



Thelonious Ellison (Monk), an intellectual novelist and academic, who happens to be black, finds his works increasingly marginalized and increasingly unsellable, because the reviewers consider him not 'black enough'.

I have dark brown skin, curly hair, a broad nose, some of my ancestors were slaves and I have been detained by pasty white policemen in New Hampshire, Arizona and Georgia and so the society in which I live tells me I am black; that is my race. Though I am fairly athletic, I am no good at basketball. I listen to Mahler, Aretha Franklin, Charlie Parker and Ry Cooder on vinyl records and compact discs. I graduated *summa cum laude* from Harvard, hating every minute of it. I am good at math. I cannot dance. I did not grow up in any inner city or the rural south. My family owned a bungalow near Annapolis. My grandfather was a doctor. My father was a doctor. My brother and sister were doctors.

While in college I was a member of the Black Panther Party, defunct as it was, mainly I felt I had to prove I was *black* enough. Some people in the society in which I live, described as being black, tell me that I am not *black* enough. Some people whom the society calls white tell me the same thing. I have heard this mainly about my novels, from editors who have rejected me and reviewers whom I have apparently confused and, on couple of occasions, on a basketball court when upon missing a shot I muttered *Egads*. From a reviewer:

The novel is finely crafted, with fully developed characters, rich language and subtle play with the plot, but one is lost to understand what this reworking of Aescgyllus' The Persians has to do with the African American experience.

One night, at a party in New York, one of the tedious affairs where people who write mingle with people who want to write and with people who can help either group begin or continue to write, a tall, thin, rather ugly book agent told me that I could sell many books if I'd forget about writing retellings of Euripides and parodies of French poststructuralists and settle

down to write the true, gritty real stories of black life. I told him that I was living a *black* life, far blacker than he could ever know, that I had lived one, that I would be living one. (...)

The hard, *gritty* truth of the matter is that I hardly ever think about race. Those times when I did think about it a lot I did so because of my guilt for not thinking about it. I don't believe in race. I believe there are people who will shoot me or hang me or cheat me and try to stop me because they do believe in race, because of my brown skin, curly hair, wide nose and slave ancestors. But that's just the way it is.

Percival Everett, *Erasure*, Faber & Faber, 2001, pp. 3-4

While Monk's intelligence and overall awkwardness seems to barely keep him afloat both in his writing career and academia, he begins to notice that another writer is benefiting from public ignorance: Monk is forced to confront the success of *We Lives in the Ghetto*, a fictional book written by Juanita Mae Jenkins, which is lauded by critics and owes its success through its inclusion of prostitution, underage pregnancy, and violence. This has earned the book the reputation of epitomizing what one review calls the "experience which is and can only be Black America." Monk sees Juanita as the embodiment of everything that he feels is wrong with cultural classification.

Extract from the summary from www.enotes.com



Percival L. Everett (born 1956) is an American writer and Distinguished Professor of English at the University of Southern California. In 22 years, he has written 19 books, including a farcical *Western*, a savage satire of the publishing industry, a children's story spoofing counting books, retellings of the Greek myths of Medea and Dionysus, and a philosophical tract narrated by a four-year-old.