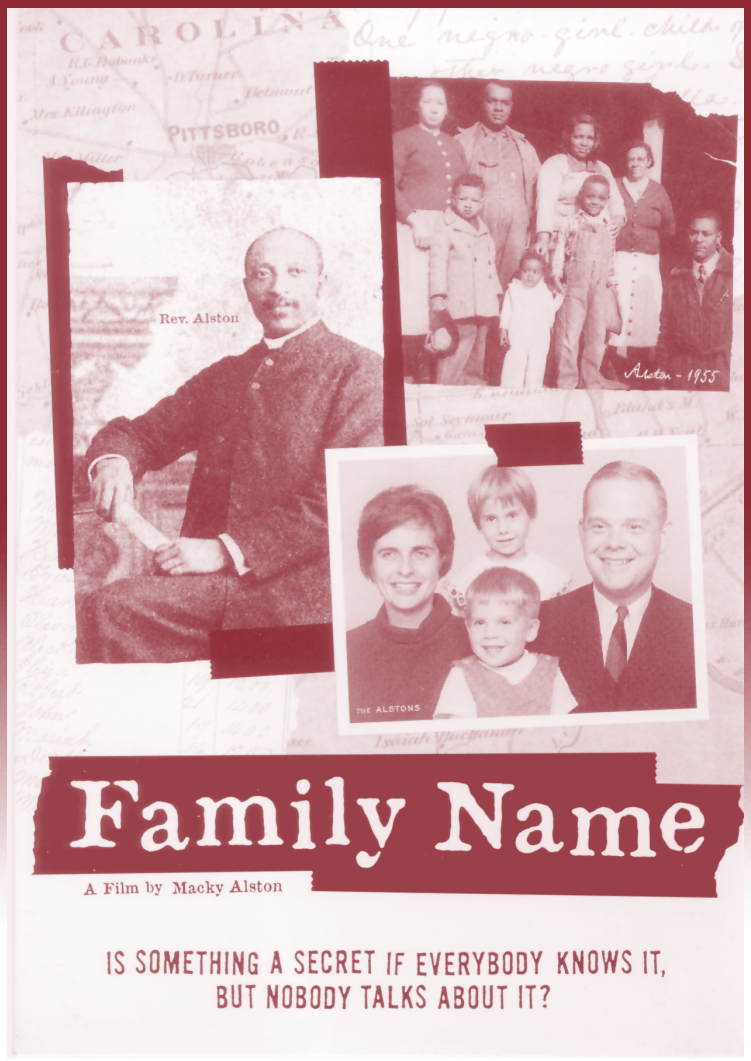
A GUIDE TO



FACING HISTORY AND OURSELVES NATIONAL FOUNDATION, INC.

A GUIDE TO

Family Name

FAMILY NAME is the winner of the 1997 Sundance Film Festival's Freedom of Expression Award, the 1997 Gotham Open Palm Award, Grand Jury Prizes at the Bermuda International Film Festival and the North Carolina Film Festival, and the 1998 National Educational Media Network Silver Apple Award.

Facing History and Ourselves National Foundation, Inc.
Brookline, Massachusetts

FAMILY NAME is an Opelika Pictures production. Theatrical/16mm distribution courtesy of Strand Releasing. FAMILY NAME is available on video for home viewing or educational distribution through First Run/Icarus Films.
Director: Macky Alston
Executive Producer: Nicholas Gottlieb
Producer: Selina Lewis

Major funding for the film and its educational distribution campaign provided by The Ford Foundation.

Additional funding provided in part by The Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation, The Mary Duke Biddle Foundation, The Cemala Foundation, Donald and Carole Chaiken, The Corporation for Public Broadcasting, Camille O. Cosby and William H. Cosby, Jr., The Donnet Fund, The Lucius and Eva Eastman Fund, The Esprit Foundation, The Maurice Falk Medical Fund, The Wallace Alexander Gerbode Foundation, The Gilder Foundation, Linda Gottlieb and Robert Tessler, Paul Gottlieb and Elisabeth Scharlatt, The Greenwall Foundation, Agnes Gund and Daniel Shapiro, The Heathcote Art Foundation, The Lauder Foundation, The Lorne Michaels Foundation, Michael Moore, The Northstar Foundation, Anne L. Peretz, Philip Morris USA, The Paul Robeson Fund for Independent Media, The Unity Avenue Foundation, The E. Craig Wall, Sr. Foundation, The Wellspring Foundation, and with public funds from the New York State Council on the Arts.

Opelika Pictures would like to extend special thanks to Adam Strom, Alison Richardson, Marc Skvirsky, Margot Stern Strom, Chris Stokes, Jenifer Snow, and Phyllis Goldstein at Facing History and Ourselves; Ellen Schneider and Lisa Heller at P.O.V.; and our own Macky Alston, Nicholas Gottlieb, Selina Lewis, Kay Gayner, Jocelyn Glatzer, Suzanne Schneider, Brian Bergen, and Elana Weinstein.

