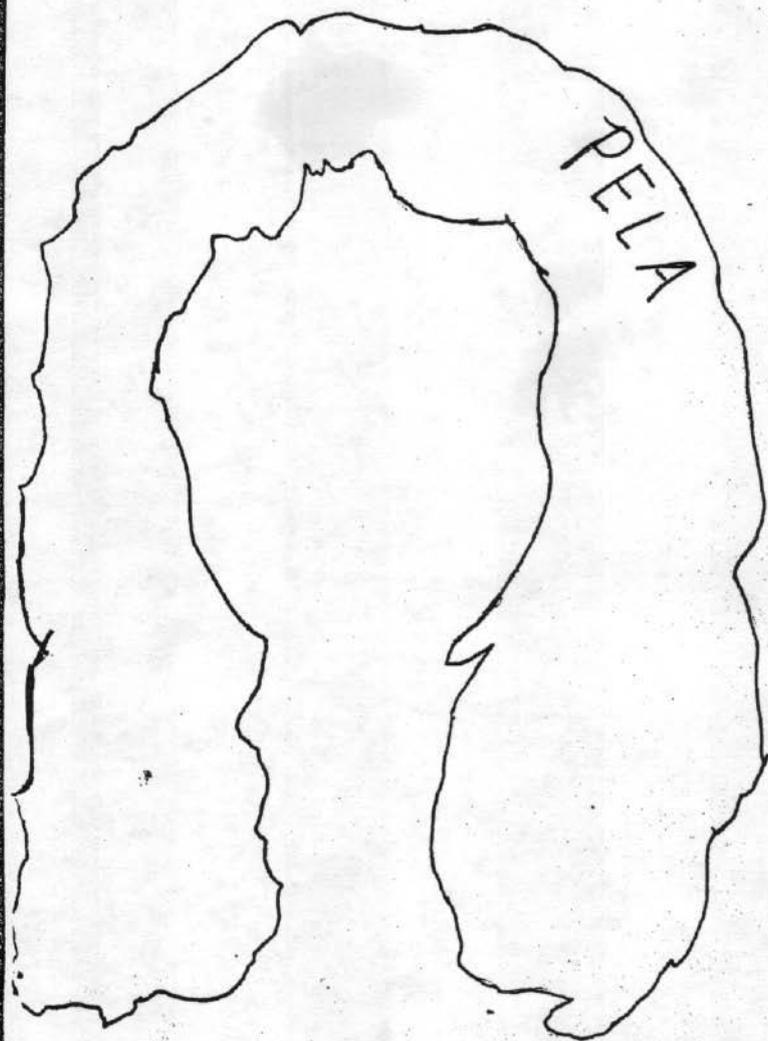




Borderlands:

*Tales from Disputed Territories between
Races and Cultures*

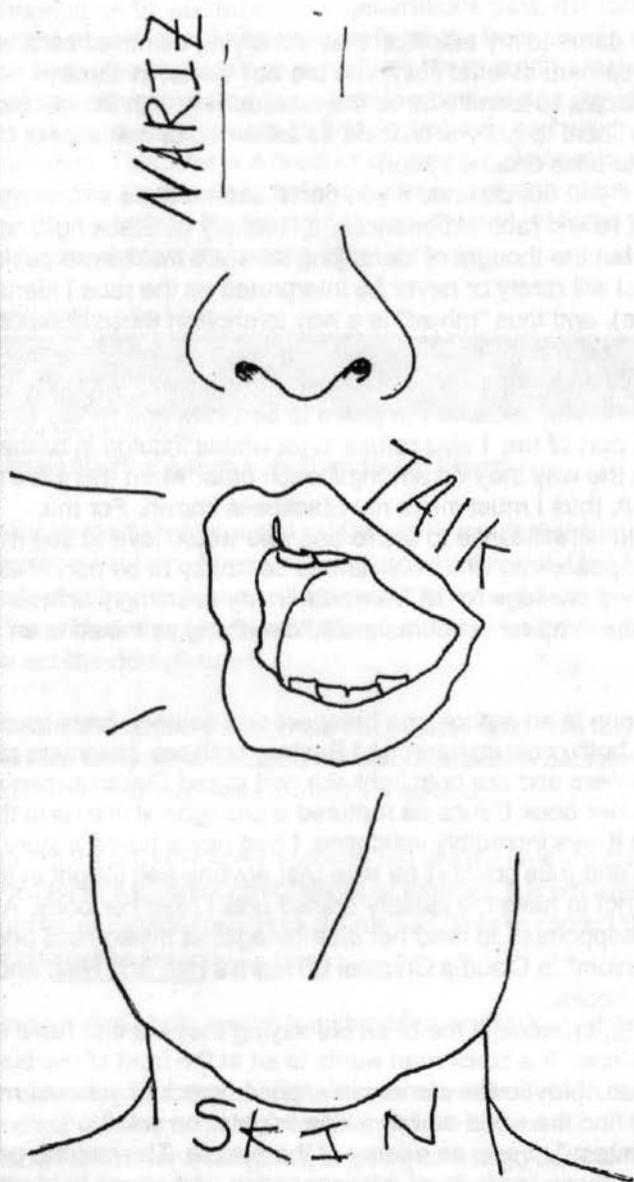
(sequel to MXD: True Stories by Mixed Race Writers)



