



# Preparing for Higher Education's Mixed Race Future

## Why Multiraciality Matters

Edited by  
**Marc P. Johnston-Guerrero**  
**Lisa Delacruz Combs**  
**Victoria K. Malaney-Brown**

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ISBN 978-3-030-88820-6      ISBN 978-3-030-88821-3 (eBook)  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-88821-3>

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This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG.

The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

*To our multiracial future—especially Amadeus Malaney Brown—may you  
be seen, validated, and affirmed as your whole selves.*

## PREFACE

As co-editors, we originally conceptualized this book as an opportunity to engage demographic insights about the multiracial population from the 2020 U.S. Census and implications for higher education. Yet, the COVID pandemic and its disruption of day-to-day routines also delayed Census tabulations. This delay made us realize that we did not need new demographic data to know what all previous data suggest: U.S. higher education will have a more mixed race future, as evidenced by the steady increase in multiracial students, staff, and faculty members over the past decades. Additionally, there has been increasing scholarship and insights on multiraciality over the past few years. So, how can we use what we already know now to help higher education prepare for its mixed race future? This book answers this question by highlighting trajectories and complexities associated with multiraciality that will be helpful for different higher education constituents—from administrators, staff, faculty, and students themselves.

We also want to note that our use of “mixed race future” is not to suggest that this is the ideal future nor a necessary future for racial justice—as too often is the case when people make such claims as, “the key to racial equality is for the different races to mix,” or “we’ll all be mixed one day.” Our stance in “preparing higher education for its mixed race future” is very much grounded in a call for higher education to change its current practices that are not inclusive of mixed race or multiracial people—those who claim membership in two or more (mono)racial groups and/or identify with a mixed or multiracial identity term (e.g., biracial, mixed race,

Blasian). We look to the future to highlight the action and movement needed for policies and practices to become more inclusive of multiraciality. Our goal is to speak truth to why multiraciality matters for higher education and what we can be doing *now* to prepare for an increasingly mixed race future.

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This volume was formed from both a call for proposals and cultivation of contributors from our networks. As co-editors, we thank all contributors for submitting proposals and also accepting our invitations to be part of this diverse community of knowledge-builders who are leading higher education into the future. Thank you for responding so quickly to our feedback and staying on top of our sometimes elusive deadlines. Together, with the excellent team at Palgrave Macmillan and Springer Nature (especially Milana Vernikova, Anisha Rajavikraman, and Brian Halm), as well as the very constructive and validating feedback from the anonymous peer reviewers, we were honored to collaborate on this volume that captures important complexities related to multiraciality across the higher education landscape as we prepare for the future.

### MARC

I would like to first thank my wonderful co-editors for being amazing partners on this journey. From keeping me organized to providing critical and constructive feedback, this wouldn't have been possible without you both! I know the future of multiracial scholarship in higher education will be better with you two contributing to it, and I feel lucky being able to witness your growth as multiracial scholars. I also want to acknowledge my past collaborator, Charmaine Wijeyesinghe, who demonstrated what being a good book editor and collaborator truly looks like. My hope is to pay it forward by being a similar model for other multiracial scholars. During the development and editing of this book, I benefited greatly from



the support of my colleagues and students at The Ohio State University, especially my department chair, Lori Patton Davis, and program chair, Stephen John Quaye. The multiracial community built through ACPA-College Student Educators International's Multiracial Network (MRN), the Critical Mixed Race Studies (CMRS) Association, and the National Conference on Race and Ethnicity (NCORE), especially Charlene Martinez, Sabrina Kwist, and Jenn Wells, provided important insights on topics featured in this book and also supportive relationships during the editing process. Lastly, I thank my partner Brian, and our pup Marshall, for always keeping me grounded and present, especially during the COVID pandemic.

### LISA

I thank the co-editors of the volume for affirming my voice as an emerging multiracial scholar and graduate student. Specifically, I thank Victoria for being a multiracial Woman of Color role model whose work in the Multiracial Network and scholarship has inspired me to move forward in academia. Marc, thank you, not only for your leadership on this volume but also for your continued mentorship throughout my doctoral journey. You are not only a co-editor, supervisor, advisor, collaborator, friend, but a mentor. Your scholarship makes me believe in this work. Thank you for writing my story in to existence and for believing in me. I also want to thank my mentors Elisa Abes, Stephen Quaye, and Aerial Ashlee for their continued support. Thank you to the Multiracial Network in ACPA for continuing to be my family. I thank Azaelea Grace Ashlee for her laughter and for reminding me why the future of multiraciality matters. Lastly, I want to thank my family and my partner, Ryan, for bringing love and joy to my life.

