

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

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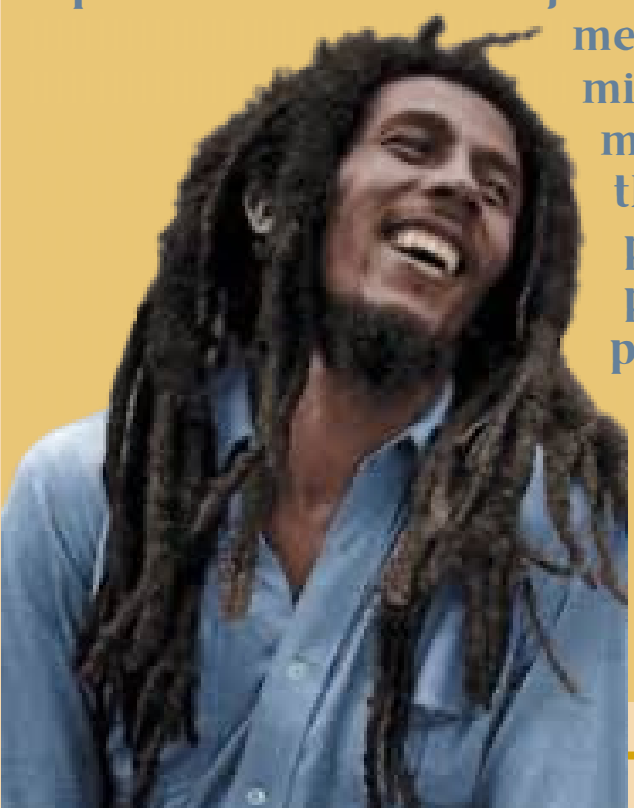
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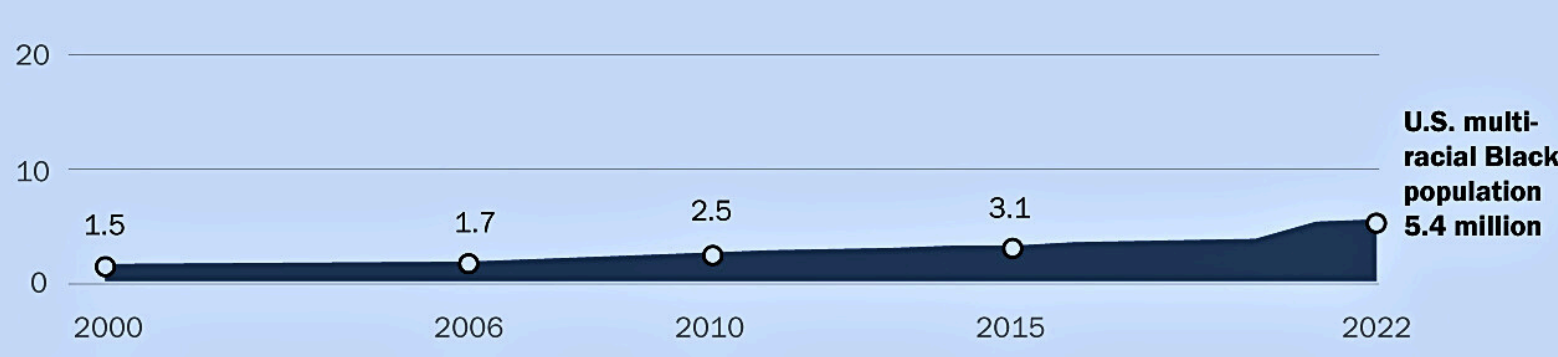
Introduction:

In the 21st Century, there has been a steady increase in Black interracial marriages and Black mixed-race children. Studies by the Pew Research Center found that Black interracial marriages have gone from 5 to 18%, and the multiracial Black population has grown by 254% between 2000 and 2022 at 5.4 million people. As these Black mixed-race people enter spotlights of fame and accomplishment, such as in sports and entertainment, sometimes their identities are called into question. In the online Black community, there has been frequent debate over whether or not Black mixed-race people are "Black," and if they can represent the community. There is also a conflation that "biracial" and "mixed" mean light-skinned Eurocentric individuals solely mixed with White, negating the occurrence of Black mixed-race people who are also People of Color. Is there an attempt of ownership of what makes a person "Black"? Why may some Black-mixed race people face rejection? Who are "Black mixed-race" people? Do they have a particular look and perspective on Black identity? This will only gain more importance as the world becomes more racially mixed, questioning the adaptability of Black diaspora, particularly if it can evolve the constantly changing labels regarding



U.S. multiracial Black population has grown by 254% between 2000 and 2022

U.S. multiracial Black population, in millions



Note: Populations rounded to nearest 100,000. "Multiracial Black" refers to anyone who self-identifies as Black and one or more other races, but does not identify as Hispanic or Latino.

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of the 2000 decennial census (5% IPUMS) and 2006-2019, 2021-2022 American Community Surveys (IPUMS).

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Objectives:

The purpose of this project is not to deem one perspective as "right" or "wrong," but to foster conversations where both can explain their own experiences and concerns on the topic, find potential origins for exclusive and restrictive behavior toward Black community membership, and to encourage validation and healing in both groups. Are these quotas of what makes someone "Black" from a particular region of the world? Do other parts of the African diaspora hold similar views of Black mixed-race people? Why might such views exist? How can we move forward toward liberation as a single community? These questions are imperative to finding nuance and clarity that online spaces surrounding the topic often lack due to the overgeneralization of both groups and their perspectives.

By giving voice to people in the African diaspora of both backgrounds and from various ethnic ancestries, the conversation will hopefully become more open and provide a platform for stories not present in online spaces.



