

Daniel McNeil, Sex and Race in the Black Atlantic Mulatto Devils and Multiracial Messiahs
2010 (Routledge, London)

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As a part of the Routledge Studies series on African and Black Diaspora this book is a necessary and useful addition. The fact that it brings a lot of research and theory together makes it a good starting point for information on an important part of the Diaspora that is often overlooked, other than with curiosity or somewhat derogatory terms.

Overall the book is informative and provides the reader with extensive notes at the end broken down by chapters and a thorough bibliography. McNeil has linked theories and philosophies to literature and contemporary TV/film in a way that provides the reader with understandable examples and brings the text to life. The writing is accessible and readable using language in a way that opens the book up from pure academia and puts it into the public sphere.

The book is split into 6 main chapters plus a preface and a conclusion. The headings for the chapters do not give a lot of information to the reader looking for specific information, however, the short preface deals with this. Each chapter draws on what has been written previously i.e. Schulyer, Rank and Dubois are used comparatively throughout, which gives the book coherence.

Overall this book is a comprehensive look at the mixed race population bringing the debate right up to date and offering a fresh look at theories and philosophies by introducing creative expression into the forum. By challenging what has been written and debated before, McNeil encourages the reader to think beyond what has always been on offer by leading theorists and to question whether it is time for a fresh look.

The following is a very brief overview of each chapter.

Preface

The preface introduces the book immediately by offering opening literary credits followed by a personal anecdote. This promises a fresh look at theory and literature grounded in reality. It gives a brief outline of each chapter, which is a useful for research purposes, although the length and accessibility of the text makes reading the whole book easy.

McNeil begins his acknowledgement outlining his reasons for writing this book, which once more added a personal touch for the reader particularly when he explains that the text was born from anger. The reading belies this emotion because it is offered as a scholarly text and fits well within that remit.

Chapter 1 – New People?

Starting with a quote from Rudyard Kipling, *The White Man's Burden* (1899) ending with the line 'Half devil and half child' McNeill sets up the tone of the chapter and alerts the reader to his critique of what has gone before. The title indicates that McNeill is not making a judgment with what is to come but is questioning and enquiring through the literature that has gone before.

This chapter, as expected, is a literature review and offers the reader an in depth insight into the literature that has gone before and gives a historical account of the 'half-caste' and 'mulatto' from colonization onwards. This is very informative and gives the reader the opportunity to research further from Dubois, Schulyer and Rogers to the novel *Quicksand* by Nella Larsen. McNeill refers to philosophers such as Rank and Freud, Fanon and introduces lesser-known theorists as well as making reference to modern day mixed race celebrities. This chapter is American-centric although there are a few references to the UK. What stands out immediately is the reference to female writers and actors, which makes a welcome change.

Chapter 2 – An Individualistic Age?

This chapter begins with a quote from Otto Rank making reference to Freud and opens with a reference to both Marx and Freud dreaming about 'grotesque racial hybrids'. This sets the tone for the chapter, which then goes on to give a brief history of Otto Rank and his 'psychoanalytic study of the artist'. McNeil covers Du Bois and Fanon in separate headed sections that are informative and turns up some little known information that questions the male orientated view of these well-known philosophers, particularly around light skinned females.

What is interesting is the references McNeil makes throughout to females rather than males, which is a refreshing change.

Chapter 3 – Je suis metisse

This chapter begins with two quotes, one from *The Diary of Anais Nin* 1934-1939 and one from Nancy Cunard's *Negro* (1970) both of which make reference to Harlem. The chapter focuses on the female and American culture. It gives an insight into the life of concert pianist and composer, Philippa Schuyler and her denial of her racial background in the 1950s.

McNeil explores this fully with referencing and quotes that shows his extensive research. He offers a fully complex character who does not conform to what is expected either of a female or a person of colour and it is this thorough investigation and reference to the philosophies that have gone before that make it interesting and thought provoking.

Chapter 4 – "I. Am. A Light Grey Canadian."

This chapter begins with quotes by Marx and Rank. As the title suggests it is an exploration of the mixed race Canadian and introduces the work of Lawrence Hill who is also a novelist and is described by McNeil as 'probably the most famous name in Canadian Studies of mixed race.'

The chapter quickly moves on to Dr Daniel Hill's studies and after thorough and comparative investigation concludes that the writer does not necessarily agree with other scholars who claim his work updates Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, but as his final sentence in this chapter states it is about adding 'context and understanding...in the study of mixed-race identities.'

Chapter 5 "I'm Black. Not Mixed. Not Canadian. Not African. Just Black."

This chapter begins with quotes from Fanon and Rosa Emilia Warder.

The focus is once more on Canada and the 'Atlantic thinkers' but is informative and explores Fanon and James then moves onto Merseyside, which brings the text to the UK and McNeil's personal interest. This is once more well researched and is thorough in its approach looking at both male and female perspectives as it moves from Nova Scotia to Merseyside and incorporates Hollywood stars and TV personalities.

Chapter 6 "Yes, We're All Individuals!" "I'm Not."

This chapter begins with a long quote from Maria P. Root, *Multiracial Bill of Rights* and a further quote from Siobhan Somerville.

The whole chapter is dedicated to mixed race celebrities and explores and examines through film and books and reference to philosophies and theories. This chapter incorporates sexuality, which the quote from Somerville suggests. McNeil uses contemporary films such as *Walking Tall* (2004) which starts 'The Rock' to illustrate his points. He ends the chapter in discussion of footballs Stan Collymore and referring to Rank and bringing the discussion back to Liverpool and the UK.

Conclusion

The short conclusion starts with a quote by SuAndi and a short paragraph outlines her stance with regard to Gilroy's *Black Atlantic*.

McNeil does not offer the usual summing up within his conclusion but offers an in-depth look into the British comedy, *The Office* and makes reference to *Star Trek*. This does not detract from the book as an excellent source of information but reiterates the fresh eye with which he has surveyed the literature and film that has gone before and offered it to the reader with a new and clear perspective.