

Analysis: Race now -- Not black & white-1

By Steve Sailer

UPI National Correspondent

From the Washington Politics & Policy Desk

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LOS ANGELES, May 8 (UPI) -- Probably the most striking moment during the otherwise interminable 2002 Academy Awards broadcast was Halle Berry's emotional Best Actress Oscar acceptance speech.

Having campaigned for the Oscar on the platform that she should receive it as a symbolic reparation to all the African-American actresses before her who had not won it, Berry exulted, "It's for every nameless, faceless woman of color who now has a chance because this door tonight has been opened." Yet, at about that point, ABC flashed a quick shot of the ex-beauty queen's mother, who is a blonde white woman.

In America's complex racial system, there isn't much about blacks and whites that is completely black or white.

This begins a series of three articles on an important, but seldom rigorously analyzed facet of the American people: What population geneticists call the "admixture" of the races. Data from new sources now allows a much more revealing picture of racial mixing in the U.S. than was possible until very recently.

The issue has political significance: University of California regent Ward Connerly, the leader of the victorious 1996 Proposition 209 initiative campaign to outlaw racial preferences in that state, has collected enough signatures to get on the ballot a new proposal that he calls the Racial Privacy Initiative. (It's uncertain whether it will be on the 2002 or 2004 ballot.)

It would ban most uses of racial classifications by the state of California. In its first Field Poll, likely voters favored the Racial Privacy Initiative almost three to two.

Although Connerly is almost always labeled "black," he points out that he is actually black, white, and American Indian. And he has grandchildren who are Asian as well. He believes that racial classifications are outmoded and divisive.

An ongoing genetic study of black-white admixture conducted by molecular anthropologists at Penn State University has for the first time confidently answered old questions about how intermingled are the family trees of African-Americans and European-Americans.

One of the answers turned out to be personally stunning to the leader of the Penn St. project. Recently, Prof. Mark D. Shriver, a 36-year-old with typical European features, decided to investigate in detail one of the most unusual of his anonymous data points -- that of a self-identified white whose genes indicated that he was a full 22 percent African by ancestry.

To the amazement of the geneticist -- and his parents -- this mixed origin individual proved to be Shriver himself! The young scientist has no apparent black features.

The more general findings of Shriver's illuminating study will be the subject of the next article in this series.

The third article will examine a striking contrast to America's racial structure: the nearly total disappearance of Mexico's African-looking people. In colonial Mexico's 1810 census, a tenth of the population was labeled "Afro-Mexican." What happened to them?

Another new data source is providing a different but also informative perspective on racial mixing in the U.S. In 2000, for the first time, the Census allowed Americans to designate themselves, or their children, as being of more than one race.

The old "One Drop of Blood" rule, which said that anyone who has any black ancestry is African-American, appears to be eroding finally. The Census found that among people over age 65 who called themselves at least part black, a mere two percent said they were also some other race. (This will be referred to as the "black and other" percentage.) In contrast, 12.6 percent of the newborns in 2000 who were at least partially black were (according to their parents) of more than one race. (To put this in perspective, 29 percent of babies who are at least partially Asian are of mixed race, according to the Census.)

This "black and other race" percentage appears to have doubled within the past dozen years. Among 10- to 13-year-old blacks, only 6.3 percent were called "black and other" by their parents or guardians.

What exactly do these "black and other" Census figures mean? They are quite different from Shriver's genetic data, which show that -- at least outside of the rural South -- a large fraction of African-Americans possess some white ancestors.

In the United States, however, during Colonial times the rule became that any individual with "one drop" of African blood (or, alternately, at least one pure African great-grandparent) was to be considered black and nothing else.

There were exceptions: New Orleans famously tended to follow the more flexible and complicated Latin American system of racial classification. In general, though, all but the whitest-looking mixed race individuals were blocked from calling themselves anything but black. So, even today, most Americans of mixed black-white descent identify themselves on the Census as being only black.

According to demographer William H. Frey of the University of Michigan and the Milken Institute of Santa Monica, Calif., those who told the Census Bureau they were black and some other race typically have a non-black parent or grandparent. People who decide to go through the trouble of personally standing up to society's "one drop" rule generally do it to honor both their parents. Unlike Berry, many individuals with parents of different races protest that choosing just one parent's race would be disloyal to the other parent.

Most famously, Masters champion Tiger Woods ruffled the feathers of some blacks in 1997 by insisting that he was both black and Thai. (In fact, Woods sometimes uses the fanciful term he invented as a boy, "Cauklinasian," to indicate that he is Caucasian, black, Indian and Asian.)

