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CHAPTER 4

Why Blacks Are Committed to Blackness

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If race is a useless construct for understanding human behavior, why is it that so many African Americans in general and African-American intellectuals in particular remain committed to it? This chapter explores the historical roots of blackness. Blackness is similar to ethnicity in that it marks one group off from another, has a distinct set of cultural traits, and those who share it believe they are related. But blackness is both more narrow and more broad than ethnicity. It is more narrow in that it has its origin in the unique experience of Africans and persons of African descent in British North America. It is because blackness has been adopted by so many persons of African descent around the globe that it is more broad than ethnicity. Ethnicity is grounded in a particular geographical place, whereas blackness has become worldwide. This chapter examines the history of the one drop rule which holds that any person of known African ancestry, regardless of her or his physical appearance, is black. While every nation in the western hemisphere includes persons of African descent, the one drop rule exists only in the United States. If the roots of blackness are found partly in widespread acceptance of the one drop rule, they are also partly found in the perceived absence of ethnicity among African Americans and most importantly in slavery. Lacking a sense of ethnicity and confronted with the one drop rule, the slaves created open communities. The chapter concludes that not only should African Americans continue their commitment to blackness, but also other Americans might do well to join them in adopting the behavior associated with it.

INTRODUCTION

Solomon Katz (1995) began a recent paper on race as follows:

Throughout this century many misconceptions about race have led to forms of racism that have caused much social, psychological and physical harm to many humans throughout the world. Unfortunately, a substantial part of these misconceptions have had their origins in various papers and books that depend heavily on old and outmoded biological concepts of race. However, as the analysis presented in this paper today will demonstrate, the changing concepts of what constitutes race have now developed to the point where the old biological concepts of race no longer provide scientifically valid distinctions.

Katz presented his paper as a member of a panel sponsored by the American Association for the Advancement of Science entitled *Is Race a Legitimate Concept in Science?* The panel, composed of scholars from the physical and social sciences, and the humanities, agreed that there was no biological basis for race as the term is commonly understood. At about the same time the panelists were preparing their papers, a number of scholars were criticizing Herrnstein and Murray's *The Bell Curve* (1994) for its reliance on scientifically discredited ideas about the racial basis of intelligence.

Definitions of ethnicity and blackness must be understood in order to examine this commitment to blackness. By ethnicity is meant the array of cultural traits that make a group unique and distinct from other groups. Ethnicity usually involves a shared sense of history and a belief that those sharing an ethnic heritage are biologically linked to one another. Whether a biological relationship exists may or may not be true; what is important is that those who constitute the ethnic group believe there is a biological tie. At first glance, blackness appears to be like ethnicity in that it marks one group off from another, has a distinct set of cultural traits, and those who share it believe they are related. But blackness is grounded in the experiences of Africans and persons of African descent in British North America. While persons of African descent in other parts of the world have adopted and accepted the idea of blackness, it had its beginnings in the thirteen colonies. It is because blackness has been adopted by so many persons of African descent around the globe that it is more broad than ethnicity. Ethnicity is grounded in a particular geographical place, whereas blackness has become worldwide.

Blackness, like race itself, is a social construct, and like race it has no genetic basis. Blackness is instead a normative and behavioral system, a way of looking at the world reflecting, deciding on how one ought to behave, and then acting accordingly. Its roots are in the slave experience, and for that reason blackness is unique. Neither whiteness nor ethnicity is conceptually like blackness. Blackness is rooted in the one drop rule, in the absence of ethnicity among African Americans, and in the slave experience.

BLACKNESS AND THE ONE DROP RULE

The one drop rule holds that any person of known African ancestry, regardless of his or her physical appearance, is black. The one drop rule has two distinct characteristics. First, although virtually every nation in the Western Hemisphere includes persons of African descent, the one drop rule exists only in the United States. In all other American nations and the European colonies that preceded them, miscegenation was acknowledged by the creation of an elaborate racial hierarchy consisting, for example, of mulattos (persons of mixed European and African ancestry), mestizos (persons of mixed European and Native American ancestry), and a host of other types intended to measure and reflect the amount and sources of racial intermixture (Mellafe 1975; Morner 1967; Rout 1976). Persons were not simply placed in categories, but these categories were ranked. So, for example, mulattos had access to jobs that were closed to blacks, whereas Indians were exempt from the persecution of the Inquisition and mestizos were not. These racial terminologies were incorporated in the cultures of the new American settlements, manifesting themselves in stereotypes that in their turn had an impact on race relations.

Because the United States and the thirteen colonies of British North America that preceded its formation were not isolated from the rest of the Americas, some of this terminology acknowledging race mixture soon found itself into American ideas about race. So, for example, most Americans understand that a mulatto is of mixed African and European ancestry. In his 1918 book, *The Mulatto in the United States*, sociologist Edward B. Reuter met most Euro-American expectations about race in arguing that virtually all Afro-American leaders were mulattos. To buttress his case he included numerous photographs showing that the majority of black leaders were partly European in ancestry. Despite Reuter's book and the on and off willingness of the United States Census to acknowledge racial intermixture, most Americans accept the one drop rule.

Ideas about miscegenation exist on the fringes of American racial consciousness. Sometimes these ideas reflect the continuation of racial attitudes that preceded the acceptance of the one drop rule in certain geographical locales. In New Orleans, for example, ideas about race continue to reflect the long control of the city and its environs by Spanish and the French settlers, both of whom acknowledged miscegenation in their racial terminology (Woods 1972). Similarly, the one drop rule was long rejected by the settlers of Charleston, South Carolina who brought with them racial categories developed in the British West Indies (Koger 1985). Similarly, most Euro-Americans know that the "half-breed" is a person of part white and Indian ancestry, and almost all who know the term accept the stereotype that half-breeds are a drunken, degenerate folk, embodying the worst characteristics of both races. But few know the term *zambo*. In many of the Spanish-speaking republics the *zambo* is a person of mixed Native American and African ancestry, but there is no equivalent term in the United States, thereby demonstrating the power of the

one drop rule. For if there had been any significant social and sexual contact between Indians and blacks, a term would exist to refer to the children of these sexual relationships. None does.

