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Traveling tropes: Race, reconstruction, and “Southern” redemption in *The Story of Evangelina Cisneros*

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Abstract

This essay considers the entanglement of race, gender, and imperialism in U.S. discourse on Evangelina Cisneros, a white Cuban woman imprisoned in a Havana jail during her country’s final War for Independence from Spain (1895–1898). I argue that, an event historically tied to the colony’s abolition of slavery, Cuban Independence in writings about Cisneros becomes discursively imbricated with the reconsolidation of white supremacy in the U.S. South following the Civil War. The study establishes a dialogue between U.S. discourse on the events published in the late 1890s – the articles on the affair that appeared in *The New York Journal* and the multi-authored book *The Story of Evangelina Cisneros* (1897) – and Southern white supremacist author Thomas Dixon, Jr.’s *Trilogy of Reconstruction* (1902–1907) in order to explore the ways in which the Evangelina Cisneros text network mobilizes racial and gender paradigms typically associated with post-Reconstruction Southern “Redeemer” thinking.

Keywords

Evangelina Cisneros; Thomas Dixon, Jr.: Southern Redemption; Spanish-Cuban-American War; Cuban independence and race; black rapist myth; white supremacy and imperialism; transnational postslavery; U.S. Cuba and the South; race and the circum-Caribbean

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This essay considers how the figure of Evangelina Cisneros, a white Cuban woman imprisoned in a Havana jail during her country's final War for Independence from Spain (1895–1898), becomes discursively assimilated to racial, gender, and imperial paradigms current in the United States in the period of Southern "Redemption" between Reconstruction and the Spanish-Cuban-American War. Born in Puerto Príncipe, Cuba, Evangelina Betancourt Cosío y Cisneros was the daughter of separatist Antonio Cosío Serrano, who had been deported to the Cuban Isla de los Pinos (present-day Isla de la Juventud), "*con la autorización de llevar en su compañía a sus dos hijas debido a su precaria salud*" (with authorization to bring his two daughters with him due to his poor health) as punishment for his activities against the metropole.¹ It was there that Evangelina, age 17, became involved in a planned uprising against the Spanish army, tasked with luring Lieutenant Coronel José Bériz into an ambush with the promise of sexual favors.² The plan failed and Evangelina was imprisoned in a Havana jail while she awaited trial and probable deportation to Spain's North African penal colony in Ceuta. Though largely forgotten today, the events figured prominently in U.S. news reports on the Cuban conflict during 1897 and 1898. Renaming the protagonist "Evangelina Cisneros," William Randolph Hearst's *New York Journal* would dedicate no less than 375 articles to the affair.³

The Evangelina Cisneros story, then, was an integral part of a propaganda campaign in the popular press urging the United States to intervene in Cuba's anticolonial struggle against Spain. Washington eventually declared war against Madrid on 21 April 1898.⁴ Race played a crucial role in the conflict, as "the Cuban-Hispanic-American War and consequent birth of the Cuban Republic [...] called for a reconfiguration of [the racial] discourse and race-defined inclusions and exclusions" prevalent during the colonial period.⁵ The Independence struggle

would open the door to definitive abolition in 1886, an Afro-Cuban rights movement under leaders such as Juan Gualberto Gómez and Rafael Serra during the late colonial period, and significant Afro-Cuban participation in the war against Spain.⁶ These facts would force the country's elites to seriously (if begrudgingly) consider the question of racial equality in a post-war republic that, unlike the United States at the time, would extend voting rights to Afro-descendants. Cuban patriot and ideologue José Martí, for his part, would give voice to this interracial ideal in his notion of "*nuestra América mestiza*" (our mixed-race América) deliberately articulated as a counterdiscourse to the aggressive Anglo-Saxonism of "*el pueblo rubio de nuestro continente*" (the blond nation of our continent), where white supremacist ideologues feared the birth of a "mulatto citizenship" during the generation following Civil War and Emancipation.⁷

Given the fear of "mulatto citizenship" in the turn-of-the-century United States, it is not surprising that the *Evangelina* texts should represent Cuba's quest for independence in terms of racialized sexual violence. In an editorial published in the *Journal*, New England reformer Julia Ward Howe asks: "How can we think of this pure flower of maidenhood condemned to live with felons and outcasts, without succor, without protection, to labor under a torrid sky, suffering privation, indignity, and torment worse than death?"⁸ Like much anti-Spanish propaganda, the question gestures at the possibility of interracial rape – a favorite trope of white-supremacist thinkers such of the period – through the euphemism "worse than death." Capitalizing on public disgust at Spain's behavior and seeking to draw attention to his newspaper, Hearst sent reporter Karl Decker to Cuba in order to smuggle *Evangelina* out of prison and into the United States. The following year, a team of writers including Julian Hawthorne, Decker, and Cisneros

published *The Story of Evangelina Cisneros* to build support for the U.S. war against Spain and eventual annexation of Cuba.

