2016): 583–97; Frank Wilderson III, *Red, White, and Black: Cinema and the Structure of US Antagonisms* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

- ¹¹ For general overviews of race science, see Ricardo B. Brown, *Until Darwin: Science, Human Variety and the Origins of Race* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2010); Ivan Hannaford, *Race: The History of an Idea in the West* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996). For race science in the American context, see Bruce Dain, *A Hideous Monster of the Mind: American Race Theory in the Early Republic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002); George M. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817–1914* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971); Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man* (New York: Norton, 1996); Winthrop D. Jordan, *White over Black: American Attitudes toward the Negro, 1550–1812* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1968); William Stanton, *The Leopard's Spots: Scientific Attitudes toward Race in America, 1814–59* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960). For the retention of polygenetic ideas in monogenesis, see George W. Stocking, *Race, Culture, and Evolution: Essays in the History of Anthropology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).
- ¹² In contrast, famed abolitionist Frederick Douglass also debunks race science but in the service of an integrationist project in speeches like "The Claims of the Negro Ethnologically Considered."
- ¹³ See Britt Rusert, *Fugitive Science: Empiricism and Freedom in Early African American Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2017); Britt Rusert, "Delany's Comet: Fugitive Science and the Speculative Imaginary of Emancipation," *American Quarterly* 65, no. 4 (2013): 799–829; Britt Rusert, "The Science of Freedom: Counterarchives of Racial Science on the Antebellum Stage," *African American Review* 45, no. 3 (2012): 291–308.

participants in the counterdiscourse of race science by arguing for sameness and difference strategically as the deliberate yoking together of Black “colored peoples” and non-Black “peoples of color.”

DAVID WALKER’S COLORED CITIZENS OF THE WORLD: NATIVE DECOLONIZATION AND THE “MULATTOES OF ASIA”

The full title of abolitionist David Walker’s early nineteenth-century pamphlet *Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World, but in particular, and very expressly, to those of the United States of America* addresses his prophetic message of violent change against the systems of slavery and white supremacy to a global audience with a national focus. This ambitious confrontation with real and symbolic borders in both his text’s thematic explorations and its material circulation made the three editions of the short pamphlet the bane of slaveholders and sparked the beginnings of radical Black ideology. The question of audience has seen little debate other than a few misguided claims that owing to Walker’s erudition and despite the *Appeal*’s title and content, white readers constituted its intended audience.¹⁴ Robert S. Levine, along with historians Herbert Apetheker and Peter Hinks, affirms Walker’s intention to create a wide-ranging Black community at all levels of education, both enslaved and free, through the promotion of the Black press among the literate, who would then perform public readings for the illiterate.¹⁵ Sterling Stuckey, who is credited with being the first to recognize Walker as a Black nationalist thinker, suggests that the *Appeal* presents “a conception of the reciprocity of interests of Afro-Asians and people of color in the Americas suffering from oppression at the hands of whites.”¹⁶ Like Stuckey, work by Crystal Anderson and Jack D. Forbes explore how racial language was in flux throughout the nineteenth century, with politically expedient overlap between terms like “colored” used to describe the groups we now recognize as Black, Asian, and Indigenous.¹⁷ Although Walker states at the beginning of his third and final edition that he speaks to “we, the Blacks or Colored People,” Stuckey notes that Walker, and Delany after him, included “his people with ‘colored people’ generally” as part of their projects of racial self-identification.¹⁸ Thus, the *Appeal*’s full title captures not only the dynamic between national and transnational but how Walker deliberately situated Pan-African and African American communities (albeit his primary focus: “in particular and very expressly”) among other peoples of color. Although the tract’s material circulation

¹⁴ Peter Buckingham, “David Walker: An Appeal to Whom?,” *Negro History Bulletin* 42, no. 1 (1979): 24–26.

