

Interracial Relationships in the 21st Century

SECOND EDITION

Edited by

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We dedicate this book to all the individuals and families who are working through the struggles and experiencing the joys associated with love-filled relationships, creating families who cross race and ethnic barriers and defy solidly established norms.

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Preface

Since we published *Interracial Relationships in the 21st Century* in 2009, changes within the national leadership of the United States of America beg the question of whether there have been any subsequent or consequent changes in Americans' attitudes and perceptions of interracial relationships.

This new edition of *Interracial Relationships in the 21st Century* provides updates to the trends—both statistical and substantive—in the interracial relationships arena since the election of Barack Obama as 44th President of the United States. We also focus on the contradictions that accompany these changes marked by the Obama election, such as the increase in what sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva calls “symbolic racism” (Bonilla-Silva 2009). For example, the Montgomery, Alabama, based Southern Poverty Law Center reports that since the election of Obama to the Presidency there has been a substantial increase in what the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) calls “hate crimes.”¹

1. <http://www.splcenter.org/blog/>.
<http://www.civilrights.org/publications/hatecrimes/white-supremacist.html>.

What's New!

Since the publication of the original edition of this book two key events that are central to any discussion of interracial families have taken place: (1) the election of the first African-American president and (2) the 2010 census, which was only the second instance that data on multiracial identity has been collected by the U.S. census in the modern era.

Because the original book is an edited volume, with each chapter written by different contributors, there is no easy way for us, as the editors, to revise the work written by others without the potential for disrupting their carefully honed theoretical arguments. Therefore, what we will do in this second edition is focus on these two key events in a new chapter that focuses on racial identity, interracial marriages, and the impact of the election of Barack Obama on the movement toward a post-racial America.

Other Trends

It is important to note that all of the chapters we included in the 2009 edition take on a heightened interest following the 2012 presidential election and the re-election of Barack Obama. In addition, the recession, which began just as the first edition of this book was being penned, has also impacted families of all racial/ethnic composition. High rates of unemployment and poverty have resulted in increasing numbers of people utilizing food banks or reporting that they quite simply don't have enough to eat. High rates of foreclosure have left many families with significant debt, or worse, plunged them into homelessness.

Furthermore, with the recession comes an increase in intimate partner violence, and we can speculate that all women are at greater risk for being victims at the hands of men who claim to love them. And, because the recession is racialized — unemployment and poverty rates have disproportionately impacted racial minorities, and African Americans in particular — we wonder how the work we co-authored on interracial intimate partner violence might be impacted by these changes. Our informed and educated speculation is that women of color are now experiencing higher rates of violence in their intimate relationships than are White women; not because

there is anything racial about violence, but because their families are more likely to be facing financial strains and pressures created by the recession.

With all the attention in the 2012 election cycle on the status of marriage as an institution and the equality in marriage movement—which seeks to extend legal marriage to all Americans regardless of their sexual orientation—the chapter by Amy Steinbugler on interracial same-sex couples becomes more relevant.

Lastly, the chapter by Kellina M. Craig-Henderson entitled “African-American Attitudes towards Interracial Intimacy” and the chapter on religion and attitudes toward interracial marriage authored by George Yancey (with Emily Hubbard and Amy Smith) should easily draw increased interest in light of heightened debate. A lot of different people, including bloggers, are debating the issues surrounding the claim that African-American single women—the largest group of single women in the country—should adjust their beliefs about keeping things “in the community” or being a “race traitor” and expand their marriage options by considering interracial partners, both here in the U.S. and abroad.

We are pleased to have an opportunity to update this book and we invite the reader into a discussion that we believe not only remains a topic of interest, but is heightened in its polarity by the election and re-election of the first African-American president.

Despite the election of the first African-American president—or perhaps *because* of the election of Barack Obama—interracial unions, and especially those between Whites and African Americans, remain highly contested and polarizing in the contemporary United States. And we have no reason to expect any radical changes in the near future.

