

**Color Struck: Conversations on the Black Mixed-Race Identity, Representation, and the  
Perceptions of Belonging**

Hannah Holness

Laidlaw Scholars Leadership & Research Program, Barnard College of Columbia University

Professor Quincy Scott Jones

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**Abstract:** With the increase in interracial relationships, mixed-race identity is growing internationally. This includes the African diaspora, where mixed-race individuals have gained traction in many fields, from politics to the arts and athletics. However, with this public presence in media, the more divided Black communities have grown on whether or not Black mixed-race people “count” as Black and can represent the community. These questions have evolved into a discussion of what Blackness means, if there is ownership of that definition, and if Black mixed-race people are even “Black” at all.

This project utilizes interviews with twelve participants of African descent across the diaspora (multiple ethnicities and nationalities) and books analyzing anti-Black racial structures to illustrate various viewpoints of Black mixed-race disposition in representing the Black community. The paper argues that the “Color Struck Theory” embodies how generational trauma from anti-Black oppression evolves within community spaces, *especially* when discussing Black mixed-race identity. It can also prompt reconsideration of tropes associated with Black mixed-race people and the very definition of “Blackness.” Beyond an attempt to provide introspection into the vastness of Black identity, these interviews discuss perceptions of mixed-race identity and colorism in the community, the entertainment industry, racial combinations dominating ideas of mixed identity, and xenophobia. Most importantly, it attempts to examine further measures that can be taken to strengthen a sense of community in the desire for Black liberation.

## **Introduction**

D.W. Griffith’s 1915 film *The Birth of a Nation* issued, not just a portrayal, but a supposed justification for the brutality of Black life both on and offscreen. Based on Thomas

Dixon's novel *The Clansman*, the film depicts Black Americans (white actors in Blackface) as monstrous villains who take over the South, insisting on the legalization of interracial marriage and forced subordination of Whites under Black people. One infamous scene contained the suicide of a white Southern Belle who would rather die than marry and engage with a stereotypically predatory Black man. This *single* film and collection of Black caricatures onscreen led to the revival and glorification of the Ku Klux Klan and the horrifically violent seizure of Black life that followed. It became a recruiting tool, new chapters sprouting throughout the States and increasing race riots. One famous example was the Tulsa Massacre in 1921, where white mobs were fueled by Klan morale and fear of a Black-induced insurrection of the South. They stormed the predominantly Black neighborhoods, torching homes and businesses, threatening assisting firefighters at gunpoint, and killing as many as 300 people.

*The Birth of a Nation*, released in the modern-day entertainment industry's infancy, was one example of how the portrayal of Black bodies onscreen impacts the perception and persecution of Black populations. It also was one of many films that fed into entertainment becoming a predominantly white atmosphere with little interest in incorporating Black life and storytelling. With these obstacles in mind, Black individuals forced the doors open with heavy influence from Black cultures to reshape the industry and weaken the barriers excluding Black life. "The Cosby Show," which started airing in 1984, was one example of 'Black-centered television shows that broke racial barriers in entertainment representation by displaying the Huxtables: an affluent Black family that challenged stereotypes surrounding Black men and women. Phylicia Rashad's Clair Huxtable, for instance, paved the way for successful Black women to be represented in television and break white supremacist caricatures. Not only that, but

the show highlighted prominent Black artists in their episodes, giving them a platform that the entertainment industry would be less likely to admit themselves.

Interracial marriages and mixed-race children are on the rise in the United States. The 2020 census found that the multiracial population is young with the median age being twelve. This phenomenon is not absent from the Black community, as studies by the Pew Research Center found that Black interracial marriages have more than tripled, going from 5 to 18%, and that the multiracial Black population has grown by 254% between 2000 and 2022 at 5.4 million people. With a young and growing population of Black mixed-race children, they too have come into spaces of excellence, some becoming icons in Black and international communities. Jamaican musician Bob Marley, for example, became a Black icon and the face of Reggae, turning it into a global phenomenon with his album “Exodus,” where he spread Rastafarian messages of anti-war rhetoric, emphasizing Black power and anti-establishment resistance. While he inspired peace movements in America and Africa, many are shocked to find that he is of Black mixed-race heritage, descending from a Black Jamaican mother and a white father.

