

# Interracial Intimacies



# Interracial Intimacies

*An Examination of Powerful Men and  
Their Relationships across the Color Line*

Earl Smith

WAKE FOREST UNIVERSITY

Angela J. Hattery

WAKE FOREST UNIVERSITY

CAROLINA ACADEMIC PRESS

Durham, North Carolina

Copyright © 2009  
Earl Smith  
Angela J. Hattery  
All Rights Reserved

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Smith, Earl, 1946-

Interracial intimacies : an examination of powerful men and  
their relationships across the color line / Earl Smith and Angela  
Hattery.

p. cm.

Includes index.

ISBN 978-1-59460-496-6 (alk. paper)

1. Race relations--United States--History. 2. Group identity--  
United States--History. I. Hattery, Angela. II. Title.

HT1507.S65 2009

305.800973--dc22

2009017894

CAROLINA ACADEMIC PRESS  
700 Kent Street  
Durham, North Carolina 27701  
Telephone (919) 489-7486  
Fax (919) 493-5668  
[www.cap-press.com](http://www.cap-press.com)

Printed in the United States of America

*To Travis and Emma, as always.  
You make the joys of parenting outweigh the struggles.  
— Mom*

*To Earl:  
This book was truly fun. I enjoyed learning about the  
lives of these fascinating people, reading to you out loud  
some of the most outrageous quotes in their biographies  
and autobiographies, and struggling to find a way to  
make sense of it all. I can't imagine it any other way.  
— Angie*

*To Angie:  
Years ago, as a new assistant professor at Washington  
State University, I was told that I should do this book.  
I said, "no." Instead I worked with several graduate  
students researching their theses and dissertations on  
topics all associated with interracial relationships.  
The topic, the stories, the injustices stayed with me all  
this time; but I never actually touched it.  
It took our discussions and insights to finally  
intellectually address the issues herein. And it was fun.  
As always, THANK YOU!  
— Earl*



# Contents

<b>Acknowledgments</b>	xi
<b>Chapter One • Introduction</b>	3
Racial Identity and the “One Drop Rule”	6
<b>Chapter Two • Mildred and Richard Loving:     The Case That Changed American     Interracial Marriage Laws</b>	11
Loving for All	16
<b>Chapter Three • Thomas Jefferson: Father of Democracy     and Racial Ideology</b>	19
Early Life	19
Professional Life	20
Romantic Relationships: Martha Jefferson	26
Interracial Relationships	27
Conclusion	31
<b>Chapter Four 8 George Washington: Founding Father     of the United States, Father of a Slave?</b>	35
Early Life	35
Professional Life	35
The Paternity Case against George Washington	36
George Washington’s Views on Race and Slavery	38
Conclusion	40

<b>Chapter Five • Richard Mentor Johnson: The Interracial “Marriage” of the Vice-President</b>	43
Introduction	43
Early Life	43
Professional Life	44
Johnson’s Interracial Marriage	44
Johnson’s Politics	45
Conclusion	46
<b>Chapter Six • Frederick Douglass: Abolitionist and Feminist, “Walking the Walk”</b>	49
Douglass’s Early Life	49
Douglass’s Political Writings	50
Interracial Marriage	53
Conclusion	57
<b>Chapter Seven • Clarence Thomas, “Protector” of Civil Rights in the 21st Century</b>	59
Introduction	59
Thomas’ Early Life	60
Savannah	61
Thomas’ Professional Life	64
Thomas Reversing <i>Brown</i>	65
Thomas’ Intimate Relationships	71
Conclusion	74
<b>Chapter Eight • William and Janet Langhart Cohen: Love in Black and White</b>	77
Introduction	77
Early Life—William Cohen	78
Early Life—Janet Langhart	80
Professional Life—William Cohen	82
Professional Life—Janet Langhart Cohen	84
Romantic Relationships	86
Courtship and Marriage	89
Conclusion	91

---

<b>Chapter Nine • Strom Thurmond, Segregationist and Father of a “Black” Daughter</b>	93
Introduction	93
Early Life	93
Professional Life	95
Romantic Relationships/Family Life	98
Interracial Relationships/Couplings	100
Conclusion	105
 <b>Chapter Ten • Conclusion: What Lessons Can We Draw?</b>	 113
 <b>Bibliography</b>	 121
 <b>Index</b>	 129



## Acknowledgments

This book began as an interest in what we, as outsiders, perceived as the complex and often contradictory lives led by southern men of power, men like Thomas Jefferson and Strom Thurmond, who engaged in racist practices while simultaneously having long-standing, intimate relationships with African American women. Intrigued by the cognitive dissonance inherent in these practices, we set out to learn as much as we could about Jefferson and Thomas. As we began to more fully explore their lives, among other things we learned that these men, their relationships, and their lives are much more complex than we first anticipated. We are grateful to all the other scholars and biographers who provided the “data” that we used to write this book.

