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abolitionism: compared with Indian reform movement, 51, 65–66, 122n22; and enslaved Indians, 119n1; and gender oppression, 31; and North-South relations, 32; and Phillips, 51, 69; white women’s involvement in, 27, 30, 31, 32, 52, 120n8. See also slavery

“Accent of the Future” (James), 29, 41
Across the Chasm (Magruder), 6
The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (Twain), 1–3, 10, 12, 23–24, 115n15, 123n30
African Americans. See blacks
Alaska, 113n2
Alemán, Jesse, 124–25n1
Almaguer, Tomás, 126n13
Almquist, Alan F., 125–26n8
amendments. See specific Constitutional amendments

“American Letters” (James), 21–22
“The American Novel of Dialect” (James), 21–22, 24–26, 28
The American Scene (James): “Accent of the Future” in, 29, 42; on Du Bois, 28; on English language, 44–45; on Harvard University’s Memorial Hall, 114n8; on immigrants, 35–38, 40, 41–45; on Irving’s house, 40; on modernity, 36–42; publication of, 3; on ruins, 1; on skyscrapers, 39–40, 42–43; on South and Southern, 28; on women’s preeminence, 19, 46–47
Ancient Society (Morgan), 72–74, 78, 116n19, 123n28
Anderson, Benedict, 10, 11, 34, 115n14, 116n17, 128n1
anthropology, 56, 59, 72–74, 83
anti-slavery movement. See abolitionism
Apache, 67. See also Indians
“An Appeal for the Indians” (Child), 79
Aranda, José, Jr., 92, 125n2, 126n10
Armstrong, Nancy, 113n4
assimilation, 57–60, 83–84, 123–24n33
Atalanta in the South (Elliott), 6
Athenaeum, Boston, 39
Atlanta Constitution, 24
Atlantic Monthly, 23, 30, 65

Benedict, Jeff, 124n36
Bhabha, Homi, 59–60, 84
The Birth of a Nation, 114n11
Black Atlantic (Gilroy), 112
Black Codes, 126n8
blacks: and Black Codes, 128n8; in
Cable’s The Grandissimes, 14–15
deportation of, to Liberia, 54, 121n7–8; legal status of, 65–66, 71–72; lynching of black men, 5, 8, 17, 28; and miscegenation, 15, 35, 116n18; quadroon mistress in
Civil Rights Act (1866), 71
Civil War: and abolitionism, 26–27, 65;
Century Magazine series on, 5, 114n7; commemorations and monuments to, 6; and crisis of national identity, 5, 8, 58; and James, 23, 28–29, 38; military promotion for Ruiz de Burton's husband during, 126n10
civitas, 74
The Clansman (Dixon), 7–10, 114nn10–11
Clinton, Catherine, 32, 118n8
colonial difference: in California, 85–88; Chatterjee on, 53, 121–22nn19–20; dismantling of, 112; and feminist movement, 54; and Indian reform movement, 53–56, 59–61; in Jackson's Ramona, 81, 85–86; in Ruiz de Burton's The Squatter and the Don, 86–89; and white women's role, 83
colonial governance, 60–61, 120n5
colonial mimicry, 59–60, 82–84
colonialism. See imperialism
Columbia University, 117n4
Compromise of 1850, 4–5
The Confidence-Man (Melville), 66
A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court (Twain), 15–18
consent/force dichotomy, 126–27n17
Constitutional amendments. See specific amendments
convict lease system, 90
Conway, Moncure Daniel, 122n22
Cooper, James Fenimore, 10, 12, 119n2
Coronel, Don Antonio, 86
Crawford, Kathleen, 126n10
Creole nationalisms, 10, 11, 115n14, 116n17, 125n6, 128n1
Crook, George, 67
Cuba, 113n2, 129n3
Cultures of United States Imperialism (Kaplan and Pease), 113n3, 119–20n3
Daisy Miller (James), 29, 119n15
Dana, Richard Henry, 125n3
Darwin, Charles, 122n26, 127n20
Davis, Pauline Wright, 32
Dawes Act, 123n33, 124n36
De la Luz Montes, Amelia Maria, 125n4
DeForest, John, 6
Deloria, Philip, 118n11, 123n30
dialect: in Jackson's Ramona, 57–58; James on novel of dialect, 21–26, 28–29; James's refusal of, as literary strategy, 18, 28–29, 34–35, 49; in Twain's The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, 23–24
Dixon, Thomas, 7–10, 114nn10–11
Dodge, Richard Irving, 117n7
domesticity: and assimilation of Indians, 58, 83–84, 123–24n33; feminists versus Victorian ideal of, 32, 49; and frontier, 79–79; and gender division of labor, 8–9, 83–84; and imperialism, 3, 52–57, 82–84, 113–14nn4–5, 119n2; and Indian reform movement, 51–53, 58–59, 65, 83–84; and Indian reform novels, 50–53, 56–60, 76–77, 83; Jackson's Ramona and Indian domestication, 72–77, 85; Manifest Domestcity, 52–57, 72, 81, 120n4, 120n7; of Mission Indians, 72, 74–76; and writing, 61–62
Dominican Republic, 113n2
Don Quixote (Cervantes), 92
Dred Scott case, 121n12
Du Bois, E. C., 118n8
Du Bois, W. E. B., 27, 28, 100, 115n12
Dundy, Elmer, 67–68, 122n25
Dunning, William, 117n4
education of Indians, 76–77, 83, 84, 122n21
Eliot, T. S., 22
Elk, John, 70
Elk v. Wilkins, 70
Elliott, Maud Howe, 6
Ellis Island, 36
Emerson, Ralph Waldo, 117n4
empire. See imperialism
English language: and immigrants, 44–45; James on, 43–49; pronunciation and enunciation of, 43–46; Webster on American language, 117n4; and whiteness, 43–44, 49; and women’s speech, 42–49. See also dialect ethnology, 123–24n33

