

Being and Being Mixed Race

"How does it feel to be a problem?" In 1903, in *The Souls of Black Folk*, W.E.B. Du Bois posed this question to capture the dilemma and turmoil of being black in the United States. The question takes on additional meaning when we reflect on mixed race and the situation of those persons who are in the impossible position of being in between the social categories of white, black, Asian or Pacific Islander, American Indian or Alaskan Native, and Hispanic.¹

People are expected to be only one of these categories. Those who do not fit into this nation's racial typology are social anomalies, and are unwelcome reminders to society that race is fluid and that taboos against miscegenation have been transgressed. It is difficult enough to make one's way through life in this society's racial categories; not clearly to belong to any of them is to compound anguish and alienation on an already challenging situation. In addition to the difficult questions of identity, mixed race *being* raises questions about the relationships of "mixed race" persons and groups to what is perceived as their parent groups.

In this paper I explore both sets of questions. First, I explore the political and ethical questions that arise from the complex relationship between mixed race individuals and groups and their various parent groups. Second, in light of recent pluralist metaphysics and their accounts of so-

¹These are all racial categories except "Hispanic," which is an ethnic category but also functions by hypodescent. A person can be Hispanic and of any race; however, like the other racial categories one is either Hispanic or not. U.S. racial categories are officially set by the Office of Management and Budget's 1977 Statistical Policy Directive No. 15, which is included in the appendix of "Standards for the Classification of Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity," *Federal Register* 60:166, Monday, August 28, 1995, pp. 44674-93). See also *Results of the 1996 Race and Ethnic Targeted Test* (Population Division Working Paper No. 18; Washington D.C.: U.S. Bureau of the Census, May 1997). Directive 15 is also included in Naomi Zack, *American Mixed Race* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1995), p. 206, and Maria Root, *The Multiracial Experience: Racial Borders as the New Frontier* (Thousand Oaks, Cal.: Sage Publications, 1996), p. 411. Recently, some states have passed legislation for the creation of a "multiracial" category; see Jodi Mailander, "Florida creates multiracial category for students," *Knight-Ridder/Tribune News Service*, August 18, 1995.

cial categories, I examine the metaphysics of mixed race. I argue that, given a metaphysical framework that is sensitive to the variances of social forces, mixed race as a human kind has a degree of reality in the U.S. Furthermore, mixed race identity can be advanced in a manner that is consistent with the liberation of traditional communities of color.

Escape from Blackness

Since the waning years of the 1980s, the mixed race movement has grown in membership and voice. The mission of this movement has been to support interracial couples and the mixed race children of such unions, and to combat racism and taboos against interracial relationships and identities. Their most visible task, however, has been to lead an assault against this nation's system of racial categorization.²

There has been a great deal of angst and surprise over this recent resurgence of mixed race identity, and the movement that has arisen for its social and political advocacy. The criticisms against the movement have been plentiful, and sometimes brutal. Worse, the support it has received from organizations outside the movement has been at times politically manipulative. The manipulation this movement suffers from false allies makes the criticisms against it more poignant and convincing. Most notable in this respect are the supporting statements from the political Right, whose support for this movement arises from motives contrary to the overall project of the movement. In this section I will review the most significant criticisms against the "mixed race" movement.

Delusions of Whiteness

One of the first criticisms offered against mixed race is that such identities represent attempts, whether conscious or subconscious, to escape

²This movement's efforts to change what its members felt was the foundation of the U.S.'s system of racial categorization—namely, the racial categories employed in the U.S.'s decennial census—climaxed on 30 June 1993, when the U.S. House of Representatives' Subcommittee on Census, Statistics, and Postal Personnel heard testimony from individuals and groups, such as the Association of MultiEthnic Americans and Project RACE (Reclassify All Children Equally), who argued for the reform of the racial categories employed in the census. These individuals and groups generally argued for dispensing with the collection of racial data altogether, or adding a multiracial category. This effort helped change census racial categories (allowing for multiple entries), has brought the issue to the national fore, and has successfully lobbied for the addition of multiracial categories on school district forms in some states. See Susan Graham, "Grassroots Advocacy," pp. 185-89, and Carlos Fernandez, "Testimony of the Association of MultiEthnic Americans Before the Subcommittee on Census, Statistics, and Postal Personnel of the U.S. House of Representatives," pp. 191-210, both in Zack, *American Mixed Race*.

blackness or darkness—to escape being a person of color. These critics argue that mixed race is impossible in the U.S. racial politic, because race in the U.S. functions by the principle of hypodescent.³ The U.S. racial system does not admit of gradations; thus, those who claim such an identity are being inauthentic, and are engaged in self-deception.⁴

Beyond self-deception, mixed race identity is problematic, critics argue, because it supports the racist mechanics of the American racial politic. Hypodescent is the operating principle behind race in the U.S., and its mechanics display the positive valuation of whiteness and the corresponding negative valuation of blackness that are the foundational assumptions in the American racial hierarchy.⁵ Opponents argue that this

³See discussion of hypodescent in chap. 2 of Naomi Zack, *Race and Mixed Race* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993). See also chap. 4 of Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 1994); and Lawrence Wright, "One Drop Of Blood," *The New Yorker*, 25 July 1994, pp. 46–55. Recently, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) approved the plan recommended by the U.S. Census Bureau's Population Division and Decennial Statistical Studies Division's Race and Ethnic Targeted Test (RAETT) as reported in *Results Of The 1996 Race And Ethnic Targeted Test*. RAETT recommended that a multiracial category not be added to the census, but allows respondents to check more than one racial heritage box. Although important, this development does not immediately change how race works in the U.S. For the American racial politic to be transformed, change must occur at all levels of government and, more vital, in the nation's social values, norms, and mores.

⁴For discussions of how mixed race identity is impossible in the U.S. racial system see Carl N. Degler, *Neither Black Nor White: Slavery and Race Relations in Brazil and the United States* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1971), p. 101; and Naomi Zack, "An Autobiographical View of Mixed Race and Deracination," *American Philosophical Association Newsletters* 91:1 (Spring 1992): 6–10, as well as chaps. 1 and 2 of *Race and Mixed Race*. For discussions of this criticism see Lynn Norment, "Am I Black, White Or In Between?: Is There A Plot To Create A 'Colored' Buffer Race In America?" *Ebony* (August 1995): 108–12, and Michael Frisby, "Black White, Or Other," *Emerge* (December/January, 1996): 48–54. To support this criticism, Norment draws upon statements by noted psychiatrist Dr. Alvin Poussaint, and journalist Lisa Jones (daughter of Leroi Jones/Amiri Baraka and his former white wife), and black rock musician Lenny Kravitz, who is quoted as saying: "You don't have to deny the White side of you if you're mixed. ... Accept the blessing of having the advantage of two, but understand that you are Black. In this world, if you have one spot of Black blood, you are *Black*. So get over it" (p. 112). In his article Frisby cites, among others, Professor of African American Studies William Strickland, who argues that it is silly "to pretend that this system doesn't see all of us as niggers." Additionally, see Lisa Jones, "Is Biracial Enough?" in her *Bullet Proof Diva: Tales of Race, Sex and Hair* (New York: Doubleday, 1994). See also Trina Grillo, "Anti-Essentialism and Intersectionality: Tools to Dismantle the Master's House," *Berkeley Women's Law Journal* 10 (1995): 16–30, and John Powell, "The Colorblind Multiracial Dilemma: Racial Categories Reconsidered," *University of San Francisco Law Review* 31 (1997): 789–806.

