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Unnatural Wills: Inheritance Disputes and Inequality

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ABSTRACT

Within the conceptual frame of relational economic sociology, inheritance disputes are a canonical form of relational mismatch. But the social patterning of relational mismatches, and their various ties to inequality, remain murky. In this paper, I examine all known inheritance disputes in Dallas from 1895–1945 within their social context to generate hypotheses about the relationship between inequality and mismatches more broadly. Inheritance disputes were usually resolved by increasing the spread of fortunes; in this sense, they moderated wealth inequality between individuals. But not everyone was equally able to make their preferred estate distribution a reality. Using a series of case studies, I argue that dispute resolutions tended to reify normative family structures and naturalize sharp, moralized distinctions between fuzzy social categories. The legal resolutions to this class of relational mismatches may marginally mitigate individual-level wealth inequality and simultaneously produce categorical inequalities by race, class, gender, sexuality, and family structure. I conclude with a set of hypotheses and questions for future studies.

1 | Introduction

Jessie (?-?) said she was George's (1852–1906) wife, entitled to a wife's inheritance, but the court said that was simply impossible. No one really disputed that they met the usual qualifications for common-law spouses in Texas at that time: they were a heterosexual, same-race (white) couple who called each other husband and wife in front of many witnesses. Indeed, those basic facts propelled *Grigsby v. Reib* (1913) all the way to the Texas Supreme Court, where it became the most-cited Dallas inheritance dispute of the twentieth century. From the judges' perspective, the problem was that Jessie and George's social statuses were too different. Jessie was a sex worker, and George was a railroad magnate. To call them married would be “an enthronement of lewdness” “inconsistent with the sanctity of the marriage relation” (*Grigsby v. Reib* 1911). It would encourage other sex workers to demand inheritances as common-law wives; fortunes of tycoons would become “the

prey of the bawd and the adventuress,” and innocent children would turn into “bastards.” Chief Justice Brown even drew on the story of Adam and Eve, arguing that “marriage was not originated by human law;” it was “a status ordained by God, the foundation and support of good government, and absolutely necessary to the purity and preservation of good society”—and God, apparently, did not believe sex workers could marry millionaires (*Grigsby v. Reib* 1913). The overtly Christian opinion is still quoted in contemporary arguments against same-sex marriage (e.g., *Brief for Liberty* 2013). The justices were so intent on distinguishing Jessie and George's tie from a legitimate union that their ruling constituted “a definite change in stance” on the definition of common-law marriage; after *Grigsby v. Reib* (1913), Texas courts assumed spouses must cohabitate fulltime (Lind 2008, 500). Jessie, in contrast, framed her case in simple, personal terms. She explained that “I tried to make a living for myself off of my house the best way I could;” that she loved George very much; that she had married twice before with

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the usual formal ceremonies, but those marriages hadn't been "successful." With George, she said, "I wanted to try it a new way" (Grigsby v. Reib 1911).

Inheritance disputes like *Grigsby v. Reib* are relational mismatches, involving competing moralized claims of the proper matches between relations, transactions, and media (Zelizer 2005, 2012). They are rare, but highly illustrative of local norms of intimacy and money; we can think of them as "exceptional cases," "[magnifying] relational patterns that in more mundane contexts lack visibility" (Ermakoff 2014, 223). In this paper, I examine all surviving disputes in one population, working to understand the social patterning of relational mismatches, particularly as they relate to inequality. I argue that inheritance disputes are mismatches whose resolutions generally spread fortunes among more heirs, or more evenly among the same heirs. In this sense, they mitigate inequality of wealth ownership between individuals, perhaps especially by gender and age within families. But not everyone is equally able to make their preferred estate distribution a reality. Dispute resolutions tend to reify certain relational forms over others and naturalize sharp, moralized distinctions between fuzzy social categories. In this way, they help reproduce categorical inequalities by race, class, gender, sexuality, and family structure.

The paper will proceed as follows. First, I situate inheritance disputes as relational mismatches, and briefly review historical links between inheritance disputes and inequality. I describe the context and data. Then I move through a series of case studies illustrating the following key themes from the collection of disputes. Dispute resolutions usually increased the spread of fortunes within families. Intimate ties that violated kinship norms were particularly likely to spawn disputes. Resolutions increased and entrenched intersecting distinctions by race, class, gender, sexuality, and family structure. They did this perhaps especially because in court, litigants who were most unevenly matched by their nominal "state categories" tended to be much more equally matched in a continuous, "infracategorical" sense of inequality (Monk 2022). Some mismatches were too lopsided to make litigation practically possible. Among those cases that did make it to multiple rounds of trial, upper-class estates have disproportionately shaped the legal system through case law. I conclude with a set of hypotheses and questions for future studies.

2 | Theoretical Background

2.1 | Inheritance Disputes as Relational Mismatches

Zelizer (2005) developed the concept of *relational work* to explain how people engage in economic activity. She (Zelizer 2012, 1) argued that "in all economic action," people draw boundaries around categories of relationships, "designate certain sorts of economic transactions as appropriate for the relation, bar other transactions as inappropriate, and adopt certain media for reckoning and facilitating economic transactions within the relation." Relational work has successfully explained economic life at multiple levels of analysis, from

global finance (Bandelj 2011; Hoang 2022) to siblings (Wigen 2023). Sometimes, the process of relational work spawns a *relational mismatch*—a disagreement over the proper matching of transactions, relations, and media (Zelizer 2005, 53). Analysts have framed relational mismatches as mechanisms through which workers consent to exploitation (Mears 2015), death compensation funds flow to families of origin rather than longtime queer partners (Zelizer 2005, 9–12), heterosexual parents make gendered economic decisions after job loss (Rao 2022), and courts fuel women's material dispossession in matrimonial property disputes (Garnaik 2025). Bandelj's (2020, 266) review of relational work argued that researchers need to further explore the interaction between relational work and inequality, and "why, and when, relational work leads to mismatches." Because inheritance has a clear connection to inequality, and because inheritance disputes are a form of mismatch, a set of inheritance disputes is well-positioned to do both.

Inheritance is a form of relational work with a clear connection to inequality. When people write wills, when executors distribute properties, when heirs claim bequests, and when courts consecrate or intervene in the process, they are all doing relational work by defining and matching appropriate relations, transactions, and media. Inheritance increasingly generates wealth inequality overall (Alvaredo et al. 2017), and tends to exacerbate wealth inequality between gender (Bessière and Gollac 2023; Tisch and Schechtl 2024; Trinh 2024), racial (Avery and Rendall 2002; Pascoe 2009), and other social categories, depending on patterned matches of bequests to relations (Wegge 2021; Beckert 2022). An extreme example is primogeniture, the inheritance system used by the British aristocracy for nearly a millennium. By mandating that estates pass mostly to eldest male heirs, primogeniture entrenched inequality between the upper class and everyone else, and ensured that within the upper class, most wealth was controlled by men (Starr 2019). But contemporary inheritance systems bake in categorical inequalities, too: in common-law jurisdictions like the US and UK, intestacy laws—laws that determine where estates go when people die without wills—categorize and rank kin relations (Beckert 2008), matching them to proper portions of an estate, and leaving non-normative family structures especially vulnerable (Bea and Poppe 2021).

Not all mismatches are inheritance disputes, but all inheritance disputes are mismatches, because they are fundamentally disagreements about the proper matching of bequests and relations. In fact, Zelizer's *The Purchase of Intimacy* (2005, p. 7–9), which introduces the concepts of relational work and mismatches, begins with an inheritance dispute: one that hinged on the definition of the tie between a white testator and a black heiress under slavery in Louisiana. Inheritance is intrinsically emotional (Wiest 2025), and inheritance disputes, like mismatches in general, are especially concentrated with "powerful" feelings like "betrayal, shame, outrage, or disappointment" (Bandelj 2020, 259). Testator's choices about the matching of properties to persons are also statements about their most intimate relationships, and they can violate heirs' and would-be heirs' deeply felt conceptions of those relations, with sometimes disastrous consequences.

