

## DO BLACK MEN HAVE A MORAL DUTY TO MARRY BLACK WOMEN?

Charles W. Mills

**I**t is a measure of the continuing social distance between the races that the average white liberal, I am sure, would automatically assume that only a racist could think that the answer to this question is anything but an obvious "No!" The answer may, of course, still be "No," but it might not be quite so obvious. At any rate, I want to suggest that this issue—a major point of contention in the black community for decades, particularly among black women—is worthy of philosophical investigation. What arguments could there be for such a duty? On what axiological foundation would it be based? How strong would it be?

### I

Let me begin with some brief remarks about the framing of the question itself. It is not just a particularistic variant of the general "Do all people have a duty to marry within their race?" because I think that the answer to *this* question is obviously "No." In other words, as will become clearer below, I am claiming that the differential social status of subordinated and dominant races, especially blacks and whites, generates *moral* asymmetries, so that whereas the claim, e.g., that "whites should only marry whites" *will* in general be based on philosophically uninteresting racist reasons, the case for black endogamy is (at least in some versions) more respectable.

Some other points. (i) Because of the ideological symbolism of marriage as an institution, and the material property considerations involved, this will be the special target of critics of interracial relationships. But many of the arguments against such unions would also be made (and hold as well or as badly) for common-law cohabitation, or just long-term relationships in general (or, for the most militant opponents, even short-term relationships and one-night stands). (ii) I focus on black men/white women relationships rather than also including black women/white men relationships because of another set of asymmetries: that in a sexist society, it is the economically

privileged male who usually gets to choose; that most interracial marriages *are* of the black male/white female variety; and that it is this kind which has historically stirred most controversy in the black community. (Since white men have historically had sexual access to black women, the motivations involved are usually significantly different in such cases.) (iii) Finally, it should be noted that though I have put the question in the strong, and positive, form, it is sometimes the case that what opponents really have in mind is the weaker (in the sense of ruling out less), but more pointed, *negative* injunction that black men should (above all) not marry *white* women. Other “women of color” may sometimes be deemed acceptable, or at least less unacceptable.

## II

That there could be such antipathies in the black community will come as a revelation to many whites, who will, of course, be used to thinking of the prohibitions going the other way. The famous line challenging would-be integrationists, after all, was always “But would you let one marry your daughter?” Indeed in the biracial coalitions of the civil rights movements, both communist and liberal, of the 1930s—1960s, acceptance of such relationships was often seen as a kind of ultimate test of good faith, a sign of whether or not whites had genuinely overcome their racist socialization.

This final intimacy (as the Klan warned: let ‘em in the classroom and they’ll end up in the bedroom) has assumed such significance because of the deep connection between racism and sex. Various theories have been put forward to explain white racism: that it is just “primordial” ethnocentrism writ large and backed by the differential technological and economic power of the European conquest (so *all* human groups would have been equally racist had they gotten the chance); the “culturalist” explanations that tie it, more specifically, to militant Christianity’s *jihad* against non-European infidels and heathens, and the Manichaeian white/good black/evil color symbolism in many European languages, particularly English; Marxist economic explanations that see it basically as an ideological rationalization of expansionist colonial capitalism (so that a naive ethnocentrism, and admitted cultural predispositions, would easily have been *overcome* had it not been for the need to justify conquest, expropriation, and enslavement); and psycho-sexual explanations focusing on the anal and genital regions, with their powerful associations of desire and shame, and their perceived link with dirt, blackness, and the dark body. But all theories have had to come to grips—some more, some less, successfully—with the peculiar horror that black male/white female couplings have aroused in the European imagina-

tion, the fear, as in *Othello*, that "Even now ... an old black ram/Is tugging your white ewe."<sup>1</sup>

In the United States in particular, there were widespread laws against what used to be (and is sometimes still) called "miscegenation," and for many of the thousands of black men lynched in the post-Civil War decades, the pretext was the accusation of raping a white woman, with prolonged torture and castration often preceding the final killing. The fact that a black man with a white wife could gain conservative support for a seat on the Supreme Court (including backing from such well-known historical champions of the black civil-rights struggle as Senator Strom Thurmond of South Carolina) is an indicator that times have somewhat changed in the intervening century.<sup>2</sup> But it is by no means the case that such unions are now routine, raising only the occasional eyebrow. As late as the 1960s, in deference to white sensibilities, media representations shied away from depictions of interracial sex. Even the "trail-blazing" 1967 integrationist drama *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* did not dare to show "Super-Negro" Sidney Poitier exchanging anything more than a chaste kiss (and in the safely diminished frame of a cab's rearview mirror) with white fiancée Katharine Houghton,<sup>3</sup> and, as William Shatner has recently revealed in his autobiography, *Star Trek's* boast that it had the "first interracial kiss" on television was actually false, real lip contact between Captain Kirk (boldly going where no white man had gone before—on television, that is) and Uhura (Nichelle Nichols) being avoided so as not to offend white viewers.<sup>4</sup> Many pornography catalogs have a specialty section of black-on-white videos where "big black studs meet blonde sluts," (How do I know this?, you casually inquire; a friend of a friend, I quickly reply), a testimony to the familiar Freudian point that revulsion and attraction often co-exist, or even merge. So for many this is truly, as some have called it, "the last taboo," and in a world where we're trying to eliminate racism, it would seem that interracial unions should be welcomed as a sign of progress.

Yet many blacks, particularly women, are hostile to such relationships. Perhaps the single most celebrated scene from Spike Lee's recent *Jungle Fever* (1991), an exploration of an interracial affair between a black man and a white woman, was the "war council" where the bereaved wife is consoled by her black women friends, and black men's alleged desire for "white pussy" is excoriated. (Anybody reading this article who has so far been completely bewildered by what I'm talking about could do worse than beginning by renting this video.<sup>5</sup>) Similarly, in a class on African-American Philosophy I taught this year, this question came up in discussions, and, when I decided to pose it as an essay question, was far and away the most popular topic, the majority of students arguing for "Yes." If this notion seems strange and

bizarre to most liberal white philosophers, then, this simply reflects the fact that, while the black male voice is still under-represented in the academy, the black female voice has until recently been silenced altogether. (In discussions of racism, the black man is the paradigm subject, and in discussions of sexism the white woman is the paradigm subject, so that, as one book title aptly puts it, the result is *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men*, going on defiantly to assert, however, *But Some of Us Are Brave*.<sup>6</sup>) This paper is, in part, an attempt to reconstruct—doubtless somewhat presumptuously—some of the possible arguments from this usually neglected perspective. So this is one for the sisters. I will go through what I take to be the most popular arguments, dealing with the weaker ones first and leaving the most interesting and challenging ones to the end.<sup>7</sup>

