White-black dating, marriage, and adoption are on the rise. This development, however, is being met with resistance—more vocally by blacks than by whites

by Randall Kennedy

Interracial Intimacy

American are already what racial purists have long feared: a people characterized by a great deal of racial admixture, or what many in the past referred to distastefully as "mongrelization." In pigmentation, width of noses, breadth of lips, texture of hair, and other telltale signs, the faces and bodies of millions of Americans bear witness to interracial sexual encounters. Some were joyful, passionate, loving affairs. Many were rapes. Others contained elements of both choice and coercion. These different kinds of interracial intimacy and sexual depredation all reached their peak in the United States during the age of slavery, and following the Civil War they decreased markedly. Since the end of the civil-rights revolution interracial dating, interracial sex, and interracial marriage have steadily increased, as has the number of children born of interracial unions. This development has prompted commentators to speak of the "creolization" or "browning" or "beiging" of America.

Over the years legions of white-supremacist legislators, judges, prosecutors, police officers, and other officials have attempted to prohibit open romantic interracial attachments, particularly those between black men and white women. From the 1660s to the 1960s, forty-one territories, colonies, or states enacted laws—anti-miscegenation statutes—barring sex or marriage between blacks and whites, and many states ultimately made marriage across the color line a felony. Such laws crystallized attitudes about interracial intimacy that remain influential today, but all were invalidated by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1967, in the most aptly named case in all of American constitutional history: Loving v. Commonwealth of Virginia.

Although white and black Americans are far more likely to date and marry within their own race than outside it, the cultural environment has changed considerably since Loving. Recall what happened in the spring of 2000, when George W. Bush, at a crucial moment in his primary campaign, paid a highly publicized visit to Bob Jones University, in South Carolina. During that visit he offered no criticism of the university’s then existing prohibition against interracial dating. In the controversy that ensued, no nationally prominent figures defended Bob Jones’s policy. Public opinion not only forced Bush to distance himself from Bob Jones but also prompted the notoriously stubborn and reactionary administration of that institution to drop its ban.

The de-stigmatization in this country of interracial intimacy is profoundly encouraging. Against the tragic backdrop of American history, it is a sign that Frederick Douglass may have been right when he prophesied, even before the abolition of slavery, that eventually "the white and colored people of this country [can] be blended into a common nationality, and enjoy together ... the inestimable blessings of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

The great but altogether predictable irony is that just as white opposition to white-black intimacy finally lessened, during the last third of the twentieth century, black opposition became vocal and aggressive. In college classrooms today, when discussions about the ethics of interracial dating and marriage arise, black students are frequently the ones most likely to voice disapproval.

Despite some ongoing resistance (a subject to which I will return), the situation for people involved in interracial intimacy has never been better. For the most part, the law prohibits officials from taking race into account in licensing marriages, making child-custody decisions, and arranging adoptions. Moreover, the American public accepts interracial intimacy as it never has before. This trend will almost certainly continue; polling data and common observation indicate that young people tend to be more liberal on these matters than their elders.

In 1960 there were about 51,000 black-white married couples in the United States; in 1970 there were 65,000, in 1980 there were 121,000, in 1990 there were 213,000, and by 1998 the number had reached 330,000. In other words, in the past four decades black-white marriages increased more than sixfold. And black-white marriages are not only becoming more numerous. Previously, the new couples in mixed marriages tended to be older than other brides and grooms. They were frequently veterans of divorce, embarking on second or third marriages. In recent years, however, couples in mixed marriages seem to be marrying younger than their pioneering predecessors and seem more inclined to have children and to pursue all the other "normal" activities that married life offers.