TITLE: PELA, SKIN, NARIZ, TALK

by Luisa

THE UNDERSTANDING: These images are about my features that have been labeled one thing or another. PELA: A man in a restaurant came up to me and started to speak to me in spanish and then realized that spanish was not my first language and then told me (en ingles) he assumed I spoke spanish because of my long black beautiful mexican hair. SKIN: I was told by my sister that I am the lightest in our family and she seemed to envy this.



NARIZ: Recently I took a photo of my Mexican father with our faces side-by-side and realized my nose is a gift from him. **TALK:** My great-grandparents are from different parts of Mexico and when they traveled to Madera Ca. naturally they passed on spanish to their children, my grandparents. When my grandparents had their own children in Madera, they decided to speak on ingles to them. And when my father had me, he had only ingles to pass on.

Letter from the Editor

It recently came to my attention that identifying as mixed-race is not entirely politically correct, at least not if you are half white. In some situations/POC spaces, to identify other than exclusively with the of-color part of your heritage is liable to get you labeled as ashamed of that aspect of your identity, as trying to pass or as a traitor.

"Damned if you do, damned if you don't" seems to be a running theme in stories of mixed race experiences. If I identify as Black I get scoffed at and written off, but the thought of identifying as white makes me puke. Like many mixed folks, I will rarely or never be interpreted as the race I identify with (if there is one), and thus "mixed" is a way to shorten those obnoxious interrogations that begin with "what are you?" In my case, just answering "Black" is always followed by a demand for an extensive explanation. And I wouldn't identify as white, because I'm proud to be Black and refuse to let anyone erase that part of me. I also refuse to let whites indulge in casual racism around me the way they do amongst each other when there are no known POCs about, thus I must make my Blackness known. For me, identifying as mixed is resistance to the forces who would love to see me assimilate and disappear into white oblivion, to be happy to be part white and milk my light-skinned privilege for all it's worth. In my seemingly unique exception-to-the-one-drop-rule circumstance, identifying as mixed is an act of Black pride.

Danzy Senna is an author who I respect and seem to have much in common with. We both grew up in/around Boston, both are daughters of Black academic fathers and are both light-skinned mixed Black women who get read as white. Her book *Caucasia* featured a protagonist like us in these ways, and reading it was incredibly validating. I had never heard a story so much like my own and thus couldn't be sure that anyone had fought in the same ways I fight not to have my identity erased until I read her book. And so I was incredibly disappointed to read her diatribe against mixed-race pride: "The Mulatto Millenium" in Claudia Chiawei O'Hearn's Half and Half, another one of my favorite books.

• She says "...it remind[s] me of an old saying they used to have down South during Jim Crow: 'If a black man wants to sit at the front of the bus, he just puts on a turban.' Maybe the same rule applied here: call yourself mixed and you just might find the world smiles a little brighter on you."

She continues, "...I was an enemy of the people. The mulatto people, that is. I sneered at those products of miscegenation who chose to identify as mixed, not black. I thought it was wishy-washy, and act of flagrant assimilation, treason, passing even."

The last quote of hers I want to remark on is this: "In all this mulatto fever, people seem to have forgotten that racism exists with or without miscegenation. Instead of celebrating the 'new race'...can't we take a look at the 'new racism'?"

