Who's Afraid of Post-Blackness?: What It Means to Be Black Now

Tour
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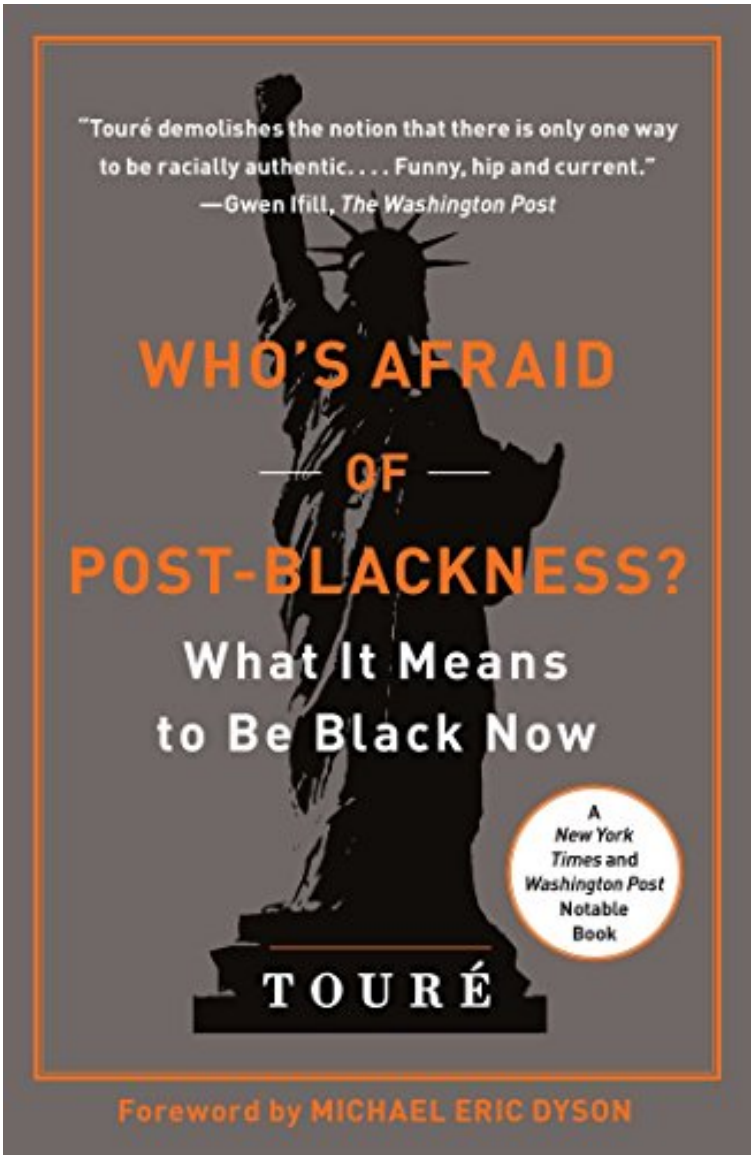

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Tour : Who's Afraid of Post-Blackness?: What It Means to Be Black Now before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Who's Afraid of Post-Blackness?: What It Means to Be Black Now:

14 of 15 people found the following review helpful. Great Book, Although It Contains Some InconsistenciesBy Jarrod JenkinsThis is a great book. I don't think Toure broke any new ground in this book. Rather, he provided comfort to those who think like him. A coming-out party if you will. All too often, Blacks who do not think or act "Black"

(whatever that means) find themselves persecuted by their own race.The biggest issue that I have is the chapter on how to have more Pres. Obamas. Toure sets the book up to say that it's okay to be post-Black. Indeed, he encourages people to be who they are not conform to any type of societal expectation. However, he says -- and I agree -- that President Obama's complexion helped him get elected. This, of course, begs the question how are we supposed to raise more President Obamas if skin complexion is immutable? Also, he says -- and again I agree -- that President Obama would not have been elected if he had a White wife. This flies in the face of his it's-okay-to-be-post-Black theory because if it truly were okay, one would not have to choose between marrying someone and running for President. This is the type of confined thinking that the book was intended to thwart.2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Good purchase/readBy Paige KillingerI am really glad I purchased this book.i feel like this book .BUT with hat being said.In my opinion, this book spent far to much time focusing on how my blackness is a reflection of racism .Which is absurd. Who i am as a black person and how my personal journey carries out has nothing to do with how white people perceive me.Being black in America does walk side by side with racism as has been a sad part of black history in this country but by no means does that define me.10 of 11 people found the following review helpful. Toure manifest and validates our experiencesBy Terry TeacherSubsequent to reading this epic piece I ordered a second book for my 25-year-old `King's English' speaking son who has never lived a day in his life in poverty. My son attended schools- high school and college - with fewer than 5% of people that looked like him (I often felt guilty for that); as opposed to his over 50 year old mother, who lived most of my days in `the projects' and actually remembers the `government cheese and peanut butter'. I must admit I experienced a rollercoaster of emotions as I read this book; mostly positive and elated that Toure so effectively and eloquently hit the nail on the head when manifesting our narrative. I had a visceral reaction to the way he brilliantly refers to and lays out the Black `shield' that we must construct and how it gets strengthened (or not) as we navigate our system. I want my son to read it because I think he will be able to relate to it on a lot of levels. Being able to apply language to our collective experiences gives them power and somewhat normalizes them. I want my son to be aware of this language because he's at the height of reinforcing his shield.On the other hand, in my opinion, Toure kind of blames the victim towards the end of his piece when he refers to how a lot of Black people, in affect, rebuke the system which leads to our rejection for employment and becoming high level executives. I'm not sure I fully agree when he refers to how a lot of Black people set themselves up to experience a self-fulfilling prophecy. I think it's unfair to juxtapose my son with my brother, for example, who grew up in poverty with a system that did not embrace him as a Black man with few to nil resources who was constantly reminded of his worth (or lack of it). He had a high school degree and I watched him struggle and try to get jobs, get close and then see the job go to a white person. During my varied professional career I've worked for the IBMs, Procter Gambles and the like and, even thought they did let a few Black men through, I observed how a Black man was not valued no matter how hard he tried. Also, as an elementary school teacher I witnessed first hand how acting-out little white boys were labeled `mischievous' while unchallenged, brilliant and creative little black boys that acted out were perceived and labeled as hoodlums or `truant'. In my current field as a social worker my heart breaks every time I counsel downtrodden Black men that this system has treaded on to the point where they have given up. No one can deny the white privilege along with the structural and systematic racism; though more subtle and maybe less often, but still prevalent in our system. I think this applies even more to the `abandoned' category of Blacks that Eugene Robinson's refers to in his book. His description of the abandoned: "with less hope of escaping poverty and dysfunction than at any time since Reconstruction".Finally, one term that resonated with me in the final chapter is the term `post whiteness' which may be more apropos in the near future.

Now in paperback, one of the most acutely observed accounts of what it is like to be young, Black, and middle-class in contemporary Americatold in a distinctive voice that is often humorousbut always intensely engaging (Orlando Patterson, The New York Times). In this provocative book, writer and cultural critic Tour explores the concept of Post-Blackness: the ability for someone to be rooted in but not restricted by their race. Drawing on his own experiences and those of 105 luminaries, he argues that racial identity should be understood as fluid, complex, and self-determined.