*The Europeans* (James), 29

family. See marriage

feminist movement: and colonial difference, 54; and imperialism, 82–84, 120–21n10; in James’s *The Bostonians*, 19, 27, 31–35, 46–47, 118n7; Manifest Domesticity and feminist studies, 120n4; relationships between racialized populations and feminists, 117n5; and romance of reunion, 31–35; scholarship on, 118n8; and suffrage movement, 123n31; versus Victorian ideal of domesticity, 32, 49

Fiedler, Leslie, 115n15

Fiftteenth Amendment, 32

Fletcher, Alice, 123–24n33

Follini, Tamara L., 118n12

*A Fool’s Errand* (Tourgée), 61

force/consent dichotomy, 126–27n17

Foucault, Michel, 122n26, 125n5

foundational fictions, 10–12, 115n13, 125n8

Fourteenth Amendment, 68, 70, 71

*Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper*, 118n10

Franklin, Benjamin, 62

Freedman, Jonathan, 23

freedmen. See blacks

“The Freedmen’s Case in Equity” (Cable), 15, 116n18, 121n16

French Revolution, 9

Freud, Sigmund, 122n26

frontier, 1, 67, 79–79, 117n4, 123n29

Gates, Merrill Edward, 77

gender: and blushing, 96–97; and discourse of separate spheres, 51–52, 83; division of labor based on, 8–9, 83–84, 104, 105–6; in James’s *The Bostonians*, 30, 33–35. See also feminist movement; women

Geronimo, 67

Gerwal, Interpol, 121n10

Gilder, Richard, 5, 30

Gillman, Susan, 112, 129n6

Gilroy, Paul, 112

*Glimpses of Three Coasts* (Jackson), 75, 86, 93

Goldman, Anne E., 124–25n1, 125n4

Graham, Wendy, 42

*The Grandissimes* (Cable), 5, 12–16

Grant, Ulysses S., 113n2

Gray, Horace, 70

Greaser Act (1855), 93

Griffin, Susan, 41, 118n13

Griffith, D. W., 114n11

Griswold del Castillo, Richard, 120n9

Guam, 83

Gutiérrez-Jones, Carl, 111, 126–27n17

Habberton, John, 6

Hale, Sarah Josepha, 54, 114n5, 120nn7–8

Harlan, John Marshall, 70–71

*Harper’s Weekly*, 23

Harris, Joel Chandler, 23, 24

Hawaii, 113n2

Hawthorne, Nathaniel, 11, 30

Heizer, Robert F., 125–26n8

Hemingway, Ernest, 23

*The Hidden Power* (Tibbles), 50–51, 52, 122n23

Higham, John, 118n9

historical alterity, 87–88, 112

historical romances, 3–7, 10, 11, 107. See also specific authors and their works

Hobsbawn, Eric, 116n1

Homestead Act (1862), 94

homosocial narratives, 10–12

*Houses and House-life of the Ameri-
can Aborigines (Morgan), 72, 123n28
Howells, William Dean, 25–26
Hoxie, Frederick, 62, 122n21
Huckleberry Finn (Twain), 1–3, 10, 12, 23–24, 115n15, 123n30
Hudson River School painters, 41
Hurtado, Albert L., 128n29