### III

#### 1. The Racial Purification, or “Let’s Get the Cream Out of the Coffee,” Argument

This argument is basically consequentialist in form, and obviously wouldn’t apply to couples who are not planning to have children, or to short-term relationships in general. In its classic version, the Racial Purification Argument is straightforwardly biologicistic, with culture, where it is invoked, being envisaged as tied to race by hereditarian links. (Where the connection is somewhat more attenuated, this shades over into what I will distinguish as a separate argument, the Racial Solidarity Argument.) The claim here is that (i) there is such a thing as a “pure” race, (ii) racial “purity” is good, either in itself and/or as a means to other ends, such as cultural preservation and future racial achievement, and (iii) members of the race should therefore regard themselves as having a duty to foster purity, or—when it has already been vitiated—to girding up their loins to restore it.

The structure of the argument is unhappily familiar from its better-known white supremacist version, Klan or Nazi. This version will include corollary racist eugenic notions of degraded “mongrel” types produced by racial interbreeding. However, since blacks are the subordinated rather than dominant race, the boundaries here are perforce drawn so as to *include* rather than exclude those of “mixed” race (the “one-drop” rule—some “black” blood makes you black, whereas some “white” blood *doesn’t* make you white). For white racists, then, the emphasis would originally have been on *maintaining* purity against black and/or Jewish “pollution” (seen—in the times when black/Jewish relations were somewhat happier than they are now—as collaborating on this joint contaminatory project: bring on those

white Christian virgins!). For blacks, on the other hand, because of the myriad rapes and economically-coerced sexual transactions of slavery and post-slavery, the emphasis is usually on *restoring* a lost purity, getting rid of the "pollution" of *white* blood. Those of mixed race are counted, sometimes reluctantly, as black, but the idea is that they should try to darken their progeny. (So for light-skinned black men, the injunction is sometimes put in the stronger terms of marrying *dark* black women.)

This argument is, of course, multiply vulnerable. To be convincing, it would really have to presuppose polygenism, the heretical hypothesis that popped up repeatedly in racist thought in the 18th and 19th centuries (and was endorsed by such Enlightenment luminaries as Hume and Voltaire) that, *contra* Christian orthodoxy, there were really separate creations for the races, so that blacks and whites were different species.<sup>8</sup> The theology of the black version will necessarily be different (for example, the original Black Muslim claim that whites were created by the evil scientist Yacub<sup>9</sup>), but the logic, with the terms inverted, is the same. In a post-Darwinian framework that assumes a common humanity, it is harder to defend (which has not, of course, stopped 20th-century white racists), though of course one can, and people still do, talk about "higher" and "lower," "more" and "less" evolved, races. However, most biologists and anthropologists would today agree that there are no such things as races in the first place, so that, *a fortiori*, there cannot be "pure" races (this is, to use old-fashioned Rylean language, a kind of "category mistake"). Instead what exists are "clines," gradients of continuously-varying (i.e., *not* discretely-differentiated) phenotypical traits linked with clumpings of genetic patterns.<sup>10</sup> Humans share most of their genes, and, as ironists have pointed out, if you go back far enough, it turns out that we're all originally African anyway, so that even those blond-haired, blue-eyed Nordic types just happen to be grandchildren who left the continent earlier.

Moreover, even if there were natural ontological divisions between different branches of humanity, an auxiliary argument would still obviously be needed to establish why maintaining these particular configurations of genes *would* be a good thing, and such a good thing that the duty to realize it overrides other claims. Culture is not tied to genotype—the familiar point that children of different "races" would, if switched at birth, take on the cultural traits of their new home. So the argument can only really plausibly get off the ground on the assumption, clearly racist whether in its white or black version, that moral character and/or propensity for intellectual achievement and/or aesthetic worth is genetically racially encoded, *and* of such a degree of difference that promoting it outweighs other considerations such as freedom of choice, staying with the person that you love, and so forth. (The

character claim, less often made these days even by white racists [though some sociobiologists *are* now arguing for a hereditarian explanation of black crime rates], is somewhat more defensible as a basis for endogamy, since it has a moral dimension built into it. The black version will, of course, presuppose the innate evil of *whites*. The claim of differential intellectual ability, on the other hand, [more often made by whites than blacks, since the black version of the Racial Purification Argument usually credits whites with a real, if devious, intelligence] runs into the following set of objections. Suppose it were even true, which it isn't, that races are biologically discrete entities, and that members of race R2 are on average less intelligent than members of race R1. In the first place, *intra*-racial differences would still be greater than interracial differences; we would have overlapping normal distribution curves, slightly displaced from each other on the horizontal axis, with some members of R2 being *more* intelligent than some members of R1.<sup>11</sup> In the second place, do people, in searching for a marital partner, always require that their spouse be just as intelligent as they are? Obviously not; there can be all kinds of facets to a person that make him/her sexually attractive, with intelligence just being one of them. On the whole, human intelligence is a good thing, but why should promoting it be such an imperative as to generate overriding moral duties, especially when our inherited educational and cultural legacy, "social" intelligence, is what is really crucial in distinguishing us from our ancestors?<sup>12</sup>)

Finally, as a fallback position, there is the defiant assertion—what Anthony Appiah calls "intrinsic racism"<sup>13</sup>—that one race is better than another in complete *independence* of these contestable claims about ability and character, so that it is just good *in itself* that there be more pure whites (or more pure blacks). And here one would simply point out that this is not so much an argument, as a concession that there *is* no argument.

## 2. The Racial Caution, or "Don't Get the White Folks Mad," Argument

Another kind of consequentialist argument involves quite different kinds of considerations, not questionable claims about racial purity but pragmatic points about strategy. This rests on the uncontroversial factual claim that, as mentioned, many, indeed the majority, of whites are disturbed and angered by such unions,<sup>14</sup> so that entering into them will increase white hostility and opposition to integration. (As surveys during the period of civil rights activism showed, many whites were convinced that integration of the bedroom was in fact the *main thing* on the minds of blacks who were pressing for "civil rights," so that this would just confirm their worst fears.) The

principle would not, of course, be that one should avoid white anger at all costs (since the advance of the black liberation struggle will *necessarily* anger some whites, and this would certainly not be a moral reason for abandoning it). Rather, the idea would be that black-on-white relationships *unnecessarily* infuriate whites. So since such unions stir up great passion, and are not a necessary component of the struggle, they should be eschewed. (Some versions might then leave it open for them to be permissible in the future non-racist society, or at least when racism has considerably diminished.)

