

Metís

Commentary

Back cover: the murder of Hipparchus by white aristocratic forces

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Remember, to hate, to be violent, is demeaning. It means you're afraid of the other side of the coin -- to love and be loved.

James Baldwin

Dedicated to:

Annabelle Williams

Ann Marie Houston

Sandra Hsu
and
Sati Hsu Houston





Goddess Athena

Chapters in the Book of Service

The Goddess

Metís

Commentary

Series 5
Vol. 2

Don Houston

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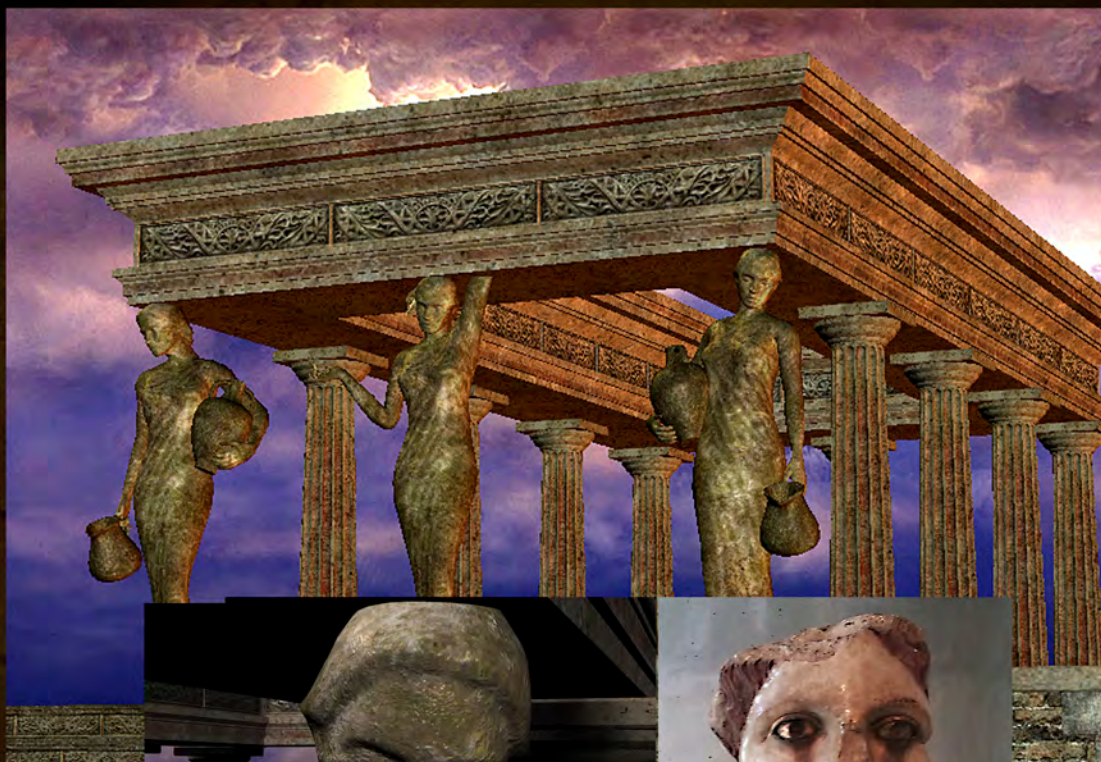
Preface

The Origin of the Metis Commentary

The changes in my life have always been associated with buildings. The investigation of the Goddess Metis is no different. It starts with the Santa Cruz Detention Facility. As the architect on site, I am responsible for contract compliance. The state-of-the-art facility will house one of the worst murders of the decade at that time, the trailside killer.

One morning, while driving to the site, I find myself arguing with a woman I am dating. The problem is I am alone in the car. I feel victimized, which makes me violently angry. However, when my rage peaks, I have an out-of-body experience. Sitting beside myself, I question myself. "Is this how you behave toward someone you love?" The slap in the face clears my mind, and I realize that I am heartsick and that I need therapy.