When we wrote this book before 2009 there was only speculation that the 44th President of the United States would be African American and/or as some would argue a multicultural man.² Now, with the reality of the first African-American President being re-

2. Steve Sailer, 2007, “Obama’s Identity Crisis,” March 26 issue. <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/article/2007/mar/26/00014/>.

elected to a second four-year term, we have an opportunity to reflect on the role that his election has had on Americans of all racial and ethnic identities.

The reality of this seismic accomplishment has also brought renewed attention and debate, not less, to the arena of interracial concerns in the United States. Coupled with the ongoing battles over illegal immigration in the Southwest³ and the Southeast,⁴ interracial relationships of all configurations have garnered new attention at the same time that the United States has become a more multiracial society.

Final Thoughts

As the saying goes, “while hindsight may be 20/20,” we as sociologists were taught that good sociology is about prediction. C. Wright Mills in his magisterial tome *The Sociological Imagination* (1970:127) reminded us thus: “The purpose of social science is the prediction and control of human behavior.” Therefore our goal is not only to reflect on the previous work in the first edition of this book, but to use our skills and use our initial findings to make predictions about the future.

In 2009 without as much thinking about it we produced two books on interracial relationships. The first, of which this is the second edition, grew out of a challenge to organize sessions at several professional meetings in which we invited scholars from all over the U.S. to join us in presenting findings about the variety of ways that interracialism impacts the society in which we live. These events led to not only the book in hand but to the companion volume addressing power dynamics of men who impact and/or impacted the life chances of American citizens because of their narrow beliefs about the “intermingling of the races,” all the while living in inti-

3. Tanya Maria Golash-Boza, 2008, “Immigrant Rights as Human Rights” (Douglas Parker, second author). In *Globalization and America: Race, Human Rights, and Inequality*, edited by Angela Hattery, David Embrick and Earl Smith. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield: 107–126.

4. Associated Press, 2011, Alabama immigration battle recalls civil rights past. October 29, <http://www.politico.com/news/stories/1011/67142.html>.

mate interracial relationships themselves.⁵ We encourage the reader to dig into this second volume as well as our other book—*Interracial Intimacies: An examination of powerful men and their relationships across the color line*—to gain a broader understanding of the complexities of race and relationship in the contemporary United States.

5. Smith, Earl and Angela J. Hattery. 2009. *Interracial Intimacies: An Examination of Powerful Men and Their Relationships Across the Color Line*. Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press.

Acknowledgments

ES to AJ: Who would have thought that the challenge offered to us by former editor Bob Conrow at Carolina Academic Press, after a review of a submitted manuscript wherein he stated “if you know more about the subject, then write the book,” would turn into not one but two books on the topic of interracial relationships.¹ It is even more astonishing that we are entering into the second edition of *Interracial Relationships in the 21st Century* some two years after Barack Obama became the first multi-ethnic President of the United States of America. I am pleased we took on the project and are now updating the book in light of new perspectives and insights into the growing number of interracial relationships in America.

Thank you!

AJ to ES: The election of the first African-American U.S. President, Barack Obama, is one of the most complex and interesting phenomenon of our time. Things have gotten both more clear and more complex at the same time. Thinking about the way in which his election signals or ushers in a post-racial society, one in which our most important decisions—including marriage—are made based on individual qualities such as compatibility, capacity, and credentials and not race or gender, makes our examination of the

1. Our other book on the topic is *Interracial Intimacies: An Examination of Powerful Men and Their Relationships Across the Color Line* (2009) wherein we analyze the contradictory interpersonal relationships across race/ethnic lines among powerful men who publicly denounce interracial relationships but privately carry on in these relationships (dating, cohabitating and even marrying across the color line).

landscape in which marriages, and interracial marriages in particular, occur that much more intriguing.

As with every project we embark on, it is the journey and the process, both professionally and personally, that makes the work relevant and interesting. I look forward to seeing where our continued conversations lead. Thank you!

Finally, we want to offer here our deepest gratitude to Beth Hall, Acquisitions Editor at CAP, who has now overseen three books (two of these into second editions) make it from ideas to publication. Thank you, Beth!!

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