This argument is obviously somewhat more respectable. It does, however, rest on the assumption that either no point of moral principle is involved, or that breach of the principle is justified by the overwhelmingly negative consequences for achieving black liberation of stirring such passions. The reply to the first might take the anti-utilitarian, let-the-heavens-fall line that individual rights to choice trump such considerations, and that if two people love one another, they should not forsake their relationship for the sake of expediting a cause. (Or, less nobly, it might just take the in-your-face form of the joys of *épater*-ing Whitey.) It could also be argued that such an approach panders to racism, and as such is immoral in its failure to confront it, since asserting full black personhood means exercising all the rights white persons have. Alternatively, on the second point (that any such principle is in this case overridden by likely negative repercussions), it might be conceded that a greater good sometimes requires restraint, discretion, and so forth, but denied that at this particular time, the consequences are likely to be so horrendous (so the viability of the argument may be in part conjunctural, depending on the situation, e.g., 1920s Mississippi vs. 1990s New York). Or it might be claimed that those who will be infuriated by "miscegenation" will be infuriated by the civil rights struggle *anyway*, so that it is not clear that there is a discrete differential increment of outrage which can be placed in the consequentialist balance pan, or maybe it's not clear how big it will be. (And it could be argued that the allegations of interracial sex will be made whether it's taking place or not.) Nevertheless, I think it is clear that this argument, unlike the first, does have something to be said for it, though there could be debate over how much. Note that here, of course, it will be the negative prohibition ("stay away from white women!") rather than the positive duty that is involved.

### 3. The Racial Solidarity, or "No Sleeping with the Enemy," Argument

This argument usually accompanies, or is actually conflated with, the Racial Purification Argument, but it's obviously conceptually distinct, if for

no other reason than that it can be addressed to couples who don't plan to have children, or to those in short-term relationships. Both consequentialist and deontological versions are possible, cast in terms of the imperative to promote black liberation (and the putatively inhibitory effect of such unions on this project) or one's general duty to the race (to be elaborated on later). Note that because of the *defensibility* of this consequentialist goal, the black version of the Racial Solidarity Argument is not as immediately and clearly flawed as the corresponding white version, with the goal of preserving white *supremacy*, would be.

Let me run through the important variants, moving, as before, from less to more plausible. To begin with, there are those resting on straightforwardly racist *innatist* theses, whether in theological guise (whites as "blue-eyed devils"—the reactive black counterpart to the traditional claim that blacks are descendants of Ham's accursed son Canaan) or pseudo-scientific guise (whites as biologically evil "ice people" damned by melanin deficiency—the reactive black counterpart<sup>15</sup> to the post-Darwinian "scientific racism" of the late 19th-early 20th centuries). So the idea is that all whites are intrinsically evil, not to be associated with except out of necessity (e.g., in the workplace), and certainly not to be sought out as sexual partners. They are collectively, racially responsible for the enslavement of blacks (the thesis of innate evil implies that though *these* whites are not literally responsible, they would have acted just the same had they been around at the time), so that willingly sleeping with them is like Jews voluntarily sleeping with Nazis. Both for the consequences and for the preservation of one's moral character, then, one has a duty not to enter interracial relationships.

Since moral character and responsibility are *not* genetically encoded in this way (even the claims of sociobiologists wouldn't stretch to this kind of reasoning), this variant is easily dismissable. The more interesting version need not make any such fantastic assumptions. The argument here readily, or maybe grudgingly, admits that whites are just humans like all of us, born as fairly plastic entities who will both be shaped by, and in turn shape, a particular socio-cultural environment. But it will be pointed out that their socialization in a white-supremacist society makes them ineluctably beneficiaries and perpetrators of the system of oppression responsible for keeping blacks down, so that they are all, or mostly (claims of differing strength can be made), the enemy, whether through active policy or passive complicity. Even if they seem to show good faith, the entering of a social "whiteness" into their personal identity means that they will never, or only very rarely (again, claims of differing strength can be made), be able to overcome their conditioning: sooner or later, their "true colors" are going to come out. If nothing else, because of the numerous affective and cognitive ties—family, friendship, cultural attachment—that link them to this white world, and

help to constitute their being, they will naturally be less sensitive to its racist character, and more reluctant to confront the radical changes that have to be made to bring about a truly just society.

In the absence of hypotheses about innate evil, the deontological version gets less of a foothold (though argument #6 below can be seen as partially falling under this category), and the consequentialist version is the one which would have to be run. The idea would be that, given these empirical claims, blacks in such unions are likely to find their efforts to attack white supremacy subtly (maybe even unconsciously) resisted and diverted, so that the long-term consequences will be to compromise black struggles. Since it is often the more successful black men (prominent black businessmen, lawyers, entertainers, intellectuals) who marry white women, such unions usually lead to a departure from the black world of the elite who (at least on some theories) are precisely the most potentially threatening to the status quo, and their entry into an immensely seductive white world of wealth, comfort and glamour where black problems, e.g., the misery of the inner cities, will gradually seem more and more remote. (This inflection of the argument makes the class dimension of black oppression particularly salient. It has traditionally been claimed that blacks have a general duty to "uplift the race," and it is sometimes pointed out in addition that by marrying a white woman, the economic and status resources of the successful black male [material and cultural/symbolic capital] are likely to be removed from the black community.) Without even realizing it, and through familiar processes of self-deception and motivated inattention, one will gradually "sell out" to the white establishment.

Unlike the innatist version, with its dubious biology, or biotheology, this version has the merits of being more in touch with social reality, and indeed of telling a not-implausible psychological tale. One response is the blunt *denial* that blacks should regard themselves as having any particular duty to combat white supremacy, the individualist every-man-for-himself solution, though this will, of course, rarely be said out loud (as against secretly practiced). A more defensible approach might be to accept the existence of this duty while simultaneously arguing, as some contemporary ethicists have done, for a *restricted* role for consequentialist moral demands.<sup>16</sup> So the idea would be that of course you do have *some* free-floating obligation to resist racism, but this can't be a full-time job invading every aspect of one's life, and unless one's white wife is actually a Klan member or a Nazi (obviously somewhat unlikely), one's personal life is one's own business. (Often this is accompanied by the universalist/humanist claim that in the end, color doesn't matter, we're all just human beings, and so forth.)