Second, we are grateful to our historian colleagues, who, upon hearing about the project, pointed us toward lesser-known individuals whose relationships were equally compelling. In particular we are grateful to Professor Paul Escott, Reynolds Professor of History at Wake Forest University, who not only offered us insight on Thomas Jefferson but introduced us to Richard Mentor Thomas, a figure neither of us had heard of previously.

We acknowledge the background biographical research that Travis Mathew Hattery Freetly did—for pay—especially his contributions to the chapters on Mildred and Richard Loving, William Cohen and Janet Langhart Cohen, and Strom Thurmond.

We are grateful for the insight and support of our editors at Carolina Academic Press, especially Beth Hall.

Finally, we are grateful for the opportunity once again to work with each other on a project that is not only intellectually interesting but provided many occasions for surprise, astonishment and laughter.



# Interracial Intimacies



## Chapter One

# Introduction

As the good book says, “Each shall seek his own kind.”  
In other words a bird may love a fish, but where would  
they build a home together?

*Tevye, Fiddler on the Roof*

In this book we examine several issues about interracial intimate relationships. Our focus is on highly visible individuals — White and African American — many of whom openly oppose/opposed such relationships. In some instances, these same individuals have participated in acts blocking such relationships (e.g., the passage of a bill, disowning offspring, openly supporting the continuance of segregated schools, etc.), while at the same time they were involved in intimate, interracial relationships themselves.

We wonder how White men who believe that people of African American descent are less than fully human, or who campaigned on the platform of Jim Crow segregation, reconciled these beliefs alongside their long-term, intimate relationships with African American women. Furthermore, we explore these issues alongside our firmly held belief, as we did in a recent publication on social stratification in the South, that the human separation or in sociological terminology, social segregation, of people based on their race is illogical (Hattery and Smith 2007; Merton 1948).

It seems unbelievable that throughout most of U.S. history, essential American institutions, such as municipalities, cities, school districts, the American Red Cross, movie theatres, churches, professional baseball teams, restaurants, and lending institutions like banks, all mandated — *de jure* or *de facto* — American people of different ethnicities to be separated, no matter the financial or

human cost. The financial costs alone of building, maintaining, and operating separate schools, hospitals, blood banks, churches, separate everything are remarkable.

These barriers existed everywhere. This is especially true of neighborhoods (Correa 2001; Logan, Zhang, and Alba 2002; Stearns and Logan 1986) but also in places one would never suspect. For example, at a time when African American men were volunteering for war duty during World War I and World War II, the growing African American middle class could not escape Jim Crow on the highways and in the national parks of America. In a fascinating research paper entitled “The Open Road: Automobility and Racial Uplift in the Inter War Years,” Franz (2001: 13–14) notes that

[W]hite auto camp owners routinely refused black travelers upon arrival . . . even the National Parks, the epitome of the open road movement for many white Americans, perpetuated racial discrimination.

While this type of segregation seems rare, it was not. In other quarters, for example, we find similar barriers to equality. The American Red Cross had deep difficulties in setting up non-discriminatory blood donor policies in both civilian hospitalities and the Army and Navy after Pearl Harbor (Parks 1973). According to Parks (1973: 148)

On 27 December 1941, the *Pittsburg Courier* announced that both the Army and Navy were unwilling to authorize the American Red Cross to accept blood from Negro donors.

Legal scholar Randall Kennedy (Kennedy 2003) discusses the complex, troubling life of Ruby Henley, a White female and mother of Jacqueline Henley, and lays bear the illogical nature of social segregation and how it is found in some of the most unexpected places. Kennedy described Jacqueline’s fate (2003: 3):

Jacqueline Henley’s aunt turned her niece over to the custody of the New Orleans department of Welfare on October 1, 1952, because she was becoming darker by the day and some of the neighbors had complained that

“the child possibly was a nigger.” Jacqueline was not yet two years old.

