2 The Making of a Category

> *Struggles over ethnic or regional identity . . . are a particular case of the different struggles over classifications, struggles over the monopoly of the power to make people see and believe, to get them to know and recognize, to impose the legitimate definition of the divisions of the social world and, thereby, to* make and unmake groups.[1]
>
> **—Pierre Bourdieu**

ON A RAINY APRIL AFTERNOON IN 2005, a multicolored RV rolled onto the campus of Tufts University in Medford, Massachusetts. The vehicle, emblazoned with colorful slogans like "Mixed race people are challenging the way our society looks at race and diversity" and "Get into the Mix!" announced the arrival of the Generation Mix National Awareness Tour—a project in which five mixed race young adults drove across the country, making stops in sixteen cities to "raise awareness of America's multiracial baby boom" and "promote a national dialogue about the mixed race experience." The tour was sponsored by the Mavin Foundation, at the time the most visible organization in the United States advocating on behalf of people who identify as mixed race. As crew members set up informational tables in the campus student center ("Children and Families," "Health," "Community") I spoke with Jamie, a twenty-three-year-old Chinese/white man from Berkeley, California. I asked Jamie how important it was to him that the U.S. census now allowed and counted multiple race responses.

> It's very big. It's giving us numbers that we can point to. It's gratifying in the sense that we know just how big the community or the population is. Both for ourselves, so that we can sit back and be like, wow, there's a lot of us, and we really aren't alone. And not just like these pockets of like a couple people here, couple people there. It's like people everywhere. And then it's something that's more legitimating for those people who care strictly about numbers, who aren't going to listen to just your personal experience. They want something

to back it up. So, 6.8 million, 2.4%, that's something we can point to for those discussions. So it's a political step forward.

Of all the data collected in the 2000 census, the results of questions on racial identification were perhaps the most eagerly anticipated. This race data would be the first collected using the new guidelines on racial classifications, agreed upon in 1997, that allowed people to "mark one or more" racial category (hereafter MOOM). The U.S. Census Bureau's "Two or More Races Population" brief (2001) showed that of approximately 281 million U.S. residents, 6.8 million, or 2.4 percent, reported more than one race. For Jamie, those numbers are symbolically and politically important—they serve as proof to mixed race individuals that they are part of a collective and they legitimize (for the skeptical) multiracial claims to group status.

To Jamie and many others, census statistics are evidence of the existence of multiracials as a group and the MOOM decision a reasonable response to changing demographics and social realities. To others, the MOOM decision makes more vulnerable the nation's system of racial categorization and policy, perhaps threatening it entirely (Harrison 2002; K. Williams 2006). Whether one reacts to the official enumeration of multiple race responses by the federal government with optimism, caution, or alarm, the fact that such a change took place is a remarkable development. Consider that prior to Census 2000, not since 1920 had the state collected census data on multiple race populations. Moreover, during those eighty years virtually no attempts were made to get the state to do so. For most of the twentieth century, in other words, claiming a "mixed" racial identity and having it recognized by the state was out of the question. By the 1990s, however, self-identified mixed race people began asking the government to identify them racially. When one considers that for most of American history racial classifications served no other purpose than to identify those to exclude, exploit, and oppress, the movement for multiracial classification presents an intriguing historical irony. What changed to make the official classification of multiracial identity very much *the* question in the 1990s?

This chapter explores the institutional, organizational, and cultural factors that led to the challenge to official classification of mixed race people in the United States. I consider how "multiracials" emerged as a self-conscious interest group, how they came to resuscitate the issue of racial categorization and identification as a topic of public discussion, and why this happened when it did. My approach here looks specifically at the conditions motivating mul-

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Jamie Tibbetts of Generation Mix National Awareness Tour.

tiracials to act. In that sense it is different from the approach taken by others who have examined the classification issue. Political scientist Kim Williams (2006) examines in detail the political opportunity structure that allowed a set of resource-poor multiracial organizations to successfully challenge prevailing modes of racial classification and how this change is likely to affect American politics. She is less concerned with the broader cultural context in which activists formed their grievances. The same is true of Melissa Nobles' *Shades of Citizenship* (2000) and Rainier Spencer's *Spurious Issues* (1999). In *The New Race Question* anthology (Perlmann and Waters, 2002), the authors examine the political impact and technical aspects of counting multirace responses in light of race-based social policy, but the people responsible for initiating the new race question are almost entirely absent. Clearly, the adoption of a multiple race option in the U.S. census arises not only because of the efforts of multiracial activists. Other interest groups and institutions like the state, statisticians, academics, civil rights organizations, and politicians all played a role in the process (see Anderson and Fienberg [1999] for details). My purpose is not to show that process in its entirety but to demonstrate how one such contender waged its struggle.

