

A Biracial Identity or a New Race?

The Historical Limitations and Political Implications of a Biracial Identity

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Over the past fifteen years in the United States, there has emerged a concerted push to racially reclassify persons with one Black and one white parent as biracial.¹ Advocates of racial reclassification are calling for the establishment of a biracial identity that is both socially and officially recognized. They are joined by a cohort of scholars, many of whom are themselves biracial identity advocates, who argue that such an identity is more appropriate for persons of mixed parentage than a Black one.² Social scientists have dominated these discussions, concerned primarily with the experiences and identity of people of mixed parentage. They maintain that a biracial identity would better recognize the complete racial background of persons of mixed

parentage and offer a more mentally healthy racial identity than a Black racial identity. Moreover, they exalt a biracial identity as a positive step in moving society beyond issues of race and toward the realization of a color-blind society.

Focusing on the scholarship advocating a biracial identity for people with one Black and one white parent, I argue that such an identity has no historical basis, and would have a negative political impact on African Americans. Historically, and currently, white supremacy in the United States has hinged on the oppression of people of African descent.³ The position of African Americans in the political economy has served as the basis for the development of a racialized social system.

the restructuring of that system at different historical moments, and the incorporation of new social groups as races into that hierarchy. Given this theoretical perspective, we must keep in mind that the push for a biracial racial category has come, and made its greatest strides, amid predictions that by the year 2050 whites will be a numerical minority and that proponents have shown considerable enmity toward the Black community and have received the backing of conservative political figures such as Newt Gingrich, George Will, and Ward Connerly. At issue is not merely creating a new personal identity, but the creation of a group identity that necessitates the creation of a new race. This new racial group would be positioned as an intermediary between Blacks and whites in a reordered, racialized social system. Rather than erase the current color line of racial oppression, it would draw an additional one that would present new problems for the Black Freedom Movement and the Black community. Thus, it is a racist project. The central concern, therefore, is the impact that a racial reclassification of people of mixed parentage will have on the structure of racial oppression and the Black community.

Biracial identity scholars have neglected this question, primarily because they are unwilling to engage Black Studies scholarship. They have at once made extensive use of Joel Williamson's work on mulattos in U.S. history and ignored the numerous studies of mulattos in the Black community. They have also ignored the scholarship on race, racism, Black culture, and color conflict in the Black community while simultaneously criticizing African Americans as increasingly conservative on racial issues. Hardly any work advocating a biracial identity addresses racism in the white community, and most portray whites as increasingly liberal on racial issues. This problematic approach

to race and racism is guided by an emphasis on the presumed positive aspects of a biracial identity. Maria P.P. Root maintains that a biracial identity "may force us to reexamine our construction of race and the hierarchical social order it supports." Naomi Zack and G. Reginald Daniel argue more plainly that a biracial identity would hasten the end of racial categories altogether, and thus the end of racism. In the end, African Americans are portrayed as no longer capable of defeating racism, and a biracial identity is exalted as the last weapon against racial oppression.⁴

The scholarship also exhibits a near-singular focus on personal experience, with only nominal attention to race and racism. This blurs the line between group historical experience and personal experience, gives greater weight to race in analysis, and makes the structural character of racism an ancillary concern. Among biracial identity scholars, this has resulted in an uncritical acceptance of reported experiences, with individual identity being emphasized irrespective of social context or history. Identity, which primarily has an impact on the individual and under certain circumstances has an impact on social structures and institutions, is then conflated with race. But because race is a political category that reflects a group's positioning in the dominant political economy and the racialized social system, to talk about one is not necessarily to talk about the other. Biracial identity scholars, echoing the idealism pervading contemporary race theory, ignore this distinction. Thus, they advance a rhetoric of "identity" grounded in personal experience that facilitates discussing people of mixed parentage as a racial group without considering the consequences of their analytical approach.⁵

Several scholars have challenged the premises of a biracial identity and the argu-

ments of biracial identity scholars. Kerry A. Rockquemore maintains that a biracial identity has multiple meanings, not a singular one, and it does not necessarily preclude a Black identity. Jon Michael Spencer notes that a biracial race would receive some of the privileges denied to Blacks and therefore would be akin to South African coloureds. Lewis R. Gordon argues that the impact of social policy being premised on mixed racial parentage "is that it fails to account for political realities that are already premised against" Black people. And Albert Mosley asserts that the end of racial classifications does not address, and is unlikely to end, the reality of racial oppression. These scholars have all brought considerable intellectual acumen to bear on this issue, but as of yet there is no critical overview of the arguments advocating a biracial identity. The current work seeks to fill this void.⁶

This article removes the discussion of biracial identity from the sole province of experience and identity and situates it in the context of race and racism as structural relationships. It provides a detailed review of the biracial identity scholarship, which is divided into historical and theoretical literature. First, I briefly outline a materialist theory of race and racism that emphasizes the structural nature of racial domination. Then follows a review of the historiography on mulattos in the United States. Pointing out the methodological and theoretical problems in this body of scholarship, I offer an alternative explanation for why an intermediary racial group never developed in the United States. The third section engages the theoretical literature, which is highly prescriptive and advocates a biracial identity for people of mixed parentage in place of a Black one. Of particular importance are (a) the conceptualization of race and racism, (b) the theoretical basis given for a biracial

identity, and (c) the contention that a biracial identity will hasten racism's demise. I conclude with a theoretical discussion of African Americans as a national group and what a Black biracial identity might mean for the Black community.

A Materialist Theory of Race and Racism

The current intellectual fashion is to argue that races are social constructions. Generally, this affirms that races are not the products of biological essence, though there is little consensus beyond this point. Some scholars view race as an arbitrary system of categorization, others as an ideology, and most treat race and racism as if they are synonymous, with the latter often being subsumed under discussions of the former. Michael Omi and Howard Winant have given the definitive articulation of the social constructionist theory of race, defining it as "a concept which signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies." In turn, the social construction of race is "the sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed." This approach highlights the dynamic nature of racial categories, but Eduardo Bonilla-Silva points out that it also "gives undue attention to ideological/cultural processes, does not regard races as truly social collectivities, and overemphasizes the racial projects of certain actors . . . , thus obscuring the social and general character of racialized societies." This approach also leads to concentrating on race(s) to the detriment of understanding racism. Moreover, Omi and Winant's definition of racism as a "fundamental characteristic of social projects which create or reproduce structures of domination based on essentialist categories of race" ultimately concentrates more

on race(s) than on racism, since racism is the expression of essentialist notions of race.⁷

This general approach dominates the biracial identity literature. I propose to address the issue of biracial identity with a materialist theory of race and racism. This combines racial formation and transformation theory as outlined by Harold H. Baron and Sundiata Keita Cha-Jua and the theory of racialized social systems forwarded by Bonilla-Silva. This differs from the social constructionist theory of race by emphasizing the structural character of racism and by viewing "the social processes of exploitation, appropriation, and exclusion" as the central elements in that structural relationship that then produces racial groups. Race(s) is therefore understood as preeminently a structural relationship of domination that is only secondarily about genetic differences.⁸ The materialist theory of race and racism has four components: (a) racial formation and transformation are central to understanding race and racism; (b) races are seen as historical material reality; (c) the theory advances a structuralist interpretation of racism; and (d) it identifies a relationship between the structure of the political economy and the structure of racism. A racial formation (or the process of racialization) is the conversion of distinct peoples, nationalities, and/or ethnicities into racial groups that are then positioned in a hierarchical racist structure. The dominant racist structure, or racial formation, is white supremacy,⁹ and as Charles Mills points out, its "most salient" dimension is economic exploitation. Races are therefore viewed as historically developed political groupings rather than socially constructed concepts. This is important for three reasons. First, it underscores that races are real historical groupings rather than arbitrary ideological categories. Second, calling races social constructions stresses their social character, but does not differentiate them from

other social constructions such as family or community. The view here emphasizes that races are political social groupings because they are positioned in a racist structure; this makes racism the most important category of analysis. Finally, this highlights what Mills identifies as the whole point of racism: "to secure and legitimate the privileging of those individuals designated as white/persons and the exploitation of those individuals designated as nonwhite/subpersons."¹⁰

There are two elements to racism in the theoretical framework advanced here: a racialized social system and a racial ideology. The principal element is the racialized social system, which is the organization of a society's institutional infrastructure so that racial groups are placed in a hierarchical relationship to one another and the society's laws, policies, and social relationships give preferences to a superordinate race and discriminates (often in different ways) against subordinate races. Of secondary importance, though critical nonetheless, is the racial ideology, which is a set of beliefs that support the actual oppression of the subordinate races. It should be noted, however, that a racial ideology need not view races as real biological groupings with essential differences that make one (or some) superior and others inferior. A racial ideology may—and increasingly does—deny the existence of race and yet support a hierarchical relationship between races. Finally, a materialist theory of race and racism identifies a connection between capitalist development, racial formation and transformation, and the structure of racism. The hierarchical structure of the racialized social system helps the dominant racialclass maintain its continued economic exploitation of subordinate racial groups. Once a racial formation is in place, major shifts in the political economy cause a racial transformation (or a new racial formation) in the racialized social system and

accordingly in the dominant racial ideology. Shifts in the political economy are therefore accompanied by new racial formations. Because this connection is central to the materialist theory of race and racism, it deserves further attention.¹¹

Racism's structure is largely determined by the stage of development of the capitalist mode of production. In discussing the relationship between the two, Baron identifies four elements of a racial formation: a white racial group, a Black racial group, a racial control system, and the dominant mode of production. He explains their interaction as operating in a patterned relationship. The "category racial formation is constructed from the combined configuration of the racially defined social groupings . . . and a pattern of their interaction within the dominant racial control system of a particular era." A given racial formation operates in the context of a specific "dominant" mode of production. Thus, shifts in capitalism precede and demand shifts in "the racial formation and have provided a matrix around which new racial control patterns were formed." Cha-Jua and Clarence Lang build on Baron to argue that globalism has prompted the current racial formation in the United States. They identify some of its effects on African Americans as the marginalization of Black workers, the increasing class stratification of the Black community, the reemergence of state terrorism and racial violence by private citizens, and the racialization of incarceration. I argue that the push to create a biracial race contributes to the current racial transformation by requiring a structural adjustment in the racialized social system to accommodate such a group.¹²

Racialization occurs in the context of class struggle and gender oppression, but it is not always dependent on them. Racism is a structural relationship unto itself that has applica-

ble effects on the larger social system, with racialization as a determinant factor in understanding racism and race(s). Moreover, as Bonilla-Silva argues, "In all racialized social systems the placement of people in racial categories involves some form of hierarchy that produces definite social relationships between the races." Because a racialized social system is always hierarchical, "social relations of subordination and superordination" always exist between races. Therefore, creating a new race that can exist outside the hierarchical order is impossible. Put another way, creating a race in a racist society only helps transform racism, not end it.¹³

This raises a series of questions about a biracial identity. Since races are historically developed political categories, not biological groupings, how might someone be "biracial" in the United States? As all races are necessarily positioned in a hierarchy, where would such a race be situated? Given that African Americans are a heterogeneous national group, is a biracial identity among Black people feasible? Most important, in light of estimates that upward of 75 percent of African Americans have white and/or American Indian ancestry, what would a biracial identity offer that a Black identity does not? The history of racialization in the United States, and Black people's response to that process, suggests that a biracial identity/race is historically unfounded and potentially detrimental to African Americans. The arguments supporting a biracial identity are ahistorical and based in essentialist logic. This is not to say that people of mixed parentage do not encounter particular identity issues and developmental processes; but biracial identity scholars have drawn several conclusions that are based on false assumptions, biological determinism, and an unwillingness to seriously engage the Black historical experience.

