

Jameson R. Sweet. *Mixed-Blood Histories: Race, Law, and Dakota Indians in the Nineteenth-Century Midwest*. Minneapolis: Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2025. 354 pages. ISBN 978-1-5179-2034-0. \$30.00 USD pbk.

A veritable trove of scholarship on individuals and families of mixed ancestry blossomed during the cultural turn of the 1970s and 1980s. Jennifer Brown, Jacqueline Peterson, and Sylvia van Kirk reshaped the history of the Great Lakes fur trade by applying an ethnohistorical lens, showing the critical importance of Native women, marriage, and families to the trade's success. Their work has continued to inspire scholarship on people of mixed ancestry, including Jameson R. Sweet's *Mixed Blood Histories: Race, Law, and Dakota Indians in the Nineteenth-Century Midwest*. Sweet not only builds on earlier work, but he also offers a critical rethinking of the "mixed-blood" identity, enriching the book with the stories of his own Dakota kin and their own "mixed-blood" history.

Sweet's *Mixed-Blood Histories* explores "the consequences of moments when the United States and white Americans initiated laws, policies, and practices that sought to delineate people of mixed ancestry as white, as Indian, ... or as 'half-breed'" (4). Sweet, however, does not reify the "mixed-blood" category even as he charts the lives and experiences of those who found themselves classified as such. Rather, he excavates its origins and life across the history of United States colonization. This history of the category of "mixed-blood" disputes accounts that characterize Indians of mixed ancestry as people in between. To study Indians of mixed ancestry, Sweet argues, is part of reconstructing a more complete Indian past – not the past of a marginal, separate people. Sweet uses language carefully. Even while excavating the history of "mixed-blood" as a legal category, Sweet uses "mixed ancestry" to describe people of white and Native descent and explores the way that ideas of mixed ancestry appear, sometimes problematically, in Lakota and Dakota dialects.

The book is structured with a loose chronology. Within that chronology, most of the eight chapters focus on episodic legal events in which the United States sought to control or define identity among the Dakota. Though this organization can be disorienting for the reader, it lends itself to the oft-stochastic history. The first chapter establishes the background, charting the way the Dakota mixed-ancestry community came to be in what is now the America Midwest. This chapter begins as a familiar story. In the early years of colonization, traders began to marry into Dakota kin networks, taking on obligations and forging connections. These relationships – and especially the Indian women who married white men – created a mixed-ancestry generation. This generation forged kin ties of their own and rapidly became key traders and diplomats in their Dakota communities. By the early nineteenth century, families of mixed-ancestry were present in every realm of the contests between Native nations and settler empires: land, trade, kinship, and diplomacy. The second chapter picks up in the 1820s, an era of extractive treaties between Indigenous nations and the young United States. This chapter charts the birth of "half-breed" as a legal concept, excavating its roots in the 1830 Treaty of Prairie du Chien and in the legal

imagination of some of the earliest jurists in the Great Lakes region. This treaty sought to circumscribe the region's Native nations and to resolve competing territorial claims at the same time. The treaty also made provisions for "mixed-breeds," articulating the group as neither fully white nor fully Indian. The category was a tool for conditional assimilation into American law and systems of property ownership. Subsequent treaties made similar provisions, and many mixed-ancestry Indians chose to participate in the distinctly American system of property law for their own gain, though they were still denied the full privileges of whiteness. Chapter three focuses on another treaty – the 1837 Treaty of Washington. In this treaty, the Dakota ceded a large plot of land to the United States. Sweet argues that the subsequent distribution of funds showed a new monetization of kinship obligations, specifically for mixed-ancestry people. In this treaty and one later, classification as an Indian of mixed ancestry could come with payment *because* of classification as a "mixed-breed."

