

Amalgamation Schemes: Antiblackness and the Critique of Multiracialism. By Jared Sexton. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008. 345 pp.

“It’s proud to be able to say that... ‘The first black president’... That’s unless you screw up. And then it’s going to be what’s up with the half white guy?”

-Wanda Sykes,

2009 White House Correspondents Dinner¹

Shortly after the 2008 presidential election, Wanda Sykes stood in front of a banquet hall of the most prominent journalists in the United States and celebrated Barack Obama for being the “first black president.” During her comments she also acknowledged his biracial identity, but her emphasis on his Black identity represented the frame of mind of millions of Americans who acknowledge Obama as the first Black president. Still, Sykes’s remarks about Obama’s racial identity indicates the choice people of mixed race have—to accept traditional notions about race and hypodescent, which determines anyone with African blood Black, or to claim a multiracial identity. Although this choice is a personal one, since the 1980s multiracial communities have mobilized to construct a politicized identity in the pursuit of racial equality.

In *Amalgamation Schemes*, author Jared Sexton examines the political history and current discourse of multiracialism in order to uncover the negative ramifications of its political agenda. Through his critical analysis, Sexton argues that in its attempt to gain political recognition as a progressive movement committed to racial equality and the elimination of sexual racism, multiracialism has positioned itself in opposition to notions of hypodescent and antimiscegenation, while simultaneously adapting a morally conservative identity. For Sexton the multiracial political agenda are dangerous breeding grounds for antiblackness, heteronormativity, desexualization of race, and deracialization of sex. In other words, Jared Sexton argues that multiracialism is a mechanism for further reinforcement of “global white supremacy” (5).

In his work Sexton’s primary aim is to “address the *problematic* of multiracial discourse” (154). What was originally a movement dedicated to furthering the goals of the Civil Right Movement, seeking acknowledgement and representation in the census, Sexton argues, was actually a misinterpretation of the original policy meant to “track the progress towards racial equality.” Ironically, Sexton argues, the very Black civil rights leaders from whom multiracialism draws are the same individuals from whom multiracialism seeks to distance itself.

Uncovering problems of interpretation is Sexton’s recurring strategy throughout this book. He repeatedly finds instances in multiracialism discourse where serious contradictions obstruct the overarching goal of racial equality. Multiracial advocates reject Black radical claims on the multiracial body. They accuse Black radicals of imposing the exact kind of hypodescent limitations that dominant White supremacy used in the past. There is also a general repudiation of antimiscegenation and an encouragement of race mixture. Sexton regards these desires as problematic because their separation from Blackness disregards the racial mixture already existing in Black identity. Their support of miscegenation further racializes the Black body and actually assumes retrogressive notions of racial purity and biological race.

¹ Alex Leo and Nico Pitney. “Wanda Sykes Kills at White House Correspondents Dinner.” *Huffington Post*, May 2009: Web. October 23, 2011, < http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/05/09/full-video-obamas-white-h_n_201264.html>

The book's most affecting section is dedicated to analyzing the texts of multiracial scholars, Gregory Stephens, Randall Kennedy, and Stephen Talty. Although these writers are not representative of the full scope of multiracial discourse, Sexton uses their scholarship to illustrate the dangerous implications of multiracialist theory. In their demand for recognition there is an effort to mark historical figures with a multiracial identity; however, scholars continue to ignore the sociopolitical limitations of these figures. In their efforts to complicate interracial relationships of the past, these writers have tried to introduce notions of healthy, loving interracial relationships. For Sexton this shift in scholarship is a dangerous dismantling of important feminist scholarship. Sexton aligns his criticism alongside feminists and sexual liberation writers, such as Bell Hooks and Angela Davis, when he argues that in an effort to re-envision interracial relationships and reconstruct an identity free of pathology, these scholars seek to reimagine notions of consent during slavery. For Sexton feminist scholars have already repudiated notions of consensual relationships under the institution of slavery, and multiracialism seeks to erase their accomplishments.

Sexton also criticizes multiracialism's concentration on the offspring of interracial relationships. For the author the focus on the child erases the complex dynamics of interracial couples, it distances itself from the sexual acts of the parents, and it emerges as a heteronormative campaign concerned only with the children of a heterosexual act.

Although Sexton's arguments are logical and compelling, his aggressive tone and diction are offsetting. His aim is to present the weaknesses in the multiracial project, but he concentrates much of his argument on the multiracial people who are results of White-Other relationships, leaving larger questions about multiracial people who do not have a White parent. His concentration on specific scholars who are not representative of all multiracialism is a little misguided. However, what is most remarkable about the text is the author's ability to analyze specific elements of multiracialism and uncover its ineffectual impact on the pursuit of racial equality. *Amalgamation Schemes* is a work that should not be ignored because it is a critical voice, vital for race, ethnic, and multiracial studies. It cautions current and future scholars about the delicate boundaries that operate within the constructions of race.

Nandi Comer
Indiana University, Bloomington