"Toure has taken a question I have asked myself uncountable times over the course of my life and asked it of everyone: 'What does it mean to be Black?' The answers in this book are thought-provoking, uplifting, hilarious and sometimes sad. His sharp writing and self-effacing stories help digest some hard facts about how identity can be used for and against each of us - and why it matters so much to all of us." --Soledad O'Brien, CNN anchor and special correspondent"[T]he ever provocative Toure boldly articulates the complicated issues of self and racial identity in the age of Obama." --"Vanity Fair""""Who's Afraid of Post-Blackness" is a tour de force! I applaud Toure's courage in standing up and telling it like it is. This special book will make you think, laugh, cry--and it will make you look at race and at yourself differently." --Amy DuBois Barnett, Editor-in-Chief, "Ebony""Toure candidly tackles a burning issue confronting us today. Black America is undeniably a community 'free, but not equal, ' and people from all walks of life are compelled to devise new approaches to confronting today's structural inequalities. Here Toure explores insights from many perspectives to help guide the way." --Reverend Jesse L. Jackson, Sr."Toure is one of my favorite writers.

I've watched him grow and mature into the thinking man's writer for the new era. Extremely observant on class and culture, this book is a must-have guide from one of the few remaining minds with the courage to tell the truth about America's beautiful stain." --Questlove, from the Roots"A fascinating conversation among some of America's most brilliant and insightful Black thinkers candidly exploring Black identity in America today. Toure powerfully captures the pain and dissonance of Black Americans' far too often unrequited love for our great nation." --Benjamin Todd Jealous, President and CEO of the NAACP"This book is quintessential Toure smart, funny, irreverent, and provocative as hell. Rejecting old school racial dogma and new school myths about post-raciality, he offers a powerful and original thesis on the status of Blackness in the 21st century. Through his sharp analysis and honest reflections, Toure challenges us to embrace a more mature, sophisticated, and ultimately liberating notion of racial identity. Any serious conversation on race and culture must begin with this book." --Dr. Marc Lamont Hill, Columbia University Professor and host of "Our World With Black Enterprise"""Who's Afraid of Post-Blackness" is a necessary book. To fulfill your potential as an individual or as a people, you need a clear sense of self. Toure has done the difficult but liberating work of moving the discussion of race beyond the Black Power-era thinking of the 1970's into the 21st Century." -- Reggie Hudlin, filmmaker"One of the most acutely observed accounts of what it is like to be young, black and middle-class in America. Toure inventively draws on a range of evidence . . . for a performance carried through with unsparing honesty, in a distinctive voice that is often humorous, occasionally wary and defensive, but always intensely engaging." --Orlando Patterson, " The New York Times Book """"The ever provocative Toure boldly articulates the complicated issues of self and racial identity in the age of Obama." --"Vanity Fair"""""A welcome response to the 'self-appointed identity cops' who would arrest and banish those they consider insufficiently black. Perceptively analyze[s] a new sensibility in black art and culture to illustrate the complex and fluid racial identification Toure dubs 'post-blackness.' "--"The San Francisco Chronicle"""About the AuthorTour is a correspondent for MSNBC and a columnist for Time.com. He is the author of Never Drank the Kool-Aid, a collection of essays, Soul City, a novel, and the Portable Promised Land, a collection of short stories. He hosts two shows on Fuse, the Hiphop Shop and On the Record, and remains a contributing editor to Rolling Stone. Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.Whos Afraid of Post-Blackness Chapter 1 Forty Million Ways to Be Black Once, I went skydiving. For about four minutes in 2007 I was aboveand plummeting rapidly towarda small town in the middle of the Florida panhandle. Jumped out of the plane solo at 14,000 feet. I did it for a TV show called Ill Try Anything Once in which every week I accepted fear-inducing challenges. On the way to the skydiving center the production team stopped for lunch at a restaurant where three middle-aged Black men who worked there recognized me from TV and came over to our table to say hi. We got to talking and they asked what I was doing there. I told them I was on my way to go skydiving. Their faces went cold. They were stunned. One of them said, in a conspiratorial tone and at a volume meant to slide under the sonic radar of the white people sitting right beside me, Brother, Black people dont do that. The other two nodded in agreement. They quickly glanced at the rest of my team and then back at me as if that clinched their point: The only people doing this risk-your-life, crazy foolishness are some loony white boys and you. As they saw it I was breaking the rules of Blackness. I was afraid but not about breaking the invisible rule book. The plane was old and small with only a seat for the pilot, barely enough room for five adults to sit on the floor, and not enough height to stand. There was one clear, thin, plastic, rickety door that didnt look strong enough to keep people from falling through it. The walls of the little plane were so thin that the sound of the engine permeated them completely. In order to be heard you had to yell. The plane did not move with the efficiency