Another tack would be to challenge the crucial empirical premise that whites cannot *ever* purge themselves of a whiteness committed to racial

supremacy (or the weaker version that their doing so is rare enough that the injunction is warranted on Bayesian grounds). It would be pointed out that people can resist and overcome their socialization, proving by their deeds that they are committed to eradicating racism. For those white women who are naive about the pervasiveness of racism, even among their own family and friends, embarking on an interracial relationship may actually have a salutary cognitive effect, the latter's hostile response awakening her to realities to which she would otherwise have been blind. An abstract opposition to racism might then assume a more visceral force, so that the net result would be a gain for the forces of anti-racism. Once the innatist framework has been abandoned, the biological link between race and character severed, and the Racial Solidarity Argument put on the consequentialist foundation of ending white supremacy, there is the danger (for its proponents) of the argument being turned on its head. Since not all *black* women will automatically be activist foes of racism (they may have succumbed to racist socialization, or, like the vast majority of human beings, just be trying to get along without heavy-duty political commitments), the question of which spouse will be of more assistance in fighting racism might then come down to simple empirical questions, rather than *a priori* assumptions. If other kinds of arguments are excluded, the foe of interracial marriages would then have to show why, in each case, the overall outcome is likely to be a debit for the anti-racism struggle. (For short-term relationships and one-night stands, neither side will be able to make much of a case for long-term consequentialist repercussions, so—if the premises are not innatist ones—the argument will usually shift to more symbolic issues, as discussed in #6, below.)

#### 4. The Racial Demographics, or "Where Are All the Black Men?" Argument

The Racial Demographics Argument is interesting because, of those we have looked at so far, it is least tied to the explicit political project of fighting white racism, with its accompanying ideological assumptions. This argument simply points to the relatively uncontroversial statistical fact that, because of the disproportionate numbers of black men in jail, unemployed, or dead at an early age (which may or may not be attributed to white racism), there is a significant imbalance of females to "marriageable" black males.<sup>17</sup> ("Marriageable" may itself, of course, seem to have classist overtones, and it is true that this complaint comes most often from middle-class, or upwardly-mobile, black women,<sup>18</sup> but the problem is more general.) William Julius Wilson is famous for his claim that this putative shortage is in part responsible for the perpetuation of the underclass, since single black women

of poorer backgrounds will then fall into poverty if they have children.<sup>19</sup> (Some left critics have accused Wilson of sexism on this point, arguing that the real political demand should be for women to get what is now reserved as a "male" wage.) The traditional race/gender status hierarchy in the United States is structured basically as: white men, white women, black men, black women. Because of this low prestige, black women have not generally been sought out as *respectable* partners (as against concubines, mistresses, prostitutes) by white men and men of other races. So if eligible black men differentially seek non-black, particularly white, women, then things will be made even worse for black women, who will then have been rejected both by their own men and the men of other races.<sup>20</sup>

If black men therefore have a duty arising out of this fact, what would its foundation be? Since we are considering arguments in isolation from one another, we need to differentiate this conceptually from the Racial Solidarity Argument as such, though it can obviously be seen in terms of racial solidarity. The argument would not be the *general* one, corollary of #3, to "sleep with the friend," but the claim that in *these* contingent circumstances black men have such a duty. This could be defended in deontological or utilitarian terms, i.e., as a remediable unhappiness which imposes some sort of obligation on us to relieve it. (So this, unlike the previous three arguments, does require more than just *not* marrying white women.)

How plausible is this? Note, to begin with that, as mentioned, no questionable racist claims about whites' innate characters are being made, so it is not vulnerable on that score. But one obviously unhappy feature it has is that, as a putative duty, it seems to be naturally assimilable to duties of *charity*, i.e., the standing obligations most moral theorists think we have (and invested with greater or lesser degrees of stringency) to relieve distress, e.g., through giving to the homeless, to Third World famine relief, and so forth. Isn't it insulting to the person to think that sexual relationships, or marriages, should be generally entered into on these grounds? How would one react to the declaration, or inadvertent discovery, that one had been sought out as a *charitable* obligation? (The argument for endogamous marriage on the grounds of black self-respect is different, and will be discussed later.) So this seems a bit problematic from the start. There is also the question of how strong this putative obligation is supposed to be. For Kant and most other deontologists, charity is an "imperfect" duty, compliance with which leaves considerable latitude for choice (timing, beneficiary, extent of commitment, and so forth). In the case of something so central to one's life-plans as a choice of partner, rights of individual autonomy and personal freedom would easily override an alleged charitable claim of this sort. Utilitarianism is in general, of course, more demanding, with—depending on the variety—less or no room for

what are sometimes called agent-relative "options," if welfare can be maximized through the policy in question. In this case, then, strategies of response would have to defend (non-black) commonsense morality against utilitarianism's demands, or make a case that such a policy, if taken seriously, would be more likely to promote net *unhappiness* (through the constraints on the freedoms of black men, and the demeaning knowledge or uncertainty in the minds of black women as to why they had really been chosen). Nevertheless, it is clearly possible that some opponents of interracial marriage would be prepared to bite the bullet and insist on such a duty, arguing perhaps that the situation of black women is now so dire as to easily *outweigh* black male unhappiness at restriction of choice, and that as an entry in the welfare calculus, this unhappiness is not to be taken too seriously anyway, since it is likely, or necessarily, the result of a brainwashed preference for white women, and could be removed with a Brandtian "cognitive psychotherapy."<sup>21</sup> So this argument could be reinforced with considerations we shall look at later.

### 5. The Tragic Mulattos-to-be, or "Burden on the Children," Argument

Another possible consequentialist argument is that the mixed racial and presumably (though not necessarily) cultural legacy of such unions will impose a differential burden on children of such households, who will be caught between two worlds and fully accepted by neither. This argument is often put forward hypocritically, with the actually-motivating considerations being along the lines of #1-4. Nevertheless, it should obviously still be examined.

To begin with, of course, it only gets off the ground if the couple *do* plan to have children. It could also be argued that it presupposes the continuation of racist attitudes, and that in a non-racist world such children would be completely accepted by both sides of the family. However, since there does not seem to be much likelihood of such a world coming into existence in the near future, this objection could not plausibly carry much weight.