It should be stressed that black-white marriages remain remarkably rare—fewer than one percent of the total. In 1998, when 330,000 black-white couples were married, 55,305,000 couples were married overall. Moreover, the racial isolation of blacks on the marriage market appears to be greater than that of other people of color: much larger percentages of Native Americans and Asian-Americans marry whites. According to 1990 Census data, in the age cohort twenty-five to thirty-four, 36 percent of U.S.-born Asian-American husbands and 45 percent of U.S.-born Asian-American wives had white spouses; 53 percent of Native American husbands and 54 percent of Native American wives had white spouses. Only eight percent of African-American husbands and only four percent of African-American wives had white spouses. The sociologist Nathan Glazer was correct in stating, in *The Public Interest* (September 1995), that "blacks stand out uniquely among the array of American ethnic and racial groups in the degree to which marriage remains within the group." Of course, the Native American and Asian-American populations are so much smaller than the African-American population that relatively few intermarriages make a big difference in percentage terms. But the disparity is real: it has to do not only with demographics but also with generations’ worth of subjective judgments about marriageability, beauty, personality, comfort, compatibility, and prestige. Even now a wide array of social pressures continue to make white-black marriages more difficult and thus less frequent than other interethnic or interracial marriages.

Nevertheless, the trend toward more interracial marriage is clear, as is a growing acceptance of the phenomenon. Successful, high-profile interracial couples include the white William Cohen (a former senator from Maine and the Secretary of Defense under Bill Clinton) and the black Janet Langhart; and the white Wendy Raines and the black Franklin Raines (he is a former director of the Office of Management and Budget and the CEO of Fannie Mae). Some African-Americans whose positions make them directly dependent on black public opinion have nonetheless married whites without losing their footing. A good example is Julian Bond, the chairman of the board of directors of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Though married to a white woman, Bond ascended to the chairmanship of the oldest and most influential black-advancement organization in the country in 1998, and as of this writing continues to enjoy widespread support within the NAACP.

There are other signs that black-white romance has become more widely accepted; indeed, it is quite fashionable in some contexts. One is advertising. When advertisers addressing general audiences use romance to deliver their messages, they most often depict couples of the same race. But now at least occasionally one sees interracial couples deployed as
enticements to shop at Diesel or Club Monaco, or to buy furniture from ikea, jeans from Guess, sweaters from Tommy Hilfiger, cologne from Calvin Klein, or water from Perrier.

Scores of interracial support groups have emerged across the country, among them Kaleidoscope, at the University of Virginia; Students of Mixed Heritage at Amherst College; Interracial Family Club, in Washington, D.C.; Half and Half, at Bryn Mawr; and Mixed Plate, at Grinnell. Although most of these organizations lack deep roots, many display a vigor and resourcefulness that suggest they will survive into the foreseeable future. They stem from and represent a community in the making. It is a community united by a demand that the larger society respect and be attentive to people who by descent or by choice fall outside conventional racial groupings: interracial couples, parents of children of a different race, and children of parents of a different race. Those within this community want it known that they are not products or agents of an alarming mongrelization, as white racists still believe; nor are they inauthentic and unstable in-betweeners, as some people of color would have it. They want security amid the established communities from which they have migrated. They want to emerge from what the writer Lise Funderburg has identified as the "racial netherworld," and they want to enjoy interaction with others without regret or fear, defensiveness or embarrassment.

"SLEEPING WHITE"

African-Americans largely fall into three camps with respect to white-black marriage. One camp, relatively small, openly champions it as a good. Its members argue that increasing rates of interracial marriage will decrease social segregation, encourage racial open-mindedness, enhance blacks’ access to enriching social networks, elevate their status, and empower black women in their interactions with black men by subjecting the latter to greater competition in the marketplace for companionship.

A second camp sees interracial marriage merely as a choice that individuals should have the right to make. For example, while noting in Race Matters (1993) that "more and more white Americans are willing to interact sexually with black Americans on an equal basis," Cornel West maintains that he views this as "neither cause for celebration nor reason for lament." This is probably the predominant view among blacks. It allows a person simultaneously to oppose anti-miscegenation laws and to disclaim any desire to marry across racial lines. Many African-Americans are attracted to this position, because, among other things, it helps to refute a deeply annoying assumption on the part of many whites: that blacks would like nothing more than to be intimate with whites and even, if possible, to become white.