and grace you want from a plane, it reminded me of an old dying car that sputters and wheezes and makes you pray itll start and keep running until you get there. As it climbed into the sky it seemed to be saying, I think I can, I think I can. If I hadnt been scheduled to jump out for the sake of television, I wouldve listened to the voice inside me yelling Bail! At 14,000 feet the thin plastic doorwhich recalled a grandmothers couch protectorwas pushed up and through the open maw you could feel the oppressively fast, hard, uninviting wind slashing by, daring you to play deadly games. You could barely see the Earth below, large buildings now smaller than ants, acre-sized fields tinier than a babys palm. My eyes were saucer wide, my palms were soaked, my heart was banging in my chest as if looking for a way out, saying, You can go, but Im staying here in the plane. The breathless terror enveloping me as a jump virgin was not assuaged by my macho divemaster, Rick, a former cop and Marine with a military-style buzzcut who owns the drop zone, jumps twenty times a day, and finds the fear of newbies funny. Rick thought gallows humor was appropriate at that moment. With the door open he said, Just remember, no matter what happens Im going to be all right. He laughed. I did not. He was going to jump out after me but he wasnt going to be on my back. I was going solo. Or as he put it, I was going to have the chance to save my own life. As I scooted on my butt toward the open doorthe wind vacuuming angrily like one of those horror movie vortices thatll suck you into another worldmy mind said, No! No! No! I was directly violating my constitution as a human, which places a very high value on survival, minimization of physical risk, and not dying. Sliding toward the open door of a plane hovering at 14,000 feet was overriding the instinct in my reptilian brain. Still, I got in the doorway and grabbed hold of the sides of the plane. I could feel the wind smacking me in the face. I could barely see the ground. I could not imagine letting go. Then Rick began to count down from three. I told myself, You will let go when he says go. You will not hesitate. I needed to tell myself those things because my body was semi-paralyzed. Rick said two. My

frontal lobe tried to veto the whole thing. Cant we just wimp out and let the plane take us back to the ground? Then Rick said go. And I just let go. And I was falling. Freefall does not feel like falling. It feels like floating but without the peace we associate with floating. Things are moving at supersonic speed and the virgin skydivers mind cant keep up, cant process all thats going on, so its a chaotic blur with the wind so loud you cant hear yourself think and cant hear yourself screaming. I think I was screaming for about ten seconds before I even realized it. And I kept trying to grab on to something, anything, but there was nothing, just air. They tell you to keep your head bent upward and to not look down at the Earth because the view is awesome, and more important the weight of your head will send you into a spin or at least into the wrong dive position. But I looked down. Couldnt help it. And that sent me spinning heels over head and then hurtling down back first for a tumultuous forty-five seconds of twisting and turning and upside-down plunging, falling toward Earth with everything happening too fast to realize how screwed up everything was and how terrified I shouldve been. I pulled the cord but because I was in the wrong dive positionstill falling on my backpart of the parachute coiled around my arm and did not unfurl. I looked up and saw this thread wrapped twice around my right forearm as I kept falling to the ground. If I did nothing I wouldve died eight or nine seconds later. But reader, I promise you, I was calm. I did not panic one bit. The voice in my mind was cool. With the same inner tone I might use to say to myself, Hmm, were out of pretzels, I said to myself, Hmm, the chutes wrapped around my arm. The day before my dive, during my eight-hour training class, Rick told me what to do if this happened: just shake your arm and the cord should come loose. So at about 5,000 feet from the groundwhich skydivers know is next to nothingI shook my arm as if shooing off a fly. The cord came loose and the chute went free and unfurled above me, breaking my fall. Suddenly, the sturm und drang of freefall gave way to peace. I was floating gently, like a snowflake. All was quiet. I could look up and see the sun playing peekaboo amidst the clouds and below I saw tiny cars and buildings and fields. I felt like a speck of dust blowing in the cosmos at the whim of a much, much larger force conducting a massive, magnificent opera. And in that moment, the perspective I gained from being thousands of feet in the air made me fully grasp how small a part of this world I am. It made me as absolutely certain of the presence of God as I have ever been. That birds eye view of Earth and the soul-stirring meditative quiet I was wrapped up in made me feel like a tiny dot in His awesomely sculpted world, a minute particle floating through a gigantic universe that will outlast me by a long ways. This is His world, not mine, Im just a visitor and should be thankful for the few days I have. It was the most deeply spiritual experience of my life. I went skydiving and ended up in church. If Id turned down the opportunity to skydive because Black people dont do that I wouldve robbed myself of an experience I needed to get closer to God. And who would deny me that? If I never go skydiving again Ill always carry with me the more tangible and concrete belief in Him that I got from that day. Thats a profound gift. If Id let being Black hold me back from skydiving I wouldve cheated myself out an opportunity to grow as