¹⁵ Robert S. Levine, “Circulating the Nation: David Walker, the Missouri Compromise and the Rise of the Black Press,” in *The Black Press*, ed. Todd Vogel (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 17–36; Herbert Apetheker, “One Continual Cry”: *David Walker’s “Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World”* (New York: Humanities Press, 1965); Peter P. Hinks, *To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren: David Walker and the Problem of Antebellum Slave Resistance* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997). For more on the pamphlet’s recirculation, see Lori Leavell, “Not Intended Exclusively for the Slave States’: Antebellum Recirculation of David Walker’s *Appeal*,” *Callaloo* 38, no. 3 (2015): 679–95.

¹⁶ Sterling Stuckey, *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 138; Sterling Stuckey, *The Ideological Origins of Black Nationalism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972).

¹⁷ Stuckey, *Slave Culture*; Crystal Anderson, “When Were We Colored? Blacks, Asians, and Racial Discourse,” in *Blacks and Asians: Crossings, Conflict, and Commonality*, ed. Hazel M. McFerson (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2006), 59–77; Jack D. Forbes, *Africans and Native Americans: The Language of Race and the Evolution of Red-Black Peoples* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993).

¹⁸ David Walker, *David Walker’s “Appeal,”* ed. Charles M. Wiltse (New York: Hill and Wang, 1965), i (all subsequent page references to this work will be given in parentheses in the text); Stuckey, *Slave Culture*, 257.

was limited to the United States, he extended the speculative horizon of his aspirational address to all peoples of color throughout the world.

By declaring such grand global and cross-racial ambitions on the title page, Walker signals the scope of his extensive refutation of Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia*, the quintessential eighteenth-century discussion of the United States that heralded the beginnings of American race science. Drawing upon biblical sources as well as classical history, Jefferson contemplates racial differences in culture, physiology, and psychology to form the basis of what, according to Appiah, "we would call a *biological* concept" of race.¹⁹ The founding father comparatively valorizes Natives as endangered noble savages while making assumptions about the innate inferiority of enslaved African Americans. Jefferson justifies the hypocrisy of slavery in America by laying the foundations of biological race science and the debates between polygenesis and monogenesis in the century to come: "To our reproach it must be said, that though for a century and a half we have had under our eyes the race of black and of red men, they have never yet been viewed by us as subjects of natural history. I advance it therefore as a suspicion only, that the blacks, whether originally a distinct race, or made distinct by time and circumstances, are inferior to the whites in the endowments both of body and mind."²⁰ In the *Appeal* Walker quotes back and refutes each line in this passage, then exclaiming, "It is indeed surprising, that a man of such great learning, combined with such excellent natural parts, should speak so of a set of men in chains" (10). Attending to how Walker calls upon his own combination of ethnographical observation, history, and theology, I wish to nuance Ian Finseth's claim that Walker presents the "most aggressive and sustained response to the theory of polygenesis" to be found in pre-1840 African American writing.²¹ Although Walker argues against Jefferson, he also views proto-Darwinian evolution as a racist scheme, deriding whites who, "after having reduced us to the deplorable condition of slaves under their feet, held us up as descending originally from the tribes of *Monkeys or Orang-Outangs?*" (10). Walker does not take an outright position between polygenesis and monogenesis; instead, like his personalized riposte against Jefferson, his writings demonstrate a tactical balance between Darwinian monogenetic universality *avant la lettre* and irreconcilable polygenetic difference in order to argue both for the humanity of Blacks and for their distinctiveness as a people. Throughout the pamphlet he calls whites "our *natural enemies*" even as he deplores "how can those enemies but say that we and our children are not of the HUMAN FAMILY" (26). The universality of the human family does not come at the cost of racial uniqueness and the political force of claiming whites as natural enemies.

Mentions of other peoples of color—Indigenous and Asian—are few, but the tangential references serve to outline the scope of Walker's political vision and redefine comparative racialization within race science. Whereas Jefferson unfavorably compares those he calls "the race of black and of red men," Walker chooses to reach across that polygenetic racial divide by claiming connections to Indigenous peoples that blur the line between the political and the biological. He opens the first of four articles in the *Appeal* by addressing his "beloved brethren" and noting that whereas the other peoples of the world "are called *men*, and of course are, and ought to be free" (7), the Blacks are not accorded the same respect, much less freedom. The people listed first here

¹⁹ Appiah, "Race, Culture, Identity," 49.

