

“Only the News They Want to Print”: Mainstream Media and Critical Mixed-Race Studies¹

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With the publication of this inaugural issue of the *Journal of Critical Mixed Race Studies*, the field of study demarcated by the journal’s title takes a major leap forward both materially and symbolically. The material leap has to do with the fact that there is now an academic publication devoted expressly to the field of critical mixed-race studies, a single source to go to for the latest in mixed-race research. Even though the journal certainly cannot publish everything in this field, and scholars will still find themselves combing through libraries and the Internet for newly published work, my hope is that this journal will nonetheless become the unquestioned touchstone of mixed-race scholarship. The symbolic leap, on the other hand, while related to the material one, has to do with the intangible satisfaction that attends to having “made it,” so to speak. While there is no difference between the good scholarly work done immediately prior to the launching of the journal and the good scholarly work we find in the pages of this issue, there is nevertheless a gratifying sense that “we”—those of us who work and publish in this area—now have a journal to call home. The importance of this should not be minimized.

With its twin components taken together, the leap, represented by publication of this journal, comes close in significance to the field’s originary moment: the extraordinary four-year period that saw the publication of four books that would define the beginnings of critical mixed-race research in the United States: Maria P. P. Root’s two anthologies, *Racially Mixed People in America* (1992) and *The Multiracial Experience* (1996); Lise Funderburg’s *Black, White, Other* (1994); and Naomi Zack’s anthology, *American Mixed Race* (1995).¹ To be sure, there had been several important books on mixed race prior to these, including those with overtly racist (Edward Reuter), indirectly racist (Everett Stonequist), and more objective (Joel Williamson, John Mencke, Paul Spickard) focuses.² But the books by Root, Funderburg, and Zack accomplished something that those earlier works did not do: they inspired a sustained response by readers that then led directly to what is often called an efflorescence or explosion of mixed-race studies scholarly work that continues today.³ All this took place almost instantly; and looking back, it is evident that the rush of scholarly activity immediately following that originary moment facilitated the emergence of critical mixed-race studies as a scholarly field. In this respect, the writers who responded to Root, Funderburg, and Zack were filling a crucial need; ironically, however, few people at the time really understood how great a need it was, even as the publications themselves continued to multiply.

The names of the very best of these early critical mixed-race scholars read like the royalty of the field today: G. Reginald Daniel, Rebecca King, Kimberly DaCosta, Kerry Ann Rockquemore, Paul Spickard, Heather Dalmage, Michael Thornton, Linda Alcoff, Cynthia Nakashima, David Brunnsma, Teresa Williams-León, and, of course, Root, Funderburg, and Zack. Any doctoral reading list for mixed-race studies today should certainly contain most, if not all, of these names, as these are the scholars whose innovative and often path-clearing writings shaped the early direction of critical mixed-race studies.

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Beyond the aforementioned trailblazers, however, it is also accurate and fair to say that not all of the early work was as critical as it could have been. For instance, there were scholars strongly opposed to any articulation of multiracial identity but for very poor if not overtly racist reasons.⁴ Coming from another perspective, we saw scholars with little to no academic experience in this area but who undertook to publish on multiraciality because they had young, biracial children, or other relatives whom they sought to better understand.⁵ These works, however, tended to contain serious flaws stemming from a lack of scholarly objectivity. Finally, a number of non-scholar activists also found their way to scholarly publication.⁶ Although these activists tended to be leaders in the American Multiracial Identity Movement, the inclusion of their writings in academic publications nonetheless tended to inject large doses of “feeling” and “self-esteem” into the growing scholarly debate, but with little analysis of the racist state and no discernible engagement with social justice. Overall, however, as the years have gone by, the prevailing tide of scholarship has tended to push the field in the direction of increased criticality, if in something of an occasionally wobbly, step-by-step fashion. Clearly, we are not all the way there yet, but the existence of this journal will surely only help in that endeavor.

If the works by Root, Funderburg, and Zack and the responses to them represented the “first wave” of critical mixed-race scholarship in the United States, we are certainly well into a “second wave” at present, or perhaps even a “third wave” depending on what sorts of divisions one might want to make and where along the timeline one might want to make them. Clearly, the field is evolving and maturing, and it now has its own history to look back on. Nevertheless, as interesting as the question of waves might be, I will leave it to others to sort out, as my purpose here is to briefly take note of the beginnings of critical mixed-race studies in highlighting—indeed lauding—the publication of the field’s first journal. From there, my main concern is to engage the challenges faced by this field and its new journal in the context of a United States that remains invested heavily in race at the deepest levels while simultaneously and quite contradictorily attempting to convince itself that it has finally entered the postracial phase of its long-troubled history.

We should be clear that these are indeed challenges; but to invoke an old aphorism, these challenges also present specific and strategic opportunities for the field of critical mixed-race studies to take advantage of. However, in seizing these opportunities we must lay a strong claim to moral as well as scholarly positions. In the most general terms, critical mixed-race studies must speak out against notions of premature postraciality and naïve colorblindness, and in so doing become a relevant player in not only the intellectual but also and especially the popular sphere of activity. As I shall enumerate presently in this essay’s main argument, the dominant media in particular are woefully misinformed in regard to race, postraciality, and the meanings and possibilities of mixed-race identity in the United States.⁷ Indeed, I would categorize as societally dangerous the effects of the media’s consistent failings in this area. One of the primary challenges for this journal will be to provide a robust intellectual counterweight to the dominant media’s representations of race and mixed race. Ideally, we will see media writers first reading relevant issues of the journal and then perhaps speaking with its editors or writers before publishing their pieces, though I certainly acknowledge the quixotic sanguineness of at least the latter possibility.

One crucial observation to make about mixed-race identity work over the past twenty years is that even though there has been phenomenal growth and change in the work itself, non-scholarly reporting on mixed race has not kept pace with those advancements. While scholarly studies of mixed race have proliferated, creating both the academic field and now this journal, and while mixed-race identity work has become more and more sophisticated, the quality of media coverage has remained ossified. In fact, mainstream media analysis of mixed-race identity in the United States is generally no different whether one reads an article from 1994, 2000, 2006, or 2012. Given its outsize impact on the

general public, the dominant media in the United States is in fact a hegemonic entity. Its coverage of mixed-race identity has crucial effects on attitudes, opinions, and even public policy; therefore, the accuracy of its reporting is critical. For this reason, dominant media representation of multiraciality will be my main focus in this article as I consider the challenges it presents to critical mixed-race studies.

Mainstream reporting on multiraciality in general is often simplified and, it seems, purposefully shallow. Because dominant media writers tend to highlight particular people in their articles, a nearly ubiquitous feature of mixed-race stories in the mainstream media is the presumption that mixed-race identity is actively diminishing the concept of race in the United States and that mixed-race individuals, especially young people, are leading us to our postracial destiny. This has been true of the very first articles published in the early 1990s, and it remains just as true today. It hardly needs pointing out that arriving at such conclusions requires either ignorance of or blindness to the ways that race and white supremacy operate in this country. Yet assertions that mixed-race identity is having these positive effects are rarely challenged either by mainstream media writers or their interviewees, leading readers to the conclusion that what has been reported is in fact true. As a result, a particular kind of authoritativeness is granted by media writers to their sources when those writers merely report but do not question or otherwise provide alternative viewpoints to the pronouncements of those informants.

Because of this, dominant media coverage of mixed-race identity has been of exceptionally poor quality going back to the early 1990s. As we shall soon see is the case even today, the early pieces were burdened by tortured attempts at hipness, by a distinct preference for sensationalism over analysis, and by an overreliance on the narratives of mixed-race young people to the diminution of scholars and persons or institutions knowledgeable about racial history or concerned with social justice. In other words, even when the voices of the latter were included, they tended to nonetheless be drowned out by the undue prestige accorded to high-school and college students of mixed ancestry, which led to something of an “out of the mouths of babes” anti-intellectualism in those pieces. As a result, the “truth” inherent in the feelings and experiences of students outweighed academics’ stodgy and apparently obsolete knowledge of structural racism and the racial state. This anti-intellectualism complemented a near-evangelicalism in regard to the rather blind fervor of its adherents, all of which was facilitated by a brand of overtly mawkish writing that appeared then and continues to be de rigueur on this subject.

