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Beyond Identity Politics
RADICAL TEACHER

A High School Class on Race and Racism

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For most people, "Cambridge, Massachusetts" conjures up images of world-class universities and, more recently, through-the-roof housing prices. But Cambridge Rindge and Latin (CRLS), the city's only public high school, located only three blocks from Harvard Yard, represents an entirely different segment of Cambridge life. The school, of approximately 1850 students in 2003, is home to a remarkable economic, racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity-42.3% Black, 33.7% white, 15.1% Latino, and 8.4% Asian-American¹; 30% low-income²; approximately 60 different home languages. The Cambridge area hosts an impressive array of private (and parochial) schools and very few Cambridge resident Harvard and MIT professors send their children to CRLS.

I have taught a course on Race and Racism at the high school three times, most recently in the fall of 2002. Normally, I teach race studies, multiculturalism, and moral philosophy at UMass/Boston. I have no training as a high school teacher, but because my children attend(ed) the high school, and through a quirky set of circumstances, I ended up with my own class there in spring, 1999. I was curious whether high school students would be willing to discuss racial issues in an open and honest way across racial and ethnic boundaries-an endeavor that, in my experience, most college students, and adults as well, find quite difficult. I hoped to be able to create a comfortable and trusting atmosphere that, leavened with a bit of humor, would facilitate this goal. And, indeed, I found high school students extremely, even dauntingly, open with their views and feelings about race and racism, and anything else for that matter. I do not want to generalize beyond my limited experience; but I have found that my students are grateful for an opportunity to discuss, explore, and learn about race-related matters; that they are very interested in each others' opinions, especially though not only across racial and ethnic lines; and that Black and Latino students will express themselves more freely in a class in which they are the majority than they report doing in other enriched and advanced classes in which they are less than about 20%.

I will discuss the course and the class in more detail, but want to situate my experience within wider currents of educational reform that have been playing out in Cambridge and the nation. The racial "achievement gap" has lately come onto the national screen in the past few years. Whites and Asians out-perform Blacks and Latinos in school, to a significant and troubling extent. The literature on this phenomenon is vast. Popular theories among conservatives and traditional liberals are that Black kids castigate high achievers as "acting white."³ Race liberals and radicals tend to favor Claude Steele's "stereotype threat" hypothesis, according to which Black students capable of high achievement fail because their fear of confirming what they rightly recognize to be a culturally salient stereotype of Blacks as low achievers leads them to become rattled in test situations, and so to underperform.⁴

The achievement gap shows up between different kinds of schools-roughly, suburban white and urban Black and Latino schools-and within mixed schools as well. In discussions in my UMass education classes, I find that students who have not studied the issue think the gap is primarily a matter of class-urban students don't do as well because their economic circumstances hinder them in various ways. But class can not be the only factor, since the racial gap exists within the same income groups too, and is in fact greater among upper-middle-class than working-class whites and Blacks, though it is not as great as when both middle-class whites and Asians are compared to working-class and poor Blacks and Latinos.

In recent years, the racial achievement gap has become much discussed at CRLS.⁵ The school has a sizable white working-class population, generally of Portuguese origin (often fairly recent immigrants), as well as Irish and Italian, along with a larger white middle-class group. There are middle-class Black and Latinos as well, although they are a small percentage of those respective groups. As far as I know, achievement measures are not generally broken down by class, and discussion in settings in which I have been present often conflate class with race.

The Advanced Placement (AP) classes are a major, particularly visible locus of the achievement issue at the high school. Nationally, in recent years, these classes have become increasingly important as indicators of both school reputation and student college admissions cachet. Hence they are seen as the site of "excellent education." These classes tend, at CRLS, to be about 80-90% white and Asian, although in recent years there has been a concerted effort, partly successful, to bring more Black and Latino students into some AP subjects, and to offer more sections of them. At the outset of the course, seven (of sixteen present) of my students cited the lack of "minority" kids in AP classes as "the major racial issue in the school." ("Minority" is the term of choice, both officially and by self-attribution, for all non-white students. More on this below.)

