

Contemporary Aesthetics (Journal Archive)

Volume 0 *Special Volume 2 (2009)*
*AESTHETICS AND RACE: NEW PHILOSOPHICAL
PERSPECTIVES*

Article 3

2009

Mixed-Race Looks

Ronald Sundstrom

University of San Francisco, rrsundstrom@usfca.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.risd.edu/liberalarts_contempaesthetics



Part of the [Aesthetics Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Sundstrom, Ronald (2009) "Mixed-Race Looks," *Contemporary Aesthetics (Journal Archive)*: Vol. 0 , Article 3.

Available at: https://digitalcommons.risd.edu/liberalarts_contempaesthetics/vol0/iss2/3

This I. Looks and Images is brought to you for free and open access by the Liberal Arts Division at DigitalCommons@RISD. It has been accepted for inclusion in Contemporary Aesthetics (Journal Archive) by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@RISD. For more information, please contact mpompeli@risd.edu.

[About CA](#)

[Journal](#)

[Contact CA](#)

[Links](#)

[Submissions](#)

[Search Journal](#)

[Editorial Board](#)

[Permission to Reprint](#)

[Privacy](#)

[Site Map](#)

[Publisher](#)

[Webmaster](#)

Mixed-Race Looks

Ronald Sundstrom

Abstract

The multiracial population is growing larger and so is popular awareness about multiracial or mixed-race identity. Simmering beneath the growing public recognition of multiracial identity are questions about the legitimacy of mixed race, multiracial, or biracial as social categories, and further questions about the ethics and politics of those identities. Behind some of these questions are worries about how multiracial identity interacts with racialized aesthetic standards. This essay addresses these issues by investigating whether those affirmations are racist and betray monoracial groups. This essay concludes that such affirmations are not necessarily racist or traitorous. Instead, they are consistent with modern expressions of individuality, and arise from self-assertions of personal authenticity and autonomy. All the same, these affirmations and assertions do risk participating in, and contributing to, racist aesthetic standards. The arguments presented in this essay are part of a broader project on mixed race and the ethics of identity.

Key Words

biracial, ethnicity, interracial, mixed race, multiracial, race theory, race, racism, racial aesthetics

Am I to be cursed forever with becoming

somebody else on the way to myself?

~ Audre Lorde

1. Introduction

The multiracial population is growing larger and so is popular awareness about multiracial or mixed-race identity. A major aspect of this identity and its social history is the meaning invested in mixed-race looks, in various societies, over time. Mixed-race looks are simply pivotal to multiracialism. [1] Popular conceptions of race associate skin color and other somatic features, such as hair texture, with racial divisions, so the somatic ambiguity of multiracial persons has attracted attention in those locales where racial categorization has been active and been the subject of curiosity, attraction, and fear. This is consistent with the considerable concern in the history of race with interracial sex and racial aesthetics. For multiracial persons, mixed-race looks and the meanings those looks have been assigned through the ages have been at the center of their experience and distinguish their experience from that of persons who come from monoethnic or bi-religious families. So much attention is given to mixed-race looks that some multiracial individuals experience being reduced to the very fact of their being mixed; they are treated as embodiments of the sexual crossing of racial boundaries and taboos.

The difficulty of being multiracial and living with mixed-race looks should not be exaggerated. There are places in the world where being multiracial is not exceptional and mixed-race looks are not exotic. Yet research shows that even in places where multiracial

persons are common, such as in the United States, this identity and its relation to the way race is commonly practiced present psychological and social challenges for multiracial persons. [2] This essay considers two ethical aspects of those challenges. The first is how the affirmation of mixed-race looks is an expression of personal authenticity and autonomy, and is linked to the loosely organized movement to gain public recognition of multiracial identities. [3] The other is whether those affirmations are a betrayal of monoracial groups.

These two lines of investigation do not exhaust the ways in which the subject of mixed-race looks may be a topic of moral evaluation. Indeed, the older, fearful obsession in the United States with non-whites, and especially blacks, passing as whites and thus misrepresenting their racial looks, had a moral dimension. The act of passing could be judged as dishonest or, more pointedly, as a failure to “come out” and declare one’s association and solidarity with the non-white group to which one “really” belongs. Negative judgments of racial passing given by white society, however, were self-serving in that the white majority expected honesty about racial identity for the sake of preserving race-based social injustices and privileges. It has been often noted that what the United States was concerned about was not racial purity *per se*, since it cared not a whit about the racial purity of non-white groups, but the conservation of the white-dominated state. Such judgments against passing were motivated by racism and stand in contrast with the solidarity-based judgments against passing. From either perspective, however, the object of evaluation was the act of passing and the misrepresentation of ambiguous racial looks. In contrast, the object of this essay is to ethically evaluate the affirmation of mixed-race looks.

Engaging the topic of mixed-race looks in this way is significant because it illustrates issues at the heart of the ethics of identity, such as recognition, authenticity, autonomy, individuality, and solidarity, and their interaction with self-presentation and aesthetic standards formed around major social categories. What is more, the topic of mixed-race looks is an especially rich case for two additional reasons. First, it involves racial identification, one of the most challenging issues for the ethics of identity, especially in those contexts such as the United States where race is a principal social category. Second, multiracial identities are at the crux of the ethical and political issues concerning racial identities (for example, whether there is an authentic way of being a member of a racial group) and may challenge or reinforce traditional racial categories and folk beliefs about race.

This engagement begins by briefly surveying the history of the “problems” of interracial sex and mixed-race looks and why they have been conceived as threatening and thrilling in the first place. It concludes that although the affirmation of mixed-race looks is burdened by historical problems that make it morally fraught, it is not necessarily traitorous if engaged in responsibly. All the same, the affirmation of mixed-race looks, along with multiracial identity, will inevitably evoke feelings of betrayal and disappointment. To this, the paper recommends responding with compassion, listening, and an additional affirmation: the affirmation to be responsible without sacrificing autonomous expressions of one’s personal multiracial identity.

2. The Devil Will Make a Grandsire of You

Attention to the sexuality of mixed-race looks is not extraneous. It has been a remarkable feature of the response to the mixing of peoples since European commentators first imagined that what was being mixed were wholly different kinds of people and later races. A wonderful example of this is the eighteenth century Spanish *Casta* paintings of parents, who are depicted as types of people from different parts of the Spanish Empire (*i.e.*, Spain, Africa, and the New World) and their offspring, who are depicted as types that result from those blends (*i.e.*, from a Spaniard and Indian comes a Mestizo/a). Although these painters and the ideas that inspired them did not use the idea of race, as that was fully developed only in the late eighteenth century, they did make careful records of the results of various pairings and attempted to pictorially explain the origins of various mixed bodies that the Spanish termed *criollos*, *mestizos*, *castizos*, *mulattoes*, *albinos*, *coyotes*, and *lobos* (see Figures 1 and 2). [4]



Figure 1. *De Español y India Produce Mestiza*. Unknown artist, circa 1780, oil on canvas, 38 X 52 cm. Collection of Malú and Alejandra Escandón, Mexico City.



