

THE QUEST FOR ROOTS AND BELONGING IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN BIOGRAPHY

JULIA SATTLER

TECHNISCHE UNIVERSITÄT DORTMUND, GERMANY

ABSTRACT

This essay deals with a fairly recent development in American literature and culture, which plays a part in the ongoing debate around a possible apology for slavery: the emergence of autobiographical narratives dealing with the attempt to find one's roots and, possibly, those family members who have not usually been acknowledged by the family because of their existence on the other, opposite side of the "color line." After a brief introduction to the importance of biracial heritage in contemporary America, the article focuses on factors that may have contributed to the emergence of these biographies before providing a short comparison of the narratives through the common motif of the family secret. In the conclusion, it outlines the importance of these narratives in the context of passing on American history to the younger generations.

KEYWORDS

American literature; American autobiography; slavery; family; race; color line; DNA testing; Shirlee Taylor Hazlip; Neil Henry; Thulani Davis; Edward Ball; Henry Wiencek

INTRODUCTION

The black/white heritage emerging out of slavery and the "Old South" has long been absent from both individual family trees and public discourse in the United States. In American post-slavery history, this has long been possible because of institutions such as the "color line" and the "one drop rule," marking everyone with just one drop of "black" blood as "black," while denying this person's "white" lineage. Intimate relationships between people of African heritage and people with European roots were not desired or openly addressed well into the 20th century. Instead, they were commonly referred to as "miscegenation," a neologism coined in 1863 and deriving from the Latin roots *miscere*, "to mix," and *genus*, "kind," in this case "race." Even though the term could technically stand for the "mixing" of any two "races," it was mostly used to refer to relationships between "black" and "white" people.¹ The word itself, along with its usage, clearly indicates that people of African heritage and Caucasians were considered to be two different "kinds" or "races," placing the emphasis on the difference instead of the equality

1. See David A. Hollinger, "Amalgamation and Hypodescent: The Question of Ethnoracial Mixture in the History of the United States," *American Historical Review* 108, no. 5 (Dec 2003): 1363–90.

of people with different roots. While Congress never passed a general law banning interracial relationships in all of the United States, and despite the apparent difficulties courts came across when attempting to construct laws prohibiting “miscegenation,”² even more than one hundred years after the coinage of the word several states still criminalized interracial dating and interracial marriage. This was especially the case in the former slaveholding states south of the Mason-Dixon line. This kind of legal arrangement was unique to the “New World,”³ and was finally declared unconstitutional in *Loving vs. Commonwealth of Virginia* in 1967 after a legal debate lasting many years.⁴

NEW FASCINATION

While the open acknowledgement of one’s own biracial heritage or biracial relationships in one’s family was hardly possible in the past, today we are witnessing a different, almost opposite development: the emergence of a new type of family narrative. This new narrative clearly acknowledges relationships or sexual intercourse between African Americans and Americans defined as “white.” While these relationships are typically located in the past, often reaching back into the days of slavery, their impact on the present is obvious. Accounts such as Shirlee Taylor Haizlip’s *The Sweeter the Juice: A Family Memoir in Black and White* (1994), Neil Henry’s *Pearl’s Secret: A Black Man’s Search for His White Family* (2001), and Thulani Davis’ *My Confederate Kinfolk: A Twenty-First Century Freedwoman Discovers Her Roots* (2006) are just a few of the better-known texts of this kind. As observed by Paul Spickard, there has been a “Boom in Biracial Biography”⁵ since the early 1990s. While many Americans are aware that their heritage is “mixed” in one way or another, these books paying a tribute to multiracial heritage “are by and about people who mix Black and White ancestry, not other combinations,”⁶ talking about “their White ancestors as well as their Black ancestors, and about their mixed selves.”⁷ At the same time, we see the descendants of slaveholders willing to put great effort into piecing together their family history and looking at interracial relationships in order to “complete the legacy.”⁸ The most famous work in this context is by Edward Ball and consists of two narratives, the award-winning *Slaves in the Family* (1998), tracing the descendants of the people his ancestors enslaved, and the follow-up, entitled *The Sweet Hell*

2. For a detailed overview of court cases and legal issues concerning intermarriage see Werner Sollors, ed., *Interracialism: Black-White Intermarriage in American History, Literature, and Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

3. See Sollors, introduction to *Interracialism*, 8.

4. See Hollinger, “Amalgamation and Hypodescent,” 1365.

5. Paul Spickard, “The Subject Is Mixed Race: The Boom in Biracial Biography,” in *Rethinking ‘Mixed Race,’* ed. David Parker and Miri Song (London: Pluto Press, 2001), 76.