The movement for multiracial classification is about more than an administrative category. It is also a means to the end of garnering public recognition for those who would claim it and destigmatizing interracial sex, families, and hybrid racial identities. In that sense, this movement's origins lie in the social policies and practices that made mixed descent persons disappear as a social category in the twentieth century (antimiscegenation laws, the one-drop rule, and other segregationist policies) and that helped to stigmatize racial hybridity. This movement is also an unintended consequence of the civil rights revolution of the mid-twentieth century and the widespread institutionalization of racial categories that it engendered. It arises in a social and cultural context in which racial identification is considered an important part of self-identity and norms about racial authenticity and loyalty are strong. These conditions created a dilemma for some mixed race people whose experiences growing up in interracial families made conforming to those norms difficult.

Counting the Racially Mixed

In the United States, decisions about how to classify racial hybrids, like the system of racial classification itself, have largely been made with reference to people of African descent. For most of U.S. history, racially mixed persons have been categorized according to the principle of hypodescent—assigned to the racial group of the lower status parent.[2] Moreover, any degree of African ancestry, no matter how small, qualified one for the categorization. This was not always the case. In the antebellum period, particularly in the lower South, as Joel Williamson succintly states, "[M]ulattoness did count, real distinctions were made, and the one-drop rule did not always prevail" (1995, 2). Even so, Williamson's work shows that one-drop ideology emerges during slavery along with a growing hostility toward miscegenation as the threat of insurrection and abolition loomed. While there have been exceptions to this rule for some types of boundary crossings (to which I refer later), the one-drop rule has been the dominant principle for allocating persons to racial categories, and since about the 1920s, it has been largely accepted, even embraced, by those it was designed to oppress, namely African Americans.

Though racial hybridity has been a part of American society since its inception, the U.S. Census Bureau did not officially record it until 1850. That year the mulatto category made its first appearance on the census. It would remain on all subsequent censuses (with the exception of 1900) until 1920. The categories "octoroon" and "quadroon" appeared on the 1890 census when enumerators were instructed to estimate by visual inspection the relative pro-

portions of white to black ancestry a person had. The results were considered so unreliable, however, that the Bureau dropped the categories before the next census (Anderson 1988).

Distinguishing mulattoes from blacks was considered important during Reconstruction because it was presumed that mulattoes were best suited to assume the leadership positions that would open up in a reconstructed South. With the demise of Reconstruction and the concomitant rise of Jim Crow segregation, those distinctions became less relevant. Under Jim Crow, what mattered to the state was not how much white ancestry an individual had, but whether one had any black ancestry at all. For the purposes of identifying who was subject to racial exclusion, any degree of known African "blood" (even one drop) made one a black person.

The one-drop principle of racial classification received state sanction through the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision in 1896. That U.S. Supreme Court decision infamously upheld the constitutionality of racial segregation in public facilities. But it also affirmed the state's right to racially categorize people according to one-drop ideology. Homer Plessy, seven-eighths white (an "octoroon") by ancestry and with a white-looking appearance, made that fact known while seated in a whites-only railroad car. According to Randall Kennedy (2003), Plessy sought to challenge not only racial segregation but also the legitimacy of the state's presumption that it could assign individuals to racial categories without regard to their wishes. The Court ruled against Plessy, deeming him to be colored despite his mixed, mostly European, ancestry. The census would continue to distinguish between blacks and mulattoes for another two censuses. By the 1930 census, the mulatto category was dropped as census officials turned their attention to more pressing matters, namely the tracking of swelling European immigrant populations. With the demise of the mulatto category, official racial categories and the principles upheld in the *Plessy* case were now in sync (Davis 1991; Nobles 2000). In the struggle over U.S. racial classifications, the black/white division was and continues to be epicentral. The one-drop rule was developed specifically to manage blacks in the aftermath of slavery and to preserve the prerogatives of whites. Relative to the scrutiny it paid black/white sexual and social intermixing, the state has been comparatively unconcerned with recording and controlling the degree of racial mixing between other groups. Moreover, the one-drop principle of racial classification was not applied to persons of non-African descent with any consistency (Davis 1991). Nevertheless, the state has often involved itself in the classification of such persons. Much as it has with blacks, the state has