### VICTORIA

I thank my hard-working co-editors for being such great thought partners on this book. Marc, I have always appreciated the quiet way you lead, provide mentorship, and inspire me. Because of you, your dedication, and innovative research and advocacy, I have found my voice as a multiracial scholar-practitioner and Woman of Color. Lisa, I was so impressed by your organizational skills and energy, I cannot wait to see how your journey as a multiracial scholar in higher education evolves. This was my first time

editing a book and I have learned so much from both of you through your wisdom and thoughtful suggestions during this project. Like Marc, I too, have found such great value in being part of the multiracial communities as well through ACPA MRN, NCORE, and CMRS that I would not be the same person and scholar-practitioner without the insights that I learned in these spaces and the people who have affirmed and validated my passion for researching multiracial people in higher education. I also want to thank my study participants, doctoral adviser, Dr. Chrystal George Mwangi who chaired my dissertation work at UMass Amherst, my dissertation committee members: Dr. Marc Johnston-Guerrero, and Dr. Ezekiel Kimball who collectively pushed my thinking on multiracial consciousness, which I offer in this book. Last, but not least I would like to thank my family members for always supporting me, especially my husband, Andrew, and son, Amadeus who bring such light and love in my life. They remind me every day to have patience and joy in this journey of life.

## ABOUT THE BOOK

As we eagerly await the 2020 U.S. Census results, which allow only the third opportunity to accurately count the self-identified multiracial population (or those who identify with two or more racial groups), all previous data support the fact that the multiracial population is increasing rapidly, particularly multiracial youth. Coupled with increasing attention and representation of multiraciality in both scholarly literature and popular culture, we must further nuance what is understood about multiracial people, particularly in the changing contexts of higher education. We offer this book as a way of *Preparing Higher Education for its Mixed Race Future* by examining *Why Multiraciality Matters*. In terms of preparation, this book highlights recent contributions in scholarship—both empirical studies and scholarly syntheses—on multiracial students, staff, and faculty/scholars. While most of the chapters focus on students, the constructs and complexities engaged offer implications for advancing multiraciality in higher education broadly, while acknowledging how that advancement is inextricably tied to dismantling multiple oppressive forces (e.g., anti-Blackness, colonial mentality, sexism) in addition to monoracism, which many of the chapters name.

### ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

This volume builds upon a rapidly growing body of literature on multiraciality by capturing a wider scope than traditional scholarship that focuses narrowly on student identity and campus experiences. To capture this

expansion and contribution to the literature, we organize the book into three separate, yet interrelated parts. The first part spotlights different points on a trajectory to and through higher education—from pre-college adolescents to post-tenured faculty. Keeping these various constituents of higher education in mind is important for the rest of the book and for how these chapters could look different depending on the focal population (e.g., pre-college youth, students, staff, and faculty). The second part of the book furthers common constructs within higher education by examining them through a multiracial lens. It also highlights other complexities associated with multiraciality. The third part looks to the future by highlighting current sociopolitical contexts around activism, and a concluding chapter offering insights across the volume answering the question: Why does multiraciality matter for the future of higher education?

### *Part I: Multiracial Trajectories Through Higher Education*

Part I highlights different constituents across a potential multiracial trajectory within higher education. We note this is one of many possible pathways to and through higher education. The five chapters connect pre-college to college access, campus climate experiences, and outcomes for multiracial students, and then spotlights examples of multiracial staff and faculty experiences. In Chap. 1, Raven Lynch offers us a better understanding of what is happening pre-college for multiracial adolescents. Then Blossom Barrett's research highlights how multiracial students access and make choices about college in Chap. 2. Once students are on campus, they have varied experiences and perceptions related to campus climate. In Chap. 3, Kim Misa-Escalante and colleagues share findings from a mixed methods study that importantly disaggregates multiracial students with two minoritized parents (TMP). Since we know students are not the only multiracial people in higher education, two additional chapters highlight issues for multiracial staff and faculty. In Chap. 4, Nicole Belisle and Michael Dixon bring an important staff perspective by sharing findings from a longitudinal study with mixed Black Higher Education and Student Affairs Professionals. Chapter 5 by Marc Johnston-Guerrero and Lisa Delacruz Combs closes out this first section by highlighting difficulties for multiracial scholars navigating academia, entrenched in a monoracial paradigm.