6. Spickard, “The Subject Is Mixed Race,” 77.

7. Spickard, “The Subject Is Mixed Race,” 77.

8. Edward Ball, *Slaves in the Family* (London: Penguin, 1998), 14.

Inside: A Family History (2001), in which he attempts to retell the family history of the black Harleston family he is related to. Another text of this kind is Henry Wiencek's *The Hairstons: An American Family in Black and White* (2000). Even though Wiencek is not related to the Hairston family by blood but rather comes across them while on assignment as a journalist in North Carolina, he still puts great effort into tracing the connections between the black and white Hairston families. The most discomfiting question in this context is contested even decades after the end of slavery: did the ancestors, at one point, enslave their own family members because of their skin color?⁹

While all accounts address heritage and the quest for one's origin or roots, they also, and most importantly, call into question the established notions of "blackness" and "whiteness."¹⁰ This "boom" of narratives dealing with America's slavery past and its long-term consequences does not only take place in the form of autobiographical accounts published as books, though. 1997 saw the screening of *Family Name*, a TV documentary investigating the connections between the "white" and the "black" Alston families of North Carolina on PBS. In 2005, *The Crisis* devoted an article named "Bound by Slavery" to both the topic of kinship between Americans living on opposite sides of the "color line" as a result of the common heritage of slavery, and the phenomenon of investigating and tracing one's roots. The article follows an African American woman from Detroit to Kentucky, where her ancestors were slaves and where she traveled in order to be united with the descendants of those who used to own her family.¹¹

The American public, which has in the past looked at what was termed "miscegenation" with horror, now seems to be focusing on the topic with a new fascination. Finally, the acceptance of people's roots and of biracial heritage as a consequence of interracial relationships during the times of slavery and afterwards may be growing. This is also indicated in the current changes in the American census statistics: in 2000, it was possible for the first time to mark one's multiracial background by checking more than one racial category. This development hints at the fact that a multiracial movement is on its way across the United States.¹² Along with this trend, hardly any textbook on race and ethnicity in the American context today is written without paying tribute to America's multiracial heritage;¹³ discussions like the one on the Confederate Flag waving on top of the South Carolina State

9. This question is directly addressed and discussed in Henry Wiencek, *The Hairstons: An American Family in Black and White* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2000), 301. It might very well be that this question is easier to address from Wiencek's point of view, as he is not related to the Hairston family.

10. See Ashraf H. A. Rushdy, *Remembering Generations: Race and Family in Contemporary African American Fiction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 147.

11. See Lori S. Robinson, "Bound by Slavery," *Crisis* 112, no. 1 (2005): 30–35.

12. See Spickard, "The Subject Is Mixed Race," 76.

13. See Spickard, "The Subject Is Mixed Race," 76.

House in Columbia, SC,¹⁴ show that the debate around collective memory in America is currently in a state of flux. This emphasis on diversity is probably going to increase even further over the next couple of years because of the Barack Obama presidency and Obama's specific family history, which also includes multiracial relationships.

BLOOD TIES

The shift toward more openness about biracial relationships might also be due to a new and different way of looking at kinship and blood ties which has only recently become possible on a larger scale, namely through DNA testing. The emergence of a "DNA testing industry" with companies bearing names such as "African Ancestry Inc." or "DNA Solutions" makes DNA testing available to the general public. On their websites, these companies promise what Alex Haley may, or, as many claim, may not have done in his *Roots* epic in the 1970s:¹⁵ to find the one African tribe one's family is descended from, and to show which other elements or ethnicities contributed to one's heritage. Ever since the publication of *Roots*, Americans, and especially African Americans, have been extremely interested in their family backgrounds, as evidenced by the presence of "find-your-heritage" kits and guides to finding one's roots.¹⁶ But the increasing availability of DNA testing has shed entirely new light on this interest and turned it into a profitable business.

