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# Introduction

*When, only a few weeks after our first meeting, I promised to marry Dr. Eastman, it was with a thrilling sense of two-fold consecration. I gave myself wholly in that hour to the traditional duties of wife and mother, abruptly relinquishing all thought of an independent career for the making of a home. At the same time, I embraced with a new and deeper zeal the conception of life-long service to my husband's people.*

*Elaine Goodale Eastman,* Sister to the Sioux

When white, middle-class schoolteacher Elaine Goodale made the decision to marry Dakota doctor Charles Eastman in 1891, she did so, she later remembered, with "a thrilling sense of two-fold consecration." Eastman was aware that her marriage was more than simply the natural consequence of strong feelings between a young man and woman. It was also part of the United States' project of finding a long-term solution to its "Indian problem." While she loved Charles, she was also conscious that her marriage would be a public demonstration of the possibilities of Native American assimilation. More than that of most white women at the time, her marriage had meaning in both the private and public spheres. As Kevin J. Mumford has pointed out, "Sex across the color line always represents more than just sex."[1] This book explores what marriages between white women and indigenous men reveal about race relations in two settler societies, the United States and Australia, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a period in which both nations were imagining ways in which indigenous people were to be assimilated into the mainstream. Finding out who participated in such marriages,

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what happened to them, and what others thought about it enlightens us with a peculiar directness about the racial, social, and national contexts in which they took place.

Scholars have paid increasing attention to the history of interracial sex, particularly the shameful story of the casual, often exploitative, relationships between white men and indigenous women, but there have been few in-depth studies of interracial relationships that involved white women.[2] Apart from Martha Hodes, who has written an influential history of nineteenth-century marriages and sexual relationships between white women and black men in the American South, few American scholars have focused with any detail on relationships between white women and nonwhite men.[3] In Australia, too, histories deal with the subject of interracial relationships mainly in terms of the exploitative sexual relations between Aboriginal women and white men.[4] Many historians have recognized how seldom relationships involving white women and indigenous men occurred. Australian historian Henry Reynolds, for example, has described the "almost impenetrable barriers of prejudice preventing intimacy between Aboriginal men and European women." Future research "may uncover evidence of relationships of even marriages between Aboriginal men and European women, but they seem to have been rare."[5]

This book proceeds from the premise that rare events and exceptions to the rule such as marriages between white women and indigenous men can tell historians much about the rules themselves. I am, of course, not the first to argue this about cross-cultural associations. A number of studies of interracial relationships explore their role in the colonial project, and there is a growing body of scholarship on the ideology of miscegenation in general.[6] Postcolonial theorist Ann Laura Stoler has recently identified a need for scholars to address "how intimate domains—sex, sentiment, domestic arrangement, and child rearing—figure in the making of racial categories and in the management of imperial rule."[7] Interracial relationships have much to tell about racial hierarchies, colonial culture, and social mores.

My aim, then, has been to investigate marriages of white women and indigenous men in Australia and the United States and then employ them

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to explore and compare the settler societies in which they took place. I have not tried to comprehensively unearth examples of relationships between white women and indigenous men in a certain time or place, nor to write a broad history of sexual relations between colonizers and colonized. This book, I hope, is more than an exploration of individual lives or a tally of couples who came together despite the odds. I have made some deliberate choices about how to approach this topic. While there are moments in the book where marriages of white men and indigenous women are touched on, I have deliberately restricted my broader discussion to the particular characteristics of marriages of white women to indigenous men. This is because interracial relationships involving white women bring to light particular aspects about the histories of the United States and Australia. They were, for example, caught up in specifically gendered ideas about race and citizenship. "Throughout the history of the United States," says Linda Kerber, "virtually all married women's identities as citizens were filtered through their husband's legal identities."[8] Until the mid-1930s, when American women married "foreign" husbands, they almost always lost their citizenship, and from 1907 legislation ensured that they did so.[9] Until the late 1930s, an Australian woman's citizenship was in danger if she married an "alien."[10] White women's sexual relationships were also inextricably bound up in their financial and social standing. As feminist historian Mary Ryan has suggested, brides in the nineteenth century "entrusted their material destiny to the business acumen of their grooms."[11] Thus when white women married across racial boundaries, the status of their husbands became crucial to their own standing in white society, much more so than white men who married indigenous women. Intermarriage was often understood as a means of assimilation into the dominant society, not the other way around. When the white partner was a man, this could make perfect sense. But women, seen traditionally as following their husbands' nationalities and social and economic status, faced a more complicated prospect, and the way their relationships were viewed is revealing of the inherently gendered and raced notions of national belonging.

