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BREAKING THE CODE OF GOOD INTENTIONS: EVERYDAY FORMS OF WHITENESS

By

MELANIE E. L. BUSH

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Anthropology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

2002

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Anthropology in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

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Abstract

BREAKING THE CODE OF GOOD INTENTIONS: EVERYDAY FORMS OF WHITENESS

By

Melanie E. L. Bush

Advisor: Professor Leith Mullings

The past three decades of economic and political transitions and related transformations in the United States and globally, have shifted public opinion from a presumption of collective responsibility for the common good and toward a belief in the social survival of the fittest. This dissertation explores the extent to which these transitions, that brought an end to the Second Reconstruction and undermined the bargaining power of an increasingly global workforce, led to the acute sense of victimization and of the world being stacked against white citizens, as portrayed by the media. The project analyzes the role that race, racialization and racism play within this framework and in the process of uniting or dividing ordinary people.

Using research conducted between 1998 and 2000 at a college within the largest urban public university in the nation, the study explores students' perceptions and beliefs about issues of identity, privilege, democracy and intergroup relations. The dissertation examines why most white people in the

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United States believe that we have achieved racial equality though social and economic indicators suggest otherwise. It explores mechanisms expressed through attitudes and views held particularly, although not exclusively by whites, that reinforce their adherence to dominant narratives. These mechanisms function to maintain and reproduce racialized structures of inequality, for the system could not be held intact without the engagement of widespread support for, or complicity with, ideological explanations and justifications of the status quo. The dissertation also provides evidence of "cracks in the wall of whiteness," circumstances when the opportunity to foster understanding about systemic patterns is apparent. Identification of these mechanisms and openings contributes to our understanding of the dynamics of power and subordination in U.S. society.

Breaking the Code of Good Intentions: Everyday Forms of Whiteness places the current day "white experience" within a political, economic and social context and identifies the mechanisms of ideological construction that support structures of racial inequality and injustice and the agency of ordinary whites. The project is thus framed so that our collective imagination can forge hope for a different and better world for all.

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This Dissertation is dedicated. . .

To the universal spirits and ever present souls who throughout history and the present day, passionately believe we <u>can</u> build a world based on peace and justice for all and who sustain strength, courage, hope and love despite all odds;

To those who are not here to receive the recognition they deserve for teaching and giving me so much, so often, and for always sharing joy, wisdom, compassion and laughter: To Soji, Barkoo, Vanda, Stanley and Uncle Pete;

And to those who are my heart, my soul, my true lifetime spiritual collaborators and co-conspirators: For Rod, Sari, Mom, Dad, E, Momma Zoom, Andree and Ms. G.

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Mom, for solving problems before I even knew they existed, for always pitching in, nurturing, comforting and encouraging me in a million different ways,

---

1. As quoted in Rodriguez (1991, xxii).

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and forever being willing to listen. Dad, seeing you proud has kept me afloat. Your willingness to intellectually engage and to stand for your beliefs has been my inspiration. Hopefully you finally accept this, even if you think I go too far. Thanks to both of you for showing us how to figure "stuff" out. E, for your perennial optimism and unconditional support, always being there when and how I need you and for Robyn, Laura and Rita. Momma Zoom, for all you taught me about the power of strong will and absolute determination, and for your wisdom. Barkoo, for your sense of morality and your worldly ways; Irene, for your generosity and creativity; my grandparents, for navigating the contradictions of whiteness with dignity; Laura for your fearlessness and loyalty; Marilyn and Vanda for being my friends forever; Juanita, Liz and Lillian for taking me in and providing phenomenal role models; LSL for being my baby brother even when you act so silly. Soji, for your playfulness, your love and musicality; Thembi and Malik for deeply enriching my life since way back. Tajalia, Angelo and Orlando for the hope you bring by your very existence.

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CHAPTER 1 - THE SOCIAL CONTEXT OF THE HERE AND NOW

American Idealism. . . has always existed in a paradoxical linkage with greed, an alarming tolerance for social injustices and the racial blindness that allowed the same mind that shaped the Declaration of Independence to condone slavery.

—*The New York Times*, Editorial, January 31, 1999
(*Black Issues in Higher Education*, 2000, 7)

INTRODUCTION

In the context of the past three decades of economic and political transitions and related transformations in the United States and globally, public opinion has shifted from an assumption of collective responsibility for the common good and toward a belief in the social survival of the fittest. This dissertation analyzes the role of race, racialization, and racism within this framework and in the process of uniting or dividing ordinary people.

Using research conducted between 1998 and 2000 at a college within the largest urban public institution of higher education in the nation (Brooklyn College of the City University of New York [CUNY]), this project explores students' attitudes and beliefs about identity, privilege, democracy, and intergroup relations. A community with a diverse yet sometimes contested environment and a relatively tolerant campus, this location provided a somewhat "safe space" for discussions with students regarding their perceptions about race.

The goal of this research was to illuminate the connection between everyday thinking and the policies and programs that structure society. The primary

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objective was to identify routine mechanisms and dynamics of power that function to produce, maintain, and reinforce dominant narratives about race. I sought to understand the extent to which the transitions of the late twentieth century that brought an end to the Second Reconstruction[1] and undermined the bargaining power of an increasingly global workforce, also led to an acute sense of white victimization, as is often portrayed by the media.[2] The project explored what it means to be "white" at the beginning of the twenty-first century and the role that education does and can play in shaping beliefs and attitudes about race.

PERCEPTIONS VERSUS MISPERCEPTIONS

At the "United Nations World Conference against Racism," Gay McDougall, Chair of the Commission to End Racial Discrimination, was asked, "Who is responsible for racism and how do we change people's minds?" She responded:

> *Racism is more than about how one person treats another; racism is imbedded in our systems. It is not about changing minds; it's about changing institutions. We need to get beyond attitudes and get to the structures that have been in place from one generation to the next* (Secours, 2001b).

---

1. The notion of the Civil Rights Movement and the period of the Sixties as a Second Reconstruction has been widely discussed (Marable, 1991). The centrality of opposition to white supremacy in the struggles of the Sixties is well articulated in Dohrn (2001).
2. Commonly termed "white backlash" this is described as the trepidation many whites have about policies and programs that they feel are too concerned with the plight of minorities. Craig Wilder cites an early example as noted in *The New York Times*, in 1965, with the formation of the group calling themselves, "SPONGE: The Society for the Prevention of Negroes' Getting Everything" (Wilder, 2000, 242). This topic has been extensively explored in works such as Fine, Weis, Powell, Wong (1997); Frankenberg (1997) and Kincheloe, Steinberg, Rodriguez and Chennault (1998).

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I argue in fact, that the connection between attitudes and the perpetuation of social structures needs investigation in order to challenge and overcome systemic racial inequality. It is important to know the extent to which whites are aware of the increased polarization of wealth that has come about through economic constrictions of the base and the explosion of a part-time, temporary and service-oriented workforce. These changes have resulted in between 25 and 30 percent of U.S. households living paycheck to paycheck (Schor, 1998, 20). "Nowhere in the nation can a minimum-wage worker afford a one-bedroom apartment; 4.9 million families pay half their income in rent" (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2002). Although the average household income grew about 10 percent during the last two decades, 97 percent of the gains went to the richest 20 percent. Between 1991 and 1995, while nearly 2.5 million Americans lost their jobs because of corporate restructuring, top pay for corporate executives soared to nearly 200 times that of the average worker (*The New York Times*, 1996, 14). Poor, working- and middle-class whites are increasingly experiencing the economic pressures related to global restructuring that African Americans have suffered for over two decades (Price, 1995, 19).

Do most whites blame the expansion of the black middle class or increased immigration (particularly from the African, Asian, and Latin diasporas) for the economic insecurity they are experiencing? Do they feel discriminated against, as

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white people? Dr. Jack Levin, Director of the Brudnick Center on Violence and Conflict at Northeastern University suggests that they do and that this resentment has led to recent incidences of racially driven hate crimes. He writes:

> *It's a defensive position from the point of view of these students, who are what used to be the proto-typical college student: white, male and Protestant. Now they have to share with people who are different - black, Latino and Asian students - and they don't like losing their advantage and privilege* (Lords, 2001, 10).

Throughout the past decade, much attention has been given to analyzing current dynamics of race, particularly whiteness, in scholarship examining racialized imagery (Morrison, 1992; hooks, 1995; Dyer, 1997; Fine, Weis, Powell and Wong, 1997; Nakayama and Martin, 1999), everyday thinking (McIntosh, 1992; Wellman, 1993; Feagin and Vera, 1995; Frankenberg, 1997; Shipler, 1997; Berger, 1999; Williams, L. 2000) and theoretical notions of the construction of whiteness (Saxton, 1990; Allen, 1994; Brodkin, 1994; Roediger, 1994; Ignatiev, 1995). This project attempts to link these three elements — imagery, everyday thinking, and theory — in the context of today's society, and demonstrates that the consequences of the mainstream consciousness of everyday people, specifically whites, reinforces and reproduces structural patterns of inequality. The system would not be held intact without the engagement of widespread support for, or complicity with, ideological explanations and justifications for the status quo.

My aim is to define specific mechanisms and elements of hegemonic discourse that function to reproduce racialized structures of power and

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subordination through the instrument of ordinary people. For example, why do most whites believe we have achieved racial equality in the United States, while social and economic measures indicate otherwise? A study conducted jointly in 2001 by the *Washington Post*, the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation and Harvard University found that 40 to 60 percent of all whites believe that the average black is faring as well or better than the average white and that "African Americans already have achieved economic and social parity" (Morin, 2001, A1). Other studies have found similar results (Sack and Elder, 2000, A1, A23; Roper Center, 2001, R29A; National Opinion Research Center, 2001a, b).

The significance of this type of evidence is generally understated or dismissed without deeper examination. It is rare that the consequences of this gap in understanding have been linked to the perpetuation of racial inequality. The following statement questions even the notion that there might be consequences.

> *Clearly, many whites harbor negative images of blacks. It is equally true that many blacks passionately believe their difficulties flow from white racism. . . No scientific research demonstrates how white racism - as a mental state among whites — incapacitates blacks* (Weissberg, 1997, 19).

However, both consciousness and structure play an integral role in the everyday decisions that whites make on the job, at the polls, in schools, stores, and in their choice of housing (Secours, 2001a). For example, a recent study indicated that while housing segregation between whites and Hispanics and between whites and Asians exists, this does not appear to be due to race. On the other hand, the

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study also showed that whites avoid living in neighborhoods with more than a small black population because they associate blacks with high crime, low housing values and low quality education (Emerson et al., 2001, 932).

> *In the range of 10 to 15 percent black* [in a neighborhood], *whites state that they are neutral about the likelihood of buying a house. Above 15 percent black, whites state that they are unlikely to buy the house. The strength of this stated unlikeliness increases with increases in the percent black. . . even after controlling for the reasons typically given for avoiding residing with African Americans*" (Emerson et al., 2001, 931-2).

When decisions are based on misperceptions, there are consequences. Since the first national survey of white attitudes toward blacks in 1942 by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Denver (now at the University of Chicago), formal research has been conducted on a regular basis (Smith and Sheatsley, 1984, 14). The 2001 *Washington Post* survey found that whites who held more accurate views of black circumstances were more likely to believe the government has social obligations. These include the responsibility to ensure that all schools are of equal quality (69 percent of whites with accurate views versus 57 percent of whites with misperceptions), and the responsibility to ensure that all races are treated equally by courts and the police (79 percent of whites with accurate views versus 60 percent of whites with misperceptions) (Morin, 2001, A1).

In real figures, there has been no decline in the black-white income gap between 1978 and 1996, when black households earned on the average 59 cents for every dollar earned by white households (*Black Issues in Higher Education*, 2000).

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Even when education and experience are taken into account, blacks have only 26 cents in assets for every dollar that whites have (Coughlin, 2001). Table 1.1 provides additional information about gaps between perceptions and reality, in three domains:

Percentage of: Whites who thought	Perception: the average black has. . . compared to the average white.	Reality:
61%	Equal or better access to healthcare	Blacks are nearly twice as likely to be without insurance.
49%	Similar levels of education	17% of blacks have completed college versus 28% of whites
42%	Similar earnings	Black Median Income $27,910 ~50% under $25,000 White Median Income $44,366 ~30% under $25,000 (1999)

Table 1.1 Whites' Perceptions of Racial Equality (Morin, 2001, A1)

Additionally, whites are twice as likely to have money invested in stocks, bonds, or mutual funds and half as likely to have reported recent difficulties in paying their rent or mortgage (Morin, 2001, A1). Results of the study indicated that 70 percent of whites hold at least one of these misperceptions, 56 percent hold two or more, and 31 percent held them all (Morin, 2001, A1).

"WHITE BACKLASH" AND RACIAL CODING

These misperceptions directly relate to the sentiment among white Americans that the liberal social policies established during the 1960s pandered to blacks to the detriment of the well-being of whites, commonly termed "white

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backlash." The anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles for freedom and justice and against white supremacy, U.S. global domination and hegemony had called upon the United States to live up to its ideals and were perceived by whites as going too far (Winant, 2001a, 148).

Although this type of white resentment surfaced in the 1960s, the civil rights movement, war on poverty and discourse about the "Great Society," created an environment where social responsibility, increased concern about justice and equality for all people, and expanded and democratic participation was encouraged. Society was engaged in a debate about the nature of poverty and the ideals on which the country was founded that led to:

> *. . . the elaboration of social policies based on vastly expanded notions of equality, democracy and social justice. . . A mature global liberalism held sway, promising the spread of the good and then the great society to all Americans and eventually to all who followed our example and leadership* (Bush, 2001).

This environment left whites conflicted about their allegiances yet since the economy was still in a period of expansion, white resentment or anger about the advances of blacks, Latinos, and Asians was not dominant. It was not until the mid-1970s that their sense of victimization and resentment began to crystallize.

> *The emergence of conservatism as a political and intellectual force in the 1970s and 1980s was an important turning point in post-World War II American politics. Prior to the 1970s, conservatives had a limited influence in the shaping of domestic policies and programs. There were influential conservatives, but no dominant ideology that shaped political life* (Stafford, 1992, 101).

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Similarly, it was not until the mid-1970s that whites began to experience the massive layoffs and the reconfiguration of their economic or political lives. Throughout the period of economic constriction that commenced in the mid-1970s, and has increased to the present day, whites have sought explanations for why they have such a difficult time staying afloat. Without the means to explicitly express feelings of blame, racialized coding has become a routine part of mainstream discourse. An *Atlantic Monthly* cover story entitled "When the Official Subject is Presidential Politics, Taxes, Welfare, Crime, Rights or Values, The Real Subject is Race" (Edsall and Edsall, 1991, 53-86) analyzed this coding as it has developed. "In this cryptic vernacular we have a new and insidious form of race-baiting that is so well camouflaged that it does not carry the political liabilities" (Steinberg, 1995, 214).

Over the last decade, mainstream discourse, proliferated particularly through media and politics, has flaunted images of successful blacks and often portrays interracial friendships as commonplace. While this development provides some positive images of blacks in contrast to the predominantly stereotypical depictions as criminals and athletes; they also have had a detrimental influence. Numerous movies and television shows now suggest that race in the United States is mediated solely through personal relations and that racial inequality is a thing of the past. These include, for example, "The Cosby Show," "The Jeffersons,"

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"Forrest Gump," "Pulp Fiction," "White Men Can't Jump," "Webster," and "Diff'rent Strokes" (DeMott, 1995, 12,13).

Within this context, this research places an ethnographic study within the framework of a structural analysis of political, economic, and social developments in U.S. and global society over the last thirty years, in an attempt to analyze and explain white misperceptions about the impact of race on everyday living.[3] The underlying premise is that belief systems reinforce and reproduce dominant systemic social patterns. Identifying the mechanisms of this reinforcement and locating agency, or as I label the openings, "cracks in the wall of whiteness" therefore, can help us understand how to interrupt and transform structures.

THE REPRODUCTION OF STRUCTURES OF RACIAL INEQUALITY

At a time when racially explicit explanations for inequality are not publicly acceptable, the perception of a wallet as a gun, and the implicit acceptance that racialized fear justifies murder[4] stand as dramatic testaments to the continuing significance of race in our lives. The issue at hand is not whether people interact in a civil manner, nor whether we can all "get along." Rather this project focuses on the everyday processes and discourses of power. By linking agency and structure

3. This has been referred to as the "The White Fairness Understanding Gap" (Street, 2001, 9).
4. This comment refers to an incident where four New York City Police officers fired 41 bullets into Amadou Diallo on February 4, 1999. They claimed that they thought he had a gun. When the case went to trial, it was ruled that their fear justified their actions and the officers were let off free. This claim has often been made in incidences where police officers have murdered unarmed individuals because of the stereotypes, particularly of the violence of young black and Latino males.

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within a political and economic framework, this dissertation contributes to the literature on race and inequality. Henry Giroux, author and scholar, said,

> *There are too few attempts to develop a pedagogy of whiteness that enables white students to move beyond positions of guilt or resentment. There is a curious absence in the work on whiteness regarding how students might examine critically the construction of their own identities in order to rethink whiteness as a discourse of both critique and possibility"* (Giroux, 1997).

I do not however, subscribe to the notion that our primary task is to forge a positive white identity, because if race was constructed as a tool to dominate and subordinate, how can we render it positive? This dissertation focuses on agency and optimism, and as with much anthropological work, connects agency, process and structure, while recognizing simultaneous, contradictory and sometimes-competing forces as they articulate in everyday living.[5]

Social life *is* competitive for most people under capitalism. For poor, working, and middle-class whites, the desire for an upper edge flows from a concrete sense of insecurity.[6] However, the cause of this vulnerability is generally attributed to the increasing numbers and power of blacks, Latinos, and Asians and not to the increasing power and wealth of the rich. In this context, the project focuses on the mechanisms of ideological construction as expressed through

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5. Jane Schneider points out a traditional approach to anthropology: "Much of anthropology asks whether locally situated, powerless peoples - classical anthropological subjects - can exercise agency in relation to the 'structures' that would dominate them." She also describes Eric Wolf's starting point as an open-ended, unpredictable, interaction sphere, whose very fluidity among competing and often contradictory, forces, enlarges those possibilities for empowerment from below." I attempt to merge these two approaches in my dissertation (Schneider, 1995, 5).

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dominant narratives. This analysis seeks points of entry for the infusion of a counternarrative that articulates a vision of the world from the perspective of the large majority of people rather than of the rich and powerful.

Studies comparing blacks' and whites' attitudes about race often conclude that divergent perceptions exist, however, they rarely offer an analysis about the reasons for, or significance of, the disparities. Dissimilarities in attitude are portrayed as isolated differences of opinion and rarely compared to actual data. The following excerpts demonstrate this point:

> *The New York Times and CBS News conducted a national survey in June 2000 to ascertain the attitudes of blacks and whites on the issue of race in America* (Sack and Elder, 2000).
>
> *It was concluded that even after the dismantling of legal segregation 35 years ago, today blacks and whites continue to have starkly divergent perceptions on many issues pertaining to race and they remain largely isolated from each other in their everyday lives* (Horton, 2000, 35).

Is it sufficient to say that blacks and whites see things differently? Who benefits when differences of opinion are described as if they were mysterious occurrences, rather than something that we, as a society, need to understand because the differences matter? In this dissertation, I assert that we need to understand both the causes and the consequences of the findings of these studies.

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6. Over forty-three million jobs were eliminated in the United States between 1979 and 1996. Between 1993 and 1995, one of every fourteen Americans lost her or his job (Thandeka, 1999,96).

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HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

In the context of recent political shifts in the domain of public higher education nationally and specifically in New York State, this study examines the pattern of white dominance and privilege that frequently remains unmarked, invisible, and illusive within discussions of race relations. New York State ranks 47th in the nation in higher education appropriations as a percent of tax revenues, yet it ranks 1st nationally in the percentage of family income needed to pay for college at public colleges and universities (Brooklyn College Chapter Executive Committee of the Professional Staff Congress, 1995, 1). During the last decade, prison funding has directly increased in proportion to a decrease in funding to higher education. One might wonder whether a constricting job market for college graduates might have anything to do with these shifts (Romer, 1999). In New York State,

> *Since fiscal year 1988,* [the State's] *public universities have seen their operating budget plummet by 29 percent while funding for prisons has increased by 76 percent. In actual dollars, there has nearly been an equal trade-off, with the Department of Correctional Services receiving a $761 million increase during that time while state funding for New York's city and state university systems has declined by $615 million. Whereas New York spent more than twice as much on universities than on prisons in 1988, the state now spends $275 million more on prisons than on state and city colleges* (Gangi, Schiraldi and Ziedenberg, 1999).

Since 1988, the state share of the City University (where this study took place) budget dropped from 77 percent to 49 percent, and the share of the budget covered by tuition and student fees increased from 18 to 47 percent.

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This has meant an increase in tuition from $1,250 to $3,400, which represents 25 percent of the white median family income and 42 percent of the national median family income for blacks and Latinos (double its number in 1988) (Mishel et al., 1998). Between 1988 and 1997, state support for CUNY decreased 39 percent and city support decreased 37 percent, yet tuition rates increased by 93 percent (Gonzalez, 1999, 10). The budget cuts administered to CUNY and SUNY (State University of New York) in the early 1990s were five times more than those imposed in any other state in the nation (CUNY Coalition of Concerned Faculty and Staff, 1995). This amounts to the privatization of higher education such that it has become questionable whether these public university systems are serving their intended mission.

Another recent policy change implemented in 1998 and projected to have racial implications over time, is the elimination of remedial programs in CUNY senior colleges. This change is expected to result in a decrease of African American enrollment from anywhere between 36 and 70 percent (Malveaux, 1998, 22), and to reduce overall public access over the next five years. In particular, it is anticipated that this policy will result in a decrease in senior college graduation rates, as it has been shown that students are more likely to graduate from a four-year college if they start at one (Romer, 1999, 47). Additionally, before the introduction of the workfare program in New York City, more than 10 percent of CUNY's student body (about 27,000 students) had received public assistance.

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Workfare regulations reduced this number by one-third to about 18,000 students (Arenson, 1997, B3). As a further consequence, workfare policy has had a significant impact in depressing wages of the lowest 30 percent of wage earners, overall, by between 13 and 17 percent (*Forward Motion,* 1996-1997, 36) also impacting CUNY students.

The imposition of this workfare policy occurred just as the average corporate chief executive officer's income increased from 12 times the wage of the average worker in 1940 to 475 times the wage of an average worker in 1999 (*Forward Motion,* 1996-1997, 36; Giecek, 2000, 49). Between 1980 and 1995, corporate salaries rose 360 percent while the minimum wage rose 37 percent. Considering that of the 2.7 million people earning an annual salary of over $100,000, 89 percent are men and 91 percent are white, there are tremendous racial implications that arise from this pattern of increased wealth polarization (*Forward Motion,* 1996-1997, 36). While these transitions disproportionately affect blacks, Latinos, Asians, and Native Americans, they significantly affect the lives of all poor and working people and constrict overall access to public education.

CONCERN FOR THE COMMON GOOD AND THE FUTURE OF US ALL

It is this connection between the devastating impact of racial inequality on the lives and dreams of people of color, and the fate of our society as a whole, that motivated this study. The individualist creed that underlies the capitalist ethic

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and inspires a philosophy of social survival of the fittest has a devastating impact on all the world's peoples. To this notion, James Baldwin once said:

> *But this cowardice, this necessity of justifying a totally false identity and of justifying what must be called a genocidal history, has placed everyone now living into the hands of the most ignorant and powerful people the world has ever seen. And how did they get that way? By deciding that they were white. By opting for safety instead of life* (Baldwin, 1984, 92).

Rationales for the political and economic changes of the last three decades have incorporated the language of standards, merit, individual responsibility, and civility. These concepts provide the justification for re-establishing more privileged populations as the main beneficiaries of public higher education and for the significant de-funding of the public sector. It is, therefore, critical to analyze the extent to which whites accept these explanations and the degree to which they understand the underlying global transformations. The increasingly concentrated wealth at the top has resulted in the constriction of social programs and access to resources for all people and certain groups, especially. Ideological explanations are drawn upon to justify these changes. During a period when the rapports de force have provided the social and political milieu for a move to the right, the successful de-funding of the public sector (Giroux, 1997), and the dismantlement of the welfare state, what is on the minds of ordinary whites?

In an attempt to answer the questions raised thus far, this dissertation examines dominance and privilege rather than subordination or under-privilege.

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People of color are often acutely aware and sensitive to the many ways in which unspoken assumptions of whiteness are continuously reflected in subtle and explicit actions. However, studies about race generally presume that a discussion about race is about the "other." Whiteness is assumed, considered the norm and the center. This project examines ways that whites participate in maintaining status, privilege, and access rather than explanations for social inequality based on the cultural deficits of the poor so widely discussed since the 1960s (Glazer and Moynihan, 1963; Lewis, 1966; Valentine, 1968; Leacock, 1971). The findings seek to contribute to the literature on race by providing insight into how whiteness influences day-to-day perceptions, about the mechanisms through which those perceptions function to reproduce racialized patterns in everyday living, and the openings where possibilities to foster understanding reside within the context of today's world.

Research on, and ethnography of, the experience of people identified as pan-ethnic "white" contributes to our knowledge about structures of dominance and superiority, as privilege and status are often divvied up in this society consistent with the underlying theme of white superiority.

Why Here, Why Now?

This study analyzes the daily experiences of white racial identity within the context of fundamental historical transformation that include economic pressures, an extended period of conservative ideological onslaught and increasingly limited

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opportunities for all peoples. The myth that upward mobility and the American Dream can be achieved by anyone who works hard is no longer being espoused. Instead, some communities have been depicted as lazy, unworthy, the cause of everyone's troubles (including their own), and beyond the scope of our concerns. Many people have lost hope in the possibility of liberal reform. Historically whites have been and are currently being seduced to an ideological position that defends the status quo and the polarization of wealth and does not challenge the vast inequalities that have been exacerbated in the global economy. With a belief that, following Eric Wolf, "historical processes are pre-eminently political and economic, reinforced through ideology" (Schneider, 1995, 3), this research set out to measure the effectiveness of this campaign in the present context and offers an analysis of the implications for academia, based on the findings.

SUMMARY OF CHAPTERS

Chapter two examines the theoretical paradigms of race, ethnicity, and social inequality, including the relatively more recent development of multiculturalism with particular attention to scholarship that has emerged as the study of whiteness. This chapter raises questions that flow from a critique of the literature about white privilege and white racial identity.

Chapter three describes the setting within which this research took place. It provides historical background about the borough of Brooklyn and the particular periods and struggles in Brooklyn College history when issues of race or ethnicity

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played a significant role. The demographics of the borough and college are reviewed and the research methodology and design are summarized.

The next four chapters contain the ethnographic data that incorporates the voices of the hundreds of people who participated in this research. These thoughts and reflections lend texture to the theory and assist us in understanding the everyday experiences of ordinary people.

Chapter four focuses on students' understanding of identity. How do students see themselves and each other, and how is identity conceptualized? What is whiteness, blackness and what does it mean to be Latino, Asian or Jewish? What is the process by which people are classified? First recollections of "a thing called race" are explored as well as how identity manifests within campus politics.

Chapter five summarizes students' thoughts about what it means to be American, their beliefs about democracy, the flag, the foreign-born experience, national identity and the relationship of race to these topics. The chapter examines students' beliefs about assimilation and the American Dream.

Chapter six explores how students interact with each other. Whom do they associate with on campus, and with whom do they socialize outside of campus? How often have they been in the home of someone of another race? Do they perceive social segregation on campus or racial tension? What are the rules for interaction? These questions are addressed as the chapter examines students' beliefs about colorblindness, human nature, and interracial relationships.

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Chapter seven examines how poverty and privilege are theorized in everyday conversation. In what contexts do whites question dominant narratives, and when do they uphold mainstream explanations for why "things are the way they are," such as poverty and inequality? Do students believe that whites are discriminated against in today's world? Do they believe everyone has a fair chance, and if not, do they think measures should be taken to equalize opportunity? Do they view education as a right or as a privilege solely for those who merit advancement? Do they think society ought to get "tough on crime"? This chapter analyzes students' views about equality and justice in today's society.

Finally, **chapter eight** summarizes the central theoretical arguments of the dissertation. Drawing on an analysis of the ethnographic data, this chapter describes mechanisms and sites through which patterns of racialized inequality are perpetuated and identifies "cracks in the wall of whiteness": places, spaces, and times when we can make a difference through an analysis of the meaning of white racial consciousness at this moment in time. The chapter offers recommendations for higher education in particular, education in general and society at large, to increase awareness about the role of race in everyday living and offers possible trajectories for future research.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF THIS STUDY

Breaking the Code of Good Intentions: Everyday Forms of Whiteness combines a theoretical framework with ethnographic "on-the-ground" detail. The

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project draws upon analyses of race, ethnicity, immigration, public policy and the shifting ideological framework of the "here and now". The dissertation explores intergroup relations, multiculturalism, and diversity initiatives within higher education, and the roles of academic and student affairs. Racial identity is examined for its social impact and rather than as an issue of individual experience. I reflect upon the thoughts of young people today to provide an analysis of society at this political, economic, and social juncture in U.S. and global history and suggest possible actions to address the reproduction of systemic inequality.

Where can we locate optimism and agency? Do whites believe that the retraction of the more liberal components of the U.S. social system has come about as a result of raised standards, increased adherence to merit as a criteria for support, an increased emphasis on individual responsibility, and civility? Do they recognize that over the last thirty years access to health insurance, decent and affordable housing, adequate employment, and higher education have become more, not less difficult to achieve for the average person in the United States?

Dr. Frances Cress Welsing, the well-known black psychiatrist suggests that: "The best thing whites can do for nonwhites is to tell them what we [whites] say when they are not around. This way we all know where we stand" (Secours, 2001a). While I do not necessarily define the "best thing" precisely this way, this dissertation is an attempt to understand and shed light on the

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everyday thinking of whites in order to demonstrate how formulations of mainstream consciousness function to reproduce patterns of structural inequality. My aim is to understand the everyday mechanisms that serve to regulate white peoples' thinking so that structural causes and outcomes of racial dynamics of power remain at bay. Were they understood and reckoned with for their impact on all people, I suggest that these policies and structures could not persist. For example, it has been raised that the gap between whites' perceptions of equality and the actual existence of inequality is sustained by misinformation, a lack of accurate information, regulated ideological discourse and a sense of hopelessness. But *how* does it happen, in everyday interaction; what are the mechanisms that produce, reproduce, and reinforce mainstream narratives that defuse and disempower the agency of ordinary people? The existing literature does not adequately address these questions.

This dissertation explores, therefore, the appearance of two nations, separate and unequal (Hacker, 1992; Shipler, 1997) and asks whether this is a random act of mysterious blindness (you know, "shit happens"), or if, multiple processes convey the notion that poverty is "natural", especially the kind that provides evidence of racialization. Mainstream explanations about why certain people are poor, tell us it is because "they" are — "less smart," "genetically weak," "lazy," "angry," "greedy," "violent," and "unmotivated."

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In a society founded on power on the one hand, and, built upon democracy and equality on the other, it is not just that there are two worldviews. One represents the replication and reproduction of power relations, and the other represents the opportunity for a better, more just and equitable world for all. This dissertation focuses how it happens that while the majority of whites do not fall within the category of the richest one percent, they take on a worldview that contradicts their material reality. Within the scholarship on whiteness, the focus is generally either on theoretical analysis (e.g., how one group of people historically came to believe they were white) or on ethnographic material documenting the "white experience." I seek to link these approaches, and to document the processes that translate people's notion of whiteness into political implications that, in turn, function to uphold and perpetuate patterns of historical racial inequality. By placing an ethnographic study within a political, economic and social framework, by linking notions of agency and structure, and through the identification of everyday mechanisms that contribute to the reproduction of patterns of racial inequality, this dissertation seeks to make a unique contribution to the literature on whiteness and studies of race. This will be further discussed in chapter two.

The goal of this research is to further our understanding of the dynamics of everyday living in the United States to support the development of strategies that can work toward challenging the pervasive and systematic racial inequality and

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injustice that continues to plague the U.S. and the rest of the world. Where are the "cracks in the wall of whiteness"? In this racially driven society, where is agency located for whites who observe contradictions in the mainstream narrative? How might we strengthen our optimism about the possibilities for a more racially and socially just and humane world order? As Howard Winant writes:

> *Today, racism must be identified by its consequences. Racism has been largely — although not entirely, to be sure — detached from its perpetrators. In its most advanced forms, indeed, it has no perpetrators; it is nearly invisible, taken-for-granted, commonsense (Gramsci) feature of everyday life and global social structure. Under these conditions - racial hegemony — racism may be defined as the routinized outcome of practices that create or reproduce hierarchical social structures based on essentialized racial categories* (Winant, 2001a, 308).

THE DOMAIN OF EDUCATION

Schools, and the domain of education, provide social groups with different types of knowledge in order to reproduce the social division of labor. They distribute and legitimate forms of knowledge, values, languages and style that constitute the dominant culture and its interests and act as part of a state apparatus. Finally, they produce and validate economic and ideological imperatives that underlie the state's political power (Giroux, 1983, 258). This process is illustrated in that children of households in the top economic quarter of the population have a 76 percent chance of getting through college and graduating by age twenty-four, while children of households in the bottom quarter have only a 4 percent chance. Twenty years ago, it was 27 percent (Loeb, 1999, 88). Within one

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state, funding differentials ranged from $2,337 per pupil in the lowest income district to $56,701 per pupil in the wealthiest (Sklar, 1997, 68). This reveals how structural inequality patterns into the educational system. At the same time,

> *To understand modern universities and colleges, we need openness to contradiction. For universities both reproduce and subvert the larger society. We must distinguish between the functions universities publicly promise to perform—the social goods they are chartered to produce—and certain of their actual consequences which, while commonly unintended, are no less real: the production of dissent, deviance, and the cultivation of an authority-subverting culture of critical discourse* (Gouldner, 1979, 45).

Hence, this domain provided an excellent context for this project. Brooklyn College, with a population reflecting the metropolitan area and that of many urban areas today, allowed access to a diverse community and a location where findings could be generalized. Academia therefore provided the site and a locus of study.

In the analysis of white racial consciousness and its connection to systemic inequality, this project seeks to identify the agency of ordinary whites, as a means to understand and work toward the transformation of our highly unequal and unjust society, into a more equal and just world for all. In this way, I critically examine the mechanisms of ideological construction so that our collective imaginations can forge hope for a different and better future, even at a time when this may seem like a hopeless dream.

> *We should always remember that in the global village* [of one thousand people] *there are only 60 of them, and 940 of us.*
>
> —Dr. Manning Marable (2001, 45)

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Chapter 2 - Theoretical Paradigms of Race, Ethnicity and Whiteness

> *The discovery of personal whiteness among the world's peoples is a very modern thing — a nineteenth and twentieth century matter, indeed. . . But what on earth is whiteness that one should so desire it? Then always, somehow, some way, silently but clearly, I am given to understand that whiteness is the ownership of the earth forever and ever, amen.*
>
> ——W.E.B. Du Bois, *"The Souls of White Folk,"* (1920, 29,30)

The concept of whiteness has been recognized over the last two decades within academia as a means to address a significant and missing dimension within discussions of race and ethnicity. However, notions of white racial identity have long been significant in the writings of scholars of color. Among the many examples include, William J. Wilson, who in 1860 wrote "What Shall We Do with the White People" analyzing the presumption of whiteness in the Declaration of Independence and during the early years of the United States (Roediger, 1998, 58). Similarly, Frederick Douglass critiqued the centering of the white experience in his famous speech, "What to the Slave Is Your Fourth of July" (Douglass, 1970, 349). Harriet Jacobs, in 1861, described the annual practice of "muster," a time when armed whites terrorized the enslaved population in anticipation of revolts. She suggested that this institution served to unite whites across class lines (Roediger, 1998, 336). In 1891 Anna Julia Cooper examined the naturalization of whiteness in the women's organization Wimodaughsis (Cooper, 1998, 88). However, "Discounting and suppressing the knowledge of whiteness held by people of color was not just a byproduct of white supremacy but an imperative of racial domination" (Roediger, 1998, 6).

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In the context of scholarship about race and ethnicity, this chapter summarizes the literature about whiteness and articulates the particular theoretical contributions of this dissertation to this body of work.

WHAT IS "WHITENESS"?

The concept of whiteness has powerful utility as a means to critique systemic patterns of racial inequality. It reveals the ways that whites benefit from a variety of institutional and social arrangements that often appear (to whites) to have nothing to do with race. Being white has generally been associated with ancestry from the European continent and the denial of African blood. The borders of whiteness have shifted during different periods in history to include or exclude various groups. Many immigrants of such ancestry have enjoyed exceptional achievement upon their integration into U.S. society (Brodkin, 1999). However, the claim to European heritage is often less significant than whether one is identified as white in everyday interactions (Alba, 1990, 3). By enlisting in this pan-ethnic "club", whites "became party to strategies of social closure that maintained others' exclusion" (Waldinger, 2001, 20). "That the once swarthy immigrants from southern, eastern, and even northern Europe eventually became white, is another way of saying that 'race' is an achieved, not an ascribed status" (Waldinger, 2001, 20).

Many controversies have emerged within the growing scholarship on the concept of whiteness. These have related to terminology, origins of racialization

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and levels of individual, institutional, social and collective responsibility for racial inequality. A key debate is whether whiteness should be reformed as an identity or abolished as an assumption of privilege (Roediger, 1994; Ignatiev and Garvey, 1996; Kincheloe et al., 1998). Many articles within scholarly journals and magazines have called for interdisciplinary studies of this concept, which has shown significant contemporary saliency as a topic for investigation.[1] This is particularly so as the boundaries of racial classification shift, precipitated by twentieth century global migrations and political and economic transformations.

In the last ten years much literature has emerged focusing on white culture and racialized imagery, theoretical notions about the construction of whiteness and narratives of white identity. This literature is summarized in this chapter. However, few ethnographic studies focus on understanding white racial identity in its everyday forms (Talbot, 1997) and within the current day context. This dissertation draws these connections.

Race and Ethnicity Theory

> *Throughout the history of oppressed humanity, there has been a moral arch spanning the diverse political and social experiences of millions of people. This arch symbolizes the faith that, despite failures and defeats of every kind, oppressed and exploited people will not remain oppressed forever. What has sustained black courage in the face of adversity is this ethical*

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1. These include, but are not limited to: *American Quarterly* (Mazie et al., 1993, 281); *Anthropology Newsletter* (Hartigan, 1997, 8; Page, 1998, 60); *Black Issues in Higher Education* (Rodriguez, 1999, 20; Karenga, 1999, 26); *Chronicle of Higher Education*, (McMillen, 1995); *Current Anthropology* (Page, 1995, 526); *Harvard Educational Review* (Giroux, 1997, 222); *Hungry Mind Review* (1998); *Lingua Franca* (Stowe, 1996, 69); *Minnesota Review* (Hill, 1996); *New York Times Magazine* (Talbot, 1997, 116; Conley, 2000b, 45); and *Transition: An International Review* (Soyinka, 1997).

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and moral belief, fueling the dynamics of black political activism.
—Manning Marable (1991, 227)

Scholarship relating the theoretical history of race and ethnicity is extensive, covers many topics and provides the framework within which the literature on whiteness has emerged. This section briefly reviews the history of the concepts of race and ethnicity and summarizes how "white identity" developed over time. Subsequent sections examine biological and social scientific explanations of race and critical race theory as this material contextualizes the emergence of whiteness studies.

The initial emergence of the notion of European racial superiority and racial exploitation has been pinpointed to over six hundred years ago with the appearance of capitalism (Cox, 1948, 322). While contact and interaction across geographically distinct populations occurred during earlier times, there is no evidence of race prejudice even in the Hellenistic empire, which had extended further into Africa than any other European empire (Cox, 1948, 322). St. Clair Drake describes the sixteenth century as "a historic watershed in global relations between black and white people," and states that neither racial slavery nor white racism existed prior to this, although color prejudice was present in some places (Drake, 1987, xxiii).

While inter-ethnic interactions have a long history, they did not necessarily reflect inevitable conflict, competition, or struggle (Smedley, 1998, 690). Identities were constructed by a wide range of characteristics including, but not limited to, place of birth, language, kinship, religion, or occupation. They were

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generally context-specific and malleable up to the seventeenth century (Smedley, 1998, 691, 2). Furthermore, Drake found that up to this point in history (the seventeenth century), blackness was not a mark of stigma, nor was race essentialized in the way that it later came to be (Harrison, 1998, 620, 621).

With the emergence of capitalism, the colonial exploration of the globe, and the beginning of the slave trade between Africa and parts of the "new" world, racial notions began to take hold. They were used to justify the subordination and exploitation of large numbers of people who formed a labor pool for building settlements and cultivating agriculture. During the earliest period in the development of capitalism,

> *The white man had no conception of himself as being capable of developing the superior culture of the world — the concept 'white man" had not yet its significant social definition — the Anglo-Saxon, the modern master race, was then not even in the picture* (Cox, 1948, 327).

Racial dynamics, however, quickly developed within the context of the expansion of capitalism and colonial settlements. This process initially took the form of a European center with Euro-dominated colonies. Ultimately, the British settler colony of North America evolved into the United States, which then became the new center (Drake, 1987). A vivid example of this process was the fateful Bacon's Rebellion in 1676 in Virginia, which established racial boundaries distinguishing between Africans, Europeans, and native peoples (Zinn, 1995, 37-59). This event is generally portrayed solely as a response to common exploitation and oppression, as African and European bond-laborers rebelled to demand an end to

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servitude. However, another key component of this struggle was an orchestrated attempt by the dominant elites to drive a wedge between these groups and the native population. Any combination of these forces was a tremendous threat to the white planters, whose wealth was great compared to that of the general white population. The poor whites had much more in common with the blacks and a potential alliance could have been disastrous for those in power.

> *In the early years of slavery, especially, before racism as a way of thinking was firmly ingrained, while white indentured servants were often treated as badly as black slaves, there was a possibility of cooperation* (Zinn, 1995, 37).

The plantation bourgeoisie responded to this threat by offering to European laborers a variety of previously denied benefits such as amnesty for white rebels, corn, cash and muskets for whites finishing their servitude, the right to bear arms and the opportunity to join slave patrol militias and receive monetary awards.

> *They constituted the police patrol who could ride with planters, and now and then exercise unlimited force upon recalcitrant or runaway slaves; and then, too there was always a chance that they themselves might also become planters by saving money, by investment, by the power of good luck; and the only heaven that attracted them was the life of the great Southern planter"* (Du Bois, 1979, 27).

This may be viewed as the nation's first "affirmative action" policy (Harrison, 1998, 621). These actions were taken to quell this potentially dangerous alliance and as a means for control. Racism on the part of poor whites became a practical matter (Zinn, 1995, 56). The explicit use of race and white supremacy was implemented as a tool to divide and conquer. Prior to this period, little advantage existed for poor whites to ally themselves with the ruling powers. They

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were accorded "social, psychological and political advantages" calculated to alienate them from their fellow African bondsmen (Morgan, 1975, 331-333,344; Du Bois, 1979, 700). In other words, racism was implemented as a means of control to hold the structure of social organization intact.

Racial domination became encoded in the process of nation-state building for the United States as "blacks were sold out to encourage white unity and nationalist loyalty to the state" (Marx, 1998, 267). Slavery, therefore, played a critical role in providing a justification for the unification of whites racially as a nation (Marx, 1998, 267), a pattern that continues to impact national identity, notions of whiteness and formulations of race in society today.

These whites learned that their whiteness rendered them "superior," and to maintain this status, they needed to place their allegiances with those in power who had the resources and could divvy up benefits. While particularly applied as a black—white polarization, this ideological formulation of race was also flexible. The stigmatization of racial inferiority could be invoked as needed to maintain divisions and a social hierarchy. For example, during the mid-nineteenth century, Chinese workers were used as the primary labor force in building California's railroads. Their subsequent brutalization, subjugation, and exclusion were framed overwhelmingly in racial terms (Smedley, 1993, 268).

Throughout the eighteenth and the early-nineteenth centuries the formation and consolidation of working-class whiteness (Roediger, 1999, 14) was founded not

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just on economic exploitation but also on racial folklore (Du Bois, 1970). Du Bois describes this dynamic eloquently:

> *It must be remembered that the white group of laborers, while they received a low wage, were compensated in part by a sort of public and psychological wage. They were given public deference and titles of courtesy because they were white. They were admitted freely with all classes of white people to public functions, public parks, and the best schools. The police were drawn from their ranks, and the courts, dependent upon their votes, treated them with such leniency as to encourage lawlessness. Their vote selected public officials and while this had small effect upon the economic situation, it had great effect upon their personal treatment and the deference shown them (Du Bois, 1979, 700, 701).*

Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, various theoretical trends emerged in the social and biological sciences to further justify the ordering of the world. These included Linnaeus' classification by descent (The Great Chain of Being), Cuvier's racial categorization that sorted humans into three subspecies (Caucasian, Mongolian, and Ethiopian) with differing permanent abilities, and a series of other typologies that attributed various characteristics to the classifications they named. "These models created a new form of social identity as the concept of 'race' developed as a way to rationalize the conquest and brutal treatment of native populations and the institution of slavery" (Smedley, 1998, 697). These racial typologists included Samuel George Morton, Arthur de Gobineau, James Hunt, and Karl Vogt (Banton, 2000, 55). During the following period the issue of origins (polygenist versus monogenist) was debated, providing the context for Charles Darwin's *The Origin of the Species* (1859), which

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demonstrated there were no permanent forms in nature (Banton, 2000, 57).

> *By the mid-nineteenth century virtually all Americans had been conditioned to this arbitrary ranking of the American peoples, and racial ideology had diffused around much of the world, including to the colonized peoples of the Third World and among Europeans themselves* (Smedley, 1998, 695).

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

The end of the nineteenth and first half of twentieth centuries was marked by two significant U.S. Supreme Court decisions concerning the Fourteenth Amendment, signifying important shifts in the racial order within the United States (Baker, 1998, 2). In 1896, *Plessy v. Ferguson* codified the practice of "separate but equal," and in 1954, the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling overturned it. Dominant theories of Social Darwinism and later anthropological writings on cultural relativism paralleled these events (Baker, 1998, 3). At the same time, the events contributed to shaping the direction of anthropology:

> *The relationship between the anthropological discourse on race and the prevailing racial construct has been close and often reciprocal. The processes that construct race have also helped to shape the field of anthropology; anthropology, in turn, has helped to shape various racial constructs. The social context from which turn-of-the-century constructs of race emerged - industrialization, poll taxes, public lynchings, unsafe working conditions, and Jim Crow segregation - at the same time gave rise to a professional anthropology that espoused racial inferiority and, as a consequence, supported and validated the status quo* (Baker, 1998, 3).

For the notion of whiteness, the turn of the century marked a period of contestation about who was to be included, as a huge influx of immigrants from Europe and other parts of the globe tested the boundaries of citizenry and racial identity. Paralleling the pace of immigration at the end of the century, the first

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decade of the twentieth century witnessed the largest number of immigrants (8.8 million) admitted into the United States (Kraly and Miyares, 2001, 47). The vast majority (92 percent) of these people originated from Europe.[2] At issue was the question of how they would be integrated and racial designated in U.S. society. The nation's expanding industries needed labor; mass immigration made cheap labor easily available. Immigrants were exploited but also "used as an instrument for more effective exploitation of others, whether native or immigrant. For this reason, immigrant workers were sometimes compelled to put aside their ethnic loyalties" (Steinberg, 2001, 38). African, Asian, and Mexican workers were used as low-paid labor source for the least skilled jobs and sectors, and established the infrastructure for industrialization and modernization. The European immigrants worked primarily within the modern industrial sector that strategically provided them with opportunities for upward mobility (Blauner, 1972, 62). This reality challenges the popular notion that "all Americans 'start at the bottom'" and work their way up the ladder. The racial labor principle has designated a different bottom for different groups (Blauner, 1972, 62, 63). Up to nearly the mid-twentieth century, white ethnics, particularly Jews, Italians, and Irish, while not fully accepted as whites, neither were they designated black.

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2. During the last decade of the twentieth century, 7.6 million people immigrated to the U.S., from: Europe, 17.4 percent; Asia, 38.9 percent; North America, 33.4 percent; South America, 6.6 percent, Africa, 4.0 percent and Oceania, .7 percent (Kraly and Miyares, 2001, 49).

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In social theory, the first half of the twentieth century brought further developments in the understanding of race and of ethnicity. Franz Boas' study of immigrant head shape called into question the presumption of immutability of race and laid down the groundwork for the later writings of Ruth Benedict, Margaret Mead, and Melville Herskovits (Smedley, 1993, 278). Boas asserted that physical differences between immigrants and native-born populations disappear after living in the same environment. Du Bois also significantly contributed to a paradigm shift in the social sciences toward recognition of the connection between race and the concept of culture, united in an understanding of economics and politics (Baker, 1998, 107-110). He described race as a political and social relationship, integral to capitalism, and the ultimate paradox of democracy (Du Bois, 1903, 372):

> *Back of the problem of race and color, lies a greater problem which both obscures and implements it: and that is the fact that so many civilized persons are willing to live in comfort even if the price of this is poverty, ignorance and disease of the majority of their fellowmen: That to maintain this privilege men have waged war until today war tends to become universal and continuous, and the excuse for this war continues largely to be color and race* (Du Bois, 1953, xiv).

Du Bois explains clearly how whiteness was constructed to reinforce and reproduce patterns of systemic inequality.

FROM BIOLOGICAL TO SOCIAL SCIENTIFIC EXPLANATIONS OF RACE

During the first half of the twentieth century the usage of an ethnicity-based paradigm to understand social relations in the United States emerged as an extension of the challenges made to a biologistic and social Darwinist conception of

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race (Omi and Winant, 1994, 12). Ethnicity was offered as a description of group formation that focused on culture and descent rather than biology. Ethnicity-based theory focused on the process of migration and the adaptation of immigrants in the United States. In 1913, Robert Park of the University of Chicago, a leading theorist within this group, asserted that by their second generation, Poles, Lithuanian, and Norwegians were indistinguishable from native-born Americans (Schaefer, 1995, 111). Park projected that ethnicity would dissolve as immigrants integrated into society, and that there was a pattern of integration into U.S. society, which he labeled the "race relations cycle." This involved stages of contact, accommodation, assimilation, and amalgamation achieved through intermarriage (Steinberg, 2001, 47). Park considered all modern nationalities to be a mixture of several groups.

During and after World War II ethnicity was expected to disappear into a new American culture. This period marked a new stage in the consolidation of whiteness as a racialized category such that European Americans were transformed into a pan-ethnicity that represented the distancing of individuals from their national origin, heritage, and language, and being grouped as "white" (Alba, 1990, 312). Two books in particular drew attention to the primacy of race within the social relations of U.S. society, and signaled a paradigm shift from the belief in biological to cultural explanations of racial difference.

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In 1945, *Man's Most Dangerous Myth: The Fallacy of Race,* by M. F. Ashley Montagu, a physical anthropologist, asserted:

> *The idea of "race" was not so much the deliberate creation of a caste seeking to defend its privileges against what was regarded as an inferior social caste as it was the strategic elaboration of erroneous notions, which had long been held by many slaveholders. What was once a social difference was now turned into a biological difference, which would serve, it was hoped to justify and maintain the social difference* (Montagu, 1945, 20).

Gunnar Myrdal's *American Dilemma* (1944) put forth a call for racial democratization, although he emphasized the need for the assimilation of African Americans. Myrdal wrote:

> *If America in actual practice could show the world a progressive trend by which the Negro finally became integrated into modern democracy, all mankind would be given faith again — it would have reason to believe that peace, progress and order are feasible. America is free to choose whether the Negro shall remain her liability or become her opportunity* (Myrdal, 1964, 1021, 1022).

Myrdal's study became "the blueprint for state-based racial reform in the postwar era, strongly influencing debates about segregation and the runner-up to the Brown decision" (Winant, 2001a, 158). His suggestion that racism revealed a contradiction between American ideals and practice was considered a major advance at the time it was written. It later became apparent that this work marked a shift from a biological focus to the social scientific notions of cultural inferiority still evident today (Steinberg, 2001, 265).

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SOCIAL SCIENTIFIC THEORIES OF POVERTY

The next phase of race and ethnicity theory was marked by Glazer and Moynihan's publication of *Beyond the Melting Pot* (1963). The authors asserted that immigrant groups do not "melt" into U.S. society but are transformed into new social forms based on political interests rather than on culture or heritage (Omi and Winant, 1994, 18). New communities were unlike each other and unlike those from where they migrated. Moynihan and Glazer argued that the United States developed a pluralist model that acknowledged differences but emphasized cooperation. By the 1970s, they spoke of ethnicity as a social category that allowed contemporary forms of group expression based on distinctiveness and, in turn, provided an opening to demand rights based on the group's character and self perceived needs (Glazer and Moynihan, 1975, 3).

Beyond the Melting Pot examined five ethnic groups in New York City and implied (sometimes explicitly) that the American commitment to progress and achievement was justly and equally apportioned. The book asserted that inherent cultural norms, ideology, and values led to the success and progress of one group but not another. Structural relations of the social system were neither considered nor deemed significant in their analysis (Mullings, 1978, 11). In this way, Moynihan and Glazer equated the histories and rationalized the social inequities experienced by European immigrants ("ethnics"), Puerto Ricans, and African Americans.

While the concept of the "undeserving poor" had long been established,

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deriving from period of early capitalism when pauperism was the fate of large number of people who forfeited their land and were displaced to the city, it was during the period of the 1960s that the phrase "culture of poverty" emerged. In formulating this framework, Oscar Lewis compares groups of people who are poor, and who he characterizes as having negative traits, values and norms to those who were poor, but do not appear to have these traits. He writes:

> *The culture or subculture of poverty comes into being in a variety of historical contexts. Most commonly it develops when a stratified social and economic system is breaking down or is being replaced by another, as in the case of the transition from feudalism to capitalism or during the industrial revolution* (Lewis, 1961, xxv).

Lewis states that the causes and consequences of poverty are a direct result of the total social system, in particular, industrial capitalism (Lewis, 1969, 190-191). He asserts that the structure of society is the most important factor in the perpetuation of poverty. Lewis' description of the characteristics of what he called the "culture of poverty" included a high degree of family disintegration, disorganization, resignation, and fatalism. Unfortunately, his work was used as a justification to blame individuals and groups exhibiting these characteristics, and to justify inequality through an explanation of the inherent cultural weakness of the poor (Lewis, 1969, 191) rather than as a means to critique the system within which these characteristics appear. This (mis) interpretation of Lewis' work parallels the underlying assumptions particularly about the weakness of the African American culture in Moynihan and Glazer's writings (1963) as indicated above and in

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Moynihan's later writings (1965) about a "tangle of pathology" characterizing black families with negative, self-perpetuating values. These theories functioned to bolster mainstream discourse that continued to emphasize the superiority of whites and white (ethnic) culture and the inferiority of African Americans and Latinos in particular. Eleanor Leacock's critique of this theoretical trend notes that people have different histories. Adaptive acts are institutionalized as internalized values appropriate for living in a given position in the socio-economic system (Leacock, 1971, 34). She writes: "Poverty, as a structural feature of our society, cannot be changed by a change of attitudes only" (Leacock, 1971, 34).

The dynamics shaping mainstream discourse from the late 1960s to the mid-1970s were complex. Liberal public officials had long used "damage imagery" to argue for policies and programs to help the poor (Scott, 1997, xvi-xvii). However, simultaneously, many groups and individuals were calling for social equality and justice, leading to the characterization of this period as a "Second Reconstruction." The visibility of the culture of poverty framework reflected a conservative influence that sought to command the parameters of thinking about the poor in an attempt to limit the power of a vision of society concerned with the common good, so well articulated by many popular movements of this period (DiLeonardo, 1999,

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59; Steinberg, 1999, 222). The ruling elite was clear about what was at stake.[3]

Theoretical notions of the culture of poverty have remained a central part of the public discourse. In recent times, this concept has been utilized in attacks on the public sector and debates about welfare and higher education. Issues of standards and merit were raised without the language of race yet implying cultural deficits of black and Latino communities and implicitly presuming white superiority.

Another explanation for group differences that emerged during the 1970s is the concept of ethnicity. While previously employed in discussions about the process of assimilation, this notion had not been consolidated as a means to explain the differences in social position between "white ethnics" and people of color. Within anthropology, a survey of textbooks written between 1916 and 1971 indicated no listings for ethnic or ethnic groups, although ethnology and ethnocentrism were included (Cohen, 1978, 380). After 1971, these terms became commonly used as the culture of poverty framework was popularized. This marked the emergence of oblique coding of race in literature, media, and discourse, allowing racialized policies and practices to function without the bluntness of explicit language. After all, who would argue against upholding "standards" to make our community "safe", or disagree with the need for "family values"?

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3. Gil Scott-Heron describes this period, "Civil rights, women's rights, gay rights; it's all wrong. Call in the cavalry to disrupt this perception of freedom gone wild. First one wants freedom, then the whole damn world wants freedom" (Scott-Heron, 1992). I owe thanks to Roderick D. Bush, Professor of Sociology, St. John's University for a clarifying discussion on this topic, 5 January 2002.

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Anthropology, in particular, has had a long history of drawing the connection between race, ethnicity, and culture. Eric R. Wolf states that these concepts play a guiding and central role in the development of the existence of anthropological study. He points out, "Each of these three concepts — race, culture, and ethnicity — has a societal background, and that background has implications for how we conceptualize and use them" (Wolf, 1994, 2). Wolf suggests that ideas embody a range of functions both essentialist and analytic, and that we should periodically disassemble them to "think better" (Wolf, 1994, 2). Wolf credits Franz Boas with the disaggregation of racial typology from culture, which he argued should be understood in their plurality, historicity and interconnectedness (Wolf, 1994, 5). Wolf also indicates that ethnicity emerged as a "hot topic" only at the beginning of the 1960s because it addresses "the fact that culturally marked entities form parts of larger systems" and allows for discussion of power differentials and agency in the construction of group identity, with differential emphases at different points in history (Wolf, 1994, 6,7). He suggests that "to call a social entity an 'ethnic' group is merely the beginning of the inquiry, rather than the implementation of it," and that this process is critically important at a time when "notions of cultural particularity have become major ideological weapons in political strife" (Wolf, 1994, 7).

Joan Vincent made another significant distinction between ethnic and minority groups. She describes minority groups as a function of political structure,

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and ethnic groups as an element of political organization (Vincent, 1974, 377). Vincent asserts that there were legal implications to each designation because groups differ in both historical and current contexts. She put forth that ethnicity should not be discussed as a neutral category, and argues that the melting pot is just a potpourri. She also supports Barth's position that "ethnic identifications are broadened when greater political mobilization is required, and narrowed when exclusion is sought" (Vincent, 1974, 376). This critique became particularly meaningful in the debates about affirmative action, as pan-ethnic whiteness consolidates across class boundaries, as either political needs arise for the dominant powers, or as poor or working class whites feel unstable and desire the status gained through their alliance and identification as whites:

> *During the late 1960s, momentum was building within white ethnic neighborhoods to the point where their concerns and grievances demanded the attention of the society at large. Partly it* [was] *a consequence of the growing discontent among white ethnics with their socio-economic position in America, partly it was one facet of the broader movement toward self-definition on behalf of many groups within American society* (Ryan, 1973, 1).

This growing discontent viewed civil rights demands for outlawing discrimination as acceptable, but not those calling for proactive or affirmative measures (Glazer and Moynihan, 1963, 17; Omi and Winant, 1994, 19). This perspective asserted that, "through hard work, patience and delayed gratification, etc. blacks could carve out their own rightful place in American society" (Omi and Winant, 1994, 19), and thereby echoed the culture of poverty argument from the perspective of white pan-ethnicity. During this period, ethnicity theory arose as a

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dominant paradigm and was constituted as a "white backlash" to the social programs that were set up as part, or as a result of the Civil Rights Act (1964), Voters Rights Act (1965), Immigration Act (1965), War on Poverty and the Welfare Rights and nationalist movements of the 1960s. White ethnics (partially funded by the government as Heritage Societies) asserted that they too, suffered, and should be the recipients of social programs to address inequality in the United States. Rather than the disappearance of ethnicity, there was resurgence and a demand for the recognition and acceptance of white ethnic groups as a political force.

It is ironic that despite the fact that the anti-poverty and civil rights programs and policies were portrayed as benefiting blacks and Latinos exclusively, in fact, many white ethnics (particularly women) also benefited. For example, 75 percent of students initially admitted through the Open Admission Policy in the City University of New York were white ethnics who were the first in their family to attend college (Ryan, 1973, 164; Lavin, Alba, and Silberstein, 1979, 69). Information such as this was muted in the public arena as the "new ethnicity" movement took strong stands against such programs and demanded resources for their own groups. Emphasis was placed on ethnicity as the primary classification for discussing groups as carriers of culture. These ideas then influenced the discourse about agency, community self-definition, contestation, and resistance.

By the mid 1970s, Moynihan and Glazer re-evaluated some of their own earlier thinking and put forth what is known as a "bootstraps model" (Omi and

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Winant, 1994, 21). While this model recognized the injustice of slavery and racism, it articulated the idea that successes and failures of specific groups are a result of different norms that they brought to bear in dealing with circumstances they faced. Nothing else is deemed relevant, including the economic climate, the reigning ideological stance of benign neglect, or the existing social structure within which all groups exist (Omi and Winant, 1994, 22). Black, Latino, and Asian ethnic or national categories are not viewed as notable (e.g. whether someone's family is from Haiti or Ethiopia; Peru or the Dominican Republic; China or India) whereas a white ethnic classification is considered significant (Omi and Winant, 1994, 22). Ethnicity generally asserts an upward distinction in status, whereas race signifies a downward distinction since whiteness is assumed to be natural, and not "raced."

In *Ethnic Dilemma 1964-1982* Nathan Glazer writes that while the 1960s legislation intended to lead us to a colorblind society, it actually increased color consciousness within the U.S. and forced institutions to pay an increasingly high level of attention to race and ethnicity (Glazer, 1983, 3). He argues that this legislation led to more discrimination and division, not less. This perspective has been a central and underlying presumption of the anti-affirmative action argument that has gained steam over the past twenty years, and to the emergence of calls for "colorblindness." Glazer asserted that the laws of the 1960s were the wrong solutions to the problem of discrimination, and that the expenditures of the early 1970s were ineffective. His writings signaled another political shift to the right,

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and a further attack on measures intended to equalize resources such as through school integration, affirmative action and various social welfare programs. This trend has continued throughout the past two decades, with the most recent consolidation in the rise of the conservative agenda and the parallel polarization of wealth worldwide.

While a number of anthropologists are included in this survey of race and ethnicity theory, overall,

> *The* [explicit] *anthropology of race is a relatively underdeveloped and sorely neglected domain. . . . neglecting to confront both in intellectual and sociopolitical terms, racism, particularly white supremacy as a major ideological and institutionalized force in today's world* (Harrison, 1997, 2).