With the help of DNA testing the proof becomes available for what has long been claimed by and rumored in African American families, that is, the rape of slave women. It was not a rare thing—it was indeed so common that it was not talked about. The problem of openly addressing this aspect of American history in front of other family members and asking questions about biracial heritage in one's own family is also mentioned by the narrators in the accounts. While Edward Ball is told by his relatives that they "don't know of any Ball folklore about the men sleeping with their slaves,"¹⁷ Thulani Davis says in *My Confederate Kinfolk* that it was a common saying that someone had "a nigger in the woodpile," but the fact that thousands of African Americans have, as she ironically states, "a redneck in the woodpile"¹⁸ was not addressed: "[W]e all knew there was a Mississippi plantation, and a Master-housekeeper, race mixing-inheritance-squabble story."¹⁹ This was not

14. For a lengthier explanation of the debate around the flag on top of the South Carolina State House see, for example, Hastings Wyman, "Furl that Banner," *American Spectator* 33, no. 6 (2000): 66–67.

15. Alex Haley, *Roots. The Saga of an American Family* (New York: Dell 1976); see also Helen Taylor, *Circling Dixie: Contemporary Southern Culture through a Transatlantic Lens* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001): 73–75.

16. See also Taylor, *Circling Dixie*, 65; and Rushdy, *Remembering Generations*, 15.

17. Ball, *Slaves in the Family*, 49.

18. Thulani Davis, *My Confederate Kinfolk: A Twenty-First Century Freedwoman Confronts Her Roots* (New York: Basic Books, 2006), 9.

19. Davis, *My Confederate Kinfolk*, 6.

discussed in the family since it was so common that it was not considered worth mentioning.²⁰ This is surely one very possible reason why biracial heritage is not often openly addressed in African American families. Another reason, I would claim, is the shame and confusion related to the rape itself. It is, along with slavery, a strong marker of powerlessness and defeat. Moreover, the laws at the time allowed slaveholders to literally treat their “property” as they wanted to and thus they made use of the option of treating these children as “step-aside” children, meaning not only not considering them “kin,” but also rendering the rape or the relationship that might have stood behind the conception of the child a literal “non-event.”²¹

The past few years have seen many interesting discoveries concerning the family secrets of slavery and have shed new light upon the life of several well-known American families. The best-known case is probably the one concerning Thomas Jefferson and the revelation that he had a relationship with a slave woman. Even though he never acknowledged the daughter who sprang from this union, he still supported her financially. While her descendants had claimed for decades that they were descendants of Thomas Jefferson,²² it took scientific facts for the oral tradition to be verified and for a feeling of kinship to be established between family members on the opposite sides of the “color line.”

COMING TO TERMS WITH SLAVERY

So far, the trauma of slavery has not been openly confronted by the United States as a whole in terms of a *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, unlike other historical traumas that originated in Germany or other countries confronted with a difficult past. Instead, it has been repressed in cultural memory. Along the same lines, the ongoing effects of the creation of “race” in America,²³ such as the existence of so-called “aggrieved communities” (George Lipsitz’s term)²⁴ and phenomena like “white flight” have been known for a considerable amount of time, but have not been addressed critically outside of the scholarly community. Nevertheless, there is a lot of evidence proving that coming to terms with a difficult past can have healing effects, as it enables people to distinguish between the past, in which something traumatic happened to them or their people, and the present. Active engagement with a traumatizing

20. See Davis, *My Confederate Kinfolk*, 9.

21. Cf. Rushdy, *Remembering Generations*, 142–43; see also 151 for a direct comment on Ball’s concern about “step-aside” children in his own family.

22. See Rushdy, *Remembering Generations*, 166–67, or, for a more comprehensive overview, see also Annette Gordon-Reed, *Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings: An American Controversy* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1997).

