

Guest Editorial

**INTERRACIAL
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Left-Wing Anti-Miscegenism

By [Emily Monroy](#)



According to a recent poll, 87% of Canadians approve of marriage between Whites and minorities. This number is more than 20% above the figure reported by Anglophone respondents to a survey conducted nearly a decade earlier. Respondents belonging to groups more likely to espouse liberal values - those under thirty, for instance - express greater acceptance of miscegenation (race mixing) than do those usually seen as more old-fashioned, such as older people. The findings of these polls seem to confirm the belief that socially progressive individuals are more accepting of interracial relationships whereas conservatives are more opposed. This general rule does not always hold true, however, at either a personal or social level. Societies far more conservative than modern-day Canada have not only condoned but promoted miscegenation: for example, when it ruled Indonesia the Netherlands encouraged marriage between Dutch men and native women in the hope of ensuring the conquered people's loyalty to the colonizer. Another exception to the above-mentioned rule lies in the fact that today some of the most vocal critics of interracial unions do not identify with the right wing but the left.

It is important to distinguish left-wing anti-miscegenists* from their old-guard counterparts such as the White supremacists**. The former include members of all races as well as people generally condemned in White right-wing circles, such as gays and lesbians and participants in leftist movements. While traditional groups decry intermarriage on the grounds that it contaminates the White gene pool, left-wing anti-miscegenists base their disapproval on the purported psychological damage to the individuals involved and the threat to minority communities' unity. Few progressive critics of miscegenation advocate outlawing the practice or ostracizing or using violence against interracial couples and families. Finally, unlike those on the right, most left-wing anti-miscegenists criticize but do not entirely oppose interracial unions. Whereas progressive criticism of intermarriage will probably not affect people's legal freedom to engage in mixed-race relations, it may discourage them from entering into such unions or from having biracial children.

A key tenet of left-wing anti-miscegenism is the belief that relations between Whites and non-Whites are inherently problematic on account of the two groups' unequal social positions. According to this philosophy, a relationship between a White and a person of colour can never be made on a truly equal footing because Whites generally possess more power in Western society. As well, such a relationship might be negatively affected by the fact that the White partner may, even unconsciously, hold racist attitudes and that he or she can never empathize with the discrimination his or her mate faces. These tenets have been expressed with regard to both heterosexual and homosexual unions. For example, in the feminist anthology [To Be Real](#), Anna Bondoc, a Filipina involved with a Jewish man, reports being asked "how could [she] build a lifelong relationship with someone who could never share this pain [of racism]". Gil Mangaoang, a gay Filipino man, voices a similar perspective in *Asian American Sexualities: The Gay and Lesbian Experience*, saying that "couples in a mixed white and non-white relationship are susceptible to cultural prejudices and racist attitudes".

By contrast, left-wing anti-miscegenists take a more benign view of relationships between members of two different minority groups. Leaders of the Asian-American movement, for instance, generally criticized Asian-White relations but tolerated those between Asians and other non-Whites. People of colour are deemed

more compatible with other minorities than with Whites. Kamal Al-Solaylee, a gay Arab Canadian, calls non-Arab men of colour his "soul mates" in the Toronto gay newspaper Xtra!. Interracial relationships between minorities are supposedly not complicated by the racism that may plague those involving Whites and people of colour. As Mangaoang says, "when two minorities struggle to forge a relationship, the obstacle of race does not become an issue". Finally, such unions have value above the satisfaction of the two people involved in that they promote solidarity between their respective ethnic groups. Joël B. Tan, another gay Filipino featured in *Asian American Sexualities*, suggests that "people of colour loving one another is a political act".

The idea that White-minority relationships are problematic because of the two partners' unequal social positions raises a number of questions. While in our society Whites on average possess more social, economic, and political power than people of colour, this may not be the case for every couple. In a relationship between a White high school dropout working as a health care aide and a Black physician, it would be difficult to conclude that the former has more power simply because he or she is White. This idea may not hold true even at the group level. For example, immigrants to Canada from Hong Kong usually enjoy higher incomes and educational levels than those from Portugal. Thus in a relationship between a Chinese Canadian from Hong Kong and a Portuguese Canadian the former partner could be expected in most cases to hold more social and economic power.