How “becoming darker” is a condition for abandonment needs to be explained—it is absurd, even in the context of the Jim Crow South, and even moreso for the yet-to-be two-year-old Jacqueline, whom Kennedy describes.

Social segregation critically shaped intimate relationships, including many which we detail in this book. First and foremost, social segregation shapes the “pool” from which we each draw our intimate partners. Regardless of one’s attitudes toward interracial relationships, one has to have opportunities to meet and interact with people of other racial/ethnic groups in order for the possibility of an interracial relationship to even exist. Secondly, for many of the people we profile in this book, social segregation and laws against interracial marriage stood as significant barriers for a loving relationship to become a stable, permanent, publicly recognized relationship.<sup>1</sup> Thus, the history and pattern of social segregation throughout U.S. history was critical to the development of the relationships we analyzed in the book.

This book is about the inconsistencies, “cultural contradictions” (Smith and Hattery 2009), in interracial relationships mainly in the lives and life chances of prominent men (and some women) who profess the *wrongs* to be found in so-called “race-mixing” while simultaneously they, themselves, were intimately involved with a man or woman of another race. Indeed we will argue that in order to deal with the contradictions in their own lives, several of the people we profile in this book actually contributed to the ideologies and laws of the United States in ways that negatively impacted the lives of those who were attempting to create loving, stable in a time or place in which interracial relationships were not only abhorred but illegal.<sup>2</sup>

---

1. This volume only reports on intimate relationships in heterosexual relationships. See our companion volume, *Interracial Relationships in the 21st Century* for research on homosexual/lesbian interracial relationships.

2. Without delving into the complex and controversial arguments about race, we use the term throughout in its colloquial sense in 21st century America.

## Racial Identity and the “One Drop Rule”

Though focused on the intimate relationships between adult men and women across the racial divide, this book, by necessity, must address the issue of racial identity, for only when racial identities are non-overlapping and mutually exclusive can there be a boundary that must be protected and subsequently crossed. Historically in the United States, the “rule” that prevailed in the establishment of racial identity was the “one drop rule” (Johnston 1970). Quite simply, one drop of “Black blood” meant that one was “Black.” The one drop rule was the fundamental rule for establishing racial identity.

Like so many laws and social issues in the U.S., the anti-miscegenation laws were applied very differently based on the race, gender, and social class of the parties involved. For example, as noted by Angela Davis, African American men were lynched for alleging having sexual relations with White women, even when the relations were consensual.<sup>3</sup> Yet, it is widely known that throughout U.S. social history, White men had consensual and non-consensual sexual relations with African American women and were not penalized for these actions—even when they were non-consensual. These violations of the anti-miscegenation laws were not only overlooked or ignored; in many cases they were actually sanctioned.<sup>4</sup> It is common knowledge now, as it was then, that White slave owners raped their African American female slaves as a strategy for increasing their property. Children born to these slave women were, by definition, identified as “Black,” they were the

---

3. In some cases, such as Emmitt Till, African American men were lynched for as little as looking at or talking to White women. See especially Patterson, Orlando. 1999. *Rituals of Blood: Consequences of Slavery in Two American Centuries*. New York: Civitas. Angela Davis, “Rape, Racism and the Myth of the Black Rapist” in *Women, Race, and Class*. New York: Vintage Books, 1983.

4. The twists and turns of these violations are found in the long-neglected Ph.D. dissertation (1937) and now a book by Johnson, James Hugo. 1970. *Race Relations in Virginia and Miscegenation in the South*. Amherst, MA: The University of Massachusetts Press.

property of the slave master, and they lived out their lives in slavery. In some cases, White male slave owners had long-standing sexual relationships with one or more Black female slaves. We will explore some examples of this among well-known slave owners and public figures such as George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and Richard Mentor Johnson.

