REPRODUCING RACE

The Paradox of Generation Mix

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The False Promise of Racial Bridging

Another major analogue to the discredited mulatto myths of the past—and, also, yet another super power—is the notion of modern-day multiracial persons serving as bridges between the races. As is the usual case, the black/white example is the most salient and the one most appealed to by the movement and its supporters. In Catherine Squires’s description of this particular viewpoint, the “multiracial citizen is often described as a bridge, linking disparate racialized sections of the public.” Naturally, this viewpoint is related to, indeed is an extension of, the simplistic and erroneous view that multiracial persons are necessarily less prejudiced merely because of their parentage.

Something one notices quite readily is that this conceptualization requires a tremendous amount of work to be laid upon the shoulders of multiracial persons, most especially so in the case of black/white persons. As Tavia Nyong’o puts it: “Racial mixing and hybridity are neither problems for, nor solutions to, the long history of ‘race’ and racism, but part of its genealogy. Racisms can emerge, thrive, and transform quite effectively without ever being undone by the magical, privatized powers we invest in intimacy and reproduction. The impossibly burdened figure of the biracial child cannot conceivably do the work of utopia that we repeatedly impose upon her.”

The motivation for the wishful thinking that leads to the racial bridging daydream is simple enough. In mixed-race children, from the perspective of white liberals and white conservatives both, is seen an easy way out of the difficult and uncomfortable work of engaging a centuries-old racial animosity, a way that would allow the nation to avoid actually dealing with the problem directly. Instead, and quite conveniently, black/white persons—simply because of who (or, indeed, what?) they and their parents are—are tasked to serve as racial ambassadors, engaging in a frenzied shuttle diplomacy back and forth between the races until they solve the race problem.
with something akin to the aplomb of professional mediators. That such an outcome is not actually expected ever to obtain goes without saying, which is in no sense a disappointment to those for whom race is an annoying distraction. The important point is that someone else would now be delegated to work on the problem.

And from the general perspective of the members and supporters of Generation Mix (the latter whether white or not), this idea is yet another special plea for the utility of multiracial identity. It is another facet of the kitchen-sink strategy of claiming and embracing anything, regardless of how outlandish, that garners support from some corner or other. One need look no further than the nauseating and fairly pornographic mid- to late-1990s public romance between the American Multiracial Identity Movement and the political far right, including such notable figures as Newt Gingrich and Ward Connerly, in order to see that the Generation Mix strategy of soliciting and accepting support from any quarter, regardless of that particular support’s own corporate agenda, is anything but a new phenomenon.  

But what of the notion that black/white persons are in themselves natural bridges for the facilitation of racial healing and reconciliation? It should come as no surprise that this is a biological argument dressed up in sociological attire. The simplistic presumption is that black/white persons, having one black and one white parent, are—because of that mere factor alone and regardless that it is, of course, biological nonsense—they somehow immune to racism and prejudice, and are motivated personally to act as ambassadorial bridges between their constituent races. This notion operates on two different levels, one biological and the other social. Certainly it is easy to see that on our everyday, low-level, glossy newsmagazine stratum of understanding, the biological approach is accepted without question or hesitation. Sad though this reality might be, it is nonetheless true. An American public that first of all remains invested deeply in biological race will have little difficulty believing that persons of purported biologically mixed racial descent are constituted quite naturally to act as healing bridges between their parental races.

In keeping with my thesis throughout Part 2, the reaffirmation of the old mulatto myths of the early twentieth century may be seen as operative in the racial bridge notion as well. It might not appear evident at first but, as I shall describe, the same basic principles are functioning here even though the old schema did not, of course, contain any suggestion of direct racial reconciliation via mulattoes. However, while that older schema did not contain any advice or overt expectation for mulattoes to serve as a mediative element between blacks and whites, nonetheless such was the intended practical result of that particular arrangement, although unrealized ultimately because it was part of the erroneous marginal man mythology. In other words, the hope or expectation of early sociologists such as Robert
Park, Edward Reuter, and Everett Stonequist was that by aligning themselves with and serving as the leaders of Negroes, mulattoes would provide some element of mediation between the races, a mediation to be understood primarily in terms of safe distance.

This is not to be confused with the idea of a buffer race, which I discussed in Chapter 7 and eliminated from contemporary consideration. Rather, the more intelligent, more serious, more highly tensioned, more reflective mulattoes—with their presumed natural affinity for whiteness—would, while not being an actual buffer race, nonetheless still provide distance from blacks, at least from the perspective of whites. I would be remiss here in failing to include one important caveat, which is that at least in Reuter’s program, which is the most explicit in terms of manipulating mulattoes for white advantage, he points specifically to Southern as opposed to Northern mulatto attitudes as a normative guide to be followed by these hoped-for leaders of the Negro race. So even though not a buffer race in the traditional sense of standing somewhat equidistant between whites and blacks while not being part of either group, as was the case with the black/white “Coloureds” in apartheid South Africa, for instance, Reuter’s mulattoes would still—as the recognized leaders of the Negroes—stand in an important sense between whites and Negroes, thereby providing the increased distance from Negroes that has been sought by whites in a continuous way for centuries. Clearly, a critical question would be whether the Generation Mix version of mixed-race distinctiveness also provides increasing distance between whites and blacks, and the answer is that it does.

But in making this connection and arguing thus am I not implying, then, that the contemporary notion of the black/white members of Generation Mix serving as racial bridges is in fact an instrument for generating distance between whites and blacks, and would this not represent a contradiction? Yes, indeed, as I am so arguing; however, it is not nearly as contradictory as it might at first appear to be. Understood in its proper context of white supremacy and antiblackness, it is in no sense contradictory at all. First, as I intimated above, no one beyond low-level activists and poorer-quality scholars expects the racial bridge idea to actually work. White power brokers certainly do not, regardless of political ideology. And multiracial activists and scholars of a more perceptive bent realize full well that just as in the case of the multiracial medical fallacy (see Chapter 8), the racial bridge misdirection is also merely a means to the specific end of garnering sympathy and support for federal recognition of multiracial identity.

Yet even so, how can the concept of Generation Mix racial bridges be thought of as generating distance between whites and blacks? The answer lies in the fallaciousness of the racial bridge notion itself and in a kind of false advertising—of the bait-and-switch variety—involving that notion. Since Generation Mix cannot and therefore will not in fact be a racial bridge.
between whites and blacks, the recognition and ensuing elevation of Generation Mix serves, as I foregrounded in Chapter 7, to further isolate Afro-Americans and their legitimate concerns on the periphery of what is seen as the current, substantive, and constructive dialogue on race in the United States. In this arrangement Afro-American concerns are considered old-hat, illegitimate, and tied to ossified attitudes on the part of blacks that are no longer relevant to where the nation is now and to where it must go in order to achieve its postracial destiny.

Relevant here also is Jared Sexton’s criticism of the American Multiracial Identity Movement’s motivations when, as considered in Chapter 6, it appropriates certain Afro-Americans of the past and recodes them unilaterally as multiracial: “Here blackness is defined of necessity as the negative residuum of the interracial encounter, left over and distilled, the difference subtracted not only from the mythic purity of whiteness but also from the sanctified ‘impurity’ of the multiracial contingent. On this score, the multiracial camp would like to disentangle its incorporation of figures of ‘false’ blackness from its inevitable expulsion of figures of ‘true’ blackness, an annexation that is at the same time a distancing. Distancing through annexation: this is a differentiation installed by the new border, the new color line . . . the re-racialization of blackness.”5 Blackness is something to be used for a purpose and then discarded once that purpose has been fulfilled. In this, both the movement and the nation in general share a wish to move past blackness into not so much a postracial future as a postblack future.