The United States and Australia had their beginnings in the impulse of colonialism. Focusing on relationships of white women and indigenous

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men, therefore, is especially revealing of how each of these groups was seen by colonial discourse. In the last decade, many scholars have concentrated on the role of white women in the colonial encounter, and this book is also a contribution to a field that asks specific questions about how race and gender have operated in settler societies.[12] As Ania Loomba has argued, postcolonial theorists have explored how women "on both sides of the colonial divide demarcate both the innermost sanctums of race, culture, and nation, as well as the porous frontiers through which these are penetrated."[13] Colonial or "frontier" conditions meant that white women and indigenous men encountered each other relatively rarely. Most white colonists, then, assumed that white women, unlike white men, were not drawn sexually to nonwhite people. The possibility that this could be so was met with intense fear and anxiety. In addition, it is nearly impossible to deny maternity (unlike paternity) of a child of mixed descent. A white man, therefore, could escape relatively unscathed from a sexual relationship across racial lines; a white woman had much less chance of doing so. Also, as Richard Dyer has pointed out, white women carried, through their role as reproducers of white children, the "hopes, achievements, and character of the race"—hence the special anxieties associated with their sexuality.[14] White men's dominance was sorely threatened should their wives, sisters, and daughters participate in relationships with men from a colonized or enslaved group. When such liaisons did take place, especially when they were tolerated or understood as part of an ideology such as assimilation, they exposed the sometimes invisible imaginings by which colonial societies justified their existence.

For this reason, I have deliberately chosen to focus on marriages, not casual liaisons. My case studies thus had an aura of respectability that tested the limits of the societies in which they occurred. Nancy Cott has alerted us to the way in which the institution of marriage is both a private and a public relationship. "To be marriage," Cott says, "the institution requires public affirmation."[15] By taking public marriage vows, the couples I examine implicated themselves, if only in a small way, in the structures of the societies in which they lived. A broad and revealing spectrum of toleration greeted these relationships, which ranged from marginalization to acceptance.[16] This spectrum helps us to understand

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better how indigenous people were imagined as part of the body politics of the United States and Australia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In an assimilationist context, white women, with their particular gendered and raced identity, and with the permanent act of marriage, to some extent could bring indigenous husbands "inside" the boundaries of mainstream society. They gave their husbands a stronger push up the ladder of social status than white men did when they formed a relationship with an indigenous woman. Their relationships were not fleeting and dismissible. To some extent, they subverted the hierarchies of race and gender by which settler societies operated, but they were also caught up in the tangible and defining mores of tolerated social behavior. They played a significant role in the story of race relations and the intimate ways in which colonialism could operate in settler societies.

Marriages between white women and indigenous men were rare occurrences. Therefore, this study has also been shaped by a basic absence of archival evidence. Martha Hodes described her experience of researching relationships between white women and African American men as "searching for stories." "No archive contained any sort of index on the topic of sex between white women and black men," she has written, "and only rarely did a catalog heading for 'miscegenation' or 'interracial marriage' lead to one or two brief references."[17] My experience has been equally challenging. For this reason, readers might expect to find some imbalances in the pages that follow. Perhaps the most obvious is the contrast between the detailed information I was able to unearth about the lives of several educated couples in the United States and the more fragmented information available about their equivalents in the Antipodes. There is a simple, fascinating explanation for this inequity. The Native American men who married white women were often almost part of the educated middle classes: Thomas Sloan, who married a white woman in 1891, was a lawyer, and Charles Eastman (also married in 1891) and Carlos Montezuma (1913) were physicians. Some of their wives were well educated; perhaps the best example was Elaine Goodale Eastman, who was a teacher and a published poet. As aspiring members of the literate and relatively leisured middle class, these couples often left rich and copious written records of their lives. On the other hand, Australian

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white women who married Aboriginal men were usually working-class women who left behind few sources for the historian: Rebecca Forbes, for example, was a cook, married to a horse breaker; Catherine Sharp was a domestic servant; and Ethel Governor was a miner's daughter who was sixteen and pregnant when she married an Aboriginal laborer in 1898. Thus the richness of my American archives could not be matched in Australia, and at the beginning of this project I struggled to make sense of this irregularity. Finding out why it existed has been a long and fruitful process, and in the end this formed the basis of my broader comparative argument about the differences between assimilation policies in the United States and Australia.