Faye Harrison explains that this relative underdevelopment doesn't negate the contribution of post-Boasian anthropologists to an anti-racist trajectory, nor the research that has been conducted by anthropologists about race throughout the discipline's history (Harrison, 1997, 2). She challenges the relatively marginalized position that these interrogations had within anthropology prior to the 1990s, thereby implicitly supporting the existing racial order presuming and naturalizing whiteness. Within the last decade a revitalization of the examination of race and racism has occurred, such that articles have appeared regularly in journals including the *American Anthropologist, Cultural Anthropology, Critique of Anthropology, Urban Anthropology, Identities,* and *Public Culture* (Harrison, 1997, 2, 3). Harrison states, "Anthropology is being reconfigured by the very forces of multiculturalism, racial/ethnic/gender diversity and decolonization that we subject

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to interrogation and social analysis in our research on others" (Harrison, 1997, 3). "This reconfiguration of the discipline's culture and concomitant crystallization of a critical mass of out-of-the-closet anti-racists has made it more difficult for the field to remain race and power evasive" (Frankenberg, quoted in Harrison, 1997, 3).

Drawing on earlier critiques by Mullings (1978) and Wolf (1994), Harrison states that anthropology has only more recently acknowledged the importance of distinguishing between ethnicities and in relating ethnicity to social hierarchy, thereby recognizing the significant role of racialization (Harrison, 1997, 6).

CRITICAL RACE THEORY

In the late 1970s, along with theoretical critiques examining the intersection of race, class and gender, and of power and dominance in general, a body of work developed among legal scholars of color, including Kimberle Crenshaw, Mari Matsuda, Richard Delgado, Charles Lawrence, and Derrick Bell. This "1980s generation of liberation scholarship came to be known as 'Critical Race Theory'" (Matsuda, et al., 1993, 5) and asserts that new discussions about race are needed to address racism as endemic to American life. Collectively, their work is "pragmatic and utopian," seeks to "respond to the immediate needs of the subordinated and oppressed" and involves "both action and reflection" (Matsuda, et al., 1993, 3). Critical Race theorists believe in the privileging of contextual and historical descriptions and attempt to "confront and oppose dominant societal and

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institutional forces that maintained the structures of racism while professing the goal of dismantling racial discrimination" (Matsuda, et al., 3). This tradition expresses skepticism towards dominant claims of neutrality, colorblindness, and objectivity, insists on context, and is interdisciplinary and eclectic. The basis for their theoretical assertions was the recognition of experiential knowledge:

> *Critical Race Theory works toward the end of eliminating racial oppression as part of the broader goal of ending all forms of oppression. . .* [and] *measures progress by a yardstick that looks to fundamental social transformation. . . not just adjustments within the established hierarchies, but a challenge to hierarchy itself* (Matsuda et al., 1993, 6, 7).

Over the past ten years these scholars have contributed broadly to the study of social stratification as shaped by inequality based on race. An important aspect of this intellectual movement is an emphasis on race in order to eradicate injustice, not solely as identity politics concerned with the recognition of difference (Ford, *CommonQuest*, 105). This perspective analyzes race and racism through a critique of power, and thereby contributed to the emergence of whiteness studies because the focus became the system itself, and not solely the consequence of systemic patterns.

It is in this context, then, that the formal anthropological study of whiteness became an urgent task within which this work is framed.

WHITENESS SCHOLARSHIP AND STUDIES

Discussions of the "souls" and " ways" of white folk (Du Bois, 1920, 1940; Ellison, 1970; Hughes, 1990) have long been part of the intellectual tradition

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interrogating the role of race in U.S. and global society. David Roediger's *Black on White: Black Writers on What it Means to be White* (1998) documents this rich history. Implicit in these works is the importance of understanding not just how whites view "others" but the very meaning of being "white", for racialized attitudes presume representation of one's self (hooks, 1995, 31-50). "Sincere fictions" and ideological constructions lead to self-characterization as a "good person" or "non-racist" or "colorblind," all the while individuals hold beliefs and support positions that presume an assumption of white superiority (Feagin and Vera, 2001, 186). Racist sentiments are not solely articulated as prejudice; they are also expressed as culturally sanctioned beliefs. A system of self-deception and denial holds these contradictions in place (Wellman, 1993, xi, 29) just as "the obsessive denial that race matter(s) was obviously a white creation" (LaZarre, 1996, 25).

During the last two decades a body of literature has emerged with these notions of whiteness as the central theme. Most are explicit, although a number of works shed light on the dynamics of white supremacy and racialization yet do not have "whiteness" as their focus. They do, however, significantly help us theoretically understand the processes that historically and currently underlie white racial construction.

Additionally, while much of the scholarship does critique and challenge the naturalization of whiteness, and the privilege, dominance, and hegemony that whiteness assumes, not all of the literature is directed toward this end. There is

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no agreement about whether whiteness should be deconstructed, reconstructed, or eliminated, or about how changes might take place. This section notes various trends in the literature and articulates the emphasis of different works.

LABOR HISTORY AND POLITICAL ECONOMY

Among the most significant and substantive contributions to our understanding of whiteness has been in writings about labor history and political economy. Renowned are works are by Theodore Allen and David R. Roediger. Allen traces the origin and nature of the 'white race" and how this concept was utilized as a means of social control, in *The Invention of the White Race: Racial Oppression and Social Control* (Volume One, 1994) and *The Origin of Racial Oppression in Anglo-America* (Volume Two, 1997). He thoroughly documents the context within which Bacon's Rebellion occurred, and discusses prior and subsequent periods when ruling-class policies created and reinforced racial oppression. Allen draws upon analogies from the history of British rule in Ireland. Roediger on the other hand, provides a framework for understanding the relationship between the economic benefits and social construction of whiteness. In *Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*, he traces how, when, and why "being white" became so important to workers included in this designation (Roediger, 1991, 5). Ultimately he argues that whiteness "was a way in which white workers responded to a fear of dependency on wage labor and to the necessities of capitalist work discipline" (Roediger, 1991, 13). In other words, that "the pleasures of whiteness could

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function as a 'wage' for white workers. . . . status and privileges conferred by race could be used to make up for alienating and exploitative class relationships. . . . fashioning identities as 'not slaves' and as 'not blacks'" (Roediger 1991, 13).

The history of European immigrants as they underwent the process of racialization between the late-eighteenth and twentieth centuries is summarize in another notable work, *Whiteness of a Different Color* (1998) by Matthew Frye Jacobson. He particularly focuses on the ambiguity and shifting nature of racial categorization and how it serves divergent political purposes at different times.

Individuals characterized as Critical White Studies Theorists critique the normalization of whiteness as it is structured into institutions in the present-day context. These include scholars such as Toni Morrison, Joe R. Feagin, Cherrie Moraga, and Eric Foner whose essays in the volume *Critical White Studies* (Delgado and Stefancic, 1997) cover a range of topics from "How Whites View Themselves" to "The Ladder of Whiteness." They analyze whiteness as part of a broad call for racial and social transformation. Significantly, several of these scholars have questioned why whiteness studies emerged at a time when African American, Latino, and Asian studies are becoming established. Concern has been articulated about whether this is just another means for directing resources to whites and through a white-dominated perspective (Talbot, 1997, 118). Tension exists between scholars and activists interested in interrogating whiteness in order to challenge structures of inequality, and those individuals who are more concerned with

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documenting the "white experience." The scholars who examine historical perspectives drawing from Critical Race Theory are particularly sensitive to this tension and explicitly define themselves as studying whiteness as a theoretical means to deconstruct racialized structures of power and subordination.

WHITENESS AS PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

The perspective that whiteness is solely an individual's experience of identity represents another significant trend within the literature. In this group, scholars have selected various lenses, however, their main focus is generally on understanding how race shapes the lives of a particular group of whites. Several works examine the intersection of race and gender. In *The Social Construction of Whiteness: White Women, Race Matters*, Ruth Frankenberg draws on life history interviews of thirty women and analyzes "the daily experience of racial structuring and the ways race privilege might be crosscut by other axes of difference and inequality" (1993, 1). She focuses on these women's experiences of race and identity, and concludes that to displace the colonial construction of whiteness as an empty cultural space, we need to analyze the position of whiteness in the social order. She leaves open the question of how this might be done and primarily utilizes narratives rather than historical or contextual analysis. A later volume edited by Frankenberg, *Displacing Whiteness: Essays in Social and Cultural Criticism* (1997), provides stories of the personal experience of white racial identity as they either reinforce or challenge dominant power structures. The essays critique

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whiteness as the cultural experience of an individual's social identity, varying by context and circumstance.

Another work that examines whiteness from a personal perspective, is Lorraine Delia Kenny's *Daughters of Suburbia: Growing Up White, Middle Class and Female* (2000), which interrogates the intersection of race, gender and class combining "auto-ethnography" with an analysis of high-profile media images of white teenaged girls such as Amy Fisher.[4] Kenny focuses on the process of racial identity formation among middle school girls in a white suburban setting, and how they come to see themselves as the cultural norm. She suggests that whiteness requires silences in order to function although she primarily focuses on the individual experiences of this particular group of white teenaged girls.

Within the literature that examines the lived experience of white racial identity are works that particularly explore the link between race and class. *Racial Situations: Class Predicaments of Whiteness in Detroit* (1999) by John Hartigan, Jr., and *White Trash: Race and Class in America* (1997) by Matt Wray and Annalee Newitz present ethnographies that articulate the relational functioning of dominance and subordination along these two axes. However, these authors focus on experiences of individuals, particularly poor whites, rather than on structural aspects of relationships. Wray and Newitz implicitly advocate for a positive re-

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4. Amy Fisher was the teenaged girl, whose affair with a married man was widely publicized in the media after she shot his wife in the face (Kenny, 2000, 11).

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construction of white identity, rather than a society-wide transformation. For example, they promote the "White Trash Girl" persona — implying that whites, too, can and should be proud of their cultural identity.

Several scholars analyze whiteness from an autobiographical perspective including Jane Lazarre (*Beyond the Whiteness of Whiteness, Memoir of a White Mother of Black Sons,* 1996), Mab Segrest (*Memoir of a Race Traitor,* 1994), Maurice Berger (*White Lies: Race and the Myths of Whiteness,* 1999), and Dalton Conley (*Honky,* 2000a). Their works have the potential to theorize and deconstruct race within a political, social and economic framework, yet they primarily explore the domain of personal identity. This weakness undermines their ability to impact discourse, as structural factors tend to remain hidden or isolated in their analyses.

CULTURAL REPRESENTATIONS OF WHITENESS

The critique of whiteness as displayed in popular culture, media, and public representations forms another trend in the literature. The most well known works are Toni Morrison's *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992) and bell hooks "Representations of Whiteness in the Black Imagination" (1995). These groundbreaking writings provide incisive depictions of the meaning of whiteness and its "hidden" centrality within all aspects of modern life. Morrison describes her project as "an effort to avert the critical gaze from the racial object to the racial subject; from the described and imagined to the describers and imaginers; from the serving to the served" (Stowe, 1996,71). hooks describes

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the amazement of her white student as they discover that "black people watch white people with a critical 'ethnographic' gaze" (1995, 34). These works follow the long-standing tradition of scholars of color who assert the importance of understanding whiteness.

Various other currents exist within the literature that examines cultural representation. One of these includes authors who analyze white racial images in the media, (*White* [1997] by Richard Dyer), and in public discourse as a "communications phenomenon", (*Whiteness: The Communication of Social Identity* [1999] by Thomas K. Nakayama and Judith N. Martin) and explore shifting popular images of straight white masculinity (*White Guys: Studies in Postmodern Domination and Difference* [1995] by Fred Pfeil). A second current examines everyday white cultural practices. Helan Page has written about this topic in numerous articles, and points to the need to "confront the embodied practice and experiences of systemic racism" that are located in the control over public discourse that is enacted by dominant racial subjects to preserve white entitlements. Page focuses on a critique of research, pedagogy, and administration that all presume and naturalize whiteness, thereby reinforcing dominance and subordination. He writes "Dominant representations ensure enforcement of the contract using racial tension as a lever" (Page, 1998, 60).

Another perspective among scholars examining cultural representations is articulated by Marimba Ani in *Yurugu: An African-Centered Critique of European*

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Cultural Thought and Behavior (1994), which explores the cultural influence on institutions and structures of European-dominated societies. Ani describes key elements of European experience and expression that have historically provided the means for imperialistic success, not based on military might but through colonization of people's cultures, religions, aesthetics, notions of identity and ideology. Ani writes, "European culture is unique in the assertion of political interest" (Ani, 1994, 7). She explains this by saying that European thought presumes its own logic, superiority, universalism and natural state, thereby describing the cultural origins of consciousness and worldview under capitalism that set the stage for global white supremacy.

Providing rich narratives of the people they interviewed, works such as *It's the Little Things: The Everyday Interactions that Get under the Skin of Blacks and Whites* (2000) by Lena Williams, and *A Country of Strangers: Blacks and Whites in America* (1997) by David K. Shipler offer detailed accounts of daily interactions between whites and blacks. Both books read like novels and primarily focus on interpersonal relationships, perceptions and stereotypes. Unfortunately, without structural contextualization, we are left with the impression that if we improve interpersonal relationships, racism and racial inequality will disappear.

Finally within scholarship exploring cultural representations of whiteness, are several works that interrogate the relationships between white, Asian, and Latino identities, locations and borders in a racialized society. These include, for

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example, *De Colores Means All of Us: Latina Views for A Multi-Colored Century* (1998), by Elizabeth Martinez, who deconstructs the origin myths of white America and *Forever Foreigners or Honorary Whites: The Asian Ethnic Experience Today* (1998), by Mia Tuan, who points to the subtle and not so subtle ways that Asians are excluded in U.S. society except when they are needed as "model minorities" (Tuan, 1998, 161). A recent article by Miri Song, "Comparing minorities' ethnic options: Do Asian Americans possess 'more' ethnic options than African Americans?" contributes significantly to our understanding of how race and ethnicity function within U.S. society (Song, 2001, 57-82). An extensive scholarship looking at whiteness from either an Asian or Latino perspective does not exist, nor one that critiques the white immigrant versus native-born experience.

These works help us to understand how mainstream imagery and discourse shape and reinforce structured relationships. They document the way that popular narratives about race are shaped but do not measure the impact through ethnographic study. This literature provides a much-needed backdrop for a broad investigation of racialization and the presumption of white dominance and superiority, but lack analysis of the impact of these representations on the everyday consciousness of ordinary people.

CONSTRUCTIONS OF WHITENESS

Another important trend within the scholarship documents legal, economic, and political processes that are engaged as groups and individuals negotiate their

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whiteness. *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race,* by Ian F. Haney Lopez, summarizes various twentieth century court cases when racial identity was contested, particularly in the process of determining whether an individual was "white enough" to naturalize as a U.S. citizen. Lopez illustrates the contingent, fluid and transient nature of whiteness by analyzing cases where immigrants from Hawaii, China or Burma were excluded, immigrants from Mexico and Armenia were included yet those from Syria, India and Arabia were sometimes included and sometimes excluded. He argues that the judicial system thereby functions as a powerful mechanism for the regulation of society and plays a central role in the social construction of race (Lopez, 1996, 9). *White by Definition: Social Classification in Creole Louisiana* by Virginia R. Dominguez, similarly documents how the parameters of white identity are constructed through historical processes of legal classification of white, black and Creole identity. Through a comparison of the histories of South Africa, Brazil and the United States, Anthony Marx explores the significance of racial encoding in state actions in *Making Race and Nation* (1998). Marx asserts that the state political and judicial systems play a critical role in constructing and reinforcing racial relationships and white dominance yet also strongly recognizes the influence that social movements have had historically in challenging established patterns (Marx, 1998, 269-281).

Karen Brodkin's *How Jews Became White Folks & What That Says About Race in America* (1998) and Noel Ignatiev's *How the Irish Became White* (1995)

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each periodize the transformation of a particular European immigrant community that was not initially accepted into white, Anglo-Saxon society. Both contribute to our understanding of the particularities, opportunities and trade-offs that specifically Jewish and Irish communities experienced and negotiated as they accepted the crown and mantle of white pan-ethnicity. These authors are explicitly political in their scholarship, and articulate their work as a means to bolster the argument for deconstructing and transforming patterns of racial inequality through understanding how these groups came to be white. Ultimately, however they articulate different visions: Ignatiev calls for the abolition of whiteness whereas Brodkin seeks for us to build a multiracial democracy. These are important differences, although both works contribute substantively to our understanding about how whiteness has been produced and reproduced in U.S. society.

An interesting edited volume of selected essays from the 30th Annual American Italian Historical Association (AIHA) Conference that took place in 1997, examines the intersection of race and the Italian ethnic experience. Fred Gardaphe, President of the AIHA at the time describes the conference and this set of essays as the beginning of a "culturally critical interaction" about issues related to Italian American and African American communities in the United States (Ashyk, Gardaphe, Tamburri, 1999, vii). In the essay that most clearly analyzes Italian American ethnicity through a critique about racialization and whiteness, Jerome Krase states: "What makes contemporary American society interesting, but

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not unique, is the simultaneous operation of contradictory myths. These cultural and structural paradoxes emerge from the ongoing dialectical social discourse as each myth calls forth its anti-myth." He urges against essentializing both race and ethnicity (Krase, 1999, 103). The scholarship would benefit from an expanded analysis of the processes that have shaped and form Italian whiteness.

WHITENESS IN PEDAGOGY AND DISCOURSE

An important, although perhaps smaller, body of literature interrogates whiteness within pedagogy and discourse. Among writings that focus on this, are Henry Giroux's "Rewriting the Discourse of Racial Identity: Towards a Pedagogy and Politics of Whiteness" (1997), Lisa Delpit's, "The Silenced Dialogue: Teaching Other People's Children" (1988), and Alice McIntyre's *Making Meaning of Whiteness: Exploring Racial Identity with White Teachers* (1997). Each of these writings expresses urgency about our need to make presumptions of whiteness visible and to challenge the racialized structures of the educational system. The authors rightfully target this institution as a locus where racialized images, beliefs, and ideology are produced and reproduced. They recognize the potential that exists within the educational system to disrupt patterns of learning that order and rank groups and individuals in a racialized society. Delpit in particular illustrates the dynamics of power within academia and articulates the ways that positionality critically determines outlook and success. Giroux articulates the weakness of this literature in this way:

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> *There is a curious absence in the work on whiteness regarding how students might examine critically the construction of their own identities in order to rethink Whiteness as a discourse of both critique and possibility. . . Central to such a task is the political and pedagogical challenge of refashioning an anti-racist politics that informs a broader, radical, democratic project* (Giroux, 1997, 23).

Several edited volumes emphasize critiques of pedagogy and discourse, and attempt to provide interdisciplinary, multi-layered analyses about whiteness. In doing so, they contribute to the body of knowledge about how whiteness and white racial identity are formed both in local and global settings, and also because they allow for multi-vocality on this important topic. Some volumes emphasize the need to reform whiteness into something positive (*White Reign: Deploying Whiteness in America,* Kincheloe, et al., [1998]), while others more clearly seek to dismantle structures of inequality through a deepened understanding of power and privilege (*The Making and Unmaking of Whiteness,* Rasmussen, et al., [2001]). Most works include essays that express a range of perspectives such as in *Off White: Readings on Race, Power and Society* (1997), by Fine, et al. Notably, the Editors of this volume express concern that whiteness studies was to become a "new intellectual fetish", and call for their book to be "the last book on whiteness. We should get back to the work of understanding and dismantling the stratified construction of race/colors, rather than one group at a time" (Fine et al., 1997, xii); although I understand they have since rethought this position.

While this body of literature analyzes racial domination and the consequent

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formation of white identity; less apparent are the authors' beliefs about how to use whiteness as a theoretical tool to impact structures of institutionalized power.

DE-CONSTRUCTIONS — WHITE ANTI-RACIST STRATEGIES AND CRITIQUES

The last trend in the whiteness literature that I will describe investigates inequality and injustice, recognizes the centrality of white supremacy in ideological formulations in racially stratified societies and critiques white privilege and internalized attitudes. Two books in particular explore the intersection of race, class, gender, and white supremacy, and several others focus on anti-racist practice. These works have an explicitly anti-racist focus.

Well known to whiteness theorists, Peggy McIntosh's "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack" (1989) has been reprinted extensively because it provides the reader with a way to understand how whiteness is structured into everyday living. McIntosh identifies "conditions of daily experience that [she] once took for granted, as neutral, normal and universally available" (82, 1995). She says that some of these privileges convey a sense of belonging (from "flesh" colored bandages and "nude" stockings to the dominance of white images in positions of power); other privileges convey protection (such as the presumption of white innocence as opposed to a presumption of black guilt); yet still others confer permission to dominate or to not listen to people in less powerful positions. She draws these conclusions through an analysis of gender and heterosexual privilege and dominance and emphasizes the need for a thorough understanding of systems

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of dominance, in order to reconstruct power on a broader base. In this way, McIntosh makes assumptions of whiteness visible. Stephanie M. Wildman takes this notion a step further in *Privilege Revealed: How Invisible Preference Undermines America* (1996). Wildman analyzes the intersection of privilege based on race, gender, sexual orientation, economic wealth, physical ability and religion in order to deepen our understanding of systems of privilege that perpetuate the status quo (Wildman, 1996, 5). She asserts that invisible privileges function to maintain hierarchies of oppression and suggests that they should be exposed and challenged.

Critiques that specifically focus on exposing white supremacist discourse include *White Lies: Race, Class, Gender and Sexuality in White Supremacist Discourse* (1997), by Jessie Daniels, and *White Man Falling: Race, Gender and White Supremacy* (1998), by Abby L. Ferber. Daniels asserts that the construction of whiteness is centrally linked to "white lies" that uphold white supremacy — that class, gender, and sexuality are not marginal but play a key role in this construction, and that the discourse of white supremacy is a part of "mainstream politics, advertising, academia and popular culture" (Daniels, 1997, 7). Ferber particularly emphasizes the need to critically analyze mainstream discourse for intertwined constructions of race and gender bias, as she believes they reflect white supremacist assumptions. Both authors express a sense of urgency, as they expose writings of the Ku Klux Klan, neo-Nazis, and militia movements.

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Two works that have been critical to the analysis of how whites think about and perceive race in their lives, helped theoretically ground this project. First published in 1977, David T. Wellman's *Portraits of White Racism* is based on five case histories and allows us to understand both the personal and the structural bases for racism. Wellman asserts that "racist beliefs are culturally sanctioned, rational responses to struggles over scarce resources" invoked to defend white advantages (Wellman, 1993, 29). While chapters within *White Racism* (2001), by Joe R. Feagin, Hernan Vera, and Pinar Batur, focus on the description of particular racist events that have occurred in the recent history of the United States, the chapter entitled "Sincere Fictions of the White Self" is devoted to an analysis of "personal ideological constructions that reproduce societal mythologies at the individual level" (2001, 186). The authors describe white attitudes about welfare, crime, and affirmative action, analyze the racialized components of these beliefs and conclude with recommendations for anti-racist engagement. This book is a useful reference to understand everyday thinking, yet the connection between how these beliefs contribute to the reproduction of patterns of structural inequality is not clearly drawn.

Finally, within the literature interrogating white supremacy and racism are three explicitly activist-oriented anti-racist works. *Whites Confront Racism: Antiracists and Their Paths to Action* (2001) by Eileen O'Brien, writes about her study of thirty whites who have been active against racism. She asserts that the

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stories of white activists remain largely invisible, and believes that knowledge of their existence and practices is integral to an understanding of participatory possibilities for challenging racism (O'Brien, 2001, 2, 3). In *A Promise and A Way of Life: White Antiracist Activism,* Becky Thompson conducts a similar survey, tracing the social history and culture of whites involved with struggles for racial justice, and exploring the meaning of the label "antiracists". She traces the relationships of these activists to broad social movements led by people of color, nationally and globally and also wants us to know this history for the possibilities she feels it presents for future challenges to white supremacy.

The New Abolitionists, known for their journal *Race Traitor* (1996), explicitly call for the abolition of "whiteness" calling it a biological and cultural fiction, a club into which certain people are enrolled at birth. This group asserts that to consider reforming whiteness as a legitimate identity is dangerous because it provides the basis for right-wing, ultra-conservative white supremacists to validate a white-power position as a corollary to national and ethnic pride movements, and that it shifts the focus to personal relationships and "getting along" rather than to political struggle. They say:

> *It is fortunate that in the nineteenth century they had abolitionists instead of diversity consultants; if not, slavery would still exist, and representatives of slaves and slaveholders would be meeting together — to promote mutual understanding and good feeling* (Ignatiev, 1998, 4).

The New Abolitionists call for a deeper understanding of how the white race is reproduced, and for challenging, disrupting, and stopping the functioning of

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institutions that structure it. Howard Winant, in an essay entitled "Whiteness at Century's End" writes:

> *Abolishing whiteness is one thing; deconstruction of whiteness is quite another. . . I understand deconstructing whiteness to mean rethinking and changing ideas about white identity, and reorienting the practices consequent upon these ideas. . . Such activity and awareness demands thought and discipline* (Winant, 2001b).

It is with this in mind that I outline the specific contributions that I attempt to make in this dissertation in seeking to build upon existing literature to extend our understanding of the link between the everyday white racial consciousness and the mechanisms that reproduce structures of racial inequality.

CONTRIBUTION TO THE SCHOLARSHIP ON WHITENESS AND RACE

The particular contributions of this dissertation are outlined below. In summary they suggest that the existing literature is generally too rigidly economistic, too political, or too personal. This dissertation aims to strike a balance between these three critical elements.

Ethnography within a Political, Economic and Social Theoretical Frame

As the above-listed survey of literature has demonstrated, scholarship about whiteness tends to be either narrative and ethnographic, or formally theoretical, addressing issues of legal, political, and social construction of race. Works that examine whiteness as personal experience generally articulate their theoretical underpinnings, yet they are often read as "stories", rather than within a structural analysis. While this material is engaging, one is generally left with an

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uncertain sense of the implications of these narratives. This dissertation, on the other hand, explicitly weaves the stories that portray everyday thinking into the context of current events and political transformations during the last three decades within U.S. and global society, although framed within the historical social system that spans the last six hundred years.

Emphasis on Economic Explanations for Inequality and Racism

Literature about whiteness generally does not address the lack of awareness of white people about the factors at work that shape their employment, education, housing and healthcare opportunities. Attitudes and beliefs are primarily explained as a consequence of the bombardment of racialized imagery and discourse, particularly in the media. This dissertation explores the implications of this lack of understanding, as expressed through the misperceptions and narratives drawn upon by everyday people, to explain systemic inequality.

Little attention is given in the literature to examining curriculum within primary, secondary and post-secondary education from the standpoint of how (and whether) structures of power and dominance are interrogated. While the contributions of multiculturalism are not to be negated, they have unfortunately, functioned in large regard to divert our attention from issues of power and subordination that are integrally embedded as forces that shape the possibilities for all people both in the United States and globally. Identifying the need to expose and analyze economic and political processes as connected to discourse and

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beliefs is an important contribution that this dissertation makes to the scholarship.

Identifying the Mechanisms of the Reproduction of Patterns of Racial Inequality

Explicitly, how *does* it happen that "well-meaning" whites end up colluding with the system by accepting mainstream discourse about whether we have achieved racial equality, whether or not individual and collective efforts for change actually can make a difference, and of the true character of human nature? These issues are peripherally explored within the literature. Works within the sub-group "*Whiteness as Personal Experience*" document attitudes, but generally link them neither to the underlying beliefs that guide them nor to the mainstream discourse that shapes them nor to the material benefits that whites receive by subscribing to these narratives. The centrality of agency is emphasized, neither within the ethnographic literature nor within the theoretical and historical works. This is critical, as, if people do not believe that they can make a difference *AND* they do not understand the factors shaping their own possibilities, they will be hard-pressed to resist economic, political and social pressures and more easily succumb to accepting hegemonic arguments for racial and other forms of inequality and injustice. If white people believe that human nature is stick with "one's own", and to care only for one's immediate circle, the parameters within which they are able to examine, analyze, and determine whether to submit or dissent are structured narrowly and rigidly. The true possibilities for humanity are then rendered invisible, and certainly impossible.

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Linking Agency and Structure, Everyday Consciousness and Institution

At the heart of this dissertation is a firm belief that the everyday thinking of ordinary people integrally relates to the perpetuation of patterns of systemic racial inequality. Therein lies the implicit potential for challenging those patterns, and for constructing a more egalitarian and just world. This linking of hegemonic discourse and ideology as practiced by poor, working-, and middle-class white populations to the safeguarding of the status quo as shaped and dictated by the most powerful and dominant sector of global society provides us with critical knowledge of how an unfair and inhumane system can persist. As we are able to understand the beliefs that underlie support for institutionalized policies and programs and the mechanisms that allow these patterns to be replicated and reproduced, we can then take action. This dissertation has explicitly sought "cracks in the wall of whiteness" in order to identify where weaknesses exist within the current racial order. This was done to strengthen our strategic ability to dismantle the formulations of race that have shaped U.S. and global history over the last five hundred years. Existing whiteness scholarship generally focuses on the individual or the institutions, rather than connections. Without linking agency to structure, we discuss only the chickens or the eggs without ever understanding the inherent relationship between the two.

The exploration of race and culture has been a central focus of anthropological work and has been one aspect of the discipline's scholarship that

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policymakers have drawn upon to shape legislation (Baker, 1998, 4). This is critically important in grasping the potential significance of this project, as it is specifically aimed at impacting and challenging patterns of racial inequality that are systematically structured. Understanding the everyday thinking of whites at this moment in time, and recognizing that their consciousness has a direct relationship to the perpetuation and reproduction of patterns of inequality means that we can intervene to alter the dominant narratives. The emphasis here is on agency, for if race has been socially *CON*-structed, it can also be socially *DE*-constructed.

Recommendations

While some of the literature offers suggestions about the implications of the theoretical or ethnographic material, this project articulates both concrete proposals and more theoretical ones that have to do with my belief in the centrality of agency, possibility and change. This dissertation explicitly is aimed at impacting policy, and contributing to the forces of change that influence structures and institutions which predominantly implement the will of the powerful. I make several specific suggestions for academia, particularly within post-secondary education where students often explore "outside-the-boxes" of mainstream discourse and their own family's ideas and traditions. Most critical is the need to forge links between student and academic affairs, and to understand the critical role of praxis

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in learning.[5] While within academia, nationally, there is a trend toward recognizing the role of community service and volunteer learning, so has there been a trend toward distance learning and enclosed "learning communities."

The implications of these developments are tremendous, and I assert the need to reflect upon them within the context of the overall mission of higher education. This is a critical contribution to whiteness scholarship, because so many of the presumptions about the future and possibilities of our society rest within visions about who is educated, about what, whom to lead, and for what purpose. The implicit racialization of responses to these questions is highly consequential. This point can also be raised in the context of the primary and secondary educational systems. Whiteness scholarship must support an interrogation of the future of academia in this light. This dissertation provides material to assist this effort, and in doing so is distinguished from other literature.

Finally, I would like to return to the issue of agency, for if there is one overarching contribution that this dissertation makes to the scholarship, it is the belief that the current structures and patterns of our highly inegalitarian and unjust order can change, and that we must identify, cultivate, and mobilize every possible crack, and recognize and strategically utilize every contradiction to make this happen. We must fight to the end for the belief in the common good and for

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5. In a recent article in the *Anthropology News*, Noel J. Chrisman says, "When anthropology is able to promote the synergy of theory and practice, we will be a mature discipline" (2002. 4).

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all of humanity. To give up, or to settle, leaves us defensive and vulnerable to the "chickens coming home to roost in ways that are unpredictable and uncontrollable."[6]

Scholarship that investigates the consciousness or lack thereof among whites, of their own racialized identity matters because the link between consciousness, ideology, social practice and structure allow us to develop the means to understand and address systemic patterns of inequality. This dissertation makes an analytic and practical contribution by providing insight into how white pan-ethnicity affects everyday perceptions that impact actions and in turn, affect policies that reinforce patterns of racial inequality, but also have the capacity to challenge them. I take my lead from a long tradition of activists and scholars who have been willing to dream:

> *The point of historical studies of racial identities in the working class. . . has never been to mount a facile indictment of white workers as simply racist. Rather it has been and is now to understand how historicized racial identities dramatically shaped what workers could do and dream in their lifetimes and how better deeds and dreams can be made possible in ours* (Roediger, 1994, 77).

With this grounding in mind, we turn next to a discussion of the background, methodology and design of the ethnographic study conducted to seek answers to the questions raised by this project.

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6. The Afterword explores this idea more fully.

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CHAPTER 3 - BACKGROUND, DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the place (Brooklyn College), the context (Brooklyn) and the people who participated in this research and connects the overall political, social and economic framework of the study with its ethnographic findings.

BACKGROUND

WHY BROOKLYN COLLEGE?

The student population of Brooklyn College (BC) is reflective of many multicultural urban centers that have emerged throughout the United States over the last several decades. This heterogeneous community roughly mirrors the population of the borough, and is comprised of over 15,000 students from one hundred ethnic groups speaking over forty languages. It was important to conduct this research in a location that provided access to a diverse population, and allowed for the findings on this important topic to be generalizable and easily compared with data collected through other studies. The Brooklyn College campus provided opportunities for generalization, access and comparison. As a college in the largest urban public university in the nation,[1] Brooklyn College has a reputation for institutional integrity as well as a history of struggle around diversity, self-determination, and commitment to the common good. As such, it proved to be an ideal setting for this research.

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1. In 1995, CUNY enrolled over 213,000 students in ten senior colleges, six community colleges, a technical college, graduate school, law school, medical school, and affiliated school of medicine (Foner, 2001b, 8).

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Overall demographic data comparing the college, university, borough and city populations is illustrated in the following table:

	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian Pacific Islander	American Indian Alaskan Native
Brooklyn College Undergraduate	49.1%	30.1%	11.5%	9.3%	0.0%
CUNY Undergraduate	29.3%	32.5%	26.1%	12.0%	0.2%
Brooklyn College Graduate	55.9%	27.2%	9.8%	7.0%	0.1%
CUNY Graduate	58.0%	16.3%	13.2%	12.3%	0.2%
Brooklyn	35.6%	41.0%	23.0%	6.5%	0.4%
New York City	33.7%	30.7%	26.3%	10.1%	0.1%

Table 3.1 Comparative Demography: Brooklyn College, CUNY, Brooklyn, New York City[2]

As can be seen, there are significantly more white undergraduate students, more black graduate students and fewer Latino and Asian students at BC than throughout CUNY. BC has more whites and fewer blacks and Hispanics than the borough, which is particularly significant because 90 percent of all BC students live in Brooklyn (Brooklyn College Office of Institutional Research [BC OIR], 1999c). Further in this chapter I summarize other demographic aspects of these students as compared to students who participated in the study.

Throughout the 1990s significant shifts in the New York City population occurred, which have been reflected in Brooklyn, at CUNY and Brooklyn College. The major trends include a decline in the white population (by more than 20

2. Brooklyn College and CUNY Race/Ethnicity Data is taken from (CUNY OIRA, 1997, Table 30. p.95). Brooklyn and New York City race/ethnicity data is taken from (*U.S. Census Bureau*, 2001b).

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percent) that is somewhat offset by an increase in immigration from Russia and other Eastern European countries, and a dramatic increase in the West Indian, Latino (except Puerto Ricans, whose numbers declined) and Asian populations. Over time, the city has become "less white" and more diverse (Mollenkopf, 2001b, 1). The CUNY student body is less white, less black, more Asian and more Latino (Mollenkopf, 2001b, 1). At Brooklyn College these trends have been evident even since 1995, when the white, non-Hispanic population was 54 percent (BC OIR, 1996, 41), which declined to 49 percent by 1997 (BC OIR, 1998, 41). In a survey conducted in 2000, 42 percent of Brooklyn College students identified themselves as white (Kuh, 2000). Nationally, enrollment at four-year institutions is 77 percent white; 10 percent black; 6 percent Asian/Pacific Islander and .9 percent American Indian/Alaskan Native (CUNY Office of Institutional Research and Analysis [CUNY OIRA], 1997, 172).

As of the 1990 census, Brooklyn was home to one hundred ethnic and racial groups, and boasted a population of 2,300,664, down from 2,627,319 in 1960 (U.S. Census Bureau, 1960). Table 3.2 provides more detailed data about the racial and ethnic changes in the borough in the second half of the twentieth century.

	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian/Pacific Islander	Native American
1990	46.9%	37.9%	19.5%	4.8%	.3%
1960	85.5%	14.1%	6.9%	Not Collected	Not Collected

Table 3.2 Brooklyn Population Comparison over Time (U.S. Census Bureau, 1960, 2000)

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Because categories and census enumeration techniques have dramatically changed over time, the data from 1960 and 1990 cannot be exactly compared. In addition, the category "Hispanic" includes people who may also report another racial identity, so totals are greater than 100 percent. These data provide a sense of the changes that have taken place during this period. Also significant is that between 1989 and 1995 the population of CUNY undergraduates born outside of the U.S. mainland increased from 38 percent to 47 percent (CUNY OIRA, 1997, 1) with approximately 25 percent of these foreign-born students arriving within the last four years. At Brooklyn College, 30 percent of the foreign-born students arrived within the last four years and 60 percent within the past eight years (CUNY OIRA, 1997, 1). This is particularly pertinent to discussions of public higher education, as CUNY has historically functioned as a critical vehicle for the education of the New York City immigrant population (Mollenkopf, 2001a).

The history of the borough and the college is summarized next, setting the stage for understanding the ethnographic material in chapters four through seven.

BROOKLYN, THE BOROUGH

> *It may not be generally known that our city is getting to have quite a worldwide reputation.*
>
> —Walt Whitman, 1862, Brooklynite and poet (Snyder-Grenier, 1996, 1)

> *In Unity There is Strength.*
>
> —The motto on the 1898 Seal of the Borough of Brooklyn[3]

3. Handout distributed by the Office of the Borough President Howard Golden, "Fascinating Facts About Brooklyn" compiled by Borough Historian, John Manbeck.

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Bedford-Stuyvesant, Canarsie, Bushwick, Bensonhurst, East New York, Flatbush, and Borough Park — these neighborhoods are diverse when viewed together, homogenous when viewed alone. They are culturally rich, yet many of their residents are poor. Brooklyn is often seen as violent and full of rage and conflict, yet Brooklynites are reputably proud, cooperative, with a strong sense of history and community. Discrepant images are simultaneously conjured up when talking about the borough. Demographics depict a multicultural milieu, yet most areas reflect a concentration of one group. Neighborhood populations vary so greatly that one, (e.g. Bedford-Stuyvesant) is 1.9 percent white, yet another, (e.g. Dyker Heights) is 92.3 percent white (BC OIR 1999c, 2). In fact, one-third of all neighborhoods have an 80 percent or greater white concentration and another one-third have a 20 percent or less concentration of whites (BC OIR, 1999b).

These images of Brooklyn, the place, reflect the incongruity in notions of whiteness and signify a disjuncture between the idea of a harmonious multicultural setting and a divided reality.[4] It became clear during this project that for some whites whose connection to European ancestry may be one or two steps removed, "Brooklyn" also functions as an ethnic identity.

Scholarship about Brooklyn reflects this fragmentation by generally

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4. Images of Brooklyn abound, e.g. the comic series, "Boondocks" includes routine references. Recently, Caesar writes his own version of the song "My Favorite Things" calling it "Things That's Aiight." When Huey asks how he manages to sound cool yet a little disinterested, Caesar says, "Hey, I'm from Brooklyn" (Mcgruder, 2001).

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focusing on one community or another, and tends to describe relationships as either peaceful and integrated or hostile and separate. Analyses are characterized by an ethnic rather than racial focus and generally depict isolated communities, rather than as diverse people who interact in public spaces, and then retreat. Much of the literature alludes to a history of tension and conflict between groups yet it does not assess the experiences of commonality or difference in the ways they perceive each other or function on a day-to-day basis. In contrast, the works of Roger Sanjek (1998) and Steven Gregory (1998) examine the dynamic history of racial politics in New York City drawing on ethnographic work conducted in Queens.

Originally inhabited by native populations, Brooklyn was colonized by the Dutch in the sixteenth century and subsequently by the British in the seventeenth century. Given the active role that New York City played in the slave trade, both free and enslaved Africans inhabited the area since the early years of European presence. The Brooklyn neighborhoods of Weeksville and Carrsville were established in the 1830s explicitly as black communities. In 1898 Broeklun was incorporated into New York City proper (Connolly, 1977, 8).

The late nineteenth and early twentieth century brought changes that significantly impacted the borough's population. Many Eastern Europeans fleeing religious persecution made Brooklyn their home, as did large numbers of Italian and Irish immigrants who were seeking jobs. During the early 1900's, many African Americans migrating north in search of employment settled in the borough.

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Beginning in the 1950s, about 50 percent of West Indian immigrants to the U.S. established themselves in Brooklyn, as did large communities of Greeks, Pakistanis, Chinese, Koreans, Indians, and most recently, Russians.

Literature about Population Shifts and Migration

Four trends in the literature about Brooklyn portray the contradictory images of the borough's identity. The first provides overviews of these population shifts and periods of demographic expansion. *All the Nations Under Heaven: An Ethnic and Racial History of New York City* (Binder and Reimers, 1995) presents a detailed examination of the many migrations to New York City since 1524. This book focuses on the public sphere and patterns of settlement rather than on the particular experiences of the city's people. New York City, as a whole, is characterized as multi-ethnic and multi-racial, and the authors speak repeatedly of the city's reputation for tolerance, diversity and adaptability. Binder and Reimers generally assert that everyone is "accepted" as long as they support the government. The issue may certainly be raised about just how inclusive such a criterion (degree of one's support for the government) actually is; relatively little attention was given to the role of New York City as an early port for slave ships, or about the pressures placed upon the native populations once Europeans arrived. Recent discoveries at the Lott House in Brooklyn provide further evidence of the complicity and involvement of Europeans in this area with the slave trade, in

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contrast to popular notions.[5] By focusing on how diversity works rather than on points of contestation, New York City is analyzed through a "white gaze."

A similar perspective is expressed in *Brooklyn is America* (Weld, 1949), which focuses on the Dutch, British, Irish, German, and Jewish presence and political life. In his work, Weld writes:

> *Here you see the mingling of races in workday relationships. . . . Quiet and peace live in the streets. There are institutions where men of all sorts and kinds and ranks meet on common ground. In Brooklyn the discouraged observer of mankind may find some ground for hope. It is the civilized world in microcosm; within its own limits it is a demonstration of world peace* (Weld, 1949, 7).

While at the time of his writing, Brooklyn was roughly 90 percent white (albeit from different parts of Europe), the image was of diversity and peaceful co-existence. One wonders whether the growing populations of African and Caribbean Americans, Latinos of many origins (particularly Puerto Ricans and Dominicans) and Asians would have portrayed the borough with the same romanticized view. This type of narrative imparts an illusion that all groups have similar experiences, and normalizes the white perspective.

Another book that describes population shifts and trends is *Brooklyn! An Illustrated History* (Snyder-Grenier, 1996). This work surveys the experiences of several of the largest groups in Brooklyn and discusses various landmark icons

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5. Dr. Arthur Bankoff, Chairperson of the Brooklyn College Anthropology Department, along with two students, brought international attention to the 282-year old Lott House in Marine Park, Brooklyn. They discovered a hidden room and items beneath the floorboards, which are considered evidence of slave quarters (Brooklyn College, 2001).

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including the Brooklyn Bridge, Coney Island and the Brooklyn Dodgers. Produced for the Brooklyn Historical Society, the book is primarily a documentary and not aimed at critiquing the relationships between groups, nor economic or political dynamics within the borough.

New Immigrants in New York (Foner, 2001b) provides an excellent analysis of the changing division of labor in New York City as a result of increased migration. It describes general trends, such as the decline in native-born white population due to settlement in the suburbs and other parts of the country, and asserts that "new immigrants" tend to replace these whites in the workforce, particularly in sectors that have maintained stability or growth over the last three decades. However, more recent white immigrants have leveraged a considerable labor market advantage in these jobs. While noting that this pattern raises important questions about the role of "race, human capital, social networks and entrepreneurship" (Foner, 2001b, 106), race is not the focal point of this book. With the exception of chapters on migration trends and the changing division of labor, communities are discussed in isolation rather than through a pan-ethnic analysis of how race mitigates or complicates immigrant experiences.

While the works that discuss population shifts and migration do portray the diversity of the borough, they tend not to do so within a political or economic analysis that illustrates the way that race differentially impacts groups.

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Social Crisis Oriented Literature

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Brooklyn neighborhood boundaries are fairly rigidly defined by race and ethnicity such that a dominant group or groups generally characterizes each area. This segregation and corresponding disparities in resources have been a source of historical tension. A second trend in the literature analyzes relationships between two groups from the vantage point of a specific crisis or incident. Examples include *Canarsie* (Rieder, 1985) and *The Closest of Strangers* (Sleeper, 1990). Both are written from the perspective of liberals (predominantly Jewish) during and after the school decentralization struggle in the late 1960s. They analyze the relationship of this community to the African American community. These authors explore the grievances of whites in places such as Canarsie and generally portray the racial and social tension and inequality as if they were due to a mysterious force of history.

Several publications discuss the perspectives of people involved in the Crown Heights community crisis in 1991 including *Fires In the Mirror* (Smith, 1993) and "Who Are My Neighbors?" (The Crown Heights Coalition, 1993).[6] Both thoughtfully document the complex views of people from the involved communities. They explicitly emphasize unity and expression yet, in some ways, these are conflicting

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6. On August 19, 1991, in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, the car carrying a Lubavitcher Hasidic spiritual leader ran a red light, hitting and killing a seven-year old boy, Gavin Cato, whose family was from Guyana. This incident sparked outrage and three days of crisis, that also resulted in the death of Yankel Rosenbaum, a 29-year old Hasidic man, from Australia. The conflict reflected long-standing tensions between the black, primarily Caribbean immigrant community and that of the white, Lubavitcher Jewish community. Both the media and the police contributed to the crisis.

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goals. Issues of historical inequality and discussions of the differential experiences of the two groups are marginalized as the focus is on building connections between the communities.

Yet another book illustrating this trend is *For the Color of His Skin* (DeSantis, 1991), which details the thoughts of people in the Bensonhurst and Bedford-Stuyvesant communities after the murder of a black teenager, Yusuf Hawkins by a group of Italian teenagers. While attempting a journalistic style, DeSantis' matter-of-fact rendition of the views and justifications of the Italian American community of Bensonhurst leaves one without a sense of the author's analysis of what occurred, or what might prevent a reoccurrence. Adequate acknowledgement is not given to the restraint exercised by the black community in response to this tragedy. As with the other works focusing on crises, this account offers minimal critique of the power and status of whiteness and communities are treated as having equally legitimate grievances. Tensions are thereby viewed as the outcome of neutral differences, individual weaknesses, or the racism of an isolated individual rather than as part and parcel of structural patterns.

Literature about Specific Communities

A third trend in the literature describes individual communities in isolation from each other including: *Caribbean New York* (Kasinitz, 1992), *A Ghetto Grows in Brooklyn* (Connolly, 1977), *Crossing Ocean Parkway: Readings by an Italian American Daughter* (De MarcoTorgovnick, 1994), *From Suburb to Shetl: The Jews of Boro*

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Park (Mayer, 1979), *Jews of Brooklyn* (Abramovitch and Galvin, 2002), *Black Legacy: A History of New York's African Americans* (Katz, 1997), *Flatbush Odyssey: A Journey Through the Heart of Brooklyn* (Abel, 1995) and *A Community In Spite of Itself: Soviet Jewish Emigres in New York* (Markowitz, 1993). Each explores the social dynamics of a specific community or neighborhood and provides insight about the economic and political experiences of one group. Their emphases vary as to whether they are written primarily from theoretical, ethnographic, or autobiographic perspective. Taken alone, these works present important material. However, in some ways, they also reinforce a perspective that lacks analysis about the pan-ethnic role of race, in a diverse setting such as Brooklyn.

Cross-Cultural Analyses

The fourth trend includes works that provide either a cross-cultural analysis or an overview of the racial dynamics of Brooklyn. *"Getting Paid": Youth, Crime and Work in the Inner City* (Sullivan, 1989) compares employment and crime patterns of young men in three neighborhoods in Brooklyn, one predominantly Latino, one black and one white. While offering insight into the differences between communities, Sullivan's conclusions are drawn as if they are all the same. He does not sufficiently address the impact of racism, and his arguments would be strengthened by an examination of inter-relationships between communities and "less clear areas" such as racially mixed groups within these communities.

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Recently published, *A Covenant with Color: Race and Social Power in Brooklyn* (Wilder, 2000) is to date the most thoughtful and comprehensive examination of the role of race in the everyday lives of Brooklynites. A masterful examination of three centuries of social relations, particularly in the sectors of housing, employment, and education, this work contextualizes what whites have to say about the role of race in everyday life. Wilder explores how racial ideology is constructed and contested, and how power relations form the basis of relationships within and between communities. This book challenges mainstream images of Brooklyn as either diverse and harmonious or conflicted and violent, and fosters an awareness of processes that reproduce patterns of inequality. Wilder aptly conveys that not all white people benefit to the same degree despite the universal capital that whiteness bestows upon its holders.

Unfortunately, most of the literature about Brooklyn reinforces images that perpetuate racialized stereotypes, undermines a comparative analysis of the experiences of different groups and portrays a shallow and romanticized view of the borough's diversity. These works reflect mainstream perspectives and beliefs. While providing insight about particular experiences of specific groups, they do not generally analyze these communities from a racial or pan-ethnic perspective and as a result, often end up naturalizing whiteness.

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Brooklyn College, Institutional History

In 1930 Brooklyn College became the first public co-educational liberal arts college in the City of New York, merging the Brooklyn men's branch of City College and the women's branch of Hunter College. Since then, the college has distinguished itself as one of the nation's leading public institutions of higher education, with hundreds of alumni who have become presidents or chairpersons of the boards of major corporations, lawyers, and doctors. BC is a comprehensive, state-funded institution within the city university system. As such, it shares the university mission whose primary goals are access and excellence, although the specific mission of Brooklyn College is to provide a "superior education in the liberal arts and sciences" (Brooklyn College, 1994, 4).

> *The overarching goal of the educational experience at Brooklyn College is to provide students with the knowledge and skills to live in a globally interdependent world and the support services to help them succeed. The college also seeks to develop a sense of personal and social responsibility by encouraging involvement in community and public service. It fosters a campus environment hospitable to multicultural interests and activities. Moreover, as an urban institution, it is able to draw upon the myriad resources of the city to enhance its educational mission* (Brooklyn College, 1994, 5).

As a senior college within the CUNY system, Brooklyn College has been part of university history from the college's inception. Significant markers of this involvement include struggles: in the 1930s about the economy and possibility of war; in the late 1960s against U.S. military involvement in Southeast Asia, against

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the draft, for Open Admissions,[7] for African American and Puerto Rican Studies and an increase of faculty of color; for Women's Studies in the 1970s; opposition to the imposition of tuition in the mid-1970s; struggles around the budget crises of the mid-1970s and mid-1990s; attacks on CUNY's population in the form of anti-remediation policies in the late 1990s; and struggles for diversity- related policies and programs throughout the 1990s.

In 1939 Brooklyn College established the first Hillel Foundation in the New York metropolitan area (Roff et al., 2000, 67). In the mid-1950s a priest was assigned to full-time duties as chaplain of the Newman Club (Roff et al., 2000, 66). Both organizations have their own facilities and exist today. Fostering the image of a progressive institution, in 1955 the President of Brooklyn College stated that:

> *Brooklyn College is deeply committed to the idea that a significant part of the education of its students, who are overwhelmingly children from immigrant homes, must be derived from participation in the varied cultural and social activities of the College as a community in itself and as an agency in the larger community* (Coulton, 1955, xii).

In the 1960s, after three incidences of racial and religious exclusion, an active NAACP chapter formed, involving students in civil rights activities. They made a demand for all on-campus organizations to declare policies on non-discrimination (Hiller, 1964, 1) but were not met with universal approval. For example, one student asserted:

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7. The Open Admissions Policy was introduced in 1970, and guaranteed a college education to all New York City high school graduates and specifically aimed to increase access for minority students. For a thorough examination of the history of this policy, see Lavin and Hyllegard (1996).

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> *Students at BC will not be bullied by this or any organization's threats into accepting people they feel won't fit into their groups. They are formed to bring together people with certain likes and dislikes* (Bohm, 1964).

Another student claimed that the NAACP was misinformed of the situation and making demands on all organizations, "erecting a barrier between Negro and white students that heretofore never existed" (Goldfield, 1964). Racial tensions on campus were also evident when, in response to what he called a "fairly innocent"[8] letter to the editor of the college newspaper describing Brooklyn College as an "obvious example of *de facto* segregation," Professor Barton Meyers faced the prospect of losing his job. The Administration felt he had "given the college a bad reputation" (Meyers, 1964).[9]

During the same time (the 1960s), various institutional efforts of a progressive sort were taken: the establishment of a House Plan Association to foster social and cultural interaction; the Brooklyn League of Afro-American Collegians (BLAC) dedicated to decreasing the isolation of minority students; a W.E.B. DuBois Club, which faced accusations by the U.S. Department of Justice[10] of being communist-controlled; an active Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) chapter; and a Challenge Program aimed at "stimulating student interest in an

---

8. Interview with Professor Bart Meyers, Psychology Department, Brooklyn College, 2 December 1999.
9. Ibid.
10. FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover and Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach requested that the W.E.B. DuBois Clubs of America be declared subversive organizations. However, at Brooklyn College, the Dean of Students allowed the group to continue its activities because they functioned in a "responsible manner." Protests took place on campus, in opposition to this decision, with signs being held such as "Dogs must register, why not communists?" (*Kingsman*, 1966, 8).

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understanding of present day affairs" (Haber, 1962, 1). The Challenge Program brought speakers to campus such as Malcolm X, resulting in great controversy. These activities took place at a time when the student population at the college was approximately 96 percent white.[11]

A highly publicized incident of political activism at Brooklyn College took place in 1967, when protests against navy recruiters on campus led to what was later defined as a riot, with the incident called "Black Friday" (Roff et al., 2000, 94) culminating in forty arrests and headlines in *The New York Times* (1967). It was estimated that more than half the BC student body actively participated in events during this period.[12]

At this time, several distinguished scholars of color were on the faculty including Charles Lawrence in the Sociology Department and John Hope Franklin in the History Department. After the Open Admissions Policy was instituted, a relatively large number of faculty was hired to teach the increased number of students, but during the budget crisis of the mid-1970s many lines were lost. From 1978 to 1998 there were few faculty hires. With retirements, deaths and people leaving for other jobs, the number of faculty of color dropped by one-half.[13]

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11. While precise racial demographic data was not kept at the time, it is estimated that fall 1969 freshman class of CUNY was 96 percent white (Harden, 1998, A3).
12. Professor Paul D. Montagna states that this figure is similar to the participation levels at Berkeley and Columbia (Montagna, 1969).
13. For example, in 1978, Brooklyn College had 60 Black faculty members; currently there are 25. Figures are drawn from a personal conversation with Professor George Cunningham of the Africana Studies Department, as historical data is difficult to retrieve. The college has information dating back to 1995; the University has information dating back to 1985.

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Brooklyn College students, along with some faculty and staff, played an active role in each of these struggles both on and off campus. However, support for Open Admissions was not necessarily universal as a professor in the English Department, Tucker Farley, describes:

> *When I first came here, I remember being shocked because I came to Brooklyn College and CUNY since there was open admissions. It was 1971. I was shocked to hear people talking about the ineducables. To me, that translated very much in terms of race.*[14]

She indicated that while this was not everyone's perspective, she felt it was a common view among faculty. The struggle for Africana and Puerto Rican Studies was also highly contested. While the activism of students resulted initially in the founding of two institutes that subsequently became departments, substantial and continuous struggles occurred, some that exist to this day. Dr. James Jennings, scholar and author, stated that at Brooklyn College, "During the struggle for Black and Puerto Rican Studies, students were physically assaulted by racist whites in the cafeteria because these Black and Puerto Rican students had chosen the Studies program as their major" (Jennings, 1985, 10).

Of this period, a faculty member of the Department of Modern Languages, William Sherzer, said:

> *They were rough years, because the campus had to re-define itself — was it a Jewish college like it always used to be? My white, non-Jewish students were as upset often at the politics of the conservative Jews as the blacks were. . .* [They thought] *that open admissions was going to*

14. Interview with Professor Tucker Farley, English Department, Brooklyn College, 15 December 1999.

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change this Jewish part of Brooklyn College that we've always had. And I'm not mentioning this as being anti-Semitic — first of all, I'm Jewish.[15]

Professor Paul Montagna of the Sociology Department described what he felt was the "moderate, liberal, left" nature of the faculty in their support of ethnic studies: "I am supportive, and I was supportive. My department, we have continued our support whenever there seems to be an issue — we can always be counted upon to sign protest statements or whatever."[16]

Professor Farley went on to speak about a later incident:

I remember sitting in the faculty lounge. There was a man in my department who was reading the newspaper the day the cops had shot a young black boy in Brooklyn mistaking him for, they said, a man who had committed a crime in the neighborhood. I was just grief-stricken, and shocked. And he was too. Then I realized that he was taking the point of view of the policeman, thinking how horrible it was to have been the policeman. And, I was taking the point of view of the parent, thinking how horrible it was to have a child killed. That just blew my mind.

She asserts that while BC has an institutional image of progressiveness, this type of incident was not unusual throughout the course of her thirty years of teaching. She describes an environment that is outwardly or by public acclamation, open and liberal in the best sense of the word but also one with many tensions residing beneath the surface.

The political environment and concern for diversity at the college has ranged from active to minimally active, from moderate to progressive, and has

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15. Interview with Dr. William Sherzer, Department of Modern Languages, Brooklyn College, 6 June 2000.
16. Interview with Dr. Paul Montagna, Department of Sociology, Brooklyn College, 15 September 2000.

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fluctuated over time. The assessment of institutional commitment and whether the campus is a friendly environment for students of color differs depending on who is asked. Historically, significant frustration has been expressed about the lack of attention to this issue. For example, in a 1985 institutional self-study, principal concerns expressed by black and Latino students were the lack of support for the particular needs of their communities and a strong desire for increased and ongoing interaction between different cultural and ethnic groups. Their general sentiment was that the institution reflected society as a whole (Brooklyn College, 1987b, 6). In this same self-study, whites less often than blacks or Hispanics reported experiencing prejudice with 40.1 percent of all students saying that they experienced some form of prejudice by faculty or staff. Of all students, only 34.9 percent believed their grades were *never* affected by race/ethnicity, religion, gender, or sexual orientation, with Jewish students (46.5 percent) being the most likely to think their grades were *never* affected (Brooklyn College, 1987b, 6).

In 1990, an "Anti-Bigotry Teach-In" was held to address bias issues on campus in the wake of the murder of Yusuf Hawkins. This led to the creation of an organization primarily comprised of students — the Multicultural Action Committee — and a committee primarily consisting of faculty and staff, the Pluralism Committee. In 1994, the Center for Diversity and Multicultural Studies was founded "to be the nucleus of diversity at the College," and in 1996 the first institutional Diversity Plan was compiled with "43 action and process-oriented

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recommendations to address the central issue of changing the college culture" (Brooklyn College, 2000). This plan was reviewed by the community and accepted by the President of the College.

Since that time, the level of activity has varied. The Center has had three primary foci — though its members have been involved in many projects. The first focus is on increasing the number of faculty of color on campus; especially since the continuous budget cuts has had a repeated devastating impact in this regard. Second, the Center has worked toward institutional transformation through multicultural policy development and implementation. This led to the establishment of a Diversity Council headed by the President, support for faculty diversity research (resulting in publications), and student multicultural internships. The third priority is on providing continuous educational programming on a wide range of topics related to diversity awareness and progressive politics in order to foster an environment conducive to dialogue and positive change.[17]

Over the last several decades, between twenty and thirty student clubs and organizations have focused on cultural and social awareness and celebration. Most tend to associate intra-racially or intra-religiously, although, in response to a Student Leadership Retreat workshop on Social Justice and Organizing in 1999, a small group of students chose to form "Understanding and Appreciating Our Differences" (UAD) in order to address social segregation on campus.

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17. Email communication, Dr. Joseph Wilson, Executive Director, Center for Diversity, April 6, 2002.

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These students sought to "help facilitate interaction and understanding between clubs and individuals in the college community."[18] In UAD's first year, they held two large events involving over fifty clubs, and sponsored fifteen diversity-oriented programs. However, the task was clearly daunting as by the end of that year, events were primarily attended by students of color. The initiating students graduated and only minimal activity has taken place since.

Another example of the general pattern of groups tending toward sticking with their own is the sense that white Jewish students congregate in Hillel, Italian and Irish students, often from fraternities and sororities assemble in the cafeteria or on the steps of the main administrative building and that the black, Latino, and Asian students spend their time in the Student Union and the Club Suite. This is a commonly accepted perception. From the survey conducted in 1987, indicated that 43.7 percent of all students either agreed or strongly agreed that race and ethnicity are important factors in campus life (Brooklyn College, 1987b, 7). In the same study, 29 percent of the faculty said they thought that Brooklyn College faculty were somewhat prejudiced with respect to students of different religious and racial/ethnic groups, and 3 percent said the faculty was very prejudiced. Of the students, 60 percent of the faculty said they were somewhat prejudiced and 5 percent said the students were very prejudiced (Brooklyn College, 1987b, 5).

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18. U.A.D. *Mission Statement* (1999).

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In spring of 1998, The Division of Student Life launched a "Community Building Initiative," in response to campus interest, then President Bill Clinton's Dialogue on America and the American Association of Colleges and Universities "Campus Week of Dialogue 1999" held throughout the country. This project, still in existence, involved students, faculty, and staff in an extensive "BC Week of Dialogue on Race" that included twenty-eight programs; workshops on issues such as "Who's Black, Who's White?; " Social Status in the Workplace," and active involvement in a conference on "The Role of CUNY Students in Fostering Intergroup Relations in the New Millennium." In the fall of 2001, a series of dialogue sessions entitled "Peace, Hope and Justice for All" was held involving hundreds of students, faculty and staff.

This section has provided a sense of the somewhat tumultuous and contradictory record of struggle and triumph, of progressivism, liberalism, and conservatism in the history of Brooklyn College. The present-day environment holds neither more, nor less, of the dynamics that were apparent in the 1960s. The college community provided an excellent location to understand real people, living real lives, experiencing real challenges and real contradictions.

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Research Design and Methodology

Brooklyn College Students

Earlier in this chapter I discussed population shifts within the college and the borough; this section will provide background about the current BC student body and will compare the demography of BC students to those who participated in this research (Figures 3.2 and 3.3). As discussed above, Brooklyn neighborhoods are ethnically diverse, yet they overwhelmingly represent one or another dominant group. While there does not appear to be a significant correlation between the ethnic makeup of neighborhoods and the number of students who attend BC, the high schools from which students are primarily drawn are located in neighborhoods with a high white concentration (BC OIR, 1999c, 2). While median family income varies dramatically by neighborhood, from $13,625 in Williamsburg, Bedford-Stuyvesant and Bushwick to $48,627 in Marine Park, Mill Basin, Bergen Beach and Flatlands, BC students are typically from neighborhoods that have median incomes close to the average median income for Brooklyn as a whole ($30, 298). This is generally attributed to the fact that more affluent students either go away to school or to private schools, and the affluent students less often attend college (BC OIR, 1999c, 2).