We, the children of interracial intimacy, have NOT forgotten. This zine is about the new racism, the racism we face in trying to undo the damage done by assimilation in generations past, the racism that negates our right to self-identify and prevents others from seeing us the way we want to be seen, the way we see ourselves. It's about the racism that creates the no-win situations we find ourselves in when forging our identity and the thin lines we often have to walk to find acceptance and validation in any community. This zine is a product of our struggle to move beyond the margins, the disputed borderland territory between races and cultures we were born into, and for the right to be validated, to forge community and to find home where ever we see fit.

In solidarity, Nia King

Connecting the Dots

By Jessie Michael Aaron Jude Thaddaeus Ulibarri

For the longest time my mom said the only way that she knew I was her son is that I have her dots. More like beauty marks than freckles, her dots are the legacy of the Adriatic sun and my grandfather and Croatia. These dots cover our bodies with uncharted constellations, undecipherable Braille and hidden connect-the-dots pictures.

My mom and I share a dot on our left pointer toes. As a mixed raced person of color, the irony never escaped me that little brown dots are the only physical manifestation of my white mother's genetics.

Beneath my dots I've always looked just like my Chicano father. At Christmas breakfast or baptismal celebrations or funerals, it is not unusual for my Grandma or uncles or distant cousins to call me Carl, only to correct themselves once they remember the decade.

I have my dad's hair, eyes, nose, shoulders and lack of a backside.

Our shared looks bring shared histories of white women clutching their purses as we enter elevators, the assumption that our brown skin makes us incompetent or sexy (and never intelligent), or being told to go back to Mexico although our ancestors were in Colorado long before the Mayflower was built.

Growing up, I was always confused as how to answer the despised question, "what are you?" Latino felt like a lie by omission, white was unbelievable and self-loathing (cops don't care if you have Croatian dots when they're pulling you over to check your immigration status), and biracial felt inadequate.

My thoughts on identity only became more complicated when I started to realize that my sexual orientation was far outside the limits of heteronormativity. As someone attracted to folks of all genders, I didn't know how to define myself. Lance Bass is gay, Elton John is gay, Barney Frank is gay. I'm not gay. Bisexual reinforces an oppressive gender binary. I'm not bisexual.

The first time I did drag was the first time I ever thought I looked like my mom and it was the first time I fully realized who I am. Standing in front of the mirror, seeing the 6'2" cheerleader Latina version of my mom I realized I'm a fabulously fierce whole Queer mixed race Latino. Complete. Connected.



Jessie Michael Aaron Jude Thaddeaus Ulibarri is a radical QPOC who loves disguises. Whether in a suit, an emu costume, or a strapless evening gown, Jessie fights injustice with his dazzling smile, killer dance moves, and hardcore grassroots organizing. He is a Taurus and thus is fond of chocolate, sex and antique furniture.

What Answers Deceive Us, What Memories Forget, Who Lives Here? By Stevie Peace

There's this story...oh, must have been two years ago now, back in the Era of White Identity. The waning days. I never saw it coming. But these things just happen, you know.

I was hitchhiking. Hitchhiking to Georgia of all places—Augusta. You know, Savannah River, golf tournaments. Straight shot down from Minneapolis to Dallas, then east through New Orleans. It's late summer, just terrible. I go to sleep sweating and wake up sweating, and I'm eating next to nothing. But I'm really driven, you know, every day back on the thumb, thumbing out east, all the way to downtown Augusta.

And I've got this list my mother gave me, see. Her old church, her school, the address of her family's corner store. All these childhood landmarks. And she hasn't been back in 40 years, you know, she moved out and didn't look back, and by then all the Chinese groceries are fading out because of those new "supermarkets," plus it's the 60's and 70's, and well, you had the race riots, and the Blacks went after the Chinese community. That's Augusta, you know. Tired city of pain, desperation.

So I go right to work, start walking. There's a pack on my back and a pack on my front and this list in my hand. And I soon learn that all her landmarks are gone—gone without a trace, or renovated all spanking-new into something else stripped of my mother's presence. Her entire community, up in smoke. And then while I'm investigating a police car pulls up and stops me. The guy is wondering what I'm doing. I tell my story but he's not buying it. There's just no way a kid would hitchhike from Minnesota to her mother's hometown in Georgia just to see what it was like, what's changed. And then more police pull up. This is exciting and new for them, you know.

They run my ID, they search my packs. They think I'm peddling drugs. They also keep saying that this is a high-drug, high-crime neighborhood, that they're trying to protect me from getting killed, you know. And then one of the officers says, you know, just cuz he's sick of all my lying, "So tell me why you're really here."

