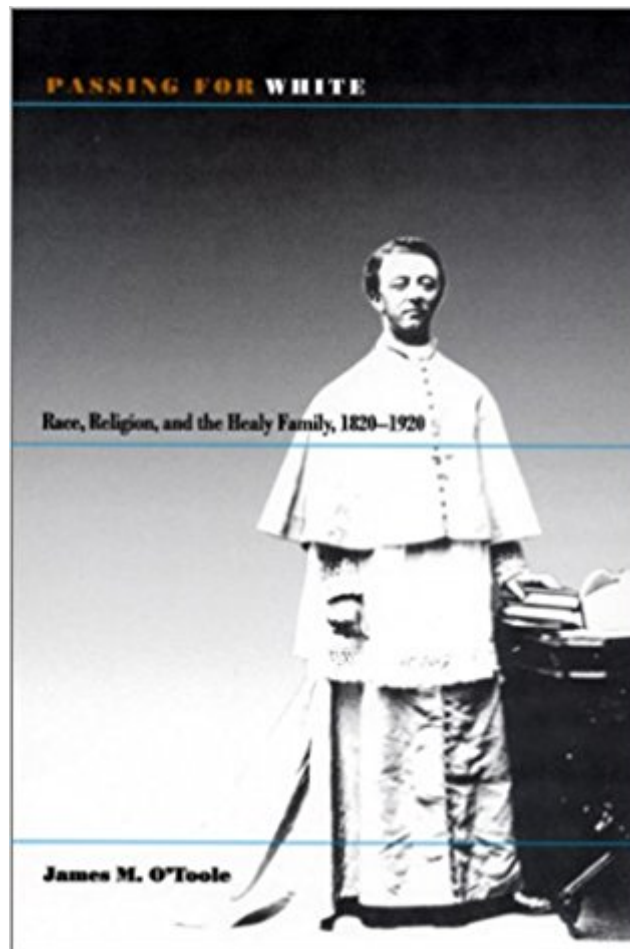




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# Passing For White: Race, Religion, And The Healy Family, 1820-1920



## Synopsis

The extraordinary saga of a mixedrace family in nineteenth-century America

## Book Information

Hardcover: 312 pages

Publisher: University of Massachusetts Press; 1st Edition edition (June 2002)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1558493417

ISBN-13: 978-1558493414

Product Dimensions: 9.5 x 6.4 x 1 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.6 pounds

Average Customer Review: 3.7 out of 5 stars 12 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #1,110,814 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #118 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Sociology > Race Relations > General](#) #314 in [Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Historical > Europe > Rome](#) #999 in [Books > History > Americas > United States > African Americans](#)

## Customer Reviews

"...enormously informative on the subject of race and religion in the nineteenth century, beautifully told and superbly researched..." -- John T. McGreevy "...presents a more complex American racial past and contributes to our understanding of the challenges of a multiracial future." -- Lois E. Horton and James Oliver Horton "I know of no book that is anywhere near as complete in its extraordinary story of an entire family..." -- Winthrop D. Jordan "The story is the thing. And it is a great story." -- Cleveland Call and Post "[A] lucid, riveting work...." -- St. Anthony's Messenger

The extraordinary saga of a mixed-race family in nineteenth-century America. An Alternate Selection of the Book-of-the-Month Club. Winner of the New England Historical Association Book Award.

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An insightful account of America, the Roman Catholic Church and the plight of being of Black in the mid-1800s. The most profound idea springing from this volume is that success in America and the Catholic Church depended upon the absolute non-disclosure by the Healys of their "Negro"

ancestry. Nevertheless, the Healy brothers were remarkable individuals who made decisions to excel as distinct ways. Yet the author provides key commentary on the impediment of being Black in this country.

this book was so informative and interesting. i feel that the Healy children had no choice but to pass for white in order to be accepted into society and to reach their positions in the Catholic Church. still very sad they had to deny and hide their African American heritage.

Poorly written. Entire story could have been told in one quarter of the space.

Prof. O'Toole's own research proves that the Healy family was not "black" or "African American" but mixed white Irish Americans. The Healys clearly never considered themselves "black," because they were predominately white and lived as white for all of their adult lives. Many of their "pure" white friends and associates knew of their mixed ancestry but did not make a big deal of it. This is comparable, for example, to the polite gentlemen's agreement that prevents most Americans from referencing the African ancestry in nearly all the Hispanic population. The Healys' mother was mixed-race, not "black" or African American. Too many American scholars like O'Toole love to impose the black/African American label on anyone who was either enslaved (a legal disability, not a "race" or ethnicity) or had some partial African ancestry (ignoring all other ancestries, no matter how predominate). All the Healy descendants are white. Would O'Toole claim otherwise? Their Irish-American Catholic identity was very important to the Healys. They identified strongly with their Irish immigrant father. Those who married chose Irish-American Catholic spouses. O'Toole seems to feel that they were not good enough to claim their Irish identity because of their mulatto mother. O'Toole's research on the Healys has value, but ignore his constant attempts to impose a false racial and ethnic identity on them. White mixed-race people who claimed their European ancestry and white identity were not nearly as rare as O'Toole implies, nor was it all that rare for other whites to accept physical whiteness and the performance of whiteness as proof of membership in the white race. Anyone reading O'Toole's book should supplement it with other works on mixed whites such as *The Forgotten Cause of the Civil War: A New Look at the Slavery Issue* or *A Legal History of the Color Line: The Rise And Triumph of the One-drop Rule*.