Similar differences are evident in the level of education attained by adults in various neighborhoods. For example, in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Williamsburg, Sunset Park, and Ridgewood, less than one-half of the adult population has a high

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school diploma yet in contrast, in Brooklyn Heights and Park Slope, more than one in five adults has a graduate or professional degree (BC OIR, 1999c, 2). BC students generally draw from neighborhoods with a high percentage of high school graduates. In fact, the higher the number of high school graduates, the greater the number of BC enrollees. For every one percent of high school graduates in a given neighborhood, the numbers of those attending BC increases by .43 percent (BC OIR, 1999c, 2). About 8.8 percent of Brooklyn high school graduates attend BC (BC OIR, 1999a). Significantly, few students report knowing what percentage of the BC and CUNY student populations are of European descent (see Table 3.1).

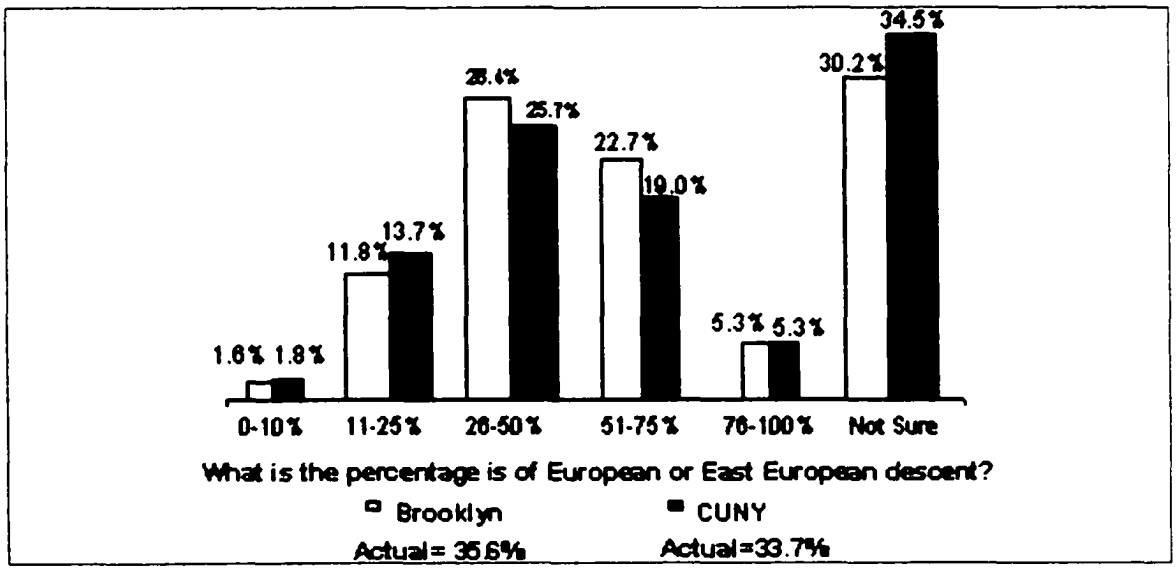

Figure 3.1. Perceptions about European and Eastern European Populations (Brooklyn, CUNY) Survey Questions: 9, 10

As illustrated above, more than one in four students thought there were more whites living in Brooklyn than there actually are, yet only one in seven thought there were fewer whites in Brooklyn. One in six students thought there were fewer whites in CUNY than actually are enrolled. Almost one in three students was

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unsure, and only one in four students knew the correct figure. This may be reflective of group isolation. Chapter six examines segregation within the context of intergroup relationships.

METHODOLOGY

This project was conducted between 1998 and 2000, and involved surveys, focus groups, participant observation, interviews, and archival research.

Surveys

Surveys created a baseline of student experiences, perceptions, attitudes and beliefs about diversity and race relations that are compared with national studies throughout this dissertation.[19] A pilot survey was administered in the *Graduate Student Organization Newsletter* in the fall of 1998; out of 1000 newsletters distributed, 146 students responded. A comprehensive survey was administered in the fall of 1999 in Core[20] classes of day, evening, weekend, and graduate students across disciplines. Of 500 questionnaires distributed, 497 were completed and returned.

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19. For copies of both instruments, see the Appendix.
20. Brooklyn College is known for its Core Curriculum, a series of interrelated foundation courses that all candidates for a baccalaureate degree must complete.

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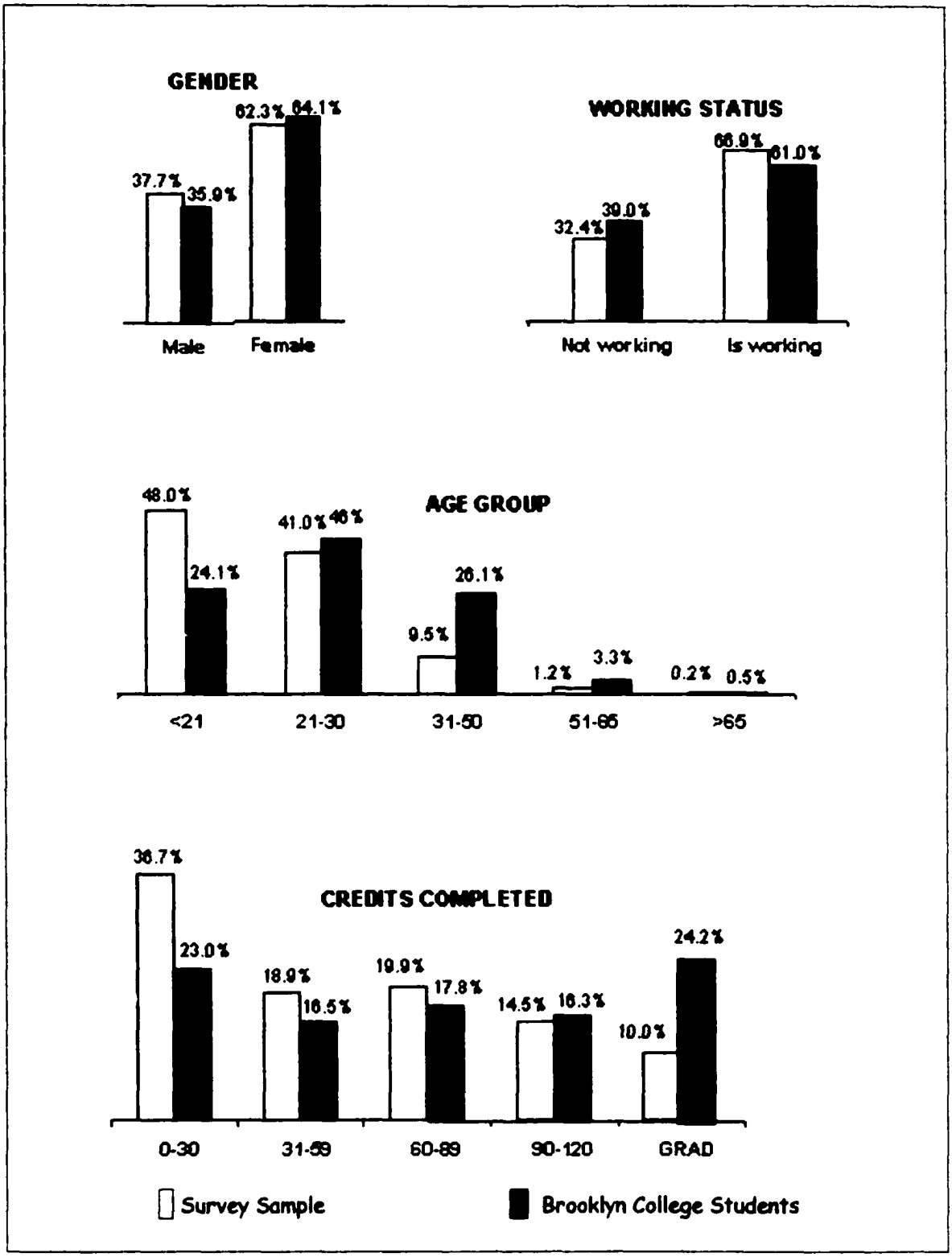

Figure 3.2 Survey Sample versus Brooklyn College Demographics

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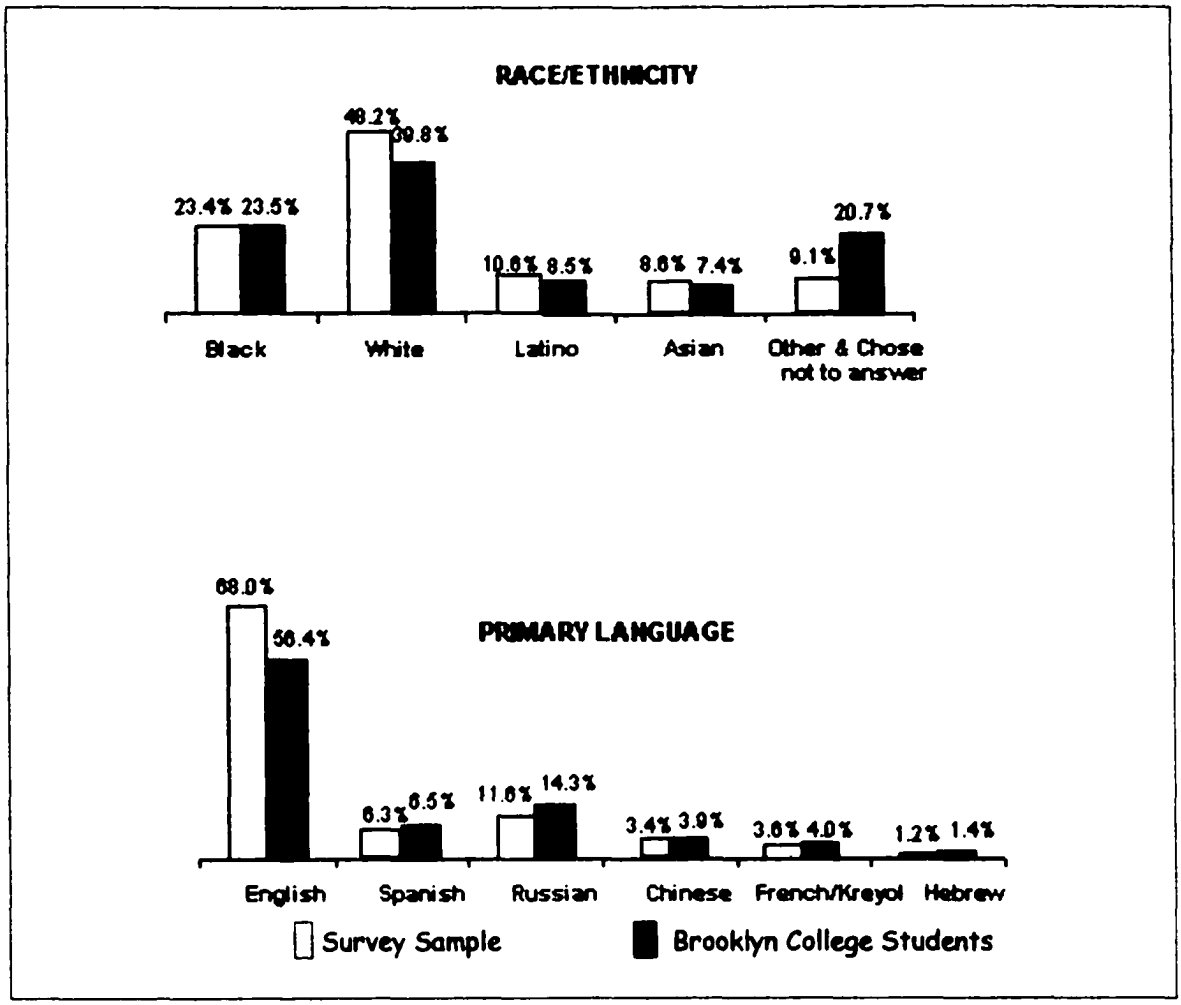

Figure 3.3 Survey Sample versus Brooklyn College Demographics (Continued)

The demography of respondents was roughly similar to the college student population as a whole, as illustrated in Figures 3.2 and 3.3.[21] The margin of significance was set at .05 percent.[22]

---

21. Brooklyn College Data is drawn from the following sources: Gender and work status: Student Profiles, Enrolled Students, (CUNY OIRA, 1996, 22); Age Group, Primary Language and Credits Completed (BC Office of the Assistant Vice President for Budget and Planning, 2001a); Race/Ethnicity (BC OIR, 1999d, 41).

22. Respondents reported the following: Of the black students 9.5 percent were U.S.-born and 13.9 percent were foreign-born. Of the white students, 30.1 percent were U.S.-born; and 18.1 percent were foreign-born. Of the black and white students, a total of 32 percent were foreign born. While Brooklyn College does not report data in this same way, 39.8 percent overall report they were foreign-born (CUNY OIRA, 1996, 4).

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Focus Groups

Focus groups were the second component of the research, involving 117 students. Table 3.3 indicates how these students compare with the BC population.

	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian/Pacific Islander	American Indian	Other
Brooklyn College	39.8%	23.5%	8.5%	7.4%	0.1%	20.7%
Focus Groups	49.6%	24.8%	12.0%	6.0%	0.9%	6.8%
Participants	58	29	14	7	1	8

Table 3.3 Focus Group Participants Compared to the Brooklyn College Student Population

These groups of three to twelve participants addressed questions such as:

- What was your first recollection of a thing called race?
- Do you believe in an American Dream?
- Do you believe that whites are privileged or receive special advantages in U.S. society?
- Do you believe that access to higher education is a right or a privilege?
- What role do you feel race has played in your life or in the lives of others around you?
- Do you define yourself as an American?
- To what cause (or causes) do you attribute poverty and racial inequality?

Survey results were also used as a reference point, asking participants what they saw as the significance of various data.

Of the fifteen student groups, five were all white, three included an overwhelming majority of whites, six were mixed, and one included only students of color. Of the three faculty and staff groups (one administrative staff group, one professional staff group and one faculty group), two were all white and one was

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mixed. Of the faculty and staff participants, eleven self-identified as white, one as black and one as Asian. In citing participants' comments, I use the description given by the individual. Some people spoke of themselves solely as white, others talked specifically about being foreign born and others described themselves ethnically but not racially. In a few instances students described themselves as "human" or used a different identifier than they had in a previous point in the discussion. The criteria I use are rooted in their self-description. A national or ethnic tag, class origin or age is included only if the individual presented himself or herself that way. Otherwise, the labels reflect how the respondent completed the consent form. While I recognize that there is tremendous political significance in the terms of identity, for the purposes of this paper I relied upon what I saw as the most standard formats. Where particularly relevant, I noted whether a focus group was mixed, all white, or consisted of students, all of color. All statements are from students, unless explicitly stated as a faculty or staff respondent.

All focus group participants signed consent forms and received an information sheet about the research, including how to contact me should they have questions after the session arose.[23] They were told that research was being conducted about the experiences and views of BC students on the role that race plays in their lives, in the lives of people around them and in the history of CUNY.

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23. See the Appendix for the flyer inviting participation, Consent Form and Information Sheet.

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They were informed that the focus was particularly on developing an understanding of white students' experiences on an urban commuter campus.

Students were informed that the results would be used both for this dissertation and to increase awareness and to foster understanding among members of the BC community through my role within the Division of Student Life. All names are pseudonyms except where individuals granted explicit and written permission. The consent form indicated that students were informed about the research, and they raised any concerns or questions. They agreed to the session to be audio taped, for notes to be taken, and to keep the discussion confidential.

Across the board, students remarked that they have rarely, if ever, given thought or engaged in discussion about these topics. If they had, they said it was only with people from their own racial or ethnic group. Several students commented that they felt uncomfortable and awkward because the questions often made them reflect on assumptions of which they were not conscious but decidedly incorporate into everyday thinking and living. Repeatedly, the experience of the focus groups was described as one where they could hear the perspectives and experiences of students from different backgrounds about sensitive and controversial issues and without concern for penalization from faculty members who might judge what they said. Most students indicated that they had never been in any environment in which they felt they could interact, speak and listen openly about these issues.

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Participant Observation

A third methodology used in this research project was participant observation of thirteen campus activities during which I noted both the content of dialogue and the tone of interaction between students. In some cases, this was a community event, such as the taping of a radio news program on immigration in which several students participated as panelists. In other cases this was the observation of campus organizational meetings. I noted both specific comments as well as the general direction of discussions.

Other Methods

The ethnographic material included in this dissertation is drawn primarily from data obtained through these three methods. However, I also conducted interviews with five faculty members who had been at the college for the last thirty years, and researched archival materials about the history of movements for access, diversity and self-determination at BC. This material provided the backdrop for understanding the history of the college and its students, and the ways that various issues have been addressed on campus. There are many possible directions for future research, and a comparison between the era of the 1960s and now is certainly one of them.

All aspects of this research project were cleared through Human Subjects Review at Brooklyn College and filed with the Human Subjects Review Officer at the Graduate School and University Center. A City University of New York Dispute

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Resolution Consortium and Hewlett Foundation grant of $5,000 provided funds for transcription, a statistician's assistance, and a small honorarium ($20) for focus group participants.

Ethnographic Focus

Despite a public emphasis on multiculturalism and diversity, the neighborhoods of Brooklyn and the on-campus social and political lives of students are generally segregated. Students enter BC with assumptions about racial and ethnic identities, having commonly attended high schools within their own communities.[24] These assumptions are sometimes challenged by the experience of working together in community service projects, classes, or student activities. However, the conversation often stops when differences of opinion emerge. Tensions run deep beneath the surface, as frequently perceived realities diverge between whites and people of color. Whites may try to understand these differences but blame nationalist leanings of people of color, culture or even human nature for the tension. This study aimed at documenting these thoughts, attitudes and beliefs and providing an analysis of the implications of the general trends and patterns in these everyday interactions.

---

24. "The New York State public school system is starkly segregated, with nearly 30 percent of its approximately 4000 schools having student bodies in which 80 percent or more of the children are African American, Latino or otherwise non-white, while almost half of the state's other schools have student bodies that are 80 percent or more white" (Dunn, 1999, 19).

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Language and Identity

Before presenting the findings, there are four issues that I would like to clarify. These are the use of a black-white paradigm and a concern about oversimplifying the meaning of race, the potential for misconstructing someone's intent or reading in to what someone says, the use of language, and the role that my own identity, racial and otherwise, played as I conducted the research.

The concept of race is a group of contradictory forces, facts and tendencies (Du Bois, 1970, 133). Categories shift; populations redefine themselves; census classification is highly contested territory. This project primarily involved reflection upon the everyday perceptions and thinking of those people defined in the U.S. as white. Because of the particular history of this nation, and because often, although not always, black and white appear most starkly as poles, there are times when it appears that I do not explicitly discuss beliefs and perceptions related to Latino, Asian, native, and mixed populations. In fact, the data collected for his project could be used to produce additional dissertations, each focused on the responses as they relate to each of these groups. Chapter four briefly summarizes some of the particularly significant findings. However, when survey data documents incremental biases toward various groups, whites' attitudes and beliefs are frequently most glaring in relationship to blacks (Martinez, 1999, 127-129). "In this country as well as in many others, unfortunately, blackness has come to symbolize the social bottom" (Basch et al., 1994) and a host of related

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characteristics (as quoted in Faye Harrison, 1998, 612). In addition, the legacy of slavery in the United States played a critical role in the shaping the notion of race, and in its ongoing impact on relationships between groups throughout history, therefore providing additional rationale for utilizing a dichotomous framework.

This stands as an acknowledged oversimplification, for there are many axes of power and dominance that complicate the issue of race and are in and of themselves, critical sites for study. These include attitudes about immigrants, language, gender, and class, national and religious affiliation. I wholeheartedly support programs of research analyzing these factors. By critiquing white people's understanding of the everyday experience of race in U.S. society, I hope to provide insight that may be used in theorizing about other forms of inequality.

Another concern is the potential for misconstruing the meaning of someone's statements. I have made a concerted effort to document respondents' comments verbatim, as they were tape-recorded and then later transcribed. The grammatical and other usages follows the speaker's words, except where noted otherwise in brackets. I have attempted to withhold my comments about what has been said, until after the reader first has the opportunity to reflect upon them. However, "as racism is organized through discursive patterns of signification and representation, it must be investigated through the analysis of discourse" (Wetherell and Potter, 1992, 4). "Racism can be the unintended consequence of everyday discourses and practices that perpetuate and reinforce an oppressive structure of power"

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although this is "not to argue that racism is a simple matter of linguistic practice" (Harrison, 1998, 611). For the purpose of this study, I analyze discourse as it "institutes, solidifies, changes, creates and reproduces social formation" (Harrison, 1998, 611).

The third issue I wish to raise concerns the language used throughout this dissertation. Language conveys meaning. Meanings about race are contested because the very notion itself is one born of struggles about power, privilege and profit (Baker, 2001). I selected the categories for race and ethnicity on the survey because these appeared to be most frequently used in other recent survey materials. In retrospect, I would have separated U.S.- and foreign-born for Latinos and Asians, although I chose not to do so because of the smaller percentages of the overall BC population that they represent. I regret this however, as it limits the comparisons that can be drawn between foreign- and U.S.-born students overall.

The term racialization is increasingly being used as a means to describe a process in contrast to an essentialized category (Darder and Torres, 1998). I also use this term to articulate the social meaning of race as opposed to a biological and immutable notion, a means to deconstruct relationships of power. While I certainly recognize the multiplicity and the simultaneity of other axes of power,[25] this

25. Rose M. Brewer discusses the need for critiquing oppositional thinking, eschewing additive analyses, recognizing simultaneity, historicity, embeddedness, relationality and contextualization in (Brewer, 1993, 16).

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project particularly examines the way whites racialize both themselves and everyone else, and how this translates into everyday practice.

A final issue is that of my own identity, and persona. Since 1990, I have been employed at BC in the area of Student Affairs, first as the Administrative Coordinator of the Personal Counseling and Career Services Center, and through several transmutations of job duties and titles to presently, Special Assistant to the Chief Student Affairs Officer. Functionally, I supervise various student services, coordinate a graduate internship and am responsible for a wide range of administrative functions such as budget and personnel for the Division of Student Life. I am white, female, 46 years old, married with children and grandchildren.

Despite my specific formal duties, my reputation on campus, I believe, is one of student advocate and counselor. Throughout my time at BC, I have actively participated in campus life and feel generally respected for my integrity by faculty, staff, and students. All of this, I suggest, functioned in my favor to provide a setting where students felt "safe." I was conscious of the dynamics of power in my relationship with students, and made an explicit effort to acknowledge and elicit concerns so that they might be addressed. Because I had existing relationships with many students, I encouraged students to interact with each other in advance, and to inquire about my reliability and integrity. My whiteness allowed white students to speak more freely than they might have with a person of

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color, presuming perhaps that I shared their worldview. My age allowed enough distance to avoid feelings of peer competition.

My politics certainly played a role although I think that in layperson's terms, they were viewed as pro-student, more than anything else. I do not think most students have been politicized to the extent that they necessarily distinguished nuances in the way I framed issues, and I was always conscious of my role as a researcher, not a dialogue facilitator. I was there to learn, not to teach, though I would like to think that the very act of interrogation fosters critical thinking. This project was about their thoughts, not my opinions. I did my best to listen hard and withhold judgment. This was, I think, one of my greatest challenges.

It is my deepest hope that by listening closely to the voices of our young people that we might discover opportunities for reconstructing a public understanding of the role of race, today. Organized by issue, chapters four through seven provide ethnographic material upon which to reflect. It is my belief that institutional structures are reinforced and can be challenged by the everyday thinking of ordinary folks. I hope this material provides insight about their attitudes and these possibilities that might improve our effectiveness in educating our students about how to live in today's world and by fostering a sense of civic responsibility and socially conscious leadership that have become millennial goals for academia.

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CHAPTER 4 - IDENTITY

What are whiteness, blackness and those places called "in-between"? What are the definers, parameters and categories of race? Who gets to choose their own identity and who does not? What mechanisms negotiate the reproduction of racial patterns within everyday life? This research relates to race "in the making" and this chapter explores the processes through which race is negotiated by students at Brooklyn College. Within the context of a diverse student population, this chapter examines how white students navigate their everyday experiences.

The section entitled Whiteness, Blackness and Places Called "In-Between" provides examples of how whites in diverse environments sometimes use this experience to avoid being accused of racist thinking. There is presumption that because a white person has regular contact with people of color, that their thinking could not be tainted by racism or racialization. This dynamic discourages engagement and reflection, which are viewed as unnecessary. Ambivalences and ambiguities emerged repeatedly in these discussions as students indicate an awareness of multiple realities. Several conversations provide insight into the tentative voice quality that is often evident when whites speak about race, a mechanism that allows them to retract their comment if it is not well received. It becomes apparent through these passages that the discourse(s) of whiteness are neither unified nor monolithic (Kincheloe, Steinberg, Rodriguez, Chennault, 1998, 9). Herein lies the possibility that openings or "cracks" in the mainstream discourse

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about race can function to challenge and not only to reproduce patterns of racial inequality.

The following section, Everyday Experiences, explores students' recollections of their first experience of "a thing called race." What happened and why was the event memorable? Students reveal their feelings about friendship, relationships and feelings of confusion and ambivalence about race. This section also includes a discussion of campus politics.

The section, Race's Roles, examines various perspectives on specific group identities and how they are perceived, understood and negotiated. While one would presume that Brooklyn was a place, site, or backdrop, a quote from someone describing himself as a "Brooklyn American" makes clear that Brooklyn has become his ethnicity. What are the implications of this in an analysis of race and racialization? We begin to explore students' perceptions about the characteristics and positioning of various groups.

Finally, the section entitled Race to Identity summarizes several themes related to how students understand their own identity and that of those around them. The section discusses the racialization of resistance as a mechanism in the reproduction of racist structures and ideology that functions to block the ability of whites to critically examine political and economic contexts and voice dissent. Examples are provided where students resist the construction of whiteness and speak to their awareness of white privilege and the immorality of racism.

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As we shift to the ethnographical material, I want to restate that the identifiers used with quotes are those the speakers themselves provided. It is for this reason that some people may be described racially, others by ethnicity. There were also times when people shifted their identification during the course of a discussion. The descriptors relay the individual's self-description.

Whiteness, Blackness and Places Called "In-Between"

What Is Race Anyway?

> *My first recollection of a thing called race was when they stole our bikes. They thought we wouldn't miss them. I'm tired of hearing we're wrapped up in money. Whatever I have I pay for with allowance; I work for what I get.*
>
> —Nancy, white Italian female

> *I'll talk to you, but I don't want another lecture. I know I'm not a racist, so why should I be labeled with something you think defines what I am? I would be happy to take on racists, and I do.*
>
> —Joey, white male

What do the above statements tell us about how these students understand who they are, how they are perceived, and how they perceive the way race affects their lives and that of the people of color with whom they interact regularly on campus? Joey expresses concern that he will be lectured to and presumed to have a certain worldview. While he describes himself as anti-racist, Joey does not indicate that he wants to hear different perspectives. Nancy appears certain of what was in the minds of the people who stole her bike, and that "they" were black. What are the implications of her statement regarding using her allowance or

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working for what she gets; what might she be suggesting about how "they" obtain these things?

These statements articulate an assuredness about the speakers' knowledge about race. They convey a sense that they know the "real story" and do not seem particularly interested in hearing other points of view. Might the process of talking about race reveal vulnerabilities they would prefer to avoid? This self-assuredness emerged frequently in discussions.

Figure 4.1 and Table 4.1 provide data about students' attitudes toward the inclusion of the historical and current experiences of people of color in the curriculum. These statistics are particularly significant given the self-confidence students generally assert about their knowledge of the history and role of race, and that what they perceived and believed was "truth."

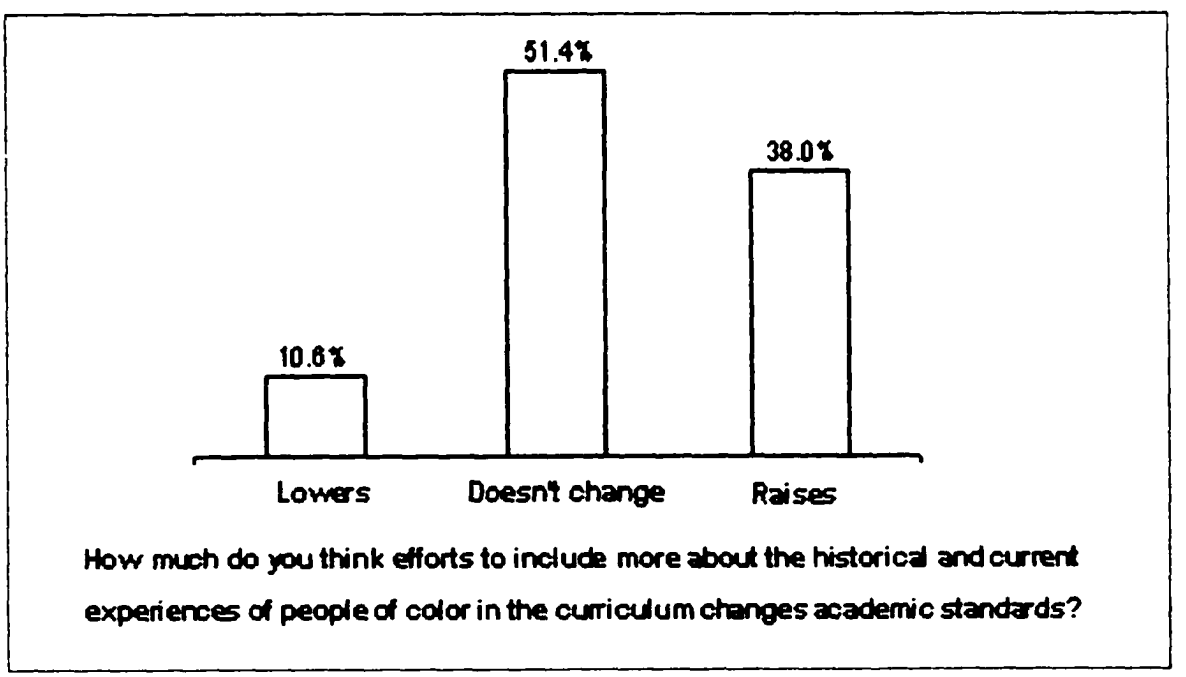

Figure 4.1 Impact of Curricular Inclusion on Academic Standards. Survey Question: 14

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White students (both U.S. and foreign-born) believe *significantly less* than Latinos that these efforts *raise academic standards* and believe significantly *more* than Latinos that these efforts *lower academic standards*. White students (both U.S. and foreign-born) and Asian students believe significantly *less* than black students (both U.S. and foreign-born) that curricular inclusion *raises academic standards*. U.S.-born whites believe significantly *less* than U.S.-born blacks that these efforts *raise academic standards*. White students (both U.S. and foreign-born) and Asian students believe significantly *more* than foreign- born blacks that these efforts *lower academic standards*.

	Raises	No Change	Lowers
Latinos	47.9%	50.0%	0.0%
Asians	33.3%	56.4%	10.3%
U.S.-born Blacks	41.9%	48.8%	7.0%
Foreign-born Blacks	50.8%	36.5%	1.6%
U.S.-born Whites	20.6%	66.9%	11.8%
Foreign-born Whites	25.6%	65.9%	4.9%

Table 4.1 Impact of Curricular Inclusion / Response by Race

These data can be compared to polls taken at other universities. For example, a survey conducted in Florida by the Central and South Florida Higher Education Diversity Coalition and administered for the Ford Foundation Campus Diversity Initiative, indicated that nearly nine of every ten students (88 percent) reported that courses and campus activities emphasizing diversity and diverse perspectives have a positive effect on education. More than half (55 percent) of

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the participants reported that multicultural courses raise standards while one-third (33 percent) reported that they have no effect. In response to a different question on this survey, 40 percent agreed with the statement "adding material about women and minorities to the college curriculum makes it less rigorous" (Diversity Web, 1998). More students of color than white students believed these courses raise academic standards, consistent with the Brooklyn College data (Diversity Web, 2001).

A report by the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), on the impact of diversity indicates, "comprehensive institutional change addressing both campus climate and curriculum is the right strategy for ensuring learning success for both minority and majority students" (Appel et al., 1996). In 1999 the AAC&U issued a report for the Ford Foundation Campus Diversity Initiative summarizing national research and stating that a key finding indicates "diversity in the curriculum has a positive impact on attitudes toward racial issues, on opportunities to interact in deeper ways with those who are different and on overall satisfaction with the college or university. These benefits are particularly powerful for white students who have had less opportunity for such engagement" (Humphreys, 2001).

We need to reflect upon the meaning of this perspective within the context reflected both in these statistics and the above comments. A survey of American voters inquired about diversity education in the curriculum and found that 69

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percent agree that courses and campus activities that emphasize diversity and diverse perspectives have more of a positive than negative effect on the education of college students. Twenty-two percent indicated that they felt the effect was more negative (D.Y.G. Inc., 1998). Slightly over half of voters (52 percent) interviewed indicated that they believe "Diversity courses and multicultural courses raise academic standards, which was three times the number who felt it lowered standards (15 percent)"; 25 percent indicated that they feel these courses neither raise nor lower standards (D.Y.G. Inc., 1998).

Aside from perceptions of the impact of multicultural curriculum on learning, many studies have found that diversifying the curriculum has a general impact on, for example, advancing cognitive development, enhancing civic awareness and the sense of responsibility and social consciousness (Kogler, 1999, 12).

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE WHITE?

The following passages offer insight into how students understand what it means to be white, whether and to what extent the culture of poverty and individualist frameworks are currently operative. Whites frequently talk about racism as something they have no part of and have rarely observed. Race is something "other people" (undefined) experience or more accurately, something "they" (undefined) use to advance "themselves" (undefined). Because of the increased immigration from areas of the African, Latin and Asian diasporas and the diversity of the student population, whites reveal they feel their daily interactions

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in public spaces with people of color provide the basis upon which to feel confident about their understanding of race.

However superficial or non-interactive, this daily contact tends to provide a justification for whites to believe that they do know and understand the daily experiences of people of color. It provides a space, therefore, in which whites assert their own perceptions and interpretations as "truths" to justify broad-sweeping generalizations about blacks, Latinos and Asians because they feel "they know." This point, in fact, contradicts the popular integrationist assumptions that contact alone results in greater understanding between groups. It is evident that this cannot be assumed.

In the following statement, Barbara implicitly acknowledges she has the luxury of not thinking about her racial identity, yet also tries to explain why:

> *I don't think of racial identity, it's true. I guess being black, Latino or Asian you might think about race because you might not get a job because of race. You would think of it because it would be a hindrance. It's my personal experience, so I think it's true. When you think of discrimination, you don't think of white. The media gives you this idea. It's an issue of blacks, Latinos and Asians not being allowed in a club. If there were more whites in a place or a neighborhood, they don't fit in.*
>
> — Barbara white female staff

To be white means is be able to assume you can get a job or take care of whatever you need and your race will not interfere. To Barbara, race is black, Latino and Asian, a disability and a disadvantage. Being white, however, you don't have to think about it. You have advantages and want to keep what you have. You do what you need to, in order to hold on to these advantages, even if that means

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denying that you have them. Furthermore, this perspective asserts that talking about race perpetuates racism, as illustrated by the following comment:

> *People choose their own fate. If you're white, green, blue, whatever color your eyes are or the texture of your hair, your intelligence and hard work makes or breaks you. Some people nowadays have it easier, but everyone started out in the same position. It is possible for anyone to succeed.*
>
> —Julie, U.S.-born white female

This masking of whiteness frames race as a process that discriminates only negatively, and never positively. Race prevents and never enhances admission to the "white" club. It appears that to recognize enhancement would be to acknowledge privilege and a more generalized responsibility for the reproduction of relations and patterns of inequality. As Shaggy, a popular recording artist claims in his song, when his friend's girlfriend catches him with another woman "Say, it wasn't me," so are whites encouraged to speak of their good intentions.[1] They can say that race doesn't play a role in their life; they hate racists. As Georgiana, a white female administrator told me, "I'm bigoted against bigots." Statements such of these often dismiss the need to look further at one's own thinking and the structuring of institutionalized racism that provides them with daily advantages.

> *I don't think whites recognize that they are the cause of the discrimination, because they are doing it. They are holding other races back and don't see it.*
>
> —Dorothy, white female staff

The association of people of color, particularly blacks, with negative discrimination was consistent throughout the discussions. Rarely was race

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described as something that imparts an identity for whites, nor was it described as a socially constructed idea to bestow, as well as to diminish power. This dynamic disguises privileging because it appears as if discrimination takes place only overtly and explicitly rather than through day-to-day interactions. Discrimination is recognized when it disadvantages, but not when it advantages. When whites do recognize the role of race in their lives, it is usually as a claim of reverse discrimination, not when they for example are given the benefit of the doubt. This process of plausible deniability allows whites (particularly those with a lot of contact with people of color) to deflect challenges to their belief that race doesn't matter. Following are comments similar to those often made in the focus groups:

> *It's always in the media that there is discrimination of blacks, Latinos and Asians. Racialization is a common thing. It's not an issue of being discriminated against if you're white. Race is automatically associated with discrimination. But there is not as much discrimination as portrayed. I associate race as a barrier. Whites don't experience discrimination but you can be white and discriminated against because of your heritage if you're Italian or Jewish or something.*
>
> —Barbara, white female staff

> *We never really experience discrimination. We don't have to think about it.*
>
> —Lori, white female staff

The ambiguity of race emerges in the questionable whiteness of Italians and Jews, yet race remains a negative characteristic that white people do not have, so they don't need to deal with, understand or play a role in dismantling the structures

---

1. In this popular song, Shaggy coaches RikRok to deny that he cheated, "Never admit to a word when she say makes a claim ... She even caught me on camera, 'It wasn't me'." http://www.lyrics.com.

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that hold racial inequality in place. Race is viewed as a barrier, not an enhancer. Whether you should think about something is measured by whether it negatively impacts you personally. This mechanism was evident in the research data, yet is also manifested in the way that issues are framed in mainstream discourse.

For example, the consequences and reality of violence, terror and poverty around the world have become slightly more visible in the aftermath of September 11th, 2001, yet people have suffered from imperialist and military interventions throughout history.[2] This point was dramatically articulated in the following quote:

> *According to a study. . . by the United Nations Economic and Social Council, 4.2 billion people— a full 70 percent of the planet's inhabitants — could use an all-star benefit concert* (The Onion, 2001).[3]

As Jim Wallis, editor of *Sojourner* said in response to someone weeping after hearing about the death of a black youth from violence,

> *I understood more clearly than ever before why our society was allowing the deadly carnage to continue. For most Americans who are white and middle class, it isn't a whole generation of "us" that is being lost. Rather it is "them." We tell them what we think of them in clear messages every day: they aren't important, they don't count, they don't exist* (Loeb, 1999, 88).

This so-called invisibility of whiteness masks the presumption of white as better, nicer and more moral. Tim Wise, author and anti-racism activist, describes the process of denial after the repeated school shootings that occurred around the United States:

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2. For an excellent overview of this history, see *ColorLines* (2001).
3. This comment refers to the benefit concerts held for the families of people who died on September 11, 2001. *The Onion* is a magazine known for political satire.

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> *Two more white children are dead and thirteen are injured. Another "nice" community is scratching its blonde head, utterly perplexed. Once again, we hear the FBI insist there is no 'profile' of a school shooter. Come again? White boy after white boy after white boy, with very few exceptions to that rule (and none in the mass shooting category) decide to use their classmates for target practice, and yet there is no profile? What went wrong is that we allowed ourselves to be lulled into a false sense of security by media representations of crime and violence that portray both as the province of those who are anything but white like us"* (Wise, 2001).

Wise points out how media stories described these boys, as loners and picked on, but never seemed to notice a "certain highly visible melanin deficiency" (Wise, 2001). The invisibility and presumption of white innocence has dire consequences.

When whites believe that race plays a role in everyday living, it is viewed either as a problem that people of color need to overcome, or as something that now negatively impacts whites such as through affirmative action, or scholarships and opportunities available to people of color but not to whites. Whites can be benevolent or generous (if they choose) but are not necessarily compelled to acknowledge or expose the structural aspects of racial inequality and injustice that require a radical transformation to address.

Related to this issue, students sometimes conveyed that they see race plays a role, yet they weren't sure of its significance:

> *I never grew up around white people, only Turkish, Russian, U.S.-born Jews, Pakistanis, blacks, Spanish, Christians, "crazy" lesbians, Middle Eastern people. I have always been culturally disadvantaged. I know blacks that hate Jews and Jews who hate blacks. The only people I hate are the white trash from Gerritsen Beach. They burned down the house of a black family who moved in. I witnessed police aggression against my boyfriend* [who is

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> black]. *They stopped him in Central Park because they said he looked like a rapist. They picked up someone else, too for the same reason but they looked nothing alike. Just that they were black.*
>
> —Sharon, white Jewish female

This intertwining of apparently incongruous attitudes about race was common. In the above stctement Sharon describes how she didn't grow up around white people. She counterpoises Christians, Jews, Russians, Turkish people, "crazy" lesbians and Middle Eastern people with people she views as "white". When asked about this, she said she wasn't sure who was white, but they certainly weren't the people she knew. Her association of white with middle class, straight and corporate became clearer through the discussion. As Rose Brewer so eloquently states, theorizing about race, class and gender must be historicized, contextualized and understood as simultaneous forces (Brewer, 1993, 16). In this case, Sharon racializes religion, sexual orientation, regionalism, and the "crazy" versus the "sane." She articulates an anti-racist position for those individuals who engage in overtly racist action, whether toward "white trash" or the police who profile. At the same time, she wants to view incidents as isolated, with people as "bad apples," rather than as a systemic problem. Nancy (white Italian female) responds:

> *Not for nothing, Sharon, if I saw your boyfriend walking down the street at night, I would cross to the other side. He's scary looking and you have to worry about your safety. Would you walk right up to a wild dog?*

Sharon appeared outwardly unfazed yet it was not clear if she was affected by this comment. She simply laughed and did not protest. This is an example of collusion between whites when speaking about race in private discussions. Nancy is

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her good friend and it is more than likely Sharon would not want to make waves even if she was offended. Sharon herself may be unsure about the perceived danger of a black man in public. So she simultaneously objects to racial profiling but doesn't challenge Nancy's comment about her boyfriend. This exchange reflects the complex underlying interconnectedness of race, class, and gender in mainstream social discourse and the ambivalences that function to undermine principled engagement about race.

Many white students appear to be conflicted about having some level of understanding of the destructive impact of racism on the lives of people of color but yet are determined not to give up the view of the world that positions themselves as the victims of unfair treatment. This meant that they are at Brooklyn College rather than at a private institution or away at school. They attribute their financial difficulties to the benefits they were not privy to because they believe scholarships and awards are all distributed to black and Latino students despite the fact that data does not indicate that this is the case.[4] They

4. Mr. Sherwood Johnson, Director of the Brooklyn College Financial Aid Office stated: "Need-based state and federal aid is based strictly on economic need. Race is not even a factor. In analyzing the allocation of merit-based scholarships, including those designated for minorities, a disproportionate number of the total are awarded to white versus minority students based on the proportion of whites versus minorities in the overall student population." A preliminary report from the Scholarship Office on funds administered through their office last year indicates that 54 percent were given to white students. Personal Communication: 27 November 2001.

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often attribute their difficulty getting jobs to the policy of affirmative action.[5] Respondents of the survey illustrated this perspective:

> *As unfair as minorities think things are, when a white person tries to get a job, they're overlooked because of quotas. Look at who works for the City.*
> —Beth, white U.S.-born female

> *Black people want jobs for being black! What about me? I have bills to pay!*
> —Mindy, white U.S.-born female

> *People of color receive more and get more benefits in life.*
> —Jessica, white U.S.-born female

When race is acknowledged as something that white folks have, the negative impact of race becomes inverted. The role of race then becomes understood then in the belief that it is very hard to be white in today's world.

WHITENESS ON MY MIND

Contradictions abound as whites negotiate their racialized identity in diverse environments. Some humanization occurs with contact with people from different backgrounds, although this exposure also lends itself to being used as a defense against having to examine one's own attitudes and beliefs as mentioned earlier in this chapter. Race is described as a problem only for those who raise it:

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5. *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* (2001a, 11) states "Blacks and other minorities are now attending college at nearly the same rate as whites yet only 4 percent of the nation's scholarship money is earmarked for blacks and other minorities." Furthermore, "Young blacks are far more likely than young whites to come from families with low incomes. Census figures show that black families are three times as likely to be poor as white families. The wealth gap between blacks and whites remains greater than 7 to 1. New statistics demonstrate that financial problems are primarily responsible for keeping low-income black students from entering and completing college. Poor blacks are far more likely than poor whites to have no access to outside connections, friendships, or other sources of money to help them pay for college. Contrary to popular opinion, scholarships for blacks claim a tiny pool of aid monies."

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I don't think of white as my identity. Some people interact and think about it. I am aware of it, but it is not the biggest issue to me. I look at the importance of education and looking at the person. Color is just not the most important thing. I have had negative experiences because of color, but it was just a first impression type of thing. I just ignore them. I don't stress myself out. I treat everyone the same and don't go to their level.

—Susan white female, working class, early 20s

Susan views herself as a nice person who does not stoop to the negativity that others practice. She can think about race or not think about it. She acknowledges that she does judge people by their education and who they are, which might translate to "how they act." She infers that education brings tolerance and that a lack of education breeds intolerance, but offers no specifics. She implies that "race" confers only disadvantage even for her — as a white woman — and does not appear to consider that she might be positively impacted by her racial identity. She states that she has experienced negative experiences, i.e., reverse discrimination, yet she herself treats everyone the same and doesn't go to "that level." Susan does not appear to view racism as a relationship of power but as something that bad people do overtly, and that structural or systemic patterns are not relevant. Paul Rogat Loeb, an associated scholar at Seattle's Center for Ethical Leadership, also discovered this pattern when he visited over one hundred campuses, "White students voiced the same ambivalent concern, bought into the same myths that said you could strip away historical contexts and still understand people's lives" (As quoted in Wilson, 1995, 182).

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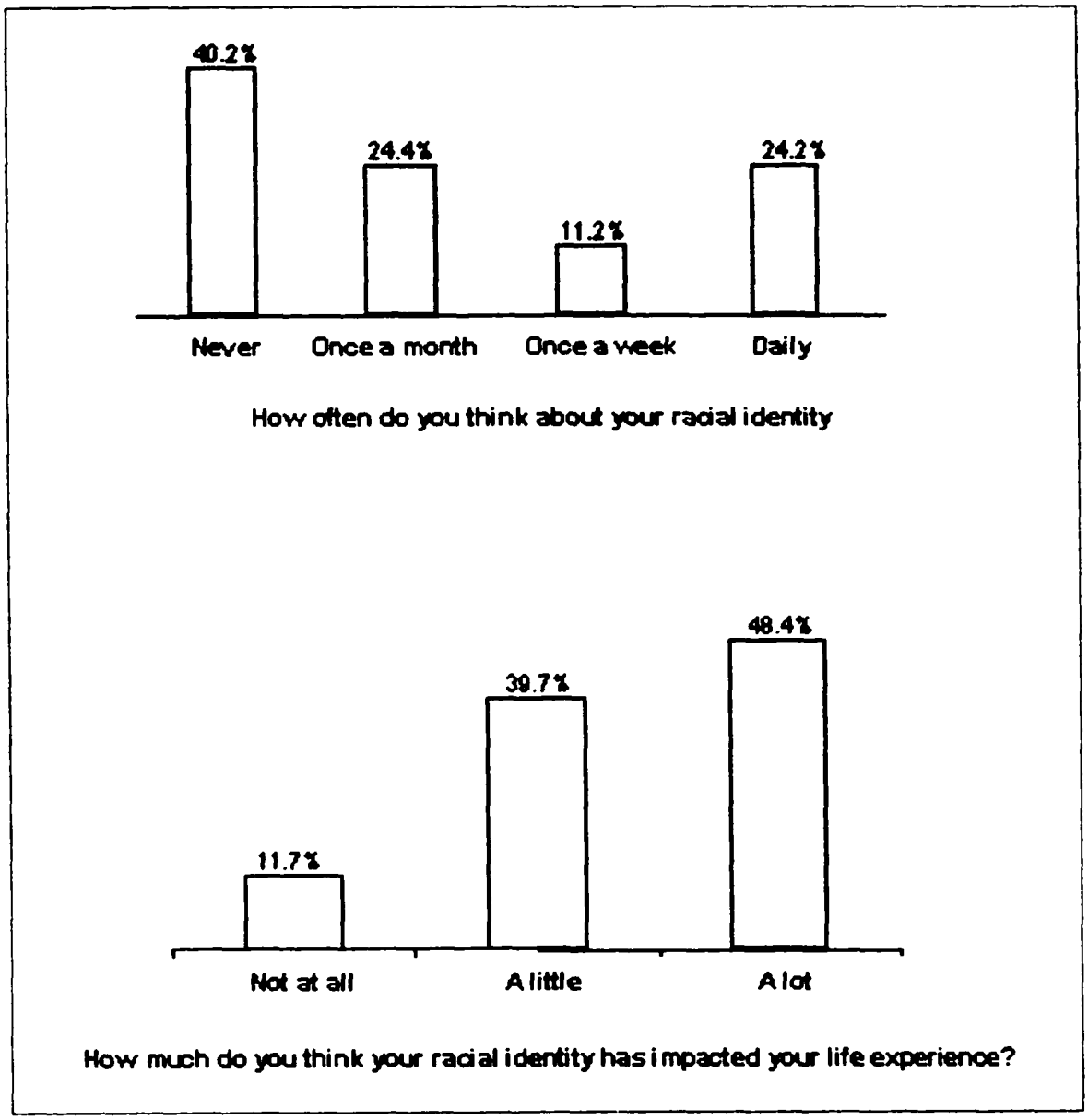

Figure 4.2 Racial Identity. Survey Questions: 6 and 11

The statistically significant differences between group responses in Figure 4.2 are reflected in Tables 4.2 and 4.3. White students (both U.S. and foreign-born) reported significantly *less* often than black students (both U.S. and foreign-born) that they *think about their racial identity.*

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	Never	1x / Month	1x / Week	Daily
Latinos	31.3%	31.3%	12.5%	20.8%
Asians	25.6%	41.0%	5.1%	23.1%
U.S.-born Blacks	25.6%	25.6%	2.3%	39.5%
Foreign-born Blacks	22.2%	23.8%	12.7%	39.7%
U.S.-born Whites	52.2%	20.6%	8.1%	17.7%
Foreign-born Whites	54.9%	18.3%	18.3%	7.3%

Table 4.2 How Often Do You Think About Your Racial Identity / Response By Race

U.S.-born white students reported significantly *more* than foreign-born black students that they believe their racial identity has *not impacted their life experience at all.* U.S.-born white students significantly *less* than foreign-born black students believe their racial identity has *impacted their life experience a lot.*

	Not at all	A Little	A lot
Latinos	8.3%	47.9%	43.8%
Asians	10.3%	23.1%	66.7%
U.S.-born Blacks	7.0%	39.5%	53.5%
Foreign-born Blacks	3.2%	41.4%	54.0%
U.S.-born Whites	17.7%	39.7%	41.9%
Foreign-born Whites	14.6%	46.3%	39.0%

Table 4.3 How Much Has Your Racial Identity Impacted Your Life Experience Response By Race

Several white students articulated an understanding of the multiple axes of power and subordination and were able to use their own experiences to think about dynamics of race, racism and racialization. This opening provides an opportunity to raise awareness of the structures of society as illustrated below:

> *Minority - See that's wild, the word minority. It's not even like race anymore because I was a minority, and I'm not black. You can break*

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minority down by so many things. I know what it feels like to be the minority because I went to school in Bensonhurst. If you weren't Italian, you were minority. I'm not Italian, plus, I'm always dealing with, "Oh, well she's a girl, she can't do that." I think once you are a minority, then you know how it feels and you could understand what people are going through to a certain point. There are people who make themselves a minority. They harp on it like, "Oh I can't do it because I'm a girl," or "I'm black." Sometimes people use it as an excuse. I do think once you are a minority, then you start caring about other minorities.

—Catherine, white female

Because the boys in Columbine were white, people thought they wouldn't or they couldn't do such a thing, because they look nice. If they were black, people would most likely assume that they could. We always assume that Spanish and black people commit most of the crimes. It doesn't necessarily happen. It's just what the media and society want you to believe. A lot more bigger crimes are committed by white people on top, that have more power and stuff. It's just covered up because they have power and money.

—Joan, white Italian female

It's been portrayed on you by society itself. If you're not white, you're different. That's how it's laid down on the table. It's always been like that.

—Hernan, Latino male

This set of comments raises several issues. Students express an awareness of the dynamics of power and discourse such that they recognize that when crime is reported in the news, the emphasis is on street crime, particularly when stories reinforce racialized stereotypes. Students appear to understand that the magnitude and impact of white-collar crime is often much greater. They raise how the "War on Drugs" was highly publicized and aimed at inner-city young people of color, yet corporate crime and violence was rarely portrayed in the media, despite its devastating impact on millions of people's lives.

"Total loss from street robbery in the United States in 1989 was $405 million, but a single price-fixing conspiracy by oil companies cost the

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nation's consumers $432 million; 3.2 million burglaries accounted for a $3.4 billion loss, yet the Savings and Loan scandal cost the nation from $300 to $500 billion" (Delgado, 2001, 10).

Another issue raised by the above comments is the way that the experience of subordination can be generalized to foster awareness about other axes of power. Catherine reflects on what it means to be a minority in a majority setting and on gender relationships. She grapples with her own understanding of society and alludes to the complex nature of relationships of power and the possibility that we can position ourselves not only as individuals, but as part of a broad community.[6] She raises issues of agency, the possibilities for coalition, and the need to fight for structural change while acknowledging structural barriers. Similarly, Joan acknowledged the role of race and power in stereotypes about crime and Hernan spoke of his awareness of the normalization of whiteness.

These passages suggest entry points (or as I label them "cracks") that could be utilized to intervene in the process of reproduction of patterns of dominance and subordination. In fact, survey findings by Mitchell Chang of the University of California, Los Angeles indicate that learning about one significant difference in U.S. society transfer well to thinking about other differences and subsequently reduce multiple forms of prejudice and misunderstanding. The implications of this

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6. Survey findings by Mitchell Chang of the University of California, Los Angeles indicate that learning about one significant difference in U.S. society transfer well to thinking about other differences and subsequently reduce multiple forms of prejudice and misunderstanding. The implications of this are great for academia (Chang, 2000).

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are great for academia (Chang, 2000). If any number of axes of power and subordination are reflected upon and if the naturalization of whiteness is exposed the heightened consciousness could lead to collective social action in small and big ways to challenge patterns of inequality. However, people would need to believe that it is in their interest to be open to these possibilities. Sometimes, as white students begin to understand the way race is constructed, they are left uncertain as to how to identify themselves, as illustrated in the following comment:

> *If I am asked, I say I'm Catholic. I really hate saying white, what the hell does that mean?*
>
> —Catherine white female

The desire for self-definition serves multiple purposes. Whites are able to deny whiteness yet still receive the protection that status provides. This starkly contrasts with the situation of people of color, few of whom can say they don't think about their identity, they do not know what it means or that they do not think race has impacted their lives.[7] On the other hand, the desire for self-definition can also represent a resistance toward the perpetuation of racial categories and a racialized world that structures realities. This becomes clear in Catherine's next statement where this resistance indicates a questioning of the status quo.

> *I think blacks think that if whites are into hip hop they're trying to be black. Or anyone who's not black who tries to rap. What are you trying to be?*
>
> —Catherine, white female

---

7. For an excellent discussion of the impact of race on middle and upper- class blacks see Cose (1993).

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In charge of the college radio station, Catherine is particularly sensitive to the racialized nature of music. She struggled to incorporate a variety of programs and to be responsive to the whole community. She explained that she was met with much suspicion and while she recognizes the power dynamics of race, it appears that some of her resistance toward describing herself as white is her desire to take a position as a "Race Traitor." While she is not ideologically identified with the New Abolitionists organization, her comments reflect a desire for a radically new perspective on race that acknowledges structural racism and creates something new. The New Abolitionists speak of the tremendous power of crossover culture to undermine both white solidarity and male authority (Ignatiev and Garvey, 1996).

At the same time, implicit presumptions can also underlie the resistance to identify as white. Salim Muwakill, senior editor of *In These Times* and op-ed columnist for the *Chicago Tribune* states that,

> *By condescending to appreciate black culture, Wiggahs may be making a humanitarian gesture, but this role of cultural adventurer seeking novelty among the exotics is what so incenses many blacks* (Muwakill, 1998, 67).[8]

Georgiana, a white female administrator to whom I described my research, held the perspective that "there's good whites and good blacks, there's bad whites

8. Leonard Steinhorn and Barbara Diggs Brown describe "Wiggahs" as "wannabees," white kids, often from the suburbs who dress, talk and act "inner-city" and cite Michiko Kakutani, who labels them "cultural tourists." They equate Wiggahs with Beatniks in the 1950s, and Yippies in the 1960s. They articulate quite a different perspective than Salim Muwakill (Steinhorn and Brown, 1999, 176).

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and bad blacks. We're all the same. What I hate is wannabees with their pants hanging down. I want to slap them in the face."[9]

The idea that whites involved in hip hop are expressing appreciation, respect and resistance is simultaneously countered by the question of whether this is yet another form of appropriation and exploitation of black culture and history. Wiggahs" may represent 'lead scouts' in our multicultural future" (Muwakill, 1999, 67).

In some discussions white students explicitly acknowledged that race impacts their daily life experiences such as in the following two statements:

> *I'm not going to speak for everyone but for me sometimes it's an advantage to be white. I can't really pick a specific time, but sometimes, you could just feel something, like people treat you differently sometimes. I can't really pick a specific example, but I know that it happens. Like if you're sitting on the bus, and there's a black person sitting over there, and then you're sitting here and an old white woman comes over, and she'll look, and then she'll sit next to me. I'm like - are you sitting next to me because I'm white or are you just sitting next to me because you like that seat?*
>
> —John, white Italian male

> *Every night when I get off real late from work, at the bus, this neighborhood is very black. I'm like a minority as a white person in this neighborhood and there's a whole bunch of black guys that get off the bus with me and there's a few taxis just waiting on the street. All these black guys, we're all walking in the same direction and the taxi drivers are like, just to me, as a white woman, "Taxi?" and they just ignore all the other black guys and black women. I'm the one who's being solicited for a taxi ride exclusively, so it's an illustration right there.*
>
> —Sara, white Jewish female

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9. Personal conversation on 10 February 2000, Brooklyn College, New York.

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John and Sara's openness reveals a level of awareness and reflection that occasionally arose in the discussions. They are clearly recognize their whiteness and consider how it impacts their interactions particularly with other whites. They speak to a silent nod and of being given the benefit of the doubt in situations where whites perceive them to be safer, more reliable and friendlier than someone of color. This interaction alludes to another misperception as more than 80 percent of violent crime occurs among people of the same race such that a white person is much more likely to be murdered or robbed by someone white, than someone black (Steinhorn and Diggs-Brown, 1999, 123).

In the above comments John's and Sara's willingness to share their observations, however, indicates a level of social consciousness that was not commonplace within discussions. They do not appear ambivalent or defensive as they describe their experiences. When John talks about his family, he says,

> *My parents were brought up Italian. My mom was Italian Catholic and she was really, really hard to live with. She used to tell me, "Don't go outside of your race, whatever you do." She blew a fit about the last two girls that I went out with. One was Puerto Rican and the other was a Russian Jew. She'd get all mad and say, "I don't want you with those — "I would mess with her and tell her, "I'm going to go out with a black chick." But from an early age, they tell you, "Don't you ever date, or ever marry a black girl." My mom said she'd write me out of the will if I did. I'm a real Italian guy.*

Being white means keeping it in the "family." John knew what would bother his mom and taunts her. He doesn't appear to talk to her about the way she thinks; he resists in a more personal way. This serves his purpose as he can feel superior

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to her but does not take a more active stance in challenging her attitudes. Chapter six explores beliefs about interracial relationships in more depth.

The next comment reveals an awareness of the psychology of white denial about race, and how the denial functions to reinforce advantage and privilege.

> *I don't think that whites want to let go of the advantages that they do get. It's a really big advantage to have one step ahead of your competition. Who wouldn't want that?*
>
> —Hernan, Latino male

Hernan juxtaposes a concern for the collective good with the self-centeredness that is encouraged by our society. He asks why, if you were in a position of dominance, would you admit or relinquish it? The very admission of privilege might threaten the security of the advantages received. He also suggests that privilege may be incremental, discrete and not necessarily dramatic but that any advantage bolsters one's chances of success and of well-being.

WHEN *YOU* SAY IT, I DON'T HAVE TO

> *I'm not racist. I get along with everyone. But there's always underlying things we don't understand like Black English vernacular. A lot of white people feel it's an ignorant version of English, a less sophisticated sub-language. It sets people aside as an isolating device, like a defense mechanism, "This is our culture, our language." I don't know how black people feel, but it's one of those things that separates people because it's seen as different. You can say it's not as good as standard American English but it's a separating device.*
>
> —Mara, white female

> *A lot of black people, when they're in their home or community, they speak with the Black English vernacular. But if they work with white people, they switch over to the way I'm speaking. It's a device to affiliate yourself.*
>
> —Marla, white female

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Mara and Marla attempt to understand the use of Black English, yet at the same time they express uncertainty about whether it is really acceptable (Murray, 1998, 35). It appears they feel it is divisive and that they feel left out though they waver about whether they can say that outright. There is an uncertainly to their support of the Black English vernacular. The discussion about this continues:

> *A lot of white people feel this is an ignorant dialect and reflects ignorance.*
>
> —Jenna, white female

Often whites open their statements with phrases such as "a lot of people think. . ." as a means to "test the waters." They may question whether they can come out and say what they really think or they may be uncertain of their own feelings. They first observe how people react. Marla responds to Jenna's comment by taking a stand supporting black vernacular. She appears to want to be an ally and to make sure that that her good intentions are visible.

> *It's just a simple difference, which doesn't carry any value. It's not better or worse, it's just a simple difference. But it's hard to get past that, and it's easy to judge it.*
>
> —Marla, white female

The dynamic where someone has distinguished himself or herself from a previous speaker or someone they know, appeared to be used as a way of "outing" others and asserting moral authority. This was similar to what John was doing in relationship to his mother's opposition to interracial relationships. Often students will discuss their parents' attitudes and are willing to talk about the older

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generation as being "backward." However, personal ambivalence is revealed when they describe their own points of view as described below.

> *I don't categorize people, I just feel more comfortable with people of my same personality and attitude. I was brought up trying to categorize people in groups, trying to hang out with a lot of Jews because of my parents, especially my mom - she's a secret racist you know. She doesn't want to know anybody.*
>
> —Sara, white Jewish female

Sara does not explain her statement about her mother yet she suggests that they hold different views but does not say so explicitly. Her statement is somewhat ambiguous in that she says she identifies and associates with people based on personality and attitude. If they happen all to be white, she implies it happens by chance. It appears she believes that she is oblivious to race yet is willing to expose her mother as a secret racist, which perhaps she feels underscores her own lack of culpability. She distances herself from her mom and in turn expresses a desire to separate herself from racist attitudes.