a human. To be born Black is an extraordinary gift bestowing access to an unbelievably rich legacy of joy. Itll lift you to ecstasy and give you pain that can make you stronger than you imagined possible. To experience the full possibilities of Blackness, you must break free of the strictures sometimes placed on Blackness from outside the African-American culture and also from within it. These attempts to conscript the potential complexity of Black humanity often fly in the face of the awesome breadth of Black history. If Id believed that Blacks dont skydive I would perhaps have disrespected the courageous Black paratroopers of World War IIthe 555th was an all-Black unit that valiantly jumped over twelve hundred times. Some Blacks may see the range of Black identity as something obvious but I know there are many who are unforgiving and intolerant of Black heterogeneity and still believe in concepts like authentic or legitimate Blackness. There is no such thing. Henry Louis Gates Jr., the director of Harvards DuBois Institute for African and African American Research, says there has always been a multiplicity of ways to be Black but now because of the economic and intellectual diversity in Black America theres a multiplicity of multiplicities. There is no dogmatically narrow, authentic Blackness because the possibilities for Black identity are infinite. To say something or someone is not Blackor is inauthentically Blackis to sell Blackness short. To limit the potential of Blackness. To be a child of a lesser Blackness. My first line in my class, Gates told me in an interview in his office at Harvard, and the last line twelve weeks later is if there are forty million Black Americans then there are forty million ways to be Black. There are ten billion cultural artifacts of Blackness and if you add them up and put em in a pot and stew it, thats what Black culture is. Not one of those things is more authentic than the other. Dr. Michael Eric Dyson, professor of sociology at Georgetown, agreed. Theres been an exponential increase in both the modes and methods of Blackness, he said in an interview at his apartment in D.C., and the ways in which Black people are allowed to be legitimately Black. It used to be much more narrow. When I hear Black people tell me Black people dont fill in the blankscuba dive or be gay in Africa or whateverI think, youre ignorant. Because the beautiful diversity of Blackness is the most remarkable feature of a Blackness that we continue to try to quarantine. Wed rather quarantine Blackness but the beauty of Blackness is that its a rash that breaks out everywhere. The moment we shatter those artificial encumberances of racea stereotype from without or a rigid archetype from withinand feel no need to respond to either is the moment we are vastly improved, profoundly human, and therefore become the best Black people we can become. And we maximize our humanity. I mean, the irony is, the greater we maximize our humanity the greater our Blackness becomes. I see a small-scale representation of Black collective identity expansion in hiphop. As a recorded medium it began in the late seventies and early eighties as a showcase for New York Black

male working-class symbols, tropes, and signifiers. Almost all of the songs, clothes, attitudes, and purveyors of very early hiphop culture were about life in the streets and clubs of New York City for Black men. Even when the Real Roxanne emerged she rhymed about her relationship, or refusal to have one, with Black men, rather than what she did with her girls when no men were around. There were many sorts of Black people around New Yorkand around Americabut hiphop did not show them. Modern hiphop does: its identity politics are much more complex. New Yorks hegemony has given way to a national culture, and the language and performance of Blackness of MCs from Atlanta, New Orleans, Houston, Detroit, Chicago, L.A., and other cities is different than that of New Yorkers. The expression of class mores has also broadened within hiphop: There are still many MCs playing exclusively with working-class signifiers, but in the wake of mid-eighties Black bohos like De La Soul and A Tribe Called Quest we now have Kanye West, Andr 3000, Common, Questlove, Lupe Fiasco, Kid Cudi, Drake, Pharrell and others whose personae are filled with middle-class and/or culturally avant-garde signifiers. There are also figures like Jay-Z and 50 Cent who grew up working class but joined the extreme upper class and now give us identities filled with a mixture of class signifiers. There are many women in hiphop expressing identity through their own point of view (as opposed to in relation to what men think). And, quiet as its kept, theres a national gay and lesbian hiphop underground scene, showing us how far hiphop has come from being a site for Black, male, working-class, heteronormative identity. If hiphop were a person and you asked it what does it mean to be Black in 1983 and again in 2013, the answers would be far different. Still hiphop fails to capture the full complexity of Black Americathere are many Black identities not represented in and by hiphop. But I think a similar broadening of the collective identityand/or a broadening of the acceptance of ithas occurred within Black America. Blackness is a completely liquid shape-shifter that can take any form, just like the chameleonic agents in The Matrix or the T-1000 or the T-X in the Terminator sequels that are made of a mimetic polyalloy that allow them to take on any appearance. Its an unfortunate coincidence that both of those memorable examples of infinitely mutable figures are villains because for the shape-shifter that power equals freedom: Be anyone you want at any time. As the artist William Pope.L says, Blackness is limited only by the