

What about the Children?

Five Values for Multiracial Families

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Foreword

When I was a kid, I used to dream of chestnut-colored hair. Growing up in Tokyo, I distinctly remember standing down below the bustle of the city, looking through the crowds at the subway station. I would gaze from head to head—it was a personal game or a whisper I didn't dare say loud enough to hear. Was there anyone here with chestnut brown hair?

My own hair was black as night until I started dying it in college, and then it later began to gray with age. My skin was light brown, and my eyes were light brown too. My dad used to say, "Did you know your eyes were green when you were a baby?" I would always respond the same way, "Green like yours?"

My mom's eyes are raven black, so dark you couldn't distinguish between pupil and her midnight iris.

I was glad my eyes seemed to be right in the middle—a blend of both of them. In my reflection, I saw a dual connection, and it made me feel like home. I wished my hair did the same thing and would pray it to be so that I didn't have as much explaining to do for my existence.

My existence: a Mixed-race girl. It was never considered normal . . . only wrong or too special to be understood. In Korea, my Mixed existence was responded to with teenage spit and words I won't repeat here. In midwestern high schools, strangers responded with questions, assumptions, and an oppressive curiosity.

As an adult, I learned about history I wasn't taught in school—there were laws in our nation that sought to

prevent Mixed-race people from existing. Learning about anti-miscegenation laws was sobering, and it also helped me understand why I had always felt such resistance, subtle or outright, to living a life of embrace for my whole story.

My parents, a Korean immigrant mother, and a Californian white father, loved me whole, and my experience at home was one that affirmed our reality. What we were was normal. It wasn't until I went out into the world and began to face the reality of our American history, world history, biases, and worldview of others around me that I began to reckon with the question, "Who am I?"

I've spent years since then answering, unpacking, processing, and rejecting those questions. What I needed all those years ago, and what my family needed, beyond, "I love you just the way you are," was the ability to name our reality and see how history impacted our reality in the world.

These days, I am a mother to Mixed-race kids and aware that this group of people is the fastest growing group in our nation. More than ever before, our American families and faith communities need language, stories, and those who can guide them in understanding and embracing Mixed-race identities. We don't just need one story about our experiences, we need many for our growing demographic, just like the many colorful stories that most of us embody.

Nicole's book does just that, and Nicole is a wise expert and guide for any family who has a member who is Mixed. Reading the stories, data, and helpful tips she's compiled are a breath of fresh air. Her compassion and honesty are what we need as we consider the generations to come and what it will mean to serve, see, and love them well.

We are not a little bit of this and that; we are whole humans. We are no longer a mere side note to the American experience; we are the future face of our nation.

Tasha Jun

Author of *Tell Me the Dream Again: Reflections on Family, Ethnicity, and the Sacred Work of Belonging*

Introduction

I am biracial, Christian woman: all weighty descriptors. I am glad to be a woman, and I am glad to be a Christian. My faith has always brought me joy, stability, and peace. I don't always understand God, but he has anchored my soul like no one else could. Without God, I no doubt would be a hapless wanderer. Being biracial is another story. For decades, I wanted to shed my skin, like a molting snake, and emerge something different, something less confusing. I didn't like the ambiguity *biracial* brings with it but wished I could plant my feet firmly in one world or another. Now, finally, after a long circuitous journey, I feel at home in my skin; *biracial* feels like a blessing rather than a curse, intentional rather than random, something to be embraced and enjoyed rather than spurned and denied. My wish is that your kids will discover this level of stability and self-acceptance much sooner than I did.

Sometimes the thing that causes us the most pain becomes a well from which others can drink. For me, being biracial was the source of tremendous angst. We simply cannot be happy when we don't know who we are or when we don't like who we are. It has taken longer than it should have for me to be at peace in my skin.

My goal and hope in writing this book is to provide insight for interracial couples who have or who are planning to have children. I'm also writing to parents who have adopted children of another race and single parents. Parents who adopt transracially, even if those children are monoracial, will likely also find many insights applicable to their multiracial families. You chose to clear the hurdles of racism and create a family. Love triumphed, and that truly is a beautiful thing. Doubtless your kids are or will be surrounded by love, but the fact that you picked up this book means that you know at least on a subliminal level that raising strong, grounded, happy kids in a multiracial family requires more than love.

I am biracial, Black and white, so my story comes from that perspective, but this book is written for parents of all biracial or multiracial kids: Black and Asian; white and Asian; indigenous, Black and Hispanic. The possibilities are almost endless, and I include stories from families of various identities as well. I trust that you'll be able to take the ideas shared and apply them to your unique family.

I am also a Christian, and I want to speak for a moment to those readers who are not Christians. Because my faith in God has been so central to my life, it comes up a lot. I'm not including Scriptures to try to convert you or preach at you but rather to try to explain where I'm coming from and to be as true to myself as possible. You don't have to be a Christian to gain insight from the values I offer. The principles shared are important for anyone with a multiracial family, regardless of religion. I'm glad you're here! I'm glad you're reading!

