Genre and White Supremacy in the Postemancipation United States

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Introduction

GENRES OF THE NEW RACIAL ORDINARY

Writing in 1891, Reverend Albery Allson Whitman, known during his lifetime as “Poet Laureate of the Negro Race,” delivered a blunt assessment: emancipation had failed. Delineating the contributing factors, he describes a newly vibrant white nationalism organized through “the common heritage of the Blue and the Gray,” scenes of “[m]utual admiration” between former white enemies, “bonds of Anglo-Saxon brotherhood,” and an invigorated racial capitalism in which industrialists “of the Atlantic seaboard will do nothing to unsettle the labor on the plantations.” First observing that “[s]trife between the white people is at an end,” Whitman then wryly concludes: “Profitable industry is a great peace-maker.”

Titled “A Bugle Note,” Whitman’s argument takes on the urgency of a cavalry charge: “The Colored people of the South are just now being tried as by fire.” But the white nationalism he describes—its scenes of everyday affection between whites cohering into the racialized sense of a common people positioned over and above nonwhite others—cannot exactly be seen as the crisis his title and “just now” implies. Or, at least, the processes he delineates don’t unfold with the sudden tempo, unpredictability, or spectacular eventfulness we associate with emergency. Instead, Whitman alerts his readers to what had already become a commonplace feature of their everyday existence: antiblackness instilled within the unfolding of ordinary life; a counterrevolution to Reconstruction arrayed in the calm and orderly peace of conflict resolution.

By the early 1890s, Whitman’s story of resubjugation was already familiar among his fellow black intellectuals, who decades previously had already begun describing emancipation’s faltering promise and the resurgence in white supremacy. Yet in his emphasis on the ordinary, Whitman’s essay adds a significant element to the story. He suggests that when we look for either the historical agents of black resubjugation or the constituents of white supremacy’s postemancipation reorganization, we would do well to examine more than the monumental gestures of reunion and reconciliation, the trans-sectional circulation of white money and capital, or even the disciplinary techniques newly imposed for enforcing and reproducing hierarchy across the color line. We should direct our attentions as well, he suggests, toward habitual practices and the commonsense of implicit, taken-for-granted
knowledge. Entering into his essay’s most prophetic mode, Whitman writes: “The proud descendants of Lee’s ragged veterans are mingling with the splendid hosts of Grant and Sheridan, and fraternizing in hope, they are to join hands in all perils, and open the gate of the Twentieth Century with a music that will respond to the music of the spheres.” The sentence captures a sentiment sweeping Northern and Southern whites into a mutual, forward-looking embrace, anticipating not only the national futurity and hopeful modernity of the twentieth century but also the certitude of divine approbation: whiteness in its rightful place as the nation’s past, present, and God-given destiny. Notably, Whitman grounds this racial momentum in two gerunds describing run-of-the-mill social practices, mingling and fraternizing. Placing emphasis on the ongoing normalization of white affinity and the consequent social reproduction of black subjugation, the verbs orient our attention to everyday rhythms and repetitions. Such a shift in scale reveals a history of antiblackness that otherwise occludes its own historicity, falling outside our historiographical and analytical purviews. Hence we might say that Whitman’s urgent summons, his bugle call, amounts more than anything to a methodological plea. What tools can we bring to bear for analyzing, assessing, historicizing, and diagnosing a mode of subjugation that obscures its own function as such? What are we to do with a system of domination and exploitation so ordinary it has become utterly asymptomatic?

Genre and White Supremacy in the Postemancipation United States takes up Whitman’s summons through an analysis of four genres that arose into widespread popularity during the years following emancipation and emancipation’s rapid demise. By historicizing and theorizing genre’s role in unfolding the era’s new racial ordinary, this book tracks the interplay between aesthetic conventions and social norms, identifying this dynamic relationship as a key influence in how Americans understood their affiliations, their citizenship, and their race. The result is both a historical argument about postemancipation white supremacy and a methodological argument insisting on genre’s paramount significance within projects, like Whitman’s, aspiring to turn the ordinary world into an urgent object of study. The first three chapters highlight how white popular genres—campus novels, the Ladies’ Home Journal, and Civil War elegies—secured fraternal and sororal identifications with white supremacy and expanded the elasticity of white belonging to include new European immigrant populations, white feminism, and even expressions of dissent against white nationalism’s large-scale interpellations. The final chapter turns from whites’ mutually affirming interactions with white genres to black collectivities made possible through participation in what was arguably the era’s most popular mode of African American popular expression, the gospel sermon. By highlighting the performative and aesthetic conventions of a popular black genre, this final chapter uncovers an alternative relationship between genre and white supremacy: one in which generic conventions worked to collectivize and propagate black affirmations of freedom rather than to naturalize and implement a racist status quo.
Introduction

During the concluding decades of the nineteenth century, generic literature reached an unprecedented level of social and cultural influence, circulating and recirculating conventions within Americans’ everyday lives. Steam press innovations during the 1850s and a rise in commercial paper mills beginning during the late 1860s made print cheaper, more accessible, and more prevalent. Improved transportation networks, the introduction of second-class postage rates for newspapers and magazines, and the explosion of book subscription services meant that popular literature showed up regularly at Americans’ front doors. Through these technologies, the aesthetic conventions of popular genres entered into and influenced people’s day-to-day experiences and guided how they located themselves within larger social and political organizations.

More specifically, popular genres influenced a new ordinariness in the experience, social reproduction, and significance of race. They maintained racial belonging as the overarching criterion for white social organization in the wake of emancipation; naturalized for white readers the hierarchy through which white supremacy reproduced itself; and, for African Americans, provided a method for affirming, energizing, and organizing radical collectivities. Genre worked so well—even for such diametrically opposing projects—because it operated as a technology, a machine, unfolding through the self-greasing mechanism of expectation and satisfaction. It entered social life by suffusing the desire for convention into encounters with texts and performances, creating expectations for recurrence and then satisfying through the circulation of ever-new instantiations.

And so it is that an engine of desire becomes an engine of history. When popular genres rise up, satisfying and demanding attention, they reflect the shared assumptions and loyalties of their audiences, operating to make certain futures seem possible, likely, appealing. Put differently, out of the multiple, layered interactions between the individuals and the conventions of genre, new social and ideological conventions first emerge and then become taken-for-granted features of daily experience. Analysis of postbellum popular genres thus facilitates a historicism uniquely invested in Albery Allson Whitman’s history of the ordinary, providing access to the obscured stakes and elided thickness of everyday life through an archive and a method that highlight the textured ongoingness of antiblackness and its discontents.

