

Soledad O'Brien: 'Who Is Black in America?'

Soledad O'Brien is the anchor for the CNN morning show, *Starting Point*, and a special correspondent for CNN/U.S. Since joining the network in 2003, O'Brien has reported breaking news from around the globe and has produced award-winning, record-breaking and critically acclaimed documentaries on the most important stories facing the world today. In 2010, she wrote a critically-acclaimed memoir "The Next Big Story: My Journey through the Land of Possibilities," which chronicles her biggest reporting moments and how her upbringing and background have influenced these experiences.

O'Brien's documentaries include the "Black in America" and "Latino in America" series; "Don't Fail Me: Education in America," a look at the crisis in public education where American kids are not learning the skills necessary to compete; "The Women Who Would be Queen," a portrayal of the future King and Queen's friendship-turned-romance and very modern royal marriage; "Unwelcome: The Muslims Next Door," a report on religious freedom protections; "Pictures Don't Lie," the story of the secret life of Civil Rights photographer Ernest Withers as a paid FBI informant; "Rescued," a look at Haiti's remarkable children before, during and after the devastating earthquake; and "Gary and Tony Have a Baby," chronicling the struggle of two gay men to have a child.

A graduate of Harvard University, Soledad lives with her husband and four children in Manhattan. Here, she talks about her upcoming *Black in America* special "Who Is Black in America?" which is set to premiere on CNN on Sunday, Dec. 9 at 8



CELEBRITY INTERVIEW

by Kam Williams

p.m. ET/PT. (Check local listings)

Kam Williams: Hi Soledad, thanks for another interview.

Soledad O'Brien: Thank you, Kam.

KW: Congratulations on your excellent election year coverage on CNN. But did you ever worry about being pigeonholed as

that's named after a prison."

SO: It's going to get crazy at times during any election year. That's just what happens. The goal for me is to be focused and really well-read so I'm prepared to ask the tough questions of both sides. You're always going to have those people who love you and those who hate you, but after four kids and a quarter-century in this business, I have a very thick skin. [Chuckles] The only thing that bothers me is if I feel I haven't done a tough interview. The people who come on regularly know they're going to be challenged, and that they can challenge me. They also understand that I'm not a pushover and that I don't crumble because I come armed with the facts.

KW: Let's talk about your upcoming special. Where did you come up with the idea for *Who Is Black in America*?

SO: We were thinking about universal themes for *Black in America* that really touch people, that really matter to people, and one

of the themes that we kept coming up with was colorism, discrimination based on skin tone. It was fascinating to hear the conversations that were happening between people who were light-skinned, people who were dark-skinned, and people somewhere in between. Just the hurt, the pain and anger on all sides was very interesting. So, we

thought we would explore that because it seemed like a very interesting story to tell, especially since we were seeing a big change, generationally. The conversations I was having with men and women of my age group were very different from the conversations younger men and women were having with people of their age group. It's fascinating to hear the take of those that we feature in the doc around 17, 18 and 19, as they kind of grapple with their identity and with where America is today.

KW: I think I heard CNN's Roland Martin mention in promo for your show that he had someone in his family pass for white.

SO: Yep, and that's not an unusual story. That's another question people would like to explore. What makes you black? How can you consider yourself black while someone with the identical genetic makeup considers themselves white or tries to pass for white? Those are the sort of big questions we wanted to grapple with.

KW: I suspect that the influx of immigrants from South America, India, Africa, Mexico and so many other countries, along with mixed marriage, is changing the definition of what is black?

SO: I think that's true. I also think that there's a real interesting conversation going on generationally. One of the young women we profile, who is biracial, very much has a hard time identifying as black. And yet, she has a sister who would say the exact opposite. [Chuckles] So, this isn't a documentary where we come up with the right answer at the end. It really is much more a conversa-

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partisan during the presidential campaign? How do you maintain your image as impartial when you have Republicans taking potshots at you? For instance, Romney advisor John Sununu suggested that you put an Obama bumper sticker on your forehead, and Fox News President Roger Ailes condescendingly referred to you as "That girl

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