immigration, 35–38, 40, 42–45, 118nn9–10
imperialism: in antebellum period, 4–5, 113n2; and Berlin Conference (1885), 116n1; and Cable’s The Grandissimes, 12–16; and colonial governance, 60–61; and colonial mimicry, 59–60, 82–84; cultures of U.S. imperialism, 3, 113n3, 119–20n3; and Dixon’s novels, 9–10; and domesticity, 3, 52–57, 82–84, 113–14nn4–5, 119n2; examples of, 113n2; and feminism, 82–84, 120–21n10; Hobsbawm on, 116n1; and Indian reform movement, 52–53; and James on novel of dialect, 21–26, 28–29; and Louisiana Purchase, 4; and Manifest Destiny, 2–5, 20, 51, 53–54, 66–67, 113n1, 119n2, 125n3; and Manifest Domesticity, 53–57, 81, 120n4, 120n7; and Twain’s A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court, 15–18; and Twain’s The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, 115n15; and U.S.-Mexican War, 4–5, 54, 92, 113n2; and U.S.-Spanish War, 10, 23, 83, 104, 113n2. See also colonial difference; post-Reconstruction national allegory
In Our Regiment (Rogers), 6
Indenture Act (1850), 90, 125–26n8
Independent, 74
India, 120n5, 121n10, 122n20, 127n20
Indian agents. See reservation system
The Indian Before the Law (Pancoast), 69–70, 80

Indian captivity narrative, 58, 64
Indian Office, 121n33
Indian reform movement: and anthropological theories of civilization, 56, 59, 72–74, 83; and assimilation, 58–60, 83–84, 121–22n33; beginning of, 56; and Child, 51, 79, 119n1; and citizenship of Indians, 70–71, 72, 84, 120n5; and colonial difference, 53–56, 59–61; compared with abolitionism, 51, 65–66; and court cases on Indians, 67–71, 121n12; and domesticity, 51–54, 58–59, 65, 83–84; and Jackson, 19, 55, 62–65, 77–78, 122n22; leadership of, 52; limits of, 77–82; moral appeal of, 66, 83; novels supporting, 50–54, 56–58, 61–82; organizations of, 52, 77, 83; and Ponca flight, 67–69; and Progressive movement, 119n1; and U.S. policy on Indians, 55–57, 59, 65, 67–71, 84; and U.S. recognition of tribal sovereignty, 55, 56–57, 69–71. See also Indians; Ramona (Jackson)
Indian Rights Association, 52
Indian Territory, 1–2, 67, 121n30
Indian Trade and Intercourse Act (1834), 2
Indians: and anthropological theories of civilization, 56, 59, 72–74, 83; anti-slavery movement inclusive of, 119n1; assimilation of, 57–60, 83–84, 121–22n33; and Cable’s The Grandissimes, 14–15; citizenship of, 70–71, 72, 84, 120n5; civilization of Mission Indians, 72, 74–76; court cases on, 67–71, 121n12; Deloria on anti-modernist deployment of figure of, 118n11; Dodge on, 119n7; domestication of, and Jackson’s Ramona, 71–76, 85; education of, 76–77, 83, 84, 122n21; extermination versus civilization of, 55–57, 57–59, 82; Hudson River School painters’ depiction of, 41; and Indian Wars, 66–67; Jackson’s A Cen-
Index

James, Henry: and Ashburton Place lodgings in Boston, 38–39; on Athenaeum, Boston, 39–40; autobiography of, 27; Bryn Mawr address by, 45; commercial successes of, 29; deaths of parents of, 47; on dialect, 18–19, 21–26, 28–29, 34, 49; disappearance of former homes of, 39; and Du Bois, 27–28; on Ellis Island, 37; as expatriate, 22, 116n2; on food eaten by women, 47–48; on immigration, 35–38, 40, 42–45, 118n9; and imperialism and U.S. national identity, 21–26, 27–29, 34–42, 45; on Irving's house, 40–41; on literary novels, 29, 49; on marriage, 48–49; on mass culture, 21–22, 24–25, 27–29; on modernity, 36–42; and race and class, 23, 116–17n3–4; realism of, 23, 34, 116–17n3; and romance of reunion generally, 3–4, 6, 11, 18–19; on skyscrapers, 39–40, 43, 118n12; on South and Southern, 27–28; and Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin, 26–28; on women's speech, 42–49. See also The American Scene (James); The Bostonians (James); and other works