> *Whites are perceived unfairly because everybody sees them as racist all the time. I see a lot of white people trying to struggle not to be, but in turn, they end up even worse because they try to be extra nice, which a lot of races don't like. I think they're perceived very unfairly; they are always abused. I don't think you can see them as racist or privileged until you get to know them a little better.*
>
> —Jenna, white female

The perception that whites are unpredictably accused of racism as expressed above, articulates a feeling of victimization that many whites feel. Jenna explains that whites are judged unfairly when people of color convey that they feel patronized by the "extra niceness." She determines that whites are

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therefore "always abused" and concludes that you can label someone as a racist or as privileged only when you get to know them personally. She does not, however, explain her criteria for passing such a judgment, nor whether she sees being privileged or racist as an active process. Her statement firmly places bias and advantage in an individual context and does not offer consideration of a structural framework for understanding race or inequality. This is also what is often done by the media where stories are told about individuals with the larger questions about social responsibility lost in the background (Cutting, 2000, 9).

Occasionally students raised whether dominance is an expression of demographic majority:

> *Isn't the percentage of white people in America about 80 percent? That's a huge majority. Most politicians are white; most people in power and big businesses are white; and economically most rich people are rich are white.*
>
> —Jenna, white female

This statement suggests that racial domination is a consequence of statistical majority. The idea that there are more whites in positions of power, wealth and politics because representatively they are a statistically larger population was frequently raised in conjunction with the sometimes explicitly stated belief that people of color want more than their "fair share." The following student challenged Jenna's dismissal of racism as a function of majority rule.

> *Population doesn't really matter. In North Africa there's a huge black population and not many whites. They still discriminate against blacks.*
>
> —Carl, black Latino

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When a student acknowledges unequal treatment, it provides an opening to explore other situations where the role of race can be recognized. When an individual articulates conservative views, they serve as a means for others to acknowledge racist dynamics. However, tension continuously emerges and dissipates as the boundaries of explicit recognition of whiteness constantly shift. This dynamic was particularly apparent in the focus groups that included both whites and students of color. Carl's comment above resulted in a white student defending white innocence. Struggles over the terms of plausible deniability are evident:

> *I don't really think whites are advantaged. It seems like it's always been, like going back to the South and black people and all that - I know that's changing and it's changed a lot. It's changed to a great great extent, but I think it's still there to a certain extent. It hasn't really gone away completely. But people are working on it.*
>
> —Sara, white Jewish female

Acknowledging that race matters, Carl and Marla respond:

> *I was in a class where the professor would hand papers to the white students but put down on the desk, papers for the students of color.*
>
> —Carl, black Latino

> *I can't recall any first-hand experience, but my daughter, who goes to a Catholic high school, all girls. There's a Rite Aid nearby and they're not supposed to let students in before three o'clock. They got out of school early and the guy at first wouldn't let them in. They were all white. But then he did. About ten minutes later a whole group of black girls came and he wouldn't let them in. My daughter came home and related the story to me. She felt bad for the girls that didn't get in. I said, "Well, I don't know what you could have done. The only thing you possibly could have done was say something to the guy, and then get all your friends and leave" you know, like a protest or something."*
>
> —Marla, white female

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Marla and her daughter recognize that the white girls were treated differently but take the position that there really isn't much one can do. She appears to dramatize an act that might appear natural, as in speaking up or taking action by describing it as a "protest." Images of activists are often racialized as dominant ideology portrays whites as "nice", "accommodating", "quiet" and "peaceful", while blacks are considered to be "aggressive", "violent" and "noisy" and "troublemakers." Marla implies that it is good to help people, but that the best thing is to leave. While she sees this as a protest, it might less likely have negative consequences for her daughter than if she spoke up at the moment. It can't be assumed that if someone acknowledges a racist act they believe racism is a systemic and structural problem. The tendency to view explicitly racist actions as isolated incidents is prevalent.

RACISM: A PROBLEM OR AN EXCUSE?

> *People use prejudice as a huge excuse for everything in everyday life. This happened to me — I got a grade I didn't deserve. If they didn't study, people are quick to say, "He's prejudiced, or she's prejudiced." It's sick, it's really a disgrace, everybody is quick to say it's prejudice.*
>
> —Andrew, white Jewish male

> *Everyone should be individually responsible, but people are always complaining about the system, or racism, or being poor. You can get around that. If you live somewhere else, your chances of overcoming these problems wouldn't be as good as they are if you're in this country. Everyone just takes things for granted in general.*
>
> —Gerda, Russian female

These comments illustrate the sentiment that people of color use accusations of prejudice as excuses to avoid hard work. Andrew, for example,

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challenges claims of injustice, and by doing so reinforces the image of the "honest" white person up against the "dishonest and lazy" person of color who uses race as a tool to get over. Andrew disdains what he perceives to be incompetent people who use claims of racism to avoid accountability and standards. Similarly, Gerda suggests that claims of unfairness are unwarranted in the U.S.; everyone can succeed if they try.

In the oscillating nature of most discussions within groups that included both whites and students of color, both Marla and Sara defend the possibility of misunderstanding, rather than intentional racism:

> *I'm pretty sure that every one of us has been misunderstood. I've been misunderstood. If somebody just walked past and you heard something about your race, you'd get offended by it automatically.*
>
> —Sara, white Jewish female

> *We put pressure on them, we always assume white will be the better one, we always have to assume that white would do this, white would do that, but minorities do not have a chance to do this, do not have a chance to do that. I feel like we put pressure on them. We put pressure among ourselves.*
>
> —Marla, white female

Andrew's explicit statement above about opportunism provided the space for Marla and Sara to defend the actions of people of color and to provide explanation for why things happen. Within many of the focus groups whites indicate some understanding of the dynamics of racism but then conclude with a rejoinder that dismisses broad social consequences.

In the survey, several respondents commented on this issue:

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Minorities hold themselves back because it is easier to claim responsibility on someone else rather than look at yourself and say what can I contribute. They blame it on their history. I believe all are equal and that everyone should be treated fairly. No exceptions should be made just because someone is a minority. We should all just be treated the same.

—Natasha, white, foreign-born female

We are all equal. Blaming race or anything else is not fair. It's easier to blame others for your own mishaps.

—Ross, white U.S.-born male

Stop these quotas. People should get jobs by their qualifications, not the color of their skin.

—Patty, white, U.S.-born female

The fear of being labeled racist appears to concern whites more than the devastating impact of racism on the lives of millions of people and diminution of the quality of life in society as a whole. This concern sometimes leads to very confused statements. A tentative quality of voice and diction often emerges perhaps reflecting ambivalence or as a means to navigate the possibility that someone might take issue with something one said. The following passage is almost undecipherable but exemplifies speech patterns that frequently emerged:

People assume that if you're white, most of the time and most people and well, white people, a white person usually, obviously not speaking for everyone, there's those people that are, they do not discriminate, they are not racist, but a lot of people are. I think the majority of people are racist to some degree. A white person, it's like that thing we were talking about. You stick more with your own group, so a white person would more likely see a white person as being, like nice, not necessarily nice in character but less likely to do something to you. If someone's hiring someone for work, they would most likely hire someone of their own racial background.

—Jenna, white female

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While initially Jenna says she thinks most white people are racist; she ultimately dismisses this, saying that discrimination occurs not as a consequence of racism but because people are more comfortable with someone they perceive to be like them. Familiarity is used as a critical measure of one's character. Her reasoning stems from the perception that if you are white, you are less likely to be hurt by someone white.[10] As noted earlier in this chapter, this does not bear out statistically when examining crime rates that reveal that whites are more likely victimized by someone white, but the perception is that they are safe with whites.

The following students comment about everyday racial profiling:

> *It happened on my own job, they assumed I was nice. If you look like them, and they think they're nice, they consider* [you] *nice*
>
> —Angelique, Russian female

> *It happens to me all the time. I enter the elevator in the building where I work wearing a suit and a tie and you can just feel everyone check their bags, especially the older women.*
>
> —Barry, black male

Angelique alludes to the racial profiling that renders the niceness of whiteness, but by speaking in ambiguous terms it is not clear whether she believes there is a racial undertone on the part of the people at her job. Barry on the other hand, is very clear about how people perceive him.

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10. Tim Wise discusses this in his analysis of "School Shootings and White Denial," (2001). "White people live in an utter state of self-delusion. We think danger is black, brown and poor and if we can just move far enough away from 'those people in the cities' we'll be safe. If we can find an "all-American" town, life will be better, because things like this just don't happen here."

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Everyday Experiences

Through the Eyes of Children (First Recollections)

I remember at first not knowing exactly what it was. Like certain words or whatever, but then you hear the words again so you start making some connections, you know that's the way it is.

—Don, white Italian male

Since there's different kinds of people around, it's not like you grew up only seeing white people and all of a sudden you see a black person in the street, and you say, "Oh, what's wrong with that guy." There were always different kinds of people around you. I think it's like 'retarded,' like when did you learn that word. You always knew it.

—Nancy, white Italian female

These students, growing up in an urban area, describe how on some level they were always aware of race. Don acknowledges that meaning was attached by observing how race was handled and discussed by the people around him. For Nancy, it appears that race was a more assumed and understood part of her world. Gerda, on the other hand, having mostly lived in Russia and Australia, does not hide her surprise upon her first interaction with a black person. She cautiously describes her experience, though it clearly left a deep impression on her:

If you're a little kid living in New York, it's a regular thing, it's your routine, you go to school, you have little black kids, you have this and that. You go to private school; you see all different kinds of things. I was born in Russia; I don't think there are black people in Russia. I had never seen one before. I was six years old, and also lived in Australia. When I came here, I saw the first black person in my life. I said "Oh my God, Ma" ... She said "yeah, you know, they have them..." Then I thought it was just that one person, and then my mother was like, "Oh you know there are people who are colored and there are Puerto Rican people." I hadn't seen this as every other little kid that sees this on a daily basis, so it is different I think.

—Gerda, white Russian female

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This alludes to a significant difference in experience between U.S.-born and foreign-born whites that is important to explore. In the following example, Joanne recollects an incident that marked what she describes as the first time she experienced "race difference" and how overwhelmed and shocked she was by what she witnessed.

> *When I was in junior high school something happened where I think a black kid had gotten killed or something. I don't know. There was this big thing in Bensonhurst[11], something happened. I don't remember what it was, yeah he got beat up or something, oh, he got killed. I had been walking on 86th Street and it was late. All of a sudden I see this older man and he's running and he's heavy-set and he's running and running around the corner. I see these big black kids running after him. I don't know what happened with the verdict, but whatever happened, it caused them to do this. The guy tripped and fell, and the black kids, teenagers started kicking him. I was like, Wow, that was just way too much for me. That was the first time I really experienced race difference. It was to the extreme. I had never experienced it before, and then that's what I had to experience.*
>
> —Joanne, white Italian female

Does this reflect an objectification of people of color, especially black people such that whites think about race as something that only affects "them"? Why does Gerda refer to "little black kids"? Joanne says, "it is way too much for me. . . I had never experienced it before, and then that's what I had to experience," while clearly knowing Yusuf Hawkins was shot. It appears she distinguishes between the two incidents. What do these recollections signify? John DeSantis, journalist,

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11. This widely publicized incident took place on August 23, 1989. Yusuf Hawkins, a black teenager from Bedford-Stuyvesant went to Bensonhurst with a friend to look at a used car, possibly to purchase. He was murdered by gunshot by a group of 40 white teenagers, disturbed by his presence in their neighborhood (DeSantis, 1991).

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suggests that the presence of white hecklers at the protest marches after the murder of Hawkins evoked the following reflection:

> *Many blacks reasoned, if so many people were unashamed to show this evil side of themselves, then how many whites, people they worked with every day and said hello to, harbored such hatred as well* (DeSantis, 1991, 118).

The implication of this is great, yet rarely discussed. The next section summarizes students' thoughts about identity in everyday interactions.

MY BEST FRIENDS

> *I have a problem when you ask whom I identify with. Ninety percent of my friends are Spanish. They are who I enjoy being with. I don't much like Italian people even though I'm Italian. I used to believe in the "American Dream" and the melting pot. Everyone expected us to melt together but it was too hot. Now there is no American culture, only combinations. People refused to melt so it destroyed American culture and created difficulties.*
>
> —Angelo, white male

National and ethnic identities are viewed as negatives and as something to blame for destroying American culture. It is implied that "they" have created difficulties; "we" were willing to get along but "they" insist on (flying their flag, speaking their language, identifying by their homeland, coming and going, eating their foods, including their histories in the history books, etc.... fill in the blank). This attitude implies that we can't be American and multicultural at the same time. This issue is explored in more depth in chapter five.

Susan, a white female student responds to Angelo's comment above saying "New York is not a melting pot. Look at the segregation of communities." Her comment acknowledges the complexity of diversity in an urban setting and perhaps

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expresses some ambivalence about its significance. She seems to want to understand neighborhood segregation and whether it is just the "way things are." Is New York a multicultural haven; is Brooklyn a model of diversity, or is it a constellation of separate communities? As we have already noted, "Brooklyn neighborhoods vary from 1.9 percent white in Bedford Stuyvesant to 92.3 percent white in Dyker Heights" (Brooklyn College Office of Institutional Research [BC OIR] 1999a).

The issue of identification is a sensitive one, as these comments illustrate:

> *This is a touchy issue. Some people take pride in being Italian, but their loyalty is to the U.S.A. I understand that the color of someone's skin matters, but it is really about how the person is inside, what kind of person they are. One incident with someone of a race and the whole race gets a bad name. Stereotypes cause societies problems, but some people just hate like the KKK.*
>
> —Joseph, white Italian male

> *We're not as different as we think. We just make ourselves more distant from each other by the stereotypes that we accept in our everyday lives.*
>
> —Terry, white female

Joseph appears to feel that whites are overly criticized because of incidences of explicit racism on the part of a few people. It is not clear whether he feels the same dynamic is true about stereotypes of blacks, Latinos or Asians. This suggests that he feels people of color label all whites as racists and particularly victimize whites. He dismisses a discussion of structural causes by saying that some people just hate rather than explore the consequences to those people and groups who are the objects of hate or the possible causes of racial hatred. Joseph

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reflects on how we as a society are affected by the impact of hate and what we might do to address the causes. Angelo continues,

> *The perception among minorities is that white people get more. In class one time, we had half Jewish Orthodox, and half students of color. I was the only white, non-Jew. A Jewish student got a copy of the test ahead of time and the blacks wanted it. A brawl broke out. I didn't fit anywhere, Mr. Bensonhurst.*

Angelo doesn't identify himself with the students who felt wronged; he frames himself as a bystander. He feels victimized by both groups and describes himself as "neutral" in this struggle rather than identifying with the blacks or asking the Jewish students to share with the whole class. He concludes that minorities perceive whites get more, then uses an example where whites did. He complains that he is not always included in receiving privileges yet does not ally himself with those who challenge unequal circumstances. The racial difference between himself and the students who wanted the test immobilized him from joining forces with them. He did not say whether the test was obtained through legitimate means or whether the whole situation raises issues of academic integrity, rather that the Jewish students got the test and the blacks wanted it. Angelo emphasizes the racial component and feels that minorities are mistaken in their perception, although his story describes otherwise. Angelo reveals below that he feels he is the victim of reverse discrimination:

> *My parents worked sixteen hours a day all their life and I work, too. There has been a backlash with affirmative action. I have had black friends and black girlfriends. Now everyone's pissed and feeling screwed. Everyone generalizes. The only trouble I have ever had in New York City has been*

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from Italians. This is even more reason to hate Italians more than anyone! But again, I helped everyone during registration and one black guy didn't like what I did, so I was reported. He said he was going to write articles about the racism in this school.

While somewhat conflicted and ambivalent about the role of race versus class, and his own personal sense of victimization, Angelo again concludes with a story that illustrates his feelings that whites are treated unfairly. He describes an incident where someone accuses him of discrimination. Rather than considering the student's perspective or overall experience, or whether he may have erred himself, Angelo dismisses the grievance. This mechanism of defense, consideration and return to the defense of whites as victims is commonplace as if the very process of consideration clears one's name.

CAMPUS POLITICS

I pass in front of Boylan [Hall] *like a million times a day and no one from The Liberal Party (TLP) asked me to vote. Everyone from Working Together Always (WTA) came up and asked me. I was walking with her and said, "Hold on! How come you didn't ask me if I voted already or anything?"*

—Cora, black female

You don't always know what's going on, you don't always know for a fact that it's racial. You might think it is, but it doesn't necessarily have to be.

—Randy, white female

Student organizations at Brooklyn College reflect both the diversity and the complexity of the student population. More than 125 clubs and organizations are arranged as academic, fraternal, or fall into a general category that includes cultural, activist and religious groups. Each of the three divisions (day, evening and

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graduate) is represented by its own student government structure.[12] The Greek-lettered organizations fall under their own Council. This current structure has functioned for the last thirty-five years. During this time, the day-student government has been generally the domain of two parties. Working Together Always (WTA) student government organization's constituency is primarily Latino, black and Asian. The Liberal Party (TLP) is comprised predominantly of Jewish students although it includes Italian and various other white ethnic students. Both organizations have included a few people who do not fit this description, but this has been the general demographics, historically. Students are clear that one is viewed as the party of color, the other one white. Nancy, a white Italian female offers the following reflection:

> *Racial and religious segregation of our campus is an incredibly important issue. White students don't participate because they are afraid of being labeled a racist. They have to go to school and to work. They think students of color will argue with us and whisper. We have to be able to disagree yet still talk. There are strong issues; we all have opinions. It helps to see different views.*

Nancy appears to hold students of color responsible for the lack of understanding and communication and feels that white students are intimidated by

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12. Per Dr. Hilary Gold, Dean of School of General Studies in the 1960s, then Dean of Students, and Vice President for Student Life until he retired in 1998, this structure was initially a Council of Club Presidents. It became a Student Assembly as part of the 1960s movement for a general election. "Composed of forty seats, it was winner take all and TLP was regularly the winner. The one challenge occurred when WTA took TLP to the Brooklyn Supreme Court during 1978-79 in protest against lack of student fee funding resulting from TLP having all forty seats and full control of the budget. The Court ruled for "equal representation" namely that the Assembly would be divided so that both parties would be represented." This is the present system. TLP has won twenty-nine of the thirty-three elections that took place between 1967 and 2000. Of those, twenty-six of the executive slates were all white; three included one black and one white student as either President or Vice-President.

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them. Her comments suggest that she believes students of color are to blame for the tension that white students experience and for the segregation. She also conveys that white students feel that if they don't talk about race, they can ignore its impact. In a way, this may be true. Blacks have to live in a white dominant world, and as W.E.B. Du Bois described in his analysis of a double consciousness, blacks have to become bi-cultural just to survive. Whites do not have that burden, as their experience is normalized and presumed. Peggy McIntosh, in her essay "Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack: White Privilege," lists forty-six everyday assumptions that a white person can make but a person of color generally can not (McIntosh, 1992). Assumption number 32 states: "My culture gives me little fear about ignoring the perspectives and powers of people of other races. Similarly, number 34 states "I can worry about racism without being seen as self-interested or self-seeking."

> *People always assume that because we are white we are privileged, but it is not always true. There are a lot of white students who want the hatred to end. We want to stop having only other whites as our only input. I want the segregation to end. We may share problems, but I guess what happens (like poverty) to students of color happens in greater numbers. But there is more help for students of color such as scholarships and internships.*
>
> —Nancy, white Italian female

This dynamic of a defense of white innocence, consideration of responsibility and then a reversion back to a defense (but they get more scholarships and internships) identified earlier in this chapter is evident in this quote. The

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perception that students of color receive a disproportionate amount of scholarships is raised once again.

What does the notion of privilege mean? Is it solely an intentional, explicit and obvious process, or can it also include the ability to collude, collaborate, enforce, ignore, defend and protect a worldview that subordinates people of color? The concept of being privileged is essentialized, as is the notion of being racist. You either *are* or you *are not* and the moral implications of either designation are so weighty that you ought to make sure you *are not* and have ready explanations and justifications. Otherwise, you are unpredictably vulnerable.

When the possibility of an uneven playing field is considered and acknowledged, there often is a follow-up sentence about how things are unfair for whites. This is where a "crack" appears and where the possibility of dialogue, increased awareness and agency lies. However, without the opportunities for discussion or intellectual engagement, poverty appears to just mysteriously exist and racialized poverty is not acknowledged. "To be poor in America is bad, but to be black and poor is worse" (Jennings, 1999). The mechanisms through which historic patterns and structures are masked and attributed to individual failings, allow people to dismiss the possibility that we might all have responsibility for the perpetuation of social and racial inequality. However, recognizing the mechanisms leaves open the potential that we could all take responsibility for its elimination.

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While there is some willingness to recognize structural relationships, there is usually an immediate reaction against considering the possibility that our society is not as it is portrayed to be as the "land of the free," "home of the brave," "champion of democracy," or a glorified "mixed salad." The framing of "I guess what happens" (like poverty) makes it appear as if the forces that structure society are beyond our control. Poverty "just happens." The ambiguity way that statements are posed holds no one and nothing responsible for current and historical patterns. The institutions and daily actions that maintain and enforce injustice and inequality are masked and permitted to reproduce relationships and dynamics of power. As Nancy, a white Italian female states, "Black kids at H.S. fall asleep, refuse to work but the Asian students work hard. What's the difference? It's the work ethic."

In a further extension of the mechanism explained above, Nancy cites her opinions as facts, and generalizes as if she is free to judge the performance, and social value of each of these groups. When asked, she objected vigorously to the idea that her statements may be biased or racist; for her, they are truth. Notions of a work ethic, like standards and merit, constitutes a coding that I suggest is implicitly racial and exemplifies the culture of poverty framework.

> *I went to NYU, and BC is much more segregated. You have to be here to believe it. It is disgusting the things which are said. Let's Celebrate*

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Commonalities (LCC)[13]*, well it was to deal with this but they don't invite me or my sisters to the events anymore. I try to be fair. WTA, sometimes they just vote black and do not pay attention to the issues.*

—Nancy, white Italian female

WTA's main purpose is to serve minority students, which I don't like. The group they forget about is white males. We're discriminated against. They are for minorities but they're not for white males. When you are in student government, you are supposed to encompass all groups.

—John, white Italian male

Nancy and John seem to feel that whites are fair but minorities are prejudiced. They both comment on WTA but not on TLP and seem to feel that whites are inclusive while minorities are exclusive.[14] Nancy asserts that WTA votes based on race and alludes to the idea that TLP votes on issues. Whites commonly believe this — that whites vote issue, but people of color vote race.[15] However, research has shown that whites more frequently vote along racial lines than do people of color. Examples of this may be found in the documented voting patterns during recent New York City mayoral primaries and during the last mayoral election (Nelson, 2001).[16] Table 4.4 details the voting breakdown in the primaries:

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13. This student club was formed in 1999, after a student leadership retreat workshop on social justice that chose to address the issue of social segregation on campus. Initially active and diverse, the group disbanded after several very successful but overly ambitious events.
14. A recent University of Michigan study found, "Despite much talk about self-segregation by students of color, such students are much more likely than white students to socialize, date, and dine across the color line. I ask whether cross-racial experience by students of color makes it likely that they know more about white students than white students know about them" (Roediger, 1998, 8).
15. For an outstanding examination of the role of race in electoral patterns, see Wing (2000). Wing points out for example, that the Electoral College negates the votes of almost half of all people of color; that people of color are the most consistent liberal/progressive voters in the nation and that whites constituted 95 percent of Bush's vote, thereby essentially disenfranchising non-white voters; and that in the 1996 election, 73 percent of people with annual incomes over $75,000 voted compared to 36 percent of those with incomes below $15,000.
16. For those unfamiliar with the candidates, Green, Hevesi and Vallone are white; Ferrer is Hispanic.

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NEW YORK CITY DEMOCRATIC MAYORAL PRIMARY - SEPTEMBER 2001				
Group (percentage of voters)	Ferrer	Green	Hevesi	Vallone
African Americans (24%)	54%	34%	13% combined	
Latinos (23%)	72%	12%	17% combined	
Whites (48%)	7%	40%	20%	31%

Table 4.4 Voting by Race: New York City Democratic Primary - September 2001

Jill Nelson, in an article in the *Village Voice* "White Voters Play the Race Card, Again" says, "Are we really to believe this vote is the result of a meritocracy, that in a field of four Democratic candidates only the three white candidates took positions palatable to 93 percent of white Democrats?" (Nelson, 2001) This pattern has been documented in elections throughout the country (Wing, 2000). In relationship to her thoughts about the Brooklyn College student government party voting patterns and allegiances, Nancy continues:

> *We don't communicate. Most of us in TLP have to spend time correcting the spelling errors in the minutes that WTA typed. If someone is white it gets voted down, if* [they are] *black, the item gets voted up. Like with the debates which TLP won. What does police brutality and daycare have to do with BC? It is an issue, but you can't eliminate workfare. How can WTA deal with the big issues if they can't even deal with their own budget? TLP wanted to set the standard, to do realistic things, not deal with police brutality, childcare. They won and there is no activity.*

Who is held accountable for this lack of understanding and communication? Does communication necessarily mean seeing the world the same way? Nancy articulates her implicit belief that white students are more literate than students of color, by saying that they are burdened with teaching students of color how to spell. She talks about whites being fair and even-handed and about blacks being self-interested and voting only for "their own." Her statements about WTA's

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concern about police brutality and childcare indicate a lack of awareness and sensitivity about the everyday lives and needs of students as a whole but also conjures up the images of blacks as violent, radical and promiscuous.

These comments also express the belief that we should be concerned only about issues that personally affect us and that caring for everyone or fighting injustice is something "they" do. "They" complain rather than doing the hard work of running society. The discussion alluded to their feeling that whites set high standards while people of color drag them down. The white students imply that they are realistic, whereas the students of color are too idealistic, which results in nothing getting done. Nancy further articulates this point:

> *WTA is racial. It's black and Hispanic, but TLP we're white, all different kinds. Chinese, black, we have everything. WTA is involved only with several groups. Every person of color is multiply involved.*

Here again, whites are portrayed as just, inclusive, multicultural and fair, regardless of the actual demography of either organization. The comment that every person of color is involved with more than one group is stated as an indictment. She implies that these students are trying to represent themselves as involving more people than they actually do. She does not attempt either to understand why this might be the case, nor to have respect for what it takes to be involved in several organizations at the same time. Nancy continues: "WTA are imbeciles who can't be spoken to. Everybody just sticks together."

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She pursues the position that TLP members (does she implicitly mean whites?) are intelligent and open-minded while WTA members (does she implicitly mean students of color?) are incompetent, unreasonable and closed-minded. Nancy asserts that followers of her party mix and mingle with all kinds of people; followers of their party stick to themselves. She implies that her members are easy to get along with, friendly and welcoming, while theirs are hostile and exclusive. She states,

> *We are all divided by racial clubs. It is emphasized and radical. The Latino group marches all the time with their flag. It makes us mad. Chanting, but by now, we should all be American. Why do they have to march every semester? Even at baseball games, they brought their flag to demand recognition for their country.*[17]

Nancy suggests that assimilation is an assumed and desirable status. She questions, hasn't everyone been given time to assimilate and implies that this club ought to stop clinging on to separatist, self-centered notions of community. Why can't "they" be more like "us", white folks, who dropped our national origins to identify as pan-ethnic whites?[18] At another point in the discussion, Nancy asks why there was an African students' club, and how she "just knew" they would not let her in. When questioned if she had asked to join, she responded, "no." She said, she just "knew" how "they" were. When asked about their policy in welcoming non-African students into their group, the President of the African Student Club said,

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17. The meaning attached to the flag is more thoroughly discussed in chapter five.
18. Richard Alba speaks of the deal cut by European immigrants whereby they traded in their linguistic and cultural diversity in order to become white (1990).

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This is quite an interesting question. I would be honest with my response. If a white Italian woman (or anyone) approached me when I was the president and said she wanted to join, I would have said to her, 'Great! Our next meeting date is... What is your email address and/or phone number so that I can remind you about the meeting and tell you about upcoming events.' I would have received her without any hesitation. During my term as President, I invited and included non-Africans and non-club members in to our club meetings and events. Take African Week for example, of the eight dancers that performed, only three were club members and only two of the three were from West Africa. I would have welcomed her.[19]

Nancy concludes,

I have pondered the separations and believe it has to do with all these ethnic clubs. We need to come together and celebrate our common heritage and history. But the problem is being separated.

Again the question can be raised as to who is held responsible for the separation between groups? It appears that Nancy feels "they" are because "they" always want to talk about their own heritage.[20] Nancy refers to being American as if it means common ancestry and heritage. Given that many European immigrants sacrificed linguistic and cultural distinctiveness in order to become white (Alba, 1990), this line of thinking inherently equates being American with being white.

The theme that "things just happen," like poverty, prejudice and segregation, continuously re-emerges. The issues of individual responsibility and

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19. Odegua Eko-Isenalumhe. Correspondence via email dated November 2, 2001.

20. Peggy McIntosh lists these assumptions in her knapsack. 7. When I am told about our national heritage or about civilization, I am shown that people of my color made it what it is. 8. I can be sure that my children will be given curricular materials that testify to the existence of their race. 31. I can choose to ignore developments in minority writing and minority activist programs, or disparage them, or learn from them, but in any case, I can find ways to be more or less protected from negative consequences of any of these choices. 44. I can easily find academic courses and institutions that give attention only to people of my race.

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potential agency are hidden, as whites feel insecure and powerless to affect change. This perspective provides an opening to discuss economic and political causality and in turn can present an opportunity to explore the socio-economic context of everyday experiences of ordinary people, including explanations for social inequality that could break down racist justifications that blame individuals and groups as in the culture of poverty framework.

> *In my sorority, most of us work two jobs. I want the segregation to end. Talk to me. Someone needs to hold WTA more responsible. There were no whites on the slate. I know the inside workings. People are putting up a face. I might have joined WTA if asked. But they screw us over a lot. TLP tried to work with WTA; we don't care who wins, only what matters for students.*
>
> —Nancy, white Italian female

Nancy asserts that whites work hard, and may be suggesting that class rather than race is the problem. She wants us to know that in her mind they are not privileged. By insisting that she wants the segregation to end but that WTA should be held accountable, she seems to blame them for the separation. She does not reveal that both the sorority and student government organization with which she is affiliated are overwhelmingly white.[21] She says WTA needs to be held more responsible for not having whites on their slate, not TLP for not having students of

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21. While precise data on the demography of Greek-lettered organizations was not accessible, I surveyed one staff member and three students, all who concurred on the following summary statement. Of the twelve to fifteen fraternities and sororities that have regularly been registered and active, 80 percent are approximately 95 percent white while the other 20 percent are predominantly either black or Latino. Of the fraternities and sororities that are 95 percent white, most are predominantly either Jewish or Italian with a few Irish students. The other 5 percent of membership are Latino, Asian, black or of mixed background.

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color. Additionally, Nancy's comment reflects her feeling that students of color are out of control and need to be restrained. Whites (TLP) care for students, yet students of color (WTA) care about power. She continues to explain her position:

> *Up to last semester the fraternity and sorority Council was all white. The first to try* [to get in] *was Alpha Zeta. At first we didn't want a Latino fraternity. It was against the idea of being all together. Isn't that racist, why is that okay? Will they make us look bad by not living up to our standards? There are serious requirements. We have probation when you first come in. Then Alan came up with his fraternity. We were skeptical. Our nationals make us work on a philanthropy like child abuse.*
>
> —Nancy, white Italian female

While Nancy herself acknowledges that the Council had been all white, this statement expresses a lack of awareness of the normalization of whiteness in the Greek-lettered organizations. No issue was raised about their exclusivity when the Council was all white. It was only when the Latino fraternity wanted to join that the issue of racism was raised and the concept of "we are one" asserted. She explicitly questions whether the Latino brothers can live up to the "serious" requirements of the Council. She implies that the Council is concerned that this new organization may diminish the Council's reputation, and that these new organizations may ask to waive standards. She suggests that this new fraternity is out for themselves, that they might be activists, or not serious.[22]

> *The Latino fraternity wanted to be in charge of approving all ethnic fraternities and we said "No." We wondered "Were there going to be*

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22. Peggy McIntosh's knapsack of white privilege includes: 34. I can worry about racism without being seen as self-interested or self-seeking. 27. I can go home from most meetings of organizations I belong to feeling somewhat tied in, rather than isolated, out of place, outnumbered, unheard, held at a distance or feared."

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rallies, mob scenes?" We wondered if they were activists. We asked, what is your philanthropy?" They said they were multiethnic but they all look black. We needed to know what they were going to do. If they were to bring Al Sharpton, no, not okay. That is spreading hatred. We are not pleased with the Latino fraternity. They are business-based and separate and they don't support events. They only come when they want money.

—Nancy, white Italian female

When students of color are involved there appears to be a presumption of the potential for violence. At the same time, philanthropy is considered acceptable as a form of patronage but activism is goes too far. It is okay to help individuals but not to object to structural patterns.

Nancy's comment questioning the fraternity's multi-ethnicity challenges their authenticity. Ironically, most Greek-lettered organizations are actually ethnically identified e.g. as the Jewish fraternity, the Italian sorority, the mixed (Jewish and Italian) fraternity and so forth. Nancy presumes that she and her associates in TLP have the right to judge who is authentic and worthy and who is not. She questions whether this was even a diverse group of students of color and implies that a mixed group would be more acceptable. In contrast, Catherine makes observations but does not pass judgment or placing blame on the students of color. She suggests that something should be done, but she's not sure what or how to make a sustainable dent in the intergroup dynamics on the campus:

At Brooklyn College there's many cultures. I've learned a lot because I came to the Student Center but there are a lot of times where it's like all minorities and no white people. I'm used to it now, so it's all right. But there's a lot of, not segregation but everybody's split off from each other. Fraternities and sororities hang out in this part of the cafeteria and the

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Jewish people hang out in another part. The blacks and Hispanics don't mix with each other. WTA is minority; TLP is white. Rarely do they cross over. The radio station, it's basically white. Black people come in but they stick together. A couple of years ago, our music format was alternative and basically white deejays, specialty shows, urban or whatever. Then we had a major urban format (R&B, hip hop). So we had alternative and urban formats. So we have white music and black music if you think about it. That's the way it is. You can make people meet and hang out, but that's going to be one time, and then, they're going to go back to their own groups.

—Catherine, white female

I decided to run for TLP as a favor to a friend. I'm not that active. If I had a friend in WTA who asked I guess I probably would. But there are usually not too many white people in the office you know.

—John, white Italian male

How might we move toward a more unified community? Given that the data indicate that relatively few whites think about their racial identity, feel race has impacted their life or that something should be done, they are less likely to take a stand about addressing segregation or the disparate understandings of everyday experiences. Awareness of these dynamics provides opportunities to engage.

Race's Roles

Race gives you a kind of bondage, like a protection group. Everyone pushed the immigrants away, you know.

—Nonna, Russian female

Being white has given me a different perspective, being on the outside of a lot of the racism. It's given me a perspective, to see it for what it really is. If you want to be really honest, when I walk into a store, and someone else walks in behind me who is black, of course I notice who's being watched and who's not. It's completely clear how ridiculous and truly racist our society is no matter how many laws or whatever is said. You can see it every day. It's very obvious because they don't try and hide it from a white person.

—Leon, white male

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I have friends of different races. The Italian kids when they're chillin' they make fun of the Chinese people, the Jewish kids make fun of the Italians and I have this Chinese friend, you'd think he's black!

—Vera, white female

Each of these comments articulates a different perspective about how race and particularly whiteness functions and is reproduced and each offers insight into how relationships are formed through a racialized lens. They express awareness of various functions that racialization performs, but also seem to suggest some level of ambivalence or uncertainty about this process and its significance. Nonna speaks about the protection of association based on race. Her comments presume a white experience where race provides protection and bounds privilege. For people of color, racial identification is often more complicated and may implicate one negatively such as through racial profiling. Race frequently functions to reduce status or to weaken one's position in a society that places such high value on being white.[23] Implicit in her comment, is recognition that racial norms establish rules of conduct and structure relationships between individuals and groups.

Leon reveals that he is conscious of everyday discrimination that takes place between whites and people of color. He acknowledges that there is a presumed consent to these practices among whites, almost like a "wink." He does not indicate however, whether he challenges offenders when he notices discriminatory practices; he simply observes it happening. Leon's awareness,

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23. See Cose (1993).

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however, raises questions as to whether he finds these actions offensive, and, if so, how one may intervene to affect change.

Vera, on the other hand, reveals her understanding that race and ethnicity are often used as means to exert one group's superiority over another. She suggests that the process repeats itself between groups, almost as a hierarchy. This awareness provides opportunities to discuss how difference has been used as a means to dominate, subordinate and divide. She articulates her feelings about the fluidity of race as she describes someone who takes on an identity that falls outside the boundaries of where they would typically be classified. She describes her friend as Chinese, but acknowledges that the way he acts (or possibly how he looks) complicates the notion of what race signifies. She seems willing to accept the fluidity of categories even when they may be confusing or complex.

In these passages students describe "Race's Roles" as both flexible and definite and tangible, yet elusive. They perform distinct functions; yet can be challenged. This awareness and sensitivity provides evidence of "cracks in the wall of whiteness" that can be explored to develop a deeper understanding of how race has been used historically and presently to justify dominance and subordination. They are tools to deconstruct the construct while acknowledging the social reality of race in their lives.

BROOKLYN AMERICANS

> *I call myself a Brooklyn American, partly to be funny but in reality it is a strong core of who I am. It is my sensitivity. A kernel of me knows that I*

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am Jewish and white, but being from Brooklyn means having sensitivity... being liberal, accepting of all people. I lived in a white Italian and Jewish environment.

—George, white male staff

Living in a diverse city bestows pride among its white inhabitants, as it provides them capital to claim rights as being colorblind and multicultural. There is a progressive and caring component to George's statement. Taking it as face value one could conclude that his chosen Brooklyn American identity breaks down racial barriers and allows George to align himself with the majority minority population of Brooklyn. In some ways, his gesture is similar to the self-identification as a "world citizen", or when people describe themselves as "human" without the constraints of a national, religious or racial identification. This can provide an opportunity for us to recognize our humanity and interconnections.

However, I would also suggest that this identification allows whites, on the one hand, to deny how they are perceived in this country but at the same time to receive the privileges of this reception. They can choose where they live, be secure of their personal safety, select their schools, watch movies, or television or attend classes and generally expect to see people in positions of power who look like them.[24] George can use his Brooklyn American identity when he wants to, yet live as a white male as he conducts his daily activities. This is a luxury that is rarely

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24. Peggy McIntosh, from her knapsack: 1. I can, if I wish, arrange to be in the company of people of my race, most of the time. I can turn on the television or open to the front page of the paper and see people of my race widely and positively represented. 24. I can be reasonably sure that if I ask to talk to 'the person in charge,' I will be facing a person of my race."

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afforded people of color. Several students spoke of trying to understand the meaning of identity within a diverse environment, and acknowledged that it is different than being in a homogenous, overwhelmingly white, environment:

> *It has to do with New York's diverse population. I'm not originally from here. Where I'm from there's not a whole bunch of different people. Here there are Jewish people, a lot of Italians, a lot of this, a lot of that. It's the first time I've ever experienced this. Where I used to live, it was just like I wouldn't know what you were and I wouldn't ever think of it. When I first moved here people could tell the race of someone like this, "Oh he's definitely Russian" or "he's definitely Jewish." How can you tell? What is it that points this out? I would never have known, I could never guess your race, still now. It's because of how I was brought up. Race just wasn't an issue. I didn't see it. Even if there were diverse people, there definitely were, but it was not to the extreme. I didn't see it.*
>
> —Terry, white female

Terry's experiences leave her confused by the diversity in New York City. However, by explaining that she could never guess the race of her classmates, she is at once allowing for multiple possibilities and at the same time dismissing the notion that racial images are prevalent in history books, media and the arts. As mentioned before, she suggests that race is only an issue in diverse environments.

Regardless of the extent to which an individual explicitly or implicitly supports or challenges patterns of racial inequality (whether in the schools, the criminal justice or transit systems) whites can still portray themselves as liberal, sensitive members of a diverse urban community. They can define the parameters of their association yet also distance themselves from the people who also live in the borough who they may feel do not embody these same qualities. A common

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image of Brooklyn, for example, is as violent, crime infested, and impoverished as illustrated below:

> *Talk to people who live in Connecticut or Rhode Island, wherever it'd be more predominantly white in the area. Tell them you're from Brooklyn. They look at you like, "Oh my God, there must be guns and killing all over the streets."*
>
> —Randy, white Jewish female

The designation "Brooklyn American" communicates a pan-ethnic identity that conjures up a white image with ambiguous borders. Is it possible to imagine someone of Haitian descent describing him or herself this way? There is a chameleon quality to this designation such that whites can be connected to, yet distanced from, negatively racialized images, a freedom not frequently granted to people of color. Furthermore, in the context of Brooklyn, does being Jewish or Italian, mean white plus something, minus something, or just plain "different"?

> *This* [racial diversity] *is in other states, too, but we are in a position to notice it because we are in New York City where there are many races.*
>
> —Dorothy, white female staff

The language of diversity and the notion of New York City as the multicultural capital of the world help to disguise racism within the environment. They paint a liberal picture of how wonderful it is for so many groups to live together so harmoniously but tend to gloss over the significant inequities between communities. Racialized urban images are portrayed within the context of narratives that convey, "Race doesn't matter." This paradox functions to block

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analysis of the very different experiences of various groups. There is an ambiguity about what diversity represents:

> *It's like stereotyping. If you grew up in a nice neighborhood in Brooklyn, which I did, and my parents had a nice home and we were of Italian descent - people would automatically assume, "They must be gangsters." It's not like that now. Then, it was almost assumed. The other side of it when my father was in the military, we lived in Louisiana. My mother said some other officers' wives didn't want their children to play with "Dago" kids. I guess that was something real in Louisiana at that time in the late Sixties. I remember my mother relaying the story to us as we were growing up, how lucky we are in New York, racially so diverse. People are more tolerant of each other here than in certain other areas in the United States.*
>
> —Joan, white Italian female

Yet the process associates urban centers with violence, drugs and inner city decay, all of which have been racially coded. The two contrasting views of life in Brooklyn portray, on the one hand, tolerance and diversity expressing racialization from a white perspective and, on the other hand, a view based on the intensely negative images of blackness.

> *The reason people act that way in the south because they're not so open-minded to different cultures and different races as people in the north. When people come from other places in the world they usually come right to New York or Florida. Most immigration comes here. People in the south are not used to different races. Whatever you don't know, you are usually afraid of. So, they're not so open to different people. Not that they're narrow-minded, but because of the experiences they probably have.*
>
> —Mara, white female

> *Brooklyn is very diverse but when you go inside the neighborhoods, East Flatbush, you step inside Bensonhurst, it's another nationality there, so it is diverse, meaning that there's a lot of different cultures. People just feel safe when they're around their own. You shouldn't be scared of other races but that's how people are, you can't change the way they are.*
>
> —Sam, white Italian male

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The above passages articulate the role that fear plays in reinforcing race relations and racialized patterns of interaction. This issue came up repeatedly throughout the discussions. For example, participants described the impact that individual incidents of hate crime have had on white communities. There is a terror about losing what one has, and an anxiety about questioning what one has been taught about different groups. If, in fact, blacks and Latinos are poor because of something structural, one might have a broad social obligation to do something about the inequality. If, in fact, police are discriminatorily brutal, then perhaps claims of racial injustice have merit. One would then have to consider whether whites are better off because of a superior culture or whether there are social dynamics that discriminate, positively, which results in whites being located in more advantaged positions. To question the causes for this social order shakes the foundation of the notion that whites are better off because they *are* better. All central beliefs about the world and why certain people have greater successes than others could then be called into question.

LATINOS "IN THE MIDDLE"

What it means to be Latino in today's world is shifting, yet this identity often described as an ambiguous, in-between category in which intermarriage is common. Research participants rarely noted diversity within the population described as Latino. When it was mentioned, it was generally in the context of a discussion of intra-group tensions (such as between Dominicans and Puerto Ricans),

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reinforcing the stereotype of Latinos as difficult, argumentative and combative.[25] Participants attributed the heightened visibility of Latinos in the United States to global shifts and to the increased political power of Latin American countries. The comments below reflect these issues:

> *Latinos mix more because they're not really white but not really black; it's really somewhere in the middle. The Latino kids could end up hanging out with the white kids or the black kids, it goes both ways.*
>
> —Leon, white Jewish male

> *Latinos are comfortable with either black or white, from my perspective.*
>
> —Mara, white female

> *Latinos are kind of like, in the middle between black and white.*
>
> —Marla, white female

> *They fit in with black and white and anything else but do have discrimination among themselves. I have friends from the Dominican Republic and from Mexico and they wouldn't get along, just because they weren't from the same place but they were still, Latino. Other races, they would get along with them just fine. That bothered me to think they couldn't get along among themselves.*
>
> —Jenna, white female

These statements indicate several assumptions about Latinos. They presume a common Latino life experience and that the categories of black, white and Latino are distinct. These comments convey prevalent stereotypes such as that while Latinos don't get along with one other, they relate well to other groups. They also imply that "Latino" is an invisible category — what are they "in-between"?

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25. The National Opinion Research Center, University of Chicago conducts routine surveys for the General Social Survey Project. In December 1990, findings indicated that the images of Latinos, as compared to whites was significantly poorer, more violence prone, less intelligent, more frequently live off welfare and less patriotic (Smith, 1990).

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One interesting statistic was that Latinos reported, *more* than any group that they had been *in the home of someone of another race* (see Figure 6.1). The specific data by race is indicated in Table 4.5 below.

	Never	1x / Month	1x / Week	Daily
Latinos	37.5%	22.9%	22.9%	14.6%
Asians	56.4%	25.6%	2.6%	15.4%
U.S.-born Blacks	72.1%	14.0%	7.0%	4.7%
Foreign-born Blacks	71.4%	17.5%	7.9%	3.2%
U.S.-born Whites	61.8%	19.1%	15.4%	3.7%
Foreign-born Whites	76.8%	15.9%	4.9%	2.4%

Table 4.5 How Often are you in the Home of Someone of Another Race / Response by Race

Similarly, Latinos report significantly *more* than any other group that they *socialize daily outside of campus* with someone of a different group. Latino students *less* frequently than all other groups said they *never socialize outside campus* with someone of a different race. The specific statistics are reflected in Table 4.6 below:

	Never	1x / Month	1x / Week	Daily
Latinos	8.3%	6.3%	29.2%	56.3%
Asians	23.1%	25.6%	15.4%	35.9%
U.S.-born Blacks	30.2%	9.3%	11.6%	41.9%
Foreign-born Blacks	25.4%	30.2%	14.3%	28.6%
U.S.-born Whites	25.0%	23.5%	15.4%	35.3%
Foreign-born Whites	29.3%	24.4%	14.6%	31.7%

Table 4.6 Socializing Outside Campus with Someone of Another Race / Response by Race

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This interaction can sometimes reinforce discourses about colorblindness and race being a figment of one's imagination, as students feel that they get along with everybody because they may do so on campus, as demonstrated below:

> *Why do people stress so much on the race issue? Things like this are what encourage people to be racist.*
>
> —Sophia, Latina

> *Racial issues are all a state of mind. If you don't let them affect you and you behave in a polite, responsible way, people will respect you and boundaries will be broken. I do it all the time.*
>
> —Sylvia, Hispanic female

Latinos additionally reported *more* frequently than U.S. born white students that they believe *BC should diversify course material* (52.1 percent versus 27.9 percent) and believe significantly *more* than all whites that *efforts to include the historical and current experiences and contributions of people of color in the curriculum raise* academic standards (Latinos, 47.9 percent, U.S.-born whites, 20.6 percent; foreign-born whites 25.6 percent). One student offered this explanation:

> *Latino people are friends with white people, Latins, Italians and blacks. Because, they're between — they're not really black and they're not really white so they can communicate. It's easier for them to get used to both.*
>
> —Joan, white female

Students' ideas about Latino identity assume rigid and exclusive classifications and by doing so, de-legitimate the particular experiences of this group. It is as though they only become visible through political acts, and mostly remain invisible in American life. It is only now, because of increased migration from the Latin Diaspora and the shifting population demography of the United States, that more

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interest has been generated about the history, culture, nations, and language incorporated within the umbrella considered "Latino." A large body of literature examines the issue of race and this identity and addresses a range of critical issues including the role of phenotype and critiques of a black/white paradigm (Martinez, 1999, 129), labor force and political integration, (Cordero-Guzman, Smith and Grosfuguel, 2001; Darder and Torres, 1998; Moore and Pinderhughes, 1993), transmigration (Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton Blanc, 1994) and racial identity (Martinez, 1998; Rodriguez, 2000; Rodriguez et al., 1991). This topic is complex as: "The experience of Latinos in the United States demonstrates that ethnicity involves both internal and external components, which are culturally, politically and subjectively influenced and multi-leveled" (Rodriguez, 2000, x) and increasingly important as we grapple with the meaning of race in today's world.

ASIAN STUDENTS' BELIEFS AND EXPERIENCES

This section briefly describes the data as it relates to students' perceptions and beliefs about what it means to be Asian in U.S. society today and highlights some of the responses by Asian students:

> *My first recollection was in high school and the kids tried to set me up with this guy who was Chinese. They said you guys should get along really well because you look alike. That was the first time I distinctly remember that I felt racism in that way, saying that I should be with my own kind. I wasn't able to be with someone else because I didn't look like him or her. That's the first time I felt bad.*
>
> —Sandy, Korean female

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As an Asian, I got a racial identity when I came here, and now though people see me as successful, I feel in my heart I feel I could be much better. Why do I feel this way?

—Susan, Asian female

A significant amount of material emerged within this study related to the experience of Asians and Asian Americans. Some particularly striking statistics are noted below, indicating that Asian students:

- Report significantly *more* (12.8 percent) than foreign-born white students (6.1 percent) that they *witness racial tension* among classmates and friends;
- Believe significantly *more* (46.2 percent) than U.S.-born white (26.5 percent) and foreign-born white students (25.6 percent) that *historic inequality* contributes to the average lower incomes and poorer housing of blacks;
- Believe significantly *less* (53.9 percent) than U.S.-born black (86.1 percent) and foreign-born black students (87.3 percent) that *if people don't have equal access to resources, measures should be taken to equalize opportunity;*
- Believe significantly *more* (51.3 percent/ 30.8 percent) than U.S.-born white (19.1 percent/11 percent) and foreign-born white students (19.5 percent/ 12.2 percent) that Brooklyn College should *increase* multicultural programming and *hire* staff and faculty of color.

Asian students are clearly negatively impacted by race and yet there are times when other factors impact their everyday lives.[26] In a very interesting summary article comparing the experiences of Asian Americans with those of African Americans, and analyzing whether they have a greater number of options

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26. The National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago conducts routine surveys for the General Social Survey Project. In December 1990, their findings indicated that the images of Asians indicated that they were viewed generally second or third in positive attributes as compared to whites on a scale measuring rich/poor, more/less violence prone, more/less intelligent, more/less frequently live off welfare and more/less patriotic (Smith, 1990).

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available to them, Miri Song, Lecturer of Sociology at the University of Kent, suggests that we need to "rethink and broaden the conceptualization of ethnicity and the need to re-examine our understanding of the images and labels applied to various ethnic minority groups" (Song, 2001, 57). Song particularly argues against the theorizing of ethnic minority groups as homogenous because she asserts this intensely misrepresents the vast diversity — cultural, economic, and political that is contained within the group classified as "Asian" and perpetrates the "model minority" image that does uniformly apply (Song, 2001, 57-82).

BEING JEWISH IN BROOKLYN

If you're Jewish it doesn't stand out; it doesn't jump out if you're Russian but there's no hiding it being black. It's out there in the open. If you're Jewish you don't have to speak Hebrew or observe the Sabbath.

—Sonya, black female

I remember someone once asked me "What are you?" I said, "A lot of nationalities, and my religion is Jewish." They wanted to know why I didn't have the little curls and the hat, did I ever try ham. It was shocking. You live in Brooklyn, how do you not know that there are different kinds of Jews? Do you think that only those people who look like that are Jewish and everyone else is Italian or Russian, or whatever.
I'm white but I'm Jewish. You'd be surprised at the ignorance that you're faced with. People just don't understand at all. They're so in the dark about people around them that they don't understand what their cousins are like. You'd think that if you live so close to different kinds of people you'd have some idea, but the questions I get asked are ridiculous.

—Leon, white Jewish male

I'm Jewish and I'm Russian. When I came here, the Borough Park people they had an attitude. "Don't even say you're Jewish, because you are not." They don't believe that if you don't wear the hat, you can still be Jewish.

—Nonna, white, Russian, female, Jewish

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I'm of Jewish background. It's very common to see a Jewish person in Brooklyn but, I've been to Missouri and I wouldn't even tell people that I'm Jewish. You see highways sponsored by the KKK and stuff out in the open. I would be an alien to them. They wouldn't know, they would be like, "What does a Jewish person look like?" It's a very strange concept to them

—Jerry, white Jewish male

This particular group is being discussed because of the large numbers of Brooklyn College students who define themselves as Jewish (25.1 percent). In response to the question "What is your racial, ethnic or national group?", 19 of the 497 respondents wrote in "Jewish." The next largest write-in response to this question was "none," indicated by 4 students. Several times comments were made by students who did not consider themselves to be white, as they were Jewish. They felt that religion, not race, was what separated them from their classmates. It is also important to note that there is a small Jewish population at the college and in Brooklyn, who are black, particularly of Ethiopian ancestry.

While whiteness in Brooklyn generally includes the Jewish community, in other areas of the country Jews are not quite white.[27] Distinctions are sometimes made about who is considered "sufficiently" Jewish. The community itself is internally stratified and there is a lack of general understanding about what it means to be a Jew in this context. While Jerry's awareness, for example, leads him to identify with a broader community, he also communicates uncertainty about his

27. The National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago conducts routine surveys for the General Social Survey Project. In December 1990, their findings indicated that Jews are perceived in a positive rating of rich/poor, more/less violence prone, more/less intelligent, more/less frequently live off welfare and more/less patriotic. Ibid.

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own stability that can translate to doing things to insure his place "back home." Both Leon and Norma, however, are concerned that their Jewishness has been called into question. They perceive a lack of understanding about their identity both within and outside of the Jewish community. It was Sonya who summed up these complexities by analyzing the role of race in one's identification as a Jew. In a public forum in 1999, entitled, "Multiculturalism and Jews" one participant expressed some resentment that emerges from this ambiguity.

> *I am Jewish not white and Jews are a minority, why isn't the multiculturalism movement about me?*
>
> —David, Jewish male

While issues related to the positionality of Jews and Italians arose within the discussions, the particularities of these identities within the pan-ethnicity of whiteness deserve their own investigation. Overall, even in the cases where students did not want to identify as white, they generally recognize that they are perceived as such by other people and were willing to pursue the discussion.

Black Students' Perceptions, Experiences and Beliefs

This section summarizes some of the responses of black students to survey questions that were statistically significantly different than other groups and the related discussions within the focus groups. This material deserves full examination, though the purpose here is primarily to document this aspect of the survey, and to leave a closer analysis for a future project.

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When I started hanging out by myself, my father was always protective. I realized it's because I am a black male. I would be stereotyped, picked up by police and put in a detention center. I was in the 5th grade.

—Max, Haitian male

The awareness of vulnerability in contact with the police was expressed clearly in the survey:

- Black students (55.8 percent of U.S.-born and 58.7 percent of foreign born) believe significantly *more* than white students (26.5 percent of U.S. born; 25.6 percent of foreign born) and Asians (28.2 percent) that the NYC Police Department *uses excessive force.*

Reflecting personal awareness and experience, black students' beliefs about racial inequality are reflecting in the following data:

- Black students (48.8 percent of U.S.-born; 71.4 percent of foreign-born) students believe significantly *more* than U.S.-born white students (29.4 percent) *discrimination contributes* to the lower incomes and poorer housing of blacks;

- Black students (55.8 percent of U.S.-born and 55.6 percent of foreign born) believe significantly *more* than white students (U.S.-born, 26.5 percent; foreign-born, 25.6 percent) that *historic inequality contributes* to the lower incomes and poorer housing of blacks.

Challenging the common grievance of whites that blacks receive special privileges, a columnist for the *Nashville City Paper* suggests,

> *Blacks do receive preferential treatment. Blacks and other people of color are preferred targets of law enforcement officers. People of color are recipients of preferential treatment in our criminal justice system; they receive longer sentences than whites for the same crimes committed. It is certainly preferable to deny a home loan to a person of color in particular neighborhoods where whites are the majority, if you are a white-owned institution* (Secours, 2001a).

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Another important issue raised by this data is whether the beliefs and experiences of native and foreign-born blacks are similar. While some of the literature points to differences in perspectives, as they perceive the possibility of achieving the American Dream, these statistics allude to the overall influence of race in determining attitude:[28]

- U.S.-born black students (48.8 percent) believe significantly *less* than foreign-born whites (76.8 percent) that the *American Dream can be achieved* by anyone who works hard;
- Foreign-born black students (44.4 percent) believe significantly *less* than foreign-born (76.8 percent) and U.S.-born whites (64 percent) that the *American Dream can be achieved* by anyone who works hard.

A number of foreign-born black students expressed that they did not think about being black until they arrived in the U.S. and were repeatedly reminded. They expressed sentiments like Jean Paul's, which implicitly communicate the subjugation and negative stereotyping of blacks in the United States.

> *Even as a black person from another country, a lot of times you're scared of black Americans because back in your country, you hear these negative things about blacks.*
>
> — Jean Paul, black male

On several occasions whites noted that they feel confused about why, when they bring up race, they are not always met with a positive reception by students of color. For example, at an open forum by the Sociology Club, entitled, "Who's Black, Who's White," Rona, a white female professor questioned:

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28. For an in-depth exploration of these issues, see Kasinitz (1992); Jaynes (2000); Hochschild (1995); Cordero-Guzman et al (2001).

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I just don't understand. Blacks get angry when I say that race matters. Is it denial, or just too harsh, too overwhelming, too long a wait. Why do they acknowledge it themselves and resent when I raise it?

Evan, a black male student responded,

How can they trust where you are coming from? They sense you have a pre-conceived notion of who they are; you are emphasizing their difference and not your own. They presume a lack of identification, a fronting "See I'm not a racist."

In another example, Louis, a white male professor says:

I notice that, consistently, when asked how they identify themselves, blacks and Asians say 'human being.' I think they are conflicted because they know that people see them as colored or not white.

While both faculty members appeared to want to understand the apparently contradictory responses by people of color, they tried to generalize and simplify the reasons why people identify themselves in one way or another. Evan's response indicates his acute recognition of perceived stereotypes and presumptions about how people of color are assumed to identify themselves.[29] His comment also notes the posturing that sometimes takes place when whites want to be seen in a positive light and certainly not as racist. This desire can, in fact, prevent individuals from increasing their understanding of themselves because the armor of defense can protect against learning as it attempts to project an image of awareness.

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29. The National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago conducts routine surveys for the General Social Survey Project. In December 1990, their findings indicated that the images of Blacks, as compared to whites was significantly poorer, more violence prone, less intelligent, more frequently live off welfare and less patriotic. In fact, over 80 percent of respondents rated Latinos and Blacks lower than whites on one or more of the five characteristics (Smith, 1990).

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These quotes and this data illustrate the experience of discrimination and the expanded desire to take action to make a difference, on the part of blacks versus whites. It is interesting, however, that both foreign (15.9 percent) and U.S.-born blacks (18.6 percent), U.S.-born whites (32.4 percent) and Latinos (20.8 percent) believe significantly less than foreign-born white students (48.8 percent) that the United States is a land of opportunity for all people. This suggests that the category "white" is not monolithic. The recent experience of Eastern European immigrants may lead them to believe that the United States is indeed full of promise. This theme is explored in detail in chapter five in the section on Race and the Foreign-Born Experience.

The Race to Identity

People, particularly and specifically "white" people, continuously negotiate their recognition that race matters with their denial that race exists. Individuals pull in and out of a parking spot as if realizing there is a broken bottle in the way. They acknowledge racialized characterizations, such as "It was black people who stole our bikes," but then would immediately make statements, such as "It's not that I'm racist," or "It's not that I think all black people. . ." to legitimate their initial comment. This chapter examined how race in daily conversation is conceived in the negative as a status barrier but not as an enhancer.

The resistance that whites express toward talking about race and recognizing ways that everyday experiences are infused with racialized images

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functions as a mechanism to mask structural inequality and, in turn, reproduces and reinforces the institutions and systems that perpetuate the patterns of dominance and subordination. Interest in understanding everyday white racial thinking has emerged within academia relatively recently. As the presumptions of whiteness as natural and superior are exposed, the link between how people think and the persistence of institutional inequality becomes increasingly clear and provides opportunities to challenge patterns of power and subordination.

Put another way, were one to acknowledge as a white person that one is privileged, one's whole understanding of the order of being in society might also become questionable. It is considered better therefore, to fight to preserve and deny rather than challenge apparent hypocrisies and contradictions. In fact, it is one's responsibility to uphold dominant views, or there will be anarchy and chaos. So while structural explanations for inequality are considered, students' conclusions dismissed their ambivalences as if it was too overwhelming to consider any possibility other than poverty as the fault and responsibility of individuals or their group affiliation. We cannot acknowledge that there may be structural causes because who then might they blame for their problems.

This chapter examined racial identity and the mechanisms of racialization that reinforce, reproduce and expand upon the culture of poverty framework. An interesting underlying implication is the way that resistance is racialized and implicitly perceived to be an outgrowth of black radicalism. When challenging the

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status quo, one is viewed with disdain and patronization as if the very idea and act of dissent is something that only subordinate and inferior peoples engage in as a means to justify their status and blame the system for their own personal deficiencies.

This implied racialization of resistance is to me a cornerstone in the reproduction of whiteness. The social stigma against raising questions, being critical, voicing opposition to the status quo, is viewed as "a black thing" and something very negative only to be engaged in by someone in a subordinate status. The white radical tradition is rich within the labor, communist, and abolitionist movements throughout history yet activists have been marginalized, stigmatized and dismissed as lunatics. Meanwhile, the widespread development of white supremacist groups and thinking is not viewed as a significant threat to society.[30]

There has been virtually no public discussion of the lack of racial profiling of people such as Dylan Klebold and Timothy McVeigh, of skinheads in general or even of white students running wild on spring break in Daytona Beach. Their radicalism (right-wing and white) has not been viewed within an overall context as part of the

30. An example is that Anthrax terrorism is not a new phenomenon. A total of 81 of 83 criminal incidents worldwide involving anthrax in 1999 took place in the United States. Most involved white supremacists, yet it was not until the aftermath of September 11, 2001 and possible links to Iraq that this threat is being made public. As it increasingly appears that a lone individual or group in the U.S. is behind the dissemination of Anthrax, the threat is being muted once again (Blackhurst, 2001, 49).