Bought this book for the chapter on Captain Mike Healy, a famous name and a revered figure in the US Coast Guard. I recommend it highly.

This story of the children of a Caucasian slave owner and his mixed blood slave "married" in all ways but for wedding that could not be legal is a story of money, skin color, and Catholic devotion. Michael Healy and Eliza Clark Healy were the parents of nine children growing into adulthood of varying shades of color. The wealthy Georgia farmer sent his children to be educated in the East where they attended Catholic schools and several became prominent as administrators, priests, and nuns of the Roman Catholic Church. Two females married as "white" and one brother was a seaman marrying a "white" woman and having a male child. This is an intriguing true life story of dark-skinned siblings with fair siblings, of highly- educated and well-traveled persons who gained significance as leaders of the Roman Catholic Church. Do not miss this story of fidelity, non-noted racial background, and human tragedy.

I first learned of the Healy family in January 1959, when I paged through the new 12 month Catholic calendar. Each month was devoted to a 19th century Catholic who made a significant contribution to American Catholic life. One of the individuals was James Augustine Healy. The short description said that James Healy was the first American negro (the acceptable for Blacks or African Americans in 1959) to be ordained a priest; and that he later became Bishop of Portland Maine (certainly another first), where he provided distinguished leadership in pastoral work, education, social advocacy, and public welfare. The commentary went on to report that James was born in Georgia to an Irish-born white father and a black slave woman. Nothing was mentioned of any siblings, the names of his parents, or how he got from Georgia to Maine. My immediate reaction was a mild (to myself) comment, "Isn't that interesting." Over the years I learned more bits and pieces about the famous Irish-American Healy family --- and what a family! . I learned that two other Healy brothers were prominent American priests --- the Jesuit, Patrick Francis Healy, being the one time president of Georgetown University; and Alexander Sherwood Healy, a canon law expert in the diocese of Boston. From James Michener's *Alaska*, I learned that that another Healy sibling, Michael Healy, was a famous captain of the BEAR, a US Coast Guard vessel operating in the Alaskan waters. And later still I learned that two Healy sisters became nuns with one of them attaining the rank of mother Superior in her community. But then I learned so much more from *Passing for White: Race, Religion, and The Healy Family, 1820-1920* by James M. O'Toole. Indeed the founder of this family was Michael Morris Healy, born in Ireland (Galway or Roscommon) in 1796. Sometime in the early 1800s he acquired land near present day Macon Georgia, and became a cotton plantation owner. And yes he acquired slaves to work the plantation, including one Eliza Clark. Unlike other slave

owners, Michael did not have a wife in the big house and a concubine in the slave quarters. Laws during the slavery era prohibited interracial marriages, but Michael and Eliza carried out their family life as husband and wife until their death in 1850 (Eliza's death preceded Michael's by about three months.) Their union produced nine children who survived to adulthood. (One died in infancy) The Healy children were never treated as slaves, but under contemporary Georgia law, they were indeed slaves. Why? A person's slave-status was determined from the status of the mother. Knowing this, Michael Healy began to send children North for their schooling. James was first to move North, followed by brothers Sherwood, Patrick, Hugh (another brother), Michael, and sister Martha Ann. Later, after the death of the parents in 1870 the younger children Amanda Josephine, Eliza Dunamore, and Eugene moved North -- with Hugh's able assistance. All this was happening when the Fugitive Slave Act was the law of the land. Technically all the Healys were runaway slaves subject to apprehension and the law's subsequent Draconian consequences. Hugh was the only one of the Healy siblings to ever return to Georgia. By returning in 1851 to retrieve three youngest siblings he placed himself at great personal risk. Under the Fugitive Slave Act, a Black person living north of the Maxon Dixon line was at great personal risk. But the risk of a Black person, technically a runaway, returning to Macon Georgia! O'Toole goes on to chronicle the many achievements and to a lesser extent the disappointments of the Healy clan. I won't list them in this review. Read them for yourself. But the title, *PASSING FOR WHITE* give us a hint of the Healys's lives in 19th century Catholic America. According to O'Toole the Healys did not deny or hide their black origin, many know of it. But the Healys managed to redefine themselves Irish-Catholic Americans. But that's enough from me. O'Toole's *Passing for White* .. Is a fascinating, well written, and well-researched (34 pages of end notes and a 17 page Bibliography) work. I don't want to give away the entire book's content. Learn for yourself about this distinguished Irish-American and African-American family. Ed Murphy FALLS CHURCH VA

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