The absence of the term *zambo* makes clear the second characteristic of the one drop rule, namely, it is applied only to blacks. One may be part Asian, or part Latino, but one may not be part black. Under the one drop rule, to be part black is to be entirely black. Sociologist F. James Davis, in *Who Is Black?* (1991), demonstrates that while all other American racial groups are regarded as assimilating minorities, blacks are not. The model for Latinos, Asians, and Native Americans is that of European "ethnics" who are accepted by European Americans to the extent that they willingly divest themselves of their Old World ethnic and cultural markers, thereby demonstrating their willingness to become Americans. While millions of black Americans have, over the centuries, demonstrated their willingness to accept the Euro-American way of life, blacks are not regarded as an assimilating minority. It is possible for a white candidate for political office in an attempt to attract the Indian vote, to make mention of her Native-American grandmother. It is possible for her to be both white and part Native American at the same time. But it is not possible for a white candidate, in an attempt to attract the black vote, to make mention of her African-American grandmother. If she has a black grandmother, under the one drop rule, she is black.

Scholars differ over the origins of the one drop rule. Historian Winthrop Jordan (1968) argues that the English attitude toward Africans was deeply rooted in their culture's ancient fear and loathing of the color black. In the English worldview, blackness was associated with the night, with dirt, and with evil. Psychologist Joel Kovel (1970) concludes that whites associated the dark skin color of blacks with feces and therefore had a basic aversion to persons of African descent. Psychologist Frances Welsing (1970) agreed with Kovel that the source of racism and hence of the one drop rule was to be found deep in the psychohistory of whites, but found it was based not in rejection of blackness, but in envy of it. Unable to produce melanin—the genetic factor that gives skin its color—Northern Europeans were envious of Africans and others who could. While doing everything possible to blacken themselves, they nevertheless created a worldwide system in which darker persons were punished, exploited, oppressed, and, in the case of Africans, enslaved. If the arguments of Jordan, Kovel, and Welsing are accepted, then the origin of the one drop rule is found in the long, deep, and complex interplay of European culture, psychology, and history.

Afrocentrists also find the origin of the one drop rule deep in the past, but in that of Africa, not of Europe. Historian Sterling Stuckey (1987), for example, writes of the direct and continuing link between the cultures of Central and West Africa and African-American culture. Research by Stuckey and other Afrocentrists (Asante 1988; Boateng 1993) suggests that, contrary to a widely held scholarly assumption, the cruelties of the Middle Passage and slavery did not destroy the African sense of self. The origin of the one drop rule is therefore

found in the continuation of a felt African identity among African Americans. Afrocentrists argue that this sense of blackness is not rooted in racial essentialism and that African Americans include within their community persons who, though of African descent, are also the descendants of Native Americans, Europeans, and Asians. Afrocentrists further argue that West African cultures have historically been characterized by their willingness to incorporate and accept persons of different religious, economic, and political beliefs. Typically, West African ethnic groups incorporated into their pantheon of belief the gods and religious worldviews of persons they conquered. While African Americans constructed a social order open to persons of various racial mixture, at the same time they retained among themselves a sense of Africanness which made them willing partners in the construction of the one drop rule.

The work of three historians (Bennett 1970; Morgan 1975; Fredrickson 1981) suggests that the origin of the one drop rule is found in neither the ancient history of Africa nor that of Europe, but rather in the need of the 17th-century ruling class of British North America to control the growing slave population and its fear that slaves would ally themselves with lower class whites. According to Morgan: "If [white] freemen with disappointed hopes should make common cause with slaves of desperate hope the results [would be] disastrous to ruling class whites." The answer to the problem, obvious if unspoken and only gradually recognized, was racism, to separate dangerous free whites from dangerous slave blacks by a screen of racial contempt" (1975:328). As Bennett, Morgan and Fredrickson see it the roots of the one drop rule are to be found in the straightforward efforts of a 17th-century ruling class to maintain and extend its hegemony.

Méchal Sobel (1987) believes that race relations in colonial North America led to the one drop rule, but finds its origin not in the 17th-century, but the 18th. For much of the 18th century, she argues, whites from the lower orders of England and Africans found much in common. Both, for example, shared the idea that time was cyclical and repetitive, not linear, and an assumption that physical space had both sacred and secular characteristics. These and other shared worldviews drew them together against an emergent white elite holding a sense of time that was linear, and believing that space should be divided into sacred and secular arenas. Sobel titled her book *The World They Made Together*, thereby suggesting that—contrary to views held by scholars who assume there were always two distinct race-based cultures in British North America—for nearly two hundred years, the gulf was not between black and white, but instead between elite whites on the one hand, and other whites and blacks on the other.

This shared cultural orientation was reinforced by the practical needs of poor whites, poor blacks, and slaves to work together. Sobel writes:

Other whites, too, had business relationships with slaves both legal and illegal. Many blacks and whites worked out symbiotic relationships: blacks took plantation produce and exchanged it with poor whites for drink and hard goods. Poor whites were often

dependent on this cheap source of provender. Upper class whites knew this and were determined to separate them. [George] Washington, for example recognized that without "their connexion [sic] with my Negroes," local poor whites "would be unable to live on the miserable land they occupy." Evidence of black-white partnerships in crime is widely available. (1987:50-51)

Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and other southern slaveholders did more than fret over these relations between whites and blacks; they did all they could to prevent and disrupt them.

A number of scholars conclude that the ideology of the American revolution with its insistence on the equality of man led to the one drop rule. If all men were created equal, then slaves ought to be freed. A. Leon Higginbotham (1980) is among those (Bailyn 1967, Jones 1978, Kaplan 1973) who suggests that the revolutionary generation could find no way out of this dilemma but to suggest that if all men were created equal, then blacks were not men. Higginbotham (1980:381-383) points out that Thomas Jefferson's original draft of the Declaration of Independence concluded with a significant diatribe against King George III for his encouragement of the slave trade. Higginbotham notes that, while this draft condemned the slave trade, it did not criticize American slavery itself. But this fine distinction, written after all by a slaveholder, was itself soon rendered meaningless. The approved and final draft made mention of neither the slave trade nor slavery. Wood outlines the dilemma facing the revolutionary generation: "Americans now recognized that slavery in a republic of workers was an aberration, 'a peculiar institution,' and that if any Americans were to retain it, as southern Americans eventually did, they would have to explain and justify it in new racial and anthropological ways that their formal monarchical society never needed" (1992:186). Only in these ways could slavery and a democratic republic be reconciled. Africans and their African-American children were transformed into despicable folk, separate and apart from the rest of the human race, destined by God to serve whites, and to be forever inferior to them.

Davis (1991) believes that the one drop rule had its beginnings in neither ancient Europe or Africa, nor in 17th-century, 18th-century, or revolutionary America. Instead, he finds it contended with an American understanding of race which recognized racial intermixture until after the Civil War. In the post-Reconstruction era, his argument runs, white Southerners who had exercised political and economic control over blacks by means of slavery were faced with the problem of how to continue to dominate blacks. It was at this point that the one drop rule was created, thereby providing an ideological justification for Jim Crow. Whites, even southern whites, did not everywhere and immediately accept the one drop rule, any more than they accepted legal segregation. Both not only imposed inconveniences on whites—restricting them as much as blacks were restricted—but also sometimes created pain by requiring them to deny family members and transform genuine friendships into relationships circumscribed by the emergent Jim Crow system.