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rise of white supremacist groups throughout the U.S, over the last twenty years.[31] Prior to their publicized acts of violence, they were either presumed to be "all talk no action," good-intentioned teenagers "feeling their oats," or simply as "boys who will be boys."[32] They are not recognized for the threat and connections that they represent as players of far-right ideology that is counter to "American values" because that would not be possible as they are white males who by definition exemplify those values as well-meaning, upstanding citizens.

Their whiteness shields them from public scrutiny and their radicalism was not perceived as a threat to the establishment in the same way that the non-violent words and actions of Al Sharpton, or of protesters against police brutality, the death penalty and the bombing of Vieques are portrayed. Even Jenna Bush, daughter of the President, provides a vivid example of positive white racial profiling in everyday practice as she was reprimanded for underage drinking, not once but twice. Had this been Colin Powell's son, would the reaction have been the same?

This process of ideological framing of opposition politics as an ideology of people of color has resulted in the dramatic reformulation of the meaning of

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31. Despite the fact that there are 25,000 hardcore white supremacist activists in dozens of organizations with another 150,000 supporters in the U.S. today, when was the last *New York Times* article about this? Approximately 10,000 people are members of neo-nazi groups or Ku Klux Klan type organizations (Ward, 1999, 50).

32. Whitfield (2001) questions why "young Christian white guys with crew-cuts" were not "profiled" after the Oklahoma City bombings, nor have the "Patriots" who have been blowing up abortion clinics, nor serial killers who have also been predominantly white males. One might question why there was no full-scale investigation of the right-wing Christian fundamentalist white supremacists groups that McVeigh was affiliated with, despite clear indication that he was operating not as an individual but as a representative of the right-wing tendency in the United States. See also Williams (1999, 9).

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liberalism. While at another stage in history, to be a liberal was something to be proud of as it represented an image of someone caring, generous and willing to stand for what's right. Today this concept has been vilified. In a recent Presidential election, when Michael Dukakis confessed his previous liberal affiliations, he was practically out of the running for office. George Bush, senior, in fact, argued that Dukakis was a card-carrying member of the American Civil Liberties Union to demonstrate the radicalism of this liberal.

The notions of a "bleeding heart liberal," and of a democrat as someone who patronizingly supports social services illustrate the extent to which the political tenor of our society has moved to the right over the last thirty years. This shift articulates a disdain for communities of color and the underlying incorporation of the culture of poverty framework into dominant discourse.

When racialized structures of society bend in your favor, you don't need to pay attention. However, as evidenced in this chapter, openings do exist to increase understanding, as many students revealed significant awareness in the focus groups and survey responses. This project was dedicated to the investigation of the opportunities for engagement and the planning for how to most effectively utilize those "cracks" to build a more just and caring society.

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Chapter 5 - American Identity, Democracy, the Flag and the Foreign-Born Experience

This chapter explores American identity, analyzing whether and how it has been racialized throughout the history of the United States. What imagery is conjured up by the concepts of democracy, nation and patriotism? What does the American flag mean to the average person, and what function does it serve? Do these symbols mean something different for foreign-born versus U.S.-born individuals, or to people of different races? These questions are explored through an examination of the beliefs and attitudes of Brooklyn College students.

In light of the tragic events of September 11, 2001, the concept of national identity and the characteristics ascribed to "the American people" have become more present in public discourse. In our increasingly globalized world, the question has been raised whether we in the United States can consider and accept a multicultural union. Does claiming national allegiance provide a vantage point from which to stand for peace, justice, and equality (Nussbaum, 1996, 136) or does it divide us from people of other nations?

Congresswoman Barbara Lee eloquently articulated her thoughts about being American when she voiced the only "no" vote on the Senate floor to the question of giving President Bush full powers to go to war with Afghanistan in the fall of 2001. She spoke of patriotism and democracy and challenging the mainstream equation of loyalty and military might. She asserted that as a citizen, one has the right and

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freedom to represent one's point of view and to dissent, and that these are central tenets of democracy. She said,

> *If I am going to be patriotic, and I am, and if I am going to be a good American, which I know I am, I am going to make sure that our democracy works and I'm going to hold it accountable and make sure that it works not only for my constituents but for the whole country. . . . Being patriotic at this moment in our history means participating in decisions about the future of our world. It means participating in decisions that will hopefully bring us to peace and ensure that these terrorists are brought to justice and that no man, woman or child, ever gets killed in such brutal assaults ever again* (Davey D, 2001).

Most students reveal that they feel disconnected from what it means to be an American. Yet they also articulate the belief that waving a flag, referring to one's self as "American" and the expression "God Bless America" provide status in relation to the rest of the world.[1] This identity, like whiteness, confers this elevated standing to those who hold it, regardless of class position, gender or skin color. At the same time, distinctions are made between images of "true Americans" and people with questionable status as imparted by the ambiguous borders and margins where many native-born blacks, Latinos and Asians are positioned. All hold tentative status as Americans, depending on circumstance. Additional distinctions are made between different generations, along lines of race and language, within both immigrant and native-born populations.

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1. Immanuel Wallerstein discusses God's unequal blessings, and how the United States has always defined itself, measured by the yardstick of the world: "We are better; we were better; we shall be better." "America and the World: The Twin Towers as Metaphor" (2001).

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American national identity functions as one of many axes from which to understand the imposition of patterns of dominance and subordination, at times to contradict and under other circumstances to enhance the status of its holder. This chapter reviews and analyzes students' perceptions and views about these issues.

On Being American, Democracy and the Flag

On Being American

> *What is a 'good' American in a country where an estimated 60 million* [people] *were either born in a foreign country or have foreign-born parents?* (Zachary, 2002, 23)

The ambiguity in people's minds about what it means to be an American, and/or a citizen, and how you become one provides flexibility so that race can be used both to reinforce structured inequality and to challenge it. Most U.S.-born white students said that they do not think about what it means to be an American; they just "are." Similar to being white, being American and a U.S. citizen is an assumed state of being from which any "other" departs. This status can be bestowed by birth, inheritance or naturalization, by association or through a belief system but it can also be retracted especially for people of color. Recent discrimination against the Arab American population, many of whom were born in the United States, testifies to their vulnerability, regardless of their place of birth or citizenship. A political cartoon that circulated soon after the events of September 11th showed a white American angrily shaking his finger at a man who

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appeared to be Arab, and saying, "Go back to where you where you were born." To this, the man asks, "Chicago?"

The construction of race thereby remains elusive within notions of who belongs and the entitlements that different populations can expect. During the fall of 2001, this issue became acutely visible, when, for example, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) summoned hundreds of men with Arab surnames for interviews about terrorism. The government justified this blatant racial profiling in the name of "Homeland Security." One might wonder why the government has not rounded up microbiologists, given significant evidence that multiple envelopes of anthrax were sent to various individuals by an American microbiologist (Blackhurst, 2001)? If the reasoning is that perpetrators of mass murder should be swiftly and summarily executed, why not call upon tobacco industry executives along with abortion doctor murders (Williams, 2001a, 11)? Students' comments below demonstrate some of the ambiguities of American identity.

> *Don't you get a certificate for being an American? You do. Yes, you do. You become an American by going for a special test and they give you your certificate. It's by law.*
>
> —Sonya, black female

> *No, that's when you become a citizen, not an American. Being an American is a belief system; it's the way you act and think towards other people. It's not where you're from or where you're born.*
>
> —Keri, mixed female

> *If you are a citizen you get a lot benefits that you don't get if you are not. But you are still an Irish person who just became an American citizen.*
>
> —Bella, foreign-born white female

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America started off as immigrants you know, so it's not like somebody's actually American. Ancestors came here from different countries so if you were born here you are automatically an American. [2]

—Leon, white Jewish male

Just because you're an American citizen, it doesn't mean you have to forget where you come from or the culture you had, or start changing anything.

—Kim, black female

American culture is a combination of everything. It is the big melting pot. There's no one set standard to what American is. There is no such thing.

—Mia, Latina

The struggle to understand the meaning of being American shifts between something tangible (naturalization and citizenship), something unambiguous (bestowed by birth), something ambiguous (a belief system), and something transitory and continuously shifting (a combination of any of these). Even the white students who said they had never thought about being American expected a range of privileges as part and parcel of their birthright. Other issues emerged such as whether being American means giving up other national identifications. Assimilation and pluralism are compared in this statement:

People in the U.S. are not as nationalistic. Americans are open to embracing anyone as an American. It's interesting that people who are born here and lived here their whole life still don't think about being an American. To have an American identity draws out notions of assimilation and maintenance of a cultural identity. Do we have assimilation or pluralism? Pluralism is when many different cultures are living together. Assimilation is more complicated. Many people hold a negative connotation

---

2. Elizabeth Martinez writes, "Today's origin myth and the resulting definition of national identity make for an intellectual prison where it is dangerous to ask big questions, moral questions, about this society's superiority; where otherwise decent people are trapped in a desire not to feel guilty, which the necessitates self-deception. . . . When together we cease equating whiteness with 'Americanness,' a new day can dawn" (Martinez, 1996, 24).

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with it because it assumes that people should change. People do not just want to be American; they want to keep their own identity.

—Louis, white male, faculty

Certain questions continuously arose in discussions about national identity. For whites, does being American mean giving up association with one's heritage, being pan-ethnic white or not completely American? Can an immigrant ever really be "American"? Does loyalty preclude dissent[3] and is there only one way to be patriotic? It was apparent that being American held distinctive meanings for different people. The survey data in Figure 5.1 and statistically significant divergences in responses between groups provide an understanding of the range of beliefs, and how they align with group experiences.

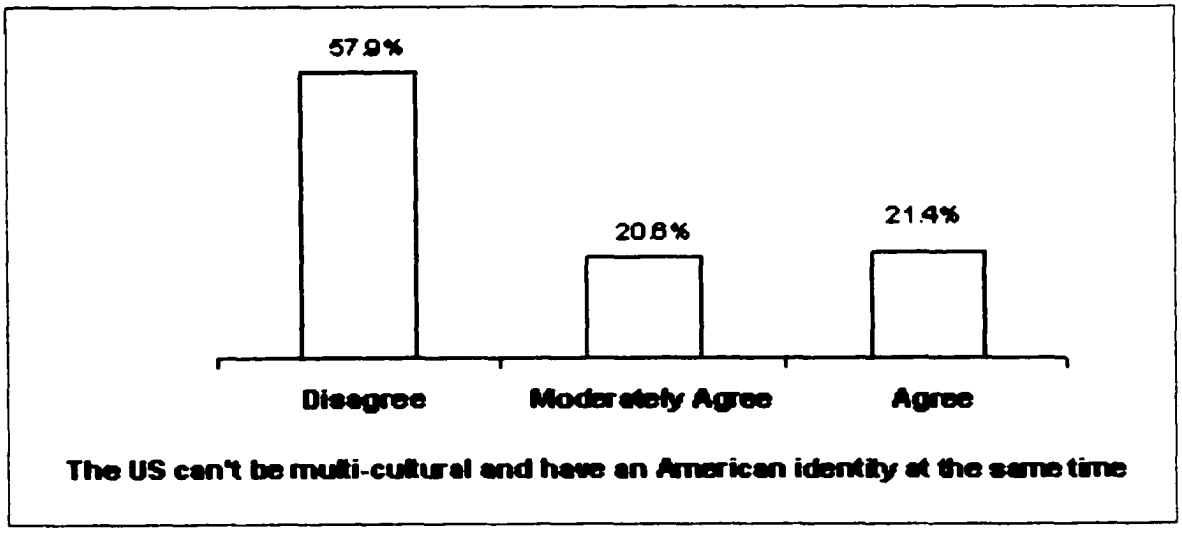

Figure 5.1. Can the United States be Multicultural and American? Survey Question: 26

Foreign-born whites (68.3 percent) *agree* significantly *more* than foreign-born blacks (42.9 percent) that the U.S. *can* be multicultural and American.

3. These questions, while asked 1999-2000, take on a slightly new meaning since September 11, 2001.

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Foreign-born white students (15.9 percent) *agree* significantly *less* than foreign-born black students (30.2 percent) that the U.S *cannot* be multicultural and American at the same time.

It is possible that these statistics reflect the racialized experience of foreign-born black students such that they are seen first and foremost as black while the foreign-born white students feel that their ability to assimilate is not hampered by how they are identified. The common equation of the label "American" with someone from the United States, rather than the continent, also intrinsically racializes the image of who is and who is not included, thereby projecting him or her as white. Similarly the dominant narrative about the U.S. as a benevolent global keeper of peace, projects the image of its citizens as nice (white) guys. This imagery was exemplified in a comment made by a firefighter, as reported in November 2001, on CNN. He said, "We in the United States take care of everyone all over the world and this is what we get?"[4]

The question of whether being American can mean something more than being geographically from the United States rarely arose. This illustrates a presumption of U.S. dominance such that there is no consideration of a broader "American" world. In this study, only Jean Paul, a Haitian male, raised this issue:

> *Growing up, I always thought of myself as an American even though I wasn't even born here. I was born in Haiti in the Caribbean and part of the continent of America. When I was six years old we kids were discussing, we live here in America, doesn't that make us automatically Americans?*

4. CNN News, November 29, 2001, 7 a.m.

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Because the continent, if somebody's from the continent of Africa, they're African, no matter what country they're from. Until I came here, I realized no, I'm not American; I'm just an immigrant. I'm Haitian and I've been living here for six years. I have to be a citizen to be a quote unquote American. But it's controversial to me, that you can't be an American just because you weren't born here, and there are fifty states on the flag.

This testimony raises questions about the uncertainty in the minds of students about the racial nature of American identity. Jean Paul raises the issues of homogeneity, assimilation, and incorporation into mainstream society. The equation of being American with being from the United States speaks to the centering and naturalization of whiteness. National pride was frequently presumed, regardless of an individual's consciousness:

I consider myself to be an American. I was born in America; my parents were born in America. I think my grandparents were born in America, but I have Irish, German and Dutch heritage. I love this country and that means a lot to me.[5] *Sometimes I'm amazed at myself when I hear, like, "God Bless America" or "The Star Spangled Banner." I get emotional, and I think, wow, God blessed this country.*

—Mara, white female

It is important to consider what it means to say "God blessed this country" when there are as many Gods as there are religions, and when much of the world's population does not ascribe to a religion that believes in a Judeo-Christian "God."[6] Why bless our country (5 percent of the world's population)

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5. For an interesting exploration of kinship systems in the United States, how they differ from those viewed traditionally by anthropology, the significance of symbolic connections and the implications for modern society, see Schneider (1968).

6. In an article entitled "Oh, Gods" in *Atlantic Monthly*, Toby Lester points out that new religions are born all the time. He quotes David B. Barrett, author of the World Christian Encyclopedia: "We have identified nine thousand and nine hundred distinct and separate religions in the world, increasing by two or three new religions every day" (Lester, 2002, 41).

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and not someone else's? This notion reinforces national pride and presumes superiority as illustrated below:

> *Being an American is being born here, and having your parents from here. Having a sense of pride, but I don't get all sappy. I don't know why not, because I was born here.*
>
> —Karen, white female

> *Being an American means having a common pride, you feel responsible for whatever happens.*
>
> —Mara, white female

> *To me, being an American means you are supposed to have pride and supposed to be powerful.*
>
> —Edward, African male

> *A lot of foreigners appreciate America more than people born here because people who are born here don't realize the history of America. They don't really see the revolution or anything. They just say, I was born here so I'm American. But people who actually come from different governments have more a sense and appreciation of the different freedoms that Americans take for granted. I never really thought if I was really an American or not. I just assumed I was born here, my parents were born here, my grandparents were born here, and I don't speak another language at home. I associate* [being American] *with people that were born here. In retrospect, people that come here, they come here for a reason. I think they're more American than people who are actually born here.*
>
> —Marla, white female

The above passages portray conflicting images of whether to be a "real American," you must uphold a certain ideology or feel a national pride, or whether to be born or immigrate to the United States is enough. Students explain their sentiments but were not sure what is "true." They appear to think out loud and to negotiate presumptions that to claim American identity, you need to pledge allegiance to the flag and be patriotic. They tend to view citizenship as the most

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definitive criteria for being truly American. Additionally, in light of changing demographics in the United States, it was interesting that the issue of what language is spoken at home was raised. In 1996, 35 percent of public school students in New York City spoke a language other than English at home (Tell, 1999).

Students grappled with understanding who determines someone's identity and status, and the roles of self-determination versus state and legal systems. It appears to depend on whether one has the power to assert judgment. Being white, one is generally provided options to be patriotic and nationalistic, or not, and to decide the terms on which these identities are negotiated. You can decide to think about being American, or not. You can choose one identity, one day, and another on a different day. A person of color, however, as Jean Paul described, does not have that privilege. One's identity is selected for you, like an arranged marriage with legal mandate. Consider the presumptions within the following statement:

> *Being an American means freedom: freedom of religion, freedom to be whoever you want, to say whatever you want, political freedom. That's why so many people come here, because other countries don't have that freedom, you can't practice whatever religion you want, you can't speak out politically. There's so much more opportunity in America. There is an American Dream, but people have to work for it.*
>
> —Jenna, white female

Jenna appears to suggest that if one doesn't achieve the American Dream it is because one did not work hard enough. Some of the contradictions implicit in this perspective came to light in the aftermath of September 11th, 2001 as media coverage noted concerns about the unequal distribution of funds raised for families

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of the deceased (Barstow and Henriques, 2001, A1) and about differentials in the severance packages of people who lost jobs.[7] While rarely explicitly visible, these long-standing economic disparities have increasingly become difficult to explain and justify, they thereby provide an opening for broader discussion about how one actually achieves the American Dream, why some people do, and others don't.

At times students grappled with trying to understand global inequality and political contradictions:

> *If you compare us to other countries, we are democratic but seeing how women are now, they still are being oppressed in some ways. Compared to other countries, the United States is a lot better off.*
>
> —Jan, Native American female

Figure 5.2 illustrates whether people identify themselves as American:

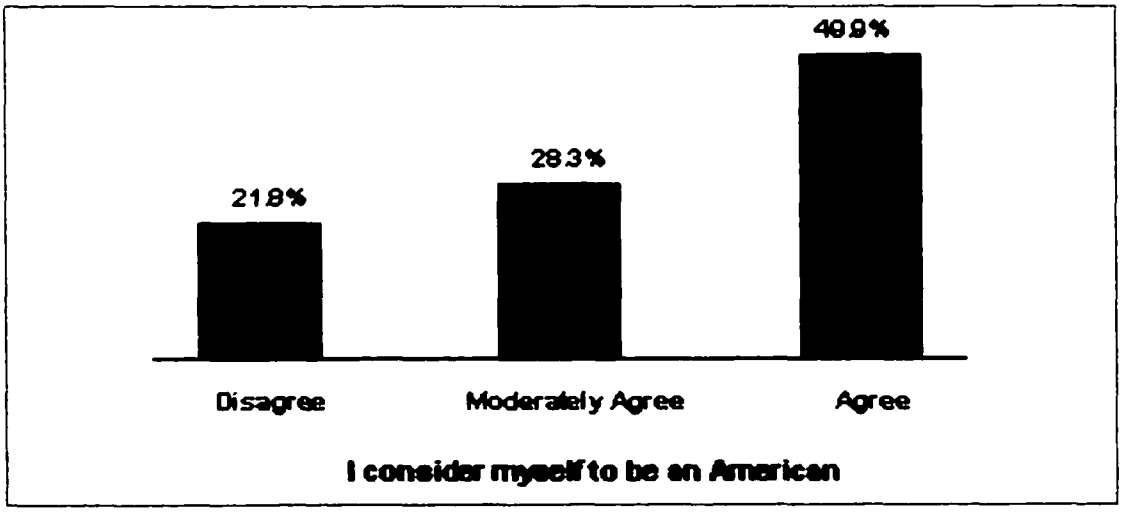

Figure 5.2 I Consider Myself American. Survey Question: 37

7. In one estimate, each firefighter's family will likely receive almost one million dollars, whereas families of people who were not unionized or were undocumented stand to receive little, if anything. Comparison of the severance packages of people who lost jobs as a result of this tragedy also reveals great disparities. On the one hand, the severance package for the outgoing executive director of the Massachusetts Port authority was reported at $175,000, the airlines bail-out was cited at $15 billion, and the overall economic stimulus package is essentially a giant corporate tax break; whereas, laid-off employees of the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International Union and various airlines are reported to receive little or nothing in the form of unemployment benefits (Jackson, 2001, A23).

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U.S.-born white students significantly *more* than any other group *consider* themselves to be *American*. Foreign-born black students significantly *less* than any other group, consider themselves to be *American* as illustrated in Table 5.1:

	Disagree	Moderately Agree	Agree
Latinos	33.3%	29.2%	37.5%
Asians	30.8%	38.5%	30.9%
U.S.-born Blacks	4.7%	34.9%	58.1%
Foreign-born Blacks	47.6%	38.1%	12.7%
U.S.-born Whites	2.9%	12.5%	83.8%
Foreign-born Whites	32.9%	37.8%	29.3%

Table 5.1 I Consider Myself American / Response by Race

This data suggest the racialization of the foreign-born experience such that foreign-born whites are more easily assimilated into U.S. society than foreign-born blacks. Another contrast is the difference in response between U.S.-born whites and U.S.-born blacks. One explanation is summarized: "Though I was and am an American, I [don't] have what most Americans feel — that unique sense of belonging" (Gilmore, 2002, 27).

An interesting contrast to the responses given in Figure 5.2 is that in response to a question about "Country of Primary Identification" on the CUNY Office of Institutional Research and Analysis (OIRA) Student Experience Survey in 1995, students at Brooklyn College identified themselves in the manner outlined in Table 5.2. Any country with 3 percent or greater is included.

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Soviet Union	16.1 %	Haiti	5.4 %
Italy	8.9 %	Jamaica	4.1 %
United States	8.4 %	China	3.7 %
Israel	6.6 %	Greece	3.5 %
Ireland	6.0 %	Other W/N/S Europe	3.5 %
Puerto Rico	5.8 %	Other Caribbean	3.0 %

Table 5.2 Country of Primary Identification
(CUNY OIRA Student Experience Survey, 1996, 8)

The discourse of America as the "land of opportunity," the "home of the brave," and model of democracy makes discussion about the stratification and structural inequality difficult to engage. Especially after the World Trade Center tragedy, any questioning of U.S. foreign policy is viewed as an attack on America. The mainstream narrative insists that everyone experiences life as white people do. We hear the slogan, "United We Stand" on a regular basis. The justification for random interrogation of Arab Americans is framed as "I have nothing to hide, why should they?" However, this perspective epitomizes the experience of someone who has never been "the persistent object of suspect profiling, never been harassed, never been stigmatized just for the way they look" (Williams, 2001b, 11).

DEMOCRACY IS. . .

Deeply rooted in the idea of American identity is that of democratic values including idealized principles of freedom, justice, and individualism.[8] This section explores students' beliefs about these ideals and how they are actualized in everyday living. These complex notions sometimes contradict one another; however,

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tensions are generally accepted as part of their very nature as ideals. The section focuses on implicit and underlying assumptions common within popular discourse.

Students were asked, "What does democracy mean to you?"

[It means] *being able to say what you want to say, when you want to say it.*
—Jacob, white Jewish male

Spoken in one of the focus groups, this comment was followed by a discussion about how the United States is different than other countries in the world. Jacob asserts a principle and wants to believe in its actuality within the lives of all people. This principle has been central to the self-definition of the U.S. nation, founded by people fleeing religious and political persecution. The Bill of Rights explicitly stands for freedom of speech, including the right to dissent, while at the same time, rights have been discriminately implemented throughout history. "'Us versus Them' thinking easily becomes a general call for American supremacy, the humiliation of 'the other'" (Nussbaum, 2001, 11).

In *An American Dilemma*, Gunnar Myrdal articulated the moral contradiction of the United States between an allegiance to democratic and egalitarian ideals, while allowing the reality of racial discrimination to exist within its boundaries (Myrdal, 1964 [1944]). Critiques of the reality versus actuality of democratic ideals were evident in works such as by Frederick Douglas, Anna Julia Cooper, and

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8. In an interesting examination of "American Values," Gerda Lerner explores the dyads of: equality and racism; open access vs. elitism; federalism vs. imperialism; individualism vs. community; and pluralism versus nativism, among others (Lerner, 1997, 74-92).

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David Walker (Blassingame, 1982; Wiltse, 1965; Lemert and Bhan, 1998).

Students view the United States as the epitome of democracy as it incorporates principle of egalitarianism. What are the implications of what they say about democracy? The following quotes explore this question:

> [It means]. . . *Free enterprise.*
>
> —Leon, white Jewish male

> *It's a lot different than the founders thought it would be. I don't think there's as much democracy, as there was, because of big business. They control so many aspects of our lives. It's not so much a democracy anymore. We don't really have much to say about it. It's kind of biased because it's not what I think, you think, he thinks, but just what they think. Anyway, there are so many races now. Then the white male was in charge. Now women are in charge, blacks in charge. Hispanics and Asians come here. It's totally different. It was founded as a democracy but changed.*
>
> —John, white Italian male

These students questioned whether the degree of corporate control in today's world was acceptable and generally felt that global corporatization has stolen the democratic process from everyday people. The idea that "ordinary" people could make a difference if they recognize common interests seems outside the realm of possibility as a result of the racialization that blames individuals and groups of color for present day poverty and ultimately keeps people divided.

John alludes to feeling that things are out of control.[9] One has the sense that he believes that there is no order to who makes decisions or to who is in charge in society. Other students reflect on these issues:

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9. This is similar to the trend articulated in the bestseller by Allen Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987) in which he decries the decline of American common values.

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[Democracy is] *the people ruling the country. We are represented in the government, our views and our thoughts and what we want. We are given equality, but the government, of course, is there to instruct and to provide and to guide us. If they disagree with what we say, what we want, of course, they're the ones to have the final say.*

—Penny, Asian female

People sneak in here. People are allowed to come in, so people who are already here don't realize how fortunate we are to be free. We have a President; the difference between a President and a dictatorship, the President is President and he doesn't have all the power. I don't know about everybody, but certainly we have it better than in other countries.

—Jeanne, white Jewish female

Minorities have less of a say because minorities don't vote as much as majorities do, and sometimes their vote is too little.

—Donna, black female

These comments portray a benevolent image of the United States: the government directs, the police protect, the schools educate, and individuals are responsible for the course of their lives. They imply that if one does not "make it", it is due to lack of motivation or hard work. This is reminiscent of the culture of poverty framework. Chapter seven explores students' beliefs about inequality

The ambivalence about whether everyone has an equal chance or if people of color are discriminated against is expressed in the following comments.

A lot of immigrants from Russia within a few years, a lot of us immigrants do very well because they do have the chance to go to school. You go to public school you don't need to pay money for that. If you have the brains, I think that you're able to put your mind to something. You're able to achieve a goal, or ambition that you want to succeed to become someone and you get that education. But I don't think it's a land of opportunity for all people. There's so much racism in this country and prejudice against minorities and black people. It's not fair but a lot of organizations or institutions, or even work places, discriminate against people.

—Sam, white Italian male

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Not everybody is created equal. You can't ask everybody on the street what they think about something, and then implement that idea. Not everybody is as smart as everybody else. Not everybody has the same opportunities. Everybody feels equal, but not everybody is.

—Leon, white Jewish male

These comments raise many questions such as whether those in power are there because they're smarter than the rest of us; why can't we involve everyone in the important decisions — isn't that the definition of democracy? Connections between economic, social and political power are drawn, but explanations for how patterns evolved remain individualized. Elites explain that they are there for the benefit of society as a whole, and got there because, in fact, they are truly better and smarter. Students express a significant ambivalence about this narrative:

The idea of America had good intentions, but it left a lot of people out who were not WASPS. The founding fathers thought they were doing something revolutionary and good but they were not. Their intentions were good, like the Constitution and the formation of democracy. Opportunity is there but everybody can't achieve it. A lot of people work really hard but they won't achieve their actual dreams. Yet there is potential.

—Steven, white Jewish male

The United States was founded on hypocrisy. They left England to get a better life, ran away from being controlled and turned around and rejected everyone else. It is a double standard.

—Etienne, Haitian male

I don't think it was at all a democracy. Not one bit, when you think about it, what was the first thing they did when they came here? They killed all the natives and abused the slaves! What was the country built on? It was built on slavery, and that's not democratic at all. You don't have slaves now, or if you do, they're called below-minimum-wage workers. It's more democratic now; you don't have slaves.

—Catherine, white female

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> *The people who made the* Declaration of Independence, *they were upper-class rich people, right? They made it. These weren't middle-class regular working people. Now you have the right to vote.*[10] *Back then they couldn't read. It was a democracy for the elite only.*
>
> —John, white male

When students express their thoughts it becomes apparent that they are unsure about whether the concepts that they subscribe to are faulty. They appear to uphold a belief in the ideals upon which the United States was founded, (such as democracy) but as quickly as they defend these values, they also appear to recognize contradictions. In this way, students generally seemed disconcerted by the discussion and uncertain, in the end, about what they really thought.

THE AMERICAN DREAM

The ideal of the American Dream has been depicted routinely through all forms of media throughout the second half of the twentieth century. Stories about "Dick and Jane," family shows such as "Father Knows Best" and folk tales about making it big in "America" form the foundation of what life in "this great country" is all about. The notion that immigrants could arrive penniless and still get rich, saturates everyday discourse. This ideal is a central pillar of the ideology of U.S. society — that all Americans have the chance to pursue their dreams, if they work hard enough; they can achieve success (Hochschild, 1995). For many, this was the case. The post-World War II era with rapid industrial growth and U.S.

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hegemony around the globe brought much to many. However, for African Americans, Latinos and Native Americans, this dream was never a reality. After immigration laws changed in 1965, increasing numbers of people came to the United States, just at the time when de-industrialization was occurring. The most prominent explanations for why these groups were not upwardly mobile drew from a culture of poverty framework.

So what is this dream, what are its components, and what did students say about whether it could be realized? Central tenets revolve around the achievement of success in the forms of high income, a prestigious job, and economic security (Hochschild, 1995, 15). The idea that this is an achievable goal for all has been built into what it means to be an American. Consider President Bill Clinton's speech in 1993 to the Democratic Leadership Council:

> *The American Dream that we were all raised on is a simple but powerful one —if you work hard and play by the rules, you should be given a chance to go as far as your God-given abilities will take you* (Hochschild, 1995, 18).

This statement set the criteria for achievement and what one can expect in return. This fundamental presumption provides an impressive ideology that has lured people to this country and kept them working against the odds (Hochschild, 1995, 25). The assumption is that if they are not succeeding, it is because of their own weaknesses and not the fallacy of the American Dream. Clinton spoke at a time

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10. Interestingly, however, during the years between 1970 and 2000 the number of 18 to 29-year-olds who voted in presidential elections dropped from about one-half to one-third, and a drop from one-third to less than one-fifth for congressional elections (Galston 2001, 816).

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when people's expectations about what qualifies as "living the good life" and achieving the American Dream greatly increased. The median response about the amount of income per year needed to fulfill these dreams jumped from $50,000 in 1987 to $102,000 in 1994. Simultaneously,

> *Between 1979 and 1989 the top 1 percent of the population increased their annual income from an average of $280,000 to $525,000.... The top 20 percent increased their share of income from 42 percent to 46 percent, and the share of the remaining 80 percent fell while the gaps between groups grew larger* (United Nations Development Programme, 1998, 61).

Paralleling this increased polarization of wealth, imagery about the American Dream shifted from a small house, with a white picket fence and two-car garage, two kids, a dog and a cat, to the lifestyle of the most affluent as portrayed on shows such as "Dallas," "L.A. Law," and "Beverly Hills 90210" (Roper Survey Organization, 1993, 86; Crispell, 1994, B1).

Another component of the Dream is the connection to a community of like-minded, similarly valued individuals all working to protect and maintain the image of middle-class Americans who do not mind paying taxes to help the "poor and unfortunate" but not so much that their own quality of life might be diminished. With media coverage of this "war on terrorism," we have been faced with the reality of poverty rampant throughout the world yet the realities of the stratification within the U.S. are blurred. The "us versus them" framework, "united we stand" slogan, and "we are all in this together against the enemy" rhetoric all function to obviate internal tensions and differences, and to further promote that

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America is the "greatest country in the world," with more modernity, more technology, more efficiency, more liberty, more culture and more democracy than anywhere else. This notion, deeply ingrained in the American psyche, signals that:

> *We are more civilized than the rest of the world. . . . We represent the highest aspirations of everyone. . . We are the leader of the free world, because we are the freest country in the world, and others look to us for leadership, for holding high the banner of freedom, of civilization. . . The Twin Towers are a perfect metaphor. They signaled unlimited aspirations; they signaled technological achievement; they signaled a beacon to the world* (Wallerstein 2001).

This issue is of supreme importance as we analyze the meaning of students' perceptions about the American Dream for we find ourselves at a time of the United States' decline as a hegemonic power looms large on the horizon. We need as a nation to reconsider our solitary greatness, and to begin by engaging our "closest friends and allies" and accept that they, too, have ideals and interests (Wallerstein 2001). The direct relationship between the future of the American Dream as even a far-fetched ideal has been shaken, even among those patriots who most vigorously defend its possibility. The events of September 11, 2001 propelled what appeared as the inevitable coming to terms with the realities of the everyday American. Increasing lines at the unemployment offices, greater numbers at soup kitchens and homeless shelters are just the beginning.

As Jennifer Hochschild, Professor of Politics and Public Affairs at Princeton University states, "the political culture of the United States is largely shaped by a set of views in which the American Dream is prominent, and by a set of institutions

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that make it even more prominent than views alone could do" (Hochschild, 1995, 37). It is therefore important to assess how this central pillar is understood in order to understand everyday thinking about race. Figure 5.3 reflects students' beliefs about the accessibility of the "Dream."

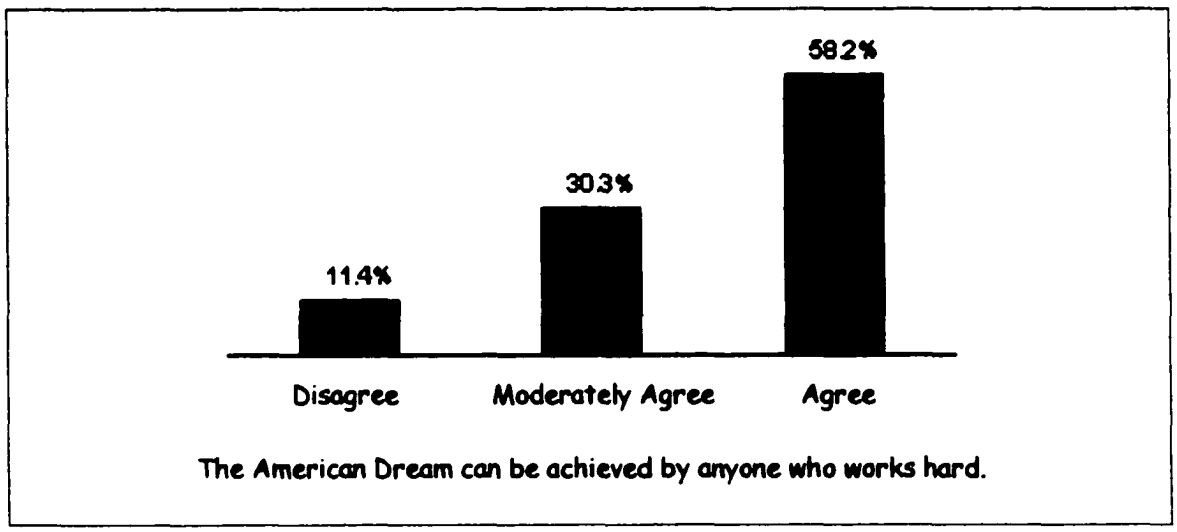

Figure 5.3 The American Dream. Survey Question: 32

Foreign-born white students (76.8 percent) agree significantly *more* than all black students (foreign-born, 44.4 percent and U.S.-born, 48.8 percent) that the American Dream *can be achieved* by anyone who works hard yet U.S.-born whites (64.0 percent) agree significantly *more* than just the foreign-born black students (44.4 percent). Students reflect on the data in Figure 5.3 as they discuss their thoughts about the "Dream."

> *The American Dream is who you know. People who have money are definitely going to be successful. They've already got the luck, money and confidence. All they need is willpower. Otherwise to succeed is a lot of work. Success is having money.*
>
> John, white male

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The American Dream is a reality for some people, but not everyone gets a good job and education. People get here and see a white picket fence, they see all kinds of people and think the society is culturally mixed but they find out about redlining. People don't know how to accomplish the dream and get discouraged. You just have to keep fighting.

—Joanne, Latina

We live in a biased hypocrisy. There are a lot of glass ceilings to keep certain groups down just by definition. In corporate environments you see more people of Caucasian ancestry in higher positions. Some people and groups can break through, mostly Caucasian. You have to work real hard. If you are born poor, there are 200 percent odds against you that you can achieve the same thing as someone with money. . .
You have to break through class. Racial and class lines meet. The economy is segregated and this adds to class stratification. It's deeper than just race and culture it's class and money, but mostly money. If you're born into a trailer park, you can work very hard and become a CEO of a major corporation. However, you have 200 percent more odds as the son of a CEO who is going to work less hard than you to achieve the same thing. It's a ladder you have to break through. If I'm on the lowest part, and I have eight glass ceilings to break through, it's going to be harder for me to do it than someone who's on the fifth and I'm five floors lower.

—Michael, white/Latino

I would have thought more than 60 percent would agree with the idea of that everyone can achieve the American Dream, but maybe people don't know what the Dream is. There is a contrast between people who say, "The American Dream can be achieved by all" versus that "everyone can be assimilated" because the American Dream is a question of the future.

—Thomas, white Italian male staff

In *Facing Up to the American Dream*, Hochschild analyzes the persistent divergence of opinions between blacks and whites about the possibility of personally accomplishing the dream themselves. She cites a study conducted in 1988 where 80 percent of blacks and 90 percent of whites agreed, "The American Dream is alive today" (Hochschild, 1995, 56). At the same time, she says, 87 percent of whites believe that "in the past 25 years, the country has moved closer to equal

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opportunity among the races," yet only between 20 to 45 percent of blacks saw an increase in racial inequality (Hochschild, 1995, 61). Since the phrasing of the question put the emphasis on the Dream rather than whether it can be achieved, it makes sense that these figures are higher than those cited in Figure 5.3.

This parallels studies by the *Washington Post* and the National Opinion Research Center about perceptions of the current status of equality in society, where whites consistently state that they believe discrimination is lessening, and blacks report the persistent reality of racial inequality in their lives. This divergence is discussed at length in chapter seven. Paul Street, Research Director of the Chicago Urban League, describes it as the "White Fairness Understanding Gap" (Street, 2001, 9-11). These data are critical to an understanding of the viability of the American Dream, in the way that different populations perceive the dream as a myth or a reality. For if as a nation, all people cannot count on freedom, justice, equality, and opportunity, then the ideology that holds this out as the explanation for why America is special is undermined. For whites, seeking an explanation for why the dream is no longer attainable, race serves as a useful explanation. Hochschild explains the connection this way:

> *Something is wrong with the American Dream, and the problem is associated with blacks (and immigrants) in some way. Identifying what is wrong and how blacks are implicated in it is a difficult and thankless task for which they receive almost no institutional support. It is far easier to cling to the Dream, insist that it really works, and find someone to blame for the lacunae* (Hochschild, 1995, 69).

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The divergence in perception between all whites and foreign-born blacks, and foreign-born whites and all blacks appears to affirm the role of race in everyday living. Otherwise, why would one group perceive the dream as reachable yet others perceive it as unattainable? U.S.-born whites have experienced some of the downward economic trends of the last decade and may feel that unlike their parents' expectations for achieving a higher standard of living than the generation before them, young whites today do not see themselves as upwardly mobile. They may feel lucky to attain even the same socioeconomic status of their parents. Trends like young people not leaving home until their late twenties, expanded patterns of part-time, temporary employment without benefits, and increasing numbers of middle-class white college students attending public institutions all point to this tension.

> *People from other countries come here and work harder for the American Dream, than people who live here. I've seen people come into my neighborhood from other countries and open stores, work the stores like eighteen, twenty hours a day, just to have something. But I know a lot of American people don't do that, people work for a paycheck and, that's it. You get comfortable, but I think people in America have in common no matter what race you are, no matter what religion you are, the freedom that America has for everyone.*
>
> —Jenna, white female

Discussions within focus groups revealed that many students were unsure of the current day reality of the American Dream. Several foreign-born students said that they had never heard of this concept. Among the people who had an idea about what it meant, white students more so than students of color overwhelmingly

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thought the dream was attainable by anyone who worked hard enough. There was a repeated tension when whites resisted the notion that success was more easily achieved for them. In one set of interactions, Nancy (a white Italian female) says:

> *You don't know our experience; you assume we're all middle-class and privileged.*

And Irma, a Puerto Rican female replies,

> *But our problems are intensified because of our color, our hair; and our language is made to seem like a handicap. I know you are not trouble-free but you have to understand our troubles are constantly compounded because of language or the neighborhood we live in.*

Nancy responds and attempts to negotiate the two positions.

> *We may share problems, but I guess it happens to you in greater numbers. Poverty is talked about as if caused by race only. It seems more typical among you. But there is more help for you, internships, scholarships, I can't get. You can get minority scholarships that I can't. At my job this guy was being paid twice what I was and he was doing half as much.*[11]

She then reflects upon the image of white America.

> *People think "Middle America" is fine and dandy but it is not true. Look at their kids like in Columbine. Where do these kids get their ideas?*

Irma replies:

> *But why when it happens there, we have to pull the country together. Why not pull together for all the daily violence. People don't understand the struggle of everyday for people of color.*

One might assume that Nancy's awareness of racial inequality reflects a willingness to support measures to take action to level the field or to be part of a collective struggle for justice, compensation, and reparation, but this is not

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necessarily the case. Perhaps she is willing to acknowledge differential treatment when she speaks with a Puerto Rican woman whose life experience she cannot deny, at least to her face. Figure 5.4 documents students' beliefs about the U.S. as the land of equal opportunity:

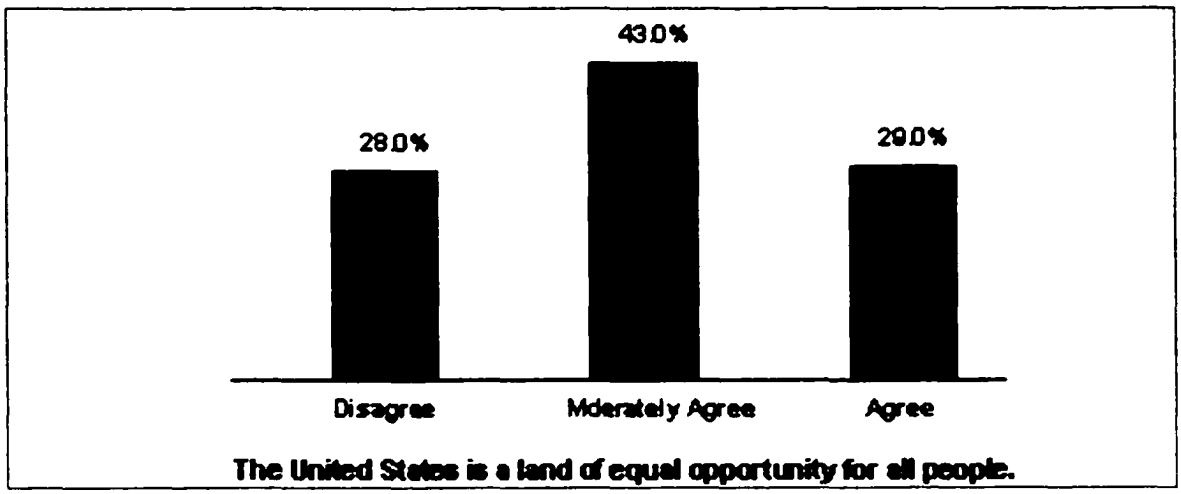

Figure 5.4 The United States: Land of Equal Opportunity. Survey Question: 28

In response to this question, foreign-born white students *agreed* significantly more than any other group that the *U.S. is a land of equal opportunity* for all people, as reflected in Table 5.3:

	Disagree	Moderately Agree	Agree
Latinos	27.1%	52.1%	20.8%
Asians	23.1%	48.7%	28.2%
U.S.-born Blacks	41.9%	39.5%	18.6%
Foreign-born Blacks	36.5%	46.0%	15.9%
U.S.-born Whites	25.0%	42.7%	32.4%
Foreign-born Whites	15.9%	35.4%	48.8%

Table 5.3 The United States: Land of Equal Opportunity / Response by Race

11. For a summary of who receives scholarship, see chapter four, notes 4 and 5.

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This pattern appears to be a consequence of the racialized experience of white foreign-born students, who, like previous European immigrants, were provided opportunities to improve their standard of living, significantly more than the U.S.-born communities of color (e.g., access to various social services under the guise of assisting political refugees). It also seems to indicate that the U.S.-born white students are experiencing the economic pressures of the recent decades and feel less certain about their own futures.

The American Dream appears to inspire pride and hopefulness yet when whites experience economic pressures, rather than looking toward structural explanations for their troubles, individuals and groups are blamed. For example, when Nancy describes her difficulty in financing her education, she targets racially designated scholarships as the problem. Rather than viewing minority assistance as a means to address historical patterns, she characterizes them as perpetuating inequality by advantaging students of color over herself.

Contradictory realities and images such as between the shootings by white middle-class youth around the country versus the common association of violence with poor and black people provide opportunities to question implicit assumptions. For example, Nancy reflected upon whether her thinking that these occurrences were out of the ordinary for white folks was valid. She does not appear to place the actions of the teenagers in Columbine within the context of the historical violence of U.S. society as expressed through enslavement, Jim Crow laws, the

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disparate use of tax funds to support or deny public services or the experiences of excessive force used by police described by many students. She is puzzled about where this violence comes from among whites. A much deeper understanding of U.S. history and present day structure might reveal the racial presumptions that lead one to be surprised by these incidents. Comedian Chris Rock points out the implicit Euro-centric assumptions that are perpetuated by the media in their attempt to explain what happened in Columbine, Santee, and in scattered incidences around the country, where young white males were involved in shooting incidences at their schools. Rock focuses on the racial dynamics that lead a young person to murder classmates because "they felt mocked" and that "nobody wanted to be their friends." He questions the way the media sought all types of structural explanations in these cases, whereas when those involved are black the explanation is directed at dysfunctional individuals and cultural failings (Rock, 1999). Tim Wise's (author and anti-racist activist) questions why there is no profile for these school shootings (Wise, 2001), and states that despite common perceptions, whites commit three times more violent crimes each year than blacks and are five to six times more likely to be attacked by another white person than a black person with (Wise, 2002, 40). Racialized images reinforce a dispassionate apathy about the violence experienced by many people on an everyday basis, whether they be physical, political, or social, for they communicate the notion that white people need not be concerned; it is not their problem.

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THE MEANING OF THE FLAG

Like the American Dream and democracy, the American flag has come to symbolize the elevated status of the United States in the global order. In *To Die For: The Paradox of American Patriotism*, Cecilia Elizabeth O'Leary, Assistant Professor of History at California State, traces of the development of the flag's symbolic meaning to the period after the First Reconstruction and through the First World War (O'Leary, 1999, 7-9). She documents the legal and political struggles that transpired in contests over what it means to be a loyal or disloyal American. She says that it was during this period (1870-1920) that there was disagreement and conflict over which icons, heroes, events, and identities would constitute the national memory and the historical narrative. Many of the symbols and rituals of patriotism that we now assume as having always existed actually came into being within the last century. The "Pledge of Allegiance" was written in 1891; the "Star-Spangled Banner" was taken as the national anthem in 1931. O'Leary traces the points of contestation, contradiction, and ambivalence about American ideals and their everyday manifestations. She ultimately speaks of the contradictions of American nationalism, as did Immanuel Wallerstein when he insisted that we reckon with American traditions of patriotism and resistance (Wallerstein, 2001). It is a challenge that many have recently faced; that is, how to understand contradictory patterns without essentializing either trend. In some ways, this is at the heart of trying to understand everyday thinking and the process

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of looking for "cracks" in the system. For if we grant agency to participants and respect contradictions, it would appear we have the ability to make a difference. This is the context within which to analyze students' perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes today about identity and allegiance, particularly at a moment in time when such notions are fragile.

Students discuss their awareness of flags and how they come to symbolize political expression. The presence of other national flags appears to signify disrespect to the American flag, which is to be respected, assumed "normal," and a natural part of routine living that should not be tampered with. They expressed this is in the commonly heard statement, "If you don't like it, then leave."

> *WTA[12] is supposed to be a government group, but they had a national flag on their backs! You can't mix the two at this time of elections when you hold up a national flag and say vote WTA, holding up your flag and waving it. You can be proud of your country and what you are and everything.*
>
> —Gerda, white female

> *To me, the flag symbolizes American pride.*
>
> —Allen, white male

> *You're living in this country; you should respect the flag, that's all. If you don't like it, go somewhere else.*
>
> —Helen, white female

> *Most of us have been immigrants in the last fifty years, whether it be our parents or grandparents. We came here for a reason, and our flag is like part of the reason you know, it represents pretty much the country.*
>
> —Joan, white Italian female

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12. Working Together Always, WTA is one of the two Brooklyn College student government organizations discussed in chapter four.

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I was in Israel for a year and a half, and whenever you see an American solider or an American flag; you just go nuts. I think it's just because we were in a different country. It was in the background the whole time. It's more of like a third-world type of country, and when you say, America, you think of the land of opportunity, it's everything.

—Allen, white Jewish male

For other students, the omnipresence of the American flag in public space seems to feel oppressive. A degree of uneasiness was evident about the connection between the symbol and the reality of the ideals that the flag supposedly reflects.

In the Marines it's ridiculous, we were in the gas station and they sell like 100,000 Confederate flags. I thought, it's not just the flag, it's the fact that they're selling them at gas stations; it's all over the place

—Jeff, white male

I always considered myself very American, and now, thinking about it, I really don't know if I consider myself that much American. Having other people say how they feel about being viewed as an American, as [opposed] *to being from another country. I don't really agree with a lot. I look at the flag on houses and I really don't agree with a lot of the things that go on within America, I don't think they're very American.*

—Marsha, white female

Yet for other students, the flag is not something they are conscious of and they are ambivalent about its meaning.

I want to think more about the American flag thing. I never really gave it much thought, I mean, my father has them plastered all over the house and he has one tattooed on his arm, but I never really gave it much thought.

—Jeff, white male

In a different country he saw the American flag and felt all patriotic. But we're here and we see it all the time, we don't appreciate it. The American flag, it's not something I think about.

—Don, white male

To me, it's not exactly the same flag as it was back then; I mean there are more stars added to it. If you actually want to think about it, it's an

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evolving flag to a degree. The country started off a little rocky, with not all people being free, but eventually moved on.

—Helen, white female

I was born and raised in America. When I see the American flag, I just see a piece of material. I remember when we used to have to stand up and say our "Pledge of Allegiance"[13] *to the flag. That's about it, personally.*

—Tania, white female

Comments about the flag reflect either a strong belief in its symbolic power to represent the nation and its ideals or articulate an absence of association, almost as an empty yet assumed symbol devoid of meaning. Not all students were willing to defend the representational meaning of the flag yet those who did seemed willing to fight for its recognition.

The objection to waving any flag other than that of the U.S., appears to signify a belief that all people should assimilate and stand under one banner. Other expressions of individual or group identity are then viewed as a threat and as divisive. The students who describe an emotional involvement with the symbol articulate its meaning as being equated with all that is good.

While for some people the flag is a symbol of the dominant assertion of American Empire, for others, it is a symbol of the Abolitionists, Suffragists, the Populists, and the Wobblies, representing a more radical tradition of what the flag symbolizes and for still others it appears to lack meaning. An important question is

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13. A thorough exploration of the history and meaning of the Pledge of Allegiance is available at <http://www.teachingforchange.org/news%20items/pledge_of_allegiance.htm>, (24 November 2001). As of October 17,2001, the New York City Board of Education unanimously adopted a resolution to require all public schools to lead students in the Pledge at the beginning of every school day and at all school-wide assemblies and events (Wyatt, 2001, D1).

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who gets to call the flag, their own (Hightower, 2001). Particularly, after September 11th it is apparent that one cannot assume to know the political beliefs of someone wearing or carrying the flag. Perhaps this is a positive development in that its meaning is less rigidified. While some people cringed at the flourishing of flags everywhere, the expanded public debates about patriotism, loyalty, symbols and dissent provided visibility to otherwise hidden presumptions. Discussions such as those on AlterNet, Common Dreams, Rethinking Schools, and Teaching for Change websites as well as in *The New York Times, The Boston Globe, Newsday* emerged on campuses throughout the country and in national media. This debate increased awareness of the history and stakes of blind acceptance and the incorporation of these symbols into everyday living. While the fragility of this moment heightens the vulnerabilities of populations of color and of immigrants, it also provides openings to foster awareness of inequalities and injustices that have long existed. This engagement is critical:

> *If patriotism were defined, not as blind obedience to government, not as submissive worship to flags and anthems, but rather as love of one's country, one's fellow citizens (all over the world), as loyalty to the principles of justice and democracy, then patriotism would require us to disobey our government when it violated those principles* (Zinn, 1990, 118).

The next section specifically examines the differential experiences of U.S.- versus foreign-born students as described in the focus groups, and the divergent attitudes and beliefs that emerged in the survey data.

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Race and the Foreign-Born Experience

> *The ideals of American democracy, which have influenced liberal democracies around the world, rely crucially on the notion of consent as the basis of citizenship. What makes someone an American is that he or she agrees to be one. . . . By raising their hands and taking the pledge of citizenship, immigrants formally enact the consent upon which our political system depends; yet which native-born citizens only tacitly affirm* (Postel, 2001, A12).

As articulated above, notions of what it means to be American, of democracy and birthright are deeply implicated in the foundation of our society. People come to the United States for a multitude of reasons and circumstances and their experiences, once arrived, also varied. These are important considerations within an analysis of the role of race in everyday living. The concept "the United States, a nation of immigrants" disguises the unequal status of various groups both in how they arrived and how they were received once they got here. This phrase presumes a white and European experience, where choice is the primary factor in migration.

Bonnie Honig, author of *Democracy and the Foreigner* (2001) argues that while democracies need immigrants,

> [We're] *nervous about what they are going to do to our democracy. We criminalize alien populations, bar them from political activity; marginalize them in terms of the labor force. We practice xenophobia and xenophilia at the same time* (Postel, 2001, A12).

While what Honig asserts is certainly true, she does not account for the differential experiences of immigrants upon their arrival to the United States. Why is it that a boat of refugees from one country is allowed entry, while another is turned away? Additionally, "Malcolm X argued that in the process of

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Americanizing, European immigrants acquire a sense of whiteness and [an understanding of] white supremacy" (Roediger, 1994, 187).

New York City has experienced tremendous growth in the number of immigrants paralleling similar increases nationally. Between 1970 and 1998, the city's foreign-born population grew from 18 percent to almost 35 percent, approaching comparable levels to that which existed at the turn of the twentieth century (41 percent in 1910) (Foner, 2001b, 1-31). As mentioned in chapter three the major trends over the last decade include a sharp decline in the native white population, (although partly offset by increased Russian immigration) and sharp increases in the West Indian, Latino, and Asian populations impacting the suburbs as well as the city (Mollenkopf, 2001a).

The foreign-born white students who participated in this research come from families who primarily originated in the Ukraine, Russia, Uzbekistan and Belarus. The characteristics of these immigrants are somewhat different than those who arrived prior to 1990. They generally had professional backgrounds and were often neither explicitly Jewish nor religious. Most important, over 85 percent were granted full refugee status, with federal subsidies easing their transition with housing, job training and education. At the same time, this group arrived during a period when many social programs were being cut resulting in benefit reductions. This led to decreasing beliefs in the idealism of capitalism, and a shift from a predominantly Republican to a Democratic political position. In New York City,

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where approximately half of all Eastern Europeans to United States settle, and where they form the second largest group of foreign-born students in the public schools, this group has retained status and resources relative to other immigrant communities (Orleck, 2001). This relatively privileged position and corresponding political allegiances appear to be reflected in the data as it is discussed in this section.

Most of the literature about immigration to the United States and urban areas focuses on immigrants from the African, Latin, or Asian Diaspora or separately addresses the recent influx of Eastern Europeans, particularly from the former Soviet bloc. Minimal scholarship has attended to a comparison of the racialized experience of different groups. Yet as this section delineates, there are divergent beliefs, which often reflect distinct experiences. This section explores those differences and some possible explanations.

FOREIGN-BORN WHITES VERSUS ALL OTHER GROUPS

Foreign-born whites often view the United States as the land of opportunity. This idea was likely shaped before they came to the country, as part of cold war ideology and through the course of the last century's immigration. They tend toward a perspective that was in direct opposition to what they were told by their governments. Upon arrival, the treatment they received appears to have reinforced their beliefs. They seem to have absorbed a "Horatio Alger" narrative

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that inverted communist ideology in relationship to a capitalist perspective. That is, everything that was bad about their prior lives would now be good, in America.

They arrive with a worldview that established freedom as a U.S. phenomenon and, as both the narrative and the statistics below indicate, they defend this image. Their experience as white immigrants has meant they have generally fared well, for example, in educational achievement with slightly fewer high school diplomas but higher levels of college accomplished.[14] However, as the impact of the increasing polarization of wealth and power under the reign of global capitalism is felt, they may find themselves in more dire circumstances and seek explanations.[15]

In contrast to the highly transnational nature of immigrants from the African, Latin, and Asian diasporas, the experience of Eastern European immigrants tends to root them in their new surroundings, where they feel welcome. Annelise Orleck, Associate Professor of History at Dartmouth College reports that among the Soviet Jews she studied, most do not care to return home for visits. They say that everyone they know is in the United States. One woman said, "America is my country, not Russia. I have no one left there to worry about (Orleck, 2001, 135).

Interestingly, however, is the lack of scholarship analyzing the particular racialized experiences of the European immigrants of the last two decades, how they align and diverge in attitude and beliefs from U.S.-born whites, and how their

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14. Interestingly, of the U.S.-born whites, only one third of those who were born in New York City had completed a Bachelors' degree as compared to three-quarters of those who had moved to the city from elsewhere in the United States (Mollenkopf, Kasinitz, and Waters, 2001).

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experiences align or diverge from those of people of African, Latin, or Asian descent. As the percentage of individuals who emigrated from predominantly white countries in 1999 was approximately 22.5 percent of all immigrants (Kraly and Miyares, 2001, 49), these questions are very important to address.

While the ethnographic data provide some insight into the daily lives and beliefs of this population, comparisons between different group experiences could easily form the basis of a future study. In *Whiteness of a Different Color*, Matthew Frye Jacobson alludes to the challenge of examining the racial distinctness of the immigrant saga (Jacobson, 1998, 275) yet this is not his focus. Nancy Foner (2001) briefly discusses this issue and several chapters of her book specifically analyze employment patterns. The impact of pan-ethnic and racial experiences on the ideological stance of various populations is not addressed though Foner does articulate the significance of race within the immigrant experience:

> *Immigrants' race has crucial consequences for their experiences and reactions to New York life. Whereas whiteness is an asset for newcomers of European ancestry, dark skin brings disadvantages. Because of their skin color — and because American society's generalized negative view of blacks is so different from racial conceptions in the home countries — black immigrants develop new attitudes and new perceptions of themselves in New York* (Foner, 2001, 14-15).

This topic deserves a full investigation. For purposes of this study, some of the statistically significant differences that emerged between the perceptions of

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15. Personal communication with Professor Donald Robotham, The Graduate School and University Center of the City University of New York (1 December 2000).

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foreign-born white students and all other students include:

- *Fewer* foreign-born white students (18.3 percent) than any other group (Latinos, 45.8 percent; Asian, 43.6 percent; U.S.-born blacks, 48.8 percent; foreign-born blacks, 71.4 percent; U.S.-born whites, 29.4 percent) believed that *discrimination contributes* to the average lower incomes and poorer housing of blacks.

- *Fewer* foreign-born white students (25.6 percent) than Asian (46.2 percent), U.S.-born black (55.8 percent), or foreign-born black (55.6 percent) students believed that *historic inequality contributes* to these circumstances.

One faculty member offered the following explanation:

> *Foreign-born whites come into U.S. society believing less in discrimination because they don't have the history of Jim Crow. They don't know what U.S. apartheid was. The Russians don't get it. They are fresh from being discriminated against as Jews, and feel there is so much freedom here.*
>
> —Louis, white male faculty

- *More* foreign-born white students (19.5 percent) than any other group (Latinos, 8.3 percent; Asian, 10.3 percent; U.S.-born blacks, 2.3 percent; foreign-born blacks, 1.6 percent; U.S.-born whites, 9.6 percent) believed that *people of color are treated equal* to whites when applying for jobs, housing and when approached by police.

- *More* foreign-born white students (23.2 percent) than any other group (Latinos, 2.1 percent; Asian 7.7 percent; U.S.-born blacks, 11.6 percent; foreign-born blacks, 4.8 percent; U.S.-born whites, 7.4 percent) believed that there is *equal and fair treatment* of all people in the media.

- *More* foreign-born white students (48.8 percent) than any other group (Latinos, 20.8 percent; Asian, 28.2 percent; U.S.-born blacks, 18.6 percent; foreign-born blacks, 15.9 percent; U.S.-born whites, 32.4 percent) believed that the United States is a *land of opportunity* for all people.

These statistics reflect the racialized experience of immigrants who are treated as whites regardless of their foreign-born status, and also their adherence

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to dominant ideology about the causes of poverty. Their defense of the structure as fair and equitable denies discrimination expressed in racialized patterns of assimilation or rejection. This process is evident as social services, and the ever-present and useful "benefit of the doubt" are available to white immigrants but not to those from the African, Asian or Latino diasporas. The case of Amadou Diallo is a recently publicized example of this distinction. The racialized image of this individual, in the eyes of the four police officers and the jury led to his murder and the officers' acquittals. A wallet in the hands of a young black man became a gun. Had Diallo been Russian, would this image transformation have occurred?[16]

There is an irony to the perceptions of foreign-born whites, as the civil rights movement laid the foundation for the liberalization of immigration policy in the 1960s. These statistics however, indicate that foreign-born whites are unlikely to support measures to eradicate structural causes for racial inequality. In other words, once arrived, foreign-born whites assume the dominant narrative, rather than recognizing where support came from to increase <u>their</u> opportunities, and, in turn, supporting opportunities for other groups.[17]

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16. This event occurred on February 4, 1999 in the Bronx, New York. Four police officers, searching for someone who had committed a rape, came upon Mr. Diallo in the vestibule of his home. They testified that he reached for a gun, which then in their minds justified shooting 41 bullets 19 of which entered his body. It was later discovered that Mr. Diallo was reaching for his wallet to provide identification. Mayor Rudolph Giuliani characterized attention to this incident as "obsessive media concern" and "frenzy" (Barry, 1999). Massive protests against police brutality and racism followed, for it was widely recognized that had Diallo been white, this was highly unlikely to have occurred.
17. From an illuminating discussion with Dr. Leith Mullings, CUNY Graduate School, 21 September 2001. This is a complex issue; for a fuller examination see Bobo (2000); Smith and Seltzer (2000); Steinberg (1995, 190-192); Gallicchio (2000).