²⁰ Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, ed. Frank C. Shuffelton (New York: Penguin Books, 1999), 150–51.

²¹ Ian Finseth, "David Walker, Nature's Nation, and Early African-American Separatism," *Mississippi Quarterly* 54, no. 3 (2001): 351.

are “the Indians of North and of South America,” who are placed as the literal closest relatives in the human family to his Black “brethren” and, therefore, worthy of the same level of regard and sovereignty. Walker’s jeremiad draws parallels between the Israelites enslaved in Egypt and the poorer treatment of Blacks in America; in educating his audience, Walker points out that the Egyptians “were Africans or colored people, such as we are,” and were “a mixture of Ethiopians and the natives of Egypt—about the same as you see the colored people of the United States at the present day,” a correlation that further links Blacks to a form of Indigeneity as well as to an ancient past (8). The Indigenous commitment to decolonial resistance is an inspiration for the fight against slavery: “Why do they not get the Aborigines of this country to be slaves to them and their children, to work their farms and dig their mines? They know well that the Aborigines of this country, or (Indians) would tear them from the earth. The Indians would not rest day or night, they would be up all times of night, cutting their cruel throats” (63). The “Aborigines” or “Indians” provide a precedent for rebellion from within the same occupied space of the Americas; through their kinship with Indigenous peoples, Walker urges Blacks to respond in kind, perhaps sensing the threat posed by what he names the “colonizing trick” of those American whites who would free Blacks from slavery only to send them to Africa (67). Walker perceived the potential for coalition with Natives and the confluence between Indigenous sovereignty and antislavery; as Peter Hinks points out, part of the pamphlet’s distribution in Georgia relied upon missionaries who were known for allying themselves with the Cherokees who had protested against the state earlier in 1828.²² As one of the Five “Civilized” Tribes who practiced slavery, the Cherokee Nation enslaved Black people, a violent complication that nevertheless did lead to intermarriage, cultural exchange, and, according to Celia Naylor-Ojronge, “a dual sense of belonging” for these Blacks as both owned by Natives and also belonging to Native culture and land. The struggle for these Cherokee freedmen to be recognized as citizens of the Cherokee Nation continues to the present day.²³ Given the pamphlet’s material life in the spectacle of emancipatory performance, it is probable that Walker’s audience would have also included Indigenous peoples, who may be hailed by the oral reading of the first article’s line “My beloved brethren:—The Indians of North and of South America,” as potential fellow “colored citizens of the world” (7).

Asians are on the periphery of Jefferson’s discussion of natural history: the geographical region receives passing mention in his studies of flora and fauna, and Asian peoples are referenced only in relation to Native Americans and not at all in association with Blacks. Walker’s bold declaration of kinship with supposedly the most distant of peoples thus constitutes a significant intervention into the understanding of Black interracial and transnational relations. As with Indigenous peoples, there is an aspect of shared decolonial resistance resonant with antislavery, for the abolitionist also asks, “Why do they not bring the inhabitants of Asia to be body servants to them? They know they would get their bodies rent and torn from head to foot” (63). This

²² Hinks, *To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren*, 130.