Typical of these pieces was the assertion that readers’ understandings of race and racial identity were old-fashioned and irrelevant. Readers discovered suddenly that their entire conception of race was obsolete. Writing in *Time* in 1997, Jack White declared that “the way Americans think and talk about race will have to catch up with the new reality.”⁸ The “new reality” to which White referred was the fact that multiracial golfer Tiger Woods had fashioned for himself a unique racial label: “Cablinasian.” However, lost in the media frenzy over Woods’ self-labeling was the fact that Woods was then and still remains the sole Cablinasian not only in the United States but on the entire planet.⁹ Because of his extraordinary celebrity, Woods was allowed to carve out a distinctive racial category for himself—a privilege denied to everyone else, thus making it very questionable that this was a “new reality” that any of us would in fact need to “catch up with,” as the intervening sixteen years since White’s article have proven.

A *Newsweek* article published in the same year opened with the labored assertion that “Tiger Woods is the exception that rules. For his multiracial generation, hip isn’t just black and white.”¹⁰ John Leland and Gregory Beals, the authors of the article, adhered to the practice of favoring sensationalism over analysis. Declaring that Tiger Woods had shown us “new truths we’ve been too busy to recognize,” the authors defended the authenticity of these supposed truths via a one-sided

array of sources, as the only words appearing in the article aside from theirs were those of Woods' father Earl; fellow golfer Fuzzy Zoeller; a trio of spokespersons for Calvin Klein, Nike, and an Asian-American magazine; and the largest group, several mixed-race college students.¹¹ In the absence of any actual analysis or opposing viewpoints in this piece, one instead found it filled with reports of unchallenged opinions that were unquestionably in favor of the idea that mixed-race identity was in the process of unilaterally effecting a positive change in the US racial economy. That neither White nor Leland and Beals included any critical scholarly perspective in their articles was part of a mainstream journalistic template for mixed-race coverage that, as we shall see, remains in effect today.

The uncontested authority of young mixed voices, a gaping deficit of countervailing scholarly perspectives, and spectacular pronouncements that race as we have known it is dying before our eyes have been the staples of mainstream mixed-race media coverage. For example, in a sidebar of his article, White quoted the vice president of a multiracial advocacy organization in whose opinion, "those that are biracial and multiracial have a "unique look" at things . . . they see from both sides, and they try to be more just."¹² This authoritative quotation ended the sidebar, with no commentary by White or any questioning of this rather unctuous and, at the very least, dubious claim.

Similarly, in a 2000 *Newsweek* piece dripping with overly affected hipness and maudlin sentimentality and also lacking any scholarly critique, Lynette Clemetson quoted a mixed-race college student's affirmation that "Mixed girls! . . . That's the way to go! All the mixed girls I know are *fine*."¹³ This assertion was also allowed to stand without comment. In the face of potential complaints that my criticisms here are too fussy, I hold steady in affirming that the tone allowed by these media writers, in addition to the content of the articles, went far in presenting a one-sided and unreflective image of mixed-race issues to an American reading public that, to be frank, was not (and is still not) informed enough on the topic to know any better. Far from being trivial, this critique is absolutely crucial. The fact that Clemetson included the above quotation but did not choose to link it to the fetishization and exoticization of mixed-race women through history, nor to the consistent and long-term denigration of black women's beauty, illustrated a troubling lack of insight on the writer's part. Rather, the only discernible goal seemed to be one of determining just how hip and cool an article she could write about multiracial identity without going much beyond asking several teenagers for their opinions about the topic.

While leveling these critiques, I do also want to affirm that it is perfectly possible for the mainstream media to "get it right." Two notable and very important exceptions to the general way the dominant media has represented mixedness were a 1994 *New Yorker* article "One Drop of Blood" by Lawrence Wright and a 1996 *New York Times* article "More Than Identity Rides on a New Racial Category" by Linda Mathews.¹⁴ Each of these important pieces contained testimony from a variety of sources who were in strong disagreement with each other (including the words of scholars) and who were essentially placed into conversation through the writers' willingness to engage in the work of performing actual journalism. And this is key. Especially since readers usually are not knowledgeable about the thinking of those in the scholarly ranks, it is the responsibility of mainstream journalists to confer with scholars and to bring their voices into play. Journalists are in a position to accurately apprise the public of all important sides of a topic. We certainly do not and should not expect journalists to be scholars, as they have a different job to perform and a broader audience to reach. However, journalists have a professional obligation to present those general readers with as full a picture of complex topics as possible, and they can fulfill that obligation only if they seek out scholarly work and filter it accurately for their readers.

To be sure, there are large and fiercely fought-over contentions in the field of critical mixed-race studies. Those of us who labor in this area certainly do not all agree with one another on everything, and

in fact some of us on occasion engage in highly-charged, academic battles. For instance, some scholars of critical mixed-race studies argue that multiracial identity has the potential to undo race in the United States as long as it attends to social justice and does not present itself as a racially superior category, while other scholars contend that multiracial identity is supportive of white supremacy and is a throwback to earlier, simplistic, and racist conceptualizations of the American mulatto. Nevertheless, even those who are on opposite sides of the spectrum on the major questions in the field are troubled by the consistently unsophisticated reporting on mixed-race identity by mainstream media outlets. For all the diversity of opinion and approach between them, I doubt that G. Reginald Daniel, Jared Sexton, Maria P. P. Root, Naomi Zack, Minkah Makalani, or Nikki Khanna would avow that the content and direction of the multiracial reality in the United States ought to be determined by appeal to the unchallenged opinions of mixed-race high-school or college students.

But it is more than the fact that mainstream media coverage of mixed race is poorly researched, sloppy, and inaccurate that is of concern to critical mixed-race scholars. It certainly is all of that, but an even greater apprehension surrounds our understanding of the uses to which this inaccurate reporting is put. According to Michael Thornton, newspapers are “the second most important news source in America,” and “play a critical role in shaping public opinion and framing policy solutions.”¹⁵ In his view, mainstream newspapers work to support the disparities of the racial status quo, appropriating multiracial Americans where useful to suggest that any racial inequalities are essentially the fault of blacks who stubbornly cling to race when everyone else wants to do away with it: “For mainstream papers, the issue of multiracial people embodies personal choice and helps clarify a fundamental change in a nation no longer personified by group identity. In this scenario, Black-American attitudes are archaic for they adhere to racial identity politics; multiracial people are their antidote.”¹⁶

Catherine Squires is of the same opinion, averring that “most mainstream media coverage of multiracial identity reinforces what some scholars have identified as a ‘conservative consensus’ on race in the United States. This consensus, referred to by other scholars as ‘modern racism,’ ‘new racism,’ ‘subtle racism,’ or ‘respectable racism,’ rejects the notion that race has any meaningful influence over life outcomes or group inequalities.”¹⁷ Thus, the faddish and unanalyzed celebration of multiracialism, combined with a concomitant denigration of black concerns especially, serves as a convenient distraction from focusing on the true sources of racial inequality in the United States: “Indeed, the mainstream news media embraced multiracial identity as a solution to race relations in the twenty-first century. Framed as a triumph of tolerance and individual choice, multiracial identity was only problematic in terms of how the Census Bureau would square the numbers; Whiteness, institutional racism, and structural inequalities were not part of the story.”¹⁸

In mainstream newspapers and throughout the dominant media, this “conservative consensus” seems to be articulated as a hope that if the claim of multiracial people moving America closer to its postracial destiny is repeated enough times, it will come true. The hope is that the nation’s oldest and foremost race problem—the black problem—rather than being solved by the racial state, will instead simply be stepped over on the way to that postracial goal, and black people’s justified complaints will therefore vanish as a result. In other words, what is desired is not so much postraciality as post-blackness. Understanding this, it is not at all difficult to contextualize Tom Morgenthau’s assertion in *Newsweek* in 1995 that “the nation’s racial dialogue, meanwhile, is changing so rapidly that the familiar din of black-white antagonism seems increasingly out of date.”¹⁹ Morgenthau was wrong when he made this premature and hopeful assertion eighteen years ago, and he is still wrong today. Black-white antagonism was high then and remains high now because the racial state has done nothing to remedy that antagonism other than to attempt to wish it away via obfuscatory vehicles

such as exaggerated claims of whiteness's imminent demise and the supposed destruction of the US racial paradigm by platoons of multiracial teenagers.