courage to imagine it differently. Melissa Harris-Perry, a Princeton University professor of Politics and African-American Studies, believes Blacks are aware of and proud of our diversity. We have a homogenizing media culture that makes all of us more alike than we might like to suggest, she told me. That dominant discourse does present pretty limited possibilities of what it means to be a Black man or a Black woman. But in Black peoples actual lives, in their families, in their churches, in their neighborhoods, they actually do know a lot of different kinds of Black people. And are not particularly surprised to encounter artsy Black people and gay Black people and, you know, perfect-English-speaking Black people, and hoodish. I mean, I think we are more aware of our fundamental humanity and the variation that goes along with it than we let on in public spaces. Now, do we have a way of saying to each other, This is an insufficiently Black or crazy thing that Black people dont do? I mean, sure. But, we also go to poetry slams and are excited when one of us plays tennis and somebody else plays violin. I guess Im just convinced that theres actually a lot more room in our conceptions of Blackness, particularly on a very interpersonal level, then we tend to let on. Im saying Im not yet convinced by the discourse or the evidence that I have out there that we really dont make room for each other. Such is the intellectual diversity of Black people: We cant totally agree on whether or not Blacks have a collective awareness and acceptance of Black diversity. I know Professor Harris-Perry is correct that many of us are cognizant and tolerant of our diversity but I also know from personal experience that there are self-appointed identity cops in our communitypeople who are like Sergeant Waters in A Soldiers Storypolicing the race and writing Authenticity Violations as if they were working for Internal Affairs making sure everyone does Blackness in the right way. But what is this right way? And who chose it? Sometimes Blackness is threatened, says Kehinde Wiley, the visual artist, by a desire to go outside of a collective sense of deprivation and to engage education and opportunity. It feels good to all be down with one another. This notion of being authentically Black is comforting. To be down is to be with it, to be with your people, to be part of the collective. But I think its time to grow out of that. The cult of the individual is something that is going to be a rescuing point for Black people. I think in order to do good for your community you have to do good for yourself and you have to stop thinking about being down and what everyones gonna think about you. You have to see the whole field of options and professions and fields of inquiry that exist in the world like one big buffet court. You have to be able to say Im gonna try something that my group has never tried before because in order for me to get somewhere I have to push myself outside of my limits and safe places. Because the white boys have always been given that free run to be individuals. Dyson suggests that certain historical forces have motivated the identity expansion Im suggesting. He gave me an analogy linking the romantic solidarity of the nationalistic sixties and seventies with a religious approach to Blackness while the post-Black rugged individualism of the new century and the future is more like a non-religious spirituality of Blackness. When I was born in 1958, he said, it was like the purpose of your life was to help further and advance the struggle for Black self-determination. I was born in 1971 and as a child in the seventies I got that same sensethat being Black meant being born into an army that you had to somehow contribute to. Not necessarily in an armed or violent way, just as not everyone in the army goes into combat. At birth, Dyson said, you were given a Black card that made you part of a group and you had to give to the group and be a good productive member. You had to sacrifice for the group and do everything in ultimate allegiance to that

group. This is what I mean by religious Blackness. The ultimate spirit of the community was God. The Black leaders were the Holy Ghost. The martyrs of the movement were Jesus. So Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm Xit doesnt matter their particular religious orientationthose who died, those are the martyrs, those are the Jesuses. As a result of that, any disagreement with the community was a disagreement with God, was a disagreement with your religious Blacknessany dissent was like apostasy. But in the eighties and nineties Black America became more diverse in terms of education and profession and income, and no dominant Black leaders have arisenperhaps because the community is too diverse to be led or maybe because deep down the community no longer wants to be ledand thus the sort of magnetic centrifugal force that once pulled the community together has faded away. That has led to a variety of approaches to Blackness. Says Dyson, In the same way that many people say, Hey Im spiritual but Im not religious, there are Blacks who dissent from the church of Blackness, from the religion of Blackness, but theyre not sinners. Theyre good Protestants, theyre just not Catholics. They dont think you have to pay obeisance to the pope or go to confession with the priest in order to get to God. They believe you can go to Him yourself. We have no pope so we can go to Blackness ourselves. Its an individual thing, its a spiritual thing, not a religious thing. And I think that has made some Black people extremely insecure and extremely cautious. And Im not suggesting that there are no legitimate reasons to be critical of the kind of willful individuality. It would be silly to believe that Black people are not