However, not all Black mixed-race people are met with enthusiasm for their achievements or pride in their identity. In 1997, Tiger Woods became the first African American golfer to win the Masters Tournament and the first golfer to win three consecutive tournaments amongst other accolades. Instead of referring to himself solely as a Black American, he insisted on being called a “Cablinasian,” paying tribute to his African American, Asian, Indigenous-American, and European ancestry. However, many in the African American community took it as a rejection of his Blackness, George Davis of Psychology Today stating, “I began wondering if he had a mentality that was so linear that he would despise Blackness because he could not appreciate the complex beauty of being Black. Did he like jazz? Did he

ever boogie?”. Similarly, Vice President and Democratic Presidential Nominee Kamala Harris, who is of Jamaican and Indian descent, had her racial identity questioned and accolades ignored despite being the first female Vice President of the United States. Political opponent Donald Trump questioned Harris’s Blackness and racial makeup due to her biracial identity, stating, “She was always of Indian heritage, and she was only promoting Indian heritage. I didn’t know she was Black until a number of years ago when she happened to turn Black, and now she wants to be known as Black. So I don’t know, is she Indian or is she Black?”.

This is not a new phenomenon, as social media also perpetuates discourse surrounding whether or not Black mixed-race people should be allowed to claim Blackness both as a racial marker and culture. Often covering the presence of lighter-skinned biracial actors and performers of Black and white heritage, Black online communities have debated the validity of a mixed-race person’s Black identity with no clear resolution in sight. For example, when debating the race of Serena Williams’s Black-white biracial daughter, one user posted “Please stop trying to convince us white men can create Black people. What they can produce with us, is a mixed race child. NOT A Black CHILD. Only 2 Black parents make Black people. Other races are making mixed race people, and it’s time to stop disrespecting BP LIKE THIS. TY.” In defense of Black mixed-race people, another user stated “Black intellectuals have stocked white hate sooooo much that Black people are going to start turning on Mixed people that have always been considered Black. We’re gonna be even more divided. Save this tweet. Shit is about to get weird.” The mixed debate is multifaceted, with criticisms and counterpoints streaming from various perspectives and quotas used to assess constructs of race. For some it’s phenotypic appearance, or if one’s society would recognize them as Black and treat them only as such, regardless if they are mixed-race. Others would consider a standard of Blackness to be based on ancestry, requiring

an individual to come from two Black parents to be considered Black at all. There is also the belief that a mixed-race person *must* identify as mixed-race only, as it would be incorrect to claim that they are Black when they are of other racial ancestry as well. These debates place the Black mixed-race individual in a position where their place in the community is not just questioned *outside* of it but *within* it, presenting controversy on both fronts with very little sign of resolution. This only raises the following questions: where do Black mixed-race people fit in the Black community? Can they say that they're Black and represent the community in their endeavors?

### **Methodology**

My primary data collection stems from 12 interviews conducted from June to July 2024 amongst Black mixed-race and monoracially Black individuals. It must be clarified that the monoracially Black pool comes from various Black multiethnic backgrounds not restricted to the United States. Some examples include Black Puerto Ricans, Jamaican and African American mixes, etc. The questions examined hotspots of discussion surrounding Black mixed-race identity and its relationship with the African diaspora. Interviewees were asked what their construct of race was and where it stemmed from, which feeds into the perspectives of what Blackness is and where Black mixed-race people fit. The Black mixed-race group was asked about their upbringing in a mixed household and if they felt welcome in the Black community. The monoracially Black group was asked about their upbringing and how it influenced their concept of Black identity. They were also asked when they first knew of mixed-race people and what they were told to detect any inherent biases imposed in childhood. Both groups were also asked about hot topics centered around Black mixed-race people in media on two different fronts. The first surrounded lighter-skinned Black-white biracial actors becoming predominantly

cast for Black roles, a practice historically rooted in colorism and controversial within the Black community. The second discussed Haitian-Japanese tennis player Naomi Osaka, who claimed her “Black card” was revoked by African Americans for choosing to play for Japan in national competition. The final question asks for the individual’s final thoughts on the subject. I also drew on other ethnographic studies on the Black mixed-race experience and books that illustrate varying structures and the “quotas” that make up such markers of Black identity depending on the region.