I say, I'm here to see where my mother lived.

And he says, very point-blank, "Well, your mother didn't live here." For serious.

I say, Yes, she did.

"Well, not anymore. I strongly advise you to leave this area immediately. If we see you walking through here again, we will have to detain you."

And you know, normally I'd give him lip about my family history and my rights and all that, but I'm feeling awfully vulnerable with my two packs in the heavy afternoon heat. And. I'm realizing that he's not seeing a white guy. He's seeing some Asian kid in a place with no Asians. My Mother Didn't Live Here.

So I left Augusta. I didn't look back. And I left the White Identity Era behind, too. Very strange, after all those years of careful attention, light and watering, coming out of college thoroughly and illogically assured of my whiteness (that is, assured by never acknowledging my whiteness), and I ended up throwing it out. Yeah, it was convenient while it lasted—just not true. I wasn't true.

And you know, it's all so fantastically difficult now. Knowing that I don't have a clue about being Asian, let alone half-Asian, but everyone else seems to be in on the joke, and that gets tiring. And all the frantic thoughts, taking a magnifying glass to every possible memory that may have been tinged with someone else's stereotypes, or the telescope on the span of my life, never knowing how much of where I am now came out of that little Asian kid everyone saw in me. And the discrimination. The fear of racial violence. The tokenism...so aggravating. A lone Asian kid in a sea of white people. But it doesn't get much better when I'm walking through a Chinatown or scoping out a Hmong marketplace; then I'm a lone white kid in a sea of Asian people. It gets to be where I sometimes want to put the toothpaste back in the tube.

BUT—I got something new now. I still don't fully understand it, an honor, a dignity that never fit me before. In the looking-glass I see someone new, and I think, My mother lives here. She really does. I can't believe it took 22 years to say hello to her.

But these things just happen, you know.

Stevie Peace is a recent transplant into Minneapolis. He's Chinese and he's white, which in some circles equals a banana, in others a hard-boiled egg. He used to travel and do slam poetry, but now it's his time to settle into a community and work on his writing. Like many Asian-Americans, he can solve a Rubik's cube. Like many white folks, he can't do it in under a minute.

Steviepeace@riseup.net

Healing Through History

By Shannon Perez-Darby

My understanding of race is filtered through growing up in a white suburb, its being the only family of color on the block. It's the little ways I remember people talking about my mother, the sideways glances and always feeling like we didn't belong.

I grew up thinking I was kind of white. I wasn't taught to think of myself as Latina just as my mother wasn't taught to think of herself as Latina. It's a journey we've taken both separately and together. Trying to pass has been a survival strategy for several generations of the Perez family. These are the histories I want so badly to know and understand.

My childhood best friend dated this boy who used to tell me "I hate Mexicans and gays." I would look at him stunned and say, "Mike, do you know who I am?" He never really got what I was saying. To him I was the safe Mexican. He knew I was Latina but it was like this information he had and stored away but didn't explicitly inform the way he thought about me. My suburban home and a level of class privilege also served as a means of erasure. This is unpacking class privilege and race, family history, why my family lived in a white suburb to start with.

The story of my Latina self is also the story of alcoholism. There are alcoholics as far back as anyone can track and that's not a mistake. What's the connection between alcoholism and self-hate, between the internalized racism passed down from generation to generation and the shame of drunks trying to drink it all away? They say alcoholism is a family disease and boy is it ever. It's the legacy of the alcoholic home that I learned from my mother who learned it from her father who learned it from his father. Alcoholism is one of the things that perpetuates the wiping out of my people, keeping us ashamed and drowning in self pity, perpetuating generations of hate as well as internalized racism and a slew of other things I'm not even able to track. It's the French soldier that impregnated my native great-great-grandmother, and the Perez family that adopted their abandoned child. The French have a long history of imperialism in Mexico and that history also lives in my history.

I want to be whole and I want to be seen. I want to understand how our histories affect us, the trauma passed down from generations of war, boarder crossings, having our culture stolen and erased, forced baptisms, and imperialism. I want to understand how this lives in my bones, self hatred, relationships, in anxiety and mental health, in insecurity and shame, in what I eat and what nutrition looks like. I also want to learn what it looks like to heal through this.