It's in therapy that my emotional intelligence takes hold, and I begin to understand the prison I was building was also a metaphor for the emotional imprisonment I felt. Not long after, I dream of being "a cyclops unchained."



Still, sometime later, I dreamed of a crying statue. As it turned out, the Goddess Aphrodite, the goddess of love, requested to tell an uncommon story about the ancient world.

One of the tales requested is the story of Metis. The goddess gave me the tale in dialogue form, which I captured in a play, *Metis Returns*. Investigating the plot, theme, and characters opened up a new reality and provided the material from which this commentary emerged.



The commentaries represent what is implied by the Sacred Blood Hermeticus.

As Jean-Léon Gérôme painted her, the naked Truth was at the bottom of a well. The only exceptions to his work were that Truth, in this instance, was at the bottom of the Well of Sorrow, and she was a Black woman. Her call came as a whispered howl.

The task was to look down into the shades of darkness, record what I saw and heard, create the Dialogues, and then assist in her rescue by employing the clue held in her hand, a mirror, the feminine aspect of self-reflection.

She emerged from the well in image and sound. Her rescue, the process of deciphering her needs and desires by creating the commentaries of the Sacred Blood Hermeticus, took courage, a fearlessness I did not know I had.

Truth is at the Bottom of the Well (1895) by Jean-Léon Gérôme, Musée des Beaux-Arts de Lyon.

Truth coming from the well to chastise mankind (1896).

The really terrible thing, old buddy, is that you must accept them....

For these innocent people have no other hope. They are, in effect, still trapped in a history which they do not understand; and until they understand it, they cannot be released from it. They have had to believe for many years, and for innumerable reasons, that black men are inferior to white men. Many of them, indeed, know better, but, as you will discover, people find it very difficult to act on what they know. To act is to be committed, and to be committed is to be in danger. In this case, the danger, in the minds of most white Americans, is the loss of their identity."

My Dungeon Shook
A letter to his nephew
James Baldwin

The page is framed by an ornate border. The top and bottom borders are wide and feature a textured, aged parchment-like background with a gold leaf border. The side borders are narrower and feature a black background with horizontal gold stripes. The corners are decorated with intricate, swirling gold and green patterns.

A Book of Service
in the Sacred Blood Hermeticus

The Goddess
Metís
Commentary

The Negro came to the white man for a roof or for five dollars or for a letter to the judge; the white man came to the Negro for love. But he was not often able to give what he came seeking. The price was too high; he had too much to lose. And the Negro knew this, too. When one knows this about a man, it is impossible for one to hate him, but unless he becomes a man -becomes equal- it is also impossible for one to love him.

*Down at the Cross
James Baldwin*



Broken Trust

Our adaptive behavior in warding off change peculiarly effective with social change is our ability to pretend that broken trust and betrayal are commonplace and to be expected. Betrayal, conflict, and jealousy are part and parcel of the human condition, but many believe the world belongs to those who can best use these tactics born of loneliness. The truth is they are wrong. Humanity has survived because we possess sufficient trust, empathy, and compassion to cooperate, not because we can adapt and work in isolation despite our fellow men or our ability to create technology.

We secured the future by setting aside our few differences and consciously working toward group cohesion and solidarity. Through cooperation, not competition, we became the dominant species on the planet. Although our similarities in makeup far outweigh our dissimilarities, some are more than willing to maim and kill each other over a misguided sense of social identity. Why this is the case has to do with, of all things, how we have learned to play.

It seems silly, but one of the significant areas of contention between human groups is how we play. Some play to win, others to impress, and others who have elevated betrayal, conflict, and competition to a form of play derive pleasure from inflicting pain. The American-Indian Wars are a perfect example. Early confrontations exposed opposing objectives in "war." Early settlers felt threatened in these encounters and brought superior firepower to bear, whereas Indians viewed the same event as an opportunity to play fight. They demonstrated bravery by touching the unknown enemy.