Although inheritance in law and practice tends to exacerbate inequality, the empirical relationship between inheritance disputes and inequality is murkier, like the relationship between mismatches and inequality more generally. Disputes mitigate inequality when their resolutions spread wealth more across more people. But they also might exacerbate inequality when some potential contestants have more power to shape the mismatch resolution, including when courts favor certain kinds of persons and relations over others. When disputes make it to trial, “lawyers, judges, and juries...work hard to establish proper matching within legal categories” (Zelizer 2005, 63), a process that is likely riddled with distortions, given the well-documented inequalities that structure legal systems and are structured by them (e.g., Harris 1993; Pascoe 2009; Pistor 2019; Bessière and Gollac 2023).

“Why, and when” do relational mismatches happen (Bandelj 2020, 266)? How do they relate to inequality? A set of inheritance disputes from one population is a set of mismatches where the sociolegal setting and type of transaction is held constant, and the relations and media are variously contested. By narrowing the scope of variation within a highly heterogeneous category, such a collection presents an opportunity to systematically theorize about where mismatches happen, and the ways that mismatches may variously reflect, mitigate, or exacerbate inequality, following the call from Bandelj (2020).

2.2 | A Brief Overview of Categorical Inequality and Inheritance Disputes

To the extent that inheritance disputes are socially patterned, they are structurally consequential. They form micro-macro linkages, in which patterned intimate dramas reflect and affect larger-scale social structures. Inheritance disputes can be mechanisms through which relatively disadvantaged actors gain more access to wealth. They may be particularly important for women and younger siblings from propertied families, who have launched inheritance disputes to gain access to family wealth in many settings around the world, including contemporary Benin (Andreetta 2020), early modern Spain (Lehfeldt 2000), colonial North India (Prasad 2008), and mid-twentieth century Zimbabwe (Mujere 2014). In the aggregate, the success of cases like those can help equalize the distribution and control of wealth within families and across gender categories.

More typically, and sometimes simultaneously, inheritance disputes seem to reinscribe inequalities of race, gender, sexuality, age, family structure, and their intersections. In the US, white people have used estate litigation to extract and hoard wealth. Before Emancipation, white enslavers occasionally willed property to black heirs, but white families used estate litigation to capture bequests by characterizing the relations as enslaver-enslaved rather than husband-wife or parent-child (Zelizer 2005, 9; Friedman 2009, 96–97). Later, “disgruntled relatives, state officials, and creditors” used miscegenation laws to take bequests “away from Black and Indian women widowed by White men, and sometimes from mixed-race children as well,” to the point that inheritance disputes formed as many as

“one third...of all the instances in which miscegenation law arose in state appellate courts” (Pascoe 2009, 136). With inheritance disputes, as more generally, racism has been “a strategy of wealth defense” (Beckert 2022, 239) and a mechanism for the construction of race itself (Fields and Fields 2012).

Estate litigation has also been used in the US to redirect bequests from queer heirs to straight families. For decades, queer twentieth-century people left bequests to their partners and chosen kin. Homophobic families of origin were “remarkably successful in contesting such wills by charging that the homosexual partner had exerted ‘undue influence’ over their deceased son or daughter” (Chauncey 2004, 100). Such contests became more frequent and perilous during the AIDS epidemic, when gay men died in droves, and increased stigma fueled courts’ willingness to disinherit queer heirs (Rosenfeld 1998). The contests were so numerous that they became a central driver of the gay marriage movement, convincing many queer people that they needed the legal protections of marriage (Chauncey 2004). Aggregated estate litigation can redirect resources toward white, heterosexual families, in the process, characterizing those family structures as uniquely “natural.”

3 | Context, Data, and Methods

3.1 | Legal Context

When people die in legal contexts with total testamentary freedom, like the US, the UK, and most of the UK’s other historic colonies, they can technically distribute their wealth however they’d like. But even in these contexts, testators still overwhelmingly give to their close kin, choosing distributions that align with social norms about the proper matching of properties to heirs. The legal term in the US for a highly unusual will is an “unnatural will.” “A ragbag of doctrines and presumptions [tilt] the scales against ‘unnatural’ wills” in court, making them especially vulnerable to litigation (Friedman 2009, 99).

The basic contours of inheritance law have mostly persisted in Texas for over a century, and generally align with most common-law contexts. To contest a will, a person must have legal “standing”—meaning they must be named in the will, or they must inherit if the will is declared invalid. Contestants must prove that something is wrong with the will or the proposed set of properties and relations. Sometimes people die “intestate,” meaning they do not leave a valid will; courts then distribute estates according to intestacy laws. In the US, intestacy laws have generally dictated that a third to a half of estates go to spouses, and the rest is split equally among the “closest” legally recognized kin of the same type (most commonly, children) (Friedman 2009). Intestacy laws presume a normative kinship structure. They largely assume adults form “heteropatriarchal (heterosexual, male-headed), nuclear (e.g., two-parent, stably married, cohoused) families (hereafter HNF) who have all of their children in common” (Cross et al. 2022, 484). Of course, families in the US have never fully or equally conformed to the HNF “fantasy of normativity” (Butler 2004, 116). Even today, Bea and Poppe (2021) found that more than a

fifth of US families have structures marginalized by intestacy classifications, and those families are disproportionately poor and of color.

3.2 | Data and Methods

This paper analyzes 81 will contests covering 70 distinct estates, which represent all cases of estate litigation in Dallas between 1895–1945 that I have found in a maximalist search of archival sources. I link those contests to a larger relational database of the Dallas elite in its first century, supplemented with analogous research on dispute participants who are not in the database. I also draw on qualitative accounts of inheritance from this setting to further contextualize the cases and build a sense of the kinds of conflicts that never made it to court.

To locate the will contests, I searched through every court case in *Nexis Uni* that took place in Texas between 1895–1945 and included the words “probate,” “contested,” and “Dallas.” I also searched for disputes systematically in the *Dallas Morning News*, [Newspapers.com](https://www.dallasnews.com), and the *Portal to Texas History*, using terms like “contested the will,” “submitted for probate,” “unsound mind,” “testamentary capacity,” and “undue influence.” Altogether, the collection of disputes represents nearly all cases of estate litigation in 1895–1945 Dallas that made it to more than one round of trial, and an unknown, but likely significant, proportion of estates that were ever contested. Table A1 lists them in full. Especially because I am missing an unknown number of cases, I do not aim to conduct a rigorous statistical analysis of these complex data; I aim, rather, to inductively analyze surviving cases by situating them in their social context. This analytic process generates hypotheses about relational mismatches and inequality that can be tested elsewhere.

I focus on Dallas from 1895 to 1945 so that I can link the cases to data from a larger project, situating them within a continuous social and demographic fabric. I link to the Dallas elites dataset, a hand-constructed relational database that draws the kinship network of the full upper class and all elites in the city's first century ($n = 20,243$ as of July 2025). The Dallas elites dataset is, roughly, genealogical research on a large scale. I take lists of upper class and elite people, look them up in an array of archival sources (including *AncestryLibrary.com*, the *Portal to Texas History*, and various newspapers), and use those sources to build a set of structured, interconnected life histories (see O'Brien 2024 for more details). I examine disputes between 1895 and 1945 because the database is most robust for those years; helpfully, it includes a set of more than 500 upper-class wills, most (about 94%) of which were not contested (O'Brien 2025). Of course, not everyone involved in the 81 inheritance disputes is in the database. I collected demographic, kinship, and qualitative data about those participants using the same general process and sources. By situating a full collection of inheritance disputes within multidimensional demographic and network data, I can generate testable hypotheses about the social topography of disputes, and I can look beyond group-based measures of inequality into the complex, continuous, multidimensional nature of inequality within and between cases (Monk 2022).