Yet as a methodological scale and framework, genre also productively complicates this picture in two significant ways. First, while genres certainly do survive through the reproduction of conventions over time, they also survive through the novelty of new instantiations, each one presenting what has already become familiar with its own small twist. Within this play of repetition and difference even highly stable patterns become vulnerable to erosion and change. Hence this book’s first three chapters, all focusing on popular white genres, document a movement toward racial belonging and a countermovement in which the reproduction of such belonging demands supplementation by something more than mere likeness, more than mere being-in-common. On the one hand, newly significant literary
and cultural genres lent potent momentum to the white supremacist project of sectional reconciliation, easing white Northerners into a feeling of kinship, solidarity, and fraternity with their Southern counterparts and eclipsing even tenuous commitments to racial justice or multiracial democracy. On the other hand, analysis of these same popular white genres captures the sometimes-fragile quality of racial affinity for whites in the postbellum North and helps us to see how, on its own, the racial kinship of whiteness remained an insufficient basis for collective identification. Hence the aesthetic conventions that we find in popular white genres reveal crucial features in the constitution and social reproduction of white supremacy: namely, that while whiteness operated as a tremendous force for bridging sectional, ethnic, economic, and political differences in the postbellum United States, it did so primarily through incorporation, accommodation, and even celebration of white particularity. In short, genre reveals whiteness’s seemingly limitless capacity to reproduce its supremacy through adaptation and elasticity.

Second, genre provides an aesthetic vehicle for collectivizing social and political potential aslant, underneath, and against dominant whiteness. More specifically, the pleasures and satisfactions of black popular genres underwrite fugitive experimentation and contra-fraternal collectivity. Genre analysis therefore revises an overly narrow sense of the political that tends to dominate in literary studies—one that situates opposition in the exceptional, lone, and spectacular work of individual texts heroically bucking convention while ignoring or even deriding the unoriginal, collective, and pooled work of generic texts and the capacities for conventionality to nurture shared life. In this sense, my fourth chapter’s analysis of black gospel sermons serves as a counterweight to its first three chapters, insisting that the politics of genre—and, indeed, the genre of politics—cannot be determined in advance. Close examination of sermons’ tenacious and multilayered conventionality reveals a widespread and collective black religio-aesthetics that resists the very terms available for political dissent. The sermon’s proffered alternatives root racial community within an improvisational performance enabled precisely through the shared conventions of genre. Gospel sermons thereby provided an infrastructure for experiments with blackness and freedom apart from either an interracial liberal project of diversified inclusion or racial fraternity’s a priori being-in-common.

Postemancipation, Sectional Reconciliation, and the Racial Ordinary

Historians, far more than literary critics, have taken up questions of emancipation’s aftermath in the postbellum United States, compiling a robust historiography unique for being as invested in tracking stasis over time as it is in historical change. Collectively, these histories survey a process initiated when the gradually
unfolding events known as emancipation produced new crises in the underwriting logic of white supremacy: “No longer could racial meanings be anchored in the exclusivity of both slavery (black) and full citizenship (white, as well as male),” writes historian Hannah Rosen. “Nor was it inevitable that distinctions based on European versus (any) African descent would continue to structure the postemancipation polity—its public life, family patterns, personal identity, and constructs of community and nation.” After surveying the varieties and extents of emancipation’s disruptions, histories of postemancipation turn to the institutional, juridical, paralegal, and cultural tools whites used to restore and re-naturalize white supremacy as the engine of US sociopolitical life. Most notably, they have documented the Ku Klux Klan’s and the White Leagues’ successes in stripping black citizenship rights, lynching’s reign of terror, the rise of mass incarceration and enslaved inmate labor, the reconfigured regulations of black labor and housing, and the emergent networks of jurisprudence that would come to be known as the “Black Codes,” all pursued under the mocking aegis of an illusory freedom. To date, then, histories of US postemancipation have primarily located resubjugation where it occurs explicitly and, most often, spectacularly—as racism carried out through actions, speech, physical brutality, imprisonment, and legislative action. What they’ve largely neglected, however, has been the frequently unremarked, ambient way that antiblackness came to underwrite everyday white life.

In contrast to the emphasis on explicit, interracial resubjugation in the South, this book’s first three chapters focus on antiblackness as an implicit, constitutive feature within intraracial scenes, primarily in the white North. I argue that white antiblack racism should not be understood merely as content, defined by a particular kind of thought or activity, but also as rhythm, repetition, seriality, and festivity. Its social reproduction and affirmation occurs more frequently through daily patterns of, say, white fraternizing and mingling than it does through more direct enactments of brutality and subjection. Critic Arif Dirlik makes a similar point when he describes the “habitualness” of racism that took hold in the wake of emancipation: “Slavery may have produced racism, but it was arguably the end of slavery that would render racism into a virulent principle of social distancing and repression, able to achieve through ideology what could no longer be guaranteed through legal oppression and exploitation.” Significantly, though, we must not limit the habitual practices of racism to scenes of interracial exploitation. Hence philosopher Charles W. Mills’s essential revision of political theory’s “social contract” into a racial contract: “it is not a contract between everybody (‘we the people’), but between just the people who count, the people who really are people (‘we the white people’).” This racial contract frames all intraracial interactions within raced space. It operates by “distinguishing on the level of everyday interaction…person–person from person–subperson social intercourse” while affirming consent to the contract’s terms, privileges, and regulations. These intraracial white interactions comprise antiblackness’s most generative praxis, constituting as they do the vast bulk of its pedagogy, reinforcement, and regularization.
By focusing primarily on racist regulatory apparatuses that arose following slavery or on scenes of explicit resubjugation of the formerly enslaved, we miss out on the ways that white supremacy’s restoration transpired in everyday, commonplace, routine interactions that are not in any explicitly discursive way about race. In other words, we miss out on those interactions that may otherwise remain unavailable to racial analysis, shielded as they are by whiteness’s incessant self-fashioning as the agent rather than the object of racial logic. While it has now been over twenty-five years since Toni Morrison’s insistence, in *Playing in the Dark*, that literary historians and critics attend to the systems and legacies of enslavement “[e]ven, and especially, when American texts are not ‘about’ Africanist presences or characters or narrative or idiom,” American literary histories still too frequently, albeit implicitly, attribute racelessness to the texts, spaces, and scenes of white literature. Such a failure causes too many literary histories implicitly to misrepresent antiblackness as a confined phenomenon, germane to scenes featuring interracial character interactions or white writers’ representations of nonwhite characters, rather than as an atmospheric condition of US life that shapes social experience both across the color line and also far apart from the color line’s scenes of abuse and subjugation.

In the postbellum United States, as Albery Whitman has already reminded us, white consent to the racial contract—to belonging together as one white people over and against nonwhite others—required bridging sectional divisions of the Civil War and at least approximating shared memory over how that war transpired and what it meant, leaving the South “beaten but unconquered.” For the past two decades, historians like Nina Silber, David Blight, and Edward J. Blum have elaborated, in significant ways, on the postbellum history of trans-sectional white belonging, tracing how white Protestant institutions, Memorial Day rituals, popular literature such as plantation stories and reunion romances, and soldiers’ reminiscences all inclined white Northerners toward sectional reconciliation. As they describe it, the process succeeded through parallel procedures: reestablishment of antiblackness as a defining, unifying, and shared attribute of the white North and South; and affirmation of the Confederate cause as morally just or, at the very least, honorably fought.

