4 Fear of a Black Planet

Livin’ in a land where the law say
Mixing of race makes the blood impure
[...]
What is pure? Who is pure?
Is it European? I ain’t sure
If the whole world was to come
Through peace and love
Then what would we [be] made of?
[...]
Why is this fear of Black from White
Influence who you choose?

Public Enemy, ‘Fear of a Black Planet’

[I] would prefer to see my race and my civilization blotted out with the atomic bomb than to see it slowly but surely destroyed in the maelstrom of miscegenation, interbreeding, intermarriage, and mongrelization.

Senator Theodore Bilbo

The ‘black planet’ that the popular rap group Public Enemy refers to is the Earth of the future. This feared Earth is not one where all other races have been replaced by the black African diaspora: this planet is ‘black’ (‘or just brown’) because the colour lines determining procreation and biological issue will be ignored by our descendants. If those lines are overridden by love and sexual desire then the racial categories of the twentieth century will be irreversibly intermingled. Public Enemy rapper Chuck D asks defenders of racial purity, ‘What’s wrong with some color in your family tree?’ and reminds listeners that every human being can trace their ancestors back to Africa. ‘Fear of a Black Planet’ hypothesizes a future where purity is not defined by racial homogeneity, and given the associations of purity with goodness and virtue, Chuck D especially questions the monopoly on purity historically attributed to ‘European’ whiteness. The addressee of this song is told that if human love is allowed to flourish without the choice of romantic partner being influenced by a need to defend racial purity, the racial composition of humanity will be very different in the future.
‘Fear of a Black Planet’ comes from the 1990 album of the same name, on the cover of which the Earth falls under the shadow of a featureless darkened planet which has the Public Enemy band logo burning on its surface. By visualizing the Earth as a jeopardized sphere, and emerging at the end of a decade of heightened fears of nuclear war between the USSR and the USA (an earlier Public Enemy track is entitled ‘Countdown to Armageddon’), it is difficult not to read the blackened planet heralded by the album title as an Earth scorched by World War Three.3 The title of the album and the song twins fear of nuclear war with fear of a future where the social codes of sexual reproduction have evaporated and the subsequent intermixture makes racial distinctions irrelevant. As this chapter will explore, several American cultural texts do similar work in twinning these future possibilities, often seeing the former as a prerequisite of the latter. The representation of post-nuclear-war worlds often exploits the emotional and political charge of interracial relationships in a future where existing social codes seem tenuous or inapplicable. Without interracial sex particularly in mind, literary scholar Daniel Cordle notes the romantic opportunities offered by the post-nuclear-war world in literature: ‘The post-holocaust environment can be treated frivolously, ripe, for instance, with possibilities for sexual adventure uncensored by the taboos of civilisation.’4

Interracial sexual relations – known as miscegenation – are massively important in the history of Western racism. New World slavery accredited slave status along the line of ‘maternal descent’, so the children born of black female slaves and white male masters (or any other fathers) were legally slaves.5 While difficult to assess, it would seem the rape of female slaves by their masters was endemic across New World plantations, leading Du Bois to state that ‘two centuries of systematic legal defilement of Negro women had stamped upon’ African America the ‘red stain of bastardy’ and ‘the hereditary weight of a mass of corruption from white adulterers’.6 In New World slave societies it was common for a person with mixed heritage to be legally black. Mixed race offspring were subject to intricate mathematical calculations and legal stipulations as to their official status, which varied depending on time and place. In the American context, marriage between a white person and a person of ‘one-eighth [...] negro blood’ would have been illegal in Missouri in 1906 but legal in Oregon (where a 1902 code only made it unlawful for a white person to ‘intermarry with any negro, Chinese, or any person having one-fourth or more negro, Chinese, or Kanaka blood’).7

Anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss commented that, along with the incest with which it is sometimes combined, in ‘some countries […] inter-
racial sexual relations’ are the most taboo versions of kinship available, stimulating ‘horror and collective vengeance’. The legal prohibitions on interracial sex in Europe’s colonies have a long history, beginning with the Spanish Empire in the sixteenth century. At the start of the 1980s, interracial marriages were still illegal in South Africa and the US state of Mississippi. The offspring of interracial relationships in New World slave societies were condemned scientifically, too. Biologists posited human extinction as the long-term repercussion of interracial sex. This rested on the belief that people identified as mulatto (a term used in reference to people of mixed race) would be barren if they bred with other mulattoes. Scientists also proposed mixed race offspring were weaker and more effeminate and susceptible to disease, and the intermixture of white and black racial stock represented the dilution of white vigour and the eventual decline of civilization (a counter-theory of ‘Hybrid vigor’ proposed that racial intermixture would bring vitality and cultural stimulation).

White men were the least penalized group in interracial sexual relations – unless they married a woman on the other side of the colour line. Black men, conversely, were the most demonized, and their sexual transgression of the colour line – actual or otherwise – the most punished. Frantz Fanon puts it bluntly: ‘We know historically that the Negro guilty of lying with a white woman is castrated.’ James Baldwin saw the American South as a particularly dangerous environment in this context: ‘How many times has the southern day come up to find [a] black man, sexless, hanging from a tree!’ Baldwin’s typical victim is ‘sexless’ because lynching victims were often castrated, an act symbolizing the supposed reasoning behind the lynching, that black men were sexual predators preying on white Southern women who had to be protected via extralegal means. The perception of ‘the Negro’ as representing ‘sexual instinct (in its raw state) […] genital potency beyond all moralities and prohibitions’ is widespread in white supremacist ideology, and as scholar Richard Godden has summarized, the image of the ‘black beast rapist’ had a privileged symbolic function in the racial economy of the American South, particularly from the mid-1880s onwards, when defenders of the dismantled slave system saw ‘a generation of young blacks […] coming to manhood without the “civilizing” effects of slavery’. Without slavery in place to control the insatiable black male, white Southern womanhood was perceived to be endangered by black lust. This jeopardy seemed all the more immense because of the cultural capital invested in the chasteness of the white woman in the South, celebrated as ‘gleaming white’ and ‘lily-pure […] Mother of God’. To compensate for the challenge to racist hierarchies opened up by Emancipation, ‘the weaponry of Jim Crowism (disenfran-
chisement, segregation, lynching) supplied the only means to subordinate blacks as they degenerated’ in the eyes of Southern Radicals.\textsuperscript{20} The uncontrollable lust of former slaves was the alibi for the violent suppression of black people in the South, murderous acts that also had the aim of maintaining the Southern system of racial subordination. As many as 416 African Americans were lynched between 1918 and 1927.\textsuperscript{21}

Frederic Brown and Mack Reynolds’s SF story ‘Dark Interlude’ (1951) depicted this immoral violence and its official tolerance. A traveller from Earth’s future visits rural America and marries a local white girl. Initially, the time traveller is accepted by the locals until he reveals his racial origins to his wife’s brother, who automatically murders the time traveller. As he tells the story of the murder to the Sherriff, the brother recounts that the time traveller was talking about a war in the future in which ‘the whites and the yellows had mostly killed one another off’. After this war, ‘all the races had begun to blend into one by colonization and intermarriage’ and by the time the time traveller was born this ‘process was complete’. Enraged that this man ‘was sleeping with’ his sister, the brother demanded, ‘You mean you got nigger blood in you?’ On hearing the time traveller’s innocent answer (‘he said, just like it didn’t mean anything, “At least one-fourth.”’) the brother shoots him dead, an action of which the Sheriff approves.\textsuperscript{22} Despite the story’s intended illustration of the hostility faced by mixed marriages, it is important that the future the time traveller comes from is characterized by racial mixing. ‘Dark Interlude’ indicates that the brother’s murderous intolerance is fighting against the historical tide; the unremarkableness of racial intermixture – ‘it didn’t mean anything’ to the time traveller – is the inevitable outcome of racial difference’s lessening grip on the comprehension of human relations. As Paul Gilroy has observed of the first interracial kiss screened on US television, between Captain Kirk (William Shatner) and Lieutenant Uhura (Nichelle Nichols) in Star Trek, such texts offer the idea that to be against racism is to be allied to the future.\textsuperscript{23} People who reject racism are already bound to the world of tomorrow and are building that future, while racists remain trapped in the logic of the past. In Star Trek and ‘Dark Interlude’, the depiction of a future free of racism implicitly underlines that its existence in the present cannot endure indefinitely.

Interracial sex has been discussed in relation to the maintenance of racist hierarchies long into the twentieth century. While (mercifully) not representative of the majority of nuclear representations, in Andrew Macdonald’s novel The Turner Diaries (1978), a neo-Nazi group called the Organization seize California and an arsenal of nuclear weapons in 1993. The book’s narrator, a member of the Organization, repeatedly proclaims
his commitment to preserving ‘the future of our race’ against the threat of black male sexual predation. The Organization launches nuclear missiles at the USSR, triggering an exchange between the Soviet Union and the USA that severely weakens both states and allows the group to take power in North America (and Europe in 1999). Victory becomes tangible when the narrator destroys the Pentagon with a nuclear warhead. The novel, a first-person narrative, is framed as a historical document published one hundred years after the events it narrates. The frame narration reveals that after another nuclear war Asia has been depopulated and only white people now inhabit the Earth: the Organization’s race war has been successful.

This novel is an extreme variant of future-war fiction that reaches for nuclear weapons as the means to prevent racial intermixture. Its appeal to racism and genocide is so blunt it is important as a political document but of limited literary interest.

