

BURGEONING BIRACIALITY:
What it Means to be a Young Mulatto in America Today

Honors Thesis

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ABSTRACT

In the form of 25 open-ended questions, I interviewed six half-black, half-white Salem State University students to seek their uncensored experiences in defining themselves and their world as biracial people. I endeavored to build upon the little existing literature that focused on the complexities of being “mulatto” – a loaded term in and of itself. Transitioning from a once uncommon, disgraced, and shamed community, half-black, half-white individuals now represent the largest group of biracial people in America, which comes with its own modern challenges and triumphs. In the vein of Lise Funderburg’s *Black, White, Other*, these six narratives weave together a complex tapestry of valuable memories, perspectives, and insights that each of these young mulattos possesses. I will be sharing highlights of these interviews in conjunction with photographs I shot of each interviewee, which add an intimate visual dimension to each narrative. I will also be reading excerpts from my personal introduction to the project, which explains the inspiration for my undertaking as a part of my own biracial journey. Furthermore, it will reveal the benefits of engaging in curious and honest conversations about race – the ways it helps shed light on America’s past, and how it can create more understanding and respect between individuals and groups alike in the present.

INTRODUCTION

*race*²

noun

each of the major divisions of humankind, having distinct physical characteristics... a group of people sharing the same culture, history, language, etc.; an ethnic group... a group or set of people or things with a common feature or features...

Although ideas of race are centuries old, it was not until the 19th century that attempts to systematize racial divisions were made. Ideas of supposed racial superiority and social Darwinism reached their culmination in Nazi ideology of the 1930s and gave pseudoscientific justification to policies and attitudes of discrimination, exploitation, slavery, and extermination... In recent years, the associations of race with the ideologies and theories that grew out of the work of 19th-century anthropologists has led to the use of the word race itself becoming problematic. Although still used in general contexts, it is now often replaced by other words that are less emotionally charged, such as people(s) or community...

- Oxford Dictionary's definition of the word "race"

"...Historically, the mixing of the races has incited jail terms, lynchings, and fiercely guarded family secrets... Interracial marriage was outlawed in seventeen states until 1967. Just as interracial relationships were deemed unacceptable, so were the offspring of those unions. Accounts in newspapers and novels portray these children as 'tragic mulattoes,' destined to a life on the margin of society, certain to be rejected by all...

For all Americans, not just the biracial ones, nothing about life or identity is so clear-cut or guaranteed - and certainly nothing that has to do with the issue of race... "if given the choice, [society] will often oversimplify rather than appreciate complexities and coexisting realities. I set out to write this book partly because I had never seen that question - What about the children? - asked of the children themselves..."

- *Black, White, Other* by Lise Funerburg (1994)



VIA PORTRAIT

I hold photos of my mother and father. Photo: Ryan Smith.



VIA CANDID

I play bingo during an event held by Cru, a Christian group at SSU. Photo: Ryan Smith.

The nonsense of Kurt Cobain's lyrics in "Smells Like Teen Spirit" speak to me. The word "mulatto" is placed within an assortment of terms (Cobain growls in the chorus: "With the lights out, it's less dangerous/Here we are now, entertain us/I feel stupid, and contagious/Here we are now, entertain us/A mulatto, an albino, a mosquito, my libido/Yeah") (Cobain), and a historically controversial term slips effortlessly under the radar, melding into a perfect chorus that kids from every nation can chant together. Instead of that reference to race defining the song, the song defines itself, and "mulatto" is simply one part of the many lyrics that spewed out of Kurt's complex brain. The song itself makes no statement – neither negative, nor positive – on mulattos. There is no background, context, or pretense to the word. It may be one of the few places I can think of where the word is not loaded with baggage.

My grandmother always said to me, "Being two races is the best way you can be. You have a unique understanding of the world that just one race doesn't have. You have the best of both worlds." I could understand what she meant by that when I heard it, but at first I didn't believe it. Instead of feeling encouraged, I felt that by being two races, I ended up knowing close to nothing about both. I felt that, though my combination of black and white races should have resulted in bright hues of knowledge and understanding, instead I felt a muddy gray, an uncultured and unsure person.

There is something about being exactly half of two different things that can leave you wanting on both sides. Because black and white interactions have been so infamously cruel in American history, being mulatto can leave you feeling like you're in no-man's-land on a war-torn battlefield. There can also be times when you can be treated with automatic interest because you appear "exotic" or "ethnic," due to your black heritage or mixed-race reality. Even if someone can't tell what race you are from first glance, appearing racially indefinable to another person can lead to challenges when interacting with them. Someone who is half-black and half-white is often asked the question, "What are you?" And they may just as often ask the internal question in response, "Once I tell them, will I be accepted for who I am?"

Thoughts from this self-conscious mindset lead me to shut my mouth, and to avoid talking about race at all. For years, I felt like I didn't have the right to speak on these topics. I told myself I didn't really know what it meant to be white or black, and that no one from either race would take what I had to say seriously if I tried to explain how I saw black or white culture, or what it felt like to be biracial. I feared that I would make someone else mad by using a stereotype without realizing, asking a controversial question, or expressing a viewpoint that someone else didn't agree with. Nonetheless, questions still bubbled up inside of me.

To confront this, I came up with a less frightening alternative: I would ask other mulattos how they felt instead so that I could educate myself. In fact, the first time I was asked about my useage of the word "mulatto" itself was from one of my interviewees, who cautioned that some might find its use offensive, as most believe "mulatto" derives from the Spanish word for "mule" (Shewchuk). I appreciated his honest feedback, and considered using different terminology. Eventually, I decided to use "mulatto" simply because it is simpler than descriptions like "half-black, half-white," and more specific

than words such as “biracial.” Despite its history, I chose to use this precise term for ease of communication with readers.

That was only one of the many things I contemplated, wrestled with, and discovered throughout this process. When I came up with the idea for this project, I knew it would help me learn, but I didn’t expect it to affect me emotionally as much as it did. Seeing my interviewees speak from a place of assuredness in what they had experienced and what they believed, even if they were still working through some things, was inspiring to me. It has taught me that I have a right to speak about how I feel, and that I can respect the place I am in my life’s journey. In turn, I want to empower readers of this project as well.

I want to create an atmosphere where anyone can express their feelings about race, regardless of whether they think they know anything about it, whether they’re comfortable with their own racial identities or not, or whether they feel they have controversial things to say or not. It’s time to ask those long-buried questions, to trek to the deeper, more unsettling places of life. Many topics in American race relations have long been un-discussed; they are the elephants in the room. When they are addressed, a whole new world of discovery and healing conversation occurs.

For reasons I will never understand, my mother was first attracted to my father by his kitschy style of dress – all-white suits (in strong contrast with his dark skin), scarves, and a constant hat, which topped a wavy black wig. I have been told that he had the manners of a Southerner, and a soft, polite way of speaking that relaxed those he conversed with. Race wasn’t a big topic of discussion, since my family accepted him under the terms they would any other boyfriend. But although topics of race aren’t always uttered, they exist underneath – a constant, silent dialogue of experience and emotion. Although this wasn’t the main reason why my mother and father didn’t end up staying together, there is something more challenging about being in an interracial relationship that is revealed in the statistics.

Though my parents were never married, the divorce rates for interracial marriages are higher than same-race marriages, and black male/white female couples have the highest divorce rates of all (Bratter, King). However, the fact that interracial marriage is a relatively new reality in America certainly plays a part. During this new practice period for interracial relationships, biracial children like myself are born. I join the miniscule 2.9 percent of mixed race people in America (although that statistic has grown 32 percent between 2000 and 2010) (Rampell). I also join a growing mulatto population, which itself represents the largest biracial group in America (Rampell).

My birth name is Olivia. The name means “olive tree,” and historically, olive branches represent peace. Part of the reason my mother chose that name was because she hoped that her biracial child would symbolize the potential of a bridge between the races. However, peace in terms of race starts much closer to home for me. A consequence of being biracial means one must make peace with oneself. Increasingly, America is entering a time in which biracial people are not forced to choose one racial or ethnic identity over another. They can choose to identify as both, but it’s still not an easy choice.

Our parents' generation of mulattos probably saw themselves as black mostly because it was forced upon them from the outside – it often wasn't an option to choose both. Although these pressures still exist, our generation has more of a possibility to choose how we identify ourselves. After a childhood of being raised by my mother, and gaining information and experience in the area of race, I had a foundation from which to choose.

Each holiday season with my mother would be tempered with a child's book about the fundamentals of Kwanzaa, the African-American cultural holiday celebrated around Christmastime, featuring a brief mother-daughter discussion about it. We read books about African-Americans who achieved great things in history, and contributed to a curriculum that I largely would have never learned in public school. The ones we did learn about in school were the token few – Martin Luther King Jr., Harriet Tubman, Rosa Parks, and a few others, mostly concentrated during National Black History month. Barely any black literature was taught, and most of the literature (largely of antiquity) that featured black people showed them as relegated to slaves, or equally subordinate roles.

Even though she knew little about African or African-American life or traditions, my mother worked to provide both sides of my cultural background, since my father wasn't there to provide his side. She had admirable and valid reasons for her attempts. However, it was hard for my young mind to grasp the importance of my mother's attempts, because children usually don't question what type of upbringing they are "supposed to" or "should" have. I was used to not having my father in my life, and so I didn't feel the significance of the gap of an absent parent quite the way she did. I can still see the image I saw in my mind when she first tried to explain to me that I am two races. I imagined a large group of people at a starting line, poised to begin a marathon, in which people of different skin tones were grouped.

I can also recall my first concrete memory of how others might see me, in terms of my race. This happened while I was in the car, driving with my mom through New York. When we began to travel through a rougher area of a city, she told me to lean down for a few minutes. She explained to me that, because my skin is darker, other people could have negative reactions to me, possibly becoming angry or violent. It was a strange shift in self-perception: my little face, with the tawny skin color and large, dark eyes that I saw in the mirror every day, could incite negative emotions in strangers. I couldn't understand why.

Defining what race means psychologically and sociologically as adults can still be complicated and confusing. When I meet someone for the first time with my mother, the thought can cross my mind as to whether this new acquaintance might assume that I am adopted, because I don't look very much like her. The first person to guess my ethnicity after I was born guessed that I was Cape Verdean, and my mother was described by the nurses as "the only white woman who gets a black baby." When confronted with forms that asked for a definition of ethnicity (school applications, doctor's forms, etc.), my mother would fill each one out differently, depending on the situation at hand. She would fill in the "white" or "black" bubble depending on whichever would benefit me most; for

example, if the organization desired minorities, “black” would fit the bill.

Because she worked for the Census in the year 2000, she witnessed the advent of the ability to check more than one box to specify multiple races on the questionnaire, a momentous event (Census). It became a way for mixed-race people to be able to say, “We’re here. We exist, and we have an identity and a reality, regardless of whether you understand it and validate it or not.” However, it can take time for this confidence to develop in biracial people. Home life is essential in laying groundwork for how a biracial person identifies race, and is usually where the first curious questions begin.

What is “normal” for home life has shifted greatly in recent years. Around 40% of the baby boomer generation’s marriages – the parents of today’s young people – ended (and likely still end, if they marry again) in divorce (Clary). Though this is true, the underlying idea that the traditional nuclear family is the ideal is still prevalent. Being raised by a single-parent sometimes feels like your family has deviated from a “model plan” for life – as if there is a handbook which states the exact rules for having a happy family, and you’ve taken the risk to deviate from them. It is hard to combat these standards, which can affect how satisfied you are with your current situation. It certainly did for me as a child.

I grew up worrying, at times, that because I was being raised by a single parent – especially given that my parents were two different races – that I was missing out on half of my heritage and cultural reality. I was concerned I was missing out on the consistent environmental influences that my father could have provided, so I wasn’t able to be who I was “truly meant” to be. Even someone who lacks one or both birth parents in their lives could experience these same feelings. It would probably come naturally for them to wonder, to be curious and feel a hole in their lives, especially if they are exposed to functional nuclear families throughout their lives.

This reality of my father’s absence has contributed to my questions, confusion, and curiosity about race. For a child, a parent is an anchor that gives that child a foundational definition for many things that need to be understood. I not only had half of someone’s genes inside of me whom I did not know, meaning that I could not connect any of my own traits back to this man, but this absence also gave me a disconnection to being black. I grew up feeling more racially and culturally white because I didn’t have an understanding of what it meant to be black. I didn’t have a consistent reference to fall back on, a safe place from which I could derive information, until I was old enough to go out into the world and form my own thoughts and opinions about race from there.

It took me a long time to stop feeling ashamed of my ignorance, and to accept that it is only natural for me to feel more unfamiliar with what it means to be black. Now that I’m older, I know that there are many other sources I can learn from about having black heritage, and that there are infinite perspectives on what that means, since all individuals have their own unique views on how they define race and race relations. I can consider others’ viewpoints with an open mind, and meld them into my own definition of what it means. For a long time, though, I felt two opposite pressures. At the same time as I felt compelled to try to explore my black heritage on my own, I also felt pressure to try to fit

into the Caucasian culture I was constantly exposed to in my daily life – to squeeze myself into a narrower, mono-racial category. It was difficult to understand the world from this limiting, uncomfortable position.

This reached its culmination in high school. The first time I personally came in contact with the word nigger, outside of hearing it on pop radio, was one day during lunch. The hand-written label of “Nigger Water” on my water bottle didn’t make me angry. It made me confused more than anything. The fact that I qualified as someone who could be labeled as a nigger in someone’s eyes had never dawned upon me before. What constitutes a nigger, I wondered? At times I had started to forget about my biracial identity, because I was so used to being around Caucasians – I started seeing myself as white, and I figured others viewed me the same way. But events such as this forced me to realize that I still never quite fit the mold.

Acts of racism occur daily in America. However, I often closed my eyes to them because I didn’t want to see them. At the same time that I didn’t want to feel like a victim, or get an overblown ideal of how much racism happened; I was also scared of it, and didn’t want to acknowledge that there are things to be afraid of. It was enough for me to understand that overt racism and racist laws didn’t occur as much as they had occurred before; for example, I didn’t have to experience using “colored only” bathrooms or drinking fountains like I had seen in photos before the civil rights movement. Thus, it was easier to try to blend into the mostly white culture I was accustomed to, and to pretend other people didn’t see me differently.

It is interesting to note, however, what types of assumptions may be made from a first glance at me. I may appear less safe, less educated, less sophisticated. Or perhaps to others, I may appear more intriguing, more mysterious, more cultured. Both of these camps swing to general extremes, and avoid any exact definition of me; for example, my love for the arts, my affinity for animal bones, and my great dislike of bananas and carrots. Only by talking to me would someone discover these parts of my personality. These race-related assumptions about my personality could happen to anyone, but given the racial history of our country, being half-black and half-white can represent something unique. It is different than being, for example, half-German and half-English, which can’t necessarily be perceived as easily by the eye. As a mulatto, your body can be a visual site of lingering hostility, of deep-rooted antagonism – in this way, you are marked by something you cannot change or prevent.

The people I interact with all see reflections of my racial identity through their eyes. Some of these perceptions could be truthful, and some may be distorted. It has taken me time to realize that no matter what other people see me as, my own definition of myself is valid in and of itself. This acceptance provided me the space and freedom to be curious about my racial, ethnic, and cultural identity – to not be afraid to make mistakes and feel awkward, and to realize that sometimes, two seemingly opposite things can exist and be true at the same time. For example, I can know I’m biracial, but at the same time I can feel white; I can realize I’m black, but at the same time that I can comprehend my biraciality – all these definitions often tumble and overlap. The goal is wrestling: to take ideas about race that other people express and to commingle them with my own, creating

a flurry of challenging thoughts.

In modern-day America, it seems that darker skin tones can end up being more noticeable and dominant than lighter skin tones in many peoples' eyes. A clear example is demonstrated in President Obama, and how he is often referred to as a "black" president, instead of a "white" president or a "biracial" president. This happens even though he is exactly the same amount white as he is black, and he is also biracial at the same time, making all three terms equally valid. However, "black" is usually still the chosen term, so much so that some people aren't aware that he is biracial at all.

However, we are more racially complex than we assume. It is possible for someone to build their identity around a supposed ethnicity, then to have it torn apart when they realize they are not who they thought they were. This happened to Oprah Winfrey during her experience of getting her DNA tested to see what her ethnic heritage was. Although she attributed some of her personal characteristics to being Zulu, and had an inner sense that she was, her test revealed that she actually wasn't Zulu at all (Stasi). Even so, she was so set on the idea that she was Zulu, that she told her television audience that she was even though she wasn't, and received some cutting feedback from the prince of the Zulu tribe at the time.

Even when someone is sure of what ethnicity they are, there are still levels of stereotypes that can be perpetuated due to peoples' understanding of themselves. My grandmother always describes herself as being calm and stubborn, because these are the traits of a Czechoslovakian (she moved to Yonkers, New York from the tiny town of Svidnik, Slovakia, when she was two years old). Just because she defines herself verbally as being calm and stubborn doesn't mean that she is always calm and stubborn, or that all Slovakian people are like that. However, tradition, ethnic heritage, and stereotypes can all get mixed together and confused over time. Different levels of ethnological knowledge can shift the perception of oneself and of others.

Consequently, blanket terms like "white" and "black" can completely oversimplify and silence a deeper dialogue of explanation. We certainly use these, and many other charged terms in daily life as quick, easy, and general expressions, and there are connotations and stigmas that linger in the process. However, I came to see that there can be a larger problem in simply throwing out all potentially controversial words, because it can silence us out of fear of saying the wrong thing. I realized that, to have good, honest conversation, I didn't have to weigh down my sentences with obsessively politically-correct terminology. Instead, I focused more on taking some time to pinpoint what I wanted to say with as much clarity and civility as possible, even if controversial terms ended up being used in the process. From that starting ground, I continue to learn which terms are beneficial, and which are harmful, which will hopefully create a more accurate and respectful vocabulary for me over time. Life is messy and full of complication, and our thoughts, speech, and actions reflect that. Nonetheless, I have witnessed the power of how talking to others can start making sense out of a confusing world, and can humble me in the light of others' meaningful words and experiences.

And this is where the project occurs, amidst these expressions and ponderings.

The liminal zone between black and white looks different for every mulatto. I have been lucky enough to meet quite a few during my time at Salem State University (SSU). All of my interviewees have at one time attended, or currently attend, SSU. I have been friends with some of them since my freshman year here, and I met some of them for the first time during the interviews. This is the culmination of the hunger that has been growing in me to learn more about other mulattos' experiences growing up and becoming adults, as I am, and to know more about white culture and black culture and what happens when the two collide.

My hope is that this project will be accessible to anyone, regardless of their race and level of knowledge about the subject. I have not written this introduction because I am an expert on the subject of race - far from it. I conducted these interviews to learn, and to present the stories of the individuals who have granted me access to their lives - stories that deserve to be heard. The subjects speak for themselves, without commentary or analysis from me or anyone else (as I believe they should). Almost 20 years after *Black, White, Other* was published, I seek to follow in Funerburg's footsteps to see how the 21st century has changed life for this new generation of mulatto children.

The conclusion of this project does not lie within my analysis or verdict on the interviews - it lies within you, the reader. This project is a growing process - it does not have a goal that needs to be reached for its purpose to be "properly achieved." I think of it more as an open forum of discussion - as a reader, you will see these interviews through your unique perspective. As topics and ideas come to mind, you can ask the questions that aren't usually raised, and breach the subjects which aren't usually breached. You can respond by journaling, talking to friends, researching more about topics of race and ethnicity, or a multitude of other ways. This is an avenue through which you can work through, re-evaluate, and express your racial, ethnic, and cultural identity, no matter your background or your place in life.

When I first came up with the idea for this project, I vastly underestimated the power of the interview. At first I looked at it from a scientist's perspective, thinking that I would be able to garner certain facts and trends from the data I would gain, and largely overlooked any emotional components. Once I stopped being afraid that it would change me, I watched myself heal in amazement, through this unique process of interviewing others. Though I wasn't the one doing the talking, I have gained so much benefit just from having my thoughts stirred up. I hope you will, too.