Clearly, purging itself of and finally moving beyond the black problem will be a great and necessary aid to the nation in its quest. This national impulse is driven by the attraction of achieving postraciality without actually dealing with the Afro-American problem, by simply bypassing it instead. In this it is clear that Generation Mix and the American Multiracial Identity Movement have been assigned, and for all that can be ascertained, have accepted, an absolutely key role to play. In being representative of a good minority, in proclaiming loudly and in no uncertain terms that they are not black, in attempting to navigate away from blackness and toward whiteness, the black/white members of Generation Mix especially perform the dutiful service of continuing the isolation of Afro-Americans from both Generation Mix and from the larger US body politic.6 Indeed, most Afro-Americans fail to recognize that the present heady rush toward a postracial American future (a rush they should view with sharply critical eyes) contains a downside for them that will result in a far worse state of affairs than the already unacceptable situation obtaining for Afro-Americans.

That the public form of this looming downside is the seemingly friendly face of multiracialism may be ironic, but that irony makes it no less alarming and no less dangerous to the prospects of Afro-Americans who either cannot or do not care to attain the new postracial mixed-race status.
What is lost in the contemporary Generation Mix narrative is, as I have been endeavoring to illustrate, the important reality that “multiracialism not only proves complicit with white supremacy and antiblackness but goes on in that respect to announce itself as avant-garde.” It is this faux avant-garde progressivism, accepted wrongly on so many fronts, that blinds nearly all commentators (albeit some quite willingly) to its far more sinister and wholly self-interested underside of biologically based multiracial superiority over regular (but nonetheless always already mixed) Afro-Americans.

As I argued in Chapters 7 and 8, the Generation Mix phenomenon impels a concerted movement away from blackness, a movement that results in Afro-Americans remaining in an isolated and bottom-of-the-barrel position in the US racial order. In the case of the black/white members of Generation Mix it is specifically a personal rejection of confraternity with their fellow mulattoes and a personal movement away from blackness and toward whiteness. In the case of the nonblack/white members of Generation Mix it is a more general distancing that makes possible the white/nonblack/black restructuring of the paradigm I detailed in Chapter 7. Either way, distance is opened between Afro-Americans and the next higher group in the paradigm, a distancing that quite necessarily results in helping to realize the goal of increased distance between whites and Afro-Americans as well.

Thus, even though contemporary mixed-race Americans, especially those who are black/white, are touted as racial bridges, everything about the American Multiracial Identity Movement’s ideology and operation is actually structured to have the opposite effect, at least in terms of any connection to blackness. As the black/white cohort of the mixed-race movement gains in recognition and momentum it redoubles its growing impulse to move away from blackness. Regardless of the enticing lure of the racial bridge promise, that promise is an empty one, for there is no effort, no intention, no inclination to in fact perform the difficult work of racial bridging, as the far stronger desire is to achieve distance from blackness.

In Janus-like fashion the movement extols enthusiastically the utility of its black/white members’ ability to serve as racial bridges while working simultaneously to encourage a view of those same members as being so distinct from Afro-Americans as to very nearly be unrelated at all. If one listens to the collective black/white voices of Generation Mix, one hears a much louder chorus of “I am not black, so stop calling me black,” than anything along the lines of “Allow me to be a racial bridge that helps you make a connection to the other side.” Seen from this perspective the point is decidedly clear, and the racial bridge fantasy decidedly inert. If any bridge is being built by the black/white members of Generation Mix, it is a bridge toward whiteness, for the mixed-race movement has already set afire the bridge that lies in the other direction. The bridge toward blackness is already burning.
So whereas for Reuter and his co-architects of the marginal man, acceptable distance was hoped to be achieved via mulattoes serving as humble leaders of the Negro race, in the contemporary moment the same goal of distance is achieved by the incessant valorization of Generation Mix—especially of its black/white members—as being distinct from, superior to, and far less troublesome than the mass of retrograde Afro-Americans. Therefore, with every subsequent elevation of Generation Mix, additional distance is generated between it and regular Afro-Americans; but even more fundamentally and far more importantly, additional distance is thereby generated between whites and regular Afro-Americans. This is so regardless of fanciful and contradictory enticements of racial bridging that are so very far from being attained and not even desired enough to be actually attempted.

But beyond even this, there is yet another reason why the racial bridge formulation is erroneous. It relies on an unthinking, accepted presumption that is as false as it is unexamined. Indeed, this erroneous presumption is so very much taken for granted that what I am about to argue may at first glance seem quite shocking. In contradistinction to the claim that the black/white members of Generation Mix are suited especially to serve as racial bridges, I contend instead that black/white persons cannot serve as racial bridges because they are completely unqualified to. Or, to be more precise, they are no more qualified to be racial bridges than supposedly monoracial whites, monoracial blacks, or anyone else. But how can this be if black/white persons partake of both blackness and whiteness? Is it not true that black/white persons are situated uniquely in terms of an intimate connection to both races? Do they not partake of both races, both biologies, both essentialities?

In fact, all of these presumptions are false, for they rely on an error so sloppy and so profound as to be unforgivable from a scholarly perspective. Indeed, they rely on nothing more than the very same unquestioned wishful thinking that underlies so much of the American Multiracial Identity Movement and its uncritical championing by the US popular media. Let us be clear on what the actual claim is. In a variety of forms the basic argument is that multiracial persons, including and especially black/white persons, are, precisely because of their multiraciality, situated uniquely to serve as human bridges in terms of mediating racial conflict. This argument is heard alike from the lips and pens of multiracial activists, multiracially supporting scholars, and rank-and-file members of Generation Mix. Multiracial activist Carlos Fernández makes the claim when testifying before Congress that the multiracial “community is uniquely situated to confront these issues [of race and interethnic relations] because of the special experiences and understanding we acquire in the intimacy of our families and our personalities.” Making exactly the same point, multiracially supporting scholar Kathleen Korgen assures us that having “an open mind” is “something that
comes with a biracial background,” and that therefore “biracial persons can act as mediators between black and white persons.”

Paul Rosenblatt, Terri Karis, and Richard Powell aver that “biracial children . . . have major advantages over children who are not biracial,” including “advantages that come with knowing two worlds and having dual perspectives.” Writing about US popular engagement with black/white romantic intermixing, Renee Romano reports that “inter racial love in these accounts is an, or even the, answer to how to improve American race relations. Some focus on the importance of multiracial children, whose very existence not only will undermine racial categories, but who also may have a unique ability to serve as racial ambassadors, shuttling back and forth between each of their racial homes in an effort to make peace.” Ellis Cose remarks that “many advocates of the new [multiracial] designation see multiracial individuals as ambassadors between groups.” He cites one such advocate who “argues that society would benefit from having multiracial people who are uniquely positioned to be ‘sensitive, objective negotiators of inter-group conflict.’” Multiracially supporting author Sundee Frazier claims that multiracial people “possess the potential to bring together the groups to which we belong,” and that “metaphorically, multiracial people display the life that flows from racial reconciliation.” Heather Dalmage finds that “multiracial family members often say that they perceive themselves as a bridge between blacks and whites.” Finally, Rachel Moran’s work uncovers the phenomenon that “mixed-race individuals are sometimes celebrated as ideal mediators between different races.”

The foregoing was a sampling of the variety of means by which the racial-bridging claim is articulated in remarkably similar, remarkably consistent ways by various elements of the American Multiracial Identity Movement. There is no doubt that this claim about the skill of racial mediation is a central tenet of the Generation Mix argument for recognition and acceptance. There is also no doubt that it is wrong, and wildly so, in at least two related ways: (1) by sloppily treating race and culture as the same thing, and (2) by making the mistake of assuming that being associated with someone—even closely—is the same thing as being able to adopt that particular person’s racial mindset. The first fallacy is a category error, while I shall label the second a marriage error, which I shall explain directly after addressing the first.

