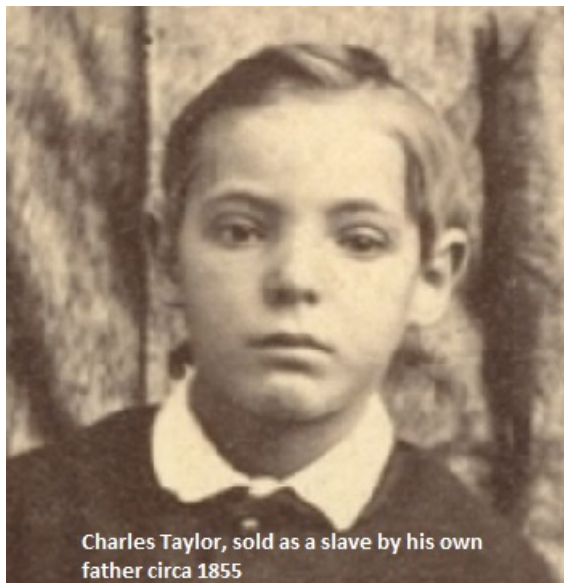


## How Many 'White' People Are Passing?

*A report reveals the proportion of Americans with "hidden African ancestry."*



Charles Taylor, sold as a slave by his own father circa 1855

I am currently filming guest interviews for Season 2 of Finding Your Roots, our genealogy series airing on PBS this September. One of the most intriguing pieces of information we share with our guests is the "admixture" results contained in their DNA—their percentages of European, Native American and sub-Saharan African ancestors over the past 200 years or so. "The past is never dead," William Faulkner once famously wrote. "It's not even past." The record of your ancestral past, in all of its complexity, is hidden in your autosomal DNA. And what surprises your DNA holds!

Although long suspected, what hasn't been confirmed until now is how many self-identified "white" women and men are walking around today with recent "hidden" African ancestry in their families—you know, white people who, at least according to the old, notorious "one-drop rule" of the Jim Crow era, would have been considered legally "black." How many of them don't know it? How many might sense it but aren't sure why? And how would they react if they did know? For Southerners, in particular, there are more than just Confederates in the Attic. And the proof and guide is their DNA.

How many ostensibly "white" Americans walking around today would be classified as "black" under the one-drop rule? Judging by the last U.S. Census, 7,872,702. To put that in context, that number is equal to roughly 20 percent, or a fifth, of the total number of people identified as African American in the same census count! In other words, there are a lot of white people with "hidden African ancestry," and they don't have to look too far back in time to find it. Yet, paradoxically, their families were able to pass for white relatively quickly.

The more we learn about the black, white and browning of our past, the more we can see how absurd, how arbitrary and grotesque the "one-drop rule" that defined the color line in America for decades and decades during its most painful chapters truly was.

I embrace the positives in these amazing DNA discoveries—further proof that America is more of a melting pot than we had even assumed, which is why my goal is and remains for every American to trace her or his roots as far back as the paper trail and DNA science will allow.

My hope, in sharing these findings with you, is that those of our white brothers and sisters who discover that they have at least 1 percent of African DNA will be filled with as much joy and pride in their black ancestors as they would be if they found out they were related to the British royal family, or if their original American ancestor arrived on these shores on the Mayflower, rather than on a slave ship.

Adapted from HENRY LOUIS GATES JR.'s article, posted: March 17 2014 (Source : [http://www.theroot.com/articles/history/2014/03/how\\_many\\_white\\_people\\_have\\_hidden\\_black\\_ancestry.3.html](http://www.theroot.com/articles/history/2014/03/how_many_white_people_have_hidden_black_ancestry.3.html))