used the recognition of mixed race people as a tool in the management of relations with Asians, Indians, and Latinos. For example, as part of its campaign to "civilize" American Indians at the end of the nineteenth century, the government embarked on a policy of land redistribution wherein individuals, rather than the tribe itself, would hold property rights. While full-blood Indians were restricted in how they could use their land, no such restrictions were imposed upon mixed bloods. Because of their white ancestry, Congress presumed mixed bloods better suited to handle their affairs (Moran 2001; Spickard 1989).

State-sanctioned differential treatment of the racially mixed was in evidence during the World War II internment of Japanese Americans as well: government officials exempted some intermarried and mixed race Japanese Americans from imprisonment. The rationale? Japanese Americans who had intermarried or were of mixed descent probably felt loyalty to the United States because of their social connections with whites. Putting them in camps with full-blood Japanese Americans might erode such loyalty (Spickard 1989).

The strategic interpretation of racial classification by state institutions is evident again in the treatment of Latinos, particularly Mexican Americans. When formerly Mexican territories were annexed to the United States in the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, residents of those territories were to have full rights of citizenship, equal to those of whites. Despite being white by law, social acceptance of people of Mexican descent as white has been regularly challenged by whites, largely because Indian ancestry and brown skin are at odds with American notions of whiteness (Moran 2001).

The ambiguity of Mexican's racial status has made it a flexible tool in adjudicating racial disputes. Sometimes, that ambiguous racial status allowed people to escape the harshest consequences of transgressing racial boundaries. For example, the numerous marriages between Mexican origin women and Punjabi men in 1920s California technically violated the state's antimiscegenation laws. These couples were seldom prosecuted because Mexican origin women were considered white in name only. The violation of antimiscegenation laws did not upset the prevailing community norm of who was really white and thus in need of the putative protection the law provided (Leonard 1992; Moran 2001).

Yet the ambiguous racial status of those of Mexican origin could also work against their interests. In segregated 1920s Texas, a black man and a Mexican woman attempted to send their children to the local white school on

the grounds that the children were of Mexican ancestry and therefore white. Rather than admit the children, school officials had the couple prosecuted for violating antimiscegenation laws. In an effort to save her husband from prison, the wife testified that she too was part black. Local school officials seized on this admission, effectively redefining all Mexicans as black and establishing a school for black and Mexican children.

The social classification of mixed descent persons is variable by group and social context. In general, mixed race persons of African descent have generally been accepted as black but not as white. In contrast, Davis argues that racially mixed persons of Asian or Mexican (Indian) ancestry "have been treated as assimilating Americans after the first generation" of mixing with whites (1991, 118).

The Social Organization of Racial Hybridity Among African Americans

By the time the census ceased distinguishing between mulattoes and blacks in its race counts, the social deconstruction of mixed race persons that began after abolition was largely accomplished. By the 1920s, with segregation becoming more entrenched as blacks migrated to southern cities (and later, en masse to northern ones), the one-drop rule had gained social and legal acceptance by most whites *and* black Americans (Davis 1991; Williamson 1995). The class structure that had emerged among African Americans at the turn of the twentieth century was in transition. That structure, according to Frazier, "was based upon social distinctions such as education and conventional behavior, rather than upon occupation and income" (1957, 20). Those on the upper rungs of this hierarchy—the mulatto elite—owed their position in part to their mixed ancestry. That ancestry and the material and social privileges it brought derived from slavery, in which light-skinned slaves, primarily the offspring of white men and slave women, were granted relative privilege vis-à-vis their darker counterparts.[3] While mulattoes were no longer officially designated, racial hybridity would continue to matter in the social life of African Americans. Educated and more class privileged mulattoes distinguished themselves from the black masses by creating social clubs like the Bon Ton society of Washington, D.C., or the Boule in Philadelphia, that chose members primarily on the basis of both social class, but also by skin color (preferring, of course, higher class status and lighter skin). Members are said to have developed criteria for measuring light skin color, such as "paper bag" tests (no

darker than a paper bag) or the visibility of blue veins (Daniel 2002; Drake and Cayton 1993 [1945]; L. Graham 1999; Wu 2002).

