

Guess Who's Coming to Dinner

1. Describe each character:

	Background/Occupation	Values	Motivations	Concerns
Matt Drayton				
Christina Drayton				
Joey Drayton				
Dr. John Prentice Jr.				
John Prentice Sr.				
Mary Prentice				

2. Describe the reactions of both sets of parents to meeting their child's partner.



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3. What is revealed in the private conversations between:

→ Matt and Christina

→ Joey and John

→ Matt and John

4. What role does Monsignor Ryan play?

5. Under what ethical principle(s) was Joey brought up? How do you know?

6. Summarize Matt's final speech. In your own words, what was he telling his family and guests?

7. What surprised you most about the film? Why? Explain.



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OP-ED COLUMNIST

Guess Who's Coming to Dinner

By **FRANK RICH**

AND so: just how far have we come?

As a rough gauge last week, I watched a movie I hadn't seen since it came out when I was a teenager in 1967. Back then "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner" was Hollywood's idea of a stirring call for racial justice. The premise: A young white woman falls madly in love with a black man while visiting the University of Hawaii and brings him home to San Francisco to get her parents' blessing. Dad, a crusading newspaper publisher, and Mom, a modern art dealer, are wealthy white liberals — Katharine Hepburn and Spencer Tracy, no less — so surely there can be no problem. Complications ensue before everyone does the right thing.

Though the film was a box-office smash and received 10 Oscar nominations, even four decades ago it was widely ridiculed as dated by liberal critics. The hero, played by the first black Hollywood superstar, Sidney Poitier, was seen as too perfect and too "white" — an impossibly handsome doctor with Johns Hopkins and Yale on his résumé and a Nobel-worthy career fighting tropical diseases in Africa for the World Health Organization. What couple would not want him as a son-in-law? "He's so calm and sure of everything," says his fiancée. "He doesn't have any tensions in him." She is confident that every single one of their biracial children will grow up to "be president of the United States and they'll all have colorful administrations."

What a strange movie to confront in 2008. As the world knows, Barack Obama's own white mother and African father met at the University of Hawaii. In "Dreams From My Father," he even imagines the awkward dinner where his mother introduced her liberal-ish parents to her intended in 1959. But what's most startling about this archaic film is the sole element in it that proves inadvertently contemporary. Faced with a black man in the mold of the Poitier character — one who appears "so calm" and without "tensions" — white liberals can make utter fools of themselves. When Joe Biden spoke of Obama being "clean" and "articulate," he might have been recycling Spencer Tracy's lines of 41 years ago.

Biden's gaffe, though particularly naked, prefigured a larger pattern in the extraordinary election campaign that has brought an African-American to the brink of the presidency. Our political and news media establishments — fixated for months on tracking down every unreconstructed bigot in blue-collar America — have their own conspicuous racial myopia, with its own set of stereotypes and clichés. They consistently underestimated Obama's candidacy because they often saw him as a stand-in for the two-dimensional character Poitier had to shoulder in "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner." It's why so many got this election wrong so often.

There were countless ruminations, in print and on television, asking the same two rhetorical questions: "Is

He Black Enough?" and "Is He Tough Enough?" The implied answer to both was usually, "No." The brown-skinned child of biracial parents wasn't really "black" and wouldn't appeal to black voters who were overwhelmingly loyal to the wife of America's first "black" president. And as a former constitutional law professor, Obama was undoubtedly too lofty an intellectual to be a political street fighter, too much of a wuss to land a punch in a debate, too ethereal to connect to "real" Americans. He was Adlai Stevenson, Michael Dukakis or Bill Bradley in dark face — no populist pugilist like John Edwards.

The list of mistaken prognostications that grew from these flawed premises is long. As primary season began, we were repeatedly told that Hillary Clinton's campaign was the most battle-tested and disciplined, with an invincible organization and an unbeatable donors' network. Poor Obama had to settle for the ineffectual passion of the starry-eyed, Internet-fixated college kids who failed to elect Howard Dean in 2004. When Clinton lost in Iowa, no matter; Obama could never breach the "firewalls" that would wrap up her nomination by Super Tuesday. Neither the Clinton campaign nor the many who bought its spin noticed the take-no-prisoners political insurgency that Obama had built throughout the caucus states and that serves him to this day.