Nor is this desire to manufacture a non-existent postraciality from whole cloth a phenomenon only of the past. In a recent *USA Today* article, Associated Press reporter Hope Yen quoted a sociologist—significantly, one who is not a critical mixed-race scholar—as saying that “mixed-race children have blurred America's color line. They often interact with others on either side of the racial divide and frequently serve as brokers between friends and family members of different racial backgrounds.”²⁰ Unsurprisingly, this paean to postraciality (notice that mixed-race children are not merely in the process of blurring the color line, but they already “have blurred” it) was not contrasted with any opposing critical mixed-race scholarly voice. I would add that the notion of multiracial “brokering” referred to above, despite its appropriation in support of the hope of postraciality, is one of a number of hotly contested claims in critical mixed-race studies.

In an even more recent piece, Yen again promotes the unsupported assertion that multiraciality will by itself lead to postraciality when she cites unnamed “experts” who predict that increasing multiracial births will render “notions of race labels increasingly irrelevant . . . if lingering stigma over being mixed-race can fully fade.”²¹ Significantly, no “experts” of a differing opinion are included in the article, and so it therefore comes as no surprise that Yen's analysis, in words harking back to the mid-1990s, promises that this demographic change is “redefining long-held notions of race.”²² It is important to recognize the extensive range of publication granted to an Associated Press writer's stories and the significance of that breadth on public opinion. With embedded testimony from a one-sided array of “experts”—whether named or not—such articles have tremendous impact regardless of how inaccurate they might be factually.

Mainstream desire for postraciality is pervasive, and it will be useful to take a few moments to consider how it operates in an analogous way, albeit on a different front. We may see this operation illustrated best in the related rush to draw untimely conclusions from the supposed shrinking white American majority, whether in terms of overall numbers or in terms of projected birth rates. A few years ago, California was the initial focus of such reporting; it has now shifted to the United States as a whole. Simply stated, in what is meant to be a major pronouncement of paradigm-shifting proportions, readers are informed that whites, long the majority race in the United States, are in the process of becoming a racial minority group. To say that this assertion is presented as an earth-shattering revelation is no overstatement.

What such articles fail to highlight, however, although a bit of text here or a telltale graphic there might nonetheless quietly allude to it, is that while whites may soon no longer represent a numerical majority, they will still remain by far the most powerful minority group in what will then be a nation of minority groups. After all, what is the real material difference between being 50.1 percent of the population in one year and 49.9 percent in another? In fact there is no difference, a fundamental detail that unfortunately escapes the reader through far too much emphasis being placed on the term “minority group,” an emphasis that elides the crucial difference between being a member of a white 49 percent minority and being a member of a black 12 percent minority. Yet mainstream media articles do not make this distinction; instead they give the impression that becoming a minority group is a significant occurrence in itself. The problem here is something of a linguistic one, as we tend in the United States to conceive of racial minority groups in relation to the majority (white) racial group. However, when whites become a minority group, there will in fact be no racial majority group remaining to serve that comparative function. In such a scenario, the term “minority group” would actually lose a vital aspect of its meaning. The tendency to omit scholarly critiques doubtless facilitates the failure of media writers to make such important connections.

Leveling minority statuses in this way, while ignoring the power differentials between groups, generates a false image of whites on the verge of being under the collective foot of non-whites numerically. In fact, the gist of such articles is precisely that when whites become a minority group, their former place will have been taken over not by a specific new group but by a collective non-white majority. However, the idea of setting whites against the totality of minorities suffers from a serious deficit of substantiveness, as there is no “united people of color coalition” standing in effective opposition to whiteness. In other words, aside from the paranoid worldview of the hardline white supremacist, there is no meaningful sense in which one can construct a legitimate image of whites on one side and all non-whites ganging up on them via reproductive warfare on the other. As I have suggested, some people may indeed feel that whiteness is threatened in this way, but white supremacy is too powerful and has put far too much superstructure in place to entertain any real fears from such a scenario.²³ Far from challenging the supremacy of whiteness, certain minorities are instead striving, themselves, to enter into its borders and share in its benefits.

Regardless of dominant media reporting concerning the presumed significance of white population losses, the fact is that relative numbers are meaningless. The only relevant issue is power. Will white power be diminished when whites represent a racial plurality in the United States as opposed to being the outright majority? Will whiteness become less invisible and more racialized as a result? Has the slight lessening of white numerical superiority recently led to a corresponding decline in white economic, political, and extralegal power? Will non-white lives change for the better on the day whites shift from being a majority to a plurality? The answer to each of these questions is, of course, “no.” Indeed, one reads these pronouncements of the vanishing white majority as though the huge black majorities in apartheid South Africa or in parts of the pre-Voting Rights Act American South meant proportional power and representation for those black populations. This would seem to be the attitude of *Time*'s John Cloud, who, writing in an article with the telling title “Are Mixed-Race Children Better Adjusted?” assures us that the time for fretting about race is nearly at an end as “fortunately, all these questions of racial identity are becoming less important, as we inch ever closer to the day when the U.S. has no racial majority.”²⁴

Numbers by themselves, however, do not equal power. In this sense, the notion of a majority-minority state or nation may be an interesting demographic phenomenon, but it is quite meaningless apart from the twin questions of whence power emanates and how it is exercised. Unfailingly, though, the impact of such articles is to push the reader toward focusing on the loss of numbers and prestige that whiteness is supposedly undergoing, and to also cause the liberal reader to reflect positively that this alleged diminution of whiteness is nevertheless a progressive development in the larger schematic of American race relations generally. In the hands of the mainstream media, it is almost as though whiteness were on the very threshold of falling apart to the benefit of the greater national good. This is how the claim of vanishing whiteness, similar to the postracial claim attached to multiraciality, is part of the mainstream media's “conservative consensus” reporting. Sensational accounts of the impending demise of whiteness serve to defuse racial tension, as if all racial animosity will finally be laid to rest once whites become 49.9 percent of the US population. Thus, similar to multiraciality equaling postraciality, in this case we have white minority group status equaling postraciality. Although the majority-minority nation is a psychological bugbear, it also represents relief via the hope that once that status is reached whiteness will no longer be held accountable for the racist state and its outcomes.

Writing about a US Census report indicating that non-white births now outnumber white births, *CNN* writer Halimah Abdullah predicts that “the coming political revolution could result in a massive changing of the guard on nearly every level of government, potential cultural clashes, and the type of political alliances that are now considered rare.”²⁵ Yet Abdullah's promised revolution seems

to assume that white power will sit back helplessly and allow this putsch to take place, and also that minorities will eschew their traditional insularity and instead act in their overall best political interests, both of which have poor historical precedents. The prediction also presumes that the births now being recorded as minority, as well as future generations stemming from those births, will remain non-white, which is very much an open question at this point.

Far from whiteness being on the defensive due to increasing minority births, the fact is that many children of Asian-white and Hispanic-white ancestry, and their descendants as well, are moving toward a status of “honorary whiteness” and eventually to full whiteness over several generations.²⁶ Thus, an increasing number of multiracial people, specifically those born Asian-white or Hispanic-white, are growing up living and being accepted simply as white or nearly white. In this case, it is not race that is changing in any fundamental way, but rather whiteness that is adapting, as Squires notes: “If some groups, by virtue of interracial marriage and/or skin tone, are granted greater access to the social, political, and economic privileges enjoyed by Whites, then Whiteness is adjusting to the new racial landscape in a way that retains certain color barriers and reframes others.”²⁷ We can see how the twin tropes of vanishing whiteness and multiraciality actually intertwine to produce not postraciality, but what we might call “strategic post-blackness.”

