


## Melungeon Identities: Search for Roots in N. Brent Kennedy's *The Melungeons. The Resurrection of a Proud People*

Meluncan Kimlikleri: N. Brent Kennedy'nin *The Melungeons. The Resurrection of a Proud People* Eserinde Köken Arayışı

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### ABSTRACT

The United States of America has historically served as a convergence point for diverse societies, drawing immigrants from numerous countries and facilitating the formation of distinctive communities. Notably, the Melungeons represent one such community within the U.S., characterized by a rich tapestry of ethnicities and identities that trace back to a wide range of geographical origins, including Spanish and Turkish lineages. The amalgamation of various ethnicities and communities within the New World has given rise to the Melungeon identity, an area of interest explored in literature. Author N. Brent Kennedy's biographical work, "The Melungeons: The Resurrection of a Proud People" (1994), offers a comprehensive exploration of this community. The text meticulously dissects the origins of the Melungeons, their acquisition of new ethnic identities in their adopted homeland, and their ties to ancestral societies. By scrutinizing the portrayal of these multifaceted ethnic identities within Kennedy's work, we can glean an in-depth comprehension of the Melungeon identity and glean insight into their lives as depicted in literature. The analysis will commence by addressing the essential biographical facets pertinent to understanding the lives of the Melungeons, subsequently pivoting to an examination of their ethnicity and ethnic identity. Additionally, the study will provide insights into the diverse ethnic origins of the Melungeons associated with various countries. Through the synthesis of this information, the study aims to illuminate the intricacies of Melungeon ethnicity and ethnic identity, alongside the representation of their diverse ancestral roots within the biographical narrative. This in-depth analysis seeks to foster a thorough understanding of the Melungeon identity and their portrayal within literary contexts.

**Keywords:** Melungeon, Identity, Ethnicity, Biography, Belonging

### ÖZ

Amerika Birleşik Devletleri tarihsel olarak çok sayıda ülkeden göçmen çekerek ve kendine özgü toplulukların oluşumunu kolaylaştırarak farklı toplumlar için bir buluşma noktası olmuştur. Özellikle Melungonlar, İspanyol ve Türk soyları da dahil olmak üzere çok çeşitli coğrafi kökenlere dayanan zengin bir etnik köken ve kimlik dokusuyla karakterize edilen ABD'deki bu tür topluluklardan birini temsil etmektedir. Yeni Dünya'daki çeşitli etnik kökenlerin ve toplulukların bir araya gelmesi, edebiyatta incelenen bir ilgi alanı olan Melungeon kimliğinin ortaya çıkmasına neden olmuştur. Yazar N. Brent Kennedy'nin biyografik çalışması "The Melungeons: Gururlu Bir Halkın Dirilişi" (1994) adlı biyografik çalışması, bu topluluğun kapsamlı bir incelemesini sunmaktadır. Metin, Melungeonların kökenlerini, benimsedikleri anavatanlarında yeni etnik kimlikler edinmelerini ve atalarının toplumlarıyla olan bağlarını titizlikle incelemektedir. Kennedy'nin eserindeki bu çok yönlü etnik kimliklerin tasvirini inceleyerek, Melungeon kimliğini derinlemesine kavrayabilir ve edebiyatta tasvir edildiği şekliyle hayatları hakkında fikir edinebiliriz. Analiz, Melungeonların yaşamlarını anlamak için gerekli biyografik unsurları ele alarak başlayacak, ardından etnik köken ve etnik kimliklerinin incelenmesine geçilecektir. Çalışma ayrıca, çeşitli ülkelerle ilişkilendirilen Melungonların farklı etnik kökenlerine dair içgörü

sağlayacaktır. Bu bilgilerin sentezlenmesi yoluyla çalışma, Melungeon etnik kökeninin ve etnik kimliğinin inceliklerini aydınlatmanın yanı sıra, biyografik anlatıdaki çeşitli atasal köklerinin temsilini de amaçlamaktadır. Bu derinlemesine analiz, Melungeon kimliğinin ve edebi bağlamlardaki tasvirlerinin kapsamlı bir şekilde anlaşılmasını sağlamayı amaçlamaktadır.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Meluncan, Kimlik, Etnisite, Biyografi, Aidiyet

## INTRODUCTION

The New World, encompassing North America, has been the destination of migrations from Europe and Asia since the 16th century, resulting in the melding of different ethnicities and the emergence of new societies. Notably, the Melungeons in the United States have garnered attention for their diverse ethnic backgrounds and unique identity. In the 20th century, writers such as N. Brent Kennedy examined the history and identity of the Melungeons. Kennedy's work "The Melungeons: The Resurrection of a Proud People" (1994) delves into the varied ethnic origins of the Melungeons, including Spanish and Turkish influences. This biographical work examines the life stories, ethnicity, and ethnic identity of the Melungeons, offering significant insights into their representation in literature.

The Melungeons, a unique and historically marginalized community in the United States, embody a rich tapestry of ethnic identities that reflect the complexities of American heritage. Emerging from a blend of diverse ancestries, including Iberian, Moorish, Northern European, and Native American roots, the Melungeons have navigated a multifaceted identity shaped by cultural intermarriages and historical circumstances. Their story is one of resilience and reclamation, as they strive to honor their heritage while confronting the challenges of societal marginalization and collective amnesia regarding their origins. N. Brent Kennedy's influential work, "The Melungeons: The Resurrection of a Proud People," (1994) serves as a critical examination of this community, offering insights into their historical context and the ongoing journey toward self-identity and pride.