Once Obama wrested the nomination from Clinton by surpassing her in organization, cash and black votes, he was still often seen as too wimpy to take on the Republicans. This prognosis was codified by Karl Rove, whose punditry for The Wall Street Journal and Newsweek has been second only to Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert as a reliable source of laughs this year. Rove called Obama "lazy," and over the summer he predicted that his fund-raising had peaked in February and that he'd have a "serious problem" winning over Hispanics. Well, Obama was lazy like a fox, and is leading John McCain among Hispanics by 2 to 1. Obama has also pulled ahead among white women despite the widespread predictions that he'd never bring furious Hillary supporters into the fold.

But certainly the single most revelatory moment of the campaign — about the political establishment, not Obama — arrived in June when he reversed his position on taking public financing. This was a huge flip-flop (if no bigger than McCain's on the Bush tax cuts). But the reaction was priceless. Suddenly the political world discovered that far from being some exotic hothouse flower, Obama was a pol from Chicago. Up until then it rarely occurred to anyone that he had to be a ruthless competitor, not merely a sweet-talking orator, to reach the top of a political machine even rougher than the Clinton machine he had brought down. Whether that makes him more black or more white remains unresolved.

Early in the campaign, the black commentator Tavis Smiley took a lot of heat when he questioned all the rhetoric, much of it from white liberals, about Obama being "post-racial." Smiley pointed out that there is "no such thing in America as race transcendence." He is right of course. America can no sooner disown its racial legacy, starting with the original sin of slavery, than it can disown its flag; it's built into our DNA. Obama acknowledged as much in his landmark speech on race in Philadelphia in March.

Yet much has changed for the better since the era of "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner," thanks to the epic battles of the civil-rights movement that have made the Obama phenomenon possible. As Mark Harris reminds us in his recent book about late 1960s Hollywood, "Pictures at a Revolution," it was not until the year of the movie's release that the Warren Court handed down the Loving decision overturning laws that forbade interracial marriage in 16 states; in the film's final cut there's still an outdated line referring to the

possibility that the young couple's nuptials could be illegal (as Obama's parents' marriage would have been in, say, Virginia). In that same year of 1967, L.B.J.'s secretary of state, Dean Rusk, offered his resignation when his daughter, a Stanford student, announced her engagement to a black Georgetown grad working at NASA. (Johnson didn't accept it.)

Obama's message and genealogy alike embody what has changed in the decades since. When he speaks of red and blue America being seamlessly woven into the United States of America, it is always shorthand for the reconciliation of black and white and brown and yellow America as well. Demographically, that's where America is heading in the new century, and that will be its destiny no matter who wins the election this year.

Still, the country isn't there yet, and should Obama be elected, America will not be cleansed of its racial history or conflicts. It will still have a virtually all-white party as one of its two most powerful political organizations. There will still be white liberals who look at Obama and can't quite figure out what to make of his complex mixture of idealism and hard-knuckled political cunning, of his twin identities of international sojourner and conventional middle-class overachiever.

