

BOOK WORLD

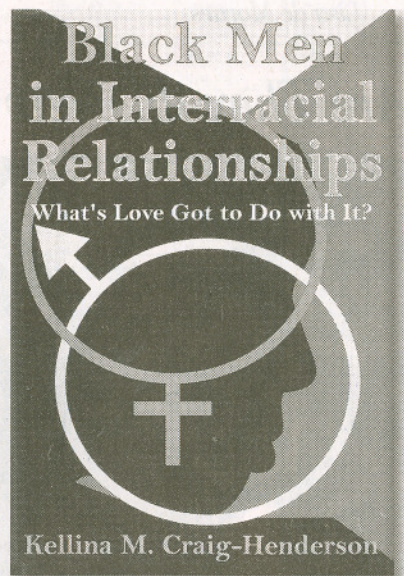
*The Color of Love Can Be Confusing***BLACK MEN IN INTERRACIAL RELATIONSHIPS****What's Love Got to Do With It?**

By Kellina M. Craig-Henderson
Transaction. 195 pp. \$29.95

By EISA NEFERTARI ULEN,
the author of the forthcoming novel "Crystelle Mourning"

Biologically speaking, there is no such thing as race. Race does not exist. Except, of course, that it does. Politically, socially, economically, race is very real, and the legacy of racism informs every aspect of American life, sometimes unexpectedly, often intimately. In "Black Men in Interracial Relationships," Kellina M. Craig-Henderson explores how race plays out in personal relationships between black men and non-black women. Anyone interested in race relations, especially the family members of individuals in interracial relationships, should consider reading this accessible academic work.

Craig-Henderson addresses the questions many black women might ask when they see an interracial couple: Why someone who looks like her? Why not someone who looks like me? And the questions that many white men might ask the woman on the black



man's arm: Why him? Why not someone with power like mine? Perhaps the biggest questions the book tries to answer are: Why the heck are we all still asking these questions in the first place? What is going on with America's attitudes toward race, interracial couples and their biracial children?

The book begins with the story of "a petite, attractive woman," a friend of

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Craig-Henderson's, who was snubbed by "a good-looking professor" at a large Midwestern university. This black man claimed "he had nothing in common with Black women" and told a white would-be matchmaker that he preferred her. Memories of that incident resurfaced a few years later, when Craig-Henderson moved to California, where she was struck by "the abundance of highly visible interracial, heterosexual couples. They seemed to be everywhere."

To find out why, Craig-Henderson, a professor of psychology at Howard University, interviewed 25 black men in depth. And it is when they speak — about family support and family rejection, raising biracial children, the reactions of strangers and their decisions to enter interracial relationships — that the book is most poignant. Racial prejudice seems to impinge on most of their relationships. One man says his white wife "never brought pictures of our home life into

the office . . . like most people do. And, she probably never will." Another recalls that his ex-girlfriend's family had to keep their relationship "from the old grandmother. They didn't want to tell her for fear that the news was so bad, that it would harm her." Another's in-laws were more "subtle . . . things like never having our pictures up on the wall where all the other siblings' ones were."

Yet can the hope for a tolerant, inclusive society be waiting for America down the aisle, at the altar, in our bedrooms? Some of these men seem to think so, though with a few qualifications. "Where we live [is] pretty well integrated, so we don't encounter any negativity because of our relationship," says E.M., a black man married to a woman from El Salvador. "But, my first girlfriend she looked a little more Anglo. When we would go out we'd get looks. . . . It's probably a matter of the passage of time." Has time helped heal race relations or is E.M.

more comfortable because his wife is darker than his "Anglo" girlfriend? Craig-Henderson suggests both may be true and that there may be "a decline in anti-Black sentiment."

But the obvious question remains: Why do black men seek companionship from non-black women at all? One of Craig-Henderson's subjects openly states that he "love[s] women with some long, loose hair," and another prefers European features. One seemed to encourage his biracial son to self-identify as white rather than black. But Gary, whose ex-wife is white, says: "I married her because she was the person I loved, I was not trying to make some kind of political statement. . . . I mean if you really want to put it in those terms, you could say that I married her in spite of the fact that she was White."

Ultimately there is no one reason these men entered interracial relationships. Indeed, their collective testimonies might challenge and surprise some readers. "Black Men in Interracial Relationships" can help spur discussions — and maybe changes — regarding color and love. Perhaps this book will help us all get to a time of racial harmony, a future time, a future American people, loving, freely, across color lines.