



## **We Are All Rainbows Now**

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For decades, TV journalist Geraldo Rivera has battled the old rumor that he changed his name from Jerry Rivers to qualify as a Hispanic and thus become eligible for some news outlet's minority-hiring program. As inaccurate as the story may be, it's easy to see why many people believed that someone holding an ethnic card might try to cash it in -- and how the tale fed cynicism about America's emerging system of racial and ethnic "preferences."

A serious legal debate about affirmative action rages on today and will not end anytime soon. Yet once again, an absurd story is drawing attention to the essential difficulty of trying to engineer diversity or make up for past racial wrongs generations after they occurred. Actually, there are two stories, but they both raise the same question: What if everyone in the U.S. is now holding an ethnic chip, theoretically redeemable at some college or workplace or government program? If we all try to cash them in, will the preference edifice collapse?

We're not there yet, but some signs are pointing in that direction. The first comes from Peter Kirsanow, a member of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. Writing about a commission hearing on the development of questions for the 2010 census in the April 12 National Review Online, Mr. Kirsanow noted that the 2000 census let respondents define themselves according to 126 racial/ethnic categories -- up from just five in 1978. Such information is more meaningless than ever, Mr. Kirsanow writes: "The rapid proliferation of racial and ethnic classifications does little to dampen suspicions that the categories are, at a minimum, arbitrary -- and probably specious. Someone may have been Black of Hispanic origin in 1990, but today that person might be Cuban or 'some other race.'"

What criteria should we use to determine a person's race? Some Americans are trying to use DNA testing to win success or riches in the diversity sweepstakes. A New York Times article Wednesday opened with the story of adopted twins, born of white parents. Since DNA tests purport to show that the boys have a bit of Native American and African blood, their father hopes the newfound ethnicity will help them qualify for college financial aid. Is this the new "one-drop rule"?

Then there is the 98% "European" woman who applied to college as an Asian after a DNA test found a 2% "Asian" strain. And with all that casino money out there, it's no wonder that some Indian tribes face people demanding a share of it based on only DNA "evidence."

Evidence is in quotation marks because DNA testing for genealogy involves as much supposition as science at this point. Human beings have so many genes in common that assigning slight variations to countries of origin or specific ethnic groups is often just guesswork. Even so, it is not that difficult to imagine a flood of Americans trying to milk the preference cow this way. Now picture officialdom struggling to respond. In a world where everybody is a rainbow, where does the sorting begin?

Come to think of it, though, this was always the ultimate goal of people of goodwill: no sorting by race, color or creed. It may just happen by ways and means we never expected.