A third camp opposes interracial marriage, on the grounds that it expresses racial disloyalty, suggests disapproval of fellow blacks, undermines black culture, weakens the African-American marriage market, and feeds racist mythologies, particularly the canard that blacks lack pride of race.

Such opposition has always been a powerful undercurrent. When Walter White, the executive secretary of the NAACP, divorced his black wife (the mother of their two children) and married a white woman from South Africa, in 1949, the Norfolk (Virginia) Journal and Guide spoke for many blacks when it asserted, "A prompt and official announcement that [White] will not return to his post ... is in order." Part of the anger stemmed from apprehension that segregationists would seize upon White’s marriage to substantiate the charge that what black male civil-rights activists were really after was sex with white women. Part stemmed from a widespread sense that perhaps White thought no black woman was good enough for him.

By the late 1960s, with the repudiation of anti-miscegenation and Jim Crow laws, increasing numbers of blacks felt emboldened to openly oppose mixed marriages. "We Shall Overcome" was giving way to "Black Power": improving the
image of blacks in the minds of whites seemed less important than cultivating a deeper allegiance to racial solidarity. To blacks, interracial intimacy compromised that allegiance. The African-American social reformer George Wiley dedicated himself to struggles for racial justice as a leading figure in the Congress for Racial Equality (CORE) and the founder of the National Welfare Rights Organization. Yet many black activists denounced him for marrying and remaining married to a white woman. When he addressed a rally in Washington, D.C., on African Liberation Day in April of 1972, a group of black women heckled him by chanting, "Where's your white wife? Where's your white wife?" When he attempted to focus his remarks on the situation of black women, the hecklers merely took up a different chant: "Talking black and sleeping white."

Other politically active blacks married to whites—James Farmer, a founder of CORE, and Julius Hobson, a tenacious activist in Washington—faced similar pressure. Julius Lester, a longtime member of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, wrote a book with one of the most arresting titles of that flamboyant era: Look Out, Whitey! Black Power's Gon' Get Your Mama! (1968). But to many black activists, Lester's writings and ideas were decidedly less significant than his choice of a white wife. To them, his selection bespoke hypocrisy. Ridiculing Lester, one black woman wrote a letter to the editor of Ebony in which she suggested that it was foolish to regard him as a trustworthy leader. After all, she cautioned, he couldn't even "crawl out of bed" with whites.

The "sleeping white" critique embarrassed a wide variety of people as distinctions between the personal and the political evaporated. At many colleges and universities black students ostracized other blacks who dated (much less married) whites. A black student who wanted to walk around "with a blonde draped on his arm" could certainly do so, a black student leader at the University of Washington told St. Clair Drake, a leading African-American sociologist. "All we say," the student continued, "is don't try to join the black studies association." Drake himself became the target of this critique. When he visited his old high school in 1968, he says, the Black Student Union refused to have anything to do with him, because he was involved in an interracial relationship. Drake's classmate Charles V. Hamilton, a co-author, with Stokely Carmichael, of Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America (1967), was shunned for the same reason.

In some instances black opposition to interracial intimacy played a part in destroying a marriage. A dramatic example is the breakup of Everett LeRoi Jones (now known as Amiri Baraka) and Hettie Jones. LeRoi Jones was born of middle-class black parents in Newark, New Jersey, in 1934. For two years he attended Howard University, which he detested. He served in the Air Force for a short time, and in 1957 he moved to Greenwich Village. He worked for the magazine Record Changer and was a co-editor, with Hettie Cohen, of Yugen, an avant-garde magazine that published writings by William Burroughs, Gregory Corso, Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, Charles Olson, and Jones himself. Hettie Cohen was a woman of Jewish parentage who had grown up in suburban New York and attended Mary Washington, the women's college of the University of Virginia. Jones and Cohen married in 1958. Although his parents accepted the marriage easily, her parents totally opposed it.

