

Imitation of Life:

A Study of Miscegenation through Politics, Poetry, and Perception

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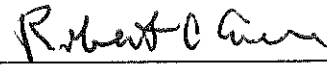
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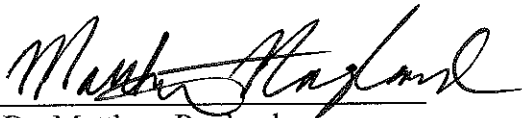
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Glory to God in the highest! I know that this would not have been possible without the favor, grace, and mercy of the God I serve. I could not begin to describe how grateful I am for storms and darkness because it showed me only He could calm the seas and remind me of my light. He gave me a gift I am privileged to use to manifest and grow the Kingdom.

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It is an honor for me to dedicate this thesis to my mother, who was born into a world that often used her color to determine her character, yet she never faltered. Her love for the skin she is in motivated me to choose this topic and explore the world of the multiracial child and family. Her love and support have been a guiding factor in my educational endeavors. They counted us out, but you've done great. I'm proud to have you, with your white skin and straight/ curly hair and mysterious lineage, as my mother. Thank you.

I would also like to dedicate this to my daughter. You changed my life forever, but it did not change the dreams I had for myself and you. I want you to always know that, regardless of any situation life might bring you to, there is nothing God can't bring you through. Trust in the process of life, Lizzie Bug and know that mommy will always be there.

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Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	5
CHAPTER 1: LAWS AND CASES	10
PACE V. ALABAMA	12
MCLAUGHLIN V. FLORIDA.....	15
LOVING V. VIRGINIA	17
CHAPTER 2: POETRY	20
MISCEGENATION- NATASHA TRETHERWEY.....	21
PASSING- TOI DERRICOTTE.....	25
MULATTO- LANGSTON HUGHES.....	28
MULATTO- ROXANE BETH JOHNSON.....	34
CHAPTER 3: PASSING	36
PLESSY V. FERGUSON	40
CHAPTER 4: THE BATTLE WITHIN	45
MISCEGENATION BALLS.....	46
HIGH SOCIETY BLACK CULTURE	48
CHAPTER 5: MISCEGENATION TODAY	55
CONCLUSION	59
BIBLIOGRAPHY	61

Introduction

Is it possible to “imitate” life? Is it possible to model life after someone or something else? The term imitate can be defined as “to try to follow the manner, style, character, etc., of or take as a model”¹. It is a common concept to want to imitate the lives of role models, like famous writers or sports players. It is also common to model life after philanthropists and even religious figures. However, what about imitating the lives of people of a different race? Imagine having the ability to copy the lifestyle of another race and live that way, in secret, forever. Though this may be a strange concept, there were and still are people who live with this form of imitation as their reality.

Miscegenation has been used to mainly explain interracial relations between Europeans and Africans. The term miscegenation is “a mixture of races; especially: marriage, cohabitation, or sexual intercourse between a white person and a member of another race”.² Though, a frequent act, this was not openly welcomed and accepted by the public. State laws attempted by any means to prevent miscegenation couples from being together in any form. States like Alabama had laws that stated, “If any white person and any Negro, or the descendant of any Negro, to the third generation inclusive, though one ancestor of each generation was a white person, intermarry or live in adultery or fornication with each other, each of them must on conviction be imprisoned in the penitentiary, or sentenced to hard labor for the county for not less than two nor more than

¹ “Imitate”. Dictionary.com. Dictionary.com Unabridged. Random House, Inc. (accessed: November 2, 2017).<http://www.dictionary.com/browse/imitate>

²“Miscegenation.” Merriam-Webster.com. (Accessed August 31, 2016).
<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/miscegenation>.

seven years”.³ This is just one of many anti-miscegenation laws established across the nation that shared in the belief that those of African and European descent engaging in relations and marriages were detrimental to the white family culture.

**The Direct Effect of Miscegenation
on Innocent Women—and Babies**

This is a subject about which people have thought it “improper” to talk, or even think. The result is shown in figures—to it is due 65 per cent. of the surgical operations on good women and one-third of all blindness in babies; it is ten times as contagious as leprosy, and causes more deaths than tuberculosis—and it thrives only because it is tabooed in speech. Plain and public words are necessary. The story is told in PEARSON'S MAGAZINE for February. It is a revelation of the effect of the depravity of man and the thoughtlessness of youth. It will offend prudes, but right is always right. It is the most important story to young men and women that has been printed. Buy this magazine now.

What the Central Bank plan means to you is set forth in the same magazine—a comprehensive explanation of the whole thing, its advantages and its risks to the average man. The great question of the **Habit** of employers toward the **injured working man** is discussed from both points of view, that of the boss and of the man. Another article includes a definite statement from women of the particular advantages that this country will gain by allowing them to vote—the first authoritative explanation of just what laws the women think should be changed. The effect of a prohibitory liquor law on general business as shown by the experience of the State of Kansas is described by an impartial observer. John B. Stanton writes of the best way to invest money, and Zach Moore tells the life story of Erman J. Ridgway. The fiction is supplied by Arthur Stringer, E. Phillips Oppenheim, Walter Prichard Eaton, Owen Johnson, George Pattullo, Oscar Graeve, Allan Updegraff, and William McLeod Balne. You can't beat that list, and the stories are better even than you think.

Pearson's
Magazine for February
THE LIVEST MAGAZINE THIS MONTH

Figure 1 An article from Pearson's Magazine attempting to identify and explain the effects of miscegenation on women and children ⁴

The term miscegenation may be used to describe the performance, but there are many terms to describe a person who is born of this process. Common names given to

³ Werner Sollors. *Interracialism: Black-white Intermarriage in American History, Literature, and Law*. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000): 25.

⁴ Connell O'Donovan. "I would confine them to their own species": LDS Historical Rhetoric & Praxis Regarding Marriage Between Whites and Blacks." *Mormons and Black-White Intermarriage*. March 28, 2009. (Accessed March 31, 2016). http://www.connellodonovan.com/black_white_marriage.html.

people of mixed races were names like mulatto, quadroon, which describes a mixed person that is one fourth black, biracial, multiracial, interracial, half-breed, and many others. Those were many of the names used by government officials like census takers in the 1800s. The classification of human beings according to their skin color and other physical characteristics is an important subject from a sociological view, but it is still one which has yielded a great deal of confusion and controversy.

The South expressed much discontent with whites and blacks being together in public places, which leaves no room for imagination when it comes to the idea of blacks and whites being together privately and intimately.

However, even with the discontent, it is evident that during the establishment of America, race mixing was not as uncommon as the government officials desired it to be. The act was simply hidden from the public until children were born. The slave trade brought Africans to the Americas to labor for the European settlers, while even before then European settlers were engaging in relations with the Native Americans. Once the slaves were granted their freedom, it illuminated the actions that many whites were desperate to hide, which had become something all too common. James Hugo Johnston stated, “the mixture of races began to take place almost as soon as the first Negroes and white men came into contact in America.”⁵ That statement is a brief explanation to the beginning of race mixing between blacks and whites.

Race relations have been a lingering, but concealed issue for many centuries in America. Many of the most notable black leaders of the last century were of European descent, from Booker T. Washington and Frederick Douglass (both of whom had white

⁵ James Hugo Johnston. *Race Relations in Virginia and miscegenation in the South 1776-1860*. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1970), 167.

fathers) to W.E.B. Du Bois, Malcolm X, Langston Hughes, and Martin Luther King, Jr. (he had an Irish grandmother as well as American Indian ancestry). From slavery to the Civil Rights Movement in 1963, to the Black Lives Matter movement today, race always has been and continues to be a pressing issue and a plaguing topic both socially and personally.

Being classified as “black” has never truly been a desirable classification when it came to equal rights and treatment. Whites expressed their hatred from a diversity of torment that ranged from ridicule, tarring, beatings, lynching, and other brutal attacks, to murder. If there was so much hatred towards the people of the opposite race, how did people born with both black and white bloodlines emerge? For those descendants of both African and European descent, life was exceptionally difficult for them. People of mixed races suffered from prejudices from both black and white individuals. They were too black to be white and too white to be black and thus, not accepted as both. Desperate for a sense of belonging, many people of mixed races, black and white, would have to choose (if their complexion allowed) what race they wanted to be. This method was known as passing.

In this “Land of Opportunity”, all opportunities are not always available to all people. The African American population has experienced, for many centuries, many prejudices. Being defined as black was not a classification many African Americans were proud to be, for many years, with the treatment received from the “more superior” whites. Rates of black-white marriages increased from 65,000 in 1970 to 422,000 in 2005, according to Census Bureau figures. Factoring in all racial combinations, Stanford University sociologist Michael Rosenfeld calculates more than 7 percent of America's 59

million married couples in 2005 were interracial, compared to less than 2 percent in 1970. According to these statistics then, race mixing has not been deterred and is steadily increasing.

Miscegenation is one of the most unknown terms to society as discovered in research. After explanation, even the most scholarly and educated individuals still cannot seem to pronounce or comprehend the word. Although miscegenation could not be prevented due to the basic human instincts of men and women, the states tried their best to find ways to prevent reproduction. The term itself originated in 1863 in a pamphlet titled *Miscegenation: The Theory of the Blending of the Races, Applied to the American White Man and Negro*, which was a hoax written by two men of the democratic party to mock the republican party. The term is now used to describe the act of race mixing, although it is not commonly used outside of academia. It is also not as prevalent since the concept behind the word has become a social norm, except for the few states in the last decade dismantling miscegenation laws.