⁵Hypodescent works differently in the U.S. for different groups. The best contrast is between African Americans and Native Americans. Traditionally, in the U.S., if a person has any black ancestors, then they are black. In contrast to the way race works for blacks,

movement encourages and preserves the negative valuation of darkness, and the positive valuation of whiteness; hence, it encourages and preserves "racial" hierarchy, and white privilege. The criticism is that those who claim mixed race identity are participating in a racist hierarchy of color and are trying to place distance between themselves and non-whites at the bottom, while decreasing the distance between themselves and whites at the top. Those who seek "mixed race" identity do not want to abolish the "racial" politic that is responsible for the oppression of communities of color. Rather, they want themselves, or their children, to move up the hierarchy and have access to white privilege.

According to this objection, mixed race identity fails to challenge racial hierarchy, and in the present racist climate of our nation, mixed race identity contributes to the oppression of communities of color.⁶ This, critics say, is the fundamental harm that is committed against communities of color by the mixed race movement. Because at its theoretical core is an attempt to escape darkness, it reinforces the negative valuation of the lives and communities of people of color, and contributes to the assault against the dignity, worth, and self-respect of people and communities of color. The individuals involved in the movement, who claim mixed race identity, say to the world, "I do not want to be Asian, Native American, or African; I would rather be white."

There is also worry that the claims of mixed race identity represent internalized racism and self-hate. In an environment in which being a

at least in terms of the policies adopted by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, having white ancestors weakens a person's claim to being Native American. A sort of opposite hypodescent seems to be operating in the case of Native Americans. The differences in the application of hypodescent between blacks and Native Americans are often explained by citing the history of the U.S.'s internal slave trade, and this government's interest in the genocide, both statistical and real, of the North American indigenous peoples. See M. Annette Jaimes, "Some Kind of Indian: On Race, Eugenics, and Mixed-Bloods," in Zack, *American Mixed Race*, pp. 133-53, for a discussion of the genocidal aims of U.S.'s standards as to who counts as being Native American. Despite the official policies regarding Native American identity, socially to have any Native Americans ancestors, especially if one is judged as "visually" looking native, is to suffer social stigmatization. For economic and political reasons, the U.S. wants as few natives around as possible, but in this country's social worlds, hypodescent works the same for Native Americans as it does for African Americans. See Mariella Squire-Hakey, "Yankee Imperialism and Imperialist Nostalgia," in Zack, *American Mixed Race*, pp. 221-28, for a relevant discussion.

⁶These arguments are discussed generally in Norment, "Am I Black, White Or In Between?" Frisby, "Black, White, Or Other," and Karen G. Bates, "The trouble with the rainbow: Will blackness have a place in a truly multiracial America?" *Utne Reader* (Nov./Dec. 1994): 91-92. These arguments are detailed, vaguely, in Grillo, "Anti-Essentialism and Intersectionality" (pp. 22-27), and more clearly in Powell, "The Colorblind Multiracial Dilemma" (pp. 4-7). For discussion of how "mixed race" categories fail to challenge "racial" hierarchy, see David Theo Goldberg, "Made in the USA," in Zack, *American Mixed Race*, pp. 237-56. See also Wright, "One Drop Of Blood."

person of color is so devalued, many non-white individuals come to hate their color and, hence, themselves. According to this criticism, given the psychologically damaging nature of America's racial politic, mixed race identity is just another sick symptom of the American racial politic.⁷

Whose Liberation?

Other arguments that the critics of the mixed race movement use are those that draw attention to the politically problematic implications of mixed race identity. The critics of this movement maintain that this identity and the demand for its public recognition will undermine and reverse advances made by the civil rights movement.⁸

Given their worry that mixed race identity represents the racial equivalent of social climbing (the attempt to climb up a racist hierarchy and thereby reassert it), critics maintain that the mixed race movement supports positions and engages in activities that run counter to the civil rights efforts of communities of color. First, given the fact that most people of color in the U.S. are of mixed racial and ethnic heritage, the mixed race movement, by encouraging such people to identify as mixed race rather than mono-racial threatens the membership base of communities of color. Thus, the movement threatens the claim of oppressed communities of color to retributive programs based on membership, the political power that results from large constituencies, and the political unity of these communities.⁹

The second thing the "mixed race" movement allegedly does to undermine civil rights efforts is provide a personal solution—a "mulatto escape hatch"—to racism. This personal solution discourages collective ones. It works against the unification, for political purposes, of people of color. Instead of identifying with, say, African Americans or Chicanas, individuals can identify as mixed race and seek uplift by emphasizing their identification and familial relation to whites, or by marrying "up" the hierarchy of color.¹⁰

Third, critics argue, the movement undermines civil rights efforts and

⁷powell, "The Colorblind Multiracial Dilemma."

⁸For an example of their demands see Maria Root, "A Bill of Rights for Racially Mixed People," in *The Multiracial Experience*, pp. 3-14. This "bill of rights" is not a list of proposed legal rights; rather, it delineates how Root, and many in the movement, thinks mixed race identity ought to be publicly recognized.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰The phrase "mulatto escape hatch" is Carl Degler's. See his *Neither Black Nor White* for a discussion of the deleterious effects mixed race categories have had on attempts to politically unify blacks in Brazil (p. 219). See also Grillo, "Anti-Essentialism and Intersectionality" (p. 25), the discussions in Frisby, "Black, White, Or Other" (p. 51), and Norment, "Am I Black, White Or In-Between?" (pp. 108-12).

past achievements by playing into the hands of the political Right, which seeks to halt the progress of civil rights and dismantle past achievements. Public figures from the Right, such as George Will and Dinesh D'Souza, have been vocally supportive of the movement. The Right, however, as the critics of the mixed race movement duly point out, is using the rhetoric of the movement to claim that since the black race is a social construction, then there are *really* no blacks; and for that matter, there are *really* no Hispanic Americans, Native Americans, or Asian Americans. In fact, the Right argues, we are all just Americans, and hyphenated identities are nothing but divisive identity politics. Given this, the Right argues, we ought to no longer use racial categories. The abandonment of race, of course, and conveniently for the Right, means the abandonment of programs to encourage and recognize diversity (e.g., multicultural education), and retributive programs based on race.¹¹

Connected to the above objections, another issue that is frequently voiced is the fear that the mixed race movement will lead to a color caste system, or *pigmentocracy*, much like Brazil's or South Africa's, and that mixed race groups will serve as a buffer race or class. Such a race or class would have fewer privileges than whites, but more privileges than the black, Asian, or Native American communities. This would serve to undermine the political efforts of communities of color by benefiting