In reaching this conclusion, Davis drew on C. Vann Woodward's *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (1957). In the book, first published in 1955, Woodward clearly demonstrated that contrary to much American thinking, legal segregation was a recent invention dating only back to the 1890s and had, been established within the living memory of many white Southerners. The book stirred up angry controversy in the South where it was widely assumed that the Jim Crow laws dated from the earliest colonial settlements and reflected whites' ingrained and natural aversion to blacks. Woodward's book directly challenged this belief and suggested that segregation was a social and legal response to the emancipation of Afro-Americans. Born in Arkansas, Woodward apparently felt the pressure from his fellow white Southerners and softened his argument in the 1957 edition.

In the first place, although the segregation system is relatively new, it is grounded upon theories and attitudes that are not at all new. It is a mistake to assume that the ideas of innate Negro inferiority and white supremacy originated along with the Jim Crow system, for they are much older. Segregation is, after all, only the latest phase in the long history of the white man's ways of fixing the Negro's status, his "place." Along with these practices, and in justification of them, there developed the old assumptions of Anglo-Saxon superiority and African inferiority, white supremacy and Negro subordination. In so far as segregation is based on these assumptions, therefore, it is based upon the old proslavery arguments and has remote roots in the slavery period. (1957: xi-xii)

Although Woodward probably wrote in response to attacks on his work by segregationists, he offers perhaps the best answer to the origin of the one drop rule by suggesting that Euro-Americans have long been fascinated by Afro-Americans, and therefore by the meaning of race.

The one drop rule did not, therefore, necessarily have its origins in ancient history, the 17th-century, the 18th-century, the revolutionary era, or in the 1890s. Its roots were paradoxically, though understandably, in all of these as the white men and women who settled North America grappled with the black men and women they enslaved. These same whites also killed Native Americans by the thousands and discriminated against persons of many and diverse racial, religious, and ethnic backgrounds. Yet they found room for all of these peoples, for the Irish, the Italians, the Jews, the Chinese, the Chicanos, and Indians, allowing them to behave as—in Davis' terms—assimilating minorities and never applying the one drop rule to them.

Whatever its beginnings, the one drop rule played a powerful and central role in shaping blackness. It persuaded and convinced Americans of African descent that they were indeed a separate, distinct, but not inferior people. David Walker in his 1829 *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World* (1965:12) argued that whites "think because they hold us in their infernal chains of slavery, that we wish to be white or of their color—but they are dreadfully deceived—we wish to be just as it pleased our Creator to have made us."

Walker accepted the concept of blackness and the one drop rule as did most African Americans of his era and of the generations that preceded it.

BLACKNESS AND ETHNICITY IN NORTH AMERICA

If the roots of blackness are found partly in widespread acceptance of the one drop rule, they are also found partly in the absence of ethnicity among African Americans. Every other group migrating to North America, as well as the American Indians who were already present, had an ethnic base for responding to what was an unprecedented experience. A number of scholars have objected to the term *New World* to refer to the evolution of the Americas in the wake of Columbus' voyages, but in fact the world was a new one in the sense that for the first time large numbers of persons of strikingly different physical appearance and cultural assumptions were thrown together. In Europe, even during the Age of Discovery, the vast majority of persons seldom traveled more than 40 miles from their birthplace in their entire lives. Within this circumscribed space, they generally encountered persons who looked like themselves, and such differences as did appear were explained by class, family, and sometimes religious factors. Peasants expected the gentry to behave in ways different from themselves, and Catholics expected Protestants to operate with a different set of assumptions.

C. Loring Brace (1995) attributes the rise of racial thought to the advances in European shipbuilding which made possible long voyages. As long as persons traveled overland from Europe, whether they reached the Near East, North Africa, or even China, as did Marco Polo, they saw no sudden changes in the physical appearance of persons. But ocean voyages were quite different as Europeans sailed from familiar ports populated by persons much like themselves and disembarked in places inhabited by persons who were neither physically nor culturally like themselves. Struck by these differences, Europeans sought to explain them in ways that would enable them to accomplish their own mercantile, religious, and imperial goals. It was one thing to grapple with these strange new peoples in their own environment, from which one might always escape, and it was quite another to build a New World, distant from Europe, in which they had to be reckoned with. Native Americans were already present when the colonists arrived, and the settlers soon transported Africans.

In understanding the role of ethnicity in the development of North America, it is important first to appreciate the achievements of the settlers. Much recent scholarship has denigrated their accomplishments, reading history backward and finding them to be racist, cruel and selfish oppressors, when in fact it makes far better sense to view them in terms of the challenges they met and mastered from the earliest settlements in the 17th-century to the time their European-American descendants declared independence from Great Britain. The colonists met and overcame, in turn, environmental, social, and cultural

challenges (Jones 1988:31-33). Ethnicity played an important role in meeting each of these challenges.

The settlers first had to master the challenge presented by the environment. They had to learn which of their own crops would grow in North America, which of their animals could survive, and which native American plants and animals could safely be eaten. They solved these problems, partly by trial and error, partly by observing the Indians, and partly by deliberate instruction from them. In the southern colonies English settlers also learned much from imported African slaves who, for example, shared information on the cultivation of rice with their owners. The settlers literally built a New World as they constructed homes, buildings, roads, bridges, and churches. In so doing they transformed the environment. In this transformation ethnicity played a crucial role as the European immigrants learned from one another. Frequently, they built on one another's successes and learned from each other's failures. When the English took over New York, they profited from the knowledge the Dutch had gained in their dealings with Native Americans, just as the Dutch themselves had earlier learned from the settlers of New Sweden. Ethnic and related religious factors sometimes led to rejection of lessons learned by earlier settlers. So, for example, while the English were willing to take advantage of established Dutch relations with American Indians, they did not adopt the Dutch practices in which blacks were accorded a "half freedom" whereby they were routinely freed, held full church membership, and were free both to marry and to hold property (Higginbotham 1980; McNamara 1973). At the same time, while the English frequently lamented the success of French Catholics in North America in converting the Indians, contrasting it with their own failure, they were unwilling to adopt the practices used by French missionaries.