It is essential to understand that white adaptive maneuvers within the US racial paradigm should not be misconstrued as destabilization or deconstruction of that paradigm. That whiteness is becoming just a bit broader at precisely the moment that “pure” whiteness is apparently declining does not mean that the basic structure of race in the United States is changing. In other words, even though some part-Asians and some part-Hispanics are now allowed into whiteness, it hardly requires mentioning that neither the honorary-white nor full-white status is generally accorded to those of part-black ancestry if that ancestry is known. To point this out is not to bemoan the fact that persons with black ancestry are still not allowed to become white; rather, it is to call attention to the fact that far from racial lines being blurred either by multiracial births or by the supposed numerical demise of whiteness, the oldest and most heavily guarded racial line in the United States remains as sharp and as cutting as ever. If this is how mixed-race identity is moving the nation toward postraciality—by a diminishing whiteness expanding to include some persons of Asian and Hispanic ancestry while black ancestry remains stigmatized—then we should all be concerned.

The specific details being reported aside, the deeper structural problem with mainstream media stories on the alleged postracial power of mixed-race identity or the supposed significance of changing racial demographics is that the information presented is often one-sided, simplistic, geared to a tabloid sensibility, and does not reflect the multiform ways that edifices of power have race embedded within them, whether visible or not. It is a matter of sensationalism taking precedence over serious analysis. David Roediger identifies this tendency of providing sensationalism without substance, noting that “often multiracial identities and immigration take center stage as examples of factors making race obsolete” and that “we are often told popularly that race and racism are on predictable tracks to extinction. But we are seldom told clear or consistent stories about why white supremacy will give way and how race will become a ‘social virus’ of the past.”²⁸ Roediger’s words highlight the importance of unmasking this postracial aspiration for what it is: an effort to provide comfort to a nation that is unwilling to do the hard work required to deal effectively with centuries of entrenched racism and the resultant consequences.

Indeed, the very assertion of multiraciality points out quite ironically that we are no closer to postraciality than we were 50 years ago. In order for one to take seriously the argument that multiraciality has delivered us to the very incipience of postraciality, that we are at this moment peering over the precipice into that promised land, one must be prepared to disregard everything one knows about biology, human nature, and self-interest. Specifically, one must account for how the

push for a particular biological racial identity (in this case multiracial identity)—a push that quite necessarily depends on assenting to and supporting the existence of biological race, as opposed to its deconstruction—can possibly lead to the dissolution of the very racial schema in which that identity would be positioned. This is one of the many contentious questions being debated today by critical mixed-race scholars, and to be sure there are those who disagree with the position I have just stated. Nonetheless, even those who disagree with me on this point do not assent to the simplistic formula that multiraciality equals postraciality.

Unfortunately, the general public has no knowledge of this debate because, as we have seen, the dominant press refuses to include such academic viewpoints in its pieces. It is essential to understand that we are facing a mainstream media whose writers and editors are trained—either in colleges or in newsrooms—to have a particular view of “normal.”²⁹ These media people may even believe that they are engaging in objectivity when they craft and circulate stories that support the racial status quo. It must also be acknowledged that a non-white writer’s race or ethnicity is not necessarily a guard against the effectiveness of such “training,” which inculcates a skewed worldview in its subjects and, through their unchallenged writings, inculcates it in their readers as well.

This is where the *Journal of Critical Mixed Race Studies* must make its mark, not only on the nation’s intellectual consciousness but also and very importantly on its popular consciousness. This is where the voices of scholars can serve as a corrective to quick and sloppy mainstream reporting by media writers all-too willing to substitute sensationalism for real analysis. But we must serve as more than merely a post-publication remediation. Regardless of where one stands in relation to the debates in critical mixed-race studies, what we should all desire is accurate and intelligent reporting in the mainstream media, not sensationalist fluff that works best at anesthetizing its readers to the realities of racism and social injustice. To that end, this journal must become recognized as the primary source of authority on mixed-race matters—not a vehicle that lacks diversity of opinion, to be sure—but a vehicle nonetheless where a journalist who expects her or his story to be taken seriously must go to see what input scholars in this field have to offer prior to the publishing of that story.

As I have suggested, the necessity of the journal becoming this kind of resource is both a moral and an intellectual imperative. Its emergence as a publication must not be seen as an end in itself. The journal must also now take responsibility for its own existence by working actively for the betterment of the field and for the sake of social justice. I want now to turn to a disturbing and very recent example of the difficult challenge we face in this endeavor to correct and affect mainstream media coverage of mixed-race identity. On the way to that example, let us first take a brief detour through this journal’s genesis.

The *Journal of Critical Mixed Race Studies* owes its existence in part to three remarkable women—Laura Kina, Camilla Fojas, and Wei Ming Dariotis—who organized the first full-scale conference devoted to multiracial identity in the United States, the inaugural critical mixed-race studies conference Emerging Paradigms in Critical Mixed Race Studies held at DePaul University in November of 2010. Before going any further, I want to acknowledge the outstanding *Colorlines in the 21st Century: Multiracialism in a Racially Divided World* conference organized by Heather Dalmage at Roosevelt University in September of 1998. I was honored to present a paper there alongside some of the early trailblazers of the field who I mentioned at the beginning of this article. One could justifiably call *Colorlines* the first mixed-race conference, but while it was a tremendous visionary achievement, especially in 1998, it was somewhat modest in size, whereas the 2010 event was more along the lines of a traditional academic conference in terms of scale.

I also want to acknowledge the many student conferences that take place all over the country. For example, I was the keynote speaker at the *Pan-Collegiate Conference on the Mixed-Race Experience* student conference put on jointly by Harvard University and Wellesley College in April of 2000.

However, a student conference, even one with the participation of academics such as myself, is not a traditional conference, and so it is fair to grant that November 2010's Emerging Paradigms conference was the first full-scale scholarly conference devoted exclusively to multiracial identity. In terms of scope—types of panels, numbers of presenters, where presenters and participants came from—Emerging Paradigms was the first mixed-race conference that could realistically be compared to, say, the annual meeting of the Pacific Sociological Association or the Association of Black Sociologists. It was somewhat smaller than these, to be sure, but it nonetheless stood much closer to such traditional academic conferences than to the various hodgepodge of far smaller mixed-race events that preceded it.

Many of us who presented papers at Emerging Paradigms in 2010 were so inspired by the experience that we urged the organizers to not only hold future conferences, but to also establish a scholarly society and publish a journal. The scholarly society has not yet come to pass, but there was a 2012 conference (*What is Critical Mixed Race Studies?*), again held at DePaul, and the journal, as we can see, came to fruition. However, I did not realize in 2010 that the idea and the planning for the journal had been underway for some time. In addition to Kina, Fojas, and Dariotis, the journal also owes its appearance to four other pioneers. In 2004, Josef Castañeda-Liles, then a graduate sociology student at the University of California at Santa Barbara, “approached mixed race studies scholars G. Reginald Daniel, Paul Spickard, and Maria P. P. Root about founding a print Journal of Multiracial Studies. However, their idea would have to wait until the advent of online open-access peer-reviewed journals in order to become a reality. . . [The journal] was founded by G. Reginald Daniel, Wei Ming Dariotis, Laura Kina, and Paul Spickard.”³⁰

The Emerging Paradigms conference thus provided an additional and critical burst of energy to the planning and execution of the journal. This confluence of events represented a serendipitous moment for the field of critical mixed-race studies. In fact, it is difficult to overstate the importance of that inaugural DePaul conference. I had seen nothing resembling it since the 1998 *Colorlines* meeting, which as I have said was considerably smaller in scale. The meeting also came at a propitious time since 2010 was a decennial census year, and the major mainstream news media were starting to again take an interest in mixed-race identity, as census data would soon begin to be released. Those of us taking part in the Emerging Paradigms conference had the palpable feeling that we were witnessing and participating in history being made.

Imagine then, our intense interest and, indeed, our scholarly joy, upon learning during the conference that a *New York Times* reporter, Susan Saulny, was present and was interviewing conference participants for not just a story on multiracial identity, but as part of an entire series devoted to the topic! It was as though the time for our academic field had finally come, as though the many media missteps of the past would now be cleared away via an authoritative series by what many consider the most important and most influential newspaper in the world. Here was a *New York Times* reporter, in the midst of a diverse collection of top scholars of multiracial identity at the largest mixed-race studies conference ever held in the United States. I saw Saulny in panels and during breaks; I observed her taking notes during sessions and interviewing participants outside of sessions; and I even had the opportunity to speak with her myself. Thinking back over the slew of monstrously bad articles on multiraciality that had been published in the dominant media during the 1990s and 2000s, I envisioned a *New York Times* reporter's appearance at this conference to be the beginning of competent and accurate media representation of mixed-race identity. Just how wrong I could be about this did not occur to me even once. Only after an incredulous reading of the first installment of the series did it begin to dawn on me how very much mistaken my assumption had been.