Figure 2. *De Negro y Española sale Mulato*. Unknown artist, circa 1780, oil on canvas, 38 X 52 cm. Collection of Malú and Alejandra Escandón, Mexico City.

The curiosity about color and the results of mixing is also displayed in the opening scene of Shakespeare's *Othello*. Iago yells to Brabantio that his daughter, Desdemona, has run away with the Moor, Othello. Iago warns Brabantio that,

Your heart is burst, you have lost half your soul;

Even now, now, very now, an old black ram

Is tugging your white ewe. Arise, arise;

Awake the snorting citizens with the bell,

Or else the devil will make a grandsire of you... [5]

Brabantio's fear that his "white" daughter will be "tugged" by an "old black" Moor and Iago's exploitation of that fear, as depicted in the play, are more indicative of English rather than Renaissance Venetian attitudes toward the mixing of peoples. Yet the depiction in that scene of fear, disgust, and alarm (being made a grandparent by the devil!) foreshadows the prurient moral ambivalence toward miscegenation that will bloom in the eighteenth century in the United States, France, and the German-speaking states.

The initial shades of this bloom are apparent in François Bernier's use of the term "race," which for some historians marks an early stage in its development as a modern concept. [6] Bernier, unlike Brabantio, was not repelled by tugging across the color line. He was openly fascinated with the relative beauty of women who were "produced" by mixing whom colonialism and slave trading made increasingly accessible. Race, gender, sexuality, and exploitation come together in his travelogue, and the ambiguous skin tones and facial features of multiracial women feature prominently in his delighted musings. Bernier, like the Spanish, was curious about the mixing of peoples, but unlike them he had a nascent racial ideology, which led him to think that these mixings were remarkable, not only for their novelty, but because they occurred across what he believed were natural categories of people.

François-Marie Voltaire, however, would have shared Brabantio's alarm. He accepted the growing view that "race" marked natural and deep divisions between humanity, so much so that different races were as distinct as species. Unlike the Spanish, who acknowledged the possibility of mixing and who produced portraits of its results, Voltaire believed racial mixing was unnatural and doubted that progeny from interracial unions could be fertile. For him, the products of miscegenation were like mules and belonged to a "bastard race." [7]

Not that there were no doubts about *mestizaje* in Latin America, the Caribbean, and in Mexico. There was ambivalence and outright rejection of it in those places too, but among the Spanish and French in the New World interracial union was so widespread that it was the norm. However, even with a liberal attitude toward racial mixing, practices of racial prejudice and domination developed. So *mestizaje*, its Portuguese variant *mestiçagem*, or its French variant *mestissage*, should not be mistaken as a sufficient sign of racial equality and fairness. As critics of the myth of Latin American "racial democracy" attest, although an aesthetic taste for *mestizaje* developed, it only produced a rhetoric of, rather than real, racial democracy.

In the English colonies in America and then in the early republic there existed a similar ambivalence. Although some approved of Native American and white unions for the beautiful, vigorous people they would produce, black and white pairings were widely condemned as a threat to the natural, moral, and political order.

Indicative of this view is Jefferson's publicly stated repugnance to miscegenation, which he makes after considering whether blacks should be incorporated into the state:

The first difference which strikes us is that of colour. Whether the black of the negro resides in the reticular membrane between the skin and scarf-skin, or in the scarf-skin itself; whether it proceeds from the colour of blood, the colour of the bile, or from that of some other secretion, the difference is fixed in nature, and is as real as if its seat and cause were better known to us. And is this difference of no importance? Is it not the foundation of a greater or less share of beauty in the two races? Are not the fine mixtures of red and white, the expressions of every passion by greater or less suffusions of colour in the one, preferable to that eternal monotony, which reigns in the countenances, that immovable veil of black which covers all the emotions of the other race? Add to these, flowing hair, a more elegant symmetry of form, their own judgment, in favour of the whites, declared by their preference of them, as uniformly as is the preference of the Oranootan for the black women over those of his own species. The circumstance of superior beauty, is thought worthy attention in the propagation of our horses, dogs, and other domestic animals; why not in that of man? [8]

This oft-quoted passage contains all the essential elements: The idea that the difference between blacks and whites is natural and deeply embedded in the skin; that black skin is ugly, monotonous, and a sign of a base character; and that white women are so superior in their beauty that black men prefer them just as orang-outangs prefer black women—the implication being that interracial sexual desire is driven by the lust of the inferior for the superior. To allow the “inferior” to openly and equally mix with the “superior” was a proposition that Jefferson would not publicly admit. He recognized that allowing blacks to be part of the *body politic* would all but invite them into the American family. [9] Both would be utterly transformed, both would be miscegenated. That, according to him, was anathema.

Although the particulars of the objection to miscegenation were to change, the taboo against it dominated racial practices of the United States until the 1967 U.S. Supreme Court decision of *Loving vs. The State of Virginia*. For example, here is what the trial judge, whose position was ultimately overturned by *Loving*, stated when he handed down the conviction against Mildred Jeter and Richard Loving and ordered them out of the state of Virginia:

Almighty God created the races white, black, yellow, malay and red, and he placed them on separate continents. And but for the interference with his arrangement there would be no cause for such marriages. The fact that he separated the races shows that he did not intend for the races to mix. [10]

A great irony about that statement, and the expressed views of Voltaire and Jefferson, is that, as the Spanish admitted, interracial sex was common and was not a result of the “animal”

desires of the colonized and enslaved; rather the widespread practice was a result of the desires of the powerful and the opportunities they had to force and otherwise encourage sexual relations. In short, widespread miscegenation was not the result of black men acting like orang-outangs satisfying their desire for an aesthetically superior woman; it was the result of the desire of white men. Jefferson knew this very well. Despite his public declarations against the possibility of a mixed blood nation, his home and life were miscegenated. He had a long-term romantic relationship with his slave, Sally Hemmings, with whom he fathered several children. [\[11\]](#)

Times have changed. Now one can find hundreds if not thousands of images from advertisements in glossy fashion magazines broadcasting the idea that mixed-race looks are everything but monstrous or monotonous. Clothing and cosmetic corporations utilize these images for many reasons, yet surely they do so because multiracial models have a beauty that is judged both exotic and widely appealing. Their very ambiguity is a visible hook to grab the attention of the consumer and, likewise, their ambiguity allows individuals from different groups, different target markets, to relate to them.