Kennedy's narrative not only chronicles the Melungeons' diverse lineage but also emphasizes the significance of cultural memory in preserving their identity. He reflects on the erosion of this cultural remembrance due to historical oppression, which has led many within the community to become disconnected from their Native ancestry. Through personal anecdotes and broader cultural analysis, Kennedy articulates the importance of rediscovering and celebrating their roots, highlighting the efforts of groups like the Lumbees in reclaiming their heritage. This exploration underscores the dynamic nature of ethnicity, suggesting that identity is not a static concept but rather a fluid and evolving construct shaped by individual experiences and collective histories.

The aim of the first chapter is to summarize the key points about the author, N. Brent Kennedy, and his book, "The Melungeons: The Resurrection of a Proud People," (1994) including his background, the themes of identity and heritage explored in the book, and the advocacy for the Melungeon community. The aim of the second chapter is to explore the concept of biography in relation to the Melungeon community, emphasizing the importance of individual narratives in understanding their identities, roots, and cultural significance. It seeks to elucidate how ethnicity and ethnic identity play crucial roles in shaping the experiences and social relations of Melungeons, highlighting the complexities of their cultural framework and the persistence of their unique identity within a broader societal context. The aim of the third chapter is to provide

a comprehensive overview of the Melungeons, emphasizing their complex and diverse ethnic backgrounds, historical origins, and the various definitions associated with them. It seeks to highlight the significance of understanding the Melungeons' mixed ancestry, which includes influences from American Indian, African-American, Portuguese, Spanish, and Turkish heritages, as well as the historical context that shaped their identity. The paragraph underscores the need for meticulous investigation into the multifaceted aspects of Melungeon heritage and the implications of their diverse genealogical roots. The aim of the fourth chapter is to examine the significance of personal narrative in N. Brent Kennedy's exploration of Melungeon identity, highlighting how his own experiences and reflections on family history contribute to a broader understanding of the Melungeon community. It seeks to illustrate the emotional complexities associated with their heritage, including themes of shame, belonging, and the importance of reclaiming cultural memory, ultimately advocating for pride in their diverse roots and identity.

In examining the Melungeon identity, this manuscript aims to contribute to the broader discourse on multiculturalism in the United States. By delving into the complexities of belonging and the significance of ethnic diversity, the study seeks to illuminate the Melungeons' place within the American narrative. As they navigate their identity within a multi-layered social framework, the Melungeons exemplify the ongoing struggle for recognition and pride among marginalized communities. Through Kennedy's work, we gain a deeper understanding of the intricate interplay between heritage, identity, and the quest for belonging, ultimately enriching our appreciation of the diverse cultural landscape that defines the United States.

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND THE BOOK**

In "The Melungeons: The Resurrection of a Proud People" (1994), N. Brent Kennedy, born in 1950 in Wise County, Virginia, a common area where the Melungeons live, claimed to be one of them. He explained that Melungeons see themselves as partly Ottoman, Native American, African, Jewish, and European, embodying a modern, inclusive American identity, much like the ethnic mix found in Turkey. Kennedy held a Ph.D. in law from the University of Tennessee in Knoxville and had academic positions at several universities. He also founded the Melungeon Heritage Association and authored several books related to Melungeons, such as "The Melungeons" (1996) and "From Anatolia to Appalachia: A Turkish-American Dialogue" (2003). However, in 2005, he suffered a stroke and spent the remainder of his life in Tennessee, passing away in 2020. Kennedy's book explores the history and identity of the Melungeons, emphasizing their complex ancestry, historical neglect, and marginalization. He encourages Melungeon descendants to embrace their heritage and take pride in their unique identity, highlighting that ethnicity is a dynamic and evolving concept. Overall, the book aims to shed light on the rich cultural heritage of the Melungeons and advocate for their recognition and pride

## **THEORIES AND CONCEPTS**

### **Biography**

The book "The Melungeons: The Resurrections of a Proud People" (1994) delves into the lives of the Melungeons. Therefore, to comprehend their identities, roots, and stories, it is important to elucidate the characteristics of biography. Biographies are non-fiction narratives that focus on individual lives. The recounting of an individual's life by a writer or narrator must be accurate and authentic to reveal truths about that person's life.

In terms of the definition of biography, it could be described as "a relatively full account of a particular person's life, involving an attempt to portray character and environment, as well as the subject's activities and experiences" (Abrams, 1999, p.22). Consequently, as the study focuses on a Melungeon individual, the biography targets that specific person and reveals hidden aspects of their life. Essentially, a biography outlines an individual's experiences, events, and significant milestones, offering insight into their character.

### **Ethnicity**

The term "Melungeons" refers to a distinct group of individuals of diverse ethnic origins. It is crucial to underscore the cultural facets that define the ethnic identity of the Melungeon community. "Ethnicity" denotes a cultural framework comprising norms, values, beliefs, symbols, and practices that demarcate the process of cultural boundary formation (Barker, 1981, p.25). Consequently, ethnicity has been utilized for the purpose of classifying, segregating, and discriminating against individuals within societies.