4 | The Disputes

4.1 | Spreading the Wealth

The first point I will make is relatively simple: inheritance disputes tended to mitigate individual-level wealth inequality on a small scale, because most dispute resolutions increased a fortune's spread. Courts often decided cases by throwing out wills and distributing estates according to intestacy laws, which typically meant they split the estate up more thoroughly. In *Campbell v. Campbell* (1919), for example, the “penurious and miserly” Archibald Campbell (1844–1917) was fatally hit by a train, leaving a wife, four children, and a sizable fortune. Sealed in his safe were two distinct wills, both leaving everything to one person—his wife in one, and their youngest son in the other. The jury determined that Archibald disinherited his kin because he was “under the influence of an insane delusion” that made him disregard “the natural and proper objects of his bounty.” As justification they noted that he was “possessed of an ungovernable and violent temper, aroused by trifles;” he would “threaten serious bodily harm to those around him” and even “on one occasion killed a number of domestic ducks.” The court threw out both wills, splitting the estate between his wife and children, and mitigating wealth inequality within his family. Settlements behind closed doors, too, spread wealth around more, because they generally entailed a monetary compromise between contestants. In *Nolan v. Smith* (1942), for example, Arthur Nolan left his entire estate to his sister Nell, cutting out their brother Tom; Tom sued, and Nell gave him a cash settlement. And of course, all cases, no matter the outcome, reduced the size of the estate by funneling funds to lawyers. In these basic senses, then, inheritance disputes in aggregate tended to reduce individual-level wealth inequality—although given their rarity and the tiny ranges of redistribution, the cumulative effect on individual-level wealth inequality was likely negligible.

4.2 | Unnatural Wills

Estate litigation is rare, but it is not random: it arises unequally. Placed in the context of their social worlds, it seems that estates enmeshed in non-normative webs of intimacy—like the estates of queer people—were especially likely to spawn disputes.

While hand-constructing the Dallas elites dataset, I have stumbled on a small collection of people (less than half of a percent) who appear queer. I categorize them as “queer,” which is an expansive, flexible term referring to people who diverge from norms of gender and intimacy, rather than “gay” or “lesbian,” which are historically specific sexual identity categories (Bartle 2015). In their rigidly gendered white upper-class world, this tiny collection of people stood out not only because they diverged from the HNF norm, but also because they neatly fit intimate economic patterns of queer upper-class life in the early twentieth century US (Faderman 1991; Chauncey 1994; Bronski 2011). The women tended to graduate from women's colleges; they usually worked for pay; they often lived together as “partners.” Men often took on “women's roles” in elite clubs, formed dense all-bachelor social networks, and lived in all-male boarding and club houses. Many of these men and women

worked in the arts; many spent months or years in queer hot-spots like Greenwich Village, Hollywood, or Provincetown; they never married,¹ or married very late, and never had children. Their sexual behaviors and desires are mostly lost to history (as are the behaviors and desires of their more heteronormative contemporaries), but they all diverged sharply from local patterns of gendered intimate economic behavior in ways that align with historical accounts of queer elite life in the early twentieth century US.

Perhaps the most striking finding from an examination of inheritance disputes in their social context is that queer elite estates are *vastly* overrepresented. Sixteen of the queer Dallas elites I have identified died between 1895–1945, making their estates eligible for the disputes collection. Remarkably, *at least ten* of those sixteen estates generated disputes: 63%, compared to less than one percent² from the elites data overall.

Consider *Harmon v. Ketchum* (1927), a fight between Clara Gilmer's siblings and her former roommate over her Dallas land. Clara Gilmer (1878–1922) was a never-married teacher who left her entire estate to Adele Ketchum (1877–1968), the first woman to graduate from the University of Illinois law school. This was striking and suggestive, because bequests of entire estates usually went to spouses (O'Brien 2025). Clara's three siblings, who would have inherited everything under intestacy law, launched a dispute, claiming that Adele had exerted "undue influence" to receive this "unnatural" spouse-sized bequest. What was the nature of this "undue influence?" Sometime around 1902, when Clara and Adele were teaching in Peoria, Illinois, they became roommates. This was the start of a heteronormative turn in US culture; whereas nineteenth century middle- and upper-class women often paired in widely accepted "romantic friendships," as the twentieth century dawned, many such women began to be "very secretive" because they were "cognizant of the fall from grace that love between women was beginning to suffer" (Faderman 1991, 53). Clara's siblings began to "resent their intimacy" and "endeavored to break it up" (*Harmon v. Ketchum* 1927). Lucy sent Adele's mother a letter, claiming Clara had once been "a good, pure-minded girl," but Adele had used "a species of hypnotism" on Clara, making it "impossible to keep her away from Adele." "Especially I do not want them to sleep together," she wrote (*The Macomb Journal* 1904). Adele sued Lucy for slander. Clara's other siblings teamed with Lucy. Their lawyer brother even defended Lucy in court, standing behind her as she said Clara "broke off an engagement to marry her third cousin because she loved Miss Ketchum more" (*The Dispatch* 1903).

Clara left Illinois to escape the scandal, teaching in various schools across the US empire before taking her own life in the Philippines in 1922. She never saw Adele again "from the time she left Illinois until the day she died." But she was intent on leaving her wealth to Adele, and *not* her siblings, writing in her will that "not one article of the most minute value... shall ever be allowed to fall into the possession of" her siblings, but that "Adele Ketchum, or her heirs, shall derive full benefit of all I possess." Ultimately, the Texas Court of Appeals ruled for Adele, noting that the evidence of undue influence "was so far removed in point of time from the execution of the will" 19 years later "as to be wholly without value." Clara wrote one last

letter to Adele before she died, telling her she would inherit her property, and concluding, "my love is with you always" (*Harmon v. Ketchum* 1927).

It is telling that the court accepted Clara's "unnatural" will not because they considered her "intimacy" with Adele legitimate, but because they were separated for nearly 2 decades. The fact that the suit got all the way to the Court of Appeals demonstrates how vulnerable queer wills were, even when testamentary freedom was supposedly total, even when partners were separated by decades and oceans, and even when a white, upper-class testator wrote a crystal-clear will.

Most queer wills were called "unnatural" not because testators left spouse-sized bequests to secret lovers, but because they gave kin-sized bequests to their chosen family. Consider the much-disputed estate of millionaire Louis Antonio Pires (1841–1922). At age eight, Louis boarded a ship to the US with his parents and brother Emanuel to immigrate from the Madeira Islands. Their parents died of cholera on the journey. Somehow, Emanuel wound up in the North, where he married a Madeiran woman and had seven children. Louis wound up in South, where he moved to Dallas and amassed a fortune. He was very socially active, and never married; by his forties, the *Dallas Morning News* (1885) reported that he had been "undecided so long" he was "doomed to celibacy." He lived in all-male clubs with other bachelors, including his longtime travel companion Charles Cobb, whose estate was also disputed, and of whom it was written that "nothing short of a miracle [would] ever induce him" to romance a woman (Fitzgerald 1899). Two of Louis's business partners and friends, J. T. Trezevant and Peter Youree, married and had daughters, Eva Trezevant and Rose Youree. Louis lavished them with gifts; they called him "Uncle Pie." Rose even hosted his funeral. His chosen family said he was evasive and mysterious. J. T. Trezevant remembered, "Pie was the closest mouthed man in the world. You'd meet him at a railroad station and ask, 'Where are you going, Pie?' and he would answer, 'Oh, down the road a piece'" (Rogers 1951, 162). Louis left identical amounts to Rose, Eva, and the surviving children of his brother Emanuel. These matching bequests positioned Rose and Eva as his nieces, and by extension, their fathers as his brothers. The rest of his fortune went to Dallas charities and fraternal organizations. His brother's children launched at least two will contests, calling the will "unnatural." They believed they, not charities and friends' daughters, had a natural right to Louis's fortune. They came to a settlement behind closed doors, which likely meant that in the end, Louis's family of origin inherited more than his chosen family (*Dallas Morning News* 1926). They made his queer will more normative.