Race is not culture and culture is not race; the two terms are not interchangeable in any sense. It is, however, a general failure of US epistemological practice to treat them as if they are the same thing when they most obviously are not. Race, for one thing, does not exist. Biological race is a fallacy, an error of clear thinking that science has debunked conclusively in various ways again and again over the past six decades. Culture, though, does exist, both incorporeally and materially. It exists in the beliefs that
people inculcate, in the clothes they wear, in the foods they eat, in the rituals they enact, and in the attitudes they adopt as part of their particular societal groupings or subgroupings. In fact, one could say that belief in race is itself a cultural phenomenon, even if such belief is in the end a false consciousness.

If we conceive of a society as a living, physical group of people, we can think of culture as the shared values and ideals that define those persons’ standards of behavior in the context of that society. Here we can also consider at least two levels of culture, which we may label respectively culture and subculture. Speaking properly and in a formal, anthropological sense, culture would refer to major collective operating principles in terms of worldview, underlying cosmological grammars, and overarching modes of societal organization. In this sense, cultural difference might be compared by analogy to the difference between two societies of people, one strictly carnivorous and the other strictly vegetarian. Both groups eat, of course, but the foods they eat differ significantly—in terms of type—from that of the other. The analogical example I provide here purely for the sake of illustration is an extreme one, in which the food of one group is incompatible with the other, but some cultural differences are quite easily this stark even while others fit more comfortably within the confines of a slowly shifting continuum. Subculture, on the other hand, would be more along the lines of the concept of some lower-order distinction. It would be a situation in which we are considering two groups (indeed, subgroups) that are both carnivores, but in which one subgroup very much prefers seafood and the other subgroup very much prefers land animals. In other words, subcultural differences are relatively minor (in the large scale of things) preferences of flavor in the context of the same overarching culture.

To now move this distinction away from the realm of the hypothetical and closer to reality, one cultural difference is that between the United States and Germany on the one hand, and Saudi Arabia and Iran on the other, in regard to the place of women in society. Few would attempt to argue that the two different systems under consideration here do not deviate hugely along a fundamental fault line on the subject of women. Another cultural difference is the divergence between the United States and Vietnam in terms of the veneration of ancestors. Clearly, the idea of engaging one’s deceased kin in an active way so as to have an impact on the way those kin continue to affect the living is for the average American a completely foreign notion. Finally, a third example of a cultural difference is the elemental divide between the general Judeo-Christian tradition in the United States, and the varieties of animism practiced in sub-Saharan Africa. So wide is this particular divide that many Americans would have no problem in withholding the title of religion from those animist beliefs. These are examples of large-scale differences that have to do with opera-
tional grammars far above the level of active thought. They are examples of cultural distinctions.

Subcultural differences are relatively minor variations (again, in the large scale of things) under the same general culture. The American example is again useful here. Certainly there exist certain communities in the United States that would prove to be exceptions to the general rule, from certain Native American groups (though not all) to extreme religious cults to antigovernment groups that would constitute separate cultures in themselves, but it is nonetheless completely uncontroversial to describe general US culture as highly racialized and highly stratified racially, Judeo-Christian, capitalistic, materialistic, individualistic, male-dominant sexist, homophobic, and since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, fairly xenophobic. For the average American these are underlying cultural grammars that inform her or his interactions in society. However, under this generalized US culture are minor variations or flavorings. Subcultural differences would be the variance one finds in different regions of the country or among different age cohorts, for example. Indeed, subculture can on occasion be so nebulous that it appears sometimes to break down and scatter even as one attempts to investigate it.

A nonregional, non-age-related example comes to mind here. One could consider evangelical Christians, mainline Protestants, Catholics, and Jews in the United States and argue that while they all fit comfortably under generalized US culture, as subgroups they each have significant-enough specific variances that justify differentiating them based on those variations. While some might contend that these variant religious interpretations should make for different cultures in themselves, such a criticism would miss the point that all four profess belief in the same type of general theological framework and in the same type of God. Indeed, depending on which group’s members one asked, some would even claim it is the same God while others might not. The point is that in terms of cultural grammar, the four religious movements considered in this example, while distinct enough from each other to justify being seen as subcultures, can nonetheless be grouped together easily under Judeo-Christianity and distinguished quite readily from religions that are animist or that stress ancestor veneration, for example. So, the differences between evangelical Christians, mainline Protestants, Catholics, and Jews in the United States are in this sort of structural analysis subcultural differences, not cultural differences.

Some might argue that US culture as I am using it is not, speaking properly, a culture, but is instead itself a subculture of Western culture. Such a view does not impact my general argument, however, as I have elected to take the more generous route. In other words, on that even more restrictive view of culture, my arguments that follow would thereby be made that much stronger. The most important point is that when we speak of culture,
we are (or should be) speaking in terms of large-scale, underlying cosmological and structural grammars that order societies and in turn determine the ways that those societies assemble themselves and then adapt to change as they move forward through time. Even subcultures have strong organizing principles, although on a far, far lower scale than cultures proper. We are not (or should not be) speaking of trivialities along the lines of what people look like physically or whether they prefer listening to the musical stylings of Snoop Dogg or Barry Manilow.

Finally, if it were to be countered that my use of culture is far too structured and rigid, that what is meant by culture in the writings of multiracially supporting scholars and activists is something far less demanding and more in line with the inconsequential musical example I lampoon above—sort of a little “c” culture or subculture as opposed to my big “C” Culture or subCulture—my response would be that such a trivial concept of culture is far, far too weak to have the great significance that is imputed to it by those very writers. In other words, if such a weak concept is what those writers have in mind when invoking culture, then it cannot possibly do the work they intend it to do, reducing essentially instead to the banal difference between sprinkling salt or sugar on one’s grits.

Having laid out briefly what culture in fact is, we may return now to the question of the relationship between race and culture in the ideology and rhetoric of the American Multiracial Identity Movement. In returning to this question, let me state first of all and with no equivocation whatsoever (albeit perhaps counterintuitively at this point), that when it comes to the vast majority of whites and blacks in the United States, there are no differences between them such as I described above—not of the cultural type, nor even of the subcultural type. In much the same way that human beings cannot be categorized consistently into biological racial groups, black Americans and white Americans cannot be categorized into two discrete groups on the basis of culture, regardless of the level. Indeed, I had anticipated arguing originally that any differences between the two were not cultural, but were in fact subcultural and therefore insignificant, but in thinking about this in even more detail I hold that there are not even subcultural differences that delineate black Americans and white Americans from each other. Rather, whatever differences might distinguish particular subgroups of black Americans from particular subgroups of white Americans cannot even be called subcultural differences. And even here the assertion of coherent subgroups is very much a less than certain enterprise.

But, might it not be objected, is it not a commonplace that Afro-Americans are more religious and more family oriented than white Americans, and that in terms of cognition they are oriented in a circular way while whites are oriented linearly? And is it not true that Afro-American male behavior is driven by a strong impulse toward a demand for respect on one
hand and avoidance of disrespect on the other that stems from its steady cycle of creation and consumption of hip-hop and rap music? And finally, do we not know that their African ancestors’ development under the smiling sub-Saharan sun makes Afro-Americans less individualistic and less obsessed with controlling nature than whites with their dog-eat-dog heritage of ice-age struggle? It should be obvious that the foregoing are just as wrongly and every bit as inaccurately stereotypical as older myths concerning Afro-Americans’ natural proclivity for dancing and aptitude for sports. That these more modern myths are repeated today as if they are actual cultural factors is unfortunate but not at all surprising.

There are arguably a number of things on which one might agree with Tommie Shelby when he refers to “black forms of cultural life,” but it is surely a long leap from such an acknowledgment to the romantic notion that there is a distinct black culture in the United States. Nevertheless, commentators often conjure up simplistic and unjustified accounts that “generally characterize black culture as fundamentally oral, communal, harmonious, emotive, spontaneous, spiritual, earthy, experiential, improvisational, colorful, sensual, uninhibited, dialogical, inclusive, and democratic. White culture, by contrast, is often viewed as essentially logocentric, individualistic, antagonistic, rationalistic, formal, materialistic, abstract, cerebral, rigid, bland, repressed, monological, and hegemonic.”