By framing Cisneros' liberation from Spanish domination as a rescue from racialized rape, the Evangelina texts reflect a common fear in the post-Reconstruction United States that, in the words of Thomas Dixon, Jr., "Desdemonas may be fascinated again by an Othello!"⁹ Begun during the U.S. occupation of Cuba (1898–1902) that followed North American involvement in the island's war with Spain, Dixon's *The Leopard's Spots: A Romance of the White Man's Burden, 1865–1900* (1902), *The Clansman: An Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan* (1904), and *The Traitor: A Story of the Fall of the Invisible Empire* (1907) – the first two of which inspired D.W. Griffith's now-infamous 1915 silent film *The Birth of a Nation* – are foundational works of the turn-of-the-nineteenth-century black rapist myth. As numerous commentators have shown, Dixon and other white-supremacist Southern-Redeemer writers would deploy the black rapist trope to preserve white hegemony against the perceived threat of black ascendancy following Emancipation.

In the following, I will examine the Evangelina texts in relation to Dixon's *Trilogy of Reconstruction* (as the three novels collectively are known) and similar works of Southern Redemptionist writing in order to explore the circulation of the white supremacist trope of the black rapist through the U.S. South and Cuba. My argument builds on Karen Roggenkamp's study of the Cisneros affair in the context of a "new journalism [that] operated explicitly within models of dramatic storytelling."¹⁰ Expanding on the idea of a "broadly drawn literary culture" through which, as Roggenkamp explains, the nineteenth-century yellow press narrativized current events, I will show how the racial mythology of post-Reconstruction Southern Redemption shaped the telling of Evangelina's story in the United States during the late 1890s.¹¹

The assimilation of Evangelina to U.S. racial mythology that I describe functions as a facet of what Cuban historian Marial Iglesias Utset has identified as “*la confrontación de los valores y las costumbres coloniales con las representaciones políticas y culturales patrocinadas por las autoridades interventoras*” (the confrontation of colonial values and customs with the cultural and political representations sponsored by the Occupation authorities). This symbolic realigning of Cuban society under U.S. invasion and occupation “*afectó toda la simbología de la existencia cotidiana e hizo resurgir la dimensión política de las prácticas simbólicas*” (affected the entire symbology of daily life and brought the political dimensions of symbolic practices back to the surface).¹² By folding Cuba into the U.S. South through the black rapist trope, the yellow press of the time imperialistically articulated the island’s independence struggle through the symbolics of white supremacy, which were uniting the Northern country after the divisive experiences of Civil War and Reconstruction. Through the black rapist trope, the propagandistic texts unify the U.S. national family following the Civil War by discursively adopting the Cuban *criolla* Evangelina. In this way, they present eventual North American military intervention in the Cuban conflict as an aspect of the white supremacist project of Southern Redemption.

Cuba in the South

Transnational studies of the U.S. South and the Caribbean have enjoyed a boom in recent years. The historian Matthew Guterl coined the term “American Mediterranean” to refer to the economic and cultural space defined by the circulation of masters, enslaved persons, and slaveocratic ideologies through the Caribbean and its littoral, a region that the Southern planter society hoped to transform into its own slaveholding empire.¹³ Similarly, literary scholar Martyn Bone, playing on Marxist theorist Immanuel Wallerstein’s notion of an “extended Caribbean,”

has proposed the “extended South” as a frame through which to view the circulation of people and ideas among the Continental United States and the islands of the Antillean archipelago.¹⁴ Inter-American scholar Kirsten Silva Gruesz has noted that, situated near the mouth of the Mississippi River in the Gulf of Mexico, Cuba occupied a central place in this extended South.¹⁵ As African American intellectual W.E.B. DuBois explains in *Black Reconstruction*, “shut out from the United States territories by the Free Soil movement, the South determined upon secession with the distinct idea of eventually expanding into the Caribbean.”¹⁶ It is not surprising, then, that “Cuba and its accompanying slave system played such a prominent role for the Confederacy that it was included in the Union blockade of New Orleans.”¹⁷ These circumstances have led some scholars to consider the War between the States and the subsequent movement for Cuban independence as two “American civil wars that share a genealogy” – what Deborah Cohn and John Smith understand as two “Northern” occupations of racialized “Southern” societies.¹⁸

Given the imbrication between the U.S. South and Cuba in the nineteenth-century North American imaginary, it is worth asking to what extent “the timeline of [Cuba’s] Ten Years War, 1868–78, add[s] another dimension to what is widely considered in nineteenth-century American literature a milestone and dividing line: 1865 [the end of the U.S. Civil War]. How does the ongoing U.S. intervention in the Caribbean after the Civil War complicate the nationalist racial frame of ‘Reconstruction’?”¹⁹ After all, the Spanish-Cuban-American War “took place during the same period that ‘Jim Crow,’ or legal segregation, was being established throughout the South.”²⁰ This historical coincidence of internal colonialism in the U.S. South and formal empire in the Caribbean forces us to ask how ideologies from the post-Reconstruction era influenced

U.S. interpretations of Cuba's anticolonial war – in which slave emancipation clearly played role – in propaganda such as the Evangelina texts.