Mulattos and Racialization in the United States

Joel Williamson's and John G. Mencke's studies are the premier works on "mulatto history" in the United States. Addressing the historical position of mulattos in U.S. society, how they were viewed by blacks and whites, and how they viewed themselves, these authors seek to understand how mulattos came to be racially classified as Black. In doing so, they suggest a crude periodization schema that identifies four periods in "mulatto history."¹⁴

The first period (1619–1776) is characterized by tremendous social mobility among mulattos, who were subject to discriminatory laws, yet enjoyed certain privileges denied blacks. In the second period (1776–1860), the social standing of mulattos declined. Westward expansion, the rise of king cotton, the close of the Atlantic slave trade, and the ensuing domestic slave trade accelerated the socioeconomic decline of mulattos and sealed their racial descent into Blackness. A third phase (1865–1900) began after the Civil War, when mulattos increasingly turned toward blacks and away from whites. In Williamson's words, this began the process of creating African Americans, or a "new people" with a history and culture critically different from what was known in previous generations. Mulattos assumed leadership of the black community and became translators of the white world for the Black one. In the final period of mulatto history (1900–1920s), mulattos married black culture smoothly to the white culture they already knew, and by the 1920s they were African American.¹⁵

This periodization schema serves as the historical backdrop for the theoretical literature on biracial identity. The tendency has been to uncritically accept the underlying premise of the schema—that mulattos were

once a race in the United States and therefore had a historical experience qualitatively distinct from that of blacks. And biracial identity advocates seek to recreate that racial distinction. Unfortunately, they have overlooked the methodological and theoretical problems in Mencke's and Williamson's work and ignored the historiography on African-American communities that portray a different picture of mulattos in the United States.¹⁶ That differences existed between how mulattos and blacks were treated is undeniable, and it is equally clear that mulattos used their fair complexion to distance themselves socially from blacks. What is questionable, however, is whether this constituted a racial distinction between blacks and mulattos or a form of social stratification among African Americans.

Williamson finds that the first mulattos in British North America were primarily the progeny of European and African indentured servants; they first appeared in significant numbers in the Chesapeake area of Virginia and Maryland. Unlike their kith in the Caribbean and South America, their white parents were typically poor, and colonial authorities did not feel compelled to separate them out from blacks. Initially, their position, along with that of "unmixed" Africans, was uncertain. But by the latter half of the seventeenth century, this began to change. In 1662, with the institutionalization of African enslavement, the Virginia assembly passed a series of acts that simultaneously discouraged miscegenation and placed mulattos in an inferior social position to whites, and in 1715 Maryland enacted laws against miscegenation, but distinguished between mulattos with black mothers and those with white mothers, the latter typically receiving better treatment. Similarly, Pennsylvania conscripted mulatto children of white mothers to thirty-one years of servitude instead of the lifetime of servitude served by those with black mothers. Be-

cause racialization was a historical process, racial boundaries were porous in the early colonial era. Mulattos were occasionally racially distinct, occasionally black, and sometimes white in colonial law, statutes, and society. By the mid-1700s, regional variations in the racial classification of mulattos began to fade as whites attempted to clarify whether mulattos were white, black, or something else. By the end of the eighteenth century, Virginia defined a black person as someone with a black parent or grandparent. South Carolina and Georgia, on the other hand, classified anyone with a white parent as mulatto, and anyone with a mulatto parent as non-Black.¹⁷

Mencke and Williamson have identified regional variations between the mulatto experience in the lower South, the upper South, and the North during the antebellum era. Both point to the lower South as the region that made a clear racial distinction between mulattos and blacks. Williamson argues that the upper South and North exhibited a high level of hostility toward mulattos, whereas the lower South "valued [mulattos] in important ways." Mencke, on the other hand, limits a mulatto racial distinctiveness to the urban lower South and argues that the upper South and North favored mulattos in important ways that facilitated the social stratification of the African-American community based, in part, on color differences. Mulattos were excluded from white society "and had to suffer the legal proscriptions imposed on blacks, [and as a result] most accepted their position in the Afro-American community. . . ." Still, their preferential treatment generally translated into color being an important factor in the social stratification of the Black community. As Robert J. Cottrol argues, "Color prejudice and family ties might have allowed mulattos to rise in disproportionate numbers to the top of Negro society, but they

did not permit escape from the group." Several scholars have pointed out differences in residential patterns, occupations, wealth, and education between blacks and mulattos in the North and upper South, indicating that color helped stratify, not fracture, the African-American community.¹⁸

In Cincinnati and Philadelphia, mulattos were members of the African-American middle class out of proportion to their numbers in the community, and they married endogenously. Yet, in Philadelphia, blacks and mulattos were members of the same social, religious, recreational, and political organizations. As Theodore Hershberg and Henry Williams found, "Fully half of [African-American] organizational memberships were held by mulattos," a pattern repeated in several other cities. And in Cincinnati, James Oliver Horton and Stacy Flaherty point out, businesses run by mulattos served the entire African-American community, and mulattos "were less likely to be detached from, and more likely to be politically allied with, the masses of blacks in community-wide activism." The upper South mirrored these social patterns, though they were not identical. For example, in 1850 in the three wards of St. Louis with the largest African-American population (Wards 3, 4, 5), the numbers of mulattos and blacks were roughly equal, though in the fourth ward there were twice as many blacks as mulattos. Blacks and mulattos frequently worked together, lived in the same dwellings, and resided in clusters, though in the third ward they married each other at a much higher rate than in any other ward.¹⁹ And the only skilled trades dominated by mulattos were carpentry and butchering, with blacks composing fully half the barbers in those wards. Similar patterns are found in the lower South, though free mulattos were clearly better off than free blacks. Thus, the critical question for the

lower South is, did these differences represent a racial distinction?²⁰

The answer is yes and no. In a few urban areas in the lower South, mulattos existed as a distinct race and were clearly viewed as such. Williamson provides evidence for a distinct mulatto race in Charleston, South Carolina, and New Orleans, Louisiana, and Mencke offers additional examples from Savannah, Georgia, and Mobile, Alabama. Throughout the lower South, mulattos were free out of proportion to their numbers in the African-American population. In 1850 and 1860, they comprised 68.7 percent and 75.8 percent of the lower South's free Black population, whereas in the upper South they were only 38.6 percent and 35 percent, respectively. Statistics, however, can be misleading; in those same years only 17.3 percent and 13.6 percent of all lower South mulattos were free, and South Carolina and Louisiana housed nearly 80 percent of free mulattos in those years. It becomes clear that free mulattos were a small population concentrated mainly in urban areas. What, then, do we make of Mencke's and Williamson's assertion that a general pattern existed throughout the lower South whereby mulattos were racially distinct from Blacks? If the evidence supporting this view accounts for less than one-fifth of that population, and the majority of these lived primarily in two areas, is it appropriate to talk about mulattos in the antebellum lower South as a historically distinct race?²¹

No. Both methodologically and empirically this argument is untenable. First, basing this argument on free mulattos in urban areas misses the apparent fact that the overwhelming majority of mulattos in the lower South were slaves on plantations. Moreover, nothing in the scholarship on slave communities indicates that a similar racial distinction emerged on rural plantations. Contrary to

popular belief, plantation work patterns did not reflect a mulatto/black divide with mulattos dominating house work and skilled labor. They certainly occupied these positions out of proportion to their numbers among slaves, and planters did show favor toward their own progeny. But we also know that many planters preferred Africans from particular ethnic groups to do certain types of skilled and house labor. Furthermore, in the Cotton Belt in 1860, three out of four slaves worked as field hands, and between 80 and 90 percent of slave men and two-thirds to three-fourths of slave women labored in the fields, and nothing indicates that mulattos were restricted primarily to non-field work. This evidence overwhelmingly supports the view that blacks and mulattos were racialized as a single race, even in the lower South.²²

In those few lower South urban areas where mulattos existed as a distinct race, there is some evidence that the black/mulatto distinction was not as clear as Williamson and Mencke suggest. South Carolina was a colony settled primarily by white planter immigrants from Barbados. They were accustomed to a mulatto buffer race between themselves and their black slaves, and most mulattos embraced the role of racial intermediary. Accordingly, they established the Brown Fellowship Society, whose membership was restricted to free mulattos of good social and economic standing. They developed separate social institutions and churches; owned slaves; and held a view of themselves as culturally and racially apart from, and superior to, blacks. Still, evidence suggests that the color line separating mulatto from black was porous. Robert L. Harris reports that Daniel Alexander Payne, a prominent mulatto, opened a school for Charleston's African-American youths and eventually became a bishop in the African Methodist Episcopal church. He also dis-

cusses Charleston's Humane Brotherhood as an example of blacks viewing mulattos as part of their race. Some mulattos even belonged to the same organizations, worshiped in the same churches as blacks, and even helped Denmark Vessey organize his failed rebellion in 1822.²³

Similarly to those in South Carolina, colonial officials in Georgia viewed mulattos as filling a distinct racial role. In the mid-1760s, Georgia expressly sought out free Black immigrants and extended to mulattos in particular all of the rights given to a "person born of British parents," save the franchise and sitting on the General Assembly. By the close of the eighteenth century, however, Georgia began tightening the restrictions on all free blacks, including mulattos. Thus, mulattos enjoyed less than a half century of treatment as "person[s] born of British parents." It is not surprising, then, that members of the small mulatto population in Savannah believed that their fate was tied to that of blacks. Together, blacks and mulattos established the city's first African-American newspaper and worked to build a diverse, if not contentious, community.²⁴

Because races are political categories denoting particular social groups, maintaining that mulattos were a race apart from blacks requires showing that they were so situated in a racialized social system, that they had a perception of themselves as racially distinct, and that their historical experience reflects that distinctiveness. The mulatto racial distinctiveness in select urban areas was an enigma to the dominant pattern of racialization, and the only place where this was structurally entrenched—and able to survive into the twentieth century—was in Louisiana. And as will be discussed below, the French and Spanish colonial past in this area gave rise to particular concerns over the social control of slaves that facilitated the rise of a mulatto race.²⁵

By the mid-eighteenth century, the differential treatment of mulattos began to fade. Ira Berlin notes that planters generally ignored the laws granting freedom to the mulatto children of white women. Because these children were typically born to indentured servants, such laws ensured the masters of white women additional labor; it did little to racially distinguish these children, as they were not freed until they were nearly "past labour" and no longer produced a profit. As Berlin eloquently states, this and other types of legislation meant that free mulattos, "like most free blacks, spent their lives working and living alongside slaves, occasionally serving terms of servitude, and sometimes plummeting into slavery." Planters treated the two (blacks and mulattos, slave and free) as one. As whites typically outnumbered African Americans four to one, there was rarely a pressing need to develop a triracial structure with mulattos as an intermediary.²⁶

Berlin diverges from Mencke and Williamson by strictly limiting a mulatto racial distinction to select urban areas of the lower South. In rural areas, color had fewer factors to combine with to sustain the type of racial distinction that arose in urban areas. Thus, Williamson's argument that the rise of the domestic slave trade slowly diminished the racial position of mulattos in the lower South is questionable. He maintains, "The lower South gave up its peculiar sympathy with mulattos and joined an upper South already in place," as they concluded, "Miscegenation was wrong and mulattos must be made black, both within slavery and without." Yet, this is applicable only to those few mulattos in the urban lower South, not the entire region. For the majority of mulattos, there was no prior racial distinctiveness. Moreover, the social characteristics of elite free blacks mirrored those of elite free mulattos in every social respect except complexion.