²³ Celia E. Naylor-Ojronge, “‘Born and Raised among These People, I Don’t Want to Know Any Other’: Slaves’ Acculturation in Nineteenth-Century Indian Territory,” in Brooks, *Confounding the Color Line*, 183. For more on the Native American practice of slavery, see James F. Brooks, *Captives and Cousins: Slavery, Kinship, and Community in the Southwest Borderlands* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Alan Galloway, *The Indian Slave Trade* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002). For ongoing complications regarding biology, race science, and kinship for Native Americans, see Yael Ben-Zvi, “Where Did Red Go? Lewis Henry Morgan’s Evolutionary Inheritance and US Racial Imagination,” *CR: The New Centennial Review* 7, no. 2 (2007): 201–29; Kim TallBear, *Native American DNA: Tribal Belonging and the False Promise of Genetic Science* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

linking of Asians with Blacks goes even further in terms of biological affiliations and complications. When Walker claims Egypt as part of Black history in his discussion of the Exodus story, he mentions “some of them yellow and others dark” (8), a description that evokes what Bill Mullen designates as a tradition of Afro-Orientalism in Black thought, of “an image of a monumental African past linked to an ancient Asiatic culture.”²⁴ These implications become complicated in a passage that has received little critical attention, when Walker insinuates there is something innate about the choice of whites to exploit others: “But some may ask, did not the blacks of Africa, and the mulattoes of Asia, go on in the same way as did the whites of Europe. I answer, no” (17). With the phrase “the mulattoes of Asia,” Walker delivers a fascinating observation on the nuances of Black-Asian relations through a familial lens that captures the material and symbolic in-betweenness of Asians that would cause Gary Okihiro to ask if yellow was Black or white and that would become Claire Kim’s figuration of Asian American racial triangulation between Black and white.²⁵ Here, with the use of “mulattoes”—the word being derived from either *mulato*, the derisive theory relating racial hybridity to mules, or the Arabic *muwallad*, meaning “foreigner”—Walker claims a degree of both familial intimacy with and estrangement from Asians in relation to Blacks and acknowledges their comparative privilege in the racial hierarchy maintained by white supremacy.²⁶ “Mulatto” existed as a transnational term for mixed-race peoples, with the regional American variation coming to mean anyone of partially Black heritage; prior to the dominance of the one-drop definition of Blackness with *Plessy v. Ferguson*, “mulattoes” were often seen as a distinct racially mixed group with relative privilege and, coincidentally, were also often called “yellow” or “high yaller.”²⁷ Jefferson regards them as evidence of essential Black inferiority: “improvements of the Blacks in body and mind, in the first instance of their mixture with the whites, has been observed by every one, and proves that their inferiority is not the effect merely of their condition of life.”²⁸ It is telling that Walker implicitly answers Jefferson by critiquing the possibility of legalized miscegenation, commenting that a Black man married to a white woman would be “a double slave to her” and would be treated “as a NIGGER!!!!” (9). This move works both to preserve the distinctiveness of Blackness and to anticipate the anti-Blackness that haunts mixed-race discourse.²⁹ Despite reaching out to Asians on the basis of shared structural and familial commonalities, he also acknowledges the active complicity of Asians in anti-Black oppression when he remarks that “some of Asia” can be included among the white Christians of America and Europe who have treated Blacks poorly by putting them “into wretchedness ten thousand times more intolerable” and by telling Blacks “that they are an *inferior* and *distinct race*

²⁴ Mullen, *Afro-Orientalism*, xxxv. For associations between Asians and the color yellow, see Michael Keevak, *Becoming Yellow: A Short History of Racial Thinking* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011).

²⁵ Gary Y. Okihiro, *Margins and Mainstreams: Asians in American History and Culture* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994); Claire Kim, “The Racial Triangulation of Asian Americans,” *Politics and Society* 27, no. 1 (1999): 105–38.

²⁶ Forbes, *Africans and Native Americans*, 132.

²⁷ Forbes, *Africans and Native Americans*; James F. Davis, *Who Is Black? One Nation’s Definition* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991); Joel Williamson, *New People: Miscegenation and Mulattoes in the United States* (New York: Free Press, 1980).

²⁸ Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, 148.

²⁹ Jared Sexton, *Amalgamation Schemes: Antiblackness and the Critique of Multiracialism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008). For earlier takes on mixed-race studies that promote antiblackness, see Edward Byron Reuter, *The Mulatto in the United States* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969); Williamson, *New People*.

of beings” (19). His inclusion of Asians into his rewriting of Jefferson’s natural history is not a naïve utopian gesture but consciously manipulates race discourses to comment on revolutionary viability balanced with admission of Asian anti-Blackness and collusion with white supremacy.