Another reason that images of mixed-race looks are utilized is the social and political idealism that is associated with mixed-race looks. The idea here is that within multiracial people the ethnoracial tensions of our societies are resolved in their beautiful faces, that the very fact of their being blended, mixed, their being a product of *mestizaje* or creolization, is a model for larger forms of harmonization. This is an amazingly naive idea but it is popular and reoccurring. [\[12\]](#)

Both of these approaches are explicit in the famously miscegenated images used in the advertising campaigns of United Colors of Benetton. [\[13\]](#) The company's slogan "United Colors" seems to say it all: the somatic blending of mixed race is a sign of future racial concord, and intercourse and intermarriage are principal vehicles for reaching that utopia. What was anathema to Jefferson has now become a cosmopolitan ideal. [\[14\]](#)

3. Four Women

This ideal, however, is in the form of a corporate slogan used to peddle clothing. And that has given cause for some to worry. They are concerned that mixed-race looks are being objectified, fetishized, and commodified. [\[15\]](#) Commodification, despite the appearance of inclusion that occurs with it, does not herald the erosion of racial categories or freedom from racial standards of comportment and mores, what Anthony Appiah has insightfully called racial scripts. Instead, especially from the critical vantage point of the cultural critic bell hooks, it is a way for white-supremacist society to appropriate and dominate that difference — *to eat the other*. [\[16\]](#) The advertising industry produces a glamorous, overtly sexualized stereotype that reinforces socially detrimental folk beliefs about race and offers this image up for general consumption. These representations feed off the idea of miscegenation as both taboo and alluring, and contribute to views of multiracial persons, especially women, as exotic, permissive, and available, as if they are permanently marked by, and are fated to reenact the social drama of racial forbidden fruit.

Additionally, in the view of those opposed to current expressions of multiracial identity, typically members of monoracial groups who are interested in conserving American racial categories, the reception of mixed-race looks by advertising agencies exposes what this growing identity is about: the opportunities that come with racial skin privilege. [17] The final section will return to how corporate commodification of mixed-race looks affects the ethics of multiracial identity, but meanwhile a related objection is worth considering because it gets to three points at the heart of the accusation, which is that the celebration of mixed-race looks is parasitic on anti-black racism, neglects the history of race, and betrays traditional monoracial nonwhite communities.

First, mixed race looks are celebrated precisely because of racist beliefs about the aesthetic inferiority of non-whites, and in particular the aesthetic inferiority of blacks. In such an anti-black atmosphere people are judged by their distance from blackness and nearness to whiteness, and while for much of U.S. history any sign of blackness was enough to make you publicly undesirable (but, as was the case with Sally Hemmings, privately desirable), now in post-civil rights America a hint of color makes you not only desirable but acceptable as well. [18]

Second, celebrations of mixed-race looks also blithely ignore the history of the production of mixed-race categories and its regulative role in systems of racial domination. These critics believe that racial mixture in the Americas is largely the result of rape, and mixed-race identities, such as creole, mulatto, or mestizo, were used to divide and manage conquered, enslaved, or colonized populations. [19]

Third, given the history of mixed-race, those who participate in its celebration and profit from its looks not only forget history but additionally betray the communities with which they share a common historical burden of racism. They engage in a behavior that evolved from the older, potentially traitorous practice of racial passing. [20] There is a triple play in this betrayal: First, those who fully racially pass, or take up a multiracial identity, dissociate themselves from their darker, non-white kin. Second, by escaping their darker kin they eschew a collective solution to the racial domination and seek a personal solution. [21] Third, through their dissociation from their darker kin and community they reinforce what they sought to escape in the first place, thus making it that much harder for those whom they have turned their backs on.

Nina Simone's song, "Four Women" helps to illustrate this triple play and the three former points. The lyrics of her song tell a story of four black women, "Aunt Sarah, Siffronia, Sweet Thing, and Peaches," whose skin tones differ but whose experiences are united in their experience of racism and sexism or, more accurately, sexualized racism or racialized sexism. Their skin tones represent gradations of their common experience of racism and sexism and, more to the point, the gradations of their skin tone are the direct result of suffering from racist sexual exploitation. You get this point from what she sang about two of the women:

My skin is yellow

My hair is long

Between two worlds
I do belong
My father was rich and white
He forced my mother late one night
What do they call me
My name is Siffronia
My skin is tan
My hair's alright, it's fine
My hips invite you
And my lips are like wine
Whose little girl am I?
Well yours if you have some money to buy
What do they call me
My name is Sweet Thing [22]

The celebrants of mixed-race looks are inattentive to the history that Simone sang about. They are inattentive, as well, to the moral demand within her song for solidarity and the rejection of racialized sexual exploitation. This inattentiveness, from the perspective of monoracial non-white groups, seems to be willful ignorance and is like rubbing salt in their pre-existing wounds. It is as if, if you will, the descendants of Siffronia and Sweet Thing, and maybe even Peaches, have forgotten that they suffer under the same sexualized racism as Aunt Sarah, refuse to work collectively to remove that burden, and, what is worse, contribute to Aunt Sarah's burden by supporting an ethnoracial social and aesthetic hierarchy that demeans and devalues her in body and person!

4. Ethno-Ambiguo Hostility Syndrome

As these charges are considered, it is important to understand that, from the perspective of multiracial persons, their distinctive looks may be a source of personal confusion and anxiety. Their desire to make note of their difference within their families, communities, and in the public sphere may be more about their desire to come to terms with their visible difference and to respond to exclusion and to the stereotypes mentioned above than it is about an ahistorical celebration of their skin tones or a mere repetition of the practice of passing. [23]

Their affirmations of being and looking multiracial are more charitably thought of as expressions of personal authenticity that result from personal and family narratives: They are claims about their particular experiences, self-conceptions, life plans, and what it means to exist ethically as multiracial persons. Moreover, most certainly have no racist intentions; rather, they see their assertions as a response to the production of monoracial categories that they see as poorly suited for themselves and significant portions of the population.

Concerns about the confusion that multiracial persons experience,

which are related to the three worries and triple dynamics of racial betrayal described above, were illustrated by Aaron McGruder in his syndicated comic strip, *Boondocks*. In a series devoted to exploring the character Jazmine's self-conception of her black-white biracial identity, the character Huey accuses Jazmine of having "Afro-Denial" when she claims that she has "good hair" and not an Afro (see figure 3).



Figure 3. The Boondocks (c) 2006 Aaron McGruder. Reprinted by permission of Universal Press Syndicate. All rights reserved.