Art Exhibit

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The basic premise of Williamson's and Mencke's periodization schema is flawed. Particularly useless is their contention that it was only in the 1920s that mulattos and blacks became a single race. The historical record simply does not support their claim.²⁷

The question remains, therefore, how did a Black racial classification come to encompass all people of African descent in the United States, but not in other American societies? Donald L. Horowitz's discussion of demographics is suggestive. He notes that in every racialized society, racial boundaries were defined and rules emerged for categorizing marginal cases, even allowing for exceptions to the rule. He seeks to determine what, if anything, was the consistent factor in setting racial boundaries throughout the Americas. By comparing color differentiation during slavery in Latin America, the British West Indies, and British North America,

Horowitz tackles the popular arguments regarding the divergent patterns of racialization in the new world. He finds explanations that focus solely on culture or economics wanting. In these arguments, culture operates in a vacuum that ignores certain contextual influences and is therefore unable to explain why two different patterns of racialization emerged in the British West Indies and British North America. Similarly, economic arguments fail to show the benefit of a mulatto race to the planter class and often underestimate the role of politics and social relationships in racialization. Horowitz therefore identifies demographics and, relatedly, security concerns as the critical factor; because these two features were distinct in both societies, the racial boundaries in the British West Indies gave rise to a mulatto race, but they did not in British North America. Theodore Allen carries the demographic argument further to

consider its functional utility to the development of capitalism and white supremacy.²⁸ Social control of large slave populations was the primary concern, but in British North America the available mechanisms of social control were different from those in the Caribbean:

If the "mulatto" on the continent were not generally, however, to be accorded the West Indies style social promotion [to a distinct intermediary race], nevertheless for the slaveholders—outnumbered sometimes twenty or more times by their African-American bond-laborers—the "mulatto" function was as necessary as it was in the West Indies. If, there [the West Indies], "mulattos" could "function as whites," then on the continent laboring-class, largely propertyless and poor European-Americans could function as "mulattos."²⁹

Horowitz's study bears this out. In the Caribbean, "slave revolts were nearly as old as slavery. . . . In the British Caribbean, whites saw disaster around every corner, and the mildest slave protest met with savage reprisals." It is equally important that at the peak of production "the ratio of blacks to whites increased beyond the ability of the colonists to control the slaves with ease." In Jamaica, the black/white ratio was ten to one; in Trinidad, six to one; in Guiana, twenty-five to one. Ultimately, "West Indian whites turned to [mulattos] as part of the solution to this problem. . . . When the planters thought of insurrection, they thought of mulattos." In British North America, however, a series of settler colonies emerged where whites generally outnumbered blacks, and in those areas where blacks outnumbered whites (South Carolina and Georgia) mulattos were a distinct race.³⁰

Though Horowitz leaves demographics and security concerns untheorized, Allen has

situated them in a materialist analysis of the political economy of race and racism. In this framework, racial formation, or racialization, is primarily a historical process. Race and racism function in a political economy. Stated differently, the political economy produces, and becomes, a racialized social system. Because it is a historical system, races are not determined for all time, nor is racism's structure static. Rather, races are formed and transformed, and accordingly racism transforms to accommodate shifts in the economic structure of the dominant mode of production and changes to the means of production. Thus, social control was a critical aspect of the slave political economy in what became the United States. Demographics contributed to a situation where mulattos were racially Black, but the demographic makeup of the United States resulted from the political economy of British North America and the nature of slavery during colonialism, which in turn influenced the nature of slavery in the antebellum South. More important, the racialized social system in the United States allowed for the greatest rate of exploitation of African Americans without a mulatto buffer race because of the presence of a large mass of poor white laborers.

Thus, several factors contributed to the divergent patterns of racial formation in the British West Indies and British North America. The pattern that emerged in what became the United States persisted because the mechanisms of social control in the racialized social system did not require a mulatto buffer race between blacks and whites; poor whites could fill the role of buffer between slave owner and slave. Mulattos served in this capacity in some places, but this was inconsistent, confined to a few urban areas, and was the exception rather than the rule. The historical nature of racialization gave certain preferences to mulattos, so that color played a sig-

nificant role in the social stratification of the African-American community. Color readily joined with class; occupation; and, in some important ways, gender to determine social standing. Mulattos married other mulattos at a high rate, were disproportionately middle class, and tended to dominate in skilled trades. Ultimately, however, this was (and still is) the stratification of a community, not the existence of two different racial groups.³¹

Many biracial identity scholars have searched for a historically marginalized mulatto in the African-American community, and in the process they have overlooked the fact that, historically, mulattos have dominated the Black community, maintained elite social institutions designed to preserve class and color differences, and generally held disparaging views of dark-skinned African Americans. Moreover, there were certainly those who wanted to institutionalize a racial distinctiveness between themselves and blacks, but they were constricted by Black Codes, and later Jim Crow, from carrying through their efforts. Oddly enough, the successes of the civil rights movement created the structural space for persons of mixed parentage to agitate for the establishment of such a racial distinction. The push for a biracial identity arose at the moment when the historical superordination of light-skinned Blacks in the African-American community has diminished, and light-skinned Blacks do not seek to make as vigorous color distinctions as their predecessors. Biracial identity advocates are primarily persons with one Black and one white parent—instead of light-skinned Blacks in general—but some of its most vocal proponents are the white parents of Black children.

A Biracial Identity or a New Race?

It is clear that persons of mixed Black and white parentage have always been present in

the Black community. Indeed, it is estimated that approximately 75 percent of African Americans have white and/or American Indian ancestry. Though the majority of African-descended peoples have a Black identity, it is readily accepted that they have some non-African ancestry. This suggests, at least implicitly, that Blacks have never conceived of themselves as a racially pure group. In many ways, African Americans are a multiracial group, which raises the question, what would a biracial identity do that a Black identity does not?

As stated above, at issue in asserting a biracial identity is not merely forging a new, personal identity, but creating a new race. Moreover, this constitutes a racist project because such a race must be situated in the racialized social system, and as G. Reginald Daniel notes, it would not be equivalent to white, but it would be “just a little less black and thus a little less subordinate.” Furthermore, the conscious attempt to create a racial group without a historical, communal, or cultural basis in a racist society can only help perpetuate this hierarchical structure. Still, the increase in persons born of mixed parentage cannot be overlooked. After antimiscegenation laws were declared unconstitutional, more than one million persons were born of mixed parentage in the United States. In the 1990s, these births (more than 300,000) were 1.4 percent of total U.S. births, 8.9 percent of all births with at least one Black parent, and 43 percent of all mixed-parented births.³² Most recently, in the 2000 U.S. census, 784,764 persons (0.6 percent of the U.S. population) marked Black and white as their racial designation. Scholars can only speculate as to whether these people consider themselves Black or biracial, but it is clear that they represent less than half of all people with one Black and one white parent. This certainly deserves scholarly attention, but by

itself it does not substantiate the need for a biracial identity.³³

Some biracial identity scholars oppose separating people of mixed parentage out from Blacks, particularly since they have no distinct history, community, or culture with which to identify. Rebecca Chiyoko King and Kimberly McClain DaCosta suggest that the central issue in biracial identity is expanding what it means to be African American, so that people of mixed parentage can also identify with their white ancestry.³⁴ Michael C. Thornton finds problems with the argument that people of mixed parentage share a common experience that validates a particular group designation, especially since this shared experience is typically "living with an ambiguous status, an experience similar to that of all people of color." These arguments are in the minority, however, and most biracial identity scholars forward a biracial racial identity as necessarily distinct from a Black racial identity. Some, like Michelle Motoyoshi, Christine C. Iijima Hall, and Jan R. Weisman, claim that these people are in fact a new race.³⁵

This section engages the arguments and propositions in the biracial identity literature, concerned primarily with three elements in these works: (a) the conceptualization of race and racism, (b) the theoretical basis given for a biracial identity, and (c) the argument that a biracial identity would hasten the end of racism. These are examined by placing biracial identity in the historical context of race and racism (as outlined above), emphasizing group historical experience over personal experience.

Many biracial identity scholars view race as a social construction and cite the "one-drop" rule as fundamental to defining a Black race and maintaining white supremacy. Focus on this rule, however, ignores the reality of white supremacy in places like South Africa

and Brazil where the one-drop rule is seemingly absent. More problematic is that most of these scholars talk about biracial identity in a manner that inverts the one-drop rule—because two parents are from different races, their offspring are necessarily biracial. It is true that biology factors into racial classification, but by itself it is insufficient for the formation of a racial group. Just as critical are the historical processes and political economy that come into dialectical relationship with the interaction of social groups during racialization.

Paul R. Spickard recognizes this when he argues that attention must be given to interaction between racial groups and the contours of their respective identities in understanding a particular racial group. From this premise, understanding African Americans would require consideration of how they have been defined historically in the context of the United States. Yet, Spickard submits, "What went unnoticed [is that] the majority of mixed people were denying their heritage in a different way: they were passing for Black." F. James Davis, in a biological determinist view, echoes Spickard's argument: "it would make as much sense from a genetic standpoint to say that the child with a black and a white parent is white as to say it is Black. . . . More logically, the child is racially mixed, and predominantly white unless one parent is unmixed African." Spickard and Davis approach race from two diametrically opposed standpoints, yet both base their arguments in essentialist logic. Davis is consistent in his view that "blacks are . . . not a race group in the scientific sense."³⁶ Spickard, on the other hand, contradicts himself. Had he been consistent, he would have considered how African Americans understand their history, community, and identity, and judged the Black racial identity of people of mixed parentage accordingly. His claim that they

have "passed as Black" misses the fact that heritage is a historical phenomenon that is socially transferred from generation to generation, and overlooks how white or European heritage has historically denied people of mixed parentage. Davis makes a similar, though more acerbic, argument when he asserts that being Black is oppressive because it subordinates individual freedoms and forces African Americans to deny their white ancestry.³⁷

Naomi Zack has most forcefully advanced this argument, but in a more complex theory of race that is nonetheless grounded in biological determinism. Reflecting the philosophical antiracialism of K. Anthony Appiah, Zack argues that race is always an essentialist concept without scientific or historical support, and thus, "black and white racial designations are themselves racist. . . ." She challenges the view that races are social constructions, finding them to be residual concepts from nineteenth-century racial theory that asserted the purity of a white race over an inferior black race. Logically, this supports her argument that racial classifications are inherently racist, but it fails to recognize that the subordination of African-descended peoples is not contingent on their being classified as Black. Furthermore, this negates the historical, communal, and cultural bases of racial identities; overlooks the dialectical nature of racialization; and imparts too much control to whites in the racialization of various groups. Thus, when Zack views the self-identification of Blacks as embracing essentialism, she ultimately attempts to negate their historical reality and their agency.³⁸

