

What you do with that image has a lot to do with whatever else is in your mind. Preparation is a part of creativity. If you're a real artist, you know your field; when ideas start coming, you know when there is an aesthetic fit. Creators can communicate their associations with other people in a form that is original,

useful, or that resonates with a certain portion of the population."

However, while intelligence and preparation may be necessary, they may not be enough to produce creativity. "Maybe it's working memory capacity that is the protective aspect," Carson says. "How many things can you hold in your mind and

process and manipulate?" In a preliminary, unpublished study, she says, "The combination of low latent inhibition and high working memory also predicted creative achievement." —CRAIG LAMBERT

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## UNCOLORING BOOK

# The End of Blackness?

**B**LACKNESS has been shrugged off by the force of events," says Debra Dickerson, J.D. '95. "Things are not perfect racially, but they're pretty damn good and it's up to us [African Americans] to step up to that. The shackles are off, the ball and chain are gone." Dickerson's new book, *The End of Blackness: Returning the Souls of Black Folk to Their Rightful Owners* (Pantheon) is a passionately argued manifesto that aims to liberate black Americans from the very idea of "blackness."

Intentionally using the past tense, she defines "blackness" as "that which allowed you to predict and manipulate the behavior of African Americans. Blackness doesn't predict any more. Neither does whiteness. I'm not saying blackness *should* go away—it is going away. The concept has lost its cohesion; it's collapsing under the weight of its own contradictions and limitations. If your father has Alzheimer's, is that a black problem or a white problem?"

Consider the case of a 51-year-old high-school principal in Los Angeles, a man of Louisiana Creole ancestry who had always considered himself an African American and lived his life accordingly. On a whim, he sent a mouth-swab sample to a company in Florida that, for a fee, will analyze DNA to

genetically locate the origin of one's ancestors. He learned that he was 57 percent Indo-European, 39 percent Native American, and 4 percent East Asian—and zero percent African. "So, *was* he black?" asks Dickerson. "Is he *still* black?"

The old truisms—like "Black people don't play golf, or ski, or vote Republican"—have fallen apart, Dickerson says. "Look at Tiger Woods or Condi Rice: in

terms of the old-school notion of black, they don't compute. You have white people on TV in Minnesota talking about 'busting a move' [acting with great vigor] or 'pimp-slapping' [slapping someone publicly as a humiliation]. And dating interracial in 2004 does not mean what it did in 1964." On a personal note, she adds, "I used to hide the fact that I like classical music, because other black people gave me grief about it."

During a 12-year career in the U.S. Air Force, Dickerson learned Korean, worked as a linguist, directed intelligence programs, and rose to the rank of captain. "I

spend a lot of time thinking about how history lives in people's lives," says Dickerson, whose book draws on research she did while an associate of Harvard's Afro-American studies department in 1996-97. (She is now a senior fellow with the Babcock School of Management at Wake Forest University.) Her book, which combines history and critical race theory, frequently cites black visionaries like Frederick Douglass, Carter Woodson, Ph.D. '12, and W.E.B. Du Bois, A.B. 1890, Ph.D. 1895. (Its subtitle references Du Bois's 1903 classic, *The Souls of Black Folk*.)

"Those three were the pivot points, the ones who most influenced my thinking. I was looking for guidance in how to be black in a post-movement context, and I wasn't getting it, so I had to go back into the past, to these writers," Dickerson says. "They were so far beyond the black-white paradigm. They made me understand that



Debra Dickerson

## Right Now

the focus had to be on controlling *outcomes*, not necessarily on racism.”

Yet many current leaders are wedded to what Dickerson considers an obsolete paradigm. “To hear it from the traditional black—and white—left, you would think it’s still 1950,” she says. “If you run in leftist circles you are pretty much pelted with pessimism all the time. Can a security guard really make a black neurosurgeon feel inferior or like he’s ‘not a citizen,’ just by following him around a drugstore? We have to stop hanging our identities on getting other people’s [i.e., white people’s] approval—which is actually a very strange form of white supremacy. We’ve outgrown ‘the Negro problem,’ but it’s blacks who still want to see themselves as the Negro problem. At the turn of the twentieth century, Du Bois grappled with the ‘strange meaning’

of race. Today, he’d be amazed that we are still grappling with it. Next, he’d be thinking about the strange meaning of contemporary blacks’ unfathomable hesitance to claim the prize we’ve struggled for for centuries. Now we’re in the final stage of the movement, the stage where blacks consciously *inhabit* their freedom.”

