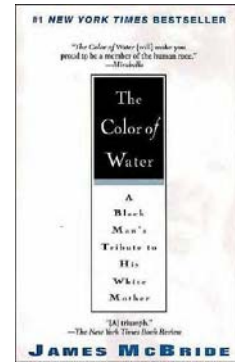


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English II

Essay #2

October 10, 2005



# THE COLOR OF WATER

By: James McBride



I loved reading The Color of Water, which is an autobiography and a black man's tribute to his white mother, written by James McBride. James and his mother narrate it. In this book, James talks about how it was for him growing up bi-racial, his mother being a white Jewish woman and his dad being African American. His mother talks about how it was being white, Jewish, married to a black man, and living in a very prejudice society. I think every part of this book reminded me of myself, my own mother, my boyfriend, and of the fact that society has not changed much, even today.

We begin learning the minute we are born, as did our parents and their parents and so on. Parents teach their children what they believe is the right way to live and instill their morals in their children, which was taught to them by their own parents. My grandmother was taught that races shouldn't mix; therefore, she believed this to be the right way to live. She then taught this same way of life to her children, one being my mother, who then tried to teach it to me. My mother taught me against mixing races, not because of being a prejudice person herself, but because of others who are prejudice. The white race is very prejudice when it comes to the black race and she was trying to spare us the hurt we would receive from those who were prejudice. For generation after generation after generation, white people have drilled into the heads of their children that the black race is no good and families should not mix. In my eyes, this is very wrong. There comes a day in our lives when we have to decide what we believe is right in our own hearts. Some of us will set aside all that we were taught about mixing races and just chose on our own what is best for ourselves regardless of what others think. I did. What I want to know is what nationalities does the white man consider white? An Italian person is not white, nor is a Chinese, Japanese, Greek, Indian, Mexican, or Arab person. What I see in society today, is that it is okay for a white person to marry an Italian or any of the other nationalities I have

listed. What is the difference if a white person marries an African American? My belief is that God wants the world to be a peaceful, loving place where people can get along and love each other freely regardless of what color or race they are. This is something that James' mother, Ruth, believed in and stood by no matter what the consequences were to come. In that sense, I am just like her. My boyfriend, who my mother thinks is wonderful, is bi-racial and grew up about the same time as James McBride. His mother is white and his father, now deceased, was African American. We sometimes can't help whom we fall in love with. I am not going to stop loving someone because society says that it is wrong to love the person I love. How can love not be right? Isn't love right and hate wrong? If someone has a problem with the way I choose to live my life, then that's it, it is his or her problem, not mine. There is only one above myself that I am here to please and that is God.

While growing up, James was very worried about his mother. He looked at her white skin as being very different from those around them. His mother chose to live in a black community instead of a white community. I think this was not only because she felt that black people were more loving than the Jewish family that she grew up in, but also because her children would be more accepted. She, like my mother, was trying to spare her children from being ridiculed by white people, most of which were prejudice. She didn't care that she was different. James knew that there were blacks that were also prejudice when it came to the whites. All the talk about black power made him fear for his mother's life. His mother, however, was not afraid. I think she also felt more accepted by blacks than whites. She had been through so many bad things growing up. The people she chose to live amongst were a breath of fresh air considering the Jewish customs she was raised by and the fact that she was molested by her father who was supposed to be an Orthodox Jewish Rabbi. Her father was

constantly saying that he hated black people and would call their children bad names in Yiddish. He would say, "Look at them laughing. They don't have a dime in their pocket and they're always laughing." During this part of Ruth's story, she recalls how her father had plenty of money, but her family was still miserable. I think this taught Ruth something. I think she learned from her poor, black neighbors that richness and being happy comes from love and family closeness and not from how much money you have in your pocket. This is an example of what I said before about people drilling into the minds of their children that black people are bad. Ruth just decided that she would decide on her own if they were good or bad and she found out that they were no different than her except for the color of their skin.

While James struggled with his identity his mother stayed strong, and taught her children what the true meaning of "family" really is. I'm sure that my boyfriend, John, had similar feelings growing up. When John entered high school, there were only about five or six bi-racial, half black, half white kids in the whole school. He was one of them. One day when James was young, he and his mother were on their way home from church and he asked her if God was black or white. His mother responded by saying, "Oh boy...God's not black. He's not white. He's a spirit." Then James says, "Does he like white or black people better?" His mother says, "He loves all people. He's a spirit." James then asks his mother, "What's a spirit?" His mother tells him, "A spirit's a spirit." Then James asks, "What color is God's spirit?" His mother answers by saying, "It doesn't have a color. God is the color of water. Water does not have a color." In my eyes, Ruth is a very wise woman who taught her children well. Her answer to James' question was perfect. It is exactly how I look at God's color. When I, as a child, asked my own mother about God, she told me that He is a spirit. When I asked her what a spirit looked like she told me that you couldn't see a spirit. She told me that a spirit is invisible and God's

spirit is with everybody at all times. James believed his mother's answer, but his older brother, Richie, had a problem believing it because of the picture of Jesus in the bible, which portrays a white man.

My mother was like Ruth in a lot of ways, raising us pretty much by herself and teaching us how to be independent through her strength. She taught us that family was everything and that I would find no better friend than my own sister, Paula. It didn't matter how sad she was or how bad she felt about her own life as long as our lives were happy. She worked very hard to raise us on her own. When I was a little girl she did everything possible to ensure every holiday was magical for us. I could never have asked for a better mother than my own. James talks in his book about how there was a certain time for everything in his house including a time for supper, a time for homework, a time for bed, and so on. His mother instilled in him and his siblings that church and school were the most important things throughout life, not to mention family. She believed that it didn't matter what color your skin was, if you wanted to be somebody in this world, you had to get an education. My mother would preach the same thing to me and would take me to Sunday school at church every week. After my children were born, my mother became a Sunday school teacher at our church. I remember a song we used to sing at Sunday school. It is called Jesus Loves the Little Children of the World. It was one of my favorites. It was still sung by all the kids, including my kids, during the time when my mom was a Sunday school teacher. It goes like this:

Jesus loves the little children,  
All the children of the world.  
Red and yellow, black and white,  
They are precious in His sight.  
Jesus loves the little children of the world.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if this song and its meaning were instilled in the hearts of every person on this earth regardless of his or her race?