That these nonsensical and, indeed, racist notions of black circularity and white linearity filter down to society in general may be seen in Frazier’s personal comparison of white and black cultures in the United States. Pointing out the “great strengths of European American culture and traits” she sees in herself “to a degree,” she mentions that her mother’s “thoughtful preparation shows others that she cares and makes for better presentation.” Frazier also cites her mother as “a planner who values attention to detail.” In contrast to this stereotypical portrait of white culture as organized and in control, of the “great strengths of African American culture and traits” she sees in herself “to a degree,” Frazier is able to come up with her father’s “going with the flow,” his “spontaneity,” and his being able to “make things work with whatever he has.”

To the potential objection that I am wrongly generalizing the traits of Frazier’s parents to whites and blacks, I reply that it is Frazier herself who promotes precisely such an overt generalization by offering her parents’ examples not as individual idiosyncrasies but explicitly as “cultural differences.” It is Frazier who describes European American culture as “a culture that expects the expected,” and Afro-American culture as “a culture that expects the unexpected.” In this stereotypical binary-opposition is a reflection of the hierarchy of the US racial order, with Frazier conceiving of whites as “expecting the expected,” implying both that they know what to expect and that they know what to do about it; and blacks as “expecting the
unexpected,” implying that they are not in control of themselves and therefore operate continually in a reactionary mode—in response presumably to the directed and controlling actions of whites.

Beyond these offensive stereotypes, there is an unthinking tendency to postulate competing varieties of singular Afro-American cultures as if all Afro-Americans can be placed into one particular cultural framework. One such postulation has it that Afro-American culture is essentially urban, violent, and interested in getting rich quickly outside of normal occupational channels. There surely are Afro-Americans for whom this would ring true, but the fact is that there are likely far more whites—especially suburban, white, teenage males—who adopt in a conscious way all or significant portions of this persona, and what are we to make of them? Are such white teens partaking in black culture? If so, are they as a result, then, black? Another model suggests a singular Afro-American culture that is rooted in “giving back to the community,” even if one did not come from or take anything from “the community,” and that stresses a continuing connection to the traditions of the Southern slave experience, even if one has no relevant personal connections to the American South.

In an article contending that the ideology of colorblindness on the one hand, and the racialization of poor blacks on the other, affect the racial identity choices of biracial Americans, Korgen first of all postulates a dominant “‘gangsta’ culture” for blacks, but then hedges her bets as to precisely whom this culture applies. Korgen avers initially that “many young well-to-do Black Americans feel the need to act as if they were raised on the streets of poor urban neighborhoods in order to be seen as ‘really’ Black,” but then a mere four pages later she asserts quite contradictorily that “many middle-class . . . Black Americans . . . resist the notion that they can’t be Black if they are not poor or do not share the cultural traits of poor Black Americans.” The reader is left to wonder which statement should be understood as being Korgen’s position on what constitutes “real” blackness.

Such cultural universalizing and assignation aside, it hardly needs stating that Afro-Americans are every bit as diverse in terms of their contemporary lives as whites or any other group, but it serves the interests of those who would keep them at the bottom of the US racial order that Afro-Americans remain mysterious and insular. The postulation of a separate and strange black culture is merely the modern and more acceptable equivalent of the past imposition of biological racial difference. As Shelby warns, “the sad fact is, some whites would be quite content, some would be enthusiastic, if blacks were to insist on remaining ‘different,’ as this would buttress white privilege and exacerbate black disadvantage.”

The fact is that to speak of these flavorings, these styles, as culture (or even subculture) is nonsensical. Shall we conclude that celebration of
Kwanzaa makes one an authentic practitioner of black culture? Or perhaps Kwanzaa plus verified love of barbeque chicken combined with the ability to dance the Electric Slide would suffice. And even if we were, somehow, for the sake of argument, to agree that this or that particular trivial style corresponded to even a subculture, it would be every bit as impossible to place many blacks in such a supposed black subculture as it would be to keep many whites out, which would in turn invalidate the very claim to it being a black subculture in the first place. But such debates usually escape our view since we never in the first place arrive at this level of analysis when dealing with Generation Mix or the overly simplistic coverage it garners from popular media outlets.

Not only is it impossible to place a supposed black racial group into a distinct black culture or subculture, but we must deal as well with the complication that people can very easily have more than one subculture to which they adhere simultaneously. Certainly there are many, many leanings strong enough to merit the designation of subculture. For some persons, surely, religion would constitute a very salient subculture. Yet one could easily imagine a mainline Protestant who was also a member of the gay subculture in the United States. Indeed, our imaginary person could in addition to these two subcultures be part of a fiercely dedicated environmentalist movement that might qualify as a subculture as well. So subcultures are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and they cut across other lines of organization, such as gender and class. It should be clear, then, that as in the cases of gender and class, race is not equivalent to culture or subculture. Rather, persons of supposed different racial groups do not entail discrete subcultures qua racial groups, but instead all partake of the practically limitless possibilities that subcultural affiliation offers.

Indeed, it is far more defensible to postulate an American hip-hop subculture than any singular Afro-American subculture. Even though a hip-hop subculture would likely be populated mostly by Afro-Americans it would certainly not be exclusively Afro-American by any means. It would include sizable Asian, white, and Hispanic elements as well. And even if one were to argue that the basis of hip-hop is some aspect of the many Afro-American experiences in this country, such a conclusion in no way entails that a hip-hop subculture would itself be constituted as exclusively Afro-American. The very catholicity of hip-hop makes this plain enough. Therefore, we will find that some Afro-Americans are part of a hip-hop subculture, while many are not; likewise, some Asians, whites, and Hispanics are part of a hip-hop subculture, while many are not. The hip-hop example is yet another means of demonstrating that it is simply impossible to argue successfully that there is a black culture or subculture in the United States and that such a culture or subculture is synonymous or coextensive with racial blackness, however the latter might be constituted.
If race is not culture, then, it clearly would be a significant problem for the American Multiracial Identity Movement to treat it as though it were. So let us turn to the voices of the movement—scholarly, activist, and rank-and-file voices—to determine if indeed such a huge mistake is made in support of arguments on behalf of Generation Mix. Romano provides an initial indication as she reports on one black woman’s plan for how she and her white husband will raise their soon-to-be-born multiracial child: “We’re going to teach you both cultures, your black side and your white side, and you’re not going to have to choose, if we can help it.”32 This example demonstrates, as will those that follow, an unquestioned and overt substitution of race for culture and culture for race that is as contradictory as it is unproblematic. The sticky problem, though, is that were multiracialism to disengage itself from its wrongful embrace of culture it would then have only the false consciousness of biological race with which to state its case.