For a while LeRoi and Hettie Jones lived together in what she remembers as a loving relationship. But then the pressure of bohemian penury, the demands of two children, and mutual infidelities (including one in which LeRoi fathered a baby by another woman who also happened to be white) caused their marriage to falter. Other forces also emerged to doom the union: LeRoi's deep internal tensions, his ambition to become a black leader, and the growing sense in many black communities that no purported leader could be trusted who "talked black but slept white."

As the black protest movement gathered steam in the early sixties, Jones aimed at becoming an important figure in it. At the same time, his career as a writer blossomed. He wrote well-regarded poetry, social and political essays, and a significant book, Blues People (1963), on the history of African-American music. What made LeRoi Jones a celebrity, however, and
what ensures him a niche in American literary history, is his two-act play *Dutchman*, which opened in New York City in March of 1964. In *Dutchman* a reticent, bookish middle-class black man named Clay meets a white temptress named Lula in a New York subway car. The play consists mainly of their verbal combat. Angered by Clay’s refusal to dance with her, Lula shouts, "Come on, Clay. Let’s rub bellies on the train ... Forget your social-working mother for a few seconds and let’s knock stomachs. Clay, you liver-lipped white man. You would-be Christian. You ain’t no nigger, you’re just a dirty white man." Clay responds in kind.

"Tallulah Bankhead! ... Don’t you tell me anything! If I’m a middle-class fake white man ... let me be ... Let me be who I feel like being. Uncle Tom. Thomas. Whoever. It’s none of your business ... I sit here, in this buttoned-up suit, to keep myself from cutting all your throats ... You great liberated whore! You fuck some black man, and right away you’re an expert on black people. What a lotta shit that is."

But Lula has the last word, so to speak: she suddenly stabs Clay to death. Other passengers throw his body out of the subway car and depart. Alone, Lula re-occupies her seat. When another black man enters the car, she begins her lethal routine anew.

Though living in a predominantly white, bohemian environment when he wrote *Dutchman*, Jones had begun to believe that it was blacks to whom he should be addressing his art. Increasingly successful, he was also becoming increasingly radical in his condemnation of white American society. Asked by a white woman what white people could do to help the race problem, Jones replied, "You can help by dying. You are a cancer. You can help the world’s people with your death." An outrageous statement coming from anyone, this comment was even more arresting coming from a man who was married to a white woman. Jones was by no means alone in living within this particular contradiction. He noted in his autobiography that at one point he and some other black intellectuals objected to the presence of white radicals on a committee they were in the process of establishing. "What was so wild," he recalled, "was that some of us were talking about how we didn’t want white people on the committee but we were all hooked up to white women ... Such were the contradictions of that period of political organization."

The more prominent Jones became, however, the more critics, both black and white, charged him with being hypocritical. The critic Stanley Kauffmann, for example, asserted that Jones constituted an exemplary figure in "the Tradition of the Fake." Stung by such charges, infatuated with black-nationalist rhetoric, inspired by the prospect of re-creating himself, and bored with a disappointing marriage, LeRoi Jones divorced Hettie Jones in 1965.

Throughout the black-power era substantial numbers of African-Americans loudly condemned black participation in interracial relationships (especially with whites), deeming it to be racial betrayal. A reader named Joyce Blake searingly articulated this sentiment in a letter to the editor of the *Village Voice*.

> It really hurts and baffles me and many other black sisters to see our black brothers (?) coming down the streets in their African garbs with a white woman on their arms. It is fast becoming a standard joke among the white girls that they can get our men still—African styles and all ...<br>

> It certainly seems to many black sisters that the Movement is just another subterfuge to aid the Negro male in procuring a white woman. If this be so, then the black sisters don’t need it, for surely we have suffered enough humiliation from both white and black men in America.
A DEMOGRAPHIC BETRAYAL?