Literary critics have likewise documented the seemingly unavoidable impulse toward sectional reconciliation over and against emancipationist possibility. Elizabeth Duquette describes this transition in white Northern literature as a shift from sympathy to loyalty. Such a transition reconfigured allegiance to race and nation in ways, Duquette argues, that led Northern white writers toward “narrative structures that reduce contingency and diminish the potential difference between both [white] persons and moments in time.” For critics working on Walt Whitman’s and Herman Melville’s Civil War poetry, by far the largest body of Americanist literary scholarship to address white sectional reconciliation, such a turn to loyalty meant diminishing antagonisms between the white North and the white South and minimizing the overly disruptive theme of black emancipation.
Ed Folsom, for instance, details how Walt Whitman edited out “the prospect of America as a biracial democracy” when revising his wartime writing for postbellum publications like the 1875 *Memoranda During the War* and the 1882 *Specimen Days*. Likewise, multiple critics cite Melville’s 1866 “Supplement” to *Battle-Pieces*, which claims that “kindliness” toward African Americans should “not be allowed to exclude kindliness to communities who stand nearer to us in nature.”

Yes, slavery may have been wrong and, yes, emancipation may be cause for celebration, yet, for the vast majority of white Northern writers, sectional reconciliation and white national loyalty took clear precedence over even inchoate imaginings of what emancipation might look like or entail.

In recent years, historians have challenged the extent and speed of sectional reconciliation, asserting that the process was both more prolonged and more precarious than initially argued. They have documented, for instance, extensive commitments among many white Union veterans and their women relations to honoring black heroism during the war, leading this subpopulation of Northern whites to hold more firmly to emancipationist principles than their counterparts.

So, for example, Brian Matthew Jordan notes several instances in which white Grand Army of the Republic members angrily assailed the racism of D. W. Griffith’s wildly popular *The Birth of a Nation* upon its 1915 release. Moreover, historians have noted that the Republican Party, which remained the nation’s dominant political force through the early twentieth century, regularly continued its legislative attempts to check antiblackness in the South up until 1891, a full fourteen years after the Compromise of 1877 and the ostensible end of Reconstruction.

While neither line of argument intends to overturn the central thesis that sectional reconciliation ultimately succeeded at the expense of emancipation for the formerly enslaved, each suggests that the reconciliationist outcome was far from inevitable. They therefore provide a strong correction to recent cultural tendencies toward alternate histories premised on Confederate victory, inviting us instead to imagine the very real possibility that an emancipationist vision—even a compromised one—had prevailed. How would the US now be different had the white South not, as Cecilia Elizabeth O’Leary puts it, “won in the cultural arena what it lost on the battlefield”? More to the point for this project, these arguments suggest that we still have much to understand about what happened in the white North during the decades following the Civil War, that period Timothy Sweet refers to as “the unsettled moment when the memory of the war was not yet overwritten by topoi that would later come to dominate, such as the Lost Cause, the romance of reunion, and the reconciliation of veterans.” What caused the white North, by the mid-1890s, to forswear any commitment to the imagination and implementation of anything approaching a vision for emancipation? If, as Colleen C. O’Brien argues, “what ushered the United States into the modern era—and marked the demise of American romanticism’s quest for freedom—was the relative abandonment of antiracist work by white reformers,” then we still need more ways to understand what made the racial contract of
antiblackness more appealing, acceptable, and agreeable than pursuing the antiracist ideals of emancipation.  

This emergent postbellum reality is what I describe as the new racial ordinary. Like Pierre Bourdieu's habitus, the term ordinary—along with the grouping of terms critics use in ways roughly synonymous, like everyday, mundane, commonplace, unoriginal, and quotidian—flags how a reconciliationist vision ultimately saturated the white North so thoroughly that it became unthinking, taken for granted, and frequently implicit: "internalized as a second nature and so forgotten as history." As a complement to analyses of the biopolitical transformation of individuals into racialized and hierarchically distributed populations, measured and managed within unequal distributions of capacity, the racial ordinary functions to shape behavior, interpersonal interactions, and the interpretation of experience while simultaneously providing the ubiquitous, ongoing, and constitutive elements of racial belonging. Unlike analyses and histories of biopolitics, however, which tend to place their greatest emphasis on the structuring interactions between aggregates (populations and science, racialization and organic matter, health and the optimization of life), the racial ordinary tracks how the small-scale interactions, reactions, thoughts, and feelings making up everyday experience align with—and, in some instances, complicate—the aggregate patterns such everyday life reproduces and naturalizes. The new racial ordinary, as this book describes it, lurks in practices and dispositions that constituted whites' "common-sense world," and it therefore structured intraracial practices for getting along and being together as well as actions and thoughts across the color line.  

Yet such an observation risks making the process seem cleaner and more self-evident than I intend. "Attending to the ordinary," writes Heather Love, "means understanding and accepting the mixed nature of reality." We might take this a step further to say that it means understanding and accepting the contradictory, paradoxical, and profoundly unreasonable nature of reality itself. Indeed, ordinariness remains implicit in no small part by taking contradictions and turning them into basic understandings about how things work. The racial ordinary for whites means living out what Mills refers to as the many forms of "white misunderstanding, misrepresentation, evasion, and self-deception…prescribed by the terms of the Racial Contract," and, moreover, expressing that ignorance as a form of commonly held knowledge, certitude, privilege, and self-possession. Nor, as I've already suggested, can we rest on any easy assumption that ordinariness is intrinsically reactionary. Indeed, it's within the ordinary more so than within the individual (in the multitude of ways we might understand such a term) that alternative ways of knowing and experiencing the world can take hold as shared resistance to white supremacy. While the first three chapters of this book focus on ordinariness within an incipient Northern white racist status quo, then, its final chapter takes a crucial turn to how, for many African Americans, the conventions of ordinary, shared experience manifested as potent vehicles for affirming a mode
of freedom that resisted both the content of antiblackness (its racial hierarchy) and the form of antiblackness (its privileged fraternity).

In considering the history of white supremacy as an outgrowth of ordinary life, I build on extensive recent work within critical race studies concerned with implicit epistemic frameworks for reproducing racial hierarchy. Focusing on what Mills terms "the more primeval sense of underlying patterns and matrices of belief," these scholars work to show how ordinariness assimilates history into the lived background of white experience, reconstituting legacies of enslavement and settler colonialism into the unnoticed, seemingly transhistorical footholds around which white life continues to be organized. Philosopher George Yancy describes the process of white racialization as a "lived density" in which the repetition of performed behaviors produces "the reality of white identity as spatial distance and ontological difference from blacks," giving to racial hierarchy "the appearance of being something natural and inevitable." For Yancy, antiblackness becomes internalized through the socializing force of ordinary experience: "white children are oriented, at the level of everyday practices, within the world, where their bodily orientations are unreflected expressions of the background lived orientations of whiteness, white ways of being, white modes of racial and racist practice." Similarly, scholarship within Native studies highlights how settler colonialism created the material conditions for the normalization of white supremacy. Aileen Moreton-Robinson describes this process as the production of "white possessive logics," which circulate "as part of commonsense knowledge, decision making, and socially produced conventions" and underpin white "rationalization" with "an excessive desire to invest in reproducing and reaffirming the nation-state's ownership, control, and domination." In other words, as Mark Rifkin writes in Settler Common Sense, "the juridical dimensions and dynamics of settlement impress upon and are lived and reconstituted as the material animating ordinary nonnative experience." In all of this work, sustained attention to the everyday ongoingness of white supremacy brings the thickness and dynamism of ordinary life—its repetitions, its dependence upon familiarity, its practices of habit and routine—into critical focus, turning those most mundane and, therefore, most overlooked aspects of experience into urgent objects for our sustained attention.