### *Part II: Furthering Constructs and Complexities*

Following the broad multiracial trajectory through higher education provided in Part I, the volume presents five chapters focusing on common constructs used to understand multiracial college students. It also presents the complexities associated with multiracial identities that are further complicated through new research perspectives and discourse. Chapter 6 by Prema Chaudhari explores the construct of sense of belonging, complicating it by examining what a mixed sense of belonging looks like for multiracial and multiethnic students. Similarly, Victoria Malaney-Brown outlines what happens when multiracial students develop an understanding of critical consciousness around their awareness and self-reflection of White supremacy, and monoracism through the conceptualization of multiracial consciousness in Chap. 7. The following two chapters complicate multiraciality further by examining the dynamics of gender identity and discourse. In Chap. 8, Orkideh Mohajeri exposes discourses associated with multiraciality and gender, and the ways contested whiteness manifests for multiracial men. Examining within-group differences, or divergences, among two Black/white mixed women, Brittany N. Smotherson and John K. Lannin, further complicate the boundaries and assumptions related to racial identities in Chap. 9. Closing out this section, Chap. 10, by Lisa Delacruz Combs and Mitchell Foster, brings in the life narratives of two Filipinx/white staff members who might share similar racial identities but demonstrate their own complexities navigating predominately White institutions (PWIs).

### *Part III: Advancing to the Future*

Highlighting current sociopolitical contexts and future thinking, Part III includes two chapters that offer necessary grounding in the work needed to advance multiraciality into the future. In Chap. 11, Brianna Miloz and Kevin Wright share their narratives associated with participating in activism and multiracial people, particularly in the wake of the racial uprisings after the murder of George Floyd and too many other Black Americans. Their recommendations for future research and practice are powerful offerings for how to move our shared responsibilities toward racial justice forward. To conclude the volume, the co-editors Lisa Delacruz Combs, Victoria Malaney-Brown, and Marc Johnston-Guerrero provide reflections on the contributions of individual chapters and the volume as a

whole toward preparing higher education for its mixed race future in Chap. 12.

### A NOTE TO READERS ON TERMINOLOGY AND STYLE

We explain to readers why they might see variations in terminology used through the volume or the style in which they appear (e.g., Multiracial capitalized or not; biracial and mixed). Our identities and terms to capture them, which likely never fully capture one's identity, are both personal and political. As editors, we allowed for variations in the preferred terms used to describe an often-contested population, including preferences on style and capitalization. These are not grammatical errors or typos, as we understand them as intentional choices made to honor one's identities and/or politics. We do not hyphenate mixed race in recognition of the limitations of hyphenated identities. We hope readers use these variations as further evidence of the nuances associated with multiracial identities and to understand why higher education must be better prepared for the increasing numbers and representation of multiraciality in the future.

Marc P. Johnston-Guerrero  
Lisa Delacruz Combs  
Victoria K. Malaney-Brown

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PART I

---

Multiracial Trajectories Through  
Higher Education



## CHAPTER 1

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# Coming of Age: Why Multiracial Adolescence Matters for Higher Education

*Raven Lynch*

### INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a time of creativity and exploring what it means to be oneself with the goal of moving toward a positive, coherent identity that makes sense to the individual adolescent during this period of growth (Tatum, 1999). Though much of the recent research on multiracial identity has focused on college students and adults, identity development is a lifelong process, with critical exploration happening in adolescence. What we do and think about in adolescence during identity exploration will strengthen neural connections that can shape the way we feel, think, reason, and make decisions into adulthood (Siegel, 2015). Knowing the positive outcomes for multiracial adults with an integrated multiracial identity (Jackson & Samuels, 2019), it makes sense to begin introducing personal meaning-making of identities at a younger age to build on identity protective factors and resilience (Fisher et al., 2014).

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M. P. Johnston-Guerrero et al. (eds.), *Preparing for Higher Education's Mixed Race Future*,  
[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-88821-3\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-88821-3_1)