Jazmine angrily reacts to his diagnoses, so Huey adds to it a diagnosis of "Ethno-Ambiguous Hostility Syndrome"—a jocular reference to the angst that is commonly assumed to arise from the "marginality" that multiracial persons experience. [24] Jazmine's hostile denial evokes the self-deprecation that results when anti-black representations in various mediums, what bell hooks calls the "colonizing gaze," are adopted by blacks and turned inward. An instance of this gaze in Jazmine's life is depicted in her exchanges and friendship with the character Cindy, a girl whose only knowledge of African Americans is through media stereotypes and the negative attitudes of her father. She is excited that blacks are moving into her suburb, and shares with Jazmine, whom she does not recognize as black, her hope that the blacks that are moving in will be gangster rappers and basketball players, as well as her father's fears about declining property values, juvenile delinquents, and set-aside programs. Jazmine reacts to this assault of stereotypes with a sad and satirical response of "lucky you." [25] In *Black Looks*, Hooks portrays the effects of this gaze in a reflection about a troubled girl, who, together with her parents, is from a "once colonized black island:"

Their little girl is just reaching that stage of preadolescent life where we become obsessed with

our image, with how we look and how others see us. Her skin is dark. Her hair chemically straightened. Not only is she fundamentally convinced that straightened hair is more beautiful than curly, kinky, natural hair, she believes that lighter skin makes one more worthy, more valuable in the eyes of others. Despite her parents' effort to raise their children in an affirming black context, she has internalized white supremacist values and aesthetics, a way of looking and seeing the world that negates her value. [26]

Hooks' phrase "negates her value" pinpoints the destructive force of the colonizing gaze and, insofar as the one-drop rule dominates and the Jazmines of the world can only be black, how that gaze results in the negation of simply being. The sharpest and perhaps most elucidating portrayal of this desolation of self-respect is in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* in which Pecola, the little black girl who experiences the ravages of racism and misogyny, "wanted to rise up out of the pit of her blackness and see the world with blue eyes." [27]

Huey's prescription for Jazmine's denial and hostility is "positive Nubian reinforcement" so that she will accept the natural beauty of her hair and achieve "Afrocentric wellness." Put next to Morrison's depiction of Pecola, Huey's response seems silly, if not inadequate. Well, Huey is a cartoon character and supposed to be silly but, despite the silliness, Huey's response is also serious and is derived from a tradition of antiracist aestheticism that grapples with this destructive problem and that encourages the spectators of society's anti-black representations to create oppositional gazes that fight back against the colonizing gaze.

McGruder's comic portrayal of the conflict between Jazmine and Huey over her self-conception is a hilarious critique of multiracial identity. Whatever was McGruder's intended message for this particular series, it makes light of both Jazmine's rejection of any association with black somatic features and Huey's Afrocentric popular psychology. All the same, Huey's diagnosis may not be accurate, and the cases of Jazmine, the girl in hook's reflections, and Morrison's Pecola may not be strictly analogous. It is not clear that Jazmine wants to escape or "rise out of the pit" of her blackness; likewise, it is not the case that every black-white biracial person, much less other sorts of multiracial individuals who claim multiracial identity or affirm their mixed-race looks, are merely repeating, in their own way, the turmoil of Pecola. Although those who are committed to the oppositional gaze that Huey represents may react with incredulity, multiracial persons may have reasons independent of internalized racism for affirming mixed-race looks.

The humorous conflict between Huey and Jazmine culminates in a strip that highlights this stalemate. Jazmine compares her biracial experience, its specialness and loneliness, to a trite image of a lonely, special yellow flower surrounded by red roses. Huey responds to this flight of fancy by telling Jazmine that she is black and should just get over it.

5. The Individual Is Sovereign

Whether the reader was supposed to take Huey seriously or not, his brusque response reflects a portion of popular opinion about

this matter. [28] To be fair, his curt statement may have been meant to serve as an intellectual wake-up call, or a koan, that delivers the message of antiracist aestheticism in a compact package. On the other hand, his comment carries the charge that Jazmine, and multiracial persons generally, are in denial and that they should accept the identity that society ascribes to them. This judgment, however, need not stand. One response to this opinion is that it is a statistical stereotype about multiracial persons, and it is a great error to see all multiracial individuals, or even all black-white biracial individuals, as simple versions of Jazmine, or worse, Pecola. Many multiracial individuals do not suffer from internal feelings of disconnection and enjoy the experience of being multiracial. In those cases there is nothing for them “to get over.”

However, the partisans of Huey’s position may respond that, even if multiracial individuals do not experience the loneliness and disconnection that Jazmine reports, they should, since they are, as Huey put it, delusional about their “real” ethnoracial identity. This is the bedrock of the argument because Huey is making an ethical claim that relies on the normative stereotype that members of a race should act according to the group’s ascribed racial script (appropriately reconstructed within the group). Specifically, his claim is that Jazmine should accept her association with blackness out of self-respect and solidarity with African Americans. *Boondocks* has too much fun with popular opinions and representations of racial scripts to be communicating that individuals should precisely adhere to the socially imposed strictures of ethnoracial identities, even if they are determined within the group, so Huey’s claim can be read as a satire on ethnoracial nationalist claims over personal identity. All the same, an important upshot of Huey’s injunction that Jazmine adhere to the popular standard of group authenticity is that it directly clashes with and rejects the veracity of Jazmine’s claim of personal authenticity as a multiracial person.

To this the defenders of Jazmine’s ambiguous self-conception retort that much of the discussion of the confusion around mixed race looks, and perhaps the feelings of individuals like Jazmine, is imposed from the social expectation of monoracial belonging and the imposition of standards for behavior, scripts, for each of the so-called ethnic groups and races in the United States. All this talk, then, of racial confusion and disconnection (for example, “Afro-Denial” and “Ethno-Ambiguo Hostility Syndrome”) is the result of the Cindys and Hueys of the world with their suspect categories and scripts, rather than the Jazmines.