¹¹For examples of the support of the Right for the multiracial category, see George F. Will, "Melding In America," *Washington Post*, 5 Oct. 1997, p. 7, and Dinesh D'Souza, "The one-drop-of-blood rule," *Forbes* 158, no. 13, 2 Dec. 1996, p. 48. For discussions of this criticism, see Frisby, "Black, White, Or Other" (pp. 49-50), and Norment, "Am I Black White Or In Between?" (p. 108). See also Powell, "The Colorblind Multiracial Dilemma" (pp.1-4). In particular, D'Souza's comments are revealing on how the Right has appropriated the language of colorblindness and the "mixed race" movement: "It makes eminent sense to get rid of these historically and scientifically absurd classifications, but powerful political interests have mobilized to preserve the status quo. They want to protect the racial privileges that the current system provides, while others seek to amend their racial titles in order to expand their race-based entitlements. Testifying at the hearings [see n. 3 above], civil rights activists condemned proposals to eliminate racial classification. They seemed unconscious of the irony that they were perpetuating the racial lexicon of their oppressors and rejecting the colorblind principle for which generations of black leaders from Frederick Douglass to Martin Luther King Jr. had labored. The motives of these activists were entirely pragmatic. They pointed out, correctly, that if the government stops counting its citizens by race, this could mean the end of college admissions, faculty recruitment, scholarships, hiring, promotion, government contracts, race-based set-asides, and voting districts based on race ... These displays show racial preferences for what they really are: Pure political pork—or rent-seeking, to use the term economists use. Consistent with Martin Luther King's vision, the government should stop color-coding its citizens. A new generation of Americans, like Susan Graham's [Director of Project Race, see n. 2] children and mine, should be able to think of themselves as Americans, and not have to go through life checking racial boxes that force them into artificial categories" (p. 48).

several subgroups of individuals of color. It would also allow whites to have the pretense of a raceless society, while only admitting into mainstream society light-skinned individuals they find appealing, acceptable, and politically impotent. Although all people of color lose, non-white parent groups would suffer doubly: they would face an increase in racism from whites, and the racism of the buffer class.¹²

Another aspect of the mixed race movement that critics express a great deal of anxiety about is the role of white mothers in the movement. Some critics have argued that the pressure to create a multiracial category comes from white mothers who have non-white children. These mothers, from their own racism, or from an urge to protect their child from society's racism, seek to resist their child from being identified as black, Asian, or Native American. According to critics, these white mothers have selfishly lobbied for the multiracial category without taking into consideration the liberation of communities of color merely for the calming of their racial fears, and the stroking of the identities of their multiracial children.¹³

Reasserting Race

A third set of objections raised against the mixed race movement argues that, despite the movement's claims to undermine race, mono-racial identities, ideas of racial purity, and false biological beliefs about race, it results in the reinforcement of all of these. Critics, such as David Theo Goldberg,¹⁴ Michael Omi,¹⁵ and John Powell,¹⁶ argue that the mixed race movement's attempt to subvert hypodescent and the American practice of assigning mono-racial identities through its discourse of mixture, hybridity, impurity, creolization, and so on, has the effect of reasserting "race." As Goldberg argues:

The general category of "mixed race," and the specific subcategories of racial identity it licenses, were admitted into the racial configuration as a way of cognizing this complexity, but cognizing it on (more precisely, *in*) racial terms. Thus, "mixed race" may *seem* to

¹²For discussions of this criticism see Bates, "The trouble with the rainbow" (p. 92), Norment, "Am I Black, White Or In Between" (p. 110), Frisby, "Black, White, Or Other" (p. 49), and "Black Lawmakers Oppose Michigan Bill That Makes New Multiracial Class," *Jet* 88, no. 6 (1995), p. 46. See also Grillo, "Anti-Essentialism and Intersectionality" (pp. 24-27), and Powell, "The Colorblind Multiracial Dilemma" (pp. 5-11).

¹³See Wright, "One Drop of Blood" (p. 47). For discussions of this criticism see Grillo, "Anti-Essentialism Intersectionality" (p. 26), and Powell, "The Colorblind Multiracial Dilemma" (pp. 5-6).

¹⁴Goldberg, "Made in the USA."

¹⁵See Michael Omi, "Racial Identity and the State: The Dilemmas of Classification," *Law & Inequality: A Journal of Theory & Practice* 7 (1997): 7-23.

¹⁶See Powell, "The Colorblind Multiracial Dilemma."

capture in the most adequate fashion prevailing demographic heterogeneity, but it does so only by silently fixing in place the racializing project. It naturalizes racial assumption, marking mixed-ness as an aberrant condition, as transgressive, and at the extreme purity polluting. It may seem to offer exciting proof positive that a deep social taboo has been transgressed, that racial discipline and order have been violated, that liberty's lure has once again undermined the condition of homogeneity by delimiting the constraints of the hegemonic. Yet it at once, and necessarily, reimposes the hegemony of racial duality—of blackness and whiteness—as the standard, the measure, of mixed-ness.¹⁷

According to these critics, to assert racial mixture is to imply the existence and purity of unmixed racial poles, and of pure black, white, Asian, Native American, and Hispanic identities.¹⁸ Likewise, as Powell stresses, mixed race discourse—talk of mixed blood, or notions that a person can somehow be made up of racial parts—reasserts discredited biological notions of race.¹⁹

A corollary objection to many of the above arguments is that the mixed race category is redundant. Critics argue that since white in the U.S. is defined negatively, in that whiteness is defined by the absence of non-white ancestors, the non-white racial categories are already mixed race categories; thus, critics maintain, an American mixed race category would be redundant.²⁰

Bad Faith

The last objection I will discuss is one offered up by Naomi Zack's "philosophy of anti-race."²¹ Zack agrees with the above criticism that the creation of mixed race identity involves the reification of race; however, her argument is existentialist and contends that the formation of mixed race identity is the formation of an identity in bad faith.²² Zack, in keep-

¹⁷Goldberg, "Made in the USA," p. 243. The italics are Goldberg's.

¹⁸See Powell, "The Colorblind Multiracial Dilemma."

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 6. See also discussion of this argument in Wright, "One Drop Of Blood."

²⁰This objection was given by Lewis Gordon at the Committee on Blacks in Philosophy's symposium on "race" held during the 1996 Eastern Division APA meeting. For similar discussions, see Goldberg, "Made in the USA," p. 252, p. 18 n. 17, and p. 6 n. 18. See also Grillo, "Anti-Essentialism and Intersectionality," p. 24.

²¹The phrase "philosophy of anti-race" is the title of the third section of Zack's *Race and Mixed Race*.

²²Zack's philosophy of anti-race is detailed in chaps. 14 and 15 of her *Race and Mixed Race*. See also the preface of her *American Mixed Race*, her "An Autobiographical View of Mixed Race and Deracination," and her "On Being and Not-Being Black and Jewish," in Root, *The Multiracial Experience*, pp. 140-51. Although Zack argues that mixed race is problematic, she recognizes that it may be a necessary step in the dismantling of the American racial politic. For example, she makes this comment in the preface of *American Mixed Race*: "I am pessimistic about the long term success of any intellectual (or practical) project of microdiversity [intragroup diversity] because I think that current ideas of diversity (or racial difference) are based on outdated pseudoscientific

ing with existentialism, argues that individuals ought to pursue an authentic life, and to have such a life persons must have authentic identities. Identities or consciousness that are false, or inauthentic, are involved in bad faith.