Such work on the racial ordinary has and will continue to have much to say about the history and social reproduction of whiteness, yet its emphases depart from those of the so-called "whiteness studies" that publishers institutionalized as an autonomous field during the 1990s. Texts like Noel Ignatiev's How the Irish Became White and Theodore Allen's The Invention of the White Race focus primarily on the social construction of whiteness—how certain groups, such as the Irish or European Jews, came to see themselves and be seen by others as white, thereby securing a place atop the racial hierarchy. Work in critical race studies instead tends to conceptualize whiteness as a key mechanism in structures of domination and privilege, particularly those anchored by the legacies of enslavement and dispossession: more "a strategy than an ethnic nomenclature," to borrow from a
discussion of whiteness in Mat Johnson's 2011 novel *Pym*. So, for example, within the framing of this latter scholarship, it is of course still accurate to say that European immigrants were assimilated into whiteness, but we get closer to the underlying nature of the process when we observe, as does Morrison in *Playing in the Dark*, that European immigrants came to understand “their ‘Americanness’ as an opposition to the resident black population.” For work on antiblackness, such a distinction is vital because it highlights racism as a constitutive feature of white experience, underscoring what Mills refers to as “the crucial reality that the normal workings of the social system continue to disadvantage blacks in large measure independently of racist feeling.” Within the postbellum United States, these normal workings suffused antiblackness into a wide array of white scenes, from the football match between sophomores and freshmen that opens so many campus novels to the networked sorority experienced and treasured by readers of the *Ladies’ Home Journal*.

**White Suffering, Black Suffering, and the Long Civil War**

The term *postbellum* I’ve just used to index this project’s historical moment relies on a typical periodization of the US Civil War, positing it as a singular event on a timeline, 1861–5, that divides the nineteenth century—and, indeed, all of US history—into two distinct eras. This version of the war prevails in history and literary studies, shaping established curriculum, monograph subtitles, anthologies, and job ads for the hiring of faculty. In a moment I’ll turn to the insufficiencies of such a historicization and the ways, in particular, that it prioritizes the eventfulness of white suffering over the uneventfulness of black suffering. First, though, let me stress why we need to augment our notion of the Civil War as an event rather than dispense with it.

To no small extent, this conventional periodization captures something crucial about the war’s immensity, its extraordinary devastation, and its momentous impact. It underscores, for instance, the significance of the shift in white supremacy, which, prior to the war, had organized itself around an inextricable link between blackness and chattel. And it therefore emphasizes emancipation and Reconstruction, even in their historically and ethically limited varieties, as tremendous and rare moments of promise in American history when different futures were imagined and made possible before being all too rapidly set aside. Hardly a liberal theorist of progress, W. E. B. Du Bois nevertheless celebrates emancipation as a radical and singular event: *Joy rose in the South “like perfume—like a prayer,” he writes, giving birth to a “new song” that “swelled and blossomed like incense, improvised and born anew out of an age long past, and weaving into its texture the old and new melodies in word and in thought.”* Using scent, sound, and spirit metaphors, Du Bois emphasizes the widespread and readily dispersed character of emancipation’s unprecedented newness, which permeated consciousness and
unconsciousness alike, giving birth to an incipient reality that "grew and swelled and lived."\textsuperscript{48}

This vision of the war and emancipation comports with that put forward by many of its historical actors in the North. Consider the opening stanza of abolitionist John Greenleaf Whittier's 1861 "Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott," the Union rallying hymn Lincoln cited as an influence on his Emancipation Proclamation.\textsuperscript{49}

In this verse, Whittier represents the war as divine purification produced through restorative violence:

\begin{verbatim}
We wait beneath the furnace blast
The pangs of transformation;
Not painlessly doth God recast
And mould anew the nation.
Hot burns the fire
Where wrongs expire,
Nor spares the hand
That from the land
Uproot the ancient evil.\textsuperscript{50}
\end{verbatim}

An Old Testament conflagration, the Civil War promised to destroy and purify the nation, breaking massively and all but completely with the past. Whittier imagines the "pangs of transformation" to be capable of instituting patterns in American life neither foreclosed nor predetermined by what had come before. This vision underlay Radical Republicans' foremost aspirations for the project of Reconstruction. Providing African Americans with military protection from white antiblack violence in the South, punishing racist aggression swiftly and harshly, and eliminating Confederate nationalism would, they anticipated, continue and then finish the work of the Civil War, utterly remaking the nation through the fulfillment of an emancipationist vision.

At the same time, however, so long as we ground scholarship—and structure the field as a whole—on this version of the Civil War, conceiving it as an event with a distinct four-year periodization, we miss out on a more expansive way the war has been understood, particularly in black and radical white antiracist thought: as an unending struggle between antiblackness and black freedom. Take Isabella MacFarlane's Civil War elegy "The Two Southern Mothers," published in the fall of 1863 by both Continental Monthly, one of the most prominent white publications within the Northern home front, and Martin Delany's The Anglo-African, perhaps the 1860s' most significant vehicle for circulating black intellectual and radical thought. The poem's first half describes the battle death of a Confederate soldier, crushed under the weight of his own horse, asking its readers to sympathize with the grief of that soldier's mother, and, through such feeling, to connect with her in a shared scene of loss, a noble and unifying collectivity of suffering. The poem additionally acknowledges honor on either side—"Northern valor, Southern pride"—anticipating the white reconciliationist agenda that later elegies, like
Francis Miles Finch’s wildly popular “The Blue and the Gray,” will take up with fervor. Most importantly for our purposes, it transforms Civil War death into an event, a cacophonous, gruesome, and monumental “scene of slaughter” that stands apart from the unfolding of diurnal time, providing an image and a frame for those lives lost that makes possible attention and memorialization.

But midway through, the elegy quickly shifts its focus, giving voice to a black woman who has been enslaved by the white mother, a woman who likewise grieves her children:

As she mourned her slaughtered brave,
Came and spake her aged slave—
Came and spake with solemn brow:
"Misses, we is even, now.
"I had ten, and you had one;
Now we’re even—all are gone;
Not one left to bury either—
Slave and mistress mourn together.
"Every one of mine you sold—
Now your own lies stark and cold:
To the just Avenger bow—
Missis! I forgive you now."

