



# Determine My Identity Answer Key

Below are brief biographies of each of the people in the quiz. The information about their racial and ethnic backgrounds shows how problematic it is to fit people into the racial categories society has created. Although these people were of mixed ancestry, most were treated as Black and therefore subject to the discrimination faced by Black people. Many had lived experiences and/or self-identified as Black or African American. Several were able to “pass” as white and chose to live at least part of their lives as white people.

- 1 Walter White** (1893–1955) was a civil rights activist, who led the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and investigated lynchings in the South. White was of mixed African and European ancestry. He sometimes passed as white to protect himself when investigating racism. “I am a Negro,” he said of himself. “My skin is white, my eyes are blue, my hair is blond. The traits of my race are nowhere visible upon me.”
- 2 Mary Church Terrell** (1863–1954) was one of the first African American women to earn a college degree and became known as a national activist for civil rights and suffrage. Her parents were both freed enslaved people of mixed racial ancestry, including Black, white, and Austronesian (from Madagascar in the Indian Ocean) people. Her autobiography was entitled, *A Colored Woman in a White World*.
- 3 Homer Plessy** (1862–1925) was a French-speaking Creole from Louisiana and the plaintiff in the famous U.S. Supreme Court case *Plessy v. Ferguson*, in which he argued that being forced to sit in the Black car of a train was unconstitutional. The Court held that “separate but equal” racial facilities were legal. Plessy was an “octoroon” or one-eighth Black. His family, both Black and white, came to the U.S. from Haiti and France.
- 4 George J. Herriman** (1880–1944) was an American cartoonist, best known for the comic strip, “Krazy Kat.” He was born to a family of mixed-race French-speaking Louisiana Creole “mulattoes,” and one of his grandmothers was Cuban. Herriman’s birth certificate lists him as “colored” and his death certificate as “Caucasian.” He may have passed as white for part of his adult life.
- 5 Timothy Thomas Fortune** (1856–1928) was an African American civil rights leader, journalist and publisher. He was the editor of the nation’s leading Black newspaper, *The New York Age*, and was a leading economist in the Black community. Fortune was born into slavery and freed by the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863.
- 6 Lena Horne** (1917–2010) was an American singer, dancer, actress and civil rights activist. Her career in film, television and theater spanned over 70 years. Horne’s family was of African, Native American and European descent. “I was unique,” she said, “in that I was a kind of Black that white people could accept.”
- 7 Jean Toomer** (1894–1967) was a school principal in Georgia, and a poet and novelist associated with the Harlem Renaissance. His parents were both mixed-race and he was majority white in his ancestry. Toomer was classified as white on the 1920 and 1930 censuses and on his marriage license, and as “Negro” on draft registrations in 1917 and 1942. He passed as white for periods of his life, but claimed he was not bound by race and was simply an American.
- 8 Rashida Jones** (1976–) is an American actress, writer and producer, and the daughter of musician Quincy Jones. Her father is African American with roots in Cameroon and a paternal Welsh grandfather. Her mother was an Ashkenazi (European) Jew. Jones has said she identifies with being Black and biracial. She has also commented, “I have gone through periods where I only feel Black or Jewish. Now I have a good balance.”
- 9 Shirley Graham Du Bois** (1896–1977) was an American author, playwright, composer and activist for African American and other causes. Her father was an African Methodist Episcopal minister and her mother was European.
- 10 Maya Rudolph** (1972–) is an American actress who has been a cast member of *Saturday Night Live* and appeared in many movies. Her mother was African American and her father is white and Jewish. Rudolph has said she never felt either Black or white and identified most with biracial people of any race. “I just never felt like that was the first place to go,” she has commented, “to define myself by race.”