

Right Now

The expanding Harvard universe

HOT COLORS

Race, Sex, and Love

TIGER WOODS, possibly the world's best-known athlete, resists being called a "black" golfer. He coined the term "Cablinasian" (Caucasian, black, Indian, Asian) to identify his race, and used it on the *Oprah Winfrey* television show after winning the 1997 Masters tournament. Although Woods's ancestry may be unusually diverse, his heritage is far less exceptional than his golfing skill, as professor of law Randall Kennedy makes clear in his new book, *Interracial Intimacies* (Pantheon). Five years in the making, the volume examines the history, lore, and especially the legalities, primarily in the United States, surrounding sexual, marital, and familial relationships among people of different races.

Racially mixed relationships are becoming more common. In the United States there are 1.5 million cross-racial marriages, a figure that has doubled about every decade. Forty percent of Asian Americans have married whites in recent years, as have 6 percent of blacks. "The general situation for people involved in interracial intimacies has never been better," Kennedy writes. Most legal obstacles to pairing across

racially mixed relationships have been struck down, and Kennedy believes that even "public opinion now permits interracial intimacies to be pursued and enjoyed with unparalleled levels of freedom, security, and support."

The rarest and most charged form of racial intermingling—at least in this country—is the black-white relationship.

Although historically 42 states passed antimiscegenation laws, the Supreme Court made such statutes unenforceable in 1967. Nonetheless, "There is still litigation over the place of race in family formation," Kennedy says. What happens, for example, when a white single mother marries a black man, and her ex-husband, the father of her child, objects—in court? In just such a case in Florida, in 1982, a judge took custody of the child away from the mother and awarded it to the ex-husband. Even though the U.S.

Supreme Court eventually overturned the ruling, the mother did not regain custody of her daughter, because by that time the father had moved to Texas and obtained a restraining order that prevented her from taking custody. The same Florida judge who had been overruled allowed the transfer of jurisdiction to Texas.

Kennedy's research abounds with such cases, which provoke deep reflection on the intersections of race, sex, marriage, and family life. Consider the practice of racially matching adoptive parents with the children they adopt. "Originally, the main impulse behind race matching in adoption was a white-supremacist, segregationist impulse," Kennedy says. Yet, few states banned cross-racial adoption, "because it was thought to be beyond discussion—it was so obviously wrong that there was no need for a law."

Since the 1970s, however, interracial adoption has grown—along



with fierce controversy about the practice. The National Association of Black Social Workers, composed largely of child-welfare officials, has opposed interracial adoption for more than three decades, asserting that black children “belong” with black parents. “Some say that children in cross-racial adoptions don’t have a good sense of their racial identity,” Kennedy says. “Tell me: what, exactly, is a ‘good sense’ of racial identity? That race means a lot to them? That they have a preference for people of their own color? What of those who say, ‘My racial identity is *human*?’”

Parentless children, Kennedy argues, “ought to be placed in the hands of adults who want to raise them—as quickly as possible, without regard to race.” He challenges “ideologues who suggest that racially homogeneous families are preferable to racially diverse families. What’s wrong with the rainbow family? Why not see it as an *opportunity*? ‘I look different from you’—that’s a chance to talk about all sorts of things. What about white families whose children have eyes of a different color from their parents? We don’t attach a lot of significance to

eye color, the way we do with skin.”

Yet Kennedy is neutral on the question of amalgamation—the view, advanced by many, including historian Will Durant and Harvard’s Beneficial professor of law, Charles Fried, that biological intermingling will eventually dissolve the race problem. “I’m not a biological determinist,” Kennedy declares. “If, in 50 years time, most whites still marry other whites and most blacks still marry other blacks, can we still have a racially decent society? Sure!”

The topic of interracial intimacies also

TALLIES CORNER

Censuring the Census

The 1890 U.S. census asked blacks to identify their status as “mulattoes,” “quadroons,” or “octoroons.” Such categories have been used historically to discriminate against particular groups—the number of “quadroons” and “octoroons,” for example, could be used to support the argument that intermarriage degraded both white and black stock and hence was bad for both races. Today, however, many minorities believe that a separate census tally works to their advantage for congressional redistricting and affirmative action. Thus, even though the archaic, pseudoscientific language is gone from the census forms, racial categorizations still loom large in the census.

The eight-question short form of the 2000 census, sent to all households, offered as racial options “White,” “Black, African-Am., or Negro,” “American Indian or Alaska Native,” or one of 11 separate Asian or Pacific Island groups. Another question asked if respondents were “Spanish/Hispanic/Latino” and if so, to sort themselves as “Mexican, Mexican Am., Chicano,” Puerto Rican, Cuban, or other.

