

Race in Mind: Critical Essays

Paul Spickard

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The fourteen *Critical Essays* in Paul Spickard's *Race in Mind* bring to the fore many delightful and provocative observations and one abrupt realization: race is and always was a dumb idea. That is, after many several thousand years of migrations, assimilations, and boundless sexual relations (some of it consensual), the notion that an individual homo sapien might fall neatly in the fold of one racial identity is biologically impossible and absurd.

So what purpose does race serve, as it relates to America and elsewhere? The juiciest answer Spickard could find is by Noel Ignatiev: "Whiteness itself is not a matter of skin color, ancestry, or anything else that might be attributed to historical or biological background. Whiteness is defined by the very act of oppressing black people."

Spickard cites George Lipsitz's *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness* as a "brilliant tour of American racial history, showing how, in each era from Jamestown to the present ... powerful whites have chosen to establish structures that favored European-derived Americans over peoples of color." Lipsitz explains, "The colonial and early-national legal systems authorized attacks on Native Americans and encouraged the appropriation of their lands. They legitimated racialized chattel slavery, restricted naturalized citizenship to 'white' immigrants, and provided pretexts for exploiting labor, seizing property, and denying the franchise to Asian Americans, Mexican Americans, Native Americans, and African Americans."

Over the years, Spickard found the ideas of W. E. B. Du Bois to be hugely influential, including the conclusion that "racialized relationships exist in every part of the globe."

Many of the later essays in this collection deal with multiplicity—"people who are manifestly multiple in their racial ancestry"—and delve into the racial history, affiliations, and loyalties of Asian Americans, Hawaiians, and Pacific-Islander Americans.

MATT SUTHERLAND (Winter 2016)

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