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NOTE: Names mentioned during interviews may have been changed.

AMANDA COOPER



PORTRAIT

Amanda holds photos of her father and mother.



CANDID

Amanda sings with the Ssockapella group in the SSU recital hall.

FAMILY AND CHILDHOOD

1. *How did your parents meet, and was there any racial tension between family, friends, or others when they decided to get together?*

My parents met at a bar, and one of them was singing. My dad was actually with his ex-wife at the time, and my mom and dad were friends. My grandfather on my mom's side didn't like the fact that he was black - there was some tension there. It was only that grandfather that had a problem. My dad tended to date white women.

2. *Lenny Kravitz said of his childhood: "I grew up not knowing about race until I... went to school... My parents were the only parents that didn't match." (Guthmann) Were you always aware of race when you were growing up, or was there a moment you remember becoming aware?*

I knew my parents were different races, but I don't think it ever really "hit" me - it was just normal. All of my friends had white parents, or black parents, and none of them were either/or, but I was just like "Whatever, that's normal."

3. *As time passes and race relations change in America, have the ways others respond to your parents being an interracial couple also changed over the years?*

I don't think so. A lot of people who [have] just met my dad are surprised he's married to a white woman (but they are also surprised he's married at all). The reactions are from no one specific - just people in general. And I think it's the same way for my mom, but I just haven't encountered it. My dad will show photos of his family of people to his work, and it's like, a white woman, and me, who's not even tan at all, and my sisters, one of which is tan, and the other of which is kind of tan.

4. *How did your parents raise you and your siblings, if you have any, as biracial children; i.e., did they agree on trying to give you the benefit of both cultures, or were you raised in more of one culture than another, or was this perhaps a point of tension between your parents?*

I don't think it was a point of tension, but I have definitely been raised in more of white culture. It just kind of happened that way, it wasn't like my dad wasn't trying. He'll make "soul food" - greens, cornbread, ribs, stuff like that. But partially it was the neighborhood [in Framingham] I grew up in, which at the time was all white people, and now everybody lives there. I was mostly brought up by my babysitter, because my mom worked and my dad was traveling for music, so they were both there - my dad took care of me during the day if he was home, but [our babysitter] took care of us, and she didn't have any black kids besides us, just because of our neighborhood. And then in high school, we all branched out into which culture we liked better.

5. *Leona Lewis said this of when she would get teased as a child: "I'd go crying home to Mum and she would say to me, "You're a beautiful girl and you're a part of me and a part of your dad. You don't have to do anything but carry yourself with pride'." (Das)*

Were there any messages or values your parents instilled in you with regard to your mixed heritage?

I don't think so. I mean it's just the same old shit that everyone says - "be who you are, be proud of who you are," stuff like that, "don't let anyone tell you any different," not like, "you are half and you should be proud of it and stuff like that. It's never really like that. It's more about humanity things, not like "Hey, you're half-black. This is how you should feel."

SCHOOL EXPERIENCES

6. Did you grow up in either an ethnically diverse, or non-ethnically diverse area, and was your school population mirrored by that town or city?

My whole time in school it's been like everything at once. Because Framingham is like, the melting pot. There's Spanish people, there's Brazilian people, there's black people, there's Asian people... It wasn't a big deal for me to see race or for race to be taken into account because everyone was just thrown together... In my high school, there was a ton of black people. It's so weird, when I hear people say, "Oh, yeah, there was like two black people at my school," I'm like "How?"... When you cross the border, I'm like, "How is Natick so fucking different than Framingham?" It's like, "Bye black people, bye ethnicity, see you later..." It's so confusing. I came up here and I went to Gloucester or something. This happened this weekend. I drove [my friend] to work and we stopped at Dunkin Donuts, and there were white people working at Dunkin Donuts... It's normal to see a few, but not like the entire staff. And I was just like, "I don't like any of this, this is not normal." I'm used to seeing everything everywhere, so I was like "This is just weird."

7. Derek Jeter said this about experiencing racism at school: "Kids would say [the N word]; you'd hear it. It would bother you and annoy you, make you feel bad. [But]... It taught me how I didn't want to be, that I needed to learn about different people as opposed to just judging them." (ABC News) Did you experience any racism at school, and if so, what was it like for you?

... There was a black teacher from Jamaica, who was racist against black people. And as soon as she found out I was half-black, she was like "Uhh." And I was like, "How does this even work?" She just thought we were all lazy. She's like, 'You don't do your work, so clearly you're not gonna know this answer.' And I was like, "What does this even mean? Have you looked in the mirror? You're way darker than I am!" ... She would change her wig in the middle of classes. Black women wear wigs all the time, she would literally go to the back of the classroom, change her wig, and come back. But I didn't see any other really real racism, I haven't experienced any yet, which is really lucky... I could pass for just white. Although people tend to think I'm Hispanic. And I'm like "Sorry, I'm not Hispanic, I'm black." And they're like, "What?"

8. What is your education experience like now, attending Salem State, which is the

second-most diverse school of all 20 Massachusetts state and UMass schools?

Salem State doesn't seem that diverse to me. Compared to Framingham, I don't see that many black people here verses Framingham. There are a ton of Asian people here, but that's because a foreign exchange program to Japan and stuff, and I'm just like "Gah, they travel in packs." Although black people here travel in packs, too... My sisters go to school in Rhode Island and Connecticut, and my sister..., who moved me in this year, was like, "You have black people!" And I was like "Yes... I go to school in Massachusetts. Not white-ass Connecticut where you can't see anyone ever of ethnicity." I'm really surprised that we're one of the most ethnic places ever. My mind is blown.

9. Did you know how diverse Salem State was when you applied to the school, and did that have any sway in your final decision to attend? Do you think schools with a range of diversity are a better thing than a school with less diversity?

Duh, school with diversity is so much better than school without diversity. It makes you meet more people, and cooler people - whether you like them or not, they all come from different backgrounds. It definitely had no effect on my school choice, 'cause I had no idea. I think this would be mad fun - go to school with all black people. I thought about going to an all-black college, but I thought I'd probably stick out like a sore thumb. But I feel like it would be so much fun because they have so much culture. At black college you talk about it, you talk about culture... When you go to a plain old white Catholic school, it's like "Yay, Jesus." And I'm like, "This is boring!"... If you go to Gordon, you're supposed to be married by 21. What is that? Okay, you can love Jesus, but you don't have to rub it in my face. I love Jesus but I'm not like "JESUS!" And "I'm gonna get married by 21!"... Definitely diverse places are totally better than bland fuckin' places.

10. Have you had any difficulty being accepted by certain groups here on campus, or the opposite - being automatically accepted because of your skin color?

... I don't look black, so white people tend to flock to me. I tend to flock to white people, I don't know why... I'm not boogie or hood or nothin', and when I hang out with black people, sometimes I feel out of place, because I don't talk like them, and I listen to the same music as they do, but not all the time, and stuff like that. Like my sisters, they're, like, black. All of my sisters (six, including halves), they act black, they talk black. Even [my two full sisters], they were raised in the same household and in high school, we found people who we flocked to, and I didn't flock to black people. I had black friends, clearly... but I just tended to flock to white people, I just didn't have the same personality. Sometimes when I tell black people that I'm half-black they're like "Aw yeah that's so cool," and they like start talking to me more, and I'm just like, "Alright, did you not want to talk to me when I was just plain white? Was there an issue?" And then there's Melissa (*our mutual friend*) who's like, "I'm the blackest person ever!" And I'm like, Melissa, you're literally more black than I am. I don't understand how it happens. She grew up in Hamilton, with white people. I'm like, "You're not even the race, dammit!"

FRIENDSHIPS/DATING RELATIONSHIPS

11. Throughout your life, have you become friends with people of a variety of different races, or mostly one or two races?

I'm friends with everyone... I literally flock to anyone and everyone, if they want to be my friend, I'm your friend, that's how it works. But I feel like if you lined up all of my friends together, most of them would be white, and then there would be black people, Hispanics... I have a diverse group of friends, it's just that, because I did theatre in high school, I think that's where all the white people were, and so, then my friends became white people and stuff like that.

12. If you have friends who are also mulatto, do you feel like you relate to or can connect with them in a special way, or do you have different backgrounds and thoughts about race than they do?

I've never actually talked about the race thing to any mulattos. I got the term "halffrican" from Rob. It's never come up - it's not a big deal. I feel like because we are mixed race... whatever. It's like, whatever.

13. Oprah Winfrey once said that she wished she could be light-skinned as a young woman, because the light-skinned women were always the ones that were most pursued by black men. Were you ever picked on for being a particular skin tone by any racial group? Do you think there is still a color-tone hierarchy?

I still think there's a color-tone hierarchy. And the funny thing is that the only people who have brought up my skin tone are my sisters. Because they tan and I don't, no matter how long I'm in the fuckin' sun. But there's totally a color-tone hierarchy, because the lighter you are, the more you can pass as a white person. Like, I can pass as being a plain ol' white person. My younger sister Tamera cannot pass. I feel like most people think I'm Hispanic... I never get black. People either think I'm white or Hispanic, and when I'm in Framingham, people think I'm Brazilian... When I first met you, I knew you were black. I thought you were just black, I didn't think you were mulatto, because I'm just used to it, because in Framingham there are so many different skin tones... I could tell by your hair and by your face that you're just black. And then you were like, "Oh I'm mulatto," and I'm just like "Really? What? I'm confused... Well, that's cool!" ...I get Spanish people who talk Spanish to me first, and I know enough Spanish to be like "I know what you just said, but I have no idea how to respond to you because I'm not Spanish." It happens at my job all the time. I work at a clothing store, and there's only one person there who... speaks Spanish and they automatically just start speaking Spanish to me and I'm like wow, I have no idea... New York and Company - it's a rich, white people clothing store.

14. Have you dated whites, blacks, mulattos, or entirely different races from yourself? And if you have dated more than one race, how have your experiences differed in accordance to the meshing of both of your respective heritages and cultures?

I have dated multiple races. I tend to lean towards the Hispanic. I tend to lean towards ethnicity. I've only had two white boyfriends out of six. And three of them were either Hispanic or half-black half-Hispanic, and so, I don't know. The only time I've ever experienced meshing of family or like cultures is with Ryan because I had to go to his sister's birthday party, and that was terrifying. Within a week of us dating, he was like, "Want to go to my sister's birthday party and meet my entire family at one time?"... Ryan is Puerto Rican and Dominican, and the party was his whole Puerto Rican side. And they're like, cool people. They remind me of black people. They're loud "like we're supposed to be," there's music going all the time... I feel like Hispanic people are the most like black people. If you go to a black household, they're all about culture and family and food, and you go to a Hispanic household and they're all about culture and family and food. Like, literally, I feel like they're like the same thing. I don't know if that's why I'm like attracted to Hispanic men. I think that could be part of it...

15. If you see yourself getting married or having children, do you see yourself most likely marrying a person of a certain race?

I just want little tan babies. I feel like with what I'm predisposed to liking, I guess, I'm probably going to marry a Hispanic man. I would not be surprised, and neither would my family. I've never imagined having a white child. White kids are so ugly! I say that all the time. Little black babies are so cute. Black babies are adorable, whether they're Hispanic or black, children that have a color are just cute. So I'm pretty sure I'll probably marry a person of color. Not that I'd be like, "Uh, you're white, I can't marry you," but I don't see myself marrying a white guy.

SELF-IMAGE

16. What is it that constitutes being a particular race - is it more cultural and environmental than color-wise, more nurture than nature?

I don't know, I mean it's nurture above nature. Because you could be adopted like Jimmy (*our mutual friend*), and everyone's like, "You're white, right?" And he's Columbian (although he [has said] "I don't even know [for sure] if I'm from Columbia"). But literally, he doesn't like Spanish food, he doesn't seem like he's Spanish. You think he's a white kid because he's been adopted by a white family. But he also doesn't look Hispanic. Like, a black kid who's raised by a white family could be... I don't know. I feel like they would be more predisposed to try to be like their culture because they feel so out of place sometimes. But with me, I don't know. I literally tell people, like, "No, I am, I'm black." Because people are like, "You're not black," and I'm like "Yes I am, want to see pictures of my father? He's dark as night. I am black." And I think the only reason they do that is because it's part of who I am and people can't see this. And I'm like, "This is part of who I am, even though you can't see it."

17. Throughout your life, have people ever been surprised when you told them you are mulatto? Did they ever guess any other variety of ethnicities that were wrong?

People are always surprised that I'm black.

18. Have you ever, or do you feel uncomfortable with either side of your black and white heritage (or in more specific terms of your ethnicity, i.e. Jewish and Haitian)?

I don't think so... Why would you feel uncomfortable with it? It's who you are. I feel like if you had grown up with your dad around it would have been totally different, especially since you grew up in Natick.

19. Race-wise, do you feel like there might be a side of yourself that is hidden, either subconsciously or on purpose? If so, do you want to reveal it?

Yes, actually, a little bit. I tend to suppress my black side. Like, when I get angry, I get black. That's the best way to describe it. You know how black people move their hands? This is literally how I talk. I start head-swerving, and I don't care about my grammar anymore. The stereotypical black girl, that's how I get when I'm angry, and I don't like being angry, because it's terrifying when I get angry, and I tend to suppress it. No one has actually seen me naturally be black. Last year, I played in Vagina Monologues as Angry Vagina as a black person, and my black side, but no one's actually seen me act black because I'm actually angry. I tend to suppress my black side a little bit more. I think that's because I look so white. I think it kind of bothers me a little bit, because when I do get in a situation where I should be more black, or whatever - even in my family I feel awkward, because I'm not like this, so I feel awkward, because my sisters are all loud - they're black people, they really are - and I am not like that. I can be loud, especially with them, but it's not to the same degree, like, I don't talk the same way that they do. I don't speak slang... even when I text, and my sister will write the number four, and I'm like, "I can't deal with this, write English, that's not English!" It can make me a little uncomfortable when I'm in that situation and I don't know what to do.

20. Bob Marley said this about being biracial: "Me don't dip on nobody's side. Me don't dip on the black man's side nor the white man's side. Me dip on God's side, the one who create me and cause me to come from black and white." (Lowney) Depending on who you happen to be around (i.e. a certain race or culture of people), does your self-image in terms of your race differ? Or, in your daily life, do you tend not to think about or notice your race?

I tend to be pretty comfortable with it. Everyone changes their personality depending on who they're around, just to fit in better. When I'm with black people, I don't tend to act super black. This is an interesting question that I've never thought about before, because it just happens. I agree with what Bob Marley said - I don't really change that much, but like, you naturally just change a little bit to just assimilate... 'Cause some people are just night and day, and that's just fake. I guess what I do to change is change my vernacular. I'm like, "You're mad fake," you can hear it in my voice. If I'm around my sisters and stuff I kind of tend to talk like that, but when I'm around white people, I tend to talk like I'm talking to you now.

AMERICAN CULTURE/CURRENT AFFAIRS

21. *Although we are coming up to a presidential election soon, America has now had four years with a mulatto president. What do you think his election and presidency means to American culture, and the often-controversial, often-shifting racial environment of our country?*

Well, I know it definitely changes the fact that... there's never been a black president... And the thing I hate is that black people are like, "Oh, we have a black president, we can do whatever the fuck we want." And I'm like, "That's a damn lie, because he's still the fucking president." And he's not an asshole, and people use it to their advantage; they're like, "Oh yeah, we finally got a black president, we can be whatever we wanted to be," And I'm like, "You could be whatever you wanted to be before, you asshole." 'Cause I feel like with black people it's like, you're predisposed to be like, "Well, I can either be a rapper, or a drug dealer to be really successful, and then I'm not going to get very far, I'm not going to be super successful... I could be a manager of a store," and stuff like that. Like, my dad is a smart man, but he's just stupid. He does stupid shit to get himself fired. And I'm just like, "Why?" He's a smart guy and he could do whatever he wanted, but he fucks things up for himself and I'm like "Why do you do these things?" The only thing that really changed is that if [Obama] does get re-elected (please, dear Lord), I think black people just have more respect for themselves, you know what I mean? Wow, I just sounded really negative toward black people! I mean, they're smart and intelligent, I think they'll try harder. I think they won't, like, settle into that form that everyone thinks they're supposed to belong to, not settle into stereotypes... I think they'll strive harder to work to their potential... Because they assume that people are always going to think of them in a certain way and I'm like, "Break out, be whoever you are, instead of being the form."

22. *Do you think that, in America today, it's still necessary to pick either solely black or solely white social groups to be accepted, or is it more complicated?*

It's more complicated than that. I think growing up in Framingham makes me feel this way - everyone will accept you for who you are. It doesn't matter what your race is. They might be wary of you in the beginning - (*I ask about what it might be like down South.*) Down South is not America! Down South is like back in like 1800s, because they're all like racist bastards! ...Down South then, I feel like you have to choose a side. You have to branch out, like, if a black kid wants to be friends with a white kid, you gotta be really careful. You have to make sure that family isn't racist, you can't do anything wrong because they might think that it was your fault, and you fucked up their kids because black people are a bad influence and stuff. I've been down South a little bit, but from people I know who've been down South more, like my family's really close friends, she says they're nice folks, but white people down there... They'll be nice to your face, but at the same time they'll be judging you and watching and make predispositions about you. Up here in Framingham, you're friends with whoever. Unless you're like the rich white people of Framingham, in which case I can see that they're all basically white together, like, they don't branch out... They rarely bring in a couple of black kids. It's not that they're racist, it's just that they've known each other all their lives and stuff... But

literally, in Framingham, I don't know one single person there who's not friends with somebody of another race. I think it's good that I grew up there. I'm lucky. If you want to learn about race and how different races interact, just go to Framingham. They interact like every other human being on the planet. It's not like "Oh, well you're black, so I have to change everything or dumb things down." It's just like, "Oh, you're black, that's awesome." That's it.

23. When asked about her daughter Nahla's race, Halle Berry said, "I feel like she's black. I'm black and I'm her mother, and I believe in the one-drop theory." (Weiss) Although Halle Berry is technically mulatto, she sees herself and her mixed daughter as black. Does anyone in your family categorize you as one race or another? If you decide to have children, how do you think you would choose to handle your children's races?

My sisters say that I'm the "white" one out of the group. They all think I'm gonna marry a white man - I'm like "No!" But, I feel like when I have kids I'll be like, "You're mixed. I'm mixed." I'm not gonna be like "You're black," unless it becomes an issue, like if they have a problem with a black person, I'll say, "I want you to realize that you are black. You might not look it, but you are black, so don't forget it - don't say stuff about other people when you are them." I think that's what happens when you get mixed so much, you don't realize it. And it's just like, "You are the same people, you came from the same place." I'm gonna be like, "You're partially black. You are. If you ask me, if you want to get technical about it, you're this, this, this, and this."

24. Lenny Kravitz said this about his parents' relationship: "[My parents] would walk down the street (and) people would spit on them... very disgusting things. My father lost his side of the family 'til I was born." (Guthmann) This memory Lenny related is well within living memory. How far have we come since then?

I think we've come pretty far. My parents don't get spit on when they're out together, which is a good thing. I mean, I've gotten some slurs thrown at me... When I was young, in Framingham, by ignorant people. I've been called "dirty blood" and stuff like that... It bothered me, but not to the point where I would fight back, because I'm just like, "You're ignorant, that's what you are, and I'm going to treat you like an ignorant person, that's how it is..." They just think that being pure is one thing even though literally nobody is pure anymore. There is no just one race anymore, because if you go back far enough, you're mixed somewhere, definitely. I'm just like, "You're not pure white, there's a blemish somewhere in your life if you want to think of it that way." But I still think we've come a long way.

25. What is the most important thing you feel you have learned about yourself and how you fit into the world as a young American mulatto?