Zack argues that individuals should not have racial identities of *any sort*, because racial categories are racist and have no scientific basis.²³ She argues that to form a racial identity of any sort is to engage in a “fantasy” of identity, and, thus, bad faith.²⁴ The individual with mixed racial backgrounds cannot have mixed race or mono-racial identity, because both involve bad faith. Any racial identity picked by such a person, according to her arguments, never leads to full acceptance and always involves lying and denial. For Zack, the only moral choice for the mixed race individual is to “hold back” and not choose, to be “anti-race,” to be “raceless”; because, that is the only choice in which we exercise good faith, and is the position in which we are being most authentic.²⁵

The Ontology of “Mixed Race”

To offer rejoinders to all of the objections offered, I want to defend and explain the existence of the mixed race category. To do so I will give an account of the category by using a metaphysical pluralist account of social categories. Specifically, I will draw upon a metaphysical pluralist ontology of race to give an account of the ontology of mixed race that demonstrates that claims of mixed race identity make sense and are not

beliefs about race; and the Balkanization of a bad idea, no matter how well-enshrined that idea is historically, can only lead to more trouble. But, also in the long run, the trouble will have been a necessary catharsis toward the ultimate racial harmony that can result only from a complete dissolution of the American concept of race as a social construction rooted in colonialization, exploitation and slavery. The reality of mixed race needs to be written and talked out before the illusion of race itself can be dispelled” (p. x).

²³See Zack, *Race and Mixed Race*, pp. 3-4.

²⁴See Zack, “On Being and Not-Being Black and Jewish,” for her use of “fantasy” in this context of bad faith (p. 149). See chap. 14 of her *Race and Mixed Race* for discussion of mixed race identity and bad faith.

²⁵See Zack, “An Autobiographical View of Mixed Race and Deracination,” “On Being and Not-Being Black and Jewish” (pp. 148-51), and chap. 14 of *Race and Mixed Race*. Zack, in that chapter, states: “An American who identifies herself as mixed black and white race is a new person racially, because old racial categories do not allow her to identify herself this way. It is such a person’s very newness racially that gives her the option of racelessness. To be raceless in contemporary racial and racist society is, in effect, to be *anti-race*. If ‘authenticity’ is a definition of the self in the face of oppression, then the authenticity of a person of mixed race may rest on her resistance to biracial racial categories—the racial authenticity of mixed race could therefore be the racial position of *anti-race*” (p. 164). The italics are Zack’s.

delusional.²⁶

Metaphysical pluralism sits in contrast to traditional metaphysics, or metaphysical monism. Metaphysical monism holds there can be only one acceptable notion of reality, and if a particular or a category is real, then it must fit this standard. Typically, in traditional monist metaphysics, if something is real, then it must be physical, mind-independent, and be explanatory by playing a role in natural laws. Such a metaphysical framework only admits the reality of physical kinds, or what has been traditionally called "natural kinds."²⁷

Metaphysical monism will not give us a fair or adequate assessment of the categories and dynamics of the social world, nor for that matter has it done so for the biological sciences. There is little hope, for example, of adequately accounting for biological categories such as "species" or "genes" with the standards of metaphysical monism.²⁸ Not only do the needs of the social sciences demand a shift toward pluralism, the needs of the biological sciences demands it as well. Under metaphysical monism, social categories such as race, class, and perhaps gender and sexuality at most can be understood only as nominal categories, and at the least they are mere illusions and myths. This perspective is devastating to the projects of the social sciences. For these reasons, among others, we ought to dispense with metaphysical monism in favor of metaphysical pluralism.²⁹ Unlike monism, metaphysical pluralism admits the reality of social kinds.³⁰

²⁶For a more a detailed discussion of my ontology of race see my "Racial Nominalism," *Journal of Social Philosophy*, forthcoming.

²⁷To refer to the kinds of the physical and biological sciences, following Root's usage, I use the phrase "naturally occurring kind." To refer to kinds of the social sciences, as well as artifactual kinds, I use the phrase "socially constructed kinds."

²⁸See John Dupre, "Natural Kinds and Biological Taxa," *The Philosophical Review* 90 (1981): 66-90; and Philip Kitcher, "Species," *Philosophy of Science* 51 (1984): 308-33.

²⁹See my essay, "Racial Nominalism," for my arguments against nominalism in regards to the kinds of the social sciences.

³⁰The metaphysical pluralism I have in mind here is the kind defended by Michael Root in his forthcoming *How To Divide The World*. Also see John Dupre, "Human Kinds," in Dupre (ed.), *The Latest on the Best: Essays on Evolution and Optimality* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1987), pp. 327-48, and his *The Disorder of Things: Metaphysical Foundations of the Disunity of Science*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993). See Ian Hacking, "Five Parables," in Richard Rorty, J.B. Schneewind, and Quentin Skinner (eds.), *Ideas in Context: Philosophy in History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 103-4, "Making Up People," in T. Heller, M. Sosna, and D. Wellbey (eds.), *Constructing Individualism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986), pp. 222-36, "A Tradition Of Natural Kinds," *Philosophical Studies* 61 (1991): 109-26, and "World-Making by Kind-Making: Child Abuse for Example," in Nancy Douglass and David Hull (eds.), *How Classification Works* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992), pp. 180-238.

According to metaphysical pluralism, there are naturally occurring and constructed kinds. Naturally occurring includes the kinds of physics, chemistry, and biology. Constructed includes the kinds of people and artifacts. Metaphysical pluralism distinguishes between the questions of origin and ontology, so both sorts of kinds can be either real or nominal. A kind is real when its members are unified—held together by a number of shared properties. The properties that unify a kind vary with the domain the kind belongs to (i.e., physical, biological, or social sciences). In physics a shared underlying or inner structure unifies a kind, and, as a result, real kinds in physics enter laws of nature or share important causal properties that enable the kind to act according to physical “laws.” Biological kinds are unified by some significant biological relation. Similarly, a human kind is real when unified by a significant social relation; or rather, when that kind is explanatory or plays a role in the laws of the social sciences. There is no ultimacy between the kinds of the differing domains, or, in other words, the kinds of the physical sciences are not “more” real than the kinds of the social sciences. Further, no one thing unifies the real kinds of all the domains; however, the real kinds of the various domains are all unified.

Three social forces unify human kinds: the force from above (the act of classification or labeling by some authority), the force from below (intentionally acting under the label by the so labeled), and the lateral forces (the normative standards that become attached to the label and are applied to those within and without the label). A human kind is real when these forces are present, and nominal when they are not. A nominal human kind is much like the classic nominal category “white things.” The category, for example, of “people in blue shorts” is a nominal category because a significant social relation does not unify all the people (at this time and site) who happen to be wearing blue shorts.³¹ For a social category, such as race or mixed race, to be a real social kind at some site, given metaphysical pluralism, what has to be present are social forces—labels, institutions, individual intentions, laws, mores, values, traditions—combined in a dynamic with enough strength to give the category presence and impact at that site.