Similarly, The Rock, star of the hit movie "The Scorpion King," is both black and Samoan.

In the 2000 Census, one of every eight new African-American babies was identified by his or her parents as being "black and other," compared to one of every sixteen 10-13 year olds. What does that mean? It presumably indicates that the number of offspring of mixed race matings has approximately doubled over the last dozen years.

Support for this comes in state-level data, which Frey recently published in a Milken Institute report. The "black and other" percentages of the black totals range from a low of 0.7 percent in heavily black Mississippi to 38 percent in nearly all-white Montana.

The "black and other" percentages of the various states correlates closely with the fraction of each state's population that identifies itself as African-American. According to a UPI statistical analysis of Frey's data, the black share of the state's population explains 87 percent of the differences in the "black and other" rate.

The chance that a black person will have a child with a person of another race is low in a state like Mississippi, where there are lots of other African-Americans around to pair up with. In Montana, however, where blacks are rare, African-Americans are more likely than in Mississippi to content themselves with a non-black mate. This consistent pattern suggests that for most blacks, a black mate would be their first choice.

The states that diverge somewhat from this pattern offer interesting clues about what drives interracial matings in modern America.

In Southern states, where the "one drop rule" had been most ferociously enforced, "black and other" individuals tend to be even rarer than one would expect judging from their large black share of the population. Frey noted, "The identification of blacks with their race is much more distinct in the South than in other parts of the country."

Other states with fewer than expected "black and others" include Illinois, where there is a high degree of residential segregation that keeps the races physically apart, thus discouraging interracial romance. Most blacks live in Chicago, while most whites live either in the city's suburbs or in the more rural Downstate area.

Another state with a lower than predicted "black or others" percentage is New Mexico, where the high proportion of Spanish-speakers and Indians on reservations lowers the proportion of children born to mixed race couples.

Even California, which is famous for its plentiful white-Asian interracial couples, does not have a particularly large number of "black and others." This is probably due to the state's large number of immigrants. According to a study by Sonya M. Tafoya of the Public Policy Institute of California, immigrants in the Golden State are only about one third as likely to marry interracially as native-born Americans. Language and cultural differences get in the way of cross-racial romance.

The most unexpectedly high percentage of "black and other" Census respondents is in Hawaii. The Aloha State has long enjoyed the highest overall rate of interracial marriage in the country. Further, many blacks in Hawaii moved there while serving in the armed forces. Service members are more likely to marry interracially than the general population. Alaska, another heavily military state, is also near the top of this list more mixed than expected.

Rhode Island and Massachusetts have far more "black and other" individuals than their black share of the population would indicate. This is driven in part by those two states' large numbers of Cape Verdeans. These are mixed race Portuguese-African islanders from a small island nation off the coast of West Africa.

Cape Verdeans are one of the few non-Hispanic populations who collectively consider themselves part black today. In contrast, the once self-consciously mixed race populations of New Orleans no longer show up in the Census. Although population geneticist Shriver found that New Orleans' black population does indeed have one of the higher white admixture rates in the country (22 percent), only one percent of Louisiana's African-American population identified themselves in 2000 as "black and other." The rise of black pride in the mid-20th century made unfashionable the discriminatory elitism of New Orleans' "octoroons" and "quadroons."

Politically and socially liberal states like Maryland, Minnesota, New York and Washington state also feature a greater than expected number of "black and others."

Next in the series: Genetically speaking, how white is the average black? How black is the average white?

Analysis: White prof finds he's not -- 2

By Steve Sailer

UPI National Correspondent

From the [Washington Politics & Policy Desk](#)

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LOS ANGELES, May 8 (UPI) -- How white are blacks? How black are whites?

Because African-Americans and European-Americans have been in contact, sometimes intimate, since 1619, these questions are central to Americans' collective self-understanding. In recent years, genetic techniques for accurately determining the answers have finally become available.

Molecular anthropologist Mark D. Shriver heads a group of nine population researchers at Penn State University who are going beyond the arbitrary "one drop of blood" rule to answer these ancient questions about the family trees of the typical American "black" and "white."

They have examined DNA samples from 3,000 individuals in 25 locations around America, mostly self-identified African-Americans, looking for the gene markers that tend to differ between Europeans and Africans.

Shriver pointed out that genetically tracking admixture is difficult because differences even between subraces, such as Scandinavian versus West African, account for only about ten percent of human genetic variation. "Thus, we are all more alike than we are different," he noted.