I am mixed because my family was taught to hide the brown. I am mixed because I want to fight the wiping out of the Latina in my family and in myself. I am mixed because it's too painful to be invisible, to not be seen as mixed, to not share these histories and stories. For me being mixed is a lot about lost and misplaced identity. It's about feeling this huge hole of cultural identity that racism stole from me. It's about coming to peace with the culture that I will never get back. It's the recipes, family histories, languages, moments of shared identity that were never given to me. For me, being mixed is about that pain and loss. Sometimes it's so palpable. It's a shared history of trauma and hate that lives inside of me. I'm not even sure where all of this pain comes from. It breaks my heart that the family that I have felt so loved and accepted by is the family that has rebuilt itself from generations of abuse, violence, hatred, and racism. For me being mixed is about building this identity for myself out of that history of pain. I will never get back those cultural memories. As much as I can learn about my history and the past of the Perez family, I will never get back the chance to grow up in a bilingual home. But I can share this common experience of loss and pain with other mixed people and folks of color. I get to talk about it, build a community of hope and support. I get to heal by sharing this with you all and through hearing your stories. So thanks.

Shannon is a queer, mixed, fat, Latina femme. Shannon's heart belongs to Denver, CO but you can currently find her living and working in Seattle, WA. Shannon writes zines about identity politics, community and healing. To get copies of her zines *From Here To There & Back Again #1-#3*, *Non/Monogamy: Doing it and doing it and doing it well*, or to find out just how fabulous she is you can contact her at anticapitalistqueer@hotmail.com.

The Little Things by Nia King

Having people see you the way you want to be seen- the way you see yourself- is a privilege. And when you don't have that privilege, every day is a battle to have your identity validated, a battle against erasure and for self-determination. In a lot of ways this is a battle of details, where every choice you make about how you present yourself to others becomes loaded, and all the little things take on more meaning than they know what to do with.

Example, this little thing, the way I wear my hair, will seem trite to those who aren't walking through a cultural minefield of misinterpretations everyday, but I feel like when I cut it boy-short or let it grow wild and curly I have to choose between presenting as queer (a white dyke or white pretty boy, specifically) and maintaining my "ethnic ambiguity," thus having a slightly greater chance of getting read as a woman of color. In short, I have to choose between being queer and being of-color in the eyes of the world. I'm not one who puts a lot of effort into my appearance, so why do I feel like my hairstyle has so much meaning?

Boy-short my hair looks straight. I lose the curls and gain the guilt and fear of being interpreted as "trying to pass" as white. My hair is one of very few markers of my ethnicity that I inherited from my Black dad. In itself it's not usually enough to get me read as Black, but it does make people think twice when mentally trying to squish me into a race-box, and inspires remarks like, "I never seen a white girl with hair like that before," (because I'm not fucking white, moron,) "are you ethnic or something?" You know where the conversation goes from here.

I like my hair boy-short, I like it a lot. I like passing as a boy at times, it makes me feel safer out in the world, alone after dark especially. But with boy-short hair I fear melting into non-descript white dyke oblivion. And sans curls I am reminded of a time when I was ashamed of my "ethnic hair", the hair I wasted endless time, energy and styling product trying to straighten (like many women of color on the curly-to-nappy spectrum) after the kids at school dubbed me Mufasa (see the Lion King). Sans curls I wonder how much or how little I've outgrown that shame since middle school.

I am a queer woman of color, so why would I have to choose between getting read as one or the other? Part of it has nothing to do with me, but with racism in "the queer community" at large. White queers have more visibility in the media, in the US, than queers of color, and thus historically they've gotten to set the "universal" standards for "what queer looks like." When queers of color enter white spaces, many of us have to fight for visibility as queers (while additionally fighting against being desexualized, fetishized and tokenized as POCs.) Unless POCs match white models of what queer looks like we're often simply invisible in such spaces. In my somewhat unique position of POC-nobody-knows-is-a-POC, I can fit the queer model easily, but have to fight in white queer spaces (as in the world at large) to be read as a person of color. Because of the lack of queer POC visibility, the tendency to assume someone is white until proven otherwise is even stronger if said person is assumed to be queer. Thus because of my light skin and blue eyes, and because of the queer default is already set to white, I can rarely be recognized as both queer and of color.

