

## Racial Identity

As we near the end of Black History Month, my hope is that my experience can offer insight into the delicate balancing act that all of us perform on the razor-edge high-wire of racial identity. As the Charter of Compassion says, "To act or speak violently out of spite, chauvinism, or self-interest, to impoverish, exploit or deny basic rights to anybody, and to incite hatred by denigrating others—even our enemies—is a denial of our common humanity." Here is my life experience performance poem, rendered in essay form. Space for responses or submissions for other Compassion Essays can be found at [www.spiritualityresourcecenter.com](http://www.spiritualityresourcecenter.com).

I came into this "black" and "white" world a mix of the populace, graced with a variety of my parents' features. My mother and father's mixed genes gleaned a baby with fine, curly hair, tanned skin turned ashy without lotion's care, and a happy outgoing demeanor that demanded attention. My intellect showed. Before I began to walk, I began to talk, pushing the boundaries provided by my mother's care.

The first lesson she stressed me to remember was when she sat me in front of a mirror. As we gazed in at my mulatto skin, she said to me, "Mine is porcelain. This is how we will be seen by others."

I remember thinking, "Of course this is how I'll be seen! This is me!" The significance of her message was lost on me until my later years. I had no clear perception of the world of men I dwelt in. It mattered not the colors of my friends, just the fun we mixed in.

My race first came into play I was eight. I had been meandering about on my bicycle when I ran into a group of children. They threw rocks and obscenities my way. In anger I threw one back. I chose the word used to oppress those whose skin was similar to my coloration for generations. They looked at me aghast, and I peddled home fast, to tell my mother the news.

There my mother taught me a second distressin' lesson. Half of my heritage had been psychologically maimed by this word. I was appalled. I didn't know why I was mad then, but now I understand. I had never believed that people could be so ignorant that they would hate another man, woman or child because of the color of their skin-- or lack thereof.

We watched *Glory* and *Amistad* and I became focused on civil rights and equality. I even chose to side against "whites" because of the pain they caused. This young misplaced hatred led me to attempt to ostracize "whites" mostly, with phrases such as "is it because I'm 'black'?"

All persons have a period in life where they define themselves. These personal definitions are usually profoundly affected by the culture in which they are placed. Being mixed, I had two cultures with which to identify. It seems the two constantly

battle each other. Imagine how hard it is for a person to identify themselves within two cultures constantly in myopic combat, pointing fingers and blame in discrimination and stereotyping.

Daily I faced ostracization from both of the races I was supposed to relate with. To the "black" culture, I was the "whitest black" person they knew. This idea took hold because of my proper sentences and illustrious vocabulary. On the other hand, my Caucasian counterparts offered a discrimination so subtle they couldn't consciously see themselves, stereotyping me.

It was so subtle, I subconsciously started believing it. I wouldn't have a seat because it was an only chair. I got that seat because I was the only 'black' one there. My soul was culturally cleaved. Neither culture I related with just expected me to be me. A product of the environment provided by their discriminatory stereotypical input. It took me this time to realize it was "black" and "white" I must define, not let "black" and "white" define me.

Morgan Allred, February 2013