### **Naming and Understanding “The Color Struck Theory”**

Zora Neale Hurston’s play *Color Struck* centers on a darker-skinned cakewalker<sup>1</sup> named Emmaline and her lighter-skinned boyfriend John on their way to a cakewalking competition. On the train is a lighter-skinned cakewalker named Effie, who is stated in the stage directions as a Mulatto, or of Black-white heritage. Throughout the play, Emmaline shows unwarranted aggression towards Effie, who is nothing but kind to her and John. Her reasoning? Effie is lighter-skinned and mixed-race, leading her to believe John will leave her due to colorist preferences. Emmaline grows so paranoid that she abandons John at the competition and is enraged when he chooses Effie as his emergency partner, supposedly proving her suspicions right. Years later, Emmaline has a Black-white daughter, likely born of sexual violence who falls ill at the play’s conclusion. John, who had returned for Emmaline, fixates on her daughter’s European features and complexion. In turn, Emmaline purposely allows her daughter to pass from illness for no explicit reason. It can be theorized that Emmaline allowed her daughter to pass upon realizing that mixed-race people too experience hardship, from fetishization to the

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<sup>1</sup> Cakewalking- A dance developed from the “prize walks,” or contests with cake as the prize in the mid-19th century, originating from gatherings by enslaved people on plantations in the American South.

trauma of growing up when mixed-race children were often born unwanted and a product of assault. To protect her child from such experiences, she allowed her to die young.

Similar behavior is replicated towards Black mixed-race people today. In their 2019 article, 'We Were All Just Black Kids,' Jennifer Patrick Sims and Rami Joseph-Salisbury reference the mixed experience in Nikki Khanna's ethnographic study *Biracial in America: Forming and Performing Racial Identity*. It finds that "[Black/White] Biracial women were more likely than biracial men to describe feeling rejected. Nineteen of the 31 women she interviewed (61.3 percent) responded that they had experienced 'hostility and negative treatment from Black people' compared with only 11.1 percent, that is, exactly one, of the men in her sample. She goes on to say that the majority of Mixed-Race women in her sample recalled negative interactions with Black women, who they perceived to be "resentful and jealous of their biracial backgrounds and, most importantly, their white physical characteristics (e.g., light skin, light eyes, or long hair) (Sims & Salisbury, 2018)." The behavior itself is nuanced, conventionally wrong but understandable due to preferential treatment given to those with closer proximity to Whiteness: an instrument of white supremacy. This leads to resentment and defense against beneficiaries of a system that actively wounds the group's most affected. Emmaline's behavior acts as a defense mechanism when in contact with potentially antagonistic stimuli. As a product of a colorist and racist environment, Emmaline sees any beneficiary of that system as a potential adversary. Hurston does not justify this, as many characters in the play condemn it. However, she *explains* the reasoning behind it and articulates that Emmaline is not the antagonist, but instead, it's white supremacy. That being said, the Color Struck Theory surrounds a phenomenon where anger and resentment founded in an oppressive system are instead misplaced toward privileged groups in the community. This results in exclusive and aggressive behavior that, while not justified, is

explained from places of hurt and an act of self-preservation in a hostile environment. However, while the mixed-race label falls into this category, as this paper will discuss, it also addresses the possibility of a “Black mixed-race narrative,” or a particular assumption made due to an arguably broad racial label. While a majority of this discourse occurs in American spaces and perspectives, global context matters when discussing the African diaspora and is incorporated into this paper.

### **Black-white Biraciality and the “Mixed” Look**

White supremacy greatly influences the image of Black mixed-race identity, impacting how it is discussed and perceived in the African American community especially. An example may be what racial combinations dominate the “mixed” racial label. Historically, Black-white biraciality, especially during slavery, stemmed from the sexual assault of white enslavers on Black women. The results included, but were not exclusive to, light-skinned racially ambiguous children. Their fates are debated, though it has been recorded that manumission was easier, as some owners freed their children. Others worked in the houses of their masters, making their proximity to Whiteness via mixed heritage a symbol of privilege many enslaved Africans would not attain.

