

# Mixed citizens want proper respect for their unique heritage, lineage

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interracial relationships, consensual or otherwise, has made the African American race truly one of many colors.

But, in today's modern world, a growing number of interracial marriages are producing a new generation of people who, like Shalati, acknowledge both of their parental backgrounds.

In the introduction to her book, "Black, White, Other," Lise Funderburg notes that conventional wisdom assumes "Children of interracial unions are born into a racial netherworld, destined to be confused, maladjusted, 'tragic mulattoes,' the perpetual victims of a racially polarized society."

Mixed couples are warned, "But what about the children."

"Underneath lies a widely held assumption that the racial divide between white and black is vast and unbridgeable," Funderburg said. "And so while two independent adults may be considered free to deal with the folly of their choice, they are appealed to on behalf of the undeserving offspring who will supposedly suffer the results."

Her book, interviews with 65

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— Edward Shalati

mixed-race offspring, seeks out their feelings and experiences as the black-and-whites in a black-or-white America.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the number of documented interracial marriages tripled between 1970 and 1992, from 310,000 to 1.1 million.

The number of black/white couples went up even faster, increasing 400 percent, from 65,000 to 246,000. The number of black men married to white women was twice the number of white men married to black women.

The offspring from interracial relationships are becoming a sizeable share of the American population.

The O.J. Simpson trial attracted attention to the trend and will likely attract more as he battles his in-laws for custody of his and Nicole Brown Simpson's children.

Funderburg notes, "Despite growing numbers, public images of mixed-race people — who have been part of the

American landscape since the first Africans reached America's shores — remain scarce."

And, the increase in interracial marriages is forcing government to consider changing the way it categorizes citizens by race.

The federal Office of Management and Budget, after congressional hearings in 1993 and administrative hearings last year, may recommend changes in 1997, in time for the 2000 census.

The census bureau is planning a test survey of 50,000 households in 1996 to help come up with solutions.

But, according to an article in *Emerge* magazine's December/January issue, suggestions for changes go beyond just adding a "mixed" or "multi-racial" category.

Groups such as Hawaiians and Arabs are demanding changes, while others, from political conservatives to some blacks want to eliminate racial classifications altogether.

er. Any changes could have implications for government efforts to track social and economics statistics, such as how many African Americans get bank loans or get steered away from certain neighborhoods. Or, for example, whether black voters need single-race districts for adequate representation.

Arthur Fletcher, a member of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, testified in 1993 hearings, that he's worried about whether many people previously listed as "Black" will rush to a "mixed" category.

Estimates indicate as many as 75 percent of African Americans have some mixed ancestry.

"I can see a whole host of light-skinned Black Americans running for the door the minute they have another choice," Fletcher said. "Black, White, whatever, but all of a sudden they have a way of saying, 'In this discriminatory culture of ours...I am something other than Black.'"

"...I know in the Black community, a large number of people who...think the eco-

nomie opportunities that would flow from being identified as 'other,' whatever other is, in this culture is an advantage and not a liability."

Shalati sees advantages and disadvantages in his racial background. Based on appearances alone, he's most often identified as white. He's been hired for jobs by bosses who thought he was white.

"But after they realize they didn't hire a white person, immediately you see a change in behavior in that you are alienated."

But "being black does not only mean your color is black, it's how you view the world," Shalati said. "A lot of people view me as white. They say 'he's something,' but they

don't know what. They don't know how to take me. Blacks, as soon as they listen to you talk and watch your demeanor and characteristics you show, they begin accepting you."

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## We must teach black history

MELODY MICERE STEWART

In the  
spirit of  
Ma'at



No systematic effort toward change has been possible, for taught the same economics, history, philosophy, literature and religion which have established the present code of morals, the Negro's mind has been brought under the control of his oppressor." Carter G. Woodson, father of black history month, wrote about black miseducation in 1933.

Beginning before our sojourn from the shores of West Africa and continuing through our mass kidnaping, the terrible Middle Passage, enduring the horrors of enslavement, the pain of segregation, the terror of lynching and, today, institutionalized and insidious racism — clearly, we have a powerful story of faith and heritage to tell.