For a while this elite would attempt to resist being lumped with blacks, but in a post-*Plessy* world in which Jim Crow segregation was taking hold, mulattoes understood they had little choice but to accept and even embrace their categorization with "unmixed" blacks. These social organizations, while maintaining a class and color boundary, were also inextricably a part of Negro community. Members understood themselves as nurturing a "talented tenth" engaged in a project of group uplift for all African Americans.

In the first few decades of the twentieth century, color and ancestry would become less directly important in securing material privilege. By World War I, increasing black migration and urbanization facilitated the attainment of education by a broader segment of the black population, not just the descendants of free people of color. Gradually, attributes such as education and occupation, and later income, became the primary determinants of membership in the black elite. Color and ancestry became like status symbols, helpful, even necessary in some quarters if one were to gain access to the Negro elite, but not sufficient alone to secure such a status.

Light color and mixed ancestry had diminishing power to signal a privileged status in part because they were no longer scarce commodities. By World War I, intermarriage between mulattoes and "unmixed" blacks was so extensive that social scientists estimated most Negroes had some non-African ancestry (Reuter 1918). Herskovits (1928) would argue that due to such extensive mixing, sharp differences in physical appearance among Negroes—the proportion who were very light or very dark—were diminishing, and they were becoming a new physical type—neither black nor white, but brown.

In the interwar years, distinctions of color and ancestry—though less determinative and indicative of social status—would remain relevant among African Americans, though largely within the confined social spaces that persons of African descent now inhabited. St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton (1993 [1945]) described in detail the relevance that mixed ancestry and intermarriage had in Chicago's Bronzeville neighborhood. "Colorism"—prejudice and discrimination on the basis of color—largely in the direction of a preference for lighter, more European-looking features—continued. In segregated Chicago, whites and blacks who intermarried were confined to black social spaces. According to Drake and Cayton, for the whites who engaged in it, intermarriage was "sociological suicide" in that, much like their children, they took on the lower social status of their spouse (Drake and Cayton 1993 [1945],

142). For black partners, intermarriage was generally not a springboard to greater social mobility among whites or blacks. Though intermarried couples were tolerated in black communities, African Americans also discouraged the practice. Drake and Cayton characterize this taboo against intermarriage among African Americans as a strategy to prevent group members (particularly men of higher socioeconomic status) from leaving the group and taking their resources with them.[4]

Indeed, in matters of racial equality, intermarriage was the rare issue over which blacks and whites largely agreed. They differed sharply in their attitudes toward economic opportunity, and to a somewhat lesser degree, residential segregation. Yet blacks and whites were in agreement that social equality did *not* include "(1) intermarriage, (2) membership in white cliques, churches and social clubs, and (3) visiting and entertaining across the color line" (Drake and Cayton 1993 [1945], 126). By World War II and continuing through the 1960s, African Americans, though increasingly race conscious, would remain indifferent to intermarriage restrictions, despite the fact that as late as 1962, "white Chicago still forces most Negroes to marry Negroes, to have Negroes as their intimate friends, and to participate in all-colored churches and associations."[5]

Restrictions on marriage decisions are ground zero in the maintenance of social inequality. For Drake and Cayton, African American indifference to these restrictions amounted to a "conspiracy of silence" that represented an accommodation to segregation—a decision to love their fate rather than struggle against it.[6] Moreover, African Americans fully accepted the one-drop rule. Though it had been designed to facilitate their exclusion, they would come to see it as a source of group cohesion. It would be another thirty years before that rule was challenged.