However, the issue is far more complex than the racial identity of the children of these couplings. As Williamson (Williamson [1980] 1995) addresses, these sexual liaisons across the color boundary created a third race of people who populated the young United States: mulattos. Based on his analysis of the 1850 census, as much as 10 percent of the “Black” population and 2 percent of the overall U.S. population was categorized as “mulatto” (Williamson [1980] 1995). Not only is this fascinating, but it raises the issue of the racial identity of “mulattos.” Though commonly referred to by this term (in Chapter Five we examine the life of Vice-President Richard Johnson, who “married” a mulatto woman), because of the intractability of the one-drop rule and the ideology of the immutability and biological determinism of race and racial identity, “mulattos” were still categorized by the census and for the purposes of segregation, legal matters, contracts, and civil rights as “Black.”

It seems a simple question, yet one that is rarely asked: Why are all “mulattos” “Black” and none of them “White?” Recall that Williamson’s (Williamson [1980] 1995) research on the 1850 census reveals the percentage of “Blacks” who are mulatto. Never does the census report the percentage of “Whites” who are mulatto.

Omi and Winant offer some insight, citing the case of Susie Guillory Phipps (1986: 53):

In 1982–83, Susie Guillory Phipps unsuccessfully sued the Louisiana Bureau of Vital Records to change her racial classification from Black to White. The descendant of an 18th century White planter and a Black slave, Phipps was designated as “Black” on her birth certificate in accordance with a 1970 state law which declared anyone with at least 1/32nd “Negro blood” to be Black ... Phipps attorney, Brian Begue, argued that ... the 1/32nd

designation was inaccurate. He called on a retired Tulane University professor who cited research indicating that most Louisiana whites have a least 1/20th “Negro” ancestry.

As we are fond of saying, how come a White woman can have a “Black” baby—or mulatto—but a Black woman can’t have a White baby—though she can and indeed many Black women did have mulatto babies? This example illustrates clearly that the racial category of “White” is fixed, whereas that racial category of “Black” is fluid and can be expanded to “absorb” people who are mixed-race or have what we now refer to as multiracial heritage.

When we analyze race and interracial relationships using a biological or genetic framework, this seems absurd. For example, we might ask of Vice-President Richard Johnson, whose interracial relationship with his wife, the mulatto Julia Chinn, produced daughters who had all of the rights that Whites possessed—they were educated, they legally married White men, and they inherited property—how did they become “White,” when children of a similar union, that between Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings, also a mulatto, did not become “White” until after Jefferson’s death? Furthermore, think of the absurdity that the children of Sally Hemings and Thomas Jefferson were (1) born “Black”, (2) categorized as “mulatto” in the special census of 1833 that attempted to identify people of African descent who wished to be returned to Africa, and (3) became “White” when they moved to Ohio and changed their names and claimed this racial identity (Gordon-Reed 2008).

Racial identity, as Omi and Winant (1986), Bonilla-Silva (2001) and others point out, is a matter of power. The children of Jefferson, Johnson, Thurmond and others adopted different racial identities and statuses as a result of social circumstances and power, not biology or genetics.

Thus, though this book examines interracial couplings, specifically those between “Whites” and “Blacks,” we focus specifically on the role that power plays in shaping the negotiation of intimate relationships, family forms, racial identity, hegemonic ideology and public policy among public figures who not only contributed to

---

the public discourses on race and interracial unions, but also contributed to the racial ideologies that gained hegemony and dominated Americans' beliefs about race and the laws and public policies that established second class citizenship for those identified as "Black."

We begin the book with a discussion of Mildred and Richard Loving, because it is their relationship that ultimately brings the challenge to the U.S. Supreme Court and leads to the toppling of anti-miscegenation laws. We follow this chapter with a discussion of Thomas Jefferson, because he is perhaps the most "famous" of the people whose lives we examine, and because his relationship across the color line was highly contested into the beginning of the 21st century. The chapters follow more or less in chronological order after that, though we end the book with the chapter on Strom Thurmond for many of the same reasons we began with Jefferson.