Zack finds the central problem with black and white racial designations not in their supposed embrace of essentialism, but in that they do "not permit the identification of individuals . . . as mixed race, [therefore making it] impossible for them to have mixed-race

identities. . . ." For her, biracial identity possesses a tremendous political potential: "If it is possible for people to be of mixed race, based on their genetic endowment alone, then race is not an essential or even an important division between human beings, either naturally or culturally." Zack therefore insists that a biracial identity "is a way of resisting the racism inherent in American racial designations" because it would create "a new person racially" who possesses the "option of racelessness," and to be "raceless in contemporary racial and racist society is, in effect, to be anti-race."³⁹

This philosophical tautology is riddled with contradictions and faulty theory. First, there is a contradiction between Zack's claim that races are scientifically unreal and her biological basis for identifying a "mixed-race" person. She offers no other basis for a racially new person than his or her mixed racial parentage. Ultimately, this presupposes black and white racial designations and insists on their having essential qualities that make their "mixed" progeny racially distinct from both. Second, she does not explain how, if black and white racial designations are oppressive and inherently racist, a biracial designation would be any less oppressive or racist. These problems raise serious doubt about Zack's claim that a biracial identity is the only "effective intellectual weapon against American racial classification, which is to say, against the core of American racism," especially since it depends on those racial classifications.⁴⁰

Equally problematic is the emphasis on the one-drop rule, which is seen as instrumental to maintaining white supremacy. In this framework, it is the conceptualization of some races as superior and others as inferior that creates inequalities and racial oppression, and since the one-drop rule is the U.S. standard of racial classifications, an effective

antiracism must oppose contemporary racial categories because they are premised on the one-drop rule.⁴¹ Such an argument is problematic because it narrowly conceives of race in the U.S. historical context and is therefore useless in those societies where racial categories are not premised on the one-drop rule. It is also ahistorical; it identifies racist hegemony as the sole force in a rigid racialization process, a view that is contradicted by a wealth of scholarship arguing for a dialectical process of racialization that involves structural constraints, white domination, and the self-activity of people of color.⁴² More perplexing, however, is the inconsistency with which opposition to this rule has been argued. Discussions have focused overwhelmingly on how this rule has defined Blacks as anyone with African ancestry, which misses the fact that the one-drop rule is preeminently about defining whites as those who only have European ancestry.⁴³ This has led to a sweeping indictment of African Americans for tenaciously embracing this rule, with a simultaneous hailing of whites as supposedly abandoning it. African Americans are ultimately portrayed as no longer capable of defeating racism, and a biracial identity is exalted as the last weapon against racial oppression.

It is undeniable that there exists a commonsense view that a Black person is anyone with a Black parent or African ancestry. It is not true, however, that this is limited to African Americans. Except for some Latino groups, people with a Black parent are still viewed as Black by U.S. society, and as a community whites still define a white person as someone with only white parents and ancestry. Moreover, though some whites view people of mixed parentage as biracial or non-Black, they generally do not accept them as white. Lynda D. Field even demonstrates that there is a relationship between people of

mixed parentage having a white Reference Group Orientation (RGO) and a poor self-concept. She argues that an RGO toward people of color is important in developing a positive self-concept among adolescents of mixed parentage. Communities of color have learned coping mechanisms for dealing with racism, and "they offer youths standards of beauty, emotional expressiveness, interpersonal distance, degree of extraversion, and comfort with physical intimacy that is often quite different from the white norm," which can give an adolescent a sense of affirmation. This is drastically different from the bulk of the literature, which characterizes a Black identity as a problematic "embrace" of the one-drop rule.⁴⁴

In the "one-drop rule" view, a Black identity is reduced to the passive internalization of racism, with no consideration of group historical experience, community, political struggles, or culture in how Black people see themselves. Zack even declares that because a Black identity is morally unfounded, inherently racist, and oppressive, Black people ignore "reason" in identifying themselves and are instead guided by "passion." And because the "concept of a black American race . . . is coercive," she opines, "perhaps the time has come to reject that concept. . . ." But as Rhett S. Jones points out, Zack's argument takes "the position that those who continue to fight as Blacks against racist oppression are essentially the prisoners of past conceptual categories, [and failing to] abandon their Africanity and . . . insist that they are partially White, these backward looking African Americans enable European Americans to continue the ideas of race purity that make possible racism." In short, Zack's argument blames Black people for the persistence of racism. Moreover, African Americans oppress people of mixed parentage by forcing them to identify as Black and are therefore denying them

an identity that would recognize their complete racial background.⁴⁵

This leads us to the implications of a biracial identity for a racist society. The critical question is what will a biracial identity mean in light of a racialized social system and racial ideology? Two issues are central to answering this question. One, will a biracial identity become a biracial race; and, two, how would such a race be situated in the U.S. racist structure? Given the historical nature of racialization, to assume that it is impossible for a new race to emerge or to be created would be negligent. Asian Americans and Latinos are being racialized, not because of biological similarity—though that plays a role—but because their history in the United States coincides with specific periods of immigration, the establishment of discrete communities (along national rather than racial lines), cultural similarities (or dissimilarity from whites), and a perceived value in forging pan-national or pan-ethnic solidarity. Advocates of a biracial identity, however, do not and cannot point to any of these as a basis for their identity and instead focus on identity issues and personal experiences of marginalization, all the while blurring the line between identity and race. This is partially explained by the fact that there is a permeable line dividing race and identity, as they complement each other. Most racial groups have a particular racial identity because of their history of racialization. William Cross explains this as a relationship between Personal (racial) Identity (PI) and Reference Group Orientation (RGO). Cross argues that PI develops during childhood and becomes stabilized throughout adolescence and adulthood. In this sense, a person of mixed parentage who identifies as Black can have a stable RGO, which, as Field demonstrates, offers community, support, role models, and mentors. Thus, on one level, biracial identity

scholars are advancing a PI that has no stable RGO. And without a historically, socially, or culturally based RGO, Deborah Johnson explains, “the question for biracial [identified] children becomes, Who is my reference group? . . . The intangibility of the ‘group’ makes identification much more difficult.” This presents a paradox: How can a biracial racial identity exist when there is no biracial race (reference group) to identify with? As can be seen in the scholarship—and the biracial identity web sites—a biracial identity is actually the creation of a biracial race (which would resolve the disjuncture between PI and RGO factors), though this weakens the claim that a biracial identity would hasten racism’s demise.⁴⁶

Biracial identity scholars have responded to the criticisms that a biracial identity would create a new race (and therefore, by its own logic, reinforce racism) by insisting on the ability of biracial people to move society beyond racial differences, and therefore racism. One strain of this argument is that a biracial identity does not create a new race or reject a Black identity, but embraces a white identity. Another strain is to view people of mixed parentage as cosmopolitan or marginal people who possess the requisite worldview to move society beyond race and racism and thus usher in a color-blind social order. Both dismiss the suggestion that a biracial identity would negatively affect African Americans, but neither argument is convincing.

Daniel regards the task confronting people with a biracial identity as developing “constructive strategies for resisting the [one-drop] rule of hypodescent” that challenges their claim to “comfort with both [Black and white] backgrounds and . . . membership in both communities.” He suggests that they are doing this “by ‘unsevering’ ties with their European American background and European Americans . . .



In the Mix

PHOTO BY MAXÍMO COLÓN

without severing their relationship with the experience of African Americans."⁴⁷ King and DaCosta similarly consider the actions of people of mixed parentage as seeking a redefinition of race:

The task for mixed-race African Americans in redefining race is to broaden prevailing notions of what it means to be African American, so that identifying with one's nonblack heritage does not preclude identification with one's black heritage. The task is not to be recognized as a separate and distinct group, but to be recognized as both/all, with access to all sides of one's heritage. [Emphasis original]⁴⁸

Daniel's argument asserts that a biracial identity is unique because it is a multidimensional identity, which signals its separateness from a "one-dimensional" Black identity. King and DaCosta, on the other hand, maintain that people of mixed parentage are squarely in the African-American community, but seek to expand its boundaries, not create a separate identity or community. This acknowledges that people of mixed parentage have historically been grounded in the Black community, but it romanticizes the push for a biracial identity by ignoring the persistent calls by advocates not to be classified as Black and for the establishment of a separate racial group, as well as the anti-Black racism of much of

the popular literature.⁴⁹ Furthermore, both Daniel and King and DaCosta exhibit a limited theoretical understanding of Black racial identity, and neither fully contextualizes their arguments in the historical reality of the United States.

The underlying assumption in the work of both Daniel and King and DaCosta is that an African-American identity rejects non-Black or non-African ancestry. Both point to the 1960s and the Black Power Movement as pivotal moments in this regard. Black Power and Black Pride, they maintain, made being Black an identity that denied nonblack ancestry. Daniel even argues that a Black identity is premised on an antiwhite stance. This ignores the struggle of African-descended peoples over what it means to be Black since the 1700s.⁵⁰ The Black Power Movement was merely one period in this intragroup struggle. At issue in this period was a new direction for the Black Freedom Movement; integration was a finite political goal, and Black control over community institutions arose as a primary objective in the late 1960s as a link was identified between racism in the United States and imperialism in Africa. Equally important was the cultural revolution that emphasized African aesthetic values, deemphasized white ancestry as important in the Black community, and raised dark skin and Africanoid features as a standard of beauty. Obviously, this oversimplifies the issue, but as Spencer points out, African Americans are familiar with the negative effects an emphasis on white ancestry can have in the Black community. According to Verna M. Keith and Cedric Herring, Richard Seltzer and Robert C. Smith, and Mark E. Hill, not only is there still a light-skin standard of beauty among African Americans, but skin color continues to influence the social stratification of the Black community, affecting

education levels, income, and housing. This suggests that what has been judged a narrow, antiwhite Black identity is more likely an attempt to mitigate against whiteness being valued in important ways in the Black community over blackness.⁵¹

An additional problem with the arguments of Daniel and King and DaCosta is that they portray whites as increasingly liberal, and Blacks as increasingly conservative, on questions of race, while underemphasizing the structural aspect of racism. This is misleading for several reasons. It overlooks the continued segregation of African Americans, the poorer educational systems they must endure, the lower median incomes for Black families, and a higher incarceration rate for Blacks than whites; in effect, it disregards the persistence of white racism. Bonilla-Silva and Lewis note, "There is fairly strong evidence suggesting that whites underreport their 'racism,'" and when studies have "probed more deeply into whites' racial attitudes [they] have shown that whites still believe many of the stereotypes about blacks and harbor hostility toward them." They also report that whites show general support "on questions dealing with the principles of integration, equal opportunity, and affirmative action, but at the same time exhibit significant resistance on questions dealing with the implementation of policies designed to guarantee racial equality." This raises serious doubts about Kathleen Odell Korgen's claim that there is now "an atmosphere in which interracial marriages and their biracial offspring [are] increasingly accepted by mainstream white America." These relationships and their progeny are certainly accepted at a greater rate than before the 1960s, but there is no evidence to suggest a widespread pattern.⁵² Additionally, a Black identity is a historically based identity, not the manifestation of antiwhite sentiments. It recognizes a persistence

among whites to refuse to acknowledge the material benefits they receive from the legacy of racism and whiteness. Relatedly, to many African Americans a biracial identity is viewed as an attempt to gain political, economic, and social benefits from the official acknowledgment of white ancestry, which explains their apparent hostility toward the push for a biracial identity that has focused on and emphasized not being oppressed by an unwanted Black identity. Taken together with the lack of attention to dismantling the structural and cultural effects of white supremacy, we discover an unwillingness to challenge the structural relationship of domination that race represents.⁵⁵