Earlier I said that my hair is one of the only markers of my ethnicity. The other big one is my name. Nia is Swahili for "purpose". It's also the fifth day of Kwanzaa, which falls on December 30th. When I compiled the first issue of this zine, MXD: True Stories by Mixed-Race Writers, I edited it and submitted to it under the name Oxette. I took this nickname while traveling places where no one knew me. I decided to use it full time when I was joking to settle down and start over. I hoped ditching the old name would help me put the past behind and get a fresh start. But I had this nagging guilt. How could I start over and leave the strong African name my father had given me- one of so few markers of my ethnicity- behind? It was unconscionable. And so I took the name back.

Acting out of fear and guilt feels pretty absurd sometimes, especially because I happened to be starting over in a unique community where folks would validate my identity as a person of color even if I decided to call myself Whitey McWaspalot. But that's the kicker. When the general public doesn't see you the way you see yourself- as a queer, as a person of color, (as a boy, a girl or a genderqueer)- you have to protect the few things that grant you entry into the communities where you see yourself, where you want to be accepted and validated.

I know that I will never be anything but a queer person of color, regardless of whether I get read as white, "ethnic", straight, or queer. Knowing who I am ~~with certainty~~ is the first step. But I can't just write off everybody who doesn't see me for what I am, because the uphill battle to be seen for what I am has no end in sight. And so I continue to strive to come to terms with what you see, who I am and what I have to do to be accepted in the communities in which I know I belong.

Nia King is a Black Lebanese Hungarian writer, illustrator, drummer and activist from Boston, Mass. living in Denver, CO. She has made the liberation of people of color, women, queers and transgender folks her lifelong work. She loves zines, indie comics, falafel, sweet potatoes, 4square and Scrabble. And dancing. You can find her other zines Angry Black-White Girl and the first issue of this zine, MXD: True Stories by Mixed-Race Writers at trangerDangerDistro.com and QZAP.org. Contact her at oxette@riseup.net.



white
boy
gay



ethnic
girl
straight



Excerpt from The Mixed-Race Queer Girl Manifesto (from *Quantify #1*, 2000) (c) Lauren Jade Martin

How Being Biracial Affects My Sexual Identity:

* It helps decrease tunnel vision. I refuse to be one of those queers who insists that queer oppression is the most pressing issue, and ignores other systems such as racism, classism, and sexism.

* It delayed my coming out to my family. For a long time, my family members were the only people I had, the only ones I could talk to. There were things about me that I never had to explain to them because they knew me, because we shared the same background, the same experiences. I was afraid that announcing my queerness would have changed all that; I wasn't willing to sacrifice our relationship.

* It shapes the way I refuse to view sexuality as an either/or category. Just as one racial category cannot define who I am, one narrow sexual category does not suffice either.

How Being Queer Affects My Racial Identity:

- * Again, it helps decrease tunnel vision. I refuse to be a person of color who insists that race oppression is the most pressing issue, and ignores other systems such as sexism, classism, heterosexism and transphobia.
- * It means I am virtually destined to be in interracial/interethnic relationships. Finding a compatible Asian/Jewish boy would be hard enough, but finding another Asian/Jewish girl who likes girls? It's not very likely.
- * It means I will never be "colored" enough for those who equate queerness with assimilation, trying to be white, and a bourgeois lifestyle.

Race and sexuality are slippery identifiers. As a mixed-race queer girl, I am an example of one who can slide in and out of identities and communities, either by choice or through others' inclusions and exclusions. For me, queerness seems like a natural progression from bi/multiracialism: growing up biracial, I am already familiar with shuttling back and forth between being an outsider and an insider, not fitting into others' convenient little categories, and intimidating people with ambiguity. As a mixed-race individual, I am the physical result of an already-broken sexual taboo.

What do I want? I want to shake up people's assumptions. I want people to acknowledge my existence as a biracial Asian American Jewish queer girl of color without expecting me to sacrifice one part of my identity for their comfort or convenience. I want people to acknowledge the existence of other mixed-race queers. Finally, by understanding how our racial identities affect our sexual identities and vice versa, I want us to begin an honest conversation about why rigid binary identifying categories are useless, hurtful, and irrelevant to most of our lives.

Read the rest of the manifesto at theyellowperil.com



¿Como que Mixed?