The absence of educated Aboriginal men for white middle-class Australian women to marry is central to the comparative insights provided by this book. In order to sharpen my comparative argument, therefore, I chose to focus on the kinds of marriages that most epitomized the assimilation policies of each country. In Australia I was in any case restricted to marriages of white women and uneducated Aboriginal men. To my knowledge, there were no equivalents of the "middle-class" marriages of the United States in the period I researched. In the United States, therefore, I opted to focus on marriages to the most educated Native American men, those who in most cases were involved with eastern boarding schools and reformers, not on white women who married relatively uneducated Native American men and lived with them on reservations. Many such marriages existed, and they remain a promising subject for future research. They have not, however, been the subject of this book.

These choices about how to focus this study have been made in order to best illuminate and compare the contexts in which they took place. There is no doubt that this study has been vastly complicated by its comparative focus, but it has also been immeasurably enhanced by it. The value of comparative, transnational, or global history lies in the insights it can provide into the uniqueness of nations while still recognizing the elements of their histories that they have in common.[18] Looking across national borders is as rewarding as it is complex. It may seem to reveal a minefield of diversity, across which comparisons are only made with difficulty. But once such comparisons are made, they can capture the

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complexity, diversity, and multiplicity of the past. For this reason, the remainder of this introductory chapter will be dedicated to beginning the story of interracial relationships and their role in assimilation policy in the United States and Australia.

Although scholars have tested the boundaries of traditional comparative history—tracing themes and ideologies across national borders rather than using differences and similarities between two societies to prove a point—by its very nature a comparison must begin with a recognition of likeness and particularities.[19] While there are many differences in the histories of Australia and the United States (most notably the reasons for, patterns, and times of first settlement, the enormous difference in population size, the different political events and traditions, and the presence in America of ex-slaves), scholars have found several areas of similarity between Australian and American history worthy of comparison.[20]

For this study, the most important similarity is the clash between people of European/British extraction and an indigenous population. Both the United States and Australia were settled by British colonists, although at different times (1607 and 1788) and for very different reasons (escape from religious persecution and the hope of profits in the United States, a dumping ground for English convicts in Australia), but both settlements displaced rich and well-established indigenous cultures. Comparative history on this subject is not new to either Australian or American history. When Frederick Jackson Turner "began" the written history of the American West with his frontier thesis, he himself suggested that it might be applied to other countries.[21] A number of mid-twentieth-century scholars have attempted to "test" Turner's theories about the development of democracy using Australian history.[22] Still others have either written or recommended a comparison of the contact history of the two countries.[23] The comparative study most germane to this book is Patrick Wolfe's comparative analysis of the relationship between motivations for colonization and racial oppression and the diverse attitudes toward interracial relationships in the United States, Brazil, and Australia.[24] I have followed Wolfe's lead in exploring the ways that crossnational comparisons help us to see exactly how race was understood in the context of colonialism.

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By the middle of the nineteenth century, for example, European settlers of the North American and Australian continents had both begun to find ways to deal with the indigenous people they had displaced. For decades they had clung to a pseudoscientific notion that contact with a "superior race" had conveniently sealed the fate of indigenous people. But Native Americans and Aborigines had stubbornly insisted on not "dying out," and politicians, reformers, anthropologists, educators, and commentators had begun to imagine a new fate for them. If they were not going to disappear altogether, they could at least be taught to live like their dispossessors, thus removing the need for any special treatment that white governments had grudgingly conceded. This was the basis of the ideology of assimilation, pursued with increasing energy by policy makers in both countries in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It had emerged from an Enlightenment faith in human equality that at first glance differed from the outright derogatory racism prevalent at the time. Articulated in Christian terminology, assimilation was given impetus in sites of British colonization by increasing evangelistic efforts in the early to mid-nineteenth century.[25] There had been early attempts by missionaries to "civilize" indigenous people in both Australia and America, but the idea gained in secular popularity. In 1857, for example, the commissioner of Indian affairs argued that alternative destinies awaited the Native American nations. Either, he said, they "must advance and improve, and become fitted to take an active part in the ennobling struggles of civilization; or, remaining ignorant, imbecile and helpless . . . they must sink and perish."[26] Although some form of cultural change is always the inevitable outcome of contact between cultures, in the period encompassed by this study white people attempted to control the process, forcing cultural change to occur in specific ways and with a particular end in mind—the disappearance of the indigenous people as a separate, distinguishable group whose members might claim some form of financial recompense for their loss of land. Despite its humane beginnings, assimilation became an ideology that inspired many cruel and inhumane policies and practices, so much so that in both countries some scholars and activists have recently identified assimilation as a form of "ethnocide" or cultural genocide.[27]