Daniel exhibits the contradictions in the scholarship when in a single essay he contradicts himself regarding the claim that a biracial identity would keep people of mixed parentage connected to a Black identity:

*The carriers of the new multiracial consciousness . . . are not, therefore, seeking special privileges that would be precluded by identifying as Black. Whether they call themselves "mixed," "biracial," "interracial," or "multiracial," these individuals represent, rather, the next logical step in the progression of civil rights, the expansion of our notion of affirmative action to include strategies not only for achieving socioeconomic equity, but also for affirming a nonhierarchical identity that embraces a "holocentric" racial self. [Emphasis original]*⁵⁴

A biracial identity is viewed as key to bringing about an egalitarian society that allows people to embrace all their racial and ethnic backgrounds in a nonhierarchical manner. Daniel therefore dismisses as extreme the claim that such an identity would create the type of racial structure that exists in South Africa. Yet, just a few pages later he advises:

What should be pointed out in this matter . . . is that the mere recognition of multiracial identity is not in itself inherently problematic. The critical question is whether the dynamics of race relations . . . are to operate horizontally (that is, in an egalitarian manner in which equal value is attached to differences) or vertically (that is, in an inegalitarian manner, in which differences serve as the basis for perpetuating inequalities). *Being multiracial in a hierarchical system simply means being just a little less Black and thus a little less subordinate, but does not assure equality with Whites. [Emphasis added]*⁵⁵

On the one hand, a biracial identity will not mean special social privileges because persons of mixed parentage are not identified as Black, yet on the other hand it will mean being a little less oppressed because they are not Black. This is a semantic sleight of hand, as there is no real difference between receiving "special privileges" and being "a little less subordinate." According to Gordon, these types of arguments "signal the matrices of value in a world that is conditioned by two fundamental convictions, (1) it is best to be white, and (2) it is worse to be black." The theoretical arguments for a biracial identity, especially by scholars like Zack and Daniel, are driven by the logical conclusion that "failing to become white, one can at least increase the distance between oneself and blackness."⁵⁶

More important than being "less black" is being biracial, or having a biracial identity. A biracial race, according to Daniel, would be able to eventually move Blacks and whites "beyond their separate and hostile worlds, by insuring that wealth, power, privilege, and prestige are more equitably distributed among Anglo America's varied citizenry. . . ." Essentially, this paraphrases Zack's contention that the problem with the Black Freedom Move-

ment is that it has accepted the one-drop rule, and therefore embraced the core of racial oppression by legitimating contemporary racial categories. And according to this logic, a biracial identity/race challenges the very core of racism and thus can effectively destroy it. As pointed out earlier, this reduces racism to an ideological construct; lost is the structural character of racism that can function without racial categories or a color-conscious racial ideology. Moreover, in a period when serious attention to the interconnectedness of class, race, and gender has illuminated the complexities of racial domination, such a simplistic argument is baffling.⁵⁷

A more nuanced argument for biracial identity hastening racism's demise is the marginal man theory. This theory claims a cosmopolitanism among people of mixed parentage because of their ambiguous position in the racial hierarchy. Because the marginal person hails from, but is not of, the Black and the white community, he or she has a "keener intelligence" and a unique, broader, even more "rational" worldview than nonmarginal people. Korgen has taken great pains to ground this theory in a historical context by identifying two key elements of marginality: (a) people of mixed parentage feel unable to fit in, and (b) they have a more objective or "cosmopolitan" view of society. Though these characteristics are rare among people of mixed parentage born before 1965, she claims that they are readily apparent in those born after 1965. Part of the reason why those born after 1965 resemble the marginal person is that they supposedly do not have experiences where black people accept them as Black. But as with much of Korgen's study, this argument is fraught with methodological problems. First, it is based on personal testimonials, which present great difficulty for gauging acceptance. This is not to devalue personal experiences but to caution against

their uncritical acceptance. They must be viewed as data for scholarly analysis, not as the analysis itself. For instance, the most common example of rejection offered is some form of the dozens. Individuals recall being ridiculed for having a fair complexion, a fine grade of hair, or a white parent, which made them feel unwanted in the Black community. Yet, the dozens also target those who are poor or overweight or have a dark complexion, broad nose, or kinky hair, which is to say that any manner of physical attribute or life circumstance is subject to ridicule, particularly among adolescents.⁵⁸ In addition, Black middle-class youths typically have their "blackness" called into question by working-class and poor Black youths. They are taunted for talking white or thinking they are better than their poorer kith. In these cases, questions of authenticity, such as cultural affectations, speech, dress, mannerisms, fashion, hairstyle, or residence, mask class antagonisms among Blacks—working-class and poor Blacks certainly experience similar ridicule from the Black middle class. Clearly, the dozens are a problematic cultural practice that at once betrays a degree of internalized racism while simultaneously strengthening the ties that bind Black people together. This does not, however, mean that they are a clear indication of rejection. It is also possible that what is experienced as rejection is actually Black people responding to what they may perceive as rejection by a biracial-identified person.⁵⁹ The point is that though it is important for the experiences of people of mixed parentage to be taken seriously, these experiences should be critically engaged, with attention to the impact that class, gender, and personal choice have had in an individual's life. Moreover, they must be weighed against the fact that not all people of mixed parentage recount experiences of rejection or feel alienated from the Black community. This raises

the question of whether this can be viewed as a modal experience for people of mixed parentage.

Korgen avoids critically engaging this problematic by emphasizing that people of mixed parentage born after 1965 have consciously chosen to live apart from the Black community. "They actively attempt to straddle the racial divide," she explains, and "in doing so, they are prime candidates for the role and experience of marginal persons . . ." Unintentionally, she places the agency of this cohort in question, allowing for class and personal choice to be considered as factors in evaluating reported experiences of rejection. Several empirical studies demonstrate that most people who identify as biracial are middle class, matured in predominantly white social environments, and had minimal interaction with African Americans.⁶⁰ Korgen goes even further to suggest that because of their economic status they have few if any Black role models; that their Black parent "implicitly promotes interacting with white persons"; and that because they "have little, if anything, in common with poor black Americans, it is no wonder young biracial persons recognize their white heritage." Implicit in this argument is the unwarranted assumption that Black people and Black identity are inextricably tied to poverty and that the higher economic status of people of mixed parentage precludes them from interacting with Black peers or having Black role models. The Black middle class is large enough, and Black suburban communities numerous enough, for middle-class people of mixed parentage to be able to interact with Black peers and have Black role models of a similar class standing. It also means that a Black identity is dynamic, not "one dimensional," as African Americans are a heterogeneous group. Moreover, a more pressing concern is the fact that the middle-class parents of peo-

ple of mixed parentage largely involve their children in white social and cultural practices and institutions, reside in predominantly white communities, and rarely involve their children in Black sociocultural settings, thereby implicitly endorsing interaction with whites as preferable to interaction with Blacks. As a result, these individuals are likely to be culturally illiterate in Black social settings and are therefore more susceptible to ridicule. It is not, then, that recognizing one's white ancestry is a logical result of their marginalization—the Black middle class, especially the older Black elite, do this very thing, though typically through an emphasis on light complexion—but that increasing the sociopolitical distance between themselves and African Americans is structured into their socialization into adulthood.⁶¹

Too often, studies of biracial identity miss the fact that African Americans exist in a heterogeneous community with important differences based on class, gender, and region that should caution against arguments premised on a mythical, unified Black community. There are instances where people of mixed parentage are rejected by Black people, but these experiences hardly represent rejection by the entire Black community. As Rockquemore's study shows, a new social setting or a different phase in life can often produce drastically different experiences. One of the young women Rockquemore interviewed reported feeling rejected and ostracized from her Black peers when she attended a public high school that was 50 percent Black. When this woman transferred in her sophomore year to a Catholic high school with only a handful of Black students, she was accepted as Black, and this continued when she entered a Catholic university in the Midwest. More important, studies of biracial identity overlook the white racism that people of mixed parentage encounter. France

Winddance Twine conducted a study of sixteen women of mixed parentage who had acquired a white or racially neutral identity during adolescence, but later acquired either a Black or a biracial identity. Twine's respondents were raised in predominantly white, middle-class environments and had minimal contact with African Americans. They grew up viewing themselves as white or racially neutral, because their mothers had not given them a racialized identity and their peers did not identify them as racially distinct. Once these women started dating, they faced rejection by their white peers, which caused cognitive dissonance with regard to their racial identity (or lack thereof). Their identities began to change once they entered the University of California-Berkeley and encountered its politicized racial communities; eventually they all developed stable racial identities. In each case, they encountered rejection by the white community they had grown up in and identified with. Indeed, people of mixed parentage will be just as alienated from white people and white society as are other people of color.⁶²

With all these possibilities, it is doubtful that the "marginal person" is naturally imbued with objectivity, rationality, and a keener intelligence that would allow him or her to assume the vanguard of U.S. race relations. Korgen, basing her argument on a statistically limited sample,⁶³ maintains, "Those who claim a biracial identity view race and our race-based society in general in a markedly different manner than the average monoracial American." Though entirely possible, this does not necessarily mean that such a view is broader or more objective than that of people who are not marginal. The most obvious methodological problem is Korgen's failure to analyze her respondents' responses. Rather than demonstrate their broader worldview, she merely accepts their

word that they possess such a worldview. This approach stems from a more serious theoretical problem: Korgen's failure to critique, modify, or bring into the current historical era Robert Park's seventy-two-year-old idea of the marginal man. As she accepts Park's essentialist, racialist, and masculinist premise, it is no wonder that she exemplifies what Spencer identifies as a tendency to view people of mixed parentage as intellectually superior to "unmixed" Blacks, a reformulation of the antebellum "mulatto hypothesis" that makes a social constructionist argument that hopelessly dovetails into a morass of essentialism. Korgen's argument would make people of mixed parentage race seers, purveyors of a new racial order based solely on their mixed parentage and date of birth—which presumably signals their distance from the Black community and proximity to the white community. Yet, the examples she provides rarely support her claim. Her respondents reveal an ambiguous understanding of race and racism and at times a negative valuation of Black people, Africanoid features, and African-American culture, something that Rockquemore also found in her research. When taken into consideration with other empirical studies and personal narratives, what has been identified as a broader outlook on race is actually a color-blind racial ideology that slights the continued salience of race and racism in U.S. society and typically evidences some form of anti-Black racism. Given that race theorists have recognized color-blindness as the current dominant racial ideology, the cosmopolitan worldview may be more detrimental than beneficial. This lends support to Spencer's claim that a biracial race in the United States would likely stay on the non-Black side of the color line rather than reach across it in significant numbers to intermingle with Black people.⁶⁴