Additionally, multiracial intellectuals and activists assertively respond that multiracial persons should, for these reasons, publicly resist monoracial scripts. The psychologist Maria P. P. Root, in particular, claims that multiracial persons have the “right” to refuse to “fragment, marginalize, or disconnect” themselves from themselves or others, and that they have the right “not to justify [their] experience to the world, not to keep the races separate within [them],” and “not to be responsible for people’s discomfort with [their] physical ambiguity.” [29] Although her assertions can only metaphorically be connected with human or civil “rights,” they are an expression of a negative right—the right to be left alone—and may be thought of as derivative of the freedom of conscience or association. Whatever their grounding, these rights, along with the other eight that Root

provides in her “Bill of Rights for Racially Mixed People,” is an assertion of psychological and moral freedom and distance from the expectations of others. They are, moreover, consonant with the modern expectations of self-fulfillment and self-expression that has given rise to the ideal of authenticity and the resulting expressive individualism that has dominated American popular life. [30]

At best these mixed-race rights echo John Stuart Mill’s defense of individuality and his ringing claim that, “Over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign.” [31] In their most extreme form and, oddly enough, socially disconnected versions, these “rights” are an absolute refusal of responsibility (“I have the right *not to be responsible* for people’s discomfort”) and are libertarian. [32]

Armed with these objections, Jazmine could tell Huey to back off, and that any “Ethno-Ambiguo Hostility” is in fact being expressed by him through his attempt to force her into “Afrocentric wellness.” What is more, she may add, she refuses the essentialist script that would have her paradoxically invent a Nubian or African center within herself to discover, and stands by “multiracial” or “biracial” as authentic markers of her experience. Although she could concede that Huey is correct that others will see her as simply black, she is not obligated to conform to their judgment. She could even take a cue from Root and inform Huey that he can set a good example for the intrusive majority, like the oblivious Cindy, by keeping his ethnoracial identity to himself.

6. Everybody Is Doing It

Even so, no matter how much distance some multiracial intellectuals and activists want to put between monoracial social expectations and the experiences of multiracial persons, the experience of ambiguity is a prominent part of multiracial experience. Most multiracial persons experience this ambiguity, deal with resulting conflicts, and incorporate them directly in their identities. It is part of the lived experience of being multiracial. [33] This is evident even in Root’s reaction to the monoracial expectations that burden multiracial persons. While she declares that multiracial persons have the right “not to justify [their] existence in this world” and are not responsible for the discomfort that their racial ambiguity causes in others, she also states that multiracial persons have the right “to identify [themselves] differently in different situations” and the right “to change [their] identity over [their] lifetime—and more than once.” [34] Despite the problems that judgments of ambiguity cause multiracial persons, she recognizes that for a significant portion of the multiracial population ambiguous mixed-race looks are an element of the multiracial experience, so she is quick to defend its protean possibilities.

Admitting the prominence of ambiguity for multiracial experience is not to give too much to the critics’ accusation that multiracial is a confused identity; instead it provides a solid reason to resist their claims. As indicated from the start, the multiracial experience is distinctive, so claims based on the normative stereotype that multiracial persons take up the script of their actual race, the group to which they really belong, is to beg the question. The experiences of multiracial persons are great evidence that they do not actually or really belong to those groups in the simple ways that the public thinks that racial

membership functions.

Further, the authenticity of the multiracial experience begins a response to the accusation of betrayal. As mentioned earlier, public discussions of mixed-race looks are less about ahistorical celebration than it is about coming to terms in racialized society in which the scripts are visibly loosening. While the rhetoric about mixed-race looks and self-acceptance may seem a little trite and clichéd, it is in keeping with the trends in American popular psychology. As such, the language of “mixed-race wellness” that Jazmine gives the readers a taste of is but a development of the same theme that “Afrocentric wellness” follows. Yes, it is irritatingly simple-minded but it is not exceptional.

This retort, “everyone (including you) is doing it,” will not satisfy critics, so a better response to worry of betrayal must be formulated. A reasonable response arises from the distinction drawn earlier between a Mill-inspired reading of Root’s rights for mixed-race persons and a libertarian one. Mill’s view of self-sovereignty follows from his principle that individuals should do no harm to others; we are only sovereign in those parts of our lives where we do no appreciable harm to others, the sort of harm that drastically interferes with the autonomy of others and infringes their rights. Thus, to live ethical lives we should be vigilant about the many ways our actions affect others. The libertarian view, in contrast, is radically individualistic and assumes far more interpersonal disconnection: it is more callous and willfully negligent about these effects. Multiracial individuals and their advocacy groups should take Mill’s route.

Multiracial individuals should admit that they have a responsibility to not harm others with the expressions of their identity or, more germane to the issue at hand, in how they celebrate and affirm mixed-race looks. This may seem odd and impractical because “harm” in this context is vague and indeterminate. After all, the opponents of multiracial identity claim that the simple public acknowledgment of a separate multiracial identity harms the interests of nonwhite monoracial groups. However, a comparison with similar obligations regarding male gender identity may help to clarify this point. For example, men have an obligation to engender and perform a masculinity that does not harm women, which can be delineated into specific injunctions against versions of masculinity that contribute and encourage sexism and violence against women. Likewise, multiracial individuals should not promote or celebrate views of mixed-race looks that encourage and contribute to racism, in particular, the view that darker skin tones are inferior and the proper object of antipathy. [35]

7. Generously Listen

This anti-racist commitment does not entail that multiracial identity should be suppressed. That request goes too far. Even if the mere existence of individuals who proclaim multiracial identities harms nonwhite group interests, the demand that multiracial people just “get over it” and accept their membership in a socially-designated monoracial group is unreasonable. It is an attempt to exact conformity and, as such, offends individual autonomy: it is an example of tyranny against the individual’s sovereignty over his or her mind and body. It would, in an unprecedented way, affirm that monoracial groups have membership rights that trump individual rights (i.e., speech, conscience, and association) and would preclude the right of

individuals to exit those groups.

Another option is to ask that multiracial persons strategically identify with their non-white monoracial groups in those contexts that matter, such as when encountering racism directed at those groups, or when participating in an event where the mass of spectators consider the monoracial identity of the participating multiracial person or persons to be historically or politically salient. What comes to mind here is the controversy over Tiger's Woods's announcement on the Oprah Winfrey Show in 1997, at the time he gained world fame as a preeminent American professional golfer, that he was "Cablinasian" (a term he constructed to denote his Caucasian, Black, Native American, and Asian ancestry) rather than just African American. When individuals who could otherwise exit the group or who, according to presiding standards, do not even belong to the group, stand in solidarity with an oppressed ethnoracial group, they stake an ethical position and perform an invaluable political act that advances the group's interests. For example, when W. E. B. Du Bois, the author of the *Souls of Black Folk*, together with other leading African Americans at the beginning of the twentieth century, appealed to African Americans to band together in black associations for the sake of fighting racial oppression in the United States and abroad, instead of pursuing the national establishment of mulatto privilege, they sparked a movement that would give birth to the U.S. civil rights movement and organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the Urban League. [36]

Voluntary acts of solidarity with an oppressed group are heroic and invaluable, but they are also supererogatory: they go beyond the call of duty. Ethnoracial groups that face racial injustice should encourage and praise such acts. But they cannot be required, because to do so would again offend personal autonomy and disregard personal authenticity. Forced identification of multiracial individuals with monoracial groups through public policy should likewise be rejected; for example the refusal to recognize and count multiracial persons in official racial statistics in various institutions and programs, such as was the case with U.S. census before 2000 and is still the case in several school districts and universities. Such policies are like the U.S. military's policy of "don't ask, don't tell" for its homosexual and bisexual service members. It ignores and suppresses internal divisions for some greater good; in this case the good of suppressing multiracial identity is the appearance of group solidarity. However, these claims can be bottomless. (When exactly will the U.S. military be ready to acknowledge its homosexual and bisexual service members, and how will suppressing the knowledge that they have been and are part of the military help?). Individuals can both confront racism and "come out of the closet" as multiracial. Hence, claims that multiracial persons identify as monoracial for the sake of solidarity are politically superfluous, too comprehensive, and fail to appreciate the moral separateness of persons.

