

**Richard J. Payne (1998) “Interracial Relationships and the One-Drop Rule”**

**Main point:** The main theme is that contrary to popular belief there is no such thing as a pure race. The chapter maintains the idea that racial mixing is not a new phenomenon and has occurred in many parts of the world. It goes on to specifically speak about the United States and our view on the issue. America used race as a way to maintain a binary way of thinking. Race was used as a justification to keep blacks inferior and whites superior. This way of thinking is currently meeting great opposition as interracial relationships begin to flourish. Particularly during the late 20<sup>th</sup> century the United States has seen a growth in the number of interracial marriages and relationships which consequently leads to many mixed race children. As these children grow and begin to fight social norms about race classifications it causes fears for those who would like the one-drop rule to prevail. A push is currently being made for a multiracial category, but as many things involving race it is also meeting opposition from advocates with a “pure race” mentality.

**Central Issues and Concepts:**

*- Race is a social construction that thrives off of the acceptance of categories and boundaries determined mainly by physical appearance and visible traits. The fear of undermining the institution of racism causes many to oppose the idea of intermingling among the races. This intermingling may eventually turn into marriage and children, becoming an action that in turn strikes fear in those that believe race should be pure. As we have witnessed since the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century a move towards acceptance has begun. As noted by findings “64% people between the ages of 18-29 approve of interracial marriages as compared to the 27% of those over the age of 50” (154). These findings show that we are moving towards an era where race will not matter as much as it has in past generations.*

*-Eroding Racial Boundaries:* This section focuses on interracial relationships and the impact they have on society. Interracial relationships “increase sensitivity to and awareness of racial problems; provide greater access to social, economic, and political opportunities; and challenge the concepts of racial superiority and inferiority” (154). Interracial relationships may cause others to accept the idea because they actually know someone who is involved with an individual of a different race. As interracial relationships increase the value of race begins to decrease because it can no longer be seen as “pure”.

*-The Myth of Racial Purity:* “Belief in racial purity rests on the fallacy of the existence of biologically distinguishable groups of people called “races”” (157). The intermingling of races is not a new idea and is something that can be dated back to the Arabs mixing with the Africans and the Spanish mixing with the Africans in 1444. As far as we are concerned race mixing has been a part of culture whether accepted by the general population or not. In the U.S strict laws were enforced to stop the intermixing of races sexually but of course did not succeed because our

nation is still characterized by biracial individuals of African, Caucasian, and American Indian descent.

*-The One-Drop Rule:* The one-drop rule began as a way to keep order. It was the idea that even one-drop of black blood made you black and the one-drop only pertained to blacks. The one-drop rule was used to clarify the status of interracial children and in some areas it offered them luxuries over their full black counterparts. Ironically enough the one-drop rule began to be favored by many because it created a bond between interracial people and blacks. Furthermore, “the increasing number of interracial relationships and society’s growing racial tolerance combine to weaken the one-drop rule and thereby the concept of race as well” (164).

*-The Growth of interracial Relationships:* After the Loving v. Virginia case in 1967 we begin to see a greater acceptance for interracial relationships. People have many reasons for the sudden increase of interracial marriages. One reason is the idea that once an individual in a family crosses the race lines it is easier for other members of that family to engage in interracial relationships. Also, many black women say the lack of highly educated black men causes them to seek white men of similar educational backgrounds. Lastly, the media has also aided in the greater acceptance of interracial marriages because they have begun to portray it in a positive light.

*-Fear and Rejection of Interracial Relationships:* On the other hand some still believe that “racial mixing must be discouraged to maintain natural order” (168). Many people do not believe in interracial relationships because they would like to maintain the concept of black and white. Interracial children are forced to choose between one of their ethnicities and it completely skews the idea of race. It can also cause families to break up and children to be disowned by their relatives. Many white women when marrying blacks experience “social death”. They are often chastised, disowned, and looked at as symbolically “unwhitened” because of their choice to date outside their race.

*-A multicultural category:* Supporters of a multicultural category believe it would “support the view that America is moving beyond race” (169). In the past the Census did have an array of choices in regards to race. Proponents of this category say “it’s an important catalyst of racial change because it does not cause them to disregard part of their heritage to fit into existing categories” (170). As always they are being met with opposition by groups such as the NAACP and NCLR who say a category such as this would undermine the implementation of affirmative action.

### **Two Key Quotes:**

“The survival of the one-drop rule depends on the willingness of Americans, especially those of racially mixed ancestry, to accept society’s definition of them as belonging to racially pure categories” (164).

“To maintain white privilege and status, legislators conferred the status of the black parent, most frequently the mother, on these children” (161).

**Key Questions:**

Do you believe the one-drop rule is still evident in our society? If yes, do you believe it is used as a discriminatory tool?

How would a multicultural category solve the issues of race in our society? Would it be more trouble than it's worth?

If we are a society that prides itself on equality then why is race necessary? How does the ability to call someone black or white aid in the progression of our nation?

Do interracial relationships have a positive or negative impact on our society?

Do you believe there is a difference between a black woman dating a white man and a white woman dating a black man? Is one more accepted than the other?

And if the argument for black women is that not enough “good” black men are around, why do we see black men and white women together?