The Lovings pleaded guilty to their charge with a minimum sentence of one year and a maximum of five; they were sentenced to one year in prison, but the sentence was suspended for twenty-five years as long as the Lovings never came back to Virginia together within those twenty-five years. “According to University of Georgia professor and family friend Robert Pratt, they got around it by riding back in separate cars and meeting up.” (Walker, 2008) Frustrated, Mildred told her story to the Attorney General, Robert F. Kennedy, and attorney Bernard S. Cohen took their case. After a nine-year struggle, the Supreme Court unanimously ruled in the Lovings’ favor. The remaining sixteen states that enforced interracial marriage laws were forced to abolish them. However, many laws remained on the books, especially in the Deep South, even if they could not be legally enforced; it was not until 2000, when Alabama finally removed their law from the books, that no more interracial marriage laws existed. (Stritof 2008)

The Lovings remained married until 1975, when a drunk driver killed Richard; he died at forty-one years of age. Mildred lived until 2008, when she died of pneumonia at the age of sixty-eight. They had three children; Donald who died in 2000, Peggy and Sidney. To the day she died, Mildred remained quiet about her story, a fame she never necessarily wished for. She let others tell her story through books and articles, including a Showtime film *Mr. and Mrs. Loving*; although Mildred claims that, “The only part of it right was I had three children.” (Walker 2008)

In honor of the couple’s courage, every year on June 12th, interracial couples across America celebrate “Loving Day.” And, it is the Supreme Court ruling that is named for them that enables interracial couples, including several profiled in this book, to enjoy the legal benefits and privileges of marriage today. We conclude this chapter with a speech by Mildred Loving given on the 40th anniversary of the U.S. Supreme Court decision that struck down all state prohibitions on interracial marriages.

## Loving for All

By Mildred Loving \*

Prepared for Delivery on June 12, 2007,  
The 40th Anniversary of the *Loving vs. Virginia* Announcement

*When my late husband, Richard, and I got married in Washington, DC in 1958, it wasn't to make a political statement or start a fight. We were in love, and we wanted to be married.*

*We didn't get married in Washington because we wanted to marry there. We did it there because the government wouldn't allow us to marry back home in Virginia where we grew up, where we met, where we fell in love, and where we wanted to be together and build our family. You see, I am a woman of color and Richard was white, and at that time people believed it was okay to keep us from marrying because of their ideas of who should marry whom.*

*When Richard and I came back to our home in Virginia, happily married, we had no intention of battling over the law. We made a commitment to each other in our love and lives, and now had the legal commitment, called marriage, to match. Isn't that what marriage is?*

*Not long after our wedding, we were awakened in the middle of the night in our own bedroom by deputy sheriffs and actually arrested for the "crime" of marrying the wrong kind of person. Our marriage certificate was hanging on the wall above the bed.*

*The state prosecuted Richard and me, and after we were found guilty, the judge declared: "Almighty God created the races white, black, yellow, malay and red, and he placed them on separate continents. And but for the interference with his arrangement there would be no cause for such*

*marriages. The fact that he separated the races shows that he did not intend for the races to mix.” He sentenced us to a year in prison, but offered to suspend the sentence if we left our home in Virginia for 25 years exile.*

*We left, and got a lawyer. Richard and I had to fight, but still were not fighting for a cause. We were fighting for our love.*

*Though it turned out we had to fight, happily Richard and I didn’t have to fight alone. Thanks to groups like the ACLU and the NAACP Legal Defense & Education Fund, and so many good people around the country willing to speak up, we took our case for the freedom to marry all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court. And on June 12, 1967, the Supreme Court ruled unanimously that, “The freedom to marry has long been recognized as one of the vital personal rights essential to the orderly pursuit of happiness by free men,” a “basic civil right.”*

*My generation was bitterly divided over something that should have been so clear and right. The majority believed that what the judge said, that it was God’s plan to keep people apart, and that government should discriminate against people in love. But I have lived long enough now to see big changes. The older generation’s fears and prejudices have given way, and today’s young people realize that if someone loves someone they have a right to marry.*

*Surrounded as I am now by wonderful children and grandchildren, not a day goes by that I don’t think of Richard and our love, our right to marry, and how much it meant to me to have that freedom to marry the person precious to me, even if others thought he was the “wrong kind of person” for me to marry. I believe all Americans, no matter their race, no matter their sex, no matter their sexual orientation, should have that same freedom to marry. Gov-*

*ernment has no business imposing some people's religious beliefs over others. Especially if it denies people's civil rights.*

*I am still not a political person, but I am proud that Richard's and my name is on a court case that can help reinforce the love, the commitment, the fairness, and the family that so many people, black or white, young or old, gay or straight seek in life. I support the freedom to marry for all. That's what Loving, and loving, are all about.*