The corresponding notion that relationships between members of different non-White races will go more smoothly than ones involving Whites and individuals of colour also leaves some unanswered questions. Al-Solaylee, in referring to men from places as diverse as Taiwan and Trinidad as his soul mates, depicts all peoples of colour as alike, although they may differ greatly in terms of race, culture, religion, and other things. For example, one might ask what a Moslem from Senegal, Africa and a Korean Buddhist have in common besides the fact of not tracing their ancestry to Europe. Some minority communities may even resemble White ethnic groups more than they do other peoples of colour. A Filipino or Lebanese Catholic may share more cultural traits with an Italian than with a Hindu Sri Lankan. These facts are not raised, though, by left-wing anti-miscegenists.

Just as not all peoples of colour are alike, neither have they always banded together, even in the face of White racism. Though on occasion they have - for instance, in the Southern United States Blacks and Native Americans frequently formed alliances against Whites - at other times minority communities have disliked each other even more than they have Whites. This fact is apparent in the attitudes of certain minorities towards intermarriage. For example, anecdotal evidence suggests most East Asian parents would prefer their children to marry Whites than Blacks, Latinos or even some Asian groups such as Filipinos. Hence the openness of minorities to relationships with other groups of colour as opposed to with Whites may be limited to those non-Whites who identify strongly with the left wing.

Progressive anti-miscegenists believe that relationships with Whites threaten the survival and unity of minority groups. When a person of colour becomes involved with a White, the former is likely to be lost to his or her group. According to one Chicana commentator, the Chicano community loses members through intermarriage with Anglos (Whites) because the children of such unions are usually raised as members of the latter group. Margaret Woo, a leader in the Asian-American movement, states that marriage with Whites threatens Asian-American unity. In an argument that recalls somewhat the White supremacists' fears about the contamination of the Aryan gene pool, she stipulates that Eurasians (people of mixed Asian and European descent) cannot take part in the Asian-American movement because they are not fully Asian. Therefore miscegenation undermines minorities as communities.

Left-wing critics of miscegenation have developed a psychological profile of individuals involved in interracial relationships. A common view of minorities who enter into such unions is that they are uncomfortable with their heritage and seek to escape or deny it by marrying or dating a White. The self-hatred paradigm is expressed by Canadian writer Lorraine Mention, who states in the anthology

Miscegenation Blues: Voices of Mixed Race Women that Blacks involved with Whites are usually "denying the reflection in the mirror". In choosing a partner of European descent, heterosexual men of colour are furthermore said to be going after an ideal of White beauty. David Mura, a Japanese-American poet married to a woman of mixed Jewish and Anglo-Saxon descent, believes his choice of wife was influenced by this ideal, while Camille Hernandez-Ramdwar, another contributor to Miscegenation Blues, claims her Black father "coveted a White woman [her mother]". Miscegenous minority women on the other hand are believed to seek White men not necessarily for their looks but their social status. Bondoc, for example, was teased by left-wing friends about wanting to "marry up". It is occasionally stated that these women lose their own racial identity. Asian-American activist Karin Aguilar-San Juan complains that some Asian women "splay themselves at the feet of white men... obliterating their own identities in the process".

Whites who intermarry are typically not seen in a good light either, though they figure less as victims than as victimizers in the left-wing anti-miscegenist paradigm. At best, they are portrayed as well-meaning people who marry interracially out of the naive belief that by doing so they are striking a blow against racism. However, their motives are at times said to be more sinister. A sometimes-expressed view is that Whites look for partners of colour in order to fulfill sexual fantasies. Mention and Hernandez-Ramdwar argue just that, respectively, that Whites involved with Blacks or other people of colour are following "weird sexual fantasies" and looking for an "exotic experience". White gays and lesbians are not exempt from similar criticism. Al-Solaylee describes a White male acquaintance of his who seemed fixated solely on Chinese men as lovers as "crying out for some serious psychoanalytic intervention". At worst, Whites in interracial relationships are deliberately seeking a minority partner in order to dominate or even abuse him or her in a racist way. This accusation is often made of White men who date or marry Asian women, allegedly for the latter's "submissiveness". One letter writer to the Toronto tabloid the Sun goes even further and notes that "some of the most racist people I know are indeed married to visible minorities" and that they do so in order to "enhance their feeling of superiority" over their partner.