23. See Thomas McCarthy, “Vergangenheitsbewältigung in the USA: On the Politics of the Memory of Slavery,” *Political Theory* 30, no. 5 (2002): 634–36.

24. See also Rushdy, *Remembering Generations*, 133, and McCarthy, “Vergangenheitsbewältigung,” 640–43, for a lengthier discussion of the ongoing consequences of “race” and racialism for American everyday life.

experience can thus lead to the recognition that the past, while related to the present, is not identical with it.²⁵

According to the German cultural studies expert Aleida Assmann, we are currently observing a worldwide shift in terms of collective memory. As a consequence, the victims' memories have moved from the margin to the center of the discussion around cultural memory. Those who were denied a voice in the past are invited to take a stand. This shift is a result or rather a consequence of coming to terms with both the Holocaust and colonialism and its defeat, and represents an important step on the way towards looking at the past from a moral, rather than from a political stance.²⁶ Along with that, it also puts the dominant narratives, the histories written by the "winners," into question and confronts different groups in society with the fact that their respective groups were affected by history in different ways.²⁷ The repression of slavery and its aftermath and consequences until today may thus stem not so much from a lack of empathy with the victims, but rather from fear of the recognition that people are not always in control of their own fate.²⁸

The inclusion of painful or problematic memories, such as the memory of slavery, is not easy, and may take a long time. These events cannot be told in terms of heroism and go against the very grain of what regional and national identities or other "imagined communities" (Benedict Anderson's term) are usually founded upon²⁹ and thus, there may not be an adequate language to express them.

Since the 1990s, interest in America's heritage of slavery and openness about it has grown considerably. Today, slavery has "assumed unusual prominence in American popular and political culture."³⁰ The past decades have seen the publication of books like Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), and movies such as *Amistad* (dir. Steven Spielberg, 1997) and *Sankofa* (dir. Haile Gerima, 1993), all of which focus on the topic of slavery and pay attention to the trauma associated with it.³¹ The prominent presence of slavery in the public imagination may also account for another prominent development: in virtually all former slaveholding states, from Massachusetts to Missouri,

25. See Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 66.

26. See Aleida Assmann, *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit: Erinnerungskultur und Geschichtspolitik* (München: C. H. Beck, 2006), 77–81.

27. See LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, 44–45.

28. See Susan J. Brison, "Trauma Narratives and the Remaking of the Self," in *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present*, eds. Mieke Bal, Jonathan Crewe, and Leo Spitzer (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1999), 48–54.

29. See Assmann, *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit*, 68–71; see also Rushdy, *Remembering Generations*, 17–18. For a detailed account of the concept of "imagined communities" and its connections to the formation of collective identities consult Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (1983; London: Verso, 2006).

30. Rushdy, *Remembering Generations*, 131.

31. See Rushdy, *Remembering Generations*, 131–33.

discussions about reparations or apologies for slavery have emerged and captured public debates, with Virginia being the first state to pass a bill, in February 2007.³² These developments, taken together with the emergence of the multiracial movement and the newly-found opportunities provided by DNA testing, may very well be held accountable for the increased openness about finally coming to terms with the consequences of slavery into our days.

FAMILY SECRET

All the recently published narratives share a common pattern of a family secret,³³ its investigation in archives, marriage records, photo files, old newspaper articles and microfilms, and, finally, its revelation: the establishment of contact with the family members who were previously missing in the family tree, and, along with that, knowledge of one's heritage and roots. This new knowledge is not always comforting, though: many times, the stories uncovered in the process bring to light painful memories which had been repressed in the previous decades.