The achievement gap has also become an integral part of white parent community discourse in Cambridge in the past five years or so, though sometimes in indirect ways. A popular theme among those who see the gap as morally and politically unacceptable is the "two communities" narrative. This narrative assumes that prior to the reform efforts that began at the school in the late '90s to create more heterogeneously grouped classes, the school was doing a very good job of serving one "community"-middle-class whites-but a poor job of serving another "community," working-class Blacks and Latinos. (The absence, noted above, of working-class whites in this conversation-as well as at the parent meetings where these issues have been discussed-is striking.)

The "two communities" narrative is, nevertheless, preferable to the way achievement issues are more frequently framed in parent meetings at the school. For as long as I can remember, those meetings have been completely dominated by professional, educated whites, who generally comprise 90% of those in attendance.⁶ In these meetings, children committed to learning (who are virtually always the children of the parents in attendance) are contrasted with those who are not; the former are "held back" and "bored" because of the latter. This is the main complaint about the heterogeneous classes, and it is a constant refrain among white, educated parents. This discourse is almost never explicitly racialized, but for the most part, the serious, hard-working kids are taken to be white and the others Black and Latino; everyone knows this reference, but no one explicitly mentions it. By contrast, the "two communities" discourse mentioned earlier tends to explicitly bring out the racial dimension of the "well-served" and the "poorly served."

The issue of heterogeneous grouping is indeed a complex one. While some research supports the general notion that heterogeneity benefits the lower effort group without harming the higher effort group, many committed teachers at the school clearly feel that they themselves are able to do a better job in more homogeneous classrooms (at whatever level), and the experience of the class moving too slow is an all too real one for many high achieving students.⁷ I feel somewhat conflicted about the issue in general, and the achievement gap it is meant to address is a very serious educational concern about which social, political, and economic reform is clearly essential along with multi-faceted educational, communal, and familial initiatives. I can only say that in my own class, students of different racial and ethnic backgrounds, and spanning a range of high and low effort and previous achievement, learned a good deal from each other in a way that neither the "two communities" nor the "my kid is bored" narratives expresses. My class contained students who went on to Yale, and others to community college, or no college at all (at least in the year after high school). In a range of subjects such as literature, social studies, and arts, in which different backgrounds tend to ground different experiences, sensibilities, perspectives, and opinions, the Yale-bound students had a good deal to learn from the community college bound (and vice versa); parents of the former who prefer, or do not mind, their children attending the bulk of their classes with students of a similar background are missing an important dimension of formal and informal education their students can be having in more mixed classes.

Let me illustrate with just one fairly typical class discussion. We had read an article about three girls of different races who were friends in junior high but started drifting apart in high school.⁸ This led to a discussion of social separation by race and also about kids acting in ways associated with racial groups other than their own, especially white kids "acting Black" and Black kids "acting white." (Later, we questioned this way of talking.) Here is some of the conversation⁹:

Lauren (white): It isn't that white kids really like different kinds of parties than Black kids; but they are expected to like that kind of party, so they are told who they should hang out with.

Grace (Black): If someone [Black] comes down on you for "acting white," you can just ignore that if you are comfortable with yourself.

Angela (Black): I went to Boston public schools until the 5th grade. When I came to Cambridge was the first time I was told I was "acting white." I knew what I was [i.e., Black]; I had been that way for 11 years, [class laughs]

DeAnna (Black): It is easier for a white kid to hang out with Blacks if he doesn't act Black; same for Blacks with whites...Black kids who act white aren't as accepted by other Black kids; like if they speak proper English.¹⁰

Waheed (Middle Eastern): Sometimes people just unconsciously talk the way the people around them are talking, not because they are consciously trying to get in with that group. My father is Iraqi and when he is with other Iraqis he goes into this heavy Arabic accent; I can't even understand him. It isn't a conscious thing.

Angela (Black): The first time I saw Lauren in 10th grade, she looked white but she acted Black. [Lauren blushes.]

Jeanie (Black) (affably says that Angela shouldn't run Lauren down [although Angela was actually praising Lauren].)

Efriem (Black): A lot of time, a person who is acting a certain way is only trying to make sure the other group understands him; he isn't trying to be a certain way [i.e., not trying to get in with that group].