A few scholars have confronted the shortcomings and contradictions in the arguments for a biracial identity. Nearly all the biracial identity scholars agree that races are social constructions, but an essentialist logic underlies the arguments for a biracial identity. There is a persistent claim that people of mixed parentage are not seeking a special status, though some scholars have reluctantly recognized that such an identity would necessarily racialize people of mixed parentage and others openly proclaim that this new race would be given more privileges than African Americans. This undermines the already weak assumption that such an identity would hasten the end of racism. Aside from implying a special quality for people of mixed parentage, it wants to be antirace while simultaneously contributing to a new racial formation through the creation of a new race. Thus, King and DaCosta's argument that this movement is designed to redefine what it means to be African American not only romanticizes the movement but ignores its politically shortsighted and conservative tendencies.⁶⁵

Thornton, Rockquemore, Field, and Twine are harbingers of new approaches to biracial identity. Thornton is critical of the idea that people of mixed parentage are a distinct group and that a biracial identity will hasten the end of racism, though he fully supports a biracial identity on a personal level. Rockquemore identifies multiple meanings for a biracial identity that makes obsolete the monolithic one assumed by many scholars. Field has directed critical attention to the problems of a white Reference Group Orientation for people of mixed parentage, pointing out that it may lead to developmental and self-esteem problems. Twine has also presented evidence that, contrary to popular belief, the white community has not (color) blindly opened its arms to

people of mixed parentage.⁶⁶ It is also worth noting that these scholars are willing to engage Black Studies scholarship and/or present their work in venues that engage Black Studies scholars. This is important because, despite the protestations of the white parents of children of mixed parentage, these are issues with which the Black community must grapple.

Unfortunately, none of these scholars has engaged in a sustained critique of the push for a biracial identity or the scholarship supporting that push.⁶⁷ Very little critical debate exists among biracial identity scholars, and the critical works of Spencer, Gordon, and Jones have been ignored or dismissed. More important, though, is the intellectual plunder of the Black activist-intellectual tradition that biracial identity scholars are engaged in—oddly enough, this coincides with an attack on that very tradition. Zack advocates constructing a “mixed-race” history by removing historical actors of mixed parentage (or lineage) from Black historical texts, an enterprise that would indict those historical actors as having failed to truly understand their “racial” reality while simultaneously denying African Americans the agency to define themselves. She has mounted a spurious attack on the Black activist-intellectual tradition by claiming that African Americans’ criticisms of white people and racism are instances of morally based extrinsic racism.⁶⁸ And when we consider Zack’s argument that maintaining a Black identity is based on “passion,” not “reason,” along with the fact that not a single biracial identity scholar has criticized her on this point, we discover an insolence toward African Americans that is only less grave than the contempt that prompted the argument itself. Indeed, the lack of debate among biracial identity scholars has produced a body of scholarship more concerned with citing colleagues than cor-

recting intellectual and political errors or seriously engaging scholarly criticism.⁶⁹

Conclusion

The decision by people of mixed parentage to assert a biracial identity is a personal choice, but such a choice is not made in a vacuum. It is made in a society where class exploitation, racism, and sexism remain the most important fissures affecting the organization of society. Racial identity, therefore, has real consequences for the organization of the institutional infrastructure and social relationships between groups. The choice of a biracial identity is no different, as it cannot be divorced from the push for a biracial identity that seeks to separate out people of mixed parentage as a distinct racial group. This would require a restructuring of the racialized social system so people of mixed parentage would not be treated as Black and would receive some of the psychological and material "wages of whiteness." Psychologically, this would mean that several people of mixed parentage would achieve what Gordon identifies as the imperative of being anything but Black. Materially, the likelihood is that they would have higher median incomes than Blacks; receive home loans at a higher frequency, and with lower interest rates, than Blacks; distance themselves from African Americans residentially, culturally, and institutionally; not have the generally hostile interactions with the state that African Americans have; further weaken already fragile Black congressional districts; and situate themselves as a new model minority. It is not that all of these things are inherently negative, but that they are collectively premised on the continued oppression of Blacks. Moreover, the underlying color-blind racial ideology would make it even more difficult to document and struggle against racial discrim-

ination, segregation, racial profiling, and racial terrorism; it would also render affirmative action, multiculturalism, and equal opportunity employment unnecessary as politically progressive social programs. In short, a new, airbrushed color line would be drawn, with a biracial race on the non-Black side and with new forms of social control helping the dominant racialclass maintain its exploitation of subordinate races.

Works addressing people of mixed parentage and biracial identity must be grounded in the African-American historical experience and have a sense of the structural character of racial oppression. It is also important to consider whether African Americans are merely a race or dually a national group. By the 1930s, Black people had responded to their racialization by forming themselves into a national group. They developed a diversified class structure, held a sense of themselves as a socially distinct people, were geographically dispersed across the United States in both rural and urban areas, and established long-standing political organizations and social institutions and a dynamic activist-intellectual tradition. This begs the questions, does room exist for a biracial (ethnic) identity in the Black community? And would the effects of this intracommunal identity be similar to a biracial (racial) identity? Given what we know about the history of skin color correlating with social status in the Black community and the privileges extended to lighter-skinned Blacks by the dominant society, some preliminary, historically based conclusions can be drawn.

In short, a Black biracial identity within an African-American national group is unlikely to create a biracial race. Individuals could identify with their Irish extended family or their German or English ancestry—effectively resolving the issue of rejection of the white parent—but not negate a Black identity

or signal an embrace of whiteness.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, the possibility still exists that such an identity would have a negative impact in the Black community, especially if it is premised on identification with whiteness. The most obvious possible consequence is that it can exacerbate the persistent correlation between skin color and social stratification in the Black community. Keith and Herring note that in the United States, social and economic privileges have historically been extended to light-skinned blacks but not dark-skinned blacks. These advantages have over "successive generations . . . been cumulative so that the most successful blacks were disproportionately lighter in complexion."⁷¹ Color still impacts educational attainment, occupation, income level, and spouse selection regardless of the influence of background and sociodemographic characteristics. Seltzer and Smith and several other studies concur, finding that today "the Black community continues to exhibit a degree of class stratification based on color, with lighter-skin Blacks exhibiting higher education and occupational attainments."⁷² It is unlikely that a Black biracial identity would lessen degrees of alienation based on lighter skin color, but such identity is likely to exacerbate the correlation between skin color and the social stratification of the Black community.

It is clear that such an identity should be advanced cautiously and attention directed to its structural implications. The question of a biracial identity will continue to be an issue for people of mixed parentage in the foreseeable future, if for no other reason than the agitation of their white parents. Moreover, biracial identity scholars are determined to keep this discussion outside the realm of Black Studies scholarship. Nevertheless, this issue deals specifically with African Americans, and Black Studies scholars must address it in light of the Black historical experience, the

struggle over group identity, and the continued salience of racism in U.S. society. Biracial identity scholars have overlooked the anti-Black racism of the popular movement and have themselves forwarded unsophisticated arguments that reproduce those sentiments. Black Studies scholarship on biracial identity must therefore address the historical nature of social relationships, institutional infrastructures, and ideologies that have oppressed, and continue to oppress, African Americans and consider what a biracial identity would mean considering that history. It is therefore necessary to have a theoretically sound theory of race and racism that avoids idealistic postulations that would support the essentialist arguments of biracial identity advocates for a biracial race. And though a Black biracial identity is less problematic, it has the potential to exacerbate differences in the Black community that raise questions about its social value. In the end, a biracial identity is a political question. Personal identity and personal choice are relevant issues, but they are subsidiary to questions of race, racism, and the structures of racial oppression.

Notes

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1. When "Black" is capitalized, it denotes a national group and is synonymous with African American. When "black" is in lower case, it denotes a racial group and signifies all people of African descent. In the section "Mu-

lattos and Racialization in the United States," "African American" refers to both blacks and mulattos, but the lower-case "black" does not refer to mulattos.

2. "People of mixed parentage" refers to people with one Black and one white parent. Though cumbersome, the term does not have the political implication of "biracial," which, given the current discourse, implies a new racial group. Also, unless in a direct quote, biracial is substituted for terms like multiracial, mixed race, and so on.

3. Johnella E. Butler, "African American Studies and the 'Warring Ideals': The Color Line Meets the Borderlands," in Manning Marable, ed., *Dispatches from the Ebony Tower: Intellectuals Confront the African American Experience* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), p. 142.

4. Joel Williamson, *New People: Miscegenation and Mulattos in the United States* (New York: New York University Press, 1984); G. Reginald Daniel, "Beyond Black and White: The New Multiracial Consciousness," in Maria P.P. Root, ed., *Racially Mixed People in America* (Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1992), p. 340, and "Black and White Identity in the New Millennium: Unsevering the Ties That Bind," in Maria P.P. Root, ed., *The Multiracial Experience: Racial Borders As the New Frontier* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1996), pp. 124-135; Lynda D. Field, "Piecing Together the Puzzle: Self-Concept and Group Identity in Biracial Black/White Youth," in Root, ed., *The Multiracial Experience*; Christine C. Iijima Hall, "2001: A Race Odyssey," in Root, ed., *The Multiracial Experience*, pp. 395-410; Rebecca Chiyoko King and Kimberly McClain DaCosta, "Changing Face, Changing Race: The Remaking of Race in the Japanese American and African American Communities," in Root, ed., *The Multiracial Experience*; Kathleen Odell Korgen, *From Black to Biracial: Transforming Racial Identity Among Americans* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger Publishers, 1998); Maria P.P. Root, "Within, Between, and Beyond Race," in Root, ed., *Racially Mixed People in America*, p. 3; Michael C. Thornton, "Is Multiracial Status Unique? The Personal and Social Experience," in Root, ed., *Racially Mixed People in America*, pp. 321-325; Naomi Zack, *Race and Mixed Race* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), p. 143.

5. For theoretical discussions of experience, see Thomas C. Holt, "Experience and the Politics of Intellectual Inquiry," in James Chandler, Arnold I. Davidson, and Harry Harotunian, eds., *Questions of Evidence: Proof, Practice, and Persuasion Across the Disciplines* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), pp. 388-396; Thomas C. Holt, "W.E.B. Du Bois's Archaeology of Race: Re-Reading 'The Conservation of Races,'" in Michael B. Katz and Thomas J. Sugrue, eds., *W.E.B. Du Bois, Race, and the City: The Philadelphia Negro and Its Legacy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), pp. 61-76; Joan Wollach Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," in Chandler, Davidson, and Haro-

tunian, eds., *Questions of Evidence*, pp. 363-387; Joan Wollach Scott, "A Rejoinder to Thomas C. Holt," in Chandler, Davidson, and Harotunian, eds., *Questions of Evidence*, pp. 397-400.