You're just there, you're here to exist and you're just you. And you shouldn't think of yourself as being weird or strange, or anything, because everyone is mixed... Even if you're Hispanic, like Ryan is Puerto Rican and Dominican... [and] one of my [other] exes... is black and Spanish. You'll find it if you look for it. You'll find your mix. And to be honest, you should think of yourself as being like everyone else. If you think of

yourself as being special - you are special as a human, but when it comes to race, you are just like everyone else. Everyone's special in their own way, and yeah, being mulatto makes me special, but it doesn't make me extremely special, because I'm like everyone else. It's not like I'm literally cut in half and one side of me is black and one side of me is white - that's special... I just feel like you need to live with what you have and use it to your advantage. When I applied to college when they asked for race, I put white and black on everything. I was like, "If my [being in] a minority [group] can help me get further, help me get into college, I'll use it." I did that for the Disney program - they asked if you were mixed, and I said "I'm definitely mixed." And I would use that - if you want diversity, I'm here for that... But you shouldn't rely on it, you've gotta rely on yourself. Like, if you want to use it to maybe tip you up a little bit, I get that, but don't rely on it, like, "Yeah, I'm gonna get this job because I am half-black, and they need diversity..." It could help you, everybody has something that could help them. Some people have a higher GPA, some people have the advantage of getting into a better school because they can actually pay for it and stuff like that. So why don't you try and use yours to help you get somewhere?

BEN KIRK



PORTRAIT

Ben holds photos of his mother and father.



CANDID

Ben hosts an event at SSU's Marsh Hall where he is a Resident Assistant.

FAMILY AND CHILDHOOD

1. *How did your parents meet, and was there any racial tension between family, friends, or others when they decided to get together?*

My parents met in high school... My father was on the football team and my mother was an assistant for the football games, she was the girl who kept scores... They never really let my dad play, so he was always on the sidelines, and he was always really into martial arts, so he was always practicing his kata on the side. She just walked up to him and was like "Oh my god, you have the longest fingers!" Then they just started hanging out after that and were best friends, and then started dating, and fell in love. They were in downtown Pennsylvania, a pretty rural area. I'm pretty sure it's still the same now, but back then it was mostly white, mostly Italian. I feel like my dad wasn't given a whole lot of grief about it, he doesn't talk about it much, but my mom used to get mugged at school for dating my father, girls used to spray paint really terrible things around the neighborhood about her dating a black guy, and my mother's parents didn't really like the fact that she was dating a black man, but they let it happen. So they spent a lot of time at my father's house or at my father's aunt's house.

2. *Lenny Kravitz said of his childhood: "I grew up not knowing about race until I... went to school... My parents were the only parents that didn't match." (Guthmann) Were you always aware of race when you were growing up, or was there a moment you remember becoming aware?*

I forget how old I was - I was very, very young, maybe preschool, or before preschool. I got lost at the mall, and I was with my older brother and sister, and they were supposed to watch me while my mom got food. And I decided that I wanted to go find her... And I ended up getting lost, I was crying, and a black woman picked me up, and looked at me, and she said, "Oh, did you lose your mom? I'll help you find her," and then the question I remember her asking is, "What color is your mom?" And I answered red, because her favorite color was red. I didn't understand. That's the only thing that I remember. And I didn't realize what that meant at the time until I got older... But, I guess, once I got into elementary school, was when like, my mom would come into school and all my friends would be like, "Um, is that your real mom? That can't be your real mom! You have brown eyes, she has blue eyes. You're brown, she's white. She's blonde, you have dark hair. That can't be your mom." So I think, those two combined, I guess.

3. *As time passes and race relations change in America, have the ways others respond to your parents being an interracial couple also changed over the years?*

My parents split up when I was, like, one [year old], so I don't really remember seeing them together, but I remember hearing stuff from the family... every now and then, my white side of the family would mention something about my father being black or me being black in a not-so-positive way I guess, and I never really heard much of it from my black side. But, from what I've observed it seems like things have moved along, but at the same time, you still get shocked at the things that people can say. We still have a long, long, long way to go.

4. *How did your parents raise you and your siblings, if you have any, as biracial children; i.e., did they agree on trying to give you the benefit of both cultures, or were you raised in more of one culture than another, or was this perhaps a point of tension between your parents?*

Since they were divorced, when I was with my mom I was with my white family more, and I guess, white culture, and when I was with my dad, a lot of his family lived in Virginia and South Carolina and stuff, so it was really just my dad to teach me black culture or whatever... I remember my mom telling me that there were times where my dad would like call my mom, angry, that he didn't think his children were getting enough, like, black education, and she was like, "Well, I'm not black, I don't think that should be my job." So, I definitely felt that I have missed out on a lot of black culture. I spent more time with my mom, and when I did - my mom's a very social person, so I was with my mom and thousand other white people. And I grew up listening to The Eagles, Janis Joplin, that kind of thing. And then when I was with my dad, he didn't really listen to much music, and it was really just like, him there, not really with anyone else, so I don't know. It was hard for him, I think. But I think it worked out.

5. *Leona Lewis said this of when she would get teased as a child: "I'd go crying home to Mum and she would say to me, "You're a beautiful girl and you're a part of me and a part of your dad. You don't have to do anything but carry yourself with pride'." (Das) Were there any messages or values your parents instilled in you with regard to your mixed heritage?*

The only time my father ever I guess, identified me as being mixed - I don't think he's ever called me mixed. He sees me as black, or he will mention that my hair is the way it is because I'm white, or my skin is lighter because I'm white. But like, that almost never comes up, so in his eyes, I'm black. And to my mom, I've always been mixed, I've never been just black. I'm either black and I'm white, or I'm mixed. But yeah, to my dad, the only time my mixed background has ever come up is when they're talking about my hair, my vernacular, and my skin complexion. That's it.

SCHOOL EXPERIENCES

6. *Did you grow up in either an ethnically diverse, or non-ethnically diverse area, and was your school population mirrored by that town or city?*

[In] elementary school, I had one black friend, and I think he was the only black person in my class. I remember seeing another black person in a year or so below me, and there were three in my sister's class. And we went to a very large school, so it was mostly white. And I remember, when I was in fifth grade, my fourth grade teacher saw me across the hall and called me over, and introduced me to a girl who was mixed, and they were showing me pictures of her brother, and they said he looked just like me - he was mixed too. And other than my sister, it was the first time I ever saw another mixed person, so I was like "Oh, these people really do look like me, it's crazy." And once middle school

came, it was pretty much the same thing, a few more dark, ethnic faces; Hispanic, Indian, I think one person from Pakistan, and I ended up... going to school with the kid I was shown a picture of in fifth grade, so once I got to high school, me and my sister and this one other kid were the only mixed people, besides [another family] - so, four people... And, in elementary school, I feel like that's where I saw the most, like, "Why do you look the way you do?" And then people sort of got used to it, and then middle school was fine, high school for the most part was fine.

7. Derek Jeter said this about experiencing racism at school: "Kids would say [the N word]; you'd hear it. It would bother you and annoy you, make you feel bad. [But]... It taught me how I didn't want to be, that I needed to learn about different people as opposed to just judging them." (ABC News) Did you experience any racism at school, and if so, what was it like for you?

There was a time in elementary school where a kid did call me the n-word, and I don't think I realized the severity of it, but these two girls... came up to me and were like, "Ben, do you know what he just called you?" And I was like "Yeah, it's okay though," and they were like, "No, you should tell the teacher, that's not a good word," and it's funny that these two white girls came to me and made me realize that this is not okay... and helped me go to the teacher, and it lead to a good conversation that taught me a lot at a young age. And after that, he apologized. He was my same age, so he didn't really realize the severity of it either. And after that, growing up, I've never felt comfortable with the n-word, and I know my dad... never used the n-word, he was not a fan of it... Even when they tried to use it in a "We're taking this word back" kind of way, it still makes me uncomfortable... It just doesn't sit well with me... I'm going to put this in the best way, poetically. Like, a crown of thorns. That's pretty much what it was. It was hurtful, and a word used to show everyone - like, when you're wearing a crown of thorns, people know it, you bleed, you're in pain. That's what people wanted to do with that word originally. And now that you're taking it and placing it on your head again, it seems like you're torturing yourself... Just leave that down. I just don't like [when people use] it, ever.

8. What is your education experience like now, attending Salem State, which is the second-most diverse school of all 20 Massachusetts state and UMass schools?

I found that out this summer. Coming in here even without knowing that information I felt blessed, because [of] seeing how much more diversity there is here than there was in my town. The fact that I met Amanda [Cooper], who is mulatto, I met this other kid Dan Quinn and Mark - there was one point where we were all in the cafeteria before Marsh Hall cafeteria was made, and we were all sitting at different tables, but we were all sort of walking towards the same place, and I was like, "Woah, I've never been surrounded by so many mulattos at once!" And we all got together and took a picture of it... So like, seeing all these people with mixed backgrounds... And then finding out... statistically, how diverse this school is, is amazing. I really do feel very blessed.

9. Did you know how diverse Salem State was when you applied to the school, and did that have any sway in your final decision to attend? Do you think schools with a range of diversity are a better thing than a school with less diversity?

I didn't know how diverse it was, I didn't research that at all because I didn't even realize that was a thing to look for. I was like, "One place is going to be the same as everywhere else, the majority white people, whatever." (*I ask, "Why is diversity in a school good for you personally?"*) For me personally, growing up, my sister was the only person that I was able to relate to as far as my culture, basically, and so many mixed people experience very similar things, and it really is a separate culture from being white or being black. It's like, mixed culture... feeling a little bit more of a sense of community, or, like, there are people here who I can relate to who belong to my cultural group, which I've never had before. Having that makes it feel almost, safer. 'Cause, I've always had mostly white friends, and with them, unfortunately, the fact that I am different sticks out in my mind. They might not even notice it, but I always know, "Oh, I'm different from them." Or if I'm with blacks, African-Americans, or whatever, I'm still different. But like, mixed people, I don't have to act any certain way, it's just like "I'm mixed, you're mixed, we're all mixed." It's great.

10. Have you had any difficulty being accepted by certain groups here on campus, or the opposite - being automatically accepted because of your skin color?

I don't know if I've ever felt that way. If anything, I've felt less accepted by the black population here than any other population here. If I ever go to a Hispanic student event or something like that, they're very open, and I sort of experience the same thing - they try to bring me out and into whatever they're doing, and a lot of the African students here are very open and welcoming. But I guess the African-American students are the ones who I feel the least accepted by.

FRIENDSHIPS/DATING RELATIONSHIPS

11. Throughout your life, have you become friends with people of a variety of different races, or mostly one or two races?

My first ethnic friend was half-Puerto Rican, in elementary school... There was another friend I had in middle school... who was half-black and half-Puerto Rican I think, and then it wasn't until college that I started meeting more, and it wasn't until last year, borderline summer, that I started really befriending people that weren't white, I guess. Honestly, I made one new friend who is half-white, half-Arab/Lebanese, and I met a lot of really good people through him... People from Africa, other students from Morocco - I guess, a lot of international students, which was really good. And then I lived with another girl... who's mixed. And it's really weird how it happened, but after the summer, I just sort of surrounded myself with mixed people. It's really strange, because [the girl I live with] is half-Irish, half-Egyptian, and then [her] friend... who I work with now, and who I became friends with over the summer is half-Brazilian, half-Portuguese, and my [other] friend... who is half-Arab, half-white, and then my friend Thomas who lives in Atlantic who is from Rwanda (he's an RA), and the "face," so to speak, of my friend group has changed drastically. But, it's great because we've been able to have conversations that I've never been able to have before about being mixed and growing up

in that way, and the challenges and stuff.

12. If you have friends who are also mulatto, do you feel like you relate to or can connect with them in a special way, or do you have different backgrounds and thoughts about race than they do?

I'm definitely always excited to talk to other mulatto people, and even if we do see things differently - I feel like this goes both ways, but just speaking from my perspective - even if we disagree on something, I still enjoy it and I love learning new things, just because it's rare, I guess.

13. Oprah Winfrey once said that she wished she could be light-skinned as a young woman, because the light-skinned women were always the ones that were most pursued by black men. Were you ever picked on for being a particular skin tone by any racial group? Do you think there is still a color-tone hierarchy?

I do believe that there is a color-tone hierarchy, I think more in women, unfortunately, than in men. Even now, my two younger half-sisters [who have the same father and different mothers - both are black] - [one] was born with slightly lighter skin and slightly looser hair, [and the other] was born darker skin, tighter hair. And already - they're nine and eight years old right now - and [the latter] is already sort of looked down upon for her darker skin and tighter hair, because in that culture, it's been going on forever. And actually, I feel... a movement trying to move away from that, but like, having the lighter skin and the most Caucasian hair is desirable, I guess. It's sad. But me personally, I mean, in high school, my friends used to - never really a bad thing - but it was still annoying, when I would always get called out with, like, "Oh... mocha skin," or, "Oh, I want my coffee that color." (*Points to his arm.*)It was... friendly teasing, but after a while it was like, "Come on. Settle down."

14. Have you dated whites, blacks, mulattos, or entirely different races from yourself? And if you have dated more than one race, how have your experiences differed in accordance to the meshing of both of your respective heritages and cultures?

I have only dated white. In my high school, that was pretty much my only option, and in college, I've only had like three relationships, and they've all been with white women. I don't think that I really have a preference, it's just, I don't know, sort of the way it's ended up. I've been attracted to women of every race, culture, whatever.

15. If you see yourself getting married or having children, do you see yourself most likely marrying a person of a certain race?

Honestly, I know you can't really choose this or anything, but I really feel like I would prefer to marry, like, an ethnic person, either mixed or not. For some reason, I just think it would be easier for my children. But... I don't know. It's a weird thought to have, but I've definitely had it...

SELF-IMAGE

16. What is it that constitutes being a particular race - is it more cultural and environmental than color-wise, more nurture than nature?

I think it's a combination, actually. It's sort of like the thing where, every now and then I'll be teased like, "Oh, you're not really black 'cause you talk like you're white," or "You dress like you're white." But what does dressing white or talking white or acting white, what does that mean? ... 'Cause, I've definitely met other mulattos who are considered black and act black to their friend groups and to people around them, and then, like me, people say I act white and all that other stuff, and I'm like, more, I guess mulatto than I am black, so I don't know.

17. Throughout your life, have people ever been surprised when you told them you are mulatto? Did they ever guess any other variety of ethnicities that were wrong?

I've gotten many, many, many things. It's such a strange thing. More recently, I think since I've sort of become friends with other mixed people, and I guess other minorities, I am annoyed when I'm asked what I am, or when people try to guess what I am. Sort of recently, I was having a conversation with a group of people downstairs, and it was about something having to do with school or school subjects, and then one of them goes, "Oh, what are you?" Someone who wasn't even involved in the conversation! I was like, "Um, I'm a senior?" And they were like, "No, what ARE you?" And I was like, "Art education major?... What do you want?" And they were like, "Come on." And I was like, "Are you asking why I look the way I do?" And she's like "Well, yeah!" And for some reason it kind of poked me the wrong way, I guess. Once people find out I'm mulatto I don't think they're surprised, but I've gotten Middle Eastern, I've gotten Hispanic, many different things. When people do try to guess, they don't really guess mulatto, but when at some point I tell them "My mom's this, my dad's this," they're like "Oh, okay. Now you make sense."

18. Have you ever, or do you feel uncomfortable with either side of your black and white heritage (or in more specific terms of your ethnicity, i.e. Jewish and Haitian)?

I do sort of still regret not really having the black culture, I guess, in my childhood, but no... seeing where I am now, I don't think I'd change anything in my past... I'm happy that I'm befriending other minorities and other mulattos and stuff like that. And I definitely want to continue going through that, 'cause when I do have children, I want to be able to show them what culture I have, which is a mixed culture, and no matter what my children are going to be mixed... (*I ask, "What do you feel like having a mixed culture means - do you feel like there's a mulatto culture and other types of mixed cultures, or is there just like a general mixed culture?"*) I think, in my terms, I guess mixed is maybe what the majority would consider - I don't want to sound like a Nazi or something - like, not pure, do you know what I mean? I guess, if you're from like an Asian country, if you're half-Japanese and half-Chinese, you're mixed. If you're half-Japanese, half-English, you're mixed, if you're half-Irish, half-Egyptian, you're mixed. So, it can be anything, but in my mind, if you're half, I don't know, English and half-Irish

- in today's culture, I feel like most people would just consider that being white.

19. Race-wise, do you feel like there might be a side of yourself that is hidden, either subconsciously or on purpose? If so, do you want to reveal it?

I notice that when I am with, I guess I want to say, black culture, I guess I do see something inside of me change a little bit. And... this sounds silly, but like I feel more black, and if I go back to my white friends with that same way of being, they kind of look at me funny like, "This isn't you, why are you acting like that?" And I'm like, "Oh, I don't know." And, even when I'm with my white family, I speak differently, I carry myself differently, and then when I'm with my black family, it changes, and I feel like it's sort of been like that my whole life. I don't know, it's a little weird identity crisis or something like that.

20. Bob Marley said this about being biracial: "Me don't dip on nobody's side. Me don't dip on the black man's side nor the white man's side. Me dip on God's side, the one who create me and cause me to come from black and white." (Lowney) Depending on who you happen to be around (i.e. a certain race or culture of people), does your self-image in terms of your race differ? Or, in your daily life, do you tend not to think about or notice your race?

I tend to - I don't want to say forget - but, I am more one with my race when I'm with other people of mixed race. So that's when I feel most one with myself, I guess. Because, when I am with white people, like I said earlier, there are times where I sort of see myself from another vantage point, like, I'm the different one, that kind of thing...

AMERICAN CULTURE/CURRENT AFFAIRS

21. Although we are coming up to a presidential election soon, America has now had four years with a mulatto president. What do you think his election and presidency means to American culture, and the often-controversial, often-shifting racial environment of our country?

I have to say that I still get misty-eyed when I think... "My president is mulatto." That just makes me the happiest person in the entire world.

22. Do you think that, in America today, it's still necessary to pick either solely black or solely white social groups to be accepted, or is it more complicated?

I think it's way more complicated than that. I think there are definitely those that, I'm gonna say, pick sides, maybe because it's easier for them, maybe it's because they prefer or are more comfortable, but for me, I almost like the challenge of sort of sitting somewhere in-between. At times it's almost like a balancing act, or like, being pulled from either side, but I don't think I would ever want to be forced to choose a side.

23. *When asked about her daughter Nahla's race, Halle Berry said, "I feel like she's black. I'm black and I'm her mother, and I believe in the one-drop theory." (Weiss) Although Halle Berry is technically mulatto, she sees herself and her mixed daughter as black. Does anyone in your family categorize you as one race or another? If you decide to have children, how do you think you would choose to handle your children's races?*

Well, my father actually has white in him. His father is half-white. But in that time, he didn't have a choice. He was black, because back then - one drop - you're black. So my father was raised black, he was just black, that's it. And I guess that's why he sees me the way he sees me - I'm black. His heritage is very mixed, like many African-Americans that have been in this country for so long; he's African-American, Native American, Cuban, Irish, and Scottish. But... he's black. To him. And, if I ever had children, I would want them to know where they came from - I'm mixed, my children will be mixed, no matter what. And I think that once they start going to school and growing up and stuff, it will not be so weird. I don't think it'll be as big of an issue or surprise as it was when I went through the school system.

24. *Lenny Kravitz said this about his parents' relationship: "[My parents] would walk down the street (and) people would spit on them... very disgusting things. My father lost his side of the family 'til I was born." (Guthmann) This memory Lenny related is well within living memory. How far have we come since then?*

Sort of going back to what I said before, we've definitely come a long way, but we still have a very long way to go. I know my mother was disowned by her family when she got pregnant, and she had to hide the fact that she was pregnant, so when she started to show, she was never at family outings, because she was "sick." She came down with the flu or a cold so she couldn't show up, and when the baby was born, she had to go to Christmas parties pretending she didn't have a child. Eventually, my grandmother met my older brother and fell in love, and was sorry - and I know she, to this day, 28 years later, she still beats herself up about it. And out of everyone, my grandmother is one of the most supportive and nurturing people in my life about my mixed race heritage. So, people can change. Many people have changed, but certain things happen and you realize that there is still a very long way to go.

25. *What is the most important thing you feel you have learned about yourself and how you fit into the world as a young American mulatto?*

This is gonna sound sort of big-headed, but, this goes for you too - I believe that mulattos are the perfect image of what America is becoming - a melting pot - a mixed group of people. I'm not saying that everyone should be mulatto and look like us, I'm saying that everyone should be mixed in mentality, and I guess, acceptance. And, yeah, I think I've tried to give that off to people...