Few scholars have demonstrated the centrality of interracial and interethnic sexual and romantic relations within American culture as extensively as the scholar Werner Sollors. In _Beyond Ethnicity_, Sollors outlines how heterosexual romance has been at the heart of American narratives of ethnic allegiance. The core of his theory is the tension between vertical lines of descent (conduits of ethnic belonging expressed through the rhetoric of natural bloodlines) and horizontal lines of consent (chosen affiliations in which participants bind themselves to the national community, perhaps by agreeing to adhere to American law). This tension is at work within an individual American’s identity and is often manifested in the heterosexual relationships into which they enter: choice of partner is a statement on how the individual is positioned and positions themselves between the demands of descent and consent relations. In one sense, that tension between descent and consent is the balancing act between an American’s ethnic or racial identity and their American national identity. For some commentators, taking up US citizenship means sloughing off one’s prior identity, be that ethnic, racial or a preceding nationality. In this modulation, being nothing but an American means renouncing all other ties inherited from the past and being remade in the American mould. The most famous formulation of this overriding American identity was contained in Israel Zangwill’s play _The Melting-Pot_ (1909), addressed to the surge of migration from Southern and Eastern Europe entering the USA’s eastern cities from the 1880s to the 1920s. For Zangwill, it is God’s will that all immigrants have their particularity burnt off and replaced with a uniform American national identity:

America is God’s Crucible, the great Melting-Pot where all the
races of Europe are melting and re-forming! Here you stand, good folk, think I, when I see them at Ellis Island, here you stand [...] in your fifty groups, with your fifty languages and histories, and your fifty blood hatreds and rivalries. But you won’t be long like that, brothers, for these are the fires of God you’ve come to [...] A fig for your feuds and vendettas! Germans and Frenchmen, Irishmen and Englishmen, Jews and Russians—into the Crucible with you all! God is making the American.26

Underlining the metaphor was the belief that contact, intermixture and interethnic reproduction would erase the descent identities of American immigrants, leaving citizens that were simply American. This model has deep historical roots and certainly goes back to the eighteenth century.27 While Zangwill’s list of peoples in the above quotation suggests his melting pot is homogeneously white, he envisaged all races adding to the mix, appending an afterword to the play in 1914 to make this point clearer.28 Importantly for this chapter, Sollors observes that ‘marital union or a love relationship across boundaries that are considered significant, and often in defiance of parental desires and old descent antagonisms, is what constitutes melting-pot love’.29 As precursors to procreation, these romantic and marital relations will generate an American identity where descent claims are irrelevant.

The promise of heterosexual relations across the lines of racial and ethnic allegiance, the promise to deliver the American melting pot, finds a unique situation in those post-nuclear-war representations set in a massively depopulated America. In such texts, the realization of the American melting pot in biological terms is not the eventual outcome of cultural intermingling. The issue of which people survive and which of those survivors reproduce takes on an added dimension because those offspring directly represent America’s future. The racial recipe of the survivors and their descendants determines who is to repopulate the United States. Where these characters are the last humans alive they represent the progenitors of humanity’s future. Interracial sex repeatedly vexes the racist imagination and in post-apocalyptic representations it takes on greater importance – and is the source of consternation and violence – because it may compromise white racial purity for posterity. Conversely, where white Americans are the sole survivors (more importantly, the sole survivors to reproduce), non-white Americans are written out of the country’s future.

This chapter marks out different versions of the racial recipe of nuclear-war survivors offered by American cultural texts. The first section examines novels from the 1950s in which the destruction of America’s urban centres and the relative safety of suburban and rural areas ensures the longevity
and social status of white Anglo-America. In addition to the spatial politics of survival, the white protagonists’ choice of romantic partner (i.e. reproductive mate) determines whether this ethnic group is to remain dominant in post-nuclear-war America.

The second section looks at films and novels from the 1950s and 1960s in which a very small group of Americans survive a nuclear war. The self-selection of sexual partners within these racially plural groups initially appears beholden to social taboos on interracial sex in the USA during the period of their production. The very different endings to the narratives, however, indicate that the writers and filmmakers were ‘trying on for size’ the kinds of familial unit made possible by disposing of said taboos. Mildly desegregationist, these texts use the post-nuclear-war setting and the evaporation of racist institutional structures to expose racism in its most absurd, naked and hostile form.

The third section focuses on the SF fiction of African-American novelist Octavia E. Butler, which uses the topic of interspecies reproduction to stage a complex negotiation of the demands of kinship when faced with repulsion against physical difference. Furthermore, Butler’s drama of who is to represent humanity’s post-nuclear-war future is addressed to the nuclear belligerency of President Reagan in the 1980s, arguing for an accommodation of difference as a counter to the aggressive rhetoric of the Reagan administration.

**Inner-City Annihilation**

During the Cold War, a series of social and economic changes affected America’s demographic distribution, such as the rise of middle-class suburbs (which black Americans were often prevented from moving into by restricted housing covenants) and the release of thousands of drug addicts and the certified insane onto urban streets following the 1963 Community Mental Health Centers Act. Inner cities came to be perceived as the site of pathological family scenarios, interracial tension and criminality – not least in the minds of American policymakers – which reflected and exacerbated the phenomenon of ‘white flight’. America’s urban centres were also believed to be the targets of Soviet nuclear weapons. In 1951 the *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* proposed dispersing large urban populations into the surrounding environs to minimize loss of life, and when the Interstate Highway Act became law in 1956, President Dwight Eisenhower cited the need to evacuate cities quickly. Sharp and Preston argue separately that civil defence planning privileged the suburban family (silently encoded as white) on both sides of the Atlantic, and Dean
MacCannell contends that strategic planning from 1960 onwards was willing to sacrifice America’s cities so the country as a whole would survive. Fictional representations echo this association. In Archibald MacLeish’s poetic drama *J.B.* (1958), the ‘lower-class, ethnically accented voices’ of characters fleeing an atomic-bombed city suggest the primary victims in a nuclear strike will be America’s multiethnic urban working class. The protagonist of Bernard Wolfe’s novel *Limbo* (1952) contemplates how nuclear war has ‘cleared the slums from America overnight’, demonstrating the kind of ‘social-engineering efficiency’ that ‘reformers and uplifters had never been able to’ muster. As Seed notes, the rationalization of atomic bombing as ‘a form of urban planning’ goes back to ‘the first atomic war novel’, H. G. Wells’s *The World Set Free*.

Philip Wylie wrote the novel *Tomorrow!* (1954) to convince the public of the necessity of Civil Defense, and it spent several weeks on the *New York Times* bestseller list, going through three hardcover printings and selling over 30,000 copies. Set in the fictional adjacent cities of Green Prairie and River City, when a Soviet nuclear weapon strikes urban congestion compounds the destruction. A map is inserted into the novel at the moment of the blast, and immediately above the cross marking ‘Ground Zero’ is the ‘Negro District’, and close by, in even bigger letters, is the label ‘Slum’. In *Tomorrow!*, and in America’s civil defence planning, the destruction of inner cities was expected to enable white suburban Americans to live through a nuclear war. This assumption structures the novel’s narrative, which favours the survival of one of those white suburban middle-class families, the Conners: parents Henry and Beth, their children Chuck, Ted and Nora, and Chuck’s eventual wife Lenore Bailey, childhood sweetheart and next door neighbour. As Sharp has noted, the novel’s annihilation of the inner city should be read as part of Wylie’s liberal critique of America. Wylie elaborates how social forces such as racism and poverty have pushed African Americans into decaying urban centres, and he underscores the injustice of this situation by making the black community the most vulnerable in a nuclear attack. Nonetheless, in *Tomorrow!* the obliteration of the slums furnishes the ‘opportunity’ to rebuild River City and Green Prairie as ‘Semidecentralized’ cities. After the attack they are rebuilt with elongated buildings that leave ‘room for gardens, for parks, for picnic grounds right in the center of the city’. The ‘bombing had proved an ultimate blessing by furnishing a brand-new chance to build a world brand-new – and infinitely better’. Sharp and Foertsch separately come to the same conclusion: Wylie’s condemnation of African-American suffering is exceeded by his utopian desire to remodel America’s cities in the shape of the suburbs, and the African-American community stands in
the way of his projected urban redemption. While some members of River City’s black community do survive the nuclear strike, it is implied this community has suffered the greatest share of the attack.

*Tomorrow!* opens with the area’s fictitious history of settlement, the establishment of trade, agriculture and industry by white pioneers fighting off Sioux attacks, and at the novel’s conclusion white ‘settlers’ build over areas previously inhabited by African Americans. Sharp further connects the nineteenth-century settlers to the nuclear-war survivors as follows: the frontiersmen able to survive and reproduce demonstrated the qualities of rugged individualism, determination and heroism. These qualities have been passed down to their descendents, the Conners, and they prove crucial for the Conners’ survival in a nuclear attack.42

Having survived the nuclear war, the last chapter suggests the Conner family will inhabit Green Prairie in the future: Chuck and Lenore, now married, are expecting their first child, making the continuing reproduction of white America the dénouement of the novel.43 The happiness that greets this news is unsurprising because of the threat to fertility posed by radiation. In the context of repopulating America, Chuck and Lenore’s unborn child is a patriotic act: ‘does this country need babies now!’44 During the narrative, Lenore must choose either Chuck or Kit Sloan to be her husband, and alongside the nuclear war scenario, the narrative makes this the major question to keep readers interested. Her eventual decision deserves close scrutiny because it evidences the subtle racial politics of mate selection. Kit Sloan is the outcome of his mother Minerva’s bad parenting: he is ‘mother-dominated’, infantile, cowardly and insecure,45 and epitomizes Wylie’s view that ‘overbearing mothers’ were turning American children into ‘effeminate, self-involved degenerates’.46 Lenore is blackmailed by the Sloans into an engagement with Kit, who tells her the ‘family line must be continued. I must find somebody steady, intelligent, healthy, good family, sound stock – you’d really fit the whole catalogue.’ While Kit thinks Lenore would be unhappy ‘being a mere brood mare’, Minerva is confident she ‘can be handled’,47 their lexicon constructing her as livestock selected to maintain a pedigree. In *Tomorrow!* atomic bombs have the advantageous effect of ‘keeping the all-American girl safe from’ Kit Sloan since the scion is murdered fleeing the nuclear strike.48

Lenore’s choice is between a romantic match with Chuck and a loveless financial match with Kit, so finishing the novel with her romantic choice manoeuvres the reader into supporting her consent union with Chuck. But despite its message that the bonds of love are the most important, the pairing of Lenore and Chuck insinuates that their romantic match is complemented by their compatibility as wholly white. A further reason
for Kit’s unsuitability is his genetic inheritance, the genealogical secret lying behind the ‘Sloan darkness’. This darkness is a colouring of the skin symbolizing the Sloans’ moral ‘darkness’, a genetic inheritance from ‘a carefully forgotten’ forebear, indicating the shame attached to the original source, ‘an Indian squaw [who] had participated in combining the Sloan genes’.49 William Javier Nelson used the term ‘hypodescent society’ to define the way status is assigned to mixed ethnic identities in America. Ancestry from a subordinate group carries disproportionately large weight, and as such, no matter how long ago ‘the Sloan genes’ were ‘combin[ed]’ with Native America, this evidence from the text belongs in an American tradition where ‘any “impure” ancestry’ overrides the privileged components in biological selfhood.50 The Conners’ ancestors defended the early frontier settlement of Green Prairie against Native American sorties; the Sloans’ ancestors trafficked with people lined up against civilization. The consent match between Chuck and Lenore is also a descent match, keeping Kit’s problematic genetic inheritance away from the fertile white woman’s biological stock and away from the future citizens of America.