Although racial solidarity has been the principal reason for black opposition to intermarriage over the years, another reason is the perception that intermarriage by black men weakens black women in the marriage market. A reader named Lula Miles asserted this view in an August 1969 letter to the editor of Ebony. Responding to a white woman who had expressed bewilderment at black women's anger, Miles wrote, "Non-sister wonders why the sight of a black man with a white woman is revolting to a black woman ... The name of the game is 'competition.' Non-sister, you are trespassing!"

Another letter writer, named Miraonda J. Stevens, reinforced this point: "In the near future there aren't going to be enough nice black men around for us [black women] to marry." This "market" critique of interracial marriage has a long history. In 1929 Palestine Wells, a black columnist for the Baltimore Afro-American, wrote,

I have a sneaking suspicion that national intermarriage will make it harder to get husbands. A girl has a hard time enough getting a husband, but methinks 'twill be worse. Think how awful it would be if all the ofay² girls with a secret hankering for brown skin men, could openly compete with us.

Forty-five years later an Ebony reader named Katrina Williams echoed Wells. "The white man is marrying the white woman," she wrote. "The black man is marrying the white woman. Who's gonna marry me?"

Behind her anxious question resides more than demographics: there is also the perception that large numbers of African-American men believe not only that white women are relatively more desirable but that black women are positively unattractive. Again the pages of Ebony offer vivid testimony. A reader named Mary A. Dowdell wrote in 1969,

Let's just lay all phony excuses aside and get down to the true nitty, nitty, NITTY-GRITTY and tell it like it really is. Black males hate black women just because they are black. The whole so-called Civil Rights Act was really this: "I want a white woman because she's white and I not only hate but don't want a black woman because she's black." ... The whole world knows this.

Decades later African-American hostility to interracial intimacy remained widespread and influential. Three examples are revealing. The first is the movie Jungle Fever (1991), which portrays an interracial affair set in New York City in the early 1990s. The director, Spike Lee, made sure the relationship was unhappy. Flipper Purify is an ambitious, college-educated black architect who lives in Harlem with his black wife and their young daughter. Angie Tucci, a young white woman, works for Purify as a secretary. Educated only through high school, she lives in Bensonhurst, Brooklyn, with her father and brothers, all of whom are outspoken racists. One evening when Flipper and Angie stay late at his office, work is superseded by erotic longing tinged with racial curiosity. He has never been sexually intimate with a white woman, and she has never been sexually intimate with a black man. They close that gap in their experience, and then stupidly confide in indiscreet friends, who carelessly reveal their secret. Angie's father throws her out of the family home after viciously beating her for "fucking a black nigger." Flipper's wife, Drew, throws him out as well. Flipper and Angie move into an apartment together, but that arrangement falls apart rather quickly under the pressure of their own guilt and uncertainty and the strong disapproval they encounter among blacks and whites alike.

The second example is Lawrence Otis Graham's 1995 essay "I Never Dated a White Girl." Educated at Princeton University

and Harvard Law School, Graham sought to explain why "black middle-class kids ... [who are] raised in integrated or mostly
white neighborhoods, [and] told to befriend white neighbors, socialize and study with white classmates, join white social
and professional organizations, and go to work for mostly white employers" are also told by their relatives, "Oh, and by the
way, don't ever forget that you are black, and that you should never get so close to whites that you happen to fall in love with
them." Graham did more than explain, however; he justified this advice in a candid polemic that might well have been titled
"Why I Am Proud That I Never Dated a White Girl."

The third example is "Black Men, White Women: A Sister Relinquishes Her Anger," a 1993 essay by the novelist Bebe Moore
Campbell. Describing a scene in which she and her girlfriends spied a handsome black celebrity escorting a white woman at
a trendy Beverly Hills restaurant, Campbell wrote,

In unison, we moaned, we groaned, we rolled our eyes heavenward. We gnashed our teeth in
harmony and made ugly faces. We sang "Umph! Umph! Umph!" a cappella-style, then shook our
heads as we lamented for the ten thousandth time the perfidy of black men and cursed trespassing
white women who dared to "take our men." ... Before lunch was over I had a headache,
indigestion, and probably elevated blood pressure.