Chapter 1: Laws and Cases

Concerning miscegenation, modern society has been as accepting as a place with a history of systematic racism can allow, though still many people struggle with the idea and concept of multicultural children and have created many barriers to prevent this from happening. Though it appears the product (biracial children) of miscegenation seems the excuse for some of those who disapprove, it does not hide the seemingly ever-underlying issue: not wanting blacks and whites to be together-let alone have children together-to prevent the confusion of passing with the intent to keep the more inferior race in their place. For some, the confusion produces anger and played an important role in sufficient support of miscegenation in the South.

These laws were developed to help maintain the “correct” breeding methods for the country to escape a path of destruction. The mixture of "higher racial types," such as Nordic whites, with other "lower" races would inevitably result in the decline of the higher race.⁶ 28 states agreed to establish a law against interracial marriage and six other states made it a part of their constitution. Even in the last decade, people still practice these laws. In October 2009, an article on the decision of Justice of the Peace Keith Bardwell in the French Quarters who still refused to marry interracial couples. He concluded that “most of black society does not readily accept offspring of such relationships, and neither does white society”.⁷ He refuses to aid in people creating “difficult” lives for the children of interracial marriages. However, many would question

⁶ Paul Lambardo. "Eugenic Laws Against Race Mixing." *Social Origins of Eugenics*. Accessed June 10, 2016. <http://www.eugenicsarchive.org/html/eugenics/essay7text.html>.

⁷ Karla F. C. Holloway. *Legal fictions: Constituting Race, Composing Literature*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 26.

his right to make that decision for the parents of those unborn children. Keith Bradwell may be a recent account of miscegenation laws being used to keep humans from experiencing a natural part of human existence: love.

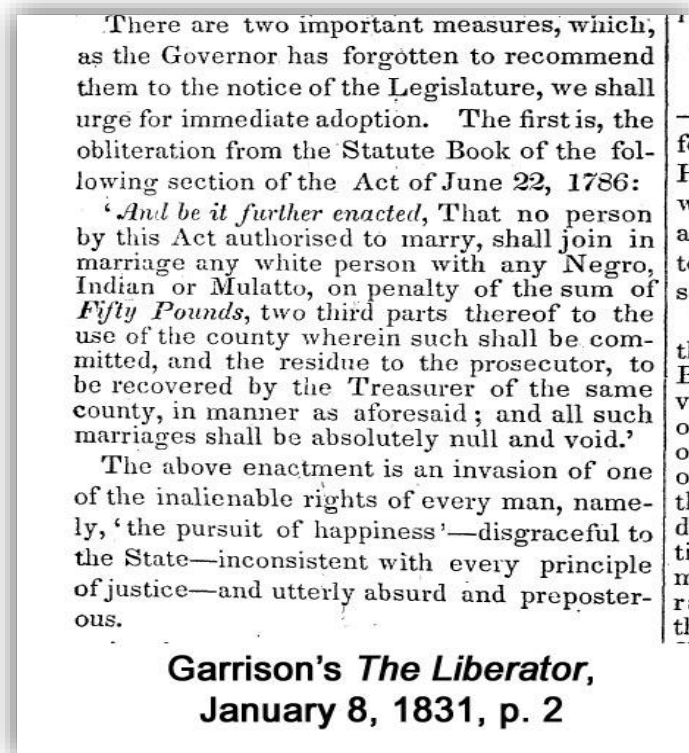


Figure 2 A section of William Lloyd Garrison's abolitionist paper, *The Liberator*, appealing to end the law against interracial marriage forcing offenders to pay a fine⁸

There are many cases with different views on miscegenation. To gain a better understanding, a review of four prominent cases will provide insight to the legal ramifications of miscegenation laws. Cases including *Pace v. Alabama*, *McLaughlin v. Florida* and *Loving v. Virginia* were trademark cases that changed history and laws against miscegenation. The world was forever changed by these cases and allowed for a

⁸Connell O'Donovan. "I would confine them to their own species": LDS Historical Rhetoric & Praxis Regarding Marriage Between Whites and Blacks." *Mormons and Black-White Intermarriage*. (March 28, 2009. Accessed March 31, 2016. http://www.connellodonovan.com/black_white_marriage.html).

multitude of couples to finally be come out of hiding. These cases exposed discriminatory factors that hindered relationships between blacks and whites.

Pace v. Alabama (1883)

In Alabama, just as many other states, there were laws created to protect the white population. Alabama saw race mixing as an abomination and a disgrace to God; but, Alabama was not focused on the white man, it was of the black man. Not only that, but in the “Bible Belt” any perceived violation to the Bible was more than a moral problem, but a legal one as well. Section 4184 of the Code of Alabama provides “if any man and woman live together in adultery or fornication, each of them must, on the first conviction of the offense, be fined not less than \$100, and may also be imprisoned in the county jail or sentenced to hard labor for the county for not more than six months. On the second conviction for the offense, with the same person, the offender must be fined not less than \$300, and may be imprisoned in the county jail, or sentenced to hard labor for the county, for not more than 12 months; and for a third or any subsequent conviction with the same person, must be imprisoned in the penitentiary or sentenced to hard labor for the county for two years”.⁹

Codes including this one, allowed state officials to regulate and control relations between all individuals of color. They assumed that adding fines and jail sentencing would prevent people from violating the law and refrain from intermingling with opposite races. They too soon learned that free blacks and whites would disregard the laws and slave master

⁹ Werner Sollors. *Interracialism: Black-white Intermarriage in American History, Literature, and Law*. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000), 25.

made the laws, so the penalties did not always apply to them when raping black women on the plantation.



Though the Bible was a strong foundation for the South, many of its guiding factors in earlier decades were racially motivated. These state officials feared the black man would try to forcibly have sex with white women. If a black man, free or slave raped or attempted to rape a white woman, he was legally subject to the death penalty.¹⁰ These laws were established to create a fear to prevent potential violators from assuming it would be acceptable to forget blacks and whites were not allowed to communicate in an intimate manner. Alabama did not abolish the laws against interracial marriage until November of 2000. According to US Today, “the vote removed the dubious distinction of Alabama being the only state in the country with such a relic from the segregated South

¹⁰ Julie Novkov. "Racial Constructions: The Legal Regulation of Miscegenation in Alabama, 1890-1934." *Law and History Review* 20, no. 2 (2002), 231.

remaining in its constitution”.¹¹ Alabama has always been recalled for its racial division and prejudice attitudes towards African Americans for more than two centuries.

In some instances, there were few rebels who would go against all laws and persecution for the sake of their desires, without condition. For example, according to Cornell Law School, “in the case of *Pace v. Alabama* in November 1881, Tony Pace, a negro man, and Mary J. Cox, a white woman, were indicted under section 4189, in a circuit court of Alabama, for living together in a state of adultery or fornication, and were tried, convicted, and sentenced, each to two years' imprisonment in the state penitentiary”.¹² Although Tony Pace and Mary J. Cox were not married, it is clear from the court case that a black man having a sexual relationship with a white woman was unacceptable.

Though the state would find this behavior an extreme violation of the laws in place, it was argued that 14th amendment rights had been violated. According to the U.S. Constitution, states that “no state shall deny to any person the equal protection of the law.” Pace’s case was brought on writ of error, which is issued by an appellate court where a case was tried, requiring that the records be sent to appellate court for examination of error. The alleged error of the case was that there was discrimination for the fact that he was a black man.

The Alabama Supreme Court ruled that the law did not discriminate because legally the law was for both blacks and whites. According to Ed Grabanowski of

¹¹ "Alabama Repeals Century-old Ban on Interracial Marriages." CNN. November 8, 2008. Accessed March 27, 2017.

<http://archives.cnn.com/2000/ALLPOLITICS/stories/11/07/alabama.interracial/>.

¹² "Pace v. State of Alabama." LII / Legal Information Institute. Accessed February 1, 2017. <https://www.law.cornell.edu/supremecourt/text/106/583>.

HowStuffWorks, “the case appealed all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court, which determined that protecting the institution of marriages was valid interest for the state, and that the threat of interracial relationships would cause serious harm to “white marriages””.¹³ The laws on fornication and adultery in place were said to be both for anyone regardless of race; however, the anti-miscegenation laws were a form of discrimination especially when those are only in place to prevent white marriages from being overcome and the lineage of the “pure” European blood lines would not be affected.

McLaughlin v. Florida (1964)

Ruling for this case stood for 81 years until a similar case in 1964, *McLaughlin v. Florida*, helped weaken the court’s decision in *Pace v. Alabama*. In 1964, this case was opened and recorded little information about the parties involved, but it was a pivotal case for anti-miscegenation laws across the United States. Florida’s goal for the statute against cohabitation of Black and Whites was thought to prevent indecency in sexual relationships regarding extramarital relations and/ or promiscuity. However, the courts found that there was no justification for banning this behavior only to those who were in Black/White relationships. This case made the color of an individual’s skin a deciding factor of their sexual misconduct being regarded as a criminal offense.

Like other states, Florida created their own anti-miscegenation laws. Florida statute 798.05 reads, “any negro man and white woman, or any white man and negro woman, who are not married to each other, who shall habitually live in and occupy in the

¹³ Ed Grabianowski. "10 Overturned Supreme Court Cases." 6: *Pace v. Alabama* (1883) – 10 Overturned Supreme Court Cases | HowStuffWorks. (November 10, 2010. Accessed June 4, 2016. <https://money.howstuffworks.com/10-overturned-supreme-court-cases5.htm>)

nighttime the same room shall each be punished by imprisonment not exceeding twelve months, or by fine not exceeding five hundred dollars". The problem with this statute is that "no other Florida statute penalized precisely the same conduct when engaged in by members of the same race"¹⁴ The act would have been considered legal if both parties were white or black, which makes this law discriminatory and violated the 13th and 14th amendment.