A word about my parents: they were/are extraordinary (my father is deceased, my mother lives not far from me). They were smart, present, and kind. I was loved, cared for, and given broad, rich experiences. I wasn't a joyful kid, but my childhood was not tragic by any means, and some of my malaise would have been there no matter what my parents did. Some of us are born with a level of melancholy that we simply have to manage ourselves. When it came to raising biracial kids, my parents did what they knew to do. There were so few resources back then,

so few books, articles, or friends with like experiences, so little transparency, and, of course, no internet. When I talk about the things that I wish they did, my purpose isn't to throw them under the bus but rather to identify some things that may have made a difference in my life so that you can help your kids love the skin they are wrapped in *before* they reach adulthood.

I also want this for my own children. They are Mixed racially and culturally. My husband immigrated from Jamaica as a young adult, and though I often think of my kids as Black, they do have a white grandmother whom they regularly see. We also live in a very white suburb in a very white school district, and perhaps because of my own childhood malaise, I am very aware that they could subconsciously resent the skin that makes them feel so *other* so much of the time. I write this book both as a parent endeavoring to raise grounded multiracial kids and as an adult child of parents who could have benefited from more guidance raising children to love and embrace every part of themselves.

Race in America is deep and primal. In the last four centuries, myriad bills have been argued and laws passed dealing with it: Is it legal to harbor escaped slaves? Will enslavers be prosecuted if they kill their slaves? Can Black people become citizens? Can Black men sleep in the same military barracks as white men? Can Black and Brown kids go to school with white kids? Can they swim with white kids? Can BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) men marry white women? Can Japanese Americans be incarcerated in internment camps? The Indian Removal Act, Kansas–Nebraska Act, Chinese Exclusion Act, Civil Rights Act, Three-Fifths Compromise, Missouri Compromise—tomes of legislation about race and ethnicity, all trying to control numbers, integration, and who gets to be considered human—these quandaries have preoccupied American courts for almost four hundred years. It makes sense then that kids who carry within themselves two or more races, each with different histories, one perhaps considered superior to another, would experience angst and would need an extra measure of guidance.

I don't say this to scare you. Your kids will have challenges others don't have, but they will also have opportunities others

don't have. God gave you these kids and will give you everything you need to raise them.

When I read through the conversations in various online groups for multiracial people, I see so much hurt and anger over racial identity. They've been told how to identify, and they resent it. They don't feel fully Black or fully Asian or fully Hispanic, yet white people treat them as if they were and monoracial BIPOC shut the door to full acceptance because they aren't. They feel as if they don't fit anywhere, that they're on the outside of life looking in. I felt that way, too, for a long time.

Solomon enjoins us in Proverbs 4:7, "Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore, get wisdom. And in all your getting, get understanding." In the chapters that follow, I will discuss five core values that will help provide some of the wisdom you need to raise happy Mixed-race kids. Each of these values—awareness, humility, diversity, honesty, and exploration—has its own section. Also, at the end of most chapters you will find questions to ponder and steps for application, according to the ages of your children. The steps are not meant to be prescriptive. You can't and shouldn't do all of them. Rather, see them as a bucket of suggestions for you to find the ones that feel most useful for your family. What strikes a chord, provides confirmation, fits with your personality and circumstances? They're meant to get the juices flowing, not to tell you what to do. I hope they're helpful.

The journey of raising your amazing kids will not be easy, but it will surely be beautiful, interesting, and full of wonder. I am delighted to be on it with you.

1

What about the Children?

I was a product of my parents' crime.
—Trevor Noah¹

When my dad proposed to my mom, she didn't say, "Yes." Instead, she uttered the words no suitor wants to hear: "I'll think about it." It was 1962 in Colorado Springs. My dad was stationed at Fort Carson, and my mom had fled to the Springs looking for succor and a fresh start after a failed relationship. They met, dated, and fell in love. The reason for my mom's ambivalence about marriage had everything to do with race: she is white, and my dad, now deceased, was Black. She had grown up in small-town Pennsylvania, where Black folks lived on one side of the tracks and whites on the other. Yet her mother had always taught her that racism was ridiculous, that it made no sense. And so, my mom made Black friends in her integrated schools and then sat with them in the balcony of the segregated movie theater: her first but certainly not her last acts of resistance against a racist culture.

Nevertheless, she was fully aware that falling in love with a Black man was forbidden by most, and that nearly half of the country stubbornly held onto antimiscegenation laws. Interracial marriage was incredibly rare, and my parents' lives would not be easy. It would take another five years,

when I was one year old, before the Supreme Court overturned the last of these laws. But in that moment, the dominant question in my mother's mind was, "What about the children?"