There is an exposition of 1950s US society in *Tomorrow!* that complicates the reading of white America’s regeneration of the city as a victory for civilization. Wylie seems too cynical about human nature to see white American culture as an improvement on barbarism and *Tomorrow!* insists upon ‘the almost universally rejected fact that people are, after all, animals’. Although Native America functions as the high water mark of savagery, the novel implies that US mass culture is a veiled version of human barbarism that erupts after the nuclear strike. The ‘presence of the end of the world’ gives licence to behaviour that ‘had thitherto been only fantasy’, behaviour that is ‘criminal’ and ‘psychopathic’ and frequently involving rape. This is not the case in the Conners’ community, but that is because of preparedness, not racial superiority. Even the Conner family enjoy American television comedy, the subject of *Tomorrow!*’s most caustic comments. The laughter it elicits is homogeneous – a ‘collective guffaw’ – and mechanical, since the audiences ‘laughed without knowing why, or even that they laughed’. Audiences are depersonalized and unthinking and the ‘utterly savage sound’ they make is ‘inspired by the sadisms which constitute most popular humor. It is a sound that would stun to silence the predatory night noises of the wildest jungle, a sound of madness’.51 The jungle is an extensively wrought symbol of civilization’s antithesis and the sadism, barbarism and mass behaviour that *Tomorrow!*’s narrator identified in television comedy are the leitmotifs of post-nuclear-war atavism. The mobs are referred to as a mass sapped of sanity, using the terms ‘maniacal hordes’, ‘dark smear of humanity’ and ‘human amoeba’.53
African-American characters stand outside Wylie’s critique of American mass culture and offer a moral alternative, teaching white America how to maintain community and decency as atavism takes hold of white River City survivors. The roles they play after the nuclear strike are ‘healers and saviors’, most notably the character Dr Alice Groves, the selfless manager of the Mildred Tatum Infirmary for Colored. The postwar rebuilding depends upon Alice’s exertions since it is Alice who saves Minerva Sloan’s life, and Minerva funds the new bank building in the rebuilt twin cities. Appropriately for a novel caught between liberal critique of racism and the desire to wipe out inner-city African-American communities to reconstruct the urban environment, black characters demonstrate superior resources of courage and nobility after the nuclear strike, but (with the exception of Alice) are discussed in general terms and act for the benefit of the white characters and the new city they build.

Like Tomorrow!, Pat Frank’s 1959 novel Alas Babylon suggests that after a nuclear strike the people who rebuild the nation will come from outside its urban centres. Alas Babylon went through 43 printings by 1983 and was adapted for a prestigious television ‘playhouse’ series. It is also explicitly critical of American racism, but the nature of this community’s survival reasserts racial hierarchy, as does the novel’s presentation of the male protagonist’s choice of partner.

In Alas Babylon, rebuilding takes place in the Florida town of Fort Repose, cut off from the rest of the country on ‘The Day’ (the community’s term for the day of the nuclear attack). The novel’s title, a codeword for nuclear war between two of the characters, comes from Revelation. It refers to God’s destruction of the sinful city of Babylon, knitting together the idea of America’s urban centres as places of crime and immorality and as targets in World War Three. Alas Babylon indicates that in a nuclear war ‘big cities would become traps deadly as deserts or jungles’ and the exodus of refugees, as ‘voracious and all-consuming as army ants’, would denude the resources of little towns. In this, Alas Babylon and Tomorrow! may be influenced by the earlier short stories ‘Lot’ (1953) and its sequel ‘Lot’s Daughter’ (1954), written by Ward Moore. Their titles also suggest God’s destruction of cities for their sins, in this case Sodom and Gomorrah. Following a nuclear attack, Moore’s protagonist Mr Jimmon is so desperate to outrun ‘the endless mob pouring out of Los Angeles […] eating up the substance of the surrounding country’ that he sacrifices three members of his family: Jimmon sends his wife and two sons into a filling station and drives off with his teenage daughter. The short stories’ titles allude to Lot from the Bible to establish the selfishness and self-righteousness of both patriarchs in their bids to survive (see Gen. 19:8).
Against the city as epicentre of America’s devastation, Fort Repose is a site of survival whose origin as a frontier outpost is stressed. Similar to the Conner family, in *Alas Babylon* the Braggs (represented by Randy, his brother’s wife and her children) are the descendents of the earliest white settlers. The Braggs band together with other families living by the river, including the Henrys, the descendents of the slaves that Randy’s forefather brought with him to Fort Repose. After The Day, this miniature river community embodies the self-reliance classically associated with the frontier. Randy Bragg accepts the responsibility of protecting the community when the Acting President empowers Reservists and National Guardsmen to ‘take independent action to preserve public safety’. When the town is threatened by murderous highwaymen (one of whom resembles ‘a Western badman holding up the Wells Fargo stage’), Randy leads his men in a shootout against the gang. The last highwayman is hung as a warning to others. Randy literally writes Fort Repose’s new laws into being and accredits himself with the authority of seeing them executed.

*Alas Babylon* ridicules the absurdity and arbitrariness of America’s racial codes, making segregationists appear un-American by having such characters oppose free speech. The novel also states that black and white soldiers can socialize freely when serving overseas. The novel’s liberal position is repeatedly dramatized after The Day, when desegregation seems inevitable because of circumstance. For instance, segregated civic resources are meaningless when resources stop working, such as the ‘two drinking fountains [...] marked “White Only,” the other “Colored Only”’. Gradual desegregationist Randy is a ‘little surprised’ when Caleb Henry attends classes with his niece Peyton and nephew Ben Franklin, but why should this be remarkable? Randy recalls in their hometown of ‘Omaha – and indeed in two thirds of America’s cities – white and Negro children had sat side by side for many years without fuss or trouble’. Outlining the full role African Americans take as trading partners, the novel’s narrator is blunt. There can be ‘no color line’ when life is ruled by ‘laws of hunger and survival’. In *Alas Babylon*, it is evidently ludicrous that a nuclear war is required to desegregate the South. The mutual dependency of black and white Americans is a feature of the river community: the Braggs’ small arsenal of firearms protects the river community, and the local knowledge of Preacher Henry allows Peyton to catch fish in a time of hardship. For Bartter the Henrys have a privileged place in the narrative because they ‘understand the farming techniques and resources of the area’ and therefore ‘truly hold the key to the group’s survival’.

Cordle observes ‘even in [the novel’s] most liberal aspect’, its full appreciation of the black characters’ contribution to the community, *Alas Babylon*
'reveals conservative assumptions about racial difference'.67 The Henrys are depicted in terms that suggest their primitivism, as if blackness is an ontological condition that has yet to enter history.68 When the two teenage boys report for guard duty, Caleb Henry ‘stepped out of the shadows, teeth and eyes gleaming. Incredibly, he carried a six-foot spear.’ Even after the nuclear war, the Henrys’ home (‘what had once been the slave quarters’) is a tableau of slow agricultural labour, fishing and contented daily routine. ‘It seemed a peaceful home, in time of peace.’69 The condition of African America is presented as a static and primitive bedrock, undisturbed by nuclear war, and the Henrys repeatedly adopt positions of happy servitude in relation to the white characters.70 For Randy, the Henrys are a ‘special problem. […] They owned their own land and ran their own lives, but in a sense they were his wards.’71 As James Baldwin commented in 1960, considering the ‘Negro’ as a ‘ward’ was ‘indispensable’ to ‘national self-esteem’. It reinforced the infantilization of African America and demonstrated to Baldwin that white Americans were unable ‘to look on the Negro simply as a man’.72 Sharp and Foertsch argue that the community’s very dependence on the Henrys is loaded with value judgments about the level of their civilization. Reduced to a subsistence existence, the people most adapted for survival are the Henrys precisely because they have not reached the same level of technological development as the Anglo- and Hispanic-American characters, for whom reverting to the post-nuclear-war environment is much more difficult.73 Sharp interprets Randy’s ‘struggle to survive on the nuclear frontier’ as rejuvenation:

Frank went out of his way to underscore his belief that Darwinian struggle on the frontier reinvigorated men like Randy. […] He became physically fit, settled down with a nice girl, and took his place as leader of the town like his forefathers.74 Randy does stop drinking whisky and loses weight, becoming ‘leaner and harder, and, truthfully, felt better than before The Day’. But the novel nuances the Darwinian struggle, and Randy draws back from the credo, ‘Today a man saved himself and his family and to hell with everyone else.’75 Equally, Sharp’s contention that the novel has a ‘romanticized happy ending’76 is too strong. When US armed forces finally arrive, the river community chooses to remain in Fort Repose. Colonel Paul Hart readies to fly away and Randy asks him who won the war:

‘We won it. We really clobbered ’em!’ Hart’s eyes lowered and his arms drooped. He said, ‘Not that it matters.’
The engine started and Randy turned away to face the thousand-year night.\textsuperscript{77}

Randy and the community have been toughened up and brought together, but the idea of American civilization being regenerated is undermined by that ‘thousand-year night’.\textsuperscript{78}

A necessary element in Randy’s regeneration is his selection of the white American Elizabeth (Lib) McGovern as romantic partner and his rejection of Hispanic-American Rita Hernandez. Before the war, Randy dated ‘lots of girls, and not all of them virgins’. His neighbour Florence ‘had seen him take Rita Hernandez, that little Minorcan tart from Pistolville, into his house and, no doubt, up to his bedroom […] And there had been others, recently a tall blonde who drove her own car’. Rita is contrasted (by height, for example) against the blonde Lib, and the reader is informed Randy has had sex with Rita but not Lib before The Day. Rita thinks the ‘war’s going to level people as well as cities’ and consequently Randy will return to her: ‘that other girl – that Yankee blonde – won’t look so good’.\textsuperscript{79} When Rita enters the narrative, her hypnotic combination of sex and danger is clear:

She was not like a girl of Fort Repose. She was a child of the Mediterranean and Caribbean, seeming alien; and yet certainly American. Her ancestors included a Spanish soldier whose caravel beached in Matanzas Inlet before the Pilgrims found their rock, and Carib Indian women, and the Minorcans who spread inland from New Smyrna in the eighteenth century. She had not gone to college but she was intelligent and quick. She had an annulled high school marriage and an abortion behind her. She no longer made such foolish errors. Her hobby was men.\textsuperscript{80}

This quotation is less than half the space devoted to describing Rita as she stands in the doorway in shorts and a halter top, brandishing a shotgun. Despite the danger she symbolizes, reading Rita’s ‘used and tired’\textsuperscript{81} skin does not give one the confidence that she will live much longer. She is intelligent and tenacious but not cultivated or judicious. Rita and her brother Pete trade food for useless consumer goods, and some of this jewellery gives them radiation poisoning, indicating that their acquisitiveness is a disadvantageous trait in the struggle to survive. Dr Dan Gunn’s pessimism about human fertility turns women who can and want to have children into valuable commodities; in terms of which woman will best serve Randy in perpetuating his family and community, Lib is mentally preparing to have children with him while Rita’s abortion associates her with failed reproduction.\textsuperscript{82} This association is compounded by Dan’s description of Rita’s jewellery: ‘Impregnated with fallout’.\textsuperscript{83} Foertsch reads
Rita’s irradiated gold ring as her ‘symbolic marriage with the bomb’, the only union available to her after failing to seduce her social superior, Randy, and ‘supposedly just reward’ for Rita not knowing her place. 