Sexual violence and racial ascendancy in Wilmington and Havana

Known as “Reconstruction,” “the violent, dramatic, and still controversial era that followed the Civil War” was marked by Northern occupation of the South in an effort to oversee emancipation and black enfranchisement.²¹ The process of reintegrating the region into the nation formally ended in 1877. This so-called “Redemption” of the South was marked by the election of anti-Reconstructionist white supremacists, such as Dixon, to state governments.²² This return of the Old Guard was followed by the gradual institution of formal segregation under state governments and racialized terror at the hands of the Ku Klux Klan.

The reconstituted white supremacist regime would seek to justify itself through the gendered language of sexual violence, which appeared in North American discourse on both the U.S. South and Cuba in the 1890s. These attitudes manifest themselves in Dixon's *The Leopard's Spots* when a character inveighs against “everything that the soul of the South loathes and that the Republican party has tried to ram down our throats – Negro supremacy in politics and Negro equality in society.”²³ In his references to emancipation and African American suffrage as an act of blacks “ramming” themselves, Dixon alludes to the Reconstruction-era myth of the black rapist of white women. Interracial rape served the late-nineteenth century South as a metaphor for the supposed post-War racial dispossession of whites, as “an exercise of power by a [black] man over [a white] man, because the woman in question was assumed to be a dependent wife or daughter within a household headed by a white propertied man.”²⁴ Cultural studies scholar Sandra Gunning explains that “what might have begun in the late 1860s and

1870s as a political struggle was increasingly characterized by the 1890s as [...] an encroachment on the sacred Anglo-Saxon male right to everything in American society and civilization.” In the metaphor of “social rape” that developed from this situation, “American society and civilization came increasingly to be figured as the white female body: silent, helpless, in immediate need of protection from the black beast”– an allegory that would come to structure the discourse of Anglo-Saxon supremacy at home and abroad.²⁵

The Redemptionist reassertion of white dominance over African Americans would be achieved in 1898, while Anglo-Saxon forces were securing their own dominion over heavily black Cuba and the New York presses were publishing *The Story of Evangelina Cisneros*. On 10 November 1898, white Southern elites would overthrow the freely elected, racially integrated, government of Wilmington, North Carolina, killing as many as 300 people in what is considered to be the only successful *coup d'état* in U.S. history. Viewed by some as “the culmination of the post-Reconstruction struggle against black franchise,” the impact of the events at Wilmington helped to consolidate the Southern racial regime of the proceeding seven decades by establishing a state of exception that would uphold the principles of white supremacy in the United States and its imperial sphere of influence.²⁶

The ostensible catalyst of the violence was an 18 August 1898 article by African American journalist Alexander Manly refuting a pro-lynching speech made a year earlier by Rebecca Latimer Felton (later the first female U.S. senator). Echoing arguments first articulated by Ida B. Wells in 1892, Manly argued – contrary to a belief that had been slowly gaining currency for the last three decades – that many victims of lynching had not engaged in rape, but in consensual relations. Viewed as an affront to the traditional racial order, Manly’s comments were met with an anti-black campaign in the white press, in which “editors focused on the

supposed interest of black men in white women, perhaps the most sensitive subject in Southern race relations.”²⁷ Filling the pages of papers across North Carolina, the discourse of the black rapist soon crept into whites’ subconscious understanding of race relations as “the myth of ‘negro domination’ over white womanhood became the powerful tool that white supremacists used throughout their campaign to dismantle African Americans’ political and economic power” in the South and to justify racial-imperial projects in Cuba.²⁸ A poem published in the 8 November 1898 edition of the *Wilmington Messenger*, for example, reads:

Proud Caucasians one and all;
Be not deaf to Love’s appealing
Hear your wives and daughters call,
See their blanched and anxious faces,
Note their frail, but lovely forms;
Rise, defend their spotless virtue
With your strong and manly arms.²⁹

In this poem, “proud Caucasian” men are entreated upon to “defend” the “spotless virtue” of “blanched” white women from an evil so obvious that it apparently need not be named. This sort of anti-black propaganda would set off a wave of lynchings and racial violence culminating in the 10 November 1898 Wilmington massacre, carried out just two days after the poem was published.³⁰

Considered the “literary figure most closely associated with the stereotype of the black rapist,” Dixon was particularly fascinated with the idea of white women “as the victim[s] of an

‘alien’ rapist” and, in his oeuvre, presented “the rise and fall of Reconstruction in North Carolina as a struggle between a besieged but chivalrous white South and a rampaging black (male) population that equates freedom with access to white women.”³¹ Both *The Leopard’s Spots* and *The Clansman* feature extended representations of freedmen committing acts of sexual violence against white women. The following passage from *The Clansman* represents a particularly vicious mobilization of the black rapist trope:

Gus stepped closer, with an ugly leer, his flat nose dilated, his sinister bead-eyes wide apart gleaming ape-like, as he laughed:

‘We ain’t atter money!’

The girl uttered a cry, long, tremulous, heart-rending, piteous.