My parents spent a lot of their dates at the Black Elks Club (one of the few places they were welcome together). One night, they enjoyed drinks with a friend who happened to be biracial, and my mom asked him what it was like: how did he fare being Mixed race? He replied that he was loved by both his parents, and that's what mattered the most. "If your kids are loved," he said, "they will be all right." My mom knew that love would not be an issue, and so she finally said yes.

But love was not enough.

For most of my life, I felt a two-ness akin to the one W. E. B. Du Bois described: "One ever feels his two-ness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder."²

My angst was not over being Black and American but rather over being Black and white. I felt fully welcome in neither world and, for a while, I wandered in a no man's land of racelessness: lonely, struggling with self-esteem, feeling the strain of two unreconciled strivings. Striving characterized much of my life and so much of that was because of race. Why can't I be like the Black girls? Why can't I be like the white girls? Full acceptance by my peers felt unattainable, and I rejected the parts of myself that seemed to be the culprit: It's my whiteness! It's my blackness! Perhaps if I closet one, then I'll fit in somewhere. That was not a happy endeavor.

Korean and white author Tasha Jun shares similar feelings: "I've always felt unfit as a Korean but somehow too Korean everywhere else."³ And writer Alia Joy so poignantly states, "I felt God had somehow made me wrong. I wasn't fully white and I wasn't fully Asian. Two halves of something that didn't seem to add up to a whole."⁴

Such feelings are not unusual among Mixed-race people. In 2020, Vox conducted a survey of Mixed Americans and noted,

Over and over again, we heard from respondents that they frequently felt isolated, confused about their identity, and frustrated when others attempted to dole them out into specific boxes.⁵

If you are the parent of Mixed-race kids, you can help to mitigate this loneliness and identity confusion by intentionally teaching your children to love the way they were made. But how? Even though the Mixed-race population is the fastest growing demographic, few resources exist to help parents raise these beautiful kids. Psychologist Sarah Gaither dedicated her graduate work to fill in some of the gaps. She confirmed that more than “mono-racials,” multiracial people have to answer the question, “What are you?” “This can lead to feelings of identity crisis and social isolation, especially if in answering the question people feel they have to choose between their parents.”⁶

And yet, she also held out hope, reporting that if biracial kids are raised to identify with both parents and to understand their complex racial heritage, they can have higher self-esteem than monoracial people. “They are adaptable [and] able to function well in both majority and minority environments.” Not only that, but they are more likely to reject the lie of racism.⁷

How powerful! Dear parents, this is the wonderful job before you: to raise Mixed-race kids who identify with both of you, who love all parts of their cultural heritage, who know that God made them beautifully, wonderfully complex and that this is an asset, not a liability. The purpose of this book is to come alongside you and give you tools and encouragement to help you on this fantastic journey.

All parents need wisdom, a realistic view of the world, and an extra measure of good judgment, especially when their kids are different, a different race from their peers, or a different race from either or both of their parents. These kids are swimming upstream. They are pioneers. All parents need acumen but how much more when your child is singular?

One white friend who is a parent of biracial kids acknowledged, “My experience is not going to be their experience.

I need to be humble and listen.” This is so apt. So many monoracial parents of multiracial kids don’t consider that their children will have a completely different experience than they had growing up. Parents, you are in new territory. Listen to your kids; if you have a partner, talk to each other about your experiences related to race and learn from each other. You both bring such good stuff to the table, and your kids will need it all.

QUESTIONS TO PONDER

1. What anxieties about parenting multiracial children did you have before becoming a parent? Do you think you had a realistic understanding of what their experience might be like? Why or why not?
2. Have you ever wondered if, since your kids look Asian, or Black, or Hispanic, you should just raise them to identify that way? For example, "Since Isaiah looks Black, we're going to raise him to be Black since that's how others will see him anyway." What might be the value of raising your child to identify as biracial or multiracial regardless of his or her dominant features? Is there a downside to this?
3. What was your racial experience like growing up? Was race an issue in your childhood? How do you think your child's experiences will be different from your own? Does this make you nervous?
4. What kinds of conversations have you had with your child's other parent about racial identity development?

2

Color Matters

[My mother] wanted me to understand there were two sides to me, and she didn't want me to feel like I had to pick one or one was better than the other. . . . She said, "Your father is a Russian Jew. This is his background. And I want you to be proud of that. And . . . we are of African descent by way of the Bahamas. And that is your culture and that is beautiful as well. And I want you to accept that, but society is only going to see you as Black. They're not going to see the other side."

—Lenny Kravitz¹

God knit us together in our mother's womb, and we are marvelous to behold. The same is true for our children. God determined their skin tone, their hair texture, the shape of their nose, whether they would have a petite, athletic body or a round, curvy one. I know all about genes, but God created genes, and he can mix them and manifest them anyway he chooses.

During much of my childhood and adolescence, I didn't like the way I looked. I hated my hair, and the way it frizzed up in the rain or on humid days (which is every day in the summer in Brooklyn). I hated what happened to it when I emerged from the water at the beach; within seconds it went from sleek, to curly, to a frizzy mass of tangles. I wanted it to stay sleek like white girls' hair. I also didn't like the way my light brown skin made me feel *different*, *other*, like I didn't belong with my Black peers, and I didn't belong with my white peers either.

