

Life with Gracie: Former pro ball player creates Mixed Nation to promote racial harmony

LIVING By Gracie Bonds Staples - The Atlanta Journal-Constitution



Former pro basketball player Luke Whitehead is founder and CEO of Mixed Nation, a multicultural movement that celebrates diversity and promotes cultural harmony. CONTRIBUTED

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I think often of a little boy from my hometown named Danny, wondering whatever became of him. He was of mixed heritage — half white, half black — cute as could be and just as sad.

Not only did white children reject him, so did black ones.

It was the saddest thing I'd ever seen and one in which I felt helpless to fix.

I was reminded again of Danny early this week while talking with **Luke Whitehead, the founder and CEO of Mixed Nation**, a national movement that for the past seven years has been providing tools and resources to parents navigating raising multiracial children in our often racially hyper-conscious society. The online destination allows members to contribute, among other things, personal stories, parenting advice, book recommendations for children, hair care tips, and inspiring quotes. A Q&A section lets them chat with each other about situations that arise for racially and culturally blended families.



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Whitehead's father is black. His mother is white. Danny's father is white and his mother is African-American.

Both he and Whitehead are members of what has been for years one of the fastest-growing populations in America. According to a 2015 Pew Research Center survey, the number of U.S. adults with mixed race backgrounds — 6.9 percent — is three times what officials census figures indicate, and rising fast.

And since the 1967 Supreme Court decision in *Loving v. Virginia* struck down laws banning such unions, so too have the number and acceptance of interracial marriages increased.

According to the same Pew report on interracial marriage, 37 percent of Americans agreed that having more people marrying different races was a good thing for society, up from 24 percent four years earlier; 9 percent thought it was a bad thing.

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Whitehead said mixed race children can struggle with understanding how they fit into their families and society. They're often dismissed as "not white, but not really black," and sometimes they feel confused or pressured to "choose a side."

Mixed Nation aims to change that and instead promote a new narrative that makes it clear that children of mixed race heritage are "Beautifully Blended" or the "Perfect Lil' Blend."



And in partnership with InterracialDating.com, it features success stories of interracial couples, many of which have produced children, as well as messages of support and inspiration for interracial couples and families living in our currently racially tense world.

"It's a message that is so very needed right now," Whitehead said.

Whitehead, 36, grew up in a multiracial family at a time when mixed marriages were still considered taboo. His mother's white family disowned her. At times, he felt forced to pick sides. And although his mother often told him he was the best of both worlds, he struggled to believe it.

As he got older, he said, he began to realize his mother was right. Being mixed race was a blessing.

Although born in California, Whitehead spent much of his childhood in Coral Springs, Fla., before the family returned to the Bay Area. He left home his senior year of high school to play for the legendary basketball powerhouse Oak Hill Academy.