Rita’s character is somewhat redeemed later in the novel when she assists Randy in catching the highwaymen, but her biographic description occupies a larger proportion of the narrative and programmes the reader to think that Randy would be wisest choosing the ‘Yankee blonde’. Earlier, Randy complained about Rita’s possessiveness, and although he thinks Lib is also ‘jealous’, that is ‘natural’. Rita’s jealousy appears overbearing, and she interrogates Randy as to which of the female guests in his house he is ‘sleeping with’. When Lib agrees to marry Randy, the polarity of possession is returned to its appropriate gender direction:

His eyes measured her – long, slender, curved as if for flight, skin coppery, hair silvered by the night. ‘You’re a beautiful possession,’ he said. ‘I wish we had a place of our own so I could keep you. I wish we had just one room to ourselves. I wish we were married.’

Instantly she said, ‘I accept.’

Schwartz argues that through Lib the novel ‘endorses greater personal independence’ for women, given her intelligence and outspokenness. Yet the novel ‘retains the belief that a strong, decisive man should head the household’. The transformation that the post-nuclear-war world demands of Randy not only restores his youth, strength and authority, it replenishes his moral behaviour and his masculinity. These are qualities the individual, the community and the nation have been lacking: as Schwartz highlights, the diplomatic incident that leads to nuclear war is the result of a ‘sexually insecure American pilot’ acting rashly out of a need for social stature. Before the nuclear attack, Lib complains Randy is ‘vegetating’ and for their relationship to develop into marriage he must take an assertive gendered role: ‘I don’t want a vegetable. I want a man.’ Conversely, Rita represents the luxuries, seductions and indolence that contributed to Randy’s vegetative state: dancing, dining, drinking whisky and having sex in a motel and in the sand dunes, locations adding illicitness to their fornication. After nuclear war, Randy is a profitably altered man, and Rita senses he is ‘tougher’ and ‘not the same Randy’. Before The Day, Randy’s opposition to segregation led him to be called ‘a traitor to his state and his race’, but his decision to partner with Lib suggests otherwise. His choice of the white woman restores his vigour and he readopts his masculine authority, which protects the community for the benefit of all Fort Repose’s ethnic groups. In sticking to his racial compartment, he preserves the human race in the town. This allows the liberal desegrega-
tionist message of the novel to coexist with the highly value-coded representation of African Americans and Hispanic Americans in *Alas Babylon*. Randy’s authoritarian leadership is made possible by the union of Anglo-American settler-descendant with his white bride.

**The Old Ideologies**

A telling fantasy sequence takes place in Chris Ware’s graphic novel *Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth* (2000). The eponymous protagonist indulges in a melodramatic fantasy featuring his black stepsister Amy in which nuclear war leaves them ‘the only people left on Earth’. The step-siblings live in a log cabin and have a child together. Jimmy’s belief that the two could start a family is a challenge to the racist taboo on interracial sex, but the fact this takes place after civilization disappears (‘everything is g-gone’) indicates how far Jimmy thinks this is viable in their present.89

This tension between the moral imperative of repopulating the Earth and the social proscription on interracial sex underpins W. E. B. Du Bois’s short story ‘The Comet’ (1920). In Du Bois’s narrative, a comet passing New York eradicates the population, except for two survivors, Jim and Julia. Jim is ‘a tall, dark working man’ and Julia is a ‘rarely beautiful and richly gowned’ white woman in her mid-twenties. After a period of angst at their situation and their supposed racial difference, a bond forms between them, and the woman says, ‘how foolish our human distinction seem – now’. Stripped of any social codes or expectations they are neither ‘white nor black’: what would such collective identities mean when no other member of those groups remain alive? Jim and Julia are instead the parents ‘of the race to be’. Their love is disrupted when it becomes apparent they are not the last people on Earth, or even New York City; both their families are alive, and discover them. The end of ‘The Comet’ reminds the reader their union would have been punished if it had been consummated. Julia publicly announces that Jim rescued her, but simply being alone together causes the gathering crowd to mutter their desire to lynch Jim.90

For much of the film *The World, The Flesh and the Devil* (1959), directed by Ranald MacDougall, the possibility of an interracial relationship is neutralized by the characters’ conscious adherence to pre-nuclear-war racial codes. With echoes of Du Bois’s Jim, who was protected from the comet’s destruction by the depths of a bank vault, the African-American protagonist of *World* survives nuclear war because he is a miner underground. Ralph Burton (Harry Belafonte) makes his way to Manhattan and moves into an apartment, believing himself to be the last human alive. Eventually he becomes aware of a young white female survivor, Sarah
Crandall (Inger Stevens). Film scholar Adilifu Nama reads the presence of a baby carriage in one shot as a symbol of the sexual desire between Ralph and Sarah; additionally, it implies their union will be necessary for the reproduction of the species. However, though they appear to be the last two people on Earth and there is attraction between them, the black male does not openly desire the white female. When Sarah suggests she move into Ralph’s building, he refuses: ‘People might talk.’ She believes that interpersonal relations have irrevocably changed and ‘can’t go back the way they used to be’, as a slightly later exchange indicates:

SARAH: It’s taking you too long to accept things Ralph. This is the world we live in. We’re alone in it. We have to go on from there.
[...] 
RALPH: Don’t push me. I’ll be so honest it’ll burn you.
SARAH: I know what you are, if that’s what you’re trying to remind me.
RALPH: That’s it all right. If you’re squeamish about words, I’m coloured. If you face facts, I’m a Negro. If you’re a polite Southerner, I’m a Nigra. I’m a nigger if you’re not. [...] Little while ago you said you were free, white, and 21. That didn’t mean anything to you, just an expression you’ve heard for a thousand times. Well, to me it was an arrow in my guts.
SARAH: Ralph, what do I say, help me! I know you, you’re a fine decent man, what else is there to know?
RALPH: That world we came from, you wouldn’t know that. You wouldn’t even know me. Why should the world fall down to prove I am what I am, and that there is nothing wrong with what I am? [Pause] We leave it the way it is, and I won’t mention it again.
SARAH: We haven’t said anything about love, have we?

Ralph’s involuntary visceral response to Sarah’s phrasing indicates how deeply those pre-apocalyptic codes are embedded in him, while Sarah has not had to reflect on her words before, since she belongs to the race that was legally privileged in 1950s America. Ralph cannot fulfil their relationship romantically precisely because he feels it is only possible now the old social codes have been wiped clean. Sarah does not accept that their love is impossible, whereas for Ralph it cannot happen on the grounds of principle, because of white America’s failure to acknowledge that he was valid as an object of love before nuclear war made it expedient. However, while Ralph’s refusal of Sarah’s advances carries moral weight, Sarah’s invocation of love seems to undercut his position. As morally rigorous as
it initially appears, when Ralph’s indignation blocks his happiness it appears as stubbornness, as it does when he walks out of the apartment after Sarah’s profession of love. Film critic Wyn Wachhorst diagnoses Ralph as having ‘racial paranoia’, but the subordination he identifies is made in a convincing and articulate manner – his anger appears to be justified. What is confused in the film is that Ralph presents his position as racial self-respect but he seems to want their relationship to be that of mistress and servant. Ralph stages a night at a club for Sarah’s birthday, pours her a drink and addresses her as ‘Miss Crandall’.

When a third survivor arrives in New York, the white male Benson Thatcher, Ralph assumes the newcomer will successfully court Sarah. Ben assumes as much and tells Sarah so. She remains in love with Ralph, however, and Ben decides – in his own words – to make her mind up for her. Ben insists on a deadly contest between the two males with the winner claiming Sarah as their prize. Ben gives Ralph a pistol, while keeping a rifle for himself and a duel unfolds down the canyons of Manhattan’s deserted streets. As Nama observes, the racial ‘stakes are high – the repopulation of the planet’. After several scenes whose tension is enhanced by the vertiginous shots of New York’s skyscrapers filmed at high angles from the ground, Ralph ends the duel. Inspired by verses from the Bible written on the side of the United Nations Building about beating swords into plow-shares (Isa. 2:4), Ralph throws down his weapons and walks towards Ben unarmed. This echoes the use of non-violent protest by the mainstream of civil rights activism, which saw the moral authority that non-retaliation to violence could add to their movement. The white male could easily kill his rival but he throws his rifle down. Ralph and Sarah walk off hand in hand, and enigmatically she then takes Ben’s hand. The last shot of the film contains the three characters walking off, with Sarah standing between the two men, and as is typical of the post-nuclear-war film genre in this era, the caption ‘The Beginning’ comes up. While highly ambiguous, many reviewers think this implies the start of a three-way sexual relationship, with said relationship affirming racial integration. Nama thinks that the extremity of the post-apocalyptic scenario works against the liberal, pacifist conclusion: ‘Either way, orgiastic or voyeuristic, the film symbolically associates and affirms black-white integration with not only the end of civilization as we know it but also the beginning of an unusual set of sexual mores.’ For Nama, this film has a rather problematic view of desegregation if it depends upon America’s virtual depopulation and a revolution in sexual relations. Acknowledging that he is speculating, Wachhorst argues the conclusion is a result of the studio’s reluctance to ‘marry Inger Stevens to a black’.
Given the theme of this chapter, it would be surprising not to follow Nama in hailing *World* as an idiosyncratic response to desegregation, with an ending that unsatisfactorily resolves the interracial sexual energies it releases earlier in the narrative. One could add evidence from earlier in the film to Nama’s reading of Ralph and Benson’s contest as ‘a two-man race war’. Ralph tells his competitor for Sarah’s affection, ‘you remind me of a guy named Snodgrass’, a reference to a well-dressed white male manikin Ralph kept in his apartment for company. Keeping a pair of manikins to stave off the crushing feeling of being the last human being alive, Ralph’s frustrations are targeted against Snodgrass. Initially protesting to the shop dummy, ‘I’m lonely and you’re laughing’, Ralph hurls Snodgrass out of the apartment. His anger will not be contained: ‘You look at me but you don’t see me. Don’t see me and you wouldn’t care if you did. Out you go my friend. We’ve been together too long, and you’ve laughed at me once too often.’ Ralph’s rage at the manikin is phrased in a markedly similar way to the articulation of being black in twentieth-century America, being unseen and an object of comedy. Ralph Waldo Ellison asserted it in the title of his seminal novel *Invisible Man* (1952), Du Bois used the rhetorical figure of the veil behind which African Americans lived their lives and James Baldwin stated that the white Northerner ‘never sees Negroes. [...] Negroes are, therefore, ignored in the North’. Once more reading the film through Du Bois’s ‘The Comet’, Darryl A. Smith makes the point that in the short story, before New York City is depopulated, the character of Jim is already alone because he is not acknowledged as living on the same planet by white New Yorkers. As in ‘The Comet’, the film uses the condition of post-apocalyptic New York to project the failure to recognize black American humanity in the present. The other subject of Ralph’s anger, that black Americans were portrayed as comic fodder in America’s entertainment media, is well documented, such as film scholar Donald Bogle’s 1973 book *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretative History of Blacks in American Films*. Ralph’s anger at Snodgrass’s supposed indifference to his existential condition suggests he has tapped deep-rooted fury at the historical experience of African America. When Ralph makes a connection between Benson and Snodgrass, Benson’s position in the narrative is analogized to the white middle-class privilege that Ralph raged against in manikin form.