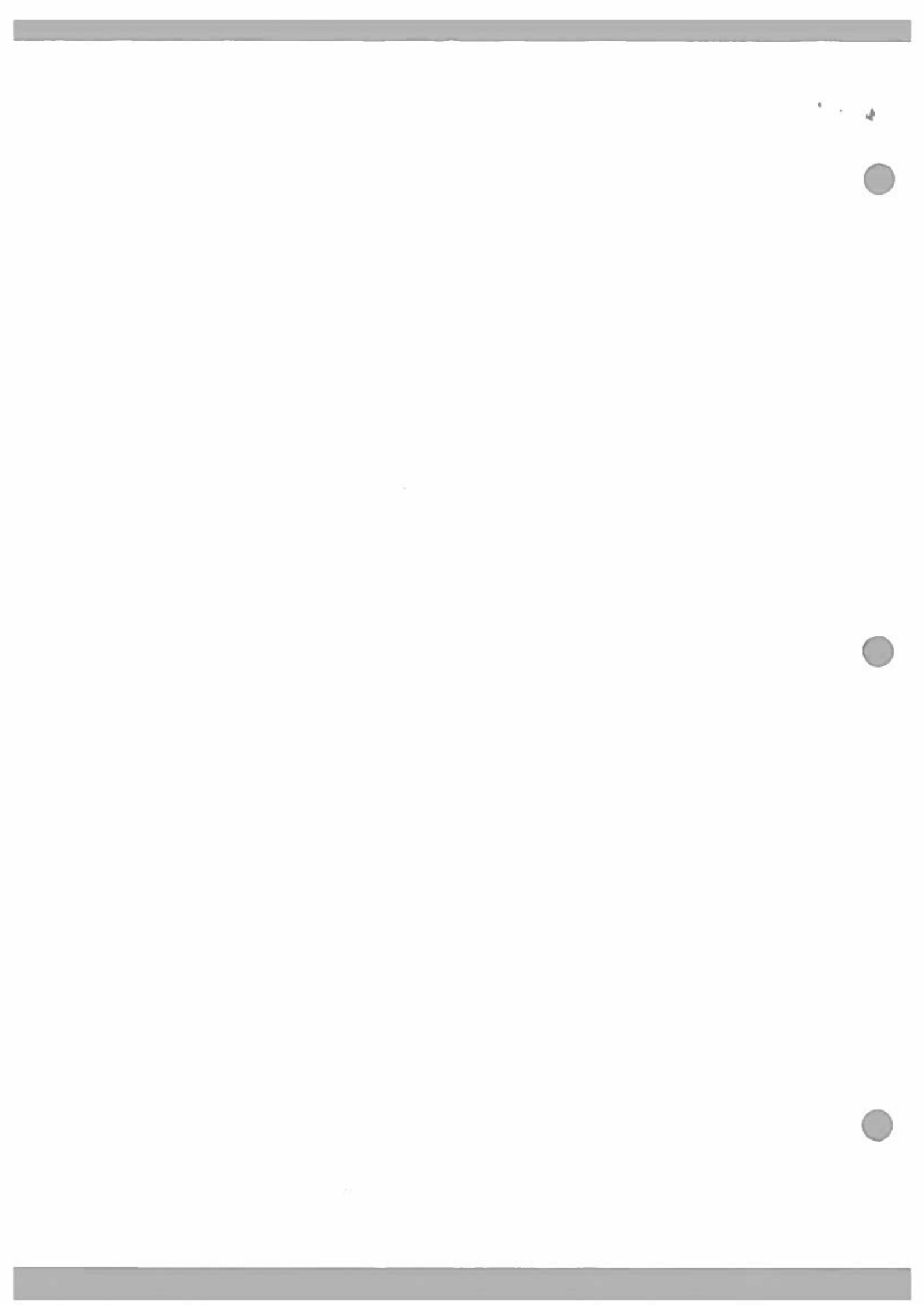
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Obama doesn't transcend race. He isn't post-race. He is the latest chapter in the ever-unfurling American racial saga. It is an astonishing chapter. For most Americans, it seems as if Obama first came to dinner only yesterday. Should he win the White House on Tuesday, many will cheer and more than a few will cry as history moves inexorably forward.

But we are a people as practical as we are dreamy. We'll soon remember that the country is in a deep ditch, and that we turned to the black guy not only because we hoped he would lift us up but because he looked like the strongest leader to dig us out.

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9/29/13 Is Interracial Marriage Still Scandalous? Room for Debate - NYTimes.com

This month marks almost 50 years since the Supreme Court case of *Loving v. Virginia*, which made interracial marriage legal nationwide. Marriages between people of different races have climbed since, to a high of 8.4 percent in 2010.

Does this mean that we have achieved a colorblind society, or just that the hate has moved to YouTube? In an age when white people are becoming a minority, is interracial marriage still scandalous?