ZOIE LUCAS



PORTRAIT

Zoie holds photos of her mother and father.



CANDID

Zoie relaxing in SSU's Atlantic Hall with friends before attending an on-campus event.

FAMILY AND CHILDHOOD

1. *How did your parents meet, and was there any racial tension between family, friends, or others when they decided to get together?*

No, because my mom and my dad both grew up in Lowell. My mom's white and my dad's black, and my mom's best friends with his sister, and my mom used to play basketball - and my dad - she used to play with the guys and stuff like that - my mom's very tomboyish, and the only reason why they didn't get together in the first place was because my mom was, like, a thicker girl, and so, he didn't want to get with a thicker girl. There wasn't any racial tension, because my mom pretty much grew up with his family. (*I ask, "Did he come to a point where he was okay with her body image?"*) Yeah, like, they just - you know, when two people hang out enough, you know what I mean?

2. *Lenny Kravitz said of his childhood: "I grew up not knowing about race until I... went to school... My parents were the only parents that didn't match." (Guthmann) Were you always aware of race when you were growing up, or was there a moment you remember becoming aware?*

My mom grew up in Lowell, and it's such a diverse community, and my mom was aware of the racism - she said you're going to be black for people's convenience, and you're going to be white for people's convenience. And I find that a lot when I work. It's like I'm white to them because of the way I speak and stuff like that, but I'm black to the people at my college, and my high school or whatever. But my mom always said, "You know what, you're beautiful..." And I remember, there are two separate instances where that stood out to me, one was when a white girl my age or whatever - I got really insulted... I was really young though - she held her arm up to me and said, "Your arm's different than my arm..." But I remember going to like Kimball's in Westford next to Chelmsford, and it's a really white neighborhood as well, a very white community, and there are upper-class people there, and I walked in, and then people were staring at me a little bit, and that's when the first time I realized that I looked different than other people. I was probably, like, 12. 'Cause when I was younger, I knew I was different, but that was the first time I actually felt different. 'Cause you walk into a place, and like I walked into there, and people were looking at me. And then I realized that I was the only black person there. And it's sort of weird, because I'm not looking at myself - I don't view myself as a color, I don't identify myself as that, I just see myself as a person. And that was one of the first times I realized, "Wow, they're seeing me as something that I don't see myself as."

3. *As time passes and race relations change in America, have the ways others respond to your parents being an interracial couple also changed over the years?*

My parents are divorced, but my dad's mom, my grandmother who had passed away - she didn't have a problem with it. But my Yia (I'm half-Greek, so my Yia [is] my mom's mom) had a problem with it, and she's very racist - just very sly things... And when my mom was pregnant with my brother and I, she would be like, "What color will they be like? They won't have an identity," stuff like that. She had a problem with it. I remember

times I used to get in arguments with my Yia, because she loves us, but she's racist, you know what I mean? My stepdad now, he's Jamaican, he's black Jamaican, and my Yia would say things like - one time, this conversation got into an argument about how black people came from monkeys. And I was like, "So you're saying - you believe in God right? So you believe God made every single white person, but they left the black people to the monkeys - do you know what I mean - to evolution?"

4. How did your parents raise you and your siblings, if you have any, as biracial children; i.e., did they agree on trying to give you the benefit of both cultures, or were you raised in more of one culture than another, or was this perhaps a point of tension between your parents?

My mom always told me that I'm Greek, who just happens to be black. So, I remember my freshman year, people would be like, "Zoie, you're black..." These were black people saying it, like, Haitian, or whatever... And I'm like, "No, I'm Greek who just happens to be black..." And yeah, I'm black, but I feel like my culture is Greek. And they said, "Zoie, look at your skin color. People are going to see you're black." And I was like, "Yeah, I know, but I'm Greek." And they would get really insulted that I identified [as] Greek, because they didn't see me as Greek, they saw me as black, and I don't see myself as black, I see myself as Greek more as a culture, and black as a color.

5. Leona Lewis said this of when she would get teased as a child: "I'd go crying home to Mum and she would say to me, "You're a beautiful girl and you're a part of me and a part of your dad. You don't have to do anything but carry yourself with pride'." (Das) Were there any messages or values your parents instilled in you with regard to your mixed heritage?

My mom would drill home the fact that just because I'm dark or whatever compared to the white community that I'm still beautiful and things like that, and in general, she always says "Act like you've been there before, carry yourself with confidence" and things like that, and she'd always say "You're a strong Greek woman," and stuff like that. But she would also say, "But sometimes, you have to act like you're a big, black, b-i-t-c-h!... Go for it!" My dad never said anything, he wasn't really like that. 'Cause he grew up in a black community with blacks, and he just... I don't think he felt the need for confidence.

SCHOOL EXPERIENCES

6. Did you grow up in either an ethnically diverse, or non-ethnically diverse area, and was your school population mirrored by that town or city?

I grew up in Chelmsford which is a white town, and I grew up in a trailer - the very low-income side of town, near Westford, so it's that weird thing that goes socioeconomically low as well as black, and the majority of people in Chelmsford were upper-middle-class to upper-class, and white. And I went to predominantly white schools before college. And

I always had contact with my dad and his family, and they are black and they live in Lowell, which is ethnically diverse... so I always had that dichotomy of living in a white community but living in a multicultural, diverse community too. So my views on different people - I knew that colleges were going to be different - like, I wasn't culture shocked.

7. Derek Jeter said this about experiencing racism at school: "Kids would say [the N word]; you'd hear it. It would bother you and annoy you, make you feel bad. [But]... It taught me how I didn't want to be, that I needed to learn about different people as opposed to just judging them." (ABC News) Did you experience any racism at school, and if so, what was it like for you?

Racism is everywhere. You can't avoid racism. And if I got offended by everything that someone could perceive as racist, then I'd just be an old witch. But, I just take it as a joke... I take it as a learning experience. I realize now... a lot of people get offended, like, "Oh, can I touch your hair?" And I respond, "No, no, you can't touch my hair! I'm not a Chia Pet!" And stuff like that, but I just take it as... I'm different to somebody. I am new... I don't want to be judged for asking questions of other cultures. That's how you learn and grow, and I know people are racist... I just take it as satire. I get more offended when people who are black or whatever are racist. Because, I don't know, maybe I just expect it from people who are white, because of... curiosity, stuff like that. But when somebody's black and within the black culture, and you're lighter skinned, or - the worst thing, I don't like when people, not white, not black, just in general, they say, "Zoie, I like your skin color, but if it was a little lighter, it would be way better," you know what I mean? They would compare, being like, "Zoie, I love that you have, like, a tan, but I would just want to be a little lighter than you. Just a little lighter, and that'd be the perfect skin tone." And that is the stuff I get really insulted by. I don't really get insulted by general stereotypes of, "Oh, black girls do this..." whatever. I don't care about that, but I care about the specifics, like light skin is better than dark skin, or, I hear people say, "Oh, you talk white." 'Cause I think that a lot of black people say - I don't want to say black people, but a lot of... not educated people, they'll say that to me. And, what is that supposed to mean? And you'll run into a white girl, and we'll have this big conversation, that's like, "She talks blacker than you." And I was like, "What do you mean? Because I can read a book? I don't understand, like, what are you talking about?" And they couldn't vocalize what it is they were trying to say. And I'm trying to get the point across that, I'm not talking like this because I'm trying to act white, it's because you're prejudiced. The most racism I have ever received outwardly is from people of color.

8. What is your education experience like now, attending Salem State, which is the second-most diverse school of all 20 Massachusetts state and UMass schools?

I don't think of it differently. I think it's cool that it's a diverse school... because I'm a diverse person, so, maybe it was just the best fit, in a way.

9. Did you know how diverse Salem State was when you applied to the school, and did that have any sway in your final decision to attend? Do you think schools with a range of diversity are a better thing than a school with less diversity?

I grew up in a family where they didn't go to college, so I didn't know about colleges, but I looked online, and I saw that some people are black and that made it... diverse, and that did make me feel more comfortable. But I didn't want to go to an all-black school, because I felt like, I don't know why, but that my identity as a black person would be... it sounds bad but, I felt like I would be just another black person instead of standing out, in a way. Because I grew up in a white town... and I was individual because I was black, but going into a black school, I would just be another black person. So I wanted to go to a diverse school for the fact that there are different races. But I wouldn't want to go to the South, though, or anything. (*I ask, "Do you think schools with more diversity are better than less diversity?"*) Yeah, definitely.

10. Have you had any difficulty being accepted by certain groups here on campus, or the opposite - being automatically accepted because of your skin color?

Because of my personality, I'll talk to anybody, I don't care, and so I've never had really a bad experience getting accepted anywhere... I had a group of friends, and I didn't join any groups and clubs, and then I became an RA (*Resident Assistant in one of Salem State University's dorm halls*)... that sort of thing...

FRIENDSHIPS/DATING RELATIONSHIPS

11. Throughout your life, have you become friends with people of a variety of different races, or mostly one or two races?

A variety of races. My sister-in-law is Asian, and my stepdad is Jamaican. My roommate my sophomore year was Asian, and I have black friends and white friends. It's like that, so I have a good chunk of people who are diverse. I don't care who you are, as long as you're a nice person.

12. If you have friends who are also mulatto, do you feel like you relate to or can connect with them in a special way, or do you have different backgrounds and thoughts about race than they do?

I don't really have friends who are mulatto except, like, Ben Kirk, so, I joke, like, people at work or whatever will be like, "I'm black and I'm Haitian," and I'm like, "Well, I'm mixed, I'm evolution!" I always say that, and I'll make a mulatto sign (*She makes a sign language "m" with her hand*). And that sort of thing, and I think people who are mulatto can relate in a lot of ways, and I just think it's funny, like, when you see somebody who's mulatto, you're like, "Oh, cool," and I think I can connect with somebody like that on that level, but I don't know a lot of people like that... I never see somebody and try to judge them on what they look like in the sense that it's like, "Oh, they're dark-skinned, so they must be black, or they're light skinned so they must be white." They'll tell me what they tell me.

13. Oprah Winfrey once said that she wished she could be light-skinned as a young

woman, because the light-skinned women were always the ones that were most pursued by black men. Were you ever picked on for being a particular skin tone by any racial group? Do you think there is still a color-tone hierarchy?

Yes, there is a color-tone hierarchy, definitely. And I feel like I'm judged because I'm lighter-skinned in a way. I'm not dark and I'm not light. Like I said earlier, I'm black to some people, and I'm white to some people. I hear this a lot - a lot of black women, from what I hear from them telling me, they'll be like, "Zoie, I love your hair, you have good hair - you have good hair because it's curly or whatever. They'll say, "It's nice, and I want to marry a white man, or I want to have babies with a white man, so I can have lighter skinned babies." And, I'm like, "That's racist! That's racist to yourself, because you're seeing yourself as lesser because you're dark-skinned." I was like, "You're beautiful the way you are," but people don't understand that because of their culture, because white signifies wealth and status, but to me it's not a big deal. And to other people, my skin color is a big deal, and that sort of racism. Like, "Oh, Zoie, you're really pretty, you're light-skinned," and stuff like that. And that sort of racism, that experience with my skin color, like, maybe they just assume I'm snobby because I'm lighter-skinned, or like that.

14. Have you dated whites, blacks, mulattos, or entirely different races from yourself? And if you have dated more than one race, how have your experiences differed in accordance to the meshing of both of your respective heritages and cultures?

I've never dated. I know, specifically for me, I don't date because I know I'm not comfortable. Like, I want to give myself fully to somebody, and I don't want to be... awkward and self-conscious and stuff like that, and I want to get to a point in my life where I'm okay with myself, and that I can actually be myself with somebody.

15. If you see yourself getting married or having children, do you see yourself most likely marrying a person of a certain race?

It's completely open, because I find different people attractive - I'm not settled onto one idea of a husband. I always say, ambition. If you have ambition, if you have a goal, then that's attractive.

SELF-IMAGE

16. What is it that constitutes being a particular race - is it more cultural and environmental than color-wise, more nurture than nature?

I took the race, class, and ethnicity course that all social work majors have to take, and one of my favorite things ever that I didn't even think about and that made me appeased about me getting offended by people saying that I talk white - because I seriously get offended, because they are racist, because they think it's a privilege to talk white, but race is a social construct - so, one of the phrases in the book noted that a black lady in Africa

doesn't consider herself black. And, that was a moment where I was like, "That's definitely true." Like, somebody who's around everybody who's just like them, they're just a person. And so, Western culture, with the fact that they have white privilege... that's like saying, like, "Oh, she's light," or whatever... People who are white set the boundaries for people who are of color.

17. Throughout your life, have people ever been surprised when you told them you are mulatto? Did they ever guess any other variety of ethnicities that were wrong?

Yeah. Some people are like, "Oh, I thought you were just black," or they say, "No, you're not white," because I grew up in a white town, so they'll say, "You're not half-black," because they saw me as black. And then when I get into Lowell and places with a lot of dark people, they'll try to figure me out. They'll think I'm Spanish, and I'm like, "Sorry, I took French. I apologize." They look disappointed. I like when people try to guess, like, "Are you this? Are you this? Are you that?" And someone threw something out last year that I was Cape Verdean, and I was like, "I didn't even know what that was!" So I just think it's funny, I don't get offended.

18. Have you ever, or do you feel uncomfortable with either side of your black and white heritage (or in more specific terms of your ethnicity, i.e. Jewish and Haitian)?

I don't feel uncomfortable around people normally, but I feel uncomfortable when they start talking about race and their ideals on race, because it's like I'm sort of stuck in the middle like, "Oh, white people, blah, blah, blah..." "Nope, they don't." Or it's, "Oh, black people, blah, blah, blah..." And I'm like, "Nope, they don't." I have both sides, so all the prejudices they're saying, it's like - with people who are stuck with their ways, who don't see themselves as racist because they said this, it's just really hard to change their mind...

19. Race-wise, do you feel like there might be a side of yourself that is hidden, either subconsciously or on purpose? If so, do you want to reveal it?

The reason why I say I'm Greek is because I'm black, and I said black's a color, but I know African-American, and specific parts of Africa - that there's a culture within Egypt, or South Africa, or whatever - there are different cultures associated with that, but African-American isn't associated with any part of Africa. And so I don't have any culture to hang on to. And yeah, black people come together for different things like that, but what is it specifically, what are their traditions? Do you know what I mean? So I consider myself Greek because Greek is a culture. It's something definable... like, "Oh, I'm having Baklava tonight."

20. Bob Marley said this about being biracial: "Me don't dip on nobody's side. Me don't dip on the black man's side nor the white man's side. Me dip on God's side, the one who create me and cause me to come from black and white." (Lowney) Depending on who you happen to be around (i.e. a certain race or culture of people), does your self-image in terms of your race differ? Or, in your daily life, do you tend not to think about or notice your race?

In my daily life I don't notice my race at all. I guess it really just depends on the people in general... Because I'm biracial, I don't really see race as a barrier as some people see it - I'll talk to anybody, like I said. And when I'm around white people, it really depends on whether you're lax in your words, whether I can be more upfront with you, and if I'm around black people, and they're more uptight - like, I'll base [my behavior] on the social aspect of it... I'll change the way I am, but not because of the color of your skin, because of who [you] are.

AMERICAN CULTURE/CURRENT AFFAIRS

21. Although we are coming up to a presidential election soon, America has now had four years with a mulatto president. What do you think his election and presidency means to American culture, and the often-controversial, often-shifting racial environment of our country?

I think it brings up racism, because I don't feel comfortable saying I like Barack Obama around people who are white or black, because they'll just assume I like him because he's biracial or because he's black. But I like him for other reasons. And it's like, "Oh, because you're black you do this," and it's like, "No, because I can make my own decisions I do this." And it just brings out the racism, like with Donald Trump and the birth certificate, like that sort of thing, where they don't question Mitt Romney on like, other things. And the stuff they ask Obama, they would never ask someone who's white, like with the birth certificate - they would never ask something else that. I think that it brings out peoples' racism, but I think it also stumps peoples' racism. Because it's like, "We have a black president, I can't be racist." And it's like, "No, you're currently racist right now," and it brings out that sort of thing. People think America is cured of racism because we have a black president, but no, because education is the key to cut down on racism, and if you're not educating people on racism because you think it's gone, then that just suppresses racism, and then we'll just have a surplus of more racism.

22. Do you think that, in America today, it's still necessary to pick either solely black or solely white social groups to be accepted, or is it more complicated?

It's more complicated than that, because maybe you'll relate to people who are lighter skinned, more just based off of, not because of their skin, but because [of shared experiences or interests], and you feel unaccepted by the people who have your color skin... I think it's good to know people who are black, and to be around people like that just so you feel like you're not going through anything that's really odd. Like, people who are black will be like, "I don't feel pretty, because I'm not light skinned or I don't have straight hair and I'm not like everybody." I feel like if I'm around people who are like me, I feel more comforted, in a sense. I see myself as just part of a population instead of just sticking out, which is weird because earlier I said that I don't want to go to an all-black school.

23. When asked about her daughter Nahla's race, Halle Berry said, "I feel like she's

black. I'm black and I'm her mother, and I believe in the one-drop theory." (Weiss) Although Halle Berry is technically mulatto, she sees herself and her mixed daughter as black. Does anyone in your family categorize you as one race or another? If you decide to have children, how do you think you would choose to handle your children's races?

I think a lot of people see me as black, and like I said, I'm Greek, but because they see me as black, therefore I see myself as black, in the sense that - I think you have to expect the worst, because if you don't prepare your child for the fact that they might face racism based off of because they're different, saying, "Oh, you're black, and blah, blah, blah," it's just preparing them for all challenges.

24. Lenny Kravitz said this about his parents' relationship: "[My parents] would walk down the street (and) people would spit on them... very disgusting things. My father lost his side of the family 'til I was born." (Guthmann) This memory Lenny related is well within living memory. How far have we come since then?

I think I see a lot more interracial couples, and that's good... And that's really cool, but again, that also breeds more racism in the sense that, it's a status thing - like, I was on the elevator just a month ago, and they were these two guys, these two POCs (*She explains that this means "people of color"*), and I was in the elevator with them, and they were just like, "Yo, I asked her, 'Can you hook me up with a white girl?' And she hooked me up man, she hooked me up." And on the train, there were... some POCs together, and this white girl walked off the train, and one was like, "Oh, yo, if I had some it'd be like blah, blah, blah," and they were like, "No, white girls are snobs, they wouldn't want you." So in a way, it's sort of a status thing. And me being an African-American, like, a black person, a darker-skinned person, that's insulting in a way, because you can't catch a break. (*I say, "[Out of all the interviewees,] all of our mothers are white and our fathers are black except for Chris's parents. It's so common, and it's directly related to what you said. Why do you think that is?"*) I think it's because... people think that people who have lighter skin are beautiful. I'm not saying everybody does, but I'm saying, look the magazines - it is what it is. Because society sets the point of, "She's light-skinned, and she's beautiful." And everybody wants somebody beautiful, and that's the norm.

25. What is the most important thing you feel you have learned about yourself and how you fit into the world as a young American mulatto?

That I'm what people want me to be. Like I said before, I'm black for people's convenience and I'm white for people's convenience. I can't change that. All I have to be is me.

DAN QUINN



PORTRAIT

Dan holds photos of his father and mother.



PORTRAIT

Dan coaches during a wrestling tournament at Quincy High School.

FAMILY AND CHILDHOOD

1. *How did your parents meet, and was there any racial tension between family, friends, or others when they decided to get together?*

My mother was a bartender - it's such a not romantic story at all - I'm pretty sure they met at a bar, and that's pretty much all I know of the story because I'm sure there's details I don't want to know, but... as far as racial tension between them - no. My mother, she's from Dorchester - she loves black people, like, she's pretty much just into black dudes, like, that's her thing. She had dated black guys before, and so no tension between them, but family wise, his family was very open - usually works that way with black families, like "Aw, sweet, we got one!" But [my mom's side of the family] is quite racist. They were not happy about it. The key story I can think of is, basically my mother, her three cousins that she grew up with were like sisters to her, and she wasn't invited to one of their weddings because they were afraid she would bring her boyfriend. So they never took it out on us, we were just kids that had nothing to do with it... I can't think of a good word for it, but we've always been kind of outsiders in the family - her at least, like, they're cool with us, but they didn't like my dad, and they didn't like her after she dated a black dude, so that's definitely been a tension family-wise.