A single tiger-spring, and the black claws of the beast sank into the soft white throat and she was still.³²

Invoking the racist metaphor of Afro-descendants as “apes,” employing an especially condescending and distorted literary rendering of African American Vernacular English, stressing Gus’s supposed animality through the references to “tiger-springs” and “claws,” and juxtaposing the blackness of those claws with the victim’s “soft white throat,” Dixon presents the reader with a strikingly racist metaphor of emancipation and black suffrage as a “violation” of the white supremacist order.³³

Sharing the same space on the pages of 1890s newspapers, the Redemptionist myth of the black rapist would become discursively imbricated with Spanish atrocities in Cuba, the U.S. war effort, and its aftermath – a discourse in which the Evangelina Cisneros affair played a

significant part. Even before the events in Wilmington, African American activist Ida B. Wells in a 21 March 1898 address had connected Southern Redemption to the Caribbean conflict by comparing “lynching crimes” to “Cuban outrages.”³⁴ Occurring within a discussion of rape accusations, Wells’s use of the word “outrage” – a euphemism for sexual violence – cannot be considered casual. Rather, it points to how gendered racial discourses on the South and on Cuba were becoming intertwined during the 1890s.

It is not surprising, then, that the polysemous word should appear multiple times in Cisneros’s *The Story*. A chapter entitled “Protests and Petitions” opens with a reference to the “burnings, murder, and other outrages” committed by the Spanish army in Cuba.³⁵ Invoking the same discourse of defense of “blanched [...] wives and daughters” as the *Wilmington Messenger*, Julia Ward Howe appeals “to every brother who would defend a sister from outrage” to rescue Cisneros from her colonial captors.³⁶ Evangelina herself, in her narrative, asks President McKinley to save “the mothers and daughters of Cuba [...] from further outrage.”³⁷ Echoing Redeemer black rapist discourse through the reiterated references to “outrage,” *The Story* “paint[s] the situation in Cuba,” like that supposedly existing in the U.S. South, “as especially pernicious for white women, who might be forced to suffer the worst of indignities.”³⁸

Not coincidentally, the trope of interracial rape is noticeably present in U.S. political cartoons on Cuba during the period. Even as Cuban nationalist texts such as Cirilo Villaverde’s 1882 *Cecilia Valdés* used *mulataje* as a metaphor for anti-colonial *cubanía* –positing a mixed-race nation against a white Peninsular and criollo colonial apparatus – the U.S. press of the pre-War period tended to represent the island as a white damsel in distress.³⁹ Hearst even went so far as to portray Spanish General Valeriano Weyler as a “rapist of women.”⁴⁰ Almost as an extension of the Redeemer discourse that framed racial violence as white men defending “their”

women from supposed black animality, 1898 drawings such as “Uncle Sam – I’ll Take Care of This Lady Now” and “Don’t Cry Little Girl. Uncle Sam is going to take you home with him. After that I’ll tend to you, young man,” appearing in *The Baltimore Morning Herald* and *The Indianapolis News*, respectively, would portray Anglo-Saxon men protecting white Cuban women from strikingly dark-skinned Spaniards.⁴¹ An 1898 image by artist Grant Hamilton entitled “The Spanish Brute” takes the racist trope further, representing the Iberian metropolis as a violent gorilla in a clear precursor to the discourse of bestiality that Dixon later would deploy in *The Clansman*.⁴² On the one hand, the cartoon draws on then-popular associations of blackness with Spanishness, a topic that has been explored in recent years by literary scholars such as Barbara Fuchs, María de Guzmán, and John C. Havard.⁴³ On the other, it reflects “intermittent rumors of an armed uprising by blacks in support of Spain against their American oppressors,” a discursive development that collapses African Americans and Spaniards into one other as common enemies of Anglo-Saxon neocolonial policy in the South and imperial designs on Cuba.⁴⁴ Like Wells’ comments on Spanish “outrages,” the evidence that I describe here points to the development of a single tropological network in which Redeemers and jingoes both participated as they discussed post-Emancipation political realities in the South and in the Caribbean.

Participating in this transnational racial-gender discourse, *The Story* figures “swaggering, leering Spanish soldiers” as black rapists.⁴⁵ For example, Berriz, a “short, ugly, dark little man with bushy hair and black whiskers on his cheeks,” is blackened discursively in Cisneros’ description of him.⁴⁶ Importantly, the Lieutenant Colonel presents sexual relations with him as an alternative to Evangelina’s father being sent to the African penal colony of Chafarinas: “if your father should be sent to Ceuta or to the Chaferinas [sic], you would be to blame. You cannot

expect to have all favors and give nothing in return.”⁴⁷ Later, he tells Evangelina that, “If I send him to Cueta [sic] or the Chaferinas, it is your fault – yours alone.”⁴⁸ By suggesting, through their interchangeability, that the coerced rendering of “favors” to the racialized Berriz and imprisonment in “Africa” are equivalent undesirable fates, the text metaphorically transforms Berriz into a black rapist of Redemptionist mythology. In this world of “black” Spanish predators, it seems that “a meaningful part of what” Decker, like the “proud Caucasian” men of Wilmington, “was rescuing was [Evangelina’s] whiteness.”⁴⁹