The initial installment of the seven-part series “Race Remixed” was published on January 30, 2011, under the title: “Black? White? Asian? More Young Americans Choose All of the Above.”³¹ The

article concerned itself with several members of the Multiracial and Biracial Student Association at the University of Maryland at College Park. Beyond the ubiquitous overreliance on young voices, the most striking thing about this piece is how little space was devoted to any critique or exploration of the students' rather typical self-absorption and sense that their generation was somehow operating outside of history. Except for several references to President Barack Obama, one could very easily splice all or part of this article into practically any mid-1990s mixed-race story by *Newsweek* or *Time* and not notice any difference at all. The traditional template for mainstream reporting on mixed-race identity was fully operative in this article, especially in the one-sided authority granted to youthful mixed-race voices vis-à-vis any alternative views.

In only one small passage of the article was a specific dissenting voice heard, when the author quoted an academic who “says he believes that there is too much ‘emotional investment’ in the notion of multiracialism as a panacea for the nation’s age-old divisions. ‘The mixed-race identity is not a transcendence of race; it’s a new tribe,’ he said. ‘A new Balkanization of race.’”³² Yet following this strong statement questioning the very nature of mixed-race identity, Saulny’s next words simply brushed the entirety of it aside, assigning all authority to the students: “But for many of the University of Maryland students, that is not the point. They are asserting their freedom to identify as they choose.”³³ Nowhere in the remainder of the article did the writer return to this academic critique or allow any other dissenting voice to speak.

The reader was thus left with a host of controversial issues that were implied but nevertheless remained ignored: in what way multiracial identity is conceived of as having problems; why it might be seen as Balkanizing; how it could fail to transcend race. Furthermore, Saulny did not take into consideration the effects of excess “emotional investment” in a multiracial identity or the tension between the assertion of a “freedom to identify” and the impact of that freedom upon other persons and other groups. Although being hinted at, these points were then dispatched from further reflection. In their place, “That is not the point,” became the guiding credo, one might say, of not only this particular article but the entire series as far as any academic critique was concerned.

In addition to the bias of limiting opposing views, Omar Ricks finds that “few actual opponents of multiracialism are quoted in the article, but, oddly enough, when opposition to multiracialism is given a face, it is generally not the face of ‘all society’ but a black one.”³⁴ In other words, despite its author’s articulation of the students’ view of the problem as being a battle against society’s coercive force in determining how people can and cannot identify, Ricks’ observation is that the only words of outright opposition in the article came not from the voice of “society,” but instead came specifically from a black voice—a voice that was then dismissed summarily. The framing of this installment of “Race Remixed”—what was presented, who was given a voice, how much space was devoted to each of the opposing views, and so forth—tilted the article far away from what could be called objective journalism. We shall want to keep this template in mind as we consider the other articles in the series.

Let me also remind readers that this article was published a mere twelve weeks after its writer attended the Emerging Paradigms conference, spending several days there taking notes and interviewing scholars and the conference organizers. Saulny was well aware that in the scholarly world there are tremendous debates concerning multiracial identity. These debates have to do with the status of whiteness; with the effects of racialization; with the insidious entrenchment of the American racial paradigm; with social justice; with the premature rush to postraciality; and with critiques of the shoddy ways multiracial identity has traditionally been covered by the mainstream media. Yet what one read of “Black? White? Asian?”—indeed, the same may be said of each of her articles in the “Race Remixed” series—conveyed that its author possessed no inkling of the vigorously contested status of mixed-race identity in the scholarly realm.

It is wholly appropriate to question whether the choice to keep such crucial aspects of the debate concerning multiracial identity hidden from her readers was a conscious decision by a writer who in fact had full access to all of it. My strongest indication that this is so comes from observations made at what I considered one of the most outstanding panels of the conference: “Back From Beyond Black: Alternative Paradigms for Critical Mixed-Race Theory.” Held in a large room that was packed to a “standing room only” condition despite its being the last session of the last day, the atmosphere was electric.³⁵ It was a controversial session, as the panelists were opposed to simplistic, “feel good” analyses of multiracial identity and were also sharply critical of suggestions that black/white multiracials were not black. At one point during the panel session, they even questioned the underlying motive of the conference itself. Yet although this panel dove into the heart of some of the most contentious disputes in critical mixed-race studies, the general mood within the room was collegial, with engaging and productive dialogue extending well beyond the end of the question and answer period. The scholars in the room, with all their diversity of views, were acknowledging some of the great controversies in the field and were attempting to engage them with earnestness. Taking a moment from time to time to view Saulny at the back of the room, rapt and taking extensive notes throughout the entire session, I thought: “This is great!”

Let me be clear that I am in no sense suggesting that the writer for the *New York Times* should have promoted any particular scholarly viewpoint in the article or included any specific academic as an interviewee. That is not the basis of my critique. What I am arguing is that a professionally reported news article on mixed race, especially one appearing in the *New York Times*, should include more than one side of the issue. What makes the situation with “Race Remixed” especially glaring is that the single side that was given precedence in the first article consisted mostly of teenagers who had a vested interest in seeing themselves as special. As Hortense Spillers notes in so wry a way: “The Facebook crowd—the young and the restless . . . is precisely that generational cohort toward which Susan Saulny’s *New York Times* piece, ‘Black? White? Asian? More Young Americans Choose All of the Above,’ is aimed and from which it draws its inspiration. For this cohort, race is no longer just ‘race,’ but becomes a playful smorgasbord of this, that, and the other.”³⁶ Were it not for the well-established template for mainstream media reporting on multiraciality, it would be startling that the article granted so much weight, and virtually no counterweight, to the voices of young people who themselves did not possess much in the way of historical knowledge beyond the insularity of their own lived experience.

Allow me to invoke a few analogies here in order to illustrate the danger of this kind of journalistic lapse. What would be our judgment of a *New York Times* piece on evolution that gave overwhelming priority to the voices of evangelical Protestants while dismissing without comment the views of the single scientist interviewed? Would we take seriously a *New York Times* article on the alleged connection between autism and childhood vaccinations that gave significant preferential weight to the voices of parents of autistic children and denied equal precedence to the views of medical professionals? We would certainly judge such articles to not have met the high journalistic standards we expect of the *New York Times*; yet it is clear that such standards were not enforced with regard to the first installment of “Race Remixed.” To put it bluntly, the major problem with “Black? White? Asian?” was a lack of professional journalistic objectivity, the very thing readers expect of the *New York Times*.

If one were unfamiliar with the debates surrounding multiraciality and were to read “Black? White? Asian?” in order to gain an understanding of mixed-race identity, presuming rather sensibly to acquire the best information on the topic from what might be considered the world’s greatest newspaper, one would be led to believe that there is no scholarly debate over the issue; that it is all about the attitudes and opinions of mixed-race Americans under the age of twenty-five; that we are on

the brink of postraciality thanks to this population; and that the only voice of resistance comes from black people.