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FOREIGN-BORN WHITES AND SPECIFIC GROUPS

Foreign-born Whites versus Foreign-born Blacks

Several significant differences emerged in the data between beliefs held by foreign-born whites and foreign-born blacks. Examples of this include:

- *More* foreign-born white students (54.9 percent) than foreign-born black students (34.9 percent) believed that *all people, regardless of color can be assimilated* into U.S. society.

- *More* foreign-born white students (68.3 percent) than foreign-born black students (42.9 percent) believed that the United States can be *multicultural and have an American identity* at the same time.

- *Fewer* foreign-born white students (15.9 percent) than foreign-born black students (30.2 percent) believed that the United States can't be *multicultural and have an American identity* at the same time.

Reflecting on this data, a focus group participant suggested:

> *It is interesting that foreign-born blacks and whites disagree that the U.S. can be multicultural. Blacks want to keep their heritage and to hold onto it. Whites want to distance themselves from their past. They have something to gain. They want their families to be raised as Americans.*
>
> —Thomas, white male staff

Reflecting on the data above, it appears that the race and immigrant status of foreign-born whites does not cause them as much difficulty for them as it does for foreign-born blacks. As they more easily assimilate into a white-dominated society, perhaps they do not see the challenge in integrating their ethnic or national background into their identity as Americans. Several foreign-born black students noted that their racial identity only became an

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issue after they arrived in the U.S. Similar divergences emerged in students' perceptions about the impact of recent changes in CUNY.

- *More* foreign-born white students (43.9 percent) than foreign-born black students (23.8 percent) believe that the recent emphasis on eliminating remediation *affects all students equally.*

These statistics reflect the strong belief and defense of a model of immigrant incorporation into U.S. society that in many ways ironically expresses both the support for assimilation and the de-valuation of multiculturalism that Robert Park's paradigm of assimilation theory and the race relations cycle articulated in the 1920s (Park, 1950, 150). Foreign-born white students tend to support the American Dream, and defend the imagery of the U.S. as providing equal opportunities to all people both for assimilation and mobility. They appear to dismiss notions of racial discrimination and were generally less willing to recognize the rights of people to retain their own cultural identity, while maintaining their rights to full citizenship. These positions actively function to define who can be American and who cannot.

The statistics on remediation reflect a belief that all people are treated equally and the belief that the United States can be multicultural and have an American identity at the same time reflects foreign-born whites' sense that they can integrate their heritage, ethnicity and nationality within an American identity.

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Foreign-born Whites versus U.S.-born Whites

Within the data, several statistically significant differences emerged between the responses of foreign-born and U.S. whites, as reflected below:

- *More* foreign-born white students (43.9 percent) than U.S.-born white students (27.9 percent) believed that the recent emphasis on eliminating remediation *affects all students equally.*

- *More* foreign-born white students (11.0 percent) than U.S.-born whites (2.9 percent) believe that someone who takes more than four to five years to get a Bachelor's degree *is not serious* about their education.

Various social services and supports are generally available to foreign-born white students because of their status as political refuges, but are less often available to foreign-born blacks, Latinos or Asians who come to the United States more often for economic reasons. This reality reinforces white immigrants' adherence to a dominant narrative about lazy students (of color) who just want their degree without working for it. These statistics place blame for one's circumstances firmly on the individual or the group. This attitude undermined the efforts to fight the anti-remediation policies. In taking this position, these students tended to ally themselves with those in a dominant position who racialized the CUNY student body, and withdrew support for the policy of Open Admissions and for public higher education in general. This provides an example of how attitudes and beliefs impacting public policy. The lack of broad support by the entire student body, allowed the policy changes to take place and, in turn, reproduced and exacerbated the pattern of inequality within the City University.

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This data also indicates that students did not recognize what they had to lose whether in relation to their own education or to the principle of support for public education. By not understanding this, they implicitly colluded with a structural devaluation of public education rather than participating in efforts to shed light on the real reasons for students taking longer than four to graduate. These factors include reductions in financial, academic, and student support services as a result of the funneling of public funds into the building of prisons away from schools (Professional Staff Congress, 2001b).

In the process of identifying with the narrative that renders them superior, foreign-born whites tend to buy into the American Dream rather than ally with the students who understand that this struggle is just another expression of a pattern of subordination and domination that constricting possibilities for all but the most wealthy and powerful. Foreign-born white students who accept the dominant narrative did not appear to understand how supporting this view hurt them, too.

In a roundtable discussion reviewing the survey results with students and staff, the following observations were made:

> *Foreign-born blacks are on the other end of the spectrum from foreign-born whites as to whether there is police brutality, or discrimination. I thought they would be more similar but I guess foreign-born whites are still white. What catches people's eyes is race. Foreign-born whites believe that everything is okay, more than foreign-born blacks. Foreign-born whites wouldn't see discrimination as clearly because they say "What are you complaining about. You are making excuses. Look where we came from." Maybe the police were worse wherever they came from.*
>
> —Lori, white Italian female

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Foreign-born whites are not singled out in society. It's the color, not their accent or what country they came from. But it's contradictory, too, because foreign-born whites can fit into the mainstream.

—Dorothy, white female staff

They hear everything is good, even before they get here.

—Barbara, white Italian female staff

The process of racialization was discussed and recognized in these discussions. The above comments were made by U.S.- born whites who, when faced with evidence of the role of race in everyday living were able to acknowledge the impact in relation to European immigrants. While all of them had initially said that they rarely think about race and, in fact, did not feel their lives were affected by their own racial identity, they clearly observe the role of race in white immigrants' lives in the United States. They were able to suggest some of the reasons why the perspective of foreign-born whites might differ from foreign-born blacks, Latinos and Asians. At the same time, they acknowledge that the process of assimilation can be contradictory, as most immigrants have to struggle, but some have to struggle more than others because of racialization.

TRANSNATIONAL IDENTITY

Significant scholarship during the last five years has addressed the transmigrant nature of recent immigrants.[18] As mentioned in the section above, this is particularly true for individuals from the African, Latin and Asian Diasporas

18. Particularly noteworthy are the works of Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton Blanc (1994); Cordero-Guzman, Smith and Grosfoguel (2001); Jaynes (2000).

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who often come to the United States seeking economic relief from the severe poverty experienced throughout these parts of the world. Once again, this topic deserves full attention. However, in a study of identity within political and economic context, reflections about transnational identity arose repeatedly. This brief section summarizes some of these thoughts.

> *If I go to Haiti now, people would not consider me Haitian. Even though I'm going to try real hard to act like the way they would act and speak without an accent, but they would still find differences. They'd be like "Okay, I don't understand your Creole." It's very Americanized now, my attitude. They wouldn't really relate to me anymore. They would probably call me an American, but when you come here in America, like they don't want you here either. You have a French accent and it's like, you don't belong on either side. When you go back, they find something American about you, but when you come to America, they find something Haitian about you. So it's more like, you're none of them, as opposed to, you're both.*
>
> —Jean Paul, Haitian male

> *When I go back to my home country, they see you as from the other country, too. You're not Chinese anymore; you're just from a different country. When you come back to America, they see you as Chinese because the way you talk, the language you speak and the skin color. I feel like was in the middle — part of me is Chinese, part of me is American.*
>
> —Edward, Chinese male

> *I guess it's really difficult to get both nationalities, but it's more like you are none of them, because you don't belong anywhere.*
>
> —Mara, white female

> *I think you have to be one or the other, either you go speak to the Americans or you stay with the other cultures.*
>
> —Jenna, white female

> *I really don't think that choosing a nationality is fair. It's really limiting yourself to different things that you could experience. I don't believe my future is as an American. I always desired to travel all over the world and somehow get a piece of every culture and language to put in me, to make me like whole, like an international person or something because I'm the kind of*

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person who likes to go and experience new things and just to settle for one nationality would be limiting.

—Marla, white female

Students indicate that differences are used to separate, not unite, but they also appear to perceive an alternative more pluralistic perspective. It is evident that many people have the experience of being excluded and this has societal implications for the overall sense of community. While students express different opinions, they all seem to struggle with the impact of transmigration. They assert their own meanings about identity, regardless of how they are defined by society.

I found it enlightening that people that aren't from this country, kind of feel in the middle of this country and their country. It kind of made me feel like they feel left out, not part of America and not part of their own country and I never really thought about that before, it was a little sad.

—Mara, white female

For whites, this lack of a sense of belonging is less of an issue as they can more easily define their identity. Race does not interfere with their option to choose how they describe themselves. However, self-ascribed identity is a luxury for people of color. Transmigrant experiences appear to be perceived as somewhat irritating because it does not easily conform to strict categorization. Some students felt pressured to choose between the identity of their origin or heritage and being American. At the same time, Marla's comment presumes a freedom of choice that she experiences and assumes others do also. There is an assumption that you can be Italian and American or Polish and American but being Chinese or Haitian does not as easily leave you that option.

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National Identity and Symbols

This chapter explored the range of beliefs that Brooklyn College students hold about national identity, patriotic symbols, and values such as democracy. Strikingly, idealism often emerged, with most students overwhelmingly asserting that anyone who works hard can achieve the American Dream (58.2 percent, Figure 5.3), that public higher education is a right to which all people should have access (83.3 percent, Figure 7.4) (though foreign-born black students [92.1 percent] agree significantly more than U.S.-born white students [72.8 percent]) and that all people should be given a fair chance to succeed (92.9 percent, Figure 7.8).

Clear contradictions were also evident. Only 29 percent of all students believed that the United States is a land of opportunity for all people with an additional 43 percent moderately believing so (Figure 5.4). *More* foreign-born white students (48.8 percent) than any other group (Latinos, 20.8 percent; Asians, 28.2 percent; U.S.-born blacks, 18.6 percent; foreign-born blacks, 15.9 percent; U.S.-born whites, 32.4 percent) believed in the *opportunities* in the United States.

Regarding democracy, most students felt that freedom of speech most exemplified this ideal. They believed that in the U.S. one may say anything at anytime. There was little awareness of political prisoners and activist movements that have been censored throughout U.S. history. White students did not appear to have an understanding of the daily experience of many young people in public schools who resist authoritarianism and end up in detention, special education

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classes or being expelled. It is important to explore ways to increase awareness about events such as the tear-gassing and beating of protesters against the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in Seattle, Quebec City, Washington, D.C., Sweden, and Rome, *New York Post* headlines like "CCNY Bashes America," and "Once-Proud Campus a Breeding Ground For Idiots" (Clarion Staff, 2001, 5) in response to teach-ins about imperialism and terrorism and the meaning and reality of democracy in U.S. society.

The dynamic whereby resistance is racialized posits that people in the United States have freedom of speech, yet it depends on who says what as to whether it is justifiable or not. Seditious, critical, and oppositional discourse is aggressively marginalized and implied to be criminal or crazy. This is evident in the suppression of facts about the role of the United States in global affairs, especially in the many instances of U.S. military intervention throughout the twentieth century.

These apparent contradictions cause whites to act "politically correct" in public while they are more open in private settings. There appears to be a line drawn between talking and taking action to equalize opportunity where they perceive they may lose something. Whites seem to say one thing yet do another: that diversity should be embraced but "not in my backyard."

The voice of foreign-born whites is clearly distinct from that of those born in the United States, although positions vary depending on the question. Foreign-

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born whites appear to defend the system, whereas U.S.-born whites appear to defend the symbols and more readily have justifications for why racial inequality exists. Whether this is the result of having had a U.S. education or the influence of mass media, is not clear. However, both positions articulate a willingness to identify with ideals in contrast to hesitancy about committing to action and structural explanations. This chapter provided material for reflection on white racial identity and consciousness in that they frame people's rationales for taking various positions, whether in the voting booth or in everyday interaction.

The media presents us with images that craft a narrative projecting a common experience, the "white" experience. Even when diverse images are presented, they generally either portray blacks who assimilated (such as on the "Cosby Show," the "Jeffersons," or the "Fresh Prince of Bel-Air") or interracial friendships in a way that camouflages or denies racial inequality and undermines our ability to analyze significant and dramatic structural and systemic patterns. Images of people "getting along", lead one to conclude that there must no longer be a "race problem" ("The Hughleys," "White Men Can't Jump," "Regarding Henry"). While a deeper exploration of the role of media is conducted in chapter seven, these images convey messages about who is considered "American." There are positive aspects to these shows, which offer a hopeful vision, and a less stereotyped view of different groups of people, though the negative impact is significantly de-fuses the idea that something needs to be done. Portraits of

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sameness imply that race is a set of interpersonal relations, focusing attention on individuals and away from institutional inequality.[19] The rendering of structural patterns invisible allows symbolic representations of what being American means, to dominate. Hence, patriotism and nationalism, with implicitly racialized ideological underpinnings, need not always be articulated. They can be called upon, at moments such as those after September 11 to impose the presumptions and draw the lines between who is and who is not a trustworthy, loyal, and "true" American.

This narrative averts attention from a broad understanding of economic and social forces that structure the everyday experiences of the majority of people worldwide. It presents "normal" with a criteria that even fewer white Americans experience. Individual circumstances are decontextualized; the responsibility for being poor is placed firmly on the shoulders of those viewed as "too lazy" to work hard enough to achieve upward mobility. Misrepresentations and lies are perpetrated outright.

In the context of the issues being discussed in this chapter, the message that I heard most clearly was that these students did not feel there was space in the structure of their academic pursuit to examine their assumptions about critical issues related to national identity, and the principles that we live by. They expressed a desire to learn about different points of view in order to intellectually

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19. For an excellent analysis of implicitly racial messages in media, see DeMott (1995).

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develop their own perspective and appeared to support a recent trend in higher education that has identified civic development as a core value.

The Association of American Colleges and Universities released a statement on the role of higher education in the wake of the tragedy of September 11, 2001 from which the following excerpt is drawn:

> *The academy both embodies and imparts democracy's finest principles of intellectual freedom, reasoned inquiry, civil liberties, openness to a full range of views and experiences and the determination to comprehend issues in all their complexity* (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2001).

While I do not feel certain that the outcome will be a national realignment of institutional strategic outcome objectives for universities, and I might question the direction that this type of thinking will take (e.g. another National Dialogue but this time on terrorism and combating the "enemy"), surely there are openings from which to expose the contradictions contained within U.S., foreign, and domestic policies as they relate to the American Dream and the image of being the champion of freedom and democracy worldwide. These notions form the core of U.S. national identity. In closing this chapter, I invite the reader to reflect upon the contrast between Langston Hughes' famous poem, "Let America, Be America Again" (Hughes, 2001, 131), and one recently circulated on the web, and to consider which definition of America will win this round?

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LET AMERICA BE AMERICA, AGAIN
(Excerpted)

Let America be America again.
Let it be the dream it used to be.
Let it be the pioneer on the plain
Seeking a home where he himself is free.

(America never was America to me).

Let America be the dream the dreamers dreamed —
Let it be that great strong land of love
Where never kings connive nor tyrants scheme
That any man be crushed by one above.

(It never was America to me).

O, let my land be a land where Liberty
Is crowned with no false patriotic wreath,
But opportunity is real, and life is free,
Equality is in the air we breathe.

. . .

O, let America be America again —
The land that never has been yet —
And yet must be - the land where *every* man is free.

. . .

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HELLO! THIS IS AMERICA!
(Author Unknown / Excerpted)

Broken Arrow, Oklahoma School officials remove "God Bless America" signs from schools in fear someone might be offended.

Channel 12 News in Long Island, New York, orders flags removed from the newsroom; red, white, and blue ribbons removed from lapels of reporters. Why? Management did not want to appear biased and felt that our nations flag might give the appearance that "they lean one way or another."

Berkeley, California bans U.S. Flags from being displayed on city fire trucks because they didn't want to offend anyone in the community. In an "act of tolerance" the head of the public library at Florida Gulf Coast University ordered all "Proud to be an American" signs removed so as to not offend international students.

I, for one, am quite disturbed by these actions of so-called American citizens; and I am tired of this nation worrying about whether or not we are offending some individual or their culture.

Since the terrorist attacks on September 11, we have experienced a surge in patriotism by the majority of Americans. However, the dust from the attacks had barely settled in New York and Washington D.C. when the "politically correct" crowd began complaining about the possibility that our patriotism was offending others. I am not against immigration, nor do I hold a grudge against anyone seeking a better life by coming to America. In fact, our country's population is almost entirely comprised of descendants of immigrants;

However, there are a few things that those who have recently come to our country, and apparently some native Americans, need to understand.

First of all, it is not our responsibility to continually try not to offend you in any way. This idea of America being a multicultural community has served only to dilute our sovereignty and our national identity. As Americans, we have our own culture, our own society, our own language, and our own lifestyle.

This culture, called the "American Way" has been developed over centuries of struggles, trials, and victories by millions of men and women who have sought freedom.

Our forefathers fought, bled, and died at places such as Bunker Hill, Antietam, San Juan, Iwo Jima, Normandy, Korea, Vietnam, We speak English, not Spanish, Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, Russian, or any other language. Therefore, if you wish to become part of our society - learn our language!

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" In God We Trust" is our national motto.
This is not some off-the-wall, Christian,
Right Wing, political slogan;
it is our national motto.
It is engraved in stone in the House
of Representatives in our Capitol
and it is printed on our currency.

We adopted this motto because Christian
men and women, on Christian principles,
founded this nation; and this is clearly
documented throughout our history.
If it is appropriate for our motto to be
inscribed in the halls of our highest level
of Government, then it is certainly
appropriate to display it on the walls of
our schools.

God is in our pledge, our National Anthem,
nearly every patriotic song, and in our
founding documents. We honor His birth,
death, and resurrection as holidays, and
turn to Him in prayer in times of crisis.

If God offends you, then I suggest
you consider another part of the world
as your new home, because God is part
of our culture and we are proud
to have Him.
We are proud of our heritage and those
who have so honorably defended
our freedoms. We celebrate
Independence Day, Memorial Day,
Veterans Day, and Flag Day.
We have parades, picnics, and barbecues
where we proudly wave our flag.

As an American, I have the right
to wave my flag, sing my national
anthem, quote my national motto,
and cite my pledge whenever and
wherever I choose.

If the Stars and Stripes offend you,
or you don't like Uncle Sam,
then you should seriously consider
a move to another part of this planet.

The American culture is our way of life,
our heritage, and we are proud of it.
We are happy with our culture and
have no desire to change, and we
really don't care how you did
things where you came from,
if it was so superior, go home.

We are Americans, like it or not,
this is our country, our land,
and our lifestyle.
Our First Amendment gives every
citizen the right to express his
opinion about our government, culture,
or society, and we will allow you
every opportunity to do so.

But once you are done complaining,
whining, and griping about our flag,
our pledge, our national motto,
or our way of life,
I highly encourage you take advantage
of one other great American freedom,
the right to leave.
It is time to take a stand!!
MAY GOD BLESS AMERICA
LAND THAT WE LOVE!!![20]

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20. *Origin unknown.* Email from Dorothy Klein. 20 October 2001.

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Chapter 6 - Making Sense, Nonsense and No Sense of Race and Rules

> *Men often hate each other because they fear each other; they rear each other because they do not know each other; they do not know each other because they cannot communicate; they cannot communicate because they are separated.*
>
> ——A. Philip Randolph (Mazel, 1998, 136)

This chapter explores the dynamics of relationships between groups and how they are understood. What are the rules of interaction? In what contexts do people question mainstream thought and when do they uphold it? Within this framework, attitudes toward interracial relationships are discussed and notions of human nature and colorblindness as a goal for society are examined.

Ultimately, this chapter considers whether and how intergroup contact impacts attitudes and beliefs. Do close relationships (versus association) make a difference in how people think? What factors influence students' adherence to stereotypes and which contribute to their identification as an anti-racist? Students' attitudes about diversity initiatives as indicated in the survey and focus groups are discussed.

Contact Matters

Students believe that implicit rules structure their relationships with people from different groups yet they raise questions about why "things are the way they are" and whether they can or should change. Many feel that the visible diversity of the Brooklyn College campus does not reflect substantive interconnection between people's lives.

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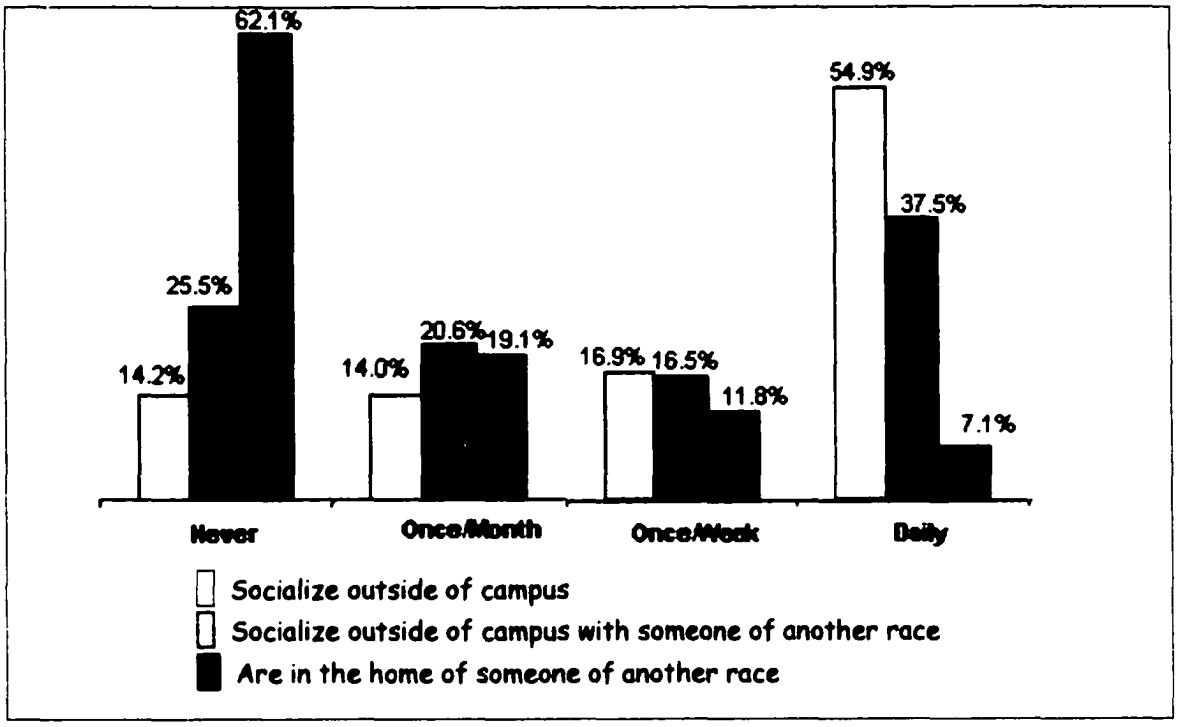

Figure 6.1. Intergroup Contact. Survey Questions: 2, 3, 4

The statistics on casual interaction reflected in Figure 6.1 parallel data from the 2001 College Student Survey (CSS) designed by the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at the University of California and administered to Brooklyn College students. The 2001 CSS Institutional Summary indicates that 58.8 percent of Brooklyn College students report that over the past year they had socialized with someone of another racial or ethnic group. This compared to 47.9 percent of students at public four-year schools around the nation (Brooklyn College Office of the Assistant Vice President for Budget and Planning, 2001b, 3).

Survey results indicated in Figure 6.1 were discussed within the focus groups and roundtables. Participants were asked to comment on their views of the significance and implications of these data. Some of the responses included:

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It's the neighborhood is why you socialize with people of your own group, and you hang out with the people who are around you. If you are white you get looked at weird if you go to a black neighborhood. Like why are you here? The same applies in reverse. But maybe they would be scared of the white people. In school, you sort of have no other choice. I think whites are scared of blacks because of the movies and how they portray African Americans as criminals. It's the media.

—Vera, white female

It has a lot to do with the neighborhood, too. I'm friends with a lot of people from my neighborhood, that plays a role.

—Jeff, white male

I am surprised because NYC is so diverse. You live right next door to somebody of another ethnicity or background. You'd think that you would go and say "Hi" to your neighbor.

—Hernan, Latino male

It's not that we don't socialize, because socializing really doesn't mean that you have a friendship with a person. Like me, I socialize with everybody. Most of the people I socialize with at Brooklyn College are people of different races, you know, of different cultures but when it comes to friendship, I usually have friends that share the same basic, common ground, like common goals. . . .

Not that I'm racist in any way or like I play favoritism but it's just that we have more in common, we have more to talk about. I know in school, you socialize and learn about different cultures. But when you need a friendship, a friendship really means a lot. Because there's a difference between friends and people you talk to. You can have acquaintances, people you're socializing with, but friendship, you really have to have a lot in common with a person to be friends with them.

—Jenna, white female

It seems contradictory but maybe you socialize only superficially. Is it the end product that people don't interact or part of the problem itself? Neighborhoods are in close proximity, segregated, but people don't mix.

—Liz, Asian female staff

Results from the pilot survey (Appendix B) indicated a number of statistically significant differences between students within various groups in

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their patterns of socializing. For example, juniors and seniors indicated *more* frequently than graduate students that they *socialize outside of campus* with someone of another race. Students who are 30 years of age or younger *more* frequently than students over age 30, indicated that they have *been in the home of and socialize outside of campus* with someone of another race. Students who are involved in campus activities *more* frequently than students who are not involved indicate that they *socialize with someone of another race.*

In the focus groups, several students expressed the sentiment that intergroup socializing occurs less on a commuter campus, and that this factor was the primary factor of this data. They seemed to feel that students stay within the groups of friends that they established in high schools, or with friends they made from their neighborhood. In both cases, the segregation of neighborhoods and schools compound what occurs on campus when they come to a commuter college, where students draw from many neighborhoods. They attempt to understand why students stay within circles of friends from their own racial or ethnic group.

> *But in terms of socializing, a college, which is like away from everything else, like Binghamton. People just seem to socialize because since we live in Brooklyn, we live here and our friends are here, but if you're somewhere else, I mean, you don't have family, you have to socialize.*
>
> —Darius, black male

> *I could pretty much go back to my own neighborhood, after school. I don't have to talk to one person here. I can just go back to my own neighborhood.*
>
> —Allen, white male

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As to why 62.1 percent (see Figure 6.1) of students report never having been in the home of someone of another race, various explanations are put forth:

The reasons why people don't go into each other's homes may be complex. When you think of a neighborhood you can visualize who lives there.

—Natalya, white female

Sixty-three percent of students have never been in somebody of another race's home? They wouldn't choose to say it outright but if you do it like that, you know it's faceless. Everybody's anonymous, and then you can see that it's an unwritten rule.

—*Allen, white male*

Historical segregation is a factor, too. Jews don't talk to non-Jews. We might say "Hi", that's all. There is stigma passed on by generations. Probably it is good to increase diversity programming. But the world will be different in fifty years. People just have to see that there are no differences among people.

—Andrew, white Jewish male

Shelley, a white U.S.-born female survey respondent wrote:

I don't think about whom I socialize with. I try to keep an open mind, but I do feel a great resentment and tension toward me from other groups.

Students also consider other factors that may contribute to the comparatively lower levels of off-campus socializing that take place between groups.

It is also where you live. If you live in a white neighborhood or a black neighborhood, then you might meet somebody at school that is of an opposite culture or something. It might be harder to be friends with them because they don't live near you. Especially when you are younger and in elementary school, you can't drive over to them. Your parents can drive you but it's easier to be friends with somebody on your block or two blocks away, than a mile away or three miles away. Some neighborhoods are mixed, but not all of them are. The ones that are not, it's harder to be friends with the ones from other neighborhoods.

—Edward, Asian male

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Students may feel they are not allowed to socialize with people of other races. Other generations may not want or allow you to have other races in your house. You can't even bring people into the neighborhood. Such as Mill Basin, Bensonhurst, Howard Beach. The tone has been set for who interacts with each other. It happens on both ends. People are afraid to go into neighborhoods, and people are not wanted. People are afraid of retribution. Look at what happens again and again. If you have friends, and bring them over, your neighbors might burn your house down. Or, you have to worry that your friend will be hurt. Look at what happened with Yusuf Hawkins, Michael Stewart, and so on and on and on.

—Lori, white Italian female

People get killed just for being in another neighborhood. I remember when the black kid was killed in Bensonhurst. The tone has been set. We're in the U.S., we should be allowed, but our neighbors might say something. Other races feel they might get lynched just for being another race. It's the fear of the unknown.

—Thomas, white Italian male, staff

The last respondent (Thomas) alluded to the idea that perhaps there are contradictions between the notion of the United States as the "land of the free" and of everyday reality. These individuals clearly articulate that intergroup contact outside the boundaries of a space perceived as safe, such as the campus, could be dangerous.

Another important issue is that while the perception is that Blacks, Latinos and Asians self-segregate more so than whites, in fact this is not the case. One of the most significant findings of the Association of American Colleges and Universities in survey research about the impact of diversity on students in higher education was that:

Contrary to widespread reports of self-segregation among students of color on campuses, the research finds this pattern more typical of white

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students. Students of color interact more with dominant students than the reverse" (Smith et al., 1997, vi).

Another study conducted by the University of Michigan of 6000 students at 390 colleges also found this to be the case. They found that only 21 percent of white students said they dined frequently with members of other ethnic or racial groups, in contrast to 78 percent of Mexican American, 55 percent of African American and 69 percent of Asian American students (*The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 1994, A31).

Even if one feels inclined toward developing relationships with people from different groups, it appears that various factors are calculated into the decision to engage that may not emanate from an individual's personal opinions but from an assessment of possible risks. These might entail consequences from one's family or one's community. Participants repeatedly voiced concern about possible negative outcomes that could occur if they challenge unwritten rules about intergroup socialization. Their calculation of risk is evident in these quotes.

Sometimes it just has to do with your parents - If a Chinese ever brought a black person home, the parents would say something about it. I'll tell you that much, my parents would. I mean, they're not racist, they're not trying to teach me to be racist, and it's just the way they feel. The same thing is with their parents, so sometimes it's genetic.

—Leah, Asian female

To me it's racist, but they feel different, you just don't feel comfortable with it. They don't say they're gonna kick the person out or they don't want the person in their house, it's just that they'd feel uncomfortable and you as their daughter would not want them to, so naturally you just don't bring them home, you don't bring people of other races home, you just keep them

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outside. It automatically builds a barrier between you and other races; we've all done that.

—Jeanne, white female

People who were born here, like children of immigrants, become very Americanized - they associate with and socialize with different cultures because at school and work, you're always seeing a mixture of different races, and different nationalities communicating with each other. But the parents, the immigrants themselves, were raised under different conditions of their own countries and they're not used to seeing other races. They grew up with their kind of people and when they come here, they're a little maybe hostile, a little, maybe hesitant to accept other people. I don't think it's intentional racism - it's because of lack of understanding and lack of communication.

—Leah, Asian female

As people calculate the risks of engagement and sort out unwritten rules, they seem to think aloud about the parameters of who can do what, where and when:

Buying a house in a neighborhood is different than visiting.

—Dorothy, white female, staff

Segregation in New York depends: sometimes it is because of racism, some people do prefer to live in neighborhoods with their own kind of people but it's because they just share the same interests maybe, because they came from the same country. I'm talking about immigrants. I'm not talking about the people who were born here. It has to do with fear of rejection, that you may not be accepted. You might say a joke and somebody in your group, from your background, they will understand it, and somebody from another country, they won't understand, they'll think you're weird.

—Jeff, white male

I had a black friend come over and my neighbor asked whether she was coming to clean. The rules have been set, the tone; you don't cross the line.

—Barbara, white female, staff

Other participants feel that the patterns of interaction were "natural", to be expected and not necessarily problematic.

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I think you want to be with a group that better and easily understands you, the same group as you.

—Nonna, white Jewish female

It depends on where you grew up, your parents and what their beliefs are.

—Leon, white male

It's basically who you are friends with because that's whose house you go to. If you're friends with somebody who's not within your race, of course you're going to go to their house.

—Jan, Native American female

I don't want people to jump on me, but I don't think it's bad if you don't necessarily socialize with people other than your race just as long as you don't make fun of them or make racial remarks about them. If you want to stick to your own race and you want to socialize with them, and that's who you've been brought up with, then I think that's okay, just as long as you don't have an attitude toward someone else.

—Gerda, Russian female

Certain classes encourage getting to know people, like in Core 3[1]. I worked with a lot of people but I did not maintain contact or make friends friends. Socializing involves deliberate choice. My friends friends[2] are people who I grew up with, gone to school and shul with. We live in the same community; my parents are friends with theirs. It all makes sense.

—Andrew, white Jewish male

But you can't force people to talk to each other. What are you going to do, stand on a podium? They won't listen.

—Mia, Latina

While these comments indicate that some students believe that increased intergroup socializing can be positive, others thought nothing should be done to change current patterns of interaction. They felt they should be allowed to relate to whomever they please. There was a sense that to encourage intergroup

---

1. This course is part of the Brooklyn College Core Curriculum. It focuses on "People, Power and Politics" and " . . . provides an introduction to the social sciences through the study of power, authority, and social organization in American society" (Brooklyn College, 1994, 75).

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interaction is to interfere in ways that are neither relevant nor anyone's business. Among the students quoted below, one claims that intergroup interaction just doesn't work.

> *If you want to interact, it's right there in front of you. There's so many people here, you can interact with anybody you want to. . . .When it comes down to it, it depends on the person, if they want to, they'll do it.*
>
> —Don, white male

> *Segregation at BC is the people's choice.*
>
> —Vera, white female

> *Sometimes when you try to do things, it gets worse, so you don't touch it. If you leave a group the way it is, it might not have any contact but if you touch the group it might turn into something worse. It's like orange juice and apple juice, you don't mix it and it's okay. But, when you mix it, it tastes nasty.*
>
> —Jeanne, white female

> *We pay to come to BC and should pretty much do what we want as long as we're not interrupting anybody's learning process.*
>
> —Leon, white male

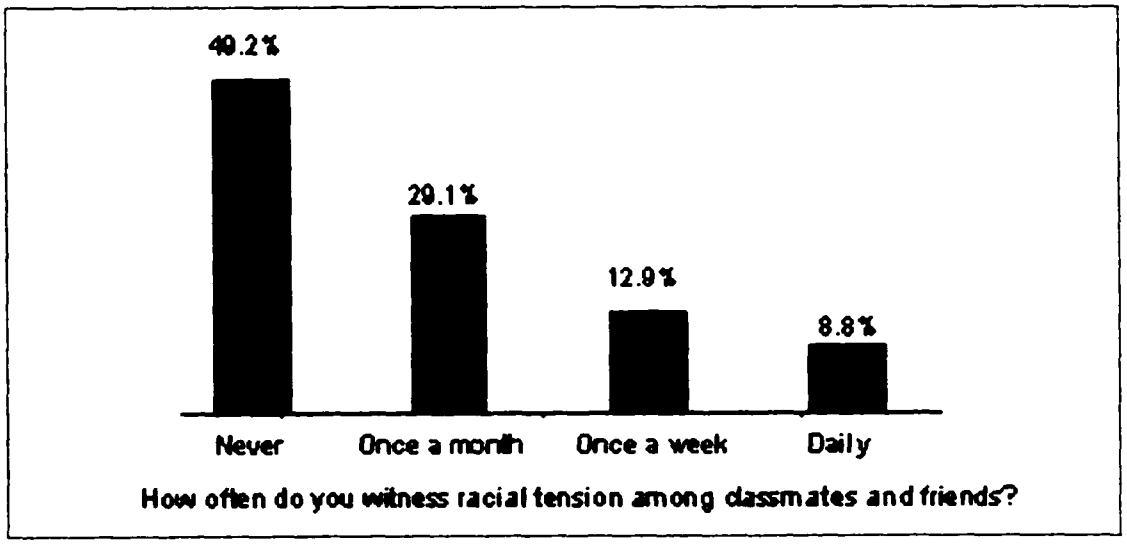

Figure 6.2. Witness Racial Tension. Survey Question: 5

2. "Friends Friends" was Andrew's phrase to distinguish from a less familiar "friend."

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The statistically significant differences between groups in response to this question was that foreign-born whites (61 percent) *more* frequently than Asian students (30.8 percent) said that they *never witnessed racial tension* and foreign-born white students (6.1 percent) *significantly less frequently* than Asian students (12.8 percent) said that they *witness racial tension daily*. A CUNY-wide Student Experience Survey conducted in 1995 indicated that 19.2 percent of Brooklyn College students reported that they believed racial tension exists at the college. Among CUNY students, 13.6 percent said that racial tension existed at their school (CUNY Office of Institutional Research and Analysis [CUNY OIRA], 1996, 48). The pilot survey that I conducted in 1998 (Appendix B) reflected several statistically significant differences between groups in their experience of racial tension on campus. These disparities include that white U.S.-born students report experiencing unfair treatment significantly less often than black foreign-born students and that when experiencing unfair treatment, white, English-speaking students more frequently report that they pursue the matter to their satisfaction, than Kreyol-speaking students.

In 1993 Howard Ehrlich, Director of the Prejudice Institute, reported that 85 percent of campuses in the United States with enrollments over 10,000 had reported at least one incident of ethnoviolence (Tolerance.org, 2001a). Most scholars who study these phenomena agree that such incidents are vastly underreported (Wilson, 1995, 178-182). The *Review of Higher Education* estimated

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recently that one million bias incidents occur every year on campuses within the United States (Tolerance.org, 2001b).

Beliefs about whether racial tensions exist and whether segregation is a problem, impact white students' level of participation in events about intergroup relations. If they don't sense a problem or they have something to gain, students accordingly would not attend related events. Accordingly, if they do feel that tensions exist, they may be concerned that attention will be drawn to them as individuals. During the spring of 1998, Brooklyn College efforts were underway to engage intergroup dialogue. On three occasions, attempts were made to initiate discussions with community members about state of intergroup relations on campus. These efforts included a student leadership luncheon, a forum on whiteness and a community-building retreat. In all three cases only faculty, staff and students of color attended. Personal invitations were extended to cultural clubs and departments with a majority of white members. Was the lack of response due to, or a consequence of tension and do these sentiments and statistics indicate a serious problem within this community and our society?

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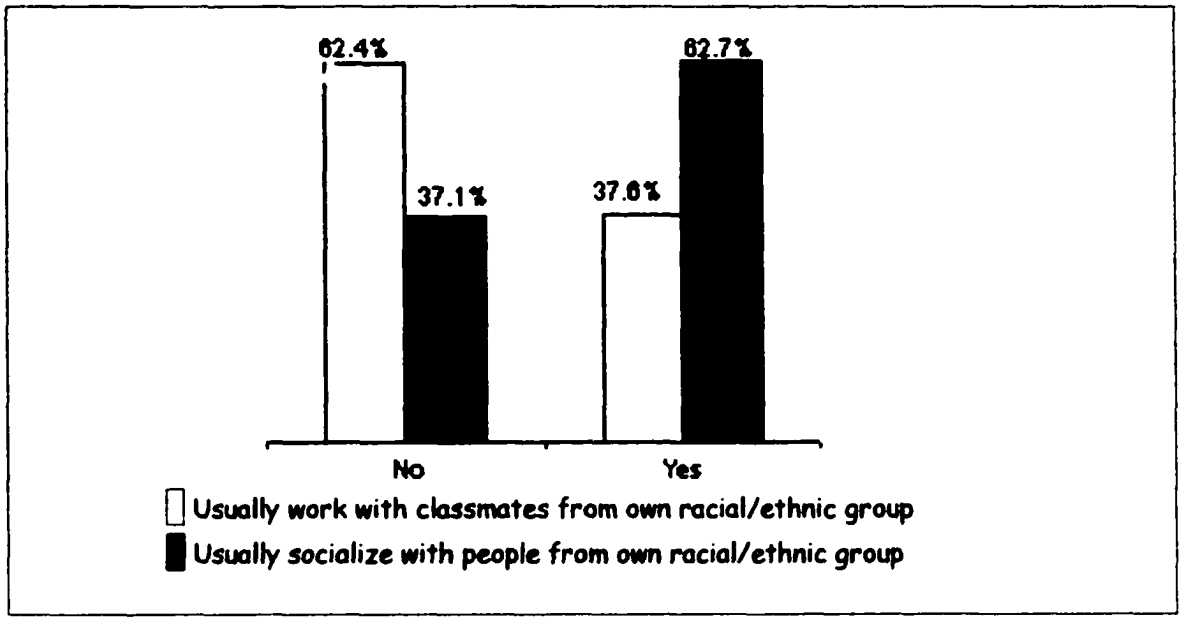

Figure 6.3. Socialize versus Work with Classmates from own Group. Survey Questions: 7, 8

While Figure 6.3 reflects a disparity between the percentage of students who socialize on versus off campus with people from their own group, concerns were voiced that minimal intergroup contact contributes to the perpetuation of stereotypes because it does not afford people the opportunity to get to know one another as individuals. The following passages illustrate this point.

> *You have to look into high schools. As a matter of fact, in junior high school, because that is where it's developed. Little by little they just start falling out. A lot of white folks expect to see me in front of a bodega buying a six-pack for my friends and smoking a blunt. It gets me upset. You don't know what I been through and what my parents have been through so I can come to school. There's an assumption from a certain race, ethnicity, background about what you're gonna wind up doing. With a kid at seventeen, dropping out of school, getting your GED when you're 21 and just bumming your life working in a grocery store or a deli. Then they say, "I'm not talking about you, I'm talking about the rest of them." "A white woman said, "They have such bad attitudes... Oh, no, not you." But people still cross the street when I walk with my friends.*
>
> —Hernan, Latino male

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I definitely think that's a big problem that people have not been in the home of another race because I think in life you'll judge people until you get to learn about their culture. There are so many different cultures out there, and once you get to know the person and you get to learn them, you see so much more, you just understand so much more about them when you get to know them, get the chance. It does not surprise me because look at the cafeteria. But it is surprising. I think it is due to comfort. It is natural. But I do think it is a problem. If I am a CEO and I am more comfortable with and only hire people who are like me it skews my hiring decision. Maybe it is not really the best person. But there is a time factor. Brown versus Board of Ed *and the Montgomery Bus Boycott were not that long ago. Being in class with different people encourages contact. But it hasn't been that long ago since segregation was made illegal.*

—Andrew, white Jewish male

It's a problem that people haven't been in the home of someone of another race and it could also be an environmental issue, like where you're brought up. There are also a lot of stereotypes, like people who don't associate with people of other races. They don't understand, they stick to the stereotype; this is how they are. Then they rationalize why they don't hang out with these people.

—Joanne, white Italian female

The kids hang out only with each other. If you hang out with predominantly white kids you are going to be more into yourself, into your race. These are the only people you know, the only ones you are around. So if they are being taught that black people are a certain way, they're gonna believe it more.

—Nancy, white female

Many participants, however, agree that contact with one another does matter, indeed, particularly when it helps to dismantle stereotypes. Ambivalence is also evident, sometimes reflecting the belief that bias will vanish over time. Participants point out that there are positive reasons to increase the level of interaction as reflected in the following comments.

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Relationships break stereotypes and let you see people for who they are. You don't feel barriers; it makes people more approachable, more open. It changes people's body language.

—Carl, Afro-Latino male

It is more difficult to negate stereotypes if individuals are isolated from each other.

—Marian, black female, staff

Without exposure, there is no change. With exposure, barriers drop and there is more understanding of commonality. When people mix they find out we're all the same. Even with exposure, open-mindedness is still slow.

—Dorothy, white female, staff

Interestingly, discourse about how "we are all human" and "we are all the same" did not generally arise in the focus groups. Benjamin DeMott makes the case that in the 1990s, what he calls an "aegis of friendship" orthodoxy undermined whites' concerns about the frontal assaults on affirmative action, welfare and housing programs, leaving the discourse of sameness, and "they're just like us" in place of prior constructions of the subhuman character of black identity (DeMott, 1995, 187).

I disagree with leaving it alone. I think that you can't get a whole mass of people to stand up as individuals . . .and sometimes it's not even planned - like the people who you hang out with. A lot of times when you see people hanging together with their own, it's not because they say, "Okay, we're all white" or "We're all black", it just happens that way. It's a natural clique. I don't know if it's because of similar experiences, but I think that's just how it happens. I don't think people get up and say, or maybe some do, but I don't think people just get up and say "Let's just hang with each other today 'cause we're all white."

—Sam, white Italian male

As Sam makes clear, recognizing or desiring increased intergroup contact still leaves open the question of how to accomplish such a change. This consideration

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implicitly raises the question about which factors make a difference. Several participants felt that simply living in New York City gave them a different perspective on intergroup relations and contact. Frequent exposure to people from different racial, ethnic and religious groups meant that people are accustomed to interacting, and that the "problem" of "race relations" was to be found in other regions of the country, but not in New York. Some participants attribute segregation to the ease and logic of associating with people who live near each other, as in the comments below.

> *From my perspective as a white person, if you go down South as a New Yorker and you try to deal with people down there, there's a lot of tension. That's a local thing. It's different cultures that you're dealing with. You grow up with the kind of social structure that you're raised in. It's a totally different culture. I went to a very small rural Texas town for a year and it was a very conservative, very agricultural and there was just not a lot of basis for communication. There's not a whole lot to relate to people on. I got along with people okay; it was just there were differences. There was always like this division, of well, I'm a New Yorker and you know, it's like I can't really relate to people talking about cows and stuff.*
>
> *Allen, white male*

> *When I went to Idaho, Brooklyn seemed like another country. The people there were very, very nice, a little too nice and it scared me a little, it was just weird. They didn't have any racial aggression towards me, but the way they acted around me was different . . .. Like, I wanted to go horseback riding and this guy was talking to me like I was illiterate... He was like, "Would . . . you . . . like . . . a . . . horse?" just because of my race and he helped the next guy and it pissed me off a little bit. You know I'm not illiterate, just because I'm not exactly white. . . . He thought I was Latino.*
>
> —Alex, white Jewish male

> *The problem is not so much here, but other places. Here we are used to being around lots of different people.*
>
> —Dorothy, white female, staff

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It's a Brooklyn thing, because right when someone immigrates they go into their own neighborhood, like, their own culture right away, everything's grouped right off the bat, they just go into their own area.

—Zena, Russian female

You have a Jewish group, you have a Jamaican group, Haitian group, and Chinese group, and so everything is evenly divided. It is done so people are able to communicate; it makes it easier.

—Nicky, white female

Many issues in the focus group discussions remained unresolved and without general agreement. Students expressed a desire to talk in order to better understand different perspectives. Questions that emerged in many groups included: Are people most comfortable within their "own" circle? Is there significance to the evidence that suggests students associate on campus with people from different groups but off campus with their "own group"? Do these issues warrant serious consideration or should they be accepted as the norm, and not problematic? Students struggled with what they personally thought about these issues. They appeared to listen closely not only to what other people were saying, but to hear themselves articulate their own attitudes, as if they were uncertain of their own opinions.

It's more difficult for people to break through barriers like language, culture and religion to interact with someone from a different country, than it is for somebody to find someone from their own culture who already speaks the same language, has the same religion and then just say, "Hey, let's hang out." But it really has nothing to do with comfort because you could be comfortable with a person of a different culture also but you have to be willing to go through the breaking of these barriers.

—Marla, white female

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Well, you know, I can be friends with anybody, but I think it's how I grew up. My parents are white, when I was a kid I went to an all-white grammar school. I lived in an all-white neighborhood, all-white high school. I didn't practically see people of another race until I was older. I think it's what people are used to. I don't consider myself racist or that I'm prejudiced. I can be friends with anybody, people that I work with, I'm close with a couple of them, black women and I love them. We don't socialize outside of the office. Not that we wouldn't, we just don't. Everybody has their own little life that they go home to.

—Helen, white female

It's not just BC, it's not just colleges, it's in the workplace too; it's everywhere.

—Jeanne, white female

Another concern among participants was whether or not greater educational and income status meant a greater likelihood for people to interact with those from different backgrounds. Initially, the assumption was generally that education led to increased numbers of interracial relationships, resulting in friendships both platonic and intimate. However, this assumption was repeatedly challenged among participants, though there was not general agreement about whether these factors make a difference, as illustrated below.

I do think BC is segregated. Not very, but it is. Look in the cafeteria. It has to do with the maturity level. As you mature you get a little bit more open-minded.

—Terry, white female

Look at Brooklyn Heights versus Seagate. Education plays a strong role because in the Heights you see lots of beautiful mixed children and interracial couples. Education makes you open-minded.

—Sabrina, white Jewish female

But that's not true. Look how white Harvard, Oxford and Yale are as well as the corporate world. That's a myth.

—Jared, male, self-described as white with Egyptian and Indian heritage

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Participants discussed the importance of understanding different perspectives and knowing different kinds of people, especially in health care, education, and business. They generally felt that images and awareness do affect how people live for example, in the impressions that police officers form about criminals. Students were clear that race plays a role but were less sure about whether it was positive or negative and how racialized images should be handled.

> *If you teach in a public school they expect you not to be racist but then the way they assign you to different schools, they're already racist. One of my Dad's friends is a teacher who works in a public school. He lived near here but was assigned to Chinatown because he was Chinese. On the other hand, his friend who graduated with him is white and is assigned near his house because those were mainly white people so they already have some racist idea that they should try to assign you to different schools already.*
>
> —Leah, Asian female

> *Perhaps you have a job where you have to appeal to the customer, I mean, if you don't know the customer's needs or what they're fond of, you're going to sound like a moron and embarrass yourself, like you could say the wrong thing in front of them, or something, you know.*
>
> —Jeff, white male

Would a white teacher who was placed within the district he lives in protest that he was put into a white district as Leah implies above? If you believe that he or she would not protest, one might wonder why not. Important issues include the role of racialization in everyday living, who is affected, and whether some people affected positively and others negatively.

> *In the medical profession and teaching, segregation has negative effects. Even with teaching, if a teacher is racist, he or she will mistreat the student based on stereotypes. Whether he or she abused the student to be mean or not, if he treats the student poorly, and the student feels*

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discouraged, then maybe he or she wouldn't want to study more. I heard a lot of cases like this where because they were discouraged and they feel that they are, I don't know, hated, or misrepresented by the teacher, they're not paying attention to, they don't want to do well anymore. They don't want to study. I think like for sure, racism has negative effects.

—Jeanne, white female

It's important for people to get to know other cultures and other people from different countries, because if I'm going to be a doctor, I'm going to have more knowledge than my patients, and I'm going to know how to act.

—Allen, white male

It's very important for doctors to get to know other ethnic groups because when you're a doctor and you're in a region that cannot communicate with you, and if you can understand a couple of words, that can make a difference between life and death. If they're telling you something in Spanish and you don't understand, but you know a couple of words here and there, you can pretty much understand them by what they're telling you in speech and their motions, what they're describing to you, can be very significant or you can call your friends and ask them to translate.

—Helen, white female

In these comments, the students clearly express their feeling that knowledge of different cultures and languages is very important in the work world, as is having friends from diverse backgrounds. However, some students are also very clear about the role that class plays in everyday living.

Sometimes it just depends on status, because I have friends who are white and regular people, but you are not always at an advantage if you're white. For example, with the President, everybody knows, it's an unwritten code that to be the President of the United States, you have to be a white male. It's not written in the Constitution but look at the history of how many women presidents there have been or how many black presidents were there - none. So you can have an advantage if you are white, depending on your status in society in general. But like a friend of mine, a regular old Joe who is white, just gets by daily like I do, just a regular person.

—Donna, black female

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On several occasions students spoke about periods of their lives when they interacted with people from a variety of backgrounds more frequently than other times. They refer to after-school programs and community centers that existed in their neighborhoods up through the early 1990's and express the opinion that these programs and centers provided spaces to interact with young people from different neighborhoods. They remember having had very positive experiences and learning to get along with lots of different people during this period. They felt comfortable and found they had a lot in common with young people who were not necessarily from their own racial or ethnic background. These students repeatedly articulate their concern and confusion about why these projects were eliminated when they contributed so much to the community's well being. They also say, however, that group segregation becomes rigidified in high school. The following comments reflect these discussions.

> *When I was a kid, at the youth center, I was good friends with all different kinds of people. We realized we were just as poor as each other. None of us were working; we discussed social issues that affected us all. We never had racial fights. Now we are not in touch at all. The center was closed down. Now we wouldn't be friends. We are older. Blacks are at black colleges. Maybe we realized that we were equally poor, now they are more advantaged because they get full financial aid.*[3] *The divide is so large.*
>
> —Nancy, white female

> *In my old neighborhood there was a community house for kids to do their homework. All kinds of kids. The teachers ran it and high school kids worked there. They were trying to close it down. It stayed open until 1 A.M. on Friday nights. Your mother and father knew where you were, playing basketball, and board games; there were tournaments. Me and my*

3. See Chapter 4, Footnote 4 and 5 for information about scholarship distribution by race.

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friends knocked on doors to keep it from closing; we went into buildings for people to sign our petition. But a lot of people were not interested. They didn't think it did anything for us. I'd say "We're the youth of America, you have to help us." One lady cracked me up. She said, "I don't give two shhh . . .who you are. You're not paying my bills. Get off my doorstep".

We kept it open by throwing parties, better than most house parties. That's how we kept it open. They're still trying, and now they are not even getting help from the city. This little kid who I used to help with his homework, I was always bugging him. He said, "Now you're in college, do something. Go talk to the people and tell them to keep it open." He said, "You go to college; you can do those smart things that college people do."

—Hernan, Latino male

I don't understand. Well, I do understand but it seems like there's been an epidemic of after-school programs closing down in the city. In such a prosperous time you would think we would be expanding after-school programs and giving more money to them so kids could stay off the streets and do their homework. Yet the mayor is cutting back on everything.

—Francine, black female

I went to Murrow, one of the most diverse high schools in Brooklyn. Every single section was a color. On the fourth floor, by the locker rooms were the Chinese kids. On the first floor, in the middle was the black kids, outside, the white kids. The teachers didn't make us be like that. I remember that the second floor was Dominican, it just was.

—Nancy, white female

The above testimony leads one to consider the factors that play a role in the shift in young people's affiliations from mixed groupings to segregated ones. Studies about this shift in friendship groups exist, generally noting that junior high school is often a transition period (Lewin, 2001, A1). Economic and social pressures foster division between young people. It appears this occurs when teenagers themselves begin to compete (versus through their parents' efforts) for specialized high school and college programs, scholarships, jobs and when they start thinking

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about their careers. This is also the time in their lives when they begin to date. The focus of their relationships, as a result become much more directed toward how they will navigate as adults within a racialized society. This issue is important to consider, as recommendations for diversity education and programs and curricula in higher education need to be extended throughout young people's academic experience, or as has been referred to, a "cradle to grave" project.[4]

Students' reflections about their experience of having more friends from different groups when they were younger, raises the question of how race is used to deflect attention from a broader analysis of global economics, to explain why they feel tremendous pressure about their futures. In the context of the increasingly scarce resources as the economy constricts, real wages decrease and poor and middle income people compete in an increasingly tight labor market, their uncertainty about their job futures is justified. However,

> *The majority of white men who are not in the top one percent of the population owning 48 percent of society's net wealth, have reason to be angry - but not at black people. Their grievance is deliberately steered toward those who are not responsible for their problem"* (Mullings, 1995, 31-34).

These community centers helped build a sense of community and fostered goodwill between people from different groups. These neighborhood interactions drew together young people from different schools, cultivated understanding and connections. Without interaction in positive settings such as this, Jack Levin of

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4. Joe Feagin, President of the American Sociological Association, at the annual conference, 2000.

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Northeastern University states that academic and economic pressures frequently add fuel to a potentially volatile mixing of diverse communities.

> *We see very high levels of competition, for grades, for campus resources and for jobs . . .. At elite schools, the combination of hyper-competitiveness and diverse student populations may ironically give them the highest volume of hate crimes* (Tolerance.org, 2001b).

Most hate crimes nationwide are committed by youths under the age of 22 (Tolerance.org, 2001b) as the pressures felt by young people in the process of becoming independent adults heightens intergroup tensions.

At the same time, some students pointed out the positive impact of interactions and ways to foster intergroup relationships on campus.

> *We need to be more assertive with friendships. Before I started coming here, I never had a Jewish friend, and now I have two, and they're cool, just like anybody else. If people took initiative to just say "Hi", and not assume because this person might be different from me racially or culturally, you know, just forget about it.*
>
> —Beverly, black female

> *As an incoming freshman, we were blocked together so I'm in three classes with the same people. We developed a very nice friendship in a family-like atmosphere. It was a really great help. We studied together. A lot of the kids in my class graduated high school in January, so they're like young, 17, because we started in February and it was a great help for them. For freshmen to be blocked with other students makes a lot of this happen, friendships, working with others. It's great, there's about twenty of us.*
>
> —Randy, white female

> *The opportunity was provided. . . . now I have friends from Poland, I have Jewish friends, friends from basically everywhere and if the opportunity wasn't provided in college . . . I would never have met them, chances are at work I would never have met them. But interacting with so many different people in school, that was about the only opportunity that I had and now I have a few friends from basically other races, so the opportunity arose.*
>
> —Joan, white Italian female

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It is important because for me, I have other friends from different areas and everything, and I mix up with them. I learned so much about their culture, and that's very important to me, because I know how to act around them, I know the things that they like, the things that they don't like and they know about me, too, so I mean, apart from having that friendship.

—Helen, white female

What would be great, would be to know people. It's good for your future altogether. It would make you much more open to other things, you know.

—Randy, white female

It's important to be somewhat worldly and have some knowledge of other races and cultures so you just don't sound stupid in a normal conversation. But it is important to feel comfortable and be able to help other people out of different backgrounds. [Yet] *I also don't think you need to run around with a checklist to make sure that I have a Columbian friend.*

—Jeff, white male

These students articulate their feelings that interaction between groups is positive and that they have benefited from experiences where they have gotten to know people from different backgrounds. Another key finding in national research on diversity initiatives has been that virtually all students desire opportunities for interaction because they recognize that it increases their understanding of the world they live in. These opportunities have also been shown to positively impact academic success, cognitive development, and overall institutional satisfaction (Smith et al., 1997, vi).

This section explored the reasons students gave for the relatively minimal intergroup interaction among students outside campus. They talk about their experiences with parental and neighborhood pressures, and both implicit and explicit stigmas. They speak about the effect that stereotypes have and that they

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believe people develop closer relationships with those who share similar backgrounds, live in close proximity and are therefore better able to understand each other.

Several students express irritation that this pattern of interaction was being questioned and feel that to discuss this was intrusive. Others feel that the cycle of segregation is reproduced through lack of contact, knowledge and experience. They raise the practical issue of having to consciously work against dominant patterns in order to become acquainted with people from other groups was voiced. Finally, participants note numerous unwritten rules that undergird interaction. They feel that children learn the boundaries and consequences of stepping out of line. Thomas, a white male staff member, illustrates the seriousness with which these rules are regarded, "People get killed for being in another neighborhood!"

Students allude to a concern that such restrictions on their mobility reflect a lack of freedom. They question whether education and income correlate to tolerance and higher levels of intergroup relationships, though ultimately this idea was dismissed. Repeatedly students compared living in New York City to living in other areas of the country, but they were uncertain as to whether they felt it was the same or different.

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COLORBLINDNESS

The notion that we now live in a "colorblind" or "color-neutral" society or that to the extent we do not, we should strive to, has been part of the dominant discourse for most of these students' lives as many are in their twenties. Despite this, there was significant diversity in opinion about these issues.

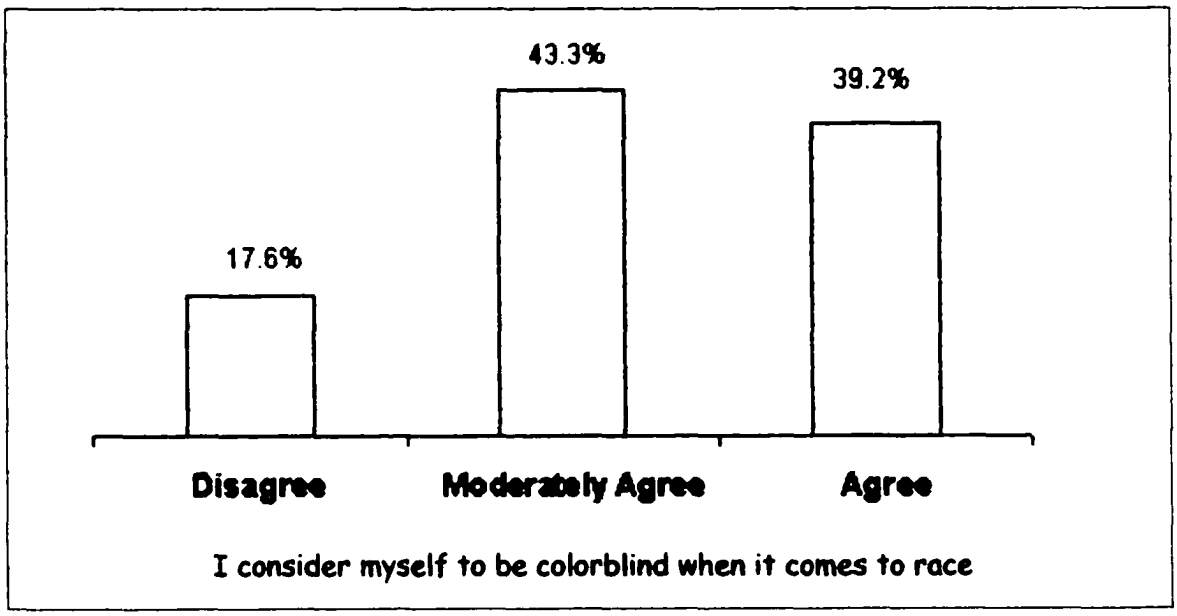

Figure 6.4. Colorblindness when it comes to Race. Survey Question: 22

Students in the focus groups were asked about their thoughts regarding colorblindness as an ideal and whether they thought U.S. society has achieved this state of being. They responded in the following ways.

I don't agree with colorblindness, I want to learn about different cultures.
—Michael, Latino and white male, self-described as human

But do you want people to see you as you are, or as a stereotype?
—Joanne, Latina

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We can't be 100 percent colorblind. It is good to see people for who they are. Things are a lot better. Some say we should call it even now but we can't erase slavery.

—Etienne, Haitian male

Some people don't have that mentality. I was brought up, that you see someone; you take them for whom they are. The way they present themselves, the way they speak, and the way they act, not just physically.

—Joanne, Latina

Being colorblind is the wrong thing to do. It's like when they had the Feminist Movement. Someone said enough is enough, why are we all trying to be men when there's something about us that's unique and different. I think the differences are beautiful. I am not going to treat you like someone who just sits and hangs out. I want to know, man, I want to pick your brain, I want to see what your culture's like, I want to see what's down over here. I don't want to just put my blinders on and ignore the culture - I like, observe it, suck it in, it's beautiful, our differences.

—Michael, Latino and white male

Would you want somebody to see you and your culture and see most of the people who haven't done something to tear it apart to have them view only one person who did wrong as everybody from that culture? That's how I see colorblindness, to not stereotype people. I don't see it as ignoring that person's culture, just that you know people discriminate on that basis.

