

There is something eating at the soul of sexuality. The act of sex is presumed to be innocuous: the outcome of natural human desires, incorrigible to social, political, and historical force. Some have begun to unsettle and interrogate these problematic assumptions about the insignificance of sex(uality). As scholars of sexual racism have demonstrated, desire is always embedded in a larger social context. Hierarchies of desire connect to hierarchies of the human; that is, who is fucked is often connected to who is *worth* a fuck.

But even as these dynamics have begun to be interrogated, the colonial history of sex remains misunderstood. To be frank, theorists don't quite know what to do with it. It is accepted that colonialism included a bevy of sexual violations: rape, pillaging, kidnapping, killing, torture, anti-miscegenation, the policing of love, desire for the Other. But even as scholars repeatedly recount colonial histories and emphasize their significance for our present, the concrete relationship between these violations and sexuality as it is practiced today is unclear. In fact, to many, the suggestion that desire established during the colonial encounter could, in any way, affect the relationship to one's own partner, spouse, or fuck-buddy is anathema. The author contends that coloniality has thoroughly invested itself in the issue of sex and desire, marking sexuality as a significant concern for theorists of racial modernity. The racialization of desire has transformed over time in accordance with larger historical transformations to the world system.

To that end, in this article, I ask the following questions: How did sexuality and desire become racialized? How are the histories of racial modernity and sexual racism connected? How has desire been transformed alongside transformations in racialization? How has the color line come to be defined, in part, by desire and sexuality? What does a historical lens emphasizing desire and sexuality tell us about the construction of the racialized world-system?

This article will make the following interventions: First, through a historical archival reading of colonial explorations and documents on sexuality and governance, I will offer an account of the colonial encounter as it unfolded on the soils of the so-called New World. I argue that the exchange of racialized bodies as non-human objects relegated to a sexual state of exception is the historical process that instilled pre-modern sexual desire with its racialized character, which laid the necessary conditions for the establishment of colonial dominion. The development of colonial relations and capitalist wealth extraction sutures race and desire together, sublimating sexual drive through colonial power relations, and connecting them with the logic of political-economy. Put another way, the new racialized world-system redirected the sexual drive into colonial sexual terror and bodily exchange: colonial dominion was only made possible through desire for the non-human Other, insofar as racialized desire was material, sexual, and psycho-sexual. In the midst of colonial domination and its political-economic logics of extraction, desire was instilled with a racialized character. Thus, the sexual desire *for* Blackness or Whiteness is only made possible or operative by the coloniality of sex; yet these desires remain central to its maintenance.

Second, this paper problematizes the idea that anti-miscegenation was the colonial state's most primary and important mode of racial-sexual control. This claim, as its natural conclusion, implies that miscegenation in and of itself represents a threat to colonial order. Instead, I implicate *both* anti-miscegenation projects *and* what I refer to as "amalgamation projects" as tools of colonial discipline that function to uphold the hierarchy of the human, reproduce the sexual state of exception against the Black subject, and instantiate racial desire as colonial state policy. It is argued that the construction of race itself, rather than discourses on miscegenation or anti-miscegenation, was the event that inaugurated the coloniality of sex; and, therefore,

sexuality, desire, marriage, and even the very act of sex itself within the colony does not escape historical significance.

Race, World-Systems, and Desire

The rediscovery of Du Boisian Sociology in recent years has brought renewed attention to the colonial encounter as it constructed the world. Racial modernity, as it begins with European expansion into the Americas, is underpinned by the color line, the global system of racial classification and differentiation. Under this context, slavery and settler colonialism perfect the penultimate technology of the world system: whiteness.

The Du Boisian account of the colonial encounter and the construction of a racialized world system answers long-standing critiques of Marxist, Weberian, and Durkheimian modernities. However, this account of the colonial encounter remains incomplete without a thorough engagement with sexual politics. Du Boisian Sociology would thus be strengthened with a consideration of how sexuality and desire constructed and continue to underpin racial modernity. Beyond Du Bois' original articulation, this article attends to desire as it served to underpin and augment the emergence of racial modernity.

On the other hand, Sociology of Sexualities literature has only just begun to contend with the issue of desire. Recent works have sought to unsettle the hold of whiteness over desire, exploring how hierarchies of desire are constructed to favor particular groups over others. This research has increasingly revealed the presence of a racialized desire, in which race becomes a salient factor in *who* is considered sexually desirable and for what reasons. However, this racialized desire is rarely connected to the larger *longue durée* of racial domination and thus appears ahistorical and atemporal. Sexual racism is often written about in the vaguest terms, connected to a "legacy of racism" that is generalized, unspecific, and imprecise.