Identifying queer people in history is a fraught business, not least because classifications for sexual behaviors and gender categories vary over time and by setting. My point is that testators like Clara and Louis were especially vulnerable to disputes precisely because of the characteristics that make them stand out as queer in their social locations: they made non-normative choices about their intimate economic lives. The fact that their wills were so frequently litigated anticipated the vulnerability of queer wills that would, decades later, fuel the marriage equality movement. They vividly demonstrate the idea

that there was a general template for relational work in inheritance, shared and reinforced by the legal system, that made technically total testamentary freedom limited in practice, even for the white upper class. More broadly, they suggest that relational mismatches may be especially likely when people forge non-normative economic intimacies— a constitutive feature of the queer experience. Mismatches may be concentrated in non-normative knots of intimate exchange, particularly when those knots are encased by rigid normativity, and their legal resolutions may tend to cram creative intimacies into more familiar structural forms.

4.3 | Model Marriages

As they resolved disputes through relational work, courts tended to reinscribe categorical distinctions by gender, race, sexuality and class. Most dispute resolutions that centered on a couple, like *Grigsby v. Reib*, distinguished and elevated one pair above all others - a white heterosexual married couple, characterized by a wife's sexual chastity and economic passivity. When courts decided on the nature of a tie, they used evidence of economic transactions, including cohabitation, care work, sex work, and cash transfers, to distinguish between sex workers, secretaries, nurses, and wives. They then matched that tie to appropriate bequests (Zelizer 2005). Often, that meant wealth stayed in the white, heteronormative family. Almost always, it involved the re-inscription of moralized distinctions between chaste, economically passive wives and all other women.

One of the most dramatic such disputes was *Craycroft v. Crawford* (1926), which grew so heated it spawned a murder. On September 11 in 1924, Lester Crawford (1897–1988) grabbed a shotgun, drove downtown, and repeatedly shot his half-sister's lawyer Paul O'Day “until he fell dead” in the lobby of a bank. “You can't insult my mother,” he explained (Ex Parte W. L. Crawford 1924). O'Day's murder was a dramatic crescendo in a yearslong legal fight between Lester's mother Kate (1861–1947) and his half-sister Lucy (1866–1953) over their father's fortune. Wealthy lawyer William Crawford (1839–1920) had died four years before, apparently leaving his entire estate to Kate, his second wife, and disinheriting his daughter Lucy from a first marriage. Lucy's legal team contended that this “unnatural” will was a product of Kate's “undue influence;” Kate's said it was the product of “natural” love of a husband for his wife. But what did O'Day's “insult” have to do with an inheritance dispute? O'Day had just submitted a legal brief saying that Lester's parents had a relationship “of a different and less honorable and conventional character than those which usually precede the marriage of an honorable man and an honorable woman.” Kate had seduced William with mint juleps and premarital sex, O'Day argued, and these “unconventional relations” were “probative” of Kate's “undue influence” over his will (Ex Parte W. L. Crawford 1924). By questioning her status as a properly chaste wife, O'Day also called into question the legitimacy of her inheritance. The Supreme Court of Texas eventually found that Kate *had* exerted undue influence over her husband and forced her to share the fortune with Lucy (*Craycroft v. Crawford* 1926).

Craycroft v. Crawford, like *Grigsby v. Reib*, explicitly conditioned a particular transaction and relation—a wife's inheritance—on sexual chastity and economic passivity. Judges and lawyers questioned Kate's deservingness as a wife-heiress not only because she may have had premarital sex with William, but also because she exerted control over the family fortune, violating the still-persistent norm that upper-class women with husbands should “disengage from economic matters” (Lareau 2022, 113). Before their marriage, William shared a household, business, and bank account with his brother, but Kate insisted they disentangle their wealth, after which the brothers became so “estranged” that they even “declined to speak to each other while gathered at the death bed of their mother.” Kate monitored spending not only in her household domain, but also at her husband's law office, where she “undertook to maintain a kind of espionage over conduct of affairs.” Allegedly, Kate even became a wife and mother to secure an inheritance. Her sister-in-law testified that Kate had “been advised by friends in Washington to leave her husband and come to Dallas to catch Colonel Crawford,” and that after catching him (in part by hiring him as her divorce lawyer), she gave him only one child, the murderous Lester, because one child was all that was necessary for the “purpose of obtaining...a mother's and a wife's inheritance.” The judges contrasted Kate's financial machinations with Lucy's exemplary economic passivity. Lucy gratefully collected gifts of land and money from her father for being “the embodiment to [him] of all that is beautiful sweet and delicate.” With their ruling, then, the justices reinforced the categorical distinction between virtuous, passive heiresses and immoral gold-diggers.

Saros v. Strickland (1941) also centered on a couple, but this case primarily reinscribed distinctions between racial categories. Everyone agreed that Anita Martinez (1876–1938) amassed a modest fortune before she died, including a boarding house, an inn, a café, and a large quantity of diamonds. They generally agreed, too, that she spent the last few years of her life in a domestic partnership with a Greek immigrant named Sam Saros (1896–1962), and that she died intestate. But there was considerable disagreement about the “controlling issue” in the case: whether Anita was white or black. Multiple white witnesses claimed she was white “with some Mexican and Indian blood,” and multiple black witnesses said she was a black woman they'd known for decades. Because “interracial” marriage was illegal, a decision about her racial category was also a decision about her heirs. If she was black, then Sam could not be her common-law husband and heir, and her fortune would go to Wesley Daugherty (1878–1943), a black man who said he was her brother. If she was white, Sam could inherit everything.

Wesley was her brother. Ample archival evidence confirms that Anita was born Tina Daugherty on a Louisiana plantation to a family variously categorized as black and mulatto, reflecting the shifting state categories of the time and region (Davis 1991). She maintained those kin ties throughout her life, and not particularly secretly. Indeed, black residents generally knew her as a light-skinned black woman named “Tena Long” who for years lived in the “colored sections” of segregated Dallas. She helped pay for a nephew's education at a black university, and when a brother died, she inherited his insurance policy from a black

fraternal organization; she was listed in his obituary in a black newspaper as “a sister, Mrs. Annette Martinez, of Dallas, Texas” (Cansler 1938b). She wrote loving “letters by the score” to her black kin that were such “models of craftsmanship and perfection” that allegedly, “many” people hearing them read aloud in court “attempted to purchase them” (Dallas Express 1942). The first Dallas judge “favored” Sam Saros, but in the face of overwhelming evidence, largely based on the history of her intimate economic life, the Court of Civil Appeals ultimately categorized Anita as black (Cansler 1938b). Sam inherited nothing.

Although the legal system assumed race was simple and immutable, Anita, like countless others, regularly slipped between racial categories. “Taking Spanish, Portuguese, or other Latin names” was a relatively common “passing” strategy for light-skinned black people in the US under slavery and Jim Crow (Williamson 1980, 101). In a white supremacist society, passing “meant gaining access to a whole set of public and private privileges” and “controlling critical aspects of [her] life rather than being the object of others’ domination” (Harris 1993, 1713). In a reference to Du Bois (1903), black journalist Olive Jimmy Cansler described Anita as a woman “who lived within and without the ‘the veil’” (1938b). Indeed, in her lifetime, Anita was variously, and sometimes simultaneously, categorized as white, black, Indian, Mexican, negro, colored, and mulatto. She went by at least eight different first names and three different surnames in various combinations; in 1932, she listed herself in the Dallas city directory as both Mrs. Annette Long and Mrs. Juanita Martinez. She shifted between nearly a dozen occupations, including innkeeper, dressmaker, Spanish teacher, psychologist, and fortune teller. Even her longtime home straddled a porous, fuzzy border between racially segregated neighborhoods. This is why the court had to work so hard to determine her race: she exemplified the contingent, continuous realities that a system of racial domination must continually classify (Wacquant 1997).

Saros v. Strickland was one of scores of post-Emancipation inheritance disputes that used miscegenation laws to block “interracial” bequests. All such cases naturalized and reinscribed categorical distinctions by gender and race. Just as “marriage was a kind of factory for the production of gender,” “miscegenation law was a kind of factory for the production of race” (Pascoe 2009, 11). This dispute was unusual, in that the property belonged to a black woman and went to black kin. But it was typical in that a white person sued to capture wealth from a family of color. As Cansler (1938a) observed of the case, “money... has a way of making the whole world kin...where large fortunes are involved, even southern white folk are not afraid of getting mixed up with their colored kin folks’ money.”

