

Tiger hoopla reminiscent of one-drop rule

■ The One-Drop Rule has faded out of the teaching, but not out of some people's minds.

My friend Lynda is a read-a-holic; one of those people with a fatal weakness for bookstores. She and I do not get together as often as we should, but when we do, Lynda has just finished some great book which she heartily recommends.

"You must read **"THE SWEETER THE JUICE-A** family memoir in Black and White" by Shirley Taylor Haizlip," she told me one day. Dutifully, I went to the nearest bookstore and bought it. Lynda was right. It is a great book, at least for readers not turned off by books on race.

Shirley T. Haizlip's book tells of her search for her mother's father and her mother's brothers and sisters who chose to pass over the color line and live as white people. "As my mother approached her eightieth birthday, I made a conscious decision to use whatever means possible to find her family," Haizlip wrote.

I hadn't thought about that book for a long time; not until the hoopla about Tiger Woods. Not the hoopla

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about him being "The Michael Jordan of Golf," but the hoopla about him being multiracial. If "The Source: A Guidebook to American Genealogy" can be believed, a huge percentage of Americans are of mixed blood. Some geneticists place the percentage in the high 90s, casting doubt about any "pure race" in America.

A couple evenings ago on PBS news, I heard Chicago Tribune Columnist Clarence Page speak about the One-Drop Rule. I learned about that rule as a child as did most African-Americans of my generation. But that history maybe lost to younger generations. That rule had its beginning in slavery time on the plantations of the South. The One-Drop Rule stated: "If you have one drop of black blood in your family — you are black." The Supreme Court re-enforced this Rule in 1896 in the Plessy versus Ferguson Case.

Homer Plessy looked white but was one-eighth black, so the court ruled that he was black.

Tiger Woods is reported to be African-American, Asian, European and Native American. Author Shirlee T. Haizlip says: "I have been called Egyptian, Italian, Jewish, French, Iranian, Armenian, Syrian, Spanish, Portuguese and Greek. I have also been called black...I am an American anomaly." Both Woods and Haizlip fall prey to the One-Drop Rule.

The numbers of people who don't fit neatly into the black or white category are increasing. Will a mixed race category ever be added to the Census forms and other forms that ask about one's race? I do not expect to see this accommodation soon.

I suspect that this aspect of race in particular and race in general will not be dealt with in any honest, healthy way in the foreseeable future. These are "hot button" issues; too emotionally loaded, too painful, too complex. Race is about anthropology, sociology, biology, genetics, DNA, psyches, sensibilities — and politics.

That's the bad news.

The good news is, in 1992, Shirlee T. Haizlip reunited her mother with one of her sisters, after 76 years!

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