Family secrets as described in these accounts are in no way unique to former slaveholding families or families formerly bonded in slavery, of course. In this case, the family secrets center on family members who are long deceased, and thus have to be called a transgenerational phenomenon: "[T]hey originate in previous ancestral traumas but haunt those in the present who make up the remembering generations."³⁴ The primary function of a family secret is to guard the self-worth and respectability of the family; traditionally, families would rather look back to a glorious past than to one of shame;³⁵ a pattern which is, of course, also true for African Americans. While, theoretically, family secrets can concern literally every walk of life, from one's sexual orientation to a mental illness someone in the family might have had, in practice "the important thing about family secrets in African American life is that they are the result of one historical American institution, slavery, and the ongoing social institution it created, race."³⁶ This is self-evident, as slavery and its aftermath caused a trauma, which has, as I pointed out earlier, not been significantly dealt with as yet. The trauma continues to hinder open conversation, as talking about the problems openly would lead

32. See Suzanne Goldenberg, "After 400 Years, Virginia Issues Official Apology for Slavery," *Guardian*, February 26, 2007, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/usa/story/0,,2021382,00.html>; see also Rushdy, *Remembering Generations*, 131, and, for more examples of new resolutions passed in the context of reparations, Thomas McCarthy, "Coming to Terms with Our Past, Part II: On the Morality and Politics of Reparations for Slavery," *Political Theory* 32, no. 6 (2004): 750–51.

33. Rushdy has made this observation for Ball and Alston; for a longer explanation see Rushdy, *Remembering Generations*, 147.

34. Rushdy, *Remembering Generations*, 21.

35. See Rushdy, *Remembering Generations*, 17.

36. Rushdy, *Remembering Generations*, 22.

to the emergence of painful memories, which have been repressed by the individuals, but also in cultural memory as a whole.

As Rushdy has rightly pointed out, family secrets about slavery are secrets in every way imaginable: they are “a secret within a family, a secret about family, and a secret denying the possibility of family;”³⁷ they are not to leave the selected circle of family members who know about the secret and concern the members’ involvement in the institution. They deny the possibility of family as they deny membership in the family to a certain part of the family,³⁸ according to the “one drop rule.” From a psychological standpoint, they also deny the intimacy and trust an individual should experience within the supposedly safe haven of the family. The fact that a marriage could be rendered “null” by skin color and that children could be pushed aside as “illegitimate” if conceived by an interracial couple “created a central paradox in American society, idealizing the concept of family while destroying certain families,”³⁹ namely those which did not conform to the traditional family ideal because of their interracial heritage. It looks as if the recently published narratives make a serious attempt to counteract this tendency and to encourage people to try to unite with the family members who have not previously been considered part of the family circle.

They enter the debate around America’s history and its implications for national and regional identities that have to be constantly re-negotiated. They deal with the topic of black/white relationships and biracial heritage, which could not, and in many ways still cannot, be mentioned in the family, or, to use Neil Henry’s words: “I often felt in my research as if I were peeling back the pulpy layers of some forbidden fruit—inexorably, almost involuntarily—and I was deeply troubled about the truths I might find at the core.”⁴⁰ Throughout their explorations, the narrators meet open resistance and hostility, ranging from simple unwillingness to talk about the issue to the accusation that further investigation would insult the dignity of the ancestors and thus should not be undertaken. They encounter rumors and stories in the early stages of their research, but no explanations are given. “You know how things were” and similar statements often have to be accepted as answers to inquiries such as Edward Ball’s question as to whether “there was, somewhere, a black clan with a bloodline that led to a Ball bedroom.”⁴¹ Family members may very well call the rumors about their existence “folklore.” “Undoubtedly, the miscegenation happened sometimes. It happened less in South Carolina than it did in Virginia. In Virginia, the Negroes were well adulterated,”⁴² Edward

37. Rushdy, *Remembering Generations*, 29.

38. See Rushdy, *Remembering Generations*, 29.

39. Sollors, introduction to *Interracialism*, 3.

40. Neil Henry, *Pearl’s Secret. A Black Man’s Search for His White Family* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 49.

41. Ball, *Slaves in the Family*, 49.

42. Ball, *Slaves in the Family*, 57.

Ball is told by a distant relative at a family reunion taking place in South Carolina, the state of the former “Ball Empire”; and that is the end of that conversation. This clearly shows that his family, especially the older family members, whom he has to involve in his investigations in order to approach the secret, does not want to be addressed when it comes to the topic of possible interracial relationships within one’s closer environment. By pointing to a different state instead, the problematic issue is located outside of the family and outside of the family’s immediate surroundings. This attempt to keep Ball silent, though, is not successful, as the publication of his narrative shows.