This case's ruling was opposite of *Pace v. Alabama*, with a 9-0 unanimous ruling that the fornication law was in violation of these amendments. Justice Marshall Harlan expressed his agitation regarding the fact that Florida's law banning interracial marriage was not addressed for its discrimination years ago. Another Justice, Potter Stewart, wrote, "It is not possible for state law to be valid under our Constitution which makes the criminality of an act depend upon the race of the actor"¹⁵ Justice Stewart offered an opinion that would have easily caused heads to turn because his views went against the way of the public.

The *McLaughlin* case declared the concept that a person's race was suspect by the Constitution and could only be justifiable if it found to be necessary to serve a legitimate state interest, at which no Justice could find a point where that could be necessary to do, making the notion invalid and unnecessary. "The application of criminal statutes must be even handed; regulating the particular conduct of one race and not another, solely because of race, is unconstitutional"¹⁶ This case was demanding equality in penalty and

¹⁴ "*McLaughlin v. Florida* 379 U.S. 184 (1964)." Justia Law. (Accessed April 30, 2016.) <https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/379/184/case.html>.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ "*Loving v. Virginia* 388 U.S. 1 (1967)." Justia Law. (Accessed March 31, 2017.) <https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/388/1/case.html#F1>.

persecution, since two parties were involved in the same said crime, they should both be held accountable. Not only that, but choosing specific races to be subjected to this law violated their rights as people. Rachel Moran notes, “through [this] clandestine attack on interracial relations, whites were able to send a clear message that political equality would not dismantle the color line. Restrictions on sex, marriage, and family would continue to be a cornerstone in defining racial differences.”¹⁷ Though there were many attempts try to demolish interracial relationship, none were successful.

Loving v. Virginia (1967)

It seems unsettling that one of the first places in America to record interracial marriage with Pocahontas and John Rolfe creating the “Pocahontas Exception” if a person was a descendent of the Native American princess and European explorer. Brendan Wolfe of the Encyclopedia Virginia noted, “Some estimated that as many as 20,000 white Virginians possessed small amounts of “Indian blood,” which would, under this revision, make them legally “colored.” In response to these fears, on February 12 the House amended Norris's proposed revision, allowing the definition of a white person to include one-eighth or less “Indian blood”—as opposed to one-sixteenth in the 1924 act—as long as the person has no other “demonstrable admixture of the blood of any non-white race.”¹⁸

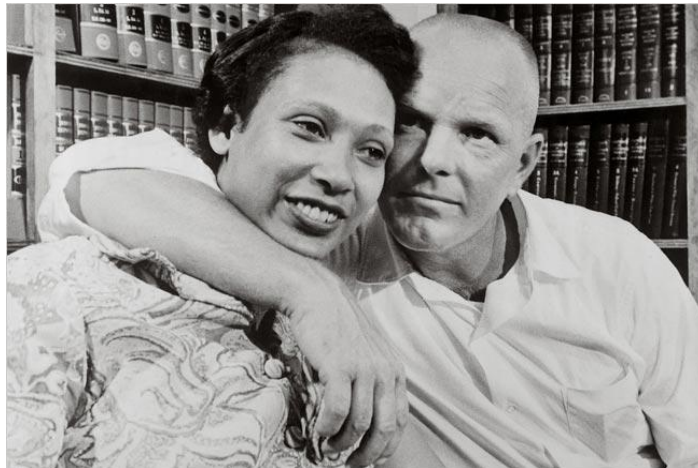
Ironically, Virginia would be among the last of the states to legalize marriage between a black and white individual. Among the many occurrences of miscegenation throughout

¹⁷Rachel F. Moran. *Interracial Intimacy: The Regulation of Race and Romance*. (London: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), 27.

¹⁸ Wolfe, Brendan. Racial Integrity Laws (1924–1930). (Accessed October 31, 2017.) https://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/Racial_Integrity_Laws_of_the_1920s#stareentry.

history, there was none more extraordinary than *Loving v. Virginia*. The case of *Loving v. Virginia* in 1967 eventually overturned the ruling of *Pace v. Alabama*.

Richard Loving, a 23-year-old construction worker, met 17-year-old Mildred Jeter in 1952. Though Jim Crow Laws were in full effect, the area they resided in offered very little reprimand for different races interacting with one another. She and Richard began dating and she became pregnant at 18. With a child on the way, the couple decided to get married. Their marriage was hindered by Virginia's Racial Integrity Act of 1924, so they left Virginia for Washington, D.C. to get married. The newly-wed could not return home to Virginia to raise their family. Unfortunately, their honeymoon phase was quickly interrupted by the sheriff. The Lovings exclaimed that they were married; however, the sheriff informed them both that their marriage license was invalid in the State of Virginia.



Mildred and Richard Loving were arrested under Virginia state law. The case was presented to the courts without questioning, according to the U.S. Supreme Court, “whether a statutory scheme adopted by the State of Virginia to prevent marriages between persons violates the Equal Protection and Due Process Clauses of the Fourteenth Amendment”.¹⁹

¹⁹ "Loving v. Virginia." LII / Legal Information Institute. (Accessed January 7, 2017.) <https://www.law.cornell.edu/supremecourt/text/388/1>.

According to Virginia, their marriage violated state law, so Mildred and Richard Loving pleaded guilty to the charges and received a yearlong prison sentence. However, the judge offered a suspended sentence for 25 years if, and only if, Mildred and Richard would leave Virginia and not return together at the same time for 25 years. The Loving's, according to Virginia code, were convicted of leaving the state to evade the law and being married in a state where interracial marriage was prohibited.

The courts failed to make note that Mildred Loving would have been part of the "Pocahontas Exception" since she claimed to only be Native American with no African lineage to the public, but to her lawyers she only identified as black. Of course, with the racial tension in Virginia, Mildred Loving knew that not claiming to be any form of African descent was beneficial to her. Regardless of what she chose to self-identify as, the case brought before the courts had all the information they needed to go against the Loving family. Richard Loving chose not to appear at court, but instead informed his attorney to "tell the court, I love my wife and it is just not fair that I cannot live with her in Virginia".²⁰ Surprisingly, Supreme Court Justices agreed and June 12, 1967 the courts ruled that any laws against interracial marriages were deemed unconstitutional. This case is celebrated annual as "Loving Day" and interracial couples and mixed-race offspring express their gratitude for the ruling of the cases that allowed for the opportunity for their ability to be married freely, without reproach.

²⁰ Arica L. Coleman. "Loving v Virginia: What You Didn't Know About Its History." Time. June 10, 2017. (Accessed August 1, 2017). <http://time.com/4362508/loving-v-virginia-personas/>.

Chapter 2: Poetry

“The first Negroes were brought to Jamestown in 1619, and in 1630 we find the first recorded step taken in the matter of race intermixture”.²¹ Many white men who participated in the act of reproducing with black women were whipped and jailed as well as the blacks they were with. “Virginia was the first state to create a law prohibiting intermarriage. Maryland followed in 1662, along with Massachusetts in 1705, North Carolina in 1715, Delaware in 1721, and Pennsylvania in 1725.”²² Children born as mulatto to a slave were slaves as well.

There are often stories of slave owners who would provide for and rear their biracial children just as if they were being raised along with his other children, and they were only treated as slaves and such when the master had guest. In the novel, *The Land*, written by Mildred D. Taylor, she tells the story of her family tree and the miscegenation act that took place between her great-great grandmother and her owner. She makes a nonfiction account to tell the story of her great-grandfather who was born as a product of miscegenation and how his father treated him and his sister. Taylor’s books are a trilogy connection to a long family tree of the stories told to her by her family. Literary works are beneficial to helping others gain perspective and insight to complicated situation. In terms of miscegenation, poetry provides a personal account or story to express and define miscegenation. Each poem selected below provides the reader with some knowledge of what arguments miscegenation develops.

²¹ Johnston, 166.

²² Ibid.

“Miscegenation”- Natasha Trethewey

*“In 1965 my parents broke two laws of Mississippi;
they went to Ohio to marry, returned to Mississippi.*

*They crossed the river into Cincinnati, a city whose name
begins with a sound like sin, the sound of wrong—mis in Mississippi.*

*A year later they moved to Canada, followed a route the same
as slaves, the train slicing the white glaze of winter, leaving Mississippi.*

*Faulkner’s Joe Christmas was born in winter, like Jesus, given his name
for the day he was left at the orphanage, his race unknown in Mississippi.*

*My father was reading War and Peace when he gave me my name.
I was born near Easter, 1966, in Mississippi.*

*When I turned 33 my father said, It’s your Jesus year—you’re the same
age he was when he died. It was spring, the hills green in Mississippi.*

*I know more than Joe Christmas did. Natasha is a Russian name—
though I’m not; it means Christmas child, even in Mississippi.”²³*

Natasha Trethewey’s poem “Miscegenation” explains in the first line that “in 1965 my parents broke two laws of Mississippi” (1-2). The next line explains what those laws were: getting married and coming back to Mississippi as a married couple. Readers could try to understand what would be the problem in this couple getting married, but the title gives it away. The laws in 1965 prevented her multiracial parents from being married, so they left the state to do so and then returned to where the act is considered illegal. The first line of this poem is like the Loving v. Virginia case, but it occurred two years after the year her parents got married. This piece shines light on the idea that there were other couples of miscegenation breaking the law long before the significant cases

²³ Natasha Trethewey. "Miscegenation by Natasha Trethewey." Poetry Foundation. 2007. (Accessed March 1, 2016).

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/55929/miscegenation-56d237f78238f>.

were used to change history. The question remains” What made those cases more appealing to the public eye? Though that question may never have an answer, Trethewey makes it pertinent to state the year in which her parents broke these laws.