The notion of "ethnic root" pertains to the perceived social identity associated with a particular group, aligned with the concepts of nation and ethnicity. This construct explicates the categorization of individuals based on their ethnicity, resulting in the establishment of social distance. As such, ethnic boundaries hold substantial influence on social relations, despite the ideal of fostering flexibility and dialogue around these boundaries.

### **Ethnic Identity**

Ethnicity is also associated with ethnic identity and understanding the ethnic identity is significant. The analysis of ethnic identities among Melungeons is crucial. "Social identity" is defined as the part of an individual's self-concept that derives from their knowledge of belonging to a social group, along with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership (Tajfel, 1981, p.255). This suggests that individuals have their own ethnic identities while also being part of the group's identity. Additionally, an individual's ethnic identity can encompass multiple facets.

From this viewpoint, ethnic identity is a construct. "The persistence of ethnic groups in contact implies not only criteria and signals for identification but also a structuring of interaction which allows the persistence of cultural differences" (Barth, 1969, p.16). Consequently, societal interaction qualities such as language and culture become paramount. In this context, individuals define and update their identity and adapt to changes in their surroundings.

## **DIFFERENT DEFINITIONS, THEORIES AND ROOTS OF MELUNGEONS**

The comprehensive analysis of Melungeons requires an in-depth examination of their diverse definitions, theories, and ethnic roots. It is evident that the Melungeons defy singular definition due to their varied ethnic backgrounds. Similarly, the discussion of their origins entails a consideration of diverse theories supported by scientific and theoretical evidence, highlighting their heterogeneous genealogical backgrounds. Their complex roots, which encompass ethnicities such as Turks and other diverse groups, necessitate a meticulous investigation of these multifaceted aspects.

It is crucial to grasp the various definitions of Melungeons. "The term "Melungeon" typically refers to individuals of mixed racial ancestry, often implying a blend of American Indian and African-American heritage" (Everett, 1999, p.386). The historical origins of the Melungeons can

be traced back to the period preceding the arrival of the Mayflower in the 17th century. According to Starnes and Yates, "there is some validity to the claims of a Melungeon connection to pirates, Portuguese, and pre-Mayflower settlement" (Starnes, & Yates, 2013, p.5). During the early 16th century, "North America was predominantly under the influence of Portuguese and Spanish settlers, with later involvement from the English, French, and Dutch" (Hoffman, 2004, p. ix). This historical context is crucial for comprehending the origins of the Melungeons and their diverse racial heritage. The Iberian Peninsula, encompassing the region where Spain and Portugal converge, has historically served as a convergence point for diverse ethnic groups, including Moors from Morocco, Berbers from the Sahara, and others. The early origins of the Melungeons, a group with mixed Spanish, Portuguese, and dark-skinned ancestry, are intertwined with the arrival of Portuguese and Spanish populations in North America. Historical narratives posit various ancestral lineages for the Melungeons, including Moors from Morocco, Berbers from the Sahara, Muslim Rifs, Guineas, and Celts, dating back to the early 16th century.

*The maritime voyages that facilitated the transference of these diverse populations to North America also extended to the Indian subcontinent, resulting in a blend of individuals from disparate regions. European powers, notably the Spanish and Portuguese, orchestrated voyages that comprised individuals from numerous countries. These diverse cohorts played a pivotal role in shaping Melungeon society throughout history. The voyages of the 16th century were significantly influenced by the conflicts between European powers and the Ottoman Empire. The Portuguese and Ottoman navies engaged in numerous battles, including the Lepanto Battle in 1571, which resulted in considerable losses for the Ottoman navy. Despite being in frequent conflict with the West, Ottoman Empire trading ships were often observed carrying mixed crews and displaying Christian, Islamic, or Judaic symbols (Serjeant, 1994, p.18).*

This points to a substantial interchange of people between the Ottoman Empire and European powers through these maritime routes. N. Brent Kennedy raises "the intriguing possibility of lesser-known incidents, such as the potential deposition of Moors and Turks by Sir Francis Drake, a British explorer who travelled to America in the 16th century, and the involvement of Turks by the Portuguese in the formation of the Melungeons through these voyages" (Kennedy, 1996, p.112). Such historical voyages have been presented as empirical evidence supporting the establishment of the Melungeon society by prominent researchers, including Dr. James H. Guill:

*One such voyage to the Azores from Flanders may not have turned North to the island at the correct time to reach islands. One voyage may have neared the coast of North America, turned north and encountered what is now the North Carolina coast. When colonization of this region begun nearly two centuries later, the colonists encountered a European group calling themselves Melungeons and identifying with the Portuguese (Guill, 1972, p.141).*

The exploration voyages led to the establishment of the Melungeon society, a group of individuals with uncertain origins first documented in the Appalachian Mountains in the early nineteenth century. These expeditions not only resulted in the alignment of Melungeon members with specific nations but also directed them to their eventual settlement regions. From this vantage point, the primary residential areas for the Melungeons are situated in Carolina and its adjacent states.