With this limit in place there are still challenges to the ethics of multiracial identity, such as the worries expressed earlier about commodification. What should multiracial individuals do about that? Well, what can they do about it and is it their problem alone? The commodification of mixed-race looks is a sliver of the commodification of every aspect of life in the modern world.

Individuals have been massed into a number of target markets, and products have been designed that are both directed at them and reify them categories, as target markets. Worse, in the process of being targeted for marketing, the public vision of these groups is narrowed, stereotyped, and homogenized. This process works on top of official census categories and the organizational work of special interest groups. For example, where there were once Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, Cuban Americans, and Honduran Americans, there is now the Hispanic and Latino census category and target market. [37]

Thus commodification is not unique to multiracial identity and its commodification does not represent historical neglect, communal betrayal, or racism. If there is an obligation to resist the commodification of an identity, then it is a general obligation on all persons and groups. Besides, whether the commodification of any identity is a moral problem is controversial. While there is general consensus that the commodification of persons is morally wrong, such agreement about identities does not exist. If anything, some nationalist groups see their identities as commodities to be controlled for the profit of group members! [38]

Critics of multiracialism, however, may still suspect that there is a sinister social function in celebrations of mixed-race looks, and suppose that participants in such affirmations are either dishonest about the damage it does, or at least implicitly accept racist aesthetic standards. In the eyes of such critics, affirming the aesthetic qualities of mixed-race skin tones and hair texture, or worse, receiving complements about those particulars, refers to and supports an archive of past ideas and images loaded with racial meaning determined by the history of racism. Just as Jasmine, in the *Boondocks* comic strip, could be seen as an analogous figure to Toni Morrison's Pecola and the troubled preadolescent girl from bell hooks' *Black Looks*, affirmations or celebrations of mixed-race looks are criticized as *repetitions* of historical racist aesthetic judgments.

This is an unreasonable and cruel position to take. It is unreasonable because it requires the meaning of myriad self-presentational multiracial acts, and indeed the meaning of the bodies of multiracial persons, to be unalterably set and determined by the history of racism. Mixed-race looks must, under this interpretation, carry a specific meaning and perform a particular racial function: to be and to denote a racial median in a racial hierarchy. Demands that mixed-race looks *must* or *necessarily* function this way overreach because they preclude shifts in the meaning of social acts and symbols. This position is absurd. Language and culture simply do not work this way; the meaning of social acts and symbols is not frozen in time or intention.

This position is cruel because by freezing the meaning of mixed-race looks it does not carve out a space for persons to ethically recognize their multiracial identity. It is a suffocation of the ethical viability of multiracial identity. Sections 5 and 6 of this essay directly resist this chokehold by arguing that the self-ascription of multiracial identity is best understood as an expression of autonomy and personal authenticity. Correspondingly, the affirmations of mixed-race looks are more charitably seen as gestures of self-worth and self-respect. As was

seen from the early history of race, there has been a tendency, exemplified by Bernier and Voltaire, to see multiracial persons as exotic objects, as both sexually thrilling and politically dangerous, and as epitomes of violations of sexual-racial taboos. The critics of mixed race identity, curiously, have a similar one-dimensional view of the self-descriptions and affirmations of multiracial persons: as an epitome of the failure to stand in solidarity against racism and perhaps including sexual-racial violation. The bodies and self-ascriptions of multiracial persons are not so one-dimensional and cannot be reduced to such psychological and political caricatures.

What remains, then, is the obligation of multiracial individuals not to harm monoracial groups in their representations and celebrations of mixed-race looks. Multiracial individuals should vigilantly guard against reinforcing racist standards of beauty within their communities, for example, by directly confronting and rejecting the racial skin-tone privilege, sometimes called "colorism," that has been historically associated with multiracial identities, such as Creole or Mestizo. In addition to the acts of resistance that are largely, and importantly, part of everyday life (Jazmine confronts Cindy by coming out as partially black in *Boondocks*), some representations of multiracial identity and looks enter the public sphere as declarations of personal authenticity and, while doing so, make anti-racist statements and oppose the commodification of mixed-race looks. [39] The production of such anti-racist representations of multiracial identity is a salient feature of the multiracial movement's strategy for public recognition because it resists the severe consequences of the commodification of mixed-race looks.

Even with those responses to charges of betrayal, opponents of the emergence of multiracial identity and the public celebration of mixed-race looks may not be satisfied. Although they are upset about irresponsible celebrations of mixed-race looks, that is not their only complaint: They want group solidarity. The expression of a separate identity is within the rights of multiracial individuals, but it will tend to disappoint the members of their traditional communities—it will break their hearts. And affirmations of mixed-race looks will feel like a betrayal, even if they are not. Multiracial persons could at this point take the libertarian option by turning their backs and walking away. A wiser, moral response would reach beyond but not sacrifice self-recognition; it would recognize the disappointment and pain that authentic, ethical lives can still cause to others. This response would necessarily involve a willingness to generously listen, the humane recognition of loss, and the promise to be responsible.

Ronald Sundstrom, University of San Francisco

rrsundstrom@usfca.edu

Published July 29, 2009

Endnotes

[1] This paper benefitted from the comments and criticisms of Nathan Hobbs, Monique Roelofs, Paul Taylor and two anonymous readers for *Contemporary Aesthetics*. I hope that the differences that remain between my interlocutors and me will be the ground for fruitful dialogue and debate. The idea for this paper, and the book project that it is a part of, *Mixed Race and the Ethics of*

Identity, originated from my experience of guest lecturing in Evelyn Rodriguez's sociology course, "People of Mixed Descent." My ideas and arguments were improved through that valuable experience. I use "mixed race" to refer to popular ideas and stereotypes about racial mixture, especially to discuss the meaning of mixed-race bodies and looks. The phrase "mixed race," however, is objected to by some organizations representing multiracial persons because they judge that it implies that multiracial individuals are mixed up and confused. I use "multiracial" when referring to persons and groups to be sensitive to such concerns.

[2] Kerry Rockquemore and David L. Brunsma, *Beyond Black: Biracial Identity in America*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008).