still judged as a group even though we argue for this robust individualism. The fact is that were still lumped together in many ways. But the civil rights struggle was about getting us to the point where we could be taken as human beings. Leading to a multiplicity of ways to be Black. Dyson defines three primary dimensions of Blackness. He calls them accidental, incidental, and intentional but I prefer to call them introverted, ambiverted, and extroverted. The introverted (or accidental) mindset is about a perhaps more private relationship with Blackness. Dyson says its Im an American, Im a human being, I happen to be Black. By accident of my birth I am Black. It just happened that way. He gives Clarence Thomas and Condoleezza Rice as celebrity examples. Ambiverted (or incidental) Blackness refers to having a more fluid relationship with it: Blackness is an important part of them but does not necessarily dominate their persona. Dyson says its people who more completely embrace Blacknessthey arent trying to avoid itbut that aint the whole of their existence. I love it but it doesnt exhaust me. In this group he places Barack Obama, Colin Powell, and Will Smith. Then theres intentional [or extroverted] Blackness, Dyson said. I be Black, thats what I do, thats what my struggles are about. This is Malcolm X, Dr. King, Jim Brown, Jay-Z. But confining most people within one of these modes isnt easy. Different moments present different situations that demand that we modulate. Heres the trick Black people always understand, Dyson said. Depending on where we are, were any one of those Blacknesses. This is the beauty of Blackness. When youre at your job and youre trying to get a raise in a predominantly white corporation, youre probably accidentally Black. You say, Hey, Bob, how are ya? Did you see Modern Family last night? Hysterical. All right, do I have the raise? Dyson and I agreed that you may also throw in a little extroverted Blackness to further your bond by bestowing a feeling of coolness on your audience. You could say, Yo, you heard that new Jay-Z album? Its tight! And youre saying it in a way that what youre really saying is Im gonna give you temporary access to the Black card. This card will self-destruct in twenty-four seconds. But for a moment youll feel cool and thatll help me build the relationship I need. I know some successful Black writers who go into the offices of stodgy white magazines calling everyone brother and sister, in a way that puts people at ease and makes them feel cool and respected and helps build a bond. Then theres times you need to throw up Black signifiers like theyre gang signs and be extroverted. I think about Barack Obama when he was running for president, Dyson said. He was down in South Carolina and hes talking about people saying he was a Muslim. Now, hes not gonna diss Muslims, he has Muslims in his family, but we know in the context of America that signifies negatively. So he says, You know Ive been gone to the same church wit my bible in my handwit, not withand theyre laughing. Its a predominantly Black audience so hes talking directly to them. He says, You know, thats the okie doke, you know what the okie doke is? They go, yeah. He says, Ya been bamboozled, ya been hoodwinked! Now heres the genius of Barack Obama: because we know hoodwinked and bamboozled are from Malcolm X. So heres a guy using the language of the most famous Black Muslim there has been to deny that hes a Black Muslim, but still communicate an insiders connection with and understanding of Black culture. That is so Black! Dyson continued: Black people have different modes of Blackness and when we need to be each of those varieties of Blackness, we exercise them. We vacillate among the modes depending on what we need. When you deal with multiple audiences you have to pivot around different presentations of Blackness. The ability to maneuver within white societyand how high you can rise within white power structuresis often tied to your ability to modulate. Black success requires Black multi-lingualitythe ability to know how and when to move among the different languages of Blackness. A prime example is Oprah Winfrey, who will switch modes in a matter of seconds and can sometimes convey multiple modes at one time. This is not selling out any more than cursing in front of your friends and not cursing in front of your grandmother is selling out: its intelligently modulating among the various selves we all have inside. There are many ways to be Black in all Black people. I would like, through this book, to attack and destroy the idea that there is a correct or legitimate way of doing Blackness. If theres a right way then there must be a wrong way, and that kind of thinking cuts us off from exploring the full potential of Black humanity. I wish for every Black-American to have the freedom to be Black however he or she chooses, and to banish

from the collective mind the bankrupt, fraudulent concept of authentic Blackness. Some of us still cling to the myth of consensus, the idea that there is some agreement on how we should do Blacknesson what is and is not Black, a right path and a wrong one. We have no race-wide agreement and have never had one. We want to think Blackness was a unified thing you could hold in your hand, Gates says, but it was always like holding water in your hand. There was a core, like there still is a coreyou could go to any Black church and feel at home. When you go to the barbershop, you know, its like a warm bath, its nice. There is a core, a recognizable Black culture, but out of that core its splintered and fragmented and it goes off in ten thousand different directions. In this book, I seek to legitimize and validate all those directions because we are in a post-Black era, which means simply that the