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Comparative historians, however, must be aware of assuming that "because they bear the same label, ideas, institutions, or groups . . . perform the same function everywhere".[28] This book is as much about how the word assimilation meant very different things when annunciated by white Australians and white Americans as it is about a particular kind of interracial marriage. The word assimilate suggests the absorption, dissolution, or incorporation of a discrete racial subjectivity into the mainstream. Most dictionary definitions of assimilation describe it as a process of acculturation, by which individuals or groups of differing ethnic heritage acquire, or are brought into conformity with, the basic habits, attitudes, and customs of a dominant national culture. A focus on interracial marriage, however, reveals a very different aspect of assimilation. Interracial relationships produced children of mixed descent. This process was sometimes perceived by white Americans and Australians as a means by which Aboriginal and Native American physical characteristics could be replaced by Anglo or white features. Children born of indigenous and white parents were denied an indigenous identity by ideas about degrees of "blood" and "caste."[29] Interracial relationships could thus be perceived to be a way of getting rid of a distinct group of people by "absorbing" their indigenous identity. Seeing interracial relationships as a means of indigenous extinction was an idea predicated on the belief that indigenous people of full descent were doomed to "die out," an expectation that stemmed from Enlightenment theories of progress, evolution, and natural selection. "The passing of the Aborigines," Henry Reynolds has argued, was a widely held belief among white Australians from 1788 onwards and was often seen as a measure of colonial achievement.[30]

Australian historian Anna Haebich has argued that assimilation was a "powerful act of national imagining."[31] It is important to understand, therefore, that as a category of analysis, "assimilation" is defined by time and place. Its meaning depends on when, where, and by whom the term is annunciated. For my purposes it could mean teaching indigenous people to live and support themselves as white people (cultural assimilation), or it could mean the loss of indigenous physical characteristics through interracial relationships (biological absorption). In most cases Australian

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and American reformers, politicians, and public servants involved in solving the "Indian problem" were cryptic when they referred to the future of Native Americans or Aborigines. They rarely explained whether they envisioned assimilation by hastening the births of mixed-descent children who did not appear indigenous, or whether they only wanted indigenous people to live in the manner of white people.

In the Australian context, a number of historians, notably Russell McGregor, Robert Manne, Patrick Wolfe, and Warwick Anderson, have described how biological absorption was used as a solution to the "Aboriginal problem."[32] In 1997 the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission released a report into the removal of indigenous children from their families and the genocidal absorptionist ideology underlying Australian assimilation policies, bringing the issue to the attention of the Australian public.[33] In 2001 Phillip Noyce's feature-length film Rabbit-Proof Fence also described the issue of biological absorption for mainstream audiences.

There has not been a similar public discussion in the United States. Although U.S. scholars have recognized the varying meanings of the term assimilation, few have explored the extent to which biological absorption played a part in the ideas espoused during this period.[34] There have been some exceptions. Patricia Limerick, for example, has summed up the logic behind some of the policies put in place by nineteenth-century white Americans as follows:

> Set the blood quantum at one quarter, hold to it as a rigid definition of Indianness, let intermarriage proceed as it had for centuries, and eventually Indians will be defined out of existence. When that happens, the federal government will finally be freed from its persistent "Indian problem."[35]

Similarly, the literature on Native American identity often lists intermarriage alongside assimilation and acculturation as one of the reasons for the complexity of indigenous identity today.[36] Circe Sturm, for example, argues that present-day Cherokee identity is "embedded in ideas of blood, color, and race that permeate discourses of social belonging

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