Thus she spoke, that sable mother;
Shuddering, quailed and crouched the other.
Yea! although it tarry long,
\textit{Payment shall be made for wrong}^{31}

When it refocuses its primary object of loss from the white Confederate soldier, spectacularly killed upon the battlefield, to the enslaved woman’s children, routinely sold for profit, the poem reconfigures from within both the genre of the Civil War elegy and the Civil War itself. Knitting its two parts together with unbroken iambic meter, rhyming couplets, and the doubling of second-person address (initially from speaker to reader, then from enslaved mother to Confederate mother), “The Two Southern Mothers” embeds the everyday violence of antiblackness within its catalog of Civil War losses and makes black suffering a visible and significant object within the war’s elegiac attention. The elegy thus argues against any neat periodization that would mark the war’s beginning and end according to violence wrought upon white bodies alone and brings into the foreground a much longer timeline of antiblack subjection. Yet its aim is not merely to antedate the Civil War to the initiation of Atlantic world enslavement; it also looks to the present and future of antiblackness as a long-term, durable, and structuring commonplace in US history. By twice offsetting the word \textit{now} (first as a standalone clause at the beginning of the enslaved mother’s speech and second with italics at that speech’s end) and by underscoring in its final couplet the deferred tarrying
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of racial justice, the elegy proleptically incorporates future abuses of black lives, anticipating those new techniques for re-enslavement—what Saidiya Hartman memorably terms “the forms of discipline unleashed by the abandonment of the whip”—that will emerge in the wake of emancipation.52

Historical periods, as Caroline Levine reminds us, act as “bounded wholes,” “forms for organizing heterogeneous materials.” They “afford constraints and opportunities, bringing bodies, meanings, and objects into political order.”53 Literary scholars are only beginning to think critically about what conventional periodization of the Civil War brings into focus and what it leaves out of sight. In his recent book *Nineteenth-Century American Literature and the Long Civil War*, for instance, Cody Marrs fruitfully traces the “transbellum” careers of Whitman, Douglass, Melville, and Dickinson to reconceptualize the war as a “nonsynchronous upheaval,” “an event that outsteps the discrete, four-year span with which it is often associated.”54 Yet Marrs remains more focused on the questions conventional Civil War periodization raises for authorship, the conceptualization of literary careers, and the institutionalization of canonical literary history, rather than on the questions it raises for racialized history and the critical study of antiblackness.

To better understand the alternative periodization of MacFarlane’s elegy, we should turn instead to a black intellectual tradition that conceptualizes Civil War periodization apart from the organizational structure of bounded forms. In the chapter of *Black Reconstruction* devoted to the nadir’s forms of re-enslavement, for example, W. E. B. Du Bois describes “how civil war in the South began again—indeed, had never ceased.”55 Likewise in his masterpiece *Just Above my Head*, James Baldwin decries the notion of the Civil War as “an event skewered and immobilized by time,” calling instead for us to witness how antiblackness was hardly “stopped at Shiloh, still less at Harper’s Ferry.”56 Similarly, Christina Sharpe describes the inadequacy of a term like postbellum for capturing the reality of the formerly enslaved and their descendants, “still on the plantation, still surrounded by those who claimed ownership over them and who fought, and fight still, to extend that state of capture and subjection in as many legal and extralegal ways as possible, into the present.”57 All of these instances resist the temporality of an eventfulness that steps out of time and calls attention to itself, preferring instead to conceptualize the Civil War as a rolling and forceful ongoingness in both the ordinariness of antiblackness and the struggle against it. “Who fought, and fight still”: this too is the Civil War, which began long before 1865 and continues into the present day.

In these pages, I attempt to heed the nineteenth century split by the war and the postbellum era’s mirrored reiterations of its antebellum counterpart; the historical significance of white sectional reunion and the fractures that reconciliation and white nationalism opened within white consciousness and social worlds; white exploitation of black life and the unfailing pursuit of new forms of freedom that characterized so many dimensions of black intellectual, artistic, and religious
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creation. I describe the late nineteenth century’s combination of profound uncertainty and sense of itself on the cusp of something new, and I track how the end of slavery did indeed restructure American life, even if only in ways that endeavored to maintain the antebellum racial order. Simultaneously, I trace the no-less-profound regression, loss, and subjection experienced at the hands of a white supremacy that was reconfigured and, in many instances, invigorated rather than weakened.

I do so primarily in two ways. First, the palimpsestic form of this book’s historical argument enables it to dig through layers in ordinary life rather than trace a cause-and-effect historical narrative. Because all of the book’s chapters overlap chronologically, the effect of the whole is to trace the coexistence of contradictory, complex impulses within time. History here is more inclined to turn inward than to arch toward progress. Second, I call readers’ attention to the scale and conventions of genre. To track literature through genre’s repeated conventions is, as Northrop Frye puts it, to refuse liberalism’s emphasis on the autonomous, self-possessed individual and to overcome our wrongheaded tendencies to think of any such “individual as ideally prior to society.”

It is to understand the social and the literary as deeply enmeshed within relationships that cannot be isolated through linear cause-and-effect historical arguments but instead must be understood as polyrhythmic and recurrently, often unpredictably, interactive networks of world making. Genre analysis enables literary histories that loosen the edges of periods and events, rendering them temporally diffuse and heterogeneous.

Genre and Ordinary Life

The last ten years have witnessed something of a reawakening in genre analysis and, in particular, the development of new methods for conceiving of genre beyond the classifying functions of taxonomy, underscoring it instead as an interchange between aesthetic objects and social life. Casting aside any sense of what Virginia Jackson calls an “an old-fashioned, belletristic frame,” recent critics are revealing genres as dynamic processes of interaction, “communally held forms of recognition” that first “hail us” and then invite us to “enter that scene of address.”

This process occurs in part through the very form that genre assumes: a regularized recurrence, a rhythm. Put differently, genre comes into being through the regularized repetition of its iterations, each of which amounts to a temporal beat that echoes the past and creates anticipation for the future. A meeting ground for memory and expectancy, genre makes and fulfills promises. Hence, in The Female Complaint, Lauren Berlant describes genre as an absorbent institution that incorporates small differences and variations, all the while delivering on its assurance “that the persons transacting with it will experience the pleasure of encountering what they expected.” These repeated aesthetic patterns anchor us within the present moment, providing the comfort of familiarity and stability. If, as Jeremy
Rosen argues, “genres make visible ... the role of literary forms in articulating broader social and ideological formations,” then genre analysis provides the best method available to literary critics for tracking conventions as they enter into daily life.

Readers familiar with theorizings of the everyday—from Judith Butler’s gender performativity to Bourdieu’s habitus to Henri Lefebvre’s dialectics of control and helplessness—will already notice a recognizable pattern of repetition, expectation, and fulfillment linking genre and the ordinary.62 “As day follows trivial day,” writes Lefebvre in exploring how ordinary life comes into being, “the eye learns how to see, the ear learns how to hear, the body learns how to keep its rhythms.”63 Genres and ordinary life gain meaning and significance within a similar shape and pattern, both organized through the regular sequence of expectations producing expectations. They each come into existence through reiterated citations recurring with regularity over time, transpiring into categories that become recognizable, familiar, second nature, and, indeed, generic. Yet the relationship between genre and everyday life goes much deeper than their mere sharing of formal properties. Genres produce and give substance to the ordinary. They are “the things we have in common.”64

Of course, the “we” in Stanley Cavell’s phrase here is never stable. It shifts between groups, across geographies, and over time, all the while acting as a dividing marker between “us” and “them.” Nor is it possible to take for granted the sequence Cavell implies, that the “we” coheres into a recognizable mode of belonging and, only then, produces the common things of ordinary life. To study, describe, and analyze genre is to trace ordinariness entering into the world provisionally and contingently, solidifying into overlapping groupings of “we,” and then—perhaps gradually, perhaps with surprising speed—transforming into something newly desirable and newly ordinary.