The fourth chapter departs from the prior three to trace treaties that the United States held directly with a newly distinct group: the "half-breeds" of the Dakota nation. In 1841 and 1849, the United States brokered two unratified treaties with mixed-ancestry Dakota. These nearly forged a new mixed-ancestry nation, separate from the Dakota. Though unsuccessful, negotiations over the treaties offered new opportunities for political participation among Native people of mixed ancestry. Chapter five charts Native suffrage. This chapter illuminates the ways that Dakota people of mixed ancestry participated in formal politics as citizen-voters or as elected officials. During the nineteenth century, Sweet finds that the citizenship status of many mixed-ancestry Dakota was uncertain and subject to fluctuations. This briefly allowed some Dakota to exercise the privileges of citizenship while maintaining Indigenous ties and identity. Sweet's linguistic methodology shines here, where he distinguishes between American ideas about citizenship (exclusive, white) and those articulated in the Dakota language (predicated on self-ownership). In the mid-century state and territorial legislatures debated over who could be a citizen and who counted as white. Motivated to build a large and loyal partisan base and, in some cases, to distinguish "mixed-blood" Indians as white in opposition to African Americans, some politicians advocated for Native suffrage and citizenship. This moment of citizenship would soon end with punitive measures after the U.S.-Dakota War of the 1860s. Chapter six pivots to excavate the experience of mixed-ancestry Dakota with property rights and dispossession. Sweet argues that although mixed-ancestry Dakota were dispossessed in similar ways by the settler state, their experience was distinctive from other Indians because of their "fictitious whiteness." While some Mixed-ancestry people were dispossessed on an individual level by squatters, white husbands, and bad surveys, others retained property to the detriment of their full-ancestry kin.

The final two chapters chart the aftermath of the U.S.-Dakota War. The American response to the war was incredibly destructive. At the same time, the war exacerbated tensions that had grown up between full-ancestry and mixed-ancestry Dakota. Some Dakota of mixed ancestry were targeted by full-ancestry Dakota because of the property and civic privileges they enjoyed. Others fought against the Dakota on the American side. Still others fought alongside the full-ancestry Dakota. The devastation of the war and the collapse of the fur trade pushed many

mixed-ancestry Dakota people toward white society and hundreds of others to Dakota reservations. In the post-war period, as chapter eight argues, animosity persisted between Indians of mixed and full ancestry and the U.S. government enshrined blood quantum in law. These two legacies, with deep roots from the nineteenth century and before, remain today.

Sweet's brief conclusion underscores the uneven history of the manufactured "mixed-blood" identity and its unintended consequences. Mixed-ancestry Dakota almost became a nation of their own but instead acquired American citizenship. Mixed-ancestry people claimed whiteness or Indigeneity depending on whether it might help them acquire legal rights or property. These snapshots, these moments of negotiation over legal categorization were bound up with negotiations about racial identity, assimilation, and nationhood. Sweet argues that these moments led to exclusionary uses of blood quantum that continue to animate American law and culture. *Mixed-Blood Histories* concludes, however, on a different note. Sweet insists on the enduring primacy of kinship within the Dakota, despite the long colonial quest to replace kinship with blood quantum.

*Mixed-Blood Histories* explores the uneven creation of a constantly contested legal, racial, and political category in a diverse region. In doing so, the monograph lays the groundwork for myriad studies applying his linguistic and conceptual innovations to other Native histories. Additionally, Sweet's work leaves room for a deeper exploration of how capital transformed the relationships between mixed and full ancestry Dakota kin. The law, also, remains largely unarticulated and unquestioned in the background leaving questions about its enforcement or reception on the ground. Finally, though a Dakota story, *Mixed-Blood Histories* uses a variety of rich sources – including sources by and about the Anishinaabe and other Great Lakes Indigenous nations. Further studies might ask: how do the Dakota "mixed-blood histories" diverge from those of other Native nations? In turn how do all of these "mixed-blood histories" together shape the Indigenous history of the Americas?

*Mixed-Blood Histories* makes several important contributions to Native legal histories, and histories of mixed-ancestry people, especially the Dakota. Most critically, Sweet excavates the history of an identity category that has been made to seem natural by the colonial state. Sweet shows its manufacture over time, in treaties, legislation, marriages, and war by Americans and Dakota, alike. Sweet also thoughtfully shows the ways in which mixed-ancestry Dakota sought membership in the American state for its privileges – even to the unintended detriment of their full-ancestry kin. Scholars of the Dakota and those interested in the nineteenth-century, treaties, and American Indian policy will find this well-researched and expansive book essential. Scholars of identity, race-making, and state-building in colonial spaces will find Sweet's major contribution – denaturalizing and historicizing racial and blood-based political identities – similarly indispensable.

Elena Telles Ryan  
Postdoctoral Fellow, School of History and Sociology  
Georgia Institute of Technology