Seeking State Categorization

The appearance in 1993 by multiracial activists at federal hearings assessing the U.S. government's racial classification schema represented a significant shift in adjudication over racial categories. Prior to these hearings, the most significant decisions made over racial classification, like the *Plessy* decision or the U.S. Census Bureau's decision to drop the mulatto category, were initiated by government institutions. This time around a group of parents of multiracial children and multiracial adults approached the state and *asked* to be racially categorized. They made the claim that since the state collected racial data, it had an obligation to "accurately" count an individual's race, which to

them meant that the state would have to in some way count *multi*raciality. In this they were like many others who have come to see the state's racial categories as opportunities to declare personal identity (Cornell 1996; Nagel 1995; Waters 1990). What was different about multiracial activists' claims was the contention that ethnoracial self-identification was a person's right. They employed the codes of liberal individualism, which constructs persons as choice-making selves who ought to be treated with dignity and respect.

The "Right" to Racial Classification

The contention that racial classification is a right is a relatively recent understanding of racial classification. Prior to the 1970s, racial classification had largely been considered an objective characteristic of persons that the state merely labeled. As such, racial classification per se did not need to be claimed as a right. Racial struggles generally centered on the rights accruing to one classified in a particular way, or one's categorization within a given set of categories. Multiracial activists claimed that the individual, rather than the state, should decide how one is racially classified. They pointed out that despite a census policy of racial self-enumeration in place since 1970, the limits placed on the number of categories one could choose effectively took away a multiracial person's ability to self-designate race. Moreover, they argued that the interests of other parties (be they the state, institutions such as schools, or other officially recognized ethnoracial groups) were secondary to those of the individual checking the box. Finally, activists situated the right to classification as one pertaining not merely to the individuals that the classifications were meant to identify, but to those individuals' *parents*. Racial classification, according to activists, was an important means by which parents could lay claim to their children and through which children might signal their affiliation with and relation to their parents.

Multiracial activists' arguments cast racial classification in very individualistic terms. In calling for the option of checking multiple racial categories, they treated the state's racial classifications as a menu of options that could and should be customized to fit each unique individual, rather than a set of mutually exclusive categories into which individuals must fit themselves. In order to advance this individualistic agenda, however, they had to argue on behalf of a group. Multiracial activists argued that the right to such a classification was essential to safeguard mixed descent persons' equal protection under the law. In doing so, they began to talk about multiracial people as a distinct class, equivalent to any other ethnic group protected by civil rights

legislation. Carlos Fernandez (1994), legal advisor to and past president of the AMEA, tried to make the case that the Revonda Bowens incident in Alabama in 1994 could be a test case for gaining recognition of multiracial/ethnic people "as a distinct class by an agency of government." In that incident , Bowens was told by her high school principal, Hulond Humphries, that she and other mixed race people like her were "mistakes" as he attempted to ban interracial couples from the prom. The case settled out of court.

The specific policy on racial classification against which multiracials argued was over fifteen years old. In 1974, the Federal Interagency Committee on Education created an Ad Hoc Committee on Racial and Ethnic Definitions whose task was to standardize the racial categories used by federal agencies. In the absence of such a standard, state agencies were collecting racial statistics using disparate categories, making comparisons across agencies difficult. The Committee's work resulted in the adoption of Statistical Policy Directive 15 by the OMB in 1977. This classification schema is commonly referred to simply as Directive 15. The 1977 version of Directive 15 included the racial categories white, black, American Indian, Asian/Pacific Islander, and Other. "Hispanic" was treated as an ethnic category.

The reactions of other contenders in the debate to the claims of multiracial activists were almost uniformly negative and challenged multiracials' claims to group status. While these civil rights organizations focused on the possible harm such a change in the system of racial classification would have on the monitoring of compliance with civil rights legislation and the likelihood that such a change would diminish the population size of established ethnoracial groups, they justified their opposition by challenging the assertion that multiracials shared sufficient commonalities as a group to warrant such protected status. The National Coalition for an Accurate Count of Asians and Pacific Islanders, for example, questioned "the salience of biraciality or multiraciality in relationship to the specific provisions and intended benefits" of civil rights programs since: "What can be stated about common experiences shared by biracial or multiracial persons? . . . biracial or multiracial persons have the burden to document what distinct experiences or disadvantagement, in contrast to persons of protected single race backgrounds, that have because of their biraciality or multiraciality before the decision to establish a multiracial or biracial category would be appropriate." [7]