Legalized in most states by 1959, Black-white interracial marriages and Black mixed-race children grew substantially during the 1960s. This was due to *Loving v. Virginia*, which ruled laws banning interracial marriage violated the Equal Protection and Due Process Clauses in the Constitution’s Fourteenth Amendment. However, the entertainment presence of Eurocentric Black-white mixes grew quicker than their monoracially Black siblings due to the same racially ambiguous features that fostered positions of privilege during slavery. Not only that, but the lighter skin and European features (longer hair, blue/green eyes, etc.) of some were

considered more conventionally attractive, resulting in the birth and growth of colorism. Similar beliefs grew in the Black community, a known example being how some Black men preferred lighter-skinned Black-white women over darker-skinned monoracially Black women, an issue highlighted in Hurston's *Color Struck*. Modern media accentuated the association between lighter Black-white biracial identity and privilege by platforming many lighter-skinned Black-white mixed artists over monoracially Black artists and entertainers. Icons of mixed Black-white ancestry such as Jesse Williams, Halle Berry, Tracee Ellis Ross, and Amandla Stenberg often became the center of Black storytelling and roles instead of a balance between the two. To many, the media's definition of the Black story was the lighter-skinned Black-white biracial story *only*.

This is not without controversy and questioning as to what "look" comes to mind when an individual says "biracial" or "mixed-race." One user on TikTok said they didn't consider mixed-race women to be Black, saying "That's because they (the media) try to erase Black women by using mixed women and being like 'Hey, that's a Black woman'." She then tried to show the viewer what "Black" looked like compared to "Mixed". Her pictures of Black women had more African-based facial features, tighter curls, and a range of darker skin tones while insisting the women in the photos had two Black parents because they "looked like it." However, her perception of mixed people only highlighted fair-skinned women with loose curls. She said that there was nothing wrong with being half Black, but then insisted "But that also means you're half *White*," as if there was no other possibility for a mixed-race person's heritage. This raises a few questions. Does being half-white *erase* the Black ancestry that a biracial person has? Why do some immediately perceive them with disdain? Are all Black-white people

light-skinned? If they aren't, are they *then* considered Black? Most importantly, *who* dictates who is and is not considered Black?

When asked why there is a frequency of lighter-skinned Black–white people that majorly occupy both Black and Black mixed-race representation, some interviewees mentioned there is almost a trope–based allure to Black-white biraciality. Kiaira of the monoracially Black group (Haitian and Puerto Rican), theorizes “It’s so much more of a narrative to tell. Like, ‘Oh, you’re two opposing sides... You’re literally like, ‘Oh my god, you- you’re on the white side, but you’re also on the Black side.’” Evan, who identifies as part of the mixed group (African American and Puerto Rican) adds, “I think it promotes some sort of narrative that, like, that’s the only mixed race that exists. I mean, even other cultures. I don’t really see any other cultural mixed races, like I’ve never seen anybody who’s mixed with Indian. I’ve never seen anybody that’s mixed with Asian descent. I’ve never seen, even with, even like Eastern European. It’s always, when it comes to mixed race in Hollywood, I’ve only had ever heard of Black and White.”

Kiaira’s idea of Black–white biraciality being alluring due to being in the middle of “opposing sides” is not far-fetched. The “Tragic Mulatto” trope is a colonial trope built on the horror of having proximity to Whiteness in appearance and socially accepted values, yet being classified as Black due to being biracial. Usually, these “tragic mulattos” committed suicide, unable to handle the “sin” of being deemed Black amidst rejection from the white community. This trope was sensational for white entertainment in the name of envisioning the sin of Black ancestry on tragic children close to “superiority” through white blood and cultural subscriptions. It also lives on in modern slam poetry spaces where biracial children (normally of Black-white heritage) discuss the pain of being caught in two worlds. However, like the “Tragic Mulatto” trope, some of these works expressed wishing to be accepted by Whiteness but unable to due to