Grace (Black): I think Blacks sometimes feel that whites are taking their culture away, when they act Black.

(I suggest that white kids "acting Black" is a sign of the power and influence of Black culture.)

Lashawna (Black): I see whites acting Black not as influencing but mocking. Like when we read about Native American team names ("Braves," "Chiefs") at the beginning of the course. Native Americans were insulted, but the people who made up the names thought they were fine or even flattering.

Jeanie (Black): Like Justin Timberlake of N'Sync putting Black females in his videos. That isn't Black culture influencing anything; it's whites ripping off Black culture to make money.

Carl (white): mutters [but I make him say it out loud] that White people have to steal other peoples culture, because they don't have any of their own.)

It is fascinating to see the Black students struggling with these issues and coming up with such divergent views. They are trying to analyze their own practices of inclusion and exclusion, with value judgments about those practices hovering close by. The white students are as well. All are speaking from a distinct, race-related experience, though their resultant opinions are quite diverse. This sort of discussion is very unlikely to take place in die kind of classes the white educated parents envision, and both the white and the Black and Latino students, indeed all students, thereby miss an intellectually enriching experience.¹¹

I see my course as engaging with the achievement gap issue in that I do not want the course to be yet another advanced level class for white and Asian students. The school allows me to do some picking and choosing among the students who sign up above the 20 student limit, and I try, as I say in the course description, for a class that mirrors the racial demography of the school. (In 2002, I had nine Black students, six whites, three Latino/ Hispanics, one "Middle Eastern" (Iraqi/Iranian), and one Indian Muslim.¹²) Not all the students who end up in the class are totally committed to the subject matter. Some are simply looking for a one-semester elective, or to find something that fits their schedule. A few are attracted to the "UMass" designation in the full catalog title of the course. Some are steered by a guidance counselor or teacher who thinks the experience would be good for them.

I have at least four goals for the class. The main one is to offer an academically enriched course for minority students in a setting in which they are the majority of the class. The main reading for the course is college level work on race (drawn from my college class of the same tide), requiring a level of conceptual sophistication some students have to struggle to take on.¹³ (See sample readings at the end of the article.) Of course, not every student identifies with the "minority" label in a way that provides an identification across non-white racial and ethnic groups; perhaps some Latino students, for example, feel as uncomfortable in my class as they do in a class of almost all white students. But the discourse of "minority" is so strong in the school that I doubt most of them experience it this way. From conversations with students and teachers at the school, I had the impression that the Black students, who are generally 40-45% of the class, are infrequently in so demanding a class in which they comprise anything like that percentage.¹⁴ I see this as my small contribution to closing the achievement gap.

Second, I want white students to have an experience of an academically challenging class in which they are a minority, partly so that they will empathize with the comparable situation of students of color in their AP classes (although some of the white students are not in AP classes), and partly so that they will have an experience of seeing the diversity of opinion within the minority, especially Black, group. Third, I want all the students to come to recognize that racial issues are a matter of serious academic study, not only of something personally or emotionally important. Finally, I want to help validate the experiences of discrimination, stereotyping, and stigmatization that the students of color may have experienced, in the wider society and possibly in the school.

Much of the course work is historical-what in contemporary academic parlance would be called "the historical construction of race." We look at slavery and the slave trade, the displacement and killing of Native peoples, and the progressive formation of the idea of "race" from the 16th until the 19th century. We look at slavery in the Caribbean and in Spanish/Portuguese America, as well as in North America, partly to broaden the view of slavery of the students, whose paradigm, unsurprisingly, is the Southern U.S. plantation system, and partly to study the contrasting systems of racial and phenotypic classification that grew up under different forms of slavery and European domination in Latin America, the Caribbean, and the U.S. I try to dislodge the sense of naturalness and inevitability accompanying my (non-Latin-American) students' use of racial categories in application to themselves and to society more generally.