Broadcast journalist Elliott Lewis writes that multiracial families are “insisting on identifying as multiracial to better reflect their multicultural upbringing.”33 One wonders, though, why such families are not therefore insisting on identifying as multicultural rather than multiracial if, as Lewis implies, multiculturality is the relevant distinction. But there is no cultural difference, and the subcultural difference—if conceived of as ethnic difference—is irrelevant to the racial issues put forth and the racial arguments being claimed here. To ensure that we are not misunderstanding Lewis we may turn to his account of one woman’s embrace of multiraciality, in which he notes that there is “more to Amanda’s embrace of her Japanese heritage than the racist actions of others.”34 But of course, Amanda’s Japanese heritage is ethnicity, which has to do with culture, not race. Considering another woman’s “attitude when it comes to identifying as multiracial,” Lewis nonetheless cites her speaking of “all my cultures, all my heritages,” which, again quite obviously is ethnicity—and therefore culture—not race.35

Writing about yet another member of Generation Mix, Charles Yesuwan, Lewis touts this person’s “ethnic background.”36 Acknowledging the contradiction, Lewis then offers Yesuwan’s explanation that although he is a “multiethnic Asian,” he nonetheless considers himself racially “mixed because [he is] a product of those different cultures and heritages and customs.”37 Yet whither multiraciality as raciality? Despite the clear ethnic—and thus cultural—concepts invoked, Yesuwan was nevertheless “taking part in a national awareness tour on the mixed-race experience.”38 Similarly, and also blurring the differences between race, culture, and ethnicity, Frazier claims that multiracial people “easily move in and out of different racial and ethnic settings because of our multicultural upbringing.”39 Are these no more than yet additional examples of the kitchen-sink strategy of simply throwing arguments into the ring? Is the issue multiracial identity, is it multiethnic identity, is it multicultural identity, or can we simply label as
multiracial anything we want to feel special about? This is no small point, for the black/white mixed-race dynamic is distinctly different from these dilemmas of ethnic identity—particularly those having an Asian component—yet all are rolled unproblematically into the same argument for Generation Mix multiracial identity.

From a scholarly perspective, Ursula Brown offers that “biracial children are not just black or white; rather they incorporate both black and white identity parts in one body and one self.” Yet Brown does not describe or otherwise quantify these “identity parts” for us. However, since she mentions both “one body and one self” it is fair to assume that she intends for biological race to have a prominent import here. Commenting on the switch in federal policy regarding the collection of race information that replaced the previous instruction to mark one only with the current instruction to mark all that apply, Brown writes that “hopefully this change will enable mixed-race parents to teach their children that they are, and culturally can be, part of both racial groups.” Yet here we are again mixing race and culture in such a way that they become interchangeable, indistinguishable from each other. Speaking in general terms, anyone can be, subculturally, part of nearly any racial group, for culture has nothing to do with race. So declarations that this or that black/white teenager is comfortable in both white and black alleged cultural settings are irrelevant completely to any proper analysis of multiracial identity as a racial identity.

Marion Kilson writes that her multiracial survey participants “value not only their ability to move comfortably within and between different cultures but their insights into different cultural worlds, which they perceive derive from their multicultural experiences as Biracial Americans.” Yet again, is the issue biraciality or biculturality? It is plain to see that Kilson is blurring race and culture quite consciously here, for she does it more than once: “Many [multiracial people] attribute their ability to move comfortably between cultures to their Biracial heritage. Several people spoke of viewing themselves as ‘bridges’ between cultures and valuing that role, while others talked of moving easily between cultural worlds.” Finally, Kilson again conveys very clearly the notion that multiracial persons are human racial bridges because of culture when she writes that “Biracial Americans, then, perceive themselves to be facile cross-cultural navigators and take pride in that role.” The contradiction here is stunning, surpassed only by the fact that so few commentators have made the effort to point it out. Moreover, in the midst of this exaggerated excitement over cultural bridging we would do well to consider Shelby’s rather rational observation that “it must nevertheless be relatively rare that dialogue breaks down because blacks fail to understand the cultural ways of white folk.”

It should also go without saying that the concept of racial bridging cannot refer to mere linguistic code switching, which is something completely
different than the purported skill of being a natural racial mediator. Code switching, or altering one’s speech patterns depending on one’s immediate environment, might be seen as a useful skill for a racial mediator, but it certainly does not constitute racial mediation in and of itself. Afro-Americans have been code switching between Standard English and Black Vernacular English for centuries—and quite extensively and quite exponentially since at least the early twentieth century—and yet it has not had the least effect on bridging the racial divide between them and whites.

Given the sloppy substitution of race for culture, and culture for race, that we have seen is endemic to multiracial rhetoric, it will come as no surprise, then, to learn that one of Kilson’s respondents boasts of possessing expertise in racial mediation with the startling revelation that “I change my speech.” Given what has already gone before in my critique of the racial-bridge notion, this admittedly is a trivial example, but I utilize it nonetheless because it so very well illustrates the tone of the Generation Mix intellectual endeavor that I have been framing and critiquing. Another respondent, in describing the art of racial shuttling, reveals that “when I’m with my White family, the terms are okay; ‘now I’m with my White family, what do I do with all this other stuff?’ When I’m in my Black community, ‘What do I do with all this other stuff?’” However, the “stuff” referred to here is no more the essence of blackness than are a hooded sweatshirt, a taste for soul food, or a Kwanzaa greeting card.

This is yet another example of the confusion between what might be called emblems of blackness (emblems that might be appropriated by anyone, however) with the concept of blackness itself. And whether blackness is in the end a false consciousness or not, the “stuff” that Kilson’s respondent believes is racial “stuff” is surely nothing of the sort. Indeed, when one considers the words of Generation Mix activists, scholars, and rank-and-file members, one finds no real arguments as to precisely how multiraciality as a specific kind of raciality grants to its members any sort of special skill at racial mediation. Rather, all the arguments presented revolve consistently around shuttling between cultures, straddling cultures, and the overly hyped transgressivity of linguistic code switching.

Nikki Khanna points out the enormous error made by these researchers in failing to distinguish what respondents are really saying when they talk about culture and race. According to Khanna: “When describing differences between black and white ‘cultures,’ respondents frequently describe characteristics that appear related less to a race’s ‘culture’ and more to social class.” Writing of her own black/white interview subjects, Khanna notes that “they often reduce ‘black culture’ and ‘white culture’ to oversimplified, one-dimensional images (e.g., white people speak Standard English, listen to rock and roll, drive trucks, value education; black people speak Ebonics, listen to hip-hop or R&B music, do not value education).” Additionally,
she finds that “for some biracial respondents, their perceptions of ‘white culture’ and ‘black culture’ reflect social class disparities found between blacks and whites in the larger American society.”\textsuperscript{50} What therefore distinguishes Khanna from the researchers I have critiqued above is her astute understanding that “what is often described by these biracial respondents as ‘cultural’ differences between blacks and whites arguably reflect differences in social class, not race alone.”\textsuperscript{51} As we recognize the necessity of refusing the simplistic bait of equating race with culture, we would do well to heed Samira Kawash’s advice that “if we are to take seriously the idea that race is not a biological but a cultural fiction, then we must confront not only the fictionality of the biological way of understanding race but also the fictionality of the cultural way of seeing race.”\textsuperscript{52}

The second way the Generation Mix claim regarding the skill of racial mediation is wildly wrong has to do with what I termed above the marriage error. Even apart from questions of the gross misuse of the concept of culture, the Generation Mix argument for racial mediation hangs on the presumption that being related closely to a person of another race and spending considerable time with that person (such as growing up under said person’s parental care) will result in one having access to, being able to understand, and being able to replicate that other person’s racial mindset. This is, again, the sort of inane fluff that glossy newsmagazines dispense to an unreflective readership whenever it is time to do another story on the perils and pitfalls of mixed-race identity.

Contrary to popular opinion—and realizing full well that what I am about to give voice to is supposed to remain unspeakable—if a black/white child grows up believing she is not white (whether believing she is black or mixed-race), that child will not have access to whiteness. The child may have a white parent and may spend considerable time with white people, but unless the child believes she is white and grows up as white, she will not have access to whiteness. When I mention “access to whiteness” in this context I am referring specifically to the sort of unique entrée, insider understanding, or special knowledge that is being touted as the exclusive domain of multiracial individuals, especially black/white persons, in regard to their alleged expertise as racial bridges. And let there be no doubt that such exclusive dominion is precisely what is being claimed or else it would not in the first place be ballyhooed as so very, very noteworthy a skill as to distinguish multiracial people from everyone else.