6. Kerry Ann Rockquemore, "Between Black and White: Exploring the 'Biracial' Experience," *Race & Society*, Vol. 1, no. 2 (1998), pp. 197-198; Jon Michael Spencer, *The New Colored People: The Mixed-Race Movement in America* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), pp. 155-161; Lewis R. Gordon, "Critical 'Mixed Race'?" *Social Identities*, Vol. 1, no. 2 (1995), pp. 301-392; Albert Mosley, "Are Racial Categories Racist?" *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 28, no. 4 (1997), p. 109, passim.

7. Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s* (New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 55, 162, note 2; Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, "Rethinking Racism: Toward a Structural Interpretation," *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 62, no. 3 (1996), p. 446. For views of race as an arbitrary category, see Audrey Smedly, *Race in North America: Origins and Evolution of a Worldview* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1993). For race as an ideology, see Barbara J. Fields, "Ideology and Race in American History," in J. Morgan Kousser and James M. McPherson, eds., *Region, Race and Reconstruction: Essays in Honor of C. Vann Woodward* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 143-177.

8. Sundiata Keita Cha-Jua, "Racial Formation and Transformation: Toward a Theory of Black Racial Oppression," *Souls*, Vol. 3, no. 1 (Winter 2001), note 4.

9. I use "racism" and "white supremacy" interchangeably throughout this article. Bonilla-Silva and Charles Mills both make a compelling argument for abandoning racism as a conceptual term for talking about racial oppression in the United States. Mills contends, "one of the crucial ambiguities in [racism's] usage is precisely that between racism as a complex of ideas, values, and attitudes and racism as an institutionalized politico-economic structure for which the ideas are an ideological accompaniment" (*Blackness Visible: Essays on Philosophy and Race* [Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998], p. 100). Bonilla-Silva makes a similar point in arguing for replacing "racism" with "racialized social system" as an appropriate conceptual terminology for addressing racial oppression ("Rethinking Racism," p. 467). I am sympathetic to, and strongly influenced by, both arguments, but I disagree with them because, in the final analysis, competing definitions of racism are a political and theoretical question. Their arguments miss an opportunity to engage an important political struggle with liberals and conservatives over what racism is, and who is (or can be) racist. They appropriately point out the various problems with the conceptualization of racism as preeminently an ideology; it does not follow that materialist approaches must therefore abdicate "racism" for another, more accurate, terminology. Furthermore, it is pos-

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sible to use both their theoretical advances in the terminological framework of—and debate over—racism: the racialized social system as the structural aspects of racism and white supremacy as the only form of racial domination in human history—and thus there is no need to differentiate it from any other form of racism, say, a mythical black supremacy.

10. Harold Baron, "Racism Transformed: The Implication of the 1960s," *Review of Radical Political Economics*, Vol. 17, no. 3 (1985), pp. 10–33; Sundiata Keita Cha-Jua, "Sankofa: Racial Formation and Transformation: Toward a Theory of African American History," Working Papers Series, no. 18, Department of Comparative American Cultures, Washington State University, Pullman, 2000; Bonilla-Silva, "Rethinking Racism"; Charles W. Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997), pp. 32–33.

11. Eduardo Bonilla-Silva and Amanda Lewis, "The New Racism: Racial Structure in the United States, 1960s–1990s," in Paul Wong, ed., *Race, Ethnicity, and Nationality in the United States: Toward the Twenty First Century* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1999), pp. 55–101; Leslie G. Carr, "Color-Blind" Racism (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1997); Helen A. Neville, Roderick L. Lilly, Richard M. Lee, Georgia Duran, and LaVonne Browne, "Construction and Initial Validation of the Color-Blind Racial Attitudes Scale (COBRAS)," *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, Vol. 47, no. 1 (2000), pp. 59–70; Baron, "Racism Transformed"; Sundiata K. Cha-Jua, *America's First Black Town: Brooklyn, Illinois, 1830–1915* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), pp. 15–16.

12. Baron, "Racism Transformed," pp. 12, 13–15; Sundiata Keita Cha-Jua and Clarence Lang, "Strategies for Black Liberation in the Era of Globalism: Retronouveau Civil Rights, Militant Black Conservatism, and Radicalism," *The Black Scholar*, Vol. 29, no. 4 (1999), p. 28.

13. Bonilla-Silva, "Rethinking Racism," p. 469; Verna Bashi, "Racial Categories Matter Because Racial Hierarchies Matter: A Commentary," *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 21, no. 5 (1998), pp. 959–968.

14. Williamson, *New People*; John G. Mencke, *Mulattos and Race Mixture: American Attitudes and Images, 1865–1918* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1976). In this section, the lower case "black" does not refer to mulattos. Also, I use "African American" when referring to both blacks and mulattos instead of the upper case "Black" to avoid confusion.

15. Williamson, *New People*, p. 124.

16. Though biracial identity scholars draw heavily on F. James Davis's *Who Is Black? One Nation's Definition* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991), I do not address it in this section for two reasons. First, it is a sociological study that draws its historical understanding from Williamson. It does not provide new historical research or address the historical, methodolog-

ical, and argumentative problems in either Williamson or Mencke, and therefore does not warrant historiographical treatment. Second, it not only repeats many of the flaws found in Williamson and Mencke, it amplifies them to the point of historical absurdity, and would thus require an essay in itself to address the multitude of deficiencies.

17. Williamson, *New People*, pp. 7–13, 15.

18. Williamson, *New People*, p. 14; Mencke, *Mulattos*, pp. 15–21; Robert J. Cottrol, *The Afro-Yankees: Providence's Black Community in the Antebellum Era* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1982), pp. 133–139.

19. See Henry L. Taylor, Jr., "Spatial Organization and Residential Experience: Black Cincinnati in 1850," *Social Science History*, Vol. 10, no. 1 (1986), pp. 45–69, for a discussion of residential clustering. Theodore Hershberg and Henry Williams, "Mulattos and Blacks: Intra-Group Color Differences and Social Stratification in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia," in Theodore Hershberg, ed., *Philadelphia: Work, Space, Family, and Group Experience in the 19th Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 423; James Oliver Horton, "Shades of Color: The Mulatto in Three Antebellum Northern Communities," *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History*, Vol. 8, no. 2 (1984), pp. 47–51; James Oliver Horton and Stacy Flaherty, "Black Leadership in Antebellum Cincinnati," in Henry Louis Taylor, Jr., ed., *Race and the City: Work, Community, and Protest in Cincinnati, 1820–1970* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), pp. 80–87; U.S. Census Bureau, *Population Schedules of the Seventh Census of the United States, 1850, St. Louis, Missouri*, reels 434–439.

20. Henry Louis Taylor and Vicky Dula, "The Black Residential Experience and Community Formation in Antebellum Cincinnati," in Taylor, ed., *Race and the City*, pp. 96–125; Williams, *New People*, p. 423; Michael S. Coray, "Negro and Mulatto in the Pacific West, 1850–1860: Changing Patterns of Black Population Growth," *The Pacific Historian*, Vol. 29, no. 4 (1985), pp. 18–27; Steven W. Engerrand, "Black and Mulatto Mobility and Stability in Dallas, Texas, 1880–1910," *Phylon*, Vol. 39, no. 3 (1978), pp. 203–215; K. Keith Richard, "Unwelcome Settlers: Black and Mulatto Oregon Pioneers," *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 84, no. 1 (1983), pp. 29–55; K. Keith Richard, "Unwelcome Settlers: Black and Mulatto Oregon Pioneers, Part II," *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 84, no. 2 (1983), pp. 173–205.

21. Williams, *New People*, pp. 25–26; Mencke, *Mulattos*, pp. 19–23.

22. Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Vintage Books, 1976), pp. 7, 10, 327–328; Michael P. Johnson, "Work, Culture, and the Slave Community: Slave Occupations in the Cotton Belt in 1860," *Labor History*, Vol. 27, no. 3 (1986), pp. 329–333; Michael A. Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African*

Identity in the Colonial and Antebellum South (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), p. 240.

23. Larry Koger, *Black Slaveowners: Free Black Slave Masters in South Carolina, 1790-1860* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995); Michael P. Johnson and James L. Roark, "'A Middle Ground': Free Mulattos and the Friendly Moralists Society of Antebellum Charleston," *Southern Studies*, Vol. 21, no. 3 (1982), pp. 246-265; Robert L. Harris, Jr., "Charleston's Free Afro-American Elite: The Brown Fellowship Society and the Humane Brotherhood," *South Carolina Historical Magazine*, Vol. 82, no. 4 (1981), pp. 289-310.

24. Theodore W. Allen, *The Invention of the White Race, Volume One: Racial Oppression and Social Control* (New York: Verso Press, 1994), pp. 12-13; Ira Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), pp. 8-9, 92-99; Mencke, *Mulattos*, pp. 14, 22; John W. Blassingame, "Before the Ghetto: The Making of the Black Community in Savannah, Georgia, 1865-1880," *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 6, no. 4 (1973), pp. 463-488; Whittington B. Johnson, *Black Savannah, 1788-1864* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1996).

25. Blassingame, "Before the Ghetto"; Laura Foner, "The Free People of Color in Louisiana and St. Domingue: A Comparative Portrait of Two Three-Caste Slave Societies," *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 3, no. 4 (1970), pp. 406-430; Gary B. Mills, *The Forgotten People: Cane River's Creoles of Color* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977).

26. Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), pp. 125-126.

27. Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*; Williamson, *New People*, pp. 3, 33-35, 74-78, 121, 130; Mencke, *Mulattos*, pp. 26-27.

28. Donald L. Horowitz, "Color Differentiation in the American Systems of Slavery," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol. 3, no. 3 (1973), pp. 509-510; Allen, *The Invention of the White Race*, pp. 12-14.

29. Allen, *The Invention of the White Race*, p. 14.

30. Horowitz, "Color Differentiation," pp. 531-533.

31. Verna M. Keith and Cedric Herring, "Skin Tone and Stratification in the Black Community," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 97, no. 3 (1991), pp. 760-778; Richard Seltzer and Robert C. Smith, "Color Differences in the Afro-American Community and the Differences They Make," *Journal of Black Studies*, Vol. 21, no. 3 (1991), pp. 279-286.

32. Daniel, "Beyond Black and White," p. 340; Peggy Pascoe, "Miscegenation Law, Court Cases, and Ideologies of 'Race' in Twentieth-Century America," *Journal of American History*, Vol. 83, no. 1 (1996), pp. 44-69; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *Vital Statistics of the United States, 1990. Part 1, Natality* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1994),

table 1-34; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *Vital Statistics of the United States, 1991. Part 1, Natality* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1995), table 1-34; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *Vital Statistics of the United States, 1992. Part 1, Natality* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1996), table 1-34; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *Vital Statistics of the United States, 1993. Part 1, Natality* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1999), table 1-34.; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *Vital Statistics of the United States, 1997. Part 1, Natality* >ONLINE [24 April 2000], National Center for Health Statistics: Available [www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/t1x1197.pdf] [14 May 2000]<, table 1-11. At this writing, statistics were available only for the years 1990, 1991, 1992, 1993, and 1997.

