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Commentary, analysis and investigations  
on issues affecting African Americans  
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**Born with a Skin Disease?!  
A Mother's Whitewash  
By David Myers**

**BlackCommentator.com Guest Commentator**

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I'll start from early on in my evolution I am a biracial man whose father is African-American and mother is Caucasian. My parents met in 1959 when my un-wed mother was in a nursing school where my father was employed as a nurse's aide. My mother was engaged to a white man who was attending engineering school. My father had an African-American wife and five children at the time of his extra-marital relationship with my mother. At some early point of my mother's pregnancy with me, she made the decision to marry her fiancé, and to lie to everyone about who the father of her un-born child was. She achieved this by claiming that I had been afflicted with a skin-disease called "melanism."

My mother and step-father had four more children together in the space of nine years after I was born, and we grew up together in a middle-class household in white America where the subject of "race" was never discussed. My earliest recollections of having to be aware of race were when I was asked questions about the color of my skin by other classmates in first grade. "Why was my skin dark?", "Was I adopted?" race was certainly a hot-button issue in 1965-66 when I began school, but any awareness that my mother and step-father had achieved from growing up in their white neighborhoods in the 40's and 50's was insufficient to prepare them for raising a biracial child, and to complicate things, they were both in complete denial of their complicity in my mis-education.

When I came home from school, after having been asked questions by fellow students from my all-white school district, my mother then explained "the skin-disease story"

to me... "other kids with this disease usually have dark blotches all over their bodies, so you should feel fortunate". When I would tell my mother about other boys and girls who would call me names or act aggressively for no apparent reason, I began to understand that I would get no further assistance from her to explain this rationale. My step-father was even more removed from the conversation and would only add, "You know what your mother said".

By the time that my step-father transferred jobs and our family of seven had moved from the all-white Cleveland, Ohio suburb of Stow to the all-white school district of Portville in Western up-state N.Y., it was the spring of 1970 and I was in fourth grade, already the veteran of many racial incidents and altercations with classmates and even some adults. My four younger siblings had also been told the same story, and had to explain the same things to their friends when asked why they had a brother who was black... "Hey, did your mother fool around a little bit??" I remember how much that hurt me when I heard it, and I'm sure they felt just as badly when they did... nonetheless, this was a "subject" that we never discussed as a family, not once, at least not in my presence.

I was taught through my observations of my mother and step-father to keep quiet about things that I wasn't sure about, and I was also taught to ignore the obvious.

As I matured into my teen years and began to experience society's issues and insecurities in coming to terms with this country's racial inequalities during the 70's, I felt an increasing need to rationalize and then codify the information that my mother had given me, regardless of what I was beginning to realize inside... I felt a growing discomfort / conflict, yet there was no one in my life to offer any other perspective. I had learned that black people were a part of society that we didn't talk about. (There was a black family in our small town, and they were poor and lived in a run-down house near the river. I never had any opportunity or reason to associate with them.)

I was a "B" student and also began taking an interest in sports where I was above average. Meeting other schools and student athletes were opportunities to then be exposed to populations that had not been told my story yet. I was just another black kid to them.

Communicating my experiences to my mother and step-father was difficult because they had no experience with racial prejudice, therefore when I had problems with other children, it would be looked at as an issue that "I" had in getting along with others (as well as intra-family sibling issues).

Because "race" was being ruled-out entirely, by my mother's denial of my father, she could not logically use that rationale to explain any conflicts that I would have. My step-father's complicity in this was to blindly support my mother's viewpoint.

The "white" viewpoint has always been that blacks (black society) were pretty well cared for, and what contact they did have would be polite and careful. What, with the Voting Rights and Civil Rights Acts being passed, the playing field had been leveled (as I was informed by my mother and step-father's generation).

The feelings and comfort of my mother were apparently what was important, and her inculcation had to have been partly comprised of the idea that white society acted as

the gate-keepers and care-takers of an infantilized black population.

Questions:

- How has black society formed its identity?
- What role models have been used, and how does white society react to positive black role models today? (Are they held to a more critical prism??)
- Is there enough information readily available for black people to easily form a positive racial identity?
- Is it important that black society is able to connect accurately the dots of its social evolution in America? and is it also important that white society can connect those same dots??
- What is White Privilege?
- What is White awareness?
- What is Whiteness?
- What about Affirmative Action?
- Is "Race" a social construct?
- How do we improve our society in America?
- Is there any other way(besides the attrition of the old guard) to achieve this??

These questions are not rhetorical. I'd like to hear from those of you that have courage and the wherewithal to provide feedback.

**BlackCommentator.com** Guest Commentator, Dave Myers, has a website, [DiscussRace.com](http://DiscussRace.com), a site focused on "race relations analysis & solutions." [Click here](#) to contact Dave Myers.

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