The Melungeons are known to reside predominantly in these areas. Historical accounts reveal that “the Melungeons, believed to be of mixed racial ancestry, encountered legal and social discrimination, prompting them to seek refuge in remote areas, particularly Newman’s Ridge in Hancock County, Tennessee” (Scolnick, , & Kennedy, 2004, p.102). In the regions characterized by remoteness and distinctive geography, the Cherokee Indians have established a profound historical legacy spanning centuries. Empirical investigations affirm the enduring habitation of these areas by the Cherokee people. “Notably, archeological inquiries have unearthed evidence of their presence as early as A.D. 1000, with the discovery of the Lee-Psigah ceramics from that era suggesting an ancestral connection between the Psigah community and the Cherokee tribe” (Rice, 2019, p.14). Consequently, the analysis suggests that the Melungeons encountered and intermingled with the Cherokee populace in these territories. Historically, the Appalachian region, where the Cherokee have perennially resided, has been subject to European incursions. Hence, it is posited that the Melungeons identify with a heritage that combines Cherokee and Portuguese lineage. “This proposition finds support in historical documentation, such as a reference to an individual of Cherokee descent who proudly acknowledges his Cherokee grandfather” (Dromgoole, 2018, p. 479). Accordingly, within the historical context, the Melungeons are intricately linked with the indigenous peoples of America.

The term "Melungeon" encompasses diverse definitions that are contingent upon the ethnic backgrounds of the respective groups. Notably, a significant definition originates from the influence of the French in America. Within this framework, "Melungeon" is inferred to stem from the French term "melange," denoting "mixture." This historical narrative traces back to the 18th-century French settlements in Virginia, wherein the French colony encountered the Indian colony and ascribed to them the designation "melange," the pluralized "melangeon," subsequently evolving into "Melungeon." (Everett, 1999, p.380). This etymological trajectory underscores the seminal role of French settlers in shaping the nomenclature "Melungeon" and underscores the impact of diverse interactions on the formulation of its definition. The subsequent significant definition of Melungeons originates from the Portuguese, who exerted considerable influence in establishing the Melungeon community. In the Afro-Portuguese context, the term "Melungo" denotes "shipmate" (Everett, 1999, p.385).

This definition aligns with the characteristic traits and historical attributes of the Portuguese people. Notably, the Portuguese are renowned for their maritime proficiency and formidable naval presence, which proved instrumental in the exploration and colonization of the New World. Their navies comprised adept seafarers essential for the navigation and operation of vessels during this era of geographical expansion and discovery. In the context of naval and seafaring perspectives, the Turkish heritage embedded in the definition of the Melungeons holds significance as it reflects the Turk and Ottoman connection of the Melungeons. N. Brent Kennedy, who traces his ancestry to Turks, engaged in a scholarly debate concerning this definition. According to Kennedy, the term "Melungeon" is derived from the Arabic "melun jinn" and the Turkish "melun can" (Scolnick, 2004, p.15). Notably, these terms bear a resemblance in pronunciation to the word "Melungeon," and their pronunciation in Turkish is also similar. Within Turkish and Arabic contexts, these terms associated with Melungeons carry the connotation of a cursed soul or an individual forsaken by God. Kennedy contends that these linguistic affinities are indicative of a Turkish connection. According to genetic and DNA research, “studies have been conducted on Melungeons, revealing that they have European, African, and Native American ancestry, as well as genetic similarities with populations in

Turkey and northern India" (Scolnick, 2004, p.102). This research indicates that the ethnic backgrounds of Melungeons include Portuguese, Indian, Turkish, and more. Dr. Kennedy and others have suggested that "the Spanish and Portuguese fort at Santa Elena, as well as a series of frontier outposts, could be a possible source for Melungeon ancestry" (Scolnick, 2004, p.103). Moreover, research also suggests "a strong possibility for a Turkish or Middle Eastern ancestry for Melungeons", indicating that the roots of Melungeons mainly consist of Spanish, Portuguese, Indian, and Middle Eastern identities, including Turks (Scolnick, 2004, p.105).

## DISCUSSION

The Melungeons have been a prominent subject in literary discourse with their extensive historical, developmental, and theoretical underpinnings regarding their identities, formations, and definitions. Melungeon and non-Melungeon authors have explored these matters in their literary works. Notably, N. Brent Kennedy, who identifies as a Melungeon, addresses Melungeon issues in his publication "The Melungeons: The Resurrection of A Proud People" (1994). To comprehensively grasp Kennedy's approach to elucidating the lives, identities, and diverse roots of the Melungeons, it is imperative to evaluate the literary attributes of his work.

An examination of the lives of the Melungeons is imperative to uncover the biographical aspects addressed in the work. In N. Brent Kennedy's book "The Melungeons: The Resurrection of a Proud People" (1994), biography plays a significant role in the narrative, as the author intertwines personal experiences with the broader historical and cultural context of the Melungeon people. Among the critical elements of biography highlighted in the book is the use of personal narrative. Kennedy chronicles his own journey of uncovering his Melungeon heritage. His contemplations on family history, identity, and the emotional significance of delving into the past are central themes throughout the book. This personal narrative enables readers to form a deeper connection with the Melungeons as Kennedy navigates the complexities of belonging and cultural identity.