The basis of the disagreement between opponents and proponents of multiracial classification lies in the way each camp interpreted the meaning and purpose of state racial classification. Opponents of multiracial classification

were essentially arguing that decisions about changes to Directive 15 should be guided by the purposes for which the Directive was originally created—as a means through which to track the effects of racial domination. For them, the question of *how* to classify persons was settled. What mattered to them was how the data gleaned from the given classifications was employed. Multiracials, they argued, could not demonstrate that they had been unfairly treated because of their multiracial status and thus did not warrant the recognition *as a group* that state classification confers. To multiracial activists, on the other hand, the question of classification was far from settled, and mattered to them because they understood classification as symbolic of their personal identity, which they believed they had the right to choose for themselves.

Creating a New Constituency

Despite these competing interests, multiracial activists gained a substantial measure of success in changing the way that race was enumerated. While the stand-alone multiracial category that some activists wanted was not approved, individuals are now instructed that they may mark multiple responses to the race question on federal government forms.[8] That they achieved this success is particularly interesting when one realizes how few multiracial activists were involved in the negotiations at the state and federal levels. The most active lobbying groups, Project RACE and AMEA, were represented at these official events by only a handful of individuals. Yet they presented themselves as representatives of an already-existing community that was unified in its support for multiracial classification. Project RACE claimed to be a "national organization" [9] while AMEA stressed its role as an umbrella organization representing numerous local multiracial organizations.

The swiftness with which multiracial coalitions were able to respond to the call to revise the racial and ethnic standards suggests there was a preexisting level of collective consciousness and organization among multiracial people that had been largely invisible to the broader public. And indeed this is true. Both AMEA and Project RACE drew personnel and resources from existing multiracial organizations. I-Pride, Biracial Family Network, and MASC, for example, are signatories on AMEA's charter.

While it is true that AMEA and Project RACE draw support from various organizations, the impression put forth by activists that they represent the community of multiracials differs somewhat from the reality. The most visible representative of Project RACE was its founder, Susan Graham. Since

membership lists of the organization are not made readily available, it is difficult to assess the extent of its support or the social position of its members. When I spoke with Susan Graham during the classification debate and in my discussions with others who worked with her, it appears that Project RACE is largely Susan Graham and those few associates. AMEA's organizational structure more closely reflects a representative body. Its leadership, for example, is elected by the membership of its signatory organizations. Even still, it is difficult to say that AMEA represents "multiracials" as such. While longstanding networks have developed among various "groups," and those groups have contributed resources to the lobbying effort put forth by AMEA, these ties exist for only a fraction of the universe of multiracial organizations. Although no official tally exists, based on advertisements published in multiracial organization newsletters and media accounts, more than sixty local community organizations have formed in all parts of the country since 1980—many more when one counts campus organizations. Of those, thirteen were signatories of AMEA's charter during the census debates of the 1990s. So while multiracial organizations were forming in all parts of the country, and many were at least nominally involved in the classification debate, most were not. Moreover, these connections between "groups" are more accurately described as connections between *individuals*, typically the nominal leaders of the organizations, whereas the rank and file of these organizations are relatively uninvolved and/or uninterested in the debate over official classification.

One local organizational leader recalled being "pressed into service" at the last minute for the 1996 Multiracial Solidarity March, with virtually no advance knowledge of either the event or the issues at stake. That event, organized by Charles Byrd, self-styled multiracial leader from Queens, New York, and operator of the Web site Interracial Voice, was intended to persuade the government to include a multiracial category on the 2000 census through a showing of the putative popular support such a measure enjoyed. Byrd billed the march (which took place on the Mall in Washington, D.C.) as something akin to the 1963 March on Washington in both scope and aim, but it was neither. Reflecting on the small number of participants, journalist Clarence Page (1996) dubbed this "march" a "hundred person picnic."