These two bodies of literature—Du Boisian Sociology and Sociology of Sexualities—have yet to cross pollinate in a constructive way. Each presents a theory of race that remains incomplete without the other: Du Boisian Sociology gives an account of the colonial encounter and its construction of a racialized modernity; yet neglects the hand of sexuality in its emergence. Sexual Racism literature has begun to interrogate the role of race in structuring desire and erotic practice in the contemporary age; but it remains unconnected to a larger theoretical framework of race and fails to historicize racial desire as it emerged. In order to understand the prevalence of racial desire in the contemporary era, one must understand its origins with the colonial encounter and its role in the maintenance of a larger racial modernity.

Racism Without Race: Origin Stories of Sexual Racism

Williams (2024) defines sexual racism as, "personal racialized reasoning in sexual, intimate, and/or romantic partner choice or interest" (6). She uses the following paragraph to illustrate this concept in practice:

In intimacy, and on dating platforms, this looks like dating profiles that say, "no fats, no femmes, and no Blacks or Asians." [...] Alternatively, this can look like a fetishization of Black and Latina women for their figure. Because women of color are treated as sexual commodities rather than human beings with full emotional capacity, power is exerted on them within the interpersonal domain of power (Williams 2024: 34).

Though Williams' work represents another empirical drop in the ocean of literature revealing inequalities in the way that people of color are desired in the sexual sphere, this work reproduces the same limited conceptualized of sexual racism: one is either exclusionary or fetishistic, and

there is little analysis of how race and racism may manifest in-between. Williams is not the only example of this trend. Stacey and Forbes (2022) construct their intervention on racial fetishization *against* conceptions of sexual racism as exclusion (Stacey and Forbes 2022:382). Paul et al (2010) describes racialized interactions as “ranging from simple expressions of race-based preferences to blatant discriminatory interactions” (Paul et al. 2010:1). Collander et al. (2012) methodologically divide their study on sexual racism in online spaces between “positive discrimination” and “negative discrimination” (Collander et al. 2012). Not only is this dichotomy of fetishization and exclusion common, but it is also systematic within scholarship on the topic.

Sexual racism and racialized desire were key mechanisms in the construction of the Color Line during the Long Sixteenth Century. However, this fact has remains unspoken within scholarship on sexual racism. The failure to properly historicize the issue of sexual racism as connected to a larger structure of racial modernity obfuscates its essential logics and ramifications, such that analysis becomes limited to the opposing poles of exclusion and fetishization. This scholarly tendency limits the scope of inquiry, obscuring the range within which racist logics manifest in the sexual sphere, and expressing a permissive negligence towards the way that race operates under the guise of otherwise normalized sexual desire. Thus, much of sexual racism scholarship has become racism *without a larger theory* of race: analysis dedicated to uncovering racism only as it manifests in two distinct, discreet poles; racism as disconnected from larger world-system frameworks within race scholarship or the Black Radical Tradition; and racism that cannot be understood beyond its explicit articulations. These theoretical inadequacies ultimately arise from a lack of robust historicization of sexual racism as a phenomenon. Applying the lens of history allows theorists of sexuality to identify sexual racism as an instrument within the *longue durée* of racial domination, which functions to both name its origins and also provide a theoretical language of race that moves beyond the false dichotomy of fetishism and exclusion.

A vast majority of sexual racism literature gives no meaningful attempt to locate the origin of the phenomenon, operating with a presentist framework that privileges the issue of exclusion within only contemporary dating practices. They move towards an understanding of sexual racism that is, in many accounts, entirely disconnected from history. Sexual racism is thus thought to come from nowhere, or, at best, from a generalized and unspecific “legacy of racism.” (See: Collander, Holt and Newman 2021, Collander, Holt and Newman 2016, Lundquist & Lin 2015, Paul et al. 2010, Wade & Piasecki 2024, Waring 2013, Conner 2021, Howard 2023). In these texts, there are tangential or vague references to slavery, anti-miscegenation, colonialism, orientalism, or racism, but they fail to center theories of race to produce a complete and coherent history of sexual racism. In other words, larger structures and institutions of race and racialization become the vague historical backdrop from which to understand sexual racism, but are never central to its logics of operation.