—Etienne, Haitian male

In this exchange, these students describe their racialized experience in very different ways. One is able to enjoy difference in its richness as a cultural voyager, while another articulates racialization as being stereotyped by the negative views with which society has portrayed blacks.

In a dialogue session examining the meaning of race in daily living, Joe Madison, a white male professor described how his neighbors were dead-set against allowing blacks to rent apartments in his building. He expressed that colorblindness does not exist because people of color mostly cannot "hide", but that white ethnics, such

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as Jews can change their names. Assimilation is therefore, more of a possibility for them.[5] To this, Karen, a white female student, replied:

> *But you can't just blame race. A French person applying for a mortgage faces more discrimination than a U.S. black.*

The notion that colorblindness actually means "invisibility" for subordinated groups was raised in several contexts.

> *Colorblinding undermines the point that social inequality exists. People are different. We should strive for the idea that people are different; we should preserve and appreciate that, and not just make homogenous cultureless beings. What's interesting is that when you are a token or in the subordinated group you end up representing your whole group. People watch me closely. Rabbis are only publicized when they molest a kid. People feel obligated to say "Orthodox" Jew. We are exoticized.*
>
> —Stephen, white Jewish male

> *I was the first black person to move into my building. I was invisible until I broke my leg and walked on crutches. All of a sudden people became friendly. Someone said that I was no longer scary. However, when I got better, I was invisible again.*
>
> —Antoine, black male

Antoine's visibility appeared to emerge only when he was vulnerable. Is it possible that Antoine was being observed the whole time, but his humanity was invisible when perhaps his neighbors perceived him as dangerous? When he was on crutches, he appears to have been humanized, and then stereotyped again once healed. Rather than his neighbors being colorblind at all, they might have been starkly aware of his blackness.

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5. For a thorough discussion of the process of becoming "white" on the part of European immigrants who at one point in history were designated otherwise, see Brodkin (1998) and Ignatiev (1995). While not specifically addressing the issue of passing as individuals, these works illuminate this point from the perspective of groups as a whole. For an interesting exploration of the experiences of Italian Americans in moving from immigrants to ethnics, see Ashyk, Gardaphe and Tamburri (1999).

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It is this awareness of the centering of whiteness that led to the following student's realization that his own perspective about the school curriculum might be culturally defined rather than objective. At first, he expressed surprise that anyone would think that including the experiences and accomplishments of people of color in the curriculum would increase standards. "*What does that have to do with academic quality?*" he asked. But then, after consideration, he quickly retracted his initial response.

> *Oh, now I understand. They probably feel that the history course or the art course is too Euro-centric. I can see that. I just never thought about it. I assumed that we are studying the right things. I think a lot of the responses by whites reflect that we don't really think about race as playing a role. We assume that everyone should be, and is, being treated equally.*

Andrew's initial statement alludes to the common assumption that indeed we do live in a colorblind society. His willingness, however, to examine his own thinking points to the possibility of engaging people to expand their awareness about the everyday realities of people of color that they may not have previously considered.

The argument for colorblindness is also framed by saying that the problem of racism is that we keep talking about it. This was periodically expressed in terms of a perspective that if we could just focus on being human, and stop talking about race, we overcome racism. This was explicitly articulated in an article that appeared in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*.

> *The opposite of being pro-diversity is not being anti-diversity. It's being diversity-indifferent, and that's me. My T-shirt would not say "Diversity Sucks." It would say, "Diversity - Who Cares?" Why am I sick of all the*

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> *praise for diversity? Because it cloaks an agenda that is anti-merit, pro-preference, and anti-assimilationist"* (Clegg, 2000, B8).

Many assumptions underlie this statement that will be further investigated in this chapter. This section examined whether students agree with the notion of colorblindness, whether they believe we currently live in a colorblind society or whether it is an attainable goal. It appears that there is recognition of the value of diversity and that there are benefits to understanding different ways of living and perspectives. However, concerns were raised that allowing the space for differences also provides space for prejudice and bias. Several people expressed that they wanted to be dealt with as an individual, rather than as part of a group. Others voiced concern that by striving for colorblindness, one undermines the struggle for equality. They felt that since not all people are (or have been) treated equally, one couldn't simply say that we all start now from the same place. History plays a significant role in people's everyday lives and will continue to do so unless inequities and historical prejudices are addressed.

Human Nature

Participants express strong opinions about what types of interaction between groups are natural and what are not. Underlying this issue is the question of whether we can or should intervene in current patterns of relationships. If we believe that interaction between groups is positive but feel, for example, that people naturally gravitate to those they consider to be like themselves or from

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their own group, our redress would be different than if we feel that circumstances structure relationships in segregated patterns but that there is no "natural" predisposition towards associating with one's own group.

The first set of participants' comments below represent the position that people are naturally greedy, impatient and self-centered. Certainly, a concern for the common good requires some willingness to put the interests of the group as a whole, ahead of one's own self-interest. Patience, one might argue, is essential if one determines that action is required to improve the quality of lives of all people. In the context of this discussion about race and racial inequality, white students allude to feeling that the expectations of people of color about the elimination of inequality are unreasonably high and imply that they feel that blacks and Latinos expect too much, too quickly.

> *Everyone just takes things for granted in general. It's part of human nature, and I think we always want more.*
>
> —Gerda, Russian female

> *People are way too impatient. I just don't understand, people want everything, like, right now, right now* (bangs the table). *I don't understand, like, patience is a big thing for me and a lot of people don't have it.*
>
> —Don, white male

> *By definition we have desire. When we come out of the mother's womb we're already crying, "Get me this." We live with that our entire life. Out of desire grows greed, greed for money and power. As long as there are things to satisfy our desire, there will be power. As long as there's power there will be inequality because somebody will have more and that makes us unequal, or somebody will have less and that makes us unequal.*
>
> —Stephen, white Jewish male

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The second set of beliefs about what constitutes human nature is illustrated by the following comments. In these cases, participants articulate the view that people prefer to "stick to their own" and that they fear difference and change. There appears to be general agreement on these points, as they were never contested in any of the groups where they were discussed.

People stick to themselves; maybe it is because they're intimidated.
—Nadine, black female

People are very standoffish unless you're involved in something.
—Joanne, white Italian female

I just think it's whites against blacks in general, that's how it looks. It's always going to be that way. People stay with their own kind.
—John, white Italian male

It's natural that you wouldn't want to socialize with, people that. . . - I'm not saying this is just black and white, but you know, say I'm socializing with our friends and I see a dark-skinned girl. I'm going to want to go up there and talk to her you know. Because, I don't know, like, if I go up to a white girl, I don't know if she's going to react the same way, so I think it's just human nature to socialize with people from your own race.
—Darius, black male

The problem is that people fear change and difference.
—Janice, Latina

Finally, one student explains that he believes it is our natural propensity to classify that propels stereotyping and being attracted to likeness. He describes his disappointment when he discovered that despite the apparent neutrality of

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cyber-communications, these too have been constructed to identify individuals according to pre-designated categories.[6]

> *It's idealistic to believe we would not stereotype. It's part of our nature, permanent, conditioned. At first I thought you could go online and expected this beautiful experience of now I am not going to be judged by how I look, or my skin color. I am just a blinking cursor on your screen and the first question asked is age, sex, location and nationality. This is within the first two sentences of the conversation online. It's like we can't exist without knowing. I don't know what it is about us. It's like I can't talk to you if I don't know what you are. The first question in a chat room is age, sex and location. I don't know whether it's because we're social beings that we have to live by these rules. It's idealistic to think that if we close our ears and exist as a human being with no identity, just our minds being judged but I think we'd all go a little batty in like two minutes because we all need something to ground us. Otherwise we feel out of place.*
>
> —Michael, white and Latino male, self-described as human

Commonly articulated narratives reinforce how we think about one another. Competition is ingrained in the mainstream worldview so that it is difficult to consider alternative options. The data in this section suggest that our ability to change established patterns of intergroup relationships is hindered by a belief in the selfish, individualistic and competitive nature of human beings. This discourse functions to reinforce the status quo, rather than to allow people to believe that caring for one's community, cooperation and generosity might be our natural predisposition. Just imagine the possibilities!

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6. An interesting exploration of this topic can be found in Young (2001). Young describes the disappointment of a growing number of scholars that "rather than curbing racism, cyberspace may be perpetuating racial stereotypes for some users."

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Interracial Marriage and Relationships

This section explores students' views about and experiences with interracial relationships and provides testimony by participants about related conflicts with their parents or friends, in one case, as early as fourth grade. Students discuss how they developed an awareness of societal attitudes and how they negotiate what they perceived to be contradictions.

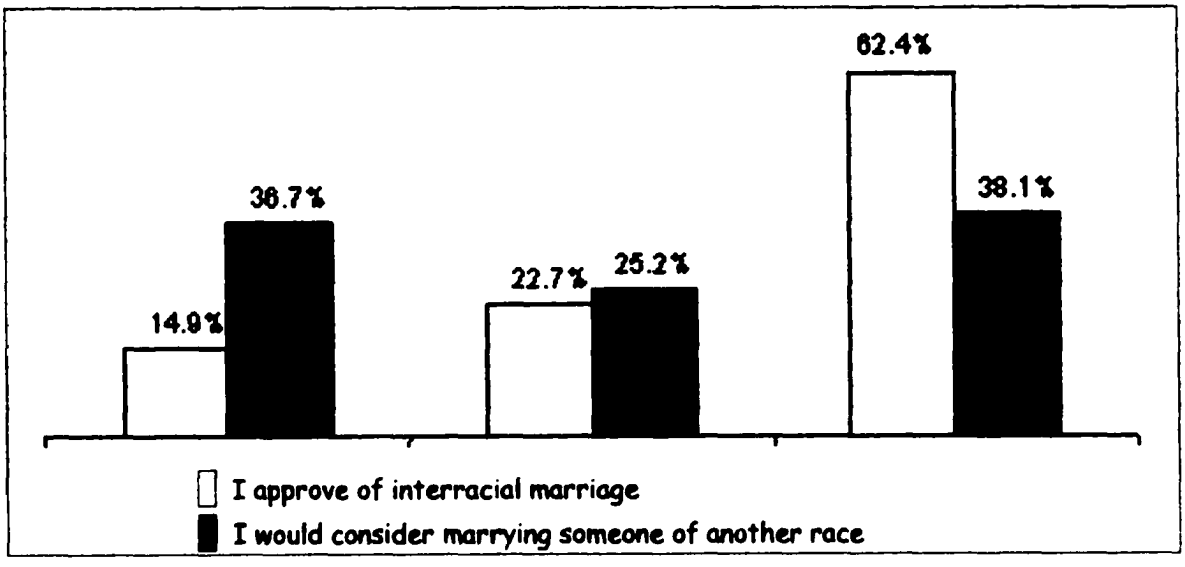

Figure 6.5. Interracial Marriage. Survey Questions: 33 and 35

U.S.-born whites (50.7 percent) *approve* of interracial marriage *significantly less* than all other groups (Latinos, 79.2 percent; Asians, 66.7 percent; U.S.-born blacks, 72.1 percent; foreign-born blacks, 69.8 percent) except for foreign-born whites (47.6 percent). Foreign-born whites *approve* of interracial marriage *significantly less* than Latinos and U.S.-born blacks.

U.S.-born whites (22.8 percent) *disapprove* of interracial marriage *significantly more* than all other groups (Latinos, 4.2 percent; Asians, 7.7 percent;

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U.S.-born blacks, 4.7 percent; foreign-born blacks, 9.5 percent) except for foreign-born whites (15.9 percent). Foreign-born whites dis*approve of interracial marriage significantly more* that Latinos and U.S.-born blacks.

White students (25 percent of U.S.-born and 20.7 percent of foreign-born) *would* consider marrying someone of another race *significantly less* than all other groups (Latinos, 62.5 percent; Asians, 46.2 percent; U.S.-born blacks, 39.5 percent; foreign-born blacks, 44.4 percent). The inverse is also true: white students (50 percent of U.S.-born and 54.9 percent of foreign-born) *would not* consider marrying someone of another race *significantly more* than all other groups (Latinos, 8.3 percent; Asians, 25.6 percent; U.S.-born blacks, 30.2 percent; foreign-born blacks, 19.1 percent).

The above statistics compare to other studies such as national data from a survey conducted by *The Washington Post*, the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation and Harvard University, where 46 percent of whites reported that it was better to marry within one's race. A companion survey found that 4 out of every 10 Americans reported dating outside their race, and nearly 3 out of every 10 Americans reported serious relationships, with higher ratios among younger people (*The Washington Post*, 2001, C2). It is also notable that in the November 2000 election in Alabama, a referendum was posed to repeal a ban on interracial marriage. More than 525,000 voters, about 40 percent of the total electorate, voted to leave this provision as state law. Blacks are more than 20 percent of the

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voting age population and were most likely to have voted to remove the ban. It is therefore probable that the majority of whites (who may have felt they had something to protect and to lose) voted to leave it in place. In fact, in 24 of Alabama's 67 counties, the referendum was voted down (*Black Issues in Higher Education,* 2000/2001, 25). At the same time, the number of mixed-race marriages in the United States as reported in the U.S. Census has increased from 150,000 in 1960 to 1,500,000 in 2000 (*The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, 2001b, 81). Analysis of the Census 2000 data, points to a separate but related issue. Of all U.S. cities, New York City has the largest population of people who said they are of more than one race amounting to approximately 4.9 percent of residents, or 393,959 people. Nationwide, the figure is 2.4 percent (Cheng, 2001, A33).

Interracial relationships appear to be acceptable as an idea but not as a lived reality as the following narratives indicate. They raise several questions such as: What causes the reaction by a white father when a black classmate called his eight-year-old daughter? Why is race an issue when a mother determines whether she approves of a daughter's boyfriend? What are the underlying assumptions and messages inherent in these incidents and why do they exist? How are the "rules" communicated from one generation to another? The following stories provide much to reflect upon.

> *In Queens there were mostly white kids, now that I think of it. There was one Indian kid, one Hispanic kid. I don't remember any black kids. In fourth grade there were a couple of black kids. Summer camp was mixed,*

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there were a lot of black kids there. I didn't know it was called race. I just knew people were different. But I was this little blue-eyed blonde girl and I didn't look at people like, "Oh she's Puerto Rican" or "He's Asian." I'm not like that, I never was. But a lot of people were and I remember this kid that I was friends with. I found out he liked me; I was okay that's so cute. Then my parents found out and they flipped, flipped, flipped. First of all, I was eight years old. Then the whole race thing came out. Oh, God it was bad.

My father was just like crazy. And it's weird cause my father's got a friend who's black. But this is his daughter now. He got really crazy. He said, "Don't bring any niggers in this house." And I was like, what? It wasn't so much a big deal that he was black, it was just that this boy called my house. But then, it wasn't even this boy, it was this black boy, you know! He was like, "No black boys, only white boys for you." As I grew up, they realized I like Hispanic, Asian, white, black, it didn't matter to me.

Where I live it's very mixed. . . . Later on it was like I'm not even talking about getting married, and it's "All right, when you get married and if you have kids", I'm like, "What are you talking about?" "If you have kids, they're not going to know what they are." They're not going to know what they are? "You know, they're not going to know if they're black or white and when they have to check off the thing, they're going to check "other." They're going to feel like a freak." I was trying not to laugh, because they were being real serious. I'm like, "C'mon, you know like, sometimes I feel like checking 'other' because I'm like six nationalities, you know." But I mean, I'm white, so that was big. The whole thing was the kids. It was like, "I don't want your kids to be confused." "I don't want your kids to be picked on." But when I was a kid, I was picked on, because they called me a geek, so they're going to pick on my kids anyway, you know.

—Catherine, white female

The first time it really affected me in my soul? My daughter was dating a black boy, and I liked him, but I wouldn't have been happy if she decided to marry him. Because I just didn't think it would be - I don't know, I totally didn't want it. He was an intelligent boy, he was polite, nice - I didn't think she'd have an easy life being married to a black person.

Yeah, I thought she was having problems, I didn't think she realized how prejudiced the world still was, and what it would mean for her, if she chose to go that way. I felt she was asking for problems by being in a relationship. Externally I was supportive, whatever she wanted was fine. We never talked about it in any kind of real depth. I saw the difference,

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even in family, and so did she, as time went on, she saw the difference in cultural things, and stuff like that. He was a black-Chinese person, so there was a lot of culture in it.

I mean, I'm Jewish, my husband's Italian, and I see there's a difference - I think black, white, Chinese, is too much of a dramatic difference. For me and my husband, I see the difference in a lot of ways. And his mother is Jewish, and he had a very dominant Italian father, and there just are differences, a lot.

—Doreen, white female staff

My sister married a black man, and there were people in my side of the family who did not come to the wedding, simply because of that fact, and that's what her life would be now. Which I don't really understand, because, if it's not really affecting you, why would you choose not to come and celebrate that, especially if you were close, like, maybe a grandfather, I remember my grandfather didn't show up. My father was there.

My father got much more accepting, simply because my father is just always right away negative, very negative towards any differences, but, yeah, with my father, he did come around. But you see it still in little ways, as how he treats their children, because they're divorced now, and my sister has the children, but then again, it could be just how he treats all children, so I don't know. With the people not showing up, it was very interesting, because my grandfather did not show up for the wedding, but then when my grandfather passed away, my sister's husband did accompany her to the funeral, and then also to the family's house afterwards. My uncle, who had hosted the celebration, or sadness, whatever, I don't know, the party afterwards. He was also someone who did not come to the wedding, and yet he seemed to be okay while she brought her husband there, but I think it was much more of a good thing for him, because he seemed more of the bigger person, showing up and saying, you know, it's fine that you didn't come to celebrate our wedding, I'm still here to support my wife and the loss of her grandfather.

I try to understand my own family, which I thought was very maybe, open, especially since my mother had so many children, and they weren't necessarily so orthodox, or you know, we grew up Catholic, so you're supposed to, if someone hurts you, turn the other cheek and not judge someone, let God judge them, and things were very contrary to what we were going to do in church every Sunday. That conflict was very confusing.

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I was around ten, - I grew up in Crown Heights, so I moved to Coney Island, I didn't see a difference because there was a majority of black, and they didn't see a difference with me, because I grew up there - I don't think it was a matter of black and white in that time, I think it was a matter of your wealth - money - yeah, you were all in the same boat, nobody really thought about who was black and who was white, and that was kind of, you know, an equal thing, and then, I went to Coney Island, and the block that I lived on were a lot of Italians, but there was one family of black people that had moved in, and there was a kid that was there, and, like, I never thought about black and white issues, really, before that, and there was a light-skinned black kid that had moved in there, and he was nice-looking, I thought, and I had, like, a crush on him, kind of, and I mentioned it to one of my friends, one of the people I met there, and they were kind of, like, "Oh, you like him?" And then, it kind of made me feel like, "Oh, I'm not supposed to like him?"

That's when it really hit me, like, okay, I guess I'm not supposed to do that, and then it kind of made me hold back from ever saying anything. I felt like I knew my place. You're not supposed to be thinking about a black guy in that way, like as a boyfriend kind of thing, you know? That's what made me feel I'm supposed to only stay with the whites, because in this neighborhood, this is where I belong, I felt very uncomfortable, because I wasn't sure of what, my thoughts were anymore - I wasn't really sure of what I had been feeling, you know, was that right, or is this right?

—Barbara, white female staff

One senses that these women struggled to think through what appeared to be as Barbara described, "contrary." These participants raised issues that included generational and peer pressures and articulated their own ambivalences about how they resolved the tensions they experienced. Each of them seemed to relinquish some of their beliefs in order to co-exist with their families, friends and neighbors. Of them, Catherine was the only one to express herself directly by confronting her father about his attitudes. At the time of this study, she was in her early 20s, whereas Barbara and Doreen were older. This data supports the findings of *The*

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Washington Post survey that indicated greater support for interracial relationships among young people under age 25 (Morin, 2001, A1).

The following comments were provided as students in the focus groups sought to explain differences in the data between the percentage of people who approved of interracial marriage and those who themselves would consider marrying someone of another race.

> *People say they don't mind but they wouldn't do it themselves; it's not for them. They feel that they can get on with their own ethnic group better.*
>
> —Angela, Russian female

> *It's like more of a commitment to say I would do it.*
>
> —Allen, white Jewish male

> *I personally wouldn't care if you married an animal. Personally it's a different story. A lot of things come into play like your parents, they might be of a different religion, and culture comes into play. If you can't get along in your own race, how can you get along with others?*
>
> —Don, white Italian male

> *I would marry someone of a different religion if I don't have to change mine. But then there comes the question of how you raise your kids. You're going to lose something. Well, I'm not going to say you're going to lose something, but it's very hard not to lose certain things when, yeah, you're gaining something too, that's true. It could be you raise your kid as an American but what is it to raise a kid as an American?*
>
> —Tania, white Jewish female

> *It comes down to how people think. I know a lot of people who would probably date somebody of another race or another religion but as she said, parents, or your friends or as I've said before, I date somebody from another race and I've been questioned a lot of times from my family and friends you know. I've got friends who say, "Can't you find somebody from your own race?" So, people still don't accept it. But that's their problem.*
>
> —Jeff, white male

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Interracial marriage and relationships raise many underlying issues. A multitude of assumptions underlie the thinking that leads a father of an eight-year-old to be distraught over his daughter's friendship, and justify his disapproval by framing his concern with questions about the "children." "What will they call themselves?" "How will they know who they are?" "What will they check off on a form?" "They are going to get picked on." This perspective supports the notion that interracial couples ask for a hard life because "the world" is still prejudiced (but not me). "There are just too many cultural differences." A parent can believe that if they are externally supportive, that their real thoughts would not be communicated, "Because we never talked about it." These assumptions are misleading. As Barbara asks, "Why oppose others if they are not hurting you?" When family members choose to "cross the line" the powers of boycott and stigmatization are evident. The capacity of human beings to change their way of thinking, as she describes her father's transition is also apparent. But she also raises the question, "How can one be religious and taught not to judge people and yet turn around and judge them?"

Barbara explains that when she lived in a black neighborhood, she was accepted because of her similar economic status however, when she moved to a white neighborhood she quickly learned the rules of interaction between blacks and whites, such as that it was not acceptable to "like a black guy in that way, as a boyfriend." Barbara describes how that message was communicated to

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her, even without an explicit statement of race, and then appears to question whether she agrees with these rules. The fact that the parameters for interaction were communicated discretely yet explicitly, seems to have had a destabilizing impact on her initial open-mindedness. Her statement that "there was a light-skinned black kid and he was nice-looking" also seems significant. What is the relationship between his complexion, the judgment about his looks and the message she is communicating to us about why she liked him?

Finally, the idea that people in interracial relationships must have had difficulty finding someone of their own race communicates implicit assumptions that interracial relationships are deviant, they are of last resort, and they raise questions about what might be wrong with the involved individuals.

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE?

This section summarizes respondents' beliefs about who should be dealing with issues of diversity. The survey data and focus group discussions provide evidence of ambivalence about whether diversity is important to our society as a whole such that everyone should be involved, or whether it is a marginal concern and should be left to those for whom it is an issue.

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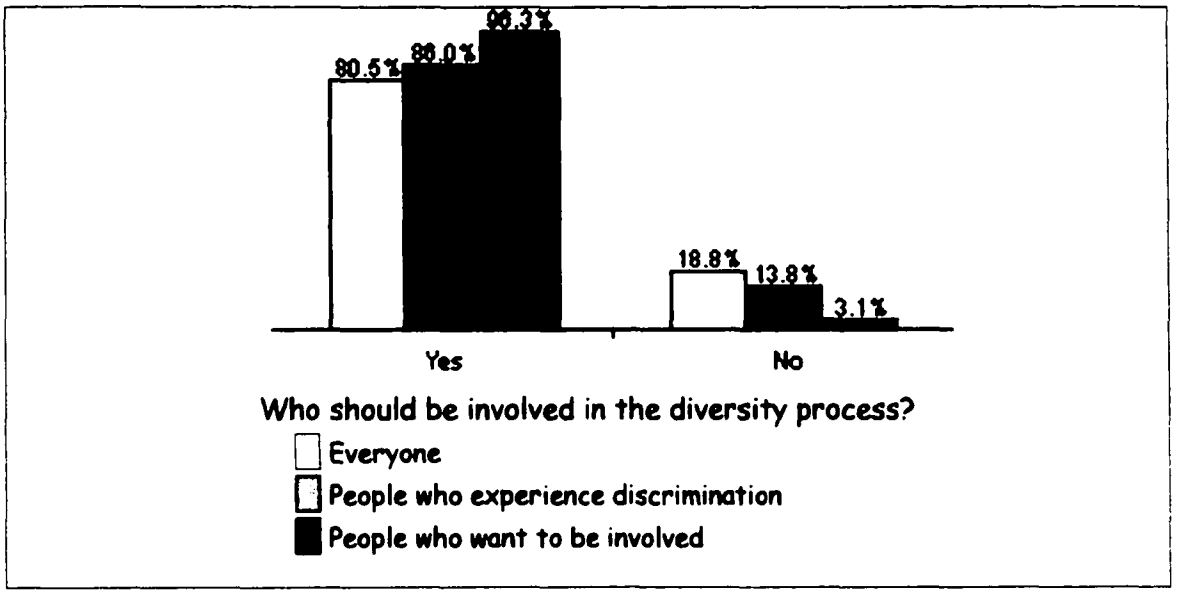

Figure 6.6 The Diversity Process - Who Should Be Involved? Survey Questions: 44 -46

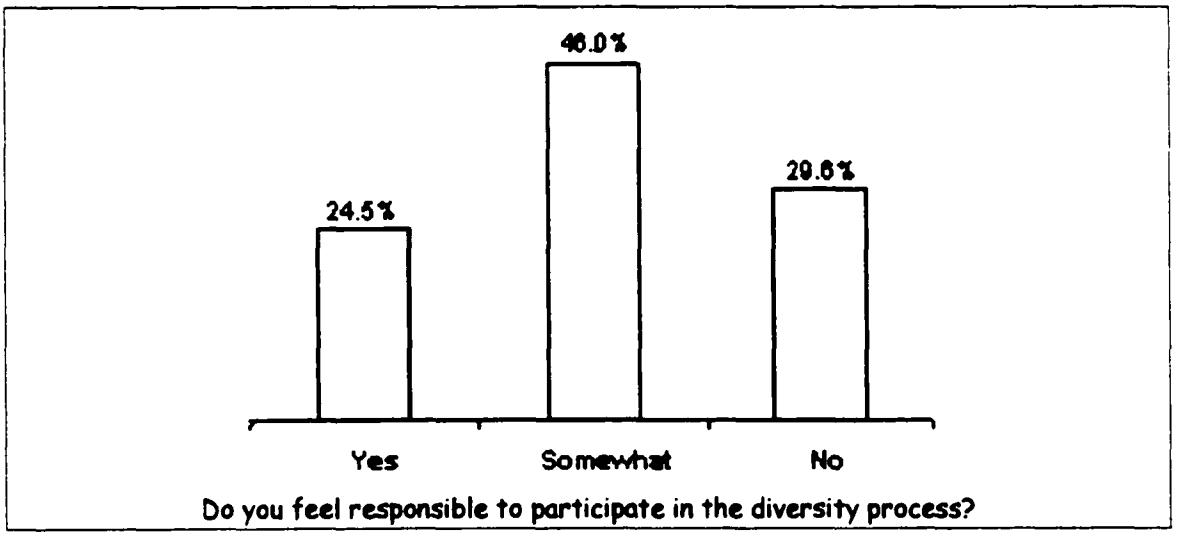

Figure 6.7 The Diversity Process - Do You Feel Responsible? Survey Question: 47

If we compare Figures 6.6 and 6.7, the data appears contradictory. While only 24.5 percent of students indicate they feel personally responsible (see Figure 6.7), 80 percent believed everyone should be involved (see Figure 6.6). Some of the explanations for this discrepancy include the following:

> *I was surprised so many people said they do not feel responsible. I think that 30 percent is all the white people who are less interested in*

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diversifying because they feel everyone should come to us, not that we need to change.

—Thomas, white male staff

Right, if I don't see a problem, nothing is wrong, so why should I change.

—Lori, white female staff

These comments demonstrate awareness that if whites do not feel negatively impacted by race, they would not see a reason to do something about racial inequality. These comments presume a white perspective but also provide an opening for dialogue. Participants express an understanding of why whites would not be concerned; yet they seem to understand why they should be. Figure 6.8 provides an overview of responses about how much emphasis should be placed on various actions within the Brooklyn College Diversity Initiative.

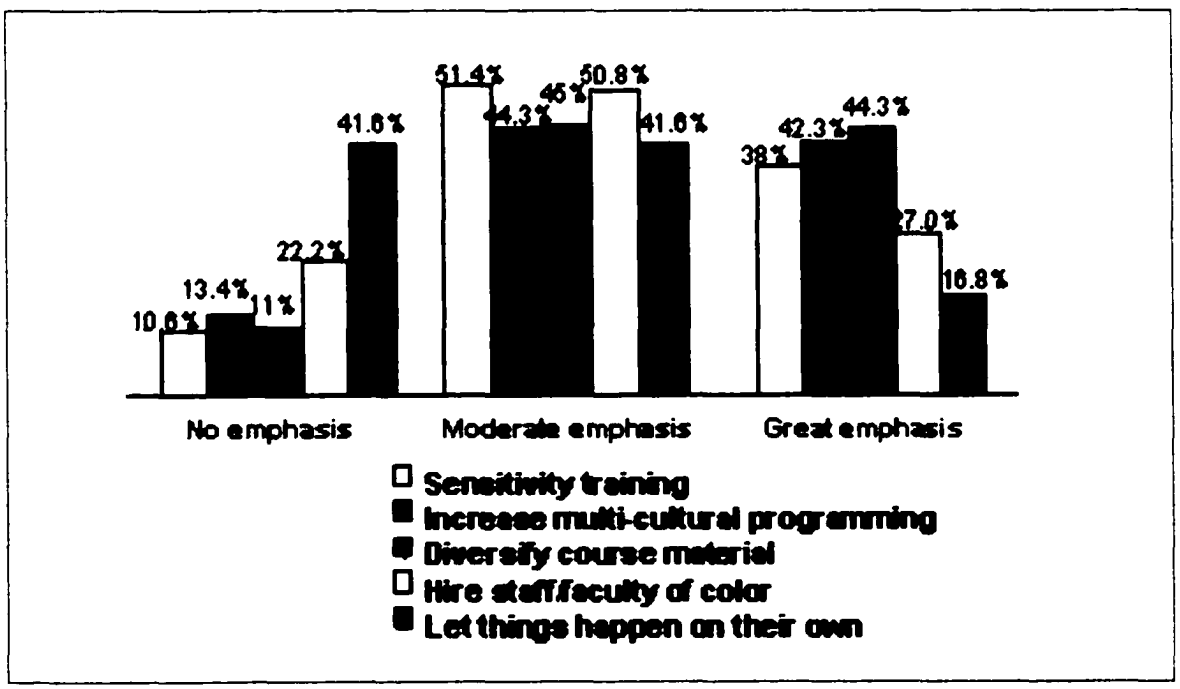

Figure 6.8 Where Should Emphasis be Placed in the Brooklyn College Diversity Initiative?

Survey Questions: 38 - 42

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White students *less* so than all other students, believed that emphasis should be placed on *hiring staff and faculty of color*. The specific breakdown by race can be found in Table 6.1 below.

	No	Moderate	Great
Latinos	14.6%	41.7%	41.7%
Asians	18.0%	43.6%	30.8%
U.S.-born Blacks	4.7%	41.9%	41.9%
Foreign-born Blacks	7.9%	41.3%	46.0%
U.S.-born Whites	30.9%	53.7%	11.0%
Foreign-born Whites	29.3%	53.7%	12.2%

Table 6.1 How Much Emphasis Should Be Placed on Hiring Faculty/Staff of Color? Response by Race

White students' responses also revealed they believed *less* than all other students that emphasis should be placed on *multicultural programming* as illustrated in Table 6.2 below:

	No	Moderate	Great
Latinos	8.3%	31.3%	58.3%
Asians	7. 7%	30.8%	51.3%
U.S.-born Blacks	4.7%	20.9%	65.1%
Foreign-born Blacks	4.8%	23.8%	69.8%
U.S.-born Whites	19.1%	55.2%	19.1%
Foreign-born Whites	17.1%	54.9%	19.5%

Table 6.2 How Much Emphasis Should Be Placed on Multicultural Programming? Response by Race

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As seen in Table 6.3 below, white students believed significantly *less* than black and Latino students that *great* emphasis should be placed on *diversifying course material.*

	No	Moderate	Great
Latinos	10.4%	35.4%	52.1%
Asians	7.7%	35.9%	46.2%
U.S.-born Blacks	4.7%	25.6%	60.5%
Foreign-born Blacks	6.4%	27.0%	61.9%
U.S.-born Whites	16.9%	52.2%	27.9%
Foreign-born Whites	8.5%	54.9%	29.3%

Table 6.3 **How Much Emphasis Should Be Placed on Diversifying Course Material?** Response by Race

In response to these data, one focus group participant said:

I was surprised that blacks think more emphasis should be placed on diversifying course material but then realized why they would think that way. The significant differences between groups meant that whites just never thought about this, so they answered no. They just assume that the books are accurate, and don't read critically whereas blacks may have thought a lot about it. Now that I think of it, the Core 4[7] history book is all about European history, and so is the Art core. It's not something you think about. I guess, how would you feel if you were left out of history?

—Andrew, white male

Two additional specific significant differences between groups include:

- White students (U.S.-born, 19.9 percent; foreign-born, 18.3 percent) believed significantly *more* than U.S.-born black students (4.7 percent) that emphasis should be placed on *letting things happen on their own;*

7. Core 4: "Shaping the Modern World" is "A broad survey course of at least three credits in world history after 1700 or the history of Western civilization after 1700 (*Brooklyn College,* 1994, 79).

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- U.S.-born white students (19.9 percent) believed significantly *more* than foreign-born black students (11.1 percent) that emphasis should be placed on *letting things happen on their own;* and

- U.S.-born white students (33.1 percent) believed significantly *less* than foreign-born black students (52.4 percent) that emphasis should be placed *on sensitivity training.*

The differences in perspectives between white students and all other students about the need to take action may infuse a sense of hopelessness about the possibilities for engaging whites in dialogue and action related to racialized dynamics of power that structure institutions of higher education. "One of the biggest obstacles to progress in race relations today is white people's denial of the continuing need for significant changes and the existence of biased policies and procedures" (Challenger, 2000, 10). However, white's awareness of poverty and racial inequality can provide opportunities to initiate discussions of ways that racism is structured in systemic patterns. In one study about the impact of dialogue on breaking through the obstacle of white people's general denial of the continuing need for changes, it was found that:

> *Interestingly enough, this was achieved not by trying to insist that we are all alike and share the same set of beliefs. Instead we were able to move toward greater understanding and unity by allowing for the expression of different experiences and perspectives. Students were able to express, question and challenge different interpretations of experiences and situations* (Challenger, 2000, 10).

In this way, academia can provide opportunities for open discussions about divergent everyday experiences and support critical analysis about global dynamics of power.

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These results have been found in other studies as well and clearly indicate:

> *Opportunities for interaction between and among student group. . . produce clear increases in understanding and decreases in prejudicial attitudes. Such opportunities also positively affect academic success. Serious engagement of issues of diversity in the curriculum and in the classroom has a positive impact on attitudes toward racial issues, on opportunities to interact in deeper ways with those who are different, on cognitive development and on overall satisfaction and involvement with the institution* (Smith et al., 1997, v-vii).

With an understanding of the mechanisms that reproduce the pattern whereby whites do not recognize the need for personal and institutional commitment to diversity, we can intervene to heighten understanding of dominance and subordination on a broad scale.

Of Race's Rules

In discussions about interracial interaction and colorblindness, students express an acute awareness of implicit rules governing their relationships that are often framed as human nature and communicated as something intransigent. Participants say that they learned the rules by observing and listening to their parents, through community responses to various events and discussions with friends. They were taught who they could associate with and under what circumstances.

Most white respondents say that they did not talk about these lessons as they learned them and articulate ambivalence about what was "right." They are aware of stereotypes but feel they didn't allow them to inform their own thinking. They

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articulate definite opinions about what they think is possible in relationships between groups and did not seem to think "outside of the box."

They believe that the visible diversity of the student body at Brooklyn College does not necessarily reflect a deep intertwining of people's lives. For the most part, they seem willing to accept this pattern either as natural or "just the way things are." They articulate an awareness of divergent opinions between groups but did not seem troubled enough to seek an understanding of the differences.

While contact itself does not appear to do harm or intensify the divergence of opinions or perspectives, it does not *de facto* erode the separation of views and lack of understanding about why people have different perspectives and the experiences that underlie various points of view. Prejudices do not necessarily shift even with awareness that they may be stereotypes. Students conduct business with each other, just as people do within the work world or within public interactions. Just as one learns not to discuss politics or religion, one learns the boundaries in discussions about justice, poverty or inequality. (Perhaps these parameters were not set; we would have to reckon with race and class in the context of our nation's democratic ideals).

Relationships are established and maintained instrumentally. People interact with each other to get things done. But the limits are present as an undertone as people get to know one another. Associations are generally of a pragmatic nature,

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so by necessity people conduct themselves with propriety and good manners.[8] As Joan, a white female points out: "It's kind of like, unconscious, the way you act."

Students seem to believe they socialize with people from their own group because that is whom they feel most "comfortable" with and where they feel understood. They say it is easier to communicate, more familiar, and more natural. You don't have to spend time trying to understand each other, you simply do. In business, one has less of a choice about whom you interact with. You can socialize with people at work, but not be friends. For whites, the fear of rejection exists, as does the concern that a comment or a joke would be viewed as racist.

It appears that people stay within the same friendship circles in which they grew up. One is raised, "to keep to one's own." At the same time, participants emphasized the importance of socializing, learning about cultures other than one's own, appealing to customers, knowing how to relate to different people. Several students felt that we as a society need to be more assertive and take advantage of opportunities for interaction that could decrease tension such as classes and block programs that put students of different backgrounds together.

The lack of substantive contact appears to reinforce blinders, and supports the dominant narratives about human nature that justify why people stick to their "own kind." Children are taught the rules and the consequences of interaction with

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8. From an illuminating conversation with Professor Donald Robotham, CUNY Graduate School and University Center. Department of Anthropology. 4 December 2000.

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different people as they grow into adults. One does not bring home people of another race; your parents won't like it or will not allow it. Recall the incidents with Michael Stewart, Yusuf Hawkins . . . .We don't want "that" to happen here. There is an underlying fear of being involved with something so horrendous, so one never crosses the line, or not much, at least. The "rules" emphasize that one can interact with anyone on campus, but you should go home to socialize with your own group. That's the rules.

Everyday lived experiences maintain moments of heightened awareness as a simply moments rather than, what I see as their potential, the development of a full understanding of the social dynamics that keep people separated. It is acceptable to acknowledge injustice and inequality, but without the everyday negative experiences of race, and with the bombardment of media shaping the discourse, whites tend to accept structural arguments but act individually. For them, their individual experience teaches them that if they play their cards right, if they don't question the status quo, at least they can make it. They may feel a little guilty but they are not going to act on it, because they have been told time and time again, "Things are not going to change." In the end they conclude, "What can I do anyway, and for now this works for me."

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CHAPTER 7 - THEORIZING POVERTY AND RACIAL PRIVILEGE

The agony of the poor impoverishes the rich; the betterment of the poor enriches the rich. We are inevitably our brother's keeper because we are our brother's brother. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly.

——Martin Luther King, Jr. 1967 (Mazel, 1998, 114)

This chapter examines students' attitudes about poverty, equality, and opportunity in the United States and their underlying beliefs about race. The first section, "Theorizing Poverty" explores the extent to which students believe all people have an equal chance for success, their explanations for why poverty exists and why some people are poor and others are not. "Caring for the Common Good Versus Everyone Out for Themselves" documents participants' perspectives on the role of media, about education as a right, and their attitudes toward the criminal justice system. These three arenas provide points of reference for discussions of individual and social rights, privileges, and responsibilities. The section on "Opportunity, Equality and Fairness" examines students' beliefs about whether society has responsibility to take measures to equalize opportunity, and the degree to which discourse on individual responsibility is internalized. As a whole the chapter analyzes how students understand inequality and whether the theoretical framework of the culture of poverty is still operative.

THEORIZING POVERTY

Why does poverty exist and how can it be eradicated? Do we have collective responsibility for the well being of all members of society, or solely

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individual responsibility for our own quality of life? Is inequality racially organized in our society? Focus group responses to these questions were not monolithic. Discussions were animated as students struggled to articulate their thoughts. While most students believe that acceptable and significant progress has been made to address racial inequality, several students feel the U.S. has achieved full equality. These sentiments are expressed in the following quotes:

> *In the past definitely whites were privileged, but things have evened out greatly over time. I don't think it's 100 percent yet, but it's very close, if anything, 51 or 49 percent even.*
>
> —Allen, white male

> *It's pretty much even, if not close nowadays. Maybe twenty years ago I would say differently, but there are a lot of new programs that have come out, just to help out, like affirmative action.*
>
> — Helen, white female

The above comments parallel the findings of a recent study conducted by *The Washington Post*, the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, and Harvard University as discussed in chapter one. In a national poll, they found that 40 to 60 percent of all whites say that the average black American fares equally or better in terms of jobs, incomes, schooling and healthcare than the average white person. However, government statistics show that while the gap has narrowed, blacks continue to lag behind significantly in many or most categories. Such perceptions by whites are indeed misperceptions (Morin, 2001, A01; Freeman, 2001, C3).

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A summary of the results of this national survey asserted that these mistaken beliefs lead to political positions that do not support measures to equalize opportunity. This makes sense, for if one does not believe that inequality exists, why support actions aimed at making things more fair? In fact, the gap in the standard of living between blacks and whites is far from closed. Fifty percent of all whites said that the average black is as well off as the average white in terms of their job, yet one-third of all whites hold professional or managerial jobs, compared to one-fifth of all blacks. Blacks are more than twice as likely as whites to be unemployed and the poverty rate for blacks is more than double the rate for whites (Morin, 2001, A01).

This same gap in perception was evident in a survey conducted in the spring of 2000 by *The New York Times*. When asked who had a better chance of getting ahead, 58 percent of whites versus 39 percent of blacks thought the playing field was now level. Similarly, 32 percent of whites versus 57 percent of blacks said that whites still had advantages (Sack and Elder, 2000, A1). Paul Street's analysis of the "White Fairness Understanding Gap" cites six factors that he feels contribute to these misunderstandings. These include an American educational curriculum notoriously conservative on questions of social, racial and economic justice; the lack of exposure of whites to the everyday realities of African Americans; media distortions that exaggerate affluence among blacks; neighborhood and school segregation; pragmatic

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reasons for denying structural causes for inequality; and the general weakness of the political left such that progressive politics are viewed as a zero-sum game (Street, 2001, 9).

Most students in this research project were convinced that poverty continues to and will always exist despite their feelings that progress had been made. Some had more difficulty explaining why this is the case, and what we might do about it; others did not.

> *There's always going to be poor people. It's not possible for everybody to have everything. It's a proven fact. I don't agree, but I think there's always going to be some people who are poor, some people who are rich, and then like there's always going to be that scale. So many people are lazy. They don't want to work and say, "Oooh, welfare will pay for us" or "Let's have another kid so we can get more money." It's very frustrating to me. They're just lazy.*
>
> —Daniel, white male

> *People become content in poverty. That's how they lived and maybe they wish they could be rich, but if that's how they are going to be and they're surviving, they're content. I don't agree about credit cards being a trap. You know, a person puts himself in that position if you don't have control.*
>
> —Gerda, white female

> *Poverty is not a new issue. It's always been around. There's been a poor class, middle class, upper-middle class and it's just a cycle of society. We have poor people and rich people. If people move a class up, the rich move another class up and they're still back in the same situation. The middle class moves another middle up, and the same amount of money goes to them that goes to everyone.*
>
> —Michelle, white female

> *There's always going to be poor people, but the amount may vary. A lot of working-class or middle class people worry about getting a paycheck every week so they can survive. If they don't, they're right under the poverty level, then they're in poverty. There's a lot more people like that now.*
>
> —Talia, Latina

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Some students suggest that they thought inequality would always exist and they were confident about some of the reasons why this is the case.

There is poverty because there is complacency.

—Allen, white male

When you're poor, you can get grants. If you're smart, and if you really want what you want, you can show that you work for it and you can get money for it. Money shouldn't be the thing that holds you back.

—Joanne, white Italian female

It's all about choice, both self-control and the ability to make decisions.

—Daniel, white male

There's no way to eliminate poverty 100 percent but in the high 90s. It's possible because everybody, not everybody, but the majority of people, have an opportunity to go to school and make something of their lives. Some people just don't care, they sit back, and they seem like perfectly healthy people just sitting there with nothing better to do, like trying to go to school, even joining the army, doing something with their lives. You have immigrants that come from other countries and within five to ten years, they're basically living a good lifestyle, making something of their lives. Some people get complacent with what they have; they don't care.

—Don, white male

It was evident that some students felt uncomfortable blaming people for being poor and alluded to concerns about society's responsibility. Several felt that more people are just a step away from being poor than we, as a society, might like to acknowledge. They were cautious about placing full blame on individuals for their life circumstances.

Some people take advantage of welfare but I also don't think we can judge "If you're on welfare, you're lazy."

—Janice, Latina

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I wasn't targeting the people who are poor. There's a difference between poverty and being poor. Somebody who is poor is living in their circumstances, but the example used regarding the poverty person as the person who just sits there for twenty years, they get comforted with a welfare check, because they don't care about anything.

—Angela, white female

Sometimes people are irresponsible about their lives and that's how things happen. Some people being poor is not their fault, but other people, like if you spend all your money on drugs, you have no money left, you're bankrupt and then you're homeless, then it was your fault. Society isn't responsible. You can't change it; it's just luck. You have to work as hard as you can.

—Catherine, white female

You have to be in the right place at the right time, there's no fairness in that. How can you control luck?

—John, white male

Some students placed the discussion of poverty within a global and historical context and expressed a self-conscious awareness of privilege and disadvantage, though not explicitly framed in these terms.

There's always gonna be that degree of poverty, but definitely in the last couple of years, the quality of life for poor people has risen a great deal, Take a poor person from this country and a poor person from Mexico or from some third-world country, it's much different. It's a much different story. Americans today put their standards in different things. Everyone wants to own a Lexus, so, if you don't own a car you're considered poor. You are setting the standards that have been raised a lot.

—Allen, white male

People take things for granted here. As much as people complain, if you are in another country, even if you are poor, you have less chances of getting success in another country than you do here, if you're poor. There's a lot of ways you can get money, you can get grants, or whatever, I think we find ways to complain when we don't sit down and realize that maybe things are good. Look at the good side of things instead of finding out what's wrong with them.

—Gerda, white female

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We're making more money but our expenses are so much higher that you're actually poorer. People in the Sixties actually had a lot more money than we have now.

—Joan, white female

Within these discussions about poverty arose the issues of what should be done to address inequality, by whom and whether we, as a society, are responsible for the well being of all people. Terry, a white female, explains that nothing will happen because no one wants to do it:

Poverty is here and it always will be here because so few people want to deal with it. So many people are willing to judge, "Oh, you're poor, you're a lazy bum, and you take welfare." A lot of people will much easier judge poor people instead of trying to see what the problems are, where it stems from, and everything like that. There's a very few people who have made differences. But I don't think there are a lot of people out there who are willing to actually take a lot of time out.

Other students take the position that something should be done and that we do have responsibility for each other:

There's so little done about poverty. Some people just don't care, and say "okay those people are poor and on welfare." But I totally disagree. I think it's good to have job fairs to get them jobs. You have to educate the poor otherwise they really don't know how to change. Don't just give me food stamps, but tell me how I can change who I am. How can I change the cycle that's been happening from generation to generation? My father did the same thing so I'm going to do the same thing. You have to educate. It's not a matter of them being lazy, it's the matter that they're poor and they can't move up in the world unless someone helps them.

—Joanne, white female

I definitely agree with the educational factor because even people who go to prison and are supposed to be rehabilitated, but a lot of them just go back to doing what they were doing because they were never really educated in prison. It's the same thing with poverty.

—Talia, Latina

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The issue of financial management, the use of credit cards and personal responsibility arose frequently. Students appeared ambivalent about whether they thought individual weaknesses or the system should be blamed for why poor people are poor and rich people are rich. They alternated between holding individuals responsible for their own fate and acknowledging structural factors that make upward mobility difficult. This ambivalence is reflected as follows:

> *People are put out in the world and never really taught how to manage their money. There was no guidebook to get out of your situation. A lot of people, especially the young generation, when they get out there, the first thing is that they get a Visa card or some credit that automatically puts their life in debt. Half of them don't even have a job when they come out of high school. How do you expect to pay the bills? How do you expect to get out of your situation and these companies are giving you the Visa card?*
>
> —Terry, white female

> *It is mostly for their benefit, because they make money off it. They're allowing you to spend this amount of their money. They say "their" money. In reality it's not their money because the people who have paid off, that borrowed before, they get their money to lend you from the other people who paid off and you're spending that money and they charge you interest. It's a lot of interest they expect you to pay and a lot of people can't afford sometimes to pay it back, because they're not rich and there's not much effort on how to get out of debt, how to get out of your situation.*
>
> —Daniel, white male

> *Once you're in a poverty level, the working poor, it's very difficult to improve your lifestyle. You're working, and your spouse is working, and you're both working at minimum wage. You have rent to pay and if you have children you have to pay childcare. Especially single working women, single parents because their jobs are considered women's work, they don't get paid comparable to a man. Like 62 percent of people living at poverty level are single mothers. There's a statistic that says if they were paid comparable to what men were paid, half of them would no longer be in poverty level. When you're at that level, you don't have proper healthcare, and your expenses are so high, it's very difficult to get a better lifestyle.*
>
> —Joan, white female

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It makes me wish I had the power to cure it all. I know I can't, I'm just gonna have to sit there and take it.

—Karen, white female

These comments reflect awareness about systemic barriers to upward mobility. At the same time students felt that to look out for all means everyone gets pulled down. While they expressed concerns about poverty and inequality, they also spoke abcut how they themselves were struggling just to survive.

I try and take care of myself, but there are always these issues. I wish somebody would do something about it. People sit here and say, "Why don't YOU do something about it" and nothing will get done. Everyone does have their own life, and you only have so much time and energy that you could put into helping everyone else. If you try to help everyone out, and no one helps you, and it's like you're supposed to have this feeling like, "Oh, I helped all these people out, I feel good." Meanwhile, you're laying there homeless. That's not right. So I'm saying, I definitely look out for myself first. And then, I'll look out for everyone else.

—John, white male

The above comment illustrates a concern about personal vulnerability that supercedes a concern for the well being of all. Several students expressed the notion that by caring for others one's own quality of life declines. The belief in a zero-sum balance of resources is apparent.

Simultaneously, these quotes indicate an awareness of the ways that we are *all* affected by social inequality. With few exceptions, poverty was described in abstract terms and naturalized as something that "just is" rather than something that we participate in maintaining.

It also has to do with your financial status, because my mother lives in Coney Island that is Latin, black and pretty much more. I feel very safe with her there, because they, as a community, will look out for my mother.

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She's a little old white lady, but they look out for each other, and that has to do with financial status. The community, they're all in the same boat kind-of-thing, just like when I was living in Crown Heights. It wasn't a color thing, because they were all in the same boat. They're sharing a common experience. I think it had to do more with now you're an upper-class white or whatever, a middle-class white as opposed to being in the poverty line - everybody's poor together, you know. And then when you're financially better off, it becomes an issue of, how do I get ahead.

This research is trying to see whether people can get to that point of understanding. All of us folks together here, in whichever segment, have a lot more in common, but because the way that we've been trained, is number one, not to see the whole context, to see all the individual interactions as injustice is being caused upon us, and not see some of even, the economics. Blacks may be more willing to accept a job at $8.47 - because I know among the white staff, who I've dealt with, people realize that by working here, you're taking a lower pay than you may if you go to Manhattan. Of course, constantly, white students will say, "Oh, you're only paying whatever, $5.15? Forget it! I'm not going to work there, I can easily get $8, $9, $10, $12 an hour." Whereas for the black or Latino they say, "Well, at least it's a job."

—Barbara, white female staff

It appears that while inequality may seem to be a mysterious aspect of our society, disconnected from economic powers and structural dominance, it is apparent that people have some understanding of the class dynamics that contribute to unequal circumstances based on racialized patterns in our society.

"Historically, race and racial divisions have been fomented in order to keep people from realizing the political, or class nature of persistent poverty in the United States" (Kushnick and Jennings, 1999, 6).[1] The impact of "the racialization of poverty has historically been to politically delegitimize and pacify the grievances

1. For a thorough examination of the role of race in the perpetuation of poverty, see Kushnick and Jennings (1999); Jennings (1994); and Hartman (2001).

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of the poor" (Kushnick and Jennings, 1999, 6). "One way of illustrating the complex political and economic factors in relation to poverty and race is to examine poverty in the international arena. If the behavior of poor people is the major cause of their impoverishment, then we can reasonably expect poverty in the United States to be unique" (Kushnick and Jennings, 1999, 7). (Either that, or we have a global crisis in motivation). The next section discusses this issue in detail.

RACIAL INEQUALITY

The question of how to explain poverty was addressed slightly differently when students were specifically asked about *racial* inequality.

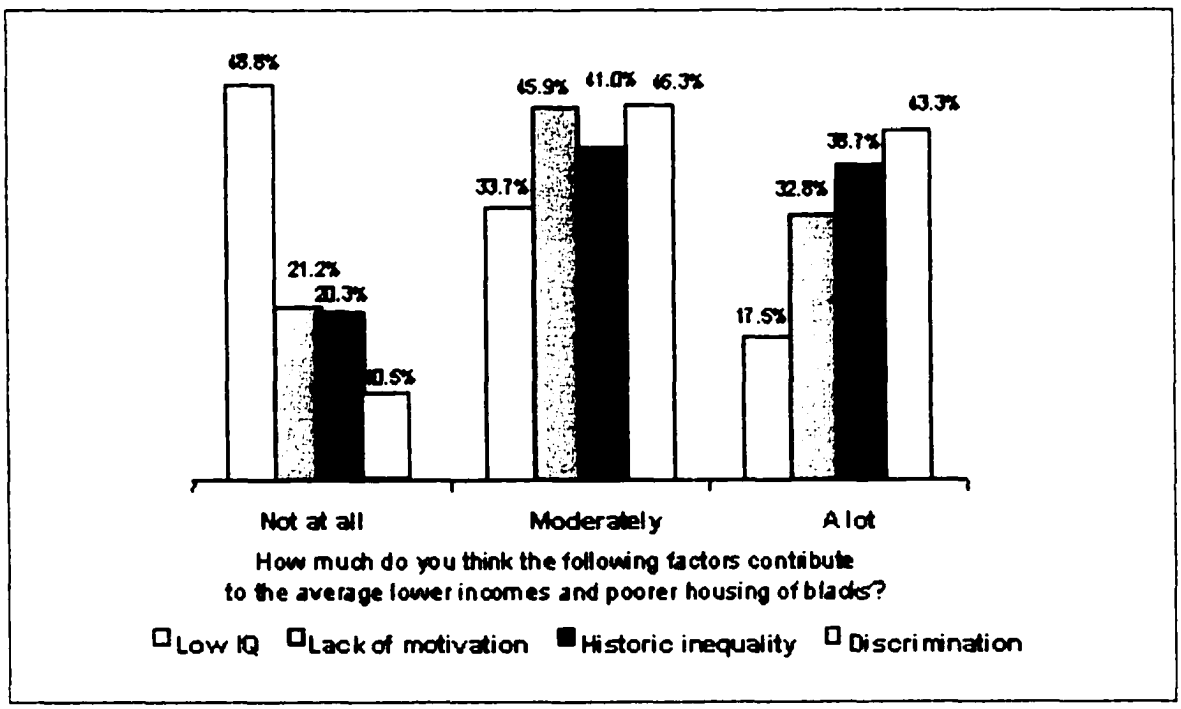

Figure 7.1 Factors Contributing to Racial Inequality. Survey Questions: 15-18

The statistically significant differences between groups in the beliefs about the role of discrimination are reflected in the Table 7.1.

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	Not at All	Moderately	A lot
Latinos	8.3%	43.8%	45.8%
Asians	7.7%	38.5%	43.6%
U.S.-born Blacks	0.0%	48.8%	48.8%
Foreign-born Blacks	0.0%	19.1%	71.4%
U.S.-born Whites	11.8%	54.4%	29.4%
Foreign-born Whites	19.5%	57.3%	18.3%

Table 7.1 Factors Contributing to Racial Inequality: Discrimination / Response by Race

Foreign-born whites believe significantly *less* often than any other group that *discrimination* contributes to racial inequality; foreign-born blacks believe *more* so than any other group. U.S.-born whites believe *less* often than all blacks that *discrimination* contributes. Statistically significant differences between responses related to historic inequality are reflected in Table 7.2.

	Not at all	Moderately	A lot
Latinos	20.8%	41.7%	35.4%
Asians	7.7%	38.5%	46.2%
U.S.-born Blacks	7.0%	32.6%	55.8%
Foreign-born Blacks	11.1%	25.4%	55.6%
U.S.-born Whites	25.7%	43.4%	26.6%
Foreign-born Whites	26.8%	42.7%	25.6%

Table 7.2 Factors Contributing to Racial Inequality: Historic Inequality / Response by Race

All whites believed *less* often than Asians and blacks that *historic inequality* contributes to racial inequality. As with *The Washington Post* survey, these results suggest an overwhelming sense among most whites that in this day and age, society

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could not possibly be saddled with segregation and discrimination. Things can not possibly be as bad as black Americans say they are (Keith Reeves of Swarthmore College, as quoted in Morin, 2001, A01).

These statistics are consistent with findings of a National Opinion Research Center survey in 1990 that asked, "On the average, African Americans have worse jobs, income and housing than white people. Do you think these differences are mainly due to discrimination?" To this question, fifty-eight percent responded no; thirty-five percent responded yes. Fourteen percent believed this to be mainly due to "less in-born ability to learn," and forty-two percent attributed this to a lack of motivation or willpower to pull themselves out of poverty.[2]

While there were no statistically significant differences among those who attributed the differential socioeconomic status of blacks versus whites to IQ, many students in the focus groups were surprised that 17.5 percent of survey respondents thought IQ contributed a lot. Interestingly, these statistics parallel those in national surveys, where 17 percent of the white population have said they believe in black genetic inferiority. That comprises 34 million white Americans, or approximately equal to the size of the entire black population (Wise, 2000). This is quite a sizable number, not to be dismissed. However, this perspective does not seem unusual in an environment where people such as President Francis Lawrence of Rutgers University in 1995 stated that he supported affirmative action because

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disadvantaged blacks didn't have the "genetic, hereditary background" to score well on tests (Tolerance.org, 2001b) and where *The Bell Curve* became a bestseller.

Students addressed the issue of why racial inequality persists in several ways. Some felt that environmental factors are just too difficult to overcome. Others thought that individual and group weaknesses led to their impoverishment. Still others communicated that they were unsure or ambivalent. They wanted to believe that the United States should and does provide for all people, yet they observed contradictions. There was general agreement about this ideal although when the discussion turned to concrete measures being taken, students were significantly less willing to do something about unequal circumstances. It appeared that they were worried they might lose what they had themselves even though they had compassion for the challenges faced by people of color, due to racism:

> *As long as African-Americans are living in bad neighborhoods, scoring statistically lower on SATs because of their environment, because there is constant crime in the area, then that's definitely bad. It's detrimental to their development and what's going to happen? They are going to die and the government doesn't care.*
>
> —John, mixed male

> *I heard that there were some black people who go on an interview for a certain job and they weren't able to get it because of their race. They do have the same achievements and basically same accomplishments as the other person. But then again, that's why I think they did construct affirmative action, to help people. That's why a lot of Ivy League schools, you know, in Columbia, they always accept a certain percentage of minorities, 5 or 10 percent, I'm not sure.*
>
> —Sam, white male

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2. The National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago conducts routine surveys for the General Social Survey Project (1998, Question 266).

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It is much harder for someone who is poor to move up and become a lawyer or something like that. People who are rich, they have it so easy because they have the connections, and the money to go to schools. There's also so much ignorance in the world. There's so much prejudice, it can bring people down. You can't help it, but it does bring people down. Especially when you're poor, I think that's the hardest thing.

—Terry, white female

It's definitely harder. We've come so far like affirmative action. Some people are against it, some people are for it; it's really good. It's so much harder for some people than others.

—Joanne, white female

I was shocked that so many people still look to IQ as an explanation for inequality but not surprised about lack of motivation. Why would you have motivation if you constantly face challenges? People agree that there is unequal treatment but say that everyone can be assimilated. They realize they can be assimilated unequally, but at least they are at the table.

—Andrew, white male

People are not aware of what is going on; they haven't experienced it.

—Donna, black female

My parents worked two jobs, so do I, and so do my friends. Everyone is pissed and feeling screwed and everyone is blaming everyone else.

—Angelo, white male

Most differences between groups relate to economic discrimination. Most whites would agree with African Americans on the issue of police brutality because it does not differ on the basis of an economic inequality.

—Bert, white male faculty member

The survey data also reflect a perspective, especially among foreign-born whites in slightly greater degree than U.S.-born whites that discrimination is not as prevalent as people of color portray it to be. They seemed to feel that if you try, you can get ahead and individual self-pity leads to failure. This point of view is reflected in the following comments.

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It's the individual. You can have somebody that lives next door to somebody else and they're both black and they're both on the same level. They're both poor and both in the same school but this one has that, like, drive. So he's going to become whatever he wants. The other one's going to be like, "Well, I'm black so there's not much I can do."

—John, white male

You can sit there and beat yourself up about it, that's not going to do anything. You get angry because you're black and you think society is keeping you down.

—Catherine, white female

Many students readily acknowledge that there isn't equality but do feel there should be. They agree that everyone should be given a fair chance but less so that measures should being taken to equalize opportunity. They worry that if something were done, they themselves would be treated unfairly. They are afraid that they were having a hard enough time as it is and couldn't bear additional pressure whether economic or social. While not explicitly stated, this perspective alludes to the role of race in the persistent patterns of inequality, and explains why whites often assert a belief in the principles of equality and justice but to a lesser degree support measures taken to ensure those chances, because of their own feelings of vulnerability. This conflict is illustrated by the following:

The data is conflicting. It says if you work hard you can make it but discrimination is the main reason why you can't make it.

—Liz, Asian female staff

Why do you keep saying perpetuation when you should say persistence of inequality? There is a difference. The difference is the victimization mentality of African Americans. They see racism where nobody else will because they have internalized the notion that they are inferior. The focus should not be only on why whites have these attitudes. There is a

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gap between whites' and blacks' attitudes. If you want to explain the gap, the attitudes of both sides must be investigated.

—Bert, white male faculty member

The tension about where to place responsibility was prevalent, as was the belief that current patterns of social relations are eternal yet the issue of causality rarely arose. The vision of a world where everyone's needs matter was never considered. This naturalization of poverty and narrow sense of possibilities form two mechanisms that reinforce patterns of inequality and undermine our ability to challenge an unequal system.