Only a small percentage of black men marry interracially; one report, published in 1999, estimated that seven percent of
married black men have non-black wives. But with poverty, imprisonment, sexual orientation, and other factors limiting
the number of marriageable black men, a substantial number of black women feel this loss of potential mates acutely. In
1992 researchers found that for every three unmarried black women in their twenties there was only one unmarried black
man with earnings above the poverty level. Given these realities, black women's disparagement of interracial marriage
should come as no surprise. "In a drought," Campbell wrote, "even one drop of water is missed."

Compiling a roster of prominent blacks—Clarence Thomas, Henry Louis Gates Jr., Quincy Jones, Franklin A. Thomas,
John Edgar Wideman—married to or otherwise romantically involved with whites, Graham voiced disappointment. When
a prominent black role model "turns out to be married to a white mate," he wrote, "our children say, 'Well, if it's so good to
be black, why do all my role models date and marry whites?' ... As a child growing up in the 'black is beautiful' 1970s, I
remember asking these questions."

Anticipating the objection that his views amount to "reverse racism," no less an evil than anti-black bigotry, Graham wrote
that his aim was neither keeping the races separate nor assigning superiority to one over the other. Rather, he wanted to
develop "solutions for the loss of black mentors and role models at a time when the black community is overrun with
crime, drug use, a high dropout rate, and a sense that any black who hopes to find ... career success must necessarily
dissociate himself from his people with the assistance of a white spouse." He maintained,

It's not the discrete decision of any one of these individuals that makes black America stand up and
take notice. It is the cumulative effect of each of these personal decisions that bespeaks a
frightening pattern for an increasingly impoverished and wayward black community. The
cumulative effect is that the very blacks who are potential mentors and supporters of a financially
and psychologically depressed black community are increasingly deserting the black community en
masse, both physically and emotionally.
Although Graham’s view is widespread, there are blacks who not only tolerate but applaud increasing rates of interracial intimacy. The most outspoken and distinguished African-American proponent of free trade in the marital marketplace is the Harvard sociologist Orlando Patterson. Patterson makes three main claims. First, he maintains that interracial marriage typically gives people access to valuable new advice, know-how, and social networks. “When we marry,” he writes in Rituals of Blood: Consequences of Slavery in Two American Centuries, "we engage in an exchange of social and cultural dowries potentially far more valuable than gold-rimmed china. The cultural capital exchanged in ethnic intermarriage is considerably greater than that within ethnic groups."

Patterson’s second claim is that removing the informal racial boundaries within the marriage market would especially benefit black women—because large numbers of white men are and will increasingly become open to marrying black women, if given a chance. He notes that if only one in five nonblack men were to court black women, the pool of potential spouses available to those women would immediately double. According to Patterson, this would be good not only because it would make marriage more accessible to black women but also because larger numbers of white (and other) suitors might well fortify black women in their dealings with black men. As Patterson sees it, by forswearing nonblack suitors, many black women have senselessly put themselves at the mercy of black men, who have declined to be as accommodating as they might be in the face of greater competition.

Patterson’s third claim is that widespread intermarriage is necessary to the integration of blacks into American society. He agrees with the writer Calvin Hernton that intermarriage is "the crucial test in determining when a people have completely won their way into the mainstream of any given society." In Ordeals of Integration he therefore urges blacks, particularly women, to renounce their objections to interracial intimacy. Higher rates of intermarriage "will complete the process of total integration as [blacks] become to other Americans not only full members of the political and moral community, but also people whom 'we' marry," he counsels. "When that happens, the goal of integration will have been fully achieved."