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Before you begin reading your assigned articles, note your own feelings on interracial dating/marriage. What about interreligious dating/marriage?

A Complex Map, but Still Divided

Rose Cuison Villazor, a professor of law at the University of California, Davis School of Law

Historically, both states and the federal government restricted interracial marriages. For centuries, in many states proscribed whites from marrying African-Americans and other nonwhites. Federal immigration laws and military policies also prevented interracial marriages. After World War II, military officials forbade American soldiers to marry foreign women (white soldiers and Japanese women, or black soldiers and white European women). Fortunately, in 1967 the Supreme Court's decision in *Loving v. Virginia* struck down antimiscegenation laws, and Congress ultimately lifted racially exclusionary immigration laws that enabled "war brides" to marry American soldiers and immigrate to the U.S. Against this historical backdrop, it is encouraging to see that more couples are getting married across racial lines. Indeed, if we look at relationships (not just marriages), we see even more interracial couples. A 2012 U.C.L.A. Williams Institute study shows that unmarried same-sex couples and straight couples have higher interracial rates than married couples. Additionally, if we expand our analysis to interracial families – including same-race couples who adopt a different-race child – the number goes higher.

Marriage should therefore not be the sole basis of a "post-racial" analysis. We aren't colorblind. Many relationships are still constrained by class and race divisions. Crucially, upon closer examination, the interracial marriage rates demonstrate that America is still far from a colorblind society. As Pew explained in a 2012 study, on closer inspection there are differences along gender, geography, education and class lines. In 2010, 26 percent of black men and 36 percent of Asian women (compared with 9 percent of black women and 17 percent of Asian men) marry outside of their races. Twenty-two percent of interracial marriages took place in the West, compared with 14 percent in the South.

Additionally, 42 percent of white men/Asian women married couples both went to college, compared with 20 percent of white/Hispanic married couples and 17 percent of white/black married couples. A look at earnings also reveals racial and gender differences: the median combined income of white/Asian couples is \$70,952, compared with \$53,187 for white/black married couples.

These differences underscore that we should not be too quick to rely on the increase in interracial marriages as proof that we now live in a "post-racial" society. Instead, the rise in interracial marriages should encourage us to continue to explore the various factors that, shaped by our racial past, continue to limit interracial couples -- who want to or are able to marry -- from saying, "I do."

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The Myth of Rarity

Kevin Noble Maillard is a law professor at Syracuse University

Interracial relationships are scandalous because people still believe them to be rare, even when we are all surrounded by them. These entirely normal couplings forever face a presumption of illegitimacy or sexualization that harks back to an era where miscegenation was illegal. In all reality, mixed race is an entirely American story, but we still see it as a mission impossible.

Every interracial couple in the history of interracial couples knows this scenario: At a party, they strike up a conversation with another guest. Introductions made, commonalities identified, drinks refilled. It's just a matter of time before the inevitable question: "How did you two meet?" No sinister subtext here. No protest. Just curiosity, because a boring story ("mutual friends" or "same dorm") is not enough. Surely, there must be adversity in the tale of an interracial couple.

It's quite different from asking a married white couple about their meet cute. Unless one person is much older, richer or better looking than the other, there is no hidden meaning. It is what it is. But when the people are different races, the subtext is, "it's so fascinating that you are together." People want to know because it seems improbable. The deep assumptions of racial difference add a layer of unspoken complex questions: Do y our parents approve? What do y our friends think? What will y our children look like? Sure, this cloud of questions could be entirely exploratory and innocuous, but it underscores the point that people believe mixed race to be an anomaly rather than a norm.

Mixed relationships are sexualized, where everything mundane and normal is forgotten in the wake of the erotic. They are scandalous because we don't think about what the couple does during the day. We think about what they do at night. White men can jump, if they date a black woman. Everyone is happy in the world of Suzie Wong. Once someone has jungle fever, they're never going back.