Human kinds, furthermore, are institutional and intentional rather than natural. And since institutional forces can be present in degrees, as can be the intention or the participation of the so labeled, the “reality” of these human kinds can be graded. As these social forces change or fade

³¹Since we are dealing with social kinds, the category “people wearing blue shorts” could be a real human kind if a significant social relation arose that connected groups who intentionally wore blue shorts to communicate affiliation or shared interests. Blue shorts, in such a context, would function as a uniform and symbol.

from existence, so do the human kinds those forces are associated with. Human kinds, therefore, may neither be “just” real or nominal, but in some state between.

I have argued elsewhere that race has been and is real in the U.S.³² I contend that mixed race has a degree of reality in the U.S. at this time too, but it is not as real at this time and site as Asian, Hispanic, black, Native American, and white are. In the U.S. race is a fully real human kind, but mixed race is not. Mixed race, however, is not nominal; rather, it occupies a space in the grades between nominal and real. In Brazil or South Africa, however, governmental and social practices serve to generate the forces to make it a fully real human kind.³³ In the U.S., the necessary social forces that would make mixed race fully real are in some instances altogether lacking (e.g., official recognition of the category), and in others not present in sufficient strength (e.g., recognition of “mixed race” persons as such by society at large).

This remains true despite the increasing adoption of multiracial categories on various governmental levels. That the U.S. government allows individuals to check off as many racial boxes as they please on census forms is not enough. Although the new rulings do alter the presence and strength of the force from above somewhat (but in a very limited manner: what you label yourself, what boxes you check off, is one thing, but how the public labels you is an entirely different matter), the one drop of blood rule remains embedded in the minds and the practices of American society. Given the persistence of assigning race through hypodescent in the U.S., the force from below and the lateral normative forces remain unaltered. This may change, perhaps, in the coming decades if mixed race identification becomes part of the American racial politic.

Despite this, the three social forces that make a human kind real are present to a degree for mixed race. The ontology of human kinds offered by metaphysical pluralism is sensitive to social forces, and allows for the reality of those kinds to be graded. This is the case for mixed race.

The social forces that make race real are apparent in the cracks between the racial categories that are officially recognized in the U.S. The different races face different combinations of the social forces that make race real. For individuals who are of mixed racial heritage, and, more crucially, who experience being raced as a person of two or more racial categories, both singularly and in conjunction, the social forces that make

³²See Ronald Sundstrom, “Race as a Human Kind,” *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, forthcoming.

³³For a discussion of racial categories in Brazil, see Degler, *Neither Black Nor White*. For a Discussion of South African racial categories, see Goldberg, “Made in the USA.”

race real combine in their everyday lives in varied ways.³⁴ Such persons experience race as mixed race persons. The lived experiences of mixed race individuals are clearly distinct from the racial experiences of the uni-raced. At this time in the U.S. some who experience race in this varied way reject mixed race identity, yet that does not change the fact that they have these varied experiences.

It is true that there is little official recognition of mixed race being, and, thus, supposedly no space for being mixed race. The U.S. racial system does not, in general, provide differing forces from above, and lateral normative forces, for individuals who are of mixed racial heritage. Not *recognizing* mixed race being by labels and treatment, however, is not sufficient to make it nominal. What would be required, in part, for the mixed race to be fully nominal is the complicity of mixed race individuals in denying the possibility of mixed race identity. There is, however, a growing population who, without the above and lateral forces, name themselves and generate a force from below—by intentionally acting under their mixed race identities—that is incongruent with society's racial politic.

Moreover, the social story of the American racial politic is complicated. The reason that so many mixed race individuals come to see themselves as such is that they are labeled (the force from above) and treated (the lateral force) as such by American society often enough to make mixed heritage an important aspect of their lives:

[I]n many cultures today, mixed-race people are treated as the corporeal instantiation of a lack—the lack of an identity that can provide a public status. They (we) are turned away from as if from an unpleasant sight, the sight and mark of an unclean copulation, the product of a taboo, the sign of racial impurity, cultural dilution, colonial aggression, or even emasculation. Which particular attribution is chosen will reflect the particular community's cultural self-understanding and its position as dominant or subordinate. But the result is usually the same: Children with impure racial identities are treated as an un-

³⁴Such a person, say, of African and Japanese American heritages, would have the experiences of being black, being Japanese, and of being black and Japanese (black Japanese American, Afri-Asian American) in America. Mixed race individuals experience, to varying degrees, the social forces that create each of the categories they are associated with. Thus, to stay with my example, somebody who is black and Japanese American is exposed to the labels, the normative forces, and the expectation of uptake of both identities. The result of course is tension and confusion. Additionally, such a person is exposed to a third set of forces: that of being mixed race. This may involve (the force from above) the recognition of not being “just” black or Japanese (or perhaps accusations that the person is not Japanese at all). People will not take the person's identity and belonging (the lateral force) as “given”; rather, these aspects will be questioned. Further, the person's self-identity and even loyalty (the force from below) will also be questioned. Even if the person decided to identify as just black or Japanese, and thus reject mixed race identity, they would be participating in the identity in a way to counter the public concerns about the nature of their status.

wanted reminder of something shameful or painful and are alienated (to a greater or lesser extent) from every community to which they have some claim of attachment.³⁵

As Linda Alcoff states in the above passage, the relationship of mixed race individuals to their communities of color is equally problematic. Frequently, they are exoticized and treated as exceptions and anomalies by their families and communities. They are labeled as high yellow, happa, mulatto, moreno, half-breed, mixed blood, mestizo, mutt, red bone, mongrel, mixed, metis, and creole. They are stereotyped as treacherous, sexually permissive, morally degenerate, confused, and tragic. Blacks, Hispanics, Asians, and Native Americans discuss in hushed tones, and occasionally with disgust, members of their communities that pass for being white.³⁶ White families nervously laugh about being "touched by the tar brush," or "having a nigger in the woodpile." Despite the official language of the American "racial" politic, there is some degree of social recognition, reluctant as it may be, of "mixed race" individuals.³⁷

Mixed race has a degree of reality in the U.S. today. It is not, however, fully real in the way the traditional racial categories in the U.S. are real. At this time and place mixed race is not as significant way of identifying people as are "black" and "white." Nevertheless, in the margins and boundaries between our racial categories, in the everyday dynamic of racist racial politics, mixed race is a significant category and identity. Claims of mixed race identity make sense.³⁸

³⁵See Linda Alcoff, "Mestizo Identity," in Zack, *American Mixed Race*, pp. 257-78.

³⁶My intention here is to draw attention to the public recognition of the possibility and practice of passing across racial and ethnic lines. That there is recognition serves to reinforce my point about the recognition of mixed race identity. I am not commenting about the ethics of passing.