Ethnicity also played a central role in resolving the problem of creating a working social order, a society in which the settlers could live and have reasonable expectations as to what would happen to them and to their children in the future. There were no European models to help the colonists. Europe was fragmented and divided by religious and national hate and was often at war during the settlement of North America. Spain, France, England, Russia, and a number of other minor European powers fought for control of North America, and there was no conception of a multicultural society to bring them together. And yet the colonists had to get along with one another. The Puritan theocracy in parts of Massachusetts and Connecticut was challenged not only by Scots, Dutch, Germans, and other immigrants, but also by the children of the Puritans themselves who refused to accept it. The charter of the colony of Georgia forbade slavery, but English entrepreneurs, envious of the wealth realized by their slaveholding fellows in South Carolina soon agitated to have the charter amended to allow slavery. They were strongly opposed by settlers of German and Scots background who insisted that Georgia should remain a colony of free persons who worked for themselves and did not force slaves to work for them (Flanders 1933; Scarborough 1933). They lost, but ethnicity clearly played a

central role in their struggle. Eventually, the colonists agreed that whiteness was more important than the ethnic and religious differences that divided them, but even after they, and their American-born children, agreed on the importance of whiteness, ethnicity continued to be an important factor.

Ethnicity was particularly important in the next problem facing the colonists who having mastered the environment and having established a set of working social relations, now had to legitimate these relations. Put in yet another way, having created a society, they now had to create a culture, and thereby persuade themselves that the solutions they had devised were correct. Put in a still different way English settlers now sought to convince newly arrived migrants from Europe to accept the emergent Anglo-American patterns of life and the institutions that supported it. In multicultural colonies such as New York, Georgia, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Maryland, this celebration of English ways was not widely accepted, but in what was to become an American pattern, ethnic communities opted for a two-pronged strategy. Insofar as possible, they recreated the institutions of their homeland, maintaining the language and supporting churches and cultural institutions. At the same time, immigrants accepted the Anglo-American political and economic order. Ethnicity remained important in the social and cultural lives of many of the people and was often turned to advantage in economic and political matters. Members of ethnic communities tended to do business with one another and to support elected officials and government policies that served the interest of their particular group. But while they remained culturally distinct from Anglo-Americans, such groups as the Irish, Germans, and Jews were drawn into the larger social framework of the nation and accepted its ideology. The much celebrated American melting pot existed only in the political and economic spheres. In marriage, in religion, and often in education and place of residence, ethnicity remained important.

The pushy aggressiveness of persons who were not white stimulated the growth of whiteness as a concept. Prior to the arrival of whites, control of a given area of land often shifted back and forth among Indian ethnic groups, always with the idea of maintaining harmony among the tribes themselves and with nature. But by the early 18th-century, it became clear to most Indians that there would be no give and take between themselves and the English; the colonists always took land, they never returned it. From this point on, some Indians became fierce foes of the settlers, while others sought to work with them in order to retain Indian land and an Indian way of life. The English and their Anglo-American children were aware of this resistance and understood that the basis for it was the Indian's commitment to his culture. Blacks were no less troublesome than the Indians, with whom they sometimes made common cause (Bateman 1990). They ran away, rebelled, and resisted in other ways. Fear of slave conspiracies was a staple of colonial thought, and even free blacks were seldom trusted. Collins (1985:66) concludes that "Indians and blacks together thus boosted whites' sense of unity and common purpose as well as their race pride."

While Native Americans may have solidified a sense of whiteness among the settlers, they presented a different set of problems to Englishmen and their Anglo-American children from that of European immigrants. At the time the whites arrived, Indians already possessed rich, complex cultures. From the perspective of the settlers, Indians could be persuaded to accept Anglo-American culture, they could be pushed out of spaces controlled by the colonists, or they could be destroyed. White American attitudes toward Indians evolved over time, reflecting both assumptions made about Native Americans and relations with them. Although Thomas (1975) argues that the Puritans, and by extension other 17th-century English colonists, were racist from the beginning and never intended to admit Indians as full members of their communities, a number of other scholars (Axtell 1981, Horsman 1981, McLoughlin 1986) conclude that many settlers sought to both civilize and Christianize Native Americans and to fully incorporate them into their settlements. Certainly, this was the attitude of Thomas Jefferson and other influential men. In the early years of the new republic, the federal government allotted funds and personnel, and encouraged missionary societies to work among the Indians in order to civilize them. But by the 1830s the Anglo-American attitude had changed. Indians were no longer regarded as capable of being assimilated despite the fact that a number of tribes, among them the Cherokee and the Seneca, had transformed their societies by adopting Anglo-American ways.

From the perspective of the Indians, the settlers presented both a problem in themselves and in their changing attitudes toward Native Americans. Dowd states that the Indians had two responses to the English colonization of North America:

Indians who identified with "tribal" leaders generally emphasized the interests of their particular people; these often cooperated with, although they were only rarely controlled by, the imperial powers. In the terms of this book, they were advocates of *accommodation*. Others cast their lot with the movement's militants, here termed *nativists*, holding less regard for "tribal" affiliation. Still others occupied positions between the two poles or shifted from one position to the other. (1993:xxi)

These two poles mirrored exactly the choices confronting the European immigrants. Indians could either seek to accommodate themselves to Anglo-American culture, or they could attempt to maintain their traditional way of life.

Like the European immigrants, Indians responded to this Anglo-American challenge along ethnic, or to use the more old-fashioned term, tribal lines. In the South, for example, the Cherokee and Seminole dealt with whites and white ideas about race and culture in different ways. The Seminole accepted Africans and African Americans as full members of the tribe. According to Littlefield:

For the most part the Seminole blacks lived like their masters and allies. They dressed Seminole fashion and lived in houses built of timbers and shingles lashed to posts and rafters with strips of oak. The men owned guns and supplemented their diet with game. Described as "stout and even gigantic" in comparison to the Indians, these blacks were more clever (in their dealings with whites) than their masters. Most spoke Spanish and English as well as the Indian languages. As a result, they were called upon more and more as interpreters and go-betweens when the Indians dealt with the whites. (1977:8)

The Second Seminole War was caused, in part, by the efforts of white Southerners to force Seminoles of African ancestry back into slavery on the grounds that they were the descendants of runaway slaves.

The Cherokee, regarded by many scholars as the most assimilated American Indians during the colonial and early national periods, took a very different attitude toward white American culture. Some, although not all of the Cherokee, rejected communal ownership of land in favor of individual farms, shifted farming from women's to men's work, ended the clan system, replaced traditional religious beliefs with Christianity, and changed a matrilineal system to a patrilineal one. The Cherokee also adopted a constitution modeled on that of the United States, created an alphabet, published a newspaper, and became slaveholders. Many of them also accepted Euro-American racism. Like most other peoples of the world the Cherokee had a set of Creation Myths, ideas about the origin of the world. Prior to the arrival of Europeans and their African slaves, these myths made no mention of race, but by the 1820s this had changed. In a myth collected in 1824 (McLoughlin et al. 1984:256-257), a Cherokee explained that the Great Spirit made the white, black, and red man but that all were destitute until they saw three large boxes descending from the sky.