Some may question whether higher rates of interracial marriage will do as much or signify as much as Patterson contends. The history of racially divided societies elsewhere suggests that it will not. Addressing "the uncertain legacy of miscegenation," Professor Anthony W. Marx, of Columbia University, writes that despite considerable race mixing in Brazil, and that country's formal repudiation of racism, Brazil nonetheless retains "an informal racial order that [discriminates] against 'blacks and browns.'" Contrary to optimistic projections, Brazil’s multiracialism did not so much produce upward mobility for dark Brazilians as reinforce a myth of mobility. That myth has undergirded a pigmentocracy that continues to privilege whiteness. A similar outcome is possible in the United States. Various peoples of color—Latinos, Asian-Americans, Native Americans, and light-skinned African-Americans—could well intermarry with whites in increasingly large numbers and join with them in a de facto alliance against darker-skinned blacks, who might remain racial outcasts even in a more racially mixed society.

Historically, though, at least in the United States, openness to interracial marriage has been a good barometer of racial enlightenment in thought and practice. As a general rule, those persons most welcoming of interracial marriage (and other intimate interracial associations) are also those who have most determinedly embraced racial justice, a healthy respect for individualistic pluralism, and a belief in the essential oneness of humanity.

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Is LOVE Becoming COLOR BLIND?

Young Adults Embrace Interracial Dating

By Shirley Henderson

They could have been just another twenty-something couple inside a trendy Chicago eatery—except that his skin was the color of bittersweet chocolate topped with a neat shock of dreadlocks and a direct

Kristina Adamski, 29
& John Phillips, 32
Reside: suburban Detroit
Rating: 6 years
How They Met: The two had drinks after Kristina met John through a mutual friend who worked with him.

In the case of Kristina Adamski, 29, and John Phillips, 32, who live together in suburban Detroit, being an interracial couple has been less of a challenge because the two communicate their feelings, and they have a large supportive network of family and friends. It’s not that big of a deal,” says Kristina, who is Polish and French Canadian, of her relationship with John, who is African-American. “The key is to have a diverse circle of friends and people who are open-minded.” Kristina’s parents, who have been married for 30 years, are also very supportive of her relationship. However, her paternal grandparents were not as happy about their granddaughter dating a Black man. For his part, John, says he has never focused on race when choosing a date; he looks at the individual. “Kristina is only the second European woman I’ve dated,” he says. “I remain oblivious to other people’s reaction to us. We’ve gotten looks, no verbal altercations. I pay it no attention.”
Matt Hamel, 21
&Tinaya Benson, 19
Reside: Rancho Cucamonga, Calif.
Dating: 1 year
How they met: They met at the recording studio of a
friend who invited Matt, a singer/songwriter, to help
Tinaya finish a song that she was writing.

Matt, who is White, and Tinaya, who is African-American, both
felt an instant attraction to each other. "I thought she was drop-
dead gorgeous," Matt says of their first encounter. "She was just
amazing. And as I got to know her personality, it was beautiful as
well." Matt admits he prefers to date Black women, and his par-
ents have accepted his decision to do so. However, he admits
that Tinaya's father had some intense questions for him initial-
ly, regarding his daughter. Not everyone is willing to give the cou-
ple the benefit of the doubt. Going out has presented them with
some obstacles, even right outside liberal Los Angeles, where
the two live. "It's hard," says Tinaya, an aspiring singer/song-
writer. "I feel that I have to fight for the relationship. Sometimes
it can get really rough."

In contrast to his date, a porcelain-skinned redhead.

As they were seated, a young Black woman at a nearby
table nudged her two girlfriends and the three women shook
their heads in collective wordless objection. An older White
man stared intently at the couple throughout their meal.