[3] Autonomy and authenticity are complex ideas and are the subjects of largely separate historical and continuing debates. For the purposes of this work, I take *personal autonomy* to be the ability of individuals to make their own life plans. I follow the usual distinction between personal and *moral autonomy*, which concerns the ability of individuals to be self-legislators of the moral law. For an overview of the autonomy debate see Joseph Raz, *The Morality of Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988). Likewise, I take *authenticity* to be a moral concept related to competing standards of *individual* self-realization and personal fulfillment. For a good survey of the debate around authenticity and various conceptions of it, see Charles B. Guignon, *On Being Authentic* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004) and Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991).

[4] Magali Marie Carrera, *Imagining Identity in New Spain: Race, Lineage, and the Colonial Body in Portraiture and Casta Paintings* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003). These are only a few of the many terms that were part of the casta systems of colonial-era Mexico and Latin America. Samples of these paintings can be found online; for example, see www.nacion.com/In-ee/ESPECIALES/raices/raices25.html (accessed on May 28, 2008). The Casta paintings depicted in figures one and two are in the public domain. Notwithstanding my good-faith efforts, I have not been able to contact the rights holders to the photographs of the pictures to obtain permission for use here. I request that contact information regarding such right holders be forwarded, if applicable.

[5] William Shakespeare and Norman Sanders, *Othello* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 1:1, Lines 96-100.

[6] François Bernier, "Nouvelle Division De La Terre," in *The Idea of Race*, ed. Robert Bernasconi and Tommy Lee Lott (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, [1684] 2000).

[7] François-Marie Voltaire, "Of the Different Races of Men," in *The Idea of Race*. Voltaire's view is captured in the etymology of the term 'miscegenation,' which is derived from the Latin terms 'miscere' (to mix) and 'genus' (stock, or in this context, race). Unlike Voltaire, Bernier seemingly held that it was "natural" to sexually cross the "natural" divisions among humans. Of course, if Bernier believed, as Voltaire did, in the theory of polygenesis (literally many creations), then his permissive attitude toward

interracial sex is in contradiction with his race theory.

[8] Thomas Jefferson, "Query XIV," in *Notes on the State of Virginia*, ed. Frank Shuffelton (New York, NY: Penguin Books, [1785] 1999), 145-46.

[9] Jefferson's statement provides a nicely compact view of the role of race in the convergence of aesthetics, sexuality, gender, and politics. The convergence of these factors is not incidental or trivial; rather, they have been an important part of the structure of racial states. The racist and sexist representations that are produced by this convergence are the object of critique by an implicitly political tradition of what Paul C. Taylor calls "antiracist aestheticism." See, Paul C. Taylor, "Malcolm's Conk and Danto's Colors: Or, Four Logical Petitions Concerning Race, Beauty, and Aesthetics," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 57, no. 1 (1999).

[10] *Loving v. Commonwealth of Virginia*, 388 US 1 (1967).

[11] Annette Gordon-Reed, *Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings: An American Controversy* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000); *The Hemingses of Monticello: An American Family* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2008).

[12] José Vasconcelos and Didier Tisdell Jaén, *The Cosmic Race: A Bilingual Edition* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), Richard Rodriguez, *Brown: The Last Discovery of America* (New York: Viking, 2002).

[13] For an overview and explanation of Benetton's advertising campaigns visit press.benettongroup.com/ben_en/about/campaigns/list/ (accessed on January 16, 2008).

[14] Despite the increased approval of the ideas of interracial intimacy and multiracialism in the United States, resistance to actual interracial marriage and relationships remains widespread. See, Roland Fryer, "Guess Who's Been Coming to Dinner? Trends in Interracial Marriage over the 20th Century," *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* 21, no. 2 (2007). However, there are exceptions to this resistance in various regions of the United States, such as Hawaii. See, F. James Davis, "The Hawaiian Alternative to the One-Drop Rule," in *American Mixed Race: The Culture of Microdiversity*, ed. Naomi Zack (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1995). Davis's appreciation for the alternative racial practices of Hawaii color his conclusions. For a more critical survey of the history of race in Hawaii see Laura Desfor Edles, "'Race,' 'Ethnicity,' and 'Culture' in Hawaii: The Myth of the 'Model Minority' State," in *New Faces in a Changing America*, ed. Loretta I. Winters and Herman L. DeBose (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2003).

[15] Caroline A. Streeter, "The Hazards of Visibility: Biracial Women, Media Images, and Narratives of Identity," in *New Faces in a Changing America*, *op. cit.*

[16] Kwame Anthony Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1992).

[17] For an extensive discussion of the objections to and defenses of multiracialism, see Ronald R. Sundstrom, "Being and

Being Mixed Race," *Social Theory and Practice* 27 (2001), and *The Browning of America and the Evasion of Social Justice* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2008). In brief, there are types of objections to the multiracial movement and the phenomena of multiracial persons labeling themselves as such. For an example of legal and political objections that are fairly representative of traditional civil rights concerns about multiracialism see Christine B. Hickman, "The Devil and the One Drop Rule: Racial Categories, African Americans, and the U.S. Census," *University of Michigan Law Review* 95 (1997).

[18] Lewis R. Gordon, "Race, Biraciality, and Mixed Race—in Theory," in *Her Majesty's Other Children: Sketches of Racism from a Neocolonial Age* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1997).

[19] For a survey of this history that is skeptical of dogmatic claims that interracial relations in the Americas were always exploitative see Gregory Rodriguez, *Mongrels, Bastards, Orphans, and Vagabonds: Mexican Immigration and the Future of Race in America* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2007). For a similar view on the history of miscegenation in the United States see Stephan Talty, *Mulatto America: At the Crossroads of Black and White Culture, a Social History* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003).

[20] Passing is a complex practice with a long social history, and it is not always or clearly a traitorous one. See, Randall Kennedy, *Interracial Intimacies: Sex, Marriage, Identity, and Adoption* (New York: Vintage, 2004), Gayle Wald, *Crossing the Line: Racial Passing in Twentieth-Century U.S. Literature and Culture* (Durham N.C.: Duke University Press, 2000). While it was always engaged in to gain access to work and other social benefits denied to non-whites during the era of Jim Crow segregation, some practitioners returned to the black community and their families after work, and thus crossed the color line to support their families. Others did it as an insurgent practice to undermine racial oppression. Walter White, for example, who was executive secretary of the National Association of Colored Persons from 1929 to 1955, passed as white to investigate lynchings of blacks in the U.S. South. See, Walter Francis White, *A Man Called White: The Autobiography of Walter White* (New York: Knopf, 1948).