4.4 | The Cases That Never Were

So far, I have only discussed cases that made it to court. But contemporaneous oral histories and memoirs often mention disagreements over inheritance, few of which spilled into the legal system (e.g., Beckett 1985; Castleberry 1994). In many potential suits, the inequality between competing sides was too extreme to make litigation practical. Notably, there is a loud

absence of suits between one ubiquitous, intimately entangled, high-inequality pair: white employers and black domestic workers. White employers regularly left cash bequests to black domestic workers. The bequests were invariably the tiniest of the bunch, but relative to the miserly wages white employers usually paid, they were significant, often amounting to several years’ pay. They were also of a different form. White testators typically left their white kin properties, trusts, or portions of the estate, and said those bequests could pass to the heirs of heirs if more immediate kin died first. In contrast, they constructed bequests to black domestic workers that explicitly marked them as workers. They often tied cash payments to years of service, and usually specified that domestic workers could only inherit if they still worked for them.

This effort to distinguish black heirs from white kin through the relational work of a will is notable especially because black workers often *were* the biological kin of white enslavers and employers. That was particularly true under slavery, but the pattern, rooted in white men’s ability to sexually assault black women with impunity (Hunter 1997; Hartman 2016), continued well after Emancipation, as white families continued to extract labor from their black biological relatives without meaningfully acknowledging them as family. In Dallas, for example, the black woman named Nancy Roy (1844–1919) who spent her whole life working for the white Samuells was also their biological first cousin (Beckett 1985, 33). The Samuells constructed economic relations with Nancy that explicitly marked her as a slave and then a worker, not as kin. In this sense, and in many others, “slavery is the ghost in the machine of kinship,” warping intimate relations long after Emancipation (Hartman, S., quoted in Butler 2004, 103).

Whether or not they shared a biological tie, white employers dangled potential bequests in front of black domestic workers as mechanisms of control. A black Dallasite and former domestic worker named Annie Mae Hunt (1909–2003) remembered that one white employer, Nelle Norrell (1880–1961), tried to keep her from quitting by promising a bequest. She “had me in her will, and I knew it. If I had stuck by her...I would have been *made whole*,” meaning that she would have inherited enough to make her economically secure (Hunt and Winegarten 1983, 75). But even if Annie had complied, there is no guarantee Nelle would have left her the bequest, and as a black woman in the Jim Crow South, Annie was practically unable to contest a white person’s will. White employers throughout the US routinely exploited, abused, underpaid, and refused to pay black domestic workers (Hunter 1997); undoubtedly, some never gave promised bequests, giving workers technical legal standing to sue. But there are no such cases in the record. In contrast, white people regularly sued for bequests promised by white testators. In *Roberts v. Carlisle* (1928), for example, white domestic worker Eva Carlisle successfully sued for a bequest promised by a white employer. Clearly, entrenched inequalities partially determined the kind of estate litigation that was practically, and not just technically, possible.

Even if a suit was practically possible, it could be socially costly. Women who claimed portions of unrelated men’s estates were vulnerable to charges of sexual immorality. At age 84, former secretary Mary Collett (1900–1986) told a journalist that in the

1940s, she almost sued for a promised bequest from her boss (Castleberry 1994, 247–8). Mary grew up on the margins of the Dallas white upper class. When she was 21, her father suddenly died, leaving the family financially vulnerable. Mary became the secretary for her father's acquaintance Edwin Kiest (1861–1941), a childless widower who owned the *Dallas Times Herald*. For 2 decades, she was “on call every minute,” arranging every aspect of Edwin's life. In return, she remembered, Edwin “promised I'd be well taken care of in his will...and I was... I know because I kept all his records.” The bequest would have made her rich enough to retire and join the elite clubs that she “wanted to [join] so badly.” But “2 weeks before he died he changed the will,” leaving everything to eight male newspaper employees, his siblings, and a niece, along with a cash bequest to his chauffeur (Castleberry 1994, 247; Dallas Morning News 1941). Mary considered suing her male coworkers, claiming they “convinced him to...leave me out.” Given her access to Kiest's records, she might have won, but she knew a suit would leave her vulnerable to charges of sexual immorality. “If my mother hadn't been living, I would have sued the hell out of them,” she explained. “I didn't because they would have said I was his mistress and it would have killed Mama.” But her decision to avoid stigma was economically costly. She had to keep working for pay, and in her old age, she said she was “living on bread and water” (Castleberry 1994, 248). In this way, the gendered moral scrutiny around the mingling of intimacy and money reinforced gendered economic inequalities, making women vulnerable to exploitation as workers and simultaneously discouraging them from making legally legitimate inheritance claims in court.

The idea that very lopsided contests were unlikely to make it to court is supported by a closer look at the most categorically lopsided cases that did spawn trials. The contests that appear most lopsided based on the contestants' social categories—like *Grigsby v. Reib*, or *Saros v. Strickland*—were not actually as lopsided as they seem in a continuous (rather than group-based) sense of categorical inequality (Monk 2022). In *Saros v. Strickland*, Anita amassed a modest fortune, and her siblings were enmeshed in the regional black elite. Her brother was well-connected enough to get one of the richest, most powerful black men in Dallas, Henry Strickland, to administer the estate. And Anita had the phenotypical characteristics, wealth, and social skills needed to deftly cross and straddle the color line. She was a “commanding” woman of “uncommon intelligence,” who was “tall, brown, with aquiline features, crinkly hair, kept in the latest fashion by frequent visits to beauty parlors,” with her “nails, skin in perfect condition” (Cansler 1938b). Her partner Sam was on the margins of whiteness, phenotypically and socioculturally. He was short, dark-haired, dark-eyed, and dark-skinned, with a large mole on his right cheek. He had no fortune; he had a Greek accent; he was working class. The court drew a firm line between Anita's blackness and Sam's whiteness in part *because* they were both so far from racial prototypicality.

Similarly, in *Grigsby v. Reib*, Jessie was an elite sex worker who likely knew many of Dallas's richest and most powerful men. She ran a high-priced brothel—the kind of house that, in the early twentieth century US, “doubled as clubs where the local political and economic elite met to exchange necessary information and informal deals.” Her job required not only beauty,

but also financial skills and “a high degree of political tact and diplomacy” (Rosen 1982, 87). Eliza, in contrast, was a tenant farmer who lived in poverty until her brother's death. When George died, she moved to Dallas with her husband and many children and bought a large house. She was briefly and marginally included in the white upper class, likely because it was generally understood that she would soon be a millionaire, but while the inheritance dispute with Jessie raged in the courts, Eliza divorced her husband, distancing herself further from the category of virtuous white upper-class womanhood. In sum, the most categorically unequal mismatches likely never made it to court. Among surviving court cases, the disputes that appeared most lopsided in a nominal sense were, in a continuous, infra-categorical sense, more evenly matched than they appeared (Monk 2022). Cases like these were mechanisms through which courts manufactured sharp, moralized categorical distinctions amidst fuzzy, continuous realities.

4.5 | The Legal Afterlife of Estate Litigation

In common law contexts like the US and UK, “many important laws are made not by legislatures but by appellate courts deciding specific cases and thus creating precedents” (Gennaioli and Shleifer 2007, 43). When mismatches made it to trial, their resolutions could become law, shaping the outcomes of future cases. But judges draw on some cases more than others. One advantage of looking at inheritance disputes from a century ago is that we can more clearly measure variation in cases' contributions to legal precedent up to the present day. The evidence is clear: in the Dallas disputes data, upper-class cases have disproportionately shaped case law.