Besides illuminating American history, Shriver hopes to use his ability to determine racial admixture to locate genes associated with illnesses that affect one race more than the other -- such as diabetes, prostate cancer, and hypertension, which are more prevalent among African-Americans, and dementia and osteoporosis among whites.

To Shriver, the most personally stunning of his findings involved one subject who reported himself to be completely white, yet whose genetic analysis showed that 22 percent of his relatively recent ancestors were African.

"I had the result for two or three years before I even looked up the ID number of the person whom we tested," a bemused Shriver recounted. "I looked at who it was and it was me! I checked myself and the rest of my relatives and tracked it through my family."

"I never considered that there were any African people in my family," remarked the 36-year-old Shriver, who looks like a typical white American. He has wavy brown hair and light skin that burns easily, but also tans darkly.

His siblings look completely European, too. "There's no real variation in my family. The admixture must have been pretty far back. It just so happens that we can detect it with the markers we have."

"My mom especially stood out as being surprised, maybe because I told her it was coming through her father." He credits his Catholic parents with providing him with a "balanced, open, and egalitarian perspective about people. But, still, she doesn't believe it about her family!"

"The part of Pennsylvania where my mother's father came from is where the Underground Railroad ended," Shriver observed, referring to the network that smuggled escaped slaves north to freedom. "There are several towns right here in Southern Pennsylvania where there are very light-skinned African-American communities that are the remnant of the Underground Railroad."

His maternal grandfather moved from Pennsylvania to Iowa, then to California, leaving behind in the process most of his ties with his relatives. Shriver is considering trying to track down his maternal grandfather's relations in Pennsylvania.

The subject of black-white admixture is particularly complicated because, since the later 17th Century, Americans with virtually any visible sub-Saharan African ancestry (the so-called "one drop of blood") have been socially categorized as simply African. Only recently has society begun to tolerate individuals like Tiger Woods (who is one-half East Asian, one-quarter sub-Saharan African, one-eighth European, and one-eighth Native American) defining themselves as anything other than as African. Indeed, Woods was criticized by some African-Americans in 1997, following the first of his three Masters' victories, for not submitting to the "one drop" definition.

Is Shriver's ancestry fairly typical for an American? In two ways, it is. First, more than 50 million whites, according to his analyses, have at least one black ancestor.

Another way to approach the question is to group together all the whites and blacks in America and calculate their mean degree of admixture. Shriver's data shows that on average, they would be about 12 or 13 percent African. So, Shriver, at 22 percent African, is fairly close to the mean.

Yet, from another perspective, Shriver is highly unusual. Even though his family tree is similar in its racial balance to the theoretical mean for blacks and whites combined, there simply aren't many African-Americans or European-Americans with anywhere near his level of admixture. Shriver pointed out, "There is a very small degree of overlap in the

population distributions." In America, most of the whites are extremely European and most of the blacks are quite African.

Despite the notorious arbitrariness of the "one drop" rule, the actual American population conforms to its strictures surprisingly closely.

Granted, the "one drop" rule would be laughed out of existence if anyone attempted to impose it on a land with a more genetically blended population, such as Puerto Rico (which Shriver has begun to study). Yet, it appears possible that the rule survives in the U.S. because it's not too wildly inaccurate. Only a small fraction of the population resembles Shriver in being more than half, but less than 90 percent European.

Among self-identified whites in Shriver's sample, the average black admixture is only 0.7 percent. That's the equivalent of having among your 128 great-great-great-great-great-grandparents (who lived around two centuries ago), 127 whites and one black.

It appears that 70 percent of whites have no African ancestors. Among the 30 percent who do, the black admixture is around 2.3 percent, which would be like having about three black ancestors out of those 128.

In contrast, African-Americans are much more racially mixed than European-Americans. Yet, Shriver's study shows that they are less European than was previously believed.

Earlier, cruder studies, done before direct genetic testing was feasible, suggested that African-Americans were 25 or even 30 percent white. Shriver's project is not complete, but with data from 25 sites already in, he is coming up with 17-18 percent white ancestry among African-Americans. That's the equivalent of 106 of those 128 of your ancestors from seven generations ago having been Africans and 22 Europeans.

According to Shriver, only about 10 percent of African-Americans are over 50 percent white.

This genetic database is restricted to adults. Black-white married couples quadrupled in number between the 1960 Census and 1990 Census, so the admixture rates among children are no doubt higher than among adults.