I am reluctant to endorse this reading too heartily. Ralph and Sarah’s initially unconsummated relationship is explicitly conceptualized in the terms of segregationist 1950s America. But the development of Ralph and Benson’s hostility is explicitly *deracialized*. Admittedly, Ralph’s early attempt to step aside and let romance grow between the two white char-
acters is presented as his belief that Benson and Sarah belong together in ways that he and Sarah did not. Absolutely, once combat is joined, the victory of one male by killing the other will have decisive implications for the racial makeup of America’s future. But Benson tells Ralph, ‘I have nothing against Negroes, Ralph. […] We have only one problem, there are two of us and one of her.’ Ralph has heard such liberal platitudes from the socially privileged race before – he responds, ‘That’s white of you’ – but Belafonte’s performance implies that Ralph accepts the absence of racial motivation in Benson’s hostility. His willingness to be part of a triangular relationship at the film’s end is barely plausible as it is – to think Ralph would do so believing Benson to be racist is an even greater stretch. Ralph’s willingness to lay his weapon down may be addressed as much to the logic of nuclear deterrence as it is civil rights. He is inspired by the headquarters of that broker of international accord (at least in theory), the United Nations. World’s narrative resolution – such as it is – may be re-read as a stance observable throughout the film, wherein the USA’s readiness for nuclear war is perceived to be placing the country in great danger. Civil Defense measures are presented as childlike in their innocent faith in survival. As Ralph tries to enter Manhattan, the tunnels and bridges are jammed with the rusting cars of New Yorkers fleeing attack, mocking an adjacent Civil Defense poster that claims, ‘Alert Today – Alive Tomorrow’. The ironic undercutting of confidence in Civil Defense is heightened by the camera focusing in on the poster’s optimistic message. The most powerful scene in the film is when Ralph, considering himself the last human left alive, enters a New York radio station turned into a Civil Defense Headquarters and listens to the last broadcasts made in America. He hears that London, San Francisco and Chicago have been destroyed, that the order has been given for New York to be evacuated, and a radioactive poison dust cloud that is deadly for five days fell around the world after the nuclear attacks. The United Nations has ordered all nations to reconvene, but on the poisoned Earth there is ‘no place to go’. For an entire two minutes, as the last broadcast is playing, the camera is fixed in the same shot following Ralph’s face as he silently tries to stop his tears from flowing. This fixed shot allows the audience no onscreen distraction from the restrained emotion of Belafonte’s performance. Focusing the audience’s ears as well, the last words on the tape retain their awful dignity and profundity: ‘Anybody there? Anybody?’ Belafonte was well known as a peace activist who supported nuclear disarmament. In The World, The Flesh and the Devil, racial politics explicitly structure how Ralph and Sarah relate to each other and set psychological parameters on their desire to form a romantic dyad. Those racial politics seem
relevant to the film’s depiction of Benson’s destructive competition with Ralph, but the narrative’s argument that non-violence is the most effective way to maintain the peace is not only channeling the sensibility of civil rights. That narrative argument is also reflecting a sensibility that the USA’s preparation for war in the form of constructing nuclear weapons and organizing Civil Defense are misguided acts of aggression that must be cast aside, as Ralph abandons his firearm, for the sake of humanity’s continued existence. As such, *The World, The Flesh and the Devil* pre-empts the combination of antiracism and antideterrence posited by the black Atlantic figures discussed in the next chapter.

The racialized sexual codes of reproduction in *The World, The Flesh and the Devil* can be productively compared to those in the 1951 film *Five*, directed by Arch Oboler. *Five* was filmed and distributed before the major early events of the high civil rights period, such as the Supreme Court’s 1954 rejection of segregated education in the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* ruling and the bus boycotts that began in Montgomery in 1955. The integration fantastically imagined in *World* is far removed from the narrative resolution in the earlier film, in which interracial tension is not overcome but erased. *Five* features a slightly larger group of nuclear-war survivors, and the two men fighting over the last (white) woman on Earth are both white – the black male character Charles does not figure as a possible suitor. Of the two white men, Eric and Michael, Eric is a racist who says it is a mistake Charles survived the attack, and he does not address him directly, calling Charles ‘this one’. Echoing the rhetoric of segregation, Eric does not want to eat and sleep under the same roof as Charles and demands he be cast out of the house the survivors all live in. To detach audience allegiances from Eric, James Anderson’s uneasy performance and the way he is lit in shots demonize his character. Eric secretly murders Charles and leaves the house with the last woman, Roseanne, and her newborn baby. Eric succumbs to the radiation that is still poisoning America’s cities, and while Roseanne returns to the house, her baby dies. One could argue that the death of the baby symbolizes the death of future generations and therefore the demise of the human race, but the final shot of Roseanne and Michael (now the last male on Earth) suggests they will have children together: they lean in to each other’s bodies in front of newly hoed farmland, and a quotation from Revelation praising ‘all things new’ (Rev. 21) is laid over this image. As opposed to the conclusion of *The World, The Flesh and the Devil*, where reproduction of the species and integration was linked, in *Five* the possibility of reproduction is more tentative and there is no suggestion that the future of humanity will be anything other than white. With the death of the racist Eric, racial antagonism
may no longer exist in Earth’s future, but the elimination of racial difference makes the construction of a tolerant, integrated community irrelevant, too.

Five was primarily filmed in director Arch Oboler’s own home, the Cliff House designed by Frank Lloyd Wright. It is an amalgam of styles, simultaneously old-fashioned (rough concrete and wooden planking reminiscent of a frontier fort) and futuristic (striking odd angles). The characters have all travelled across America to this building, whose location in the hills shields it from radioactivity; its modernist shape suggests it belongs to the future and will carry the characters safely into that future through the deadly fallout. Against Eric’s racism, Michael makes a speech where he expresses his desire for the house to become a harmonious community very different from the world that existed before the war: ‘let’s not make the mistakes they did, the millions of them. Let’s work together, live together, like friends.’ Thinking about the community Michael wants to build in the house, it is appropriate to consider the 1950s writer Van Wyck Brooks and his views on Wright’s architecture:

In his essay ‘Transnationalism’, Van Wyck Brooks cites Frank Lloyd Wright’s ‘open plan in architecture as an appropriate example of what we might call ‘melting-pot art forms’ since it ‘abolishes all the partitions that have divided room from room’ in the same way the ‘human laboratory’ of America ‘abolishes the barriers between man and man in the interest of a wide sociality and all-human freedom. Wright has translated Walt Whitman into architecture.’

This combination of the architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright, the American melting pot and surviving a nuclear war recurs in Philip Wylie’s novel Triumph (1963; a ‘condensed’ version of the novel was published in the Saturday Evening Post on 2 February 1963). In Wylie’s novel, millionaire Vance Farr has torn down his family home set on a Connecticut hill and replaced it with a new building, named Uxmal, complete with an extensive underground survival complex: ‘they tore down the Victorian job, gazebos and all, and had one of that – what-was-his-name – that Frank Lloyd Wright’s students – man of fifty, now – design their new house’. The abolition of boundaries Brooks identifies as characteristic of Wright’s style is evident in Uxmal’s living room, a long room with a glass exterior wall whose subdivision is effected by a recessed floor. Because it is set in the future, Triumph has to make Uxmal’s designer a student of Wright rather than the architect himself, but the influence is apparent, with the low design of the building repeatedly described as ‘modernistic’ and ‘Mayan’.

As with the Cliff House, Uxmal aesthetically bridges the past and the future.
These buildings protect their residents within their walls and preserve them safely through time and nuclear attack.

The 14 inhabitants of the underground complex in Triumph are suitably mixed in ethnic origin: Chinese American, Japanese American, Jewish American, Italian American, half Hispanic-half Irish American, African American and a handful of Anglo Americans – the Farr family trace their lineage back to the Puritans. Valerie Farr, the group matriarch, describes the assembled survivors as a microcosm of the USA’s productive ethnic diversity: ‘its perfectly miraculous, this group! A real League of Nations, yet everyone an American’. Her invocation of American identity as the connective tissue for a federation of nationalities echoes the model of ‘Trans-National America’ advocated by social theorist Randolph Bourne in 1916. Bourne opposed the melting-pot model because he saw its homogeneous Americanness as really being Anglo-Americaness. He hailed the distinctiveness of communities formed out of the Old World customs of immigrants and praised the interaction between members of discrete ethnic groups. For Bourne, this curiosity and open-mindedness towards different groups was characteristic of America’s cosmopolitanism. Given Brooks’s claims for Wright’s architecture, it is striking that neither the Cliff House nor Uxmal successfully preserve their ethnically plural American communities in Five or Triumph. The pluralism of the Cliff House is eliminated by murder; the Uxmal house is destroyed in the nuclear strike, and the underground complex is unable to protect the survivors indefinitely. One wonders how mischievous Wylie is being when Valerie describes the group as a League of Nations, given the widely perceived bathetic status of that international organization, dismissed by Franklin D. Roosevelt as ‘nothing more than a debating society and a poor one at that’.