Thirty-two out of 81 disputes are in the record of cases in *Nexis Uni*, which calculates the number of times a case has been cited in subsequent cases, legal briefs, law review articles, and legislation. Figure 1 depicts the total number of citations for each court case as of April 2025 by testator class. Here, I define the *upper class* as anyone listed in the Dallas social registers (a relatively standard measure of upper-class status in the early twentieth century US) and anyone who was a parent, child, or sibling of someone listed.³ Nearly 68% of the 81 total cases, and 78% of the 32 cases in *Nexis Uni*, featured upper-class testators. Clearly, the upper-class cases have been cited much more often in subsequent trials and legislation. Collectively, the upper-class cases have garnered 1372 citations, compared to 179 for the middle- and lower-class cases—more than seven times as many. They have also been cited about three times more on average, with a median of 31 citations per upper class case and 9 citations outside of it. Even the private squabbles of the upper class have disproportionately impacted everyone else. The law, in this sense, is continually distorted by the intimate concerns of the rich and powerful.

5 | Discussion and Conclusion

In this paper, I analyzed a collection of inheritance disputes within their social and demographic fabric, generating hypotheses about the multiplex ties between relational mismatches and

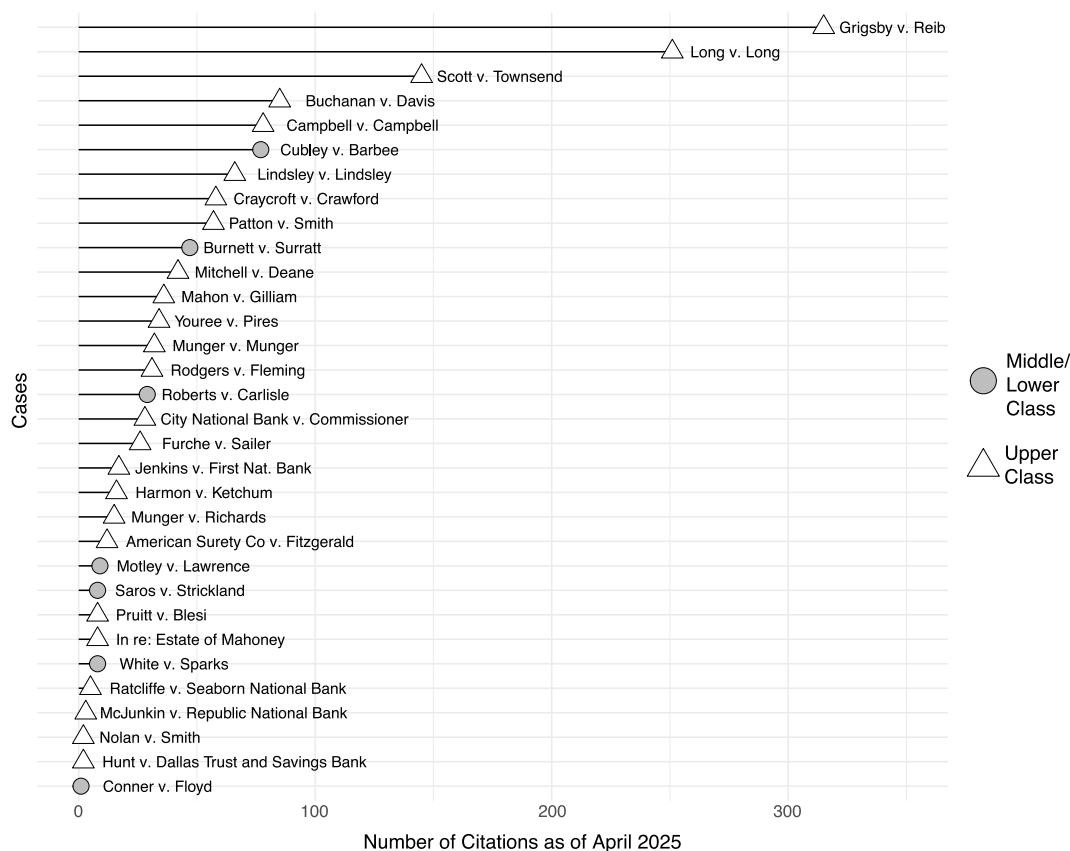


FIGURE 1 | Legal citations of inheritance dispute court cases by testator class.

inequality. Using a series of illustrative case studies, I argued overall that mismatch resolutions may marginally mitigate individual-level wealth inequality while simultaneously producing and solidifying categorical inequalities by race, class, gender, sexuality, and family structure. Dispute resolutions tended to spread estates around more, moderating individual-level wealth inequality on a small scale. Courts settled inheritance disputes by reinscribing moralized distinctions between normative and non-normative family structures, and between gendered, racialized, and classed categories of people. Those reinscriptions were likely especially important because court cases featuring fights between people of highly unequal state categories were often quite close to each other in continuous terms. Many more inheritance disputes never made it to court because the inequalities between competing sides were too extreme. Lastly, inheritance disputes in the upper class have had vastly more impact on case law than the inheritance disputes spawned in other families.

Of course, inheritance disputes are only one form of relational mismatch, which is a large, heterogeneous category of social processes. By holding constant the type of transaction and the sociolegal context, I can generate testable hypotheses about the ways mismatches might work in a population, and about how they might relate to inequality. This effort follows a call from Bandelj (2020) to investigate where and why mismatches happen, and what their relationship to inequality might be.

When mismatches make it to court, legal actors may generally resolve them by reproducing and naturalizing categorical inequalities. In the face of the irreducibly heterogeneous relational fabrics that constitute societies, inheritance norms and laws elevate some intimate structures over others, reinforcing that elevation through injections of inherited wealth. These cases suggest that this is an active, ongoing process, in which courts repeatedly draw lines between types of relations and persons, especially at the fuzzy spaces between continuous social and relational categories: like black versus white, family versus friend, or spouse versus illicit lover. Because all of this takes place at such an intimate level, court-based relational work can be an immensely powerful naturalizing force, shaping “what forms of kinship can be admitted to exist or deemed to be possible, and what the limits of imaginability might be” (Butler 2004, 117). Future studies could test this idea by looking at other mismatches adjudicated in court, in other settings, perhaps especially ones where legal and normative kinship systems are in flux, like the US immediately before and after the institution of same-sex marriage.

Another reasonable hypothesis is that mismatches may be particularly common for queer people, who, by definition, live non-normative intimate lives. This makes some sense. Adams (2007, 6) observed that relational work can represent “social action as so subtle, so challenging in its multiple matching processes that we have to wonder whether people will need portable computers to make such complicated calibrations.”

They do not, she concludes, because “the actors...are working with categories and institutions that are indeed complex but also partly canned.” The degree to which categories and institutions are canned depends on the social location. When people are living more normative intimate lives, they can do canned relational work, but people who want to “try it a new way” must get out their portable computers. It follows that people who forge new intimate economies will experience more mismatches, particularly if they are intimately entangled with people who prefer more normative choices, and particularly if they are subject to states invested in a “fantasy of normativity.” We can read mismatches, then, as one manifestation of discrimination against queer people. We can also read patterned relational mismatches as emerging sites of socioeconomic and sociopolitical change, and as mechanisms through which queer people may disproportionately drive that change.

The finding that early twentieth century Dallas inheritance disputes have contributed more to legal precedent even a century later when they sprang from the upper class could also be tested in other contexts. Future studies could conduct a more rigorous statistical analysis to ask whether and to what extent contestants’ (and even judges’ and lawyers’) wealth, power, and status may be positively associated with contributions to precedent. Qualitative work could dig deeper into the processes through which certain cases became more cited than others, and into the ways they are cited, which do not always seem to be predictable, such that a case about heterosexual marriages between millionaires and sex workers can be applied a century later to debates over same-sex marriage.

