

## Review

**GREG CARTER.** *The United States of the United Races: A Utopian History of Racial Mixing.* New York: New York University Press, 2013. ix + 265 pp. 22 halftones. \$24 paper. ISBN: 9780814772508. \$75 cloth. ISBN: 9780814772492. Also available in eBook.

Greg Carter's first book exemplifies a new generation of interdisciplinary scholarship yearning to contextualize multiracial identities, historicize interracial sexuality, and highlight the everyday experiences of mixed-race people in the United States. Rather than atomize these experiences, Carter situates them within the larger scholarly debates that inform more traditional academic inquiries. In doing so, he joins a diverse cohort of scholars intent on disrupting racial binaries by harnessing not only the field of critical mixed race studies but also the similarly burgeoning area of Interracial America being developed by Matthew Briones, Mark Brilliant, Moon-Ho and Moon-Kie Jung, and Tiya Miles. At stake is nothing less than the master narrative of race in the United States and its political marshaling in our current post-Obama moment. If Carter and his compatriots succeed, not only will America's diversity be reflected in its historical memory, but so too will its interracial and mixed-race realities.

Much ink has been spilled over the social construction of race in the United States. Carter, in contrast, focuses on the forces working at the same time to deconstruct race. In Carter's view, a small group of Americans from the colonial era to our own ventured well beyond simply fighting racism (a process which often affirmed racial categories) and instead worked to dissolve the boundaries of race altogether. For Carter's activists, mixed-race people and interracial sexuality were the symbolic paths forward toward a more egalitarian, casteless, and potentially raceless society.

Proceeding chronologically, Carter traces the various ways in which these racial utopians imagined their multiracial nation and its mixed-race population. Focusing primarily on activists who argued that an ever-expanding mixed-race citizenry was prototypically American—and *ipso facto* democratic—Carter demonstrates that these eternal optimists guaranteed that the United States would never reach an absolute consensus on either race or the classification of mixed-race people. Thomas Jefferson's personal hypocrisy is thus juxtaposed with Hector St. John Crèvecoeur's open embrace of colonial interracial sexuality. Wendell Phillips is compared not only to his fellow abolitionists, who strategically skirted the dreaded topic of miscegenation, but also to W. E. B. Du Bois and the leaders of the NAACP who at times followed a similar course. Throughout his work, Carter argues that racial utopians forced the nation into an ongoing deadlock between a majority who saw mixed-race people as a problem that must be contained by clear racial codification and a small but vocal minority who saw these same mixed-race bodies as the promising, symbolic figureheads of American civic ideals. In short, Carter's study is not the history of mixed-race people in America. It is rather the history of the United States struggling to define itself through its mixed-race people.

Relying heavily upon secondary literature, Carter's book presents itself as part synthesis, part corrective, and part call to action. The author proves particularly effective in connecting the various discourses surrounding mixed-race people with the vast scholarly literature on American imperialism, immigration, and nationalism. Carter shows that attempts to define that ever-elusive "American character" took place through an international prism with mixed-race people appearing time and again as the perfectly situated domestic "other." The United States consistently invoked multiracial people and interracial sexuality when deciding how to run its empire, when to mix with foreign peoples, and where to mark the boundaries of American citizenship.

As part of this move, Carter revisits the field of whiteness studies through Israel Zangwill's melting pot. Counting Zangwill as one of his racial utopians, Carter cites his controversial analogy as a potentially progressive vision that only later excluded non-Europeans to become the current symbol of regressive assimilationism. Including white ethnics as part of this conversation has the potential to reconfigure long standing assumptions in immigration history, labor history, and urban studies.

Ambitious in scope and bold in pronouncements, Carter's study dances seamlessly between time and space. He analyzes eighteenth-century Spanish *casta* paintings against *Time* magazine's now infamous "New Face" edition from 1993. Census 2000 becomes part of a long battle over the legal classification of "mulattoes" dating back at least to the 1870 census. While traditional historians may balk at this approach, Carter freely admits that there are no direct historical continuities between his various utopian visionaries. Each new generation of racial utopians seemingly developed its own strikingly similar arguments almost from scratch with little or no reference to their predecessors. In this way, Carter positions himself less as a dispenser of historical answers and more as a contemporary provocateur filled with questions. His perspective challenges historians from a number of different fields and methodologies to consider the station of mixed-race people in America and incorporate mixed race studies as "one analytic tool" (7) informing their interpretations. The end result is a refreshing intellectual history infused with the passion and immediacy of an American Studies approach.

While Carter's contrarian spirit and iconoclastic tendencies are among his major strengths, they unfortunately find their way into his citation practices and footnoting techniques. Endnotes are scant. The study often goes pages without any citations at all. Deciphering precise sources from the few notes that do exist frequently proves futile. For a book hoping to make the case for mixed race studies to traditional historians, Carter might have considered his target audience's notorious disdain for such practices. In addition, certain specialists may find troubling Carter's reliance on overly broad historical generalizations that clutter this text. An easy scrub of both issues would have left this work much improved.

Carter's conceptual implications also demand consideration. Throughout this work he repeatedly argues that the anti-racist struggle needs to be intellectually decoupled from mixed-race people who are neither its burden bearers nor its poster-children. The idea that mixed-race people necessarily are reducible to racial progress is a particular target for Carter as he finds this patronizing ideology contributing to the commodification of multiracial bodies to sell everything from hope, to consumer goods, to misguided political projects. Tiger Woods, Barack Obama, and the nameless exotic model in the department store all take shape in relation to this pernicious backdrop. The great paradox for Carter is that mixed-race people in the United States are used and abused in a very particular way because of their racial otherness, even as they are simultaneously praised for their supposedly quintessential Americaness and racial transcendence. In some ways, this book is a preliminary gesture toward a long history of the post-racial fantasy—placing mixed-race people at its center.

Yet the danger of falling into the very post-racialism that he so clearly abhors remains a nemesis for Carter, albeit one that he keeps largely at bay. Romanticizing either mixed-race people or the utopians who fetishize them is a temptation against which Carter cautions his readers and himself manages to avoid. While the specter of the first wave of multiracial studies tends to creep into his prose sporadically, Carter is skeptical of either lionizing his subjects or discounting them outright. Still, to many, Carter's book will itself appear to be a utopian history as much as a study of the history of utopian racial thought. In the end, he not only analyzes utopian visions from the past but also produces one of his own. Despite his own misgivings, Carter contends that racial utopians have ultimately "opened up far more possibilities than their opposition could" (17). The trick for Carter—

and others convinced of the value of critical mixed race studies—remains how to advocate for fluid racial categories and multiple racial identities while not falling into the post-racial trap and becoming playthings of the very forces that this field hopes to undermine. While Carter never purports to resolve this dilemma, his commitment to developing a politically salient mixed-race scholarship will earn him the respect of all who seriously approach his work.

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