Of course, race mixing is an abomination (at least in public) to the usual suspects: nostalgic Dixiecrats, Internet trolls and extras from "Deliverance." It's a long, grossly unyielding battle. But it's harder to assess the opinions of the "normal" mainstream, where overt discrimination is shunned. This is the majority that swears by colorblindness and equality but can't stop staring at mixed couples. The individuals are eclipsed by the assumptions about them. So perhaps the inevitable party question deserves a gratifying and expected answer. The next time a mixed couple is asked "how did you meet," they should respond: "Craigslist."

It's O.K. to Be Intrigued

Heidi W. Durrrow is the author of the novel "The Girl Who Fell From the Sky" and a founder of the Mixed Roots Film & Literary Festival.

I'm the product of a marriage that was illegal in 1965 in South Carolina, where my parents planned to wed. So you'd think that would give me some kind of special sensitivity chip, but when I see an interracial couple I can't help but stare. "Tomato at 9 o'clock," I'll say to my husband, using our code word when I spot a mixed-race twosome.

Growing up in the '70s and '80s, I thought it was a big deal to see interracial couples and families. My father was African-American, and my mother is a white Danish immigrant. I don't know exact numbers, but I'm guessing Afro-Viking households were pretty rare.

Today, interracial relationships are ubiquitous. Census figures show that interracial marriages are at an all-time high, and the multiracial population is the country's fastest-growing demographic. The interracial unions of the famous are celebrated: think Halle Berry and her fiancé, and Matt Damon and his wife. Even the all-American blond, blue-eyed reality star bachelor Sean Lowe chose a brown-skinned Filipino beauty to be his bride, to the delight of the reality star's fans.

But today, it's not enough for interracial couples to be seen; they must also be heard. The racist rants sparked by a Cheerios commercial featuring an interracial marriage show that the ubiquity of interracial couples isn't enough. Indeed, what was most heartening about the flap over the ad was that the outrage against the hate speech was more vocal and robust than the bigots' attacks. Conversations about interracial intimacies haven't advanced much in the last couple of decades. So it's time to counteract bigoted views with more than just images – with stories too. Colorblind love doesn't mean you don't talk about race. It means you talk about it more.

Parents Pass the Bias Along to Their Kids

Diane Farr, an actress and writer, is the author of "Kissing Outside the Lines."

Let's blame it on the parents. Love is the last area where even educated and progressive parents can still *openly* teach prejudice at home – which is the only reason interracial marriage is still scandalous. Few peers of any recent generation give much thought to friends dating outside of their race. However, far too many Americans who dare to love someone of a different racial or cultural background find they will still have to face something unpleasant – ranging from disappointment to being disowned – from those people they loved first, their mothers and fathers.

This includes even a father from a cosmopolitan American city, with a postgraduate degree, who loves and respects someone of a different race at work and might even invite someone of a varying skin tone or eye shape to Thanksgiving dinner but privately will tell his 10-, 20- or even 40-year-old son, "but you can't marry *one of them*."

Which is just what my husband's father told him when he explained his intentions with me. My husband was born in South Korea, and his parents are educated, well traveled, Asian professionals who have been American citizens for over 30 years. Yet, straying outside of his race for love was always forbidden for him. This was problematic, because I am your standard-issue white girl of European descent. Which does not mean that my Caucasian parents were any more accepting of whom their children loved. My family's prejudices around marriage were just

reserved for the more familiar American race war of calling black-white relationships “wrong” or “unfair to the children.”

My husband and I married anyway, with the hard-won support of all our parents when the day finally came. Seven years later we have three biracial children who are beloved by their grandparents, as am I. Because once we as a couple met the multiracial scandal with a united front, the idea of me being “too different” eventually faded away. This leads me to believe that interracial prejudice can be eradicated in one more generation – if today’s parents stop teaching it to our little ones, in subtle or unsubtle ways.

Are you ready for the challenge, moms and dads?