This fairly sophisticated educational goal plays differently with different students. For example, in the middle of a unit emphasizing how Latin Americans do not think of race in terms of a "Black/white" binary and are less focused on racial

classifications than US Americans, Parris, a Black student, turned to Juan, an Hispanic student, and said, "Yeah, that's what I want to know. Are you guys Black, or white, or what?" By contrast, Efriem, a student of Ethiopian parents, told me in a follow-up interview I did with him after the course was over, in answer to the question "Can you say more about what you got out of the class?": "The fact that race was created, to learn that it is not inevitable or that it might not have been...When I participate in class where I hear people saying race is inevitable, I say no, and I am more confident about it." And Lauten, a white student involved in anti-racist political activity, said that a main thing she learned in the course was that "to get rid of racism, we have to get rid of the idea of race. Before, I had believed in race but just thought we had to get rid of racism."

The historical material continually spills over into the present, and that is fine with me. Also, throughout the historical part of the course, the students do personal journals on any topic related to race. One Black boy described his and a white friend's attempt to get a job at a local art cinema, and wanted to know if I thought he had been discriminated against when the friend was offered a job and he wasn't. A white (but not particularly "white looking") working-class Portuguese-American girl talked about interracial relationships, decrying the narrow-mindedness of some of her friends, and her family, on this matter. A very racially conscious Black girl went into painful detail about the steps involved in Black females' straightening their hair. Her entry had the spirit both of informing me about something she thought I as a white male should know and probably didn't, and also expressing a combination of sympathy for and outrage toward females who undergo this process.

In addition, twice I asked the students to write about a "racial incident" they had witnessed or had been a party to. We then talked about these incidents in class (with the identities of the students hidden). A particularly interesting one was supplied by Efriem, a Black student with Ethiopian parents. He was visiting in a town in New Hampshire and entered a convenience store carrying a drink (of a type not sold in that store), looking for an item he couldn't find. The store manager followed him closely and questioned him about his drink; and Efriem was sure he was being racially profiled. The class took up the question of whether the profiling had age and attire dimensions, and some white students said that white high school students, especially if they dress in a manner associated with Black students, are also given tighter security scrutiny. Some students saw that this was itself a form of race-related profiling, although some of the non-Black (not only white, in this case) students had seen it as a non-racial form of profiling. Also, Efriem suggested that the incident was in part his own fault, for bringing the drink into the store in the first place. No other Black student would go down that particular path with him. Also, the students generally had no clear take on how to respond, how to take some kind of constructive anti-racist action, in this kind of situation, for example, by challenging the manager, or raising the issue with him without implying that he was necessarily guilty of any wrong-doing.

Later in the semester, we discuss contemporary racial issues-general issues in society, and issues as they arose in the school. Also, I break the students up into racially diverse "project groups," and each group researches a topic and makes a presentation at the end of the course. The topics in 2002 were comparative slave systems, academic segregation by race at the high school (i.e., the achievement gap in the context of AP classes), social segregation by race at the high school, racial profiling at the school and in the Cambridge community, and mixed race identity.

We spent two classes on the achievement gap itself, in addition to the group presentation. For the class discussion we had read an article about a high school in Denver with a similar racial make-up to CRLS, at which (the article claimed) the guidance counselors had steered minority students away from AP classes independent of the particular student's potential.¹⁵ In our class discussion, my students had a range of perspectives on this issue. Waheed said that at CRLS students are not discouraged from taking advanced courses. Parris said the racial tracking was the same at CRLS, only they are not open about it. (In a comparable discussion in a previous year's class, the students were much more critical of the guidance counselors for steering minority students away from the AP classes.) Jeanie, a Black student, said that students get used to lower expectations being held of them, so they are not comfortable with the high demands of the AP classes. In a later class, Jeanie went into more detail about her personal experience of this. She said she had essentially been forced, by one of her history teachers and her guidance counselor, to take an AP History class; they would not sign off on her schedule unless she agreed to sign up for that course. She said she had never taken a class that was so hard, and she just wasn't accustomed to working that hard for a course.¹⁶ Jeanie said she was not sure that she is glad she did take the class, since she thinks she would have gotten a higher grade in a non-AP class. Angela dissented from this view and said that the AP classes were manageable, that you had to push yourself a bit harder than in the other classes, but that it could be done.

