



RACIAL GENUFLECTING AND GENEALOGY: ISSUES OF IDENTITY AND DIGNITY

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Regardless of persistent post-racial rumors, urban legends and lingering plantation hopes about the declining significance of race and the deserved death of racism, the recent construction of celebratory social relevance around the latest “discoveries” of Whites in Black beds, bodies, bloodlines and history offers abundant evidence to the contrary. Surely, before the recent genealogical fad of “search and celebration”, we found no mystery or extra meaning in the Black/White mixed identity of various Blacks from the Holocaust of enslavement to contemporary times. And not even the Creoles of Louisiana imagined that such a mixture spoke to something miraculous about America. Moreover, there are multiple mixtures within our people, not just Black/White, but also Afro-Native American, Afro-Latino and Afro-Asian and combinations thereof. And yet, there are no similar celebratory searches or narratives about how this proves we are moving toward a more “perfect union” or other mindless Americana triumphalism without the human tragedy White supremacy has imposed on our various peoples.

No thinking, thoughtful or minimally informed person in U.S. society can be unaware of or surprised by reports of rape or coerced sex imposed on conquered and enslaved women and resultant offspring from this. So the current social construction of almost magical meaning around Blacks searching for and “finding” White relatives and linking it to some gospel of American exceptionalism certainly suggests need for an honest examination of the meaning of this particular form of “meaning-making” itself.

History is replete with reports of conquerors and enslavers considering the bodies of the conquered and enslaved women, men and children as possessions to be used as they

desired and determined. And so, reports abound of rape used as both an act of coercive sex imposed on women, men and children, and a brutal and terrorizing demonstration of domination. There are also reports of a less frequent kind of sexual exchange born of “conquerette” curiosity and attraction to the exotic. Likewise, there are unreliable reports of “consensual sex” and “love” between the enslaved and enslaver and conquered and conqueror. But this is psychologically and ethically untenable. For when a person is considered and treated by law, religion and social consensus and coercion another person’s property and/or inferior, there can be no question or claim of consensual sex or love in any real, reliable, moral or truly human sense.

There are several things to note about this new thing-to-be-about. It appears first in its most public quest and “meaning-making” form as a bourgeois class thing, a historical quest to relate more closely with the ruling race/class, for both psychological and social reasons. A rereading of E. Franklin Frazier’s *Black Bourgeoisie* and Nathan Hare’s *Black Anglo-Saxons* will remind us that this quest for the discovery and appropriation of Whiteness in their background by some is not new. Perhaps, it differs only in the disguise and context in which it emerges and the new technological tools available to feed the fantasy and addiction. But it also plays into the interest of the ruling race/class, cultivating uncritical conceptions and falsifications of Black and U.S. history and focusing on Whiteness as the defining feature and subject of all history and genealogy worthy of the name and quest.

It is important to note here that people have a right to know and search for any relative or person they wish. So, the issue is not the right, but rather the reason that is worthy

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of at least discussion. It is especially needed if the racial paradigm for meaning-making, worthiness of reference, and public demonstrations of respect is Whiteness, and genealogy is reduced to racial genuflection.

Critical here also is how the sanitized treatment of White relatives from the Holocaust of enslavement and the barbaric oppression it represents, hides or reductively translates the savage horror of the Holocaust. Instead of honoring and giving voice to the victims of one of the greatest holocausts in human history, some discuss the holocaust-makers and supporters, at worst, as misguided relatives. The same obtains with other periods of brutal oppression. Indeed, our narrative is redefined and reframed most currently as an American saga, personified as an individual ascent from the bloodred "hut" of the enslaved to the ghastly white house of the oppressor. And it is put forth, not to praise the creative genius, adaptive vitality and human durability of Black people, but to praise the myth of American openness and opportunity, erasing or sanitizing the inhuman savagery of the Holocaust of enslavement, raw and disguised racism and other forms of White supremacy's imposition, ideology and institutional arrangements.

It is said as a matter of fact and faith that this is a history and heritage we Blacks should know and acknowledge. But the question is how should we do this, from what vantage point, and for what serious and dignity-affirming purpose? Indeed, we must ask, what is the purpose of this current fad and flight into historical and genetic genealogy, this

wandering into the fields of fantasies of *wished-for-white-ancestry.com*? Is it a search for meaning and added value; an alternative enhanced identity, full knowledge of what it means to be "American me"? In addition, will a discovery of Whiteness within our historical beds and current bodies alter our identity, enhance our dignity or increase our wealth, power or status? And are there similar public thrusts by Whites to search for, find and reveal and revel in the discovery of Black relatives, ancestors or alternative enhanced identities?

Whatever is decided and whatever path we pursue on this issue, it is important that we do it with appropriate self-conscious consideration for our dignity and identity as Black persons and Black people, *who in all our diversity still recognize and respect our Africanness, our Blackness, as a unique and equally valid and valuable way of being human in the world*. And this, too, we should hold in mind and memory, there is something grossly undignified about genuflecting, bowing and scraping, even to salvage love or save one's life. And thus, to do so for something less important seems vulgarly unworthy, a violation of our human status, defined by our ancient *African* ancestors as *possessors of dignity and divinity*.

There is a beautiful verse in the *Odu Ifa* (152:2) which says "May the struggles we wage always add to our honor." And so, may the struggles we wage against White supremacy in all its subtle and savage forms, add to our honor, reaffirm our dignity, and our identity and duty as those divinely chosen to bring and do good in the world. Ase.

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