Grateful acknowledgment is made to the following for permission to reprint previously published material:

Page 3: From *Slaves in the Family* by Edward Ball. (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998), p. 7.
Pages 6-7: From "Passing" by Shirlee Taylor Haizlip. *American Heritage*, February/March, 1995, p.47.
Page 7: Ibid., p. 48.
Pages 7-8 From "The American Anthropological Association Preliminary Statement on Race". *Anthropology Newsletter,* April 1997, 1.
Page 12: From *A Discussion with Elie Wisel: Facing History Students Confront Hatred and Violence*. Facing History and Ourselves, 1993.
Page 13: From *The Sweeter the Juice* by Shirlee Taylor Haizlip. (Simon & Schuster, 1994.) p. 14.
Pages 13-14: From *Slaves in the Family* by Edward Ball, 13-14.

Photographs: cover, title page, 2, 4, 6, 11: Courtesy of Opelika Pictures.
Page 6: Courtesy of Shirlee Taylor Haizlip.

CONTENTS

*A 25-minute version of the film is available for these discussions. It consists of brief, isolated clips that can be used to highlight a particular idea, theme, or concept developed in the film.

PREFACE

FAMILY NAME documents Macky Alston's efforts to confront his family's history and relate what he learned to his own identity. It is a journey with both particular and universal implications. In many respects, it models the journey many teachers and students take as they confront the past in a Facing History and Ourselves institute or course. They, too, ask difficult questions about privilege and responsibility, identity and membership, legacy and memory. As they seek answers, they too begin to relate the past to their own sense of who they are and what they might become. Throughout their journey, many turn to the Facing History staff for guidance and suggestions.

As Alston edited his film and then adapted it for classroom use, he received suggestions and support from Adam Strom, Alison Richardson, and Blaise Kearsley of Facing History. They shared the film with the entire staff and gathered ideas, comments, and criticisms from Facing History teachers at workshops and institutes. They also previewed the film with Facing History's Student Leadership Group in New York. They, too, expressed opinions and offered suggestions. That process of listening and learning from one another blurs the line between teacher and student. It is a process that benefits everyone who participates. That same process informs all of the work of Facing History and Ourselves, including this study guide.

Margot Stern Strom
Executive Director
Facing History and Ourselves

PreView

INTRODUCING FAMILY NAME

FAMILY NAME, the documentary you are about to see, traces the efforts of filmmaker Macky Alston to uncover the history that unites three present-day families that share his last name—two are black and one is white. Alston introduces himself at the beginning of the film with these words:

> My grandfather's name was Wallace McPherson Alston and he was a preacher. My father's name is Wallace McPherson Alston, Jr. and he's also a preacher. My name is Wallace McPherson Alston the Third. I dropped out of seminary after two years. Okay, so I rebelled . . . . When I was five [my father] put me in a predominately black public school in Durham, North Carolina. It was where I first met black children with the same last name as me. I remember wondering how this could be, but I felt like this was something I couldn't talk about. We moved north when I was eight and the issue never really came up again.
>
> Recently I asked my dad about our family history and he gave me a book. That's where I discovered that the Alstons were one of the largest slave-owning families in North Carolina.
>
> Is something a secret if everybody knows it, but nobody talks about it? I want to know the whole story behind my family name.

In the film, Alston shares the journey he took to learn more about his name, his family history, and ultimately, himself. It is a journey that helped him discover how he and his family relate to the outside world.

CONNECTIONS

A journal is a way of documenting the process of one's thinking. For author Joan Didion and others, it is also a way of examining ideas. She explains, "I write entirely to find out what I'm thinking, what I'm looking at, what I see, and what it means." You may find it helpful to use a journal to explore the ideas raised in FAMILY NAME. Begin by writing about your own name. Who named you? What stories are associated with your name? Interview members of your family to find out more about how you got your name and what it means.

As you watch FAMILY NAME, pay attention not only to what people say but also to their gestures, pauses, and facial expressions—their body language. How does an individual's body language add to your understanding of what he or she is saying?
After watching the film, use your journey to record:

—your impressions. Which scenes or interviews stand out in your mind?
—what you learned from the film. What did you discover about Macky Alston and his family? What did you learn about the intricate relationships between a person's family and his or her identity? Between identity and history?
—questions that the film raised but did not fully answer. What questions would you like to ask Macky Alston? The people he interviews in the film?

In *Parting the Waters*, historian Taylor Branch writes, "Among the most joyous feelings most frequently mentioned by freed or escaped slaves was the freedom to choose a name. A name was no longer incidental. 'For it is through our names that we first place ourselves in the world,' Ralph Ellison wrote." For most of human history, a man's name was determined at birth and could not be altered. In many societies, however, a woman's name is changed when she marries. What does this practice suggest about the relationship between one's gender and his or her identity? About the way one's name places one in the world?