By claire barrera

Until I was in high school, my father, sister and I were the only Latinos in our town. Besides us, there was a Chinese couple that worked in the same government laboratory as my dad and mom, three African American kids that had been adopted by a white family, and some folks of Native American descent. I know we didn't call ourselves Latinos back then. If my dad ever named us anything, it would have been Hispanic. But my primary experience of identity as a mixed kid was just being comparatively different. I always recall having the vague combination of self-disgust because of these differences (thick, dark and coarse hair, a funny last name, a weird dad) as well as the longing to understand them better and live in them more fully.

By the time Jesús moved to my town, in high school, I felt even more acutely this covetousness of the Latino history and culture I was denied, although I was still pretty embarrassed about it too. My sophomore year I started taking Spanish although I was in an ongoing battle of wills with Mrs. Faggerstrom, the teacher of that class. She seemed to think I was special and always talked to me about my dad being Latino. But she was also the only teacher who ever got me suspended, for talking back to her.

I'd always felt resentful toward my dad that he hadn't raised me speaking Spanish, and that thus I was forced to learn it the slow awkward way on my own. Every time one of the over-achieving white girls answered Mrs. Faggerstrom's question using perfect verb conjugation and sentence structure I felt like a total failure at being Latina. The rest of the day, these same kids never let me forget I was a failure at being white, too. I won't go into it too much, let's just say I got called "Claire Burrito" a few times by some of my enemies.

Anyway, they put Jesús in my Spanish class because he was a recent immigrant and we didn't have ESL in my little Montana school. I guess they figured Spanish class would work reverse on him and teach him English. I befriended Jesús pretty quickly, and we would partner up whenever it was time to practice speaking. I was confused when I learned he was ashamed of his ability to speak Spanish, and although he was fairly fluent in English he continually felt it was not sufficient. I remember I tried to convince him how lucky he was to speak two languages, and how much I longed for the ability to speak Spanish as well as he spoke English. He would just shake his head and look down.

It was the first time I really started to understand the difference between my experience of race and those of many other people of color. It clarified the privilege I had as a First World, light-skinned, English-speaking and middle-class youngster. I also felt a huge sense of loneliness, because I didn't know any other mixed kids who were confused about what they were and where they came from. I wanted badly to have the very same thing Jesús wished he could get rid of, the very thing that lowered his value in our country. Did that make me stupid, or just confused?

Years later, I saved up enough money and Xicana pride to travel to México alone. In the weeks leading up to my trip, I dreamed the streets were filled with Welcome Home parades in my honor. I stood in the balcony of a tall Spanish colonial building, staring down into the narrow cobbled streets filled with people, and waved as they cheered and multicolored streamers fell from the sky. What I wanted, as author Junot Díaz wrote of his first trip back to the Dominican Republic, was "to be recognized as the long lost son/daughter] that I was." It would rectify all my childhood identity confusion, and give me the roots I'd been wandering without my whole life.

Of course, no fue así. Everyone thought I was a gringa and spoke to me in English, though by this time I had already achieved fluency in Spanish. When I told people I met I'd come to México to learn Nahuatl (one of the major indigenous languages of the country), they seemed confused and a little put off. If I told them my father was of Mexican descent, this connection seemed to strike them as distant and unimportant.

I had spent so much time back home building an altar in my mind to all things Mexican (Frida, the Aztecs, the Virgen de Guadalupe), that I had been convinced everyone of Mexican descent must also be on this endless quest to claim their history. Many of these things were in fact important to the people I encountered. But I didn't know they had always had this history, lived in it. My experience would always be one of longing, searching, and making it up as I went along.

There were a few people in Mexico who didn't question me as I am. The old man who taught me Nahuatl simply accepted me as his pupil and opened his world to me. We met for hours every day, sipping our coffee under a shady tree and studying grammar. Although I don't remember much of the language, I do remember all he told me of local herbs and ancient history. He gave me many new roots to put down.

I also met two punk boys in Cuernavaca, and we traveled to the beach together. They were hilarious, kind and giving. Instead of bonding about our mutual history (and lack of mutual history), we just bonded about being punk, being radical, eating vegetarian and supporting indigenous movements. These two kids also took me as I am, and it was incredibly gratifying.

I still struggle continually with the line between reclamation and appropriation, privilege and oppression, the validity of my experience and how it might differ from those of other people of color, including mixed folks. Not long after I returned from Mexico I made the decision to move to the Bay Area. It was the first time in my life I lived in a community that included a lot of mixed kids. Suddenly the identity crisis I'd always had was reflected by the world around me. I became part of a community, one in which we could help guide each other. Help each other navigate the tenuous in between spaces, and feel a little more whole.