The question of what community multiracial spokespersons represent is even more complicated when we note that many of the multiracial organizations that formed in the last twenty years no longer exist. I conducted a phone survey in 1997 of the multiracial organizations advertised in the now-defunct

Interrace magazine. Of the nearly 60 organizations listed, fewer than half were still in existence in 1997. Many organizations that were around in the early 1990s are no longer meeting regularly, if at all. Several of the past coordinators of these groups said their groups fizzled out because the participants' children "outgrew" the group. Others pointed to the difficulties of coordinating busy schedules. The temporary nature of many organizations suggests that the "multiracial community" as such is only loosely organized.

The point here is not that the goals of multiracial activists are entirely divorced from any constituency. Rather it is to point out that gaining *state* recognition of social identities *requires* that activists make their claims on behalf of a putative group—to *create* a constituency. Activists' references to a "multiracial community" were (in part) rhetorical devices self-consciously employed to bolster claims that they represented a constituency. As Ramona Douglass, past president of AMEA put it, "we made it seem like we were a massive force to be dealt with." This illustrates a fundamental feature of struggles over social classifications. It is not unusual for activists to claim to represent a "community" of shared interests that in reality does not exist as such, wherein the presumed members of the community are relatively uncommitted to the goals that motivate spokespersons of that "community." Activists must make "the community" *appear* to exist in order to bring it into existence.

While key to multiracial activists effectiveness was their ability to present themselves as representative of a community, they also had to present that community as unified over the issue of classification, even though there were significant differences in philosophy within the coalition of activists organized around classification. Susan Graham of Project RACE was deeply committed to getting a separate multiracial category on the census, while AMEA eventually backed a category that allowed for specific ancestry responses. Although in June 1997, just before the OMB was to make its final decision, Project RACE had agreed to support the multiple check-off option in conjunction with AMEA, that coalition broke down shortly after, with Project RACE ultimately supporting a stand-alone multiracial category. In the end, OMB adopted a version (MOOM) that more closely resembled the one backed by AMEA.

Key to AMEA's effectiveness was its ability to forge coalitions with strategically placed individuals and organizations. First, it drew on the symbolic capital of academics, several of whom either sat on its board or provided it with advice. Moreover, the messages in some of the writings by these academics, most of whom identify as mixed race or are themselves intermarried,

are indistinguishable from those of activists. The "Bill of Rights for Racially Mixed People" written by psychologist Maria Root illustrates the extent of this parity.[10] Academics lend legitimacy to the notion of organizing along the principle of multiraciality. Their work (creating courses on multiraciality, writing anthologies and memoirs) serves a powerful legitimating function because prestigious and seemingly neutral institutions like universities and publishing houses support it. Moreover, the simultaneity of these messages alongside populist appeals makes the phenomenon of multiracial collective organization appear more coherent and widespread than it is in fact.

Perhaps more important than the support AMEA garnered from academics is the coalition it formed with persons of partial Asian descent, represented by HIF. Prior to 1997, HIF had not been active in the classification debate. As Greg Mayeda, one of its founders, noted, "The classification issue seemed less urgent than building relations with the Japanese American community." As the Interagency Committee's deadline for making recommendations to OMB approached (July 1997), however, Ramona Douglass of AMEA made a concerted effort to bring HIF into the debates over racial classification and succeeded in getting representatives of HIF to join the lobbying effort. The presence of HIF was important primarily because it lent strength to the contention that multiracial activists' support was broadly based. In particular, the support of Asian multiracials eased the suspicion of some that those in favor of multiracial classification were really interested in being a little less black. In another attempt to counter such accusations, multiracial activists stressed that the multiracial community contained within it persons who were "double minorities"—not part white—who, therefore, could not be accused of trying to gain white privilege.

Greg Mayeda recalls that HIF board members initially supported a multiracial box, though largely before they had thoroughly considered the issues. Soon after becoming involved, however, HIF moved to a position supporting any alternative that allowed multiracials to "respond to multiple boxes" without "diminishing the count of anybody else." Mayeda believes that because AMEA and HIF decided to lobby for a multiple check-off option rather than a stand-alone multiracial category they were able to "build a coalition" with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP):

> The thing that sort of broke it open for us to build a coalition was when I told him that our position had always been multiple check-offs, that we weren't going to support just a multiracial box, that we wanted a choice. We didn't