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Crossing B(l)ack

Mixed-Race Identity in Modern American Fiction and Culture

SIKA A. DAGBOVIE-MULLINS

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The past two decades have seen a growing influx of biracial discourse

in fiction, memoir, and theory, and since the 2008 election of Barack Obama to the presidency, debates over whether America has entered a "post-racial" phase have set the media abuzz. In this penetrating and provocative study, Sika A. Dagbovie-Mullins adds a new dimension to this dialogue as she investigates the ways in which various mixed-race writers and public figures have redefined both "blackness" and "whiteness" by invoking multiple racial identities.

Focusing on several key novels—
Nella Larsen's *Quicksand* (1928), Lucinda
Roy's *Lady Moses* (1998), and Danzy
Senna's *Caucasia* (1998)—as well as
memoirs by Obama, James McBride, and
Rebecca Walker and the personae of singer
Mariah Carey and actress Halle Berry,
Dagbovie-Mullins challenges conventional
claims about biracial identification with
a concept she calls "black-sentient
mixed-race identity." Whereas some
multiracial organizations can diminish
blackness by, for example, championing

the inclusion of multiple-race options on census forms and similar documents, a black-sentient consciousness stresses a perception rooted in blackness— "a connection to a black consciousness," writes the author, "that does not overdetermine but still plays a large role in one's racial identification." By examining the nuances of this concept through close readings of fiction, memoir, and the public images of mixed-race celebrities, Dagbovie-Mullins demonstrates how a "blacksentient mixed-race identity reconciles the widening separation between black/ white mixed race and blackness that has been encouraged by contemporary mixed-race politics and popular culture."

A book that promises to spark new debate and thoughtful reconsiderations of an especially timely topic, Crossing B(l)ack recognizes and investigates assertions of a black-centered mixed-race identity that does not divorce a premodern racial identity from a postmodern racial fluidity. \checkmark



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