Political conservatives have taken to denouncing the "one drop" rule -- George Will recently called it "Probably the most pernicious idea ever to gain general acceptance in America" -- perhaps because it is used to determine who qualifies for affirmative action for blacks. Many opponents of racial preferences now argue that it is absurd to award benefits based on this arbitrary definition. This view is embodied in Ward Connerly's upcoming Racial Privacy Initiative, which would partially ban the state of California from demanding citizens categorize themselves by race.

The number of mostly white but a little-bit-black young people -- the kind who cause confusion for affirmative action classification schemes -- is growing as interracial marriage becomes more popular. On the other hand, as Shriver's data shows, there aren't yet all that many adults who fall genetically in the "gray zone" between the races. Perhaps at present the "one drop" rule, for all its theoretical folly, still is indeed good enough for government work -- assuming that government work should include racial preferences, which are now illegal in California.

The admixture rates vary by region. The African-American populations with the highest average numbers of white ancestors found so far are those in California and Seattle. They average a little over one-quarter European ancestry.

In contrast, according to a recent article published by Shriver's team in the *American Journal of Physical Anthropology*, the Gullahs of the long-isolated Sea Islands of South Carolina and Georgia, who are famous for speaking a pleasantly African-sounding dialect, are only 3-4 percent white.

In the rest of the rural South, African-Americans tend to be not as black as the Gullahs, but still blacker than the national average. Shriver's team found that the white admixture percentage in four Lowland farm counties in South Carolina was 12 percent.

Cities, whether Northern or Southern, tend to be about average. In terms of white ancestry among African-Americans, New York is a little above the mean, while Philadelphia is a little below. Jackson, Miss., is near the norm.

The African-Americans of New Orleans average 22 percent white. This fairly high number reflects the influence of Spanish and French mores in Louisiana. Latin cultures have no "one drop" rule, so intermarriage was somewhat more socially acceptable there.

Advocates of the growing popular idea that race is merely a "social construct" with no biological reality point to the artificiality of the "one drop" rule as evidence for their view. Yet, it's possible that the "one drop" rule itself helped to construct the genetic reality that Shriver has uncovered.

Latin cultures, which lack the one drop rule, create more evenly blended populations, as Shriver has helped document among Mexican-Americans. He and his colleagues found that Hispanics in certain New Mexico and Colorado locales averaged 58 percent white ancestry, 39 percent New World Indian, and three percent African.

In contrast to the "bimodal distribution" of blacks and whites in America, Mexican-Americans clustered around their average admixture level of 58 percent European.

For centuries, however, American whites defined anyone with visible black ancestry as ineligible to marry a white. (It wasn't until 1967 that the Supreme Court overturned the "anti-miscegenation" laws that were then still in force in 19 states.) This meant that mixed race people could seldom marry white people.

Unless, that is, they were white-looking enough to pass for white, and were willing to pull up their roots and move to a different part of the country where they could assume a white identity. This happened not infrequently in American history. For instance, one of the slave Sally Hemmings' one-eighth black sons (who, according to geneticists, was fathered by either Thomas Jefferson or one of his relations) moved to Madison, Wis., after he was freed and founded a family of socially identified whites. Nonetheless, Shriver's data suggests that well over 90 percent of the African genes in Americans are still found in people who call themselves black.

Over the generations, mixed-race lineages would tend to either pass into the white population and become more white with each generation's marriage to a white person, or stay in the African-American population. If the latter, the families would normally become more genetically African over time as their offspring married African-Americans.

Thus, the "one drop" rule helped make African-Americans and European-Americans into two social groups whose members -- despite sometimes being highly varied in ancestry -- are perhaps more distinct on average in their family trees than the arbitrariness of the "one drop" would lead you to initially assume.

In the final article in the series: What happened to the Africans of Mexico?

Analysis: Mexico's missing blacks - Part 3

By Steve Sailer

UPI National Correspondent

From the Washington Politics & Policy Desk

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LOS ANGELES, May 8 (UPI) -- Where did Mexico's blacks go?

The nearly complete absorption of Mexico's identifiably African people offers an intriguing contrast to the persistence of a rather distinct black race in the United State.

Most Americans, and even many Mexicans, don't realize that a significant fraction of the Mexican population once looked markedly African. At least 200,000 black slaves were imported into Mexico from Africa. By 1810, Mexicans considered at least part African members of the population numbered around a half million, or more than 10 percent of the population.

Mexican music, for example, has deep roots in West Africa. "La Bamba," the famous Mexican folk song that was given a rock beat by Ritchie Valens and a classic interpretation by Los Lobos, has been traced back to the Bamba district of Angola.