³⁷For discussions of these social dynamics, see Cynthia Nakashima, "An Invisible Monster: The Creation and Denial of Mixed-Race People in America," in *Racially Mixed People in America* (Thousand Oaks, Cal.: Sage Publications, 1992), pp. 162-80; Philip Tajitsu Nash, "Multicultural Identity and the Death of Stereotypes," in Maria P.P. Root (ed.), *Racially Mixed People In America* (Thousand Oaks, Cal.: Sage Publications, 1992), pp. 162-80; Freda Scott Giles, "From Melodrama to the Movies: The Tragic Mulatto as a Type Character," in Zack, *American Mixed Race*, pp. 63-78; Teresa Kay Williams, "The Theater of Identity: (Multi-) Race and Representation of Eurasians and Afroasians," in Zack, *American Mixed Race*, pp. 79-96; Alcoff, "Mestizo Identity"; and Adrian Piper, "Passing for White, Passing for Black" in *Out of Order, Out of Sight: vol. 1, Selected Writings in Meta-Art 1968-1992* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996), pp. 275-307. Also see chaps. 6 and 7-13 of Zack, *Race and Mixed Race*. For a good discussion of the politics of color in the African American community, see Kathy Russell, *The Color Complex: The Politics of Skin Color Among African Americans* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992).

³⁸There are a growing number of texts that discuss mixed race identity. The stories that are related all attest to the rich, painful, unique, and *real* experiences of mixed race

This argument answers, in part, the metaphysical criticisms against the movement that charge that mixed race identity is a false identity, somehow inauthentic, and formed in bad faith. I presented these criticisms, in part, in the "Delusions of whiteness" subsection. It was argued that mixed race identity is an attempt to escape darkness, that it is an impossible identity, and that it is an expression of internalized racism.

Given the above, we can argue that mixed race identity does not find its basis in an attempt to escape being non-white, nor is it *necessarily* the expression of internalized racism. Many non-white people in this nation's racialized environment suffer from internalized racism of some form, and certainly mixed race persons are not immune from self-hate. It is a simplification, however, of the motives of the mixed race movement to suggest that the desire to be identified as mixed race rather than black, Asian, Native American, or Hispanic is based on self-hatred. Self-hate needs to be excised from all of our identities, but doing so does not entail the passing of mixed race identity. Mixed race identity is based on mixed race experience.

In the "Reasserting Race" subsection, the criticism was offered that mixed race identity and its category is problematic, because, despite claims to be transgressive, it serves to reinforce race. This objection, offered by David Theo Goldberg and John Powell, and the related criticism by Naomi Zack that mixed race is based on bad faith presuppose ontologies of "race" that do not allow for mixed race.

Given metaphysical monist assumptions that real kinds must be naturally occurring kinds, then a call for a mixed race category would reinforce essentialist or discredited scientific conceptions of race, as would any claim that race is real. The metaphysical pluralist ontology of race, however, delivers an ontology of race, and an account of mixed race identity, that is divorced from naturalizations of race, essentialism, notions of racial blood, or biological conceptions of race. Furthermore, mixed race does not necessarily re-impose "the hegemony of racial duality—of blackness and whiteness—as the standard, the measure, of mixed-ness." The ontology of mixed race that I have presented depends on the complex dynamic of social forces. Nothing is implied about racial purity, nor does it necessarily reinforce the poles of racial duality. Mixed race identity results from the positioning of individuals in social spaces where they experience, as members of multiple racial groups, various combinations of the social forces that make race and the various racial

individuals. Four anthologies that bring together various narratives on mixed race experiences are Carol Camper (ed.), *Miscegenation Blues* (Toronto: Sister Vision Press, 1994); Root, *Racially Mixed People in America*, and *The Multiracial Experience: Racial Borders as the New Frontier*; and Zack, *American Mixed Race*.

groups real. The racial or experiential purity of parent groups, of blackness, whiteness, and so on does not follow from the claim that mixed race identity is possible.

To be fair, some in the movement do go on about race in a manner that seems informed by naive popular conceptions of race.³⁹ These individuals have yet to part with false biological conceptions of race. Their false beliefs and unfortunate comments are separate problems that call for education and remedies of strategy for the movement.

Naomi Zack's arguments are existentialist; my rejoinder, however, is external to that methodology. In addition to mixed race identity, she objects to all racial identities on the basis that race lacks scientific merit. For Zack, race is a social fantasy; thus, racial identities are fantasies, and identities based on fantasies are formed in bad faith. Zack's conclusions, however, are based on an "ontology of race" that does not take into full consideration the nature of its social construction—its social reality. Race is far from a social illusion or fantasy; it is real at some sites and not at others. Therefore, just in terms of metaphysical considerations, the formation of racial identities, whether mixed or not, are not based in bad faith.

My last rejoinder is to the argument that mixed race is redundant. As I argued above, the ontology of race that I am defending says nothing about the purity or impurity of any of the races in the U.S. I agree that the non-white racial categories, given hypodescent, include mixed race individuals; these categories, however, assign individuals and their experiences to one race. Hypodescent is a "many to one" function. In contrast, mixed race is a "many to many" function. It does not seek to reduce multiple identities to one identity.

Furthermore, there is no, or very little, social space for mixed race identity in American racial categories at the current time. The social forces that make race real provide lateral normative forces that, in conjunction with the force from below, create norms of values and behaviors that function as standards of authenticity. Society labels the races, sets up standards of behavior, and those within and without the category expect the members of these categories to act accordingly. Given the nature of the social forces involved, these standards of authenticity do not admit of transgression and border-crossings—of mixed race identity. Thus, someone with Afri-Asian heritage is black in the U.S. Such a person is not expected to identify as Afri-Asian or express Afri-Asian identity because they are defined as black and are expected to comply with that identifi-

³⁹I find the comments of Susan Graham, founder and president of Project RACE (Reclassify All Children Equally), to be indicative of this problem. See Graham, "Grass-roots Advocacy."

cation.⁴⁰ Mixed race identity is not equivalent to black, Asian, Hispanic, or Native American identity; thus, it is not redundant.

In this section I have argued that mixed race is not as real as racial categories like “black” or “white” in the U.S. today. Some people identify themselves or are identified by others as mixed race, and thus mixed race is real to a degree, and mixed race identity makes sense. The goal of the mixed race movement is social recognition and acceptance of mixed race identity and its category. This movement intends, in effect, to make mixed race a fully real human kind. It may be that in the future the social forces necessary to make mixed race real will be present, maybe not to the extent that they are for race, but enough to make the category more real than it is today. Whether this should happen depends on other political and moral arguments.

Mixed Race Identity and Liberatory Politics

In this section I will address the political objections to mixed race as presented in the “Whose Liberation?” subsection. In doing so, I will outline a strategy for the movement that is consistent with the liberatory aims of parent groups.