The radical abolitionist’s examination of Natives and Asians reformulates and exceeds Jefferson’s earlier work on American natural history, providing comparative racial points of reference in an expanded conception of possible “colored citizens” in the world and, in particular and very expressly, in the United States of America. While the ferocity of Walker’s rhetoric may make it appear unscientific to modern eyes, his writings reflect the eclectic, popular nature of nineteenth-century science: what for critics like Finseth may appear to be the use of nature as a “rhetorical and polemical resource” is in fact consistent with the popular and performative aspects of the era’s science as often adapted by Blacks.³⁰ It is therefore crucial that we view Walker’s sustained critique to be as “scientific” as Jefferson’s, for Walker understood his work as the Black equivalent inasmuch as science is inseparable from politics: “We, and the world wish to see the charges of Mr. Jefferson refuted by the blacks *themselves*” (15), giving new value to the worth of Blacks as the subject, not object, of science. The *Appeal* attacks *Notes on the State of Virginia* at the temporal turning point when Jefferson’s eighteenth-century natural history would be taken up and transformed by the growing standardization of the sciences in the nineteenth century.

MARTIN R. DELANY ON NATURALIZING A COALITION BETWEEN PEOPLE OF COLOR RATHER THAN ACCEPTING WHITE ASSIMILATION

In the Black nationalist tradition, Martin R. Delany’s writings expand Walker’s legacy, including Walker’s underappreciated reimagining of race science and cross-racial coalition. Throughout his long career, Delany delved more deeply into a scientific and political schematization of Blackness and its cross-racial networks. His more formal engagement with the further institutionalization of race science stemmed from his training. Delany was one of the first three Black students to be accepted to Harvard Medical College; however, his fellow white students successfully petitioned to have the Black students dismissed by Dean Oliver Wendell Holmes without finishing their degrees.³¹ As a medical practitioner, a researcher, and an educator, Delany drew from Western science but infused it with a radical epistemology of social justice and the drive for Pan-African uplift. This Black project of radical scientific world building hoped to achieve its goals by appropriating and subverting both polygenesis and monogenesis and by offering a new model of science predicated upon organic relationships between peoples of color spearheaded by Black people, thereby creating an alternative natural order to remedy an unjust world.

Here, I look to Delany’s lone foray into what Rusert identifies as his work on speculative fiction³² to discover how he employs the racial science of his revolution, an imaginative vision of Black-led rebellion and cross-racial coalition. In his novel *Blake; or, The Huts of America*, published serially between 1859 and 1862, science must be separated from its oppressive, authoritative institutions and instead realized as a transformative practice of knowledge. Perhaps it was only in the imaginative space of literary fiction that Delany felt he could explore the emergent properties

³⁰ Finseth, “David Walker, Nature’s Nation, and Early African-American Separatism,” 361. See also Rusert, “Science of Freedom.”

³¹ Robert S. Levine, *Martin Delany, Frederick Douglass, and the Politics of Representative Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Frank Rollin, *Life and Public Services of Martin R. Delany* (New York: Arno Press, 1969).

³² See Rusert, “Delany’s Comet.”