their Black ancestry, like it was a *blight* on them. The genre became known as “Mixed Kid Poetry,” commonly joked about in the Black community online. One user on TikTok pretended to be a biracial poet, lamenting, “Mixed girl, Oreos swirl/ Kinky-headed girls always came for *my* silky hair/ Sorry, *KEISHA*, I don’t care.” Another user had done something similar, saying, “My daddy *coffee*/ My mama *cream*/ Who am I, if not the American Dream?” It can be attested that the popularity of the “Tragic Mulatto” trope in older media, as well as the times it resurfaces in modern creative spaces, contribute to the perspective that biracial people are predominantly Black-White, privileged with lighter skin, have Eurocentric features, and possess an anti-Black mindset. However, this assumption eliminates those of mixed heritage who are Black and from another community of color that does not benefit from proximity to Whiteness. Suzanne, an interviewee who grew up during the Vietnam War, embodied this confusion, as she was surprised that people could assume “mixed” and “biracial” immediately meant Black-white heritage. She recalls a lot of Black soldiers returning from Vietnam with Cambodian and Vietnamese wives with Black-Asian children in her community, defying the Black-white trope. In her opinion, assigning “biracial” and “mixed” to specifically Black-white heritage is reductive, and “If you're gonna say that, and that's the definition, then you need to include everyone in that definition, right? Otherwise, get a new definition.” Suzanne’s experience of having Black-Asian children as her initial exposure to Black mixed-race identity proposes a contradiction to the Black-white online designation of the label. Given the Vietnam War occurred at the same time as *Loving v. Virginia* and an increase in interracial marriage, how did the Black-white narrative persist? Could this then argue there is a disconnect between Black mixed-race people in actuality compared to the “Tragic Mulatto” lighter-skinned narrative that takes over most spaces in dialogue and

entertainment representation? Can this oversaturation of Black-white tragedy drown out the reality of the mixed experience?

When asked about why mixed Black-POC people lack the spotlights Black–white individuals have, Kiaira replies “Majorities are not typically concerned with minority-on-minority issues like that. Like, you know, anti-Blackness and Asian communities, or even like Asian stereotypes in Black communities, is something that, like the majority has never cared about.” It can be theorized that the full POC biracial quota is faint in the entertainment industry due to its supposed lack of tragedy, as there is no “superior white blood” to grant the biracial individual some kind of validated empathy in the eyes of a white audience. If white is at the top of the American racial hierarchy, there is no alluring tension between fully POC biracial individuals, as both sides of their heritage are still below Whiteness.

Two monoracially Black interviewees in the entertainment industry provided insight into the preference for Black-white mixes in media aside from its desire for “ambiguous features.” Jeffrey, who was in multiple theatre productions in his township, said “ It's easier. It's easier for them in lighting. It's easier for them-for paying people for makeup, it's easier for so many different reasons... So they just do it because it's easier, not because it's representation.” Actor Nicolle Rochelle also clarified that the calls for mixed-race women to give Black roles to darker-skinned women aren't a simple resolution to the problem, saying “If lighter-skinned actresses do assess it for themselves...If they don't feel like they're appropriate for that role, that doesn't mean they're not gonna give it to another light-skinned actress. Just not you.” The very foundations of the entertainment industry seek out a particular look for both “Black” and “Mixed-Race” racial labels on a screen. The white audience that fawned over the “Tragic Mulatto” and the colorism mentioned in Hurston's *Color Struck* are all products of white

supremacist infrastructure that would operate with or without the coercion of Black-white individuals. It can be argued that it isn't immediately a Black-white biracial person's fault for being cast over a fully Black individual for a Black-centered film, but rather the circumstances that granted that action.

### **What is Black?**

The rejection expressed by some Black online community members towards their Black mixed-race siblings is not always founded in phenotypic appearance, but also personal identity choices. Haitian-Japanese tennis player Naomi Osaka faced this when choosing to play for Japan in international competitions. She was the first Japanese player to win a Grand Slam title and the first Asian tennis player to rank at number one internationally. However, in her docuseries taking fans behind the scenes of her life, she claimed African Americans “revoked her Black card” because of her choice. She responded, “African American isn't the only Black, you know? I don't know, I feel like people really don't know the difference between nationality and race because there's a lot of Black people in Brazil, but they're Brazilian.” Nationality, ethnicity, and race are often conflated in discussions surrounding being part of racial groups. Osaka is not of African American descent but *Haitian*: a predominantly Black island in the Caribbean. For African Americans to revoke the “Black card” of a person not born in the region and of that particular culture, questions not just whether or not Black mixed-race people are considered Black, but if people of African descent outside of the United States are Black.

