Affirming Diversity

The Sociopolitical Context of Multicultural Education

Third Edition

Sonia Nieto

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LONGMAN

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Introduction

As a young child growing up in Brooklyn, New York, during the 1940s, I experienced firsthand the effects of relative poverty and discrimination. In the schools I attended, a common perception was that my culture and language were inferior. I spoke only Spanish when I entered first grade, and I was immediately confronted with the arduous task of learning a second language while my developed native language was all but ignored. Almost 50 years later, I still remember the frustration of groping for English words I did not know to express thoughts I could say very capably in Spanish. Equally vivid are memories of some teachers' expectations that my classmates and I would not do well in school because of our language and cultural differences. This explains my fourth-grade teacher's response when mine was the only hand to go up when she asked whether anybody in the class wanted to go to college. "Well, that's okay," she said, "because we always need people to clean toilets."

I also recall teachers' patronizing attitudes about students who spoke a language other than English. "Is there anybody in this class who started school without speaking English?" my tenth-grade homeroom teacher asked loudly, while filling out one of the endless forms that teachers are given by the central office. By this time, my family had moved to a middle-class neighborhood of mostly Jewish, Italian, and Irish families. My classmates watched in hushed silence as I, the only Puerto Rican in the class, raised my hand timidly. "Are you in a special English class?" he asked in front of the entire class. "Yes," I said. "I'm in Honors English." My teacher looked surprised, and I was secretly pleased that I could respond in this way. Certainly there is nothing wrong with being a second language learner, or being in an ESL (English as a Second Language) class, but I had learned to feel ashamed of speaking Spanish and I wanted to make it very clear that I was intelligent *in spite of it*.

Those first experiences with society's responses to cultural differences did not convince me that something was wrong with the *responses*. Rather, I assumed, as many of my peers did, that there was something wrong with *us*. We learned to feel ashamed of who we were, how we spoke, what we ate, and everything else that was different about us. "Please," I would beg my mother, "make us hamburgers and hot dogs for dinner." Luckily, she never paid attention and kept right on cooking rice, beans, *plátanos* (plantains), and all those other good foods that we grew up with. She and my father also continued speaking Spanish to us in spite of our

teachers' pleas to speak to us in English only. And so, alongside the messages at school and in the streets that being Puerto Rican was not something to be proud of, we learned to keep on being who we were. As the case studies in this book point out, a great many young people still face negative messages about their language and culture in school, even while their families attempt to teach them to see diversity in a positive light.

DIVERSITY: THE VIEWS OF SCHOOLS AND TEACHERS

Negative beliefs about diversity leave their imprint not only on students but on teachers and schools as well. Although I have been fortunate to work with many talented and caring teachers who welcome their students' identities and view them as assets, I have met others who accept the notion that differences get in the way of learning. Even many well-meaning teachers who care about their students hold this belief. This has become evident to me through the scores of presentations on multicultural and bilingual education I have made in many different school systems, colleges, and universities over the years. After each session, a few teachers invariably approach me with the same concern: Why do some of their students (usually African American, Latino, or American Indian students and very often poor European American students) fail no matter what they, their teachers, do, whereas other students (usually middle-class European American and some Asian American students, as well as middle-class students of other ethnic groups) succeed?

A small number of these teachers may believe that their unsuccessful students are genetically or culturally inferior. But I am convinced that the vast majority of teachers do not harbor such racist and classist beliefs. I have found that some teachers who were committed and idealistic when they began teaching have simply tired of facing hostile and nonachieving students in their classrooms every day. Still other teachers who have not been able to reach students of diverse backgrounds may start to believe that children from some groups may indeed be inherently "better" students than others. The cause for failure, they may reluctantly conclude, must be within the children, their families, or their culture. After all, the schools have tried everything from compensatory education to free lunch and breakfast programs. Nothing seems to work, and the same young people keep dropping out and failing. How can multicultural education help?

WHAT GOOD CAN MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION DO?

Educational failure is too complex and knotty an issue to be "fixed" by any single program or approach. To view multicultural education as "the answer" to school failure is simplistic because other important social and educational issues that affect the lives of students would be ignored. Multicultural education does not exist in a vacuum but must be understood in its larger personal, social, historical, and political context. However, if it is broadly conceptualized and implemented, multicultural education *can* have a substantive and positive impact on the education of most students. That is the thesis of this book.

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I have come to this understanding as a result of many experiences, including my childhood and my life as a student, teacher, researcher, and parent. I believe that to be effective, multicultural education needs to move beyond diversity as a passing fad. It needs to take into account our history of immigration as well as the inequality and exclusion that have characterized our past, our present, and our educational record. These issues are too often ignored in superficial treatments of multicultural education.

For example, immigration is not a phenomenon of the past. In fact, the experience of immigration is still fresh in the minds of a great many people in the United States. It begins anew every day that planes land, ships reach our shores, and people on foot make their way to our borders. Many of the students in our schools who themselves are not immigrants have parents or grandparents who are. Not just a nation of past immigrants, often romantically portrayed, the United States is a nation of immigrants even today.

Although almost all of us have an immigrant past, very few of us know or even acknowledge it. But because schools have traditionally perceived their role as that of an assimilating agent, the isolation and rejection that accompany immigration have simply been left at the schoolhouse door. The rich experiences of millions of our students, and of their parents, grandparents, and neighbors, have been lost. Rather than using students' experiences as a foundation, curriculum and pedagogy have been based on the myth of a painless and smooth assimilation.

U.S. history is also steeped in slavery and conquest. Millions of descendants of Africans, American Indians, Mexicans, Puerto Ricans and others colonized within and beyond U.S. borders have also experienced disparagement of their native cultures and languages. But the history of racism and exploitation experienced by so many of our people, including their children, is rarely taught.

The research reported in this book suggests to me that we need to make the history of all these groups visible by making it part of the curriculum, instruction, and schooling in general. The words of the students in the case studies in this book provide eloquent testimony for the need to do so. For instance, Manuel Gomes, the young man who is the subject of one of the case studies following Chapter 6, claims that he "cannot be an American" because it would mean forsaking his Cape Verdean background. Vanessa Mattison, a young woman fiercely devoted to social justice and equality but with little awareness of the U.S. history of racism and inequity, knows nothing about her European American past and even feels uncomfortable discussing it. James Karam, whose case study is presented at the end of Chapter 5, is a Lebanese Christian student whose culture is totally missing in the school's curriculum and extracurricular activities. James has learned to appreciate any references to his background, even if negative.

The immigrant and colonization experiences are a significant point of departure for our journey into multicultural education. This journey needs to begin with teachers, who themselves are frequently unaware of or uncomfortable with their own ethnicity. By reconnecting with their own backgrounds, and with the suffering as well as the triumphs of their families, teachers can lay the groundwork for students to reclaim their histories and voices.

No child should have to make the painful choice between family and school, which inevitably becomes the choice between belonging or succeeding. The costs of such a choice are too high, from becoming a "cultural schizophrenic" to developing doubts about one's worth and dignity. This is nowhere more poignantly described than in Richard Rodriguez's painful recollection of growing up as a "scholarship boy," an academically promising student doomed to lose his family and native culture and language in the process. His conclusion is that the public and private worlds of immigrant children cannot be reconciled:

> My awkward childhood does not prove the necessity of bilingual education. My story discloses instead an essential myth of childhood—inevitable pain. If I rehearse here the changes in my private life after my Americanization, it is finally to emphasize the public gain. The loss implies the gain.[1]

Because of the wrenching experience of the loss of his native language and culture, Rodriguez decided that policies such as bilingual education, multicultural education, and affirmative action do not work because they only delay the inevitable loss. My conclusion is quite the opposite: Losing one's culture and language is too high a price to pay for academic success and social acceptance. I am not calling here for cultural separation or "ethnic purity"; these notions are not only unrealistic but also undesirable and impossible in a pluralistic nation. But because culture and language help define the very soul of a people, to insist on wiping them out is both an unusually cruel strategy and, in the end, a counterproductive one.

I am not suggesting that multicultural education simply concerns the affirmation of language and culture. Multicultural education is a transformative process that goes far beyond cultural and linguistic maintenance. In the final analysis, multicultural education needs to confront issues of power and privilege in society. This means challenging racism and other biases as well as the structures, policies, and practices of schools.

As you will see in this book, affirming language and culture can help students become successful and well-adjusted learners. But unless language and cultural issues are approached through a critical lens based on equity and social justice, they are unlikely to have a lasting impact in promoting real change.

SOME ASSUMPTIONS

There are a number of assumptions in the text that I want to clarify. The first concerns who is included in my idea of multicultural education. My framework is broad and inclusive: multicultural education is for everyone regardless of ethnicity, race, language, social class, religion, gender, sexual orientation, ability, and other differences. But although I refer to many kinds of differences, this text is primarily concerned with race, ethnicity, and language. I use these as the major lenses to understand multicultural education. Both multicultural and bilingual education

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were direct outgrowths of the civil rights movement and they developed in response to racism, ethnocentrism, and language discrimination in education. These inequities continue to exist, especially for Native American, Latino, and African American youngsters.

Other lenses with which to view inequality in education include gender, social class, sexual orientation, religion, and exceptionality. But because one book cannot possibly give all of these topics the central importance they deserve, my focus is on race, ethnicity, and language. Other books emphasize differences that are equally meaningful and necessary for all teachers to know about. I encourage you to become aware of all the differences that are not the main focus of this book because they provide valuable insights into how students who are not considered part of the "mainstream" are also marginalized in schools.[2]

Having a broad definition of multicultural education raises another dilemma, however. One reason it is easier for some educators to embrace a very inclusive and comprehensive framework of multicultural education is that they have a hard time discussing and facing racism. For example, whenever I bring up racism with a group of predominantly White teachers, I find that too often they want to go immediately to, say, sexism or classism without spending much time on racism. Sexism and classism are certainly worthy of study and attention; in fact, they must be part of a multicultural agenda. But the discomfort that many White teachers feel in talking about racism is very evident in incidents such as these. Racism is an excruciatingly difficult issue for most of us. Given our history of exclusion and discrimination, this is not surprising. But it is only through a thorough exploration of discrimination based on race and other differences related to it that we can understand the genesis as well as the rationale for multicultural education.

Another assumption that guides this book is that teachers cannot be singled out as the villains in the failure of students. Although some teachers do bear responsibility for having low expectations, being racist and elitist in their interactions with students and parents, and providing educational environments that discourage many students from learning, most do not do so consciously. Most teachers are sincerely concerned about their students and want very much to provide them with the best education. But because of their own limited experiences and knowledge, they may know very little about the students they teach. As a result, their beliefs about students of diverse backgrounds may be based on spurious assumptions and stereotypes. Further, teachers are often at the mercy of decisions made by others far removed from the classroom; they generally have little to do with developing the policies and practices in their schools, and frequently they do not even question them.

Teachers are also the products of educational systems that have a history of racism, exclusion, and debilitating pedagogy. Hence their practices reflect their experiences and they may unwittingly perpetuate policies and approaches that are harmful to many of their students. We cannot separate schools from the communities they serve or from our society in general. Oppressive forces that limit opportunities in the schools reflect such forces in the society at large. But the purpose of

this book is not to point a finger but to provide a forum for reflection and discus sion so that teachers take responsibility for their own actions, challenge the action of schools and society that affect their students' education, and help bring abou positive change.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Why students succeed or fail in school has been the subject of much research anc debate, particularly for students whose racial, ethnic, linguistic, or social clas backgrounds differ from that of the dominant group. Programs in bilingual anc multicultural education have been two responses to the dilemma of school failure and both have been viewed as controversial because they challenge the status quo But in the final analysis, even bilingual and multicultural education by themselve will not substantially change the outlook for most students because the issue i more complicated than implementing a specific program or approach. The com plex interplay among personal, social, political, and educational factors help explain students' academic success or failure. In this book, I will consider thes links in exploring the benefits of multicultural education. I will also use case stud ies because it is especially by listening to students that we can learn how they expe rience school, how social and educational structures affect their learning, and wha we can do to provide high-quality education for them.

Educators frequently rely on their own experiences and common sense whe they teach. However, educational research (i.e., the systematic and careful study o how and why students learn) generally provides a better source for educationa practice. Rather than relying on convention or tradition or what seems to work, i is more effective to look to research for ways to improve teaching. This book i grounded in research because research gives us a way to understand what hap pens in classrooms, with implications for improving education.

I do not mean to imply that research is always neutral and fair. As huma beings, we approach each endeavor with a set of assumptions and a philosophica and political outlook. No research can be entirely free of biases, no matter how neutral it may claim to be. Even the decision to study a particular phenomenon i not impartial and may have unstated agendas. Moreover, research findings ar seldom neat and tidy, and often contradictory. But research nonetheless con tributes to our understanding of education by sharpening our awareness of com plex issues.

This book explores the meaning, necessity, and benefits of multicultural edu cation for students from all cultural backgrounds through the following:

1. An investigation of how schooling is influenced by
   a. racism and other biases and expectations of students' achievement.
   b. school organization and educational policies and practices.
   c. cultural and other differences such as ethnicity, race, gender, language, and social class.
2. A rationale for multicultural education based on that investigation.

part one

Setting the Stage
Approaches and Definitions

Multicultural education cannot be understood in a vacuum. Yet in many schools it is approached as if it were divorced from the policies and practices of schools and from society. The result is a "fairyland" multicultural education disassociated from the lives of teachers, students, and communities. The premise of this book is quite different: *No educational philosophy or program is worthwhile unless it focuses on two primary concerns:*

- Raising the achievement of all students and providing them with an equitable and high-quality education.
- Giving students an apprenticeship in the opportunity to become critical and productive members of a democratic society.

Let me begin by defining a number of terms and explaining the approach used in this book. Helping students get along, teaching them to feel better about themselves, or "sensitizing" them to one another may be meaningful goals of multicultural education. But these goals can turn into superficial strategies that only scratch the surface of educational failure if they do not tackle the far more thorny questions of stratification and inequity. Simply wanting our students to get along with and be respectful of one another makes little difference in the options they will have as a result of their schooling. Because students' lives are inexorably affected by social and political conditions in schools and society, we need to consider these conditions in our conception of multicultural education. Decisions made about education are often treated as if they were politically neutral. Such decisions are *never* politically neutral, but rather tied to the social, political, and economic structures that frame and define our society. This book is predicated on the *sociopolitical context* of multicultural education.

Two terms often associated with multicultural education are *equality* and *equity*, and although they are sometimes used interchangeably, they are in fact different. *Equal education* does not just mean providing the same resources and opportunities for all students (although this alone would afford a better education for a wide

range of students). Equal education also means considering the skills, talents, and experiences that all students bring to their education as valid starting points for further schooling. *Equity* is a more comprehensive term because it suggests fairness and the real possibility of *equality of outcomes* for a broader range of students. Throughout this book, both equal education and equity are considered fundamental to multicultural education.

Our public schools are unsuccessful with many students, primarily those from racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse and poor families. Why schools fail to meet their mission to provide all students with an equal and high-quality education has been the subject of educational research for some time. Theories about cultural deprivation and genetic inferiority are once again being used to explain differences in intelligence and achievement, and the implications of these deficit theories continue to influence educational policies and practices. *Deficit theories* assume that some children, because of genetic, cultural, or experiential differences, are inferior to other children; that is, they have a deficit. One problem with such hypotheses is that they place complete responsibility for children's failure on their homes and families, effectively reducing the responsibility of the school and society. Whether the focus is on the individual or the community, the result remains largely the same: blaming the victims of poor schooling rather than looking in a more systematic way at the schools in which they learn (or fail to learn) and the society at large. All these factors need to be explored together.

Another problem with deficit theories is their focus on conditions that are out of the control of most teachers, schools, and even students. Deficit theories tend to foster despair because students' problems are thought to be determined, with no hope for changing the circumstances that produced them in the first place. But teachers and schools cannot alleviate the poverty and other oppressive conditions in which students may live. It is more realistic to tackle the problems that they *can* do something about, among them, providing educational environments that encourage all students to learn. That is why school policies and practices and teachers' attitudes and behaviors, rather than the supposed shortcomings of students, are the basis for the kinds of transformations suggested in this book.

Part I sets the stage for understanding the approach used in this text. Chapter 1 begins with the rationale for using case studies, then describes the case study approach and briefly introduces the students in the case studies. Chapter 2 underscores the connection between terminology and multicultural education by exploring how groups of people are identified in the text.

chapter **1**

Why the Case Study

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chapter **2**

About Terminology

Language is always changing. Because it mirrors social, economic, and political events, it is an important barometer of a society at any given time. Language also becomes obsolete; it could not be otherwise because it is a reflection of societal changes. The shift in terminology over the years, for example, from *Negro* to *Black* to *Afro-American* and more recently to *African American*, is a case in point. Such changes often represent deliberate attempts by a group to name or rename itself. This decision is political as well as linguistic, and it responds to the need for group self-determination and autonomy. Terms also evolve as an attempt to be more precise and correct. In this sense, the term *African American* is more comprehensive than *Black* because it implies culture rather than simply color. This term recognizes that the notion of "race," in spite of its overarching importance in a society rigidly stratified along these lines, does not define the complexity of a people.

Terminology is particularly important in multicultural education. In our society we have not always been appropriate or sensitive in our use of words to describe people. In its most blatant form, this insensitivity is apparent in the racial and ethnic epithets that even our youngest children seem to know. It is also evident in more subtle examples, such as observations made by Allport many years ago: (a) that the refusal of southern newspapers to capitalize *negro* was meant to diminish the stature of Blacks, and (b) that certain words develop stereotypical ethnic connotations (e.g., *inscrutable* is almost automatically associated with Asians, *rhythm* with African Americans).[1] Although these words are not negative in and of themselves, they can become code words for simplifying the experience of an entire group of people, and hence are disparaging.

MAKING CHOICES ABOUT WHAT TERMS TO USE

To be both sensitive and appropriate in the use of language, I prefer particular words or terms over others. I am not suggesting that these terms are "politically correct" or that they are the only ones that should be used, nor do I want to impose my usage on others. Rather, I will explain my own thinking to help others determine what terminology is most appropriate for them.