[21] In Hannah Arendt's analysis of the origins of totalitarianism, Arendt famously labeled those European Jews who gained "exceptional" status as "parvenus," whom she distinguished from the "pariahs," those Jews who had little or no legal status and did not enjoy the protection of the state. See, Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, [1951] 1985). One of her points about the parvenus is that their strategy was too individualized and left the majority of European Jews and ultimately themselves vulnerable to state oppression and destruction. There is something of the parvenu in the worst and naïve segments of the multiracial movement.

[22] Nina Simone, "Four Women" on *Wild is the Wind*, Philips PHM 200-207. The song was recorded in 1966 and appeared in several of her subsequent albums.

[23] See, for example, the projects of the Mavin Foundation, www.mavin.net (accessed on January 16, 2008).

[24] This long-held and popular assumption was supported by

the development of the "marginal man" theory. See, Everett V. Stonequist, *The Marginal Man, a Study in Personality and Culture Conflict* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1961). Stonequist's work was about the emergence of "marginal" groups, groups that are in between cultures, races, or other major social groupings, and their assimilation or rise to dominance. He used as his primary example the development of "mixed blood," educated, and bourgeois African Americans as a class, and hypothesized that this class experienced a life cycle that included an "introduction to the two cultures, crisis, and adjustment."

[25] Aaron McGruder, *The Boondocks: Because I Know You Don't Read the Newspapers* (Kansas City, MO: Andrews McMeel Publishers, 2000).

[26] hooks, *op. cit.*, 3.

[27] Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (New York, NY: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1970).

[28] In an *Ebony* article on the proposal to accommodate multiracial identities in the U.S. census, the musician Lenny Kravitz made a statement that echoed Huey's: "You don't have to deny the White side of you if you're mixed. ... Accept the blessing of having the advantage of two; but understand that you are Black. In this world, if you have one spot of Black blood, you are Black. So get over it." See, Lynn Norment, "Am I Black, White or in Between? Is There a Plot to Create a 'Colored' Buffer Race in America?," *Ebony*, August 1995, 112.

[29] Maria P. P. Root, "A Bill of Rights for Racially Mixed People," in *The Multiracial Experience: Racial Borders as the New Frontier*, ed. Maria P. P. Root (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1996).

[30] Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*.

[31] John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, ed. John M. Robson, vol. xviii, *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977). Mill's self-sovereignty claim is part of the "no harm" principle that he argued for in the book: "That principle is, that the sole end for which mankind are warranted, individually or collectively, in interfering with the liberty of action of any of their number, is self protection. That the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilised community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others." What Mill meant by "harm" was principally connected to the defense of individual rights and the free development of individuality. He wanted to encourage what he called "experiments in living" and was particularly critical of the imposition of identities that limited the liberty and individuality of whole classes of people. His *The Subjugation of Women* is a testament of this aspect of his legacy. See, Mill, *The Subjection of Women*, ed. John M. Robson, *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, Vol. xxi (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984). Mill's "no harm" principle and his conception of society and individuality have been the subject of a large body of literature. A good place to start is John Skorupski, *Why Read Mill Today* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2006).

[32] Such expressions of personal identity are libertarian rather than egoistic, which is an ethical principle that prioritizes the

individual pursuit of self-interest. Individuals who take this position do not deny that they should fulfill their obligations to others; however, they do deny there is a natural moral obligation to accept ascribed racial identities. Although the critics of multiracialism may judge that move as egoistic, it is not, strictly speaking, ethically egoistic. Assertions of multiracial rights that do not attend to its effects on others are libertarian because they regard personal identity in the way libertarians regard personal property—as absolutely individual and so sacrosanct that it should be free from the coercive claims of others. In this view, personal identity is a matter of personal choice and should be autonomously determined by individuals. Nobody has a natural or socially determined claim on the identity of another. The only legitimate social identity claims would be voluntary and contractual.

[33] Linda Martín Alcoff, "Mestizo Identity," in *American Mixed Race: The Culture of Microdiversity*, ed. Naomi Zack (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1995).

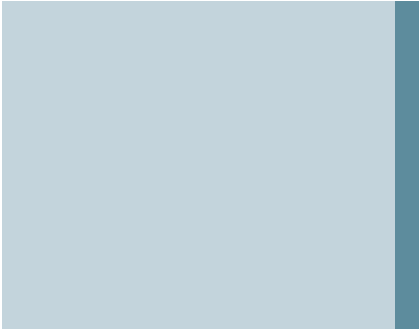
[34] Root, "A Bill of Rights for Racially Mixed People," 7. Root is claiming a pragmatic relationship with mixed-race ambiguity. On the one hand she claims that multiracial persons have the right to exist beyond rigid ethnoracial standards, but on the other hand they have a right to utilize those same standards for their personal needs. This might seem contradictory since she claims that racial labels are inadequate markers of our identity, while she advocates that multiracial persons may use whichever racial labels they feel justified using whenever they want to use them. Root's position, however, becomes contradictory only if it is paired with principled anti-racialism. Although she leans in that direction, she does not think that multiracial persons have a moral responsibility to reject all racial categories. However, she does think that dominant, monoracial practices will be undermined as multiracial persons increasingly assert their identities.

[35] Philosophical accounts of racism that are sensitive to individual or personal racism, as distinct from social or institutional racism, are particularly useful for morally evaluating multiracialism because they do not ignore the intentions that motivate individual declarations of multiracial identity nor do they over-determine the phenomenon as a mere outgrowth of older, racist practices. See, in particular, Jorge L. A. Garcia, "The Heart of Racism," *Journal of Social Philosophy* 27 (1996), Lawrence A. Blum, *"I'm Not a Racist, But...": The Moral Quandary of Race* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002).

[36] W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Conservation of Races," in *African-American Social and Political Thought, 1850-1920*, ed. Howard Brotz (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, [1897] 1995).

[37] Gregory Rodriguez, *op. cit.*

[38] This attitude is typically but not exclusively found among groups that espouse some version of cultural nationalism, and seek to ensure that the production, performance, sale, or other forms of dissemination of "cultural products" associated with their group (e.g., rugs, pottery, music, dance, cuisine, and so on) is controlled by and profits their members. This attitude may result as a reaction to the rampant commercialization or it may be motivated by the simple desire for profit.



[39] Numerous books and art works provide narratives and representations of multiracial lives that resist narrow and static interpretations of multiracial identity and the meaning of mixed-race looks for multiracial persons. See, for example, Carol Camper, *Miscegenation Blues: Voices of Mixed Race Women* (Toronto: Sister Vision, 1994), Kip Fulbeck, *Part Asian, 100% Hapa* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2006), Gigi Kaeser and Peggy Gillespie, *Of Many Colors Portraits of Multiracial Families* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997).