There is a very simple truth that has somehow escaped notice in both the popular and scholarly discussions concerning racial bridging. That simple truth is the reality that neither looking white nor being taken for white occasionally are the same thing as experiencing life as white—or, speaking more properly, experiencing the false consciousness of whiteness—for there are far deeper ideological considerations and ingrained expectations than
that. To assert that a black/white person (who does not identify as white) understands whiteness simply because of her home life is to diminish grossly and irresponsibly the tremendous power of race and racism in the United States. It is to trivialize the oldest and longest-lasting (along with sexism) self-induced scourge this nation has yet to free itself of. And the US racial structure itself is far from accommodating this idea of bidirectional racial flexibility. After all, one unchanging fact of life in the United States is that black/white persons are free to be mixed or black, but they are not welcomed into whiteness as long as their sub-Saharan African ancestry is known.

Recognizing that it nonetheless is a false consciousness, what we might call participation in whiteness consists in a particular state of mind (believing that one is white) that coheres with a particular experience (being perceived by others as white), and that carries with it both observed and unobserved white privilege. Absent one or the other of these two states (belief plus experience), one does not partake in whiteness. It is the reciprocity of these internal and external states that brings true participation in the false consciousness of whiteness. Merely living with a white parent or white siblings does not. Therefore, the person who believes she is multiracial, regardless of how she is perceived by others, does not participate in whiteness any more than does the person who believes he is black but is perceived by others as white.

Seeing, talking with, and living with someone who identifies as white may give one important insights into that person’s personality and psychology, but the point I will stress over and over (because it so very crucial) is that such contact, however intimate, does not by itself grant one unique access to understanding the nature of whiteness in a way that then results in an ability to mediate racial conflict. This purported ability has been asserted time and again by multiracial persons, by movement activists, and by scholars who support multiracial identity, but the fundamental and always unrecognized key point is that despite the endless assertions, it has not been supported by the least bit of anything approaching actual argument or proof.

Let us once again reorient ourselves in terms of the specific claim being advanced. Multiracial persons, including and especially black/white persons, are said to be situated uniquely to serve as racial bridges because of their mixed racial parentage. We should first of all ensure that this is not a biological claim—that we are not talking about a claim to a genetic kind of racial imprinting that for all practical purposes operates at the level of instinct. Such a conceptualization of the factors behind racial bridging would leave us with the absurd conclusion that a black/white person who did not know she was mixed racially, perhaps having been adopted and raised as black by a black couple, would nonetheless possess the skill of racial mediation purely because of her genetic heritage. I am unaware of any multira-
cial advocate—even on the fringe of the farthest fringe—making such a claim, and so we may feel comfortable in retiring it at this point.

But if the special power of racial bridging does not have a genetic basis, it must then have a social basis. It must be, therefore, that the unique form of racial mediation being advanced by the multiracial movement, if not inherited biologically, is instead a skill born of social interaction and social experience. Yet how sensible is this? In asking the question I want especially to maintain an emphasis on the assertion that mixed persons are talented uniquely in this way. It is critical to not elide the distinction between just anyone being good at racial mediation and multiracial persons being very good at it, for the central claim under consideration is that multiracial persons are especially good at racial mediation, precisely because they are multiracial.

On this view, one supposes that children adopted transracially would be just as good as multiracial persons at being racial mediators, for this special trait stems from social contact and not from biology. Naturally, children fostered transracially would also fall into the same category and would therefore also possess the same cross-racial mediatory skills. Or perhaps only some would be, for such children might be adopted or fostered, as the case may be, by a monoracial parent set and, if so, they would not have parents of two different races. Indeed, outside of celebrities and other famous people, we do not expect white children to be adopted by Afro-American parents. But is there any reason—beyond our being told so, always sans evidence—to suppose that this racial-bridging phenomenon actually takes place? It has certainly been declared time and time again, as we have seen above, and quite apparently with complete certainty; however, I am of the opinion that we might perhaps think about and examine this proposition before accepting it as truth.

Structurally, the argument being proffered by the American Multiracial Identity Movement is that growing up with one parent who is in some significant way different from the other parent gives one access to the essentiality of that parental difference, such that one is then able—specifically from the perspective of either parent’s particular difference—to interact empathetically with other people from either parental group, and that in the multiracial case specifically one is able to do this in a distinctive way not available to monoracial persons or, one supposes, to multiracial persons who for whatever reason have parents of the same race. Therefore, as the argument is deployed, if one has one black parent and one white parent, one is thereby situated uniquely to mediate conflict successfully between blacks and whites; and one is able to accomplish this precisely because one is the child of these differently raced parents. But, I dare ask, why so? Surely we are not speaking simply of the mundane notion that being acquainted with someone, as a friend, classmate, or work colleague, means that one possibly
comes to know that person better as a result. This is something that anyone is certainly capable of, and it happens every day. No, the Generation Mix racial-bridging argument goes much deeper than this, and is expressly about a unique skill in regard to racial mediation, a skill that is based expressly on one’s status as multiracial.

It therefore must be something significantly more than talking to a workmate over lunch every day and hearing that person give her side of things. It therefore must be something significantly more than working on a semester-long group project with a classmate and having him explain his perspective. If it were merely something along the lines of these trivial examples it would be nothing special and it would not require a multiracial identity in order for the skill to be conferred. Yet Frazier says just as much in making the racial-bridging claim: “I have friends in both worlds. I see things from a different perspective that enables me to see both sides of a situation. I can understand where a black person might be coming from, but I can also understand where a white person might be coming from. And that enables me to be a person to help the two sides understand one another.”

Frazier’s structuring of the claim, by placing the point about friends first, implies that it is her having “friends in both worlds” that makes all this possible, rather than multiraciality itself. This would make anyone with “friends in both worlds” a potential racial mediator. On the other hand, if that is a misinterpretation on my part, and the point about having such friends is meant to be subordinate to multiraciality, Frazier would of necessity then have to be arguing that it takes being multiracial in order to have “friends in both worlds,” which, ignoring its patent falseness, would perhaps represent yet another Generation Mix superpower. But the argument breaks down even before we arrive at this point, for according to racial-bridging logic it is clear that one need not have a multiracial identity in order to have this skill. I am thinking here of a black/white interracial couple who have a multiracial child and subsequently adopt a black child. On the assumptions of the racial-bridging schema, that black child should be as proficient at black/white racial mediation as his mixed-race adopted sibling. Indeed, we need not even posit a black child, for should this same couple adopt an Asian child, that Asian child should also develop the special skill of mediating racial conflict between blacks and whites. Presumably, in accordance with the logic of the racial-bridging claim, both the black child and the Asian child will undergo the same processes of parental interaction or, indeed, mere observation, that would grant black/white racial bridging skills to the multiracial child, for it is social interaction and not biology that brings about the purported special skill, although one would then have to do what has yet to be done, which is to provide a coherent argument that such parental social interaction is different significantly from the trivial examples given above.
Note that I am not claiming that the black or Asian child adopted by a black/white couple will in fact have the same experiences as that couple’s black/white children by birth. What I am pointing out is that according to the logic of the racial-bridging claim, if the special skill of racial mediation is not based in biology but is based instead in social interaction, then both the black child and the Asian child adopted by a black/white interracial couple will go through the same processes that grant the skill of racial mediation between blacks and whites, whatever those processes may be. The key is that, if one takes the logic of the racial-bridging argument seriously, one then of necessity affirms that racial mediation expertise derives simply from living with parents of different races, such that the adopted Asian child of a black father and a white mother will possess in a unique way the skill of mediating conflict between blacks and whites. It is the simplistic logic of the racial-bridging claim that leads to such absurd conclusions as this.