That there are serious problems with such an interpretation goes without saying. It is merely a new iteration of the same “conservative consensus” in regard to mainstream reporting on mixed race (i.e., selfish and retrograde blacks are the only thing holding these multiracial teenagers from leading the nation to its postracial promised land). According to Ricks, “it would require an excessive degree of naïveté or willful disregard to ignore the same symptoms of thought in Saulny’s article series.”³⁷ Moreover, far from multiraciality leading to any utopian, postracial future, the data in the article itself do not support its conclusions. Analyzing a graphic in the article showing “Who is Marrying Whom,” Jason Antrosio arrives at the opposite conclusion: “First, white people and the white-black household wealth gap are not going away; second, the ‘Hispanic’ category shows signs of bifurcating into white and black; third, Asian-Americans have more securely become ‘probationary whites.’”³⁸

Gino Pellegrini also critiques the aspirational nature of the article in granting such a strong yet unquestioned bias to the power of multiracial identity:

The popular media and specifically the Race Remixed series in the *New York Times* propagate the myth of multiracialism. According to this social myth, the increasing number of interracial families and multiracial children in America is transforming race and paving the way for a post-racial future. This myth assumes the existence of a growing mass of mixed youth who both identify with their multiracial heritage and who have a clear conception of its significance and transformative potential. At best, writers and audiences (popular and academic) who believe in this myth are engaged in wishful thinking. From my experience and observation, they confuse a few individuals for the many.³⁹

That the *New York Times* should be the vehicle for a series that facilitates this wish is more than unfortunate—it is dangerous. The premature rush to inaugurate postraciality at the expense of resolving the nation’s racial problems cannot be allowed to stand unchallenged. We must heed the chilling words of Spillers, who warns us that “if ‘racial ambiguity’ or *looking* that way, can be amplified and translated into a legitimate *political* interest (as it is increasingly becoming a *commercial* one), then the padded new racism that comes about as a result will gladly declare a new class of winners.”⁴⁰

The bias toward simplistic and utopian constructions of mixed-race identity inherent in this preliminary “Race Remixed” article was not an accident. In fact, “Black? White? Asian?” is seen most properly as an extension of the “conservative consensus” mainstream reporting on mixed race that goes back to the 1990s. Placed in historical context, it does what nearly all mainstream media articles prior to it have also done, which is to promote the naïve stance that multiracial identity is in itself the vehicle to move us beyond race. In this view, biological race is not a problem; rather, it is merely that the bad stereotypes associated with particular racial groups must be done away with. In contrast to this, the best critical mixed-race scholars—regardless of their own particular ideological stances on multiraciality—reject this unsophisticated presumption and instead argue that race itself, as opposed to merely biased readings of race, is what must be transcended. Multiraciality may have a part to play in the eventual transcending of race—that remains to be seen. If it does have a role, though, it will be as part of an analysis that goes far beyond simplistic notions of black-and-white heterosexual activity equaling postraciality.

However, as Squires notes and as “Black? White? Asian?” proves, “the groups and scholars that endorse this latter view are not the ones normally consulted by the mainstream press.”⁴¹ In the articles of the media writers to whom Squires refers, in this first iteration of “Race Remixed,” and in

the remainder of the series, we also do not hear about whiteness. There is no discussion of the way whiteness structures the American racial paradigm; nor do mainstream media writers acknowledge, even as a part of their articles, the persistent call of critical mixed-race scholars to unmask and deconstruct it. Instead, “mainstream media have avoided the challenges to Whiteness and racial hierarchy that many multiracial scholars emphasize in their work.”⁴² Understanding this, Saulny’s decision to ignore what she saw and heard at the Emerging Paradigms conference, though frustrating and disappointing, is not at all surprising. Rather, that decision is part of a long and well-established tradition in the dominant media.

It would have been damaging enough to the public’s accurate understanding of multiraciality if “Black? White? Asian?” were the only article published; however, it would merely be the first. The February 10, 2011, installment of the series entitled “In a Multiracial Nation, Many Ways to Tally” involved a new rule adopted by the Department of Education in regard to classifying persons who check more than one racial box on school-related forms.⁴³ In accordance with this rule, “students of non-Hispanic mixed parentage who choose more than one race will be placed in a ‘two or more races’ category.”⁴⁴

The most important and most controversial aspect of this particular issue was actually missed completely by the article. The 1997 decision by the Office of Management and Budget to allow multiple responses was predicated on a compromise with the nation’s civil rights organizations that no federal multiracial category would be approved. In other words, the organizations agreed to drop their resistance to multiple responses as long as no stand-alone multiracial category was adopted by the federal government. Therefore, for a government agency such as the Department of Education to, in essence, create a multiracial category in a backdoor way via the “two or more races” strategy represents a significant breach of trust by the federal government toward those civil rights organizations and their constituents.⁴⁵ The inclusion of a critical mixed-race studies perspective might have led to a useful discussion of this important point. Finally, as the issue here involved controversies over tabulating multiple responses by a government agency, it therefore did not lend itself too much to commentary by students, although one student from the University of Maryland at College Park was featured in the article.

Using two young interracial families to make the case for changing racial attitudes in America’s Deep South, the March 20, 2011, article in the series “Black and White and Married in the Deep South” deployed census statistics as evidence of that supposed change. To open the article, we are introduced to a black man in a “serious relationship with a woman who was white and Asian” who decided to move with this partner to Hattiesburg, Mississippi.⁴⁶ While readers are meant to take this as a move requiring no small amount of bravado, the black man and white/Asian woman in this “serious relationship” had in fact already been living in Louisiana, rendering the move to Mississippi significantly less subversive than the writer sought to present it. Louisiana, after all, is much more like Mississippi than, say, like California or New York when it comes to recent state histories of sexual tension involving blacks and whites.⁴⁷

The sleight of hand involved in exaggerating the peril of this particular interracial couple’s relocation was significant because it was the analogue of a much larger and much more important attempt at legerdemain in the article’s main thesis. Immediately after this introduction, in the fourth paragraph of the piece, the article notes that Mississippi has “one of the country’s most rapidly expanding multiracial populations, up 70 percent between 2000 and 2010.”⁴⁸ This was followed two paragraphs later by the equally explosive declarations that in “North Carolina, the mixed-race population doubled. In Georgia, it expanded by more than 80 percent, and by nearly as much in Kentucky and Tennessee. In Indiana, Iowa and South Dakota, the multiracial population increased by about 70 percent.”⁴⁹ However, it is a full six paragraphs after these startling pronouncements, and

tucked away on a completely different page, that the article's author provided any raw numbers, and then only for Mississippi's multiracial population: "34,000, about 1.1 percent."⁵⁰ Despite trumpeting their percentage increases over the previous ten years, Saulny declined to provide even a single raw population figure for North Carolina, Georgia, Kentucky, Tennessee, Indiana, Iowa, or South Dakota. The problem here is that a percentage change without knowing the original figures tells us nothing.

In fact, Peter Nardi found "Black and White and Married in the Deep South" to be an especially useful example of how percentages can be misleading. Referring to the claims cited above and also to the article's assertion of a "possible national multiracial growth rate of 35 percent, maybe even a 50 percent increase from the last census in 2000 when 2.4 percent of Americans selected more than one race," Nardi had the following comment: "With these numbers coming at you fast and furious, it takes a moment to reflect on what is actually being said and what information is missing . . . it's one thing to claim that the multiracial population may increase 50 percent, but when the original figure is only 2.4 percent of Americans, a 50 percent increase simply means that the 2010 multiracial population could end up around 3.6 percent of the population. The number 50 surely sounds more impressive than the smaller 3.6 figure. Manipulating these numbers can create misleading impressions, sometimes done with intention."⁵¹

Despite the bevy of percentages included in this installment of "Race Remixed," what the article did not include was that Mississippi's 2000 multiracial population figure was an anemic 0.74 percent. Placing this number in the same paragraph with the announcement that it had risen by 70 percent over the past ten years—as opposed to locating that information on a different page altogether—would have resulted in a far different impression than the one implied by the article. As Antrosio observes quite succinctly, "Saulny's own census numbers suggest race remixed is a fiction."⁵² Unsurprisingly, there is also no space given to a critical mixed-race studies position in this piece.

