



Tackett Miscellany



Elvis Presley Revisited

Elvis Presley's "Melungeon" ancestry in question

Opinion by Jim W. Tackitt

To show the extent to which unfounded family lines make their way into the "public consciousness," below is an abstract from the book by "Melungeon" icon, Dr. N. Brent Kennedy.

Dr. Kennedy's Melungeon book presents undocumented material which allege that **Elvis Presley** had "Jewish" ancestry and roots of "Melungeon" origins through his claimed **Tackett** lineage. His use of the **Tackett** surname as "a common Melungeon surname" is completely unfounded and attempts to track down his allegation have proved unsuccessful.

Now, shucks, it's "OK" to have ancestry of any sort, and we **Tacketts** do have PROVED lines which, thru some of the female & adopted lines, will cover just about any ethnic variation - but "Melungeon" is not one of them, assuming there even was a true ethnic/racial group by this name.

Kennedy [with no claims to being a genealogist] makes other assertions that have been soundly criticized for their lack of solid research techniques & evidence by many, with a particularly scholarly analysis given by noted genealogist, **Dr. Virginia DeMarce**, past president of *The National Genealogical Society* and "*Historian with the Branch of Acknowledgment and Research, Bureau of Indian Affairs.*" She has written a great deal on the subject and it does appear, to us, that her expertise in this field does seem to outweigh, by a considerable degree, the credentials of Dr. Kennedy.

"The Melungeons: The Resurrection of A Proud People; An Untold Story of Ethnic Cleansing in America," by N. Brent Kennedy, second, revised, and corrected edition; page 140. Kennedy writes:

"Yes, **Elvis Presley** had North Carolina roots; his mother's family left western North Carolina in the early

1800s, taking with them their legend of a Cherokee and Jewish heritage. His maternal great-great-grandmother was supposedly "a full blooded Cherokee" from Tennessee named **Morning Dove White**. However, **White** is a far more common Lumbee, Melungeon, and Powhatan than Cherokee surname, and **Morning Dove** is an uncommon Cherokee given name. Also, the man she married, **William Mansell**, had been something of a renowned Indian fighter, making his choice of a "full-bloodied Cherokee" questionable. **Mansell's** family was also native South Carolinian since the 1700s, placing them more in Lumbee than Cherokee territory. In any event, **William Mansell** and **Morning Dove White** settled in Alabama around 1820, and had several children, including **John Mansell**, **Elvis's** great-great grandfather. **John** later abandoned his family to run off with a younger woman named **Mandy Bennett** (another Lumbee surname).

In 1870, **John's** son **White Mansell** married a woman named **Martha Tackett** from Tennessee. **Martha** also possessed a common Melungeon surname and, even more appropriately, claimed to be Jewish. Elaine Dundy's excellent biography of **Elvis** provides fascinating genealogical background and unintentionally paints a rather convincing Melungeon heritage for the "King of Rock and Roll."

Kennedy refers to "the excellent biography of Elvis," by Elaine Dundy [*"Elvis & Gladys,"* Dell Pub. Co., Inc., New York], noted above. This biography presents unverifiable accounts for **Elvis's** "Tackett" ancestry that should not go unchallenged. To find that Kennedy has also accepted this material [as have others], does bring Kennedy's research further into question. I also fail to find any of the "rather convincing Melungeon heritage" [for Elvis] that Kennedy refers to. **Martha Tackett**, above, prob. born in Fayette Co., AL, not Tennessee, also has a question mark regarding her parentage. Although we have placed her as a dau. of **ABNER H. TACKITT**, 1803-1889, [Knox Co., KY to Fayette Co., AL], she more likely was a younger sibling of the much younger 2nd recorded wife of **ABNER H. TACKITT**, name of **SARAH WILLETT**, b c1838/39, Alabama but this has yet to be proved, beyond question, one way or the other.