Some version of Jeanie's remarks was echoed by two other Black students in my follow-up interviews. Parris, a Haitian-American, said: "there are not enough Black kids who work hard. I'm not saying I'm smart, but I work hard. There are not enough Black kids who work hard. For some reason, we don't work hard enough. That's why my mother thinks African-Americans are lazy." Efriem, an African immigrant Black student, said: "I would say it goes back to elementary school. The Black kids are not pushed to do that well; they don't get pushed by their parents in the same way as a lot of white kids are. By the time you get to high school you haven't had that kind of encouragement and so it is hard to do when you are a junior, to all of a sudden challenge yourself like that."

The view that minority kids did not work as hard as white kids was expressed in some form by several of the students. One white student wrote in a journal, "I don't mean to sound racist, but from what I've seen there is a large majority of minorities that don't care how they do in school." None expressed the idea that Black kids are discouraged from achieving by being said to "act white" if they are successful. However, two students mentioned a revealing twist on this idea. One Black student wrote in a

journal: "I've noticed that people have formed stereotypes about people who are in AP classes. They think that they are all just smart snobby white kids, and some Black students in AP classes don't like to say that they are in the class because they don't want to be considered as 'AP' kids. It's almost as if they are embarrassed." A white student reported that students of color in AP classes do not identify themselves as "AP kids" and do not identify with the white students in those classes. Neither student suggested that students of color actually felt discouraged from signing up for these courses by the image they had of the canonical student in them, but it seems a plausible inference.

Clearly we are hearing here some age-old stereotypes of Blacks as lazy, as well as familiar and unfortunate distancing of immigrant Blacks from African Americans.¹⁷ Later discussions and a final project about stereotypes gave the students and me an opportunity to challenge some of those stereotypes, as well as stereotyping in general. Certainly teachers' expectations also play a significant role in minority achievement, and I hoped in my own class to create a culture of demand and achievement that applied to all students alike. At the same time, unequal academic effort among different racial groups is not a mere figment of a stereotypical imagination; clearly it exists and is one contributing factor to the achievement gap. The current school administration is attempting to break the sense that this unequal effort and achievement are inevitable. Although I sometimes worry that a constant harping on the gap will subtly reinforce the idea that it is inevitable, it seems clear that recognizing the gap is a first step toward dealing with it constructively. The administration and some community groups promote events and groups targeted to Black and Latino youth that aim to encourage achievement; Parris described one such event to me in his interview, and it sounded very constructive. I also heard, more recently, that a Latino student, involved in orientation for incoming 9th graders, challenged Latino and Black students to make sure that the AP classes offered when they became juniors do not have as few of their groups as his own current AP classes did.

In my post-course interviews with seven students, three of the five students of color talked about their own experiences in AP classes that shed light both on their experience in my class, and possibly on issues related to the achievement gap. They all said that they were aware of the very small number of minority kids—from three to five in a class of approximately 25—in those classes, and this inhibited them from speaking in the class. (At CRLS, most of these students' other classes would have had a minority of white students.) Efriem said: "I always felt like every time I spoke, people were seeing me as an example of other Blacks. I always felt like I had to represent our people." (He added, later, "You have to prove you are worthy to be there.")

Ahmad, from an Indian immigrant family, had a similar reaction. "Like in my AP history class now [the semester following my class], there are only four minority and the other 26 are white. We don't really want to talk; I am not really sure why but we just don't talk. ...Like I would think twice before answering because if I said something stupid then people would be saying, what is he doing here, why is he in the AP class." Parris, discussing an AP literature class, said, "Like you gotta watch out. Make sure if you say something bad. You don't want to give them a negative impact of Black people. They act like we're like the first Black people they've ever met."

Several students discussed one particular such course, with a white teacher who was very eager for the students of color to participate in class, but, according to my students, found this difficult to achieve. We had discussed this course in my class, and a Latino student, Vanessa, who was accustomed to being in white-dominated classes, was shocked to discover that her classmates from my class who had taken the class in question had felt uncomfortable speaking up in his class, given the teachers encouragement. Clearly there are complex issues of identity and critical mass involved in the levels of comfort students feel in different classes. For example, this Latino girl thinks of herself very distinctly as "a minority" (the term of choice at the high school), and assumed that because she herself felt comfortable speaking up, that other "minority" kids would do so as well. Ahmad, who did not feel comfortable, also, like Vanessa, distinctly saw himself as a "minority" (although the South Asians, and other Asian students as well, often do not identify with the Black and Latino students). Perhaps Ahmad's particular way of appropriating a "minority" identity was bound up with his growing up in a largely Black and Latino housing project in Cambridge. He had adopted some hip hop cultural mannerisms and felt comfortable with the Blacks and Latinos. While Vanessa infers from her comfort in speaking that other minority students will feel such comfort as well, Ahmad (in no way a shy student) feels inhibited by what he perceives as a lack of a critical mass of minority students.