(I have encountered an interesting inversion of this argument, put forward perhaps only semi-seriously, that could be termed the Racial Elimination, or "Browning of the World," Argument. The thesis is that if the bottom line is indeed fighting white racism, and/or racism in general, then interracial unions are not merely morally *permissible*, but *desirable*, to be positively encouraged as a long-term strategy for eliminating racism by making everybody some shade of brown. Unfortunately, I think this underestimates human ingenuity in finding differences upon which to erect comparative aesthetic, moral, and intellectual claims. For many decades

after the 19th-century abolition of slavery in the Americas, there were elaborate color hierarchies in the black communities in the United States, the Caribbean, and South America, structured according to one's shade and presumed degree of "white" blood, e.g., octoroon, quadroon, mulatto, Negro, and these persist today in a continuing preference in the West for light-skinned blacks.<sup>22</sup> Even if [which seems genetically impossible, given the normal human variation even in the children of *one* set of parents] all of us were to become a uniform brown, there would still be differences in hair texture and facial features which could be traced back to differential racial ancestry, and which could be used as grounds for discriminatory sorting. In general, I would suggest that the notion that mere somatic difference is the sufficient, or major, cause of racism is historically and anthropologically naive. I am sympathetic to the general left position that if politico-economic differences require "racial" differentiation, then the categorization will be generated accordingly even if people are much closer somatically than they currently are. It's worth remembering that in 19th-century Europe, the white working class was sometimes thought of as a separate "race". Where there's a political will, it could be said, there's a conceptual way.)

But back to the burden on the children. One obvious reply would be that some parents-to-be will be able to speak with authority about the non-racist character of their side of the family. But what about those who can't? And even those who do sincerely give such assurances about others' feelings may, of course, be self-deceived, or even deceived by their relatives (whether through disingenuousness, and the fact that racism is no longer respectable, or by normal human self-opacity, and the genuine non-awareness of one's actual gut responses when faced with a flesh-and-blood "mixed" grandson or niece). The way to argue around this might be to insist that extra-loving parental care can make up for any family hostility. However, there is also the set of problems the child will face in the larger society, e.g., growing up in a school and neighborhood environment where racial polarization may lead to partial ostracism by other children of both races. So I think that this does raise genuine concerns, and even if they are outweighed by other factors, they should be given their due. (A magazine called *Interrace* addresses these and other problems of interracial couples.)

#### **6. The Questionable Racial Motivations, or "Maybe You Can Fool That Stupid White Bitch, Nigger, and Maybe You Can Fool Yourself, But You're Not Fooling Anybody Else," Argument**

I have left to the last what I consider to be the most interesting argument, or set of arguments. This is the claim that black men who enter such unions, particularly with white women (as against women of other races), are either

always, or usually (the claim can be made with differing strengths), motivated by questionable considerations. The argument tends to be deontological in form, the presumption being that some set of normative criteria can be imposed to assess the appropriate motivations for entering a marriage—these days, basically revolving around romantic love—and that, absent these motives, and/or present some other set, the decision to marry is wrong. Since motivation is unlikely ever to be pure, and we are not completely, or at all, self-transparent anyway, one might have to talk about the *preponderance*, and the *likelihood*, of certain kinds of motivations. In addition, there is the separate moral issue of the woman's awareness or non-awareness of the nature of the motivation. Thus one would have to distinguish cases of ignorance and deception, where the white woman doesn't know what is really driving her male spouse-to-be, from cases where both parties know what's going on. (In other kinds of non-romantic marriages, for example marriages of convenience for immigration reasons, or the standard pragmatic tradings of financial security for youthful beauty, both parties often know the score, so that if these unions are wrong, it is not because of *deception*.)

Now obviously interracial marriages have no monopoly on questionable motivations, but the claim of opponents would be that they are *more* likely to be present (or, more strongly, *always* present) in such unions. What is the basis of this claim? The argument is that because of the central historic structuring of the American polity by white racism,<sup>23</sup> the psychology of both whites and blacks has been negatively affected, and that this has ramifications for human sexuality. (Or, as initially mentioned, there is the more radically foundational claim that sex is in fact at the root of racism in the *first* place, so the whole thing *starts* there.) In a patriarchal society, sexuality is distorted by sexism as well as racism, so that male sexuality characteristically involves the notion of conquest, sexual competition, and a proving of one's manhood by securing the woman, or the series of women, more highly ranked in the established hierarchy of desirability. But *white women* will in general represent the female somatic ideal in our society: they are pre-eminently the beauty queens, fashion models, movie goddesses, magazine centerfolds, porn stars, whose images are displayed from a billion magazine covers, billboards, television screens, videos, and movie theaters.<sup>24</sup> Black males will inevitably be influenced by this, so that a wide range of potentially questionable motivations is generated:

- (i) sexual exoticism and forbidden fruit-picking,
- (ii) racial revenge,
- (iii) racially-differentiated aesthetic attraction, and
- (iv) racial status-seeking and personhood by proxy.

(i) Sexual exoticism *per se*—the lure of the different—obviously has no intrinsic connection to black and white relations, and indeed need not involve *racial* difference at all, being felt across cultural, ethnic, and class lines. Moreover, on its own it would not really seem to raise any moral problems; people are sexually attracted to each other for all kinds of reasons, and if the strangeness of the Other is what is turning them on, there seems no harm in this—whatever gets you through the night, and so forth. The real concern here would be the prudential one that this is unlikely to prove a reliable foundation for a long-term relationship or marriage, exoticism rapidly being demystified in the quotidian domestic irritations of house-cleaning manias and toilet seats left up. It is really the coincidence of the exotic with the black-white racial taboo, the fact that this strange fruit is *forbidden*, that gives rise to what Spike Lee calls “jungle fever.” But again, assuming a liberal view of sexuality, which would deny the legitimacy of such taboos, and taking for granted that both parties know what’s going on, no moral, as against prudential, questions would really seem to be raised. I think when people advance this as a moral argument they are either unconsciously conflating it with one or more of the *other* possibilities ([ii] to [iv]), which we’ll examine separately, or assuming that one party, e.g., the white woman, doesn’t realize the real source of her appeal. So insofar as this is a successful moral argument, it would really just be subsumable under the general proscription against deceit in interpersonal relationships, perhaps with the added *a priori* reminder that, given people’s capacity for self-deception, black men are not likely to be willing to face the fact that this *is* really what’s driving them (a point we’ll encounter again). For (i), then, if there is a duty, it is derivable, given certain empirical assumptions, from the conventional set of duties to the other person, which can be founded either on welfare or Kantian grounds.