of a counterdiscourse of race science. His later, post-*Descent of Man* scientific treatise *Principia of Ethnology: Origin of Races and Color* is an amalgam of monogenetic and polygenetic contradictions: he promotes a shared human origin but rejects “Darwinian development theory,” arguing for a static system with the so-called “pure” races that he classifies as Black, White, and the interchangeable Yellow/Red, none of which should mix.³³ In *Blake*, the titular protagonist’s travels in the United States, Canada, West Africa, and Cuba trace out the territory of a new nation, akin to the imagined audience addressed by Walker’s *Appeal*. Blake’s travels to communities of people of color serve to acknowledge the legitimacy of affective connections to land and place. In one episode, Blake meets with members of the Choctaw Nation and undertakes an extensive examination of the Native American enslavement of Blacks and of their shared pasts of intermarriage and resistance, thereby anticipating Sharon P. Holland’s concept of the mixed-race “crossblood,” who “consistently cross[es] the borders of ideological containment” in his or her identification and embrace of both heritages; the crossblood illustrates that “it is possible to move into the space of Afro-Native literatures with both emancipation and sovereignty in mind.”³⁴ Through his actions Blake functions as a catalyst whose movements enact, but also make visible, the transnational web of feeling that redraws the global network of racial injustice, replacing relationships of exploitation with organic responsibilities to one another. The details of the protagonist’s plans for effecting such a total revolution are not revealed, just hinted at: with the novel’s final chapters now lost, Blake’s revolt remains suspended at the cusp of narrative realization just after his meeting with revolutionary leaders in Cuba—its potential unrealized but also unrestrained.

The rebel congress in Cuba is a gathering of diverse peoples whose overflow of feelings binds them together as a revolutionary community. “Never before had the African race been so united as on that occasion [*sic*], the free Negroes and mixed free people being in unison and sympathy with each other.”³⁵ This Pan-Africanism naturally led to connections with fellow oppressed non-Black peoples of color: “There was a greater tendency to segregation instead of a seeming desire to mingle as formerly among the whites, as masses of the Negroes, mulattoes and quadroons, Indians, and even Chinamen, could be seen together” (245). In this intriguing observation we can note a number of key points: foremost, the deliberate exclusion of white people in order to emphasize the convergence of peoples of color, followed by a listing of these peoples that suggests a spectrum of radical involvement according to race and perhaps even proximity to whiteness. Delany adds a footnote to his inclusion of the Indians, noting, “For many years the Yucatan Indians taken in war by the Mexicans were sold into Cuba as slaves” (245), a fact that authenticates the Indigenous presence at this gathering and reminds the reader of Blake’s earlier encounters with the Choctaw Nation.³⁶ With “even Chinamen” Delany suggests that the inclusive scope

³³ Martin R. Delany, *Principia of Ethnology: The Origin of Races and Color* (Philadelphia: Harper and Brothers, 1879), 16.

³⁴ Sharon P. Holland, “‘If You Know I Have a History, You Will Respect Me’: A Perspective on Afro-Native American Literature,” *Callaloo* 17, no. 1 (1994): 335.

³⁵ Martin R. Delany, *Blake; or, The Huts of America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), 245 (all subsequent page references to this work will be given in parentheses in the text).

³⁶ For Delany’s politically strategic use of Native Americans, see Levine, *Martin Delany*; Timothy Powell, “Postcolonial Theory in an American Context: A Reading of Martin Delany’s *Blake*,” in *The Pre-occupation of Postcolonial Studies*, ed. Fawzia Arzal-Khan and Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 347–65; Rochelle Raineri Zuck, “Martin R. Delany and the Rhetorics of Divided Sovereignty,” in *African American Culture and Legal Discourse*, ed. Loyalie King and Richard Schur (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 39–56.

of his vision runs up against the Chinese as its outermost limit. “Even” functions not only to echo Walker’s observations of the anti-Blackness of Asians but also to remind Delany’s readers of the Chinese coolies living and working alongside the Black enslaved peoples in the Caribbean, which would also result in mixed-race peoples.³⁷ Emotions run high at the rebel gathering and catalyze the attachments between these seemingly disparate individuals: the music that opens the great meeting generates an effect on the crowd that is “electrical—every kind of demonstration indicating the soul’s deep sympathy and heartfelt hatred to oppression” (251). During this summit the “greatest emotions were frequently demonstrated, with weeping and other evidences of deep impressions made” (259) and evocations of “deep emotions of sympathy” (284). Throughout the novel Blake had developed the conditions for this new transnational world order: these displays of affective solidarity between peoples of color undermine the existing race science’s white-supremacist hierarchy as well as its divisive separation of the races.

