



The Elusive Dream: The Power of Race in Interracial Churches

Korie L. Edwards

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It is communion Sunday at a mixed-race church. A black pastor and white head elder stand before the sanctuary as lay leaders pass out the host. An African-American woman sings a gospel song as a woman of Asian descent plays the piano. Then a black woman in the congregation throws her hands up and yells, over and over, "Thank you Lawd!" A few other African-Americans in the pews say "Amen," while white parishioners sit stone-faced. The befuddled white head elder reads aloud from the Bible, his soft voice drowned out by the shouts of praise. Even in this proudly interracial church, America's racial divide is a constant presence.

In *The Elusive Dream*, Korie L. Edwards presents the surprising results of an in-depth study of interracial churches: they help perpetuate the very racial inequality they aim to abolish. To arrive at this conclusion, she combines a nuanced analysis of national survey data with an in-depth examination of one particular church. She shows that mixed-race churches adhere strongly to white norms. African Americans in multiracial settings adapt their behavior to make white congregants comfortable. Behavior that white worshipers perceive as out of bounds is felt by blacks as too limiting. Yet to make interracial churches work, blacks must adjust their behavior to accommodate the predilections of whites. They conform to white expectations in church just as they do elsewhere.

Thorough, incisive, and surprising, *The Elusive Dream* raises provocative questions about the ongoing problem of race in the national culture.

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