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My choice of terms is based generally on two major criteria:

1. What do the people themselves want to be called?
2. What is the most accurate term?

I have answered these questions by talking with people from various groups, reading current research, and listening to debates regarding the use of terms. Language is always tentative, and so are the choices made here. New terms evolve every day. Such is the inexactitude of language that it can never completely capture the complexity of our lives.[2]

In some cases, I have chosen to use two terms or more, sometimes interchangeably, because each may have meanings important in particular contexts. My choices change over the years because of changing usage. For example, for years I used the term *Native American* exclusively for the many indigenous nations in the Western Hemisphere. During the late 1960s this seemed to become the preferred term because it reflected a people's determination to name themselves and to have others recognize them as the original inhabitants of these lands.

During the late 1980s and 1990s, the use of this term declined, so I decided to use the terms *American Indian, Indian,* and *Native people* more often. I did so because I noted that people from this group generally used the term *Indian.* Also, a number of students explained to me that it is not so much that the term *Native American* has been *abandoned,* but rather that some of their communities had never really adopted it. Another student told me that this term had become confusing because it was often used to mean a citizen of the United States whose early ancestors came from Europe (i.e., who is now *native* to this land). Because *Indian* also refers to people from India, I usually add the qualifier *American* or *Native.* More recently, the term *Native American* has again become common among the group itself.[3] Fern, one of the young women in the case studies, deliberately refers to herself in this way, thus reminding us that even among people from the same group, different terms are used.

Chicano, a term popular in the late 1960s and early 1970s, is also making a comeback. An emphatically self-affirming and political term reflecting the culture and realities of urban, economically oppressed Mexican Americans in U.S. society, *Chicano* grew out of the Brown Power Movement in the 1960s. It was never wholly accepted in the general community. Although used by many scholars and activists, the more descriptive but less political term *Mexican American* has been more common in many segments of the community. *Mexican,* on the other hand, is used generally to refer to first generation immigrants. I have decided to use all these terms within their appropriate contexts because each has connotations that must not be lost.

I have used the terms *Hispanic* and *Latino* more or less interchangeably to refer to people of Latin American and Caribbean heritage. Although I generally prefer the term *Latino*—because its connotation includes the African and indigenous heritage as well as the Spanish heritage of these groups—*Hispanic* is more widespread

and well known.[4] Unlike *European, African, Latin American,* or *Asian,* however, it does not refer to a particular continent or country (i.e., there is no continent named *Hispania*). *Latino,* on the other hand, has the disadvantage of having a sexist connotation when used to refer to groups that include both genders. I use neither term, however, when the more specific ethnic name is available. For example, none of the Latino students in the case studies refer to themselves as either Latino(a) or Hispanic: Marisol defines herself as Puerto Rican; Yolanda is Mexican; and Paul uses both *Chicano* and *Mexican American.* Whenever possible, these distinctions need to be made because otherwise fundamental differences in ethnicity, national origin, self-identification, and time in this country are easily overlooked.

White people, as the majority in U.S. society, seldom think of themselves as *ethnic*—a term they tend to reserve for other, more easily identifiable groups. Nevertheless, the fact is that we are all ethnic, whether we choose to identify ourselves in this way or not. This is one of the reasons I have opted to use the term *European American* rather than *White* in most cases in this book. Although Whiteness is an important factor, it hides more than it reveals: There is a tremendous diversity of ethnic backgrounds among Whites, and this is lost if race is used as the only identifier. The term *European American* also implies *culture,* something that many European Americans lament they do not have. This is nonsense, of course. Everybody has a culture, whether clearly manifested in its more traditional forms or not.

The term *European American,* just as all terms, has its drawbacks. For one, although it is more specific than *White,* it is still overly inclusive of a great many ethnic backgrounds that may have little in common other than "race." A similar criticism applies to terms such as *African, Asian,* or *Latin American.* For another, many European Americans are a mixture of several European ethnic groups: A person may be German, Irish, and Italian and not speak any of the languages or follow any of the rituals associated with any of these cultures. It is reasonable to ask, in such cases, why they should be called *European American* when in effect they are "as American as apple pie." They may never have even visited Europe, for example, or may not at all identify with a European heritage. I have chosen to use the term because the habits, values, and behaviors of White Americans are grounded in European mores and values. Although these may be quite distant, and adapted and modified within the U.S. context, their roots are still European. Because Whites in U.S. society tend to think of themselves as the "norm," they often view other groups as "ethnic" and therefore somewhat exotic and colorful. By using the term *European American,* I hope to challenge Whites also to see and define themselves in ethnic terms.

I do not use the terms *Anglo* and *Anglo-American,* except when speaking specifically of those with an English heritage, because it is inaccurate as a general term to refer to Whites in the United States. Many Whites are not English in origin but represent a wide variety of ethnic groups from European societies; classifying all of them as Anglos is a gross overgeneralization. If used to contrast English speakers from speakers of other languages, *Anglo-American* is equally inaccurate because African Americans, among others whose native language is English, are not included in this classification. of whom are many Irish Ameri being identified with an English

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Race as a notion is dubious at best, as I will explain. But the problem with using terms that emphasize *culture* only is that the very real issue of racism in our society is then obscured. My use of terminology is in no way meant to do so but rather to stress that the notion of race alone does not define people. For example, African Americans and Haitians are both Black. They share some basic cultural values and are both subjected to racist attitudes and behaviors in the United States. But the particular experiences, native language usage, and ethnicity of each group is overlooked or even denied if we simply call them both Black rather than also identifying them ethnically.

I have decided to use terms that refer specifically to so-called racial groups when they are warranted. In speaking of segregated schools, for example, it makes sense to refer to Black and White students rather than to African American and European American students because color is the salient issue. In this way, I also hope to underscore the fact that there are always differences of opinion about the use of various terms.

I have capitalized the terms *White* and *Black.* I do so because they refer to groups of people, as do terms such as *Latino, Asian,* and *African.* As such, they deserve to be capitalized. Although these are not the scientific terms for so-called racial groups, terms such as *Negroid* and *Caucasian* are no longer used in everyday speech or are rejected because of their negative connotations. Because I treat the more commonly used words *Black* and *White* as the terms of preference, I capitalize them.

The concept of "race" itself has come in for a great deal of criticism because, in a strictly biological sense, race does not exist at all. There is no scientific evidence that so-called racial groups differ biologically or genetically in significant ways. Differences that do exist are primarily social; that is, they are based on one's experiences within a particular cultural group. There is really only one "race". In the words of Linda Howard, one of the interviewees in the case studies that follow Chapter 3, "I'm human. That's my race; I'm part of the human race." Linda identified as Black American and White American, but she saw herself primarily as a member of her family rather than a race: "My culture is my family," she explained. She knew that, historically, the concept of race has been used to oppress entire groups of people for their supposed differences.

It is now generally accepted that the very concept of race is a social construction, that is, a racial group is socially and not biologically determined. Many scholars who write about race have made the decision to use it only in quotation marks to underscore its social construction ("race").[5] I have decided not to do so for a couple of reasons. First, it can be reasonably argued that *all* differences are socially constructed (social class, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and so on) and to separate race from the others seems arbitrary. The second reason is for the sake of convenience: Given the many times that race, gender, social class, ethnicity, and other differences are discussed in this text, readers would find it disconcerting to trip over entire paragraphs about "race," "gender," "social class," and so on.

I generally use terms related to specific ethnic backgrounds, but if an overarching term is needed, I prefer either *people of color* or *bicultural* rather than *minority*. First, *minority* is a misnomer; it is never used to describe groups such as Swedish Americans, Albanian Americans, or Dutch Americans. Yet strictly speaking, these groups, which represent numerical minorities in our society, should also be referred to in this way. Historically, the term has been used to refer only to *racial minorities*, implying a status less than that accorded to other groups.

Even when these groups are no longer a "minority," there seems to be in the dominant discourse a tenacious insistence on maintaining the "minority" status of some groups. The result is convoluted language that maintains a pejorative classification. For example, schools in which African American students become the majority are called "majority minority" schools rather than "primarily Black" schools. The connection between name and low status in the use of this term is quite clear. Given this connotation, the word is offensive.

The term *people of color* encompasses those who have been labeled "minority," that is, American Indians, African Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans, and it emerged from these communities themselves. It also implies important connections among the groups and underlines some common experiences in the United States. But in spite of the acceptance of *people of color* and its use by many people (and in this book), I find it increasingly unsatisfactory on several counts. One problem is the implication of a common historical experience among all those included under this designation. Aside from a mutual history of oppression at the hands of those in power—not an insignificant commonality—a shared historical experience among all people of color is an illusion. Moreover, a presumed common experience suggests that there is no conflict among these groups. As we know, such conflicts not only exist but they have resulted in periodic outbreaks of serious interethnic violence. These emanate not only from a shared oppression and the competition for scarce resources that results from political domination, but also from deep-seated cultural and social differences among the groups themselves.

People of color is also inaccurate when referring, for example, to Latinos of European background, as is the case with many Argentinians and Cubans, and light-skinned Latinos in general. When these Latinos refer to themselves in this way, it might imply that they have experienced the same level of virulent racism as their dark-skinned compatriots, and this may be entirely false. I am thus not wholly comfortable with its use.

In the case of *bicultural*, I am following the lead of Antonia Darder, who has argued that this term is preferable to "minority" because it emphasizes the fact that students from these groups must contend with two cultural systems that are often at odds with one another and with a vastly different educational experience from that of majority-group students.[6] I like the term because it emphasizes what students from these groups *have* rather than what they are *missing*, as is usually the case when terms such as *minority, disadvantaged, at risk*, or even more consciously politically charged words such as *disempowered* or *dominated*—terms that are accurate although incomplete because they emphasize only victimization—are used.

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LUMPING GROUPS TOGETHER

Overarching terms cause a number of problems. The term *European American,* for example, implies that all those who are White are also European American. This is not always true, as in the case of many Jews, but language remains imprecise in capturing these differences. Although some groups, such as Latinos, share a great many cultural attributes, they are also quite different from one another. A Guatemalan and a Dominican, for example, may both speak Spanish, practice the Catholic religion, and share deeply rooted family values. But the native language of some Guatemalans is not Spanish, and Dominicans have an African background not shared by most Guatemalans. These differences, among many others, often go unacknowledged when we speak simply of *Latinos* or *Hispanic Americans.* Within the context of the U.S. experience, Latinos differ in many respects, including race, social class, level of education, and length of time in this country. Each of these may make a dramatic difference in the school achievement of children from distinct groups.

The same discussion applies to the terms *Native Americans* and *Asian Americans,* each of which includes groups with tremendously distinct histories and cultures. Again, although they may share some basic cultural values and historical experiences, specific ethnic characteristics and historical frames of reference are lost when we lump these people all together. For this reason, I try to refer to each group by national origin. Besides being more accurate, it is ordinarily how people prefer to be called. A Bolivian, for example, refers to herself first as a Bolivian and then as a Latina; the same can be said for a Navajo, who identifies first with his Nation and second with Indians as a larger group.

But it is also true that there are many commonalities among all indigenous groups, as there are among most Latino groups. These may include a worldview, a common historical experience, and shared conditions of life in the United States. Where such commonalities exist, I sometimes refer to the groups by the more generalized term. In addition, I am restricted by the fact that much of the literature of both American Indian and Hispanic groups does not distinguish the ethnic groups within them. As a result, I am sometimes obliged to use the generic term in spite of my preference to disaggregate along ethnic lines.

A similar argument can be made for Asian and Asian American ethnic groups. These classifications include an incredibly diverse array of groups, such as Chinese, Japanese, Vietnamese, Filipino, Native Hawaiian, Pakistani, and Indian. To believe that one designation could possibly be sufficient to cover them all is foolhardy, because they differ not only in history and culture, but also in language—unlike Latinos, most of whom share at least a common language. Asians also differ in social class, length of time in the United States, immigrant experience, and

educational background and experiences, and these differences invariably influence the educational achievement of the children in these groups.[7] The term *Pacific Islander* now is used together with *Asian* to provide a more specific term for a number of groups. It is preferred to the outdated and exotic *Oriental* by most Asians and Pacific Islanders, but this term also fails to account for all differences.

Finally, a word about the terms *America* and *American*. Because *America* refers to the entire Western Hemisphere, whenever possible I will refer to our country as the *United States*. Also, although *American* has been limited by common use to mean U.S. citizens, this is not only inaccurate but also offensive to millions of North, Central, and South Americans who consider themselves as much Americans as people living within the confines of the United States. Nevertheless, because the term is in common use in the United States, I have decided to use it at times to refer to citizens and residents of the United States.

CONCLUSION

The language choices made throughout this book are meant first and foremost to *affirm diversity*. I have attempted to identify people as they would want to be identified. I have also used terms that emphasize what people *are* rather than what they *are not* (e.g., I have avoided terms such as *non-White* and *non-English-speaking*). Readers familiar with the first and second editions of this text will note that I have made some changes in my terminology for this third edition, and I expect to continue to do so. Language that refers to human beings is inaccurate and imprecise, and although I have strived to be both precise and sensitive, my choices are certainly open to debate. Language can capture only imperfectly the nuances of who we are as people but, like multicultural education itself, it is in constant flux. We therefore need to pay close attention to the connotations and innuendos of its daily use.

NOTES

1. Gordon W. Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1954).
2. Zoë Anglesey has written a helpful guide on the need to change offensive and dehumanizing terms: see "Moving From an Obsolete Lingo to a Vocabulary of Respect." In *Multicultural Review*, 6, 3 (September, 1997), 23–28; for a useful dictionary on the evolution of ethnic and racial terms and the biases they contain, see *The Color of Words* by Philip H. Herbst (Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press, Inc., 1997).
3. This was pointed out by Deirdre A. Almeida in "The Hidden Half: A History of Native American Women's Education." *Harvard Educational Review*, 67, 4 (1997), 757–771. For a helpful discussion about "real Indians," see Cornel Pewewardy, "Will the 'Real' Indians Please Stand Up?" *Multicultural Review*, (June, 1998), 36–42.
4. See the discussion by Murguia on the different connotations of each of these terms. Edward Murguia, "On Latino/Hispanic Ethnic Identity," *Latino Studies Journal*, 2, 3 (1991), 8–18.
5. Anthony Appiah, "Identity, Authenticity, Survival: Multicultural Societies and Social Reproduction." In *Multiculturalism*, edited by Amy Gutmann (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 149–163.
6. Antonia Darder, *Culture an*
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7. For specific examples of the g
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chapter **3**

Racism, Discrimination, and Expectations of Students' Achievement

[Racists have power] only if you let them! We'll stick with [the example of] striped shirts: If I go where everyone is wearing solids, and I'm wearing a stripe, and someone comes up to me and tells me, "You don't belong here; you're wearing stripes," I'll say, "I belong anywhere I want to belong." And I'll stand right there! But there are some people who just say, "Oh, okay," and will turn around and leave. Then the racist has the power.

Linda Howard, Interviewee

Linda Howard is a young woman who has been directly harmed by racism in and out of school, and she has a highly evolved understanding of it on both an individual and an institutional level. As you will see in her case study, Linda has thought very deeply about racism. Many teachers and other educators, however, have not. In this chapter, we will explore the impact that racism, other biases, and expectations of student abilities may have on achievement. We will focus on *racism* as an example of bias, but I will also point out other kinds of personal and institutional discrimination when appropriate. These include discrimination on the basis of gender (sexism), ethnic group (ethnocentrism), social class (classism), language (linguicism)[1] or other perceived differences. I will also mention anti-Semitism, discrimination against Jews; anti-Arab discrimination, directed against Arabs; ageism, discrimination based on age; heterosexism, discrimination against gay men and lesbians; and ableism, discrimination against people with disabilities.

DEFINITIONS OF RACISM AND DISCRIMINATION

Discussions of prejudice and discrimination tend to focus on the biases and negative perceptions of individuals toward members of other groups. For example, Gordon Allport, in his groundbreaking work on the nature of prejudice, quotes a United Nations document defining discrimination as "any conduct based on a distinction made on grounds of natural or social categories, which have no relation either to individual capacities or merits, or to the concrete behavior of the individual person."[2] This definition is helpful but incomplete because it fails to describe the harmful effects of such conduct. More broadly speaking, *discrimination* denotes

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negative or destructive behaviors that can result in denying some groups life's necessities as well as the privileges, rights, and opportunities enjoyed by other groups. Discrimination is usually based on *prejudice,* that is, the attitudes and beliefs of individuals about entire groups of people. These attitudes and beliefs are generally, but not always, negative.

Our society, among many others, categorizes people according to both visible and invisible traits, uses such classifications to deduce fixed behavioral and mental traits, and then applies policies and practices that jeopardize some and benefit others.[3] Classifications based on race, ethnicity, gender, social class, and other physical or social differences are all around us. Frequently, they result in gross exaggerations and stereotypes: Girls are not as smart as boys; African Americans have rhythm; Asians are studious; Poles are simple-minded, Jews are smart; and poor people need instant gratification. Although some of these may appear to be "positive" stereotypes, both "negative" and "positive" stereotypes have negative results because they limit our perspective of an entire group of people. There are two major problems with categorizing people in this way: First, people of all groups begin to believe the stereotypes; and second, both material and psychological resources are doled out accordingly.

We see a clear example of the implications of such categorizations in the case study of Rich Miller. Rich was quite severe in his criticism of other African Americans, whom he characterized as "settling for the easiest way out," "lazy," and "tacky." He had internalized the myth of success based completely on individual endeavor rather than as also influenced by structural issues such as institutional racism and lack of opportunity. It is easy to understand how this happens: In our society, the metaphor of "pulling yourself up by your bootstraps" is powerful indeed; it allows little room for alternative explanations based on structural inequality.

Racism and other forms of discrimination are based on the perception that one ethnic group, class, gender, or language is superior to all others. In the United States, the conventional norm used to measure all other groups is European American, upper-middle class, English-speaking, and male. Discrimination based on perceptions of superiority is part of the structure of schools, the curriculum, the education most teachers receive, and the interactions among teachers, students, and the community. But discrimination is not simply an individual bias; it is above all an *institutional* practice.