We Can’t Just Wait for Bias to Disappear

Gary B. Nash, a professor of history at the University of California, Los Angeles and the director of the National Center for History in the Schools

Although the tide of American sentiment is shifting toward viewing skin color and “race” as irrelevant to love and marriage, tidepools of old-fashioned racism certainly remain. Nearly two centuries ago, the abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison wrote:

The standard of matrimony is erected by affection and purity, and does not depend upon the height, or bulk, or color, or wealth, or poverty of individuals. Water will seek its level; nature will have free course; and heart will answer to heart.

It has taken a long time (and generations of heartbreak and violence) to get close to what Garrison hoped would be the common only accepted view. We are far from the finish line. Racial fissures continue to accompany racial fusion. They may even have increased since the election and re-election of Barack Obama as our president. The sight of a biracial man in the White House has rekindled racial antipathy, which can be seen on full display in scores of hate-filled Web sites. This has made it more difficult in most parts of the country, not just in the Southern strongholds of racism, for mixed-race couples to escape the barbs – and worse – thrown at them. This is especially true for couples in which a white woman is with a black man.

Part of the opposition to racial mixing is generational, just residue. Gallup has found that 95 percent of people 18 to 29 approve of interracial dating, compared with less than half of those 65 and older. If this trend continues, the hardest-line opposition to interracial marriage will wither away as elderly Americans pass on. But the line will not disappear. Income and wealth inequality, the enemies of true color-blindness, will silently maintain the racial boundaries that have afflicted American society for generations.

Annotations:

- 1. What is the author’s primary argument(s)? Do you agree/disagree?**
- 2. Note what surprised you, and why.**
- 3. Find connections between your assigned articles.**

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As a rough gauge last week, I watched a movie I hadn't seen since it came out when I was a teenager in 1967. Back then "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner" was Hollywood's idea of a stirring call for racial justice. The premise: A young white woman falls madly in love with a black man while visiting the University of Hawaii and brings him home to San Francisco to get her parents' blessing. Dad, a crusading newspaper publisher, and Mom, a modern art dealer, are wealthy white liberals — Katharine Hepburn and Spencer Tracy, no less — so surely there can be no problem. Complications ensue before everyone does the right thing.

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There were countless ruminations, in print and on television, asking the same two rhetorical questions: "Is He Black Enough?" and "Is He Tough Enough?" The implied answer to both was usually, "No." The brown-skinned child of biracial parents wasn't really "black" and wouldn't appeal to black voters who were overwhelmingly loyal to the wife of America's first "black" president. And as a former constitutional law professor, Obama was undoubtedly too lofty an intellectual to be a political street fighter, too much of a wuss to land a punch in a debate, too ethereal to connect to "real" Americans.

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Still, the country isn't there yet, and should Obama be elected, America will not be cleansed of its racial history or conflicts. It will still have a virtually all-white party as one of its two most powerful political organizations. There will still be white liberals who look at Obama and can't quite figure out what to make of his complex mixture of idealism and hard-knuckled political cunning, of his twin identities of international sojourner and conventional middle-class overachiever.

After some 20 months, we're all still getting used to Obama and still, for that matter, trying to read his sometimes ambiguous takes on both economic and foreign affairs. What we have learned definitively about him so far — and what may most account for his victory, should he achieve it — is that he had both the brains and the muscle to outsmart, outmaneuver and outlast some of the smartest people in the country, starting with the Clintons. We know that he ran a brilliant campaign that remained sane and kept to its initial plan even when his Republican opponent and his own allies were panicking all around him. We know that that plan was based on the premise that Americans actually are sick of the divisive wedge issues that have defined the past couple of decades, of which race is the most divisive of all.

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TED Talk

Jay Smooth – How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Discussing Race

I want to talk a little bit about race tonight. Or to be more precise, I want to talk about how we talk about race. How we engage in race conversations, and how we might get a little bit better at it in some ways. It's a topic I've always enjoyed--most Americans avoid race conversations like the plague, and we often take our ability to avoid it and use that as a measure of our progress and enlightenment, which I think is kind of telling in and of itself. But I've always been drawn to those conversations and fascinated by them.