2. *Lenny Kravitz said of his childhood: "I grew up not knowing about race until I... went to school... My parents were the only parents that didn't match." (Guthmann) Were you always aware of race when you were growing up, or was there a moment you remember becoming aware?*

I have a pretty good memory of when I was younger, kindergarten, preschool stuff, and I think there's always a consciousness that you're different, and you're different from black kids too. The furthest back I can remember my racial consciousness is, I was convinced I was from Africa, and I was like, "No you guys, I'm special, you don't even know, I was born in Africa." I would look around and be like, "Makes sense, I'm probably from Africa." And I remember my mother coming in and telling me that we could celebrate Kwanzaa this year to my kindergarten class, and that was like confirmation for me, because I thought I was from Africa - I wasn't, but that moment confirmed it, because she came in and was telling me about Kwanzaa, and I was like "I told you, I'm celebrating Kwanzaa this year, I'm like an African prince!" So that kind of confirmed it for me that something was going on, because we did celebrate Christmas and everything, but we were the only kids that celebrated Kwanzaa. I mean, we had a white mother, but we knew something was up with our dad to make us look the way we did. We were pretty open about it; I think from a young age, when you're uh - I almost said "colored" there, that would be terrible - when you look different, you're darker, you feel like, dirtier or something like that, and I remember having a lot of conversations with kids who thought you were dirty, and you think you're dirty, so those are really young memories of just being different.

3. *As time passes and race relations change in America, have the ways others respond to your parents being an interracial couple also changed over the years?*

No, they're not. I couldn't see a noticeable difference, really - we were pretty well accepted outside of the family. We were kids that could speak intelligently, and I think that definitely helps. Like Chris Rock [says] - there's black people and niggers, basically, that applies - I think a lot of racists really feel that way, so to them, I'm just a black person, and I can speak intelligently, I'm educated and stuff like that, but if I had been a bit more of a stereotype even, or if I had used maybe more ebonics, dressed a little different, like, I think it's definitely harder on you. I mean, you have your problems here and there, problems with cops, and stuff like that, but, I don't think time's really changed too much. I mean, you have a biracial president now, it's a big watershed moment, but it's nothing noticeable for me, really.

4. How did your parents raise you and your siblings, if you have any, as biracial children; i.e., did they agree on trying to give you the benefit of both cultures, or were you raised in more of one culture than another, or was this perhaps a point of tension between your parents?

I should preface my answer with, my dad was not around... he's your typical black dad cliché, he just bailed. I've actually never met him in person. The first time I talked to him I was probably 12 on the phone, and then he died when I was like 17, 18, but it's kinda one of those situations where it's like, "Your dad's dead," and I'm like, "Hmmm." He really wasn't alive to me anyways, it's a real harsh way to say it, but I didn't have a relationship with him anyway, so it was nothing, really. So he wasn't around, so he wasn't involved in the rearing process. My mother... she was very open, and she tried to bring in aspects of black culture as best she could, but she knew it would be a little ridiculous of her to - just 'cause she has black kids change her whole life. So, we were kind of raised to her expectations, which was just kinda, city people [from] Boston... she's from Dorchester and Southie, so, I think, raised like any one of those kids. I don't think there was any clash because my dad had no input.

5. Leona Lewis said this of when she would get teased as a child: "I'd go crying home to Mum and she would say to me, "You're a beautiful girl and you're a part of me and a part of your dad. You don't have to do anything but carry yourself with pride'." (Das) Were there any messages or values your parents instilled in you with regard to your mixed heritage?

Yeah, I mean, I can remember coming home, and the first time I'd hear kids call me "coon," or kids call me "nigger" or whatever, you'd come home and like, use those words like it was cool, like, "Oh, this kid called me coon!" You thought it was... a term of endearment. So, those are conversations I can remember specifically regarding race with her, was her sitting me down and telling me what those words meant, and not to use them, which I don't follow at this age, but just stuff like that. She showed us race movies. She's kind of big on civil rights... and she's one of the people who thinks racism doesn't exist today or something like that. Yeah, she thinks in like small pockets it exists, but she thinks that we're in a post-racial world, which we butt heads on all the time. But yeah, those are conversations I can remember... Stuff like, "You're not any different, no better no worse." We were very scientific from a young age so she was like, "You know, race is just a concept. The distinctions between our races, it's such a small genetic makeup that

it's not even a good judge of any kind of character traits or anything like that," so we kind of grew up knowing that and you didn't have to feel inferior even when people tried to make you feel inferior.

SCHOOL EXPERIENCES

6. *Did you grow up in either an ethnically diverse, or non-ethnically diverse area, and was your school population mirrored by that town or city?*

I'm from Quincy, which is very ethnically diverse, but it's only like four percent black. Why it's so diverse is because it's like 36 percent Asian, so it's a diverse town, but not in anything that really applies to my race. I definitely had more black friends in my neighborhood than I did in school. Our friends kind of gathered together based on just an odd sense of humor, and it ended up being me and two or three white kids and one black kid, but yeah, I hung out with more black kids around my neighborhood. And once you get to high school, your high school group's your group, so those were the guys I hung out with the most - it was a mostly white group.

7. *Derek Jeter said this about experiencing racism at school: "Kids would say [the N word]; you'd hear it. It would bother you and annoy you, make you feel bad. [But]... It taught me how I didn't want to be, that I needed to learn about different people as opposed to just judging them." (ABC News) Did you experience any racism at school, and if so, what was it like for you?*

Yeah, definitely. The thing about the North, what my dad always said was - not that I've heard it - it's something my mother quoted it all the time, and other people have quoted from him was - he was from the South, and he preferred racism in the South because you get it right in the face. He said, in the North, [they] just walk by and mumble it under their breath or pretend you don't exist or something like that. So, I think, where people were racist a lot of times, you'd kinda hear it second-hand. After a certain age especially, no one's going to come right up to your face, because in this day and age, you're never the good guy. Especially in Massachusetts, we're a pretty liberal state, and Quincy especially, diverse city on the coast and stuff, so people really weren't too bad to your face, but you'd hear stuff. I remember, the first girl I asked out, she said no in a really blunt way - she just hung up on me, and the exclamation that she gave her friends was "I don't date niggers." Like that, too - like, "niggers." She was white, with some Spanish in her too, so I was like "Calm down!" ...I mean being brown, you can kind of infiltrate groups and kinda hear how people talk when black people aren't around, so you can kinda get a sense for it, and you're like, "Wow, this is how they're talking about me, this is how they're talking about other people." I think you definitely feel like you don't fit in with the white kids, don't fit in with the black kids. Black people were equally racist to me in high school because I wore this kind of shit (*references the polo shirt and jeans he is currently wearing*), and I'd get "white boy" and shit all the time, which I couldn't stand. I'd rather get "nigger" than "white boy." I feel like, if you call me a nigger I can just write you off as a racist or something, but "white boy," you're picking on my

character, and saying that I'm some kind of traitor or something, I'm not like "down for the cause" or whatever, and that definitely hurts more... I think I got it from the black side - they were at least more open about it. I was routinely hated by a lot of the black groups at my high school.

8. What is your education experience like now, attending Salem State, which is the second-most diverse school of all 20 Massachusetts state and UMass schools?

Yeah, I think nobody's going to be harsh to your face here about race, really. If somebody was bad to my face, and I was the kind of person who would tell on them, I think they'd get in some deep shit here, especially. You have your gay posters on the wall - that's a weird way to say it. It's a really liberal college... Definitely dealing with freshman year, going to parties there were places where - there was a hockey house, it was a little racist there, this kid was just like, "You and your friends gotta get the fuck out of here," and kicked us out for no reason, we weren't doing anything, and I heard later that it was - well, they like their black kids, but, new black kids or whatever... I remember being at a party at a lacrosse house, and this group of four or five black dudes came in, and they were immediately rushed to the door and they were like, "Alright, you guys can come in, but don't cause any trouble." And the worst part is, the whole party is about "These black dudes are gonna cause trouble," and there's always a fight, because what do you expect when you're watching these people all night, and you're treating them like fuckin' animals in your house? I mean, if you want to treat someone like an animal, don't be surprised when they fuckin' fight somebody. So I feel like that's the only time I see it, 'cause people are drunk, and they get that little liquid courage, and that's when your dormant racism might come out a little bit, so it's something you see at parties, it's something even friends of mine - one of my real good friends here is a conservative from western Massachusetts, and he's like "Look man, I'll be honest, black people make me pretty uncomfortable." And it's something that I'm like, "Hey man, it's a small part of a person, I don't care, we can talk about, as long as you're straight up with it." But when he's a little bit drunk, that's when the real racist shit comes out... But on campus, no, you're not gonna get it in class really. So I mean, people are mature enough now to know that if you don't like black people, they're just going about their day, you don't need to be all in their face and stuff.

9. Did you know how diverse Salem State was when you applied to the school, and did that have any sway in your final decision to attend? Do you think schools with a range of diversity are a better thing than a school with less diversity?

I've read stuff on both sides. I think in Massachusetts, a school with better diversity is good, but I think in other places sometimes they try to force diversity, and they get black people beat up and shit. So that shit kinda worries me. I think here, I didn't know how diverse Salem was, no, but I think the diversity is good... Here you're kinda gonna fall into your own group anyways. I don't think the diversity has affected me or anybody I know, really, or nobody's really brought it up... They put me in a room with two white guys, and the race talks come up, and stuff like that, so I think the diversity helped there, and I think I'm probably the first black friend of both of them, so, I guess that's somewhere it's affected my life.

10. Have you had any difficulty being accepted by certain groups here on campus, or the opposite - being automatically accepted because of your skin color?

Yeah, I think that definitely gets better with age. When I was younger, you really felt the black kids were pushing you away, and the white kids were pushing you away too. (*I say, "Have you experienced reverse racism? Being automatically accepted because of your skin color?"*) No. Because the way I talk, definitely - like, if I meet a black guy, he may not even know I'm black, he may think I'm Spanish or something. I've never been accepted into a group here because of my skin color. There was one time where these kids were being pretty racist to this black dude, just calling him out for being loud when everybody was being loud - he wasn't nearly the loudest, and a few of my friends even, were being pretty fucked up, and they were like, "Hey, he looks like Wayne Brady," and he got offended, because he does not look like Wayne Brady at all. And I was just sitting there laughing, and he was like "White people love Wayne Brady, huh?" Which is a Dave Chapelle quote, "White people love Wayne Brady because he makes Bryan Gumbell look like Malcom X," or something like that, and he looked to me, and I was like, "Yeah!" That was probably the only example I can really think of.

FRIENDSHIPS/DATING RELATIONSHIPS

11. Throughout your life, have you become friends with people of a variety of different races, or mostly one or two races?

I had black and white friends in high school, one or two Asian friends. I'm not restrictive with who I become friends with, but I think other people are, and other people aren't necessarily gonna approach you. So, yeah, I haven't really stuck to one race.

12. If you have friends who are also mulatto, do you feel like you relate to or can connect with them in a special way, or do you have different backgrounds and thoughts about race than they do?

I don't have any biracial friends. In my high school, I couldn't tell you another kid. I'm sure there were, but I had never met them. And then here, I knew Ben [Kirk] was, 'cause he had brought it up to me, I'd come in drunk or something, and we'd be like "Mulatto! What's good?" But I haven't really sat down and had a conversation with another person of a mixed heritage.

13. Oprah Winfrey once said that she wished she could be light-skinned as a young woman, because the light-skinned women were always the ones that were most pursued by black men. Were you ever picked on for being a particular skin tone by any racial group? Do you think there is still a color-tone hierarchy?

Oh yeah, definitely. Black people, too - you get it from both sides, it's one of those same situations, black people will call you light-skinned and shit, like, "You're not one of us... You're in the group, but you're gonna get shit for being light-skinned." And I do think

definitely, if you look on TV, there's a lot of white-washing, like, Beyonce's awesome, and she's wicked talented and gorgeous and everything, but she's very acceptable because she's light skinned. Kelly Rowland, also from Destiny's Child and dark as fuck - I don't think it's a skin thing why she's less successful, I just think she's less talented, but I do think you can see it on TV that if you're Mariah Carey even, a lot of light-skinned black people make it big. Especially women, to go back to your point about black men pursuing lighter-skinned women, which I'm sure you've dealt with. I think that's definitely true. There's a Chris Rock joke or something, where it's like, "Black women are like, 'Anytime you get some money, you wanna get a white girl, a light-skinned girl.' And he's like, 'No, before that!'" I think, for a lot of black guys, you go to like, "Well, I'm trying to get a white girl, if I can't get a white girl I'll get a light-skinned girl, if I can't get a [light]-skinned girl, then, well, I'll settle." (*I ask, "Why do you think that is? Is it a status thing?"*) I think that's definitely it. If I bring a good-looking white girl to a party, I'm gonna get some high-fives, like "Oh, she's nice, she's fine," and everything, and if I bring a good-looking black girl to a party, a lot of them don't find her attractive. A lot of men, including black men, don't find black women attractive. They don't find black hair attractive, so, yeah, I think it is a bit of status, but it's also what you're into, and I think when you're young, you are kind of conditioned to favor the lighter skin.

14. Have you dated whites, blacks, mulattos, or entirely different races from yourself? And if you have dated more than one race, how have your experiences differed in accordance to the meshing of both of your respective heritages and cultures?

I usually mess around with white girls, one or two black girls, but I've never gotten to the point in a relationship where it lasted long enough to get to where our cultures really mixed.

15. If you see yourself getting married or having children, do you see yourself most likely marrying a person of a certain race?

I would like to think that I'm a good enough guy that it wouldn't matter. But, I mean, who knows, you like what you like, and I definitely, definitely like white girls - I mean, I like all kinds of girls, but I could see myself settling down with a white chick...

SELF-IMAGE

16. What is it that constitutes being a particular race - is it more cultural and environmental than color-wise, more nurture than nature?

I think race for me is about how other people treat you. I think you can speak as intelligently as you want, but to a certain population, you're still a nigger. You can't really change that. People know they can hit a nerve with you, and you wear that nerve on the outside of your body. I think there's cultural stuff, but it's so fragmented nowadays. There's this commercial where Jay-Z's like, "This is great, everybody's feeding off each others' culture," and all that stuff, and that's not a new idea at all... I just

like Jay-Z, so he's the guy I'm thinking of, but I think that's true as far as black dudes in skinny jeans, and white dudes wearing the same shit, I feel like the culture - especially in the city, all the white kids dress like black kids, and the culture is so fragmented that it's just about what you look like now.

17. Throughout your life, have people ever been surprised when you told them you are mulatto? Did they ever guess any other variety of ethnicities that were wrong?

I think anybody that's brown thinks I'm whatever they are. I've had Cuban people tell me I look Cuban, and I train in martial arts, and the style I do is Brazilian Jiu Jitsu, and the gym I teach in is in Somerville where there's a ton of Brazilian people, and my gym is 80 percent Brazilian, and most of them, when I first met them... 80 percent come and start speaking Portuguese to [me] - they just assume, and I work in a kitchen now with a lot of Brazilians, and same thing. Like, "Do you get that a lot?" "All the time, dude, don't worry about it." And then black people think you're black, and I had a girl at my work the other day - we were just having this conversation, she looked kind of offended by it, which I don't really get... As soon as race gets brought up they get really uncomfortable and they don't want to talk about it, like, "I'm not a racist..." It's one of those things, and she was like, "Oh, well I'm white, so I must think you're white." And I was like, "You would be correct." I don't think she got it, but I think that's been my experience with it - I'm not immediately identifiable as black. Like, I would say you aren't either. Have people called you Spanish? *(I say "Yes.")*

18. Have you ever, or do you feel uncomfortable with either side of your black and white heritage (or in more specific terms of your ethnicity, i.e. Jewish and Haitian)?

My friends were always weirdos, so we just kinda did our own thing... and I'm huge on soul music, hip-hop - I listen to tons of that, and I think you'd identify those things as black, but I also do things people would identify as white, where I'm kind of a melting pot. I wouldn't say I identify with my black or my white side. My white side, I guess not really. My family's Italian and... Irish... [and] I always thought their shit was kinda stupid. I'd always come around and I was like "I don't fit in here." There's a lot of people eating and talking loudly, that's basically all their gatherings, and then yeah, the Irish side... I mean, I like potatoes, but I don't really have any kind of Irish... stuff that I identify with. I guess I have more stuff that people would immediately identify as black about me. *(I ask, Do you know where you're from in Africa?)* No idea. I know I'm an eighth Cherokee Indian, and then the rest of it is just like - because I knew my mother's side, I can remember this from a young age, my mental picture was *(gestures with his hands)* here's the middle, my mother's side, I'm this much Irish, this much Scottish, all this stuff, and my dad's was just black, or, Africa. And then I found out Cherokee, but it's still mostly Africa. I don't know where they're from - especially too, my mother's really into genealogy, and slave records from black people are very wishy-washy and tough to deal with and routinely inaccurate, so I really don't know. I think there were slave descendants on that side.

19. Race-wise, do you feel like there might be a side of yourself that is hidden, either subconsciously or on purpose? If so, do you want to reveal it?

If I found out where we were from in Africa, it's distant enough for me that I would feel very touristy to go there and do anything. It wouldn't feel like any journey of discovery, it would kinda feel like me going and being offensive, like, "Hey, 400 years ago..." I really wouldn't do that. I spent some time in Pennsylvania with the black side of my family, and that was pretty cool. It's definitely a different lifestyle. My grandparents are Jehovah's Witnesses, and everyone else is very religious, but, like, the kind of churches with choirs. I remember a Sunday dinner with them where it was my uncles in purple suits and shit, and little kids in suits, and it was one of those churches where the women are standing up in the aisles like this (*raises arms and bounces up and down*), and goin' nuts and shit, it was pretty awesome. I guess that could kind of be like my Africa. I'm a little bit closer to it - I actually have relatives there.

20. *Bob Marley said this about being biracial: "Me don't dip on nobody's side. Me don't dip on the black man's side nor the white man's side. Me dip on God's side, the one who create me and cause me to come from black and white." (Lowney) Depending on who you happen to be around (i.e. a certain race or culture of people), does your self-image in terms of your race differ? Or, in your daily life, do you tend not to think about or notice your race?*

I think you have to be conscious of your race at some level if you're a logical adult, because you know that it's a factor in a lot of situations. I'm sure you've gotten, "You seem a bit brainy." Have people been like, "You're so articulate!?" (*I say, "I haven't gotten that."*) Such a backhanded compliment. It's like, they're so shocked. It's something that when you're younger you're like "Thanks!" But now you're like "Alright..." I probably wouldn't say that if I was white, really. So I think you have to be conscious of it. I know people are like, "Race? I don't see color." It doesn't seem very mature to me. It's like, "Well, you don't believe in color, but color believes in you." It's a factor with a lot of people. You know who it's not a factor with, but you have to be cognizant of it or you're gonna be like, "Why doesn't this guy wanna be my friend?" And you'll be acting like a 10 year old. When you were 10, you should've found out he doesn't want to be your friend 'cause you're black. You have to understand that stuff. And I think that's where it comes up, is situations like that, but when you're off on your own, you're just being yourself. Most people I know nowadays, black or otherwise, they're like "I'm my own person." They all use that kind of shit. Everybody wants to be special, individual.