In her book, Dickerson writes, “The last plantation is the mind, and through those magnolias blacks can’t see that they have the ultimate power in post-movement America—the power to disregard nonsense and refuse to be sidetracked from accomplishing what’s important...” She says, “It’s incumbent on us to go for the gusto; I don’t think a person who has inherited what I have has a right to fail. I’m not saying racism is over, but I’m going to lay that burden down. Let’s not try to fix white people, and not spend time pointing

fingers at what Trent Lott said when we need to fix the inner cities. In Europe, I knew hairdressers who spoke three languages and were doing interesting things with their lives. Here, we have poor people trying to fill up holes in their souls with big-screen TVs and \$300 sneakers.”

Dickerson asserts, “We need bus drivers and we need astrophysicists. If someone is driving a bus who could be an astrophysicist, we all lose. I don’t think that anything can be good for black people that isn’t good for America, and vice versa. You win not by beating the other faction into submission, but by talking about transcendent values—American values, human values.”

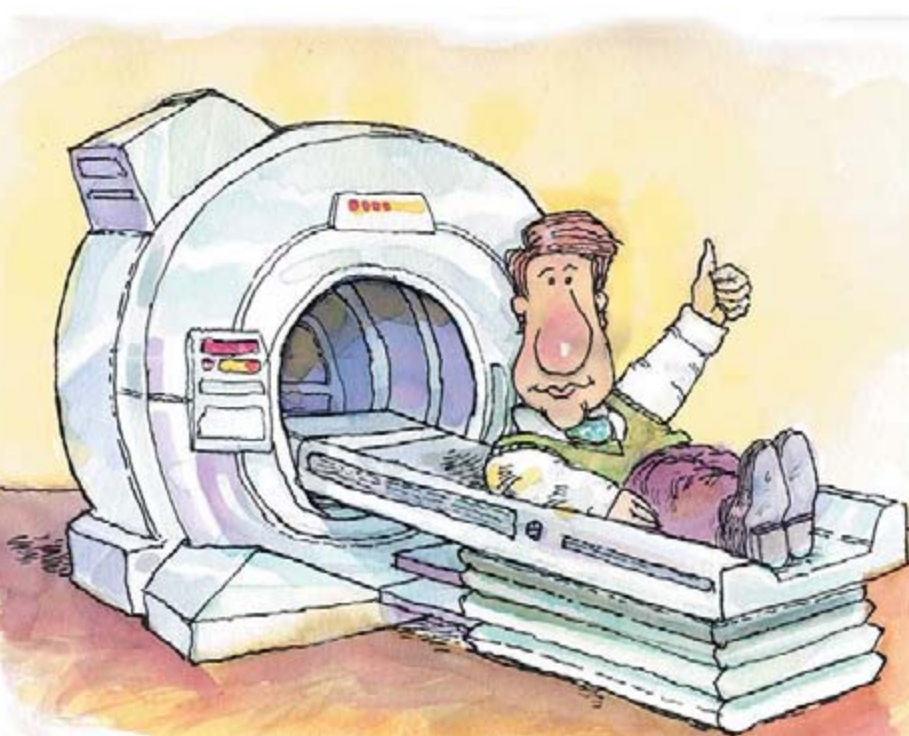
—CRAIG LAMBERT

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STEP ON THE GAUSS AND WIPE THAT TEAR AWAY

## Magnetically Lifted Spirits



**N**EAR THE END of the first act in Mozart’s *Così fan tutte*, after the two handsome Albanians have collapsed from apparent arsenic poisoning, the chambermaid Despina—disguised as a doctor—pulls a large iron magnet from her bag and holds it above the writhing bodies at her feet. “Very soon now you’ll see, by virtue of magnetism’s power,” she declares, “the end of this paroxysm.” Since this is *opera buffa*, the horseshoe-shaped magnet and its attendant hocus-pocus are as hilarious as they are absurd. But 200 years later, scientists are discovering that magnets—albeit magnets exponentially stronger than Despina’s—can have powerful and demonstrable effects on our bodies. And minds.

Researchers at McLean Hospital’s Brain Imaging Center have found that the oscillating magnetic fields of an MRI scanner (a machine commonly used in medicine to produce high-resolution images of internal organs and tissues) can immediately improve the moods of depressed patients suffering from bipolar disorder, a psychiatric illness characterized by alternating periods of mania and depression. A controlled study recently pub-