Claire Lamar Smith Barrera lives and works in Portland, Oregon. She is the Bilingual Coordinator of the youth program at a local domestic violence shelter, writes fiction and non-fiction, and is a dancer. Currently she is interested in healing movement and dancing with dis/abilities, anti-prison activism and Xicana@ studies. She resides in a drafty house with two ladies, two cats and her osito Henry.

50 Experiences of Racially Mixed People

Maria P. P. Root

1. You have been told, "You have to choose; you can't be both."
2. Your ethnicity was mistakenly identified.
3. People assumed your race to be different by phone than in person.
4. You are accused of not acting or wanting to be Latino, Asian, Black...
5. You have been told, "Mixed race people are so beautiful or handsome."
6. Strangers looked between you and your parent(s) to figure out if you were related.
7. You have been told, "You don't look Native, Black, Latino..."
8. You have been asked, "What are you?"
9. People say things they might not otherwise say if they knew how you identified racially.
10. You have been asked, "Where are you from?"
11. You have repeatedly been the recipient of stares or longer than passing glances from strangers.
12. You have been told, "You look exotic."
13. Your choice of friends has been interpreted as your "selling out" or not being authentic.
14. You have been accused of "acting or wanting to be white."
15. Judgments of your racial authenticity have been based upon your boyfriend/s or girlfriend's (partner's) race.
16. Comments are made about your hair or hairstyle, skin color, eye shape etc.
17. You have been subjected to jokes about mixed race people.
18. You have been told, "You think you're too good for your own kind."
19. Grandparent(s) or relatives don't accept you because of your parents' interracial relationship.
20. Your parents or relatives compete to "claim" you for their own racial or ethnic group.
21. You have been told, "You have the best of both worlds."
22. You have been asked about your racial or ethnic heritage as an object of curiosity.
23. Upon meeting you, people seem confused by your last name. They do not think it "matches" you.
24. People assume you are confused about your racial identity or have had a hard time figuring it out.
25. People speak to you in foreign languages because of how they interpret your physical appearance.
26. You have been told, "Society doesn't recognize mixed race."
27. You have been told, "You aren't really Black, Latino, Asian..."
28. You have been mistaken for another person of mixed heritage who does not resemble you.
29. You have been told you must be full of self-loathing or hatred because of how you racially identify yourself.
30. You have been told, "You are a mistake."
31. Different people perceive your race differently based upon the company you keep.
32. The race people assign you varies in different parts of the U.S.A.
33. You have difficulty filling out forms asking for a single race.
34. You identify your race differently than others identify you.
35. You are told, "You aren't like other Indians, Asians, Latinos..."
36. Your siblings identify their race differently than you do yours.
37. You have been called racial slurs of groups with which you do not share heritage.
38. Friends suggest that you date someone based upon the race or ethnicity with which they think you should identify.
39. Your parents identify your race differently than you identify.
40. You are told, "You aren't Black, Latino, Asian...enough"
41. Your mother was assumed to be your nanny or babysitter.
42. A stranger assumes that your father is your "older boyfriend" or your mother is the "older woman."
43. You were treated differently by relatives or your parents than a sibling on the basis of racial features.
44. You were well liked by peers but were not asked for dates.
45. You wish you were darker and try to get as much sun as possible.
46. People assume your father was in the military.
47. You have enrolled in Spanish language classes in order to develop the ability to say "Yes" to the question, "Do you speak the language?" and remove one of the blocks to authenticity.
48. Your otherwise friends become more distant when they think associating with you will make their racial authenticity or popularity questionable.
49. You have been knowingly approached and asked, "Your mother's white (black, Asian), huh?"
50. You have tried to hide one or both parents from view of people who know you but are not your closest friends because you anticipate they will treat you differently.

Didn't see your experience reflected here?

It's because you didn't submit!

You are eligible to submit if you are a person of color who is mixed-race, bi-cultural and/or transracially adopted. Please send your non-fiction personal stories and visual art about how your racial/cultural identity relates to your experiences (work, school, family, relationships, etc.) or other aspects of your identity (gender, sexual orientation, class, ability, immigration status, religion, etc.) to oxette@riseup.net to be part of issue three. **Entries are due June 1st, 2008.** No longer than 600 words please. No poetry.

Thanks! -Nia