As in the case of Saulny, another mainstream media writer, *Los Angeles Times* Op-Ed columnist Gregory Rodriguez, also invoked these percentages as an indication of the nation's movement to a postracial future that he labeled "the new multiracial era."⁵³ Steven Riley, in a commentary on the columnist's piece, illustrates that in addition to the manipulation Nardi warns against, Rodriguez also missed the real message of those numbers:

While some writers may write glowing articles about—for example—a 70% increase in the number of people checking two or more races in Mississippi (from 0.74% in 2000 to 1.15% in 2010), and how they are supposedly leading to "the softening of racial lines," as Mr. Rodriguez puts it, a deeper interrogation actually reveals the continuing persistence of racial lines. What you will not hear from the likes of Mr. Rodriguez is the fact that Mississippi has the *lowest* percentage of people checking two or more races while ironically—and not surprisingly due to its tortured racial past—at the same time, having the *greatest potential* for racial mixing because it is the state with the lowest white to black ratio in the nation.⁵⁴

As with the second article, the June 14, 2011, piece "On College Forms, a Question of Race, or Races, Can Perplex" dealt less with multiracial identity leading directly to postraciality than with technical matters of which boxes mixed-race prospective college students should or should not check in order to increase their chances for admission.⁵⁵ Of interest in this piece, co-written by Saulny and Jacques Steinberg, was the short shrift once again granted to a critical mixed-race studies perspective, which amounted to a single such scholar, Ulli K. Ryder, being given a solitary sentence in which to ask, "How do we include multiracials in our view of an egalitarian society and not do it in a way that disadvantages other groups?"⁵⁶ Needless to say, this scholar's crucial question was not followed-up in the article. Moreover, this article dealt with the choices students make about declaring race when

applying to college. While critical mixed-race scholar Nikki Khanna—who had recently co-authored a highly regarded journal article on this very topic—was interviewed for this particular article, her voice was left out of the piece.⁵⁷

The final “Race Remixed” article to which Saulny contributed “In Strangers’ Glances, Family Tensions Linger” published on October 13, 2011, concerned the struggles of one young interracial family.⁵⁸ In this article we learn quickly that life as a mixed-race person can be a kind of hell through the introductory story of a multiracial woman who—despite mentioning a lifetime of experience with similar interactions—was nearly brought to tears and flight recently by another person asking why this woman and her daughter had such different skin tones.⁵⁹ This bathetic introduction set the atmosphere of the rest of the article, in which being multiracial was equated, among other things, with being forced to endure a lifetime of paper cuts. I will forego belaboring the many serious problems with this image, which was not contrasted with any alternative views of mixed-race life, as if this were the typical multiracial experience.⁶⁰ It also echoed the many such pathological caricatures found in the *Newsweek* and *Time* articles of the mid-1990s.

Beyond this, Antrosio observes problems that are identical to those of the earlier articles in the “Race Remixed” series: “But it’s the same stuff—the claim that mixed-race is a rapidly growing category; the idea that this will by itself transform society; the almost complete focus on personal comments and narratives rather than economic and political inequalities. One sociology professor [Jenifer L. Bratter] manages to get in a few words about inequality.”⁶¹ Considering that the October 13, 2011, article was published more than eight months after the first one and that it contains the same deficiencies as that first piece suggests that what we were actually witnessing was a singular template deployed again and again with only surface differences.

As an example of this template, of the five articles in which Saulny was either author or co-author, the only three critical mixed-race scholars cited were allowed to speak a mere 21, 23, and 23 words respectively, for a grand total of 67 words between them all. This disregard for scholarly voices, as well as other patterns throughout the series, raises legitimate concerns regarding journalistic objectivity. Frankly, in addition to the writer’s clear support of the mainstream “conservative consensus” with this series, I believe it is worth questioning whether the writer had some sort of personal agenda for crafting these articles the way she did.⁶² In other words, it may be that “Race Remixed” actually tells us more about Susan Saulny than it does about multiracial Americans in general.

There were two additional “Race Remixed” entries that Saulny was not involved with. “Mixed-Race Artists Court Higher-Profile Projects” (July 6, 2011) by Felicia Lee explored the creative works of mixed-race artists. “For Many Latinos, Racial Identity is More Culture Than Color” (January 13, 2012) by Mireya Navarro gave specific coverage to mixed-race Hispanics.⁶³ Although adhering to the general template for mainstream mixed-race coverage, these two pieces did include a few noteworthy aspects. For instance, Lee’s article was the only piece in the entire series to contain the words “critical mixed-race studies” although there was no elaboration whatsoever as to what those words might signify.⁶⁴ Lee also devoted by far the most space to a critical mixed-race scholar, Michele Elam, whom she allowed to say 62 words, five fewer than the total words of all such scholars quoted by Saulny. Navarre’s article also broke with the rest of the series, in its case by being the only one to broach in an explicit way the subject of Hispanics moving to honorary- and full-white status. Beyond these two relative bright spots, however, “Race Remixed” as a series did far more to muddle than to clarify the reading public’s understanding of mixed-race issues by rehashing the poorly researched and false claims of the past. Spillers’ comment on the first article—“We’ve been here before, and that *is* the disappointment”—is a fitting assessment of the series as a whole.⁶⁵

Earlier in this article I averred that “the uncontested authority of young mixed voices, a gaping deficit of countervailing scholarly perspectives, and spectacular pronouncements that race as we have known it is dying before our eyes have been the staples of mainstream mixed-race media coverage.” It is clear that the template used throughout “Race Remixed” positioned the series firmly within that tradition, and that it represented not objective journalism but was instead an exercise in cherry-picking numbers and silencing alternative voices for the sake of putting forth yet another iteration of the “conservative consensus” about multiracial identity leading America into postraciality. That the *New York Times* chose to descend to the level of *Newsweek* and *Time* in its coverage of mixed-race issues is unfortunate, but the evidence is incontrovertible. And this is no small point, for while poorly researched articles in the latter two publications might well frustrate us, we nevertheless expect far more from the *New York Times*. Moreover, “Race Remixed” was more than a single feature in a glossy newsmagazine; it was a multi-part series in one of the most respected newspapers in the world.

The damage “Race Remixed” has done to popular understandings of America’s mixed-race reality is incalculable, but it is unquestionable that the way back lies in the hands of critical mixed-race scholars who must now work to undo that damage. In this crucial project, the *Journal of Critical Mixed Race Studies* has a preeminent part to play. If critical mixed-race studies is to mature fully as a field, it will only be through the good growth and solid reputation of this journal. We must support work that is rigorous and done well, even if we disagree with its premises or conclusions. We are all enriched by good quality work, even that which might be incorrect at some level, because this is how dialectic works to move knowledge forward. In the same vein, we should reject shoddy work whose foundations or outcomes we nonetheless agree with. Scholars of critical mixed-race studies must support the publication of good quality work and academic criticality in this journal regardless of our own preferences.

If we fail in this, and instead hold to some sort of dogmatic, exclusionary line, we will find that critical mixed-race studies will never achieve its rightful respect or its rightful place in the academic pantheon, and it will be helpless to avert disasters such as “Race Remixed” from happening again. To avoid the possibility of such a failure, I urge each of us to grab a metaphorical shovel, saw, or hammer and set about building the *Journal of Critical Mixed Race Studies* into what it can—indeed, what it must—become.

NOTES

* Race terms in this essay are always a reference to people's misguided belief in biological race and the American racial paradigm. In order to talk about and around this misbelief without resorting to cumbersome and distracting caveats in the text, I do use such terms reluctantly. The reader should therefore understand such terms to include the words "coded by others or self-coded as" (i.e., "persons coded by others or self-coded as black, white, multiracial, etc.>").

¹ Root, ed., *Racially Mixed People in America*; Root, ed., *The Multiracial Experience*; Funderburg, *Black, White, Other*; Zack, ed., *American Mixed Race*.

² Reuter, *The Mulatto in the United States*; Stonequist, *The Marginal Man*; Williamson, *New People*; Mencke, *Mulattoes and Race Mixture*; Spickard, *Mixed Blood*.

³ I certainly do not intend to imply that no other books on the topic of multiracial identity were published between 1992 and 1996; however, these four stand apart from any others.

⁴ Asante, "Racism, Consciousness, and Afrocentricity," 127–43; Jones, "The End of Africanity? The Bi-Racial Assault on Blackness," 201–10.

⁵ Ursula M. Brown, *The Interracial Experience*; Kilson, *Claiming Place*.

⁶ Nancy. G. Brown and Douglass, "Evolution of Multiracial Organizations," 111–24; Fernández, "Testimony of the Association of MultiEthnic Americans," 191–210; Graham, "The Real World," 37–48.

⁷ In this essay I shall use the term "dominant media" to refer to mainstream, non-minority-serving vehicles such as the *New York Times*, *CNN*, *Time*, and *Newsweek*. I thank Catherine Squires for pointing out that sources such as these "(1) set agendas, (2) draw the attention of elites and the lay public, (3) have huge distribution networks and thus gain exposure nationally, and (4) get cited by others." Catherine Squires, e-mail message to author, May 31, 2012.