James, William, 22, 27–28, 30
James R. Osgood publisher, 30
Jefferson, Thomas, 97–98, 115n16
Jim Crow segregation: and black dialect used in literature, 24; Cable on, 15, 116n18, 121n16; codification of,
2, 7, 17, 66; and discourses of violent black male sexuality, 58; James on, 27–28, 116–17n3; in Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, 2; Johns Hopkins University, 119n4

*The Jungle* (Sinclair), 128n25

Kaplan, Amy, 3, 53, 54, 113n3, 114n5, 120n4, 120nn7–8

*A Kentucky Colonel* (Read), 6

King, Charles, 6

kinship, 73–74

Kipling, Rudyard, 25

*Kitty's Conquest* (King), 6

Ku Klux Klan, 7–10, 114n11

La Flesche, Francis, 124n33

Lake Mohonk Conference of the Friends of the Indians, 52, 77

Land Act (1851), 94, 95–96, 101 language. See English language

*The Last of the Mohicans* (Cooper), 12

“Last Wave” nations, 115n14

Latin America: anti-colonial thought from, 20, 107, 108–13; historical romances of, 9, 11, 115n13

League of the Iroquois (Morgan), 72

*The Leopard's Spots* (Dixon), 10

Lewis and Clark Expedition, 13

Liberia, 54, 120n7–8

*Liberia* (Hale), 120n7

Lincoln, Abraham, 26, 54, 92, 126n10, 127n24

Lincoln, Mary Todd, 92, 126n10

Lipsitz, George, 127n22

literary realism, 23, 34, 116–17n3

Literature periodical, 21–22

Lomas, Laura, 128n2

Louisiana Purchase, 4, 12–14

Luis-Brown, David, 124–25n1

lynching, 5, 8, 17, 28

Macmillan & Co., 30

Magruder, Julia, 6

Malory, Thomas, 15

Manifest Destiny, 2–5, 20, 51, 53–55, 66–67, 113n1, 119n2, 125n3. See also imperialism; post-Reconstruction national allegory

Manifest Domesticity, 53–57, 72, 81, 120n4, 120n7

“The Manners of American Women” (James), 42–43, 47–48


Marx, Karl, 122n26

Melville, Herman, 10, 66

mestizos: Californios as, 90; Jackson on, 86; in Jackson’s *Ramona*, 63, 81–82, 110–12; negative stereotypes of, 87, 125n3; in Ruiz de Burton’s *The Squatter and the Don*, 96, 99; sexuality of, 125n3; Tourgée on, 108

Mexican-American War, 4–5, 54, 92, 113n2

Michaels, Walter Benn, 8, 23, 114nn10–11, 116–17nn3–4, 128n28

Miller, David, 113n4

miscegenation, 14 34, 58, 81–82, 92, 99, 110, 116n18

Miss Lou (Roe), 6

Mission Indians, 72, 74–76, 124n35

missionaries and missions, 19, 50–52, 75–76, 89, 119n2

*Modern Women* anthology, 46

modernity: Foucault on, 125n5; James on, 36–42
INDEX

Morgan, Lewis Henry, 72–74, 78, 116n19, 122–23nn27–28
Morgan, Matthew, 118n10
Mormonism, 78–79
Morrison, Toni, 22
Morte D’Arthur (Malory), 15
Moylan, Michelle, 124n35
muckraking, 127–28
n25