In many ways, as Thulani Davis states, the current generation does not really know “how things were,”⁴³ because they are not told by their family or their teachers, who should know but actually do not know either. Thus, an investigation is needed, often involving the study of documents in archives or libraries, marriage records, lists with the names of slaves a family kept, or, as a final step, a DNA test. The narrators expose the truth about their *American* families: all of them include biracial family trees, and, in addition to making relatedness and family membership across different skin colors open to the public, provide visible proof of the South’s biracial heritage. Each narrative features a photo section showing people of different complexions. The family genealogy thus fulfills a new and rather non-traditional function in these narratives: it is used to address questions of color and race, instead of keeping them out of the discussion. The issues and elements which have previously been absent from genealogy are placed in front of a mass audience in these narratives.⁴⁴ This focus, which started with Alex Haley’s *Roots*, emphasizes the idea that “genealogy is no longer a mechanism to be solely employed or deployed to reinforce the primacy of a select group of white Americans.”⁴⁵ I would even go as far as to state that it is used in order to emphasize and underline America’s biracial heritage in these narratives.

HISTORY YET UNTOLD

Since the narratives very openly admit that the families had one or several cases of interracial unions resulting in children who were often not acknowledged by the “white” members of the families, they question “whiteness” and the privileges emerging from being defined as “white.” In many ways, the authors engage in telling a part of history so far untold in the American context, and enter into the ongoing dialogue about the legacy of slavery until today, about whether today’s generations can be held accountable for wrongs committed long before they were born, and about whether an apology or some form of reconciliation is appropriate. This also brings up important ethical concerns: how should one mourn one’s losses as a

43. Davis, *My Confederate Kinfolk*, 45.

44. See Eric Gardner, “Black and White: American Genealogy, Race, and Popular Response,” *Midwest Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (2003): 149.

45. Gardner, “Black and White,” 152.

descendant of slaveholders while still acknowledging the losses of the victims? How should one talk to the descendants of the people who enslaved and raped one's ancestors, and profited—in one way or other—from decades of unpaid labor and oppression? There is no way to balance these accounts, and all this attempt is going to result in is more questions, and possibly even more shame and guilt.

What is being found out through DNA analysis today, as well as the results of the confrontations of family members with events that happened in the past and that might or might not be documented in archives, may very well change the way we look at history and especially at questions of family, kinship, race, and ethnicity, first of all with a view to the present. It may show not only the elite of American families or American politicians, but also the ancestors of generations of Americans, from a different point of view, and, in addition, also put the slaveholding South, which is, despite intense criticism from scholars, still being romanticized by many parts of the public, into a different light. Some stories which have always been part of a family's oral tradition and could not be proven may well turn out to be true; on the other hand, investigation and DNA testing may also bring some uncomfortable truths to light, for example, when they show that one is not related to people one always considered close family.

CONCLUSION

"Family" is and will probably remain a highly debated issue in the American context.⁴⁶ The newly emerging family narratives are, in many ways, an open attempt to alter the debate about family from an exclusive concept to one that focuses more on kinship, as defined through blood ties: "It may take a recognition that some of the unnamed actors of American history, from traditional heroes shot by the British in the Revolution to nameless lynch victims, are our kinfolk—the relatives of black and white Americans—for all of us to act when black votes are not counted. . . . Where compassion has failed, maybe history can help."⁴⁷ At the same time, they also express the opinion that social connections are more important than these very blood ties.⁴⁸ Neil Henry, for example, ends his account in stating that "it would be a stretch to say we considered both sides of our tree one 'family.' Our lives continued much as before, separately, quietly, distinctly white and black."⁴⁹

The narratives question power relationships, and, along with that, issues such as interracial relationships, heritage, family, responsibility, accountability, and the interconnectedness of the above in the contemporary United States. The narratives are thus to be considered a criticism of the way history, and especially the history of slavery and the Civil War, is taught or