While interracial couples may be more prevalent, that
doesn't automatically mean that these couples are either
welcomed or even accepted by people around them. The
acceptance factor often depends on geographic location
and age. Still, many Blacks and Whites in the under-30 age
group cross the color line without giving a second thought
to race, and many of them haven't even heard of the Loving
v. Virginia case, which legalized marriage between people
different races in every state in 1967. According to U.S.
Census Bureau statistics in 2000, out of 570,919 interracial
marriages, 116,000 were between White men and Black
women. It's a number that continues to rise as more Black
women begin to date men from other races. Black men are
more likely to date, marry and cohabitate with women of
different race or culture, according to the report, at a rate
more than double that of Black women and White men.
THE COLOR OF LOVE

Many people do pay special attention to interracial couples. The reasons may vary, according to Dr. Kellina Craig-Henderson, Ph.D., a social psychologist and tenured professor at Howard University and author of Black Men on Interracial Relationships: What’s Love Got to Do With It? She says while there is a perception that the majority of Black men are dating and/or marrying outside of their race, that’s actually not the case. “It’s hard not to see those kinds of couples,” she says. “There really isn’t this exodus of Black men running to White women. Because we don’t see a lot of Black men and Black women together as couples, it stands out in our minds when we do see Black men in interracial relationships.”

Believe it or not, it can be hard on Brothers, too. Steve Crawley, 24, a mortgage broker in Milwaukee, met his girlfriend Amy, 25, while they were both attending a predominantly White high school. “She was cute,” Steve recalls. “Also, I like the way that she was upfront. She had an outgoing personality. That was the initial attraction.”

The couple dated for five years and took a break from each other before deciding to reunite. Steve says his friends, who have challenged his decision to date...
Interracial Couples

CELEBRITY LOVE IN THE SPOTLIGHT
There are many celebrities who are involved in interracial relationships, including such famous Black men as (left to right) NBA star Tony Parker (engaged to actress Eva Longoria) and singer Seal (married to model Heidi Klum). On the flip side, Black women are pairing up with men from different races as well. They include actresses Alfre Woodard (third from left), who's married to Roderick Spencer; and Kerry Washington (far right), who is engaged to actor David Moscow.

women of a different race, have confronted him. “As far as my peers, we don’t share the same view,” says Steve. “They tell me that I shouldn’t date White women, and I’ve been called a grocery list of things... I don’t exclude Black women. I’ve dated Black women before and some have been decent relationships.”

Many people involved in interracial relationships (like Steve, who grew up with a White stepfather) say they were taught not to notice color—and they don’t. Matthew Stover, 25, executive director of Jackson Symphony Orchestra in Tennessee, is another one who has found it enriching to date women from different cultures. He is currently engaged to a Hispanic woman, speaks fluent Spanish, and is a capable salsa and merengue dancer.

Perhaps because observers still frequently criticize interracial couples, many prefer to reside in areas where they are more accepted, including the East and West coasts. But even in the South, some interracial couples are gradually starting to feel more at home.

Guess Who’s Coming To Dinner?
What do parents of children involved in interracial relationships really think about their child’s choice to date someone of another race? We talked to some and their answers may surprise you.

“My husband and I have diverse backgrounds. I’m a hospice nurse, so we both look at people as people. Neither one of us looks at other people by color... John has been a great, great guy. They’d make me some beautiful grandbabies, wouldn’t they?”
—Fran Adamski, Kristina’s mom, Detroit

“I just always wanted little brown grandbabies. So there was some disappointment when my son came home with a White woman. I thought, ‘Is this really what we fought for in the ’60s?’”
—Charlene Gregory, 62, Los Angeles

“While I like my Japanese-American daughter-in-law well enough, I don’t want it known in a national publication that my son married outside of his race.”
—Anonymous

“Though there was a bit of angst about my son’s marriage to a White girl, I was proud of the courage they showed. While I have also been impressed with how race seems not to be an issue in their daily lives, at times I still worry that outside the bubble of their fairy-tale-like world where race still colors much of American life, there are still people in this country who would hurt them just for being together.”
—A Chicago father