The author examines the significance of Melungeon heritage in relation to the sense of belonging. Kennedy's investigation into his Melungeon lineage serves as a central focus of his work. He reflects on his family's history and the impact of their mixed heritage on his sense of self. He addresses the shame and stigma associated with being Melungeon, asserting, "To hide our shame, as it were, we were conditioned to feel guilt over our very being" (Kennedy, 1994, p.6). This personal link to his heritage propels his storytelling, as he presents family narratives about being Melungeon. The book is replete with anecdotes from Melungeon families, imparting insights into the authentic experiences of Melungeons. Kennedy shares accounts of Melungeon ancestors, highlighting how their trials and resilience shaped his comprehension of identity, emphasizing the significance of family stories in confronting the past and reclaiming identity.

The author expands his story from personal examples to the cultural context of the Melungeons. Discussing their challenges, including discrimination and the erasure of their identity, he states, "The most important thing a man or a woman can possess was stolen from the Melungeons, something far more valuable than mere land: their identity" (Kennedy, 1994, p.x). This historical perspective enriches the biographical narrative by connecting personal experiences to collective history. The author also candidly shares emotional struggles as he navigates the identities of Melungeons, expressing shame and the desire for acceptance, stating, "shame was at the most basic level—the shame of being alive" (Kennedy, 1994, p.143).

Kennedy emphasizes the fears, shame, and difficulties of being a Melungeon in society, allowing readers to empathize with his journey and understand the weight of Melungeon heritage. Kennedy's quest to embrace his Melungeon identity is a significant aspect of his biography. He reflects on the transformative power of acknowledging his roots: "To embrace heritage—whatever it might be—and wear it like a banner" (Kennedy, 1994, p.143). The desire for belonging and pride in his heritage is a driving force in his narrative. He expresses a desire to honor the legacy of his ancestors and inspire others to reclaim their identities. He hopes his story will catalyze others, stating, "If but one family finds release from a dark and painful legacy by way of what is said in these pages, then the effort will have been worthwhile" (Kennedy, 1994, p.126). He encourages others to look at their Melungeon past and be proud of it. This commitment to legacy underscores the biographical significance of his work. Thus, the author refers to the importance of the connections in the Melungeon community and emphasizes the importance of community in his narrative. He acknowledges the contributions of other Melungeon descendants seeking to reclaim their heritage.

*Not only by me, but by truly qualified researchers and, more importantly, those Melungeon descendants brave enough to stand up and be counted. People like Scott Collins of Sneedville, Tennessee, Jack Goins of Rogersville, Tennessee, and Vernoy Moore of Wise, Virginia. And those among us who still carry their names and genetic codes will, at long last, be able to honor their lives by simply being aware of their existence (Kennedy, 1994, p.xvi)*

The author delineates specific surnames prevalent among the Melungeons and elucidates their noteworthy contributions to the community. This underscores the importance of acknowledging community bonds and the communal essence inherent in the Melungeon experience. N. Brent Kennedy consistently interlaces this theme throughout his narrative, recounting his personal journey of discovery, delving into the rich histories of his ancestors, and illuminating the broader historical context of the Melungeon community. Through these narrative elements, Kennedy adeptly chronicles his own story while paying homage to the often-overlooked legacy of a people marginalized in historical discourse.

The Melungeon identity encompasses a diverse range of ethnic heritages, including Portuguese, Spanish, and Turkish origins. It is marked by struggles with societal perceptions and prejudices as individuals grapple with the challenges of their multi-ethnic identity. Through a novel, the author explores the complexities and difficulties faced by Melungeons, shedding light on the painful experiences of discrimination and social ostracism. For instance, the novel recounts instances where individuals were derogatorily labeled "Black Nash" by insensitive townsfolk (Kennedy, 1994, p.63), portraying the challenges of navigating identity as a Melungeon and emphasizing the stigma associated with their heritage. The significance of cultural heritage in shaping the identity of the Melungeons is underscored by the author. The novel portrays the pride in their multicultural roots and emphasizes the belief that their diverse heritage contributes to a distinctive and enriched identity. The narrative reflects the resilience and pride of the Melungeons in the face of adversity, demonstrating their determination to reclaim their identity and celebrate their diverse ancestry despite the challenges they encounter.

In the subsequent section, the author directs attention to the adversities and challenges encountered by the Melungeons. Within this context, the work places significant emphasis on the concept of collective memory. The author specifically delves into the repercussions of



historical displacement on the Melungeon identity, articulating, "Losing their most precious cultural, historical, and spiritual memories to an enforced collective amnesia" (Kennedy, 1994, p.98). Through this assertion, the author underscores the struggle to perpetuate a profound sense of identity and historical connection, accentuating the imperative nature of preserving and commemorating their heritage. The author underscores the pivotal role of collective memory in this context.