And then one day a friend looked at me and said, "You know you're beautiful, right?" I thought she was joking, but then she challenged me to read Psalm 139, and though I had read it many times before, it was as if scales fell from my eyes: *Oh yes,*

you shaped me first inside, then out; you formed me in my mother's womb. . . . Body and soul, I am marvelously made! (vv. 13–14 MSG).

That Scripture catalyzed my journey to self-acceptance.

Your kid is God's kid. She is loved unconditionally and created to do amazing things that only she can do. She possesses gifts and tendencies and a personality molded by the Divine. God breathed life into her, and she is exceptional, unique, one of a kind. Kids do best when they know they are accountable to someone and when they know they are loved unconditionally. I tell my sons all the time, "God is there, even when we're not, watching you and loving you. So live right! And don't be dismayed if friends reject you. The One who created you will never reject you."

They still do dumb things sometimes, and they still feel sad when a friend pulls away, but my hope is that this mantra will become part of their subconscious and will help to mold them into secure, grounded men.

Our children, however, aren't spiritual beings, floating through life without a body. They have a body, and that body has a color, and that is both wonderful and consequential. Those passing them on the street or sitting in the boss's seat on the other side of the desk or wearing the uniform when they are stopped for going a little too fast will see first your child's color, and other ethnic details, even before they see their gender. That's just the way it is, and there's nothing we can do about it.

This is not, in and of itself, bad. One of the things God decided when he formed us in the secret place was the slant of our eyes, the curl of our hair, the quantity of melanin in our skin. A couple can have three Mixed-race kids with completely different physical traits. One may be very fair, another possessing ebony skin, and another a soft mocha complexion. One may have cascading light brown hair and another dark, tight curls. God ordained it all. All of it is beautiful, and all of it has a purpose. There is no good hair or bad hair: no such thing as too dark or too light; no good eyes or bad eyes. God crafted all of it, and those whose ancestry springs from Norway will be lighter than those whose forefathers were taken from Nigeria. God determined our origins and our physical traits, and God declared all of it *good*. Norwegians and Nigerians

carry equal amounts of God's image. Japanese and Jamaicans are equally amazing.

Tasha Jun writes, "(T)hese gifts of ethnicity and culture are love letters from God. They are deliberate tools that reflect his love and intention." I love that: *deliberate tools*. Our ethnic heritage is not accidental; it is not unfortunate or shameful. We don't have to pretend it doesn't exist, and we don't have to assimilate into some sort of colorless, featureless mass.

Color blindness is an insult to the One who created color. Color should be seen, embraced, and appreciated, never denied or scorned. The question isn't whether people will see your child's color; of course they will! The question is, will he be treated differently if he has darker skin? Will he be afforded the same level of dignity as someone with a much lighter complexion? His physical features will be part of his story, and your role is to help him craft a strong, confident narrative, especially since the world will try continually to reshape it.

As a parent of multiracial children, you have the privilege and joy of teaching your children to see and appreciate all of themselves, including their color. Jun writes about her journey of self-acceptance: "I began to realize that I couldn't know God's love for me unless I accepted and uncovered all of who he has made me to be."³ Your kids need to be able to look at themselves fully in the mirror and know that God created all that they see. He didn't make any mistakes; it is all beautiful, all lovely. They also need to know the richness of the cultures commingling in their veins.

Defining Terms

Before we discuss the first of the five values I mentioned earlier, let's define some terms. It's good to make sure we're on the same page before we proceed much further.

race: Categories based on skin color and other physical features.

ethnicity: The culture of people from a geographic region, including their language, heritage, religion, and customs.

biracial: People whose parents are two different races. For example, Black and white, white and Chinese, or Black and Filipino.

Mixed-race: People whose parents are two or more races.

multicultural: People whose parents may or may not be the same race, but they have different cultures. For example, African American and West Indian, Italian and German, or Chinese and Canadian.

Black: People whose parents both descended from Africa.

white: People whose parents both descended from Europe.

BIPOC: An acronym for “Black, Indigenous, People of Color.” Anyone who is not white.

racism: The belief in a racial hierarchy.

white supremacy: The belief that white people and white culture are superior to nonwhite people and culture and that they dwell at the top of the hierarchy.

QUESTIONS TO PONDER

1. Have you ever thought that color blindness is a good thing, that your kids' Christian identity or their human identity is the only truly important part of their identity? If so, what makes you hesitant to highlight racial differences?
2. Have you ever worried about whether your kids will be treated differently because of their color or ethnic features? How do you think you can prepare them for this possibility?
3. Do you ever talk to your kids about their features? Have you told them that their skin, their eyes, their hair are all beautiful? How have you sought to reinforce this truth, for example, with the art on your walls, the magazines on your coffee table, the picture books you read to them?
4. Are any of the terms in the list above new to you? Are any of the definitions surprising to you?