Most definitions of racism and discrimination obscure the institutional nature of oppression. Although the beliefs and behaviors of *individuals* may be hurtful, far greater damage is done through institutional discrimination, that is, the systematic use of economic and political power in institutions (such as schools) that leads to detrimental policies and practices. These policies and practices have a harmful effect on groups that share a particular identity (be it racial, ethnic, gender, or other). The major difference between individual and institutional discrimination is the wielding of *power,* because it is primarily through the power of the people who control institutions such as schools that oppressive policies and practices are reinforced and legitimated. Linda Howard, one of our young interviewees, already understood this distinction. In her case study, she distinguished between

prejudice and racism in this way: "We all have some type of person that we don't like, whether it's from a different race, or from a different background, or they have different habits." But she went on to explain, as we saw in the quote at the beginning of this chapter, that a racist is someone who has *power* to carry out his or her prejudices.

Let me give another example: Let's say that I am prejudiced against tall people. Although my bias may hurt individual tall people because I refuse to befriend them or because I make fun of them, I can do very little to limit their options in life. If, however, I belonged to a group of powerful "non-talls" and we limited the access of tall persons to certain neighborhoods, prohibited them from receiving quality health care, discouraged intermarriage with people of short or average height, developed policies against their employment in high-status professions, and placed all children who were the offspring of "talls" (or who showed early signs of becoming above average in height) in the lowest ability tracks in schools, then my bias would have teeth and its institutional power would be clear. In the discussion that follows, we will be concerned primarily with institutional discrimination.

Institutional discrimination generally refers to how people are excluded or deprived of rights or opportunities as a result of the normal operations of the institution. Although the individuals involved in the institution may not be prejudiced or have any racist intentions or even awareness of how others may be harmed, the result may nevertheless be racist. In this sense, intentional and unintentional racism are different. But because they both result in negative outcomes, in the end it does not really matter whether racism and other forms of discrimination are intentional. Rather than trying to figure out whether the intent was to do harm or not, educators would do better to spend their time addressing the effects of racism.

When we understand racism and other forms of discrimination as a *systemic* problem, not simply as an individual dislike for a particular group of people, we can better understand the negative and destructive effects it can have. Vanessa Mattison, whose case study is one of those that follows this chapter, provides a good example of a young person struggling to reconcile our country's lofty ideals of equality and fair play with the reality of the injustice she saw around her. Vanessa was committed to social justice, but she saw it primarily as working to change the attitudes and behaviors of *individuals*. She had not yet made the connection between racism and *institutional* oppression, and she did not grasp that institutional racism was far more harmful than individual biases or acts of meanness. But she was beginning to see that certain norms existed that were unfair to Blacks, women, and gays and lesbians. In her words: "There's all these underlying rules that if you're not this, you can't do that."

This is meant neither to minimize the powerful effects of individual prejudice and discrimination, which can be personally painful, nor to suggest that discrimination occurs only in one direction, for example, from Whites toward Blacks. There is no monopoly on prejudice and individual discrimination; they happen in all directions, and even within groups. However, interethnic and intraethnic biases and personal prejudices, while negative and hurtful, simply do not have the long-range and life-limiting effects of institutional racism and other kinds of institutional discrimination.

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As an illustration of institutional racism, let us look at how testing practices are sometimes used in schools: Students from dominated groups may be stigmatized and labeled because of their performance on standardized tests. What places these students at a disadvantage is not that particular teachers have prejudiced attitudes about them; teachers may, in fact, like the students very much. What places the students at jeopardy is the fact that they may be labeled, grouped, and tracked, sometimes for the length of their schooling, because of their score on an ethnocentric and biased test. In this case, it is *institutions*—schools and the testing industry—that have the major negative impact on students from culturally dominated groups.

Prejudice and discrimination, then, are not just personality traits or psychological phenomena; they are also a manifestation of economic, political, and social power. The institutional definition of racism is not always easy to accept because it goes against deeply held notions of equality and justice in our nation. According to Beverly Tatum, "An understanding of racism as a system of advantage presents a serious challenge to the notion of the United States as a just society where rewards are based solely on one's merits."[4] Racism as an institutional system implies that some people and groups benefit and others lose. Whites, whether they want to or not, benefit in a racist society; males benefit in a sexist society. Discrimination always helps somebody—those with the most power—which explains why racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination continue.

According to Meyer Weinberg, racism is a system of privilege and penalty. That is, one is rewarded or punished in housing, education, employment, health, and so on, by the simple fact of belonging to a particular group, regardless of one's individual merits or faults. He goes on to explain, "Racism consists centrally of two facets: First, a belief in the inherent superiority of some people and the inherent inferiority of others; and second, the acceptance of distributing goods and services—let alone respect—in accordance with such judgments of unequal worth." In addressing the institutional nature of racism, he adds, ". . . racism is always collective. Prejudiced individuals may join the large movement, but they do not cause it." According to this conception, the "silence of institutional racism" and the "ruckus of individual racism" are mutually supportive.[5] It is sometimes difficult to separate one level of racism from the others, as they feed on and inform one another. What is crucial, according to Weinberg, is understanding that the doctrine of White supremacy is at the root of racism.

THE HISTORY AND PERSISTENCE OF RACISM IN U.S. SCHOOLS

As institutions, schools respond to and reflect the larger society. It therefore is not surprising that racism finds its way into schools in much the same way that it finds its way into other institutions such as housing, employment, and the criminal justice system. Overt expressions of racism may be less frequent in schools today than in the past, but racism does not just exist when schools are legally segregated or racial epithets are used against Black students. Racism is also manifested in rigid ability tracking, low expectations of students based on their identity, and inequitably funded schools.

Racism and other forms of discrimination—particularly sexism, classism, ethnocentrism, and linguicism—have a long history in our schools and their effects are widespread and long lasting. The most blatant form of discrimination is the actual withholding of education, as was the case with African Americans and sometimes with American Indians during the nineteenth century. To teach enslaved Africans to read was a crime punishable under the law and it became a subversive activity that was practiced by Blacks in ingenious ways.[6] Other overt forms of discrimination include segregating students, by law, according to their race, ethnicity, or gender, as was done at one time or another with African American, Mexican American, Japanese, and Chinese students, as well as with females; or forcing them into boarding schools, as was done with American Indian students. In such groups, children have been encouraged to adopt the ways of the dominant culture in sundry ways, from subtle persuasion to physical punishment for speaking their native language.[7] This, too, is a bitter reminder of the inequities of U.S. educational history.

Unfortunately, the discrimination that children face in schools is not a thing of the past. School practices and policies continue to discriminate against some children in very concrete ways. Recent studies have found that most students of color are still in schools that are segregated by race and social class, and the situation is worsening rather than improving.[8] At the impetus of the civil rights movement, many school systems throughout the United States were indeed desegregated. But less than rigorous implementation of desegregation plans, "White flight," and housing patterns have succeeded in resegregating many schools. Segregation invariably results in school systems that are "separate and unequal" because segregated schools are differently funded, with fewer resources provided to schools in poor communities and vastly superior resources provided to schools in wealthier communities.

Segregation often results in students receiving differential schooling on the basis of their social class, race, and ethnicity. In addition, schools that serve students of color tend to provide curricula that are watered down and at a lower level than schools that serve primarily White students. Also, teachers in poor urban schools tend to have less experience and less education than colleagues who teach in schools that serve primarily European American and middle-class students.[9] Even when they are desegregated, many schools resegregate students through practices such as rigid ability tracking. Consequently, desegregating schools in and of itself does not guarantee educational equity.

Manifestations of Racism and Discrimination in Schools

Racism and discrimination are manifested in numerous school practices and policies. Policies most likely to jeopardize students at risk of educational failure are most common precisely in the institutions in which those students are found. For example, many studies have found that rigid tracking is most evident in poor communities with large numbers of African American, Latino, and American Indian students.[10]

It is sometimes difficult to separate what is racist or discriminatory from what appear to be neutral school policies and practices or behaviors of individual teach-

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ers. An early study cited by Ray McDermott[11] can help illustrate this point. Through filmed classroom observations, he found that a White teacher tended to have much more frequent eye contact with her White students than with her Black students. Was this behavior the result of racism? Was it because of cultural and communication differences? Or was poor teacher preparation responsible for her behavior?

David and Myra Sadker cite many anecdotes in their powerful report on sexism in schools that bring up similar questions. They found that well-intentioned and otherwise excellent teachers often treat their female students far differently from their male students, interacting with them less frequently, asking them fewer questions, and giving them less feedback than they give male students. Because boys are expected to be more verbal and active and are both praised and reproached more often by their teachers, girls become invisible in the classroom. Girls are singled out neither for praise nor for disciplinary action. They are simply expected, as a group, to be quiet, attentive, and passive.[12] Is this because of inherent sexism? Are teachers simply unaware of how such practices may jeopardize girls and, in a different way, boys as well?

In another example of how difficult it is to separate racism from individual teachers' behaviors or seemingly neutral policies, Patricia Gándara found in a study of 50 low-income and high-achieving Mexican Americans that most were either light-skinned or European-looking. Few of the sample, according to Gándara, looked "classically Mexican in both skin color and features."[13] Does this mean that teachers intentionally favored them because of their light skin? Did teachers assume that their light-skinned students were smarter?

These questions are impossible to answer in any conclusive way; it is probable that institutional racism and teachers' biases both play a role in negative outcomes such as those described in the studies. The results, however, are very clear: In the study by McDermott, the Black children had to strain three times as hard to catch the teacher's eye, looking for approval, affection, and encouragement. In the Sadker and Sadker report, the researchers concluded that girls are frequently denied an equal education simply because of their gender, rather than because of any personal talents or deficits. In Gándara's study, the light-skinned students were able to derive more benefits from their schooling than their darker-skinned peers.

Thus students' educational success or failure cannot be explained solely by their family circumstance, social class, race, gender, or language ability. Racism and other forms of institutional discrimination also play a part. African American, Latino, American Indian, and poor children in general continue to achieve below grade level, drop out in much greater numbers, and go to college in much lower proportion than their middle-class and European American peers. Two concrete examples illustrate this point: Black students are chronically underrepresented in programs for the gifted and talented, being only half as likely to be placed in a class for the gifted as are White students, even though they may be equally gifted. Latino students drop out of school at a rate higher than any other major ethnic group; and in some places, the rate has been as high as 80 percent.[14] If educational failure were caused only by students' background and other social characteristics, it would be difficult to explain why similar students are successful in some classrooms

and schools and not in others. For instance, students at Central Park East High School in East Harlem, one of the most economically impoverished communities in New York City, have reached unparalleled levels of success compared to their peers in other neighborhood schools who are similar to them in every way.[15]

School structures have also proved to be sexist in organization, orientation, and goals. Most schools are organized to meet best the needs of White males; that is, the policy and instruction in schools generally reflect what is most effective for the needs of their male students, not the needs of either females or students of color.[16] This organization includes everything from the curriculum, which follows the developmental level of males more closely than that of females, to instructional techniques, which favor competition as a preferred learning style, although it is not necessarily the best learning environment for either females or most students of color. The effect of such discrimination on female students is to reinforce the persistent message that they are inferior. In fact, high-achieving female students tend to receive the least attention of all from their teachers.[17]

Discrimination based on social class is also prevalent in our public schools. In a study of affluent and low-income youth in a secondary school, Ellen Brantlinger found that students' social class was highly correlated with their academic placement, with most low-income students in special education or low tracks and *all* the high-income students in college preparatory classes. This was the case in spite of the fact that two of the high-income students were classified as "learning disabled."[18] Using data from 1993, the National Center for Education Statistics also found a significant correlation between social class and dropping out of school. While only 6 percent of high-income students dropped out, over 40 percent of low-income students did so.[19]

The *hidden curriculum*, that is, subtle and not-so-subtle messages that are not part of the intended curriculum, may also have an impact on students. These messages may be positive (e.g., the expectation that all students are capable of high-quality work) or negative (e.g., that children of working-class backgrounds are not capable of aspiring to professional jobs), although the term is generally used to refer to negative messages. These frequently unintentional messages may contradict schools' stated policies and objectives. For instance, Carolyn Persell found that, in spite of schools' and teachers' stated commitment to equal education, social class is repeatedly related to how well students do in school.[20] In fact, she found that students are more different from one another when they *leave* school than when they *enter* it, thus putting to rest the myth of school as the "great equalizer." Persell found that differences in academic achievement experienced by students of different economic and cultural backgrounds are due primarily to a number of specific factors: the kinds of schools the students attend, the length of time they stay in school, the curriculum and pedagogy to which they are exposed, and societal beliefs concerning intelligence and ability.

Rather than eradicate social class differences, then, it appears that schooling reflects and even duplicates them. This finding was confirmed by Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis in their ground-breaking class analysis of schooling.[21] They compared the number of years of schooling of students with the socioeconomic

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Intentional or not, racism, classism, and other forms of discrimination are apparent in the quality of education that students receive. A graphic example of discrimination based on both race and class is found in the differential resources given to schools. As is evident in Jonathan Kozol's searing indictment of the funding of public education, the actual money spent on schools is very often directly correlated with the social class and race of the student body. Furthermore, a review of relevant literature by Carol Ascher and Gary Burnett reported that disparities in funding between rich and poor states, and between rich and poor districts in the same state, has actually grown in the recent past.[22]

In the case of African American youth, Angela Taylor found that to the extent that teachers harbor negative stereotypes about them, African American children's race *alone* is probably sufficient to place them at risk for negative school outcomes.[23] Of course, many teachers and other educators prefer to think that students' lack of academic achievement is due solely to conditions inside their homes or inherent in their cultures. But the occurrence of racism in schools has been widely documented. In a report about immigrant students in California, more than half of the students interviewed indicated that they had been the victims of teachers' biases, citing instances where they were punished, publicly embarrassed, or ridiculed because of improper use of English. They also reported that teachers had made derogatory comments about immigrant groups in front of the class.[24] Most of the middle and high school students interviewed in a study by Mary Poplin and Joseph Weeres also had witnessed incidents of racism in school.[25] And in a study in an urban high school in the Northeast, Karen Donaldson found that an astounding 80 percent of students surveyed said they had experienced or witnessed racism or other forms of discrimination in school.[26]

Studies focusing specifically on Latino youth have reported similar results. Marietta Saravia-Shore and Herminio Martínez interviewed Puerto Rican youths who had dropped out of school and were currently participating in an alternative high school program. These youths keenly felt the discrimination of their former teachers, who they said were "against Puerto Ricans and Blacks." One young woman said that a former teacher had commented, "Do you want to be like the other Puerto Rican women who never got an education? Do you want to be like the rest of your family and never go to school?"[27] In Virginia Zanger's study of high-achieving Latino and Latina high school students in Boston, one young man described his shock when his teacher called him "spic" right in class. Although the teacher was later suspended, the incident had clearly affected how this young man perceived school and his teachers.[28] If we keep in mind that these are successful students, who are apt to hear far fewer of such damaging comments than other students, we can begin to grasp the enormity of the problem confronted by young people who are not as successful in school.

The effect of discrimination on students is most painfully apparent when students themselves have the opportunity to speak. Their thoughts concerning their education are revealing. In her study, Karen Donaldson found that students were affected by racism in three major ways: White students experienced guilt and embarrassment when they became aware of the racism to which their peers were subjected; students of color sometimes felt they needed to compensate and overachieve to prove they were equal to their White classmates; and at other times, students of color said that their self-esteem was badly damaged.[29] However, self-esteem is a complicated issue that includes many variables. It does not come fully formed out of the blue, but is *created* in particular contexts and responds to conditions that vary from situation to situation. Teachers' and schools' complicity in creating negative self-esteem cannot be discounted. This point was illustrated by Lillian, a young woman in a study of an urban high school by Nitza Hidalgo. Lillian commented, "That's another problem I have, teachers, they are always talking about how we have no type of self-esteem or anything like that. . . . But they're the people that's putting us down. That's why our self-esteem is so low."[30]

RACISM, DISCRIMINATION, AND SILENCE

Many times, unintentional discrimination is practiced by well-meaning teachers who fear that talking about race will only exacerbate the problem. As a consequence, most schools are characterized by a curious absence of talk about differences, particularly about race.[31] The process begins with the preparation of teachers. In one study, Alice McIntyre interviewed a group of White female student teachers working in urban schools in order to understand how they made meaning of their Whiteness in relation to teaching.[32] She found that these preservice teachers were reluctant to discuss racism or to consider their individual or collective role in perpetuating it. Because they saw their students primarily as victims of poverty and parental neglect, these student teachers preferred to place themselves in relationship to their students as protective "White Knights." This patronizing stance facilitated their denial of racism.

Silence and denial about racism are still quite prevalent when student teachers become teachers. In a follow-up study to her initial research concerning students' experiences with racism, Karen Donaldson had a hard time recruiting White teachers to take part in an antiracist education teacher study because most White teachers were not aware (or claimed not to be aware) of racial biases in schools and of how these biases could influence students' achievement.[33] In another study, Julie Wollman-Bonilla found that a sizable proportion of the teachers in her children's literature courses explicitly rejected children's books about race and racism for use with their students. Whether it was to shield their students from unpleasant realities, or to uphold particular societal myths, Wollman-Bonilla concluded that many teachers lack the courage to present views that differ from the mainstream perspective. As a result, their role becomes one of maintaining the status quo rather than helping children question social inequality and injustice.[34] That this attitude can be taken to an extreme is evident in research by Ellen Bigler: When she asked a

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middle school librarian in a town with a sizable Puerto Rican community if there were any books on the Hispanic experience, the librarian answered that carrying such books was inadvisable because it would interfere with the children's identification of themselves as "American"![35]

Silence pervades even schools committed to equity and diversity. This was a major finding in a study by Kathe Jervis of the first year of a New York City middle school consciously designed to be based on these principles.[36] Although she had not originally intended to focus her study on race, Jervis found that there was an odd silence on the part of most teachers to address it. Their reluctance to discuss race resulted in their overlooking or denying issues of power that are imbedded in race. Jervis concluded that "even in the 'best' schools, where faculty try hard to pay attention to individuals, Whites' blindness to race clouds their ability to notice what children are really saying about themseles and their identities."[37]

Failure to discuss racism, unfortunately, will not make it go away. As you will see in her case study, Linda Howard's close relationship with Mr. Benson, her English teacher, was no doubt partly due to the fact that they were able to talk openly about racism and other biases. Racism, classism, and other forms of discrimination play a key role in setting up and maintaining inappropriate learning environments for many students. A related phenomenon concerns the possible impact of teachers' expectations on student achievement.