Trethewey goes further to express her thought on the fact that her parents had to cross a river to get to Cincinnati, which she noted, “begins with a sound like sin, the sound of wrong in Mississippi” (3-4). There are two ways to analyze this line. The first being that she signifies Cincinnati with “sin” as because it was considered a sin for her parents to be together or another could be her parents did not want to live in sin by being unwed and being together, so they decided to get married. She also expresses how the sound “sin” is the same sound of “wrong” in Mississippi because their sin of loving each other was “wrong” in Mississippi for the laws they were breaking. It could also be considered Mississippi is wrong to deny her parents the ability to be married and make them resort to living in sin and there was error in their judgment to penalize them for following a natural concept and making it unnatural. Her views of “mis”- wrong also could apply to miscegenation as well. In Mississippi, miscegenation is a wrong act and using it as the title of the poem brings light to something many saw as wrong, but she found it to be “right” title for her poem.

In addition, the author interprets the meaning of her name, which means the same thing everywhere she goes, including Mississippi. She asserts, “I know more than Joe Christmas did. Natasha is a Russian name-/ though I’m not; it means “Christmas child, even in Mississippi” (13-14). This stanza is important because it acknowledges the ancestry of her name to her readers. Trethewey informs the reader that “Natasha” is Russian; it is neither English to allow society to assume that her parents attempted to aid

in her ability to pass, nor is it African, which would have yielded prejudices for her in both cultural realms. She knows her parents, more than Joe Christmas could admit. However, even that still does made her an orphan to society by race, not biology. People who have a mixed-race background often find it difficult to find belonging in either worlds, which creates a “societal orphan”. Mixed race individuals often feel confused and isolated; however, Trethewey eliminates confusion by acknowledging her name’s origin and meaning (her father *chose* her name while reading War and Peace, illustrating the stability she has as an individual), her knowledge of her ancestry by noting she knows she is not Russian, but regardless, Mississippi knows her name’s meaning, even if it is an illusion of her race.

Furthermore, Trethewey makes a reference to William Faulkner’s Light in August. She writes, “Faulkner’s Joe Christmas was born in winter, like Jesus, given his name/ for the day he was left at the orphanage, his race unknown in Mississippi” (7-8). The reference to Joe Christmas explains he knew nothing of his “supposed” ancestors. He has no identity until it was born that Christmas night. This insufficient knowledge lead Christmas to live stuck in the liminal phase of neither black nor white; yet, forever assuming what his background. In retrospect, his circumstances are like that other African slave-no name (except what was given to him by owners), the possession of nothing, not even themselves, and the carrying of internal tension and pressure throughout history. Christmas was a drifter, in some sense, trying to escape the ridicule he might face if he were ever exposed for his alleged African lineage. His internal tension and pressure comes from attempting to live a paranoid life in a world of social division also possessing a tormented culture much like the South. His relation to Jesus Christ,

other than shared initials and his last name being the time of Jesus' birth, he shares in his crucifixion around the same age. Though Jesus died for the sins of mankind, Joe Christmas died for his own. Trethewey, noting that her birth was near Easter, acts as a "resurrection" to the many stories like Joe Christmas' of people lost without identity and she is aware that because she knows her background she will not internally die from confusion and isolation.

Natasha Trethewey provides an insight to miscegenation that many are unaware. So many are misinformed of their heritage and spend their entire lives uncertain and seeking answers to find an identity. Being born into miscegenation, she adheres to the truth that her parents were breaking laws and yet, found the historical reference to them leaving for Canada like slaves for their freedom to be together. This poem is a primary example of the effects of miscegenation when children are informed versus when society can determine identity.

“Passing”- Toi Derricotte

A professor invites me to his “Black Lit” class; they’re reading Larson’s Passing. One of the black students says, “Sometimes light-skinned blacks think they can fool other blacks, but I can always tell,” looking right through me.

After I tell them I am black, I ask the class, “Was I passing when I was just sitting here, before I told you?” A white woman shakes her head desperately, as if I had deliberately deceived her. She keeps examining my face, then turning away as if she hopes I’ll disappear. Why presume “passing” is based on what I leave out and not what she fills in?

*In one scene in the book, in a restaurant, she’s “passing,” though no one checked her at the door—
“Hey, you black?”*

My father, who looked white, told me this story: every year when he’d go to get his driver’s license, the man at the window filling out the form would ask, “White or black?” pencil poised, without looking up.

My father wouldn’t pass, but he might use silence to trap a devil.

When he didn’t speak, the man would look up at my father’s face.

*“What did he write?”
my father quizzed me.”²⁴*

Toi Derricotte’s “Passing”, from her larger work, *Tender*, addressed the complex concept of passing in the subject and the beholder’s eyes. She emphasizes the underlying

²⁴ Toi Derricotte. "Passing." Poetry Foundation. 1997. (Accessed April 24, 2016). <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/42878/passing-56d22186a4e29>.

importance that both black and white society places on categorizing race using both public and private experience throughout her life.

The class reading Larsen's "Passing" on the day Toi happens to get invited to the Black Lit class is ironic and a set-up by the professor. She appears to be a guinea pig more than a guest, being used to exemplify to the class how easy passing can be and how it is often too difficult to determine a person's race. However, she quickly learns that she is not "fooling anyone" as a student states, while looking through her, apparently determined to make it known that those of mixed race are unable to hide. Strangely, she made no real attempt to pass on purpose and was not asked to identify her racial background, as if she was expected to wear a "Hello, I'm Black" name tag. This begs the question to the reader of whether mixed race people should self-identify simply to satiate others' curiosity.

Derricotte acknowledges the frustration of race assumption and the reactions of those who feel they are "deceived". For example, she explains how she seemed to have angered the people in the "Black Lit" class because no one knew her race until she informed them. She stated, "A white woman shakes her head desperately, as if / I had deliberately deceived her" (10-12). It seems obvious that the woman would not expect her to disclose that information, but when forced to face her incorrect assumption of Derricotte's race, her reaction is one of denial and bewilderment, as if she had been purposefully fooled. Derricotte also writes, "One of the black students says, "Sometimes light-skinned blacks think they can fool other blacks, but I can always tell", looking right through me" (2-4), implying that she is unrecognizable to either group.

She further illustrates the concept of deceit in racial identity with the example of her father getting his license and experiencing a common example of inherent racial assumption. Her father, “who looked white” but “wouldn’t pass”, when asked, choosing instead to “use silence to trap a devil” (18-19). This use of silence provided insight to how a bystander would prepare to treat them based on their assumption of their race.

“Mulatto”- Langston Hughes

*“I am your son, white man!
Georgia dusk
And the turpentine woods.
One of the pillars of the temple fell.
You are my son!
Like Hell!
The moon over the turpentine woods.
The Southern night
Full of stars,
Great big yellow stars.
What's a body but a toy?
Juicy bodies
Of nigger wenches
Blue black
Against black fences.
O, you little bastard boy,
What's a body but a toy?
The scent of pine wood stings the soft night air.
What's the body of your mother?
Silver moonlight everywhere.
Sharp pine scent in the evening air.
A nigger night,
A nigger joy,
A little yellow
Bastard boy. Naw, you ain't my brother.
Niggers ain't my brother.
Not ever.
Niggers ain't my brother.
The Southern night is full of stars,
Great big yellow stars.
O, sweet as earth,
Dusk dark bodies
Give sweet birth
To little yellow bastard boys.
Git on back there in the night,
You ain't white
The bright stars scatter everywhere.
Pine wood scent in the evening air.
A nigger night,*

A nigger joy. I am your son, white man!
A little yellow
*Bastard boy.*²⁵

²⁵ Langston Hughes, Arnold Rampersad, and David Roessel. *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*. New York: Vintage Books, (1995). 100-101.

Langston Hughes' poem "Mulatto" is a story of a young man expressing to his white father that he is his son, only to be rejected by him in the end. Langston Hughes, a prominent poet during the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s and 30s, wrote many poems regarding African American oppression and cultural division in White America. His poem "Mulatto" which was later made into a play, may not have been one of Hughes' most well-known pieces, but it expresses in detail the difficulties of parental acknowledgement, especially from white fathers. Hughes, a mulatto himself (his paternal great-grandfathers were white slave owners), seems to have created this poem as a voice for the mulatto slave. There were many slave masters who had relations with the female slaves resulting in mulatto children, who, though half white, were still counted and treated as slaves by their white fathers.

Hughes begins the poem with the narrator expressing to his father, a white man, that he is his son. Hughes begins to describe the night he has conversation with the father who stated harshly there was no way he could be his son. "What's a body but a toy? /juicy bodies/of Nigger wenches/blue black/ against black fences/what's a body but a toy?". The father has now objectified the female body, which is essentially what many slave owners did to them slaves. These people were objects to be used and played with and sold off when they had gotten to a place where there is no physical need. The context of the piece expresses how the slave was simply entertainment for the master, and the slave served the purpose of being whatever his master needed.

However, the fact that the intermingling of the slave and master had been done in secret raises the notion that the master knew that the acts they were committing were wrong. Some slave owners were married and had children. Prominent leaders in the

community and were government officials. The slave owner seems to think that he could not be his father because the black female body is nothing more than a toy. The act of being together was camouflaged to hide the miscegenation. These men did not want the public to see their sin and ruin their reputations (though, many were engaging in the same activities), so denying their children makes it, in their minds, justified.

In addition to stating that the body is nothing but a toy, the father of the poem goes further to say, “What’s the body of your mother?” (19). He wants to make the son understand that if the body is but a toy, his mother (a toy or an object), then that makes the son nothing more than an object as well. This allows the father to go on as if his son does not exist because he is nothing to him but more property.