These unflattering portraits in some ways echo those of old-style anti-miscegenists as well as those of popular culture. For example, Aguilar-San Juan's description of Asian woman "splaying themselves at the feet of white men" ironically sounds much like the commonly held stereotype of the Oriental geisha, a stereotype that Asian-American activists protested vigorously when it appeared in mainstream works like the play *Miss Saigon*. Lorraine Mention's picture of Whites who run after Blacks in order to fulfill their "weird sexual fantasies" similarly has much in common with the White supremacists' denunciation of White women who consort with men of colour (particularly Blacks) as sexually immoral. To a lesser extent, even the depiction of men of colour involved with White women as men seeking an ideal of White beauty recalls the traditional stereotype of the male "Other" - a position held at various times by Black, Filipino, and even Jewish men - who threatens the sexual purity of White (or White Christian) women. For instance, Hernandez-Ramdwar's description of her father "coveting a White woman" seems to imply that Black men are eager to couple with White women at any cost.

Many of these stereotypes do not correspond with reality. For example, White men who marry Asian women are not necessarily the GI Joes portrayed in some progressive literature. A study in Hawaii showed that White husbands of Asians were actually less domineering than those of White women. The same report found Asian women with White husbands were no more submissive than their sisters who married within their race, a result that calls into question Aguilar-San Juan's characterization of the former group of women as "splaying themselves at feet of white men". Similarly, it is hard to confirm Aguilar-San Juan's claim that these women lose their identity, as individuals who marry outside their ethnic group, race or religion may be less attached to their culture of origin in the first place than those who marry within it. Hence these stereotypes are not only unflattering but often untrue or unconfirmable.

Left-wing anti-miscegenists, like their right-wing counterparts, often promote the belief that mixed-race children are prone to confusion and psychological disturbance because they are "caught between two worlds yet part of neither". Bondoc was warned by leftist friends that her future children (by her White boyfriend)

would have a "screwed-up identity". One contributor to *Miscegenation Blues* states she has difficulty blessing interracial unions because of her concern for the children. Even *Challenging Conceptions*, a book on lesbian motherhood - which might be expected to be more socially advanced than usual - questions whether lesbians should seek sperm donors of other races and cites the example of "Pat", a mixed-race woman who claims to have suffered as a child on account of her origins. While left-wing anti-miscegenists might appear to be very avant-garde in their social views, their statements on the effects of miscegenation on children are frequently very much in tune with those of old-style opponents of intermarriage.

Like the stereotypes of individuals involved in interracial relationships, the "tragic mulatto [or Eurasian or mestizo or other combination]" is more a creature of fiction than of fact. While "Pat" may make a compelling individual case against miscegenation, there is no evidence that she represents all mixed-race people. Studies comparing biracial individuals with their monoracial peers have generally found that the two groups are equally well adjusted, and most of the remainder have actually discovered better psychological health on the part of the former group. It is unlikely, though, that left-wing anti-miscegenists will look at this research and "see the light", as most people are loath to acknowledge studies that contradict their personal beliefs. As well, the idea - no matter how scientifically dubious - that the offspring of interracial relationships are disadvantaged provides a powerful argument against such unions, so anti-miscegenists have a reason not to discard it.

Some people - particularly Whites involved with minorities - might argue that a preference for a partner of a particular race or ethnic group should be considered an individual and not a political matter. On other hand, given the reality that in our society there are differences in power and prestige between racial and ethnic groups, intermarriage cannot simply be equated to a choice of a partner with a specific height or hair colour. Pathologizing such unions, however, does not seem to be the right path either. Some interracial alliances can be very successful, even if race will always be an issue, while others may fail, whether because of obstacles related to ethnicity or other factors. Perhaps the best approach is to view miscegenation as neither a panacea to racial strife nor a death knell for minority communities but as a type of relationship that may pose special challenges and may or may not work for different individuals.

* The term "anti-miscegenist" is taken from the book [Racially Mixed People in America](#), edited by Maria Root. **It should be noted that conservative opposition to miscegenation is not limited to White society. For example, some Asian communities, such as the Japanese, were traditionally hostile to marriage with outsiders. However, these groups' anti-miscegenism will not be discussed in the present article because in Western society they have not attempted to impose their views outside their own communities.

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