EXPECTATIONS OF STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENT

Much research has focused on teachers' interactions with their students, specifically teacher expectations. The term *self-fulfilling prophecy,* coined by Robert Merton in 1948, means that students perform in ways that teachers expect.[38] Student performance is based on both overt and covert messages from teachers about students' worth, intelligence, and capability. The term did not come into wide use until 1968, when a classic study by Robert Rosenthal and Lenore Jacobson provided the impetus for subsequent extensive research on the subject.[39] In this study, several classes of children in grades one through six were given a nonverbal intelligence test (the researchers called it the "Harvard Test of Influenced Acquisition"), which researchers claimed would measure the students' potential for intellectual growth. Twenty percent of the students were randomly selected by the researchers as "intellectual bloomers," and their names were given to the teachers. Although the students' test scores actually had nothing at all to do with their potential, the teachers were told to be on the alert for signs of intellectual growth among these particular children. Overall these children, particularly in the lower grades, showed considerably greater gains in IQ during the school year than did the other students. They were also rated by their teachers as being more interesting, curious, and happy, and thought to be more likely to succeed later in life.

Rosenthal and Jacobson's research on teacher expectations caused a sensation in the educational community, and controversy surrounding it continues to the present. From the beginning, the reception to this line of research has been mixed, with both supporters and detractors.[40] But one outcome was that the effect of teachers'

expectations on the academic achievement of their students was taken seriously for the first time. Before this research, students' failure in school was usually ascribed wholly to individual or family circumstances. Now, the possible influence of teachers' attitudes and behaviors and the schools' complicity in the process had to be considered as well. The most compelling implications were for the education of those students most seriously disadvantaged by schooling, that is, for students of color and the poor.

Early research by Ray Rist on teachers' expectations is also worth mentioning here. In a ground-breaking study, he found that a kindergarten teacher had grouped her class by the eighth day of class. In reviewing how she had done so, Rist noted that the teacher had already roughly constructed an "ideal type" of student, most of whose characteristics were related to social class. By the end of the school year, the teacher's differential treatment of children based on who were "fast" and "slow" learners became evident. The "fast" learners received more teaching time, more reward-directed behavior, and more attention. The interactional patterns between the teacher and her students then took on a "castelike" appearance. The result, after three years of similar behavior by other teachers, was that teachers' behavior toward the different groups influenced the children's achievement. In other words, the teachers themselves contributed to the creation of the "slow" learners in their classrooms.[41]

In the research by Rist, all the children and teachers were African American but represented different social classes. But similar results have been found with poor and working-class children of any race. Persell, in a review of relevant research, found that expectations for poor children were lower than for middle-class children *even when their IQ and achievement scores were similar*.[42] Teachers' beliefs that their students are "dumb" can become a rationale for providing low-level work in the form of elementary facts, simple drills, and rote memorization. Students are not immune to these messages. On the other hand, a study by Diane Pollard found that the academic performance of African American students is enhanced when they perceive their teachers and other school staff to be supportive and helpful.[43]

Some of the research on teacher expectations is quite old. Although it is reasonable to expect that, with the increasing diversity in our schools, it no longer holds true, there are still numerous examples of teachers' low expectations of students. A recent study by Francisco Ríos underscores the problem. Ríos studied teachers in an urban city in the Midwest to determine what principles of practice they used for teaching in culturally diverse classrooms.[44] Among the 16 teachers he studied, he found that most of the comments they made about their students were negative; further, *none* of the teaching principles that they identified focused on academic achievement and only *one* teacher said that her students wanted to learn.

These findings are particularly problematic when we consider the impact that such beliefs can have on students. Given the increasing diversity in our public schools, the problem is even more acute because many teachers know little or nothing about the background of their students. Consequently, teachers may consider their students' identity to be at fault. This was the result found by Bram Hamovitch in an ethnographic study of an urban after-school program for adolescents at risk

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of dropping out of school. In his study, Hamovitch concluded that the program failed to meet its objective of motivating students to continue their education because "it allegorically asks them to dislike themselves and their own culture."[45]

Teachers' attitudes about the diversity of their students develop long before they become teachers, however. In a review of recent literature, Kenneth Zeichner found that teacher education students, who are mostly White and monolingual, by and large view diversity of student backgrounds as a problem.[46] He also found that the most common characteristics of effective teachers in urban schools are a belief that their students are capable learners, and an ability to communicate this belief to the students. Martin Haberman reached a similar conclusion, identifying a number of functions of successful teachers of the urban poor. Most significant, he found that successful teachers did not blame students for failure and they had consistently high expectations of their students.[47] Rich Miller, whose case study follows this chapter, offers compelling evidence of this reality. According to Rich, standards would be higher in his high school if there were more White students. But the reason was not because White students are smarter, but because *White teachers don't push the Black students* as much as they push White students. On the other hand, Black teachers, Rich said, have "expectations [that] are higher than White teachers. . . because they know how it was for them."

What happens when teachers develop high expectations of their students? In a wonderful example of how changing the expectations of students can influence achievement in a positive direction, Rosa Hernandez Sheets recounted her own experience with five Spanish-speaking students who had failed her Spanish class.[48] Just one semester after placing them in what she labeled her "advanced" class, the very same students who had previously failed passed the AP Spanish language exam, earning college credits while just sophomores and juniors. A year later, they passed the AP Spanish Literature exam. As a result of the change in her pedagogy, over a three-year period, Latino and Latina students who had been labeled "at risk" were performing at a level commonly expected of honors students.

The issue of labeling is key in this situation. In a similar case, Rubén Rumbaut found that the self-esteem of immigrant students is linked to how they are labeled by their schools. Specifically, he found that students' self-esteem is diminished when they are labeled "Limited English Proficient."[49] If this is the case with a seemingly neutral term, more loaded labels no doubt have a much greater impact. But explicit labeling may not even be needed. According to Claude Steele, the basic problem that causes low student achievement is what he terms "stigma vulnerability" based on the constant devaluation faced by Blacks and other people of color in society and schools.[50] In schools, this devaluation occurs primarily through the harmful attitudes and beliefs that teachers communicate, knowingly or not, to their students. Steele maintains, "Deep in the psyche of American educators is a presumption that black students need academic remediation, or extra time with elemental curricula to overcome background deficits."[51]

Although disadvantage may contribute to the problem, Steele contends that Blacks underachieve *even* when they have sufficient material resources, adequate academic preparation, and a strong value orientation toward education. To prove his point, he reviewed a number of programs that have had substantial success in

improving the academic achievement of Black students without specifically addressing either their culturally specific learning orientations or socioeconomic disadvantage. What made the difference? In these programs, student achievement was improved simply by treating students as if they were talented and capable. Steele concludes, "That erasing stigma improves black achievement is perhaps the strongest evidence that stigma is what depresses it in the first place."[52]

Research on teachers' expectations is not without controversy. First, it has been criticized as unnecessarily reductionist because, in the long run, what teachers expect matters less than what teachers do.[53] Second, the term itself and the research on which it is based imply that teachers have the sole responsibility for students' achievement or lack of it. This is both an unrealistic and an incomplete explanation for student success or failure. The study by Rosenthal and Jacobson, for example, is a glaring indication of the disrespect with which teachers have frequently been treated and raises serious ethical issues in research. Blaming teachers, or "teacher bashing," provides a convenient outlet for complex problems, but it fails to take into account the fact that teachers function within contexts in which they usually have little power.

There are, of course, teachers who have low expectations of students from particular backgrounds and who are, in the worst cases, insensitive and racist. But placing teachers at the center of expectations of student achievement shifts the blame to some of those who care most deeply about students and who struggle every day to help them learn. The use of the term *teachers' expectations* distances the school and society from their responsibility and complicity in student failure. That is, teachers, schools, communities, and society interact to produce failure.

Low expectations mirror the expectations of society. It is not simply teachers who expect little from poor, working-class, and culturally dominated groups. Garfield High School in East Los Angeles, a school made famous by the extraordinary efforts of Jaime Escalante and other teachers in propelling an unprecedented number of students to college in spite of poverty and discrimination, was visited by George Bush when he was running for U.S. president. Rather than build on the message that college was both possible and desirable for its students, Bush focused instead on the idea that a college education is not needed for success. He told the largely Mexican American student body that "we need people to build our buildings. . . people who do the hard physical work of our society."[54] It is doubtful that he would even have considered uttering these same words at Beverly Hills High School, a short distance away. The message of low expectations to students who should have heard precisely the opposite is thus replicated even by those at the highest levels of a government claiming to be equitable to all students.

THE COMPLEX CONNECTIONS BETWEEN DIVERSITY AND DISCRIMINATION

Because societal inequities are frequently reflected in schools, institutional racism and other biases are apparent in inequitable school policies and practices in complex ways. Let us take the example of language. The fact that some children do not

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EEN DIVERSITY

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enter school speaking English cannot be separated from how their native language is viewed by the larger society or from the kinds of programs available for them in schools. Each of these programs—whether ESL, immersion, or two-way bilingual education—has an underlying philosophy with broad implications for students' achievement or failure, as we will see in Chapter 6. As a consequence, each approach may have a profound influence on the quality of education that language minority children receive. But linguistic and other differences do not exist independently of how they are perceived in the general society or by teachers; there is a complex relationship between students' race, culture, native language, and other differences with institutional discrimination, school practices, and teachers' expectations.

Social class provides another example of the complex links between difference and discrimination. In spite of the firm belief in our society that social class mobility is available to all, classism is a grim reality because *economic inequality is now greater in the United States than in any other industrial or postindustrial country in the world;* in fact, social class inequality has actually *increased* in the past 20 years.[55] Related to this reality is the widely accepted classist view among many educators that poverty *causes* academic failure. Yet although poverty may have an adverse effect on student achievement, the belief that poverty and failure go hand-in-hand is questionable. Research by Denny Taylor and Catherine Dorsey-Gaines provides evidence that by itself poverty is not an adequate explanation for the failure to learn. In their work with Black families living in urban poverty, they found inspiring cases of academically successful students. They discovered children who consistently did their homework, made the honor roll, and had positive attitudes about school. The parents of these children motivated them to learn and study, had high hopes for their education, were optimistic about the future, and considered literacy an integral part of their lives—this in spite of such devastating conditions as family deaths; no food, heat, or hot water; and a host of other hostile situations.[56]

Similarly, an in-depth study by David Hartle-Schutte of four Navajo students who might be identified as "at risk" by their teachers because of poverty and culture found that these students came from homes where literacy was valued. But their school failed to recognize and build on the many literacy experiences they had in their homes to help them become successful readers.[57] These cases point out that home background can no longer be accepted as the sole or primary excuse for the school failure of large numbers of students.

Examples such as these demonstrate that although poverty is certainly a disadvantage, it is not an insurmountable obstacle to learning. The economic condition of African American and other poor students has often been used as an explanation for academic failure, but as Kofi Lomotey, in a review of the education of African American youths, states: "... there are clear examples of environments that have, over long periods of time, been successful in educating large numbers of African-American students. These models can be replicated; the situation is not hopeless."[58] In fact, one major explanation for students' lack of academic achievement lies in the lack of equitable resources given to students of different social classes and cultural backgrounds. For instance, one of the most disturbing patterns found in the 1997 national *Condition of Education* report was that, compared

with middle-class White children, children of color and low-income students were much more likely to be taught by teachers who had little academic preparation for their teaching field. Furthermore, the skills differentials that result from this inequity will lead to earnings differentials as adults to a much greater extent than was the case even 20 years ago.[59]

In the ideal sense, education in the United States is based on the lofty values of democracy, freedom, and equal access. Historically, our educational system proposed to tear down the rigid systems of class and caste on which education in most of the world was (and still is) based and to provide all students with an equal education. Education was to be, as Horace Mann claimed, "the great equalizer." On the other hand, some educational historians have demonstrated that the common school's primary purposes were to replicate inequality and to control the unruly masses.[60] Thus the original goals of public school education were often at cross purposes.

Mass public education began in earnest in the nineteenth century through the legislation of compulsory education and its most eloquent democratic expression is found in the early-twentieth-century philosophy of John Dewey.[61] The commitment that Dewey articulated for educational equity continues today through policies such as desegregation and nonsexist education and through legislation and policies aimed at eradicating many existing inequalities. But the legacy of inequality also continues through policies and practices that favor some students over others, including unequal funding, rigid tracking, and unfair tests. As a result, schools have often been sites of bitter conflict.

Race is another pivotal way in which privilege has been granted on an unequal basis. Based on his research, the historian David Tyack asserts that the struggle to achieve equality in education is nothing new, and that race has often been at the center of this struggle. He adds: "Attempts to preserve white supremacy and to achieve racial justice have fueled the politics of education for more than a century."[62] But resistance on the part of parents, students, and teachers has been crucial in challenging the schools to live up to their promise of equality. That is, schools were not racially desegregated simply because the courts ordered it, and gender-fair education was not legislated only because Congress thought it was a good idea. In both cases, as in many others, educational opportunity was expanded because many people and communities engaged in struggle, legal or otherwise, to bring about change.

Although in theory education is no longer meant to replicate societal inequities but rather to reflect the ideals of democracy, we know that such is not always the reality. Our schools have consistently failed to provide an equitable education for all students. The complex interplay of student differences, institutional racism and discrimination, teachers' biases that lead to low expectations, and unfair school policies and practices all play a role in keeping it this way.

• CONCLUSION

Focusing on the persistence of racism and discrimination and low expectations is meant in no way to deny the difficult family and economic situation of many poor children and children of color, or its impact on their school experiences and

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achievement. Drug abuse, violence, and other social ills, as well as poor medical care, deficient nutrition, and a struggle for the bare necessities for survival harm children's lives, including their school experiences. The fact that poor children and their parents do not have at their disposal the resources and experiences that economic privilege would give them is also detrimental.

But blaming poor people and people from dominated racial or cultural groups for their educational problems is not the answer to solving societal inequities. Teachers can do nothing to change the conditions in which their students may live, but they can work to change their own biases as well as the institutional structures that act as obstacles to student learning. As we have seen, racism and other forms of discrimination play a central role in educational failure, as does the related phenomenon of low expectations.

• *TO THINK ABOUT*

1. Let's say that you are a high school teacher and you are having a discussion with your students about the benefits of education. This is your dilemma: Horace Mann's claim that education is "the great equalizer" has been criticized as simplistic or unrealistic. On the other hand, a focus on racism, discrimination, and teachers' expectations can be criticized as being overly deterministic in explaining school failure. What is the appropriate approach to take? Do you say to students, "You can do anything you want! You can become president of the United States. The sky's the limit, and all you need to do is work hard"; or do you say, "No matter what you do, it is almost impossible to accomplish anything if you are [Navajo, African American, Mexican, female, etc.]"? Try role playing this situation in which you, as the teacher, try to find the most beneficial stance.
2. Think about schools with which you are familiar. Have you seen evidence of racism or other forms of discrimination? Was it based primarily on race, gender, class, language, sexual orientation, or other differences? How was it manifested?
3. Observe a classroom for a number of days to see if you can find some examples of the hidden curriculum. How does it work in that classroom? What are the messages, unintended or not, that children pick up?
4. There has been some controversy about research on teachers' expectations. Review some of the debate in the sources cited in this chapter. Think about your own experiences as a student: Describe a time when teachers' expectations did or did not make a difference in your life.

Case Study: Linda Howard

"Unless you're mixed, you don't know what it's like to be mixed."

Jefferson High School is a large, comprehensive high school in Boston. It has a highly diverse population of students from throughout the city, including African American, Puerto Rican and other Latino, Haitian, Cape Verdean, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Chinese American, other Asian American, and European American students. This is the high school from which Linda Howard,[1] a 19-year-old senior, is just graduating. Linda is the class valedictorian, has been awarded a four-year scholarship to a prominent university in New England, and is looking forward to her college education. She is already thinking about graduate school, and although she has not yet decided what she wants to study, she is contemplating majoring in education or English.

Frequently taken for Puerto Rican or Cape Verdean because of her biracial background (her father is African American, and her mother is European American), she resents these assumptions by those who do not know her. Linda's insistence about being recognized as biracial and multicultural sometimes puts her in a difficult situation, especially with friends who pressure her to identify with either her Black or her White heritage. She remains steadfast in proclaiming her biracial identity in spite of the difficulty it has caused her. Her friends represent the varied backgrounds of her school and of the community in which she lives. Her best friend is Puerto Rican, and her boyfriend is West Indian.

Linda has had an uneven academic career. At Tremont School, a highly respected magnet elementary school in the city, she was very successful. The school's population was quite mixed, with children from diverse backgrounds from all over the city. She loved that school and has good memories of caring teachers there. By the time she reached junior high, she was held back twice, in both seventh and eighth grades. There were two major reasons for this: She had been in an accident and had to be absent from school a great deal during her recuperation; and she disliked the school, Academic High, one of the most prestigious public schools in the city. After the eighth grade, Linda transferred to her present school, which she attended for two years, including summer school. By the end of her second eighth grade, she had improved her grades significantly. She has been a highly successful student ever since, although she feels that Jefferson High is "too easy." The normal load for most students is four academic courses and two electives, but Linda has taken six academic courses per semester.

Linda is recognized as a gifted student by her teachers. She is a talented singer and hopes someday to make a living as a musician. She inherited her love of music from her father, who gave up a career in music. The entire family sings together, and Linda claims to be the best singer when her father is not around. She has been a member of the school choir and also studies music on her own. Music gives her great solace and motivates her to do her best. In addition to her musical talent, Linda is also gifted in language. She frequently writes poems to express her feelings.

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Identity, Racism, and Self-D

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Linda lives with her mother, father, one older brother, and two younger brothers in a middle-class, predominantly Black community in Boston. Her family moved from a public housing project 14 years ago and bought their first home two years later. She still calls the housing project and neighborhood where she grew up "part of my community, part of my heritage." Both of Linda's parents are working professionals, although that was not always the case. She is proud of the fact that her father started in the telephone company as a lineman some 20 years ago. He now has a white-collar job. Her mother is a human services administrator.

