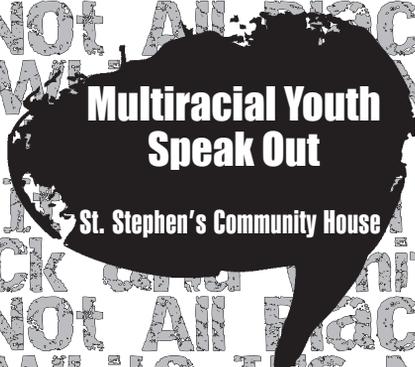


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**Multiracial Youth
Speak Out**

St. Stephen's Community House



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toronto + new york + vancouver

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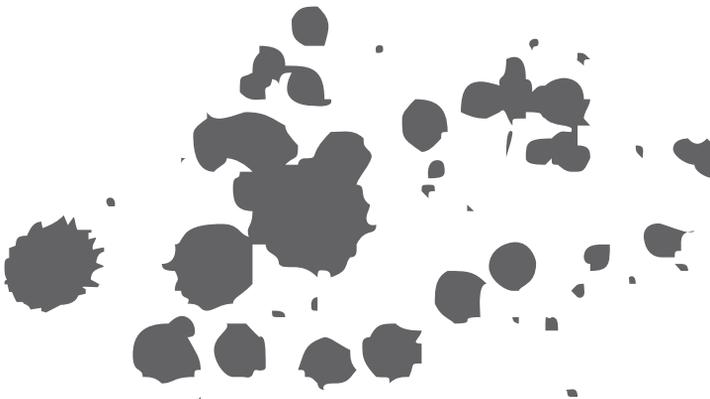




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Preface



“Wow, what good hair you have!”

“Such a beautiful complexion! You are so exotic.”

“Are you mixed? What is your background?”

These are the types of reactions I have elicited since I was a child, and they continue today. I am West Indian, French Armenian, and Canadian, so it is not surprising that people want to figure out who I am.

My biracial journey began at the nursery with a confused father looking for a brown kid. My dad was surprised to find a very light—almost white—baby with straight, black hair. It was a different time, when interracial relationships were not as accepted and mixed-race kids were few. As a kid, I didn’t understand the complexity of race or the labels “mulatto,” “half-breed,” or “mixed.” I simply knew that my mom was white and my dad was black.

In my teenage years, I would switch from trying to be “more black” to chilling with all white folks. I forgot I held black history and culture. I lived for years thinking that I was a white girl. It took a long time, but I finally embraced my black heritage. I now realize being biracial is a gift of strength, wisdom, and heightened awareness. I went through this confusing process in silence, but luckily you don’t have to.

It is thanks to St. Stephen’s Community House’s recognition of the increase in numbers of mixed-race youth and the importance of race and racial issues that this book is available.

St. Stephen’s Community House is a unique, community-based social service agency that has been serving the needs of Kensington

Market and surrounding neighborhoods in downtown West Toronto since 1962.

I was privileged to begin working with St. Stephen's Community House, Youth Department, many years ago. I recently became aware of a particular need for a focus on questions of racial identity, especially around being of mixed race, and so the project called Making Sense of One was created.

I coordinated the project, which involved a group of phenomenal and wise youth who opened up and shared their stories, ultimately to create this book. In line with the Youth Department's philosophy that young people should be encouraged to think critically about themselves and the world around them, the book addresses key issues that affect multiracial youth as the experts of their own lives. It is St. Stephen's third book for youth published with Annick Press. The first two are books about teen sexuality: *The Little Black Book for Girlz* and *The Little Black Book for Guys*.

It is our hope that you will find some connection to the stories presented here and that they will encourage conversations about race. The ultimate goal is that one day we will look beyond race—to come to an acceptance of people regardless of our differences. Until then, this multicultural world requires us to maneuver among racial boxes. So while we wait for further change to occur, we hope that this book will help guide you. We know that these issues are complex and that this book may not cover all the topics connected to being of mixed race, but it is a good start. Journey with us.

—Karen Arthurton
Coordinator, Making Sense of One
St. Stephen's Community House, Youth Department



The Making Sense of One group: (top row, from left) lalo lorza, Yvonne Sanchez-Tieu, Kalale Dalton, Chiloah Turner, Bianca Craven, Janine Berridge; (bottom row, from left) Elizabeth Jennifer Hollo, Karuna Sagara, Karen Arthurton Absent: Bailey Allett, Andrew Ernest Brankley, Justin Robinson

INTRODUCTION

Yes, we made it! In 2010, a group of eleven young people began meeting at our community youth drop-in center on a weekly basis to talk about the one thing that we all had in common: being of mixed race. During this process, we also welcomed a number of new faces who donated their time to talk about race.

