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Soledad

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tion about colorism because, ultimately, what is at the heart of all this is this sense that there's some better skin color to be, and that people are discriminated against. So, it's not just that people are grappling with identity but that there's a lot of pain and shame and embarrassment and hurt and anger on account of colorism. And we wanted to understand what that was.

KW: Tell me a little about Nayo Jones, one of the young women you profile on the special.

SO: She's biracial. Her father is white and mother's black. She lives with her dad and very much identifies with her white side. She's a super-talented, smart young singer and poet. She goes through life with people trying to figure out what she is, and asking, "What are you?" which really makes her mad.

KW: What about Perry DiVirgilio?

SO: In a way, he's the center of all the stories. He's a biracial guy. His dad is white, his mom is black, and he runs the poetry workshop in Philadelphia on understanding who you are where all of these people's lives intersect. They're sort of the right age for it because they're the coming-of-age age. When you're a slam poet, part of the agenda is to connect to your material. And your success is a measure of your honesty and your authenticity. I think a lot of those slam poets don't want to tackle the hard stuff, and Perry really pushes them and challenges about what their identity means to them by asking, "What is making you angry?" "What are you afraid of?" and "What are you ashamed of?" So, he's sort of the centerpiece of our documentary not just for his

own story but because he connects to all the young people as the poet/mentor who tries to get them to be honest. What you realize is that most people aren't that honest, and this is one of the rare times when you capture people on camera speaking about how they feel about race and identity.

KW: How do you see this coming-of-age generation as different?

SO: I think those in our documentary share a sense of optimism, and I'm curious to see where it goes. Overall, it was very interesting to see all these different people trying to tackle the problem of colorism, because in some ways it's such a deep psychological problem. Perry, our poet, thinks so. He believes that young people being able to articulate their poetry so unbelievably is really about understanding who they are. The exercises that he does in his poetry workshop are just fascinating.

KW: Do you think you might have different generational reactions to the special?

SO: I'm sure. Some of the younger people exhibit a certain flexibility. They're like, "Why can't I be biracial? Why can't I be both?" I never felt that was an option for us. Maybe it was, but I never felt like I had an option for both. My identity was very strong. I never believed people who



Soledad O'Brien



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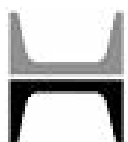
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