(ii) By contrast, racial revenge as a motivation is clearly and uncontroversially immoral. The idea here (though this will not usually be said out loud, or at least within earshot of whites) is that marriage to, or sometimes just sex with, a white woman (or, better, *many* white women), is an appropriate form of revenge, conscious or unconscious, upon white men. This is linked, obviously, to acceptance of a sexist framework in which male combat, here interracial, takes place in part across the terrain of the female body, so that masculinity and honor are fused with ability to appropriate the woman. Sex with the enemy’s woman then becomes a symbolic retribution both specific—for the thousands of rapes and other sexual abuses visited upon black women over the hundreds of years of slavery and its aftermath, which black men were in general powerless to stop—and general—for the

systematic humiliations of the denial to black men of their manhood in a society created by white men. Obviously black men who enter unions with white women for such purposes are just using them.

(iii), (iv) I will discuss these together since, though the details are different, the root issue is arguably the same. Thus far the duty, insofar as it exists, has been easily derivable from standard prohibitions against deceiving and using others. These final two subsets of allegedly questionable motives are to my mind the most interesting because they raise the possibility of duties to oneself and/or duties to the race.

First, the aesthetic question. As pointed out, in this country the white woman has traditionally represented the somatic norm of beauty.<sup>25</sup> It's true this has recently begun to expand somewhat, with black Miss Americas (including one chosen just this year, 1993), and some preference in the fashion industry for "ethnic" models. But the first black Miss America, 1983 queen (though later deposed) Vanessa Williams, was so fair-skinned that the Congress of Racial Equality refused to recognize her as black, and the black models used in MTV videos will usually be light-skinned, Caucasoid blacks. White or light skin, long non-kinky hair, "fine" noses and narrow non-everted lips remain the norm, and as such are difficult or impossible to achieve without artificial assistance for black women of non-mixed heritage: hence the long-established cosmetic industry in the black community of skin bleaches, hair straighteners, wigs and hair extensions, and more recently (for those who can afford it) chemical peels, dermabrasion and plastic surgery. The argument is, then, that in choosing to marry white women, black men are admitting by this deed their acceptance of a white racist stereotype of beauty, and rejecting their own race. (Obviously there is a feminist, and indeed even more general humanist, argument that stereotypical physical attractiveness should not be the major criterion for marriageability *anyway*, but I am not endorsing these norms but merely outlining their logic. This is in fact what motivates most men, and pending the advent of a utopia where physical appearance becomes unimportant, to be systematically disadvantaged by race seems unfair. In other words, I am assuming, though I will not try to show this, that this racial dimension inflicts an *additional* unfairness on top of the normal genetic lottery by which, within a race, "plain" or "ugly" people are socially disadvantaged through not meeting *intra*-racial standards of attractiveness.)

The other set of motives is conceptually distinct, though in practice it will usually go with the aesthetic set, and the ultimate source of both is arguably the same.<sup>26</sup> This is the project of achieving social status through one's white

wife. White women are then a kind of prize who can both affirm one's self-esteem, and help to provide an entree (at least in liberal circles) to the still largely white world of status and power of the upper echelons of society. Bluntly, a white woman on your arm shows that you have made it. As such, this is separate from the aesthetic argument, since the idea would be that even a white woman plain by conventional white standards of attractiveness will still provide the aura of social prestige radiating from white-skin privilege. Indeed, one of the arguments that black women who object to such unions frequently use is that black men go out or end up with white women whom they would never consider if they were black and of the same comparative degree of attractiveness (assuming that some kind of interracial translation of such measurements is possible, i.e., a 6 on a white 10-point scale becoming an equivalent 6 on a black 10-point scale, somehow relativized to different phenotype). Under these circumstances in particular, the claim will be made that "it's only because she's white" that the black man is going out with her.

The more radical version of this accusation is that one is actually trying to achieve some kind of derivative personhood, personhood by proxy, in such marriages, insofar as black personhood is systematically denied in a racist society and the black man is likely to have internalized this judgment. (Personhood and status are linked, but separate, since obviously whites can have the former while still wanting to increase their ranking by some metric of the latter, e.g., through climbing the corporate hierarchy.)

For both these sets of motivations, then, duties would arise *in addition* to the obvious ones of not using the white partner. (The latter set of duties is still pertinent since, while people don't usually object to having been chosen at least in part on the basis of their looks, they would presumably *not* want to be chosen merely on the basis of being an abstract representative of an instrumental whiteness.) And these could perhaps be construed as duties to *oneself*, or duties to the *race* (or perhaps this could be collapsed into duties to oneself *insofar as* one is a member of the race, a subset of the more general duties we have to ourselves as humans). In modern moral theory, the notion of duties to oneself is found most famously, of course, in Kant. His idea was that in general we owe respect to all persons, a respect generating duties of differing degrees of stringency, and since we are persons ourselves, this means we have duties to *our* selves (so that certain actions are wrong because we are *using* that self). The idea has been judged problematic by most contemporary philosophers, but some, for example, Thomas Hill, Jr., think that it is in fact a defensible and fruitful way of explicating the internal moral logic of the notion of self-respect.<sup>27</sup> So respecting ourselves precludes acting out of certain kinds of motivation. Applying this to the case of interracial

marriage for reasons of types (iii) and (iv), then, the implication is that *even if the white woman is fully aware of, and has no problem with, the black man's motivation*, such marriage would be wrong because it endorses a racist set of values and as such implies a lack of respect for oneself and one's own race.

I think that, though the other arguments I have discussed are also employed, and taken seriously, this really captures the essential objection that many black women have to interracial relationships. And it coheres nicely with the interpretation of racism as an ideology which, in anti-Kantian fashion, systematically *denies* full personhood to certain groups of humans—in effect, the whole race is thought of as sub-persons, *Untermenschen*. The Jamaican activist Marcus Garvey, one of the most famous black leaders of the twentieth century, is celebrated for his insight that white supremacy had left blacks as “a race without respect,” and correspondingly the notion of “dissin” someone, so central to black popular culture, is arguably a recognition, on the level of folk wisdom, of the danger of this diminished moral standing.<sup>28</sup>