To refer to the previous statement about the act going unseen as camouflage of black bodies and black fences, the author exposes the act by coming out of the darkness of the woods. He is told to return to the dark. The father states, “Git on back there in the night/ You ain’t white” (35-36). He undoubtedly makes this statement to exclaim that his mulatto child does not deserve to be seen in the light because he is not white. That could also be viewed as the father implying that only white people can be out in light and the son should cower back to the dark, the secret place he came from. Like many mulatto slaves, there is a dawn-like place they dwell in because their “light” skin is still visible in the dark, making that somewhere they will always be seen, and their darker than white skin in the light makes them unfit for the light with other whites.

Although Hughes is expressing, through practically the entire piece, much of the father’s disapproval on this “little yellow bastard boy” wanting recognition as a son, and

as a person, Hughes claims that regardless, “a nigger night. / A nigger joy, I am your son white man!? A little yellow/ bastard boy” (39-42). Though the father, who knows of his sexual acts, still sees no humanity in his son, the son tells him it is a black night and a black boy’s joy because that belongs to him and the right for him to admit he is his son.

To some, miscegenation was not initially an issue, not even to one of the founding fathers of this country. Southerners including Thomas Jefferson referred to slavery as a “necessary evil”²⁶, has been proven to be the father of Eston Hemings, the son of one his slaves, Sally Hemings, and assumed to have fathered her six other children. A slave owner having sexual relationships with a slave was not uncommon in the South. In fact, raping a female slave was often used as a punishment for both the husband of that slave and herself when the master saw fit to use this method. There were no safeguards to protect them from being sexually stalked, harassed, or raped, or to be used as long-term concubines by masters and overseers.²⁷ The men with authoritative positions used this power to their advantage. Some of the women could have consented to the intercourse, but even if they had not, there was still no choice. The slave men were left powerless in protecting their wives and daughters.

There was much controversy about the stories of Thomas Jefferson fathering children with his one of his slaves. It is believed that the white Jefferson family knew of his illegal offspring, but kept it hidden from the public’s knowledge.

²⁶ "A Bio. of America: Slavery - Transcript." Annenberg Learner. (Accessed November 27, 2017).

<https://www.learner.org/series/biographyofamerica/prog09/transcript/page05.html>.

²⁷ "Judgment Day: Conditions of Antebellum Slavery 1830 - 1860." PBS. (Accessed April 7, 2016). <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4p2956.html>.

In 1998, the results of DNA tests on Jefferson and Hemings descendants supported facts of the Jefferson-Hemings relationship. This new-found information was not a surprise to the black family members. They knew without a doubt that Thomas Jefferson had indulged in interracial relations, while at the same time making laws against it. "In the black community, the Jefferson-Hemings liaison stands along with the Declaration of Independence as evidence of the deeply conflicted nature of American society, and blacks' struggles with the precariousness of their existence in the United States."²⁸ DNA had proven that Thomas Jefferson did indeed have a child with Sally Hemings; if he was the father of all Sally Hemings children, that is still unknown today.



Figure 3 Descendants of Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings²⁹

²⁸ Annette Gordon-Reed. "Blacks and the Founding Fathers." PBS Frontline. (Accessed August 10, 2016.)

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/jefferson/enigma/blacks.html>.

²⁹ "Hemings, Sally (1773-1835)." The Black Past: Remembered and Reclaimed. (Accessed May 28, 2017). <http://www.blackpast.org/aah/hemings-sally-1773-1835>.

“Mulatto”- Roxane Beth Johnson

“Grandma is washing me white. I am the color of hot sand in the bleached sea light. I am a stain on the porcelain, persistent as tea. Stay in the shade. Don’t say she was the only one. Cousins opposite say: you too white. I am a night-blooming flower being pried open in the morning. My skin a curtain for a cage of bones, a blackbird coop. My heart is crusty bread, hardening. Hardening. This way, I feed my own fluttering. Under shade, the day looks like evening and I cannot bear the darkness. Don’t say, I can’t stand to be touched. Say, I stare into the sun to burn off the soiled hands that print my body with bloody ink. Don’t say, Mulatto. Say, I am the horse in Oz turning different colors, each prance brightening flesh. A curiosity. Don’t say, Bathwater spiraled down into the pipes. Say, I never did fade. Say, Skin holds the perseverance of my days. Folding, folding, the water continuously gathers, making wrinkles in a map.”³⁰

Beth Johnson’s poem, “Mulatto”, from *Jubilee*, is a piece that expresses the internalized racism often experienced by the mulatto from family members. Johnson describes her childhood as a fair skinned mulatto child in a family that either attempted to ignore or ridicule the complexion of her skin. She expresses that she is hurt by the words they say to her, and she would rather them not say them, but choose would rather a more acceptable phrase fitting to the suffering her skin color has created.

Many family members of the mulatto offspring tended to despise their light complexions, but the grandparents always seem to play a major role when it came to identify the importance of color in relation to race. Johnson proclaims in the poem, “Grandma is washing me white” (1). This line does not necessarily mean her

³⁰ Roxane Beth Johnson. "Mulatto by Roxane Beth Johnson." Poetry Foundation. 2006. (Accessed February 13, 2016). <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/54415/mulatto>.

grandmother was scrubbing her white, but in many cases, black grandparents, who experienced the subjugation and detestation, especially if they were mulatto themselves, often felt it was important to keep the skin of their grandchildren as light as possible. Dark skin was frowned upon not only by whites, but also by many high society upper class black organizations. By keeping them in the shade when playing outside, by not allowing them to adhere to “black” mannerisms and culture, in a sense, they were white washing as Johnson grandmother was attempting to do. Her being washed white could have been preparation for her to successfully pass for white in society in hopes that people would view her as “sun bleached” in enabling her to gain status and respect from both cultures.

She explains further, “Cousins/ opposite say: you too white” (2-3). This statement displays the internalized racism many blacks express when addressing people of lighter complexion. Her cousins show that even amongst the black family, one can easily become the “white” sheep” that stands out like a sore thumb. The white of her skin appears “too” much for her cousins. The point of that statement implies that she is only allowed to be “white” to a certain degree.

Poetry allowed writers to express their thoughts on their lives involving miscegenation and how it affected them thought their lifetime. Many authors could express a more personal account to miscegenation in both a positive and negative light. Poetry allows for a reader to be placed in a moment to share in the experience of the writer in hopes that the purpose will be fulfilled and, in this case, that the mask of miscegenation will be unveiled.

Chapter 3: Passing

In some cases, one might find it difficult to imagine someone making a conscious decision to spend their lives as something they are not. However, there were many incidences that proved the challenge was often accepted by many who were up to the task.

Segregation was essentially a dividing of persons by physical appearance, many of those with "white" appearances blended into the white world and in addition to racism, there was seemed to be no escaping the problems that being "black" seem to bring upon birth. So, any possibility of escape would be considered. Christian Promitzer and other editors of (Hidden) Minorities describe that, "this strategy is often called "going to the other side," "crossing over," or "passing."; the term is often used in literature and refers to the relationships between whites and blacks (i.e. passing for white), but it can also be transferred to other majority- minority contexts".³¹ The process of passing mostly began when someone of a mixed race was mistaken for another race.

This was not an uncommon act for those with light complexions to make the choice to pass themselves off as white. Once blacks noticed they could hide their black heritage; many of them used this new-found talent to their advantage. It takes significant determination and bravery to leave everything behind to pursue a life full of fear that someday someone might find out your secret.

³¹ Christian Promitzer, Klaus-Jürgen Hermanik, Eduard Staudinger . *(Hidden) minorities: language and Ethnic Identity between Central Europe and the Balkans*. Wien: Lit. (2010),46.

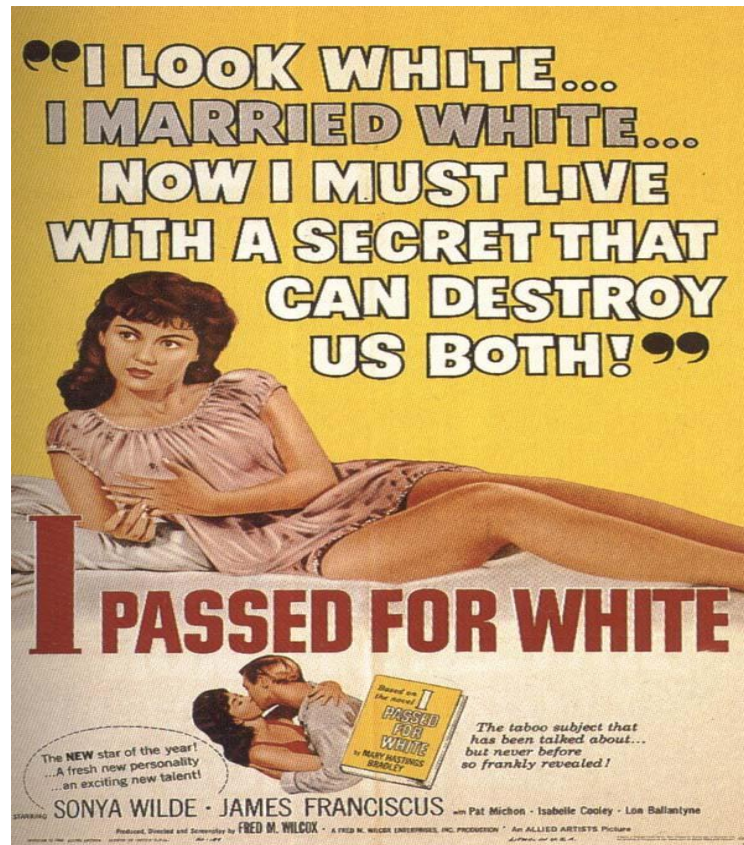


Figure 4 A movie poster for a film that brought the fears and truths of passing to the big screen in 1960 ³²

With all the issues surrounding miscegenation among whites and blacks, it can be clearly assumed the children of interracial couples were not accepted into society. What did they do to escape torment in ridicule? They began to pass themselves off as white. It seemed to more of a “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy.

