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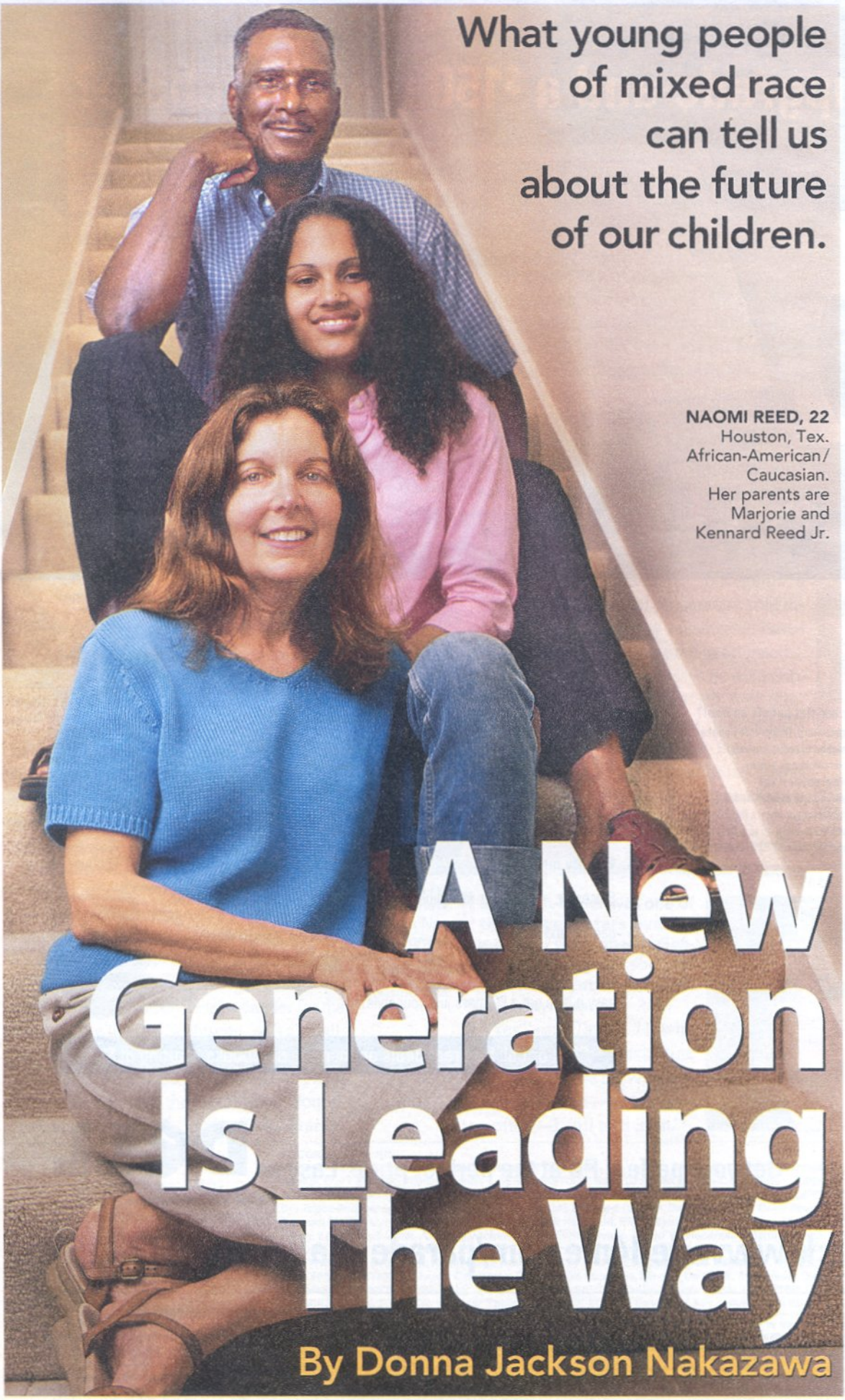
PARADE

The Changing Faces Of America

The number of multiracial children in the U.S. is increasing rapidly. How will they affect the way we think about race?

By Donna Jackson Nakazawa

Plus... How To Prevent Identity Theft • Keep Your Pet Healthy • Actress Brooke Burns



What young people of mixed race can tell us about the future of our children.

NAOMI REED, 22
Houston, Tex.
African-American/ Caucasian.
Her parents are Marjorie and Kennard Reed Jr.