Could this then be seen as a friendly amendment to Kant? (I really mean “Kantianism” rather than Kant; in general Kant's own views on sexuality can't be taken seriously.) The immediate obstacle is that race is part of the phenomenal self deemed morally irrelevant, so how could we have duties to ourself based on racial membership? Or how could we have duties to the race that are differentiated from duties to abstract noumenal (and hence raceless) persons? But I think this objection can be finessed in the following way. The claim is not that, *because* we're black (or white, or any other race) we're *differentially* deserving of respect; this would indeed be inconsistent with Kantian principles, presupposing hierarchy rather than equality of value for different persons. So the argument is not that race does enter at the noumenal level. The claim is rather that the historic legacy of white racism has been a social ontology in which race has *not* been abstracted from, but used as an indicator of one's personhood, so that those with a certain “phenomenal” phenotype have been seen as less than human and so undeserving of full (or any) respect. *Resistance* to this legacy therefore requires that one affirm one can be *both* black and a person, that the phenomenal does not correlate with a sub-par noumenal self. Retreat into typical philosophical abstraction (“we're all human—race doesn't matter”) evades confronting this, since the terms on which humanity will have been defined will be *white* ones. So the “person” is tacitly constructed as white in the first place, which is why this hidden moral architecture, this colorlessness which is really colored white, has to be exposed to the light. Because of black socialization into this system of values, the fact is that marriage to a white woman *will* often be based on the continuing, if not consciously acknowledged, submission to this racist

social ontology, and when it is, *will* imply a lack of racial self-respect, respect for one's race (as all other races) as equally entitled to take the full status of personhood. It is, finally, I believe, something like this moral perception which, even if not always clearly articulated, underlies many black women's intuition that there is often something questionable about these relationships.

But what—the obvious reply will be—if one is quite sure, or as sure as one can be about anything, that one is *not* marrying for such motivations? Here, the opponent of interracial marriages has at least two interesting fallback positions (as distinct, that is, from any of the other arguments previously discussed). First, what the critic may do is introduce an auxiliary *epistemic* thesis (our knowledge of our motivation) as distinct from the *substantive* thesis itself (what our motivation is). The argument would then be that, though in some cases (a minority) black men's motivation might be pure, the combined effects of standard human self-opacity and the cognitive interference produced in these particular circumstances by the strong motivations for self-deception (who will want to admit to himself he's really trying to whiten his being?), mean that they can never *know* that it is pure, so the safest thing to do is to eschew such unions. If this fails, then there is, secondly, the ultimate fallback position of re-introducing a consequentialist framework to argue that even if (a) one's motivation is pure, *and* (b) one knows one's motivation is pure, there is always (c) the fact that, whatever one's motivation, one will be *perceived* by other blacks as having married out of racial self-contempt, thus reinforcing white superiority. And this (as one of my black female students coldly informed me when I was trying to defend a liberal position on the issue) will be "a slap in the face of black women everywhere." So the bottom line for critics is that one's actions will be perceived as being motivated by these self-despising beliefs, and—especially if one is a prominent black figure of high status, with a correspondingly enhanced range of racial spousal selection—this action will be sending a message to the world that, once you *do* have this option to choose: *black women just ain't good enough*.

#### IV

I have no neat, wrap-up conclusion to offer, since I think the issue is a complicated one about which a lot more could be said. Rather, my basic aim has been to demonstrate this complexity, and, as a corollary, to show the mistakeness of the knee-jerk white liberal (or, for that matter, black liberal) response that no defensible case could possibly be made for the existence of such a duty. Some of the arguments *are* obviously weak (e.g., #1), but others

are stronger, though they may be of conjunctural strength (e.g., #2), involve empirical and normative claims which may or may not hold true (#3, 4, 5), or rest on speculative claims about motivation which are hard to disprove, with a consequentialist fallback line which may seem illegitimately to hold us hostage to others' perceptions (#6). Whether singly or in combination (to the extent that this is possible, bearing in mind that *different* normative frameworks have sometimes been used) they do yield at least a presumptive duty I will leave, perhaps somewhat evasively, for the reader to decide, and if so what kind of a duty it is. At the very least I think I have shown that—using conventional moral theories, and without making racist assumptions about whites, or even appealing to any controversial separatist ideology—an interesting case can in fact be built for a position quite widespread in the “commonsense morality” of the black community.

One common, misguided white liberal reaction to racism has been to move from the anthropological premise that “race” (in the biological sense) doesn’t exist, to the conclusion that “race” (in the social sense) doesn’t exist either, so that the solution is to proclaim an (ostensibly) colorless universalism in which we pay no attention to race. Sometimes this is expressed in the claim that race is “constructed” (true enough) and therefore unreal. But neither conclusion follows (try walking through the next constructed brick wall you encounter). As Aristotle pointed out long ago, treating people equally doesn’t necessarily mean treating them the same, and one could argue analogously that genuine race-neutrality actually requires not *blindness* to race but close attention to the difference race makes. The subtleties of unraveling and re-weaving conventional morality in a white-supremacist society gradually transforming itself have only just begun to be worked on by philosophers. If discussions such as this one have rarely, if ever, graced the pages of philosophy journals, this is arguably a consequence not of the unimportance of such debates but of the demographics of the profession, and the absence of voices speaking from the day-to-day lives and concerns of a significant sector of the population. We can expect that, with the demographic “browning” of America that is under way, leading to a minority white population some time late in the next century, and perhaps even (dare one hope...?) some more non-white faces around APA meetings, such issues will increasingly begin to appear in these formerly cloistered white pages.

I would like to acknowledge the support of the Institute for the Humanities, University of Illinois at Chicago.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> For discussions of racism in general, and racism and sex in particular, see, for example: Winthrop D. Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (1968; rpt. New York and London: W.W. Norton, 1977); St. Clair Drake, *Black Folk Here and There*, vol. I (Los Angeles: Center for Afro-American Studies, UCLA, 1987); John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), chapter five; Calvin C. Hernton, *Sex and Racism in America* (1966; rpt. New York: Grove Press, 1988).
- <sup>2</sup> As Judge A. Leon Higginbotham, Jr. sardonically pointed out to Clarence Thomas, admonishing him for his cavalier disparagement of the work of civil rights activists, had it not been for their efforts, "if you and your present wife decided that you wanted to reside in Virginia [their present home], you would ... have been violating the Racial Integrity Act of 1924, which the Virginia Supreme Court as late as 1966 said was consistent with the federal Constitution because of the overriding state interest in the institution of marriage.... [Y]ou could have been in the penitentiary today rather than serving as an Associate Justice of the United States Supreme Court." "An Open Letter to Justice Clarence Thomas from a Federal Judicial Colleague," *University of Pennsylvania Law Review*, 140 (1992); reprinted in Toni Morrison, ed., *Race-ing Justice, En-gendering Power: Essays on Anita Hill, Clarence Thomas, and the Construction of Social Reality* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1992), pp. 24-25.
- <sup>3</sup> For changing (and unchanging) depictions of blacks in United States cinema, see Donald Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies & Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films* (New York: Viking Press, 1973).
- <sup>4</sup> William Shatner, with Chris Kreski, *Star Trek Memories* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1993). Nichols disgustedly describes the backstage drama: "[The network suits were] telling me that the kiss would make the show impossible to air.... I mean, they even went so far as to suggest changing the scene so that Kirk gets paired off with Nurse Chapel and Spock ends up with me. Somehow, I guess, they found it more acceptable for a Vulcan to kiss me, for this alien to kiss this black woman, than for two humans with different coloring to do the same thing." *Star Trek Memories*, pp. 284-285. The network arranged for the scene to be shot twice, the first take showing actual lip contact, the second take positioning the camera behind Shatner's back at the crucial moment, so that an actual kiss did not have to be shown—and did not in fact occur. The second take was the one eventually aired.
- <sup>5</sup> For an interesting discussion, see also the *Newsweek* cover story (June 10, 1991) on the movie, "Tackling a Taboo."
- <sup>6</sup> Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith, eds., *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women's Studies* (Old Westbury, New York: The Feminist Press, 1982).
- <sup>7</sup> I should record here the fact that I have greatly benefited from exposure to, even when I have not always agreed with, the arguments put forward by my students in classroom discussion and essays submitted in the "African-American Philosophy" course I taught in Spring 1993.
- <sup>8</sup> For a discussion, see, for example, Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man* (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 1981).
- <sup>9</sup> See, for example, chapter 10, "Satan," of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, as told to Alex Haley, (1965; rpt. New York: Ballantine Books, 1973).
- <sup>10</sup> "There are no races, there are only clines." Frank B. Livingstone, "On the Nonexistence of Human Races" (1962); rpt. in Sandra Harding, ed., *The "Racial" Economy of Science: Toward*