Then the Great Spirit spoke and said, "White man, you are pale weak, but I made you first, and will give you the first choice, go to the boxes, open them and look in, and choose which you will take for your portion." The white man opened the boxes, looked in and said, "I will take this." It was filled with pens, and ink, and paper, and compasses, and such things as [white] people now use. The Great Spirit spoke again and said, "Black man, I made you next, but I do not like you. You may stand aside. The Red man is my favourite, he shall come forward and make the next choice. Red man, choose your portion of the things of this world." The red man stepped boldly up and chose a box filled with tomahawks, knives, war clubs, traps, and such things as are useful in war and hunting. The Great Spirit laughed when he saw how well his red son knew how to choose. Then he said to the negro, "You may have what is left, the third box is for you." That was filled with axes, and hoes, with buckets to carry water in, and long whips for driving oxen, which meant that the negro must work for both the red and white man, and it has been so ever since.

Prior to the arrival of Europeans, the Cherokee had a system of slavery, but it was not based on race. As this myth suggests, however, many of these Indians had now accepted racist rationalizations for slavery.

The Cherokee and other Native Americans did more than simply accept racist ideas and incorporate them in their myths, they also manipulated them with considerable skill. In a 1793 letter Little Turkey, a Cherokee chief sent to William Blount, then governor of Tennessee, the Spaniards were described as "a lying, deceitful, treacherous people, and not real white people, and what few I have seen of them looked like mulattos, and I would never have anything to say to them" (Perdue 1979:48). At the time Little Turkey wrote, the English, the French, the Spaniards, and the recently established American Republic were all attempting to gain control and influence over Indians in the southeastern part of what is now the United States. Just as these powers sought to play the Indians off against one another, so too did the Indians skillfully play them off against each other. Little Turkey may not therefore have believed the Spaniards were mulattos, but he knew enough about the prejudices of Anglo-Americans to pretend he did.

Indians did not always simply choose between maintaining their native traditions and wholeheartedly embracing European ones. Like the European immigrants, many tribes sought to temporize, to find a middle ground between their way of life and that of the invaders. Richter (1992:480) explains that the Protestant Mohawks of Tiononderoge had returned, after conversion to Christianity, to many traditional practices but "had not abandoned their faith as they defined it. They continued to pray to the Christian God and to teach their children lessons learned from [white missionaries] even while many also participated in ceremonial feasts, consulted traditionalist shamans, and fulfilled wishes expressed in each others' dreams." Like European immigrants both the Mohawks and other Native Americans were apart from and incorporated into Anglo-American culture, and like the immigrants they created a new identity for themselves. The colonists moved from a sense of their separate ethnic identity to agreement on the fact that they were white. Similarly, Dowd (1993:xy) argues that Indians "came to recognize commonality. Factions of them acted on that recognition, producing a movement as religious as it was political." He goes on to demonstrate that this pan-Indian movement of resistance was cross tribal and produced, at least among many Native Americans a sense that all Indians had something in common.

Yet ultimately both white peoples and Native Americans coped with the strange New World from an ethnic/tribal base. While Euro-Americans accepted the concept of whiteness and eventually celebrated it, many of them retained a sense of ethnicity, and from this ethnic base helped to shape whiteness. Similarly, Indians retained a strong sense of tribal identity while at the same time working to forge pan-Indian alliances. In committing themselves to these larger identities rooted in a sense of whiteness and Indianness, the two groups had to submerge their ethnic identities, yet these remained durable and strong.

The experience of blacks was different from that of all other Americans who coped with the emergent New World from an ethnic base. Slavery destroyed ethnicity among blacks. During the latter 17th and early 18th centuries, when African-American culture had its beginnings there were

comparatively few blacks and it was rare indeed for a number of persons from the same ethnic group to be enslaved in the same area. The slaves had to cope with all the problems faced by their owners as they had to resolve a series of physical, social, and cultural challenges, but in addition they had to adjust to slavery, and perhaps most important of all, adjust to one another. Unlike Native Americans and European immigrants, the slaves were not able to bring intact, ethnic-based cultures with them to grapple with New World problems. They had to forge a new identity without having an ethnic base on which to draw.

In this the North American slave experience was distinct and different from the slave experience in English, French, and Spanish settlements in the Caribbean and parts of South America, and from Portuguese settlements in Brazil. In these colonies, large numbers of slaves from the same ethnic groups in West Africa were brought together under circumstances that enabled them not only to maintain their language, their customs, and a sense of their history, but also to pass this knowledge on to their American-born children. So, for example, it is possible to trace the history of the Fon in Haiti, the Ashanti and Fanti in Jamaica, and the Yoruba in Brazil. Murphy describes one African ethnic group in colonial Cuba:

The Yoruba were quick to establish a strong community in Havana. They came to be called "lucumi" after their way of greeting each other, "*olaku mi*, my friend." They formed guilds and dance halls, taverns, and fraternities, where they would dance the old dances. More than ever they needed [their gods] and their ways of power, and they found ingenious ways of keeping them alive. (1993:27)

With the change of a few words, this could well describe the experience of many other African ethnic groups in Latin America and the Caribbean, just as it could serve as an equally valid description of such ethnic groups as the Germans and the Irish in British North America.

It could not, however, serve as a description of the African experience in North America where the ethnic link between Africans and their Afro-American children was broken. In *The Myth of the Negro Past* (1941) Melville Herskovits proved, though many of the readers of his time, both white and black, rejected his proofs, that African culture had not been eliminated among New World blacks. What had been eliminated was the sense of ethnic continuity, so that Africa's children in North America lacked a sense of themselves as Yoruba, Ewe, or Fanti and knew only that they were black. In concluding the chapter poignantly entitled "The Death of the Gods," Albert Rabreau writes:

The character of the religious milieu, the average number of slaves on plantations, and the number of Africans in the slave population were all factors in the survival or loss of African culture. In the United States all these factors tended to inhibit the survival of African culture and religion. It was not possible to maintain the rites of worship, the priesthood, or the [ethnic] identities which were the vehicles and supports for African theology and cult organization. Nevertheless, even as the Gods of Africa gave way to the

God of Christianity, the African heritage of singing, dancing, spirit possession, and magic continued to influence Afro-American spirituals, ring shouts, and folk beliefs. (1980:92)

Africa continued to be important to black slaves in the thirteen colonies, although they were unable to retain a sense of ethnic identity.