As Berriz’s discursive blackening makes clear, the specter of racialized sexual violence haunts the Cisneros texts, qualifying and containing the interracial reality of a separatist Cuba that, recently having abolished slavery, soon would contemplate black suffrage. A 28 August 1897 *New York Journal* article entitled “Truth Too Black to Be Hidden” reports that “an accused but unconvicted girl of good character, education, and refinement has been kept in the Casa de Recogidas [...] for upwards of a year [...] [I]t was the intention to send her to Cueta [sic], the most loathsome of penal colonies, for twenty years.”⁵⁰ Here, the “girl of good character, education, and refinement” on her way to face a “black” truth in Africa parallels Dixon’s Southern civilization, down whose “throat” “Negro supremacy in politics and Negro equality in society” supposedly are being “rammed.”⁵¹ Similarly, one of the authors of *The Story of Evangelina Cisneros* worries that, following her trial, the white Cuban woman will be banished to “Africa, where she would be at the absolute mercy of Spain’s worst criminals.”⁵² The text ominously invites the reader to consider “what the fate [of African imprisonment] meant to a pure young girl who had been all her life tenderly guarded and cared for.”⁵³ Not unlike the “spotless” maids and matrons of Wilmington in the “manly arms” of their fathers and husbands, Evangelina, according to the writer, has “absolutely no experience – child that she was,” a detail

that underscores the sexual nature of the ills that await her in Ceuta.⁵⁴ Least there be any doubt about the threat of racialized rape, *The Story* glosses Ceuta as an “African penal settlement” or “African penal colony” at least twice, placing the modifier “African” before another adjective that too easily can be interpreted as a phallic pun.⁵⁵

A letter from Julia Ward Howe to Pope Leo XIII reprinted in *The Story* is more explicit, as she asks the Pontiff to plead Evangelina’s case to Spanish Queen Regent María Cristina de Habsburgo. In her letter, the writer expresses her fear that the white Evangelina “is in danger of suffering a sentence more cruel than death – that of twenty years of exile and imprisonment in the Spanish penal colony of Ceuta, in Africa, where no woman has ever before been sent” – again, as punishment for her participation in a process deeply tied to abolition and black political mobilization.⁵⁶ She uses similar language (“torment worse than death”) in an editorial later published in *The Story*, while a letter by Vania Davis speaks of Evangelina’s “fate worse than death.”⁵⁷ Invoking the common nineteenth-century phrase “worse than death” to refer to potential rape in Africa, the imperial propaganda text mobilizes the same myth of the black rapist as is found in Southern Redeemer writings – Dixon, for example, alludes to the euphemism three times in two pages in *The Leopard’s Spots*.⁵⁸ This equivalence between post-Emancipation Cuban and Southern societies that the North American jingoist press draws through the trope of the black rapist works to incorporate the Caribbean island discursively into the United States by presenting the two areas as under a common racial “threat.” If, as Gilmore argues, Southern white men were moved to violence in order to protect their “blanched wives and daughters” from the supposed threat of black assailants, by inscribing Evangelina’s story into the racist national mythology of the black rapist, Howe, Davis, and others incorporate the Cuban woman – and, by

extension, the country that she represents – into the U.S. national family. This assimilation is reinforced by her receipt of “immediate U.S. citizenship” in the closing pages of *The Story*.⁵⁹

Evangelina, 1898, and the U.S. family reunion

As a new member, Evangelina would enlarge the U.S. national family imperially while altering domestic dynamics between North and South. *The Story of Evangelina Cisneros* prominently features the family of Colonel Fitzhugh Lee, consul general of the United States in Havana. As his surname would indicate, Lee was the nephew of Robert E. Lee, commander of the Confederate forces during the Civil War.⁶⁰ In her narrative of the events, Evangelina stresses that Lee’s solicitous wife visited her in prison and “spoke to me as she might to her own daughter.”⁶¹ That the white Cuban has been “adopted” by the ex-Confederate family becomes evident at the end of the narrative, when Evangelina’s suitor Carlos Carbonell appears at the Lees’ home in Richmond, former capital of the Confederacy, to ask for her hand in marriage. The act situates the Cuban woman under the patriarchal tutelage of Consul Lee, represented simultaneously as a U.S. imperialist and an heir to the Confederacy. Similarly, Karl Decker, who led the *Journal*’s mission to rescue Evangelina from her Havana jail, was “the son of a Confederate colonel.”⁶² It is important to note that Lee and Decker are representatives of the post-War generation, scions of Southern families that have “risen again” after losing the Cause. As with the mythical black rapist that reappears in the Evangelina texts, then, Lee’s and Decker’s Southern genealogies serve to inscribe the Cisneros affair within the metanarrative of Southern Redemption.

Importantly, this family attitude towards Evangelina is not the particular prerogative of the Confederates, and, when the *criolla* is presented to President McKinley at the White House,

she is accompanied by the widow of Northern General John Logan, who appears to fill in for the girl's dead mother.⁶³ What emerges here, then, is not the traditional rivalry between North and South, but the union (or reunion) of Logan's North – presented not as a military champion, but as a maternal chaperone – and a South “redeemed” in the benevolently paternalist forms of Lee and Decker. Related through their new “daughter,” whom they – like the white men of Wilmington – have saved from “African” domination, the two sides of the U.S. national family are reconciled through their mutual, white supremacist, interest in the white Cuban woman's wellbeing in the face of the black social and political advances occurring throughout the extended South at the time. Connecting white neocolonialism in the South with U.S. imperialism in the Caribbean, Evangelina's rescue from African rape by Anglo-Saxon saviors serves to tie Southern Redemption to the rise of the United States as a global power.