Professor of education and sociology emeritus Nathan Glazer terms the amount of space devoted to race and Hispanicity on the census short form “ridiculous.” Last fall, in *The Public Interest*, Glazer declared that the census form was “miseducating” the American people about the importance of race. In the census, he says, race and ethnicity “appear to be more important than how educated Americans are, whether they are foreign-born, or whether they voted in the last election.”

Only blacks should be able to identify themselves by race, according to Glazer; he explains that, unlike other minorities, African Americans did not come to this country by choice and historically have intermarried less than other groups. He recommends a second question asking for the birthplaces of respondents, their parents, and perhaps their grandparents—and that would be it for the category of race. Glazer argues that the United States is, and should be, a melting pot that assimilates immigrant groups, so that by the

third generation, intermarriage and social mobility will render one’s race largely symbolic.

The current elaborate race questions, he contends, reflect political lobbying by the various ethnic groups themselves. In 1970, for example, President Nixon bowed to pressure from the U.S. Interagency Committee on Mexican-American Affairs and ordered the “Hispanic” category added to the census form—which was already at the printer’s. Immigrants from India, he says, were initially classified as white, but Indian



leaders pushed to be identified as Asian, thinking this would bring affirmative-action benefits.

“There’s a lot of illusion there,” Glazer explains. “There’s the notion that the more of you there are, in some way, it’s going to be better for you. Either you’ll get more distribution from the federal government—which doesn’t really work out that way—or politicians will take you more seriously. So ethnic groups tend to inflate their numbers. The fact is, there is no distribution of federal funds on the basis of ethnic-group size.”

—Robin Abrahams

NATHAN GLAZER E-MAIL ADDRESS:
nglazer@fas.harvard.edu

evokes Kennedy's broader philosophy of individual freedom. Ultimately, like Tiger Woods, he favors racial self-identification: "People should be able to determine for themselves what their race is." He backs racial mobility as well, and his book includes a chapter on "passing." Re-

garding intimate relationships, "I want individuals to be able to express themselves and do what they want," he says. "I'm attacking customs of racial separateness enforced by the government *and* those imposed by groups—white, black, or anybody else. Affection should be able

to display itself free of wrongful impediments, including racial ones. My most basic position is, I'm for love—put me in the love camp." ~CRAIG LAMBERT

RANDALL KENNEDY E-MAIL ADDRESS:
rkennedy@law.harvard.edu

FURRY LOGIC

Best Friend Bests Chimp

A CHIMPANZEE enters a room where food is hidden in one of two opaque containers. A human gazes at the container that hides the food. Reaches for it with outstretched arm. Marks the container with a wooden block. The chimp doesn't get the message, even though chimpanzees are one of *Homo sapiens'* two closest extant primate relatives and might be expected to figure it out. Biological anthropologist Brian Hare and colleagues tried this game with 11 chimps, and only two of the brainy apes used the conspicuous cues to find the food.

Dog owners may not be surprised to learn that nine of 11 dogs in the same situation correctly read the human signals and found the food. A control exercise established that odor was not a cue in either trial.

A wolf raised by humans enters the room. The experimenter gazes at the baited container. Points at it. Even taps it. The wolf doesn't perform above chance on any of these cues. Seven dogs and seven wolves take a turn. The dogs find more food than the wolves in response to each of the three visual cues, even though wolves are dogs' closest relatives. Recent research by Peter Savolainen and colleagues at the Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm convinces them that all dogs, from the Mexican hairless to the komondor, from the Scottish terrier to the borzoi, descended from a very small number of East Asian wolves

Anthropologist Brian Hare, whose field is the evolution of human cognition, with consultant Milo

who lived roughly 15,000 years ago.

A puppy dog enters the room. It, too, finds food better than chimps and wolves. Hare, a fifth-year graduate student at Harvard whose work was largely funded by the Max Planck Institute in Germany, gazed, and then gazed and pointed, with 32 puppies, varying in age from nine to 26 weeks, including puppies who had had little contact with humans. The ability of a dog to perceive the meaning of his gestures is innate, he concludes, not learned over the course of a dog's life.

Reporting their findings in *Science* magazine last fall, Hare and his team concluded, "These findings suggest that dur-

ing the process of domestication, dogs have been selected for a set of social-cognitive abilities that enable them to communicate with humans in unique ways." Of the wolves who hung around a campsite hoping to snare food from the scrap heap, perhaps the one most adept at fathoming human gestures was the one most likely to prosper. Perhaps an early wolf-dog helped a human to hunt and earned a place by the fire that way.

Hare believes that the dog gained an evolutionary edge by learning to understand human cues, that humans selected for breeding the dogs that had this skill. But possibly Fido's canniness is simply a byproduct of domestication, not a deliberate human goal.

Hare hopes to explore the byproduct hypothesis in Siberia this summer. A research group at the Institute of Cytology