46. Rushdy, *Remembering Generations*, 32.

47. Davis, *My Confederate Kinfolk*, 4.

48. See Rushdy, *Remembering Generations*, 32f.

49. Henry, *Pearl's Secret*, 287.

passed on to the people referred by Rushdy as the “remembering generations”: the importance of the men and women freed from slavery is constantly underestimated, even though they changed the course of American history in every way imaginable; as yet “there is no cultural memory of these millions.”⁵⁰ Thus, taboos being broken, along with the newly emerging perception that “[t]he plantation heritage was not ‘ours’ like a piece of family property, and not ‘theirs,’ belonging to black families, but a shared history,”⁵¹ may eventually also change race relationships and the way history is taught in the United States and around the world for the better.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alston, Macky, dir. *Family Name*. Opelika Pictures, 1997.
- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*. 1983. London: Verso, 2006.
- Assmann, Aleida. *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit: Erinnerungskultur und Geschichtspolitik*. München: C. H. Beck, 2006.
- Ball, Edward. *Slaves in the Family*. London: Penguin, 1998.
- Ball, Edward. *The Sweet Hell Inside: A Family History*. New York: Harper Collins, 2001.
- Brison, Susan J. “Trauma Narratives and the Remaking of the Self.” In *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present*, edited by Mieke Bal, Jonathan Crewe, and Leo Spitzer. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1999. 39–54.
- Davis, Thulani. *My Confederate Kinfolk: A Twenty-First Century Freedwoman Discovers Her Roots*. New York: Basic Books, 2006.
- Gardner, Eric. “Black and White: American Genealogy, Race, and Popular Response.” *Midwest Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (2003): 148–60.
- Gerima, Haile, dir. *Sankofa*. Channel Four Films, 1993.
- Goldenberg, Suzanne. “After 400 Years, Virginia Issues Official Apology for Slavery,” *Guardian*, February 26, 2007, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/usa/story/0,,2021382,00.html>.
- Gordon-Reed, Annette. *Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings: An American Controversy*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1997.
- Haizlip, Shirlee Taylor. *The Sweeter the Juice: A Family Memoir in Black and White*. New York: Touchstone, 1994.
- Haley, Alex. *Roots: The Saga of an American Family*. New York: Dell, 1976.
- Henry, Neil. *Pearl’s Secret: A Black Man’s Search for His White Family*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.
- Hollinger, David A. “Amalgamation and Hypodescent: The Question of Ethnoracial Mixture in the History of the United States.” *American Historical Review* 108, no. 5 (December 2003): 1363–90.

50. Davis, *My Confederate Kinfolk*, 6.

51. Ball, *Slaves in the Family*, 14.

- LaCapra, Dominick. *Writing History, Writing Trauma*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001.
- McCarthy, Thomas. "Vergangenheitsbewältigung in the USA: On the Politics of the Memory of Slavery." *Political Theory* 30, no. 5 (2002): 623–48.
- McCarthy, Thomas. "Coming to Terms with Our Past, Part II: On the Morality and Politics of Reparations for Slavery." *Political Theory* 32, no. 6 (2004): 750–72.
- Morrison, Toni. *Beloved: A Novel*. New York: Knopf, 1987.
- Robinson, Lori S. "Bound by Slavery." *Crisis* 112, no. 1 (2005): 30–35.
- Rushdy, Ashraf H. A. *Remembering Generations: Race and Family in Contemporary African American Fiction*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001.
- Sollors, Werner, ed. *Interracialism: Black-White Intermarriage in American History, Literature and Law*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Spickard, Paul. "The Subject Is Mixed Race: The Boom in Biracial Biography." In *Rethinking 'Mixed Race,'* edited by David Parker and Miri Song. London: Pluto Press, 2001. 76–98.
- Spielberg, Steven, dir. *Amistad*. DreamWorks, 1997.
- Taylor, Helen. *Circling Dixie: Contemporary Southern Culture Through a Transatlantic Lens*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001.
- Wiencek, Henry. *The Hairstons: An American Family in Black and White*. New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2000.
- Wyman, Hastings. "Furl that Banner." *American Spectator* 33, no. 6 (2000): 66–67.