This is in part because growing up as a very light-skinned black man of mixed descent I often find myself in sort of peculiar race-based conversations. Often when I'm meeting someone for the first time, rather than making small talk they will immediately present me with a philosophical conundrum. They will ask, "What are you?" And I'll have to explain, "I'm not a philosophy major, you know, my father's black, my mother's white... [but] what are we...?" [shrugging]

So I've always had a passion for studying and observing how we communicate about race and how we might get a little better at certain aspects of that communication. I made a video commentary named How to Tell Someone They Sound Racist that talks about a particular type of race conversation, which usually doesn't involve any explicit racist intent, and there's no blatant racism involved. It usually involves well-intentioned people, but it's a situation where one of us feels the need to tell another that something they said may have had connotations they weren't aware of, or they may have done something that had a hurtful impact they might not have been aware of.

That's a conversation we all find ourselves in from time to time. And it's a conversation that usually goes horribly.

Because no matter how clear you try to be in conveying that you're not attacking the person, just trying to offer a specific critique of a particular thing that just happened, when we are receiving that sort of critique we tend to deeply personalize it and take it as a personal attack. We tend to respond with "are you saying that I am racist??" How could you say that?? I am a good person, why would you say that I am a racist?" and you try to explain, "I'm just saying, about this particular thing that you said--" "No! I am not a racist!" and what started out as a "What You Said" conversation turns into a "What you Are" conversation, a "What I Am" conversation, which is a dead end that produces nothing except mutual frustration. You never wind up seeing eye to eye or finding any common ground.

So in my video I offered some suggestions for how we might stay focused on the "What You Said" conversation and find some common ground. And that video--most videos on YouTube die off after 48 hours, but this video really struck a chord which I think shows how hungry many of us are to find better ways to communicate on these issues.

And the two types of feedback I get most commonly on that video are: 1) "I really appreciated the perspective you gave about staying focused on a "What You Said" conversation" and 2) "I tried these strategies that you suggested about staying on the what you are conversation and they actually never work." [Audience laughter] And this is true, unfortunately--no matter what angle you take as far as voicing that critique, the vast majority of the time it's still going to lapse into a defensive "What I Am" conversation.

I think framing it as clearly as you can in that "What You Said" form is still valuable because it makes the substance of your beef as clear as possible to other people observing the conversation, especially in public discourse. And it gives both of you the best shot at finding common ground and seeing eye-to-eye, it's worth going for that ten percent. But generally--the success rate might be higher here at Hampshire College--but where I live, on the internet, the success rate tends to be around ten percent.

So, since I made that video and took in that feedback I've been thinking about what other approaches we might be able to take, and since we can never entirely fix that conversation by changing how we voice the critique, I think we might be able to make it budge a little more by considering how we receive that critique. And I've been thinking about how we might be able to take that suggestion--that we may have said or done something racist--and take it in stride, and not completely freak out and assume that the world thinks that I'm a bad person.

The first thing that makes it difficult to accept that critique, that you may have said something racist, is simply that it involves the possibility that you made a mistake. None of us takes that too well, none of us enjoys that, but in most other situations, when the possibility arises that we made a mistake, we're usually able to take a few deep breaths and tell ourselves, "I'm only human, everyone makes mistakes."

But when it comes to conversations involving race and prejudice, for some reason we tend to make the opposite assumption. We deal with race and prejudice with this all or nothing, good person/bad person binary in which either you are racist or you are not racist. As if everyone is either batting a thousand or striking out every at bat. And this puts us in a situation where we're striving to meet an impossible standard. It means any suggestion that you've made a mistake, any suggestion that you've been less than perfect, is a suggestion that you're a bad person.

So we become averse to any suggestion that we should consider our thoughts and actions, and this makes it harder for us to work on our imperfections. When you believe that you must be perfect in order to be good, it makes you averse to recognizing your own inevitable imperfections and that lets them stagnate and grow.

The belief that you must be perfect in order to be good is an obstacle to being as good as you can be. It would make our conversations with each other a lot smoother, and it would make us better at being good, if we could recognize that we're not perfect and embrace that. So I want to offer a couple of things that you could keep in mind when you need to remind yourself that I'm not supposed to be perfect when it comes to navigating race.