The belief that one can choose his or her own name and identity is a relatively new idea and a very American notion. Throughout the nation's history, tens of thousands of individuals have taken on new names in order to redefine their identity. What is the relationship between our name and our identity? Would you be the same person if you had a different name? Would others see you in the same way? How does your name place you in the world?

At one point in the film, Macky Alston meets an African American with the same last name. He too introduces himself through his name.

> My name is Fred Oliver Alston, Jr. Fred comes from the word *Frederick* which means "peaceful chieftain" or "peaceful ruler." *Oliver* has something to do with peace. And *Alston* has to do with the old village, so technically my name means "peaceful chieftain from the old village." It's also my father's name, so I guess I'm connected with him through that also.

How much do you know about the history behind your family name and the way it connects you to the world? If you decided to explore your family and its history, what places would you visit? Whom would you interview? What questions would you ask? How might the answers you get help you place yourself and your family in the world?

Fred Alston, Jr. gets a hug after performing at Cherry Hill, a former Alston plantation in Inez, NC.

PostView

THE QUIET TRUCE: A LEGACY OF SLAVERY

Reading 1

S. Allen Counter and other scholars have noted that "the descendents of the enslaved and the enslaver alike operate under a kind of quiet truce, tiptoeing around the delicate subject to avoid pain, embarrassment, or hostility." In FAMILY NAME, Macky Alston tries to break that truce by asking direct questions about the legacies of slavery. For the most part, the Alstons, both black and white, avoid answering his questions. Jeff Alston, Fred Alston's son, is one of the few in the film to even try to respond. He describes an incident that may reveal what lies behind that "quiet truce:"

> One time in history class we somehow got on about how did the myth come about that black males are stronger than everyone else. And so, this one girl, she had a hard time forming what she was trying to say. She was like, "Well, maybe, maybe it's because they are closer to the apes or something like that." At first I'm like, you know, I was kind of caught and stunned but the thing that burned me up most was that the teacher, right away, went on to another topic. We just moved right over that, forgot all about it, just buried that and went on to another topic. So, I was like, "Well, look, I know the answer to that, " I said, "I can tell you that right here. I'd like to address something that was said before." But she was like "No, write it in your journal, write it in your journal, write what you believe."

The Alstons are not the only family in the United States with secrets and silences related to "race." Edward Ball has discovered that his family also "tiptoes around" the topic. Ball, like Macky Alston, is the son of a minister. He too set out to research his family name, his history, and his own identity. In *Slaves in the Family*, the book he wrote about that journey, he repeats a "little joke" his father often told:

> "There are five things we don't talk about in the Ball family," he would say. "Religion, sex, death, money, and the Negroes."*
>
> "What does that leave to talk about?" my mother asked once.
>
> "That's another of the family secrets," Dad said, smiling.

* The word *Negroes* was commonly used in the early 1900s to refer to African Americans. Its use reflects the time period.

CONNECTIONS

In approaching difficult subjects, like racism, is there a "quiet truce" or are people reluctant to discuss opinions that they fear may be misinterpreted or misunderstood? Macky Alston's father warns his son not to "invade a person's privacy . . . not only because it's poking into somebody's intimate family background, but also because it carries the baggage of segregation, of slavery, of abuse, of injustice." How do his comments relate to the "quiet truce" that S. Allen Counter describes? To a fear of being misinterpreted? How does Macky Alston seem to regard the notion of a "quiet truce"? Does he invade anyone's privacy? In discussions of controversial issues, how do we know when our questions have crossed the line? Is it ever necessary to cross that line?

Why did Jeff Alston's teacher ask him to write his comments in a journal rather than tell them to the entire class? What do you like to think you would you have done if you were Jeff? If you were his teacher? What does his story suggest about the effects of "the quiet truce"?

Truces are usually negotiated through noisy discussion and heated debate. How is a "quiet truce" negotiated? What are the consequences of "tiptoeing around" a delicate subject? Why might many Americans "tiptoe around" topics like "race"? Is their discomfort a legacy of slavery?

After a conversation with his grandmother, Macky Alston notes, "It's a strange dance—what we tell each other and what we don't. When I came out to my parents twelve years ago, they asked me not to tell my grandmother and so far I never have." How do you decide what to say and whom to say it to? When to speak up and when to remain silent? What topics are most difficult to discuss publicly? What do they have in common?

Macky Alston and his grandmother.

Reflecting on his conversations with black and white Alstons, Macky Alston notes, "I guess I expected black Alstons to be angry and white Alstons to feel guilty, and I asked questions to provoke these specific responses.Was I just trying to prove something instead of really listening to what they had to say?" How would you answer his question? What does it mean to "really listen"? Have you ever "really listened" to someone? What did you learn from the experience? What do you think of Macky Alston's questions? Are they designed to provoke thought and discussion or do they "cross the line"? Do any make you feel uncomfortable? If so, are you uncomfortable for Macky Alston or for the person being interviewed?