If people did not question them about their race, they were certainly not going to willingly give the information. There have been reports of mulatto people living their entire lives as white, and even marrying white people and never telling anyone of their true heritage. Regarding passing, “when they[mulattoes] married whites, their children

³² Faihaa Khan. "Tragic Mulatto Trope in the context of." *Passing* by Nella Larsen. May 07, 2016. (Accessed August 14, 2017). <https://passingnellalarsenproject.wordpress.com/2016/04/21/tragic-mulatto-trope-in-the-context-of-passing/>.

became involuntary passers, completely unaware that they were in fact black under the one-drop rule”.³³

People often “passed” or “crossed over” to escape to often tragic lives of the blacks in black communities. Blacks were subjected to the worst treatment, had horrible jobs for not much pay, and had basically had no rights as human beings. So, many of the mulatto slaves and blacks would often to move to new lands and develop entirely new identities never looking back on their past.

Passing became extremely popular among the fairest of blacks for education purpose and for some, even for love. This is not to say that affluent blacks want to be white, but it certainly suggest that they have seen the benefits accorded to lighter-skinned blacks with whiter feature—who are hired more often given better jobs, and perceived as less threatening.³⁴ Still, in the richest of black communities, just as the lower-class blacks, they still experienced issues from whites. If those black passing were ever caught or “outed” by other blacks (usually those of a darker complexion were more likely to “out” them) it could be fatal.

How was life for people who had crossed over? It was basically the same as any other white man or woman. They worked, went to church, school, married whites, and had children with their spouses. It is described that, “other blacks passed temporarily, working for a few years as white to amass some savings before returning to the black community”.³⁵ Not every case of passing was permanent, the goal was simply to “pass”

³³ Moran, 45.

³⁴ Jeffrey Ogbonna Green Ogbar. *The Harlem Renaissance Revisited Politics, Arts, and Letters*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010): 47.

³⁵ Ibid, 45.

for opportunity and still return to the original roots and use the skills and money to provide for the family.

People who lived “on the other side” usually never let others know they were of another race. Often, they felt the benefits of portraying that race was greater than those of the race they were.

In many cases, some people died with their families never knowing that they were African American or of any other race. Most could figure that, since they could clearly not fit into the world of the black and brown people, they must make lifelong accommodations to tie their lives in with the whites. Most of them took their secret background with them to the grave, fearing the consequences if anyone ever found out they were not who they have been portraying to be. Can you imagine the type of punishment that may have been imposed on a person of mixed races for pretending to be a white person? Can you imagine what type of torment they would endure if a white man was then embarrassed by the fact that he had been fooled by a Negro? Moran continues to explain that, “individuals with any African ancestry traditionally were barred from all of the privileges associated with white identity. Passing became a way for some blacks to circumvent the color line without directly challenging it. Blacks used an ambiguous phenotype to integrate into white society and evade a genotypical definition of race. Yet those who passed never disabused white of their beliefs about how blacks looked and acted.”³⁶ A lost culture and identity resulted in these actions, but many felt what they would gain was far better than what they were losing.

³⁶ Moran, 47.

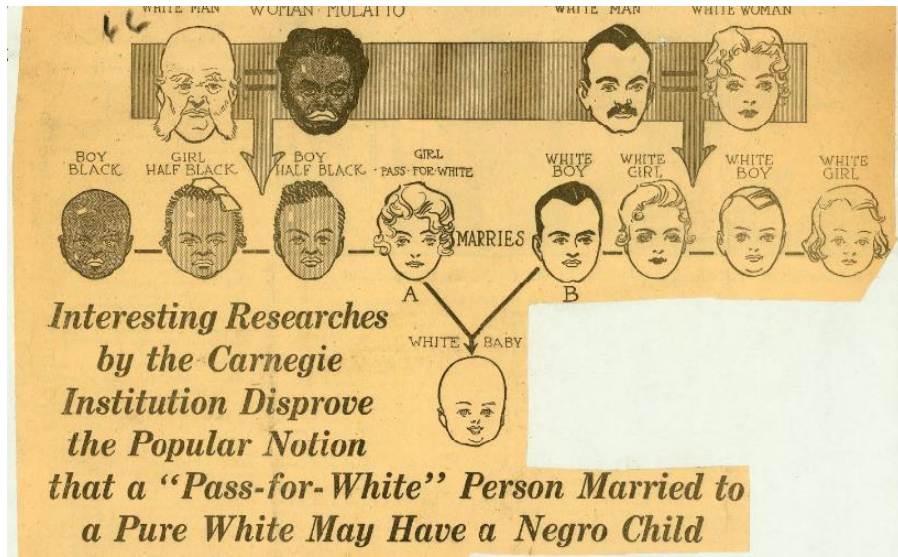


Figure 5 A family tree design to depict how a mulatto child can pass for white based on who they mate with ³⁷

Plessy v. Ferguson (1896)

One of the first reported cases of passing was the Supreme Court case of Plessy v. Ferguson. Homer Adolph Plessy purchased a first-class ticket for the East Louisiana Railroad and upon entering, told the conductor "I have to tell you that, according to Louisiana law, I am a colored man"³⁸. Homer Plessy was attempting to sit in a segregated train car for "White Only" passenger and refused to leave being that he was seven-eighths Caucasian. The surprised conductor did his duty and told the well-dressed, well-spoken, light-skinned gentleman to seat himself in the "colored car," which has the grimy accommodation just behind the engine whose wooden benches were reserved for Negroes, drunks, and neglected.

³⁷ Lambardo, Paul. "Eugenic Laws Against Race Mixing." *Social Origins of Eugenics*. (Accessed June 10, 2016).

<http://www.eugenicsarchive.org/html/eugenics/essay7text.html>.

³⁸ Leslie Vincent Tischauser. *Jim Crow Laws*. (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood, 2012), 29.

Figure 1 This depicts that the odds being stacked against Homer Plessy during the Jim Crow era and how justice was not on his side ³⁹



When Plessy refused to sit in the colored car, he set in motion a legal case that would reach the U.S. Supreme Court and reverberate for decades. Homer Plessy and his supporters were out to challenge the increasingly harsh pattern of racial segregation spreading through the Southern states since the end of Reconstruction in 1877. When their plan backfired, and it ushered in more than 60 more years of legalized racial discrimination, Plessy was arrested by the police under an 1890 Louisiana law segregating railroad car by race. He spent a night in jail, and a month later he pleaded before Judge John H. Ferguson that the law, which called for “separate but equal”

³⁹ Drgloag. "Homer Plessy 1892." YouTube. March 08, 2013. (Accessed November 28, 2017). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L5Hw4ULENg0>.

accommodations for blacks and whites, was unconstitutional under the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments to the U.S. Constitution.⁴⁰ The case depicted that even you

This is the case that made segregation legal in America. If Homer Plessy had not been an honest man, this case in history would be nonexistent. Seven-eighths Caucasian is more white than black, and it based on that information it was easy to confuse Plessy as white, but unlike other mixed-race blacks, Plessy's integrity led him to have one of the most famous court cases in U.S. history. However, it is evident, based on the image below, how easy it would be to be confused a mulatto for white and would create controversy for those who are confused and feel tricked.



Quiz from *Ebony* magazine, April 1952

Figure 6 A quiz published in *Ebony* magazine to depict how difficult it can be to tell if someone is black or not⁴¹

⁴⁰ Paraphrased from "Plessy v. Ferguson." LII / Legal Information Institute. (Accessed April 2, 2017). <https://www.law.cornell.edu/supremecourt/text/163/537>.

One of the most popular cases of passing began when Anita Florence Hemmings who took passing to an entire different level. Her story tells of how she became the first unknown black graduate from Vassar in 1893.



Figure 7 Anita Florence Hemmings successfully passed her entire college career and became the first black graduate from Vassar⁴²

Hemmings attended Vassar under the false information that she was white because she and her family knew she would be denied if she marked herself as colored on the application. She knew that with her complexion she would be able to pass to get and that is exactly what she did. Just weeks before graduation her roommate told her father she suspected that she was not white, and he investigated the information and discovered she was in fact, colored. She did graduate from Vassar, but after being outed she returned home and later married a man who passed for white himself. The two of them continued

⁴¹ "Race and Identity in Passing Films." Introduction. (Accessed July 5, 2017). <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~ma02/rodriguez/thesis/introduction.html>.

⁴² Mancini, Olivia. "Passing as White: Anita Hemmings 1897." *Passing as White - Vassar, the Alumnae/i Quarterly*. (Accessed May 28, 2017). <https://vq.vassar.edu/issues/2002/01/features/passing-as-white.html>.

to pass together and raise their family as white⁴³. Passing was not easy, Davis indicated, “Those who pass have a severe dilemma before they decide to do so, since a person must give up all family ties and loyalties to the black community in order to gain economic and other opportunities”⁴⁴ The choice served profitable for some, but for others, it cost them everything. The tragedy is truly in the fact that the only way someone could have a successful life is to toss away who they are and become someone else and live and fear attempting to accomplish that goal.

⁴³ Paraphrased from Mancini, Olivia. "Passing as White: Anita Hemmings 1897." *Passing as White - Vassar, the Alumnae/i Quarterly*. (Accessed May 28, 2017).