African ethnicity played no role in the new sense of self built by North American blacks. While their task was no easy one, it was facilitated by two factors. First, most slaves were imported from West Africa, from a region roughly between the present-day African nations of Senegal and Angola, and areas near the Atlantic coast. Mettraux (1972:29) explains the consequences, noting that most of these peoples "have basically a common culture in spite of linguistic differences and deep antagonisms. Resemblances were increased by reciprocal influence and frequent contact." This shared culture is best understood by comparing it to the shared culture of Western Europe where despite differences in religion, language, and governance there was a widespread acceptance of what constituted civilization, moral behavior, and widespread belief in Christianity. Second, in addition to sharing a common culture, African slaves had the common experience of creating ways of working with one another within the chains of slavery before they arrived in North America. In the slave pens and on the slave ships, Africans of different ethnic, class, and religious backgrounds learned to cooperate with one another. Their working understandings might be viewed as the beginning of the African-American culture in which ethnicity played no part. The slaves sometimes committed collective suicide by together jumping off ships; other times shortly after their arrival in the New World they revolted or ran away. They early understood the need to support one another, and they early understood what they shared. While Europeans and Native Americans were moving toward a sense of race that would transcend their ethnicity and draw them together, in the absence of ethnicity the slaves created and embraced blackness.

This is not the simple and oft-repeated argument that the slave experience was so horrible and overwhelming that Africans transported to the New World as slaves lost all vestiges of African cultures. Instead it is an argument that in the absence of ethnicity the slaves of North America were forced to draw on African cultures in a way that was unique in the hemisphere. In parts of Latin America and the Caribbean, African ethnicity remained so powerful that the slavemasters were able to play African ethnic groups off against one another by encouraging their distinct identities. But in the thirteen colonies of British North America all slaves were treated as though they were the same, and transported Africans themselves were forced to seek out cultural areas of commonality, which transcended the differences among African ethnic groups.

The slaves used their discovery of a shared West African culture in aggressive ways, defining the world in their terms and rejecting those of Anglo-Americans. As Isaac writes:

Afro-Virginians cannot have been caught in the subtle tensions between church-centered, "sacred" celebrations and home-centered, "profane" forms. For them the English Christian distinctions between the "religious" and the "secular" would probably have had little meaning. Although we can discover almost nothing of the symbols that the slaves used to represent ultimate value and meaning, we know that their primary modes of expression were song and dance, with exemplary tales perhaps playing a secondary role. A basic African cultural "grammar" appears to have transcended the great diversities of language and specific customs that confronted the captive migrants as they began to coalesce into a distinct society upon the North American seaboard. This is a case where the medium was indeed the essence of the message. Clearly, during the formative decades of the eighteenth century the slaves were able to keep alive distinctive African expressive styles and sensibilities. (1982:70)

Afro-Virginians, Africans forcibly transported to Virginia, and their fellows in the other twelve colonies found ethnicity irrelevant and useless in their struggle and so moved beyond it. In rejecting ethnicity, they created blackness.

BLACKNESS AND SLAVERY

Blackness was rooted partly in the one drop rule, partly in the absence of ethnicity among North American blacks, but most importantly in slavery. Lacking a sense of ethnicity and confronted with the one drop rule, the slaves created open communities. Blackness was open to all who were slaves regardless of whether they physically appeared to be African, European, Native American, or, as was increasingly the case after the middle of the 18th century, some combination of the three. As they did not control their own communities, the slaves made a virtue out of necessity, and slave societies were open to all. They were populated by persons of varied African, European, and Native American heritage, but, because slavery was based on race in North America, all were considered black. Whites were never enslaved, and Native-American slavery had pretty much ended by the mid-18th century. Moreover, the emergent white American justification for slavery was the inferiority of Africans. It would have been unthinkable to enslave either whites or Indians so that all slaves were, by definition, black. While Euro-Americans were creating a sense of whiteness based on the alleged racial purity of white folk, Afro-Americans were creating a sense of blackness based, in part, on their shared slavery. Whiteness was ultimately based on the idea that all white people were linked together in a great chain of racial superiority over all nonwhites, while blackness was based on a sense that all black people were linked together by a shared experience in America's race-based slavery.

With scholars increasingly sensitive to the persecution of many of America's peoples—Native Americans, Chinese, Jews, Chicanos, Catholics, and many others—the oppression and suffering of African Americans is often regarded as essentially similar to that of other groups. In many American colleges courses on race and ethnicity are taught in which the two are viewed as much the same, and the black experience is discussed as one that is in the

process of evolving through a number of stages similar to the stages through which European immigrant groups passed. Katz (1995) has suggested that ethnicity might eventually replace race as a more useful construct and one that has the advantage of being rooted in culture and not in some supposed, but—dispite all the efforts made by racists—never identified set of genes. Katz is correct, and it makes sense to replace race with ethnicity as a way of exploring the history and culture of all other American groups except blacks. Blacks had a racial not an ethnic experience, an experience shaped by slavery.

Slaves had no rights and enjoyed none of the legal protections and other safeguards that all other Americans took for granted. The absence of these protections struck most deeply at the most basic of all human institutions, the family. With the exception of a brief period in the 17th century when the large number of African males imported as slaves were housed in barracks, most slaves lived in families consisting of father, mother, children, and on occasion members of the extended family. The slave family looked like every other American family, but appearances are deceiving. For each slave family had an invisible member, the slaveholder. It was the slaveholder who decided whether a man or a woman who wished to marry would be allowed to marry legally, or would have to settle for just living with one another. If the couple had a son who liked to work with wood, it was the slaveholder, not the child's parents who decided whether he would be trained as a carpenter, just as it was the slaveholder who gave or withheld permission for the parents to teach their daughter to read. It was the slaveholder, not the parents who decided whether their children would be baptized, or if they were baptized, whether they would be baptized in the faith of their parents or one chosen by their master. The slaveholder even decided whether the family would remain together because he could, and did, sell husband away from wife and children away from parents.

Slavery prevented black parents from passing on the fruits of their labor to their children. By law, all that the slaves produced belonged to their master and his children. Most American immigrants arrived in North America, worked hard, accumulated some property and then passed it on to their children. As slaves were nonpersons they could pass nothing on to their children save by permission of a slaveowner. He or she might permit the slave to pass on a musical instrument, a tool box, or a Bible, but no slaveholder had to allow even this and few let slaves pass on any substantive property to their children.