Professor Carol Gilligan has written about girls whose voices have been silenced and the consequences of that silence to their identity. She notes that what is said is a question of not only "who is speaking" but also "who is listening." How does that idea apply to conversations in the film? To your own conversations with family and friends?

Near the end of the film, Fred Alston, one of the many African-American Alstons Macky encountered on his journey, gives a concert for black and white Alstons. He says of it, "The first thing I did here was speak. That has been the most difficult thing for me to do. I came from . . . a long line of not saying much. . . . The black man in the South, in order to live, has to keep his mouth shut. I think I was taught that as a survival mechanism and I survived." In "We Wear the Mask," African American poet Paul Laurence Dunbar comments on yet another survival mechanism.

> We wear the mask that grins and lies,
> It hides our cheek and shades our eyes.
> This debt we pay to human guile
> With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,
> And mouth with myriad subtleties.
>
> Why should that world be otherwise,
> In counting all our tears and sighs?
>
> Nay, let them only see us, while
> We wear the mask.
>
> We smile, but, O great Christ, our cries
> To Thee from tortured souls arise.
> We sing, but oh, the clay is vile
> Beneath our feet, and long the mile;
> But let the world dream otherwise,
> We wear the mask.

How is the silence that Fred Alston describes like a wearing a "mask"? How do both affect communication? To what extent do both responses support the "quiet truce"?

In the video *Facing Evil*, Maya Angelou adds verses that deepen our understanding of Dunbar's poem. The video is available from the Facing History Resource Center. How do her verses also deepen our understanding of the ideas expressed in the film?

At Facing History's 1997 Human Rights and Justice Conference, "Collective Violence and Memory: Judgment, Reconciliation, Education," psychiatrist James Gilligan observed that "secrets make individuals sick. They make families sick and they make nations sick." Who in FAMILY NAME shares his view? Who would probably disagree? What is your opinion? Can secrets be dangerous? Are they "unhealthy"?


Shirlee Taylor Haizlip

Like Macky Alston, Shirlee Taylor Haizlip has traced her family's history. In doing so she, too, has confronted many of the complexities and contradictions associated with "race." In *The Sweeter the Juice*, the book she wrote about her experiences, Haizlip tells of how her mother was separated from her closest relatives at the age of four. After the child's mother died, distant cousins reared her. She grew up thinking of herself as an African American. She also grew up wondering what had happened to her father, uncles, aunts, sisters, brothers, cousins, and grandmother. They all seemed to have vanished after her mother's death.

It took Shirlee Haizlip fifteen years to locate her mother's vanished relatives and learn their stories. Each had chosen to "pass" as white. In an article, Haizlip reflected on the meaning of the term:

> Although [my mother and her sister] had the same parents and skin color, one lived all her life as a black woman, and the other lived hers as a white woman, keeping her black heritage a secret from her white husband, their only child, and their grandchildren. The sister was not alone in the choices she made. My mother's other siblings and the rest of her family had also abandoned their race. They acted on the complexly simple infinitive "to be," and in fact they "became," they "were," and their descendants still "are" . . . "white."
>
> Some would say these relatives have "one drop" of black blood, so they are in fact black. But except in Louisiana, all of the "one drop" racial laws have been rescinded since 1986. So if you look white, marry white, live in a white community, attend a white church and a white school, join white associations, have white-looking children and grandchildren, you are "white," as defined by the majority in this country.
>
> Hundreds of thousands of blacks passed for white, starting in the days of slavery and continuing into the present. Because of the secret nature of the transaction, no records were kept of the exact numbers who created new places for themselves in American society. Population experts tell us that large numbers of black people are "missing." I doubt they were abducted by aliens.
>
> According to Carla K. Bradshaw, a clinical psychologist and professor at the University of Washington, "Passing is the word used to describe an attempt to achieve acceptability by claiming membership in some desired group while denying other racial elements in oneself thought to be undesirable. The concept of passing uses the imagery of camouflage, of concealing true identity or group membership and gaining false access. Concealment of 'true' identity is

> considered synonymous with compromised integrity and impostership. . . . If an ideal world existed from the psychology of dominance, where racial differences carried no stigma and racial purity was irrelevant, the concept of passing would have no meaning. In fact, passing of any kind loses meaning in the context of true egalitarianism. . . ."