At the same time, both Efriem and Partis articulate a distinct sense of racial vulnerability absent in both Ahmad and Vanessa. Both say they are worried that a "stupid" remark they make will make Blacks look bad in general; Ahmad says only that he is worried that a stupid remark he makes will make students wonder why he is there, not members of a specific racial or ethnic group. The Black students' responses are akin to Steele's idea of stereotype threat, except that the students do not say that they performed less well on the graded assignments in the class, but only that they did not feel as comfortable speaking.

At the end of my course quite a few students suggested that the course should be mandatory (though some also recognized that this would make for a very different atmosphere in the class). One Black student said, "Things you would want to say in other classes you can say in this class." And another: "Other teachers are not as educated about it. It isn't that they don't want to talk about it." This suggests to me that many high school students, not only the few in my own class, are eager to engage with racial issues in a thoughtful and non-dogmatic manner, if a safe and respectful context can be provided for doing so, in which there is a critical mass of the relevant groups. Some students thought that several of their teachers would actually like to have more conversations about racial topics, but were either not sufficiently knowledgeable to do so, or not sure they could handle the emotions that might emerge in such discussions. The high school is currently engaging these issues in some

helpful ways. As mentioned, racial issues are increasingly part of the school's discourse about education, and the school has always offered several courses on African-American history and other race-related topics. In 2003-04, Peggy McIntosh's SEED project (seeking Educational Equality and Diversity) ran groups for parents, teachers, and administrators, and this initiative will be carried into the future. I believe that many teachers at the school are eager to take on the challenges suggested by my students' comments above.

On the more challenging issue of the "achievement gap," I can not draw conclusions from my minor foray into the high school world. I can only hope and assume that caring and knowledgeable teachers who try their best to genuinely reject the racist assumptions about the intellectual capacities of Black and Latino students to which we are all subject, and can hold all their students to high standards of achievement while providing the support essential to meeting those standards, can help move us in the right direction.¹⁸

SOME COURSE MATERIALS

The main text for the course is Audrey Smedley's *Race in North America: Origins and Evolution of a Worldview*, 2nd edition (Westview, 1999).

I also use *The History of Mary Prince, A West Indian Slave (1831)* and selections from Ira Berlin's *Many Thousands Gone: the First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Harvard Univ. Press, 1998).

Other selections are from David Walker, *Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World* (1830); Benjamin Banneker's letter to Thomas Jefferson concerning Black intellectual capabilities; Nathan Huggins, *Black Odyssey*; Haney-Lopez, *White By Law: the Legal Construction of Race*; David Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness*; Joseph Lelyveld and New York Times staff, *How Race is Lived in America: Pulling Together, Pulling Apart*; Garrod, et al., eds., *Souls Looking Back: Life Stories of Growing Up Black*; Lisa Funderberg, ed., *Black/White/Other: Biracial Americans Talk About Race and Identity*.

[Sidebar]

The absence of working-class whites in this conversation is striking.

[Sidebar]

Discussion in settings in which I have been present often conflate class with race.

[Sidebar]

"I always felt like every time I spoke, people were seeing me as an example of other Blacks. I always felt like I had to represent our people."