Because the slaves had no protection for their families, the property they produced, or even themselves they became the most watchful of America's many peoples. Defenseless before the law and with many Christian clerics arguing that God had cursed the descendants of Ham to forever serve whites, the slaves carefully watched white people and in this watchful reflectivity is to be found the origin of blackness. Their very survival depended not on an understanding of the law or of their rights as citizens—though many slaves were surprisingly knowledgeable of American rights—but on an accurate reading of white attitudes and intentions. Of course, all Americans had to be watchful as together they went about building a New World. Whether Native

American, Euro-American, or recent immigrant, the inhabitants watched and learned from one another. The earliest settlers learned from Indians, Indians adopted many of the material items of whites, and immigrants, with an eye on other Americans, adapted their own cultures in such a way as to retain some of the old and incorporate some of the new. The slaves were faced with the same environmental, social, and cultural problems as confronted all other Americans, but because they had far less control over their lives, they relied far more than other Americans on themselves and their intelligence and far less on institutions such as the law. It is therefore one of history's many ironies that slaves have been presented as mindless simpletons when in fact they were the most watchful and reflective of Americans.

Race, in the biological sense in which it is usually employed, had nothing to do with this watchful reflectivity. Those enslaved were sometimes mostly black, sometimes mostly white, sometimes mostly Indian, and at other times of such mixed ancestry that it was impossible to determine which racial group had contributed the most to the racial makeup of the slave. It was therefore not race that played the central role in shaping blackness, but slavery. All slaves were, or were believed to be, the descendants of Africans. Slaveholders and their supporters acknowledged that some of their living property might be of mixed ancestry, but the one drop rule rendered such biological realities socially meaningless. All persons of any known African ancestry were black, and only blacks were slaves. But just as this justification for slavery served slavemasters, so too did it serve the slaves, and hence African Americans, for blackness was rooted not in the idea of racial purity, but rather in the shared necessity, as slaves, of watching whites.

Because whites were in power, they had the luxury of treating all blacks as though they were the same. Indeed, it was in their ideological and material interest to behave as if blacks were identical in ability and according to Jones to create

public fiction to the effect that all Black people were inferior physically, intellectually, culturally, and morally to all white people. By public fiction, is meant here the collective, civic acceptance and promulgation of something individual members of the society know and privately concede to be untrue. Slaveholders, who pushed most strongly for the public fiction of Black inferiority, knew very well it was not true. As the works of Blassingame, Fogel and Engerman, Genovese, and Miller make clear, masters did not treat their slaves as if they were all the stupid, docile, immoral brutes they publicly proclaimed them to be. Instead, almost without exception, slaveowners drew careful distinctions among their slaves, recognizing which were intelligent, strong, rebellious, and which were not. To have operated a plantation as though all its resident bondsmen were the grinning simpletons of public fiction would have led to disaster. (1988:35)

White power gave whites the luxury of pretending that all blacks were inferior to all whites, just as it gave them the luxury of entering into relations with individual blacks which contradicted the public fiction of black inferiority.

Blacks had no such luxury and did not pretend that all whites were the same, so that blackness was therefore partly rooted in the necessary monitoring of whites. It was also partly rooted in the necessary monitoring of blacks, Africans in America and their American-born children watched one another as carefully as they watched whites and for the same reason. Slaves had no organized polity to discipline one another and to protect themselves from one another. Slave quarters were organized to serve the interests of the slaveholder and not the slaves. As a consequence, the slaves, unlike all other Americans, could neither publicly celebrate nor publicly discipline one another. Those who served the community at the expense of the master had to be covertly rewarded, just as those who served the master at the expense of the community had to be covertly punished.

Because the celebration of heroes and the punishment of villains had to be hidden from the slaveholder and supportive whites, the slave community was different from all other American communities in which public assemblies were held to see the war hero applauded or the murderer executed. This did not prevent the slaves from reaching a consensus as to how blacks ought to behave—a different way of saying they created blackness—nor did it prevent them from maintaining this consensus despite their enslavement. Webber writes:

Most [slave] quarter communities also generated and told stories which perpetuated the memory of more or less historical quarter figures. By building the legends of these persons through telling their story the quarter community gave great sanction to the deeds of these men and women. The legendary figures most often immortalized in story were of three general types: those who fooled or made fun of whites; those who sacrificed for family or friends; and those who physically confronted plantation authorities. (1978:21)

The slaves honored all three in their songs and tales, offering them as models for their children to emulate.

And emulate these heroic men and women they did, creating in the process one of the most remarkable societies in the annals of humankind. Without money, without property, without political power, without full control over their families, or even full control over their own bodies, American slaves created a society in which men and women delivered respect to one another. Perhaps even more remarkable, they did so in the shadows of the larger, more populous free white society, itself based on education, money, property, titles, and control over family life, all denied to slaves. Whites as free persons could behave in one way, blacks as slaves had to behave in another. Lacking freedom, black peoples created an alternative system, a means of respecting one another when the usual ways in which white Americans delivered respect were denied them. In deciding who deserved respect, European Americans looked at dress, education, occupation, degrees, size of residence, location of residence, number of servants employed, possessions, and titles. These were readily discerned at a

glance so that a well-dressed merchant with a carriage and driver received more respect than a shabbily dressed workman who had neither. The difference in respect given the two men was supported by an emergent ideology which held that American society was an open one and the (presumably) hardworking merchant deserved respect, while the (presumably) lazy worker did not.

Their enslavement made it impossible for blacks to accept the ideology that Americans got what they deserved. They knew that they had done nothing to deserve slavery, and even if they had, their unborn children certainly did not deserve to be slaves. Blackness was rooted in the shrewd awareness of slaves that American society rested on lies. But beyond this awareness and more important was the fact that in the separate cultural world the slaves were creating they wore no obvious badges of respect. The slaves had few clothes, no titles, no degrees, no fine houses, and no servants. While whites ranked one another based on possessions and other obvious social markers, blacks ranked one another on the basis of behavior. Men and women in the slave quarters earned respect based on commitment to community, respect for the elderly, care for children, and belief in God. But, in sharp contrast to the white community, there were no easy markers, no quick way to determine at a glance that members of the slave community deserved respect. Only by means of watchfulness over a period of time could the slaves determine whether one of their fellows was good to his children, respected the elderly, was committed to the community, and believed in God.

Their very lives depended on the slaves watching and assessing one another. Most slave revolts in North America failed because they were betrayed. The slaves were placed in a cruel dilemma as the most successful revolt was the one with little planning, in which the rebels simply got up one morning and decided on rebellion. But although these revolts might succeed in the short run, they were destined to fail because the conspirators had not planned what to do after their initial success. Would-be rebels therefore devoted some time to planning, but ironically the more time they took in developing their plans, the more likely it was that the rebellion would be betrayed.

