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## *Love's Revolution: Interracial Marriage.* Maria P. Root. Reviewed by Dianne Rush Woods.

Dianne Rush Woods  
*California State University, Hayward*

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## Book Reviews

Maria P. Root, *Love's Revolution: Interracial Marriage*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2001. \$69.50 hardcover, \$22.95 papercover.

*Love's Revolution* provides a scholarly analysis of a very emotional issue, interracial marriage. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, W.E.B. Dubois observed that the color line would be a central problem in American society in the future. This book documents how the blurring of the color line presents social, political and systemic problems for all families of color in the United States. Although the last law against miscegenation was repealed in the 1960s, the fear of miscegenation remains a significant issue. Rates of intermarriage have doubled in recent decades, yet the issue of interracial marriage still challenges long-held assumptions and social conventions. According to the author, Maria Root, resistance to interracial marriage is present, in varying degrees, in all racial groups—white, black, Hispanic and Asian.

Root examines the social and legal discourse surrounding the American drama of interracial marriage. Scientific, religious, social and legal arguments that underscore the social construct of race and purported racial differences are explored in a comprehensive and lucid manner. Most importantly, she chooses to conduct a qualitative analysis at the level of the family unit. This analysis scrutinizes the impact of interracial marriage on the family of origin as well as the newly created family. The interviews describe the difficulties couples had integrating into each other's families. Root interviewed over 200 individuals, in focus groups and individual interviews. Three groups were identified: first, interracial couples, married and divorced; second, the families of interracial couples, and third, the bi-racial or multi-racial children of these unions. The focus of her analysis on the family as the unit of analysis sets this text apart from others that either examine the impact of interracial marriage on the individual couples or their children. In analyzing these interviews, Root talks about race in an inclusive way with black and white being the extreme ends of the spectrum. She does not ignore other interracial relationships as is the case in some others studies. She spends time talking about

all of the possible mixtures and provides statistics to support her discussion. She also discusses the reasons why certain marital and racial combinations are more prevalent than others.

Root's analysis is framed in terms of theories related to power, race and gender as explanatory factors. She discusses the issues of interracial marriage within a historical and socio-political rationale for what she sees as a caste system in America. As she defines it, this system serves to keep the powerful, primarily white males, in power and to preserve the sanctity of their position by ensuring that white females serve as the producers of white children. She ties this historically to anti-miscegenation laws. The blurring of the color line threatens the balance of power by undermining the caste system.

Root also provides a detailed history of interracial relationships and she discusses sex, race and love. She discusses the meaning of marriage to families and explores the body of sociological and psychological literature that has developed to explain the process of intermarriage. The concept of race as caste is strongly developed in this context. Incorporated into the text is a discussion of the false beliefs and prejudices that have motivated families to fear or reject interracial unions. Root introduces the issue of the desirability of the individual in the culture and associates it with power; power being correlated with race and gender. Being white and male in the hierarchy of the American caste system is considered the most desirable power position.

The strongest sections of the book are to be found in chapters 4 and 5. Root uses a systems theory model to define what happens to couples once they are married. She also uses the concept of open and closed families to describe the family of origin. An open family is one which can extend itself to a new family member who is as racially different, while a closed family is typically unable to do so. Root then talks about the business of families and their ultimate product, future generations. She equates the behavior of individuals in a family system to organizational rather than individual behavior. This behavior is predicated on the shared beliefs and values of the corporation or, in this case, the family. The family's mission statement is its overall goal and the style of leadership in the family. These issues are excellently covered and shed a new light on our view of the interracial marriage.

The book also examines the subject of bi-racial children and

their struggles to define themselves in a world that attempts to categorize them and finds it difficult to do so. An interesting aspect of this chapter is the children's comments on their parent's ability to help them address the issues of race, ethnicity and color. Many felt that their parents did their best, but that they were woefully unprepared to assist them to deal with these issues. It is in this context that the author introduces the interesting idea of enacting a Bill of Rights for Racially Mixed People. A bill of rights of this kind would focus on the rights of the mixed race person to operate within the wider boundaries offered to those who are not anchored in one racial identity. It would allow people to choose or declare their race; to claim many; and to create a new vocabulary related to their multi-racial status.

The book concluded with a discussion of what the author describes as the 'truths' of interracial marriage. She defines these truths and attempts to use them to normalize the process of interracial marriage. She points out that desegregation created the opportunity and the means for people to intermarry, and that the increasing independence of women in recent times has permitted them to marry whom they choose. Love, a shared vision, and a common values propel people to marry across racial lines. Interracial couples live normal lives and despite the challenges they face, they rarely marry to make a political statement or to rebel. Families reject interracial couples and their children when they value reproduction of race over love and commitment. Divorce rates and reasons for divorce for interracial couples are much the same as those of same race married couples.

Maria Root's writing is clear and accessible. She presents an overview not available elsewhere, and she utilizes an effective systems-organizational theory model that is very helpful in presenting reasons why some families embrace interracial marriages while others reject it. Her book addresses many complex issues in a truly scholarly style and it is based on strong empirical research and careful documentation. At the same time, the book is particularly appropriate for social work, counseling and psychology practitioners, and for those who are involved in the interracial marriage process as spouses or children. This is an important book which deserves wide attention.

Dianne Rush Woods  
California State University, Hayward