AMERICAN CULTURE/CURRENT AFFAIRS

21. *Although we are coming up to a presidential election soon, America has now had four years with a mulatto president. What do you think his election and presidency means to American culture, and the often-controversial, often-shifting racial environment of our country?*

There was this ROTC kid in my class that I used to argue with all the time, and I used to think it was about politics, but when he actually got elected, I walked into class and just

slammed my bag down, and I was like, “What’s good! What’s up, man!” And then we watched the inauguration in class, and he was like, “Bang, right here.” I was like “Oh shit, I’m not talking to you again.” He was really rooting for assassination. I heard that from a few people who were like, “He’s gonna get shot.” I think him actually being president, a lot of people were like - it’s kinda like there was this big momentous occasion, like “Aretha Franklin’s singing, this big thing, such a big moment for America,” and all that stuff, and then when he was actually president, it kinda hit with people that it’s really not that big of a deal, because people were like, “Well, he’s a same old politician.” The one thing people are still talking about is that he gets elected by white guilt, and I think that’s just really stupid. I don’t think I’ve ever met a white person that I got that vibe from, that they were voting for him out of guilt from slavery. So, that’s another thing, but I think him being president has cued people into [the fact] that it’s just not that big of a deal.

22. *Do you think that, in America today, it’s still necessary to pick either solely black or solely white social groups to be accepted, or is it more complicated?*

...It’s one of those wounds time heals, especially nowadays, a lot of people I know, they’re racist to Asian people and Spanish people, and they’re like, “Black people are cool, whatever.” Because they grew up with pictures of black kids and white kids holding hands, and MLK day and stuff like that, and racism’s bad, but really, racism only extended to “I’m not racist, I love black people.” I think it’s a diversity thing and time passing, and it was part of the curriculum. Black history month especially, it was brought up. And you always have your population in class with a couple kids who are like “Oh, black history month, mutter, mutter.” It’s whatever.

23. *When asked about her daughter Nahla’s race, Halle Berry said, “I feel like she’s black. I’m black and I’m her mother, and I believe in the one-drop theory.” (Weiss) Although Halle Berry is technically mulatto, she sees herself and her mixed daughter as black. Does anyone in your family categorize you as one race or another? If you decide to have children, how do you think you would choose to handle your children’s races?*

People usually consider me black, I consider myself black. (*I ask, “Both sides of your family?”*) Yeah. I don’t know why that is - well, I guess I do, but yeah, people do consider me black. If I had kids with a black woman, I think the kid would be black enough that he or she would have to consider themselves black. If I married a white woman, a kid who’s a quarter black, really, it’s not even necessarily identifiable. I had a kid I wrestled with for years who’s a quarter black and I didn’t even know, so I think how people treat you affects how you identify yourself and how you have to raise your kids and stuff. Halle Berry grew up in a time where she’s dark enough that she really couldn’t pass, so I think [her mother suggesting she stick with black friends to be accepted] makes sense for her. (*I say, “But some people wouldn’t define themselves by what people see you as. Are you saying that you would want to raise your kids so that if they’re dark, you would make sure they know that other people see them as black?”*) Yeah, if I had a kid who was dark - you have to have that conversation with them. I saw something on CNN that was on kids who weren’t exposed to race at all, and the ideas that they got that were horrific. It was like, “Black people are dirty,” and shit like that. It’s just a cultural thing,

and you have to be aware of it. It's a little naïve to say, "Well I think I'm white, so society should view me as white." Or, "I don't care what society thinks." That's not up to you. I think if people identify you as black, you kind of have to view yourself that way. You need some kind of correspondence with reality in your self-image, otherwise you're off in la-la land.

24. Lenny Kravitz said this about his parents' relationship: "[My parents] would walk down the street (and) people would spit on them... very disgusting things. My father lost his side of the family 'til I was born." (Guthmann) This memory Lenny related is well within living memory. How far have we come since then?

Well, you don't get spit on, but we're from the North too. I think, certain parts of the South is, "The South will rise again," confederate flags, and all that stuff. I don't think they've come too far. I think they're still bitter about the Civil War in some places, Civil War reenactors and everything, "Oh, it's about the history, it's not about slavery." I think here, yeah, it's come a long way, but... Southie's extremely racist. Whitey Bulger was a hero for keeping black people out of Southie, really, so I feel like you have a big racist spot there, but I think it's come a long way as far as, I've never seen anything like that really, nobody would - I never was around my mother and my father when they were a couple, but you would never expect somebody to spit on them.

25. What is the most important thing you feel you have learned about yourself and how you fit into the world as a young American mulatto?

... You're calling this project "American Mulattos?" (*I ask, "Does that bother you?"*) A lot of people don't like that. I don't mind it, because I think when I say biracial, the conversation has to keep going, and they'll say are you Spanish, etcetera. When you say mulatto, people understand it like, they know what you're talking about, but a lot of people do not like that term. (*I restate the original question.*) I think just increased self-awareness, and I think a lot of kids don't really understand how they fit into a room at a young age, and you have to be cognizant of that stuff... and I think definitely, I've always been one of the more self-aware kids - I would always make jokes about, "This is one of those conversations they have," stuff like that, so I think self-awareness is an area where I'm strong because [of] my culture, or my skin, so I don't know. I think that's definitely something I've learned from it. (*After finishing the interview, I explain why I used the word mulatto in the title of the project.*) I think mulatto is a good name, it's punchy, but I don't usually call myself mulatto. I wouldn't be offended if somebody called me mulatto, but I don't know if it's a good or a bad thing. It's got kind of dirty origins.

CHRIS FRITZ-GRICE



PORTRAIT

Chris holds photos of his father and mother.



PORTRAIT

Chris enjoys coffee with his girlfriend at Jaho Cafe in Salem.

FAMILY AND CHILDHOOD

1. *How did your parents meet, and was there any racial tension between family, friends, or others when they decided to get together?*

My parents actually met at a blues bar in Chicago. My dad was a bouncer, and - just to specify, my dad's white and my mom's black - and my mom was there with a date, and it wasn't going well, so she "went to the bathroom," and kinda just ran away from him, and went home with my dad that night. It was just a random hookup thing that turned into, "Oh, we're gonna hang out for a little bit." It was never meant to go anywhere with me involved or anything like that. But yeah, there was some tension when they started dating, and then my dad brought her back here to Rockport to meet the family and stuff like that, and there was a lot of racial tension and stuff like that. But... Got over that, I guess.

2. *Lenny Kravitz said of his childhood: "I grew up not knowing about race until I... went to school... My parents were the only parents that didn't match." (Guthmann) Were you always aware of race when you were growing up, or was there a moment you remember becoming aware?*

I was always kind of aware of it because I was in the city [of Chicago], so there were a lot of minorities and everything like that. I was in the inner city too, so it was very apparent - going to school with black kids, lots of Latino kids, a few white kids and stuff, so I was always aware that I was very different. Like, when I would come here for vacation because my dad's from around here, so we would come here and I was always the black kid. But when I was there, depending on who I was around, I was the white kid, or people would try to come and speak Spanish to me, and I was like "I don't understand, sorry." So... I've always been aware of [race]. And my cousins on my mom's side are mulatto too, but they're a lot darker than me, so they could blend in a lot easier, and I stuck out, because I was the lightest of them.

3. *As time passes and race relations change in America, have the ways others respond to your parents being an interracial couple also changed over the years?*

Just to put it out there, my parents have never been together. Ever since I was born, they tried to make it work... No. Never married, nothing like that. Actually, my mom didn't know that she could get pregnant, and, oops! And my daddy didn't even know I was a thing until I popped out. (*I ask, "Do you get weird looks when people find out your parents are two different races?"*) Oh yeah. All the time. A lot of things - like when I'm walking around with my mom or something like that, they think we're a couple or something sometimes. It's really weird. I don't look more like one or the other, I'm a complete mix, so it's just weird sometimes. Very different.

4. *How did your parents raise you and your siblings, if you have any, as biracial children; i.e., did they agree on trying to give you the benefit of both cultures, or were you raised in more of one culture than another, or was this perhaps a point of tension between your parents?*

Well, my parents never really got along. My dad did a lot of the raising and stuff, because my mom was doing some crazy shit - she was still in her party phase. My dad was the more responsible one growing up. He raised me, but then he would always take me to my grandmother's house, which was my mom's mom, so I grew up there, then at my dad's house, and I grew up with my mom too, so I got a mix of everything. When I was at my dad's house, race wasn't a thing, like, it didn't exist. He was like, "This is how it is - we're family, so it doesn't matter." But like, in the black culture, race is still a very big topic. It's like, "Aw, white people do this, white people do that, niggas this," and stuff like that, so it's very different. But yeah, as far as the household, I got a little bit of everything. Like when I was hanging out with my cousins, it was a lot of hip-hop, talking about basketball, going to get your hair cut at the barber - the barber shop, the setting and stuff, that sort of thing, and when I was with my dad, he was playing his acoustic guitar and stuff like that, all of his hippie friends would come over sometimes. It was just a good balance, I guess.

5. Leona Lewis said this of when she would get teased as a child: "I'd go crying home to Mum and she would say to me, "You're a beautiful girl and you're a part of me and a part of your dad. You don't have to do anything but carry yourself with pride'." (Das) Were there any messages or values your parents instilled in you with regard to your mixed heritage?

Yeah, they were always like, "You have the best of both worlds." They would always tell me that. But, I never really saw that and still don't, because it's one of those things where, when you're going through school and with your peers and stuff like that, you want to feel like you fit in somewhere. You want to be able to fit somewhere where you're not always being pointed out and singled out... And that's impossible for me. I work at a Portuguese restaurant right now, and there are so many people who are just like - I get that question at least once a day, like, "What are you? What is your race, what is your heritage?" Some people speak Portuguese, like, "Are you Brazilian? Are you..." All these things, and I'm just like, "Nope. Nope. Nope." "What *are* you?" Honestly, Irish and Haitian, basically. I get that all the time, and you really want to be able to fit in, but it's not possible, it's really not. And I did get made fun of, especially when I moved here to Rockport, which is like an all-white town, basically. I made up the black population in the school for a while. And so that was a really tough thing, because I always got singled out, because I was always the butt of every black joke, and it's like, you could get mad, but it's you against the entire school, basically, and you either just have to let it go, and just be able to laugh at it - like, I find race and stuff like that kind of amusing now. Just because, if you get angry, you're only hurting yourself, you're only bringing yourself down, because nobody else gives a fuck, to be honest. But you still have to have pride, you still have to have the sense of, "You know what, I'm still a person, it doesn't matter." So yeah, school is fun.

SCHOOL EXPERIENCES

6. Did you grow up in either an ethnically diverse, or non-ethnically diverse area, and

was your school population mirrored by that town or city?

To begin with, I moved around schools a lot when I was in Chicago. I moved to Massachusetts when I was 12. And while I was there, it was like, custody battles and stuff like that, and my parents were taking me out of this school, putting me in this school that they wanted, and then, “No, no, no, you can’t do that,” bringing me back and forth. And one of the schools I went to was primarily black. We were still at a young, tender age, so it didn’t really matter that much, but you knew there was a difference and stuff like that. People would single me out, like in recess games, I would always be the last picked and stuff like that. The Hispanic people would all pick their people and the black kids would do that same thing. But then in the other school that I went to from like second grade to sixth grade, it was a primarily Hispanic school - Hispanic, and then black, and then only a couple of white people. So I had lots of different friends - I was like the Mecca for people, so I had white friends, black friends, Mexican friends, they all came together... But it was still very interesting, because of the gangs. I was in the inner city, so gangs were a really big thing; gang members, different types, like Latin Kings, Gangsta Disciples, black gangs and Latin gangs... all trying to recruit me, at nine, 10 years old. That’s how early they start. That was the main thing that was like, “Okay, time to get out of here.” It was just like, “Mom, dad, this happened, some dude was just like ‘You should do this,’” and they were just like, “No.” That was the only thing they ever saw eye to eye on - that was not a good place for me to grow up. You become a product of your environment at that point, no matter what color you are. So there was that, and again when I moved here, it was just lots of white people, as far as the eye can see. It was crazy. So when I graduated and came here, I was like “Yes! Finally some people who are, you know, not so translucent!” And also, it’s kind of weird, because, I told my mom this when I moved here, I was like, “Mom, I need to be around some colored people. I need to be around, like, ethnic people,” and she was like, “What are you talking about? That’s crazy.” And then she moved here, and she was like, “I totally know what you mean.” It has nothing to do with the color of your skin, it’s just... culturally different... Definitely, big, big culture gap between the two.

7. Derek Jeter said this about experiencing racism at school: “Kids would say [the N word]; you’d hear it. It would bother you and annoy you, make you feel bad. [But]... it taught me how I didn’t want to be, that I needed to learn about different people as opposed to just judging them.” (ABC News) Did you experience any racism at school, and if so, what was it like for you?

Okay, well... The “N” word, we shall say. In the black culture it gets thrown around a lot, like, a shit ton. A lot of kids, just like, every other word - it kind of makes me sick, at this point. But when I first moved to Rockport, I felt the racial tension just because I was the black kid, so that’s what was expected of me, was to be that way. And I was just trying to fit in, I was trying to make friends, I knew no one, so I kinda just followed suit with that, and started to do the whole dressing thug thing and stuff like that. That was actually the reason I started playing basketball, because people expected me to. So I was like, “Alright, I’ll give it a try.” It was a really weird time... I just got so confused. People would sing songs and be like, “Nigger,” and stuff like that, and I was like, “Wait, wait. You can’t do that.” And there was a point - because I’ve been rapping for a while -

there was a time when that was a really big part of my vocabulary. I remember one time, freshman year of high school or something like that, me and my boys were all hanging out, and I was like, “You know, you guys are my homies, I feel comfortable with you guys saying that, calling me nigga and stuff like that,” and then there reached a point, I forget exactly when it was, where it was just like, anybody who said that, black, white, or anything - it makes my stomach turn a little bit. I don’t use that word, I don’t like to - I mean, it slips out depending on my mood and stuff like that, for example if I’m drunk with some people, I’m just like “What’s up, nigga?” No big deal, but on a daily basis, I never use that word. I don’t like other people to, either. I find it now that more white people around me use that word more than black people do. (*I say, “That’s a weird thing.”*) It’s not really, but I mean, to be honest, throughout history, black people have set the trends that white people have caught on to. For instance, the high five: invented by black NBA players, and then white people took it, and then what came after that? Giving daps... white people took that too. And just with music too, throughout history - you obviously know about the history of rock n’ roll music; black artists did things, and white artists capitalized on it because they had the white face, and made it popular. Same thing with hip-hop. Vanilla Ice... he was like, “Oh wait, I can do this too,” and he rose up and became a face of hip-hop.

8. *What is your education experience like now, attending Salem State, which is the second-most diverse school of all 20 Massachusetts state and UMass schools?*

Coming to Salem State was definitely a little bit of a culture shock, but definitely refreshing, but in my experience, I really wasn’t accepted by the black people here. It’s always been a thing that I’ve known and what I’ve noticed. Excuse what I’m about to say, but, “Niggas hate other niggas.” They don’t, they really don’t. It’s just a trust thing. Like, I walk down the street, I don’t look like I’m full black and stuff like that... every time I walk by people I get grilled, I get people watching me, trying to size me up, and I’m like, “Whatever. I’m me...” I don’t gravitate towards people who I feel are putting on a front. A lot of the black kids that I’ve met here at Salem State were just all like thugged out and stuff like that, trying to be hard, and I’m like, “Dude, you’re going to college. You’re getting an education, you’re doing the right thing. Stop trying to be so hard.” That’s how I felt - I could have been judging a book by its cover, but they were doing the same to me. They didn’t like how I dressed and how I carried myself, so we just never hit it off. Honestly, I didn’t have many friends while I was here. It was just a really, really bad time in my life while I was here. (*I say, “From my view, you seemed like you were popular.”*) I stayed in my room a lot. I didn’t really socialize all that much. I had a really controlling relationship at the time, so I didn’t really go out and make friends that much. I was socially awkward - I felt. But I don’t think anyone else really picked up on it. But I gravitated towards the people that gravitated towards me. (*At this point, a young man comes up and starts talking with Chris. He eventually asks what Chris is doing, and Chris says, “I’m doing an interview about being mulatto in America.” He says, “It’s struggles.” Chris echoes, “Struggles.” I find out right after that it is one of Chris’s cousins that he hasn’t been in touch with for years.*)

9. *Did you know how diverse Salem State was when you applied to the school, and did that have any sway in your final decision to attend? Do you think schools with a range of*

diversity are a better thing than a school with less diversity?

Yes, so much better. Because, there are a lot of people who go to these schools, like you and I, who went to all white high schools and all black high schools and stuff like that, and... Getting to know different people with different backgrounds and stuff like that, that's so interesting... Especially, I remember the open mic that was here, the last one that I attended before leaving Salem State, and so many different people, so many different acts, I remember [our mutual friend] got up there and did his "Ruby Tuesdays" song or something, and then Jeremy got up there and did his freestyle thing, and it was just like, wow, this is really cool... freshman year, the very first open mic with the woman Iyeoka... That was awesome... Everyone was feeling it. It was cool because she was this awesomely powerful black woman onstage, with white guy on the rhythm guitar who was spittin' rap and stuff like that... I saw that and I looked at the crowd and everything, I stood up and I was just goin', I remember that... Everyone was still nervous, but you could see everyone vibin' to it, the cluster of white kids over here, the girls with the Uggs, Northface, stuff like that, then you have the sisters over here just like, "Ayy!" And it was just really cool. That's what I liked about Salem State was the diversity, it was a little bit of everything. It was like a little city.

10. Have you had any difficulty being accepted by certain groups here on campus, or the opposite - being automatically accepted because of your skin color?

(I ask, "Have you ever experienced reverse racism?") Yup. White kids love me. At least at Rockport, where I went, I was automatically cool. I went in there and I didn't even have to try to be like "Hey, what's up," people came up to me and I was automatically the cool kid because I was different. *(I ask, "Did you get that here?")* It goes both ways. Some people feel like I'm really open, but there's a lot of people I'm finding out now who are just really intimidated by me. I just walk down the street or down the hallway, going to class, I'm minding my own business, head held high, like, "Hi. I'm here, whatever." That's my presence. So I guess people are really intimidated by that, or can be. I learned this at New England Institute of Art where I transferred after Salem State, because I had a couple people tell me, after I got to talk to them and know them and stuff, they were just like, "Honestly, I thought you were a huge asshole before I even talked to you and stuff like that," and I was just like, "...Okay." It depends on who you're talking to and stuff. 'Cause I'm a very open, very social person. If I didn't know you, and you were sitting here doing this interview, and I overheard, I'd be like, "What are you guys talking about? This sounds really cool." I don't care.

FRIENDSHIPS/DATING RELATIONSHIPS

11. Throughout your life, have you become friends with people of a variety of different races, or mostly one or two races?

Not many are different, they're mostly white people. *(I ask, "How do you feel about that?")* It doesn't matter to me, but sometimes I'm afraid I'm not embracing a side of me.

Culturally, I just feel like I'm abandoning one side. You feel like you're more white, or something. I guess I am, just because the black culture that I'm used to is a very dangerous, violent, really ignorant side. It's gangbanging and doing crazy shit like that, and I don't want any part of that. That's why I moved out of Chicago. I don't even like going and visiting, even though my family's there. To give you an example, my two younger cousins: completely, completely stereotypical. Dad's black, mom's white, he used to beat her, they're separated now and they have their own families, but dad's not in the picture much, so it's mom who's handling that, but they both live at their grandmother's house, and [one of my cousins is] four months younger than me, and she already has a three year old kid, and she's not with the father, and that's a big thing, and [another one of my cousins] just turned 19, this is his third time going to jail. It sucks though, because that's the kind of shit, you know? That is the inner city black culture, and it sucks because that's how it is, but I want no part of it, I really don't. So I guess you could say I am embracing the other side more because it is safer, it is more... appealing, bound to be successful, happier, you know? It sucks that it is that way.

12. If you have friends who are also mulatto, do you feel like you relate to or can connect with them in a special way, or do you have different backgrounds and thoughts about race than they do?

No, it's like, that special bond. I have a couple of friends who are mulatto, and we talk about it, and it's so interesting isn't it? It's cool because you finally feel like somebody understands you. You hang out with these people, you love 'em to death, you're really good friends, but until you have that person who looks like you, who understands the differences and stuff like that, it's special. You might not even be that close with them, but you have that connection, so that's awesome, you feel good about it.