definitions and boundaries of Blackness are expanding in forty million directionsor really, into infinity. It does not mean we are leaving Blackness behind, it means were leaving behind the vision of Blackness as something narrowly definable and were embracing every conception of Blackness as legitimate. Let me be clear: Post-Black does not mean post-racial. Post-racial posits that race does not exist or that were somehow beyond race and suggests colorblindness: Its a bankrupt concept that reflects a nave understanding of race in America. Post-Black means we are like Obama: rooted in but not restricted by Blackness. It means we love Blackness but accept the fact that we do not all view or perform the culture the same way given the vast variety of realities of modern Blackness. Its not that some people are post-Black and some are notand post-Black cannot be used as a replacement for Black or African-Americanits that were in a post-Black era when our identity options are limitless. And theres no going back. Most terms have a confining aspect to them but post-Black is not a box, its an unbox. It opens the door to everything. Its open-ended and open-source and endlessly customizable. Its whatever you want it to be. Such is the dynamic hyper-creative beauty of modern individualistic Blackness. Kara Walker, the great visual artist, told me its hard to talk about an individualism movement, but thats what I see. Our community is too diverse, complex, imaginative, dynamic, fluid, creative, and beautiful to impose restraints on Blackness. I am not here presenting myself as or claiming to be an expert on Blackness. Im a Black person who loves Black culture and history and has been actively thinking and reading about what it means to be Black since I was a child. Because I am not a scholar, and because I thought it would be a fascinating research project, I decided to interview 105 prominent Black people about various aspects of contemporary Blackness. They include: politicians like Harold Ford Jr., the former Congressman from Tennessee; Sharon Pratt, the first female mayor of D.C., and Benjamin Jealous, the president of the NAACP. visual artists including: Kara Walker, Glenn Ligon, Lorna Simpson, Barkley L. Hendricks, William Pope.L, Gary Simmons, Julie Mehretu, Kehinde Wiley, and Carrie Mae Weems. recording artists: Chuck D of Public Enemy, Questlove of The Roots, Vernon Reid of Living Colour, Talib Kweli, Santigold, and Lupe Fiasco. writers: Malcolm Gladwell, Greg Tate, Stanley Crouch, Shelby Steele, Roland Martin, Nelson George, Juan Williams, dream hampton, Kristal Brent Zook, Jonathan Capehart from the Washington Post, and Charles Blow from the New York Times. academics: Dr. Beverly Tatum (president of Spelman), Henry Louis Gates Jr. (Harvard), Dr. Cornel West (Princeton), Michael Eric Dyson (Georgetown), Dr. Alvin Poussaint (Harvard), Patricia Williams (Columbia), Dr. Marc Lamont Hill (Columbia), Wahneema Lubiano (Duke), Dr. Jelani Cobb (Spelman), Dr. Elizabeth Alexander (Yale), Farah Griffen (Columbia), and Dr. Charles Mills (Northwestern).I also spoke with Reverends Jackson and Sharpton, comedian Paul Mooney, filmmaker Reggie Hudlin, CNN host Soledad OBrien, and Mr. Boondocks, Aaron McGruder. I spoke to every significant member of the creative team of the television show that I think best epitomizes the post-Black ethos: Chappelles Show. That includes co-creator and co-writer Neal Brennan, whos white. I was not able to speak with Dave Chappelle for this project but I interviewed him when I was at BETthe interview took place after hed left the show, when he was promoting Dave Chappelle's Block Partyand I pull from that interview here. That old Chappelle interview is also not counted toward the 105these are all new interviews. Toward the end of the process I decided itd be interesting to include the perspective of Robert Farris Thompson, a white Yale history professor and a noted authority on African art and religion and Afro-Cuban dance, who knows and cares an extraordinary amount about Black culture. We had a nice long lunch at an Italian restaurant near Yale. I also had a psychiatrist interview me for two hours, hoping to unearth things Id forgotten or not realized. The people I spoke with challenged me, enlightened me, and helped me sharpen and deepen my ideas. I dont know if talking to a different 105 would have produced a totally different book, but this book would not be what it is without the amazing contributions of this 105. I aimed to have the sort of deep, honest, intense conversations we have about race in private spacesusually with smart or trusted friends after a glass of wine or two. None of these interviews were lubricated by alcohol but most had that level of candor and often the intensity of a therapy session. Reverend Jackson criednot a sob but a single tear ran down his cheektalking about a painful moment from his childhood. Some questions I put to almost everyone, some questions I put to those in a specific field, and some questions I posed just to specific individuals. For the purpose of understanding the project, and so you can have a chance to think about how you wouldve answered, here are some of the questions I asked almost everyone: What does being Black mean to you? Does being Black mean something different now than it meant three or four decades ago? Has what it means to be Black changed over the last forty years and if so, how? Is there an authentic Black experience? What do you think about the concept of post-Blackness? Do you think Blacks have ways of imposing limits on Black identity? What does it mean when one is said to be acting white or is being not Black? Whats the value to Blacks of attacking Blacks in that way? Do you think some Black