What's especially ironic about Mexico's "racial amnesia" -- a term coined by African-American historian Ted Vincent -- is that during Mexico's first century of independence, more than a few of its most famous leaders were visibly part black.

Emiliano Zapata was perhaps the noblest figure in 20th century Mexican politics, a peasant revolutionary still beloved as a martyred man of the people. Although Marlon Brando played him in the 1952 movie "Viva Zapata!" the best-known photograph of the illiterate idealist shows him with clearly African hair. His village had long been home to many descendents of freed slaves.

Similarly, Vicente Guerrero, a leading general in the Mexican War of Independence and the new nation's second president, appears from his portraits to have been part black.

Perhaps African-Mexicans were so often leading the revolutionary vanguard because they were even more oppressed by law than Mexico's Indians. Back in the 16th century, the great Spanish Bishop Bartolome de las Casas, the first modern human rights activist, in the sense of battling for justice for another race, persuaded the King of Spain to ban the enslavement of Indians, at least nominally. Yet, bondage for Africans remained legal until "El Negro Guerrero" officially abolished it in 1829. It had largely withered out before then, however.

The apparent assimilation of Mexico's ex-slaves into the overall gene pool is in marked contrast to America's experience, where the black race has remained relatively distinct. In the average self-declared white American's family tree, there is only the equivalent of one

black out of every 128 ancestors, according to the ongoing research of molecular anthropologist Mark D. Shriver of Penn State University and his colleagues. The completely white-looking Shriver discovered -- to his surprise -- that he himself was 22 percent African.

In fact, Mexico even differs from the rest of Latin America, where distinct black populations remain genetically unassimilated. "Mexico is unique in this regard," commented population geneticist Ricardo M. Cerda-Flores of the Mexico's Autonomous University in Nuevo Leon.

Cerda-Flores' team found that a sample of Mexicans living around Monterrey in Northeast Mexico averaged around 5 percent African by ancestry, according to its genetic markers. In other words, if you could accurately trace the typical family tree back until before the first Spaniards and their African slaves arrived in Mexico in 1519, you would find that about one out of twenty of the subjects' forebears were Africans.

Cerda-Flores and his colleagues also examined the DNA of Mexican-Americans in Texas, who came out as about 6 percent black. Other studies of Mexicans and Mexican-Americans by molecular anthropologists have come up with black admixture rates ranging from 3 percent to 8 percent.

By way of contrast, this appears to be, very roughly, something like half of the black ancestry level of the overall American population, as implied by Shriver's studies. Of course, most of the African ancestors of Americans are visibly concentrated among African-Americans, who average 82 percent to 83 percent black, according to Shriver. Among Mexicans, however, African genes appeared to be spread more broadly and evenly.

Nevertheless, the official ideology of Mexico has been that the Mexicans are simply a "mestizo" people -- a mixture of Spaniards and Indians -- officially referred to as "La Raza" or "The Race." Since 1928, Mexico has celebrated Oct. 12 as "The Day of The Race." On Oct. 12, 1946, Mexican politician José Vasconcelos famously declared mestizos to be "the cosmic race."

African-American anthropologist Bobby Vaughn wrote, "Issues of race have been so colored by Mexico's preoccupation with 'the Indian question' that the Afro-Mexican experience tends to blend almost invisibly into the background, even to Afro-Mexicans themselves. Mexico's official narratives ... leave Afro-Mexicans outside of the national consciousness."

That's because Mexico's national ideology centers on "the belief that contemporary Mexico is a kind of 'perfect blend' of both Spanish and Indian heritages, and that this synthesis is at the heart of what it means to be Mexican."

Socially, Mexico does not have any kind of "color line," in contrast to the United States, where "one drop of African blood" frequently categorizes a person as "black." For example, Oscar-winning actress Halle Berry's white mother raised Halle to think of herself as black, even though her African-American father abandoned the family when she was quite young. Those kind of sharp-edged racial categories seldom exist in Latin American countries.

In reality, Mexico's white-Indian racial blending is far less complete than Mexico's political orthodoxy would make it appear. What Mexico does have instead of a color line is a "color continuum." There are no sharp racial divides, yet the rule for social prestige remains "the whiter the better." For example, the stars of Mexican television are almost completely European. In fact, the actresses on Mexican "telenovelas" tend to be blonder than the ones on American soap operas.

Mexico's elites are much whiter looking than its working class. At 6'5" tall, President Vicente Fox stands roughly a head taller than the average Mexican man. Fox's paternal grandfather was an Irish-American born in Cincinnati.