Yet, we are still the only eth-

nic group in America to leave the cultural and historical indoctrination of ourselves and our children to outsiders. Other ethnic groups have their own internal institutions to properly teach the story of their people to their children from their particular point of view, e.g., Jews/Hebrew School.

Because we do not do this, the minds of too many of our children have been brought under the control of the oppressor. They do not realize our history begins at the beginning of time nor do they understand that we are an African people with a rich heritage.

Even more tragic, too many of our children believe that the concept of excellence belongs to white folks, when, in fact, we set the standards of excellence in antiquity. We cannot expect other people to tell our story. Nobody will tell your story like you will tell it. (Or, why would you expect a people who treated us wrong to teach us right?)

The critical importance of learning and teaching our his-

torical lessons is a point which cannot be overemphasized. According to an academic study presented to the National Association of Social Workers, black families with "a sense of racial pride, evidenced in discussing black history and racism with their children, are better equipped to handle the stresses of everyday life, set family goals and achieve material success."

With the advent of the Million Man March, the millennium window opened and the opportunity for the African American community to address the internal needs of the community has arrived. Martin King wrote, "When a people are mired in oppression, they realize deliverance when they have accumulated the power to enforce change."

Today, African Americans are the richest Africans on the planet — we have the most skills, resources, access to technology, capital, etc. than any other African people. Despite our considerable wealth and knowledge, black people have not institutionalized a mechanism in which to

drew 5,000 people to Detroit's Museum of African American History during its Martin Luther King Day festival, said museum staffer Kevin Davidson.

More than 85,000 viewed the exhibit during a six-month showing at its home in the Mel Fisher Maritime Heritage Society. Mel Fisher's crew found the slave ship while searching for a Spanish galleon. Several expeditions were carried out to recover artifacts, but the hull has not been disturbed.

"What makes this unique is the wealth of artifacts," said Davidson. "They have shackles in various sizes, smaller ones for children."

"This is the first physical evidence of a slave ship in the western hemisphere," Davidson said. "That is why it has gotten so much attention."

"What makes the exhibit most appealing is there is a slave ship section you can actually walk through and feel like you are in this confined space."

Other stops on a tour include Los Angeles, Memphis, Tenn., and Atlanta, where it will open in the fall of 1998.

It will also be exhibited October 1997 through January 1998 at the Fort Worth (Tex.) Museum of Science and History.

## Ship to anchor here

Continued from page 1A

ing to Charlotte. She's already planning presentation on African American inventions before and during slavery.

"The Henrietta Marie will not only show the past, but it is also a self-esteem builder, even though it is a negative — a slave ship," Mills said. "Because once you see where you came from and where you are now, you have got to see where you are going."

Ray Swann, president of the Nubian Divers of Charlotte, promised the full cooperation of local African American divers and said he will ask NABS president A. Hosea Jones to come to Charlotte.

"He is one of the two who went down to put a (2-ton commemorative) plaque on the Henrietta Marie," Swann said. "The membership is very excited about this and we certainly appreciate the efforts of Spirit Square in bringing it here, despite the loss of interest by some other groups."

Madine Fails, executive director of the local Urban League chapter, said she was also happy to hear that the exhibit is coming here.

"That sounds great," said Fails, who is a member of

Discovery Place's board of directors. "It sounds like a great learning experience. The African American community, in particular, needs to get behind it."

Discovery Place officials considered but rejected a showing of the exhibit in the spring of 1998 during a larger exhibit on undersea exploration.

Rudy Cooper, Discovery Place's vice president of exhibits, objected to the "negative image" portrayed by the slave ship. "We need to forget about slavery," Cooper said.

Discovery Place officials deny Cooper's opinion alone caused them to pass on the Henrietta Marie exhibit. They said it did not meet their criteria as a "hands on science display."

Museum of the New South's executive director Emily Zimmern also passed on the exhibit. She said the museum covered the Carolinas in the period since the Civil War.

"As you know we are a young institution," Zimmern said. "We need to establish our identity. Regrettably, the slave ship Henrietta Marie...doesn't fit in our mission."

The Henrietta Marie exhibit

### WHAT DO THESE PEOPLE HAVE IN COMMON?



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