Other interviewees voiced times when they felt rejected by African American communities because they “didn't fit the stereotypes” of what Blackness was. Jane, who is fully African American but adopted by white parents, recalls “I always felt like my peers, who may not have been mixed, always sometimes made it feel like I was—I was different...And I do think

like, like it was a common source of jokes, or like, it was a common thing that I think people would bring up, or like, ‘Jane has white parents,’ or whatever it was. And I think that's hard.”

Kiaira recalled feeling excluded from other students at her school as a child for not fitting stereotypical ideas of Blackness, saying

I didn't feel like similar to them at all, I guess, like a part of that has to do with the fact that I'm not like stereotypically Black, which is like a whole other thing, but like I was super studious and academic, and I wore glasses, and I was really nerdy, and I, like, you know, was always reading like comic books and stuff like that, and like watching Anime and, like, things that weren't considered typically African American made me not African American, even though I didn't necessarily perceive myself as any different than that, implying those around her didn't find “nerdy” hobbies to be part of Black culture. As someone who formerly acted in *The Cosby Show* and saw him as a “father figure,” Nicolle protested against Bill Cosby, who was accused of multiple charges of sexual assault. Jumping a barrier fence and charging after Cosby on the first day of his retrial at the Norristown Courthouse, topless with her body covered in writing such as “Women’s Lives Matter,” “Cosby,” “Rapist,” and the names of women charging Cosby with sexual assault. As a result, she recalled getting vile reproach from the Black community online who deemed her as “mixed” due to her lighter skin, despite being having two Black parents. She recalls, “they didn't even take the time to do any research about anything. They called me a ‘bed wench,’ which I'd never even heard of until that I was like. Oh, so I like to have sex with the master for fun as a slave. Okay, so I'm a ‘bed wench.’ I'm a traitor to my race. They called me nigger. They called me all kinds of bad, you know, bad names. They made fun of the-they said my nipples were pink. They were saying like ‘You need a tan.’” Nicolle’s experience of having the word “mixed” and ideas of Black-white

heritage being used as a derogatory term furthers the notion of some community members finding Black mixed-race people to be separate and potentially lower than them. They were meant to be excluded, that white blood somehow repelled the Black ancestry they had. Not only that, but it establishes an assumption that a Black person who is lighter-skinned is somehow Black mixed-race. It only raised more questions about what it meant to be “Black.” Does a particular region hold ownership over the term?

When asked about the definition of Blackness, Professor of Africana Studies Dr. Jose Pimienta Bey recalls his memories of his uncle Johnny, who was not keen on racial labels as a construct and identity marker. He states, “Black is not a land. Black is not a nationality. It’s a social and political term. It’s a construct that grew out of mostly African people losing knowledge of our ethnic or national origins.” With Dr. Bey and his uncle Johnny’s perspective in mind, the umbrella term for those of African descent being “Black” may be used as a marker to express a canonical loss of identity within history. In countries like the United States where the Black population predominantly originated from the Middle Passage, for instance, Black is the closest thing that one has to a name for a home that was wrongfully stripped from them. Black becomes a label signifying endurance, creativity, and active resistance in a setting where it is societally viewed as a distinction between human and inhuman. Naturally, in these places, the word could then house cultural phenomena exclusive to that region, though in the process, it becomes accidentally intertwined with defining the entire race.

However, “Black” may not hold similar meanings within the racial infrastructure of other countries. Jane recalls her trip to Argentina in the past few years, where she was told “Black” was not a comment on phenotypic racial features but class, explaining “Their whole thing was, it doesn't matter what your skin looked like, if you were poor, they would call you Black... There's

this assumption that like, if you're poor, you're Black. It's- it's still this very kind of disgusting racism, but the racism wasn't based in the color of your skin. And like, to me, that was a very different way of looking at visual instruction.” She also remembers the experiences of her best friend’s Jamaican immigrant mother who says “I was never Black until I came here, it was a very different identity. I was always Jamaican and then came here and everyone called me Black and in Jamaica, nobody called me Black. I had never thought about that until I was like 25 years old.” Jane’s shock and change in perspective surrounding racial constructs abroad only feed into Dr. Bey’s point: Black is arguably a societal term that could be upcycled depending on the socio-political and racial climates of a nation’s circumstances. Its quotas and usage in one country may not hold the same weight and sentiment as another. Assuming these terms carry the same meaning as they do in their home country would be a product of regional bias.