A New Generation Is Leading The Way

By Donna Jackson Nakazawa

COVER PHOTOGRAPH BY MICHAEL SKOTT. FRONT ROW (L-R): MAXWELL ZASLOWER, 5 (JEWISH CAUCASIAN AND LATINO); ELIZABETH BUDHAI, 8 (LATINO AND INDIAN); AND EMILY WARREN, 7 (CHINESE AND CAUCASIAN). BACK ROW (L-R): CELENA PERSAUD, 5 (SOUTH AMERICAN INDIAN AND CAUCASIAN); WYATT KUDO, 6 (CAUCASIAN AND JAPANESE); MIRANDA SCOTT, 5 (CAUCASIAN AND AFRICAN-AMERICAN); AND ERIK TECKMAN, 4 (SWEDISH AND POLYNESIAN).

AS A WHITE WOMAN WHO HAD grown up in white America, nothing quite prepared me for the reactions that I and my Japanese-American husband encountered when we began our multiracial family a decade ago. The curious stares in the grocery store and the intrusive questions from strangers ("What *are* they?" "Wow, do you ever get used to the fact that they don't look anything *like* you?") took me by surprise.

Later, my son brought home his own playground stories. ("That's your mom? No way!" "What *are* you, anyway?") I began to wonder how my multiracial children would find their identities in our color-conscious world. And I decided to speak with as many young people of mixed race as I could, to discover what *they* had learned growing up in America.

"You Can't Be Both"

My children and I are part of a trend that is changing the face of our nation. According to the latest U.S. Census estimates, 4.5 million children now under 18 in this country are multiracial. The rate of interracial marriages is skyrocketing. In some areas, one in six babies born today is of two or more racial heritages—making multiracial youth one of the fastest-growing segments of our population.

Yet numbers don't necessarily signal acceptance. Most of the kids I spoke with said they struggled, often painfully, with their racial identity as they grew up. They found that many people became uncomfortable when they couldn't easily categorize them into one of the five standard racial pigeonholes (Caucasian, African-American, Native American, Asian or Latino).

"Kids would ask, 'Is that your mom?' or, 'Are you adopted?'" recalls Nicole Brown, 22, of Los Angeles, who is African-American and Caucasian. "Even my closest friend—my 'pretend sister' in grade school—told me one day that I had to say whether I was black or white. She said that I couldn't be both. I had to choose."

Nicole, like most multiracial students, found junior high and high school even more challenging. That's when friends start dividing up along racial lines, most visibly at lunch in the cafeteria. "As a teenager, you really want to belong," says Nicole. "You need to have a group where you know you fit in. But I felt torn. I spent half my time, at school, playing one role—as part of that white world—and half my time, at home, hanging out with the black kids. I fit into each world I was in, but I never got to be all of myself at the same time."

Matt Kelley, 23, of Korean and Caucasian heritage, said he felt uncomfortable when forced to fill out school forms that provided no space for having a mixed-race background. Matt, who grew up in Seattle, either had to check "Other" or choose between Asian or White.

Photos by Pam Francis (Naomi Reed and parents), Kristina Loggia (Nicole Brown), David Moser (Jamie Doyle and Bethany Bastinelli) and Donna Day (Matt Kelley)

"Identity is based on how you see yourself and how others see you," he notes. "And when every form you fill out tells you that how you identify yourself is not an identity you can have, how can that not affect how you see yourself? You end up feeling, 'I'm a freak.'"

Choosing A Broader Identity

Many multiracial young people say they came into their own during the college years, as they began to broaden their own sense of identity in settings with a wide variety of people. Jamie Mihoko Doyle, 23, of Philadelphia, whose parents are Japanese and Irish, remembers the time she went to an Asian sorority party at the University of Texas and was greeted by whispers and stares. "Students at my university separated by rigid racial lines," she says. Instead, Jamie sought out a diverse group of friends. "They encompass just about every shade in the racial spectrum."

Students also noted that college offers an opportunity to explore a racial heritage that may not have been emphasized at home: They can join different ethnic organizations, take ethnic-studies classes or learn a foreign language that is in their family background. As a result, some students even change their primary racial identity.

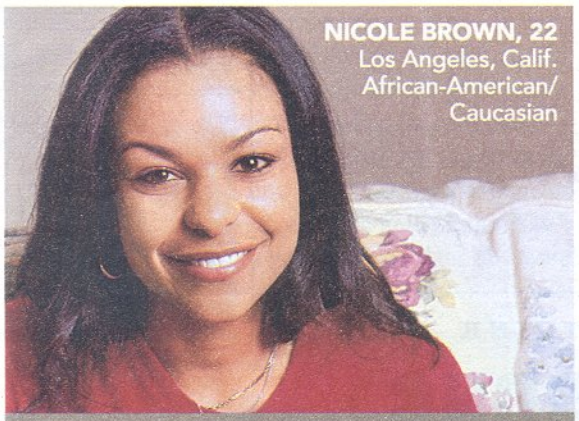
"I was raised practically as a white person," says Tracy Scholl, 29, now a political fund-raiser in Washington, D.C., who is of African-American and German roots and grew up in the Philadelphia suburbs. "But in college I became an African-American person. I became immersed in African-American history courses. I learned the black kids' language—their slang—even though at first I couldn't understand a word of it." Scholl says her racial identity has continued to evolve. "Now I'm both," she says. "I want to have a multicultural life."