⁸ White, "I'm Just Who I Am," 34.

⁹ For an excellent analysis of this point, see Rockquemore, "Deconstructing Tiger Woods," 134, 138.

¹⁰ Leland and Beals, "In Living Colors," 58.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 59.

¹² White, "I'm Just Who I Am," 34.

¹³ Clemetson, "Color My World," 74. Emphasis in original.

¹⁴ Wright, "One Drop of Blood," 46–55; Mathews, "More Than Identity Rides on a New Racial Category," A1, A7.

¹⁵ Thornton, "Policing the Borderlands White," 106.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 111.

¹⁷ Squires, *Dispatches from the Color Line*, 8.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 179.

¹⁹ Morgenthau, "What Color is Black?," 63.

²⁰ Hope Yen, "Interracial Marriages at Record 8.4%," *USA Today*, February 16, 2012, http://www.usatoday.com/USCP/PNI/Nation/World/2012-02-16-BCUSInterracial-MarriageHFR_ST_U.htm.

²¹ Hope Yen, "Census: Whites no Longer Majority by 2043," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, December 13, 2012, 2A.

²² *Ibid.*, 1A.

²³ Rush Limbaugh, "CNN: GOP Voters are White, Aging, Dying," *The Rush Limbaugh Show*, May 21, 2012, http://www.rushlimbaugh.com/daily/2012/05/21/cnn_gop_voters_are_white_aging_dying. Indeed, while Limbaugh claims that it is *CNN* issuing the racial threat, the effect of his statement is nonetheless to amplify the alleged threat to whites represented by changing demographics.

²⁴ John Cloud, "Are Mixed-Race Children Better Adjusted?" *Time*, February 21, 2009, <http://www.time.com/time/health/article/0,8599,1880467,00.html>.

²⁵ Census Bureau, "Most Children Younger Than Age 1 are Minorities," <http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/population/cb12-90.html>; Halimah Abdullah, "GOP Problem: Their Voters are White, Aging and Dying Off," *CNN*, May 24, 2012, <http://www.cnn.com/2012/05/21/politics/gop-census-latino/index.html>.

²⁶ For in-depth discussions of this phenomenon, see Bonilla-Silva, "New Racism," 271–84; Gallagher, "Racial Redistricting," 59–76; and Jennifer Lee and Bean, "America's Changing Color Lines," 221–42.

²⁷ Squires, *Dispatches from the Color Line*, 165.

²⁸ Roediger, *How Race Survived U. S. History*, 214.

²⁹ I am indebted to Minelle Mahtani for pointing out to me that "it's not just sensationalism, although of course that informs the vagueness of the pieces. It's about how journalists are trained, and systemic whiteness in journalism." Minelle Mahtani, e-mail message to author, June 19, 2012. Squires also makes a similar point, *Dispatches from the Color Line*, 202–08.

³⁰ "Mission, Scope, and History," *Journal of Critical Mixed Race Studies*.

³¹ Susan Saulny, "Black? White? Asian? More Young Americans Choose All of the Above," *New York Times*, January 30, 2011, A1, A20–22.

³² *Ibid.*, A20.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Omar Ricks, "Playing Games with Race." *The Feminist Wire*, June 3, 2011, <http://thefeministwire.com/2011/06/playing-games-with-race/>.

³⁵ Steven Riley of MixedRaceStudies.org, who attended the session, describes the popularity of this panel as an "overwhelming response—80 people or more in attendance." Steven Riley, e-mail message to author, June 9, 2012.

³⁶ Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Too," 1.

- ³⁷ Ricks, "Playing Games with Race."
- ³⁸ Jason Antrosio, "Race Remixed?" *Living Anthropologically*, March 28, 2011, <http://www.livinganthropologically.com/2011/03/28/race-remixed/>.
- ³⁹ Gino M. Pellegrini, "Generation Mixed and the One Love Club." *Education, Race, Amalgamation, Class & Solidarity*, June 3, 2012, <http://ginopellegrini.wordpress.com/2012/06/03/generation-mixed-and-the-one-love-club>.
- ⁴⁰ Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's, Too," 2. Emphasis in original.
- ⁴¹ Squires, *Dispatches from the Color Line*, 51.
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, 50.
- ⁴³ Susan Saulny, "In a Multiracial Nation, Many Ways to Tally—Race Remixed, The Pigeonhole Problem," *New York Times*, February 10, 2011, A1, A17.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, A17.
- ⁴⁵ This approach creates a multiracial category on the tabulation end, rather than on the input end. I maintain that the Office of Management and Budget's turning a blind eye to this renegeing on the 1997 compromise is a shameful slap in the face to the nation's civil rights organizations that will likely result in other federal agencies following suit.
- ⁴⁶ Susan Saulny, "Black and White and Married in the Deep South: A Shifting Image—Race Remixed, Blurring the Color Line," *New York Times*, March 20, 2011, A1.
- ⁴⁷ A more appropriate headline might have read: "Black Man and Part-White Lover Make Scandalous Move to the Deep South from . . . the Deep South!"
- ⁴⁸ Saulny, "Black and White and Married in the Deep South," A1.
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, A4.
- ⁵¹ Peter M. Nardi, "Understanding Popular Uses of Percentages," *Pacific Standard*, April 30, 2011, <http://www.psmag.com/culture-society/understanding-popular-uses-of-percentages-30686/>.
- ⁵² Antrosio, "Race Remixed?" (updated 13 October 2011).
- ⁵³ Gregory Rodriguez, "President Obama: At Odds with Clear Demographic Trends Toward Multiracial Pride," *Los Angeles Times*, April 4, 2011, <http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/commentary/la-oe-rodriguez-column-obama-race-20110404,0,3716973.column>.
- ⁵⁴ Steven F. Riley, "Demographic Demagoguery: Gregory Rodriguez's Views on Race and the Census Just Don't Add Up," *Mixed Race Studies: Scholarly Perspectives on the Mixed Race Experience*, April 8, 2011, <http://www.mixedracestudies.org/wordpress/?p=13113>. Emphasis in original.
- ⁵⁵ Susan Saulny and Jacques Steinberg, "On College Forms, a Question of Race, or Races, Can Perplex—Race Remixed, Filling in the Boxes," *New York Times*, June 14, 2011, A1, A12.
- ⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, A12.
- ⁵⁷ Khanna and Johnson, "Passing as Black," 380–97. Nikki Khanna, e-mail message to author, June 14, 2011.
- ⁵⁸ Susan Saulny, "In Strangers' Glances, Family Tensions Linger—Race Remixed, A Family Tree of Many Colors," *New York Times*, October 13, 2011, A1, A19. The online version of this article carries a slightly altered title and publication date: "In Strangers' Glances at Family, Tensions Linger," October 12, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/13/us/for-mixed-family-old-racial-tensions-remain-part-of-life.html?pagewanted=1&r=0>.
- ⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, A1.
- ⁶⁰ One might argue that the writer was merely illustrating that an interracial family may face unpleasant reactions from other people, but what would be the point of that if we were not also provided with (and the writer did not provide) any contextualization of how common such experiences might be? In the absence of any comprehensive and non-anecdotal information regarding how common or how uncommon these claimed experiences were, it is fair to state that the article's exclusive highlighting of this one family's assertions represented journalistic cherry-picking.
- ⁶¹ Antrosio, "Race Remixed?" (Update 13 October 2011).
- ⁶² Or, it might be that Saulny labored under the thumb of an editor who demanded that "Race Remixed" be a one-sided, inaccurate, and misleading series. Regardless of who in particular is to blame, "Race Remixed" nevertheless stands as one-sided, inaccurate, and misleading.
- ⁶³ Felicia R. Lee, "Mixed-Race Artists Court Higher-Profile Projects—Race Remixed, Art on the Fault Line," *New York Times*, July 6, 2011, C1, C6; Mireya Navarro, "For Many Latinos, Racial Identity Is More Culture Than Color—Race Remixed, A Divided Self-Definition," *New York Times*, January 13, 2012, A11–A12.
- ⁶⁴ Lee, "Mixed-Race Artists," C1.
- ⁶⁵ Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's, Too," 1.

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