There remain in dire poverty millions of virtually pureblooded Indian peasants, who speak the same Indian languages as their ancestors did before 1492.

This ideological assumption that all Mexicans are mestizo can lead to some amusing conundrums. For example, Luis Echeverria, president from 1970-1976, saw himself as the natural leader of the nonwhite Third World. The problem was that he, like most Mexican presidents, appeared to be pure white. So, he spent many hours under sun lamps, trying to tan himself into the Third World.

While it's easy to scoff at this "mestizo myth" as propaganda put out by the mostly white ruling class to keep the brown lower classes from noticing Mexico's racial hierarchy, its usefulness at maintaining the peace should not be despised. In recent decades, Mexico has suffered much less from racial violence than nearby Guatemala or more distant Peru. During the '80s in both of those countries, where attitudes of white superiority are more blatant than in Mexico, oppressed Indians joined Marxist intellectuals in guerilla wars against the white ruling class.

The Mexican populace's African "third root" is occasionally honored, but Mexican officials have generally ignored it. University of Minnesota demographer Robert McCaa wrote, "Afro-Mexicans, who numbered one-half million in 1810, more or less vanished, thoroughly intermingled and unidentifiable by 1895 if the official discourse is accepted at face value."

That discourse should be viewed skeptically. It's unlikely that African racial characteristics had become so blended in by 1895 that they had actually vanished. Yet, since then, black genes appear to have been so broadly distributed around the population that few Mexican individuals stand out today as notably black.

In fact, the black contribution to Mexico's "cosmic race" has been so forgotten that in last November's race for governor of the state of Michoacán, Alfredo Anaya of the former ruling party PRI hammered away at his opponent Lázaro Cárdenas, the scion of Mexico's most famous leftist dynasty, for having a part-black Cuban wife and son.

Anaya argued, "There is a great feeling that we want to be governed by our own race, by our own people."

One of his supporters said, "It's one thing to be brown. The black race is something different."

Ultimately, this strategy failed, as Anaya lost. Still, he came within five percentage points of beating the son of Cuauhtemoc Cardenas, the man who is widely believed to have been

cheated out of Mexico's presidency in 1988 by massive PRI vote fraud. Further, this Lázaro Cárdenas is the grandson of The Lázaro Cárdenas, Mexico's most popular president, who is still adored for triumphing over the United States by nationalizing American-owned oil companies in 1938. So, considering the vast name recognition enjoyed by Cardenas, Anaya's pro-mestizo and anti-black ploy cannot be dismissed as wholly ineffectual.

By 2001, after generations of intermarriage, no more than 1 percent of the Mexican population is said to be identifiably African. Most of the remaining Afro-Mexicans are concentrated in the humid coastal regions, rather than the cooler highlands or dry northern desert.

There are self-consciously Afro-Mexican communities on the Gulf of Mexico near Vera Cruz, where the slave ships docked. There are heavily black villages on the Costa Chica on the Pacific, although the residents tend to see themselves as simply Mexicans with dark skins. One confusing factor is that Mexico also imported slaves from across the Pacific, including some African-looking New Guineans and also Negritos from the Philippines.

Life can be difficult for black Mexicans, because they are often assumed to be illegal immigrants from elsewhere in Latin America, such as Panama. The Mexican police often treat illegal aliens harshly.

Mexico's obliviousness to its black roots is slowly changing. An Afro-Mexican Museum recently opened south of Acapulco in Cuajinicuilapa in the state of Guerrero, which is named after the Afro-Mestizo second president.

So, what happened to the Afro-Mexicans who made up one tenth of the population in 1810?

The massive importation of East African slaves into the Middle East has not left much of a visible trace there either, although Prince Bandar, the Saudi Arabian ambassador to America, is clearly part black. Historian Bernard Lewis attributes this lack of blacks to the tendency in the Islamic world to castrate male slaves and work both sexes to death.

In contrast, the Mexican experience appears to have been much more benign. According to Cerda-Flores, intermarriage continued steadily until African genes had widely diffused into the population.

It's often argued these days that race is purely a "social construct." This view often puzzles geneticists, such as the forensic anthropologists who are employed by the police to examine hairs left at crime scenes and determine the race of suspects from their DNA.

Yet, there is a definite sense in which societies construct their own genetic makeups. America's color line and "one drop" rule have kept the genes of black Africans relatively isolated. In contrast, Mexico's color continuum and openness to interracial marriage have spread them so widely that there are few conspicuously black Mexicans left.