Haizlip views "passing" as a way of coping with the "poisonous legacy of slavery." A large part of that legacy are the myths and misinformation associated with "race." In her research, Haizlip discovered:

> Some geneticists claim that as many as 80 percent of black Americans have white bloodlines and that a surprising 95 percent of white Americans have some black ancestry. These statistics are based not on guesswork but on the direct clinical examination of nucleotides and microsatellites, genetic components common to all human blood. Dr. Luigi Cavalli-Sforza tells us in *The History and Geography of Human Genes*, the first genetic atlas of the world, just published by Princeton University Press, that all ethnic groups hold an array of overlapping sets and subsets of mixed gene pools. He notes that modern Europeans (the ancestors of America's immigrants) have long been a mixed population whose genetic ancestry is 65 percent Asian and 35 percent African. There never has been any such thing as a "Caucasoid" gene. Nor is there such a creature as a "pure" white or black American. During recent hearings of the Senate Committee on Government Affairs on the Human Genome Diversity Project, Dr. Cavalli-Sforza and Dr. Mary-Claire King, a geneticist at the University of California at Berkeley, discussed the implications of their work. They called racism "an ancient scourge of humanity" and expressed the hope that further extensive study of world populations would help "undercut conventional notions of race and underscore the common bonds between all humans."
>
> Just from looking at archival records of my family, I know that every census has measured race differently. In different periods the same people in my family were listed as mulatto, black, or white. The designation could depend on the eye of the beholder or the neighborhood where they lived. In the meantime, their neighbors, their co-workers, and their communities at large saw them as either black or white, depending on who decided what. . . .Scholars who study "race" generally agree that the term is scientifically meaningless.

In 1997, the American Anthropological Association (AAA) issued a statement that summarizes the findings and conclusions of biologists, anthropologists, and other experts on the question of "race." It states in part:

> "Race" is a set of culturally created attitudes toward, and beliefs about, human differences developed following widespread exploration and colonization by Western European powers since the 16th century. In the North American colonies, European settlers conquered an indigenous population and brought in as slaves alien peoples from Africa. At the end of the18th

century, a rising antislavery movement, produced by liberal and humanistic forces mostly in Europe, compelled slave owners to find new defenses for preserving slavery. "Race" was invented as a social mechanism to justify the retention of slavery. [Beliefs about "race"] magnified differences among these populations, established a rigid hierarchy of socially exclusive categories, underscored and bolstered unequal rank and status differences and provided the rationalization that such differences were natural or God-given. The different physical traits became markers or symbols of status differences.

As they were constructing this society, white Americans fabricated the cultural/behavioral characteristics associated with each "race," linking superior traits to Europeans and negative and inferior ones to blacks and Indians. Thus arbitrary beliefs about the different peoples were institutionalized and deeply imbedded in American thought. Ultimately "race" as an ideology about human differences . . . spread to other areas of the world. It became a mechanism for dividing and ranking people, used by colonial powers everywhere. But it was not limited to the colonial situation; it was employed by Europeans to rank each other, and during World War II, became the motive for the unspeakable brutalities of the Holocaust.

"Race" evolved as a worldview, a body of pre-judgments that distorts our ideas about human differences and group behavior. Such beliefs constitute myths about the diversity in the human species and about the abilities and behavior of people [combined into] "racial" categories. . . . Racial myths bear no relationship to the reality of human capabilities or behavior. Scientists have found that reliance on such folk beliefs about human differences in research has led to countless errors.

At the end of the 20th century, we now understand that human behavior is learned, conditioned into infants beginning at birth and always subject to modification and change . . . .

How people have been accepted and treated within the context of their society and culture has a direct impact on how they perform within that society. The "racial" worldview was invented to assign some groups to perpetual low status while others were permitted access to privilege, power, and wealth. The tragedy is that it succeeded all too well in constructing unequal populations. Given what we know about the capacity of normal humans to achieve and function within any culture, we conclude that present-day inequalities between human groups are not consequences of their biological inheritance; rather, these inequalities are produced of historical and contemporary social, economic, educational, and political circumstances.

CONNECTIONS

Orlando Patterson, a sociology professor at Harvard University, writes that "nearly all social scientists, except for those on the fringes, reject the view that 'racial' differences have any objective or scientific foundation. In other words, a 'white' person is no different biologically from a 'black' person." If "race" is a fiction, why is it so central to the way many people see themselves and others? If "race" is a myth, why do we still have racism? What does it mean to have a myth guide one's view of the world?

Martha Minow, a professor of law, writes, "When we identify one thing as unlike the others, we are dividing the world; we use our language to exclude, to distinguish, to discriminate." How do her comments apply to popular ideas about "race"? To the use of "racial" categories in everyday life even though experts tell us that "race" has no scientific meaning? How do those categories affect the way we see ourselves? The way others view us?

How do myths and misinformation about "race" explain the practice of "passing"? How does the fact that thousands of "blacks" have successfully "passed" as "whites" reinforce the idea that "race" is a "social invention" rather than a realistic description of human differences?

Shirlee Haizlip calls "passing" "a way to cope with the poisonous legacy of slavery." Do you agree? To what extent is "passing" a mechanism for survival? An act of resistance? Among the books that explore the causes and effects of "passing" on individuals, families, and the larger society are *Passing* by Nella Larson, *The House Behind the Cedars* by Charles Chesnutt, *Flight* by Walter White, and *Plum Bun* by Jessie Fauset.