*STEPS FOR APPLICATION***Toddlers and Preschoolers**

- Read picture books featuring diverse kids and talk about how lovely they all are. If you are Jewish or Christian, read Psalm 139 to your little ones. Lay it on thick that God made them just right: their hair, skin, eyes, nose, and mouth are perfect and beautiful.

Elementary School

- Teach your kids that their skin is brown, for example, because Dad's great-great-great grandparents came from Africa and Mom's greats came from England. And that they are a wonderful combination of both! Help your kids to understand and appreciate why they look the way they do.

Tweens and Teens

- Provide books about the grandeur of past kingdoms in Africa, Asia, or Latin America, wherever each side of their family is from. Don't depend on school to instill this pride in your kids.

VALUE I

Awareness

3

Race, the One-Drop Rule, and Cultural Racism

Identity in America for biracial people has been complicated. Racism has played a major role in this complication. . . . Some people want you to feel guilty for being mixed and identifying as biracial, nothing else. This group supports biracial identity. We are mixed! I will not apologize for being who I am! There are biracial selections on the census, job applications, medical documents, dating websites, and even driving tickets. It's time we put an end to the "one drop" ideology. We are biracial and multiracial people. Love us or hate us, we will NOT change!

—Biracial in America Facebook group description¹

Awareness is the first value we will discuss. Since you have children who are Mixed-race or have adopted children of another race, it's important for you to know where the idea of race came from, the subtleties of racism, and why historically Mixed-race people have had to choose one race over another.

Many years ago, a white college friend queried, "Why can't you just be a person? Why does figuring out your race matter so much?" I wish those who had constructed the idea of race in the first place had considered this. I wish those who segregated our country based on melanin content realized the absurdity of it all. But from the very beginning of our nation's history, race has been a "thing," and the strict boundary between white and nonwhite observed at all costs.

The Invention of Race

One of the first to suggest racial categorization was German scientist Johann Blumenbach. His theory proposed that there are five distinct races: Caucasian, Mongolian, Malayan, American

Red, and Ethiopian. He based these categorizations on skull size and shape, and he considered the Caucasian skull the most beautiful.² Later, skin color, hair texture, eye shape, and nose width were added to the formula to determine race and worth. Caucasians were placed at the top of the pyramid, said to possess the most intelligence, the most attractive features, and the greatest value, and everyone else was stratified underneath. Indeed, some considered nonwhite races an entirely different and inferior species.

Race theory crossed the Atlantic at a very opportune time. In eighteenth-century America, when some were beginning to criticize the inhumane trafficking of African people, race theory provided a solution to salve the gnawing conscience. If African men were subhuman, created only to serve, then it was perfectly fine to shackle them. If African women were not really women, then selling their children was little more than selling the foals of a horse. Indeed, enslaved Black women were routinely called *mares*. Similarly, if Native Americans were just savages, taking their land was reasonable and just; savages wouldn't know how to steward such lush land anyway. If you want to steal land or steal labor, you just have to convince yourself that they are both rightfully yours.

David Hume, a Scottish philosopher, boldly declared. "I am apt to suspect all Negroes, and in general all other species of men . . . to be naturally inferior to the white."³ There you have it: "species of men." The idea that there are different species of men, some better than others, lay at the root of the deep racial division we still experience today.

One Puritan judge said in 1700, "To prove that all men have equal right to liberty, and all outward comforts of this life . . . [is] to invert the Order that God hath set in the World, who hath ordained different degrees and orders of men, some to be High and Honorable, some to be Low and Despicable . . . yeah, some to be born Slaves, and so to remain during their lives."⁴

Similarly, Cotton Mather, son of Harvard University's first president, said, "The state of the Negroes in the world must be low, and mean, and abject, a state of servitude, no great things

in this world, can be done for them. Something then, let there be done, towards their welfare in the world to come.”⁵ Many believed that it was in the Africans’ best interest to be enslaved by the white man and then converted to Christianity so that they might receive salvation, even if on this earth they were bound to menial labor.

One Southern philosopher noted, “If there are sordid, servile, and laborious offices to be performed is it not better that there should be sordid, servile, and laborious beings to perform them?”⁶ Latinx and Asians were also at various times in U.S. history considered laborious beings.

When the United States won the Mexican-American War in 1848, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo granted the United States 55 percent of Mexican territory and with that territory thousands of Mexicans who were granted American citizenship. This was good news for the Southern Pacific Railroad, which wanted cheap labor. But Mexican Americans were never really treated like citizens; they were forced into barrios and their children denied access to good schools. By the 1920s, fears about them taking all the jobs grew to such an extent that two million people were forcefully deported, the vast majority of whom were already American citizens.⁷

Asian immigrants have a similar story. Around the time of the Civil War, the United States welcomed Chinese laborers to help build the transcontinental railroad. These workers were considered inferior to whites but were paid wages for their work. About a decade after the railroad was finished, however, Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, banning any more Chinese from entering the United States. Japanese were demonized in the World War II era, Chinese during the McCarthy era, and Koreans and Vietnamese during the Korean and Vietnam Wars.