In terms of Triumph’s portrayal of ethnic difference, the following example, taken from the Chinese-American character Lotus (Lodi) Li’s diary, is paradigmatic:

‘I used, not so much to envy, but sort of wistfully wonder what it was like to be one of those graceful, tall, blonde women that nineteenth-century novelists used to call “willowy.” [Hispanic-Irish-American] Angelica is too shaped and too dark-haired to qualify, but [Anglo-American] Faith does. And I know what it is like to be like Faith.

‘Not a bit different from being slant-eyed and Chinese! Or from being colored, like [African-American] Connie!

The dramatic pause at the end of that third sentence mirrors the narration as a whole. It suggests that Lodi can only know what it means to be graceful
and blonde vicariously, via her friend Faith Farr – but then it trumps that difference in the next sentence, asserting the identical experience of these female characters. Physical difference is not denied; its presence is conceded but rendered meaningless in terms of phenomenological being. Throughout the novel, the third-person narrator works hard to eliminate racial boundaries between the characters: inescapable differences are set up only to be revealed as surface prejudices obscuring essential human sameness.

As in *Five*, the character who wants to leave the dwelling and the multiracial community is a white male racist whose attenuated self-preservation impulse is an aspect of wider insanity. In *Triumph*, that character is Kit, and he romps away from the safety of the underground complex, shouting back to the Jewish-American hero Ben Bernman:

> [You] and your scientist pals have a conspiracy! To keep us buried till we die! Jew, Chinese woman, Jap kid. You’re taking a revenge on the white race. I’m fed up with those caves [...] So I’m going, as a test! When I get back, and when the gang sees how you’ve betrayed all of us, you’ll be slaughtered, Mr. Jew Doctor Benvenuto Cellini Bernman and young [Japanese-American] George Hyama! Then we white poeple [sic] will all come out, and your crazy plot will be futile!110

His description of George and Ben’s ‘crazy’ plot is deeply ironic and putting racism in the mouth of a madman is one means these texts have to discredit it. Kit’s delusions are almost humorous, and his assured death ends his objections to the transnational American community. Beneath the ridiculousness, though, Kit’s use of the word ‘slaughtered’ indicates an exterminatory desire. In this depopulated America, Kit wants to repopulate with white stock, and not only will the non-white members of the community be prevented from living with the white Americans, they will be removed from America’s future.

Characters in *Triumph* proclaim nuclear weapons to be racially white technology, but as observed elsewhere in this study, nuclear war centres white privilege around the world. Ben doubts that science can prove that any race possesses a ‘special quality or superiority’; he thinks the only important difference is ‘*Environment, and the attitudes of other people to anyone, or to any minority group, regarded as “different” – and, of course, in consequence, as inferior*’. Ben’s interior monologue puts ‘white men’ in quotation marks to make dubious their status as a racial group, but he is in no doubt that people who have been incorporated (albeit uncertainly) into this category have committed historical crimes: the English and Spanish settlement of
the Americas, the enslavement of Africans, the colonization of Asia and European anti-Semitism. For Ben, the racial arrogance of whites culminates in nuclear war: Old Testament references are used to suggest white North Americans and Europeans have died for their sins. The ‘white man’s world’ has ‘committed suicide’, killing ‘the helpless islands of the Japanese people’, too. Labelling the white population of the Northern Hemisphere the ‘bigoted billion’, Ben suggests their ‘world-conquering aspirations’ sealed their fate. The genocide of nuclear war is a differently scaled version of Kit’s white supremacism, the racial arrogance which led him to leave the safety of the shelter in an insane posture of invulnerability. Both are suicidal acts in *Triumph*’s narrative. With white supremacism destroying itself, the novel is unequivocal that the post-apocalyptic Earth will grow into a more peaceful and racially egalitarian place than the pre-apocalyptic world that incubated the Cold War. The survivors beneath Uxmal are told over the radio that the parliaments of ‘Australia and New Zealand [are] creating a world outfit […] International government, of course’. This international ruling body will use hydrogen bombs to maintain the peace, and all the surviving nations have a stake: ‘Everybody’s coming in – the Latins, the African nations, Indonesia.’ With such an inclusive international government, the existing power relations will look very different as ‘men are to become free and equal’ and the Australian speaker specifies what kind of freedom and equality will be enshrined in the future: ‘Without racial differences. Took the extermination of half a world to bring it about. Worth it, though, perhaps, eh?’ The ‘federation of racially, nationally free and equal people’ the American survivors are joining is not the world they have left.

As the only Americans left alive, the country’s future will be shaped by the survivors’ selection of reproductive mates. Those decisions reveal the extent to which the novel’s post-nuclear-war community is transnational – and which relationships touch an especially sore area of the racist imagination. The character of Connie Davey, an African-American woman, and her relationship with Pete Williams, an Anglo-American, lies at the ultimate limit of *Triumph*’s liberal desegregationist vision. One such limit is the recurrent primitivism that filters the narration’s depiction of Connie. She is portrayed as animalistic and stunningly beautiful, and her attractiveness seems to be an index of her feline muscularity. This is accompanied by her extraordinary intelligence and learning – physical power is matched by intellectual power. When she first enters the narrative, the short sentences mirror the calculating absorption of Ben as he takes in Connie’s visual presence: ‘A Negress. Tall, tawny-skinned, lithe, and striding, almost – yet with feral smoothness.’ Her physical power seems in tension with
her gracefulness, as it is when Connie is described by Vance Farr to Ben. Vance’s fixated description is a glimpse of the effect her physicality has on men like him:

She had the body of a leopard, golden-brown, and just that taut, that alive. [She] became the most-chased young woman in this part of Connecticut – and many pursuers were older men, also – white, rich, and very respectable, except when they saw Connie. […] On a glance, she makes ninety-five per cent of all men of all sorts and ages forget she is a Negress and concentrate on the fact she’s a woman.

Connie can control her physicality, then, but most male observers cannot control their reaction to her – her animal power is irresistible. Vance’s comments indicate that her race would usually be a bar to the older white ‘respectable’ men chasing her, but her feminine allure exceeds those social constraints (to take this portrayal at face value would mean ignoring the extensive evidence that black women in America were potent objects of white sexual desire during and since the era of plantation slavery). Ben’s uneasy internal reaction to Vance’s lurid perceptiveness makes the reader sceptical of the millionaire’s statements, but the third-person narrator and Ben’s thoughts validate Vance’s infatuation. She is a ‘nubile woman’ possessing a ‘feline, dark body, a black panther body’. The double lexical markers of her catlike-ness and her blackness are repeated from her earlier representation. Despite her composure and education, this physicality threatens to become savagery: Ben thinks of her as a ‘calm, intelligent, highly-educated, yet feral woman’.113 Wildness and primitivism are constantly present in the adjectives used to describe her, threatening to undo her reason, as they do in the final part of this sentence that acts as a rebuttal (‘yet’) to her self-control and learning (‘calm, intelligent, highly-educated’).

When Connie speaks for herself in Triumph, her evident calm rationality gives a different impression from the repeated descriptions of her as catlike and ‘feral’. It is suggested that racialized sexual codes have forced her to self-reflect continually on her romantic relationships. Her growing attachment to Pete is no exception to this self-consciousness, leading Connie to draw back from the relationship. Not because of the absence of desire: ‘Pete wants me. I want him. Only human.’ According to Lodi, the pre-nuclear-war sexual codes have been transcended because Connie and Pete see each other’s humanity rather than a skin colour: Pete has ‘already forgotten he’s white and she’s black […] when somebody doesn’t remember color any more, that makes everything different’. Connie thinks this is possible because the underground community has been deracinated.
from American society and she withdraws from the romantic relationship because ‘if we ever get back to humanity’ she believes being re-immersed in racial codes would compel Pete to re-acknowledge his identity as a white American, an identity that would catastrophically collide with his love for her: ‘a white man too close always feels he’s too close – to a colored girl. I hate that. And that would smash up Pete’. The enclosure of the underground survival complex has meant freedom from society’s racial codes, but if the survivors were restored to the society they knew before the war, physical liberty would come with claustrophobic social surveillance, and under that pressure Pete would buckle.

Seen through the pre-nuclear-war social codes of romantic coupling, Connie and Pete’s relationship bears the greatest strain out of all the heterosexual relationships inside the underground complex. After the radio contact with Australia that proclaims the end of racism, Ben makes a concluding speech hailing the enormously increased probability of the pair living and loving together. The length of the speech (approximately one-and-a-half pages), its position as the last reported speech in Triumph, Ben’s courage and humility (in summing up the group’s achievements he omits his own acts of life-risking heroism) and it going uninterrupted all add to the moral authority of Ben’s arbitration on the meaning of their survival. With this authority Ben interprets the disengagement of Connie and Pete’s relationship as evidence, not of the absence of love, but of its profound affirmation: their actions were undertaken to avoid hurting each other in the future. The post-nuclear-war southern hemisphere represents a benign social environment for Pete and Connie, one where it ‘seems at least possible’ they can ‘resume their love’. Triumph turns the ability of individual characters to love across the colour line into a principle that the world of the future will live by, using love as a counterpoint to the national and racial separatism that compels humans to assert their allegiance to descent-based identities. Love has operated in this manner in American culture for centuries: presenting the romantic bond between a man and a woman as a force of nature robs descent identities of their claims to naturalness. Ben’s mantra is that the underground community has survived because of the characters’ love; they ‘have learned’ the ‘error’ of the world that went to nuclear war, which is that it ‘came to love things more than one another’. The narration leaves no doubt that the love for other humans prescribed to prevent another nuclear war is the equivalent of the love transcending racial and ethnic division that lies between several of the underground couples. Ben ends his speech by identifying the absence of this love in the USSR and the USA of the 1960s, committing himself ‘to embody [love] always’, and finally embracing Faith, the woman he had
been reluctant to declare his love for before the war because he perceived their descent identities to be incompatible.¹¹⁷

The offspring of Faith and Ben and the other couples will be the Americans of the future – or they would be, if the community of survivors was to remain on (or beneath) American soil. The narrative ends with the survivors waiting to be airlifted out of the country by Australians. The transnational promise of intermixture and openness that Brooks saw in Frank Lloyd Wright’s design might survive, but not on American soil (and the modernistic house itself has been destroyed in the war), as an Australian helicopter pilot ponders:

They were Yanks. Americans. Specifically, North Americans. Citizens of the United States. All who remained alive in that enormous nation. [...] They would leave the United States of America forever. And when they had gone, the place would have no name.¹¹⁸

The conclusion of Triumph seals the ongoing existence of humankind, yet melancholy supersedes hope as the overriding emotional mode. How does this emotion programme the reader when deciphering the new world that the survivors are entering? It turns a last-minute rescue into an elegy for the nation. The transnational community is airlifted off its hill, but the italicized ‘were’ signals the past tense of Americanness. The novel ends in mourning for the country that is about to stop existing. From Wylie’s perspective in 1963, sacrificing America enabled a world where an African-American woman and Anglo-American man would have a chance to love openly and in public.