What is holding this entire fallacious structure in place is the erroneous idea that family life somehow confers an access to race that is beyond—and in a very significant way—that conferred by the more trivial friendship, school, or workplace associations mentioned above. I do not think that it does, however, for this is yet another one of those uninvestigated and always unproblematicized common sense assertions that the American Multiracial Identity Movement has become expert at tossing into the kitchen sink of multiracial special pleading. With neither the popular media nor multiracially supporting scholars inclined to acknowledge or otherwise contend with these sorts of errors, merely floating such ideas is all that is required in order to see them seated firmly into popular discourse. Yet I nonetheless question expressly the heretofore uncritiqued assertion that being multiracial and having parents of two ostensibly different races gives to one a set of racial mediation skills significantly above and beyond the trivial examples of friendship, school, and workplace associations. I can surely anticipate the criticism that the racial-bridging claim was never meant to be held to such logical scrutiny, that I am overanalyzing it, but I reject such counterarguments in the strongest terms. If a claim is made, particularly an important claim such as this, then it ought to withstand rational examination or otherwise be withdrawn summarily.

Much as in the case of the somewhat related and just as smarmy assertion that interracial marriage is emblematic of harmony between the races (as if monoracial marriage were emblematic of harmony within the races), the commonsense notions about multiracial life in an interracial family require serious unpacking before they are accepted. In addition to the complication that members of such families may very easily hold thoughts and feelings about their own particular family members that diverge wildly from their thoughts and feelings about said family members’ groups in general, we have also the fact that family life and parental influence are not the over-
arching factors that simplistic analysis would have us believe. In terms of the former, there is nothing impossible about a white person who is married to a black person but who nonetheless is an antiblack racist. Nor is there anything impossible about the reverse case, as people have a remarkable capacity for selfishly inconsistent behavior. One’s spouse, partner, parent, or child may very easily be set apart as an exception to a generalized racist outlook.

And in terms of parental weight, there is the reality that peer influence becomes a larger and larger factor as one’s development progresses. As the individual expands her horizons by attending school and going outside to play unsupervised with friends, those other associations compete with and eventually supplant parental influence. All of which is to state that parental and family influence—as they are conceived specifically in the racial-bridging schema—are exaggerated to quite a strong degree. To be sure, parental and family influences, when present, account for their fair share of a child’s development; however, the flowery assumption fostered by the racial-bridging argument is far too naïve. Put simply, it is much more complicated than that, despite multiracial advocates’ insistence on proffering those extraordinarily simplistic analyses.

Writing about multiracial people and intimate interracial relationships, Courtney Bonam and Margaret Shih overlook completely the foregoing inconvenient facts and instead offer the sentimentalized and unproblematized view that “Multiracial youth often grow up in interracial families in which they observe people of different backgrounds living together in harmony, contradicting society’s messages about the inevitability of racial conflicts.” Their study, though, contains no evaluation whatsoever of this claimed harmoniousness of interracial households. To merely state it, apparently, is enough. I will, however, continue to insist that when these kinds of unverified presumptions are built into a research model, that particular model cannot help but be tainted either by the careless failure to substantiate such a key presumption or by the specific bias of the presumption itself, or, very likely, by both.

It is not only academics who stand guilty of attempting to wish the racial-bridging thesis into reality. For example, Frazier sees the possible salvation of the nation itself as being bound up with racial mixing when she avers that “American social problems may increase if mixing doesn’t happen. Racial tensions are as high as they’ve ever been. Interracial families, however, ameliorate tension by bringing diverse people together.” Given that racial tensions were a good bit higher, and demonstrably so, during, say, the years leading up to the American Civil War (the Compromise of 1850, the Kansas-Nebraska Act, Bloody Kansas, the Dred Scott Decision, John Brown’s Raid, etc.), during the Reconstruction and Redemption periods, during the horrendous decades of lynching and Jim Crow, as well as
during the Civil Rights and Black Power Eras, one could be forgiven for supposing that Frazier is engaging in significant exaggeration here—exaggeration that extends as well to her unsupported thesis concerning the ameliorative effects of race mixing.

Since, as is usual in the cases of pro-multiracial assertions, there is absolutely no actual empirical evidence to support the racial-bridging claim, what is the best similar case we might be able to use in order to obtain a sense of the argument’s validity? The best and most obvious case is the institution of marriage, which involves persons of different sexes (overwhelmingly, despite new laws and court challenges here and there) living together in close intimacy. Importantly, given that we are investigating an argument involving racial difference, sexual difference is likewise taken to be a primary difference, a fundamental difference, an elemental difference—much as racial difference is taken to be—and so it should serve therefore as a very useful indicator of the validity of the racial-bridging argument.

If simply living together is supposed to confer a privileged access to essentialist racial empathy, then we should expect the most significant act of living together to bring about the same results in the area of sexual difference. If living with parents of two different races grants to the multiracial individual a unique ability to bridge the races, then living with a spouse of the opposite sex should grant to men a unique ability to mediate conflict with women, and it should grant to women a unique ability to mediate conflict with men. Indeed, if the structural presumptions of the racial-bridging argument are valid, then married households of opposing sexes should see an absolute minimum of intersexual misunderstanding and tension. This is the marriage error I mentioned earlier.

It hardly requires pointing out that far from married couples in the United States representing anything approaching the state of mediated, blissful and “harmonious” understanding we would expect were the racial-bridging structure to actually be valid, the US institution of marriage is more accurately conceived as a disaster of endlessly replicated serial monogamy driving the nation’s horrendous divorce rate continually in an ever upward direction. Moreover, based on this simplistic view of marriage and on interracial marriage as a symbol of extra-special love, black/white couples should never divorce. However, a glance through any of the survey research shows quite a different story, for in that literature we tend to find significant numbers of black/white individuals with divorced parents. Indeed, if any such naïve theory of racial bridging accomplished by the progeny of interracial marriage were actually true, it might have to be based most ironically on many multiracial individuals growing up with only one parent present in the home.

Indeed, there is a reason for the gaping absence of anything approaching evidentiary justification by the champions of racial bridging who claim
“harmonious” interracial marriages (and especially black/white marriages) as a cause. And that is the inconvenient fact that actual research reveals quite the opposite to be true. In an article investigating “the relative marital stability of interracial and same-race marriages,” Jenifer Bratter and Rosalind King report two conclusions that are particularly relevant to the present discussion. The first conclusion is that “generally, non-Whites who intermarry experienced less marital stability than their same-race married coethnics,” and that even taking into account differences between the various groups in question (a complication the apologists for “harmonious” interracial marriages and racial bridging never trouble themselves to consider), “interracial marriages overall are more prone to divorce.”

The second very significant conclusion is that “compared to White/White couples,” interracial marriages involving white women and black men “were more prone to divorce.” Indeed, the authors reiterate their finding that black/white marriages, “specifically those involving Black men and White women, have the highest likelihood of disruption of any White/non-White marriages.” Insofar as black/white marriage is concerned, the black man/white woman combination represents the predominant pattern in the United States. As Khanna reports: “In 2000, black men had white wives 2.65 times more often than black women had white husbands,” a fact that, when considered in the context of Bratter and King’s research, quite simply proves fatal to any claim suggesting that the “harmoniousness” of black/white intermarriages leads to the unique skill of racial bridging on the part of multiracial offspring.

Moreover, in an article discussing the relative psychological distress experienced by interracially married partners, Bratter again, this time with Karl Eschbach, finds “a significantly increased rate of distress” for white women married to black men. They conclude that in the case of black/white marriage, “the increase in distress for persons in these relationships is specific to the white partner, and especially white wives with African American husbands.” We may therefore draw two very significant conclusions from the research of Bratter, King, and Eschbach: (1) that claims concerning interracial marriage that fail to take into account the differences within and among the various groups in question are flawed inherently, and (2) that generalized and oversimplified celebrations concerning the “harmoniousness” of interracial marriages, black/white marriages in particular, are based on nothing more than wishful thinking and unreflective fantasy.