13. Oprah Winfrey once said that she wished she could be light-skinned as a young woman, because the light-skinned women were always the ones that were most pursued by black men. Were you ever picked on for being a particular skin tone by any racial group? Do you think there is still a color-tone hierarchy?

I find that throughout the white community, with trying to date people, with girls, I always felt not as good of a candidate to be dated by a white woman as a white guy. For whatever reason, just because they seem more compatible, they look better together, they look like they go together, you know what I'm saying? My girlfriend now is a blonde girl. And when I look at us together, it's like... Something's off, you know? It's kinda weird for me. You get over it, but... Do you know what I'm saying, a little bit? *(I explain that because I've dated almost all white guys, I got used to seeing myself with white guys so it looks normal to me. Then I branch out into why I'm doing this project - to get other perspectives, and that it was hard for me to broach this topic until recently.)* It's hard, it is. It's way more difficult than people think. It's just that feeling of "Where do I belong?" *(I say, "And it's not like you're going to go somewhere where there's just a bunch of mulatto people hanging out.")* No, of course not. There's gonna be a bunch of white people hanging out, a bunch of black people hanging out, with maybe a lighter skinned person, and it all depends too, because you and I have pretty Anglo-Saxon features. But we have the darker skin, so people get confused. You see a group of black people

hanging out, and there'll be a lighter-skinned person in the group, but they look like they're black, like their facial features make them look black, but it's just their skin tone that looks off. I have the opposite problem - I have a white nose, white upper lip, and I kinda look more white than I do black no matter what my skin color does, and it confuses you, and it's just like, "Where do I belong?" 'Cause I always get made fun of - not made fun of, but poked fun at in the wintertime, I feel like I'm pasty, like I'm so light, and people are just like "Fuck you, you're so dark still, shut up!" And I'm like, "Are you blind?" It's like, I'm darker than the coffee, whatever. (*I say, "Those little jokes tend to get to me after a while."*) After a little while. See, I make fun of myself, because I'm around white people all the time, so it's just a thing now. I know how to get laughs out of people, like when girls are like, "...I'm gonna go tanning," I'll be like, "I just got the premium package, I'm doing four times next week!" And they just look at me like, "Really?" And I think it's hilarious, but honestly, I started making fun of myself more just so people would stop making fun of me, so I had control over it. And then I started to feel better about it, because if you can't laugh at yourself, what are you doing? Everybody has "faults" or whatever, so you have to start laughing at them, or start crying. And I don't want to do that.

14. Have you dated whites, blacks, mulattos, or entirely different races from yourself? And if you have dated more than one race, how have your experiences differed in accordance to the meshing of both of your respective heritages and cultures?

If we're talking about "real" girlfriends, and not those elementary school holding hands and passing notes things - all white girls. I was with this girl very briefly, and she was half-black, half-Cuban, and we really connected on - she would cook for me, and it was good stuff 'cause it was all ethnic, Hispanic mixed with like, the soul food and stuff like that. But in my experience, black girls are crazy, just in general. (*I say, "I can't really comment on that because I wasn't really friends with any black girls [up until recently]."*) Yeah, I do little social experiments from time to time, and one of them was when I was in a pretty diverse audio engineering class at the New England Institute of Art. So, a lot of brothers, a lot of white guys and stuff like that all doing different things, but doing the audio. And it was funny because I would come in with my headphones on, hood up, hat, and stuff like that, and when I would talk in class, I would consciously do it differently. Because I remember the accent that I used to have, how people talked in Chicago with the slang and everything. I would go in one class and talk with the dialect that I'm using with you right now, and then at the end of class, the white guys would just comment on me and start chatting with me. The next day, though, I would start talking hood, and then the brothers, the Latin dudes, would come up and talk to me. It was really weird. It had nothing to do with how I was dressed because I wore the same thing every day, but how you talk is really big. It opened my eyes like crazy. Just by the way you talk, because that's a cultural similarity.

15. If you see yourself getting married or having children, do you see yourself most likely marrying a person of a certain race?

To be honest with you, I've never really seen a successful marriage or real relationship, so marriage doesn't seem like a very likely thing for me, but I'll fall in love with

whoever. It doesn't matter their race, I'm open to anything. But as far as kids go, I don't know. And also, I have a hyphenated last name because my parents were never together, and I'm the guy, so how would a woman take on my hyphenated last name - Mr. and Mrs. Fritz-Grice? That just doesn't sound right, to me at least. (*I say, "You can choose to call yourself whatever you want to call yourself."*) But then I feel like it would be picking sides.

SELF-IMAGE

16. What is it that constitutes being a particular race - is it more cultural and environmental than color-wise, more nurture than nature?

A lot of people see it as nurture over nature, definitely, because I've heard so many people say "He's the whitest black kid I know," and shit like that, and it's definitely how you were raised, like the culture - the culture definitely more, I think. Because I knew white gangbangers, who, if you would talk to them, you would swear they were black. It all depends, 'cause you can only go so far with just the color of your skin.

17. Throughout your life, have people ever been surprised when you told them you are mulatto? Did they ever guess any other variety of ethnicities that were wrong?

Yes, all the time. Like I said before, people think I'm Portuguese, Brazilian, Dominican, Mexican sometimes, depending on if I let my facial hair grow. But once they see the curly, nappy hair, they're like, "Oh, okay. Right." But people are always surprised when I tell people I'm Irish and German, they're like, "No way." When people don't guess and they just straight up ask me, I'm like, "How much time to do you have?" I'm a little bit of everything from the Caribbean Islands, mostly Haitian, and then like 30, 35 percent Irish, a little bit of German, a little bit of Dutch, and Scottish.

18. Have you ever, or do you feel uncomfortable with either side of your black and white heritage (or in more specific terms of your ethnicity, i.e. Jewish and Haitian)?

I'm definitely more aware of the differences when I'm around black people. I'm definitely more conscious of the fact that I'm the odd one out, just because I'm used to being around a whole bunch of white people anyway, so it's just different. Not something I'm unwilling to embrace, but it's just different.

19. Race-wise, do you feel like there might be a side of yourself that is hidden, either subconsciously or on purpose? If so, do you want to reveal it?

Oh yeah. But I don't know if I want to reveal it, because you know the saying "You can take the boy out the hood, but you can't take the hood out the boy?" You can take someone out of the hood, but you can't take the hood out of them. That's definitely part of me - the ignorant, loud, hood personality, that comes out of me when I'm either really drunk, or I'm pissed off. Like, I don't get mad. I've made myself a very calm person, I

just let things go and stuff, because I don't like that side coming out. But it does, and it can, and it will. And it's bad.

20. Bob Marley said this about being biracial: "Me don't dip on nobody's side. Me don't dip on the black man's side nor the white man's side. Me dip on God's side, the one who create me and cause me to come from black and white." (Lowney) Depending on who you happen to be around (i.e. a certain race or culture of people), does your self-image in terms of your race differ? Or, in your daily life, do you tend not to think about or notice your race?

When I'm alone is when I notice it most. It's when I'm just in my head, so I'm thinking about it all the time. But yeah...when I get on the phone with my cousins and my family out there... all that stuff gets pulled out, it's really funny. Because whenever I'm around people - my ex-girlfriend used to say it to me all the time - she's like, "You get that accent when you're on the phone, it's really funny how different you sound." And I'm like, "I can't help it," you know? Because you get accustomed to one thing, but I'm really good at adapting. I can adapt in any situation, so if I go into a room full of, let's say, emo people listening to screamo, death metal and shit like that, I can go in there and I can relate, I can talk how I need to. I'm just really good at making people like me and feel comfortable around me. So anywhere I go I can do that.

AMERICAN CULTURE/CURRENT AFFAIRS

21. Although we are coming up to a presidential election soon, America has now had four years with a mulatto president. What do you think his election and presidency means to American culture, and the often-controversial, often-shifting racial environment of our country?

I'd rather see Obama in the office again than Mitt Romney, definitely. (*I ask, "Is that for reasons of race?"*) I feel like Obama has been [made into a scapegoat] because of his race, and it's like "Oh yeah, we tried a black president and it didn't work to how we wanted it to, so let's go back to what we know." That's what I feel like people are saying, when they start Obama-bashing about how he hasn't done shit for this country... It definitely goes beyond race at this point with the presidential election... A figurehead is all it is now, it's very similar to the king and queen of England. They're there, and they get all the shit, and they're the ones who do all the talking. They're the front man, but the music's being played by everyone else... The fact that he wasn't assassinated is a great thing, because I was expecting that. I thought he was going to get assassinated as soon as he got up to the podium for the inaugural speech. But it's interesting, because racism is still alive and kicking in this country, whether we want to believe it or not. But we as a culture are definitely taking steps to knock that down. Obama being president is an amazing thing, because that's the ultimate success story. Like, yes, you, black kid in the hood, you can rise above and become president? No one thinks that. No one in the black community expects that of anyone. It's just like rapper, basketball player or something like that, win the lottery. That's how you're going to get out. But being president? No

way. So that's a really good success story. Definitely, having our president be a black person - or at least part, definitely has to make people be like, "Oh... Well you're not white, Catholic?" It probably has made people more accepting. I can't say for sure, because all of my friends that I hang out with, they know there's a difference in people, but they're very open, accepting. That's why I surround myself with them. Actually it's really funny, for a Halloween party last night, me and my girl dressed up. Our idea was, she was the schoolteacher and I was the principal. It was awesome. But as soon as I walked in, everyone was like, "Are you Obama?!" 'Cause I just had a white button-up with a nice tie and pants, and they asked automatically. And I had a red tie on too, and I was just like "Ignorant people!" (*Laughing.*)

22. *Do you think that, in America today, it's still necessary to pick either solely black or solely white social groups to be accepted, or is it more complicated?*

People view you however they're gonna view you. People definitely judge other people on the people they surround themselves with, definitely. And, to me it doesn't matter at all. If you connect with people, that's what you do, you just connect with certain people. But if I have black friends or if I have white friends, it doesn't really matter to me. It's just whoever I click with. And I'm not gonna fight for someone's approval, which is what I feel like I've always had to do with black people, which have not been as accepting of me as white people. So I'm just like, "You know what? I'll just accept it."

23. *When asked about her daughter Nahla's race, Halle Berry said, "I feel like she's black. I'm black and I'm her mother, and I believe in the one-drop theory." (Weiss) Although Halle Berry is technically mulatto, she sees herself and her mixed daughter as black. Does anyone in your family categorize you as one race or another? If you decide to have children, how do you think you would choose to handle your children's races?*

My children are gonna be mixed because I'm mixed. And depending on who I'm with - I'm a very light-skinned person, and if I end up having children with a white woman, they'll be a quarter black - they gotta know their culture, they gotta know their ethnicity, but again, it's nurture vs. nature: where are they gonna grow up, how are they gonna grow up and everything like that. But, I'm a rapper, that's what I'm gonna do. I love music, and a lot of people who are into music are multicultural, because music is the universal language, so it doesn't matter what color you are, what language you speak, there are gonna be so many different people.

24. *Lenny Kravitz said this about his parents' relationship: "[My parents] would walk down the street (and) people would spit on them... very disgusting things. My father lost his side of the family 'til I was born." (Guthmann) This memory Lenny related is well within living memory. How far have we come since then?*

Pretty far, because like I said... I'm not that dark, but me and my girlfriend walk down the street all the time, and we turn heads... Good way, bad way, don't know, but guys are checking her out, girls are checking me out, and it's cool, because it's so unorthodox for people still. You see blonde-haired, blue-eyed people walking down the street together all the time and nobody says a thing, and that's just the picturesque thing. I really like it

because I feel like I break the mold. I'm throwing a curve into people's perception of what they expect, and I love doing that. So it's good. That's what I'm saying - if me and you walked down the street together, we'd look very similar, we would turn fewer heads. It makes sense... But otherwise it's a little different... It's funny. I like it.

25. What is the most important thing you feel you have learned about yourself and how you fit into the world as a young American mulatto?

Honestly, I think that the thing that I've taken from this mostly is just, you can't focus on the differences. If you actually want to be happy, and feel good about yourself, you can't focus on the differences. And if you are with people who do focus on the differences, they're usually knocking you down. Like I said, when I'm here around white people and stuff, I'm usually the black kid. And vice versa, when I go to Chicago, I'm the white kid. I remember being at the barber shop with my uncle, and his son who is full black, and [one of my cousins] is half-black but he's a lot darker than me, and they were - all the barbers and stuff - were just making fun of me and stuff like that, like, "Oh, you want to look like Jason Kidd, right?" Like, I was the white kid, even though I'm mixed, they still just saw the differences mostly. And that made me feel uncomfortable because it's like, "Yeah, okay, can we get over this now?" Because race is a really big thing still in the black community compared to the white, so I think that's why I haven't gotten along with black people as much, because race is such a big thing, and I just want to get over it. I am who I am, take it or leave it. I'd say, don't focus on the differences - we are all people. We are all God's children.

CAITLYN JONES



PORTRAIT

Caitlyn holds photos of her mother and father.



PORTRAIT

Caitlyn rehearses with the cast of *Cabaret* at SSU's Mainstage theatre.

FAMILY AND CHILDHOOD

1. *How did your parents meet, and was there any racial tension between family, friends, or others when they decided to get together?*

I think they were working for the same bank, in different branches, and they met at a work cruise. That's basically all I know of how they met. Then they got together, and my dad's family - my dad's black, my mom's white - was fine with it, and my mom's family was not okay with it at all. I think they met in 1988, and were married in 1990. My mom's dad didn't really care that much, but her mom was completely against it, and her sister went along with what her mother was saying, so when they got married, my mom's mom disowned her, and they haven't spoken since 1990. My mom's tried to send her birthday cards or like, "Hey, I'm having a child," and my grandmother just didn't acknowledge it whatsoever. And occasionally we'll see my granddad, her dad, but she has to call his work phone because she can't call the house phone, 'cause if her mother picks up, it'll be a bad story, so he's kind of going behind her back to talk to her, and she hasn't really talked to her sister at all. And we live in Wilmington right now, and they live in North Reading, which is a town over. So they live a town over, but I've never met my aunt or my grandmother.

2. *Lenny Kravitz said of his childhood: "I grew up not knowing about race until I... went to school... My parents were the only parents that didn't match." (Guthmann) Were you always aware of race when you were growing up, or was there a moment you remember becoming aware?*

I don't really remember being unaware or aware - it was always just how I was living, and how I grew up. I went to a private Christian school from age two to eighth grade, and there was another boy who was in my class who was also mulatto, so it was never really a thing. Once I got to high school, then it was like, "Oh, you're half-black," and it was interesting. I went to Tewksbury High where there were maybe three black people in our class, so out of my friends I was the "blackest" person, so it was kind of a running joke, but I never really remember it being a thing where I was aware or unaware of it.

3. *As time passes and race relations change in America, have the ways others respond to your parents being an interracial couple also changed over the years?*

They're not together anymore. They split up when I was 15 or 16, so I don't really remember anything about them being together or not. I do remember my mom mentioning at some point that people would ask if me and my brother were adopted, and she'd be like, "No, they're not, they're my kids."

4. *How did your parents raise you and your siblings, if you have any, as biracial children; i.e., did they agree on trying to give you the benefit of both cultures, or were you raised in more of one culture than another, or was this perhaps a point of tension between your parents?*

My mom was always very aware that she was raising children that might be viewed

differently, so she always tried to make it “Okay, you’re black, don’t forget,” and we were like, “We don’t really care.” I remember this one VCR tape we had called “My Friend Martin,” and it was this cartoon of Martin Luther King Jr., and these kids that go back in time to hang out with him, and we would bring it in to school every year on Martin Luther King Day, and we’d watch it. So she was always trying to make it a part of our lives, so that we would not be uncomfortable, but we never really were. We were always, “Well, this is just how we are.” We never really experienced any bullying or any negative aspects when we were young from it, so it was never really an issue. My dad, though, he - it’s very weird, my dad has a very “white” personality... when my friends meet my dad, they’re like, “Wow, Caitlyn, your dad is so white.” I don’t know if it’s because black people are usually looked at as “ghetto” people or something, but he was raised in a suburb, in Billerica, and granted, his family was one of like two black families in the 60s. And he’s different than his older brother who is more “black.” But it’s not like our family was, like, out of place - it didn’t feel like my parents were of different ethnicities. It felt like they were on the same level, and my dad never really made a big deal about that, and he actually hates the term African-American, because he’s like, “Well, I’m not from Africa, my family hasn’t been from Africa in generations - I’m just black - that’s my skin tone, I’m black.”

5. Leona Lewis said this of when she would get teased as a child: “I’d go crying home to Mum and she would say to me, “You’re a beautiful girl and you’re a part of me and a part of your dad. You don’t have to do anything but carry yourself with pride’.” (Das) Were there any messages or values your parents instilled in you with regard to your mixed heritage?

Not really. Being of a mixed race wasn’t really a problem. I was never bullied as a child, so I didn’t have to experience that. But my mom always - she would try to say, “If anyone says anything, it doesn’t matter,” prevention-wise. My dad never really said anything about it.

SCHOOL EXPERIENCES

6. Did you grow up in either an ethnically diverse, or non-ethnically diverse area, and was your school population mirrored by that town or city?

From ages two to eighth grade, I went to a private Christian school in Wilmington, which is a predominately white suburb, so it wasn’t very ethnically diverse. There was another mulatto boy in our class. It was never really a problem. I don’t know if it was because it was in a private school where it was so small. I don’t know why it was never a problem - I’m not complaining. Then when I got to high school, I went to Tewksbury High, which is also a predominately white suburb, where I wasn’t really teased - I wasn’t bullied, but it was a running joke. Like, I would consider myself very “white,” like, if I was looking at, ethnically, who I related to most. I’ll put down black and white on questionnaires asking your ethnicity, but I’d consider myself more white just how I’ve been raised and where I was raised. So I was the token black kid amongst my group of friends, even

though I can't dance, and I can't play basketball, or any sort of "black" thing.

7. *Derek Jeter said this about experiencing racism at school: "Kids would say [the N word]; you'd hear it. It would bother you and annoy you, make you feel bad. [But]... It taught me how I didn't want to be, that I needed to learn about different people as opposed to just judging them." (ABC News) Did you experience any racism at school, and if so, what was it like for you?*

I can't really think of anything. I'm pretty lucky. Now that I'm in college, and because I'm a theatre major, because I want to be an actor, part of it is figuring out what "type" you are, and it's so hard to figure out where I am, because I could look Hispanic, but I don't speak Spanish, and I'm not black enough to play Beneatha in *Raisin In The Sun*, but I'm not white enough to play the blonde ingénue. We actually had a workshop a couple of months ago with Greg Alan Williams, who was on *Baywatch*, and is going to be the mayor in District 11 for the new *Hunger Games* movie, and I was talking to him about that whole type thing, and what type I should be, and he's like "Well, you could be all different types. There a lot of parts where you don't cast for it - it doesn't matter what ethnicity you are." So it's something good, and I can take advantage of that, but right now I'm in a place where it's kind of freaking me out, but I can play different things so I need to explore that more, and this guy was saying at the workshop, "Well, you do look Hispanic, so maybe you can make a headshot... and how about the name you put on your headshot at the bottom - just be like, Caitlyn... Ramirez or something, just put a Hispanic last name, so that the first thing that they see is something that they associate with - " (*I ask, "You can lie about that?"*) Yeah, I guess so... He's like, "Well, people choose stage names all the time, so it's just like using different stage names for different auditions. Or maybe it's just association-wise - if they see a Hispanic name, and they'll picture you as Hispanic." So he's like, "Learn Spanish, and then you have another niche you can play into."

8. *What is your education experience like now, attending Salem State, which is the second-most diverse school of all 20 Massachusetts state and UMass schools?*

Is it really? It's pretty much felt the same. I didn't know it was so diverse, but because there is obviously more diversity, I haven't felt so, like, out of the loop. It's not that I ever felt bullied or ostracized, but I just didn't completely feel like I was completely white, or, I didn't fit a category. Here, I'm still finding - I want to fit somewhere, but I don't feel the need so much to fit this exact category, because there's more people around.