Breeding beyond the Species

As hinted by the title of Ray Bradbury’s ‘The Other Foot’ (from his 1951 collection The Illustrated Man), in this short story America’s racial balance of power is reversed in the future. Following the exclusively black colonization of Mars and a subsequent nuclear war on Earth that leaves few survivors, the new inhabitants of the red planet become responsible for the preservation of non-black humankind. Initially, it seems the nuclear-war survivors (and by corollary, a multiracial humankind) will be saved and brought to Mars, but with the white nuclear-war survivors subjected to segregation and lynching. The narrative of ‘The Other Foot’ eventually avoids this future, and as in Triumph, harmonious interracial social relations become possible because the USA has been atomized beyond recognition.

In ‘The Other Foot’, the black population of Earth ‘just up and walked
away and came to Mars’ in the mid-1960s, migrating to a place free of racial persecution. An exodus of African Americans en masse to Mars to escape lynching and economic servitude also featured in Bradbury’s earlier The Martian Chronicles (1950). In that instance, the migration was not racially exclusive, although, as in ‘The Other Foot’, it is almost immediately followed by nuclear war on Earth. In the latter story, ‘the Chinese and the Indians and the Russians and the British and the Americans’ fight a nuclear war into the mid-1980s; a year after the war’s conclusion, the ‘five hundred thousand’ survivors, of ‘all kinds and types’, are able to salvage ‘enough metal to build […] one rocket’. A small group flies to Mars, where their presence has some novelty value, since ‘no white men’ve come up’ to the planet since the black population migrated there. The two protagonists of the narrative, Hattie and her husband Willie, rush to be at the landing site when the rocket lands, and Willie accurately predicts that with Earth wrecked beyond repair, the survivors have sent an advance party to ask the new Martians for sanctuary and assistance in ferrying the last Earthlings off the planet. Exactly how this parley will be resolved is the narrative tension at the centre of Bradbury’s short story, since Willie and other new Martians are preparing to instate a system of segregation resembling that of the United States, but inverted. Willie tells Hattie that white people can come up and live and work here […] All they got to do to deserve it is live in their own small part of town, the slums, and shine our shoes for us, and mop up our trash, and sit in the last row in the balcony. […] And once a week we hang one or two of them. Simple.

Willie prepares to greet the first white man to emerge from the rocket by readying his lynching rope (his murderous impulse is made more understandable because on Earth his father was lynched and his mother was shot). A thin, trembling white man addresses the crowd from the rocket, conceding that the humans who stayed on Earth have been stupid and evil, and that in exchange for being ‘taken in’ the nuclear-war survivors will ‘do the things you did for us – clean your houses, cook your meals, shine your shoes, and humble ourselves in the sight of God for the things we have done over the centuries to ourselves, to others, to you’. Bradbury elongates the tension by stretching the ensuing silence and hesitation over several paragraphs. Hattie is desperate to turn Willie away from his homicidal wrath and she interrupts the silence with questions concerning Greenwater, Alabama, the town they lived in on Earth. The white man reports that Greenwater has been destroyed in the nuclear war, so the
spaces that symbolized racist violence to Willie – the tree where his father was hanged and the shack where his mother was shot – no longer exist. Without their presence to anchor the memory of his parents’ murders in the physical environment, and knowing that the ‘big-pillared houses’ of white privilege have also been ‘ripped into confetti’, Willie has nothing left to hate; the landscape of the United States cannot be invested with the psychic trace of past atrocities if the country is an unrecognizable wasteland. Willie, acting as a spokesperson for the new Martians, drops his rope and tells the visitors they will not have to toil as a racially segregated underclass. When Willie states, ‘everything’s even. We can start all over again, on the same level’, his choice of imagery suggests a newly discovered social parity between the races and the sense of living in a universe of undifferentiated horizontal space. In Willie’s reading of the situation, African Americans had not been at home in segregated America; after the nuclear war, ‘the white man’s […] got no home’ either, and from that shared experience of homelessness and loneliness different races can be equal on Mars.121

Extending the theme of outer-space colonization and racial tension, the final section of Walter M. Miller Jr’s A Canticle for Leibowitz (published as a novel in 1959 but released in serial forms earlier in the 1950s) is set long after a nuclear war. Humankind has rebuilt itself to the point where it can use nuclear weapons again, and with the threat of a second nuclear war growing in likelihood, different racial groups compete to colonize outer space. After the Asian Coalition sends ‘the first colony ship’ into orbit, competitors in the West protest, ‘Are we to let the “inferior” races inherit the stars?’ To demonstrate their racial superiority, ‘black people, brown, white, and yellow people’ launch their own ‘colonies’. Casting a satirical shadow over the competition between races on the colony planet, geneticists point out that ‘since each racial group was so small’ it was necessary for their descendants to intermarry to avoid ‘deteriorative genetic drift due to inbreeding’. Interracial competition spurs outer-space colonization but interracial reproduction becomes a prerequisite of survival.122 Sharp appreciates this novel as ‘a strong critique of contemporary American society’ and, like the ‘wry’ geneticists in Canticle, the novel invites readers to mock the failed ambitions of race supremacists in the 1950s as well as in the future. In its narrative, the decision-makers at state level cannot preserve the human race on Earth, let alone the interests of the race they avow to promote. If humankind is to survive, it is – by genetic necessity – forced to ‘cross-breed’, a metaphor for the necessity of ‘racial tolerance and cooperation’.123

‘Cross-breeding’ as a metaphor for interracial cooperation is part of the
texture of *Dawn* (1987), the first in the *Lilith’s Brood* series of novels (originally entitled the *Xenogenesis* trilogy) by African-American SF writer Octavia E. Butler. *Dawn*'s post-nuclear-war future slides the metaphor used in *Canticle* over to humans breeding with an alien species. The extraterrestrial Oankali have saved the human survivors of World War Three and placed them in suspended animation. The humans are being awakened slowly, and *Dawn*'s protagonist, Lilith Iyapo, has been chosen to assist other human beings in acclimatizing to the interspecies breeding planned by the Oankali. In relation to *Dawn*, Sherryl Vint is right to suggest all of Butler’s novels can be read as neo-slave narratives. One could certainly see the novel’s dramatic scenario as an allegory for the dilemma faced by the transplanted New World slave population and their descendants. Lilith has been permanently separated from her first family and physically removed by her captors into a realm they control, and the Oankali intend to coerce Lilith into procreating with them. Growing to accept these terms of survival, Lilith must ‘build’ a ‘livable future’ with the ‘former oppressors’.124

What I want to do here is consider how the questions confronting Lilith connect racial and gender distinctions to the heightened nuclear consciousness of the 1980s. Butler uses the relationship between human and Oankali to dramatize debates about living with difference: once again the question ‘how far can one live with difference?’ is translated into the question ‘with whom will one reproduce?’ And once again, the answer to that last question holds a clue to the future of humankind. Those questions are immediately suggested by the first name of the main character in *Dawn*. Lilith’s name is borrowed from the first woman in Judaic folklore, who preceded Eve as Adam’s wife. Lilith was made at the same moment as Adam but she refused to obey his authority. She left Eden and mated with demons, the devil or an archangel, depending on the version of the tale, and the mythical Lilith’s procreation of a monstrous race outside humankind is an evident reference point for the dilemma faced by Butler’s Lilith.125

In the essay ‘The Monophobic Response’ (1995), Butler writes of a human need ‘to create aliens’ that stems from our inability ‘to get along with those aliens who are closest to us’ – other humans. She states the desire for division, ‘dominance, and exclusivity’ enacted in the ‘terrible sibling rivalry going [on] within the human family’ is expressed through the creation of extraterrestrials.126 Butler uses extraterrestrial–human encounters in *Dawn* to reflect back on human division and hierarchy, drawing attention to this tendency rather than sublimating it into a fascination with outer-space aliens. An explicit theme of the novel is the harm done when the need for ‘dominance’ is ignored rather than seeing it as an
evolutionary inheritance stretching back to the first humans. 

*Dawn* feeds off the antinuclear sentiment that ran high during the 1980s and the renewed tension between the USSR and the USA in the first half of that decade. The nuclear belligerency of President Reagan compelled Butler to interrogate flaws in the species:

During the early part of the Reagan era, there were people who thought we could win a nuclear war and rid ourselves of the Soviet Empire. I thought they were nuts, but they were there. And Reagan got into office in spite of the fact that he thought a nuclear war was winnable. […] I got my idea for the *Xenogenesis* books (*Dawn, Adolescence Rites* and *Imago*) from Ronald Reagan because he was advocating this kind of thing. I thought there must be something basic, something really genetically wrong with us if we’re falling for this stuff.127

Jonathan Scott does not see the difference between ‘black’ and ‘white’ in Butler’s work as a natural distinction but as a boundary drawn to demarcate social blocs; as such, ‘white racial oppression is about social control, not phenotype’.128 Butler’s interview is not incompatible with Scott’s conceptualization of racial difference here, but following her line of thought, the construction of racial difference in the *Lilith’s Brood* trilogy does appear to be an example of a ‘genetic’ human inclination to organize human individuals and groups into hierarchies. This is best seen in *Dawn* in the dialogue between Lilith and Jdahya, one of the Oankali:

‘You have a mismatched pair of genetic characteristics. Either alone would have been useful, would have aided the survival of your species. But the two together are lethal. It was only a matter of time before they destroyed you.’ […] ‘You are intelligent’, he said. ‘That’s the newer of the two characteristics, and the one you might have put to work to save yourselves. You are potentially one of the most intelligent species we’ve found […] You are hierarchical. That’s the older and more entrenched characteristic. We saw it in your closest animal relatives and in your most distant ones. It’s a terrestrial characteristic. When human intelligence served it instead of guiding it, when human intelligence did not even acknowledge it as a problem, but took pride in it or did not notice it at all […] That was like ignoring cancer. I think your people did not realize what a dangerous thing they were doing.’129

Hierarchical thinking produced the racism of the novel’s past, and, as Jdahya’s comments indicate, when intelligence is placed in the service of hierarchical thinking, weapons that can shatter a planet are built and used.
Butler explains she chose a nuclear war because it evidences the dangerousness of this tendency to think of oneself as superior to others: ‘I put this [debate about humans’ inherited characteristics] after the big war because it’s kind of an example. We’ve one-upped ourselves to death, just our tendency to one-up each other as individuals and groups, large and small.’ For the character Tate in *Dawn*, who believes in an ‘original sin’ model of human nature, nuclear war was inevitable: ‘Human beings are more alike than different – damn sure more alike than we like to admit. I wonder if the same thing wouldn’t have happened eventually, no matter which two cultures gained the ability to wipe one another out along with the rest of the world.’