Nation, 38, 46
national allegory. See post-Reconstruction national allegory
Native Americans. See headings beginning with Indian
“A New England Winter” (James), 46
New Historicism, 125n5
New South, 13, 103, 127n24
New Woman, 3, 49, 114n11
Newman, Louise, 54, 119n5, 120n10
No-Fence Law (1862), 94
North, Michael, 24
North-South relations: and abolitionism, 32; in Cable’s The Grandissimes, 13–15; and colonial difference, 112; displacement of, by imperialist East-West configuration of national identity, 1–4, 18–20, 85, 107; in Dixon’s The Clansman, 7–8; and Indian reform movement, 58; James on South and Southern, 27–28; in James’s The Bostonians, 6, 18–19, 30–31, 33–34, 119n6; and New South, 13, 103, 127n24; and Reconstruction, 1; reunification of, after Reconstruction, 2, 4; and romance of reunion, 6–8; and slavery, 4, 5; in Twain’s A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court, 16–17. See also abolitionism; Civil War; Reconstruction; romance of reunion; slavery
North American Review, 23, 61
Northwest Ordinance (1786), 4
Notes on the State of Virginia (Jefferson), 97–98, 115n16
novel of dialect. See dialect
O’Farrell, Mary Ann, 96–97
Omaha Daily Herald, 68
Omaha nation, 67. See also Indians
Osgood, James R., 30
other, 60, 66, 82, 119n2, 125n1
Our Wild Indians (Dodge), 119n7

Padilla, Genaro, 126n12
Page, Thomas Nelson, 23
Pancoast, Henry R., 69–70, 80–81
Peabody, Elizabeth, 30
Pease, Donald E., 113n3
Pequot, 124n36. See also Indians
Philippines, 83, 124n34
Phillips, Wendell, 51, 69
Pita, Beatrice, 127n18, 127n23, 128n26
plantation novels, 126n9, 128n28. See also slavery
Plessy v. Ferguson, 122n25
“The Point of View” (James), 44
Ponca Nation, 67–69. See also Indians
Porfirio Díaz, José de la Cruz, 129n5
The Portrait of a Lady (James), 29, 41–42
Portugal, 116n17
Posnock, Ross, 23, 116n2
post-Reconstruction national allegory: and East-West axis of Twain’s Huckleberry Finn, 1–3, 12; failure of, 12–18; and foundational fictions, 10–12, 115n13; and homosocial narratives, 10–12; and Indian reform movement, 52–54; in romance of reunion generally, 3–7, 18–20; success of, 7–10; and white supremacy, 7–10. See also specific authors and their works
postcolonial theory, 113n3, 120n4
Preemption Act (1841), 94
The Princess Cassimassima (James), 30
Progressive movement, 119n1, 128n28
proletarianization, 20, 88–89, 91, 94, 99, 102, 127n18
property ownership and property crimes, 74, 76–77, 80–81
Prucha, Francis Paul, 122n24
Puerto Rico, 75, 83

The Question of Our Speech (James), 42–45, 48

race. See blacks; Indians; Jim Crow segregation; mestizos; slavery; whiteness and white supremacy

rational segregation. See Jim Crow segregation

radical alterity, 87, 88, 125n5

railroad: and Jackson's Ramona, 124n35; and James, 38, 42, 47; in Ruiz de Burton's The Squatter and the Don, 20, 91, 93, 101–7, 127–28n25

Ramona (Jackson): and aesthetics of reform, 61–72; Alessandro Assis in, 58, 63–64, 78–82, 109–11; Alessandro's death in, 64, 80–82; Aunt Ri in, 57, 64–65, 76, 79–81; as bestseller, 57, 124n35; California setting of, 62, 85–86; colonial difference in, 81–82, 85–86; colonial representational practices in narrative of, 61; compared with Ruiz de Burton's The Squatter and the Don, 85–88, 124–28n1; dialect in, 57–58; failed national allegory of, 82; Felipe and Ramona's exile to Mexico in, 81, 124n35; first title for, 64; and Indian domestication, 71–77, 85; and Jackson's involvement in Indian reform movement, 55, 62–65; Jackson's purpose in writing of, 63, 65–66; limits of Indian reform movement in, 78–82; love story between Ramona and Alessandro Assis in, 58, 63–64, 109–11; Marti's translation of, 20, 108–13, 128n2; Moreno family in, 63, 78, 86; plot of, 63–64; Ramona as mestiza in, 63, 81–82, 110–12; as romance of reunion, 3–4, 19, 58, 107; serialization of, in Christian Union, 67; and Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin, 65–66, 72, 109; Tourgée's review of, 61–62, 107–9, 109

ranches and rancheros, 89–90, 93–96, 104–7, 126n9

Ransom, Basil, 26–27

rape: of black women, 5, 8, 11, 17; of white women, 8, 58, 122n20

Raphael, Vincent, 124n34

Read, Opie, 6

realism, 23, 34, 116–17n3

Reconstruction, 5, 8, 20, 46, 58, 66, 119n4, 126n8. See also post-Reconstruction national allegory