Being both outgoing and personable, Linda has a great many friends. When showing her more playful side, she says she and some of them frequently "cruise around, find cute guys, and yell out the window, 'Yo, baby!' That's how we hang!" Tyrone is her "very best friend." They have known each other for 17 years and were actually engaged when she was 15. She broke off the engagement because she felt that she had her life ahead of her and needed to plan for college and a career. One month ago, they broke up completely but are still good friends. Linda says that she would do anything in the world for Tyrone. Both of them think that they may end up getting married to each other in the future.

Linda is very aware of her values and of the role her family plays in their formation. Her interviews highlighted a number of issues that are central to understanding these values: her struggle around identity and racism, the importance of teachers' caring and their role in students' learning, and the great value of education in her life and her parents' influence over this factor.

Identity, Racism, and Self-Determination

My parents are Black and White American. I come from a long heritage. I am of French, English, Irish, Dutch, Scottish, Canadian, and African descent.

I don't really use race. I always say, "My father's Black, my mother's White, I'm mixed." But I'm American; I'm human. That's my race; I'm part of the human race.

After all these years, and all the struggling (because when [my parents] got married it was a time right before desegregation), people from all sides were telling them, "No, you'll never make it. You'll never make it. White and Black don't belong together in the same house." And after 20 years, they're still together and they're still strong. Stronger now than ever, probably. That's what I like the most about them. They fought against all odds and they won.

It's hard when you go out in the streets and you've got a bunch of White friends and you're the darkest person there. No matter how light you are to the rest of your family, you're the darkest person there and they say you're Black. Then you go out with a bunch of Black people and you're the lightest there and they say, "Yeah, my best friend's White." But I'm not. I'm *both.*

I don't always fit in—unless I'm in a mixed group. That's how it's different. Because if I'm in a group of people who are all one race, then they seem

to look at me as being the *other* race. . . whereas if I'm in a group full of [racially mixed] people, my race doesn't seem to matter to everybody else. . . . Then I don't feel like I'm standing out. But if I'm in a group of totally one race, then I sort of stand out, and that's something that's hard to get used to.

It's hard. I look at history and I feel really bad for what some of my ancestors did to some of my other ancestors. Unless you're mixed, you don't know what it's like to be mixed.

My boss, who was a teacher of mine last year, just today said something about me being Puerto Rican. I said, "We've been through this before. I am *not* Puerto Rican. I am Black and White." I may look Hispanic, but this is what I mean. And this is a person who I've known for a whole year and a half now. [I felt] like I was insignificant. If, after all this time, he didn't know and we discussed it last year. . . . It was insulting. I usually don't get insulted by it. I say, "Oh, no, I'm not Spanish. I'm Black and White." And people say, "Oh really? You *are*? I thought you were Spanish."

[Teachers should not] try to make us one or the other. And God forbid you should make us something we're totally not. . . . Don't write down that I'm Hispanic when I'm not. Some people actually think I'm Chinese when I smile. . . . Find out. Don't just make your judgments. And I'm not saying judgment as insulting judgments. But some people, they don't realize that there are so many intermarried couples today. You have to ask people what they are. If you really want to know, you have to ask them. You don't just make assumptions. 'Cause you know what happens when you assume. . . . If you're filling out someone's report card form and you need to know, then ask. . . . Like I said, race isn't important to me. But if you need it for paperwork, or if you need it for something important, then ask. When people are misjudged, especially after you've known them for a while, and you write down the wrong thing about them, it's kind of insulting.

I don't know how to put this. . . race hasn't really been a big factor for me. Because in my house, my mother's White, my father's Black; I was raised with everybody. Sometimes I don't even notice. I see people walking down the street, I don't care what they are; they're people.

My culture is my family. I have an enormous family. I have three brothers, two parents, and my father has 10 brothers and sisters, and all of my aunts and uncles have children. That to me is my culture. . . . I was born and raised in America. I'm fourth-generation American, so it's not like I'm second generation where things were brought over from a different country or brought and instilled in me. I'm just American and my culture is my family and what we do as a family. Family is very important to us. . . . My family is the center of my life.

I've had people tell me, "Well, you're Black." I'm not Black; I'm Black and White. I'm Black and White American. "Well, you're Black!" No, I'm not! I'm both. It's insulting, when they try and. . . bring it right back to the old standards, that if you have anybody in your family who's Black, you're Black. . . . I mean, I'm not ashamed of being Black, but I'm not ashamed of

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an. "Well, you're Black!" No, I'm
ry and. . . bring it right back to the old
our family who's Black, you're
being Black, but I'm not ashamed of

being White either; and if I'm both, I want to be part of both. And I think teachers need to be sensitive to that.

I would say I have more Black culture than White. . . because I know all about fried chicken and candied yams and grits and collard greens and ham hocks and all that because that's what we eat. . . . My father had to teach my mother how to cook all that stuff [*laughs*]. But that's just as far as food goes. . . . But as far as everything else, my family is my culture.

See, the thing is, I mix it at home so much that it's not really a problem for me to mix it outside. But then again, it's just my mother and my grandmother on the "White side," so it's not like I have a lot to mix.

My [Black] grandmother, I don't think she means to do it, when she talks, she refers to people, she describes them. If she's telling you, "Oh, you know that girl, the White one, with the blond hair and the blue eyes?" Why not "the thin girl with the long hair"? Instead, they have to get you by the color. I don't notice [color] too much. But it is unusual, because a lot of people I know do it. And I just say, what's that got to do with it?

I don't think [interracial identity is] that big of a problem. It's not killing anybody, at least as far as I know, it's not. It's not destroying families and lives and stuff. It's a minor thing. If you learn how to deal with it at a young age, as I did, it really doesn't bother you the rest of your life, like drugs. . . .

In the city, I don't think there's really much room for racism, especially anymore, because there's just so many different cultures. You can't be a racist. . . . I think it's *possible,* but I don't think it's logical. I don't think it was *ever* logical. It's possible, it's very possible, but it's sort of ridiculous to give it a try.

I think we're all racist in a sense. We all have some type of person that we don't like, whether it's from a different race, or from a different background, or they have different habits.

But to me a *serious racist* is a person who believes that people of different ethnic backgrounds don't belong or should be in *their* space and shouldn't invade *our* space: "Don't come and invade *my* space, you Chinese person. You belong over in China or you belong over in Chinatown."

Racists come out and tell you that they don't like who you are. Prejudiced people [on the other hand] will say it in like those little hints, you know, like, "Oh, yes, some of my best friends are Black." Or they say little ethnic remarks that they know will insult you but they won't come out and tell you, "You're Black. I don't want anything to do with you." Racists, to me, would come out and do that.

Both racists and prejudiced people make judgments, and most of the time they're wrong judgments, but the racist will carry his one step further. . . . A racist is a person that will carry out their prejudices.

[Racists have power] only if you let them! We'll stick with [the example of] striped shirts: If I go where everyone is wearing solids, and I'm wearing a stripe, and someone comes up to me and tells me, "You don't belong here; you're wearing stripes," I'll say, "I belong anywhere I want to belong." And

I'll stand right there! But there are some people who just say, "Oh, okay," and will turn around and leave. Then the racist has the power.

I wrote a poem about racism. I despise [racism]. . . .

Why do they hate me?
I'll never know
Why not ride their buses
In the front row?
Why not share their fountains
Or look at their wives?
Why not eat where they do
Or share in their lives?
Can't walk with them
Can't talk with them unless I'm a slave
But all that I wonder is who ever gave
them the right to tell me
What I can and can't do
Who I can and can't be
God made each one of us
Just like the other
the only difference is,
I'm darker in color.

I love to write. I do a lot of poetry. . . . Poetry is just expression. You can express yourself any way you want; it doesn't have to be in standard English.

I had a fight with a woman at work. She's White, and at the time I was the only Black person in my department. Or I was the only person who was *at all* Black in my department. And she just kept on laying on the racist jokes. At one point, I said, "You know, Nellie, you're a racist pig!" And she got offended by *that.* And I was just joking, just like she'd been joking for two days straight—all the racist jokes that she could think of. And we got into a big fight over it. She threw something at me, and I was ready to kill her. . . . There's only so far you can carry this. . . . She started to get down and dirty. . . . She was really getting evil. . . . They locked her out of the room, and they had to hold me back because I was going to throttle her.

She thought I was upset because she tossed the water at me. I said, "You know, Nellie, it's not the water. It's all these remarks you've been saying. And you just don't seem to have any regard for my feelings."

I remember one thing she was talking about. She said, "I'm not racist, just because I was jumped by eight Black girls when I was in the seventh grade, I'm not racist." After [30] years, why was she still saying they were eight *Black* girls? That to me was insulting. That was then; this is now. I didn't do it to you, I didn't jump you. It wasn't my father who jumped you; it wasn't my aunt who jumped you. . . . I told her I didn't want it taken out on me, that's the thing. I don't want anybody's racism taken out on me.

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Teachers, Role Models, anc

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All of my teachers were w
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I love that school! I want to te

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all. I *hated* it, absolutely hated
I was average. They slapped m
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racism taken out on me.

I've got a foot on both sides of the fence, and there's only so much I can take. I'm straddling the fence, and it's hard to laugh and joke with you when you're talking about the foot that's on the other side.

She couldn't understand it. We didn't talk for weeks. And then one day, I had to work with her. We didn't say anything for the first like two hours of work. And then I just said, "Smile, Nellie, you're driving me nuts!" and she smiled and laughed. And we've been good friends ever since. She just knows you don't say ethnic things around me; you don't joke around with me like that because I won't stand for it from you anymore. We can be friends; we can talk about anything else—except race.

Teachers, Role Models, and Caring

My first-grade teacher and I are very close. . . . As a matter of fact, she's my mentor. I'm following in her footsteps. I'm going to study elementary education. . . . She's always been there for me. After the first or second grade, if I had a problem, I could always go back to her. Through the whole rest of my life, I've been able to go back and talk to her. . . . She's a Golden Apple Award winner, which is a very high award for elementary school teachers. . . . She keeps me on my toes. . . . When I start getting down. . . she peps me back up and I get back on my feet.

All of my teachers were wonderful. I don't think there's a teacher at the whole Tremont School that I didn't like. . . . It's just a feeling you have. You know that they really care for you. You just know it; you can tell. Teachers who don't have you in any of their classes or haven't ever had you, they still know who you are. . . . The Tremont School in itself is a community. . . . I love that school! I want to teach there.

I knew [Academic High] would be a hard school, but I didn't know it would be so. . . they're just so *rigid*. The teachers, there's no feeling. . . . Like I said, the Tremont was a community for me and I loved it. I'm that type of person; I'm an outgoing person and I like to be able to talk to anybody and not feel that I can't talk to someone. If I have to spend six hours a day in school, I want to feel that I can talk to my teachers. At Academic, I didn't feel that at all. I *hated* it, absolutely hated it. They let me know that I wasn't high anymore. I was average. They slapped me with it. My first report card, *oh goodness,* it was terrible. I don't remember exactly what grades they were; I just do remember it was the first time in my life I had seen an *F* or a *D* under my name.

I think you have to be creative to be a teacher, you have to make it interesting. You can't just go in and say, "Yeah, I'm going to teach the kids just that; I'm gonna teach them right out of the book and that's the way it is, and don't ask questions." Because then you're gonna lose their interest. . . . Because I know there were plenty of classes where I lost complete interest. But those were all because the teachers just [said], "Open the books to this page." They never made up problems out of their head. Everything came out of the book. You didn't ask questions. If you asked them questions, then the

answer was, "In the book." And if you asked the question and the answer *wasn't* in the book, then you shouldn't have asked that question!

Mr. Benson, he cared; he was the only one of the two Black teachers [at Jefferson High School]. He was not enough. . . . The other Black teacher, he was a racist, and I didn't like him. I belonged to the Black Students' Association, and he was the advisor. And he just made it so obvious. . . he was all for Black supremacy. . . . A lot of times, whether they deserved it or not, his Black students passed, and his White students, if they deserved an A, they got a B. . . . He was insistent that only Hispanics and Blacks be allowed in the club. He had a very hard time letting me in because I'm not all Black. . . . I just really wasn't that welcome there.

He never found out what I was about. He just made his judgments from afar. He knew that I was Black and White and I looked too White for him, I guess. But we never discussed it.

At Jefferson, just about the whole school is like a big community. There are very few White, Caucasian, whatever you want to call them, *us* [*laughing*]. There are very few, but they don't cluster together. It's all integrated. . . . Nobody gets treated differently. We're all the same.

I've enjoyed all my English teachers at Jefferson. But Mr. Benson, my English Honors teacher, he just threw me for a whirl! I wasn't going to college until I met this man. . . . He was one of the few teachers I could talk to. . . . Instead of going to lunch, I used to go to Mr. Benson's room, and he and I would just sit and talk and talk and talk. . . . My father and Mr. Benson share a lot of the same values. And every time I've heard Mr. Benson talk, all I could think about was Daddy: "Oh, that's exactly what my father says!" . . . "Education, get your education and go far." "Whether you're flipping burgers at the local joint or you're up there working on Wall Street, be proud of yourself."

'Cause Mr. Benson, he says, I can go into Harvard and converse with those people, and I can go out in the street and rap with y'all. It's that type of thing, I love it. I try and be like that myself. I have my street talk. I get out in the street and I say "ain't" this and "ain't" that and "your momma" or "wha's up?" But I get somewhere where I know the people aren't familiar with that language or aren't accepting that language, and I will talk properly. . . . I walk into a place and I listen to how people are talking, and it just automatically comes to me.

Mr. Benson is the same as I am. Well, his mother was Black and his father was White, so Mr. Benson and I could relate on all the problems that you face in the world. Like when you go to fill out any kind of form and they ask you, "Black, White, Chinese, Hispanic, Other." I check off "Other" and I'll write it down. And then Mr. Benson told me that he found out that when you write it down, they put you under "Black" because it all comes back to the old laws about if you had any Black blood in you, you were Black.

I wrote a poem about it. It was just a bunch of questions: "What am I?" I had filled out a whole bunch of college essays, and I was tired of having to write out "Other: Black American and White American." And I went to him

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Family Values and Education

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and I said, "Mr. Benson, what do you do when you get all these forms and they ask you "Black, White, or Other?" And he said, "You might as well just fill out "Black" because that's what they'll do to you." That just drives me nuts! And we got on this big conversation about it. . . . But no other teacher ever. . . .

He came from the lower class in Chicago and worked his way, and he studied every night, six hours a night. He got into Harvard and he went to Harvard, and now he's back helping the people who needed help. Because the way he sees it, he could go and he could teach at Phillips Academy and he could teach at Boston Latin, which he did for awhile. But those people don't need his help. That's how he sees it. They're gonna learn with or without him. He wanted to come back to a small community, the underprivileged community, and help those people. That's what made me admire him the most because I like to help people.

The teacher who didn't really help me at all in high school. . . was my computer lit. teacher. Because I have no idea about computer literacy. I got A's in that course. Just because he saw that I had A's, and that my name was all around the school for all the "wonderful things" I do, he just automatically assumed. He didn't really pay attention to who I was. The grade I think I deserved in that class was at least a C, but I got A just because everybody else gave me A's. But everybody else gave me A's because I earned them. He gave me A's because he was following the crowd. He just assumed, "Yeah, well, she's a good student." And I showed up to class every day. . . . He didn't help me at all because he didn't challenge me. Everybody else challenges me; I had to earn their grades. I didn't have to earn his grade. I just had to show up.

I'd do what I've seen teachers who I like or enjoyed do: make the classroom fun; make it exciting. If I were to teach math, I'd turn all the math problems into games. I had a teacher who did that. I hated math up until the second time I was in the seventh grade. . . . I *hated* math; I despised math until I met Ms. Morgan. And from that point on, I have never received less than a B in math. She turned every math problem, every type of math problem was a game.

So that school is never, "This is the way it is, and that's just it. Just learn it." I'd make everything exciting and fun, or I'd try to. That makes school enjoyable.

Family Values and Education

In the Tremont and in the Williams [schools], I was the top of my class, well, not top of my class, but I was very high up in the ranks. . . . That all comes from family. My mother's been reading me books since probably the day I was born, up until school age. . . . Any book with a serious message for children. . . . My mother's always been very big on that, to make sure that reading was important. I still love to read. . . mysteries, human interest stories. . . . It made a difference in elementary school, it really did. And, actually, it made a difference in high school, after I left Academic High, because I graduated first in my class.

My parents know that the further I go in school, the better life I'll have. Because they had to struggle to get where they are today. They had to struggle to make themselves comfortable. Going to school is going to be a struggle. But as long as I'm in school, my parents will always be there for me.

The first five years of your life, that's when you develop the most. Before you go to school, you've already got your personality. If you have parents who are showing you the right values (not "*the* right values" because everybody's values to them are right. . .), whatever values they've given you are what you carry for the rest of your life.

That's the way my family has raised me. . . . They really taught me not to judge. . . . You just accept [people] the way they are. . . . With my family, if you go to church, you go to church; if you don't, you don't. My grandmother says, "Jesus still loves you and I still love you, whether you go to church or not. . . ." It's that kind of thing. You just learn to accept people.

Sexuality—I don't judge, I try not to, anyway. I'm sure subconsciously I do. . . . I don't come out and say, "Ugh, he's gay." My neighborhood is thoroughly mixed and sexually open. And they're my neighbors. I don't differentiate them. And that's something I wish a lot of people would do. Because I think it's wrong. Because if you were to take people and differentiate because of their preferences, be it sexual or anything, *everybody's* different. I prefer a certain type of music; you prefer a different type of music. Does that mean we have to hate each other? Does that mean you have to pick on me and call me names? That's the way I see it.

I'm not going to be exactly like my parents. I grew up with basic values. And I follow those basic values. And if you think about it, the choices I make have something to do with my values. And the only place I got my values from was [home]. . . . So, I may change things around, flip them over, just adjust them a bit. But they still come down to my home values, my basic values, and my basic values came from home.