In the early 1900s about 38 states had anti-miscegenation laws—laws that banned marriages between individuals of different "races." Although these laws set clear distinctions between "whites" and other "races," they varied greatly in the way they defined the various "races." In a legal brief filed in the 1960s by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (the NAACP) challenging those laws, the organization commented on those inconsistencies.

> In Mississippi, Mongolian-White marriages are illegal and void, while in North Carolina they are permitted . . . . In Arkansas, a Negro is defined as any person who has in his or her veins "any Negro blood whatever;" in Florida, one ceases to be a Negro when he has less than "one-eighth of African or Negro blood," and in Oklahoma, anyone not of the "African descent" is miraculously transmuted into a member of the white race.

How does the statement by the AAA help explain those inconsistencies? How does it help us understand why those laws remained on the books until 1967, the year the United States Supreme Court declared them unconstitutional? What kind of power do ideas—even mistaken ideas—have to shape the way we see ourselves and others?

In her novel *Paradise*, Toni Morrison meditates on questions of "race" and gender, of "us" and "them." A number of readers have noticed that she never mentions the "race" of sev-

eral women in the book. When asked why, Toni Morrison says that she wants "to have the reader believe—finally—after you know everything about these women, their interior lives, their past, their behavior—that the one piece of information you don't know, which is, the race, may not, in fact matter. And when you do know it, what do you know?" How would you answer her question?

Every ten years, the United States government conducts a census—or count of the people of the United States. One of the ways the nation categorizes its residents is by "race." The American Anthropological Association has suggested that the government stop asking about "race" and develop more scientific and realistic ways of looking at human differences. In response to such criticism, the government has announced that on the 2000 Census, individuals may check more than one "racial" box. To what extent does the ruling address the criticism? What are the implications for individuals? Groups? The nation as a whole?

More information on the ideas explored in this reading can be found in Chapter 1 of *Facing History and Ourselves: Holocaust and Human Behavior* and in *Confronting the American Eugenics Movement*. Both are published by the Facing History and Ourselves Foundation and are available from the Facing History Resource Center.

THE PROCESS OF CHANGE

Reading 3

What prompts people to change their thinking about "race"? To alter their behavior? In FAMILY NAME, Macky Alston's father, a minister known for his long-standing commitment to civil rights, recalls a turning point in his life—an incident that prompted him to reassess his attitudes and his actions. He tells his son:

> When I was in the Navy, I was a naval officer. I remember driving through the entrance to our base with another officer with whom I lived at the time. We saluted the officer at the gate who was black and I made some comment about the person's obvious low degree of intelligence. And my companion said to me, "Wallace, that's a human being and you have no right to demean a human being with comments like that." And all of a sudden I woke up. . . . I had a deep experience of having treated a human being verbally in an abusive way. This one incident I think, it was more key in my memory than anything I can remember. I began to be very interested from the time I was in the Navy in civil rights.

In reflecting on his father's story, Macky Alston observes:

> It never occurred to me that Dad struggled with the issue. All I ever saw were the awards, the honors, the accomplishments. . . . In 1963, in his first church in Wadesboro, North Carolina he fought for civil rights and faced down death threats from the [Ku Klux Klan]. In Auburn, Alabama he galvanized his community to fight poverty and build housing for poor families. After I was born we moved to Durham, North Carolina where dad put me in the . . . public school where I first met black Alstons.
>
> I did see him struggle with the gay issue. It took me walking in and telling him "I'm gay" for him to really look at his prejudice. Now he's started speaking out for gay rights. Who would he have been if these moments never happened?

Macky Alston

CONNECTIONS

In reflecting on his interview with his father, Macky Alston asks, "Who would he have been if these moments never happened?" How would you answer that question? How has your thinking about "race" and other ideas changed over the years? What prompted each of those changes? Was it an incident like the one Wallace Alston describes? A book you read? A class you took in school? A conversation with a friend? A TV show? A lesson in school? A picture? An historical event or a contemporary one? Share your answers with your classmates. What do they suggest about what prompts individuals and societies to grow and change?

Macky Alston says, "It never occurred to me that my Dad struggled with the issue [of civil rights]. All I ever saw were the awards, the honors, the accomplishments." How does knowing someone's successes but not their struggles affect our understanding of that person?

Wallace Alston's friend chose to speak out rather than ignore a racist comment. What do you and your friends do when you encounter a stereotype, a racist remark, or an ethnic joke? How do you decide whether to say something or to let the moment pass? If you have ever spoken out, what did you say? How were you able to have your concerns heard without offending the other person? If you ignored the remark, why did you choose to remain silent? In either case, how did you feel about your decision later? What effect did it have on you and others? How important are such moments?