As it features collaboration from both sides of the U.S. national family, the letter-writing campaign discussed at the beginning of *The Story* exemplifies the text's use of adoption as a metaphor for national reconciliation through imperial gazing. Tellingly, the widows of both Confederate president Jefferson Davis and Union general Ulysses S. Grant took part in this effort to “cut through the animosities between North and South that festered after the Civil War and unite the women of the United States in a common cause.”⁶⁴ Upon signing the petition to María Cristina, Nancy McKinley, mother of then-President McKinley, exclaimed that “the women of America can accomplish a great deal sometimes, and I can assure them they have my hearty endorsement and prayers for success. I hope the Queen Regent will listen to the voices of the American women and her own conscience, and set the Cuban child free,” positing the group of U.S. women as moral guides to the Spanish Regent.⁶⁵ Given her relation to the president, Nancy McKinley's quote serves to frame the petition to María Cristina de Habsburgo within the same

family allegory that Evangelina's adoption by the Logans and the Lees represents. This can be seen when soon-to-be adoptive mother Mrs. Logan, who drafted the missive, suggests to the Spanish Regent that Evangelina's case "must appeal to your mother's heart" and insists that the ruler take action.⁶⁶ In this way, the Northern and Southern signatories not only perform the reunification of the national family by adopting Evangelina, they also, through this maternal act of protecting the Cuban when the Spanish Regent has abandoned her, show themselves to be the "true" mothers of the young colonial when the representative of the "mother country" fails to shield her from racialized rapists.⁶⁷ The campaign thus evidences the ability of the post-Reconstruction era North American national family to put aside their regional differences in order to save the white Cuba(n) from a fate "worse than death" at "African" hands, in contrast with Mother Spain's apparent inability to do the same and resolve her own racialized conflict on the Empire's Southern periphery. Even as it complicates the gender binary upon which the black rapist mythology rests by granting greater agency to white women (while resisting interrogation of the construct's underlying racist assumptions), like Decker's rescue and the Logan's and the Lee's metaphorical adoption, the signatories' maternal gesture serves to justify the U.S. intervention in the island's independence movement that would occur a short year later.

Thus, as the bi-regional rallying around the Cuban captive's cause makes clear, the U.S. military intervention on the island represented "the first time since the Civil War that the North and South had united in a common goal, which built badly needed unity" and paved the way to expansion into the moribund Spanish Empire.⁶⁸ This is also reflected in a chapter of *The Leopard's Spots* entitled "The New America," in which Dixon presents Northern withdrawal from the former Confederate States of America at the end of Reconstruction as though it were a consequence of the national unity forged in the conflict with Spain, explaining that, after the war:

Negro refugees and their associates once more filled the ear of the national government with clamour for the return of the army to the South to uphold Negro power, but for the first time since 1867 it fell on deaf ears. The Anglo-Saxon race had been reunited. The Negro was no longer the ward of the republic. Henceforth, he must stand or fall on his own worth and pass under the law of the survival of the fittest.⁶⁹

In much the same way that the potential annexation of slaveholding Cuba “contributed significantly to the polarization of North and South” before the Civil War, the postbellum invasion of the island functions for Dixon to finally resolve sectional tensions within the United States.⁷⁰ As in the *Evangelina* texts, here, too, the Southern “Lost Cause” finds itself in U.S. imperialism and “the Anglo-Saxon” nation, newly united, enters “the new century with the imperial crown of the ages on [its] brow and the scepter of the infinite in [its] hands.”⁷¹

It is important to note that, despite what Dixon describes, Reconstruction did not end in 1898, but in 1877. However, as mentioned previously, in addition to the beginning of formal empire in the Caribbean, 1898 was also a key year for U.S. race relations, as it marks the date of another historical event: the Wilmington insurrection (to which Dixon alludes elsewhere in his novel), in which the gains of Reconstruction were definitively reversed by the interlocking forces of racial terror and gender policing – ideologies that also would create the conditions of possibility for *Evangelina*’s imperial adoption by the re-United States. This relationship between Cuba and North Carolina would have been apparent to readers at the time. “On November 12, 1898, the *New York Herald* ran stories about the U.S. presence in Cuba, the ‘race riot’ in Phoenix, South Carolina, and the massacre of Black people in Wilmington, North Carolina.”⁷²

Similarly, the front page of the *New York Journal and Advertiser* (the *New York Journal*'s new name) from the day after the massacre features stories about both the events in Wilmington and Theodore Roosevelt, who had been elected governor of New York after his successful campaign in the Caribbean. While the articles about Roosevelt appear on the left-hand side of the paper and those about Wilmington on the right, the columns are not even, and the two stories collide on the page, making it difficult for the reader to determine where one starts and the other stops. The rest of the issue is filled with news from occupied Cuba. The two racialized conflicts thus become confused with one another on the *Journal*'s pages, tying "the racial question at home to America's world mission abroad" through the myth of the black rapist and suggesting that "the South's regional redemption from an imperialist North lays the foundation for national imperialism at the turn of the century."⁷³