⁴⁴ Davis, 143.

Chapter 4: The Battle Within

African American society has made great strides in gaining acceptance from people of different racial and cultural backgrounds, but sadly, it appears that all blacks have not accepted each other. It is believed that this negative attitude displayed by blacks towards one another stems from slavery. “Typically, the slaves with lighter skin complexions were more likely to work in the house. Not surprisingly, both whites and “house niggers” came to consider dark-skinned “field niggers” to be less civilized and intellectually inferior.”⁴⁵ This demarcation developed in response to the slave masters’ treatment of house slaves and created a wedge between the slaves. By doing this, the master established internalized racism amongst slave. This would serve as a benefit to the master because he created enemies and untrustworthiness amongst dark and lighter skinned slaves, which has lasted for generations.

The internal racism still serves as an issue today. There are still problems that exist within the African American culture that divides the group and makes the unit structure become a faltering and penetrable force that is easily broken. Not many were accepting of blacks who tried to step outside of the “black cultural norm”. Many were not accepted, “certain black groups, in particular young adolescents, may not readily accept a biracial person who “looks” black but whose behavior and speech patterns are seen as “Whitey- white”.⁴⁶ This is still a problem among the youth today. Black adolescents feel that if one speaks eloquently or dresses professionally, that individual is “acting white” and that is unacceptable.

⁴⁵Lawrence Otis Graham, *Our Kind of People*, (New York: HarperCollins, 1999), 7.

⁴⁶ Kathlyn Gay. *The Rainbow Effect: Interracial Families*. (Franklin Watts: New York, 1987), 21.

The occurrences in the media today have re-erupted racist behaviors that many assumed were buried or well hidden. There seems to be no way to escape the separate worlds that have been established in the black community because it is a taught habit and there are many factors that led to these attitudes of jealousy, frustration and unaddressed internal racism.

Miscegenation Balls



Figure 8 Caricature drawing done to for a political cartoon to state that under Abraham Lincoln, this kind of behavior would be what to expect, which is unacceptable⁴⁷

The phrase “miscegenation ball” is not actual term used to describe the activity that takes place. Miscegenation Balls, or quadroom/ octoroon balls or placage, are farm

⁴⁷ G.W. Bromley Co. &, and Kimmel &. Forster. "Political Caricature. No. 4, The Miscegenation Ball." Home. (January 01, 1864). Accessed February 8, 2016. <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2008661682/>.

from a large party where people gather to dance and intermingle with societal figurehead. These were prominent in Louisiana. Davis identifies the development as, “the respectable New Orleans placage system featured elaborate, “quardroon balls” for meeting and courting prospective free mulatto mistresses and for meeting the parents and discussion details of agreements for housing and child care.”⁴⁸These “balls” can be better described as a how a prince goes to a ball to find a bride, except the men at these balls were looking for free mulatto women to enter a common law marriage with where there were not penalties and they were not totally breaking the law.

Miscegenation Balls in Louisiana violated rules of interracial relations, but not marriage because technically those engaged in these concubine relationships were simply common law married. “These were regular public affairs at which wealthy and cultured white men formally courted prospective mulatto mistresses. When the man had made his choice, he met the woman and her parents and offered an arrangement, a “placage” in which he agreed to maintain the woman in a certain style and provide for any children who might be born of the union. If his offer was accepted, the woman was established in a household of her own, less than a wife but a bit more than a concubine.”⁴⁹

The women involved in these types of agreements basically were signing prenuptial agreements without the nuptials. When these relationships ended, the woman was not left with anything unless it was previously stated in the agreement from the start.

⁴⁸ F. James Davis. *Who Is Black?: One Nation's Definition*. (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1993), 37.

⁴⁹ Joel Williamson, *New People: Miscegenation and Mulattoes in the United States*, (London 1980), 23.

The placage agreements may be one of the best kept secrets of the South, there is neither information that fully confirms or denies that these “quadroon balls” took place. However, there is evidence that proves there was a vast amount of mulatto children and creole and blacks of French descent in the New Orleans area. It goes without saying that, “mixing of genes from white and African (and Indian) populations continues to occur mainly within the confines of the population defined by the one-drop rule as black”.⁵⁰ It has not changed and with not change, so the one drop rule would need to be eliminated; otherwise, almost everyone would be classified under that category.

Sometimes the arrangements were permanent; however, many only endured months or years in these arrangements. In few incidences there were relationships that also occurred between white women and mulatto men, but those were less frequent. Placage systems allowed white males to publicly break the law and face no penalty while the woman in the relationship would and could eventually end up becoming a single mother that no man would choose to legally marry because of her impurity. Though love may have been a factor for some in the placage, the system failed to see the damage it created to the African culture and the mulatto woman’s image. This is another instance where a free person was sold to be used by someone until there was no further need for them and at that point, there was nothing left for them to gain from this agreement, but a broken life.

High Society Black Culture

In many circumstances, some blacks purposely rid themselves of their black ancestry to fit into the white world. “Black Bourgeoisie” by E. Franklin Frazier presents

⁵⁰ Ibid, 77.

the rise of the black middle class. His purpose was to analyze the behavior, values, and attitudes of the black bourgeoisie during the early 1900s. The black bourgeoisie was constituted of those Negroes who derived their incomes primarily from the services which they rendered as white-collar workers. Frazier discusses the development of black enterprises and companies that helped white-collar blacks establish wealth from banks to the Negro press. He gives a timeline of how black culture and heritage became forgotten while blacks tried to develop lives that would be acceptable in white society. In adapting to the “white world,” the black middle-class community tossed aside the ethics and identity of their enslaved ancestors to create a life in which hunger never become an issue.

The education of middle-class black children was more substantial than that of the lower-class child, which was to be expected because funding for a better education was readily available. Frazier discusses that “the more money made by blacks, the less their culture seemed to matter to them.”⁵¹ Black progression was not the issue. The issue was that with this progression, a society of people became lost trying to assimilate into a society of people that would never truly accept them. The black bourgeoisie had been uprooted from its “racial” tradition and consequently had no cultural roots in either the Negro or the white world.

Frazier breaks down every aspect, characteristic and myth of the Black Bourgeoisie. It would seem from the large number of middle class blacks that there were ample opportunities for all blacks to experience this wealth, but like anything there is a criterion necessary to having the chance to be “in” on the wealth. It derives from the

⁵¹ E. Franklin Frazier. *Black Bourgeoisie*. New York: Free Press Paperbacks, (1957), 67.

status of one's family, one's work background, resources, and one's educational background. In the cities of the North as well as of the South, the free Negroes could accumulate some wealth through the ownership of real estate. This gave way to expansion of black business.

To maintain this new-found wealth, blacks had to establish a way to build their business and companies. The upper class developed many incentives to aid in the expansion of wealth among the Negro people. Negro banks were organized primarily to supply Negro businessmen with credit and capital. Although the first bank, the Freedman's bank, was not very successful, it was a key factor in the development in the banks that succeeded. Aside from prospering from banking, blacks were establishing careers that even some whites had not obtained.

The bourgeoisie was creating its own nation with doctors, lawyers, bank tellers, teachers, and businessmen. They created secret society organizations, such as Greek organizations, the first being Sigma Pi Phi in 1904. They were building living communities and schools, but of course they were not all too successful and still had many stipulations that hindered them from having complete ownership of what they were creating—stipulations imposed by white supremacy. Yet even with unequal opportunities, the black middle class began making a place in America, and it would carry on for many years to come; bringing substantial wealth to the black community, but losing the community at the same time.

Lawrence Otis Graham discusses in his book *Our Kind of People* the stigma that blacks had placed upon each other, such as the "brown paper bag and ruler test." These were tests that were simply designed to push out the original black culture even more. If

your skin complexion was darker than a brown paper bag or if your hair was not as straight as a ruler, then you were in the group of people who could not mix or intertwine with the blacks of a fairer complexion.



Figure 9 Image of a Catillion Ball, a regular event in the upper class black community that taught debutantes the skills needed to be prominent, classy women in society ⁵²

Graham writes about black millionaires, the development of secret societies, sororities, fraternities, the development of the Girl Friends, the Boule', Jack and Jill, black elite across the South, as well as those passing for white in some circumstances. He also discusses how some of them responded to the Civil Rights Movement. Graham's

⁵² Vintageblack2. "Vintageblack2." Vintage Black Photos. July 12, 2011. (Accessed August 29, 2017). <http://vintageblack2.tumblr.com/post/7519088951/debutante-ball>.

great-grandmother stated, “I don’t see anything civil about a bunch of nappy-headed Negroes screaming and marching around in the street.”⁵³ This statement expresses the internalized racism and discrimination that blacks imposed on one another that was taught and carried into new generations.

Graham talks about how his great-grandmother, a woman of light complexion, would discourage him and his brother from playing in the sun to avoid their skin getting darker. He discusses that the black elite were established even before there was wealth to be had by blacks, through the education of slaves by their masters. Typically, the slaves with lighter skin complexions were more likely to work in the house. Not surprisingly, both whites and “house niggers” came to consider dark-skinned “field niggers” to be less civilized and intellectually inferior.⁵⁴ It was obvious that the lighter-skinned blacks were descendants of their white masters, and after the Emancipation Proclamation, many of these blacks were often mistaken as whites, such as in the Plessy v. Ferguson case when a black man was seated in a first-class boxcar of a train because his complexion was so light that whites could not tell if he was black. Even though this mistake was not his fault, he was still blamed for the mix up, proving that there is no escaping the inequalities of the white supremacists no matter how light one’s complexion.