Throughout the last 150 years, anti-immigrant hostility has tragically culminated in vigilante violence, including lynchings of men, women, and children. Today, anti-immigrant hostility is on the rise once again, as nativist groups use terms like *aliens* and *Chinese virus*; some are even trying to get birthright citizenship, guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment, repealed.

In the United States, capitalism and racism have always worked in tandem. We import or invite nonwhite people in service to capitalism, and then we want them to leave because of racism. The underlying assumption is that America is a white nation, and nonwhites can come to serve white people for a time, and then they must leave. Some even hoped that African Americans would return to Africa after emancipation. In 1816, several prominent white men founded the American Colonization Society (ACS) to deal with “the problem” of free Blacks in the United States. The mission of the society was to move liberated Black people to Africa. Members included Henry Clay, Daniel Webster, and John Randolph; Presidents Thomas Jefferson and James Madison also supported this vision. In 1821, a Navy ship found a suitable location, which was later named Liberia, and by 1838, twenty thousand formerly enslaved Black people had crossed the Atlantic and settled there.⁸ The truth, however, is that America has never been a white nation. People of color have always been here—even before white people.

Deciding that BIPOC were subhuman provided justification for slavery, servitude, and genocide, all to build the American economy. In other words, race theory was an economic necessity. As historian Ashley Montagu noted, “The idea of race was, in fact, the deliberate creation of an exploiting class seeking to maintain and defend its privileges against what was profitably regarded as an inferior social caste.”⁹ This racial caste system still exists today. A Harvard study suggests the persistent entrenchment of America’s racial hierarchy, which assigns the highest status to whites, followed by Asians, then Latinx and Blacks at the bottom.¹⁰ White supremacy is part of America’s root system that has never been extracted.

The One-Drop Rule

The sharp distinctions between races that white supremacy demanded were complicated by the reality of Mixed children, some of whom had very light skin. With supposedly essential

racial lines blurred, it was harder to know how to classify someone. Because of rape, and the rare occasion when mixed-race couples actually fell in love, rules had to be established to deal with Mixed offspring. Maryland passed the first antimiscegenation law in 1664. Other colonies followed, and interracial marriage remained a criminal offense in most states for almost three hundred years.

The One-Drop Rule of 1920 legally assigned minority status to Mixed-race individuals. Now if you had just “one drop” of Black blood, for example, you were considered Black.¹¹ You could not be white *and* Black; you had to be white *or* Black, and you were Black if you possessed any African feature or if anyone knew you had any Black relative. The same was true for those with Asian, Indigenous, or any other nonwhite heritage.

In Louisiana, even as late as 1983, “anyone whose ancestry was more than one-thirty-second Black was categorized as Black”¹² and in 1985, someone with a Black great-great-great-grandmother (i.e., one sixty-fourth Black) was barred from identifying as “white” on her passport.¹³

Several years ago, the hullabaloo over the British royal family’s alleged racism was all over the news. They knew Meghan Markle, Prince Harry’s bride, was biracial, but she looked white and so was allowed through the hallowed doors. But what about their children? Genes can be capricious. You can be completely light skinned, with a narrow British nose, and give birth to a dark baby with fuzzy hair. What if Meghan and Harry produce a Black baby? How could a Black baby be a royal? In the minds of some, the one-drop rule lives on.¹⁴

Whiteness was defined—and “protected”—by exclusion and separation, and those who dared to jump over the hurdles of separation threatened the dissolution of a well-established social caste system. In the United States, enforcing this caste system meant BIPOC were separated and sequestered away from white people. Those who enforced segregation in the Jim Crow South specifically warned against “race mixing,” arguing that Black men would surely rape white women if they were near them. (They failed to acknowledge that, for centuries, it was white men who raped Black women.) There were legally sanctioned

white schools, white neighborhoods, white water fountains, white subdivisions, white libraries, white swimming pools, white social clubs, white unions, white churches, white colleges, white art exhibits, white theaters, white restaurants, and white hospitals. If a city couldn't afford a separate structure, then they just established times when white and nonwhite people could use it separately. For example, only once a week in some cities could Black people use the library, and only from certain sections could they check out books. In Chicago, Black people could swim in the public pool only on Wednesday nights; they could never swim at the same time as whites as Black people were considered dirty, diseased, and lascivious, unable to control themselves around white women in bathing suits.

It's true that some Europeans who immigrated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, like Jews, Italians, and the Irish, were barred from certain amenities, too, but for a much shorter time. Soon, these ethnic groups were enfolded into whiteness and afforded humanity. They were allowed to intermarry, obtain skilled jobs, and hold positions of power and authority as in police and fire departments. They could buy homes in most neighborhoods, and their children could attend white-only schools. At a time when Puerto Ricans were redlined into slums and when Blacks faced clubs and dogs for trying to vote, an Irish Catholic was elected President of the United States.