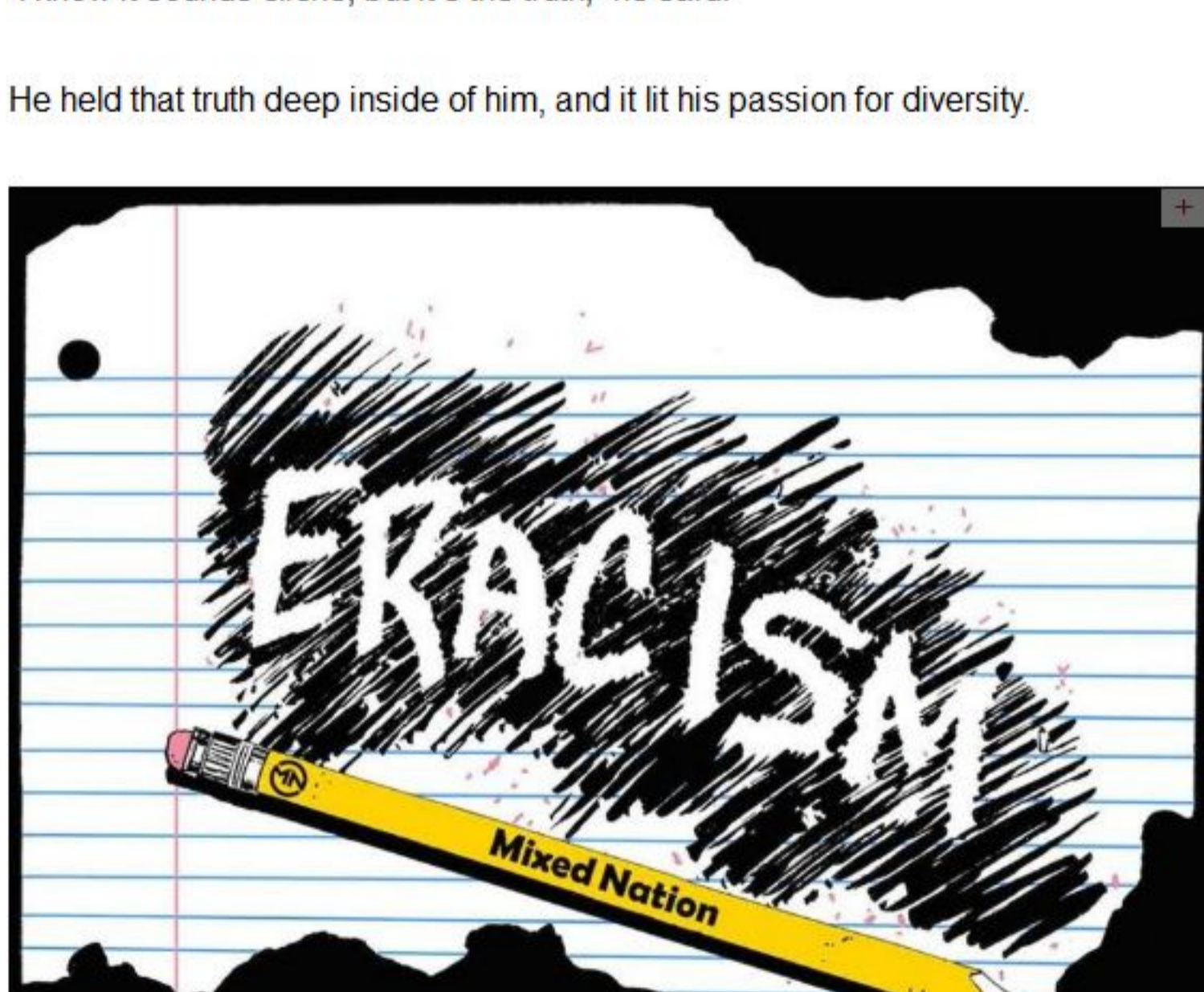
He graduated in 2000 and headed to the University of Louisville, where his father, Eddie Whitehead, preceded him in 1962, breaking the color barrier. Both Whiteheads became standouts on the Cardinal team.

After graduating from UL with a degree in communications, Luke Whitehead signed briefly with the Golden State Warriors for the NBA summer league, but didn't make the team's final roster. He played professional basketball for six years in the Philippines, Korea, Germany and finally Australia before deciding he wanted to do something to change the way we see one another.

Having had the chance to experience so many different cultures, he was convinced that "no matter how different we look or sound, we're all brothers and sisters."

"I know it sounds cliché, but it's the truth," he said.

He held that truth deep inside of him, and it lit his passion for diversity.



Mixed Nation recently joined forces with InterracialDating.Com to create Eracisia, a celebrity-driven social media campaign to end racism and view racially ... [Read More](#)

In 2009, Whitehead decided to retire from basketball and created Mixed Nation.

He first envisioned a multicultural social networking site that would allow people to post their profile and share their experiences much like Facebook, but months later, he shifted gears and created a blog that featured content from around the world but utilized social media sites.

Today more than 500,000 people around the world participate, celebrating in Whitehead's words "their beautiful blend" and promoting cultural harmony.

"We've been doing this for seven-plus years, but with racial tensions brewing, it's needed now more than ever," he said. "We're trying to bring people together."

It seems to be working.

Whitehead pointed to a white mother who submitted a photo of her mixed race little girl who didn't like her curly hair.

"She asked me to post her picture to see how many people really liked her hair," he said. The post has reached more than 50 million people, accumulated over 3.3 million likes and 306,000 comments, telling the little girl "she is beautiful just the way she is."

"That's a great example of how Mixed Nation can make a difference, and shows that it's not just talk," Whitehead said.



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God knows we've had enough talk.

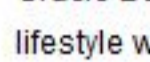
Whitehead said he hopes Mixed Nation will become a household name. If it'll change the way kids like Danny are treated and ensure that they are loved the way they deserve, I do, too.

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