Whether they wished simply to maintain the slave community and continue delivering respect to one another, or whether they wished to rebel and overturn both this community and destroy the white community that governed it, the slaves watched one another. Just as the slaves never had the luxury of pretending all whites were the same, neither did they have the luxury of pretending all blacks were the same. In his overview of the 18th-century formation of African-American culture Kuikoff writes:

Even native-born slaves had little choice either about their work or about the people who lived with them in their quarters. Nevertheless, they had a small measure of self-determination in their family life, in their religion, and in the ways they celebrated and mourned. When they could choose, Afro-Americans simultaneously borrowed from whites and drew on the values and beliefs their ancestors brought from West Africa to form a culture not only significantly different from that of Anglo-Americans but also

different from the culture of any West African group or any other group of North American slaves. (1986:346)

In the formation of this culture, and in maintaining it, the slaves had no alternative but to watch one another as carefully as they watched whites.

CONCLUSIONS

Blackness had its origin in the one drop rule, in the absence of ethnicity, and in slavery. Unlike whiteness, which is rooted in the belief that whites are racially pure and that being white is genetically determined, blackness makes no assumption that blacks are racially pure, nor that being black is genetically determined. Blacks and whites in the United States offer strikingly different explanations for behavior. Most white people, not all, really believe that race determines behavior and that when they see black people they know something of their physical capacities, intellectual limitations, and sexual inclinations. Whites come by this belief honestly enough, for their culture has taught them that blacks are an inferior, degraded people, strong, stupid, and oversexed. Most black people, not all, really believe that behavior is determined by choice, and that the choices made are moral ones. Blacks come by this belief honestly enough for their culture has taught them that some whites behave morally and others do not. The slaves distinguished among slavemasters, their supporters, abolitionists, and those whites who were neutral toward slavery. Today African Americans distinguish among whites who are racist, those who are antiracist, and those who claim—despite much evidence to the contrary—that racism is no longer a force in American society. Blacks draw these distinctions for the same reason as their slave ancestors, they do not have the luxury of pretending all whites are the same.

Blackness is behavioral, not genetic: it is based on choice, not race. This explains why race hate groups find so few followers among Afro-Americans. Many blacks hate whites, and they often turn out in large numbers to hear black demagogues who preach hatred of all whites, but most African Americans stop short of joining such groups. To do so would be to reject blackness by lumping all whites together. In the eyes of most blacks, this would mean making blackness just like whiteness and behaving just like whites who lump all blacks together. Blackness resembles whiteness in its acceptance of race as a conceptual category, but differs from it in that it argues neither for racial determinism nor for biological purity. Blackness resembles ethnicity in that it is culturally based, and in the context of American society it is not centered on economics or politics. Like most ethnic groups blacks have seldom sought to create independent politics or separate economies, although like most ethnic groups, blacks sometimes appeal to group solidarity as a means of accomplishing economic and political goals. Blackness differs from ethnicity in that it was created in North America and was not transported from Asia or

Europe. It also differs from ethnicity in that it was created by slaves, men and women who had far less control over their lives than did other Americans.

Blackness is not, however, fully independent of European-American ideas. Nowhere is this more clear than in the Afro-American color hierarchy. While the one drop rule prevented the development of the complex racial ranking of blacks, mulattos, quadroons, octoroons and other persons of color characteristic of Latin America and the Caribbean, it did not prevent many black Americans from accepting the idea that European physical features were beautiful and African ones ugly. In their opening paragraph on this color complex Russell, Wilson, and Hall (1992:1) observe: "Yet beneath a surface appearance of Black solidarity lies a matrix of attitudes about skin color and features in which color, *not character* [italics added] establishes friendships, degree of lightness, not expertise, influences hiring, and complexion, not talent, dictates casting for television and film." While blackness leads African Americans to focus on character, not on physical appearance, the cultural hegemony of whites leads them to accept the idea that a light-skinned spouse is preferable to a dark-skinned one. Physical appearance becomes more important than moral character. This color ranking is reversed when black Americans accept the white American stereotype that the darker the skin color, the more exciting the sex as reflected in the folk-saying, *The blacker the berry, the sweeter the juice*.

In addition to being influenced by Euro-American attitudes, blackness has come under attack in recent years. Biologists, geneticists, physical anthropologists, and other scientists deny that race is a valid biological construct. In general, they have demonstrated that white supremacy is based on the scientifically discredited idea that whites constitute a separate, distinct race, pure, isolated from, and superior to all other races. Similarly, the biracial/multiracial movement seeks to undercut ideas about white racial purity and thereby end racism, by insisting that its members are of mixed racial heritage (Jones 1994; Reddy 1994; Zack 1993). These two assaults on blackness share the assumption that blackness is the same as whiteness. The assumption is understandable as the one drop rule established the bipolar idea about race in which persons must be either black or white. The biracial movement has been especially aggressive in attacking blackness because many of its members assume that blacks have been the most resistant of all the nation's racial groups to the destruction of the bipolar idea about race. In this they are correct as biracialism has long been accepted by Asian Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans—where one may, for example, be part Asian and part white—but it strikes at and attacks the essence of blackness. It is not therefore surprising that many African Americans are hostile to the biracial movement. Ironically, the African-American community includes descendants of all racial groups, demanding of them only that they identify themselves as black and commit themselves to the struggle for racial justice as blacks.

There are two lessons in all this, one for nonblacks and the other for blacks. First, nonblacks must realize that blackness is not the same as whiteness. Although the two appear to be conceptually similar, and there are

black preachers of race hate who mimic white racists, blackness and whiteness are different in their history and assumptions. Martin Luther King, Jr., looked forward to a time when people would be judged by the content of their character and not the color of their skin. In this he merely urged white Americans to behave like black Americans. Although blackness is not perfect, and although many black Americans accept the color hierarchy, other Americans might do well to emulate a culture that rewards those who love their children, respect the elderly, serve their community, and believe in God. Second, blacks must accept the idea that many persons who are phenotypically black do not wish to be black. Recent immigrants from Latin America and the Caribbean wish to hold on to their national identity, the grandchildren of Cape Verdean immigrants wish to maintain a sense of being Cape Verdean, and many new immigrants from Africa are committed to an African ethnicity. Some biracials of African ancestry want to separate themselves from the African-American community. While the majority of these persons appreciate the long African-American struggle for justice, most of them are committed to it, and some of them consider themselves as black, they do not want to see their sense of self submerged in blackness. The culture of blackness demands that African Americans allow these people not to be black. Just as the slaves allowed persons of mixed race ancestry to be black, so must their descendants allow persons of mixed race not to be black if this is their choice.

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