

Strong Views on Interracial Dating

Contributed by Vanessa Philogene -- Black College Wire
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Virgin Islands students express opinions -- and objections

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Have we finally moved on from racial prejudice in this country? If it's OK to have a black man in the White House, what about a black man in the embrace of a white woman? Or, vice-versa? How do individuals really and truly feel about that? According to a Gallup poll, 95 percent of young Americans between the age of 18-29, and 45 percent of those 65 or over of all races accept interracial dating. And almost half of all Americans of all races have been involved in an interracial relationship.

Nevertheless, as I spoke informally to a number of students at UVI, I got a surprising amount of negative reaction to the notion of interracial dating -- some who opposed it based on the history of slavery, some opposing it because of cultural differences, while others say it's no big deal.

Their Points of View

I asked one of my black girlfriends from California, Irys Watson, sophomore in General Studies, if she would date a white man. Her response was startling.

"I would rather date a Mexican before I date a white person." A white man, she said, might try to be a "master" over her. As for her comparison to a Mexican man, I decided to leave that alone.

One of my black classmates, April Glasgow, told me that given the stigma of slavery, she doesn't know how the two races could live together, and therefore she would feel uncomfortable dating a white man. While she said she's not suggesting a white man in today's world would treat her as a slave, she couldn't help being reminded of history. Besides, there's the matter of chemistry. "I don't find white men attractive," said Glasgow.

For Glasgow, there are things about a Black man, like his presence, the way he speaks, his skin, and the texture of his hair, that she is attracted to and wouldn't trade for anything.

Like Glasgow, Zuri Baker, freshman in Education, and Mahlik Baker, freshman in Biology, both of whom are black, believe that culture plays a big part in choosing a significant other.

"It's a (matter of) parental influence to prefer my own race," said Zuri. She believes that it's part of human nature to gravitate to what's familiar. And, Mahlik told me that dating has to do with culture and culture reminds him to keep with his roots.

Even people involved in interracial relationships can be challenged by racial stereotypes. Take this white woman I spoke to recently who is involved with a black man. Although it was her first experience with a black man she concluded that white guys are more caring than black guys.

"I didn't have any concern before getting in the relationship, but I feared that he would date another woman while dating me," she said, asking not to be named. She believes that it was part of his culture to date multiple women at once. I was quite surprised by the comment and thought it was very interesting how she boils it all down to race, and not personality.

Monica Johnson, a sophomore in Communications, who is black, said that love has no color, and you can't help who you love. She added that it doesn't matter if you're black or white. But she does feel it's important for individuals to maintain their culture and roots.

"When a black woman is dating a white man, she has two sets of identity," Johnson said. "I hope that she knows who she is and stays that way."

Same thing for a white woman, according to Johnson, who said she believes that white women sometimes attempt to conform when dating a black man. "If a black man is attracted by that, they could just date a black woman," she said.

While she doesn't have a problem with interracial dating, Johnson does worry that some black men disrespect black women, and she finds that offensive.

"The black men who downplay the black women fail to realize they came from a black woman," Johnson said. "So everything they say about black women, they're saying it to their mother."

My Point of View

Both of my parents are black and are natives of Haiti, but I was born in Connecticut. At two months old, my mom took me to Haiti, where I lived for 14 years. Then I moved to Brooklyn, and lived in a predominantly black and Jewish neighborhood. Four years later, I relocated to Iowa for college. Iowa is a very white world, totally the opposite of what I was used to.

Many would say I carry in me Caribbean values and spent most of my life around black people, which is true. But, I'm in love with a white man.

My choice to date a white man is personal, not cultural. All my past boyfriends have been black, but why limit myself because of culture? There's nothing wrong with something new.

We all know that true love is not based on physical characteristics alone, but on who the person is and how they treat you. Nevertheless, ever since we got together, nearly two years ago, I've been questioned about my relationship.

"What's it like to date a white man?" "How could you possibly be with him as a black woman?" "Don't you know your history?"

I remember one time in one of my classes at Iowa State University we were doing a question and answer activity. After a couple of fun trials, one of my peers told me that she always wanted to know how my relationship was with my boyfriend in terms of race. Surprised, I told her that most times it's like any other relationship I've been involved in.

I told her that as a matter of fact, it is society that reminds us that we are different. Caleb and I don't let the color of our skin get in the way of our happiness. We were aware of our skin color before we got into the relationship.

"What about your boyfriend, who I know you love deeply," I replied. "Let's say he was white, would you still love him?"

She was adamant that she couldn't. He would be too aligned to the history of slavery and she couldn't shake that perception.

I totally understood where she was coming from. I know the history. I just don't let it define my future or come in between my happiness. As a Haitian, I have a history that is a bit different than that of an African-American. We've been independent since 1804 -- more than 200 years of freedom.

I'm not using that as a justification for me dating a white man, but I grew up in a home that didn't have mixed feelings about white people. I was always reminded that I was equal to them and should get along with them.

Therefore when I'm with my boyfriend, history doesn't cross my mind. He's too good to me to judge him based on the past. I am comfortable enough to love him because, regardless of all stereotypes, he's the one, of all my past boyfriends, who has introduced me to romance. The one who has let me experience the true definition of love.

Today, I'm pleased to know there are many blacks who are open to date interracially. However, I'm still amazed in today's world that race is such a big factor in finding love.

One thing that I concluded is that the inclination to judge based on race still exists, even when it comes to dating. I simply hope that when my children start dating they won't have to defend their choices if the person they love is not the same color.

Like Martin Luther King Jr., I dream to one day live in a nation where a person will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

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Vanessa Philogene wrote this article for the UVI Voice, the University of the Virgin Islands student newspaper, where it originally appeared.