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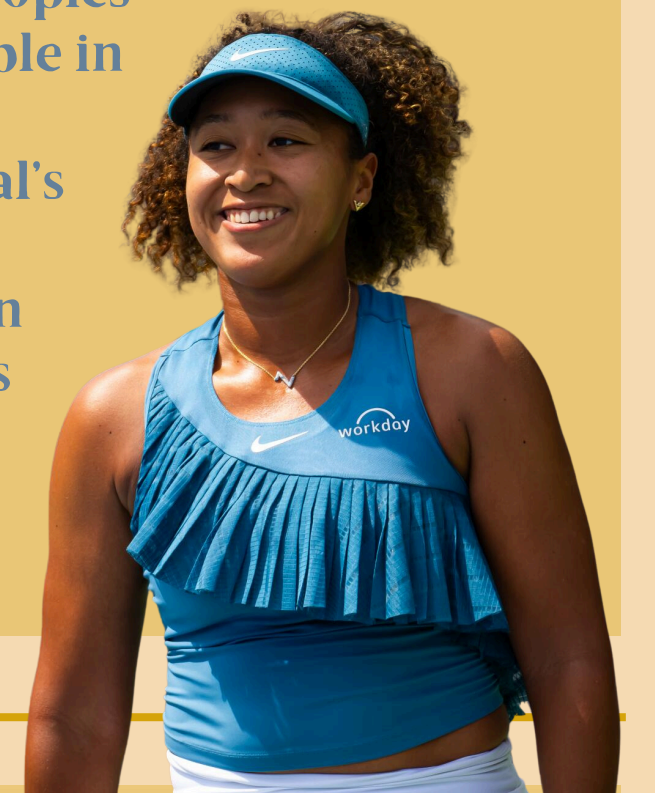
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Methodology:

- Primary data collection stems from 12 interviews conducted from June to July 2024 amongst Black mixed-race and monoracially Black individuals.
 - The monoracially Black pool comes from various Black multiethnic backgrounds not restricted to the United States (ex-Jamaican + African American descent)
- Questions examined hotspots of discussion surrounding Black mixed-race identity and its relationship with the African diaspora.
 - 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.
 - 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: film and sports.
 - 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.



The Color Struck Theory:

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. Instead, it only insinuates more division in the community that the behavior was attempting to protect.

Coined after Zora Neale Hurston's play *Color Struck*, depicting a darker-skinned Black woman's envy and hatred towards a lighter-skinned mixed-race woman based on the fear that colorism would rob her of her accolades and cherished relationships. The aggressive behavior is never justified, and blame is never distributed to either member of the Black community. Instead, Hurston points the blame to White Supremacy, whose influence furthers internal jealousy and division in the community, breaking it from the inside out.



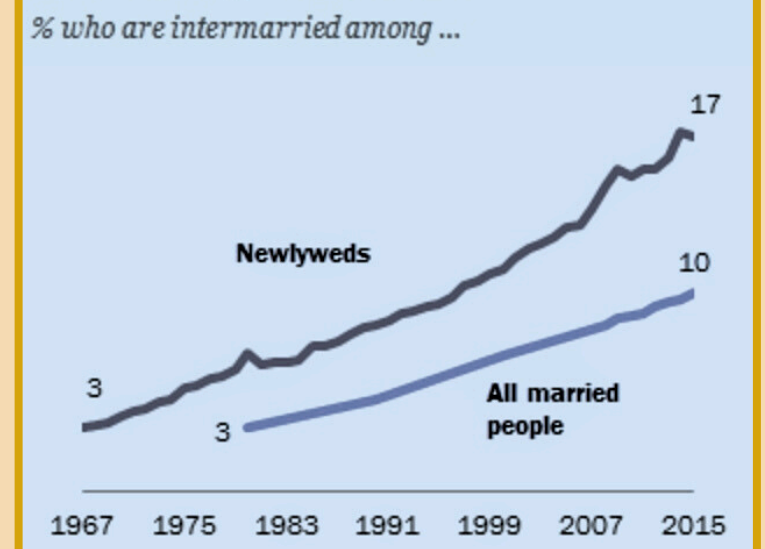
The "Mixed Race Image":

- Often perceived as a lighter-skinned and Eurocentric individual who wants to avoid and even show animosity towards the Black community due to internalized racism
 - This is an overgeneralization of both the appearance and experiences of Black mixed-race people. Why may that be?
- The Tragic Mulatto Trope: Colonial trope depicting lighter-skinned Black mixed-race individuals (usually women) who long to be part of White society but are blighted by Black blood and therefore excluded and deemed inhuman. Often, these Tragic Mulattos commit suicide.
- In the United States, Black-mixed race children were often the product of sexual assault on Black women by their enslavers. These children, still viewed as fully Black due to the "One Drop Rule," had an easier time gaining manumission and more privileged assignments if they remained enslaved. The mixed identity became a symbol of privilege, and Black-White heritage became the face of the entire racial group.
- "Mixed Kid Poetry"- A slam poetry genre usually expressed by Black-White mixed-race individuals who voice their frustrations of being "caught between two worlds." However, this genre has a habit of expressing anti-Black sentiment and a desire for proximity to Whiteness, resulting in disdain from the online Black community. Many compare it to a modern version of the Tragic Mulatto Trope.



Since 1967, a steady rise in intermarriage in the U.S.

% who are intermarried among ...



Note: Data prior to 1980 are estimates. See Methodology for more details. For "all married people," 1980, 1990, 2000, and 2008-2015 data points are shown.

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of 2008-2015 American Community Survey and 1980, 1990 and 2000 decennial censuses (IPUMS).

"Intermarriage in the U.S. 50 Years After Loving v. Virginia"

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View the Participants' Responses Here