In general, inheritance disputes are empirical goldmines for any analyst of intimate economic life. Each of the 81 cases in these data is textured enough to deserve its own article. Given the word and conceptual limits of one paper, I have excluded with much regret, for example, multiple murders, multiple forgeries, a kidnapping, an adopted child musical prodigy, and an astronomy enthusiast who disinherited his kin to fund an observatory under “the insane delusion that someday astronomers would be able to see the gates of heaven, and...who was inside” (Rodgers v. Fleming 1927). I hope that this article might inspire more work on the many facets of inheritance disputes, continuing the tradition begun by Zelizer (2005). I especially hope that in this context of ever-rising inequality, it might motivate more studies of inheritance from the relational work perspective. Such an approach neatly joins economic sociology and inequality—a union many economic sociologists have called for (Tomaskovic-Devey and et al. 2017; Hirschman and Garbes 2021; Norris 2023; Krippner and Flores 2024; Krippner 2024). This is especially important because standard economic theory largely fails to explain inheritance. Milton Friedman, the prototypical neoliberal economist, said that even though he believed “the bequest motive of the family [is] the foundation of free market capitalism,” why people make bequests is “completely mysterious” (quoted in Cooper 2019). Relational work helps us see that with inheritance, as in economic life more generally, people act relationally. They categorize and match ties and transactions, in a “partly canned” but sometimes creative way. Understanding this varied and highly impactful social process—and especially what happens when it

goes wrong—requires us to envision our unequal economy in relational terms, as a textured, ever-changing, often lopsided, variously contested web of intimacy.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are publicly available court cases, available at *Nexis Uni*, and newspaper records from the *Dallas Morning News* and [Newspapers.com](https://www.newspapers.com). I include a full list of cases in the Appendix.

Endnotes

¹ Over a thousand people in the dataset simply never married; this exceedingly small list only includes people who fit most of the criteria I list in this paragraph.

² As of July 2025, the Dallas elites database includes 6142 people who died between 1895–1945, 56 of whom are in the collection of disputed estates.

³ The US and UK have different class structures, of course, but in both contexts, we can think of the upper class as a set of interconnected families who collectively monopolize a disproportionate amount of wealth, status, and power (Reeves and Friedman 2024), and in the US context, the social registers capture this population well (Baltzell 1963).

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Appendix

TABLE A1 | Full collection of inheritance disputes in Dallas, 1895-1945.

Death year	Testator name	Woman?	Race	Estimated estate size (2024 dollars)	Upper class?	Type	Outcome	Trial names	Total cites
1906	G.M.D. Grigsby	0	White	\$17,041,444	1	Common law marriage	Lost	<i>Grigsby v. Reib</i> , 105 Tex. 597, 153 S. W. 1124, 1913 Tex.; <i>Grigsby v. Reib</i> , 139 S. W. 1027, 1911 Tex. App.	315
1932	Martha Long	1	White	\$2,255,485	1	Undue influence	Won	<i>Long v. Long</i> , 98 S.W.2d 236, 1936 Tex. App.; <i>Long v. Long</i> , 133 Tex. 96, 125 S.W.2d 1034, 1939; <i>Long v. Long</i> , 129 S.W.2d 1206, 1939 Tex. App.; <i>Long v. Long</i> , 133 Tex. 623, 138 S.W.2d 798, 1939	251
1911	Winfield Scott	0	White	\$96,867,158	1	Undue influence	Won	<i>Scott v. Townsend</i> , 159 S.W. 342; <i>Scott v. Townsend</i> , 106 Tex. 322, 166 S. W. 1138, 1914 Tex.	145
1917	A. W. Campbell	0	White	\$23,964,531	1	Unsound mind; competing wills	Lost	<i>Campbell v. Campbell</i> , 215 S.W. 134, 1919 Tex.App.	78
1927	Mary Leonard	1	White	\$3,437,671	0	Disinherited adopted daughter	Won	<i>Barbee v. Cubley</i> , 25 S.W.2d 689, 1930 Tex. App.; <i>Cubley v. Barbee</i> , 123 Tex. 411, 73 S.W.2d 72, 1934 Tex.	77
1917	Ophelia B. Buchanan	1	White	\$940,608	1	Undue influence, unsound mind	Won	<i>Buchanan v. Davis</i> , 43 S.W.2d 279, 1931 Tex.App.; <i>Buchanan v. Davis</i> , 60 S.W.2d 192, 1933 Tex.App.; <i>Buchanan v. Davis</i> ,	85

(Continues)

TABLE A1 | (Continued)

Death year	Testator name	Woman?	Race	Estimated estate size (2024 dollars)	Upper class?	Type	Outcome	Trial names	Total cites
1938	Henry Lindsley	0	White	\$15,228,525	1	Community property issue; breach of promise	Lost	300 S.W. 985, 1927 Tex. App.; <i>Buchanan v. Davis</i> , 12 S.W.2d 978, 1929 Tex. App.; <i>Buchanan v. Davis</i> , 15 S.W.2d 562, 1929 Tex. App. <i>Lindsley v. Lindsley</i> , 152 S.W.2d 415, 1941; <i>Lindsley v. Lindsley</i> , 139 Tex. 512, 163 S.W.2d 633, 1942	66
1915	Edward G. Patton	0	White	\$3,796,361	1	Breach of promise	Lost	<i>Patton v. Smith</i> , 221 S. W. 1034; <i>Smith v. Patton</i> , 241 S.W. 109	57
1920	W. L. Crawford Sr.	0	White	\$2,085,616	1	Undue influence	Won	<i>Craycroft v. Crawford</i> , 262 S.W. 91, 1924 Tex. App.; <i>Craycroft v. Crawford</i> , 275 S.W. 124, 1925 Tex. App.; <i>Craycroft v. Crawford</i> , 285 S.W. 275, 1926 Tex. App. ; <i>Craycroft v. Crawford</i> , 287 S.W. 244; <i>Ex parte Crawford</i> , 98 Tex. Crim. 289	58
1934	W. A. Burnett	0	White	\$228,915	0	Unsound mind	Lost	<i>Burnett v. Surratt</i> , 67 S.W.2d 1041; <i>Burnett v. Surratt</i> , 97 S. W.2d 256	47
1923	J. H. Mitchell	0	White	Unknown	1	Competing wills	Lost	<i>Mitchell v. Deane</i> , 294 S.W. 347, 1927 Tex. App.; <i>Mitchell v. Deane</i> , 10 S.W.2d 717, 1928 Tex. App.	42
1912	Samuel Mahon	0	White	\$1,897,398	1	Interpretation	Interpreted	<i>Mahon v. Gilliam</i> , 215 S.W. 124; <i>Gilliam v. Mahon</i> , 231 S. W. 712	36
1922	L. A. Pires	0	White	\$34,492,040	1	Jurisdiction issue	Lost	<i>Pires v. Youree</i> , 170 La. 986; <i>Youree v. Pires</i> , 5 S.W.2d 178	34
1920	J. B. Wilson	0	White	\$113,328,613	1	Community property issue	Won	<i>Munger v. Munger</i> , 298 S.W. 470, 1927 Tex. App.	32
1928	F. G. Osborne	0	White	\$472,603	0	Breach of promise	Won	<i>Roberts v. Carlisle</i> , 4 S.W.2d 144, 1928 Tex. App.; <i>Roberts v. Carlisle</i> , 4 F.2d 79; <i>Roberts v. Carlisle</i> , 287 S.W. 110 1926	29
1925	W. J. McDonald	0	White	\$26,292,514	1	Unsound mind	Settled	<i>Rodgers v. Fleming</i> , 295 S.W. 326, 1927 Tex. App.; <i>Rodgers v. Fleming</i> , 3 S.W.2d 77, 1928 Tex. App.	31
1922	L. A. Pires	0	White	\$34,492,040	1	Breach of promise	Won	<i>City Nat'l Bank v. Commissioner</i> , 16 B.T.A. 719 1929; <i>First Nat'l Bank v. Commissioner</i> , 45 F.2d 502 1930; <i>First Nat'l Bank v. Burnet</i> , 1931	28
1907	Augustus Furche	0	White	\$2,247,392	1	Disinherited children from prior marriage	Lost	<i>Furche v. Sailer</i> , 8 S.W.2d 334, 1928 Tex. App.; <i>Sailer v. Furche</i> , 22 S.W.2d 1065, 1930 Tex. App.	26
1922	Clara Gilmer	1	White	\$1,095,521	1	Undue influence	Lost	<i>Harmon v. Ketchum</i> , 299 S.W. 682, 1927 Tex. App.	16

(Continues)

TABLE A1 | (Continued)