This local drop-in center, better known as the Youth Arcade, became a second home to many of us. Our group leader often spoke about the issues around being of mixed race, and we discovered this was something that we could all relate to, regardless of our ages.

It wasn't an issue we thought about on a day-to-day basis, but

after our discussions it was becoming increasingly clear that not only our group but also many like us have unique experiences and understandings of what it means to be multiracial. The interaction of two or more races comes with assets and privileges but also sometimes with feelings of confusion, anger, resentment, isolation, or rejection. We needed a positive space to experience and express our feelings, so we talked, we laughed, we argued, we cried, and we created this fantastic book, which reflects many of our conversations.

In this book you'll find a collection of personal stories, poetry, and artwork by a group of nearly twenty mixed-race youth. There are also interviews based on the experiences of those who are either mixed race and/or raising mixed-race children. We have also included the voices of several insightful mentors of older generations who have passed on their wisdom to us, and now to you. We hope you will find answers, gain insight, feel connected, and ultimately be inspired by our stories.

So read on, friends, read on ...

—*The Making Sense of One group*

RACE

What is *race*, anyway? There doesn't appear to be just one answer to this question. Some say that there are four races: black, white, red, and yellow. Others say that there are many: white, black, Asian, Aboriginal, or Hawaiian, for instance. Race has been used to classify humans according to their common ancestry, using physical characteristics such as skin color, stature, hair texture, and facial features as visible definers. Race is also used to describe a group of people who share some biological characteristics and who differ from other groups because of these characteristics. Still others say that there is no such thing as race, and that race was socially constructed to create divisions among groups. Even though its definition is not completely clear, race plays an important part in everyone's life, as does racism.

MIXED RACE

Mixed race is a broad term used to describe people whose ancestries come from multiple races. *Biracial* refers specifically to people with only two different races in their heritage (e.g., black and white). *Multiracial* refers specifically to people with two or more races (e.g., white, black, and Native American).

RACE VS CULTURE

Race is based on your physical and/or biological characteristics. *Culture* consists of the social aspects shared by a group of people, such as beliefs, religion, art, food, music, and so on. While a person can change and adapt his or her culture over time, his or her race(s) cannot change.

**Changing past,
constant future.
The two rivers join ...**

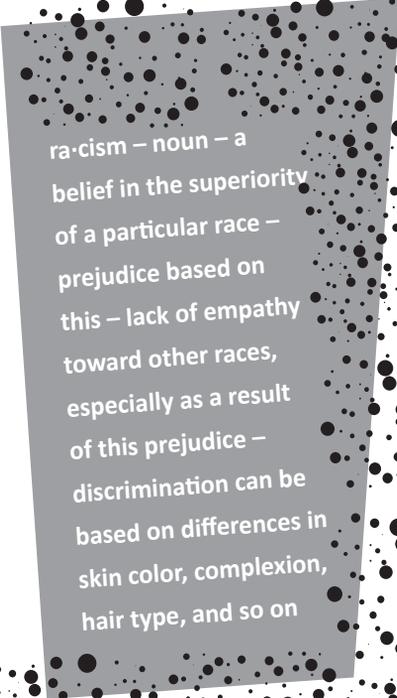
I view my future as being constant, because even though I am from two different cultures, I always picture a future that combines both—my two cultural and racial backgrounds flowing into one stream.

—Spencer Brigham

CHAPTER 1

We've Come a Long Way

So it is 2012, and we would like to believe that the world is free of racism, discrimination, and hate. All should be good now, but sadly, this is not the case. Although we have come a long way from the days when mixed-race relationships were taboo (and, in some places, illegal) and mixed-race folks were excluded, we still experience some challenges. Issues such as racism, stereotyping, and feelings of being unaccepted by friends and family continue to affect some mixed-race youth. In all this confusion, we are trying to make sense of how it's not all black and white: we explore race, culture, and ways to belong. In this chapter, you will hear from different generations of mixed-race people. Using poetry, testimonials, and interviews they will discuss what it means to be multiracial or to raise multiracial children. Join us as we uncover the first steps to finding our way home.



ra-cism – noun – a belief in the superiority of a particular race – prejudice based on this – lack of empathy toward other races, especially as a result of this prejudice – discrimination can be based on differences in skin color, complexion, hair type, and so on

ONE OF MANY

lalo lorza

Many people assume that children born mixed race grow up to be confused, lost, and isolated. This is true for some, but for others being mixed leads to exploration. Knowing where you come from helps you decide where you may want to go and unlocks mysteries long forgotten or kept secret.