That is to say, genres come and go. Aesthetic, formal, and thematic characteristics become newly familiar generic groupings when they fulfill a function for their particular present and their particular audience, fading once that function loses its urgency.65 There are, as Bruce Robbins describes it, “social tasks that cause a genre to be seized on at a given historical moment and invested with special energy and representativeness.”66 So, for instance, campus novels, the topic of my first chapter, provided white postbellum Americans with a scaled down idealization of the national community as a conciliatory, jovial commingling of peers, turning interracial, internecine agonism into skirmishes quickly overcome through banter and merriment. Or, to take a more recent example, we might think of our own era’s penchant for novels and films narrating survival in the wake of apocalypse—narratives that channel our anxieties related to the precarious global economy and the inevitability of ecological crisis by inviting us collectively to identify with the survivors of catastrophe. These popular modes of expression come together in the repeating conventions of genre when we need them to ameliorate tensions and ease social and psychic pressures. Genre exists in no small part to smooth over
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Antagonisms and conflicts, to re-attach us to social belonging, and to help us feel a sense of connection to the conventions that enable shared experience. It mediates the “we” and maps our belonging within it.

How literary historians access and interpret this process presents a set of methodological and archival questions that can make genre criticism strangely reminiscent of the editorial prefaces to scholarly editions. This is because what belongs to or participates in any given genre always amounts to a vexed question, just as so frequently is the case with decisions about what belongs and doesn’t belong in the authoritative edition of, say, Melville’s “Hawthorne and his Mosses.” Genres, as Wai Chee Dimock writes, amount to “fields of knowledge”: “none is a closed book, none an exhaustive blueprint.” This open-endedness comes into play when attempting to ascertain any given genre’s lifespan, and it often comes into play again when interpreting any given text’s relationship to generic grouping. Yet only by positing the straw horse of absolute generic purity, as Jacques Derrida does in “The Law of Genre,” can we conclude that such open-endedness means that “genre declasses what it allows to be classed,” thereby rendering it all but meaningless as a critical concept. What such open-endedness does mean, however, is that ascertaining and then analyzing a genre’s defining conventions cannot be strictly empirical or quantitative—cannot, that is, be addressed more through data sets than the professional reading practices typical of graduate literary training.

Dimock, in her argument against quantitative reading practices, refers to genre criticism as a “fluid continuum” between the large-scale conventions binding groups of texts and the small-scale manifestations of those conventions within single texts. When the “micro evidence is sufficiently detailed and precise,” she argues, we can bring close reading methods to those patterns and conventions that bind texts into “extended kinship.”

In the process of researching white campus novels, Civil War elegies, the Ladies’ Home Journal, and gospel sermons, my initial aim has been to identify each genre’s defining conventions, or what Jeremy Rosen refers to as the “relatively stable center” that binds them and makes them recognizably related to their generic peers. To do so, I’ve read as close to the entirety of the genre as possible, a process of necessarily incomplete archive assembly and study that each chapter describes explicitly. The analysis I compile here, however, depends on close readings of texts and moments drawn from a selection of this archive. In choosing which examples to describe and analyze, I looked for moments that stand out either for their exemplariness (their close adherence to the defining conventions of their genre) or their metaliterary self-awareness (their expression of how their genre’s defining conventions interact with each other and the outside world). This method provides one way to work through the problem of scale we face whenever attempting to negotiate the flux between the conventions binding texts into genres and the uniqueness of individual iterations within those genres. It enables analysis of the significance and complexity of conventions while also facilitating understanding of the relationship between those conventions and the departures from them.
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This process will always be partial. Just as there can be no exhaustive reading of an individual text, so too is it impossible to provide an exhaustive reading of any given genre. What I’ve attempted instead is to open new possibilities for understanding the interaction between popular genre and race, proposing how we might better appreciate the interrelationship of conventions within genre and the links between generic aesthetics and social life.

Popular Intraracial Genres

Campus novels, white women’s magazines, Civil War elegies, and gospel sermons became popular during the nineteenth century’s latter decades in no small part for their ability to help individuals feel connected to a racial community, to provide patterns for relating to others within that community, and, in some instances, to negotiate feelings of unease and misrecognition in the interchange between individual identity and racial belonging. I term them *intraracial genres* because they focus almost exclusively on the patterns, textures, and feelings of social life between whites or between blacks and, in so doing, conceptualize the binding agents of racial membership and its forms of belonging. By *intraracial*, therefore, I do not refer to genres with an exclusively homogeneous cast of characters. Indeed, white intraracial genres in particular often include minor characters of color and racist humor about people of color in the service of affirming racial belonging through the naturalization of white supremacist racial hierarchy.

The genres collected here are but a few of the many modes of popular literature and culture operating within and against the postbellum color line. Minstrel performances and songs circulating after the Civil War, for instance, shifted their focus in response to new demands the war placed on white supremacy. Antebellum minstrelsy, as Eric Lott has argued, organized white fascination with black men and black culture, negotiating between the allure of a subject position deemed transgressive and the threat such an allure posed to racial and sexual autonomy. Yet postbellum minstrelsy, responding simultaneously to the aftermath of sectional discord between whites and to the late-century rise in European immigration, could not take white affinities as self-evident and therefore tended to focus primarily on securing white racial belonging through the white entertainments and white pleasures of antiblackness. The genre came to emphasize the black figure as grotesque and barbaric. It enabled, as Bill Brown notes, native-born and immigrant whites to secure themselves within America by “identifying against the nation’s internalized, perpetual other,” while simultaneously earning the wages of whiteness afforded through the spectacle of racist mockery. Hence the affinities between postbellum minstrelsy and a Civil War genre that emerged only after formal emancipation: the novels of white supremacist melodrama, including, among many others, Thomas Nelson Page’s *Red Rock* (1898), Thomas Dixon’s *The Leopard’s Spots* (1902) and *The Clansman* (1905), and J. W. Daniels’s *A Maid of the
Foot-Hills (1905). These novels—most familiar to us through the film adaptation of *The Clansman, Birth of a Nation*—bemoan Reconstruction’s challenge to white supremacy as a national threat advanced by an avaricious white minority against the white majority, implicitly outlining the condition for national reunion as a welding of white power and citizenship. ⁷⁴ In a similar vein, sectional reunion romances worked toward producing white Northern sympathy toward former white Confederates. In fictions like Julia Magruder's *Across the Chasm* (1885), Constance Fenimore Woolson's “Old Gardiston” (1876), S. T. Robinson's *The Shadow of the War* (1884), Charles King’s *A War Time Wooing* (1888), and Joel Chandler Harris’s *A Little Union Scout* (1904), white Northerners and Southerners transfer the marriage plot into the sectional reunion plot, figuring white national mutuality as the progeny of heterosexual desire. ⁷⁵ Along with the genres collected in the first three chapters of this study, these genres became, for postbellum white Americans, the “things we have in common.”

This brief survey points to a distinguishing factor in the genres I’ve assembled and studied. Three of the four featured in this book do not prominently feature slavery, the Civil War, or Reconstruction. Unlike minstrel performances, with their Lost Cause reminiscences of antebellum plantation life or their caricatures of Reconstruction-era black politicians; white supremacist melodramas, with their explicit analysis of the racial politics of Reconstruction and the antebellum South; or sectional reunion romances, with their none-too-subtle prescriptions for national unity, campus novels, regionalist sketches, and gospel sermons treat the war as at best peripheral to their central investments. Moreover, where minstrelsy, supremacist melodrama, and reconciliation romance feature regular scenes of cross-racial interaction, such scenes remain rare in the genres featured here.

