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O'Brien

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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 conversation 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.

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



Soledad O'Brien

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.



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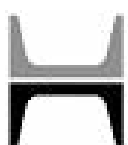
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11-21-12

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