In delineating the significance of collective identity for the Melungeon community, the author duly addresses the diversity inherent within the group, encompassing lineages of Portuguese and Indian descent. The literary work delves into the malleable nature of Melungeon identity, articulating its dynamism as a pertinent facet of ethnicity. Citing the assertion that "ethnicity is a dynamic, ever-changing concept", the narrative underscores the notion that being a Melungeon constitutes a mutable identity, subject to evolution over time, and reflective of individual experiences and broader cultural paradigms (Kennedy, 1994, p.142). The author meticulously examines the assorted identities within the Melungeon community, thereby fashioning a nuanced exposition on the intricacies of being Melungeon. The novel adeptly captures the tribulations, ardor, and fortitude of the Melungeons as they navigate their identity within a multi-layered social framework, underscoring the significance of cultural inheritance and collective remembrance as formative influences on their personal constitution. In the quest to uncover the identity of the Melungeons, it becomes essential to investigate and comprehend their individual ethnic affiliations such as Turkish and Spanish. Particularly notable is the prevalence of the Spanish identity, which underscores the presence of a distinct Spanish ethnic heritage within the Melungeon community. N. Brent Kennedy's work, "The Melungeons: The Resurrection of a Proud People" (1994), extensively scrutinizes the intricate identity of the Melungeons, emphasizing the substantial influence of Spanish origins. Within this framework, Kennedy expounds on the Melungeons' mixed lineage, comprising Iberian lineage, notably from Spanish and Portuguese settlers. He posits, "The steadily accumulating evidence is heavily favoring a mixed Iberian-Moorish-Native American heritage for the 'Melungeons'" (Kennedy, 1994, p.120). This assertion underscores the significance of Spanish ancestry in elucidating the identity of the Melungeons, as postulated by Spanish theories positing their migration to America from the Iberian Peninsula.

The author illustrates the influence of Spanish culture on the Melungeons' identity through cultural exchanges. The exploration of interactions among diverse cultures, including the Spanish, is shown to have contributed to the formation of the Melungeon identity. In citing Eloy Gallegos, a researcher on the Melungeons, the author acknowledges the substantial research on southeastern Spanish settlements, which served as foundational evidence for the theory of the Melungeons' ethnic composition. The writer's reference to Spanish settlers accentuates the broader Iberian influence on the Melungeon community. Furthermore, the historical context provided by Kennedy regarding Spanish identity is imperative for comprehending the Melungeon lineage. The mention of Eloy Gallegos's work on the extensive sixteenth-century Spanish settlements in the southeastern United States highlights the profound impact of Spanish colonization on shaping the identities of various groups, including the Melungeons. The author delves into the Spanish identity within the Melungeons, shedding light on the complexities individuals of mixed heritage face in asserting their identity. Notably, the author underscores specific characteristics such as dark skin, Christianity, and European lineage as integral components of the Melungeon identity. Despite encountering challenges, the author proudly

embraces his Spanish heritage as an inherent facet of the Melungeon identity, effectively reclaiming it. The book "The Melungeons: The Resurrection of a Proud People" (1994) intricately interweaves the broader narrative of Melungeon identity, placing emphasis on the significance of Iberian heritage, cultural interactions, and the historical backdrop of Spanish settlement. Importantly, the narrative addresses the multifaceted nature of this identity and the pride associated with it. In addition to their Spanish identity, the Melungeons also maintain a Portuguese identity, which warrants analysis to comprehend the Portuguese influence within the Melungeon community. Within his work, Kennedy delves into the significance of Portuguese heritage within the Melungeon identity, citing Portuguese ancestry. He emphasizes that many Melungeons historically identified themselves as Portuguese, reflecting their intricate heritage. Kennedy notes, "The earliest-encountered Melungeons... invariably claimed to be 'Forty-ghee'... Not 'Portuguese,' but 'Portyghee,' the way native Iberians or captured Moors would have pronounced it" (Kennedy, 1994, p.120). The author thus associates the earliest Melungeons with the Portuguese, highlighting the cultural and linguistic nuances in their self-identification.

In the context of association with Portuguese heritage, the author explores the cultural amalgamation of the Melungeons and the amalgamation of various ethnic backgrounds, including Portuguese, to establish the Melungeon identity. Additionally, the author acknowledges the inclusion of Scotch-Irish, English, German, and African influences over time, which exemplifies the Portuguese heritage as an integral part of a broader array of identities spanning the Iberian Peninsula and its links to the African Sahara. Furthermore, the author provides historical insights into the presence of Portuguese colonists in North America. The author specifically cites the assistance of Eloy, a Melungeon researcher, underscoring the noteworthy role of Portuguese exploration and settlement in shaping the lineage of the Melungeons. In addition to historical evidence of the Spanish identity of the Melungeons, the writer points out the genetic and cultural evidence. Kennedy discusses the genetic makeup of the Melungeons, linking it to their claimed Portuguese heritage. He writes, "The genetic makeup of these captives (that is, Iberian, Moorish, and South American Indian) fits perfectly with the known genetic profile of the American Melungeons" (Kennedy, 1994, p.118). Kennedy refers to genetic studies showing the Iberian-Moorish connection of the Melungeons. This connection between genetics and cultural identity reinforces the significance of Portuguese ancestry in understanding who the Melungeons are. Thus, Kennedy emphasizes the historical claims of Portuguese origin, the blending of cultures, and the importance of language and genetics in shaping their identity, all while expressing pride in this heritage.