Humanity gains some degree of satisfaction from hurting and killing others. Still, it's a peculiar type of play that has turned us away from collective trust, group cohesiveness, and solidarity. This form of play is relatively new and stems directly from the broken trust in our most intimate relationships, willfully inflicting pain on our children, siblings, and relatives.

Sadistic play fascinates us. Other examples of sadistic play between groups were the rape and murder of African Americans, Chinese, Mexicans, and Native Americans as a form of entertainment. It wasn't until the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s that this form of play between ethnic groups finally came under social regulation and was seen for what it was: intentional cruelty. What happened to us? How did things get so topsy-turvy that broken trust became a common expectation?

The image depicts Sally Hemings,
an enslaved woman owned by Thomas Jefferson, the third U.S. President



On some level, sadism is natural. Pain and pleasure are two sides of the same experience. But where did we go wrong? Where did we go overboard, leaving trust, compassion, cooperation, and group solidarity behind? The answer emerged while studying Goddess Metis since a large part of Western civilization's ethos begins with the destruction of group solidarity between the sexes, the betrayal of women, and the intentional abuse of children in ancient Greece.

"The Negro came to the white man for a roof or for five dollars or for a letter to the judge; the white man came to the Negro for love."

If this wasn't enough, studying the Goddess Metis also uncovered peculiar fundamentals that must exist for democracy to flourish. It arises from particular social and economic conditions. Sadistic play and rape must be in evidence, along with oppression, greed, debt, slavery, and ethnocentricity, for democracy to take hold.

In this chaotic fertile ground, men like Thomas Jefferson overcome intergroup emotions, such as stereotyping, discrimination, and xenophobia, to champion compassion, cooperation, and love. Such men may pretend to support democracy from an intellectual sense of justice and fair play. However, if conditions in America parallel those in Greece when Athenians created the first constitutions, Jefferson's long-term relationship with his Metis wife, Sarah "Sally" Hemings, significantly shaped constitutional democracy.

Behind the scenes, his love for his native wife influenced his actions. Like Metis women of the past, Sally couldn't step forward and demand her rights as a person. She had to influence what transpired through her relationships. The unbroken trust shared by Sally and Thomas and their children inspired him to propose a system of government that promised justice and equality for all.

Another Metis woman of the same period similarly shaped the course of history as Sally Hemings; her name is Dido Elizabeth Belle, the daughter of John Lindsay, a British naval officer, and his enslaved African lover. In 1765, Mr. Lindsay took his daughter to England and placed her under the protection of his uncle William Murray, 1st Earl of Mansfield and Lord Chief Justice of England. In the ensuing years, Belle helped her uncle with his correspondence, developing a close association:

One of Mansfield's friends, American Thomas Hutchinson, a former governor of Massachusetts who, as a Loyalist, had moved to London, recalled that Belle "was called upon by my Lord every minute for this thing and that, and she wed the greatest attention to everything he said." He described her as neither handsome nor genteel - pert enough."

Dido Elizabeth Belle and Lady Elizabeth Murray, painted in 1778 by David Martin



She was called upon not as a maid or servant but as a companion. For this reason, when William Murray ruled that slavery had ever been approved by statute or common law in England in the *Somerset v Stewart* case of 1772, there was conjecture that his association with his niece had influenced his decision:

At the time, people suggested that Mansfield's personal experience with rearing Dido Belle influenced his decision. Thomas Hutchinson later recalled a comment by a slave owner,

"A few years ago, there was a cause before his Lordship brought by a Black to recover his liberty. A Jamaica planter, being asked what judgment his Lordship would give [answered] 'No doubt... he will be set free, for Lord Mansfield keeps a Black in his house which governs him and the whole family.'"