The first thing is that anytime we're dealing with race issues, we are dealing with a social construct that was not born out of any science or reason or logic, we are grappling with a social construct that was not designed to make sense. And to the extent that it is the product of design, the race constructs that we live in in America were shaped specifically by a desire to avoid making sense. They were shaped for centuries by a need to rationalize and justify indefensible acts.

So when we grapple with race issues, we're grappling with something that was designed for centuries to make us circumvent our best instincts. It's a dance partner that's designed to trip us up. So just based on that alone we should be able to keep in mind that you will never bat a thousand when it comes to dealing with race issues.

And the other thing that we need to keep in mind is, as we are all imperfect humans, and as has been laid out in some of the other talks this evening, we all have unconscious thought processes and psycho-social mechanisms that pop up. There are many things in our day-to-day lives that lead us toward developing little pockets of prejudice, that lead us toward acting unkind to others, without having any intent to do so.

These are things that will just naturally develop in our day-to-day lives, so the problem with that all or nothing binary is it causes us to look at racism and prejudice as if they are akin to having tonsils. Like you either have tonsils, or you don't, and if you've had your prejudice removed, you never need to consider it again. If someone says "I think you may have a little unconscious prejudice," you say "No--my prejudice was removed in 2005!" [Audience laughter] I went to see that movie *Crash*, it's all good!"

But that's not how these things work; when you go through your day to day lives there are all of these mass media and social stimuli as well as processes that we all have inside our brains that we're not aware of, that cause us to build up little pockets of prejudice every day, just like plaque develops on our teeth. [Audience laughter] So

we need to move away from the tonsils paradigm of race discourse toward the dental hygiene paradigm of race discourse. Basically, if I might just offer one piece of advice.

And in general I think we need to move away from the premise that being a good person is a fixed, immutable characteristic, and shift towards seeing being good as a practice, and it is a practice that we carry out by engaging with our imperfections. We need to shift from, we need to shift toward thinking of being a good person the same way we think of being a clean person. Being a clean person is something that you maintain and work on every day. We don't assume that I'm a clean person therefore I don't need to brush my teeth. And when someone suggests to us that we've got something stuck in our teeth, we don't say "Wh-what do you mean? I have something stuck in my teeth? I'm a clean person! Why would you--" [Audience laughter]

So I know that this is no small task, but if we could shift a little bit closer, toward viewing these race conversations the same way we view a conversation about something stuck in our teeth, it would go a long way toward making our conversations a bit smoother and allow us to work together on bigger issues around race.

Because there are a lot of--beyond the persistent conversational awkwardness of race, there are persistent systemic and institutional issues around race that are not caused by conversation, and they can't be entirely solved by conversation. You can't talk them away, but we need people to work together and coordinate and communicate to find strategies to work on those systemic issues. Because despite all of the barriers that we've broken, all of the apparent markers of progress there are still so many disparities.

If you look at unemployment rate, infant mortality rate, incarceration rates, median household income, there are so many disparities on the various sides of the color lines in this country that it is worthwhile for us to iron out these conversational issues if for nothing else so that we can get a little closer to working together on those big issues.

So I hope that we can--if I could have one wish it would be that we would reconsider how we conceptualize being a good person, and keep in mind that we are not good despite our imperfections. It is the connection we maintain with our imperfections that allows us to be good. Our connection with our personal and common imperfections, being mindful of those personal and common imperfections is what allows us to be good to each other and be good to ourselves.

I know that this is no easy task, and race may be the most difficult sphere in which to apply this concept, but I think it's where it could also reap the most rewards. And I hope that bit by bit, if we consider that and are mindful of it, we can shift away from taking it as an indictment of our goodness and move towards taking it as a gesture of respect and an act of kindness when someone tells us that we've got something racist stuck in our teeth.

How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Discussing Race. By Jay Smooth. *YouTube*. TEDx Hampshire College, 15 Nov. 2011. Web. 30 Sept. 2013.