As I argued above, the category mixed race has a degree of reality; however, how do we further this reality without being complicit in racist hierarchy? We want to name ourselves, we do not want to accept racial identities that do not reflect how we see ourselves, but neither do we want to reinforce white privilege and extend racial hierarchy. As Trina Grillo asked:

How is it possible to take our experiences seriously without having them turned into means of separating ourselves from other Blacks or into a means of ranking people of color, with those of mixed race given more power than other Blacks?⁴¹

This task is not impossible. Critics should keep in mind that the problem of buying into racial hierarchy and white privilege is not something unique to mixed race. If you will, selling out is not something that necessarily follows from mixed race identity. Any person of color can sell out, can seek a higher position in the “racial” hierarchy by becoming an economic or political lackey or sycophant to white privilege. This is as much of a problem for those who pursue a higher class status as it is

⁴⁰This is highlighted by the turmoil over golf professional Tiger Wood’s public expression of his Afri-Asian identity. See Jack E. White, “Multiculturalism: The Melding of America,” *Time* 149, no. 18, 5 May 1997, pp. 32-40.

⁴¹See Grillo, “Anti-Essentialism and Intersectionality: Tools to Dismantle the Master’s House,” p. 24.

for those who pursue mixed race identity.

To avoid the problem, a strategy must be adopted that specifically resists complicity. Such a strategy might include the following:

(1) A rejection of naive popular conceptions of race (e.g., melanism, or racial essentialism), and biological conceptions of race.

(2) An understanding of race as a social category made real by social forces.

(3) An understanding that race, via racism, is a mode of oppression: Social status, privileges, and burdens are parsed out according to a racial hierarchy that places whiteness at the top and darkness at the bottom.⁴²

(4) A rejection of, and a commitment to resist, racial hierarchy and white privilege.

(1) through (4) address the various objections to mixed race, and their acceptance is an important condition to having a conception of mixed race that resists complicity in racism and racial hierarchy.

Given this strategy the political objections against mixed race can be answered. First, the accusation that claims of mixed race identity simply represent attempts to ascend the racial hierarchy is false. As I argued above, mixed race identity is presently to some degree real, and is based on mixed race experience. The only thing mixed race people are trying to escape is the denial of this identity. As for the accusation that mixed race serves to devalue the communities and identities of parent groups, the acceptance of the above strategy would curtail that problem. Just as the existence of “white” or “Hispanic” need not denote hierarchy, the existence of categories between our current ones need not assert a hierarchy.

Second, the same response can be made to the accusations that mixed race allows for the “mulatto escape hatch,” or that it would lead to a caste system. The explicit adoption of the above strategy would resist either development. Under my understanding of mixed race experience, such individuals are escaping nothing. Mixed race individuals are not saying, “I want to be white”; rather they are saying, “I am complex. My mother is from group X, my father from group Y. I am not just X or Y. I am X and Y, as well as mixed race.” If mixed race individuals are racist, then we can hold them accountable for their racism. Their merely being mixed race is not, in and of itself, racist.

To avoid racial hierarchy, mixed race individuals, as my strategy states, ought to disavow racial privilege and hierarchy. They should, to

⁴²Racial hierarchy places blackness at the bottom. This should not be construed as a weighing or a comparison of tragedy. Nevertheless, especially in the Americas, the bottom value is assigned to blacks; however, what group is assigned the lowest value differs in differing contexts and at differing sites.

use the phrase popularized by whiteness scholars, be *race traitors*. Being a race traitor does not mean that mixed race persons deny their complexity any more than it means that white persons should deny their whiteness. What they are being traitorous of is privilege and hierarchy based on their racial identities.

Third, as for the accusation that the support of mixed race identity, and the pursuit of public recognition for it may reduce the populations of various parent groups, I respond: That very well may be. What group has rights to membership? Such a right would entail that an individual's right to freedom of association can be trumped by a group's need to claim that individual on membership rolls. That scenario, in our liberal political tradition, is unacceptable. This objection is no objection at all, since groups do not have rights to membership.⁴³

I would also remind critics who assert that these groups have a claim to members who may check *other* boxes that, as autonomous individuals, we have moral obligations to other individuals, and we may in some cases have moral obligations to groups, but we do not have any moral obligation to maintain membership in any group. As a member of social categories such as gender, sexuality, or race, our actions in regards to that category may impact the other members of those categories in morally relevant ways. To avoid failing in our moral obligations to the other members of our social categories, we need to be conscious of how these human kinds function in our societies.

For example, take a Chicano who rejects his membership in that community, and acts in a manner that is racist and denigrating to other Chicanos. In his racist actions he has failed to fulfill his moral obligation to his fellow Chicanos; however, his rejection of his membership in that community is not in itself morally problematic—it is only in conjunction with his racist behavior that his rejection of his community is morally problematic. If this fellow were to accept my strategy, and thereby act morally to Chicanos, his decision to walk away from his community would not be problematic.⁴⁴

⁴³This is a good point to remark on the proprietary language that many of the critics of mixed race use when discussing mixed race individuals. They seem to think that *they*, or *we*, can decide not to let mixed race individuals identify as mixed race. They seem to think that simply omitting means to identify one's self as mixed race is enough to prevent the growth and promotion of mixed race identity. For examples of such language, see Grillo, "Anti-Essentialism and Intersectionality"; Bates, "The trouble with the rainbow"; Norment, "Am I Black, White Or In Between?"; and Frisby, "Black White Or Other." Whatever decision the nation comes to regarding mixed race category, it will not stop this movement, nor will it somehow hold us in certain categories.

⁴⁴Such a person is not one who passes, or politically repudiates his group. This person merely walks away from race. Perhaps this person takes on Zack's position of being anti-race, and refuses race and ethnicity altogether. This person would certainly *disappoint* his

Although I am utilizing individual rights to argue against the membership claim of communities, I do not want to depict mixed race concerns as primarily individualistic. This is an accusation that is asserted by critics of the movement.⁴⁵ Mixed race individuals, however, do not typically use arguments that rest on individualistic concerns. In stories about their identities and families, mixed race individuals report that they feel identifying as a member of only one race or another betrays their varied *family* heritage. In their memoirs there is often talk of not wanting to betray one parent's identity in favor of another's. There is a rich sense of multiracial belonging and community in their personal stories, and of a desire for truthful and fair representation of this heritage in their personal identity.⁴⁶

Moreover, the decision by the O.M.B. skirts this problem by allowing individuals to check multiple boxes, instead of one multiracial box. The populations of parent groups are preserved, since mixed race individuals are counted as members of every group they claim membership in. Additionally, there is evidence that suggests that this worry is unfounded. In the Census Bureau's 1996 "Race and Ethnic Targeted Test," which studied the effects of various wordings of the multiracial category on the populations of U.S. racial groups, it was concluded that the effect, with the exception of Pacific Islanders, on present racial categories was small.⁴⁷

Fourth, the objection regarding the role of white mothers in the movement is *ad hominem*. This objection is offensive because it marginalizes the voices of the fathers, who are persons of color, the mixed race children, as well as the African American, Asian, Hispanic, Native American, and mixed race mothers and grandparents of mixed race children who support this movement. This objection seeks to discredit the movement by placing responsibility for it in the hands of a few white mothers, whom critics portray as being racist. Why, however, should the presence of a few racist white mothers be more illuminating than the presence and efforts of others involved?