This project instead highlights worlds and relationships a far remove from white supremacist exploitation across the color line. That, in crucial ways, is their very point: such supposed distance—from the Civil War, from the debates surrounding Reconstruction, from explicit scenes of racist assault—has distinct advantages for this book’s aim to track a new racial ordinary. The archive here helps us to trace affective attachments within white and black America, respectively, and to better understand daily practices that propelled and resisted the emergent color line, its social logics, its patterns, and its contradictions. The genres I analyze allow us to historicize and conceptualize the ordinary in all of these textures, uncovering the social reproduction of white supremacy and resistance to white supremacy as outgrowths of everyday experience.

My first three chapters trace the role played by white campus novels, the *Ladies’ Home Journal*, and Civil War elegies in soliciting white consent to white supremacy. Yet while their focus overlaps, there's also an organizational logic to their sequence. Each successive chapter tracks increasingly less certain, contradictory, ambivalent, and even frustrated instances of consenting affirmation. My point is not that failure amounts to a destination, as though the rigidity of white nationalist social practices gradually undoes itself. Rather, the book’s sequence underscores the
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thick texture of ordinary life, in which norms and conventions exist in networks of successes, failures, compensations, and adjustments. If the dominant narrative of these first three chapters pertains to the mutually beneficial relationship between popular generic aesthetics and white racial fraternity, a clear secondary narrative pertains to the capacious elasticity of whiteness, which incorporates European immigrants as well as seemingly disruptive strains such as intra-white gender conflict and feelings of misrecognition between the white individual and the racial fraternity.

The first chapter documents and clarifies the nature of this fraternal structure. It does so by studying the surprisingly popular genre of campus novels, which became prominent from the late 1860s through the early twentieth century. Combining picaresque with Bildungsroman, campus novels document the merry frolicking, naughty pranking, and classroom avoiding behavior of white college students. Through these good times the novels register a joyousness experienced through commonality organized, first, by membership within the same collegial institution, and then, metonymically, by racialized membership within the same nation. Campus sociality thus became a white national fantasy with influence that far exceeded the small percentage of whites going on to higher education, offering a set of practices, such as banter and good-humored joshing, for affirming similarity, flattening difference, and managing conflict. Moreover, campus novels developed a ready-to-hand solution for the vapidity that so frequently plagues social organizational forms that distribute their affections too widely. By saturating their scenes with nostalgia, campus novels gave depth and a sense of weightiness to relationships frequently divorced of intimacy or meaning. In this way, their affective energies connect them to the culture industry of white nationalist nostalgia characterizing Civil War memory and Lost Cause mythology that, by the 1890s, was spreading through the white North as rapidly as it was through the white South.

My second chapter turns from white fraternity to white sorority, focusing on how the Ladies’ Home Journal fashioned white women’s culture as a mediating force for an imagined sisterhood and intimate public that provided the comforting sense of familiarity across distance, while also responding to a perceived crisis in the conditions of white women’s intimate friendship. I argue that both scales of white social practice, the mass belonging promised by sorority and the closeness facilitated through friendship, attached white women’s social forms to antiblackness. On the one hand, the Journal infused its imagined sisterhood with a deep sense of racial supremacy through frequent use of racist humor, blackface minstrelsy, and social segregation, providing white women a compensation that at least partially made up for the harms and alienations produced by heteropatriarchy and gender inequality. On the other hand, by revitalizing intraracial, intimate friendship as a necessary departure from antiseptic social life, the Ladies’ Home Journal engaged an Aristotelian politics of friendship in which the precondition for befriending (whiteness) naturalizes itself as the precondition for largerscale modes of belonging. In this sense, intimate friendship acted to reinforce and
invigorate the large-scale, racialized social forms of white sorority, white fraternity, and white nationalism.

Chapter 3 looks at white fraternity’s ability to incorporate and put to use the discontent it simultaneously produced by analyzing those Civil War elegies circulating widely throughout the North from 1861 through the 1890s. Like white campus novels, many of these poems enthusiastically celebrate the ability for racial bonds to overcome intraracial differences and heal sectional division. Elegies like Finch’s “The Blue and the Gray” take loss as an occasion to forge national community out of shared mourning while also, by frequently depicting Southern benevolence toward Northern dead, disciplining their white Northern readers’ lingering sectionalism and pushing them toward a more reconciliationist frame of mind. Yet where campus novels supplement their fraternal social organization with nostalgia and the Ladies’ Home Journal supplements its with intimate friendship, nontrivial subsets of Civil War elegies tend to supplement theirs with dissent. Antiwar elegies, for instance, describe a set of feelings—such as exhaustion, despair, and even boredom—that seem inassimilable within nationalist celebration. Likewise, melancholic elegies, by refusing and even mocking the admonition to cease mourning and move on, depict the sentiment frequently found in their nationalist counterparts as fraudulent, obtuse, and even grotesque. While we might expect antiwar elegies and melancholic elegies to comprise distinct alternatives to more explicitly nationalist verse, their publication history instead indicates surprisingly easy alignment. Indeed, nationalist and dissenting elegiac modes sometimes appear side by side in patriotic anthologies or even within the very same poem. Instead of historicizing dissenting elegies apart from the racial community of white nationalism, I argue we should consider them as key particulars in nationalism’s appeal. Doing so reveals the tremendously incorporative drive through which white nationalism could include intra-white dissent and misrecognition without disrupting the fundamental shape of white belonging.

My first three chapters focus on the fraternal organization of white racial community in the North, highlighting its organizational emphasis on being-in-common and its remarkably elastic capacity to incorporate internal difference. My fourth chapter shifts from white to black attachments, from fraternal to more provisional modes of belonging, and from a regional process within the white North to a trans-regional network of black Protestantism. In doing so, it also shifts from examining genre as an accomplice and agent of the status quo to examining genre as a mechanism for organizing alternatives to the status quo. The chapter analyzes the conventions and frequently contentious reception history of the gospel sermon, a performative and collaborative oral poetics that arguably became the most popular African American literature of the postbellum era.

Turning religious enthusiasm into a durable genre and rendering it a recurrent feature of black Protestant worship, the gospel sermon facilitated ecstatic experiences that reoriented congregants’ relationships to their selves, to the divine, and to each other, enabling a provisional fellowship oriented around shared encounter
with the uncanniness of the Holy Ghost. The presence of the unknown and divine suffused this fellowship with what its participants frequently compared to electricity, madness, and contagion, binding agents that render its community un-chosen yet also contingent, local, and experiential. Doing so constituted an essential aspect of the gospel sermon’s fundamental alignment toward improvisation, experimentation, and openness to otherwise unimaginable futures. Against a backdrop of white supremacist notions harnessing black freedom to self-possessed individuality and rational consent to the status quo, gospel sermons enabled practices of freedom unburdened by liberalism’s notions of institutional organizing, community, or personhood.