Conclusion

A reconsideration of the well-known place of yellow journalism in the Spanish-Cuban-American War in the frame of the "extended South" or "American Mediterranean" allows us to think about the transnational dimensions of postslavery, a historical moment frequently examined from the national perspective.⁷⁴ By focusing on the intertwining of white Redeemer neocolonial and Anglo-Saxon imperial discourses through the black rapist trope, we add a new layer of nuance to our understanding of the U.S. invasion and occupation of Cuba. After all, the U.S. intervention into the island's affairs represented a military and political domination justified in part by a desire to "redeem" the post-abolition former Spanish colony from the racialized debasement of the Spanish colonial world and the more egalitarian iterations of the separatist project. The United States' unsuccessful efforts after the Caribbean War to disenfranchise Afro-Cubans, as

well as its involvement in the 1912 repression of the Partido Independiente de Color – an event that also responded to rumors of rape – demonstrate the mobility of the Redemptionist racial and gender paradigms popularized by writers such as Dixon in the imperial context of the circum-Caribbean.⁷⁵ The discursive domestication of Evangelina and Cuba within the extended South thus illuminates a transnational racial-imperial ideological-tropological network that would develop in the early-twentieth century Americas and influence race politics in the two Souths.

Notes

¹ González and Quintan, *Evangelina Cossío Cisneros y William Randolph Hearst*, 13–14.

² *Ibid.* 7–8.

³ Albert, *The Rescue of Evangelina Cisneros*, 132.

⁴ For histories of the war, see Phillip Foner, *Spanish-Cuban-American War*, and Pérez, *Cuba between Empires*. For a discussion of historiographic representations of the war, see Pérez, *The War of 1898*.

⁵ Martínez-Echazábal, “Mestizaje,” 32.

⁶ Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba*.

⁷ Martí, “Nuestra América” and Dixon, *The Clansman*, 46.

⁸ Qtd. in *The Story*, 41. Though an abolitionist, Howe infamously puts her racist views on Afro-descendants on display in her travel narrative *A Trip to Cuba*.

⁹ Dixon, *The Leopard's Spots*, 90.

¹⁰ Roggenkamp, *Narrating the News*, 16.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 18. Though, as Helg shows, the black rapist trope certainly exists in Cuban discourse from the period, as well, canonical Cuban texts by Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda and Anselmo Suárez y Romero, for example, display (perhaps insincerely) much more positive attitudes towards black male sexuality. North American writing on Evangelina Cisneros seems not to have dialogued with this Cuban race discourse. For a comparison of the Cisneros affair in U.S., Cuban, and Spanish periodicals, see Wilcox. For a general discussion of race and gender in the nineteenth-century exile press, see Lazo, *Writing to Cuba*. For a reading of Cisneros in the context of U.S. Latino literature, see Torres-Salliant.

¹¹ Guterl, *American Mediterranean*.

¹² Iglesias Utset, *Las metáforas del cambio*, 15.

¹³ Guterl, *American Mediterranean*.

¹⁴ Bone, "The (Extended) South"; Wallerstein, *Capitalist World Economy*.

¹⁵ Gruesz, "The Gulf of Mexico System."

¹⁶ DuBois, *Black Reconstruction*, 42.

¹⁷ Alemán, "From Union Officers," 91. On Cuban contributions to the Union and Confederate armies, see Tucker, ed. *Cubans in the Confederacy*; Alemán, "From Union Officers to Cuban Rebels"; and Lazo, "Confederates in the Hispanic Attic."

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 105.

¹⁹ Lazo, Introduction, 16.

²⁰ Russell, *African Americans*, 1.

²¹ Foner, *Reconstruction*, xvii.

²² Clark, Introduction, xii.

²³ Dixon, *The Leopard's Spots*, 196.

²⁴ Edwards, *Gendered Confusion and Strife*, 8.

²⁵ Gunning, *Rape, Race, and Lynching*, 7. For a black feminist critique of the myth of the black rapist, see Davis, *Women, Race, and Class*, 172–201.

²⁶ Gillman, *Blood Talk*, 97.

²⁷ Prather, “We Have Taken,” 30.

²⁸ Kirshenbaum, “The Vampire,” 9.

²⁹ Qtd. in Gilmore, “Murder, Memory, and the Flight of the Incubus,” 75.

³⁰ It is important to point out the largely fictitious nature of this discourse, which rarely included testimony from the alleged victims themselves. Gilmore has shown that there was, in fact, no statistical increase in the incidence of rape in North Carolina between 1897 and 1898 (76).

³¹ Gunning, *Rape, Race, and Lynching*, 28; Durham, *White Rage*, 84; Leiter, “Thomas Dixon, Jr.,” n. p. For an overview of race and gender in Dixon’s oeuvre, see Lyerly, “Gender and Race.”

³² Dixon, *The Clansman*, 304.