Racism and oppression still thrive in the present, and mixed-race people are not excluded from racism. In fact, being mixed generally adds even more challenges, such as guilt, self-hate, and pressure to fit in. Even in the multicultural environment that many grew up with, mixed-race people may face discrimination from all sides and all angles.

We live in a world where people often categorize each other based on skin color and features. How can someone of two or more races feel comfortable in a single box when parts of who they are don't fit? The reality is that it's time for nonmixed people and systems to stop trying to fit us into racial categories and just accept the fact that we are not one race but many—or, as I like to say, we are many races that create ONE.

STOP trying to fit us in

Race Is Ubiquitous

Elizabeth Jennifer Hollo

The morning chill rushed to greet me as I exited the warmth of my three-story building. Smoky gray clouds enclosed the sky as the crisp air whisked about and bitterly caressed my cheeks. Autumn had arrived, although it felt more like winter. Blocking the wind's attempt to freeze my eyeballs, I strode out into the vicious winds. The warmth of the sweater's fuzz underneath my jacket made me feel snug, like sitting on a fur carpet in front of a fire in the dead of winter.

I had left early that Saturday morning to go to Hungarian school—by myself. It was a blessing from above; being independent made me feel more like a woman, like I was growing up. I had gotten up and gotten ready quickly, while my mother and father were still fast asleep. I made as little noise as I possibly could, then I woke my father up when I was finished.

"Daddy, I'm going to school!"

He sat up briskly, fetched his oversized glasses from the table, and looked me up and down.

"I won't make it on time if you come, Papa. You should stay and go back to sleep."

He smiled slightly, reached over to grab his wallet, and pulled out two bus tickets. I took them with a grin and kissed him while falling onto his neck for a hug. Somehow I knew he understood.



The chilly air meant nothing against the warmth of my clothing. My mind was weaving in and out of the nature around me: the colors of the changing leaves, the crunching sound the dry ones made as I treaded heavily through the field. I looked up at the rain clouds above me as it began to drizzle. Contentment set in as I felt the relief of the clouds releasing their moisture onto the earth. Feeling magnificent, feeling mature, feeling blissful and blessed. Who knew it could be wrenched away so fast?

Dressed in pink, old, and gray, I'd have never thought of her that way.

Didn't know her from anywhere; she just came near.

She grimaced at me and winced away.

"Nigger," she whispered. "Filthy," she sneered.

My heart skipped a beat.

My blood began to curl.

The world stopped moving.

"Nigger!" she screamed.

"You're a criminal!" she said.

My face boiled up. I swear I turned red!

Shocked, infuriated, heartbroken, and in tears.

Confused and frustrated, not knowing what to do.

"What?" I cried, as she cringed away.

"You filthy nigger!" she screeched, hurrying her pace.



*“What did I do?” I squealed after her,
trying to catch up.
She turned to me, her eyes threatening
my every move.
Stopped in my tracks; wounded to the
core.
She turned and ran, swearing at me.
I watched her go, watched her scream.
Wondering, why me?*

Until that day I never really knew what racism was or what effect it could have on you. When I experienced it in elementary school I didn't understand, but as I stood there—heart icy as snow, blood past boiling point, mind in chaos, and feeling vulnerable—I became aware that racism is everywhere. It can strike at any time, and I have to be aware that race is a huge part of life, especially for a woman of color. Horrendous and remarkable all at once, race is ubiquitous.



IT'S 2012, WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN?

Bianca Craven

Black, white, and everything in-between
Racism, you thought you could go unseen
It's 2012, where have you been?
A thing of the past, 1918
When I was a kid, I thought I was black
Used to have my hair in braids, cornrows to the back
Played jump rope 'n' hopscotch, never stepped on a crack
I was just a kid, hangman and tic tac
Then high school came, like "oh my gosh"
I'll never forget the first time I was called "whitewash"
It was by this white chick who thought she was hot
I kicked her right in her gut for talking her talk
That was the first fight of many to come
Are you white? Are you black? They'd all gather 'round
That word I don't like, I just don't like the sound
"Nigga," that's what some white people say when I'm not around
I heard it again and it came from a friend
It hurts me to hear, and she says it again
Black, white, and everything in-between
Just don't say the *N* word, you got it? Seen?
Well that's what I thought, you know what I mean
I keep hearing my own people say it, they say it to me
Black, white, and everything in between
They all say the *N* word, so it seems
It's 2012, where have you been?
Racism a thing of the past, 1993
We have come a long way, far too far
For us to still be calling each other "Nigga"
Black, white, and everything in between
Let's all become one, now dat would be sweet!