9. *Did you know how diverse Salem State was when you applied to the school, and did that have any sway in your final decision to attend? Do you think schools with a range of diversity are a better thing than a school with less diversity?*

Yes, I feel like more diversity is just necessary to know more about the world. And I think part of college is just learning more about your environment and your world. And if you're kind of stuck in this one-ethnicity place, you're not really experiencing other cultures as much.

10. *Have you had any difficulty being accepted by certain groups here on campus, or the opposite - being automatically accepted because of your skin color?*

(*I ask, "Have you experienced reverse racism?"*) Not really. I'm pretty light-skinned for being half-black, so it's not like I'm automatically - I guess, yeah, I'm more automatically accepted into the white sphere, because I remember last year in the freshman dorms, my hair was down, and it's very curly, and this girl who, I wasn't really friends with, but she was on my floor, and we were friendly, we were both kind of outgoing people. She was friends with a few of the black girls on our floor, and she's like, "Hey, did you know Caitlyn Jones is half-black?" And they're like "What?" And I'm like, "Yeah, I am." And then they're like "Oh... I didn't know that." And I'm like, "Yup, my dad's black and my mom's white," and they're like, "What black are you?" And I've never had anyone ask me that. And I'm like "What black am I?" And they're like, "Yeah, I'm from Barbados, where are you from?" And I don't know, because my dad never made a deal about it. He's always just like, "I'm black, and that's it." (*I ask, "You never asked him?"*) No, I never really asked him, and I asked him after that. So I do know that I'm part African, like, from slave ships. My grandmother is from Naches, Mississippi, and she moved up to Massachusetts when she was an adult, but she's from Naches because that's where the slave ships landed however many years ago. I know that the grandson of the slave who landed straight from Africa married a Cherokee woman, so I know I'm part Cherokee, and I know I'm part Irish. My grandmother on my dad's side, her father is half-black and half-white. My grandmother's father's father was Irish... but I don't really know where exactly my "black" is from, and I never thought about that until someone asked me, because I've never had that happen to me. People have asked, "Oh, your mom's white, what is she?" And I'm like, "Oh, she's a little French, a little Dutch, a little English, Irish, and some Native American," but I've never had anyone ask me what "black" my dad was. I don't know if that means - 'cause the people that are asking are usually white, and usually don't know what the differences between the different types of black are - I think that's probably the case. Also, being from Tewksbury and Wilmington, I get more white people asking what I am than black people. 'Cause people do ask, "Oh, what are you?"

FRIENDSHIPS/DATING RELATIONSHIPS

11. *Throughout your life, have you become friends with people of a variety of different races, or mostly one or two races?*

Most of my friends are white. Mostly when I was growing up in Tewksbury and Wilmington, it was all white people around me, and also, the few black people that were around me were more "black," and would speak with ebonics and had their own culture, and I didn't really fit that, so I just gravitated towards the white people. In college, in the theatre department at least, there's like two black people, and the one girl I'm friends with who's black, she's from Reading, and that's also a very "white" suburb, so she's not very "black" either... I don't know how to describe it - maybe I'm just really racist and like white people. I've only dated white men before. My first boyfriend was white, upper-

middle-class, from Tewksbury. My current boyfriend is white, upper-middle-class, from Medford. I don't know, that's just how it worked out.

12. If you have friends who are also mulatto, do you feel like you relate to or can connect with them in a special way, or do you have different backgrounds and thoughts about race than they do?

The people I do know who are mulatto, like Ben [Kirk] and Amanda [Cooper] and the kid who I went to elementary and middle school with - it was kind of a bonding thing, like "Oh, halfies, yay," ...but we never really talked about what race really meant to us, except I had like one conversation with Ben [Kirk] when he was telling me about your project. It's nice and interesting and cool to have someone that you can relate with... but we never really delved into the subject so much. My cousins are half-black as well. My father's older brother who's black was with a white woman, and had five children, and then he was with another white woman and had one, so I have six cousins who are mulatto, but I do not connect with them at all. I don't want to say the sole reason is because of this, but most of them are - I don't really see them very often, so I can't say this for sure, but - they are more "black" than I am. It feels like they are of a different ethnicity than I am. We're all mulatto and we're all in the same family, but it just feels like there's kind of this separation, because my dad is a "white" black man, and their dad is a "black" black man, and they also grew up in Lowell, which is the town over from mine, but is very diverse, and a completely different atmosphere than the suburb I lived in. (*I ask, "What are the specific things that are different about them?"*) I think part of it was, my brother and I grew up going to a Christian school, which was more sheltered, and they grew up going to public schools and everything. And our mothers were completely different people. But growing up, they would listen to rap and hip-hop all the time, and I listened to more just like, pop. My cousins' situation is different - they lived with our grandmother for a while because their mother couldn't take care of them, and then a couple of them got emancipated once they got old enough, so they have a very different living situation than I did as well, so that's probably part of the reason that we don't connect as well. One of my cousins has a very "ghetto" personality... So... some of them, the way they speak is very ebonics, like, "Hey girl, wassup..." The cousin that I was just talking about, she had a daughter when she was 17, and then she had a son when she was 19, and so that also put another rift between us, because she's only four years older than me, and we were kind of closer when we were younger, but as we got older, our personalities shifted completely, and we have different values and different living situations, and it was hard staying connected.

13. Oprah Winfrey once said that she wished she could be light-skinned as a young woman, because the light-skinned women were always the ones that were most pursued by black men. Were you ever picked on for being a particular skin tone by any racial group? Do you think there is still a color-tone hierarchy?

Throughout my daily life, not. I am very light-toned, so I don't know if that has like, put me in some higher position or something like that, I haven't really felt that. Sometimes I feel out of place with my cousins who are all darker-toned than I am, and even my younger brother is darker-toned than I am, so that's even more of a rift between me and

my “black” side, and it’s so hard just connecting with that because I don’t look that black and I don’t feel that black. I hate using “black” as a term of personality, but... My grandparents and my aunt moved to New Mexico about eight years ago, and we visited them when I was in eighth grade, and I came back... and I see my cousin, and she’s like, “Girl, you have no color. You went to New Mexico and you came back with no color?” And I’m like, “Well, sorry.” So, it’s weird feeling so light-skinned sometimes when the rest of my family is darker-skinned. And because I don’t associate with the white side of my family at all - like, I’ve met one of my uncles like three times on my mom’s side, and I’ve met her other brother’s wife and his kids like once or twice when I was little and I don’t remember them at all. I actually went to high school with and graduated in the same grade as my cousin who is my mother’s sister’s son, but because my mother’s sister stopped associating with her when my grandmother did, he didn’t know we were cousins. We had never met each other. I got to school, and freshman year I was friends with one of his friends, and my mom told me ahead of time, “Don’t develop a crush on this one kid, because he’s your cousin.” ...So I knew who he was, and I ended up meeting him, and my friend was just like, “Hey, did you know Caitlyn’s your cousin?” And I’m like, “Thank you for telling him that way.” He’s like “What?” I’m like, “Yeah, your mom...? ...My mom [and your mom are] sisters.” And he’s like “Oh... I didn’t know I had a cousin.” And the thing is, I don’t know if he knew my mom existed. So he had no idea we were related. (*I ask, “Do you still talk, or are you allowed to talk?”*) I think we’re friends on Facebook... but we never really talked in high school. If we needed to say something to each other, it wasn’t that awkward, but never really had a need to because we weren’t friends. We were family, but we weren’t family because he didn’t know we existed, so we were never a family support system at all.

14. Have you dated whites, blacks, mulattos, or entirely different races from yourself? And if you have dated more than one race, how have your experiences differed in accordance to the meshing of both of your respective heritages and cultures?

(*I ask, “Did the families of the guys you dated accept you?”*) I... half-dated his one kid before my two boyfriends, but he’s gay and my best friend now, so I don’t really count that. He’s white too, and I kind of grew up with him because he went to my church, and I love their family... so that was never an issue. But for my current boyfriend and my boyfriend before that - they had no problems with me, they completely accepted me, but I remember specifically meeting this boyfriend’s family, and it’s kind of like, “Uh, are you gonna think I’m weird because I’m not white?” And I think part of that goes to my mom’s mom just disowning her, but there’s always just a tiny bit of me that’s like, “Are you sure they’re gonna accept me? What if they don’t because I’m not white?” But they never had a problem with it. And my boyfriend has mentioned that his grandmother is somewhat racist, so... I haven’t had an opportunity to meet her, and I don’t know if I ever will, but that’ll be an interesting roadblock when I hit that. But... people have been more accepting than I thought they would be.

15. If you see yourself getting married or having children, do you see yourself most likely marrying a person of a certain race?

If it’s not my current boyfriend, it would probably still be someone who is white, because

I've never really been attracted to black men.

SELF-IMAGE

16. What is it that constitutes being a particular race - is it more cultural and environmental than color-wise, more nurture than nature?

I think part of it is definitely skin tone, because if someone is of a darker skin tone, you're like, "Oh, you're black," and that's the first thing you see about them, no matter how they act. So people notice that I'm not completely white because my skin tone is slightly darker, and my nose is slightly wider, and my hair is very curly, so that's how they know I'm not completely white. But when I think about it, I definitely think of it as more cultural/environmental, because my culture and my environment, the way I've been raised, has always been of "white" ethnicity, that's what I identify more with. My brother's somewhat different, though, so I don't know. We were raised in the same household, we've been through most... of the same experiences. He also went to the private Christian school until he was in eighth grade, [but] we did go to different high schools, so that might have been a little different. He went to the tech school. But he does have a darker skin tone than me, and people will see him as black more than they see me as black, and he also tends to be all "Dope and up in the hood" and "Wassup" - jokingly, though. So it's weird. He had an afro for a while. He didn't take care of it, so it didn't look very good, but he was proud of his afro.

17. Throughout your life, have people ever been surprised when you told them you are mulatto? Did they ever guess any other variety of ethnicities that were wrong?

...On my way coming back from New Mexico, in eighth grade... I had gotten my hair relaxed and straightened while I was in New Mexico - my grandmother is a hairdresser, so we were always like, "Grandma, can you do something with my hair, or have someone do something?" Because my mom did not know how to take care of my hair when I was little because it was insane. But... it was really long and straight, and I think it was my grandmother, but I'm not sure who said it - someone said I looked Native American. And I mean, I'm part Native American, but that's not my total genetic makeup, but I looked very Native American, so that was interesting. Usually, if people are going to mistake me as something, it's Hispanic, because I look more Hispanic than I do black or white. Mostly, I don't know what people are thinking, they just say, "Hey, what are you?"

18. Have you ever, or do you feel uncomfortable with either side of your black and white heritage (or in more specific terms of your ethnicity, i.e. Jewish and Haitian)?

I don't usually think of myself as Irish or Native American. If people ask, I usually say I'm half-black and half-white and I leave it at that, unless they're like, "Oh, what type of white, what type of black?" And I never really think of that until I'm asked, because... I don't nitpick all the different cultures inside of that. I remember one time for Saint Patrick's Day, I'm like "Oh yeah, I'm Irish," and they're like "Caitlyn, you're black,"

and I'm like, "I'm half-black! And I'm also Irish." (*I ask, "Who was saying this?"*) I think it was just one of my friends. They're like "You're Irish?" And I'm like "Yeah I'm Irish, I'm mostly Irish." Because my mom is mostly Irish I think, and there's Irish on my dad's side too, so I'm like, I am Irish, thank you.

19. Race-wise, do you feel like there might be a side of yourself that is hidden, either subconsciously or on purpose? If so, do you want to reveal it?

(To further explain the question, I explain how I started to feel like I should explore my black heritage in college, and how I started doing this by attending some black and multicultural events on campus.) I definitely can relate more to my white ethnicity than I do my black, and I'll see things for the multicultural associations, and I still feel like, too "white" to be a part of these things. "Oh, I could go - no... I could - no, not really... I'm too white for that, it would be weird." And then because I've had, like, "white" experiences growing up, and that's what I associate with, if someone were to ask me about - I don't even know how I would respond to it. I don't know how to put this - I just feel too white to be black. (*Emphasizes*) I feel too white to be black. But at the same time I'm like, "But I *am* black," but I don't know what that means.

20. Bob Marley said this about being biracial: "Me don't dip on nobody's side. Me don't dip on the black man's side nor the white man's side. Me dip on God's side, the one who create me and cause me to come from black and white." (Lowney) Depending on who you happen to be around (i.e. a certain race or culture of people), does your self-image in terms of your race differ? Or, in your daily life, do you tend not to think about or notice your race?

From day to day, I don't really think about it unless it's mentioned. If I'm around a group of white people I don't think about it, but if I'm around a group of black people, I feel really white. When I was in New Mexico visiting my grandparents, they were attending a predominantly black church, and I felt so white in that church. Skin tone wise, me and my brother were the lightest people there. I'd never been to a church where it's like, "Hallelujah, praise the Lord" ...kneeling down, lift your hands up - I'd always been to a white Congregational church where we sit, and then we stand, and we sing, and then we sit, so that was a complete culture shock. I'm more uncomfortable if I'm around a group of black people than if I'm around a group of white people.

AMERICAN CULTURE/CURRENT AFFAIRS

21. Although we are coming up to a presidential election soon, America has now had four years with a mulatto president. What do you think his election and presidency means to American culture, and the often-controversial, often-shifting racial environment of our country?

It's funny because I've never really thought about it. What I have thought about is, do people even realize he's mulatto? 'Cause most of the time people are like, "Oh, black

president,” and it’s like, “He’s half-black, actually. Did you know that?” He didn’t even grow up with his black family. I think it’s a good thing for America because, again, I think being in diversity is better than not. Because if you’re stuck in your zone of all white people, it’s harder to associate with people who aren’t. And I think the same thing is true in reverse, like if you’re stuck with all Asian people, or black people all the time, it’s harder to associate with people who aren’t of the same race as you are, and I think I have that problem too, because I’m with white people still more often in college, but I think that having a black, mulatto president kind of shows that, “Oh, you don’t have to be white for things...” I don’t know, I haven’t really thought that much about it. That’s kind of an important thing to think about, though.

22. Do you think that, in America today, it’s still necessary to pick either solely black or solely white social groups to be accepted, or is it more complicated?

I think it’s definitely more complicated than that, especially if you are a mulatto person who could fit into either side. I think you shouldn’t have to try to pick a side, I think you should just fall in to where you’re most comfortable in. And sometimes that is with one side or one group of people over another group of people.

23. When asked about her daughter Nahla’s race, Halle Berry said, “I feel like she’s black. I’m black and I’m her mother, and I believe in the one-drop theory.” (Weiss) Although Halle Berry is technically mulatto, she sees herself and her mixed daughter as black. Does anyone in your family categorize you as one race or another? If you decide to have children, how do you think you would choose to handle your children’s races?

(I explain the one-drop theory to her to explain the question before she answers it.) How people viewed me - in my family at least, I think my grandmother, my mother’s mother, probably views me as black, because she hasn’t made any effort to know me, or to know that I’m a good student, I graduated high school, I’m in college - she doesn’t care about any of that. So I think she views me as black, because to her, I’m not good enough, and I’m not worth knowing, I guess. I think my grandparents on my dad’s side, I don’t think they really care, because most of their grandchildren are mulatto. I don’t know if they view me as black or as white. I’ve never really had to think about that as much, because I’ve known that they’ve always just accepted me for who I am... How I would refer to my children - I have no idea. I think they would know that I’m half-black and half-white... assuming I had children with a white man, which I probably will... I don’t think I would make a big deal about them being part black, just because I don’t really make a big deal about me being part black... *(I ask, “Are you going to teach your children about black culture like your mom tried to?”)* My mother tried very hard to - she even got a Kwanzaa Bible or something, and I’m like, “Mom, you have no idea what this is saying...” I appreciate what she did, definitely, but I almost feel like I didn’t need it, or maybe I did need it, and maybe because I didn’t focus on it so much, that’s part of the reason why I associate so much with being white. But for my children, I don’t think I have that drive to push them to knowing that they’re part black and that’s okay, because I kind of feel like they should know that already - or, they’re children, they wouldn’t know anything already! I think it would all depend on, one, their appearance, whether they look more black, because kids are kids, and there’s gonna be kids that are like, “Oh, you’re

black. Why is your hair different? Why isn't your skin the same color as mine?" And if that comes up, I'll be like, "Yeah, you're a quarter black. Look at your grandpa, he's half-black, and you still love him, right? And he still loves you." So I definitely think I would say it is okay, like that's just part of who you are, but I don't think I would emphasize it, like, "You should be proud of this." I would be like, "This is who you are."

24. Lenny Kravitz said this about his parents' relationship: "[My parents] would walk down the street (and) people would spit on them... very disgusting things. My father lost his side of the family 'til I was born." (Guthmann) This memory Lenny related is well within living memory. How far have we come since then?

I think we've come far, far from that. I think spitting on someone because they're an interracial couple is not a normal thing, and it's not an acceptable thing. I think if someone does that, there are more people around that would say something - or I would hope that there are more people around that would say something like... As someone who hasn't really been bullied for being half-black and half-white, I think that's a testament to where the country is, or where it's going. I know that's not the case for everyone, but I think as a whole we've moved forward. I think we've come a long way, that we're on the other side of history, and there's a very small minority that views interracial relations as something disgusting. I think some people are still confused by it, just because they're very stuck in like, "Well, this is my race, this is your race, why would we be together?" But I don't think they're disgusted by it.

25. What is the most important thing you feel you have learned about yourself and how you fit into the world as a young American mulatto?

...I don't know, I don't like this question, because I don't know what to say. *(I explain some of the details of why I am doing the project, and how I would answer this question - realizing it's okay to be in a racial liminal zone, and not forcing myself to change, but letting myself learn more over time.)* I think that for me - don't judge me... I feel like as a mulatto person, I'm... comfortable with how I am. But I'm always going to be kind of questioning who I am and where I am, and who I should associate with and who I do... I wish I associated more with my black side - wish I could, and I can, and maybe I'm not trying hard enough to, because I'm just comfortable where I am, and I don't want to... I've struggled more with it as I've grown up. It wasn't really something I struggled with at all when I was younger, because, maybe I was just completely ignorant. Maybe I was being teased and I just didn't notice, or maybe people did look at me really weirdly when I walked down the street with my mom, and I just didn't notice 'cause I was little. But as I get older, it's something I'm noticing more, it's something that I have to notice more just as my career. Being an actor, if I want to play black roles, I'll have to identify myself as black, and that's hard for me to do. I think, in general, I'm just confused, and I think it's confusing being a mulatto person.

ADDENDUM TO THE INTERVIEW:

April 17th 2013, 8:05 PM via Facebook Mobile: Caitlyn Jones

I just received this email from my mom and [thought] you might want to use it. She doesn't mind if you do. It's just so timely.

"I had sent a birthday card to my brothers wife in [February]. Didn't hear anything. I sent an Easter card to my sister. Haven't heard anything. I sent a birthday card to my mother, who used to send them back unopened. She sent me a thank you card addressed to Dear Judy with her cell phone [number]. I thought I would let you know, since I had included the shiny sticker you had wanted to give her as a child."

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ADDITIONAL PHOTOS

The following photos were taken for Photography Portfolio, the capstone class of my photography minor, which was taught by Professor Richard Lewis of the Salem State University Art + Design department. I used this thesis as the theme of my work during the semester so I could visually explore the lives of other half-black, half-white SSU students. They feature the same aspects as the photos of the six interviewees (one portrait and one candid per person).

DANIELLE MARIE



PORTRAIT

Danielle holds photos of her father and mother.



CANDID

Danielle cheerleads during halftime for an SSU basketball game.

MICHAEL BLUNT



PORTRAIT

Michael holds photos of his mother and father.



CANDID

Michael oversees a rehearsal for an Urban Arts Theatre production at SSU.

CHRYSTA SLAYTON



PORTRAIT

Chrysta holds photos of her mother and father.



CANDID

Chrysta attends an SSU induction event with family (from left: mother, sister, Chrysta).

TUCKER DAVIS



PORTRAIT

Tucker holds photos of his father and mother.



CANDID

Tucker talks with a teammate during their lacrosse practice at SSU.