Fifth, to the objection that mixed race is problematic because of its appropriation by the political Right, I reply that this objection is accurate; however, the political Right is also appropriating the language of the

parent group, but as long he did not participate in the devaluation of his group, then he has done nothing morally wrong. This person would abstain from race, and his actions are no more problematic than a decision by him to run off into the wilderness, away from his community, and live the rest of his life as a hermit.

⁴⁵See Wright, "One Drop of Blood."

⁴⁶See n. 38.

⁴⁷See U.S. Census Bureau, *Results of the 1996 Race and Ethnic Targeted Test*, pp. I-10 and I-15.

civil rights movement and the images and words of enshrined civil rights leaders, particularly those of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. That situation does not lead us to reject Dr. King or the language of the civil rights movement, so why should we abandon mixed race? We ought to defend mixed race from manipulation in the same way we defend Dr. King's image and his words.

Given the suggested strategy, the movement should aggressively reject the Right's efforts to exploit the mixed race movement. The movement should draw attention to the fact that when members of the Right, such as George F. Will or Dinesh D'Souza, discuss mixed race they do so only in terms of people of color. They never draw out the implications of mixed race for the white population. They use mixed race to argue that there really are no blacks, Asians, Native Americans, or Hispanics, and thus no person, or group, who deserves retributive justice on racial grounds. The movement should challenge George and Dinesh to cease their hypocrisy, and, if they truly believe in the message of the mixed race movement, stand in front of white conservative audiences in the Heartland, the South, or in Orange County and proclaim to the world, in the words of James Baldwin:

[W]e are all androgynous, not only because we are all born of a woman impregnated by the seed of a man but because each of us, helplessly and forever, contains the other—male in female, female in male, white in black and black in white. We are a part of each other. Many of my countrymen appear to find this fact exceedingly inconvenient and even unfair, and so very often do I. But none of us can do anything about it.⁴⁸

Baldwin's words lead me to note the similarities between the resistance mixed race identity has received from communities of color, and the resistance that feminist and queer liberation has received.⁴⁹ In all three cases of resistance, critics argued that these groups should submit to the will of the parent community, and defer their ambitions for liberation for the sake of the liberation of the parent communities. In all three cases, when these groups refused to defer their ambitions, they were accused of being traitorous and inauthentic. In all three cases, these critics

⁴⁸See James Baldwin, "Here Be Dragons," in *The Price of the Ticket: Collected Non-fiction 1948-1985* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), p. 690.

⁴⁹For discussions of these conflicts and their intersections see Rhonda Williams, "Living At The Crossroads: Explorations in Race, Nationality, Sexuality, and Gender," in *The House That Race Built: Black Americans, U.S. Terrain* (New York: Pantheon, 1997), pp. 136-56); Kendall Thomas, "'Ain't Nothin' Like The Real Thing': Black Masculinity, Gay Sexuality, and the Jargon of Authenticity," in *The House That Race Built*, pp. 116-35; Ron Simons, "Some Thoughts on the Challenges Facing Black Gay Intellectuals," in *Brother To Brother: Collected Writings by Black Gay Men* (Boston: Alyson Publications, 1991), pp. 211-28; and Karen Allman, "(Un)Natural Boundaries: Mixed Race, Gender, and Sexuality," in Root, *The Multiracial Experience*, pp. 277-90.

failed to be self-critical. The critics that make these claims have been insensitive and blind to the oppression they engender. They have replicated the oppression they have received onto members of their communities.

Racial hierarchy and racism are problems of the greatest priority; however, they are not the only oppressions that deserve the attention of liberatory work. There is no reason why we cannot work in coalition against racial hierarchy, racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism, ableism, and mono-racialism. To avoid replicating oppression we need to be open to the worlds in which liberation may lead, even if it means the eventual liberation from categories we cherish. To do this we need to be more self-critical and maintain a socially critical perspective, or distance, from our social categories.

The Future of Mixed Race

The social nature of human kinds is dynamic, a fact that, I argue, invites us to regard such kinds with a sort of humility—a humility that arises from an understanding of human kinds as historically contingent, as fragile, and as constructed out of our interests, conceits, and prejudices. We should be cognizant of this dynamic and we ought to let knowledge of that dynamic bear on how we regard our social categories. We ought to be aware of the shifting and contingent nature of social worlds and the categories that interact within them. We should regard the categories of our social worlds with irony.⁵⁰

Irony in relation to human kinds is a consciousness of their contingency, fragility, and changing nature. It is an understanding that these kinds have not always been and may one day be no more. It is an understanding that we inhabit multiple categories and that we move across many, if not all of them, in our lifetimes. Irony is a socially critical perspective that allows us to distance ourselves from our categories, not to become too beholden to them, and to be “Socratic” about their natures and our associations with them.

This perspective applies as much to the emerging mixed race movement as it does to parent communities. Mixed race, without a conscious effort to uphold moral obligations to parent communities, without a commitment to fight racial hierarchy and racism, without a rejection of

⁵⁰Being ironic about identity does not mean being flip about it, or treating it as a triviality. For more on my use of irony, see “The Prophetic and Pragmatic Philosophy of ‘Race’ in W.E.B. Du Bois’ ‘The Comet,’” *Newsletter on Philosophy and the Black Experience* 99, no. 1 (Spring 1999), and “Laughing To Keep From Crying: Resisting The American ‘Racial’ Politic Through Irony,” *Tympanum* 4, 15 July 2000, pp. 1-21.

white privilege, without irony, is tragedy—it would be the horrible extension of the racializing project from an already monstrous dichotomous system into a multi-headed hydra.

Mixed race with irony, and with the strategy I recommend, has the potential to be prophetic. It can challenge the American racial politic in a manner that the racial status quo, hypodescent, an economic device of America's internal slave trade, can never do. A proper mixed race consciousness, born from responsible mixed race politics, challenges widespread and false conceptions of race held uncritically by the public. It challenges America's racial vision of itself, by pointing out America's long history of cultural hybridity—intermixture via sex and culture. In doing these things it also challenges white identity and white family identity, the modes by which white privilege is preserved.⁵¹ Finally, in promoting hybridity and intermixture it may, perhaps, lead to the collapse of the races into one: *Una raza mestiza*.⁵²

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⁵¹For discussions of the role of white family identity in the system of white privilege see Piper, "Passing for White, Passing for Black," and chap. 3 of Zack, *Race and Mixed Race*.

⁵²For discussions of how mixed race may undermine the American racial politic, see Wright, "One Drop Of Blood," and Naomi Zack's introduction to *American Mixed Race*. In "My Racial Self Over Time," in Camper (ed.), *Miscegenation Blues*, pp. 20-27, Zack argues that she does not think "showing up the absurdity" of mixed race is effective because the blacks and whites are invisible to each other (p. 25). I am more optimistic than Zack. The mixed race movement is aggressively impinging on individual and community racial identities. It is doing this in a way that cannot be, and is not being, ignored. For discussions of *una raza mestiza*, see Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands: La Frontera = The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987), and Alcoff, "Mestizo Identity."

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