Skin color has always played an important role in determining one’s popularity, prestige, and mobility within the black elite. Graham notes, “It is hard to find an upper-class black American family that has been well-to-do since before the 1950s that has not endured family conversations on the virtues of “good hair, sharp features, and a nice

⁵³ Graham, 3.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 7.

complexion.”⁵⁵ Even today these features seem to imply that a more “white” skinned person would be more civilized than an individual of dark complexion. The more “white” one had, the better chances one had of success and acceptance in the black elite community.

Blacks in these upper-class lifestyles prided themselves on their more “white” features because their skin color set them apart and made them more distinguished than others. Graham goes further to acknowledge, “Having less Negroid features has been exchanged over time for more politically correct ones, but it is a fact that the black upper class thinks about these things more than most.”⁵⁶ As African Americans began to perm their hair for a straighter look, refrain from excessive exposure to sunlight to avoid darkening the skin, and disassociating themselves from activities associated with their original culture, they achieved for a more acceptable outward appearance when associating with white society. Regardless of how much money these elite blacks acquired, whites still did not want to live in the same neighborhoods with them.

The black elite avoided the second-class treatment by accommodating themselves with recreation centers, stores, schools, etc. They also avoided interacting with other blacks who were not in the same social class. Undoubtedly, they had nothing in common except for being black in America. They feared that society, especially many white constituents with whom they regularly engaged in business affairs, would not take their success seriously if they did not eliminate their “black” features. Madam C. J. Walker is a prime example of a high society black who made it a goal to eliminate black features of “nappy hair.” Her invention of a hair relaxer made it easier for black to straighten out the

⁵⁵ Graham, 377.

⁵⁶ Graham, 377.

kinks and curls of their natural hair for a more bone straight look to appear more appealing to society. It was thoughts such as these (needing to eliminate “negroid” features) that made passing a more acceptable process and if one could, some would wonder why one would choose to pass up such an opportunity.

Chapter 5: Miscegenation Today

Southern states were the least susceptible to approving race mixing. Slave states, especially Virginia, were adamant about their laws against interracial relationships. Although there were less reprimands for the white male having relations with a black female, the penalty for a black male having a relationship with a white female involved jail time or death. Sharecroppers and slave owners in the South had a well-kept, but unkempt secret that often the birth of mixed children would reveal. The South had more of a concern about the Negro male having a relationship with a white female. Before they could determine if a black male was having relations with a white female, they had to first determine if, in fact, he was black. In the South, it was believed that if one carried one drop of black blood in one's body, you are considered African American. It began with one being classified as whatever race the biological mother was; then the "one drop theory" came in to play. Any black blood, no matter how remote, made one black, and endless mixture with pure white would never erase that fact.⁵⁷ So, to stop the spread to the black race with white people, new laws were developed that carried more detail than those developed before.

Today miscegenation is not that big of an issue. There are thousands more cases of interracial marriages or biracial children. Today more people embrace all walks of their historical backgrounds; whether black, white, Irish, Mexican, Chinese, Italian, etc. A record 14.6% of all new marriages in the United States in 2008 were between spouses of a different race or ethnicity from one another.

⁵⁷ Williamson, 65.

INTERRACIAL/INTERETHNIC MARRIED-COUPLE HOUSEHOLDS IN THE UNITED STATES		
	Number	Percent
Total Interracial/Interethnic Couples	5,369,035	100
Non-Hispanic White/Hispanic (any race)	2,020,825	37.6
Non-Hispanic White/Non-Hispanic Black	422,250	7.9
Non-Hispanic White/Non-Hispanic American Indian and Alaska Native	280,780	5.2
Non-Hispanic White/Non-Hispanic Asian	737,493	13.7
One Partner Reporting Multiple Races*	838,190	15.6
Both Partners Reporting Multiple Races*	341,255	6.4
Hispanic/Non-Hispanic	390,650	7.3

Figure 10 A chart depicted the number of identifiable interracial married couples in 2010⁵⁸

The courts assumed of the decades they would create laws preventing this kind of interbreeding from happening between cultural groups, but once those laws were deemed unconstitutional there was no stopping the flood of marriages and the introduction to hidden relationships and marriages. All this is due to the ruling in the Loving v. Virginia case where it was written, “as Chief Justice Earl Warren wrote in his decision: “Under our constitution, the freedom to marry to not marry a person of another race resides with the individual and cannot be infringed upon by the State.””⁵⁹ That decision changed history forever and now people are free to marry whomever they please.

Over the last 50 years miscegenation has seen a complete transformation in its make-up and definition. There are more mixed-race couples than can be counted. According to Kathlyn Gay, “estimates of the total number of missed offspring range from hundreds to thousands to more than five million. No firm statistics exist, since there is no

⁵⁸ Hilary W Poole. *Multiracial Families*. (Broomall, PA: Mason Crest, 2017),14.

⁵⁹ Gay, 19.

official was to categorize people of interracial or interethnic ancestry.⁶⁰ By 2010, those numbers increased again as more people began to identify with being in “interracial” relationship.

There are still some people refrain from self-identify because the stigmas are still at play about black people. It is noted that, “many people over the years have been reluctant to claim a missed heritage because they feared society’s disapproval”.⁶¹ No one want to be cast into a category of people who the world itself sees as an issue and refuses to treat fairly and equally still, over 150 years after slavery has ended. The only solution is that the terms of race be abolished. They serve no purposed in a melting pot of a nation full of people of all different backgrounds, know and unknown. Studies show that, “today, most scientists do not agree with the idea that race is a biological category. Scholars have concluded that the concept of race was created by society, not nature. It is misleading to think of people in terms of “the black race”, “the white race,” “the red race”, or “the yellow race”. All humans are products of the mixing of people and cultures that has been going on for tens of thousands of years.”⁶²

Unfortunately, the world may not be ready to fully accept that theory and such acceptance may never happen. However, as the number of interracial marriages and children continue to increase, at some point there will not be a way to completely identify any individual, except for the term “human”.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 19.

⁶¹ Ibid, 19.

⁶² Bárbara Cruz. *Multiethnic Teens and Cultural Identity: A Hot Issue*. (Berkeley Heights, NJ: Enslow Publishers, 2001), 11.

HOUSEHOLDS WITH PARTNERS OF DIFFERENT RACE OR HISPANIC ORIGIN, BY REGION: 2010

	Partners of different race			Partners of different Hispanic origin		
	Husband and wife	Unmarried couples		Husband and wife	Unmarried couples	
		Opposite-sex partners	Same-sex partners		Opposite-sex partners	Same-sex partners
United States	6.9	14.2	14.5	4.3	8.2	10.4
Northeast	5.3	12.3	12.8	3.2	7.1	8.7
Midwest	4.4	11.1	11.1	2.4	5.4	6.1
South	6.2	12.7	12.1	3.9	7.2	9.2
West	11.6	20.9	20.9	7.5	13.4	15.6

Figure 11 A chart depicting the regions of interracial relations across the United States, including those of Hispanic origin⁶³

Interracial marriages and biracial children may not be accepted by all, including the black population, these days, but the only penalty many are subjected to are stares, threats, and rude name calling. Society has become so used to race mixing involving blacks and other races to the point that there might not be one pure American left in this country.

⁶³ Poole, 41.

Conclusion

Have mixed race couples and biracial children come from being a mark of disgrace to simply an being the unspoken target of disapproval by racist and of open acceptance by those who approve? Will race and ethnicity cease to exist in our world? There is a possibility that people will develop more toleration for those of different races, but if the danger of racism and prejudices are not taught to children in every generation, the issues of race cannot die. It is not only the whites who harbor prejudices, but blacks and other races as well, and if people allow those thoughts of hatred and disgust to dwell in their minds about one another people, they will continue to fight silently, and often aloud. Miscegenation seems as if it is not dying out of existence, but increasing quickly. Passing does not seem to occur as often as in did since opportunities for all races seem to be on a slow process to equalization. However, it is a well-kept secret, so who would ever really know? In recent media stories, people are being exposed as passing for black, instead of white. There are still people who walk among us with secret identities and hidden stories of their past races, but who are we to question a person's heritage, when to anyone we could look as if we belong to another race? There is no answer to whether passing does not and will not exist anymore because all people now have a right to privacy. Race and ethnicity are untraceable to some, apparent to others, and disregarded by many.

It appears that society is reverting backwards, or harbored racist feelings are being expressed as violently as they were during Jim Crow. The media and politics create and stir the melting pot of heated debates. With a rise in the use of technology and social

media, people can send and receive information instantaneously, and people are also allowed to express their opinions by commenting on life choices and race.

What is unfortunate is that the members of black community still place stigmas placed on one another because of class and skin complexion. There are still families who pride themselves on being able to pass; blacks of a lighter complexion are still allotted better opportunities than those of a darker complexion; and there is still a separation of blacks because of economic status, as in any other nationality. The mulatto child is becoming prominent even in the South and a culture of darker black people, who had a very strong heritage to be proud of, is being diminished. Even though there were scores of people and researchers who stated that the mulatto child born from a miscegenation relationship would be scared, it has been proven “many black/ white interracial families agree that color differences have nothing to do with harmony in a family- or for that matter, with disagreements”.⁶⁴ Family is based on love and the morals and ethics taught and established, not by the color of skin or lack thereof.

The number of blacks who experienced living the American dream before many whites did is stunning, yet what is even more astonishing is the number of black elite who were not willing to “share the wealth.” Then and even today, race issues are still prominent and potent; but those issues exist not only between blacks and whites; but between blacks themselves, as well. The difficulties that existed in the past are not much different than the ones that exist today. The reality is not just one of the differences black and white; there are a variety of differences that dwell in the grey area, and at some point, that concept needs to be accepted by all people.

⁶⁴ Gay, 40.

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