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These two books have achieved for Rainier Spencer an iconoclastic place in mixed-race studies, which is a wonderful development for a genuine specialist in critical mixedness studies. His argument, in a nutshell, is that mixed-race and multiracial studies suffer from a contradictory set of aims. On one hand, they challenge the tenability of race and its impact on American society. On the other, they present a case for their inclusion in the American racial order. Spencer argues that the projects are not compatible, but even if they were so, there are other contradictions at the heart of the multiracial formulations of mixture offered by many scholars in the field. He points out, as I too have pointed out in my book *Her Majesty’s Other Children* (1997), that discussions that examine Black-White mixture often fail to acknowledge the already mixed dimension of African American people. As Spencer correctly points out in *Challenging Multiracial Identity*, by posing mixture against Black Americans, such advocates are in fact posing multiraciality against multiraciality. In effect, they would have to create a conception of “purity” that erases mixture within one group as the basis of determining mixture for a preferred group. There are also logical problems of descent, which make in effect an offspring genetically connected to a parent in which she or he is considered ontologically different from. Spencer offers historically informed theoretical challenges to the field by exemplifying consistency in his constructivism through his constantly reminding the reader that just as social identities come into being, they can also go out of being. What, in other words, will be the organization of human identities in the future will be a function of the kinds of critical questions and social and political conditions that come to bear on their meaning and being. In this sense, he is building upon what Frantz Fanon, in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967) called sociogenesis; that is, about how the social world produces identities.

The best testament I can say about these two books is that they should be required reading in courses on race, especially critical race theory. This is not to say that I don’t have criticisms, here and there, of some of what I have read. For instance, there are subtleties in argumentation here and there that call for
some questioning, such as, on page 3 of *Spurious Issues*, where Spencer writes that “Identities imply categories, for if a person has an identity (or identities), that person must then identify as something (or some things).” The verb “to identify” is ambiguous. If used as what a person must do, then the statement is false. Having an identity does not necessitate accepting it, exemplifying it, or even living it. If used as a predicate, then it becomes tautological: In having an identity, one is that identity. This may seem a bit pedantic, but it is less so when one realizes how the use of logic works within the framework of a foundationalist argument. In that regard, the clarification, or at least enriching, of some terms would strengthen Spencer’s arguments. When he writes, for example, on the same page that “a philosophical approach only tells us if it makes logical sense to be where we are,” he is working with a conception of philosophy that is only analytical philosophy, and with the appeal to logical evaluation, in the spirit of logical positivism. Such a conception of philosophy has been transcended in many circles, especially in the area of Africana philosophy, where race studies is taken seriously, and the research there actually supports, as philosophical, Spencer’s view of the subject of race demanding a retroactive critical evaluation of methodological assumptions. Beyond the question of race, disciplinary solipsism occludes the study of various facets of human reality, including at the methodological level, which calls for an act of teleological suspensions of disciplinary commitments. This suspension paradoxically leads to the construction of new disciplinary formations through paying attention to living problematics that generate disciplinary constructions. What this means is what might be at work in such research as Spencer’s is not interdisciplinary work but transdisciplinary work or perhaps the creation of new disciplines.

A related discussion of disciplinary formation and the clarification of terms emerge, as well, in Spencer’s use of the word “myth.” He uses it to refer to false consciousness, pseudoscience, and fictional phenomena. But the study of myth reveals it to be much more than these categories. For instance, the myth of value-neutrality in science or the myth of a secular grammar of epistemological life, or even the myth of rationality and science as antitheses of myth, suggest that the counsel of overcoming myth requires more than the demonstration of a falsehood. The self-critical stance of self-purgation of myth is also a challenge. Here, it may bode well to consider the work of Leszek Kołakowski and Paget Henry on logic and myth. Other areas that could use some development are the conception of “tragedy” at work in the discussion of the “tragic mulatto.” An element of all tragedies that would help Spencer’s argument is the notion of “innocence.” The tragic hero suffers for being good, being a paragon of virtue. Here, Spencer’s point, especially in *Challenging*
Multiracial Identity, that multiracial advocates tend to wrap their arguments in a veneer of victimology and superiority would find support; for in spite of the many advantages offered to mulattoes in New World societies, there is a tendency for them to portray themselves as locked between two evil racial forces—namely, Black and White, as though such actions as rejecting Black solidarity while seeking White acceptance render their alienation devoid of complicity.

That I am writing about such debates attests to the richness of Spencer’s scholarship. A complaint I have written about many scholars of mixed-race studies, but most especially against Naomi Zack, who is perhaps the most known with regard to foundationalist approaches, is that their work lacks historical accuracy and that they often carry an agenda of advocating the superiority of mixed Black-and-White peoples to Black peoples. Spencer’s work does not suffer from these pitfalls. His work is historically rich with nuances, and he points out that much recent scholarship serve more as confirmation of racist hierarchical thinking as those that emerged in, e.g., Edward Reuter’s The Mulatto in the United States (1918). Here Spencer points out that recent books such as Marion Kilson’s Claiming Place: Biracial Young Adults of the Post–Civil Rights Era (2001) and Kathleen Korgen’s From Black to Biracial (1999), are part of a growing, advocacy community of White mothers who are also scholars. Their work (although not all are such) bring to the fore the familiar views of mulatto children as better looking and smarter than their supposedly “pure Black” counterparts. The Reuter reference, among many others, points to the historical amnesia that dominates recent scholarship. Few scholars refer to Reuter’s work as they should, since its racism is, in effect, updated in much recent mixed-race advocacy scholarship. Spencer has done many of us a great service by drawing out the complexity of these contradictions.

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References