Jamaica, a nation of predominantly African descent, did not focus on separating the masses based on racial labels and who was or was not kin. Such sentiment was expressed as early as *Jamaica’s Jubilee; or, What We Are and What We Hope to Be* in 1888 by anonymous Black Jamaicans urging for Black unity to gain independence and attain nationhood. In this book, Deborah A. Thomas notes “The authors made a plea for greater unity among Jamaicans. They argued that ‘internal jealousy’ in the guise of racism and class prejudice prevents steady advancement as a civilized people (JJ 30), and that unless Blacks in Jamaica united, the development of a national spirit would be inhibited” (Thomas 36). This emphasis on unity rather than playing into white supremacy’s induced jealousy and internalized racism created their motto: “Out of many, one people.”

What the book’s authors label as “internal jealousy” that inhibits the prospects of national spirit is the behavior noted in the Color Struck Theory. The generational trauma and distribution

of racialized and phenotypic privilege by white supremacy creates the exclusive behavior replicated in Hurston's play and modern Black online spaces. Some interviewees recognized such behavior as a means of defense against people claiming Blackness when convenient. Malla, a woman of Guyanese Indian and African American descent, believes Osaka's rejection by the African American community was because of selectiveness in claiming her Blackness. She states, "So if you're like, playing for the American team, and you're Black today, and then you're Japanese tomorrow, what that is, is, literally, is, it's not your Black card, it's you being called out on, what are you doing for the community that, in theory, got you-got you some recognition when you were playing in the first place." Osaka *has* supported Black causes, both African American and Caribbean. At the 2020 U.S. Open, she wore seven masks for seven matches, each displaying the name of a Black American martyred by police brutality. In Haiti, Osaka built a tennis academy so children could have resources for a sport she believed should be accessible to everyone. Eric, an African American man, agreed the offense comes from passion and perceived rejection, reasoning "I mean Black people are- we're-we're passionate. We're animated. We're-we're vocal. We generally, like, *love* being Black, despite everything we've- all the obstacles we've gone through. We're resilient. So I think it is rooted- a lot of what we do is rooted honestly in passion, like from the Civil Rights Movement to playing sports," thus making representation of proud Black people in these spaces mean much more. For someone like Osaka to choose her non-Black side, there may be a sense of rejection from people who immediately accepted her as kin for her Blackness. This may come from previous media tropes like the Tragic Mulatto and white supremacist structures that emphasized Black blood is the lowest kind, and that having any other blood mixed in increases their superiority.

The danger with the logic that a biracial person can choose when they are Black and if Black causes are for diversity-founded fame or genuine interests, however, is that it can also be utilized by white supremacist rhetoric such as Donald Trump's claim against Vice President Kamala Harris. This only furthers the notion that it's not just members of the Black community that think this way, out of concern for their community, but also white supremacists who want to destroy that community, making finding a middle ground and safe space for Black-mixed race people more difficult. Words that can be said out of misunderstanding and supposed rejection of generational work and advocacy can, unfortunately, also be recycled and weaponized by the oppressive system that required that resistance in the first place.

### **Americentrism and Black Education**

While examining the Black community's perspective on the mixed-race debate, it is integral that unfortunate cases of Americentrism and xenophobia be discussed. Isabel Wilkerson's *Caste* does a phenomenal critique of America's racial hierarchy, though some could claim there's American-based bias in her discussion of Black immigrants. For instance, she creates a hypothetical scenario about a "second-generation child of Caribbean immigrants quick to clarify that they are Jamaican and categorically not African American" (Wilkerson 269) to prove that immigrants would do anything to avoid being at the bottom of the American racial hierarchy. While some in the community may do this to remain separate from African American persecution and stereotypes, some may do so because they are asserting their *rightful* heritage. They do not share the same history as African Americans because their relationship to colonialism and nationhood was different in the Caribbean, not because they hate African Americans. However, Wilkerson insists with this logic that anti-Black rhetoric drives the desire to claim one's immigrant roots, not the fact that they are afraid of losing them in a new