In the ongoingness of the new racial ordinary, generic and social conventions circulated promiscuously, attaching white postbellum subjects to race and linking their everyday lived existence to the reproduction of racial hierarchy, while also providing African Americans with collectivizing possibilities for new forms of living, resisting, and being together. Race, within this framework, comprises an interactive set of affinities and practices: a social framework governing how people enter into relation with one another, how they behave within those relationships, and how those relationships accrue into aggregate scales of belonging. It emerges out of the machinations in which the interactions between cultural consumers and their generic texts mirror and shape the relationships between men and other men, women and other women, mourners and their beloved dead, subjects and the nation, congregants and other congregants, worshipers and the Holy Ghost—a system for reinforcement and reproduction that locates both the ongoingness of white supremacy and the seeds for its undoing at the level of our most commonplace and everyday interactions.
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4. Forty-four years later, in Black Reconstruction, W. E. B. Du Bois makes a similar observation, while also expanding Whitman’s claim beyond the mingling of former enemies into white social practices writ large. Locating white racism in a new ordinariness, Du Bois describes what he terms a ‘slowly evolved method’ that affirmed and reaffirmed whiteness as the prerequisite for national belonging while compelling African Americans “almost continuously to submit to various badges of inferiority” (Du Bois, Black Reconstruction (New York: Free Press, 1998), 700, 701). As he put it in a 1907 address to students at the Philadelphia Divinity School: racism “is a problem not simply of political expediency, of economic success, but a problem above all of religious and social life” (Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois, The Negro in the South: His Economic Progress in Relation to his Moral and Religious Development (Philadelphia: George W. Jacobs and Company, 1907), 185). For Whitman and Du Bois, the new color line comes into being continuously through an overlapping, interlinked series of social practices and commonsense understandings that enabled whites to negotiate their relationships to their selves, to one another, and to their nation, while also naturalizing their domination over black life. Saidiya V. Hartman echoes Du Bois in Scenes of Subjection, arguing that to historicize and understand intensified forms
of racist revulsion that replaced antebellum paternalism ("the revolution of [white] sentiment") we must focus our studies on the new "everyday sites and practices" of the postemancipation era (Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 121).

5. Whitman, "Bugle Note."

6. Variations of these questions have recently been explored through critical theory (e.g. Christina Sharpe’s In the Wake: On Blackness and Being and Monstrous Intimacies: Making Post-Slavery Subjects), science fiction and fantasy (e.g. N. K. Jemisin’s Broken Earth trilogy), poetry (e.g. Robin Coste Lewis’s 2015 ‘Voyage of the Sable Venus’), and, as I elaborate in my coda, essay (e.g. Claudia Rankine’s 2015 ‘The Condition of Black Life is One of Mourning’ and 2017 ‘Was Charlottesville the Exception or the Rule?’).


11. I am indebted here to Stefany Harney’s and Fred Moten’s descriptions of the “the ordinary fugue and fugitive” fantasies that emerge from within the undercommons (The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study (Brooklyn, NY: Minor Compositions, 2013), 94).

12. Claudia Stokes’s history of the ways that "literary unoriginality had genuine value for much of the nineteenth century" traces the contemporary critical disdain of conventionality to our wholesale acceptance of “the New Critical regard for innovation as the distinguishing hallmark of literary achievement” ("Novel Commonplaces: Quotation, Epigraphs, and Literary Authority," 30 ALH (2018): 217, 202. Demonstrating precisely such an attitude in relation to genre and the value of genre criticism, Jonathan Culler argues that the point of genre analysis is primarily to offset the value of unconventional texts: "We are rich in theories about language, discourse, hybridity, identity, sexuality, but not in theories of the rules and conventions of particular genres, though such theories are necessary for understanding the ways individual works subvert these conventions—which, after all, is a major point of interest for interpretation” (The Literary in Theory (Stanford, CA: Stanford..."


16. I intend this emphasis on race and the ordinary as a complement rather than a challenge to projects that take up more visible objects in the history of American race relations. To cite one prominent example in this historiography, consider Colin Dayan’s analysis of the gaping loophole carved out by Section 1 of the Thirteenth Amendment, which outlawed slavery “except for punishment of crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted.” The amendment, as Dayan argues, “marked the discursive link between the civilly dead felon and the slave or social nonperson,” extending slavery’s social status beyond both the historical border of emancipation and the geographic border of the South Legal history, literary history, and the history of everyday social experience intersect in this chiastic knot tied around criminality and race (“[c]riminality was racialized and race criminalized”) (*The Law is a White Dog: How Legal Rituals Make and Unmake Persons* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011) 54). The amendment turned everyday, recurrent black social practices, such as the fellowship produced through gospel sermons (my topic in Chapter 4), into fodder for criminal misconduct, rendering African Americans unfit for civic belonging. Simultaneously, it extended roony permissiveness around everyday, recurrent white criminality, such as the vandalism and carousing of college students enthusiastically celebrated in the pages of campus novels (my topic in Chapter 1), rendering them cause for national celebration rather than complaint.


40. Ibid., 3.


42. Mark Rifkin, *Settler Common Sense: Queerness and Everyday Colonialism in the American Renaissance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 17. For recent work on the racial ordinariness that focuses not on the benefactors of white supremacy and the racial contract, but on those forced to negotiate its exclusions, see Ju Yon Kim’s remarkably subtle *The Racial Mundane*. Kim tracks how, within the very ordinariness of racial existence, everyday bodily performances flicker as they mark the Asian American subject with stark racial distinction and then fade into a blurring of racial difference (*The Racial Mundane: Asian American Performance and the Embodied Everyday* (New York: New York University Press, 2015)).

43. Frequently cited texts within 1990s Whiteness Studies include Theodore Allen, *The Invention of the White Race, vol. 1: Racial Oppression and Social Control* (London: Verso,

44. Mat Johnson, *Pym* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2011), 31. Moreover, as historian Edward J. Blum notes in *Reforging the White Republic*, 1990s whiteness studies frequently left out the most elemental histories of antiblackness, including enslavement and its post-Reconstruction recapitulation. As just one glaring example, Blum notes that "studies of the making and transforming of whiteness in the nineteenth century...have largely neglected that the white republic fell, shattered, and was eventually put back together again," a critical absence that prevents them from seeing that, by the 1890s whiteness had "re-ascended and transcended sectionalism" (7).

45. *Playing in the Dark*, 47.


52. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 139.


55. *Black Reconstruction*, 670.


57. *In the Wake*, 12.


60. My understanding of rhythm is indebted to Caroline Levine’s *Forms*.


65. I’m building here on Franco Moretti, who applies a Darwinian understanding to the lifecycle of any particular genre: “A genre exhausts its potentialities—and the time comes to give a competitor a chance—when its inner form is no longer capable of representing the most significant aspects of contemporary reality” (*Graphs, Maps, and Trees: Abstract Models for Literary History* (New York: Verso, 2005), 17). My focus tweaks this claim in a small yet significant way. Where Moretti highlights genres’ ability to represent their reality, I want to focus more their usefulness for their reality, a usefulness that cannot be reduced to representation. Moreover, as I’m describing it, genre operates as an agent in the present moment rather than as a tool for historical classification, and it therefore departs from taxonomy, as it is sometimes understood. That is, genre is not merely a device to be applied in retrospect through what Michel Foucault describes as “the history of the order imposed on things” (*The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1994), xxiv).


Endnotes