[My parents] have always taken good care of me. . . . They're always there for me, all the time, if I need to talk. And they make it so obvious that they love me, you know, with these ridiculous curfews that I have [*laughs*]. I know it's for the better, although I can't stand it; I know there's a reason behind it, some twisted reason! . . . Just a regular night out, I have to be in at midnight. If it's a party, I don't have to be in till two. All my friends stay out till three and four in the morning. But that's because their parents can go to sleep. My parents can't sleep if I'm not home. That's what I like the most about them.

I was reading an article the other day about how the family dinner has sort of been tossed out the window in today's society. My family sits down to dinner together four out of seven nights a week, all six of us. Dinner's at six. If it's late, then everybody waits. You don't just eat on your own. . . . I've noticed a lot of people, my boyfriend, for one, they never eat together. I've had all kinds of friends who always say. . . "Your family *eats* [together]?" And that's different from other families.

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It's very important to my parents and it'll be important to me. Because that's the time when we sit down and say, "How was your day? What'd you do? How are you feeling? Do you have a headache? Did you have a rough day? Did you have a good day?" You know? And that's about the only time the whole family can sit together and talk and discuss. . . . It's different from other families, because a lot of families, they sort of miss each other. And they say, "Oh, *you* were supposed to pick Johnny up today?". . . My family never has that problem because we always sit down together and talk.

I have wonderful parents, although I don't tell them [*laughing*]. [*Do they know?*] Probably.

My father and my mother had to work up. . . . My father has been working for the telephone company for 20 years. He started off cutting lines and working underground. Now he sits in his office. . . . He's a businessman these days, and he had to work his way up. Whereas if I go and get myself a college education, I'm not going to have to start splicing lines if I want to work at the telephone company. I'm going to start with the knowledge that I don't have to splice a line. I could start in the office with my father.

A lot of us [Black kids] just don't have the home life. I really do think it begins when you're a baby! My mother, like I said, I believe she read to me from the day I was born; I'm sure of it. A lot of people just didn't have that. Their parents both had to work; they didn't have anybody at home to read to them. They just sat in front of the tube all day. When they came home from school, their homework was just tossed aside and they sat in front of the television until Mom and Dad came home. Then Mom and Dad rushed them through dinner, got them to bed, and this and that. A lot of them just didn't come from the right background to have—not the smarts, but to be educated enough to pass that test [to get into Academic High]. Because the Academic test isn't a test of how much you know; it's more of a test of how well can you solve problems. . . . The Black population wasn't very high there.

I blew two years. . . . I learned a lot from it. As a matter of fact, one of my college essays was on the fact that from that experience, I learned that I don't need to hear other people's praise to get by. . . . All I need to know is in here [*pointing to her heart*] whether I tried or not.

It's not the school you go to, it's what you want to get out of it and what you take from it.

If I know I did my hardest, if I know I tried my very best and I got an F, I'd have a beef with the teacher about it, but if that's what I got, that's what I got. If that's seriously what I earned after all my efforts, then I'll have to live with it.

[Grades] are not that important. To me, they're just something on a piece of paper. . . . [My parents] feel just about the same way. If they ask me, "Honestly, did you try your best?" and I tell them yes, then they'll look at the grades and say okay. . . . The first thing my father always looked at was conduct and effort. If all the letter grades in the academic grades said F's, and I had A's in conduct and effort, then my father would just see the F's, and say "Oh, well. . . ."

I love music. Music is life. I sing at the top of my lungs every morning. . . . I'm always going to keep this in my mind: After school, after I go to college, after I get my degrees in what I want to get my degrees in, maybe I'll put all of that on hold. Even if I have a teaching degree, I may never teach. I want to be a singer. I just want to go out there, and I want to make myself known, and I want to sing to my heart's content. It's just what I love to do! But I always want to have something to fall back on. Singing is not my main career goal because I realize it's a far-fetched dream to become a world-famous singer. It's not *too* far-fetched, but it is far-fetched. . . . Oh, I can do it. I have no doubts I can do it. I just know it's a lot of work. . . . I do eventually want to be a singer. . . . I can become more famous, and you can read about me in the papers, and you can see my videos on television, and you can see me in interviews on "Good Morning, America". . . [*laughing*].

[The reason for going to school is] to make yourself a better person. To learn more, not only about the world and what other people have gathered as facts, but to learn more about yourself.

The more that there are opportunities for you to learn, you should always take them. . . . I just want to keep continuously learning, because when you stop learning, then you start dying.

I've got it all laid out. I've got a four-year scholarship to one of the best schools in New England. All I've gotta do is go there and make the grade.

If I see the opportunity to become a leader, I'll do it. I'll just go and take over. . . . I like the recognition.

I'm ready now. I can face the challenge. . . . I'm ready to go out in the world and let [that] university know who I am!

COMMENTARY

Issues of identity are clearly at the core of Linda's striving to carve out a place for herself in her family, community, and school. Although she has reached quite a sophisticated understanding of race, racial awareness, racism, and identity, some feelings of ambivalence, conflict, and pain are still apparent. Being "mixed," to use Linda's term, is the reality of more and more students in U.S. schools. In an ethnographic study of an alternative urban public school in East Harlem, for instance, Linda Levine found that almost two-thirds of the children in the classroom she observed were members of biracial or interethnic families.[2] Yet many schools are unaware of the strains and dilemmas that biracial identity poses for children. A recent study concerning the self-concept of biethnic and biracial students found that the school environment was hostile to them through an insistence that these students deny part of their heritage. Moreover, the students who were interviewed felt that their schools did not promote the inclusion of biethnic and biracial students, and in fact, hindered their self-identification.[3]

Many people in the United States are probably a mixture of several racial heritages, but this is either not known or not readily acknowledged. According to some estimates, Blacks in the United States are on average about 20 percent

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White, and Whites are about 1 percent Black.[4] Although this assertion is impossible to prove, *miscegenation,* or racial mixing, is far more common than generally admitted in our society. Discomfort with this issue is understandable, given the history of rape and subjugation forced on African and African American women, especially during slavery. This is an example of the legacy of racism, as is the "one-drop" rule—the law that one drop of Black blood makes a person Black—to which Linda alluded. In fact, the "one-drop" rule was reaffirmed as late as 1982 in a court decision in Louisiana, in which 1/32 African ancestry was sufficient to keep "Black" on an individual's birth certificate.[5]

This classification has not been practiced in other societies and was not always the case in the United States, either. Rather, it emerged sometime in the early eighteenth century.[6] The classification was to the benefit of the institution of slavery because with this logic, people could still be enslaved even if they were mostly White. As is the case with race itself, this was a social construction rather than a biologic one. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the vast majority of those of mixed African and European ancestry were identifying as Black rather than as White or mixed. Horace Mann Bond, the renowned sociologist and educator—and himself a light-skinned Black—wrote of a blue-eyed and seemingly Anglo-Saxon man who spoke fervently at a meeting about "the necessity that all of us black men in America and the world stand together."[7]

Although interracial marriages in the United States had declined dramatically during the first half of the twentieth century from earlier times, they began to increase after the civil rights movement. Between 1970 and 1980, the number of interracial marriages doubled, from 310,000 to 613,000, and by 1991, the number had climbed to 994,000. As documented in *Of Many Colors,* a recent book of portraits and interviews of multiracial and multiethnic families, it is estimated that there are now over a million interracial marriages. However, this still represents a small percentage of all marriages in the United States.[8]

Given the racist underpinnings of group and self-identification in the United States, the dilemmas Linda faces are difficult indeed. According to Robin Lin Miller and Mary Jane Rotheram-Borus, the biracial child may be even more vulnerable to racism than monoracial adults: "This is because the biracial child represents an affront to the racial divide; biracial persons must often cope with reactions reflecting the internalized racism of society."[9] The pressure to identify as one race or the other is something that Linda has lived with since birth. In *Of Many Colors,* Ifeoma Nwokoye, a young adult of Nigerian/White American heritage, writes, "In America, people are often unwilling to accept the idea of a biracial person. In our everyday lives we are constantly confronted with situations in which we must define who we are. We check the boxes marked "*white,*" "*black,*" on our college forms, but there is no space marked '*multiracial*' yet. There is no place for me."[10]

Linda is adamant in claiming both her heritages. But she is certain that although she goes to the trouble of writing "Mixed—Black and White" on college applications and other forms, she is automatically placed in the "Black" category anyway. (Like Linda, the national movement Interracial Pride—or

"I-Pride"—advocates the elimination of "check only one" forms; they also object to current census categories.[11]) But Linda identifies most strongly with her family. As she says, "My culture is my family." And because her family is mixed, so is her culture. Hers is an extraordinarily courageous stand in a society that either forces you to choose one over the other, or fits you into one that you have not necessarily chosen yourself. The simple act of naming herself has been a powerful experience.

Except for her time at Academic High, where she was made to feel unintelligent, Linda has for the most part loved school. Having teachers who have understood and cared has also been meaningful for Linda. Fortunately, there have been a number of such teachers in each of her schools. Of course, Linda does not expect all her teachers to be biracial like herself, but she expects them all to be sensitive and accepting of who she is, rather than imposing their own identity on her. Her strong family background has been her first and most significant support system. This is evident from what she calls "family jam sessions," in which everybody takes part; the key role of reading in the family; and the centrality of family dinners. Friends are Linda's second strongest support. Her schools have come in a distant third, although she has had some stellar teachers. The teachers who have stood out have been not only those with whom she could identify culturally but also those who have made learning fun, engaging, and challenging.

Linda Howard is an extraordinary young woman who is full of ambition, certain of her talents, and ready for the future. Her strong family bonds, love of learning, and steadfast identification as Black and White no doubt all contribute to her academic success. Her teachers and schools have not always been able to understand or support her, emphasizing the importance of a school's social context and the degree to which it can insulate students from racism and influence self-esteem.

TO THINK ABOUT

1. Linda Howard insists on identifying herself as biracial. She also says that she is just "a member of the human race" and that race is not that important to her. Nevertheless, she obviously has spent a great deal of time thinking about race, as some of her anecdotes and poems make clear. Are these assertions contradictory? Why or why not?
2. If you were one of Linda's teachers, how might you show her that you affirm her identity? Give specific suggestions.
3. What kind of teachers have most impressed Linda? Why? What can you learn from this in your own teaching?
4. Linda's family is, as she says, "the center of my life." How do you think this has helped Linda become a successful student? Does this mean that students whose families are different from hers cannot be successful? Give some examples of academically successful students you have known.
5. Can issues of race and identity be handled by the school? Or are these issues too complicated for schools? What skills do you think teachers need if they are to face these concerns effectively?

Case Study: Rich Miller

"Self-respect is one gift that you

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Case Study: Rich Miller

"Self-respect is one gift that you give yourself."

Speaking slowly and deliberately, Rich Miller[1] is a young man who thinks carefully about life, education, and the key role of family. Rich is 17 years old and is just graduating from high school. He is Black and has lived in a racially and ethnically mixed community in Boston since he was born. Rich says that the neighborhood "isn't bad" but laments that it was once much nicer than it is now.

The youngest of three children, Rich lives with his mother, brother, and sister. Both of his siblings are in college—his brother in a public college in the South studying engineering, and his sister in a private liberal arts college in New England. All three are close in age, the oldest being 20. Rich's mother is a nursery and kindergarten teacher. She did not attend college until she was an adult, and she has had to struggle to get an education and develop her professional career. Consequently, she feels very strongly about the need for her children to get a college education. This is a major value in their family. Rich is clearly devoted to his mother and considers himself lucky to be part of his family. But he is also quick to point out that at times he feels that his mother is overbearing, "getting on his case."

Rich feels that he has had a good basic education. He has always gone to desegregated schools that have "a good mix" and are, he recalls, free of racial tension. At present, he attends a comprehensive high school that he describes as "pretty good." He decided not to go to his neighborhood school because his high school offers a number of special programs, including one in music. Almost three-quarters of the students in his school are African American, about 10 percent Latino, 15 percent White, and a small number of Asians. Rich will be graduating this year, and although he feels that he has had a very good education there, he points out that the teachers' expectations are often based on their students' race and background. He plans to study pharmacology and has been accepted into a respected program at a good college.

Because he has been studying music (both violin and piano) since fourth grade, Rich has been very involved in the music program at school. He played at graduation and other occasions, and he has conducted workshops for other students. Music is a big part of Rich's life outside of school, too: He plays the organ at his church, and he and his family frequently take part in church activities. Thus his church is also a significant part of his life. Rich is contemplating combining a profession as a pharmacist with teaching music to private students.

Three themes emerged through interviews with Rich. One is his great sense of personal responsibility and independence; another focuses on the expectations and pressures he feels from society and teachers and some of the attitudes he has developed as a result. The third relates to family lessons that he has learned along the way.

Personal Responsibility

I'm more or less an independent person. I don't depend on anyone to do anything for me. . . . I don't let dependence stand in the way of anything that has to get done. . . . I don't depend on anyone learning for me or making decisions for me or anything. I just want to see how far I can carry myself and what I can achieve on my own. I'm not saying that I wouldn't accept the aid of others, but just see what Rich can do.

The first year [of high school] was real heavy . . . because I was in that transition going from junior high to high school, and at that particular time, when you have that homework—I had never had this much homework before! . . . My mother stayed on me about that, but then it was *my* decision. That first semester of my first year was, oh, it was terrible. It actually opened my eyes up that it was left up to me; it's up to me to go and get that education.

I'm looking at the future as long as I can just continue right into education and not wait until the latter part of my life. I believe that "business before pleasure," so take care of this now and later I can enjoy the time off; I can enjoy the finer things in life that one wants earlier. . . . Many of us want to go out and get cars, but some things have to give and some things come first. I feel that if I involve myself in a lot of things now within the world, then that may hinder me from getting my education. . . . My future is getting that education. Whatever else happens after that, I won't have that problem or worry about getting a job.

I decided on pharmacy. . . . That's next to being a doctor, so it's just as hard. I decided that I wanted to go into a career that would give me guaranteed bacon. . . . Like with music, there's so much competition out here and no matter how much or how hard you study, there's always somebody better than you are. . . . So I figured there's enough room out here for pharmacists.

I always liked music, but when I was little I never felt there was a place for me in music. Other people are talented, and they can just sit down and just actually play. Well, I started from scratch, so I didn't know that there was a place for me. . . . So I began taking lessons. . . and I have stuck with that.

There was a time that I had decided to go into music education. Now, I am going to pursue this career in pharmacy, but I also want to be a music teacher. . . . Now, as far as performance, that's something that has to be worked with. I feel there *can* be a slot for me in music education.

I plan on keeping my music up. I really don't have hobbies and I don't play too many sports or anything like this, so I really think this keeps me going. It gives me something to go for from day to day. And you learn something new all the time.

I'm always looking to learn something new. The music I like playing the most is, well, I like playing between the classical and the gospel music. I learned the classical and I always feel that it's a challenge. That's the first music that I really got into before I began the gospel music. . . . I like gospel music because I like to play for the church.

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Getting ahead in life, not letting anyone discourage you in any way [is important]. Say, "Well, I want to go forth and do this. . . ." And then someone might say, "Well, I don't think you can do it; I don't think you can make it." And because of someone saying something, then you decide, "Well, no, I'll leave it alone. . . ." I think no matter what anyone says, if you feel that within yourself you can achieve something, go for it!

I was fairly comfortable in school. I'll admit, I mainly kept to myself. Now, it's not saying that I didn't have any friends or anything like that. I had friends, but I knew how to take relationships up to how far. So I've maintained trust and loyalty to friends. So it's not like I was totally alone. . . . I know how I want my friends to treat me, and I treat them how they would expect to be treated.

Friends won't let you down. Friends will be around. My closest friends are there. . . more so to offer encouragement to get that education. . . . Many of my friends are encouraging me to go on to college. I've had that kind of push from outside just as much as I have from inside.

There's just things that I just want to fulfill for myself, and if it takes the rest of my life, eliminating [plans for a] family and whatever, then so be it. . . . I don't want to take on a million responsibilities at once.

Expectations, Pride, and Shame

I went to the Robert Jennings School, where we had an Advanced Work Class. Advanced Work Class was more like an exam school for elementary students [*Note:* Students need to take an examination to be admitted].. . . That's when I first became familiar with music. We had a teacher to come in to teach violin and cello and those string instruments. So that's where I first started with music and I began taking violin. My mother asked me did I want to take piano lessons, so that's also when I started taking piano lessons.

I was a good student in the average class, the normal, basic class that everyone has to go through. Now, getting into the Advanced Work Class, *there* there are students who fall behind. And I think that I wasn't really looking to be there. I managed to get myself there, but I don't think I really wanted to be there. And I think that's more what the problem was.

I did act out, as I didn't want to be there. But between my mother and the faculty, I never did get out! So, I managed to be in there up until the end of eighth grade. I was trying to get out by acting out, but they didn't go for that because it was just a show that I was putting on that could be stopped. It wasn't a real disability of not being able to do the work.

There are certain teachers that challenge you to think. There are students who say, "School is really tough and I can't do this and I can't do that, and this is just too hard for me. . . ." Some students get through high school; that's it for education for them. They don't pursue college. They take a trade because they might be better at working with their hands. . . . Then there is a part that helps you to think. Some people like challenging problems. . . . I believe there are parts of school that can promote you to think.

[Chemistry class] was just totally interesting. When I first heard of it, you know, my brother and sister, they had chemistry before I did. . . . To hear them tell it, chemistry was hard and I just knew I couldn't do it. . . . But I did it. . . . I still didn't understand it like I understand music. You can tell me something about music and I can understand it; I can see how you go about it. There were some things in chemistry that I couldn't. I myself personally feel like I need to take it all over again. . . . That's what made up in my mind that anything that you want to do, it can be done. Because I just had in my mind that I couldn't do it. . . I kept at it, I didn't give up. . . . The teacher just constantly told us that it's not difficult. The only difficult thing is getting that understanding. Once you understand how you do something, you can in fact go on with it.

There were games that go on. Like math classes, when we had math competitions that actually help you to learn. You'd win little prizes, candy prizes, or whatever. It actually made school a bit more interesting. It made learning a lot easier because it was a game.