Some texts have attempted to connect sexual racism to the larger history of anti-miscegenation law and slavery. Williams (2024) and Lay (1993) would suggest that sexual racism originates in anti-miscegenation discourses that emerge to protect the regime of slavery. For Williams, anti-miscegenation laws were a structural expression of eugenics, serving to protect racial purity and delimit the presence of Black blood such that the “one-drop” rule could be maintained within public and private life (Williams 2024:34). For Lay, like Williams, anti-miscegenation laws also served to maintain clear racial boundaries in public life, such that mixed-race children would not render slavery and segregation laws ambiguous and ineffective (Lay 1993:166). These statutes, however, were formulated in such a way that the separation of white women from Black men was paramount, leaving Black women vulnerable to interracial rape from white men and slaveowners. *Loving v. Virginia*, then, marks the crumbling of

structured regulation of interracial sexuality, an unequivocally progressive step towards racial equality, and specifically Black civil rights: “For Blacks, the decision signaled the end of legalized second-class citizenship” (Lay 1993: 178).

There are two problems with the anti-miscegenation origin story as it has been formulated in these texts, however. First, there is an exceptionalism assigned to anti-miscegenation law and towards the *Loving* decision. Anti-miscegenation law is constructed as the beginning of state-sanctioned regulation of interracial sexuality, and *Loving* is assigned its end, even though the state concern with miscegenation extends far beyond these moments. Further, there is a failure to interrogate sexual racism outside the context of anti-miscegenation. Interracial love is thus constructed *against* racist exclusion, such that interracial sexuality is presumed to be a form of resistance against state regulation of sexuality. While slavery, anti-miscegenation, and the *Loving* decision are significant nodes in the political history of sexual racism, settlers in the 1400s—when the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade was in its infancy and hundreds of years before the earliest anti-miscegenation law was passed in the United States—expressed racial desire towards colonial subjects. This fact indicates that the history of sexual racism is a far more expansive feature of the colonial timeline than the purview of the anti-miscegenation discourses.

In summary, literature on sexual racism has only just begun to conceptualize the issue in relation to the colonial encounter. A vast portion of the literature makes only vague references to colonial legacies and racism but remains disconnected from more systematized theories of racial modernity and world-system analysis. Of scholarship that attempts to engage this colonial legacy more substantively, sexual racism is located within anti-miscegenation discourses or lacks a coherent genealogical throughline across time. In other words, there has hereto been no construction of a coherent throughline of sexual racism, from one node to another, colonization to today.

Finally, and most importantly, a vast majority of sexual racism literature reproduces a false dichotomy of sexual racism: fetishization on one hand, and exclusion on the other. This false dichotomy, I argued, extends from the lack of historicization of sexual racism as it emerges in connection to the large world-system of race. A thorough historical analysis would reveal that sexual racism has subsumed a range of forms beyond the extremes, as is expected of racist ideology more generally (Bonilla-Silva). The predominance of this false dichotomy over sexual racism literature has significant effects on the discipline’s scope of analysis and application of theory. This critical assumption obscures manifestations of racist logic in the sexual sphere beyond its extremes, foreclosing on alternative language or frameworks to explore race, racism, and racialization operating in ways that are presumed to be normal, colorblind, or otherwise organic expressions of love. Thus, sexual racism literature takes up a color-blind framework that race scholars have problematized for years: the solution to sexual racism is to not discuss race at all. It assumes there must be a “happy-medium” between fetishization and exclusion whereby love is fully organic. In a word, the ideal becomes a kind of “color-blind” romance.

The false dichotomy must be ruptured. A historical analysis of sexual racism will reveal the various forms of racial desire across a range of institutions, as it became and remains a critical instrument of the Color Line. Further still, racialized desire for the mythologized Other laid the groundwork for colonial interest. Provisions against miscegenation and colonial amalgamation schemes alike serve to re-entrench the logics and structures of racial modernity. In line with this thesis, this work will deal with how the sexual subjectivity of the colonial subject came to be fabricated and (un)desired during the early moments of colonial dominion. Colonial relations redirected the sexual drive towards the colonial Other, a force only made possible through a theologically-legitimized sexual state of exception that allowed the free trafficking,

fucking, raping, and economic exploitation of the racialized non-human. The exchange of racialized bodies under this state of affairs inaugurated a new world-system that operationalizes both miscegenation and anti-miscegenation as techniques of control. In this sense, sex, sexuality, desire, marriage, and family—even as these things are conceptualized as organic expressions of love beyond the reach of race, fetish, exclusion—become as equally implicated as rape, conquest, extraction, exploitation and death. These are all matters of concern bent towards the will of colonial administration.

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