ADDRESS

Fakultät Kulturwissenschaften/IAA
Technische Universität Dortmund
D-44227 Dortmund
Germany
julia.sattler@udo.edu

MORAVIAN JOURNAL OF LITERATURE AND FILM

VOL. 2 NO. 1 FALL 2010

ISSN 1803-7720

The *Moravian Journal of Literature and Film* is a Czech scholarly journal whose objective is to be a platform for an intersection of literary and film history, criticism, and theory. The journal examines literatures and films in any language, thus merging both regional and universal themes. The journal is published in English, is peer-reviewed, and has two issues a year.

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Marcel Arbeit
Palacký University, Olomouc
Czech Republic

ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Michal Peprník
Palacký University, Olomouc
Czech Republic

MANAGING EDITOR

Roman Trušník
Tomas Bata University in Zlín
Czech Republic

EDITORIAL BOARD

Jan Nordby Gretlund
University of Southern Denmark, Odense
Denmark

Constante González Groba
University of Santiago de Compostela
Spain

Jakub Guziur
University of Ostrava
Czech Republic

Nigel Hatton
University of California, Merced
USA

Bernd Herzogenrath
Frankfurt University
Germany

Heinz Ickstadt
Free University of Berlin
Germany

Josef Jařab
Palacký University, Olomouc
Czech Republic

Stanislav Kolář
University of Ostrava
Czech Republic

Bohuslav Mánek
University of Hradec Králové
Czech Republic

Tomáš Pospíšil
Masaryk University, Brno
Czech Republic

Luboř Ptáček
Palacký University, Olomouc
Czech Republic

Martin Procházka
Charles University, Prague
Czech Republic

Erik S. Roraback
Charles University, Prague
Czech Republic

Werner Sollors
Harvard University
USA

SUBMISSIONS

The *Moravian Journal of Literature and Film* welcomes contributions in literary, film, and cultural studies exploring all aspects of the disciplines. All submissions will be peer-reviewed. Send essays electronically to moravianjournal@upol.cz, or, mail printed essays accompanied by a compact disc with the electronic version to Moravian Journal of Literature and Film, Department of English and American Studies, Philosophical Faculty, Palacký University, Olomouc, Křížkovského 10, 771 47 Olomouc, Czech Republic. Essays should conform to the humanities style (notes and bibliography), as defined in the current edition of *The Chicago Manual of Style*. The editors can assume no responsibility for loss of manuscripts. Manuscripts shall not be submitted simultaneously elsewhere.

SUBSCRIPTION

Individual issues of the *Moravian Journal of Literature and Film* may be ordered in the publisher's e-shop at <http://www.e-vup.upol.cz>.

PUBLISHER

Palacký University, Olomouc
Křížkovského 8
771 47 Olomouc
Czech Republic

This journal is published within the Research Plan "Plurality of Culture and Democracy" MSM6198959211, a grant project supported by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic.

© 2010 Palacký University, Olomouc
moravianjournal@upol.cz
www.moravianjournal.upol.cz

ISSN 1803-7720
Reg. no. MK ČR E18802

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ARTICLES

- Diana Rosenhagen*
Polk County: Zora Neale Hurston's Black South and the Quest
for a "real Negro theater" 5
- Julia Sattler*
The Quest for Roots and Belonging in Contemporary
American Biography 19
- Constante González Groba*
Putting the Dynamic Past to Everyday Use in the Fiction
of Southern Women Writers 31
- Jan Nordby Gretlund*
Black and White Identity in Today's Southern Novel 43
- Roman Trušník*
Memories of Child Abuse in Jim Grimsley's Dan Crell Trilogy 53
- Radek Glabazňa*
*Theater of Identity: *The Buddha of Suburbia* 65*
- John Andreas Fuchs*
Showing Faith: Catholicism in American TV Series 79

BOOK REVIEWS

- Pursue the Illusion: Problems of Public Poetry in America,*
by Astrid Franke (reviewed by Jiří Flajšar) 99
- Literary Childhoods: Growing Up in British and American Literature,*
edited by Šárka Bubíková (reviewed by Ema Jelínková) 103