I would put more activities into the day that can make it interesting. . . . It's up to you what you think you might be interested in. If you think that you're interested in dance, which they had, that would be fun to you, so then you would not look at it as being a math class. Who likes a math class? There are people who do, but who really likes a math class that would go there because they like being there? But for people who like to dance or the physical education class, they would break their neck practically to get into that class.

I believe a teacher, by the way he introduces different things to you, can make a class interesting. Not like a normal teacher that gets up, gives you a lecture, or there's teachers that just pass out the work, you do the work, pass it in, get a grade, good-bye!

I didn't know what I wanted to do; I had no *idea*. At least the majority of students graduating have some idea of what they want to do. I didn't have the faintest. So [my guidance counselor] put in front of me many different brochures about dental hygienist or pharmacy and other different careers. . . . Well, I didn't hear of too many people in the career of pharmacy, so it's something that I want to try. I feel that if I put forth that effort, there's a chance for me. . . . She was more like you would say a fellow classmate. There's always somebody who knows just a little bit more that can help you out. It wasn't about "Well, make an appointment to come and see me." She was always glad to help, so when she offered or presented you with different things or different ideas, or careers, it was from the heart more so than from "doing my job." It made a difference, because she has a general idea of what you're about and what you might like.

This particular guidance counselor. . . I had her for my sophomore year in high school. And till the end of June, even after graduation, I was still seeing her. . . . We still keep in touch. She's White. . . . She'd probably have in the range of 200 [students].. . . She gave me ideas. . . . If I didn't have the guidance counselor that I had, then I really don't know what direction I would be in.

I don't think that we [Black folks] do enough to stick out like a sore thumb. I don't think we do enough to put us on top or put us up in a higher

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league. I don't think many of us are working to the ability that we can. We are settling for the easiest way out as far as working, as far as education. We feel that after high school, that's it for us; we don't have to go on with it. As far as getting a job, some of us even would resort to selling drugs (not only the Black race, but specifically speaking on the Black race); we would even go to sell drugs just to make it easier for us. I mean, selling drugs, you can make more that day than the average person makes a week. We always oftentimes, we set up the limits rather than going on to higher expectations.

It's important to me because I believe that I am no different from anyone else. I believe there is a space for me. And it's up to me as an individual; it's up to others in the Black race, to take on those opportunities to further ourselves education-wise and as far as living is concerned.

I'm not saying that there's not enough of us out there. I mean, let's take a household, for example. Nine times out of ten, out of a family, there may be at least one person that succeeds in life. Well, why can't *everyone* succeed in life? That's the question that I'm asking: Why can't everyone?

We're somewhat tacky. We don't act professional at anything. I'm not saying everyone, but there are some of us who just don't want to be professional. We rely on welfare to take care of us. I don't believe that even those that are on welfare, I don't believe that anyone should have to touch welfare. . . . You know, there are some of us who are smart or some of us who are able to either further our education or get a job, and we don't even want to do that much. . . . Lazy. I think lazy, and we get too comfortable. . . . "Well, I won't go today, I'll go tomorrow." And tomorrow never comes. And I think too many of us are just too comfortable at home, comfortable with the way things are, not really struggling, getting this check every month.

See, I believe that you can take a rich White and put him in a poor Black neighborhood, and he would [be] somewhat immune to it. But if you take a Black and put him in a rich White neighborhood, how do you think that Black would act? There are some of us who are classy, but then there are some who like to have those parties, and have everyone over and being loud. . . . They just really can't fit in.

I feel that's something that Black people are doing to themselves. Like, for instance, I find that a White can move anywhere, and a Black, if he wants to get out in a highly suburban area where there are rich White doctors, something like that, and for instance, if that house is $300,000, it might go up $100,000 just so you can't get in there. Because it is known for Blacks to, not necessarily true, but it is known for Blacks to pull down an area.

I believe that we can do something about it as Blacks. Because we buy homes, very nice homes and so forth, but we don't seem to be upkeeping our homes. We just let it fall down to the ground completely. And then we say, "Oh, look at them! They're not taking care of the house," and whatever.

With [my] school being predominately Black, well, it's natural that you're going to have quite a bit of top Black students. However, if you were to take those top Black students, say you have two top Black students, and you put them in a classroom with 20 top White students, where would you rank? . . .

Just how educated do you think you are? You know some of us, because we sit in this class, and we say, "Well, I'm the smartest," just how educated are you?

Most people think it's not being top [because it's a Black school]. . . . I think if we had more White students, Black students would go further. I find that White students want to learn. Most White students wanted to learn as much as they can get. I think standards would be higher [if there were more White students].

Many of the White teachers there don't push. . . . Their expectations don't seem to be as high as they should be. I mean, work that I feel myself, being a teacher, I would give them to promote any kind of high standards. I know that some Black teachers, their expectations are higher than White teachers. . . . They just do it, because they know how it was for them. . . . Actually, I'd say, you have to be in Black shoes to know how it is.

Black teachers. . . want to impress you more about getting an education, you know; they're your own race, more so than the opposite race. Because of back then, segregated times or times when you weren't able to get that education. But I think that it is just important to all teachers and to all students just to teach the curriculum as they would in an all-White school or as they would any other student.

My only thing to make it better is just to encourage the teachers to push the curriculum, that's about it.

Family Lessons

I have one brother, one sister, and my mother. And we're just a happy-go-lucky family. My brother is the oldest; my sister is the second to the last in line. It's okay, because the parent and first-child relationship has broken the barrier for the second and the last child. So things that they did, they can expect from the second and the third. So it's not like it's tougher on me.

[My mother] didn't go to college right away. . . so she felt that a lot of what she's doing now, she could've been doing back then. But by not going to school right away, by prolonging that time, "Well, I won't go this year, but I'll go next year," has turned into a matter of years. And she feels that if you go right after school, then things will look up. And then you'll say, "Well, I'm glad I went to school now rather than wait." You see, we don't want to go to school (going to college, I should say) because we've had it with 12 years of school! It's hard; it's dull; it's boring; we don't like the teachers! So this is our option, whether we want to go on to college. And many of us feel that "Well, I'm not going to go right away. . . ." And she didn't want the same thing to happen to us. . . . Even today, she's wondering, "Well, what are you going to do about school? All I want is you kids to go to college and get an education and live a halfway decent life."

It mattered to me, because I used to say to myself, and probably still do, back in my mind, "Well, what's the big deal about going to school?" I'm not going to find a job without going to college.

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I like the goals and objectives that she set for herself being a single parent. Things that I would change: She's really bossy. I should say bossy *to her children,* not to everyone else. Because she desires those things for us to go on and gradually be pharmacists and nurses and engineers. So, she's very persistent. . . . It's out of love, but it's really aggravating [*laughs*]. . . . Actually, it is out of love and persistence, so I'm trying to bear with it.

It's wonderful being a member of my family. We have our ups and downs, but every day, I have fun. I enjoy being with my mother, my sister, and my brother. And I don't think I can compare her. I wouldn't exchange her for anyone else's parents. . . . I mean, look at us, we're not out roaming the streets or anything like that.

My sister's going into nursing, so it's the same [field], medicine. So I'm looking to actually learn with her. Because some classes, she already had that I'm going to be taking in the fall. And then some classes we're going to be having together. So I feel that this will be an excellent benefit for the both of us.

I don't want to be a letdown to my family, personally, and to myself. But I feel that if I tried and then failed, then that's a different story. At least I did put forth that effort. But you never know until you've tried. You don't know what you can do or what you cannot do unless you've tried.

I've learned from my family, I could say how to survive. Now you say, how do you survive? I know I've learned how to work a job, how to stay on the job.

I've learned about being Black. . . that Blacks have to work harder at things. Some things are just harder than others. What I mean by working hard, I say if you work hard now, it'll pay off later, it definitely will. Something good will come in your life. But let's not look at life as a piece of cake, because eventually it'll dry up, it'll deteriorate, it'll fall, it'll crumble, or somebody will come gnawing at it. . . . But we want to build *solid* foundations for ourselves and for our future generations, for our future children.

We find many students saying, "Well, Mom, you didn't go to college. How come you're making me go?" But let's not look at it that way. Let's look at it, "Well, you have the opportunity; you can get scholarships; you can get financial aid." And just pursue it. Do something for yourself. You know, it might be hard trying to help with your parents, but that'll make them happy, by you prospering.

Grades are very important to my family. My mother is the most influential on that, and my sister. . . . At all times, I just look out for what Rich can do, what he can accomplish, how well he can do it. Because I find that when you are competing, sometimes if you're trying just a little too hard, sometimes we try just a little too hard and we end up messing things up for ourselves. So I feel that, don't take it easy, but you know how much you can take and when to let go. . . . I'm comfortable setting my own standards.

I mean, I feel that there's a thing with "very well," "good," "average," and "poor" and "inferior." I believe that everyone should at least be "average." It's all right to come out "good" and it's all right to come out "excellent," but you should try to at least be average.

I'm just looking forward to all of us to be graduates of some college. Even if not my brother and sister, I at least want to do something for myself. . . . As they say, self-respect is one gift that you give yourself. And I feel that I'll be doing something for myself if I go to college. Nobody can't go to college for you; nobody can't get that knowledge and understanding for you but yourself. So I think I'm going to be doing something for myself.

My mother won't always be there. . . . So that's where it's left for you to decide: "Well, what am I going to do? How am I going to avoid this situation?"

I think the only thing that's holding me back from getting a good education might be me. I just have to be ready to accept it. . . . I want to pursue a future the right way. . . and not find myself in a graveyard or in jail somewhere.

COMMENTARY

The three themes revealed here are inextricably linked. Independence and responsibility, for example, are major values in Rich Miller's life. He has learned these by being the son of a strong mother who is deeply concerned about the education of her children. But the expectations held for him by teachers and society sometimes counteract this message. What emerges in this case study is a portrait of a highly complex young man who is independent, resourceful, mature; at once proud, and critical of his culture; and always appreciative of his family for their pressure and support. Through the messages of family, school, and community, Rich has also learned that Blacks have to work harder to get anywhere and that White teachers have lower expectations of Black students than of White.

The sociopolitical context in which Rich has developed his values and learned these lessons cannot be underestimated. For example, Rich's enrollment in an Advanced Work Class placed him with a minority of African American students. Data collected by the U.S. Office for Civil Rights support the contention that African American students do not receive equal educational opportunities but in fact are subjected to what has been called "second generation school discrimination" through practices such as ability grouping, differential disciplinary practices, and lower graduation rates. They are grossly overrepresented in classes for the mentally retarded and grossly underrepresented in classes for the gifted and talented.[2] Although racism may be manifested differently from before, it still exists.

Another way messages are communicated to students is through the social status of students and staff in schools. Rich, for example, has concluded that the presence of more White students would raise standards for all students. It is not simply the *presence* of these students that would raise standards, however, but rather teachers' expectations of them. The issue he raises is one of teachers' perceptions as well as of student responsibilities. Even the percentage of Black teachers in a school may make a crucial difference (in his case, for instance, Rich feels that Black teachers have higher standards for Black students). By stressing what Michele Foster calls "the paradox of desegregation," that is, the

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contrast between the ideology and the reality of equal educational opportunity in desegregated schools, African American teachers help to challenge the status quo.[3] Yet, the number of teachers of color in public schools is diminishing.[4]

In Rich's case, we can see that the relationship among students, teachers, and communities can influence both student achievement and the perceptions they may have of themselves and their people. Organizational arrangements in schools such as tracking, discriminatory disciplinary policies, and testing can also have an impact. All of these factors in combination may send damaging messages to young people about themselves, their families, and their cultural groups.

Rich has benefited academically from school, but in the process he has picked up some disabling messages: that Blacks are lazy, unproductive, and too ready to take "the easy way out." Rich has no doubt had experiences in his own community that reinforce these perceptions, but by presenting the problem in such broad strokes, it becomes an indictment not against *particular* Blacks but against Blacks *as a class.* Rich has learned to "blame the victim," although he himself becomes one of them.

The issue is not this simple, however. Although Rich may be demonstrating some negative perceptions of his community, he is also tremendously proud of his culture: He loves gospel music and is involved in his church; he wants to "build solid foundations" for future generations; and most important, he feels that Blacks can take control of their lives ("I believe we can do something about it as Blacks"). His ideas are influenced by expectations from schools and society and point to their complex role in helping young people develop their self-concepts.

The issue of Black self-esteem has been studied by many scholars. Research by William Cross on African American identity may help us to understand the many and seemingly contradictory statements made by Rich about his culture, family, and teachers. Cross points out that diversity is at the very core of Black psychology. Although most African Americans have healthy personalities, they may have different ideologies. Cross also challenges the view that "Negro self-hatred" is a thoroughly documented finding or that it explains everything. He proposes that it is a complex, layered, multidimensional construct. In what he calls "The Pre-Encounter Stage" of Black identity, Cross describes several characteristics and attitudes that are clearly evident in Rich: social stigma attitudes (race is seen as a problem or stigma); anti-Black attitudes (a "blame the victim" prism); and spotlight, or race image, anxiety (anxiety about being "too Black," and hence too conspicuous).[5] This anxiety is evident when Rich talks about Blacks being loud or not taking care of their property. Cross points out what is apparent in Rich: "A great deal of pain and sorrow can be associated with such behaviors."[6]

The role of parents and family in building strong character and motivating children to succeed in school is equally important. Rich's mother and siblings have provided strong motivation for him to succeed and go on to higher education. But Rich's mother is not unlike other parents in this regard. What makes

her different is that *she knows how to help her children get the education they need.* Because she herself went to college, albeit several years after graduating from high school, she is convinced that a college education is necessary to her children's welfare. Her involvement with her children's education, starting with elementary school, is evident every step of the way. Rich talks of how instrumental she was in keeping him in the advanced class. He also complains, although lovingly, that she is too "bossy." She came from an economically oppressed family, and she learned the hard lesson of the value of an education and passed it on to her children. The fact that she may have been poor or that she is a single parent have not been viewed by her as insurmountable roadblocks.

These family lessons are not always easy to teach. In fact, some of them run counter to the reality that Rich confronts every day and that he will continue to face in the future. The role that a strong family takes on in teaching its children to struggle against societal constraints becomes much more crucial in the lives of students like Rich, who must constantly buck the tide of low expectations and negative images.

Rich Miller is, like all of us, a product both of his environment and of his own doing. He has learned about his worth and about the value of an education from his mother. He has learned about his culture from his family and his church. He has learned about the expectations of Blacks from his teachers and from society in general. And he has learned the important lesson that "self-respect is one gift that you give yourself." We are left with the portrait of a young man who defies easy categorization and who challenges us as educators to look beyond stereotypes of students, their families, and communities for the more subtle but complex issues that help explain student achievement.

TO THINK ABOUT

1. What does Rich Miller mean when he says, "Self-respect is one gift that you give yourself"?
2. What do you think has helped Rich become a successful student?
3. How is Rich's determination to get ahead apparent to you? How might it be related to his criticisms of other Blacks?
4. Rich says that most teachers "just pass out the work, you do the work, pass it in, get a grade, good-bye." What are the implications for teachers? How might you design curriculum to appeal to Rich?
5. Think of some of the Black students you teach or have known. How are they different from Rich? How are they the same? What did you learn from reading this case study?

Case Study: Vanessa Matt

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Case Study: Vanessa Mattison

"A good education is like growing, expanding your mind and your views."

Vanessa Mattison[1] is 17 years old and European American, and her family has been in the United States for generations. Vanessa lives in a small, rural hill town in western New England, but she has had a number of experiences that have helped make her far more worldly than others in her circumstances. By 17, she had traveled to Africa, the Caribbean, and Mexico. Her travels opened her eyes to some of the realities beyond Welborn Hills, the town where she lives.

Welborn Hills is a small community made up of several diverse groups of people: farming families, who have lived in the area for generations; more educated and liberal families who have come from urban areas; and working-class families, who make their living in the retail and light industry of the surrounding towns and small cities. Although Vanessa's family does not fit neatly into any category, it is probably closest to the second group. For example, they read not only *Newsweek* but also *Greenpeace;* they are vegetarians; they listen to Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, and reggae and blues music; and they have traveled from time to time. A number of the other families from Welborn Hills routinely travel outside the United States, but others have never even been to Boston or New York, both just a few hours away by car. In the town's only elementary school, as well as in the regional secondary school that the town's students attend, the class conflict between the more liberal and educated families and the families that have lived here for generations is almost palpable.

Only a tiny minority of the residents of Welborn Hills are people of color. The same is true of Hills Regional High School, a grades 7 to 12 school with a population of approximately 700 students, which serves a number of rural towns including Welborn Hills. For many of the European American students, access to understanding cultural differences and to meeting and being friends with people different from themselves depends on class and educational privilege. Only students who have had the privilege of traveling—as Vanessa has—have any inkling of the influence of racism or cultural differences on those different from themselves. Both their social class background and rural, White New England culture have influenced their perceptions of people of other cultures.

Currently taking classes in Spanish, calculus, sociology, humanities, art, and "contemporary problems," Vanessa is in an academic track. She is looking forward to being the first in her family to go to college and is successful and engaged in school. She is socially active, involved in sports, and quite self-confident and open to new ideas. She has many friends, both male and female, from a variety of cultural backgrounds. She enjoys spending time with her friends and describes a good time as laughing and talking with them. Very soft-spoken and thoughtful in all her replies, Vanessa has deeply held beliefs about the value of all people, peace, social justice, and environmental issues.

At present, there are just three people at home: Vanessa and her parents. Her sister, age 21, lives in a nearby town. Her father, who was raised in this

area, is a craftsperson; her mother is a paralegal. Although both parents finished high school, neither went to college. Vanessa sees her family as different from others because her parents are still together and everyone is happy and gets along. She takes pride in the fact that her parents stand up for what they believe in. At the time she was interviewed, their courage of conviction was taking the shape of protest against the Gulf War, which had just begun. Vanessa and her family live in a modest home and are economically lower middle class. She works after school in a local store.