Dido Elizabeth Belle - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia.mht

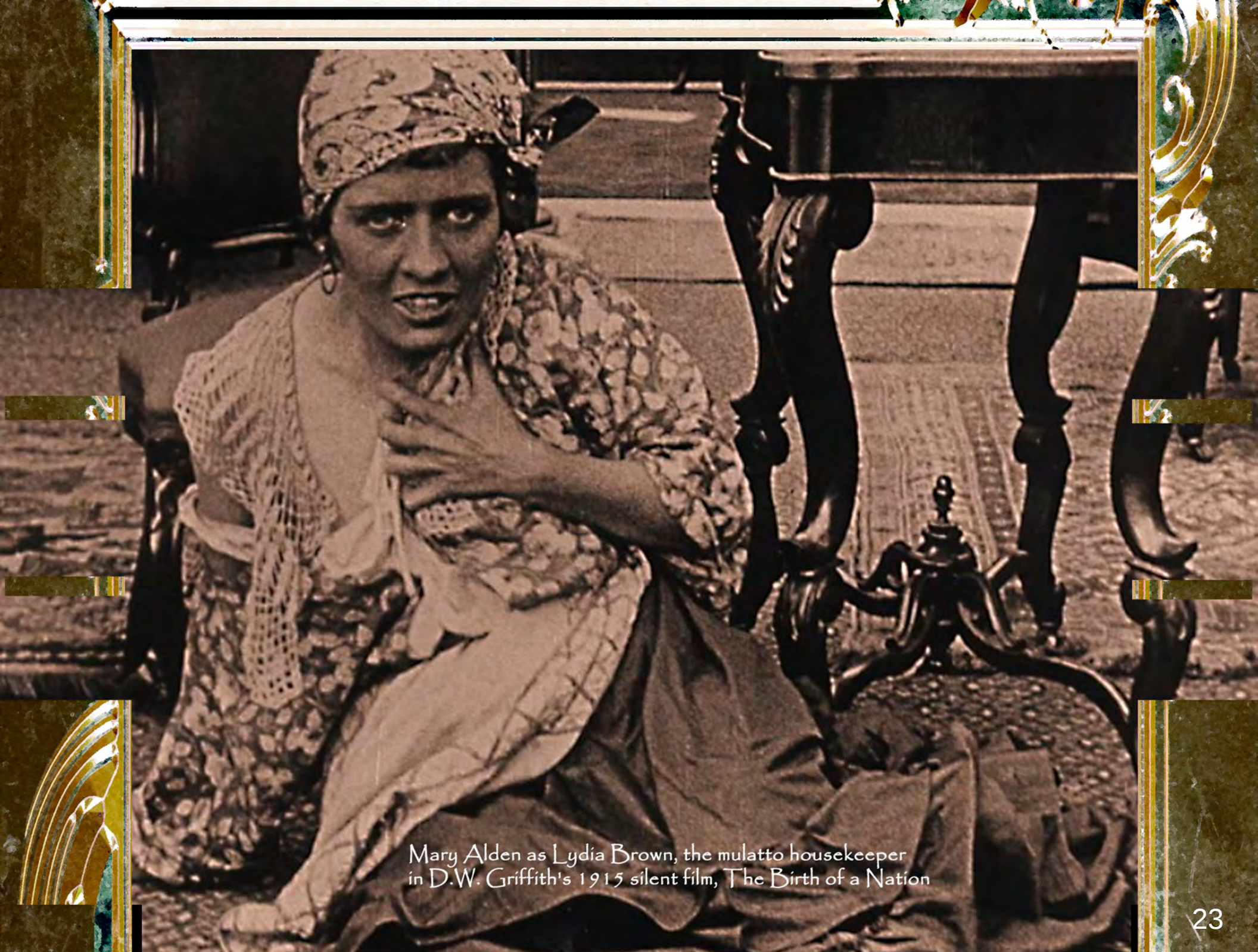
The ramifications of Murray's decision in *Somerset v Stewart* immediately freed 15,000 slaves in England. It did not abolish slavery nor stop the British from profiting from the slave trade, but it set change in motion. With the commission of their portraits, we must agree that William Murray loved and cherished both his nieces.