³³ Kim Magowan, for her part, deconstructs the “black beast” trope to show how white men also are depicted as animalistic in Dixon’s novels. For a biographically based, psychoanalytic explanation of the black rapist myth in Dixon’s oeuvre, see Williamson, *Crucible of Race*, 141–175. For a queer reading of the subject, see Stokes, *Color of Sex*, 133–157.

³⁴ Wells, “Remarks,” 862. For more on comparisons between Spanish violence and U.S. lynching in the U.S. African American press, see Russell, *African Americans*, 44–48.

³⁵ Cisneros, *The Story*, 31.

³⁶ Qtd. in *ibid.*, 41.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 221.

³⁸ Fountain, “Questions of Race and Gender,” 39.

³⁹ Pérez, *Cuba in the American Imagination* and Roggenkamp, *Narrating the News*, 106.

⁴⁰ Sánchez Pupo, *La prensa*, 52. Pérez notes that U.S. discourse from the occupation period, conversely, normally allegorized Cuba as a black child, see *Cuba in the American Imagination*, 95–174. On Africanity as an anti-colonial metaphor, see Williams, *The Crucible of Race*. Sartorius, for his part, recently has problematized the widely accepted dichotomy between white loyalists and Afro-Cuban separatists, see *Ever Faithful*.

⁴¹ Qtd. in Pérez, *Cuba in the American Imagination*, 75 and 83.

⁴² Qtd. in Charonon-Duetsch, “Cartoons,” 13.

⁴³ Fuchs, *Exotic Nations*; de Guzmán, *Spain’s Long Shadow*; Havard, *Hispanism*. Even Cuban nationalists at the time looked doubtfully on Spanish claims to whiteness, such as when Villaverde writes: “*Es que tu padre, por ser español, no está exento de la sospecha de tener sangre mezclada, pues supongo que es andaluz, y de Sevilla vinieron a América los primeros esclavos negros. Tampoco los árabes, que dominaron en Andalucía más que en otras partes de España, fueron de raza pura caucásica, sino africana*” (Just because your father is Spanish doesn’t mean he’s exempt from the suspicion of having mixed blood. I suppose he’s Andalusian, and the first black slaves came to América from Seville. And the Arabs, who were more dominant in Andalusia than in other parts of Spain, weren’t of pure Caucasian race, either. They were African). *Cecilia Valdés*, 135.

⁴⁴ Gillman, *Blood Talk*, 91. On African American participation in the war against Spain, see Kaplan, “Black and Blue” and Russell, *African Americans*.

⁴⁵ Cisneros, *The Story*, 141.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 157.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 170.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 171.

⁴⁹ Torres-Saillant, “Recovering,” 442.

⁵⁰ Qtd. in Albert, *The Rescue of Evangelina Cisneros*, 82.

⁵¹ Dixon, *The Leopard’s Spots*, 196.

⁵² Cisneros, *The Story*, 36.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 35. For a study of the figure of the Cuban woman – particularly the Afro-Cuban woman – in nationalist discourse, see Kutzinski, *Sugar’s Secrets*. For a historical study of the role of Cuban women in the independence movement, see Prados-Torreira, *Mambisas*.

⁵⁴ Cisneros, *The Story*, 36.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 32 and 61.

⁵⁶ Howe, qtd. in Cisneros, *The Story*, 39.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 41; Davis, qtd. in *ibid.*, 38.

⁵⁸ Dixon, *The Leopard’s Spots*, 126–127.

⁵⁹ Roggenkamp, *Narrating the News*, 112.

⁶⁰ Campbell, *The Year that Defined American Journalism*.

⁶¹ Cisneros, *The Story*, 189.

⁶² Albert, *Rescue*, 121.

⁶³ Cisneros, *The Story*, 222.

⁶⁴ Albert, *Rescue*, 58.

⁶⁵ Qtd. in Cisneros, *The Story*, 46–47.

⁶⁶ Qtd. in *Ibid.*, 43–44.

⁶⁷ Widow of the late Spanish king Alfonso XII, María Cristina de Habsburgo was of Austrian, not Spanish, birth. This fact seems not to have impacted how the Anglo-American women discussed here saw her.

⁶⁸ Albert, *The Rescue of Evangelina Cisneros*, 22.

⁶⁹ Dixon, *The Leopard's Spots*, 418.

⁷⁰ Tucker, *Cubans in the Confederacy*, 4.

⁷¹ Dixon, *The Leopard's Spots*, 439.

⁷² Davis, *Women, Race, and Class*, 117.

⁷³ Rogin, “The Sword,” 153; Thomas, “*The Clansman's*,” 321. The details of Dixon’s views on U.S. imperialism remain a subject of scholarly debate. Williamson and Thomas argue that Dixon’s faith in U.S. empire gradually increased during the war years and their aftermath, while Michaels contends that the author’s racism prevented him from endorsing U.S. Anglo-Saxon entanglements with non-white peoples abroad.

⁷⁴ For a notable exception, see Scott, *Degrees of Freedom*.

⁷⁵ Helg, *Our Rightful Share*, 169–176, 197–198, 211, and 216. For more on the impact of U.S. imperialism on race structures in early-republican Cuba, see de la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, and Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba*.

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