a *Democratic Future* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993).

- <sup>11</sup>The more radical objection made by some theorists is that the whole idea of quantifying intellectual ability as a single reified number, and then ranking people on a unilinear scale, is inherently incoherent: again, see Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man*. This is sometimes summed up in the *bon mot* that the only thing IQ tests measure is the ability to do well on IQ tests.
- <sup>12</sup>I have benefited here from Joyce Trebilcot's argument opposing sex roles: "Sex Roles: The Argument from Nature," *Ethics*, 85 (April 1975); rpt. in Garry Brodsky, John Troyer, and David Vance, eds., *Contemporary Readings in Social and Political Ethics* (Buffalo, New York: Prometheus Books, 1984).
- <sup>13</sup>Kwame Anthony Appiah, *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 13-15.
- <sup>14</sup>As late as 1978, a national survey showed that "70% of whites ... rejected interracial marriage on principle": cited in Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 95.
- <sup>15</sup>Though contemporary "melanin theory" is indigenous to the black community, the notion of "sun people" and "ice people" actually comes from the white Canadian author Michael Bradley's *The Iceman Inheritance: Prehistoric Sources of Western Man's Racism, Sexism, and Aggression* (New York: Kayode, 1978).
- <sup>16</sup>See, for example, Samuel Scheffler, *Human Morality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).
- <sup>17</sup>Black unemployment rates in recent decades have been at least twice as high as white unemployment rates, and for the category of young black men in the inner cities the rate approaches catastrophic proportions. Another tragic figure frequently cited is the 1990 study that showed that, on any given day in 1989, nearly 1 in 4 black men from the ages of 20 to 29 were either in prison, on parole, or on probation. The leading cause of death for black men 15-34 is homicide. For some of these frightening statistics, see William Julius Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1987) and Andrew Hacker, *Two Nations: Black and White, Separate, Hostile, Unequal* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1992).
- <sup>18</sup>Terry McMillan's recent bestseller, *Waiting to Exhale* (1992; rpt. New York: Pocket Star books, 1993), revolves in large part around this theme.
- <sup>19</sup>Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged*.
- <sup>20</sup>I have worked throughout within a heterosexual, and, some gays might say, heterosexist, framework. Why, it may be asked, should black women wait for black, or any other, men? Why shouldn't they embrace their sisters? I certainly don't mean to impugn the legitimacy of lesbian relationships—I think that gay relationships and marriages should be recognized—but, on established assumptions about people's sexual orientation, there will still be a majority of *straight* women for whom this is not an attractive solution. If these assumptions are wrong, of course, so that the whole concept of a basic sexual orientation is misleading in the first place, and sexuality is radically plastic, then some of these arguments won't work. But the *general* issue of racism and sex obviously isn't just an issue for straights.
- <sup>21</sup>See Richard Brandt, *A Theory of the Good and the Right* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979).
- <sup>22</sup>For a fascinating discussion of the psychological ramifications of this, see Kathy Russell, Midge Wilson, and Ronald Hall, *The Color Complex: The Politics of Skin Color Among African Americans* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992).
- <sup>23</sup>And many other countries too, of course. Though I have implicitly focused on the United

States throughout, many of these arguments would be applicable elsewhere also.

- <sup>24</sup> A quick riddle for the reader: name a black female movie star other than Whoopi Goldberg (pop singer Whitney Houston's one-shot appearance in *The Bodyguard* doesn't count). My guess is that the average white reader will come up empty. Now think how remarkable this is in a country where for most of the century movies have epitomized American popular culture, and blacks make up 12% of the population. (Goldberg, by the way, is the exception that proves the rule, in the original sense of that expression, now largely forgotten, of *testing* the rule so that an explanation for the anomaly is called for. At least until lately, she has standardly appeared as a de-sexed comic grotesque. After I completed the original draft of this article, Angela Bassett was nominated for a "Best Actress" Academy Award for her role as Tina Turner in *What's Love Got To Do With It*. So that's one more black actress the white reader is now likely to know. But my general point obviously still stands.)
- <sup>25</sup> The following discussion draws on *The Color Complex*. The notion of a racial "somatic norm" was first put forward by the Dutch sociologist Harmannus Hoetink; see, for example, *Caribbean Race Relations: A Study of Two Variants* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962).
- <sup>26</sup> It should be noted, though, that some researchers have argued, on anthropological evidence, that there is a pro-light skinned aesthetic bias in *all* societies, which pre-existed, though of course it will be reinforced by, colonialism and white racism.
- <sup>27</sup> Thomas E. Hill, Jr., *Autonomy and Self-Respect* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), especially chapters 1 and 2.
- <sup>28</sup> Likewise, it is no accident that the work of black philosophers has so often focused on the particular importance of *self-respect* for blacks; see, for example, Laurence Thomas, "Self-Respect: Theory and Practice," and Bernard Boxill, "Self-Respect and Protest," both in Leonard Harris, ed., *Philosophy Born of Struggle: Anthology of Afro-American Philosophy from 1917* (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Co., 1983).