Having never needed to identify ethnically or racially because she has always been considered the "norm," it became clear from the outset that Vanessa was embarrassed and uncomfortable with the issue of self-identification and culture. In spite of her probable greater awareness of culture and cultural differences than the majority of her peers, it nevertheless was a difficult issue for her. She did want to grapple with it, however. In fact, she agreed to be interviewed precisely because the project sounded "interesting and important," and she made time for it in her busy schedule. Discomfort with issues of cultural, racial, and linguistic differences is the major theme that emerged with Vanessa. The other issues focused on the promise, sometimes unfulfilled, of education and on what teachers can do to make school more fun for students.

The Discomfort of Differences

[*How do you describe yourself?*]: I generally don't. . . . Wait, can you explain that? Like, what do you want to know?

Well, I would [describe myself as White], but it doesn't matter to me, so that's why I said it's a tough question. 'Cause I usually just describe myself as like what I believe in or something like that. Rather than like what culture I am, whether I'm Black or White. 'Cause that doesn't matter.

[I'm]. . . well, Scottish, French, and German, I guess. My family all speak English at home, though I'm taking Spanish. I guess I'm middle class or lower class. It depends on how you think of it. I guess the German part might have come in the twentieth century. I'm not really sure, that's just a general guess. . . . I wasn't really interested. I don't really know if we have that many connections back to who was where when and what happened.

I don't have any [religious beliefs]. I've never gone to church. We never like read the Bible as a family or anything. I think both of my parents used to go to church. I think they were Catholic. . . . They probably didn't think it was as important to their life as the people who had wanted them to go. . . . I don't really know much about it. But if I had a choice, I probably wouldn't want to go to church because I think that I'd rather formulate my own ideas than being told that the earth was created in seven days and God did this and He did this. I don't know, He seems like just too almighty of a person to me. I just don't believe it.

I guess obviously I just made it seem like [culture] wasn't [important]. It's just that like all the stuff that's happened to people because of their culture, like the slaves and Jewish people. Culture, what you look like, whether you're

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Black or White could matter less to me. It's the person who you are. . . it's not what your appearance depicts.

The American society has always been. . . you had more opportunities and stuff. But I don't really see that as good 'cause it's not fair. You have more opportunities and just more of an equal chance. But I guess "equal" can't really be used there. Less of a struggle.

I don't think it's fair. I don't think that one person should have an easier time just because of the color of their skin, or their race, or 'cause they belong to a particular church or something.

People like Blacks still don't have as many rights as the White man. I'm saying "man" because women don't have their rights either. The "superiority game. . . " 'Cause people just have it stuck in their head that that's the way it is and. . . I don't really know how to change it. I try and change it, speak out against it.

[Other cultures] are not that well represented [in my school] because there's not that many people who live around here. The majority is probably White. But they're represented in a small margin. . . . We've read books and we've seen movies. I think we saw part of the freedom marches in the South and stuff like that. And we saw *Gandhi,* although that isn't really to this culture.

Each of us that go there is important to our school because it adds what you could say would be a *culture.* Just like our community, the school community. . . . Well, I guess people's backgrounds *do* [matter] because that's what makes them what they are.

[Culture] is like a conglomeration of language, the way you speak, the way you are. . . things that are important to you. . . . Well, the culture of the United States is kind of like norms, things that happen a lot. Like if you were to go to another country, it might strike you as weird because you don't do it at home that way.

Well, people in Central Africa, if you go into a store you need to say "hi" to the person who's working there and acknowledge them. Because if you don't acknowledge them, they're not going to acknowledge you and they won't help you, and that's really important to them. . . . Like when a woman has a child, they go off with their mother and their aunts and their sisters and stay with them for three months to start to raise the child. Which I don't know if I completely agree with, because it leaves the husband away and detaches him at the very start.

In Mexico, I was in a really big city, quite the change. There's lots of rules there about what women can wear. I know at one time, they couldn't wear shorts. I don't really think that's true anymore. It was weird. . . . The way people did things was really different. . . . Like in Central Africa, people sweep their houses and their yards every day, but then they'll just throw their junk right off the edge of their property. Which here, it's a little bit more discreet because you throw it at the dump.

I don't agree with a lot of our culture. I don't agree with how it's so rushed and how if you're Black, you're supposedly not as good or you're not as fit for the job or something like that. And if you're a woman, it's the same

thing. And like you can't be gay without being put down. I don't know, there's all these underlying rules about if you're not this, you can't do that.

It seems weird. . . because people came over from Europe, and they wanted to get away from all the stuff that was over there. And then they came here and set up all the stuff like slavery, and I don't know, it seems the opposite of what they would have done. It was probably like burned into their head already from where they were: If you were lower class, then you usually weren't taught to read or educated. . . . They might not have come over thinking that's what they had in mind, but since that's what they had always known, that's what they did.

When I see racism, I often think that I wish I was Black or I wish I was the group that was being discriminated against. You know how some women say, "I hate men"? I don't know, but I'm sure that Black people said this, when they were slaves, like "I hate White people." I don't want to be thought of like that because I'm not against them. I think they're equal. And also after they've been put through so much awfulness, I think that every White person should be in their shoes.

Like [President] Bush says in his speech a little while ago that "We're doing all we can to fight racism" and blah, blah, blah, when the Supreme Court just made the ruling about schools and busing, which was basically turning back a decision they had made a long time ago.

When I was in second grade, there was somebody coming into our class who was going to be Black. He was like a new student and somebody said something about it, and me and a couple of my other friends got really mad at him. "It doesn't matter what color they are. They could be orange or yellow or brown. It doesn't matter, they're just a person."

For strength and inspiration, I usually look to Martin Luther King, Jr.

I like Gandhi too, because I believe in nonviolence. And I believe they helped to strengthen the basis for my belief and they gave specific examples of how it could work. I just believe in nonviolence as a way to get what you want and peace. I don't believe if you punch somebody, then, yeah, they may do what you want them to do, but they're not going to be doing it because they want to. They're just going to be doing it because of fear. I don't think fear is a good policy.

Education and Values

Supposedly education is what this country is built on, but there's no money for it.

Money is being cut out of all the schools. We lost a bunch of programs. We don't have as many teachers. We're going to lose more money, and it seems like the government's always promoting it as this great big deal. Then, where's the money for it? They're not supporting it. . . . They still have, for seventh and eighth grade, sewing and cooking and art. Music is still there, and sports was supported by the public this year through bottle drives and a

big fund-fest. I don't know what supported.

[My parents] feel the same help and that it's sad that it's go to learn. Because they want me as I said before, get locked in a

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[My parents] feel the same way, that the government needs to step in and help and that it's sad that it's going downhill. I think they think it's important to learn. Because they want me to be able to do what I want to do, and not, as I said before, get locked in a corner.

I've learned a lot of my morals [from my parents], like nonviolence and expressing myself, and striving for what I want, being able to have the confidence to reach what I want.

They're caring and they're willing to go against the norm. They're willing to protest, that's a good word for it, for what they believe in.

I think [Dad] values being able to survive on his own. Like moving away from your family and growing up and having your own job and supporting yourself and being able to get around, and not always having to have people do things for you. . . . He's fun and supportive.

[Mom] also strives for what her goals are and believes in self-support, working for what's yours.

[I would like] a little less pressure. . . like around college and school.

It's not a broken-up family. My parents are together and they're happy and there isn't any fighting. Everybody gets along. A lot of my friends [are from divorced families]. There's a lot of support that I don't see in other families. . . . We don't always go with the flow. You know, like most people supposedly right now are for the Gulf War. We're not, so we stand in the minority. . . . I personally don't believe in violence to solve things. I don't think that killing a zillion million people for oil is a good reason either. And you can't bring peace to somewhere that's not your culture and has a different government, and you especially can't do it through war. That's not going to solve things. And it would take a lot of talking and rearranging their entire society to get them to be like us, which I don't think is what they should be, 'cause they're not and they never have been and probably won't be. . . . People drive by the [peace] vigils and give us the finger.

[My parents want me to go to school] so I can be educated and get a job. So I can have options and not get stuck. . . . Probably because they didn't go to college and they'd like me to. That's just a guess.

[I want to] go to college to help people. I want to be a psychologist or do social work, work with the environment. I'm not sure. . . . There's a guidance counselor, but my parents have done more of that with college. I'm not sure what help I need.

I guess [grades are important] because they've kind of become that way. Once you get into the cycle of being in one place, you kind of stay there. . . . I think education is if you learn *personally*. That's not what the school thinks. It's not like if you get an A or an F, but if you learn. It's not just for the grades. . . . If I get grades that aren't real good, [my parents] are not real excited. And they always make sure that I'm doing my homework. They tell me to get off the phone.

I'm happy. Success is being happy to me, it's not like having a job that gives you a zillion dollars. It's just having self-happiness.

A good education is like when you personally learn something. . . like growing, expanding your mind and your views.

Making School More Fun

[In elementary school I liked] recess, 'cause it was a break between doing stuff. Everything wasn't just pushed at you. And art, which was really fun. . . . It was a safe place and I liked the teachers and the people that went there. . . . I liked that on Valentine's Day and Christmas and birthdays they had [parties] for us. They mixed school and fun.

I did the work, I understood it, and I was interested.

My favorite [subject] is art because of the freedom to express myself, to paint and draw. Humanities is my worst 'cause it's just lectures and tests.

I play field hockey and I've done track and I've done tennis, because it's a way of releasing energy and feeling good about yourself and being in shape. And working with other people. . . . I play sports and I'm in a peer education group. It's a group of 18 seniors who set up programs to educate the other students in the school on issues like alcoholism, drunk driving, stereotyping, a bunch more. It's kind of like, since they're students and they're projecting to a student audience, it's easier for some people to relate.

We did a skit on [stereotyping]. We had jocks, hippies, snobs, burnouts, and a nerd. And we did these little scenarios like the snob liked this guy who was a hippie and all her friends were like, "Oh, my God! You like *him*?! He's such a hippie!" And then like the hippie friends said the same thing about the snob, and then like everything stopped and the two people who liked each other got up and said, "I wish my friends would understand. . . ." And then the person who was narrating said, "Well, here's one way in which the situation could be fixed." So they went back where they were and said, "Okay, yeah, well, I guess we should give them a chance." Most of the ideas came from us except for the one I just explained to you. Me and two other people basically wrote the whole skit. We just did it for the seventh and eighth grade. We thought that would be the most effective place 'cause that's where it basically starts. They liked it.

It's important for teachers to get to know all the students and know where they're coming from and why they may react a certain way to certain things because then it'll be easier to get through. And there won't be as many barriers because they'll already know. . . . Maybe if school didn't just start off on the first day with homework, maybe if it started off with just getting to know each other, even if you're in a class that's already known each other.

Have games, more free time. . . . You could have games that could teach anything that they're trying to teach through notes or lectures. Well, like if you're doing Spanish, you can play hangman or something. You can play word games where you have to guess the word. Like they give you a defini-

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Make it more entertaining 'cause people learn a lot from entertainment. If you see a play, you'll probably remember it more than a lecture, if you see a movie, play a game, or something. Work those more into what they're doing. . . . I think that some books should be required just to show some points of view.

Some [teachers], based on [students'] reputation, may not be as patient with some people. [Students get reputations] basically through grades and troublemaking, like if you get in trouble with the system and get detentions.

[Unhelpful teachers are] ones that just kind of just move really fast, just trying to get across to you what they're trying to teach you. Not willing to slow down because they need to get in what they want to get in.

[Most teachers] are really caring and supportive and are willing to share their lives and are willing to listen to mine. They don't just want to talk about what they're teaching you; they also want to know you.

COMMENTARY

Coming face-to-face with racial, class, cultural, and other differences was difficult for Vanessa because she had not often needed to consider these things. One gets the sense that for her, "culture," "ethnicity," and "race" are what *other* people have and Vanessa sometimes seemed offended at having to talk about them. It was almost as if it were rude to broach questions of race and culture, that discussing them meant you were a racist. In this, Vanessa is similar to other young people of European descent: In one study assessing the salience of identity for young people of various backgrounds, the researcher found that most African American, Mexican American, and Asian American youngsters rated ethnicity as important to their identity, but only one quarter of White students did.[2]

Vanessa took the approach that cultural and racial differences are not significant, that it "couldn't matter less to me." In this, she is simply reflecting the value of being color-blind, which we all have been led to believe is both right and fair. In this framework, differences are seen as a *deficit* rather than as an *asset*.[3] Being White and Christian, she rarely has been confronted with her cultural identity. She considers herself the "norm," "just a person." As is the case for most White Americans, she has the privilege of seeing herself as just an individual, an opportunity not generally afforded to those from dominated groups.

Because Vanessa, as well as others from dominant (and dominating) groups, associates culture, race, and other differences with oppression and inequality, the subject becomes difficult to address. For one, she sees cultural and other differences as *causing* oppression ("like all the stuff that happened to people because of their culture, like the slaves and the Jewish people"). For another, she is offended by the unfairness with which differences are treated: The fact that some people are penalized for being who they are, while others are rewarded for it, makes it difficult for her to confront differences.[4] Not wanting

to benefit from racism, Vanessa finds it easier to avoid or downplay the issue. Her growing awareness of sexism, revealed through comments such as, "I'm saying 'man' 'cause women don't have their rights either" may help her make the connection between the two issues.[5]

Vanessa is struggling to understand the contradictions between the ideals she has been taught and the discrimination she sees around her. She is beginning to forge links among issues such as peace, social justice, and racism and other biases. Although she associates herself with her race only when confronted with the example of other White people being racist, it is at such times that Vanessa sees clearly the need for Whites to stand up and take responsibility. She also understands that being White means having more opportunities, which she resents as unfair.

Through dialogue with Vanessa, it became clear that few of these issues have ever been addressed in any of her classes. When asked if she learns history and other subject matter in school from the perspectives of different groups of people, she answered that everything was taught from what she called "a general perspective." Because the viewpoints of others are invisible in the curriculum, students begin to think of the one reality that is taught as the "general" reality, whereas the experiences of others become little more than ethnic add-ons to "real" knowledge.

In spite of her lack of awareness of diverse perspectives, Vanessa is becoming keenly aware of and committed to social issues. For example, she says that she speaks out against discriminatory statements and in that way tries to change things. This quality was already apparent in second grade. Even in that incident, however, she and her friends thought that by *overlooking* racial differences, they would be helping the new boy in class. Being color-blind was, in their understanding, the moral imperative.

Vanessa is quite involved in a peer education group and has taken the issues of drug abuse, alcoholism, and others seriously. To make the skits they developed for young audiences more accessible to their experiences, they centered on social class types in the school (e.g., "nerds," "hippies") rather than race or culture.

Vanessa believes that education should be a major priority in our society if we want to give all students an equal education; yet she is aware that the societal commitment simply is not there. The promise of education for advancement and rewards is important but "not as important as society makes out," she is quick to add. "They want me to go and I have to," she says, supporting the idea that although education is compulsory it often is not engaging. Related to the value of education are the other values that Vanessa has learned from her parents: self-reliance, self-confidence, and independent thought. These values obviously have helped her develop her own persona in a school setting that may be both conformist and conservative.

The role that her parents play in supporting her personal choices and her academic success is very clear. Vanessa's parents value education beyond high school for their daughter, understanding very well that it will give her options they themselves did not have. They are involved in school activities (her mother

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became clear that few of these issues
classes. When asked if she learns his-
om the perspectives of different groups
g was taught from what she called "a
ɔoints of others are invisible in the cur-
ıe reality that is taught as the "general"
rs become little more than ethnic add-

liverse perspectives, Vanessa is becom-
ɔcial issues. For example, she says that
:ements and in that way tries to change
nt in second grade. Even in that inci-
ıght that by *overlooking* racial differ-
ɔoy in class. Being color-blind was, in
e.

ducation group and has taken the issues
ɔusly. To make the skits they developed
eir experiences, they centered on social
ippies") rather than race or culture.
uld be a major priority in our society if
ucation; yet she is aware that the soci-
ıe promise of education for advance-
s important as society makes out," she
ıd I have to," she says, supporting the
ɔry it often is not engaging. Related to
ıes that Vanessa has learned from her
ıd independent thought. These values
own persona in a school setting that
e.

ɔporting her personal choices and her
s parents value education beyond high
very well that it will give her options
volved in school activities (her mother

served on the local school committee, and both parents have volunteered time to the schools) and have demonstrated their concerns in many other ways as well. Their involvement, in Vanessa's words, "shows that they care."

Vanessa sees education as crucial, but she is not getting as much out of it as she thinks she should. She wishes it were more interesting and interactive. Her perceptions on the boring and "flat" nature of schooling, especially at the secondary level, corroborate what has been found concerning many schools around the United States,[6] and her suggestions for teachers emphasize making school more entertaining and fun for all students. She is particularly concerned about students who want to drop out because they feel so disconnected from school. In relation to this, Vanessa also suggests that clubs, sports, and other activities be continued. She is dismayed that so many of these activities have been removed because of budgetary constraints. In her own case, involvement in a school club and in several sports, as well as her part-time job, seems to have helped her develop in more than just academic ways.

A strong and forthright young woman with deeply held values and beliefs, Vanessa Mattison views education as a vital part of every person's growth and development. Although still uncomfortable with issues of diversity in any comprehensive way, she is committed to struggling with them. The interviews themselves seemed to have served as a catalyst to her thinking more extensively about diversity, racism, and identity. For example, after thinking about how *unimportant* race and culture are to her, she quietly admitted, "Well, I guess people's backgrounds *do* [matter] because that's what makes them what they are." Given the strength and support of her family, her searching soul, and her grounding in peace and social justice, she is a wonderful example of a young person ready to, in her words, "expand my mind and my views."

TO THINK ABOUT

1. Why do you think that White people in the United States in general do not identify with any particular racial or ethnic group? Who might be exceptions?
2. What kinds of school experiences might have made Vanessa more comfortable with diversity?
3. As a teacher, what is your responsibility in introducing your students to diversity? What strategies and activities might you use? How would these differ in a primarily White school from a more culturally and racially heterogeneous school?
4. What is the role of values in education? Should schools teach values? Why or why not? Would some of the values that Vanessa's family believes be included? Why or why not?
5. Vanessa gave several suggestions to make school more entertaining and fun. What do you think of these? Do they contradict the purpose of school?
6. In a group, develop suggestions for teachers that would make school more interesting and engaging for students. Focus on a particular grade level and subject area.