Lady Belle and Sally Hemings are just two examples of how Metis women shaped history through the affection they inspired in their relationships. These influences from behind the scenes, however, were noticed. As men like Thomas Hutchinson quoted, their influence made a difference. But it takes D.W. Griffith to surface the apprehension, fear, and dread of Metis women and the threat they represented palpably.

In *The Devil Finds Work*, the second essay, *Who Saw Him Die? I Said the Fly*, Baldwin tackles D.W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation*. He focuses on Lydia, the mulatto (Metis) housekeeper. Baldwin notes that she is depicted as manipulative and lustful, bent on destroying a good man and obliterating the Southern lifestyle. She can do this feat due to her charms and ability to exploit a "good man's" weakness.

The lack of Negros in Griffith's production is astounding. With few exceptions, the actors are all white, including Lydia. Baldwin clarifies that the movie is not about the motives and aspirations of Negroes. It concerns the fears and anxieties locked in the white imagination, along with the perceived "threat" the mulatto poses.

Ignore the blatant racism, and a more subtle vision of white fear presents itself. Hatred of the mulatto, either male or female, has little to do with Negros and more to do with white social identity, a self-categorization



Mary Alden as Lydia Brown, the mulatto housekeeper
in D.W. Griffith's 1915 silent film, *The Birth of a Nation*

derived by measuring oneself against those less "fortunate" to be white. A mulatto, carrying any percentage of white blood, blurs the distinction between in-group and out-group members, which then questions white social identity as a sign and symbol of superiority.

The blurring of white identity was the threat Griffith perceived and attempted to capture in *Birth of a Nation*. While the film's creation and called-to-arms of the Ku Klux Klan were to save white people's ability to self-categorize, Baldwin aptly states that the destruction of mulattos, and other Negroes as well, is suicidal since the negro is of the white man's making. "For the Negro is an America undertaking, born of this nation, and the backs upon which this nation was built, the Negro is the 'flesh of his flesh,' and to kill the Negro amounts to infanticide, the murder of your children."

The American experience is not the first time this call for the mass murder of mixed children has been heard. The same call happened in ancient Greece. In *The Crusade of Indignation*, Baldwin exposes his desire to read a book that describes how and why racial prejudice was brought into being. Race prejudice is not only the product of Caucasian men. As counter-intuitive as it may appear, it is also the product of the Black imagination, specifically bicultural children.

In the *God Phosphorus* commentary, a sketch of how the descendants of Herakles went to extreme measures to demean, oppress, and humiliate their darker native kin. Their hatred of darker skin was driven by social perception and self-categorization. Their loathing and disdain for skin complexion was an intergroup emotion fostered by their need to categorize as Caucasian. Perhaps this is why Spartan newborns displaying "abnormalities" were exposed to the elements and left to die. Could the deformity be nothing more than possessing a darker complexion?

To clarify, ethnocentrism and racial prejudice are not the same things. Indeed, Caucasian clans were ethnocentric in their attempts to stave off cultural and political assimilation by native tribes. Still, virulent loathing and disgust of "blackness," the underpinnings of racial prejudice, resulted from mixed peoples' passing' as Caucasian. Later, when this large population of bicultural children streams out of Greece in a mass exodus, this disgust and aversion to "blackness" follows suit, laying the foundation for race prejudice that confronts us today.

The phenomenon is not uncommon. Those who wish to hide their association with an out-group become the most vocal and abusive in affirming and reinforcing their attachment to their self-categorized social identity. A perfect example is Lady Belle's last known descendent, who lived in apartheid South Africa

until he died in 1975. Unfortunately, without new information, we will never understand why he chose to live in apartheid conditions. But, there is a historical precedent for descendants of mixed parentage seeking such an environment; the children of Herakles did the same in the ancient city of Sparta.



Perhaps his most famous photograph, Peter Magubane's 1956 image of a Black maid tending to a white girl captured the racial divide in apartheid South Africa. Credit...Peter Magubane