multicultural country. The Color Struck Theory emphasizes generational trauma induced by white supremacist infrastructure as the reason why some assertive behavior is expressed to a non-threatening group such as African Americans believing Black Caribbean individuals loathe them because they are “beneath them.” However, the most important part that ties these behaviors with that history is the lack of education both about African American history and Black diasporic histories. Many African diasporic countries had different colonial constraints, resulting in different journeys of independence, community-building, and racial structures. In some countries like Cuba, more American ideas of stiffened racism scarcely exist, but widespread systemic colorism *does*. In Black multiethnic countries like Jamaica, there is less documentation of separation and exclusion between Black and mixed-race individuals. The discourse online and books on mixed-race studies are often held within an African American context. That raises the question: Is there a case of Americentrism when discussing Black and mixed-race identity in online spaces?

Dr. Bey recalls that American standards of race and Black identity specific to the United States replicate “A problem that you can talk about in so many areas. You know, we're gonna ‘export democracy’ to other countries right? And expect those countries to automatically take on the same values and the same outlook in the span of a couple of years. Their histories are different.” The comparison of imposing American definitions of race, specifically Blackness, to the American insistence on “spreading democracy” in places with unique histories and colonial scars is an inflammatory but nuanced topic. Like Eric, Kiara believes this supposed imposition comes from the kinship of shared anti-Black struggle, regardless of colonial history and region. She mentions, “I think African Americans specifically are very protective over the history of fighting to be able to be African American.” Not only is the history of African American struggle

important to consider but so is the fact that the country scarcely talks about it in its school systems. Not only does the United States teach misinformation surrounding slavery in many states, but some limit the teaching of African American history altogether, an example being how AP African American History was removed from Florida schools in 2023. If the United States education system barely teaches truthful African American history to its youth, including Black children, is it possible for that same school system to teach Black diasporic history? How can the nuances of racial studies and Black development in other countries be understood? Without understanding how racial constructs developed in the Black narrative internationally, the arguments around Blackness, including mixed-race identity, can easily become convoluted within the biases of an individual's native racial structure. For instance, given that most online users who take part in this divisive Black mixed-race discourse are African American, it can be assumed that Americentric biases, combined with active suppression of Black narratives internationally and domestically, cause superficially layered conversations that require much more introspection and globalized thought.

## **Conclusion**

The topics discussed in this paper are not the solutions to the discourse surrounding Black mixed-race identity. They don't cover every opinion in the African diaspora or every colonial history and race. The purpose is to highlight how historical tragedy and generational resistance have divided Black spaces. The lack of a truthful education system in the United States along with white supremacist-influenced media that portrays stagnant images of Black and mixed-race identity with their struggles creates illusions of both groups. While the darker histories behind oppression, privilege, racial tropes, and definitions of Blackness are imperative to preserve in historical discourse, it is also important to understand how that history impacts community

movements in the present. It questions the concept of “ownership” of a particular race and the cultural quotas associated with it, particularly if the mixed-race debate’s regional origins imply quotas for the diaspora altogether. However, even amid this ongoing debate of mixed-race identity’s place in the Black community, interviewees overall advocated for welcoming Black mixed-race people into the community. Suzanne compared Blackness to a garden, as “you can’t just have a garden filled with roses, or a flow- or-or sunflowers. You know there has to be a variety of flowers to make it a garden, a beautiful garden. You need, you know, irises there, too, so I do know that, ha! Being different, we bring something to the table.” Kiara recalled her Haitian grandfather was blind, but regardless he saw her as Black, saying “good insight from somebody who literally couldn’t have any bias like my blind grandfather definitely helped me a lot.” Although the term “Black” has become a symbol of resistance amidst centuries of oppression and adversity, racial categories and what goes under each is constantly evolving. It only makes Black mixed-race identity in the face of Black representation in media much more important, especially in the United States where a Black-Asian woman may soon become president. The revelations made in this paper only emphasize a drastic need for critical and nuanced discussions within the growing evolution and various elements of the Black experience to enforce a stronger community with the hope of a liberated future.

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