Feeling Whole

Indeed, mixed-race students on university campuses are increasingly forming their own student groups. Today, more than 25 colleges have multiracial student organizations—including Brown, the University of Pennsylvania, the University of Virginia, the University of Michigan, Smith, Wellesley and the University of Texas.

As a freshman at Wesleyan University, Matt Kelley founded *Mavin*, a magazine for multiracial young people. He says he chose the name because it means "one who understands" in Hebrew. "I wanted the magazine to be a forum where we could come together and talk about our experiences and be understood," he says.

Jamie Mihoko Doyle helped form Neapolitan, a multiracial group, at the University of Texas. "When I was growing up, I'd often have to explain myself to other people in parts," she says. "Neapolitan has allowed me to be all that I am—a whole person."



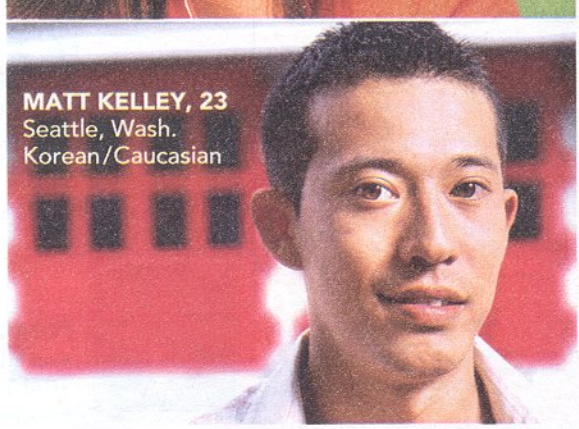
NICOLE BROWN, 22
Los Angeles, Calif.
African-American/
Caucasian

"As a teenager, you really want to belong. But I felt torn. I never got to be all of myself at the same time."

JAMIE MIHOKO DOYLE, 23
Philadelphia, Pa.
Japanese/Irish

"Now my friends encompass just about every shade in the racial spectrum."

BETHANY BASTINELLI, 24
Nazareth, Pa.
Native American/
Italian



MATT KELLEY, 23
Seattle, Wash.
Korean/Caucasian

Becoming A Bridge

As I spoke with young people of mixed race in every part of the country, it became clear what an extraordinary group they are: self-aware, open-minded, optimistic—and eager to use their own experiences and insights to promote understanding and to work to close the racial gap in our country. I found their words and perspective both inspiring and comforting as I thought about the road that lay ahead for my own children. Multihued and multiethnic, these young men and women are leading the way toward a society in which race may simply become an interesting background note to a person's identity.

Bethany Bastinelli, 24, of Nazareth, Pa.—whose parents are Native American and Italian—works in the Fraternity and Sorority Affairs Office at Lehigh University. "I want to help incoming freshmen to understand that in college they're surrounded with people from all different backgrounds, and they can choose to erase the stereotypical tapes we all have in our minds," she says. "When they do have a racist thought, they can say to themselves, 'Hey, this is stupid. This isn't how I want to think.'"

Nicole Brown, a graduate of Columbia University who is now an executive at a film-production company in L.A., says: "Because of my multiracial background, I can connect with and make relationships with so many different types of people. It's something extra that I have that others don't have."

That perspective is echoed by Naomi Reed, 22, a math graduate student at Rice University in Texas, whose roots are African-American and Jewish Caucasian: "Being multiracial has allowed me to see things from both sides of the color line," she says. "It opens my mind to differences of all types, so that I don't prejudge anything or anyone. That's something I wish we could all do. If I could have any wish, it would be to be able to go inside people's heads and flip the little switch that controls racial categorization and racism. I think people would be surprised at how many more genuine friends they would have if we all met each other in the dark."

For resources and advice on raising multiracial children, visit *www.parade.com* on the Web.

www.parade.com

Donna Jackson Nakazawa is the author of "Does Anybody Else Look Like Me? A Parent's Guide to Raising Multiracial Children" (Perseus).