Clearly, even the European Americans who faced the most discrimination were never treated the way nonwhite populations were treated. Native Americans were killed or pushed onto reservations, Mexican Americans forced back to Mexico or into barrios, Chinese pushed into Chinatowns, and Blacks into inner-city slums. Black and Brown neighborhoods all over the country offered only tenement housing, substandard schools, negligible health care, and terrible working conditions. By the 1940s, some 80 percent of Latinx children in California attended separate schools. They were turned away from newer, more beautiful white schools and sent to learn in shacks. School officials believed that Latinx kids, like Black kids, were dirty and infected with disease.¹⁵

Cultural Racism

Even though legal segregation ended over fifty years ago, we still need to talk about how to help our Mixed-race children love themselves because racism is still so rife in our society. We see the obvious manifestations of it in racial slurs or hate crimes, but there are myriad more covert examples of racism that affect our kids in subtle but real ways. Dr. Beverly Tatum writes about something called *cultural racism*, that is, the “cultural images and messages that affirm the assumed superiority of Whites and the assumed inferiority of people of color.”¹⁶ She says this is so pervasive it is like smog in the air. You breathe it in without knowing it. The only way to counterbalance its effects is to breathe in the clean air of truth: that all people are created equal, endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights. You breathe in clean air by reading about the contributions people of color have made. You reject the mere suggestion of genetic superiority, knowing we are all part of the *imago Dei*, equally sinful, equally loved, equally special. And you seek to discover why disparity exists, refusing simplistic, smug answers to difficult problems.

You don’t have to look far to see cultural racism in the things we look at and listen to.

I remember watching a television police series with one of my sons. After seeing about six or seven episodes over the course of a couple of weeks, I asked him, “Hey, what color are the bad guys—usually?”

He responded, “Um, Black or Hispanic.”

“Yes, and what crime are they usually committing?”

“Um, they’re usually drug dealers.”

When I told him the majority of illegal drug users and dealers in America are white, he looked at me in astonishment. *Really?!* It saddened me that my son subconsciously believed that people who looked like him were mostly responsible for the drug trade in America.

In the media, Black men are over-represented as perpetrators of crime, and Black suspects are presented as more threatening. Black mug shots are shown more often than white, and the

perpetrator's color is more often mentioned on the radio if he is Black.¹⁷ All of these things reinforce the Myth of the Dangerous Black Man, which has existed since Europeans first set foot on the African shores.

Hollywood presents Blacks and Hispanics as dangerous gang members or welfare recipients. Hispanics are gardeners or maids, rarely doctors, lawyers, or judges. Asian men are daft and powerless or brutal and emotionless. Asian women are cute or oversexualized.

The Myth of the Model Minority is a subset of cultural racism that also negatively affects Asians. The myth states that Asians are polite and successful and that their success is due to hard work plus innate intelligence. Asian kids are math whizzes, Asian women are tiger moms, and Asian men work in STEM. And all the while, Asians are relegated to the position of permanent foreigner. The myth does damage in several ways. First, it makes Asians into a monolith; it doesn't take into account that Asia is the largest continent on the planet, including not only China, Korea, and Japan but also India, Burma, the Middle East, and more. In America, some Asian immigrants have graduate degrees and high-paying jobs, but many do not. Yet the myth states that because of hard work and not getting caught up in talk of racism, all Asians have achieved the American Dream. The myth strips Asians of their individuality and pushes them all onto the poster of American meritocracy. Asian children can't fail. Asian employees can't grieve. Asian women can't have a bad day. Asian men can't feel. Trying to live up to superhuman standards is a contributing factor of the high suicide rate among Asian college students. They have the typical immigrant/minority pressure to achieve, plus this myth to live up to.

The myth also pits Asians against other BIPOC who may have lower achievement rates. *Why can't you be like the Asians?* gets hurled at other people of color and creates division among those who would otherwise find comradery in each other. Asians also get rewarded with white approval for staying quiet about

racism, where those who don't are branded troublemakers, race baiters, and dividers.

Whether you're trying to protect your child from the Myth of the Dangerous Black Man, or the Myth of the Model Minority, or any other racist myth out there, you are your child's trusted guide through their childhood years, and you are the first line of defense. You are the one who can see, evaluate, and battle back the long-term toxic mold of cultural racism.

Likewise, you can combat racist myths and assumptions with information. Do your kids know why racial disparity exists? Kids notice that many suburban areas are mostly white and that most inner cities are mostly BIPOC. They see the difference; don't ignore it and pretend it doesn't exist. They see the disparity, and if we don't teach them why it exists, they will likely draw false conclusions that will inflate or deflate their self-esteem.