But even apart from these devastating empirical revelations, the racial-bridging model fails the most basic tests of logical consistency. If living with someone is supposed to result in special understanding with regard to racial difference, then it is absolutely reasonable to infer that it should also result in special understanding with regard to sexual difference. If living
with someone of a different race is supposed to result in a unique ability to serve as a mediator for people of that race, then living with someone of a different sex should likewise result in a unique ability to serve as a mediator for people of that sex, since the driving idea is that living with essentialist difference results in special understanding and access to that essentialist difference in a way that qualifies, equips, and practically deputizes the individual to serve in a mediative way between the groups in question.

To be as direct as possible, this is complete nonsense, regardless of how often it might be repeated and accepted blindly over and over again. Merely living together does not bring women and men together in this way, it does not give them access to each other’s essentialities, and it certainly does not equip them uniquely to mediate conflict between the sexes. Indeed, in many cases marriage actually intensifies and worsens that sexual conflict. So the blanket, unquestioned, commonsense assertion that living together grants one this specific kind of access and mediatory skill—whether in terms of sex or in terms of race—while popular and accepted, is patently false. As is the case with so much of multiracial ideology, the claim of racial bridging is merely stated without the least bit of critical backing, while no one inside the movement, and precious few outside it, care to point out the inconsistency. It is no more than an unproven desire, a case of wishful thinking, based on a supposed alterity of multiracial people that harks back to the marginal man.

In order to place the racial-bridging claim in context, it will be useful to return to Robert Park’s declaration of mulatto superiority over Negroes—a superiority based on intimate contact with white people: “The mulatto and the mixed blood are, for the reasons I have described, the product of a double inheritance, biological and cultural, that is different from that of the black man. If the mulatto displays intellectual characteristics and personality traits superior to and different from those of the black man, it is not because of his biological inheritance merely, but rather more, I am inclined to believe, because of his more intimate association with the superior cultural group.”

The modern-day claim that Generation Mix has a racial-bridging superpower based purely on social contact is precisely the kind of superiority that Park attested to mulattoes possessing over monoracial blacks nearly eight decades ago. Is this the extent of the progress we have made since 1931?

While admittedly anecdotal, I nonetheless think it very useful and perfectly appropriate here to close this chapter’s discussion by reflecting on my own experience of living at home with a white mother for the first twenty-two years of my life. In undergoing this reflection I can state quite honestly and for the record that being putatively black/white racially mixed and living with a white mother did not give me any special access to whiteness nor did it render me in any way qualified—whether uniquely or not—to serve as a racial bridge between whites and blacks any more than it qualified me to
serve as a bridge between females and males, between Germans and Americans, between persons with blue eyes and persons with brown eyes, or between persons whose first names begin with the letter “L” and those whose first names begin with the letter “J.”

While I am quite obviously satirizing the idea of racial bridging through the use of the latter facetious examples, I want to make it clear that I do not take racial identity itself to be a trivial status in US society. It is a false consciousness, to be sure, but hardly trivial nonetheless. The simple reality is that the members of Generation Mix put forth the nonsensical myth of the racial-bridging super power because they want desperately to believe this about themselves. They want to believe that being mixed racially confers upon them the power to serve as racial bridges, and so they say that it does. And they are facilitated in this wish by pro-multiracial academics such as Kilson and Korgen, who record such desires during their interviews of multiracial youth, and then report those desires as fact while neglecting conveniently their academic duty to apply scholarly objectivity and critical tools to their published work. It is much easier to assume the role of scholarly cheerleader and pretend that multiracial identity will lead to the deconstruction of race in the United States, than to actually engage in something along the lines of academic work in pursuit of proving that particular claim.

Sexton is correct in pointing out to us that the assumption that racism is “undermined by the proliferation of now permissible race mixture and the correlated growth in multiracial self-identification requires, at the very least, gross historical amnesia and acute political naïveté.” As no less a giant than James Baldwin has stated, blacks know whites; indeed, that has never been a problem. Knowing them has not done anything to lessen racism, however. “The American Negro has the great advantage of having never believed that collection of myths to which white Americans cling. . . . Negroes know far more about white Americans than that; it can almost be said, in fact, that they know about white Americans what parents—or, anyway, mothers—know about their children.” “Ask any Negro what he knows about the white people with whom he works. And then ask the white people with whom he works what they know about him.”

Moreover, as Moran writes, “the idea that intermarriage will serve as a natural melting pot for the races is an insidious myth, one that masks the magnitude of the marriage gap for blacks as compared to Asian Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans.” Indeed, in Moran’s view, “multiracialism is apt to work best at mediating race relations where it is needed least. Groups already intermarrying in substantial numbers will produce offspring who can bridge an ever narrowing social divide.” And we will note here with some significance that Moran writes specifically of bridging a “social divide,” not a “racial divide.”
Notes


4. Although an actual analysis would be far more complicated, the standard view contrasting Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois, for example, provides a useful sense of Reuter’s thought here in regard to Southern versus Northern mulatto attitudes.


6. As Squires points out, “indeed, as has happened sporadically with Asian Americans, multiracial people seem to be moving into a ‘model minority’ niche in mainstream news media accounts of their rise to visibility and demographic critical mass.” Squires, Dispatches from the Color Line, 2.


8. In reading the citations that follow, it is important to note that some are the objective reports of careful scholars on what other people are thinking and saying in regard to multiracial persons supposedly serving as racial bridges, while others are the pronouncements of decidedly less careful scholars who personally support that same flawed premise.


14. Ibid.

15. Sundee T. Frazier, Check All That Apply: Finding Wholeness as a Multiracial Person (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 131, 135.


18. I acknowledge that some readers may take issue with one or more of these adjectives. Some are expressed more intensely than others, but I hold that all still apply.


20. Ibid., 163–164.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid., 95, 96.
24. Ibid., 95.
25. Ibid.
27. Ibid., 31, 35.
29. The Electric Slide is an omni-generational line dance that is popular with many Afro-Americans.
30. As Shelby asks most incisively: “Are there distinctly black norms of etiquette or black social values? Is there a black ethics, epistemology, or aesthetic? Are there uniquely black styles of dress, hairstyles, or modes of speech? While some of these are no doubt interesting questions, there is no reason to believe, and in fact every reason to doubt, that blacks can achieve anything like consensus on such matters.” Shelby, *We Who Are Dark*, 225.
31. I could certainly see a similar objection to there being a gay subculture as such, just as I have argued that there is no black subculture in the United States, that gayness is perhaps an attribute much like blackness, as opposed to constituting a discrete culture or subculture. I would not take issue with such a position if argued for competently.
34. Ibid., 257.
35. Ibid., 365.
36. Ibid., 265.
37. Ibid., 265–266.
38. Ibid., 265.
41. Ibid., 113. Italics added.
42. Marion Kilson, *Claiming Place: Biracial Young Adults of the Post–Civil Rights Era* (Westport, CT: Bergin and Garvey, 2001), 55. Italics added.
43. Ibid., 81. Italics added.
44. Ibid. Italics added.
45. Shelby, *We Who Are Dark*, 182.
46. Quoted in Kilson, *Claiming Place*, 145.
47. Ibid.
49. Ibid., 65.
50. Ibid.
51. Ibid., 61.
56. Jenifer Bratter and Rosalind King report that “over the past few decades, the rate of divorce (per 1,000 married women aged 15 years and older) rose from 14.9 in 1970—the year before the introduction of no-fault divorce laws—to a peak of 22.6 in 1980 and then declined and stabilized to around 20.0 during the 1990s.” Jenifer L. Bratter and Rosalind B. King, “‘But Will It Last?’ Marital Instability Among Interracial and Same-Race Couples,” *Family Relations* 57 (April 2008): 161.
57. Ibid., 169.
58. Ibid., 160.
59. Ibid., 169.
62. Ibid., 1040.
63. This is not to say that all black/white marriages are in distress or that all such marriages are doomed to failure. Rather, the larger point is that both the popular and the academic literature that takes for granted the “harmoniousness” of interracial marriage in general is simply wrong.
67. Ibid., 103.
69. Ibid., 178.