A Chicago high school student attended an elementary school that had very little diversity. She recalls that in her class "large differences did not exist." Yet there were outcasts. "It was," she reflects, "as if the outcasts were invented by the group out of a need for them. Differences between us did not cause hatred; hatred caused differences between us." Although she was among the outcasts, she remembers a time when she joined the others in poking fun at a classmate:

> One of the popular girls in class came up to me to show me something that she said I wouldn't want to miss. We walked to a corner where a group of three or four sat. One of the girls read aloud from a small book, which I was told was the girl's diary. I sat down and, laughing till my sides hurt, heard my voice finally blend in with the others. Looking back I wonder how I could have participated in mocking this girl when I knew perfectly well what it felt like to be mocked myself. I would like to say that if I were in that situation today I would react differently, but I can't honestly be sure. Often being accepted by others is more satisfying than being accepted by oneself, even though that satisfaction does not last. Too often our actions are determined by the moment.

What insight does the student offer as to why some people remain silent in the face of injustice?

Reading 4

Near the end of the film, Macky Alston reflects on his journey by asking himself a series of questions: "What am I trying to do? Am I trying to make amends for what my ancestors did? Does getting to the truth about history really change anything? I have found these connections, now what am I going to do with them?"

Alston's father believes it's time to leave the past behind. When his son asks if he would have owned slaves had he lived before the Civil War, he replies:

> That's a question I'm completely unable to answer. . . . The better question is where do you stand now? That's the better question . . . . Do you see now? Do you see now? Stop looking at history. Do you see now, right around you? Are you making your stand now?

In *The Sweeter the Juice*, Shirlee Haizlip writes that she cannot stop looking at history.

> Mysteries of color have encased my family for five generations. Putting together the bits and patches shading from dark to light, red to brown, tan to pink. There are ragged edges and missing segments. I dream I will find some of myself in those holes and gaps. I need to finish the quilt, wearing it smooth until its edges feel soft to my touch, blending its clashing colors to my own notion of harmony. Only then can I store it away in a safe place, taking it out every once in a while to look at.
>
> Make no mistake, I do not lust after my whiteness. More often than not, I feel ambivalent about the white part of me and those circumstances, both known and imagined, that resulted in the mix. I am not sure what the white portion of me means, if anything. Is it a separate self? Does it have a subconscious racial memory? How can I love it when it may not love me?
>
> Finding the missing souls of my family has supplied some of the answers. I will keep looking for those who can provide the vanished biographies; from those who can restore the limbs amputated from my family, I will learn to close the circle of my existence.
>
> What is it I will get from confronting these living ghosts? A knowledge of the other side? The opportunity to feel superior? The revenge of exposure and embarrassment? Recognition, contrition, forgiveness of what might have been their sin of abandonment? A gathering unto their bosoms? Sometimes I believe I want all of these things. Often I think I want none of them.

A family reunion prompted Edward Ball to confront his "living ghosts." In the introduction to his book, he observes:

Despite my having left the South, the plantation past was etched in my unconscious. The prospect of the family reunion pushed me, finally, to come to terms with it. To contemplate slavery—which for most Americans is a mysterious, distant event—was a bit like doing psychoanalysis on myself. Did the plantations form part of my identity? By outward measure, no. The wealth created by the slave system was destroyed, and the latter-day Balls had no inheritance from it. Some of the family had manners, others none; some had money and status, some neither. But inwardly the plantations lived on. In childhood, I remember feeling an intangible sense of worth that might be linked to the old days. Part of the feeling came from the normal encouragement of parents who wanted their children to rise. An equal part came from an awareness that long ago our family had lived like lords, and that the world could still be divided into the pedigreed and the rootless.

The invitation to the family reunion sat on my desk, beckoning. No one among the Balls talked about how slavery had helped us, but whether we acknowledged it or not, the powers of our ancestors were still in hand. Although our social franchise had shrunk, it had nevertheless survived. If we did not inherit money, or land, we received a great fund of cultural capital, including prestige, a chance at education, self-esteem, a sense of place, mobility, even (in some cases) a flair for giving orders. And it was not only "us," the families of slaveowners, who carried the baggage of the plantations. By skewing things so violently in the past, we had made sure that our cultural riches would benefit all white Americans.

The subject of the plantations stirred conflicting emotions. I felt proud (how rare the stories!) and sentimental (how touching the cast of family characters!). At the same time, the slave business was a crime that had not fully been acknowledged. It would be a mistake to say I felt guilt for the past. A person cannot be culpable for the acts of others, long dead, that he or she could not have influenced. Rather than responsible, I felt accountable for what had happened, called on to try to explain it. I also felt shame about the broken society that had washed up when the tide of slavery receded.