Kennedy underscores the Portuguese ethnic identity, which aligns with the research on the Melungeons, and also directs attention to the Native American ethnic identity, which is intertwined with the Melungeon identity. In his work, N. Brent Kennedy delves into the Native American heritage of the Melungeons as a significant facet of their identity. Kennedy underscores the prevalence of Native American ancestry among the Melungeons, highlighting that many Melungeon families have long laid claim to Native American heritage as an integral part of their identity. This recognition is pivotal in comprehending the intricate lineage of the Melungeon people:

*I contend that the remnants of Joao ("Juan") Pardo's forts, joined by refugees from Santa Elena, and possibly a few stray Dominicans and Jesuits, exiled Moorish French Huguenots, and escaped Acadians, along with Drake's and perhaps other freed Moorish*

*and Iberian captives, survived on these shores, combined forces over the ensuing years, moved to the hinterlands, intermarried with various Carolina and Virginia Native Americans, and eventually became the reclusive Melungeons (Kennedy, 1994, p.119).*

The author examines historical documentation pertaining to Portuguese settlements and their interactions with indigenous populations, positing that these engagements contributed to the emergence of the Melungeons, a group identified with a distinct Native American ethnic lineage. Subsequently, the discourse reflects on the complex cultural amalgamation embodied by the Melungeons, with particular emphasis on the encompassing influence of Native American cultural heritage. This analysis pivots towards a contextualization of the Melungeon identity vis-à-vis Native Americans, expounding upon the historical dynamics between European colonizers and indigenous peoples as formative agents in the development of the Melungeon identity, marked by intermarriage and the fusion of cultural legacies:

*But there was also some intermarriage between these folks and their Melungeon cousins from North and South Carolina prior to their arrival in Hancock County. By the time the eighteenth-century Melungeons arrived in extreme eastern Tennessee and southwestern Virginia, they were probably a blend of four primary parent groups, reflecting a well-integrated Iberian, Moorish, Native American, and Northern European heritage (Kennedy, 1994, p.141).*

Kennedy discusses the intermarriages between different ethnicities such as Iberian, Moorish, or Northern European, including Native Americans, resulting in the formation of the Melungeons. He emphasizes the cultural blending that occurred due to these marriages, highlighting the significance of Native American roots in the overall identity of the Melungeon community. The author frequently reflects on his identity and pride as a Melungeon, including his Native American heritage in his family history. He expresses pride in his identity, indicating a pride movement within the Melungeon community regarding their Native American ethnic identity.

Kennedy highlights the significance of cultural memory and legacy in preserving the Melungeon identity. He examines the erosion of cultural remembrance within the Melungeon community as a consequence of historical oppression and marginalization, observing that many have become disconnected from their Native ancestry. This collective amnesia concerning their heritage underscores the importance of rediscovering and venerating their Native heritage. Subsequently, the author delves into the process of reclaiming their identity as Native Americans. The book accentuates the continual journey of the Melungeons to reassert their identity, encompassing their Native American lineage:

*The Lumbees were among the first to reawaken, moving with great force, and against great odds, in reasserting their heritage. Books on their history, a research institute, and an office of tribal enrollment are but a few of the tangible manifestations of their regained pride» We Melungeons are only now taking those first baby steps toward once again becoming a real people, a proud people (Kennedy, 1994, p.143).*

Kennedy emphatically highlights the successful efforts of various groups, such as the Lumbees and the Melungeons, in reclaiming and celebrating their heritage. He underscores the importance of acknowledging Native ancestry, the fusion of cultures, and the historical context of interactions with Native Americans. The narrative reflects a broader and confident movement among Melungeons to honor their diverse roots, including their Native American heritage.

Kennedy highlights the Turkish identity of the Melungeons in his work and underlines their Turkish roots. In the introductory pages, he explores the Melungeon's definition and its Turkish connection, citing his visit to the Turkish embassy in Washington. "Notably, Mrs. Seriha Ishtar of the Turkish Embassy in Washington revealed that the Turkish terms "melun" and "can" (pronounced together as "melun-jun") signify "one who is deeply in love with life" (Kennedy, 1994, p.xiii). Kennedy thus accentuates the Turkish association with the Melungeon definition, offering a new interpretation compared to existing ones. Referring to the genealogical connection between the Melungeons and Turks from this linguistic association, he writes,

*The Melungeon characteristics of olive, ruddy, and copper-colored skins, as well as blue and brown eyes, and wavy and straight black, as well as reddish-tinted, hair, can now be explained by the inclusion of Berber, Arab, Jewish, Turkish, Basque, Native American, African, and native Iberian genes into the original ethnic pool (Kennedy, 1994, p.125).*

Kennedy unequivocally presents genealogical studies and research indicating a strong connection to a Melungeon-Turkish ethnicity and firmly emphasizes the Turkish ethnic identity among the Melungeons. Furthermore, he confidently asserts numerous physical resemblances between Melungeons and Turks, thus highlighting the Turkish identity of the Melungeon community. From this point onward, Kennedy traces the Turkish roots of the Melungeons back to the very early stages of American history. He discusses the South Carolina people and their Turkish connection. Kennedy extends the Turkish roots of the Melungeons to the very early stages of American history. He mentions the South Carolina people and the Turkish connection:

*Two other South Carolina "mixed-race" groups, the "Redbones" and the "Turks," are probably related as well, although the "Turks" apparently also claim a direct descent from a real, eighteenth-century South Carolina Turkish-American named Joseph Benenhaley. Benenhaley married a woman with the Lumbee surname of Oxendine, and it is possible that at least some of the Lumbee "Bennetts" may be descended from this more recently arrived "Moor." Of course, Benenhaley may well have been attracted to a people who exhibited many of his own ethnic characteristics. In eastern and central Virginia, the Powhatan and Pamunkey Indians, as well as the Catawba Indians in North Carolina, could prove to be admixtures of either Drake's captives or the Spanish and Portuguese refugees from Santa Elena, or both. I have at least seven "Melungeon" ancestors with central Virginia Powhatan-Pamunkey connections (surnames of Adams, Adkins, Bowling, Cook, Garland, Greene, and Osborne) who intermarried in the early 1700s with other "Melungeon" ancestors who had come north from South Carolina (Kennedy, 1994, p.132).*

Kennedy refers to the South Carolinian people known as Melungeons and includes Turks within this group. Moreover, he draws connections between the Turks and the Lumbee, a Native American tribe. He then traces the narrative back to the 1700s, establishing a link between his ancestors and the Turks, who are part of the Lumbee community. Consequently, he expands the Turkish heritage to encompass the Melungeons, the Lumbee, and himself. He intertwines his Melungeon identity with Turkish heritage and incorporates Turkish identity into the broader Melungeon identity. From these connections, Kennedy also refers to the cultural aspects of the Turkish identity in the Melungeons. He mentions the Virginian tribes and locates the Turks within these Native American tribes: "These decimated Virginia tribes also possessed Iberian

and Turkish/Moorish culture and genes, then the stage is set for a legitimate source of Moorish-Indian-European "Melungeons" (Kennedy, 1994, p.137). The author asserts that Turks intermingled with the locals, signifying a blend of cultures encompassing both Turkish ethnicity and culture among the Melungeons. The author vividly portrays the rich Turkish cultural influence within the Melungeon community, delving into their deep-seated Turkish roots. Additionally, the author illuminates the notable presence and remarkable achievements of individuals with Turkish heritage among the Melungeons:

*Louisa Hall Nash's handsome and ambitious brother Floyd Hall likewise left Wise County to try his luck in Kentucky. Her less dark but still Mediterranean-looking ("Turkish," in the opinion of some family members) brother succeeded beyond the levels any Melungeon could hope for, becoming an outstanding lawyer, accumulating large land holdings and the respect of his fellow Kentuckians. Given the chance, Melungeons could do anything their fairer-skinned neighbors could (Kennedy, 1994, p.37).*

Kennedy references a successful individual of Melungeon descent and indicates the potential presence of Turkish ancestry within this individual. Additionally, he celebrates the success of Melungeons and incorporates individuals of Turkish descent into this narrative of achievement. Through these acknowledgments, Kennedy underscores the Melungeons' intricate and diverse ancestral heritage, specifically emphasizing the Turkish lineage. He accentuates the amalgamation of cultures, historical contextualization of interactions, and contemporary endeavors to reclaim and honor all facets of their heritage. This implies that Turkish ancestry is integral to the intricate tapestry that defines the Melungeon identity.

## CONCLUSION

The study underscores a multifaceted cultural heritage that challenges conventional notions of ethnicity and identity. The Melungeons, with their diverse ancestry encompassing Native American, European, and Middle Eastern influences, exemplify the intricate nature of identity in a multicultural context. Kennedy's work functions as both a personal narrative of discovery and a broader call for the acknowledgment and celebration of Melungeon heritage, stressing the significance of reclaiming cultural memory in response to historical marginalization.

Approaching this subject from a critical standpoint, the analysis emphasizes the importance of comprehending the Melungeon experience as indicative of broader dynamics of race, ethnicity, and belonging in the United States. Recognizing ancestral ties, such as Turks alongside other ethnic identities, underscores the interconnectedness of cultural narratives and the necessity for comprehensive narratives that honor the diverse backgrounds of marginalized communities. Ultimately, the journey of the Melungeons towards self-acceptance and pride in their layered identity serves as an inspiring validation of the enduring influence of cultural heritage in shaping one's sense of self.

The manuscript underscores the significance of cultural memory in the Melungeon experience, highlighting how the reclamation of their heritage is essential for fostering a sense of pride and belonging. Kennedy's personal anecdotes and broader cultural analysis reveal the emotional struggles faced by individuals within the community as they navigate societal perceptions and their own identities. By sharing his journey of self-discovery and the collective experiences of the Melungeons, Kennedy advocates for a deeper understanding of the importance of acknowledging one's roots. This call for cultural reclamation resonates not only with the



Melungeons but also with other marginalized groups seeking to honor their diverse backgrounds.

Ultimately, the journey of the Melungeons towards self-acceptance and pride in their layered identity serves as an inspiring validation of the enduring influence of cultural heritage. Kennedy's work contributes significantly to the discourse on race, ethnicity, and multiculturalism in the United States, encouraging readers to reflect on the complexities of identity in a diverse society. By illuminating the rich cultural tapestry of the Melungeons, the manuscript not only fosters appreciation for their unique heritage but also advocates for the recognition of the diverse narratives that shape the American experience. In doing so, it inspires future generations to embrace their identities and celebrate the interconnectedness of cultural narratives in a multicultural world.

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