

Black or White?

March 29

One of the best takes on dolezal so far:



<https://socialinqueery.com/2015/06/17/rachel-dolezal-is-really-queer-transracial-politics-and-queer-futurity/>

We live in dark and cowardly times per all the people attacking her.

Shemon

March 29

Terrific article, thank you Shemon.

Sandra Young

March 30

Shemon,

Thank you very much for the articulate and emotive piece on Rachel Dolezal. I have long felt that she was very unfairly attacked and reviled for her voluntary racial transformation. (Among other things, she lost her teaching job, her position in the NAACP, and has been socially ostracized.) It has been particularly irksome to me

that, in contrast to Caitlyn Jenner, who utilized her transformation to launch a lucrative career in the mass media, Rachel worked on a much quieter level to further the cause of Black liberation.



Of course, over the years, there have been more than a few phenotypically white people who felt themselves to be Black and became members of the Black community. Two of the more public examples that I am aware of are the jazz clarinetist and saxophonist, Mezz Mezzrow, and the Rhythm and Blues legend, Johnny Otis.

Mezzrow, born Milton Mesirow, the son of Russian Jewish parents, recorded with many important Black jazz musicians. He married a Black woman, moved to Harlem, and, at one point, was the major dealer of marijuana there, so much so that "Mezz" was one of the slang expressions for the weed. (Louis Armstrong was one of his main customers.) In 1939, he was arrested while trying to enter the World's Fair in New York City with 60 joints in his pocket, and charged with possession with intent to sell. He was tried, convicted, and sent to prison. When he being processed, he persuaded the warden that he was Black and asked to be housed with the Black prisoners. As far as I know, he was completely accepted by them.

Johnny Otis, who became a major figure in the history of jazz, rhythm and blues, and rock 'n' roll, was born to Greek immigrants who owned a grocery in the Black section of Berkeley, California. All of his friends were Black. He played with them, went to school with them, and felt himself to be Black. He married a Black (and Filipina) woman. During his long career, he discovered, produced, and recorded with an astounding list of R & B singers, including Esther Phillips, Etta James, Willie Mae Thornton, Hank Ballard, Little Willie John, Jackie Wilson, and others. He had a long career as a musician,

bandleader (he had a major crossover hit in the 1950s with "Willie and the Hand Jive), nightclub owner, record producer, radio DJ, and TV show host. While he never denied his Greek identity, he felt himself to have "crossed over" into the Black community.



Speaking personally, for much of my life, I have been perceived as, and seen myself as, as a dark person. In Los Angeles, I am regularly taken to be Latino, including and in particular by Latinos. I have also been seen as being Black, Arab, and Armenian, by members of those ethnic groups. As one who does not comfortably fit into our society's racial (and other) categories, I identify with and support Rachel and wish her well. For those who are interested, a sympathetic interview with her recently appeared in The Guardian.

Ron