33. U.S. Census Bureau, "Overview of Race and Hispanic Origin: Census 2000 Brief," >ONLINE [issued March 2001] U.S. Census Bureau: Available [www.census.gov/prod/2001pubs/cenbr01-1.pdf] [14 May 2001]<, p. 8. That 784,764 persons reported both Black and white as their race on the census actually tells us little about a biracial identity. First, we have no way of knowing how many of these respondents have one Black and one white parent, how many were merely indicating that they have Black and white ancestry, or how many actually embrace a biracial identity. This uncertainty is even more apparent when we consider that almost 72 percent (562,914) of the persons marked Black and white on the census were under the age of eighteen. This suggests that it was their parents who marked their race on the census, a good number of whom were in fact attempting to impart a biracial identity to their children. Furthermore, because racial identity is a dynamic process and not a finite choice, there is no guarantee that the children who embrace a biracial identity during adolescence will maintain it later in life. Finally, we cannot know whether the 28 percent (221,850) of respondents over the age of eighteen consider themselves Black or biracial. Indeed, to make categorical conclusions either way about these data is intellectually untenable. About the only categorical conclusion we can draw is that 784,764 persons reported Black and white as their race on the census. See U.S. Census Bureau, *Census 2000 Redistricting Data (Public Law 94-171) Summary File: PL3. Race for the Population 18 Years and Over* >ONLINE [issued March 2001] U.S. Census Bureau: Available [http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/DT-Table?_ts=14826529020] [7 June 2001]<.

34. King and DaCosta fail to explain exactly what this "white" is that is being identified with. This is particularly important in light of the work of such scholars as Theodore Allen, Noel Ignatiev, Ian F. Haney López, Charles Mills, Cheryl I. Harris, and David Roediger, who all point to the economic, social, political, and philosophical problems of white racial identity. This is an even more glaring oversight by King and DaCosta when

we consider that several of these scholars have suggested that whiteness is something that should be abandoned. See King and DaCosta, "Changing Face, Changing Race," p. 239; Allen, *Invention of the White Race, Volume One*; Allen, *The Invention of the White Race, Volume Two: The Origin of Racial Oppression in Anglo-America* (New York: Verso Press, 1997); Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge Press, 1995); López, *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race* (New York: New York University Press, 1996); Mills, *Blackness Visible*; Harris, "Whiteness As Property," *Harvard Law Review*, Vol. 106, no. 8 (June 1993), pp. 1707-1791; Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso Press, 1991); Roediger, *Towards the Abolition of Whiteness: Essays on Race, Politics, and Working Class History* (New York: Verso Press, 1994).

35. Thornton, "Is Multiracial Status Unique," p. 324; Michelle M. Motoyoshi, "The Experience of Mixed-Race People: Some Thoughts and Theories," *Journal of Ethnic Studies*, Vol. 18, no. 2 (1990), p. 89; Iijima Hall, "2001"; Jan R. Weisman, "An 'Other' Way of Life: The Empowerment of Alterity in the Interracial Individual," in Root, ed., *The Multiracial Experience*, pp. 152-164.

36. I would be remiss if I did not point out that there are no race groups in any scientific sense. Either Davis has misspoken or, more likely, he is implying that whites are a scientifically valid racial group. This means that Davis has either made an inexcusable error or is being intellectually lazy.

37. Paul R. Spickard, *Mixed Blood: Intermarriage and Ethnic Identity in Twentieth-Century America* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), pp. 10, 12-14, 17; Spickard, "Mapping Race: Multiracial People and Racial Category Construction in the United States and Britain," *Immigrants and Minorities*, Vol. 15, no. 2 (1996), pp. 107-119; F. James Davis, *Who Is Black?* pp. 15, 125, 178.

38. Zack, *Race and Mixed Race*, pp. 3-5; K. Anthony Appiah, *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

39. Zack, *Race and Mixed Race*, pp. 4, 97, 164.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 164.

41. For a critique of the one-drop rule argument, see Spencer, *The New Colored People*, pp. 55-90.

42. G. Reginald Daniel, "Passers and Pluralists: Subverting the Racial Divide," in Root, ed., *Racially Mixed People in America*, p. 91, and "Black and White Identity"; Davis, *Who Is Black?* pp. 5, 42, 63; Paul R. Spickard, "The Illogic of American Racial Categories," in Root, ed., *Racially Mixed People in America*, pp. 12-23; Thornton, "Is Multiracial Status Unique?" pp. 322; Zack, *Race and Mixed Race*, pp. 75-76; Allen, *The Invention of the White Race, Volume One*; Allen, *The Invention of the White Race, Volume Two*; Bonilla-Silva, "Rethinking Racism"; Cha-Jua, "Sankofa"; Cha-Jua and Lang, "Strategies for Black Liberation"; Gomez, *Ex-*

changing Our Country Marks; Melvin L. Leiman, *The Political Economy of Racism: A History* (Boulder, Colo.: Pluto Press, 1993); Charles W. Mills, *Blackness Visible*; Sterling Stuckey, *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

43. Oddly enough, Zack offers a devastating discussion of white family structure and the lone critique of how white identity is formed.

44. Lynda D. Field, "Piecing Together the Puzzle," p. 225.

45. Zack, *Race and Mixed Race*, pp. 157-158, 165; Rhett S. Jones, "The End of Africanity: The Bi-Racial Assault on Blackness," *Western Journal of Black Studies*, Vol. 18, no. 4 (1994), p. 202.

46. William Cross, *Shades of Black: Diversity and African-American Identity* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991); Field, "Piecing Together the Puzzle"; Deborah Johnson, "Developmental Pathways: Towards an Ecological Theoretical Formulation of Race Identity in Black-White Biracial Children," in Root, ed., *Racially Mixed People in America*, p. 44.

47. Daniel, "Black and White Identity," pp. 129, 138.

48. King and DaCosta, "Changing Face, Changing Race," p. 239.

49. The call for a separate racial group is most clearly seen on the advocacy web sites. See, for example, Interracial Voice, www.webcom.com/~intvoice.html; Project Race, www.projectrace.com; and The Mulatto People, <http://internettrash.com/users/mulatto/for.htm>.

50. See Stuckey, *Slave Culture*, chap. 5, for a discussion on the struggle over African-American identity.

51. Spencer, *The New Colored People*, pp. 53-55; Keith and Herring, "Skin Tone and Stratification"; Seltzer and Smith, "Color Differences in the Afro-American Community"; Mark E. Hill, "Color Differences in the Socioeconomic Status of African American Men: Results of a Longitudinal Study," *Social Forces*, Vol. 78, no. 4 (2000), pp. 1437-1460.

52. Daniel, "Black and White Identity," pp. 132, 238; Bonilla-Silva and Lewis, "The New Racism," p. 69; Korgen, *From Black to Biracial*, p. 21. That 40 percent of Alabama's voters sought to keep a state ban on interracial marriages suggests that Korgen's assertion is misguided.

53. Kerry Ann Rockquemore, "Race and Identity: Exploring the Biracial Experience," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Notre Dame, 1999.

54. Daniel, "Beyond Black and White," p. 334.

55. *Ibid.*, pp. 339-340.

56. Gordon, "Critical 'Mixed Race'?" pp. 386, 391-392.

57. Daniel, "Black and White Identity," p. 139; Zack, *Race and Mixed Race*.

58. Korgen, *From Black to Biracial*, pp. 52, 69-70; William D. Pease, *Playing the Dozens* (New York: Viking, 1990).

59. Charise Chaney, from the documentary *An American Love Story* (1999), recalled that she faced rejection and general hostility from her African-American classmates in high school because she insisted that she was biracial, not African American. Though her account is unclear, it appears that her experiences were conditioned by her insistence on not being Black rather than on her assertion of a biracial identity. This is much different from her assuming a biracial identity after she was rejected by her Black peers.

60. No studies substantiate the claim that even the majority of people born of mixed parentage are middle class or live in predominantly white communities.

61. Korgen, *From Black to Biracial*, pp. 55, 79; Christine Kerwin, Joseph G. Ponterotto, Barbara L. Jackson, and Abigail Harris, "Racial Identity in Biracial Children: A Qualitative Investigation," *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, Vol. 40, no. 2 (1993), pp. 221-231; Christine Kerwin and Joseph G. Ponterotto, "Biracial Identity Development: Theory and Research," in Joseph G. Ponterotto, James M. Cases, L. A. Suzuki, and C. M. Alexander, eds., *Handbook of Multicultural Counseling* (Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1995), pp. 199-217; W. S. Carlos Poston, "The Biracial Identity Development Model: A Needed Addition," *Journal of Counseling and Development*, Vol. 69 (November/December 1990), pp. 152-155; Rockquemore, "Race and Identity."

62. Rockquemore, "Between Black and White," pp. 204-206; France Winddance Twine, "Brown Skinned White Girls: Class, Culture and the Construction of White Identity in Suburban Communities," *Gender, Place and Culture*, Vol. 3, no. 2 (1996), pp. 205-224.

63. Korgen's sample consisted of forty respondents; the majority were college students in the New England area.

64. Korgen, *From Black to Biracial*, p. 79; Rockquemore, "Race and Identity"; Bonilla-Silva and Lewis, "The New Racism"; Carr, "Color Blind" Racism; Neville et al., "CoBRAS"; Spencer, *The New Colored People*, p. 155. Spencer makes a rather hyperbolic statement: "[N]owhere around the world where whites have created a median [racial] group . . . do we see mixed race

people in any significant numbers reaching over the color line to intermingle with blacks" (ibid., p. 118). There are very notable exceptions in Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, Angola, and Cuba, as well as in South Africa in the 1980s.

65. Weisman, "An 'Other' Way of Life," pp. 162-163; Daniel, "Beyond Black and White," and "Black and White Identity"; Iijima Hall, "2001"; Zack, *Race and Mixed Race*; King and DaCosta, "Changing Face, Changing Race."

66. Also see Lise Funderburg, *Black, White, Other: Biracial Americans Talk About Race and Identity* (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1994), for examples of persons of mixed parentage (even those born after 1965) experiencing white racism.

67. The most sustained critiques have been of Zack's philosophical arguments in *Race and Mixed Race*. See Rhett S. Jones, "The End of Africanity"; Lewis R. Gordon, "Critical 'Mixed Race'?" and *Existential Africana: Understanding Africana Existential Thought* (New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 96-117.

68. See Appiah, *In My Father's House*, pp. 13-17, for a discussion of intrinsic and extrinsic racism.

69. Zack, *Race and Mixed Race*, pp. 157, 165.

70. Thanks to Helen Neville for making this observation.

71. Keith and Herring, "Skin Tone and Stratification," pp. 761, 773.

72. Seltzer and Smith, "Color Differences," pp. 284-285. See also Claud Anderson and Rue L. Cromwell, "'Black Is Beautiful' and the Color Preferences of Afro-American Youth," *Journal of Negro Education*, Vol. 46, no. 4 (1977), pp. 76-88; Hill, "Color Differences in the Socioeconomic Status of African American Men"; Michael Hughes and Bradley R. Hertel, "The Significance of Color Remains: A Study of Life Chances, Mate Selection, and Ethnic Consciousness Among Black Americans," *Social Forces*, Vol. 69, no. 1 (1990), pp. 1105-1120; Tracy L. Robinson and Janie V. Ward, "African American Adolescents and Skin Color," *Journal of Black Psychology*, Vol. 21, no. 3 (1995), pp. 256-274.