Redeemers, 127n24

reform. See Indian reform movement

Renan, Ernest, 34

reservation system, 66, 67, 69, 122n23, 124n36. See also Indians

Robinson, Stephen T., 6

Roe, E. P., 6

Roediger, David R., 127n22, 128n27

Rogers, James S., 6

Rogin, Michael, 114n11

romance of reunion: characteristics of, 3–7, 88; examples of, 6; and failure of post-Reconstruction national allegory, 12–18; and feminism, 31–35; marriage in, 6–8, 11, 12–16; and success of post-Reconstruction national allegory, 7–10; and white supremacy, 7–10. See also specific authors and their works

The Romance of Reunion (Silber), 6

Romero, Lora, 3, 53, 87–88, 114n5, 119n2, 125n5

Ross, Marlon, 126n15

Ruiz de Burton, María Amparo: California property of, 92; on East Coast, 92; family of, 91; and land speculation, 128n26; marriage of, 92; and military promotion of husband, 126n10; and romance of reunion generally, 3–4, 19–20; Who Would Have Thought It? by, 92. See also The Squatter and the Don (Ruiz de Burton)

Ryan, Susan M., 119n6
INDEX

Saldívar, José David, 96
Samoan Islands, 113n2
Sánchez, Rosaura, 127n18, 127n23, 128n26
Sánchez-Eppler, Karen, 53, 119n2, 120n8
Sargent, John Singer, 118n14
The Scarlet Letter (Hawthorne), 11
Schurz, Carl, 55, 76–77
Scribner’s Monthly, 12
segregation. See Jim Crow segregation
“Self-Reliance” (Emerson), 119n4
separate spheres ideology, 51–53, 83–84
Serra, Father Junipero, 75
sexual division of labor. See gender
The Shadow of War (Robinson), 6
“The Significance of the Frontier in American History” (Turner), 1
Silber, Nina, 6–7, 10, 31, 114n9
Sinclair, Upton, 128n25
Sioux, 67. See also Indians
skyscrapers, 39–40, 43, 118n12
slavery: in Brazil, 116n17; emotions of slaves, 97–98; James on, 28; and James’s The Bostonians, 34–35; and Jefferson, 97–98, 115n16; in Latin America, 11, 116n17; legal status of slaves, 66; and North-South conflicts, 4, 5; in plantation novels, 126n9, 128n28; and planter class, 9, 34–35, 126n9; in Twain’s A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court, 16, 17; in U.S. territories, 4; women’s oppression compared with, 31, 35, 118n7. See also abolitionism; blacks
Small, Albion, 119n4
A Small Boy and Others (James), 27
Societas, 74
Sommer, Doris, 10, 11, 115n13, 125n6
The Souls of Black Folks (Du Bois), 27–28
“The South as a Field for Fiction” (Tourgée), 122n25
South-North relations. See abolitionism; Civil War; North-South relations; Reconstruction; romance of reunion; slavery
Spanish-American War, 10, 23, 83, 104, 113n2
“The Speech of American Women” (James), 42–49
speech of women, 42–49
Standing Bear, 67–69
Standing Bear v. Crook, 67–68
Stokes, Edith, 118n14
Stokes, I. N. Phelps, 118n14
Stowe, Harriet Beecher, 26–28, 54, 65–66, 72, 109, 114n5, 120n8
“A Study in Civilization” (Tourgée), 61–62, 107–9, 109
suffrage, 32, 121n31
Supreme Court, U.S., 70–71, 95, 120n9, 121n12, 121n15, 122n25, 126n12
Telling Complexions (O’Farrell), 96–97
Thanksgiving holiday, 54
Index

Thirteenth Amendment, 101, 126n15
Tibbles, Thomas Henry, 50–52, 52, 68, 69
“Tom and Huck Among the Indians” (Twain), 113n1
Tourgée, Albion, 1, 61–62, 107–10, 122n25, 128n1, 129n5
Townsend, Edward, 21
Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, 90, 93, 97, 120n9, 126n11, 126n16
Trilling, Lionel, 22, 116n2
Turner, Frederick Jackson, 1, 119n4, 121n29
Twain, Mark, 1–3, 10, 12, 15–18, 23–24, 113n1, 115n15, 121n30
Two Years before the Mast (Dana), 125n3