[Footnote]

NOTES

- 1 These are the school's official racial categories. Students of Arab or other Middle Eastern background are counted as "white" and the Asian group includes a number of South Asians, a not insignificant number of whom are Muslims.
- 2 This 30% figure is generally thought to be too low. The figure is 40% for the district, and school officials believe that some students who would qualify for free or reduced lunch (a major criterion of "low income") are embarrassed or ashamed to claim that status. I have been told that 40% of the students live in public or subsidized housing.
- 3 The "acting white" hypothesis has acquired a good deal of public cachet, with little scholarly support; what support there has been has derived from a somewhat misleading reading of the work of John Ogbu and Signithia Fordham (e.g., Fordham and Ogbu, 1986). John Ogbu's 2002 major work, *Black American Students in an Affluent Suburb: A Study of Academic Disengagement* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2003) retreats more decisively from this view, but nevertheless retains the claim that values and patterns within the Black community (in both peer and parental cultures) contribute significantly to Black school underachievement, and that African American students are subject to "low effort optimism" leading to diminished academic effort.
- 4 See for example, Claude M. Steele and Joshua Aronson, "Stereotype Threat and the Test Performance of Academically Successful African Americans," in Christopher Jencks and Meredith Phillips (eds.), *The Black-White Test Score Gap* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1998): 401-427. Jencks and Phillips's collection presents and evaluates many hypotheses about the achievement gap (focused more specifically on the gap in standardized test scores). Genetically-based explanations, suggested by the 1994 best-seller *The Bell Curve* by Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray, are refuted by Jencks and Phillips in the introduction to their collection, and do not seem to be taken seriously by the scholarly community dealing with the achievement gap.
- 5 There is a national network-the Minority Student Achievement Network-of which CRLS is a part, consisting of schools with a demographic similar to CRLS that are attempting to close the achievement gap.
- 6 The advent of a new African American principal (in 2002), and a veteran CRLS African-American vice-principal, seems to promise a new empowerment of Black parents.
- 7 Jeannie Oakes, *Keeping Track: How Schools Structure Inequality* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985) is a classic defense of heterogeneity. I have also seen Anne Wheelock, *Crossing the Tracks: How 'Untracking' Can Save America's Schools* (New York: New Press, 1992) cited frequently. I am not conversant with the scholarly literature in this field.
- 8 Tamar Lewin, "Growing Up, Growing Apart," from *How Race is Lived in America*
- 9 The conversation is reconstructed from notes taken by a post-doctoral student who was observing the class.

10 The students frequently referred to what I would call "standard English" as "proper English," and "African American vernacular" as "slang." I did not systematically challenge this use but intend to do so next time I teach the class, in fall 2004.

11 This discussion, like so many in the course of the term, was intense and very fast-moving, and I was unable in the moment to take up various threads that might have seemed to cry out for more exploration, such as the idea that whites have no culture, or reasons other than those mentioned why a member of one group might adopt or be attracted to the cultural styles of the other. (For example, is the white attraction to Black youth culture connected with Blacks being seen as "bad," as oppositional, in a way that covertly reinforces the stigmatizing of Blacks in American life?)

12 In the three times I have taught the course, I have never had an East Asian student, though I have had several South Asians. Although there are five times as many Black students as Asians, this does not explain the racial gap in enrollment, as the Black group is always oversubscribed. I think that for many students at the high school, "race and racism" is a Black or possibly Black and white issue. Once a Black student said she was surprised that there were any white students in the class, and, she implied, any nonBlack students at all.

13 Very occasionally, I have had a student who was really unable to do the work, and dropped the class, although I have never actually encouraged a student to drop, but have always tried to provide extra tutoring to make up for previous educational deficits.

14 At the same time, I should make clear that, while the reading material is very demanding, the work load is generally not as severe as in the students' AP classes, although it is more so than in their non-AP ones.

15 Tim Walker, "Something is Wrong Here: Denver students confront racial tracking at their high school." *Teaching Tolerance*, #22, Fall, 2002 (www.tolerance.org/teach/printer.jsp?p=0&ar=321&pi=ttm)

16 The particular AP course Jeanie is talking about here is a famously demanding course at the high school, and should not be thought of as typical of AP courses in general.

17 I did not directly challenge the stereotyping that emerged in the post-class interviews, since I was trying to allow the students to elaborate their own views and those of their families.

18 Much thanks to Meira Levinson, Rick Weissbourd, Martha Minow, and Mary Casey, and especially to Ben Blum-Smith, as well as the editors of *Radical Teacher*, for feedback on previous drafts of this article.

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