Death year	Testator name	Woman?	Race	Estimated estate size (2024 dollars)	Upper class?	Type	Outcome	Trial names	Total cites
1920	J. B. Wilson	0	White	\$113,328,613	1	Interpretation	Interpreted	<i>Munger v. Richards</i> , 87 S.W.2d 797 1935	15
1910	Alice Parsons Fitzgerald	1	White	\$24,216,790	1	Trustee embezzlement	Lost	<i>American Surety Co. v. Fitzgerald</i> , 36 S.W.2d 1104 1931	12
1922	Sallie Motley	1	White	Unknown	0	Unsound mind; undue influence	Won	<i>Motley v. Lawrence</i> , 283 S.W. 699, 1926	9
1937	Lela G. White	1	Black	Unknown	0	Homestead	Won	<i>White v. Sparks</i> , 118 S.W.2d 649, 1938	8
1926	Nonie Boren Mahoney	1	White	\$3,466,057	1	Ex-husband claimed to be husband	Lost	<i>In Re Estate of Mahoney</i> , 85 cal. App. 675	8
1915	C. H. Langdeau	0	White	\$1,518,544	1	Unsound mind, undue influence	Lost	<i>PRUITT v. BLES</i> , 204 S.W. 714, 1918	8
1938	Anita Martinez/Annette Dougherty/Tina Long	1	Black, "passed" as white	\$435,101	0	Miscegenation case/common law marriage	Lost	<i>Saros v. Strickland</i> , 148 S.W.2d 865, 1941	8
1928	Eunice Hopkins Smith	1	White	Unknown	1	Competing wills	Lost	<i>Ratcliffe v. Seaboard Nat'l Bank</i> , 46 S.W.2d 750, 1932	5
1932	T. L. Bradford Sr.	0	White	\$41,248,494	1	Alienation of affection	Lost	<i>Jenkins v. First Nat'l Bank</i> , 26 F. Supp. 312, 1939 U.S. Dist.; <i>Jenkins v. First Nat'l Bank</i> , 107 F.2d 764, 1939 U.S. App.	17
1931	Fred McJunkin	0	White	\$11,099,362	1	Interpretation	Interpreted	<i>McJunkin v. Republic Nat'l Bank</i> , 131 S.W.2d 1085, 1939	3
1916	Irene Springfield	1	White	Unknown	1	Interpretation	Interpreted	<i>Hunt v. Dallas Trust & Sav. Bank</i> , 237 S.W. 605, 1921; <i>Hunt v. Dallas Trust & Sav. Bank</i> , 237 S.W. 605, 1922	2
1940	Arthur Nolan	0	White	\$5,477,607	1	Disinherited brother	Settled	<i>Nolan v. Smith</i> , 166 S.W.2d 750, 1942	2
1936	J. A. Floyd	0	White	Unknown	0	Unsound mind	Won	<i>Conner v. Floyd</i> , 95 S.W.2d 183, 1936	1
1938	Whitfield Harral	0	White	\$4,351,007	1	Disinherited child of prior marriage	Settled		
1940	Brook Mays	0	White	\$10,955,214	0	Unsound mind; undue influence	Settled		
1937	Ivor O'Connor Morgan	1	White	\$23,431,986	1	Competing wills	Lost		
1937	Ivor O'Connor Morgan	1	White	\$23,431,986	1	Unsound mind	Settled		
1905	Julien Reverchon	0	White	\$1,150,298	1	Interpretation	Interpreted		
1941	Libby Benson	1	Black	\$521,677	0	Common law husband	Settled		
1923	Robert T. G. Matthews	0	White	\$3,049,522	1	Alleged secret wife	Dismissed		
1930	Sophia Pappenhagen	1	White	\$1,065,345	1	Interpretation	Interpreted		
1937	W. W. Samuel	0	White	\$26,411,044	1	Community property issue	Lost		

(Continues)

TABLE A1 | (Continued)

Death year	Testator name	Woman?	Race	Estimated estate size (2024 dollars)	Upper class?	Type	Outcome	Trial names	Total cites
1937	W. W. Samuel	0	White	\$26,411,044	1	Boundaries of estate	Settled		
1931	Cecil Keating	0	White	\$20,180,658	1	Unsound mind	Settled		
1915	C. H. Langdeau	0	White	\$1,518,544	1	Unsound mind, undue influence	Lost		
1935	Joseph Loose Brown	0	White	\$2,239,022	1	Breach of promise; lost will	Lost?		
1904	Frank Reeves	0	White	\$689,317	1	Executor graft, competing creditors	Lost		
1916	J. F. O'Connor	0	White	\$34,787,529	1	Interpretation	Interpreted		
1923	Frederick Wilson	0	White	\$5,381,509	1	Disinherited child of prior marriage	Settled		
1930	Agnes Burke Marshall	0	White	\$183,680	1	Disinherited children; unsound mind	Lost		
1938	Henry Lindsley	0	White	\$15,228,525	1	Breach of promise	Settled		
1929	Elma Weichsel	1	White	\$7,688,716	1	Suit for partition	Settled		
1910	Alice Parsons Fitzgerald	1	White	\$24,216,790	1	Interpretation	Interpreted		
1929	E. W. Morten Sr.	0	White	\$53,502,209	1	Unknown	Settled		
1915	Edward G. Patton	0	White	\$3,796,361	1	Unsound mind	Lost		
1896	Mary Williamson Richardson	1	White	\$1,821,140	1	Unsound mind; executor graft	Won		
1935	Alice B. Wright	1	White	\$559,755	1	Undue influence	Lost		
1930	C. C. Cobb	0	White	\$14,694,419	1	Lost will; alleged common law wife	Lost		
1934	Carrie Fuller Green	1	White	\$1,144,574	1	Unsound mind	Settled		
1922	L. A. Pires	0	White	\$34,492,040	1	Unsound mind	Settled		
1905	J. B. Simpson	0	White	\$1,883,614	1	Community property issue	Settled		
1932	T. L. Bradford Sr.	0	White	\$41,248,494	1	Interpretation	Interpreted		
1932	T. L. Bradford Sr.	0	White	\$41,248,494	1	Interpretation	Interpreted		
1928	Carrie Slaughter	1	White	\$17,834,070	1	Undue influence; unsound mind	Settled		
1900	Harriett Simpson	1	White	\$1,168,556	1	Suit for partition	Settled		
1937	Anna Lauderdale	1	White	\$106,509	0	Unsound mind; undue influence	Settled		
1938	A. P. Charlton	0	White	\$504,717	0		?		

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TABLE A1 | (Continued)

Death year	Testator name	Woman?	Race	Estimated estate size (2024 dollars)	Upper class?	Type	Outcome	Trial names	Total cites
						Common law wife			
1940	E. A. Cook	0	White	\$547,761	0	Unsound mind	?		
1934	E. A. Milner	0	White	\$1,602,404	0	Undue influence; unsound mind	?		
1943	Fleta Miller Curtis	1	White	\$70,924	0	Unsound mind	?		
1936	Harry Schwarz	0	White	\$1,108,057	0	Unsound mind	Settled		
1940	Henry Pollack	0	White	\$1,643,282	0	Undue influence; unsound mind	Lost		
1937	Hunter T. Farrell	0	White	\$21,30,181	0	Unsound mind; undue influence	Settled		
1936	J. C. Hooper	0	White	\$441,361	0	Unsound mind	Lost		
1938	Lou Wilson	1	Black	\$54,388	0	Unsound mind	?		
1934	Marie Schulz	1	White	\$34,338	0	Undue influence		Contestant died	
1937	Mary S. Knox	1	White	\$1,597,635	0	Unsound mind	?		
1933	Millard McDuff	0	White	\$178,341	0	Unsigned will	Won		
1931	Rosalie Rosche Lacy	1	White	\$302,710	0	Illegible will	Won		
1940	Josephine Stribling	1	White	\$547,761	0	Unsound mind	Lost		
1933	Dorothy Joynes Woolley	1	White	\$118,894	0	Possible murder	NA		
1935	Edward Homer Jones	0	White	\$2,195,683	0	Undue influence	Dismissed		