Uncle Tom’s Cabin (Stowe), 26–28, 54, 65–66, 72, 109, 120n8
U.S.-Mexican War, 4–5, 54, 92, 113n2
U.S.-Spanish War, 10, 23, 83, 104, 113n2

vagrancy laws, 90
Vallejo, Mariano Guadalupe, 95, 126n9, 126n12
Vallejo, Pláton, 95
Vallejo, Salvador, 126n9
vanishing Indian narrative, 67. See also Indians

wage slavery, 128n27
Wald, Priscilla, 55, 121n12, 121n15
Walker, William, 113n2
A War-Time Wooing (King), 6
Ward, Mary Augusta, 25
Wardley, Lynn, 33, 119n15
Warren, Kenneth, 23, 26, 116n3
Washington Square (James), 30
Webster, Noah, 119n4
Wexler, Laura, 53, 119n2
white slavery, 128nn27–28
white women. See women
whiteness and white supremacy: and blushing, 97–100, 103, 104; in Cable’s The Grandissimes, 13–15; and civilization, 82–83; Du Bois’s “wages of whiteness,” 100, 101, 115n12; and English language, 43, 49; and idealization of planter-slave relationship, 24; and Indian reform novel, 84; and Jackson, 122n22; in Jackson’s Ramona, 80, 81; and James, 22, 43, 49, 116–17nn3–4; in James’s The Bostonians, 19, 34–35; and Jim Crow segregation, 116n18; and Manifest Domesticity, 53–55, 81; and post-Reconstruction national allegory, 7–10, 103; and Reconstruction, 5; and romance of reunion generally, 7–10; in Ruiz de Burton’s The Squatter and the Don, 19–20, 87, 89–91, 97, 99–101, 105, 124–25n1, 127n17; and women’s speech, 49. See also Jim Crow segregation
Who Would Have Thought It? (Ruiz de Burton), 92
Wilson, Benjamin Davis, 75–75, 76
Wilson, Woodrow, 119n4
women: access to public social agency for, 51, 54–56, 83, 119n2; domestic influence of, on Indians, 50–52, 76–77, 83–84, 121–22n33; food eaten by, 47–48; and gendered division of labor, 8–9, 83–84, 104, 105–7; imagined native male savagery against white women, 8, 58, 122n20; and Indian reform movement, 50–54; James on preeminence of, 19, 46–47, 48, James on speech of, 42–49; James’s address to Bryn Mawr graduating class, 45; Ku Klux Klan and white women, 8–9; and New Woman, 3, 49, 114n11; oppression of, compared with slavery, 31, 35, 118n7; protection of white women, 8; rape of black women, 5, 8, 11, 17; and separate spheres ideology, 51–53, 83–84; suffrage for, 32, 121n31. See also domesticity; feminist movement; rape
Women’s National Indian Association, 52, 83
women’s rights. See feminist movement
In The Troubled Union: Expansionist Imperatives in Post-Reconstruction American Novels, John Morán González traces the imperialist imaginings behind literary efforts to reunite the United States after the trauma of the Civil War and Reconstruction. This innovative study explores how the U.S. historical romance attempted to rebuild a national identity by renovating Manifest Destiny for the twentieth-century imperialist future through courtship and marriage plots. Yet even as these literary romances promised expansive national futures, the racial and gender contradictions of U.S. democracy threatened to result in troubled unions at home and fractious ventures abroad. Canonical authors such as Henry James, popular authors such as Helen Hunt Jackson, and rediscovered authors such as María Amparo Ruiz de Burton provide the dramatic narratives examined in this book.

Employing theoretical perspectives drawn from American Studies and Latin American Studies, González highlights the importance of the “domestic”—understood as both the domestic boundaries of the nation and of the home—as a key site within civil society that maintained and renewed imperialist national subjectivities. The Troubled Union combines the formal analysis of literary genre with interdisciplinary cultural studies to elucidate just how the imperial national allegory deeply structured the U.S. cultural imagination of the late nineteenth century.

John Morán González is associate professor of English at The University of Texas at Austin.

“In The Troubled Union: Expansionist Imperatives in Post-Reconstruction American Novels, John Morán González presents insightful and persuasive new readings of widely read and much studied novels, links aesthetic choice to political and ideological issues in generative ways, and advances our understanding of the importance of thinking about the nation in the world and the world in the nation effectively. This work is, without a doubt, relevant to the study of national allegory, the culture of empire, and the social construction of realism.”

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