Perhaps to avoid the obvious defeatism to which this *Weltanschauung* could lead – that war and racism can be ameliorated but never eliminated – Jdahya adds, ‘It isn’t simple, and it isn’t a gene or two. It’s many – the result of a tangled combination of factors that only begins with genes.’ Butler blends human nature and social organization in explaining why the world slips into nuclear war, seemingly using the Oankali as a mouthpiece for her own views. When Lilith asks whether humans ‘were genetically programmed to do what we did, blow ourselves up’, Jdahya’s explanation parallels humanity’s genetic inheritance to the cancer cells the Oankali removed from Lilith. The cancer, part of Lilith’s inherited disposition, is small and once discovered can be ‘cured’. ‘But’, Jdahya asks her, ‘what if you hadn’t recognized the significance of your family history? What if we or the humans hadn’t discovered the cancer?’ Lilith’s answer – that it would have killed her – is the key to understanding humanity’s fate. ‘If [humankind] had been able to perceive and solve their problem, they might have been able to avoid destruction. Of course, they too would have to remember to re-examine themselves periodically.’ Humanity was unable to use its intelligence to identify the will to be superior and therefore was unable to isolate that tendency from the social body. In Jdahya’s metaphor this tendency cannot be eradicated decisively because it is part of our humanity. But constant vigilance can prevent it damaging and killing, a constant vigilance informed by collective memory of this inheritance.

Several examples in the novel indicate how this inheritance – referred to as the ‘Human Contradiction’ – leads to suspicion, violence and death. The reactions to Joseph and Lilith’s relationship suggest hierarchy and prejudice remain hardwired into the human psyche. Joseph is a Canadian of East Asian descent, and unpleasantly familiar forms of homophobia and racism secretly circulate against him: an Oankali reports, ‘there are already two human males speaking against him, trying to turn others against him.'
One has decided he’s something called a faggot and the other dislikes the shape of his eyes.’ Lilith explicitly says the tensions rising between the human survivors are comparable to the spirit of violence that pitted the superpowers against each other. ‘It’s like “Let’s play Americans against the Russians. Again.”’ Curt Loehr, a New York cop, embodies the desire for hierarchy when he leads a splinter group of humans away from Lilith and Joseph’s group. The Oankali alter Lilith and Joseph’s DNA so they can heal more quickly, and fearing this regenerative ability, Loehr hacks Joseph’s head off. Through free indirect discourse, Lilith calls this an act of ‘Insanity!’ which connects Joseph’s murder to the nuclear war, something she refers to as ‘an insane act’.134

Dawn can be usefully read alongside the public debate taking place on the other side of the Atlantic in the 1980s. In The Meaning of Conservatism (1980), the British conservative philosopher Roger Scruton wrote that people naturally seek the company of those who resemble themselves. Scruton defends ‘Britons [who] feel strongly about something which was once called “the alien wedge” [of immigrant communities]’. He argues that the sentiments of such Britons ‘involve natural prejudice, and a desire for the company of one’s kind. That is hardly sufficient grounds to condemn them as “racist”.’135 Similarly, Ray Honeyford stated in the collection Anti-Racism: An Assault on Education and Value (1986) that ‘prejudice’ is acceptable when it means ‘no more than a preference for one’s own kind’.136 The other humans’ hostility to Joseph and Lilith might be more evidence of what Scruton calls ‘natural prejudice’ – presumably, an inborn preference for people who are similar to us. As G. A. Cohen notes, though, the language used by Scruton and Honeyford is vague: what does ‘one’s kind’ mean? Butler uses the relationship between Joseph and Lilith to underscore one of Dawn’s main points: sameness takes place on several levels beyond that of physiology. By doing so, Butler talks back to the preference for ‘one’s kind’ that Scruton and Honeyford expressed in terms of race.137 In Dawn, preference for sameness does not only mean physical resemblance – it can mean a shared set of values. Before they awakened Lilith’s human companions, one of the Oankali thought she ‘would choose one of the big dark ones [i.e. an Afro-Caribbean male]’ as her romantic partner ‘because they’re like you [in appearance]’. Jdahya, however, thought she would choose Joseph for the same reason: ‘During his testing, his responses were closer to yours than anyone else I’m aware of. He doesn’t look like you, but he’s like you.’138 Reconciliation, then, is not the best way to describe the politics of difference being worked through in Dawn. What readers are asked to consider is the recognition of sameness that coexists with physical dissimilarity.
Meditating on coming to terms with difference – and not seeing difference as inferiority, that deadly human inheritance – *Dawn* is hopeful that even when repugnance is the immediate emotional response, a shared set of terms will be recognized by both parties, from which solidarity of objectives can be formed. The narrative of the novel implies this process in the journey that Lilith makes, from recoiling against the Oankali, to suspicion over their intentions, to empathizing with their values, and finally to committing herself to the extraterrestrials’ vision of the future against those humans who cannot sever their repulsion. Near the start of the narrative, the novel uses a series of extended accounts to convey her slow, difficult process of tolerating their Otherness:

She awoke abruptly, twisting around to look at him. He was still on the platform, his position hardly altered. When his head tentacles swept in her direction she got up and ran into the bathroom. He let her hide there for a while, let her wash and be alone and wallow in self-pity and self-contempt. She could not remember ever having been so continually afraid, so out of control of her emotions.

The force of this reaction is made so strong in order for the reader to see the instinctual repulsion Lilith must overcome. Lilith describes what she is experiencing as a ‘true xenophobia’, and in intertwining desire and repulsion her ‘ambivalence exactly echoes the psychic structure of racism’. Luckhurst reads Lilith’s complex emotional response to the Oankali and her situation (a residue of resentment lingers throughout the trilogy) in terms of Butler’s entire oeuvre and the moral responsibility that surrounds her conceptualization of hybridity. Luckhurst wants to avoid calling Butler’s work ‘hybrid’ because of that term’s celebratory associations – the ‘automatic utopianism’ bound up in its usage. Butler’s engagement with hybrid states is never easy or euphoric; it is morally conflicted and subject to a barrage of emotional responses. How could it be otherwise, when Butler’s SF and its depiction of biological intermixture constantly thematizes how twentieth-century cultural hybridity has so often been arrived at as a legacy of slavery and colonialism? Luckhurst usefully terms Butler’s writing as ‘miscegnate fictions’, defining her work in relation to the political and historical contexts that considered racial intermixture to be horrifying and wrong. Butler understands that the influence of those contexts makes sanctifying the figure of the hybrid simplistic, and lacking the moral power that comes from acknowledging the much more complicated history addressed by her miscegnate fictions. As part of this complexity, the human Paul Titus sees interspecies breeding as a form of genocide for terrestrial humans: ‘When they’re finished with us there
won’t be any real human beings left. [...] What the bombs started, they’ll finish.’ Alternatively, Jdahya calls it ‘trade’, an exchange promising to enrich both parties.\textsuperscript{141} Lilith aligns herself with the project to repopulate the Earth with a mixed species. She retains reservations, but after seeing the murderous ramifications of the Human Contradiction, ‘human nature […] does not appear to be particularly worthy of preservation’.\textsuperscript{142}

The narrative presents the Oankali and humans as having elective affinities that promise a greater future than antagonism built on physical difference. There is, however, a perceptual gap between the Oankali’s perception of nuclear war and the norms of Cold War deterrence that serves \textit{Dawn}’s antinuclear politics. The interpretation of a different species makes the illogic of nuclear war come into relief. They tell Lilith they believed ‘that there had been a consensus among you, that you had agreed to die’. Even after they gain an understanding of the Cold War context that led to nuclear war, it remains distant and inassimilable to thought. There is a degree of irony in this physically abhorrent extraterrestrial professing that nuclear stockpiling was ‘Frighteningly alien’. Their alterity to the historical context that made nuclear war legible is analogous to Lilith’s personal politics, and she tells them, ‘Yes. I sort of feel that way myself, even though they’re my people. It was […] beyond insanity.’ Their shared incredulity at the people of Earth’s willingness to accept the threat of nuclear war reinforces the differing notions of likeness presented by \textit{Dawn}: one may be like the people who share one’s outlook on the world, rather than being like people closest to one’s physiological constitution. The Oankali’s interpretation of nuclear war as species suicide mirrors Lilith’s earlier reflection on the event, that a ‘handful of people tried to commit humanicide. They had nearly succeeded.’\textsuperscript{143}

\textit{Dawn} reflects on the need to acknowledge sameness against the inclinations of the Human Contradiction. Various examples connect the humans’ fear of the Oankali to the terrestrial prejudices of homophobia and racism (these connections become more explicit later in the \textit{Lilith’s Brood} trilogy\textsuperscript{144}), and to the destruction of nuclear war. Focalized through Lilith, the novel tracks how the end of the species is worth pursuing, not the end of the species in World War Three but through interbreeding with aliens. The behaviour of various humans in the narrative indicates that the permanent transformation of human nature may mitigate the Human Contradiction, and as such, should not be feared. Indeed, although humans are encouraged into relationships with aliens in the novel, it appears that the lessons learnt in this post-apocalyptic world are applicable to combat the forces of racism at work in twentieth-century America, where strong prohibitions have policed love and procreation outside one’s racial or
ethnic group. Dawn’s combination of antiracism and antinuclear activism is one used again and again by writers, thinkers and performers from the black Atlantic to scrutinize the direction Western modernity was taking, as explored in the next chapter.

Notes


17. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 177.


49. Wylie, *Tomorrow!*, pp. 107, 149.
86. Schwartz, ‘Family, Gender, and Society in 1950s American Fiction of Nuclear Apocalypse’, p. 419.
91. Adilifu Nama, *Black Space: Imagining Race in Science Fiction Film*, University of Texas Press, Austin (2008), p. 44.
130. Butler, ‘Interview with Joshunda Sanders’.
134. Butler, *Dawn*, pp. 159, 175, 224, 33. See also pp. 14–15, 132–33, and


140. Luckhurst, “‘Horror and Beauty in Rare Combination’”, pp. 31–37.