people need to be more open-minded about what it means to be Black? Is Blackness at the center of your persona? Are there particular, necessary characteristics of Blackness? Is there a centrifugal force pulling Blackness together? What is the most racist thing to ever happen to you? What was its impact on you? What do you think of the words nigger and nigga? How is it certain Black politicians can make a silent deal with voters to be so-called beyond race and others cant? How is that deal made? Why are we still colorstruck? Are there advantages to being light? Are there disadvantages to being light? Are there advantages to being dark? Are there disadvantages to being dark? Would you be comfortable eating watermelon in a room full of white people? As a child in the seventies I was taught and I felt that Blackness was a movement, that being Black is like being part of an army that you must contribute to in some way. Im not sure that we are involved in that same sort of a unified movement anymore. What do you think? Do you love America? Do you think Black people love America? Or are we conflicted, like a battered spouse? I believe that Black people correctly remain angry at America for the lack of rights and the oppression that weve experienced both as a collective and as individuals, but I wonder if were giving ourselves enough credit for being key architects of America, especially in the twentieth century when, through Thurgood Marshall, Malcolm X, Dr. King, Huey P. Newton, and others, we forced the country to move toward being as democratic as it claimed to be. Were reluctant patriots but were also critical shapers of this countryweve been molded by it but weve also molded it. What do you think about that? How do we create more Barack Obamas, by which I dont necessarily mean more Black presidents but more people who are proudly Black and intellectual, and are comfortable in Black and white spaces, and feel like they can set extraordinarily high goals without fearing that race will keep them from achieving those goals?I talked to as many as possible in their homes or in offices or in restaurantsI met with Paul Mooney in a tiny dressing room at Carolines after one a.m., following a show; with Kara Walker at her studio where I glimpsed an extraordinary piece in progress; with Reverend Sharpton at a private, members-only cigar club while former Mayor Giuliani sat just a few feet away; with Reverend Jackson in the lobby of a hotel, then in his car as he was driven downtown, and then in a private room at Penn Station as he waited to board Amtrak. Some interviews had to be conducted over the phone. For obvious reasons I connected with Mumia Abu-Jamal by letter. Almost all of the conversations lasted exactly an hour, though Professors Gates, Dyson, and West talked to me for about 90 minutes while thenNew York Governor Paterson could spare only fifteen minutes. Some of those I interviewed I already knew personally, some I emailed cold, some were referrals from others Id interviewed, and in some cases I met them through Twitter. Im especially grateful to Thelma Golden, the curator of the Studio Museum in Harlem, for connecting me to so many in the art world. Golden, along with the artist Glenn Ligon, coined the term post-Blackness as a way of describing something they saw happening in art. I thought I saw the art movement they named traveling into and through the entire American culture. When I described my initial thoughts about this book to Goldenand asked if she felt I could apply her meme about Black artists to all Black peopleit felt like I was asking her if I could take her magnificent, ultra-rare, expensive car for a drive on the highway. In essence, she said she wouldnt drive it on the highway but I could, if I dared. Some will say, Hey, were a society dealing with a growing jail population, AIDS, cancer and other health care problems, an education gap, widespread unemployment, predatory loans, foreclosure, rising povertyhow can you be talking about frilly issues like identity? Well, I believe that when the body is under attackand I mean both the collective body and our specific bodiesthen theres a need, or even an imperative, to check in on the soul. I will deal in depth and detail in this book with the impact of racism on our souls because I am in no way saying racism is over or has even lessened. In my research I found it remains a major shaper of Black identitysome of the people who spoke about the most racist thing that had ever happened to them, including Reverend Jackson, said it was a defining incident in their lives that led them to become who they are today. I do not discount or ignore the institutional and de facto forms of racism that continue to shape and oppress Black life in America. But I also think we can deal with those matters and these at once. One does not eclipse the other. As the painter Kehinde Wiley said, People who say we cant afford poetry; we need to change lives, we need to feed people, people are dying of treatable diseases, people are starving, and youre talking about satisfying states of internal grace and being self-actualized authentically? I understand that. And I think that as adults we have to recognize the necessity for both. And as a mature society we are graced to be able to actualize both. Who I am is indelibly shaped by Blackness, so I have to examine Blackness to know who I am. But I am much more than a repository for Blackness. If you are Black, you may be, too. I have been told, explicitly and implicitly, that there are borders to Blackness, and that sometimes I had strayed beyond them. Am I the fish that swam away from the school or did the school become as big as the oceanso big you cant swim away from it? If Blackness is, like the ocean, too high to get over and too low to get under, then how could any Black person ever not be Black?