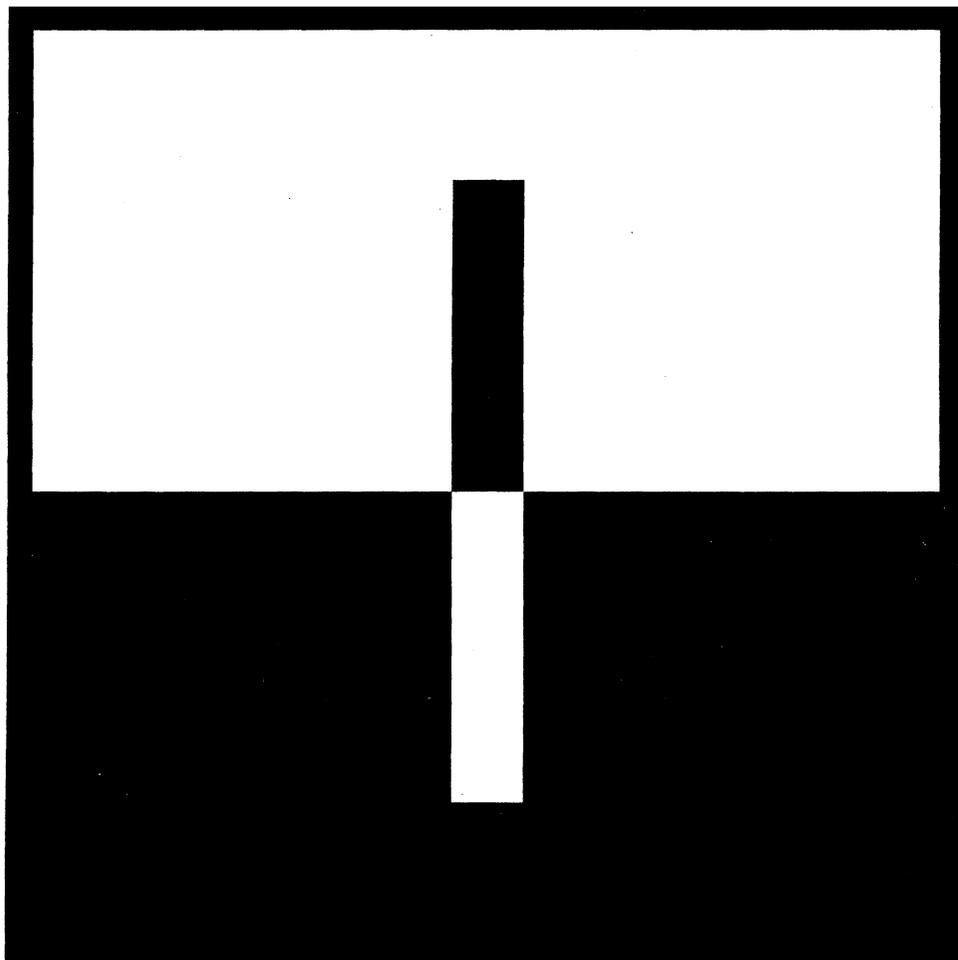


Book Review of Rachel F. Moran's "Interracial Intimacy: The Regulation of Race and Romance," 33 *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 320 (2002)

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Interracial Intimacy: The Regulation of Race and Romance. By Rachel F. Moran (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2001) 271 pp. \$30.00

This thoughtful, provocative book treats an important topic that has received inadequate attention.¹ Moran discusses the unfinished revolution that began with *Brown v. Board of Education*, in which the nation's highest court ordered desegregation of the public schools, concluding "that racial boundaries could be broken down and racial hierarchy undone only through interracial contact" (10).² She describes in powerful terms the central role played by the ban on interracial intimacy in the segregationist system of our past, and the myriad restrictions that operate to prevent such intimacy in our theoretically integrationist present. In the end, she makes a nuanced and persuasive case for the good that would come from liberating love and enabling interracial intimacy.

Moran uses history to shine a bright light on the present. She tells in horrifying detail the story of whites' use of racial barriers to maintain their superior position, not only over blacks but also over Native Americans and successive immigrant groups seen as alien. She also shows how at each stage of historical development, from the days of slavery through abolition through Reconstruction, those in power have seen interracial intimacy as the ultimate threat to racial hierarchy. She describes those resisting change as obsessed with the importance of at least maintaining the color line in this arena, whether through laws preventing interracial marriage and adoption or through the lynching of black men suspected of consorting with white women. She describes those promoting change as feeling compelled to provide reassurance that their kind of racial progress would never mean breaching the all-important ban on interracial marriage. This history provides persuasive proof of the point that she makes explicit—interracial intimacy is subversive of the racial order.

American law today reflects the unique place of interracial intimacy in our culture. The federal constitution has been interpreted to forbid states from preventing interracial marriage.³ Recent legislation passed by Congress forbids agencies receiving federal funds from preventing transracial adoption.⁴ But nothing in the law requires efforts to *promote* racial integration in the family, as has been the case, at least to some degree, in the areas of public education and employment. Nor does the law forbid *private* racial discrimination in the choice of marriage mate or adopted child, even though the federal Civil Rights Act of 1964 launched a variety of federal and state laws that prohibited private discrimination in employment, public accommodations, housing, and many other areas of communal life. Moran shows how the doctrines of family privacy and anti-discrimination that developed during the twentieth century merged in *Loving v. Virginia*, in which the Supreme Court ruled antimiscegenation law to be unconstitutional.⁵ The resulting "hands-off" approach (98) meant that the state was to remain neutral, neither preventing nor encouraging interracial relationships.

Noting "how readily people have accepted" racial separation in the context of family, Moran is intent on finding a way to nurture the "subversive seeds of racial ambiguity," short of legally mandating integration in the family context (124, 42). She applauds the new understandings of

1 See also Randall Kennedy, *Interracial Intimacies: Sex, Marriage, Identity, Adoption* (forthcoming).

2 *Brown v. Board of Education*, 147 U.S. 483 (1954).

3 *Loving v. Virginia*, 388 U.S. 1 (1967).

4 Small Business Job Protection Act of 1996, Pub. L. No. 104-108, 110 Stat. 1755 (codified at 42 U.S.C. §1996b), amending Howard M. Metzbaum Multiethnic Placement Act of 1994, Pub. L. No. 103-382, 108 Stat. 1755.

5 For *Loving v. Virginia*, see n. 3.

racial identity forged in the context of interracial marriage and transracial adoption, and personified by the new “multiracialism,” citing Tiger Woods’ use of the term *Cablinasian* to proclaim his black, white, Native American, and Asian ancestry (154, 159). She sympathizes with the reasons why some blacks promote race separation in the family as a way of “embrac[ing] the positive sense of community and culture that has come from resisting racial subordination” (9), but, in the end, she clearly holds that a move toward more interracial intimacy is the right move for our society.⁶ In her final words, it is through such intimacy that “we can undo race before it undoes us” (196).

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