The revolutionary summit in Cuba exposes the principles of polygenesis as a perversion of what Delany proposes is the true relationship to nature: a holistic relationship to the land and all other peoples of color in the world that also shuns the monogenetic arguments implied by Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species*, which was published in 1859 during the first half of *Blake*’s serialization. The rationale for the revolution is presented as scientific, thereby naturalizing their vision as lawful and righteous: “Their justification of the issue was made on the fundamental basis of original priority, claiming that the western world had been originally peopled and possessed by the Indians—a colored race—and a part of the continent in Central America by a pure black race” (287). In this worldview, the separate developments of the races theorized by polygenesis usurped the organic web of relationships between peoples of color and place. These assertions are not voiced by any specific character; indeed, the ambiguous third-person pronoun used throughout suggests that this overthrowing of Western science arises naturally out of the collectivity of rebel peoples of color, an expression of the world they want to bring into being. They present “facts worthy of consideration, which three hundred years had indisputably tested”: while the “colored races” adapted and flourished as inhabitants and producers—“it being a scientific fact that they increased and progressed”—whites, by contrast, “were there by intrusion, idle consumers substituting by imposition,” who “decreased and continually retrograded, their offspring becoming enervated and imbecile” (287). The phrase “colored races” refers to all racialized peoples: here, Delany deliberately cites the race science used to justify the subordination of peoples of color as laborers but manipulates its rationales to affirm the place of the colored races as the rightful citizens and, even, leaders of the Americas. The iteration of “fact” works to replace other theories of race with a new science of race grounded in bodies, labor, place, and human relations. Whiteness becomes decentered and denaturalized: critiques of settler colonialism and slavery come together with the parodying of scientific justifications of racial inferiority turned against whiteness.

CONCLUSION

Current antiracist thinking is skeptical of both postracialism and multiracialism as political solutions and as the basis for coalition and substantive social change; as Jared Sexton’s work shows, anti-Blackness undergirds the moves to transcend race in the aims of multiracialism, as well

³⁷ See Kathleen López, *Chinese Cubans: A Transnational History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013); Lisa Yun, *The Coolie Speaks: Chinese Indentured Laborers and African Slaves in Cuba* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008).

as what he terms “people-of-color blindness.”³⁸ To understand race, we must center power and bodies but not the power of biology.³⁹ Yet as we see, in a move that now appears counterintuitive and pseudoscientific, these early Black nationalist thinkers appropriated biological race science to imagine a radical counterpolitics that attempts to account for both universal humanity and racial uniqueness, centering embodied Blackness as part of a larger, living, networked metaphor of shared oppressions and heritages. This way of thinking, manipulating the arguments of polygenesis and monogenesis, allowed for a separatist focus on the structure of Blackness along with the possibilities of cross-racial coalition. It used the existing logic of comparative racialization to rearrange the white-supremacist hierarchy, leveraging Native decolonial resistance grounded in place as well as the antipodal construction of Asian alienness to demonstrate their scale and nature relative to Blackness. The different senses of “relative” are key to the calculated oscillations in the indexes of affective, familial, and political affiliation and estrangement: Walker and Delany used race science to manipulate strategic shifts between the Blackness of “colored people” and the range of non-Black “people of color” to open up an organic, planetary dimension to their emancipatory imagination. A

³⁸ See Sexton, *Amalgamation Schemes*; Jared Sexton, “People-of-Color Blindness: Notes on the Afterlife of Slavery,” *Social Text* 103, no. 2 (2010): 31–56.

³⁹ For an example of a Black feminist and scientific reading of bodies, see Chanda Prescod-Weinstein, “The Physics of Melanin: Science and the Chaotic Social Structure of Race,” *Bitch* 73 (2016), <https://bitchmedia.org/article/physics-melanin/science-and-chaotic-social-construct-race> (accessed December 10, 2016).