

**“The Almost White Boy”: Have Our Bi-racial Views Progressed?**

**by**

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The theme of Willard Motley's short story "The Almost White Boy" shares more similarities than differences with present day views and attitudes toward the bi-racial child. Two main views that are held in the pre-segregation setting of Motley's story are still very apparent today. The first is that the bi-racial child is considered to be more black than white and is treated accordingly as a black individual. Furthermore, this view of being more black than white is held by both the black and white segments of society. The second view is that inter-racial dating is much more acceptable than inter-racial marriage. While these are only a couple of views or attitudes that are directed towards the bi-racial child, I believe they are possibly two of the most profound.

The fact that a bi-racial child is considered to be more black than white is clearly evident in Motley's story. The first to let us in on this view are the children in Jim's neighborhood. One child taunts Jim by saying, "You're black just like us" and "You ain't no different. My ma says so." At the same time another child is singing, "Yeah! Yeah! You're a white nigger – white nigger!" Jim's girlfriend also displays this attitude. When he reveals his background to her she says, "Why do you tell people?" Even Jim sees himself in this manner. His thoughts, "It had to go four revolutions. Four times a part-Negro had to marry a white person before you are legally white", give evidence of this as he ponders his prospects of marrying a white girl. So it is clear during the pre-segregation era that society viewed the bi-racial child as being much more black than white.

This view of bi-racial children being more black than white probably originates from the "one drop of blood" rule. Since the time of Motley's story society's view have evolved a bit from the one drop rule. However, in many situations bi-racial individuals

are still being viewed and treated as if they were black. In the story, it is very clear that Jim's girlfriend and the taunting children got these views from their parents. This points to the fact that everyone in society shared this attitude. Two generations later I believe this more black than white attitude is still with us. I see this proven by the fact that bi-racial individuals tend to gravitate towards the black community more than they do to the white community. In fact, the black community is held responsible for raising bi-racial children more often than not. Furthermore, even though people might change their racial views a little, I am certain that this shared view of bi-racial children being more black than white will be continue to be passed from generation to generation.

Another view that a majority of people in our society share with Jim's society is the dislike for inter-racial marriages. This view is incorporated into the climax of Motley's story. Cora, his girlfriend, obviously feels inter-racial dating is acceptable because she dates Jim for around four months. At the climax of the story Jim resists Cora's advances and asks her to marry him. Her reaction is definitive: inter-racial marriage is acceptable but inter-racial marriage is not. In response to Jim's request for her hand in marriage Motley gives this narrative, "Her eyes met his, burning angrily at the softness in his eyes. 'You damn dirty nigger!' she said, and jumped up and walked away from him as fast as she could." Her response demonstrates that even people who considered themselves to be "open minded" during this era still drew a fine line between inter-racial dating and inter-racial marriage.

Cora's reaction shows that Jim clearly did not understand the socially accepted terms their dating. Her violent outburst implies that there is an unspoken rule in regard to inter-racial dating versus inter-racial marriage. It implies that the former is much more

acceptable than the latter. This attitude comes from previous generations and will be passed on to future generations. Many people today still have vivid memories of life during the pre-segregation era. It is our families' memories of this time that greatly influence our perceptions of the world with regard to inter-racial relations. I believe this is why this unspoken rule still exists within our society today. Most of us are not raised with specific instructions to avoid inter-racial dating. However, I believe that most of us are raised with the unspoken yet common knowledge that inter-racial marriage is unacceptable. When the time comes for the bi-racial couple to share their intentions with each other's families, we usually hear of their having to "break the news." I believe that what they are really breaking here is not the news of marriage, but rather they are breaking this unspoken rule towards inter-racial marriage. Although views about inter-racial marriage have progressed since the pre-segregation era, I believe this progress has been limited to that of a tolerance for these marriages.

While there are signs of progression in society's views toward the bi-racial child, I would not say that it has been a radical change. These two social views towards the bi-racial child were obviously more apparent in Jim's day than our present day. When Jim tells Cora of his ethnicity, he does not tell her that he is bi-racial or part black. He tells her that he is a Negro, as if there were no white blood in him at all. I believe some progression can be seen here simply by the fact that we refer to someone with Jim's background as bi-racial instead of completely black. A change in attitude can also be seen with inter-racial marriages being much more common today. However, I think that this has been a progression from intolerance to tolerance, not from intolerance to acceptance. Progression that is truly radical in nature would not be so similar to the

previous views and attitudes of Jim's society toward the bi-racial child. Radical progression of these views will be upon us when bi-racial children are seen as an equal member of both cultures from which they were conceived. It will come when bi-racial children embrace both cultures, the black and the white. More importantly, however, radical progression will have occurred when both cultures embrace their bi-racial children as well. Progression that is radical will consist of acceptance of inter-racial marriages rather than just tolerance for them. Unfortunately, I do not see this kind of progression in my life as my generation like others before it will continue to pass on these two attitudes.