Does your child know why so few Asians inhabit leadership positions, why Asian women are objectified and Asian people, including the elderly, were targeted during the COVID-19 pandemic? Does he know that these things happen because of ignorance, hatred, and racism, not because there's something wrong with Asians? Does your child understand where Asian stereotypes come from and why they are false?

Does your child understand why there's such a dramatic wealth gap between white and Black people in America? White Americans hold ten times more total wealth than Black Americans.¹⁸ Hispanics have a little more wealth than Blacks, but nothing close to that of whites. But why? Either white people really are superior, working harder, and making better choices—or systemic racism really does exist. Either BIPOC have had the same opportunities but can't take advantage of them because of genetic inferiority or people have been systematically denied opportunities to make wealth. In other words, either white supremacy is true or systemic racism is true. Which do you believe, and which will you teach your kids? Neither science nor Scripture indicates genetic superiority. Rather, it is a lie created to divide and oppress people.

I remember sitting at the dinner table and telling my boys that in the United States, there are more poor white people than poor Black people, and they were both so surprised! What we see on TV or in certain sections of the city is Black and Brown poverty, so they assumed that Black and Brown poverty was greater. I explained to them that poor whites tend to live spread out in rural areas, while poor Black and Brown people tend to be clustered together in inner cities, and whenever poverty is concentrated, it is both easier to see and also compounded in its effects. I've told them that poverty breeds certain ills and wealth breeds certain ills and though we want to be careful about ranking sin, the Bible speaks more about the sins of the wealthy than the sins of the poor. Poverty is never presented in Scripture as a moral failing, rather Jesus says, "*Blessed are the poor!*"

We teach our boys why our city, Rochester, New York, is so segregated and why the suburban schools are so white. The difference in quality between the city and suburban schools does not mean that white people are better but rather that the city was intentionally segregated and the consequences of that are vast and far reaching. We make sure that they know that despite so much hardship, the majority of Black and Brown people have left poverty behind.

Dear parents, white supremacy is part of America's root system, so much so that in most art and in most movies, even Jesus has been depicted as a white man. It is absurd to suggest that a Middle Eastern man would have white skin, but white supremacy rejected the idea that Jesus could possibly be Brown and demanded that he have white skin, flowing blond hair, and blue eyes. This alone kept some Black people from becoming Christians. It was a stumbling block set in place by a racist culture. How tragic! Yet how wonderful that there has always been a remnant church who rightly believed that white, Black, or Brown, all people bear his image, and not the other way around.

Even people of color can believe that white is better; after centuries of seeing racist images, being treated with contempt,

and held at arm's length, it can be difficult to believe in your own equality and worth. We owe it to our children to uproot any trace of white supremacy from our lives and intentionally teach them that white is *not* better, no matter what the wider culture tries to tell them.

I'm reminded of an experiment conducted in the 1940s by psychologists Kenneth and Mamie Clark called the "Doll Studies." They used it to demonstrate the negative effects of segregation on Black children: segregation gave children a sense of inferiority that stayed with them for the rest of their lives.¹⁹ This test is often repeated to this day, and sadly the results are the same. A group of Black and Brown kids is shown a white baby doll and a Black baby doll, and then asked a series of questions: *Which one of these dolls is the mean doll? Which one of these is the bad doll? Which one is the ugly doll?* After each of the above questions, Black and Brown kids all pointed to the brown doll. They were then asked: *Which is the skin color adults like the most?* Now, for the first time, each child pointed to the white doll. On the last question, *Which doll is your favorite?*, all the girls chose the white doll. When asked why, they said, "*because the white doll has prettier eyes (blue).*"²⁰

The test was even given in Singapore to Asian kids, this time with a white doll, a light brown doll, and a dark brown doll. The kids responded in the same way; they all preferred the lightest doll.²¹ All of these BIPOC kids have breathed in the smog of cultural racism their whole little lives and now subliminally believed that the doll that looked the most like them was mean, bad, and ugly, and they also believed that adults prefer those who look the least like them. Parents, please do what it takes to protect your kids from this kind of heartbreaking self-rejection. Let them know that their skin, light, dark, or somewhere in between, is beautiful.

QUESTIONS TO PONDER

1. How many famous nonwhite people do you and your kids know about? What kinds of contributions to our society did they make? Do your kids know about BIPOC scientists, authors, and leaders, as well as athletes and musicians?
2. Why do you think the average white family has more wealth than the average Black or Brown family? Why do you think Black and Hispanic men are incarcerated at a disproportionately high rate? If you don't know, seek out reliable information.
3. What examples of cultural racism do you see? Think about the television shows you watch or news media you consume.
4. Has the Myth of the Dangerous Black Man or the Myth of the Model Minority negatively affected you at any point of your life? How?
5. How often are your children surrounded by BIPOC people from races and ethnicities that are not represented in their own backgrounds? Do they feel comfortable in those situations? Do they know that Asian, Hispanic, or Black culture is dynamic, multifaceted, and beautiful, not static or monolithic?