I decided I would make an effort, however inadequate and personal, to face the plantations, to reckon with them rather than ignore their realities or make excuses for them. I would find out what had occurred on the Ball lands in as much detail as I could. America was beginning to work through the tragic parts of its history, and the Ball name, once admired in a small corner of the country, seemed likely to become a casualty of that process, painted with infamy. Paradoxically, by describing as honestly as possible what the family had done, I might clear space around our name, and around us.

CONNECTIONS

Who are the "living ghosts" that Shirlee Haizlip confronts? How are they like the ghosts that Alston encounters on his journey? The ghosts Ball describes? Why has each chosen to face them? To what extent do such encounters shape one's identity? To what extent do they deepen an understanding of one's identity? Who are your "living ghosts"? How have you confronted them?

Although Edward Ball's family is no longer rich and the last person in the family to own slaves has been dead for many years, he writes that he and his relatives have benefited from the family's "plantation past." How have they benefited? To what extent have other white Americans benefited from slavery?

Macky Alston asks "Now that I have made these connections, what am I going to do with them?" What do you suggest? To what extent was making the film a way of doing something with those connections?

Just as individuals try to make meaning of their history, nations struggle to confront their past. In 1997, U.S. Representative Tony Hall suggested that the United States apologize for slavery. President Clinton expressed interest in the idea. In *The New York Times*, Brent Staples discussed the controversy that followed:

> Bill Clinton has earned a boatload of scorn since suggesting that he might apologize for slavery, as some in Congress have suggested. Critics from both left and right argue that such an apology would be trivializing, empty, arrogant and racially divisive. The dominant view, is . . .that there is essentially nothing to discuss since the Civil War closed the issue and the slavers and enslaved are long since dead. But all the noise suggests that the issue is very much alive. The terms of the emancipation are nearly as explosive today as during the 1860's, when they dominated the public consciousness and nearly tore the government apart.

What does the word *sin* mean? To what extent are we responsible for the sins of our ancestors? To what extent are we accountable for those sins? To what extent are nations responsible for misdeeds that took place long ago? To what extent are they accountable for those misdeeds? Should the nation apologize for slavery? What purpose would the apology serve? To what extent would it lead to healing?

Are there acts that are unforgivable? If so, how do we individually and collectively come to terms with those acts, the damage they have done, and our part in that damage?

Facing History and Ourselves' 1997 Human Rights and Justice Conference "Collective Violence and Memory: Judgment, Reconciliation, Education" looked at various responses to injustice including trials, truth commissions, and artistic expressions. Tapes of the conference are available from the Facing History and Ourselves Resource Center.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For a fuller treatment of ideas and concepts developed in this Study Guide, see Chapters 1 and 2 of *Facing History and Ourselves: Holocaust and Human Behavior*, available from Facing History and Ourselves.

The following books may be used to explore specific topics and/or concepts related to FAMILY NAME.

Ball, Edward. *Slaves in the Family.* Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998

Bontemps, Arna, ed. *Great Slave Narratives.*Beacon Press, 1969

Franklin, John Hope.*Race and History: Selected Essays.* Louisiana State University, 1989.

Gates, Henry Louis, Jr. *Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Black Man.* Random House, 1997.

Haizlip, Shirlee Taylor. *The Sweeter the Juice: A Family Memoir in Black and White.* Simon & Schuster, 1994.

Horwitz, Tony. *Confederates in the Attic: Dispatches from the Unfinished Civil War.* Pantheon, 1998.

Hurmence, Belinda, ed. *Before Freedom: 48 Oral Histories of Former North and South Carolina Slaves*. Penguin, 1990.

Jacobs, Harriet A. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl Written by Herself.* Edited by Jean Fagan Yellin. Harvard University Press, 1987.

Larsen, Nella. *Passing.* Knopf, 1929.

Love, Spencie. *One Blood: The Death and Resurrection of Charles R. Drew*. University of North Carolina Press, 1996.

Takaki, Ronald. *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America.* Little Brown, 1993.

Tatum, Beverly Daniel. *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria? and Other Conversations About Race*. Basic Books, 1997.

Terkel, Studs. *Race: How Blacks & Whites Think & Feel About the American Obsession.* The New Press,1992.

Thomas, Hugh. *The Slave Trade.* Simon & Schuster, 1997.

West, Cornel. *Race Matters.* Beacon Press, 1993.

Facing History and Ourselves is a national educational and professional development organization whose mission is to engage students of diverse backgrounds in an examination of racism, prejudice and antisemitism in order to promote the development of a more humane and informed citizenry. By studying the historical development and lessons of the Holocaust and other examples of collective, students make the essential connection between history and the moral choices they confront in their own lives. Facing History and Ourselves has offices in areas including Boston, Chicago, Europe, New York, Memphis, Los Angeles and San Francisco. For more information, contact the national office.

National Office
16 Hurd Road
Brookline, MA 02146
(617) 232-1595

web site: http://www.facing.org
e-mail: info_boston@facing.org

FACING HISTORY AND OURSELVES