UNEQUAL TREATMENT BUT AN EQUAL CHANCE AT SUCCESS?

Another apparent divergence between the recognition that not everyone is treated equally and the belief that everyone has a fair chance to succeed is reflected in the following data (Figure 7.2). Only 8.9 percent of all respondents felt that people of color are treated equally to whites when applying for jobs and housing and when approached by the police. However, 42.8 percent believed that all people, regardless of color, can be assimilated into U.S. mainstream society.

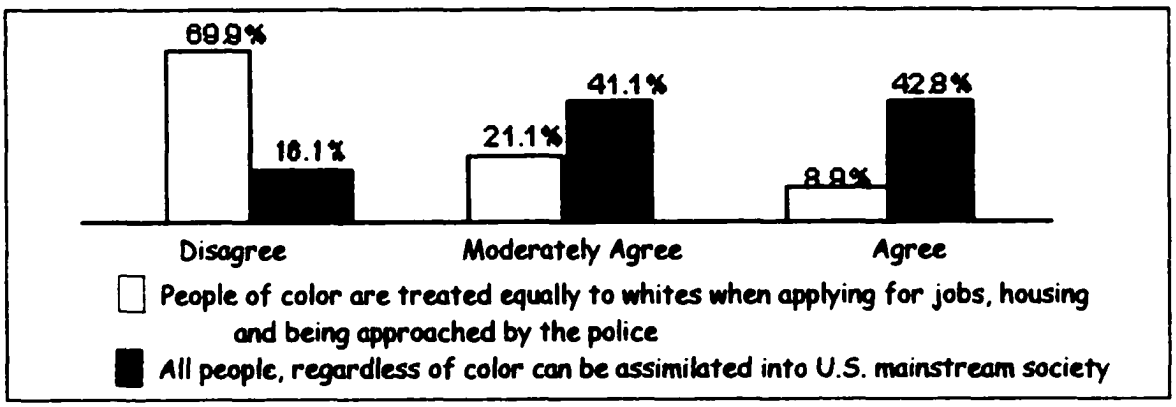

Figure 7.2 People of Color are Treated Equally / All People can be Assimilated.
Survey Questions: 24 and 30

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The breakdown of responses by race about whether people of color are treated equally is documented in Table 7.3.

	Disagree	Moderately Agree	Agree
Latinos	85.4%	6.3%	8.3%
Asians	66.7%	23.1%	10.3%
U.S.-born Blacks	83.7%	14.0%	2.3%
Foreign-born Blacks	93.7%	4.8%	1.6%
U.S.-born Whites	59.6%	30.2%	9.6%
Foreign-born Whites	41.5%	36.6%	19.5%

Table 7.3 All People are Treated Equally / Response by Race

Table 7.3 demonstrates that foreign-born whites believe significantly *more* than every other group that people of color are *treated equally* to whites when applying for jobs and housing and when approached by the police; US-born whites believe so significantly *more* than Latinos and blacks. Foreign-born whites (54.9 percent) believe significantly *more* than foreign-born blacks (34.9 percent) that all people can be *assimilated* into U.S. mainstream society.

A recent Gallup poll indicated a steady decline in the belief that all people have the same opportunities for affordable housing among blacks, even as whites continue to believe equal treatment exists. In 1989, a 20 percentage-point gap existed, whereas by 2001 the gap between black and white perceptions reached 35

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points.[3] This poll also found that 38 percent of whites, and only 9 percent of blacks think black and white citizens are treated equally in the United States. This poll reported that nearly half of all blacks polled said they were treated unfairly in one of five situations including shopping, at work, eating out, using public transportation or in dealing with the police (Tilove, 2001, 1).

In the 2000 survey by *The New York Times*, blacks were roughly four times more likely than whites to say they thought blacks were treated less fairly in the workplace, shopping, eating out, or other entertainment venues (Sack and Elder, 2000, A1). One participant reconciled this divergence indicating that what is considered acceptable for one group may not be considered acceptable for another:

> *Lots of faculty say "I was discriminated against but I still assimilated into society." Fundamentally people believe everyone can be assimilated but just not equally.*
>
> —Louis, white male, faculty

In discussing whether opportunity exists for equally for all people, students are ambivalent about their understanding of structural forces. Most explanations are framed in relationship to an individual's access to resources, as if one could be held personally responsible for whom one knows. Contacts and resources are viewed as critical, as is demonstrated in these statements.

> *In the world today, you can move up. But the way society has become in our day, it doesn't matter what you know or how well you do out there, it's*

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3. This poll was based on 2004 telephone interviews, including 895 white and 1003 black respondents between 23 March and 16 May 2001 with a randomly selected sample of adults in the Continental United States (Tilove, 2001, 1).

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whom you know. You could come from wherever you come from, if you don't know anybody out there, you still can't make it.

—Daniel, white Italian, male

Nowadays, the world is mostly built on who has the money, who has the power, and who you know.

—Janice, Latina

But aren't we the world? Aren't we society? I'm not saying anything against you, but I'm saying, we are society. We may sit here and complain but you say society and you're complaining about yourself. Everyone does it.

—Gerda, white female

Sometimes when you have less resources, it makes you a better person. It's harder to move up but it makes you understand the world better. You're not gonna be like, "They can't make it because they're poor." You can make it, it's just harder. It's definitely changing but it's still harder.

—Terry, white female

Assimilation is an assumed virtue and it is believed that everyone can "make it" in U.S. society if they try hard enough. There is a presumption that opportunities are available, so inequality reflects solely differing degrees of challenge that one has to overcome in order to succeed.

CARING FOR THE COMMON GOOD VERSUS EVERYONE OUT FOR THEMSELVES

The political atmosphere in the 1960s embodied a concern for the common good as exemplified by the heightened activism of many subordinated and underrepresented groups. This took the form of movements such as for Civil Rights, Welfare Rights, Black Power, Gay Rights and student formations. In contrast, mainstream discourse today emphasizes individualism and competition. Discussions about healthcare portray those considered not healthy enough to

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sustain their own life as "collateral damage" that society does not have the means to protect. Those in prison are considered "criminals" who are there to keep "law-abiding" citizens safe. People on welfare are "lazy" and unwilling to work for their money. Students who take more than four years to get their undergraduate degree are "unmotivated" or not "college material." These ideological framings are justified as if they are in all of our interests because they "hold people responsible." In fact, these narratives distract attention from structural causes for inequality, and from the increasing polarization of wealth. This recently became evident as billions of dollars are available to help with the re-building of New York City, and to assist businesses, but there "no funds" exist for affordable housing, health care or education.

Another example is the notion expressed in recent tax reform legislation that taxes should be returned to "the people" so they may decide how to use their money themselves. However, the initial concept of taxation was to create a common fund to benefit society as a whole. We rarely hear that we are experiencing the greatest increase in the polarization of wealth that has ever occurred in U.S. history yet the wealthiest, proportionately pay the least taxes.[4]

The dynamic whereby the status of society is assessed from the

---

4. "In 1989, the United States had 66 billionaires and 31.5 million people living below the poverty line. A decade later, the United States has 268 billionaires and 34.5 million people living below the poverty line - about $13,000 for a three-person family . . .. The top 1 percent of households has more wealth than the entire bottom 95 percent combined" (Collins, Hartman and Sklar, 1999).

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perspective of the most wealthy and powerful was evident during the fall of 2001. The largest corporations (General Electric, General Motors, IBM, Ford, etc.) proposed that to "stimulate the economy" *they* should receive tax rebate checks totaling more than 15 year's of federal income tax and corporate taxes should be eliminated forever (Institute for America's Future and Citizens for Tax Justice, 2001). However, "the $15 billion airline bailout provided not one penny for the 140,000 men and women who were laid off in that industry" (Institute for America's Future and Citizens for Tax Justice, 2001). An estimated 1.1 million people lost jobs between September and December 2001, and projections predict another 700,000 jobs to be lost this year (*The New York Times,* 2002a, A16).

This demonstrates "profiteering in the name of patriotism" and the way that the rich and powerful set an example of looking out for one's own interests rather than for the common good. House Majority Leader Dick Armey says that helping the unemployed "is not commensurate with the American spirit" (Citizens for Tax Justice, 2001). This pattern is justified in mainstream discourse, as what is good for the company, is good for all. Unfortunately profit margins are rarely revealed. This discourse establishes ground rules such that neither corporate greed nor the impact of nearly two million lost jobs are easily interrogated.

> *When Abraham Lincoln faced the dissolution of the nation in the early 1860s, he imposed new taxes on the wealthy to help save the Union. When Franklin Roosevelt took America to war against the Nazis, he sharply increased taxes on businesses and the rich to help fund that crusade. Now George W. Bush is leading a new battle against international terrorism, and*

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> *insists that as part of that effort, we need to cut taxes on corporations and the best-off Americans!*
>
> --Robert S. McIntyre, *The American Prospect*, 2001

Hence, the tone is set about whether we should look out for ourselves, or care for the common good. Given that we live in a society where whites enjoy a disproportionate share of wealth, the implications of this perspective are highly racialized. However, "White power is so pervasive that it's never perceived or even considered, white power. It's just the way things are" (Hartmann, 1998). Disproportionate corporate wealth impacts poor and middle class whites, too, however blacks, Latinos and Asians are not part of the discussion except when policies such as affirmative action are being portrayed as reverse discrimination. For whites, explanations for their own insecurity are framed as due to the benefits that "others" now have, that whites are no longer privy to.

Questions can be raised about why the prison system has expanded so dramatically over the last two decades. Are people more criminal now; was society too lenient in the past? Is it possible that these people no longer needed in the job market — what becomes of an educated population with no jobs? One perspective not often heard is reflected in the following quote:

> *Why is there such bipartisan agreement on expanding police power? The answer lies in the function of the police. Cops don't arrest bosses when they lay off workers. They don't arrest politicians who take healthcare and food away from children. They don't arrest the KKK or right-wing militias who promote and commit racist violence. The politicians and their corporate bosses are anticipating an explosion of justifiable anger in*

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response to their cutbacks. So they want more cops to keep the poor in check while they intensify their economic oppression (Saxakali, 1999).

The issue of whether current language related to crime, taxation, education and social welfare is racially coded is addressed in many different ways. Students grappled with their own thoughts about what is just and where responsibility lies. The following comments reflect some of their thoughts.

> *It's like that movie,* Bulworth. *He said white people pay more taxes so they can get more benefits. According to the statistics, that's what they are doing because SUNY students have more of a white background, and they'd have to give them more money.*
>
> —Alex, white male

> *But it should be the other way around. More money should go to the schools that have the more economically disadvantaged people paying less taxes, because they need it more. If the students at SUNY schools are making, like, X amount of money paying X amount of taxes, they have a lot of money, so they don't need all that funding.*
>
> —Marla, white female

> *In reality, the guy with all the money wants his money's worth. Simple as that. That's what really ends up happening.*
>
> —Jenna, white female

Are taxes solely an investment in one's own individual future?[5] Property rights have always been bound up in the notion of freedom in the United States. Three issues are at stake here. First, when Thomas Jefferson substituted wording about "pursuit of happiness" for "property" in *The*

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5. The very notions of government, and taxation have long been contested. In its ideal state, as described in the "Preamble" to the *Constitution*, one function of government is to promote the general welfare. In this view, taxes implicitly are to support government assistance to the less fortunate (Zinn, 1990, 158). In recent debates, there is little irony in the fact that Charles Murray, author of *The Bell Curve*, also authored *Losing Ground*, which argued enthusiastically for doing away with government aid for the poor. The interconnection between race and class prejudice are profound.

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Declaration of Independence, he shifted the notion of democracy from being implicitly wealth- and class-oriented to one that alluded to visions of community and humanity. Second, intent on minimizing governmental interference, many of the leaders of the American Revolution considered equality of opportunity to mean rough equality of conditions, given that hereditary privileges and mercantilist monopolies were to be dismantled. The belief then was that the natural workings of society would lead to justice, liberty, and equality. The third issue was how taxation would be viewed. During this period of attempted democratization, many efforts such as to limit the amount of property individuals could accumulate, were raised in the name of liberty. To lack economic resources was to lack freedom. Jefferson proposed to award fifty acres to those who did not possess it as a means to enhance the liberty of national subjects. Significant debate took place about these issues during that period. In the end, the "idea that political decisions and economic relationships ought to reflect concern for the common good, rather than private gain long survived the revolutionary era" (Foner, 1990, 20-22). Of course, these discussions all took place in the context of a slave-holding nation. These tensions continued throughout U.S. history with the question of who is included remaining riddled with class, gender, and racial bias. In the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments to the *Constitution*, the phrasing reverted back to "life, liberty, or property" (Foner, 1990, 20-22). Jenna's

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defense of the right to be rich, above, is entirely part of the centering of competition within capitalism. She justifies inequality through a defense of individualism and one's right to privilege.

Another conversation that implicitly grappled with issues of common good versus individualism is one in which students discussed how they would handle issues of principle on the job. Would they speak out on behalf of their principles or remain silent to protect their job? This debate took place between two white students:

> JOHN: *I'm a TV/Radio major but can't stand the media.* [Beverly Hills] 90210, *they're all white and rich — then you think everybody's like that. If you're not, what the hell is wrong with you? When I'm on a job, the bottom line is I'm going to have a boss no matter where I am. I'm going to have to do what she or he or it wants me to do. If they want to see white people on TV, they'll tell me, put white people on TV. That's what they're going to get because that's what I'm getting paid for. That's the bottom line. I'm not going to argue. I won't let my morals stand in the way. Morals aren't going to feed me or provide for a family, that's the bottom line.*
>
> CATHERINE: *I guess I'm more into this. I'm not an activist but I have the attitude of one.*
>
> JOHN: *It'll change, trust me, I used to do that.*
>
> CATHERINE: *I wasn't always this way. At the end of high school I started to actually stand up for myself. I always heard you know I'm a girl and can't do this. A white girl, I heard that, too. When I came to BC, I started joining these different clubs. So now it's just like, if I disagree with something, I disagree. But I've never been faced with; it's your job or your morals.*
>
> JOHN: *If you live with your parents it's easy. I hate to sound like my father; it's ridiculous. I just turned twenty and I sound like my father! But once I move out and independent, I'm going to have to pay my own bills. I won't have the luxury to protest.*

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CATHERINE: *I'm not going to easily say; okay I'll do that. But if the general manager says he wants a certain amount of white people, you can't say no.*

If the threat of job security is that acute, and the insecurity about one's future is so linked to holding on and acquiescing, what hope is there to challenge systemic and institutional patterns? How do we educate people about a possible range of options such that they see that they are not so alone in their decisions? Perhaps these conversations reflect the belief that we do best by striking out alone. The students are ambivalent — aware of implications to their actions yet not feeling they have a choice. This exchange between Catherine and John alludes to an acknowledgement of privilege and an unwillingness to forfeit it for the "greater good." If, in fact, society is headed for more difficult times, would they see their fate as more closely linked to those who are not as well situated?

> *A true revolution of values will soon look uneasily on the glaring contrast of poverty and wealth. There is nothing but a lack of social vision to prevent us from paying an adequate wage to every American citizen whether a hospital worker, laundry worker, maid or day laborer. There is nothing except shortsightedness to prevent us from guaranteeing an annual minimum and livable income for every American family* (Sklar, 1997, 71).

In the same vein, racial dynamics were structured into society by people and can therefore be structured out by people with the willingness to do so.

THE ROLE OF MEDIA

This sub-section examines the perceptions of students about the role that media plays in reinforcing racialized images and ideological narratives.

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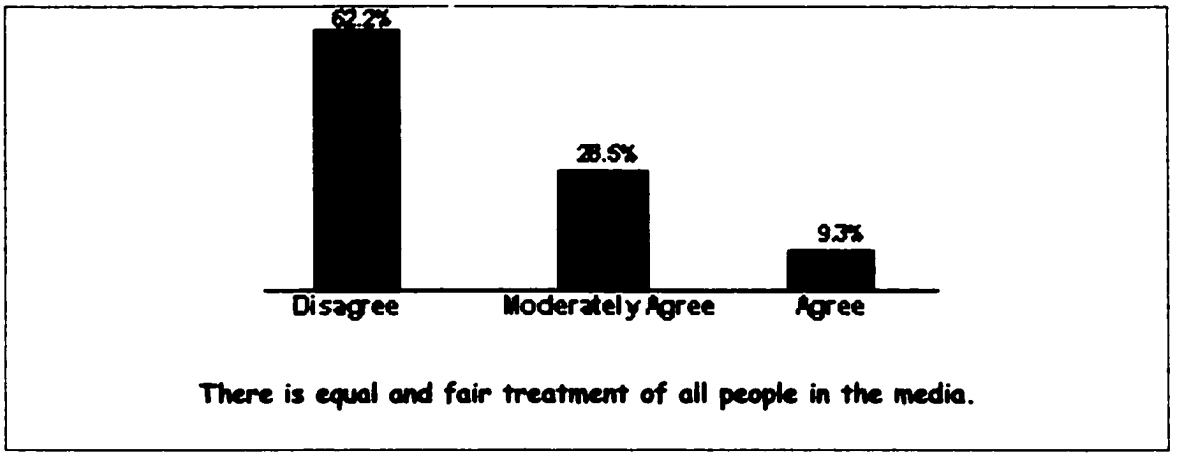

Figure 7.3 Fair Treatment in the Media. Survey Question: 34

	Disagree	Moderately Agree	Agree
Latinos	70.8%	27.1%	2.1%
Asians	48.7%	43.6%	7.7%
U.S.-born Blacks	76.7%	9.3%	11.6%
Foreign-born Blacks	76.2%	17.7%	4.8%
U.S.--born Whites	63.2%	27.9%	7.4%
Foreign-born Whites	30.5%	43.9%	23.2%

Table 7.4 Fair Treatment in the Media - Response by Race

As illustrated in Table 7.4, foreign-born whites believed *more* than any other group that there is *equal and fair treatment* of all people in the media. Most students felt the media plays a strong role both in shaping people's ideas of what is "normal" and "American" and about the characteristics of different groups. They believed that media is highly implicated in shaping and reproducing attitudes about race in society, as expressed in the following statements.

> [The] *media is one of the prime instigators of racism.*
>
> —Sonya, black female

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American culture is what you see on TV. It's the nuclear family, the kids, husband and wife. Other cultures have bigger families. Relatives live together. The first thing that pops into my head when I hear American culture is the nuclear family and a family sitting around the kitchen table.

—Nonna, white female

That image of American culture includes the dominant white race, not someone with almond-shaped eyes and black hair. It's a very limited impression but it is not number one on the list of what fuels racism.

—Sarah, Asian female

It takes a lot to get stuff like that fear in the case of Diallo out of people's minds. You get conditioned to fear things. In most movies the criminals are black guys. The media reinforces these attitudes. Statistically, there are a higher percentage of black criminals and then it's just like a circle. They have less opportunity because of that fear.

—Dmitri, white male

I don't think the image of the white Y2K nuclear family is so bad. It's true that images of whites are leaders and blacks are comedians and criminals. But sometimes like on the Mountain Dew commercial a white kid is dressed like he's supposed to be black or something. Like something he's not.

—Leon, white male

In discussions about white students' earliest recollections of race, media images were often raised, frequently connecting a television program and an elder's reaction. It was as if the impression made by the show was not sufficient to instill racialized values, alone. It was the negative reaction by a parent or grandparent that imparted an idea that blacks were subordinate and inferior. The following quotes illustrate this dynamic:

It's not that my family is racist, but as a kid, your grandfather or your great-grandfather when they're still around, might have made comments. Who knows, it could be anything. Maybe it was Spike Lee's Do the Right Thing *in 1985.*

—Talia, white Italian female

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I'm not sure when my first recollection was, but my mother worked for the State, as I do. She had black women friends who came to the house, but my father was very prejudiced. I remember everyone loved the Cosby Show. *Everyone thought Bill Cosby was like a surrogate father. My father would not watch that. He would not be in the room when it was on. He would say things like, "What is this crap doing on", things like that, but he would never come out and say what he was actually feeling. He would just say little things like that and leave it.*

—Barbara, white female staff

Television shows communicate who's who, and who fits where. The following students articulate their thoughts on how this takes place:

Truly, it comes from the media; they depict minorities as inferior, with less education. The media portrays, "Oh, somebody got gunned down; it must be African American or Latino," or there's a drug bust right away they're gonna think Latino. If it's cocaine, must be Latino; if it's marijuana, must be Jamaican. It's how the media portrays it 95 percent of the time.

—Hernan, Latino male

I remember Cosby. He made me think about whether I considered myself part of the mainstream and I didn't. I was separate even though I have instant whiteness. When I wear a baseball cap, I am white; when I wear a yarmulke *I'm Jewish. I can camouflage my privilege, though to be a professor of cinema studies it doesn't help being a white male. You hear it's easier, but it's not. Though, it is still a white man's land.*

—Stephen, white Jewish male

Messages are communicated both through what is represented *and* in what is not represented.[6]

I don't think it's just white people. The media puts into light the blacks and Latinos committing the crimes. They don't want to show that white people can do the same amount of damage.

—Beverly, black female

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6. "Media has long been feeding Americans a steady diet of misleading and provocative news bites. Exaggerating the extent to which whites have suffered from affirmative action, this coverage has interacted toxically with nearly three decades of relative income stagnation and decline for masses of white Americans to stoke the fires of white racial illusion" (Street, 2001, 9).

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I don't think the media targets; things happen in different places because different people live in different places. If it was Kentucky, it would be much different. It wouldn't be black people or Hispanics targeted.

—Allen, white male

I don't think the blacks and Hispanics are targeted — I really don't think so. I think it just seems that way. That's just the way it is.

—Helen, white female

Sometimes I'll see that if it's a black or Hispanic person, it's usually in the headlines. Whenever it's a white committing a crime, it usually gets stuck in the back of the paper; you can read it with a microscope.

—Darius, black male

But a lot of time the media goes for reaction, whoever they can get the biggest reaction from, that's what they'll follow up with.

—Joan, white female

If they can get a story they'll go ahead and do that. When that man was shot forty-one times, it was a very big issue. Then a couple of weeks later the other guy was shot, but not by a white cop, he was shot by the Spanish cop, for pulling out his beeper or cell phone. It was a big issue, but not half as big as the other, because they couldn't get as much of a reaction. First it was a white thing and then it became a whole police thing in general

—Jeff, white male

These comments show an awareness of the exploitation that is an inherent part of the media industry yet it does not appear these students feel that there are consequences. It is interesting that they (with the exception of foreign-born whites) overwhelmingly believe that the media does not treat all people equally and fairly, although the attitude appears to be: "That's the way things are — what do you want me to do about it?"

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EDUCATION AS A RIGHT

This section discusses several issues that have arisen within CUNY as part of a broad struggle to redefine both the constituency eligible for college education and its overall purpose. As discussed, this project is framed as an exploration of the end of the Second Reconstruction.[7] It was, in fact, during the First Reconstruction that the idea emerged that education (including college) should be made available to all people, not just to white elites (DuBois, 1979, 637-669). "The City University had its heritage as the first free public educational ladder [and] began a new experiment in democratic schooling: mass higher education" (Gorelick, 1981, 194). During the struggle for Open Admissions, activists "demanded that rather than defining human need in corporate terms, the colleges must serve the needs of working-class minority communities - including their need for fundamental social change (Gorelick, 1981, 194).

The funding shift that followed not that long after these demands were made was part of a national trend toward the expansion of what is known today as the prison industrial complex, at the expense of higher education.[8] This transition

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7. The notion of the Civil Rights Movement and the period of the Sixties as a Second Reconstruction discussed in chapter one. See Bush (1999); Harding (1980); Louis (1970); and Allen (1990).
8. "Between 1988 and 1998, funding to New York State prisons increased by $761.3 million, while funding for education was decreased by $615 million. People of color and non-violent offenders were hit hardest by this shift. The cost of keeping the state's nonviolent drug offenders in prison as a result of the Rockefeller Drug Law roughly matches that of the education funding decrease. More African Americans have entered prison for drug offenses than have graduated from SUNY every year since 1989 and almost twice as many Latinos were incarcerated for drug offenses as have graduated from SUNY in 1997. The costs of housing per prison per year is $30,000, roughly that which would cover tuition for nine students at SUNY or CUNY (*Black Issues in Higher Education*, 1998, 12).

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amounted to a move toward regressive taxation and away from support for social services; and toward consolidation of the wealth of the elite and the increased impoverishment of poor, working- and middle-class people of all races. Government priorities shifted from the support for economic opportunities for the poorest Americans that had been won in the 1960s, and toward increased tax breaks for the highest income brackets. Between 1977 and 1998, the share of national annual income taken by the nation's richest 1 percent grew from 7.4 percent to 15.7 percent, while the share taken by the nation's bottom 90 percent dropped from 71.4 percent to 59.8 percent (Center for Budget and Policy Priorities analysis of IRS and Congressional Budget Office, 2001, 1). Similarly, George W. Bush's 2001 tax rebate provided America's richest 1 percent, with over $1000 a week while giving the typical family less than $10 a week (Center for Budget and Policy Priorities analysis of IRS and Congressional Budget Office, 2001, 1).

This shift impacts all people on the lower end of the economic scale, although people of color are impacted disproportionately because they are relatively more dependent on services such as public schools, health facilities, etc. due to a lack of other resources. Huge wealth and resource differentials between whites and people of color also increase the challenges. Paradoxically, while whites possess nearly twelve times as much median net worth ($43,800) as blacks ($3,700) (Oliver and Shapiro, 1997, 203-231), this has been used to rally poor whites in support of welfare reform, tax cuts, and healthcare reform as the

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argument is made that blacks and Latinos, in particular, receive more than their fair share of city services; yet pay a smaller share of taxes. The notion that taxes should be returned to the payer in the form of services that correlate to the amount paid, has become incorporated into mainstream thinking.

> *From 1977 to 1995, the average state increased its correctional funding by two times more than its funding for public colleges, according to a recent ABC News Study. The most egregious example is Texas, where funding for public colleges has grown by 391 percent over that time span; and prison funding increased by 2,232 percent, nearly six times as much. In fiscal year 1988, New York's public university funding was almost twice that of its prison system. Over the next ten years, New York cut spending on public higher education by 29 percent, while the state's correctional system saw a 76 percent increase in its funding* (Choe, 1999, 12).

As a consequence of this funding shift, New York State is now ranked forty-fifth in spending per capita on higher education, despite having the fourth highest per capita income in the country, and ranked fiftieth in the percent change in state and local appropriations for higher education from 1990 to 1999 (Professional Staff Congress, 2001, 3). A tuition increase of 30 percent made up for a portion of the lost funding (Choe, 1999, 13). This has shifted the cost of running CUNY to New York City and its students such that the budget share covered by tuition increased from 18 to 47 percent between 1988 and 1998. The impact of this is racially disproportionate as tuition cost as a percentage of median family income is 25 percent for whites and 42 percent for both blacks and Latinos (Choe, 1999, 13).

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In recent years, the argument has been made that when Open Admissions was initiated in CUNY in 1970, standards dropped, and that in the effort to increase access, excellence was reduced (Harden, 1998). Some people feel this attitude emerged because 30 to 40 years ago, CUNY was overwhelmingly white, whereas now the majority are students of color.[9] In 1966, CUNY was 96 percent white, whereas the student population of 2001 is 32 percent white.[10] The CUNY Board of Trustees launched a campaign in the mid-1990s to "increase standards", as they asserted that a CUNY diploma is not valuable in the work world. They put forth that students are just being allowed to pass classes because of a liberalism that hesitates to challenge immigrants and students of color. An article describing one of the protests against this campaign summarizes this position:

> *The attitudes expressed by the state's highest officials and by the press: that CUNY students— many of them poor, immigrants and people of color— are ineducable brutes who don't deserve a first-rate university. . . . The state is building prisons while cutting education. They're saying we belong in jail, not in college. Responses to the demonstration from the mayor and governor, responses that went virtually unchallenged in the press - expressed blatant contempt for CUNY students, for the principle of public higher education and even for the democratic act of protest. . . . portrayal of CUNY students* [is] *as a bunch of semiliterate hoodlums* (Kaplan and Solomon, 1995, 11-12).

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9. "The greatest beneficiaries of open enrollment were not blacks and Puerto Ricans as it is portrayed, but white ethnics, particularly Catholics who had not been able to earn admission to senior colleges prior to 1970 . . . .The real upheaval at CUNY, then, was not due to the beginning of open enrollment in 1970 but to the financial crisis that gripped New York in 1975" (Glazer, 1998).
10. In 1970, CUNY was 74% white, 16.9% black, 4.8% Hispanic 2% Asian/Pacific Islander and .2% American Indian. By the year 2000, incoming freshman in Bachelor's programs in CUNY were 33% white, 22.5% black, 25.6% Latino, and 18.4% Asian/Pacific Islander (CUNY Office of Institutional Research and Analysis, 2000, Table 1).

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In other words, higher education is deemed to be something available only to those who pass standardized tests and not to the public at large. A significant and related side-note, however, is the fact that:

> *For more than 40 years, an astounding one-fifth of Harvard's students have received admissions preference because their parents attended the school. Today, these overwhelmingly affluent, white children of alumni - "legacies" are three times more likely to be accepted to Harvard than high school kids who lack that handsome lineage"* (Larew, 1991, 10).

At Yale, legacies are two and a half times more likely to be accepted than their peers. Dartmouth admitted 57 percent of its legacy applicants, in contrast to 27 percent of non-legacy applicants (Larew, 1991, 10). It has also been found that:

> *The average admitted legacy at Harvard between 1981 and 1988 was significantly less qualified than the average admitted non-legacy. . . With the exception of the athletic rating,* [admitted] *non-legacies scored better than legacies in all areas of comparison. Exceptionally high admit rates, lowered academic standards, preferential treatment... hmmm. These sound like the cries heard in the growing fury over affirmative action for racial minorities in America's elite universities. Only no one is outraged about legacies"* (Larew, 1991, 10).

While this data can be viewed as irrelevant to the attack on CUNY, it is central to the issue of how the preferential treatment of whites is hidden within the domain of higher education. Rarely (if ever) have we heard outcries about how legacies pull down standards at Harvard, Yale, Dartmouth or elsewhere.

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The mid-1990s attack on CUNY led to policy changes that eliminated remediation classes at the senior colleges in 1999[11] (Arenson, 1998, B1). According to the Federal Department of Education, remedial courses are offered at three-quarters of America's four-year colleges and taken by one-third of all freshmen. Remedial courses remain within the SUNY system. The need for remediation is particularly great in CUNY, where more than half of all incoming freshmen speak a language other than English at home. Often these students score well in math and reading, but have disproportionate difficulty with the writing assessment exam (Harden, 1998). While it is true that these students can take classes first at a community college, students who transfer from a two year school college are 11 to 19 percent less likely to get a bachelor's degree than freshmen at four year schools, even when the have similar grades and aspirations (Avenoso, 1995, 16).

Underlying this perspective is a belief that not everyone is "college material" and that when someone takes more than four years to graduate, this is an indication of an inability to a lack of intelligence or a lack of commitment. At issue, was the policy of open admissions and perspectives on whether the CUNY Mission (established in 1847) "to educate the children of the whole people" is weighed in balance with access and excellence, or whether the achievement of one virtue could only occur to the detriment of the other (Romer, 1999, 47). The reality is that

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11. "In 1998, Mayor Giuliani and Governor Pataki agreed upon a plan to eliminate remediate courses at CUNY's 11 four-year schools, with the intent on raising standards because of a public view that a CUNY degree had become meaningless" (Archibold, 1998, 3).

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remedial courses, whether labeled as such or not, have expanded nationally in both public and private colleges. Many people have voiced the feeling that such courses came under attack in CUNY because it is the largest urban public university, the third largest university system in the nation, and because of its predominant constituency of color (Cooper and Savage, 1996, A15). It is projected that those who will be denied admission to four-year colleges as a result of this policy will disproportionately be Hispanic and Asian immigrants.

Another related issue is the funding of public schools in New York State. In 1992 a lawsuit initiated by a coalition of two hundred and fifty City University faculty, staff, and students challenged the differential funding between SUNY and CUNY as SUNY was substantially more highly funded per student.[12] This was viewed as racially discriminatory. The ruling in this case was that higher education is not a right to which all are entitled; therefore, no constitutional illegality was found despite the acknowledgement of fiscal disparity.

> *The Court explicitly affirmed that unlike primary and secondary education, "There is simply no 'right', constitutional or statutory, to a state financed higher or college education" (The New York Law Journal,* 1995, 1).

In January of 2001 a similar lawsuit was taken up on behalf of the Campaign for Fiscal Equality, a coalition of groups representing New York City children, and this time related to primary and secondary school funding. In this case, a New

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12. In 1991, state spending per full-time student in SUNY was $7,653 versus $6,927 per student in CUNY. Minority students comprised less than 20 percent of SUNY population, but 63 percent of all students in CUNY (Anderson, 1993, 1; Riley, 1992).

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York judge ruled that the State's funding system does not provide New York City students with a sound education and violates federal civil rights laws because it disproportionately hurts minority students who comprise three-quarters of New York City's school population. The impact of this ruling remains to be seen (American Federation of Teachers, 2001). Opinions about educational entitlement and disparities were elicited in the survey and discussed in the focus groups:

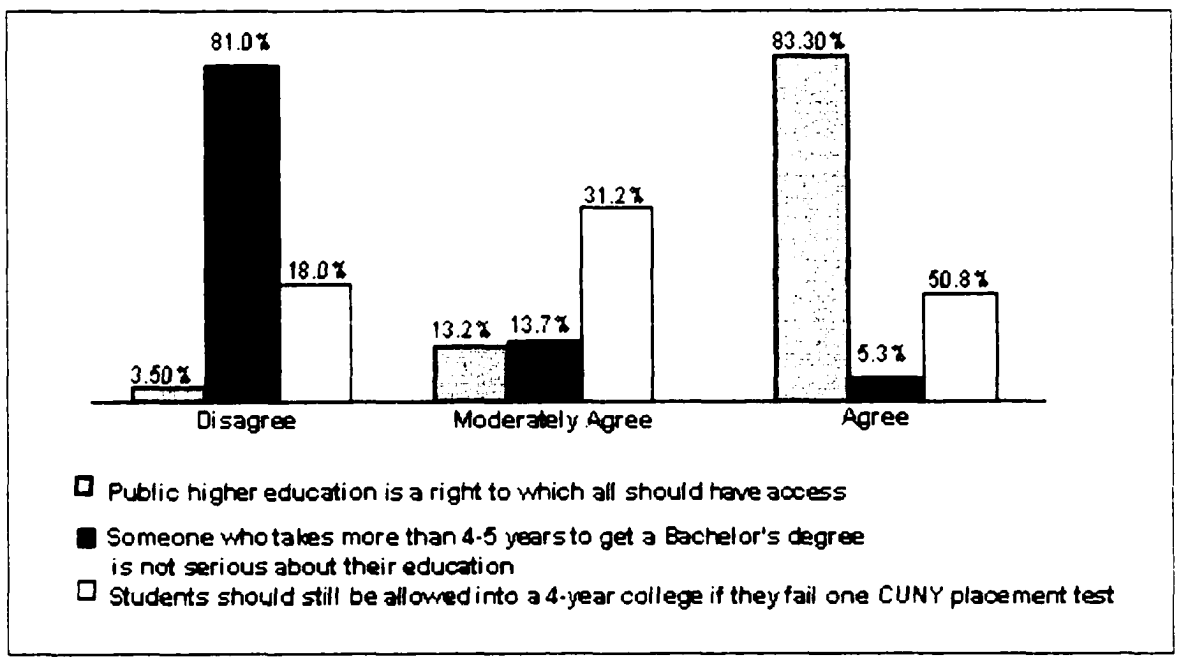

Figure 7.4 Higher Education: Beliefs. Survey Questions: 31, 36, 21

Statistically significant differences between group responses include that:

- U.S.-born whites (72.8 percent) believe significantly *less* than foreign-born blacks (92.1 percent) that public higher education is a *right* to which all should have access.
- Foreign-born whites (11 percent) agree significantly *more* than U.S.-born whites (2.9 percent), Latinos (2.1 percent) and foreign-born blacks (3.2 percent) that someone who takes more than four to five years to get a Bachelor's degree is *not serious* about their education.
- U.S.-born whites (37.5 percent) believe significantly *less* than Asians (74.4 percent), foreign-born blacks (55.6 percent) and foreign-born whites (59.8

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percent) felt that if someone fails one CUNY placement test he or she should *still be allowed* into a four-year college.

Noting that 83.3 percent of all students consider public higher education to be a universal right and 81 percent disagree that someone taking more than four to five years to get a Bachelor's degree is not serious about his or her education, it appears that there is an awareness of the challenges in pursuing higher education today. It is not clear however, whether this reflects support for open access to higher education for all of society. One explanation for why foreign-born whites believe more than other students, that someone who takes more than four to five years is not serious about his or her education, is that they, as immigrants, have received more social support, so they are less burdened by financial need. The fact that U.S.-born whites believe significantly less than foreign-born blacks that public higher education is a universal right appears to reflect dominant discourse asserting that not everyone is "college material." Following are some comments about whether access and excellence are simultaneously achievable.

> *Sixty years ago was better, but standards were a lot higher. Some kids that get in now, they never would have even looked at your scores. It's better to have a more open school. It's a better sense of diversity, more accepting.*
>
> —Marianne, white female

> *Being here is a good experience, being in the real world, because that's what the real world is about. There's a whole mixture of people. The people that go to Ivy League schools, where there are only, certain types of people aren't exposed to the realities that we're exposed to. They're shielded from what the real world is.*
>
> —Daniel, white male

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She said it's good to have an open school but I don't think so. I totally disagree because I worked really hard in high school. Before I was going to school here I was going to the University of Texas. I had to work to get into that. Not all of my friends got in there. They had to go to the city college first. I worked hard to get an education. That's what community colleges are for. If you're not really too sure about a certain subject, go there, get the classes and then go on to a higher education.

—Jan, Native American female

People were trashing CUNY because of racial diversity which I think is good but a lot of people judge it. It used to be a white college, back sixty years ago. Now there's a higher population of minorities and they assume (I'm not saying this is true) but they automatically assume that if there is a certain number of black people that they got in because of remediation. You can't have open admissions and high standards at the same time.

—Janice, Latina

It's more racially diverse in CUNY schools than in SUNY schools. They tend to look down on CUNY schools more than on SUNY. People think that anyone and everyone can walk in a CUNY school and get in, so they assume that it's not as good as a SUNY school.

—Terry, white female

When you take money from higher education and put it toward prisons, you're increasing the chance or likelihood that a person will be denied higher education because CUNY, they say it's the poor man's college. If you take away funding from CUNY and put it to prisons, you are denying somebody of working- or lower-class a chance at higher education. That leaves them on the street without much chance at an education. They may or may not get involved into criminal activity. You're increasing the chance or likelihood that they're going to be in a prison when you should be funding higher education and giving them an equal chance to get into schools, to do something and get out of the slump they're in.

—Marianne, white female

That's so sad, because if you're working on a population to be educated, the best thing is to provide it for all. That's one of the great things that I saw with the educational system here is that to get into college, it's not something up there where you have to be of this status or you have to be so bright to get in. If they want to separate Ivy League and private schools, go ahead and be a separation and whatever, cause there's always going to be standards where people are going to say it's better to go to

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this school, or that school. But when you get into the CUNY system and say the standards are being lowered, it's a way to up the standards so only certain people can be given an opportunity to get it. I think that is so sad.
— Gerda, white female

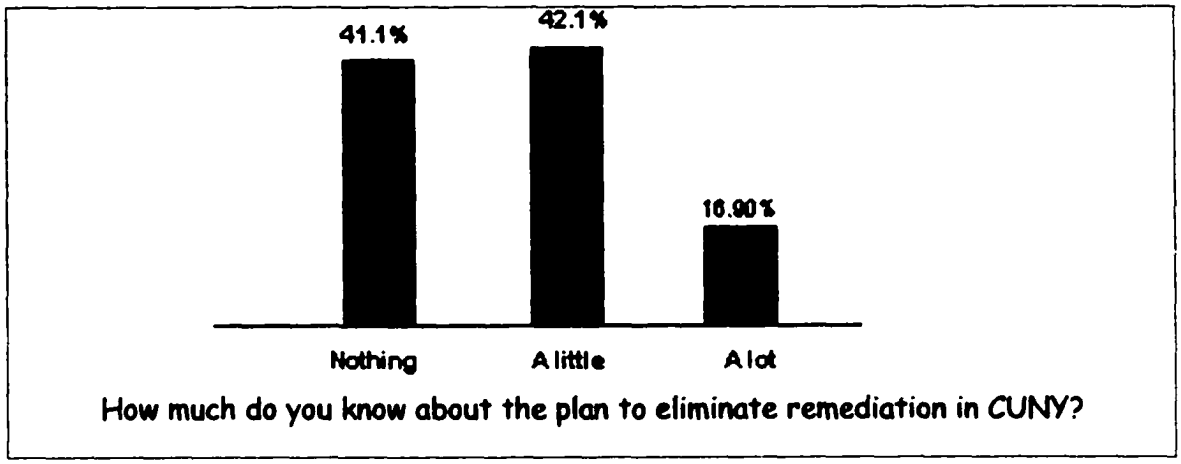

Figure 7.5 Remediation in CUNY - How Much Do You Know? Survey Question: 12

Table 7.4 reflects the breakdown by race of the question of how much students know about the plan to eliminate remediation. The statistically significant differences between groups include that white and Latino students report *less* often that they *know about the plan* to eliminate remediation in CUNY than black students. White and Latino students report that they *know nothing about the plan* to eliminate remediation in CUNY *more* often than blacks.

	Not at all	A Little	A Lot
Latinos	39.6%	45.8%	12.5%
Asians	38.5%	53.9%	7.7%
U.S.-born Blacks	30.2%	34.9%	34.9%
Foreign-born Blacks	15.9%	55.6%	28.6%
U.S.-born Whites	50.7%	34.6%	14.0%
Foreign-born Whites	50.0%	40.4%	7.3%

Table 7.5 How Much Do You Know About the Plan to Eliminate Remediation/Response by Race

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Students' responses about whether or not eliminating remediation impacts all groups equally are reflected in Figure 7.6 and Table 7.6.

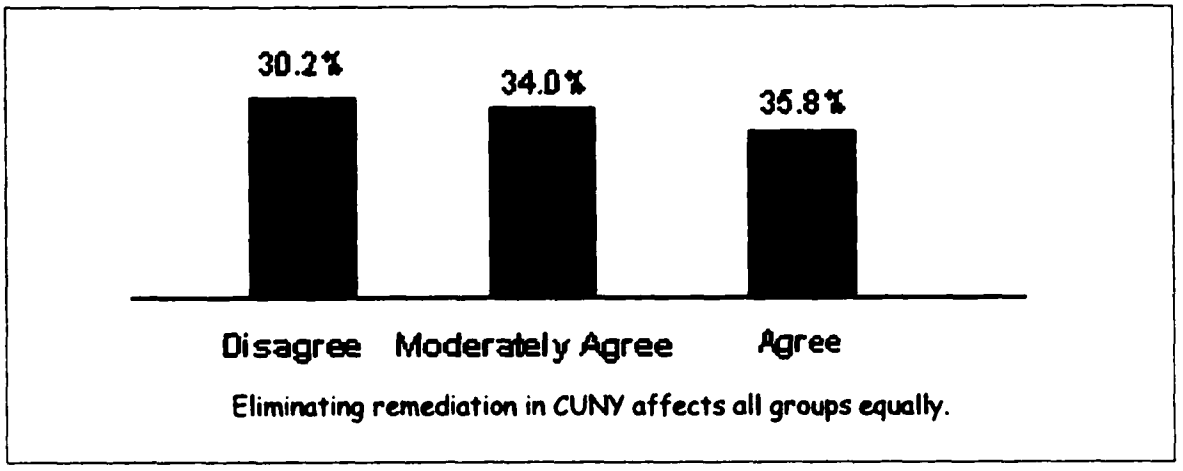

Figure 7.6 Eliminating Remediation Affects all Groups Equally. Survey Question: 23

Foreign-born whites and Latinos agree significantly *more* than foreign-born blacks that eliminating remediation *affects* all groups *equally*. Foreign-born whites agree significantly *more* than U.S. born whites.

	Disagree	Moderately Agree	Agree
Latinos	18.8%	20.8%	52.1%
Asians	23.1%	41.0%	30.8%
U.S.-born Blacks	25.6%	34.9%	27.9%
Foreign-born Blacks	46.0%	28.6%	23.8%
U.S.-born Whites	26.5%	34.6%	27.9%
Foreign-born Whites	14.6%	31.7%	43.9%

Table 7.6 Eliminating Remediation Affects all Groups Equally / Response by Race

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Students' attitudes about remedial courses were generally negative and focused on whether people could "make the cut" or work hard enough to pass. There were occasional counter-arguments, but generally they were dismissed by the more dominant perspective. The differences between who knew about the changes in CUNY policy regarding remediation and who didn't know, and between those who felt that the policy will have a racially differential impact versus those who did not think so, seemed to arise between those who felt more or less vulnerable. Students discussed these policy changes and expressed a variety of opinions as illustrated by these comments.

There shouldn't be remedial courses in college. If you need remedial courses, you shouldn't be in college.

—Leonard, white male

There's too many people just getting passed. That's why you need remedial courses to get them up. They're getting high grades and go to an English course and they're not gonna know. That's why you need remedials.

—Veronica, self-described as "human" female

In the end, remediation makes sense. It gives everyone a chance. Sometimes you have to step back or else you are elitist.

—Angelo, white male

If they didn't learn anything in twelve years of school, they aren't going to learn anything on the college level.

—Carl, black Latino male

But I've tutored people, and they do learn a lot.

—Julissa, Latina

College is supposed to be a higher level of education. If you don't know how to read and write properly you shouldn't need remedial classes in college. It's a waste of taxpayers' money. When my dad was going to Brooklyn College there were people getting remedial classes and into the

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quotas. They were getting the same credit he was getting for taking a regular college level class. That's wrong.

—Jacob, white male

It goes back to the home. Most students' parents aren't pushing them to do their homework, to study properly. Maybe they're stepping around, watching the TV too much. But you can't just be one factor. It's not just "Oh well, they didn't have the right opportunity in school". You have to go back to the home, and see what's going on there. Ultimately, it's the responsibility of the parents.

—Veronica, self-described as "human" female

However, 81 percent of public colleges and 78 percent of all colleges in the United States presently provide remedial classes (Professional Staff Congress, 1998). Students assert that remediation should take place before someone enters college, and point to the inadequacies of primary and secondary educational systems. Some place blame on individuals and their families but are also challenged by their classmates, who argue that people can learn and that to not provide opportunities was elitist.

In a public forum entitled "The Mission of CUNY: Why Jews Should be Concerned," held in the fall of 1999 at the Brooklyn College Hillel, Michael Kahan BC professor of Political Science, discussed this issue as it related to his observation that faculty and staff were protesting the anti-remediation policies, as were students of color, but that he did not see white students speaking out. He said:

Where are they? Busy with jobs and so forth, yes, but students feel that if there are fewer students it will be easier to get the classes they want. White students feel their problem is not in getting in, but in getting out.

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Several speakers at the forum felt that Jews have historically stood for access and excellence, and they were concerned about the lack of involvement of the current generation of Jewish students in fighting the assault on public education. Kahan asserted that caring for the whole society and upholding the right to education is a fundamental Jewish value and should be guarded: "We protect ourselves by protecting others. We circle round for protection." He expressed profound concern about the withdrawal of this generation of youth from active politics of liberal Judaism, and articulated the view that Jews have been successful because they have linked their future to that of all people. He was concerned that he does not see that happening in the struggle for access to the City University, and suggested perhaps only when young people understand the economic constraints experienced by their classmates of color will they understand this connection.

Karen Brodkin explores in depth the transformations that have taken place within the Jewish community from a time during the early part of the twentieth century when they were considered non-white immigrants to a current status incorporated in a pan-ethnic whiteness. In a National Opinion Research Center (NORC) survey on attitudes about different racial and ethnic groups, Jews were the only group viewed positively compared to whites in general (NORC, 1998, Question 266). Brodkin extensively discusses the history of Jews as model immigrants, and traces the federal programs that assisted their upward mobility in a form of affirmative action (Brodkin, 1994, 78-102).

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Edith Everett, former Trustee of CUNY, pointed out that the anti-remediation fight was a cover for a punitive campaign aimed at CUNY and its constituents. She asserted that if standards were the only concern, efforts to increase access would be expanded. She argued that society must be serious about helping people, quoting the scholar, Hillel, "If I am not for self, who will be for me? If I am only for myself, what am I? If not now, when?"

There appeared to be a willingness to accept some social responsibility but a desire to hold individuals accountable as if people are naturally lazy and have to be monitored. The quality of education in the primary and secondary schools was raised numerous times as a determinant in college success.

> *It's on the junior high and high schools. It's their responsibility. I graduated from high school with twenty-four college credits all in advanced placement. It depends on where you go.*
>
> —Leonard, white male

> *It has to do with the fact that teachers get treated like shit.*
>
> —Carl, black Latino male

> *They don't get paid enough and are the hardest working people. Without teachers, there is nothing. The world can not go on without them, because they makes us who we are. They get paid nothing and get no respect.*
>
> —Jacob, white male

Several students were concerned about the future of higher education and did not understand the direction of recent policy shifts.

> *The government has given up on people, given up on education, so now we pay to punish, not improve people. The lack of education is going to lead to crime and violence. Why is more money going to prisons? Is that because they are giving criminals better food?*
>
> —Leon, white male

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The government is promoting the education of the white kids more than the kids who attend CUNY. They have more faith in them. They put more emphasis on educating the white group because that's the majority. The majority wants to keep the majority so they have little loopholes to do it.

—Keri, black female

Some students voice how privilege and status are expressed in attitudes toward community colleges. They articulate both their own sense of being disrespected for attending a public university, and their feeling of superiority toward groups they consider inferior. Their awareness of privilege and subordination points to an opportunity to educate people on the function of social status stratification that maintains structural inequality. As long as they can feel better than someone, they feel okay rather than calling into question an entire system that ranks students by whether they are in a public or private university, attend a two- or four-year school or not in school at all.

Our butt-about jokes are about Kingsborough, but [private school students] *their butt-about jokes are about Brooklyn College. Kingsborough doesn't even exist to them.*

—Leon, white male

People always say "Oh you go to Brooklyn College, what is that a community college?" Then there's always Kingsborough, and you feel so much better.

—Vera, white female

Discussions about testing raise questions about whether standardized exams are racially biased. Among whites, there appeared to be an attitude that this issue

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illustrates how people of color blame someone or something other than themselves for lower scores.[13] Following are some students' reflections on these issues:

> *Some people even think that the SATs, the way they're written helps white males. I don't know if that is true or not, but I don't think so because it's a standardized test. It never changes its format pretty much.*
>
> —Allen, white male

> *I agree. The test never changes its format, just the questions change moderately. You're open to the same books as I am, the same courses, it's standard, it's math and it's English.*
>
> —Nicky, white female

> *Who writes the SATs? If it is whites, it is rich whites. They might say there is an important distinction to be made in the relationships between two wines and how would we know? Some minorities say there is discrimination, but they need to show statistics.*
>
> —Nancy, white female

> *Math you can't complain about, but maybe English. It's presented way beforehand. I went to public high school; it was mixed. Everyone was offered the same things.*
>
> —Helen, white female

Within this section on higher education, many issues emerge relating to the tension between caring for all and looking out for oneself. The tendency is to blame individuals for their lack of achievement. Yet, even specifically for Scholastic Achievement Test (SAT) scores, there is a strong correlation with family income, thereby discriminating against women, low-income earners, and

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13. While many factors contribute to success on SATs, two are particularly significant. Having the resources to enroll in a review course and doing so, can greatly increases scores. In an email of 26 November 2001, Pete Guzik, Assistant Director of Online Course Engine of The Princeton Review states, "We offer a guarantee of 100 points for a full course." Additionally, SAT scores are strongly correlated with family income that therefore discriminates against women, low income and minority students (Arenson, 1999, B7).

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minority students (Arenson, 1999, B7). This is especially insidious, as it excuses educational inequalities, implying that some people are more able than others, and borders on a biological explanation for inequality. While perspectives are not monolithic, the students in these discussions feel they understand the reasons for differentials and why they are justifiable. The naturalization of a notion of white intellectual superiority and a lack of awareness of this presumption appears throughout the discussions about higher education.

POLICE, CRIME, AND JUSTICE

While there are many important issues related to race, crime, and justice, only a few were addressed in this research. This section provides students' responses as to whether police brutality is a myth or a reality and why, how it happens and attitudes toward the criminal justice system.

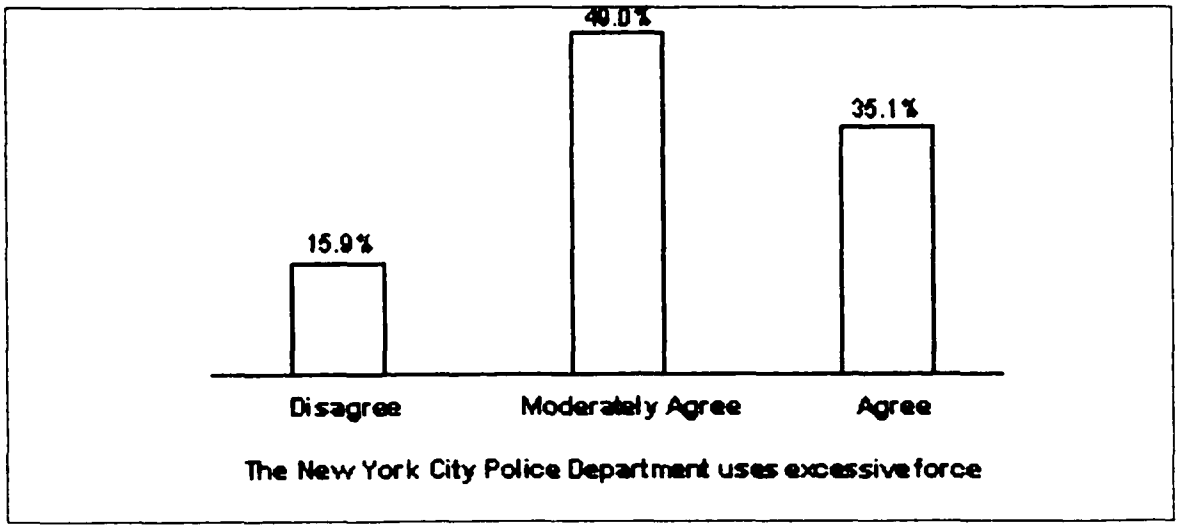

Figure 7.7 New York City Police Department Use of Force. Survey Question: 29

White students (26.5 percent of U.S. born and 25.6 percent of foreign-born) and Asian students (28.2 percent) believed significantly *less* than black

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students (55.8 percent of U.S. born and 58.7 percent of foreign-born) that the NYC Police Department uses excessive force. These statistics overall, indicate a general sentiment that the police department uses excessive force. The question did not specify whether this force was targeted at particular groups; however, one might infer that the significant difference of opinions between groups reflects divergent experiences. Notably, not only students of color, but also by white students, raised the issue of police harassment.

A survey in 1999 indicated that less than one quarter of all New Yorkers believed that the police treat blacks and whites equally. Nine of ten black residents believed that the police often engage in brutality against blacks, while seventy percent of all residents believed so, though by comparison, only twelve percent believed that the police brutalize whites. Over all, more than half of those surveyed said they believe the police use excessive force. This figure differed by the race of the respondents as 33 percent of whites; 67 percent of Hispanics and 75 percent of blacks believed the police use excessive force (Barry and Connelly, 1999). Mayor Giuliani attributed this belief to a partisan political campaign (Barry and Connelly, 1999). Students who participated in this research had other ideas:

> *I am not surprised that students recognize the brutality of the police. I was stopped and roughed up over something really petty and I don't think I look like a criminal. The police officers said they were afraid. How did they get that way. How did it get in their minds that this was someone to be afraid of? Is it possible that the level of brutality is so intense, constant and cruel that many young people have this experience or know*

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someone who has been stopped? There is more questioning of authority. Young people have experience with media publicity of incidents.

—Andrew, white Jewish male

Someone in class was talking about how they got pulled over by a cop; a white boy. There was two black cops or one black cop, I don't know, he got pulled over. He was, discriminated against—It goes all ways, against blacks, against whites, against Jews. It happens everywhere. You don't know if they're in the Ku Klux Klan. There are cops who are in the KKK.

—Zena, white female

The cops were definitely wrong but I don't know if it always translates to a white on black kind of thing. A friend said he was stopped by the police. They rolled up, grabbed him, threw him up against the car. They put his hands behind his back. He fit an image of a known criminal in the area. They didn't give him any time to explain and harassed him. That's less than being shot and killed, but still it can be anyone. I think the cops, it's like a totally different story, they go over the limit with a lot of things.

—Jacob, white male

It's gone so far beyond race right now. It's everyone versus the cops. They're on the sickest power trip. If you look since the verdict, three other people have been killed by a cop. It goes so much further to the Department and Giuliani. They are not trained correctly.

—Cindy, self-described as "human" female

The messages conveyed by these statements illustrate that students have an idea about what a criminal looks like (certainly not white and educated), but also reflect a concern about policies implemented by officers, regardless of race. For whites this may be framed as reverse discrimination or as a way to show how times have changed and society is truly colorblind. It was said that Mayor Giulani's first response to hearing about Amadou Diallo's murder by 41 bullets, was to question

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why the young man had been out at 1 A.M.[14] One must wonder if his response would have been the same, had his own son been shot.

Little discussion took place about the frequency of harassment although students generally recognized the excessive tendencies on the part of the police department. This provides an opening for dialogue about the kind of policing one might envision in a caring society. When these incidents occur within the white community, it fosters understanding about excesses of power yet also provides a rebuttal to the notion of racially targeted harassment. The *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, reports that 4 percent of white Americans say they were unfairly stopped by the police, compared to 37 percent of black Americans (Summer 2001b, 81).

Students were also concerned about criminal justice policies that direct police to shoot to kill or maim:

> *Abner Louima, that's very controversial. They say it wasn't the cops' fault that the cops were right in what they did because inside the police academy, they teach you that when you bring out your gun, there's no such thing as shoot to hurt. You have to shoot to maim so they can't hurt you.*
>
> —Leon, white male

> *No, you mean Diallo. But why would they take out the guns.*
>
> —Sonya, black female

> *Didn't the cops think he had a gun?*
>
> —Leon, white male

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14. "Open Line Talk Show," KISS FM, Brother Mtume, 25 November 2001, 9:30A .M.

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Think about it. If you think the guy is crazy and he can kill people, rape them, whatever, and you're the police officer, and you think he has a gun, what are you gonna do?

—Leonard, white male

Like they didn't know better. There is no shoot to hurt. If the cop is pulling out a gun, he's going to kill.

—Mia, Latina

They shouldn't be trained to shoot but maybe they're afraid not because of the race and everything. If you're a cop and you're looking for a dangerous criminal, you probably are gonna be afraid and a little edgy. If you think he has a gun, you're gonna shoot. It doesn't have anything to do with race. Wipe out the color part. You know, everybody's the same.

—Jacob, white male

Why don't we remember the names of black and Latino cops killed by criminals? We only remember the names of black and Latino criminals shot by cops.

—Josie, white female

In addition to concerns about police excesses, students described images that have been reinforced by the media and through the educational system. This was most explicitly illustrated by students of color who have been the object of such bias and who shared their experiences in the focus groups.

One of the worst experiences that ever happened in my life was being stopped by the police. They kept saying right from the start, "Who you gonna beat up, what kind of problems are you trying to raise. I don't like the way you're walking, what kind of drugs are you selling." I'm like. . . Where is all of this coming from?

—Hernan, Latino male

How could Rodney King (televised for 53 seconds), Louima (what a sadistic and sinister culture that they could get away with it), Diallo, (41 shots) and Dorismond take place? Racism is drummed into white folks' heads since birth. When they are stressed, they can not be thoughtful about their reactions.

—Flora, West Indian female

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They had a notion that this black man is a rapist. They have an idea that all black men in this area are criminals. That's in the back of their heads.
—Carl, black Latino male

With these images in students' minds, the meaning derived from general comments about police excess being an expression of fear, has explicitly racialized significance.

The Diallo case was totally related to fear. If there was no fear, I don't think that the cops would have shot him. If they did the right thing, they would have called back up instead of opening fire, which made no sense.
—Leonard, white male

In the Diallo case they were afraid of being in the neighborhood. That was part of it. I think they were getting a lot of pressure from Giuliani and from the higher- ups to catch this criminal. When you get pressure like that, you know, mistakes happen, you know. Your boss is telling you, get this done, get this done. You know, maybe you're gonna cut corners, maybe you're gonna be nervous about things and bad things happen.
—Jacob, white male

One additional theme that students struggled with throughout the focus group discussions was the meaning that could be attached to the racialized structure of the criminal justice system. As indicated in many of the comments above, students appeared to resist the racialized portrayal of who uses drugs and who is a criminal, though they seemed unsure about why there were so many more blacks and Latinos in prison. They were also uncertain as to whether drug use is more common in communities of color and asked for information on these topics. Their lack of information about this important subject was extremely apparent.

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A recent Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and National Institute for Drug Abuse (NIDA) study showed that whites are the primary consumers of narcotic drugs, although in New York State 90 percent of drug-related prisoners are black or Latino (New York Correctional Association, 1998a). While African Americans and Latinos comprise about 25 percent of New York State's population, they represent 83 percent of the people in its prisons (and 92 percent of the people in New York City's jails) (Gangi, Ziedenberg, and Schiraldi, 1999, 8). The following statement illustrates how this divergence takes place.

> *Blacks, whites, and Latinos all use drugs at the same rate . . . But it's where you buy the drugs that gets you arrested. Do the police go into stock brokerage houses to bust people for cocaine? Do they go to Columbia University fraternity parties? No, they bust the people who are using drugs out on the street. . . If whites were arrested at the same rate, we would not be building prisons. Governor Pataki would be declaring a state of emergency* (Schiraldi as quoted in Choe, 1999, 14).

There are now more blacks and Latinos locked up in prison than there are attending SUNY (New York State Correctional Association, 1998b). Since 1989, more blacks have entered the prison system annually for drug offenses than have graduated from SUNY with Bachelor's, Masters and Doctoral degrees combined. In 1997, the number of Latinos who graduated from SUNY was less than half the number of those who entered prison on a drug conviction. While the number of whites entering New York prisons for drug offenses increased by 107 percent between 1980 and 1997, the number of African Americans increased 1,311 percent and for Latinos, 1,615 percent. In 1980, approximately the same number of blacks, Latinos

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and whites were sent to prison for drug offenses (New York State Correctional Association, 1998b).

The official position is that New York State neighborhoods are safer now than during the last twenty years, and the high costs of prisons are a result of New York State's commitment to inmate "programming" (New York State Correctional Association, 1998b, 14). However, funds actually are allocated to corrections operating costs and to building new prisons, particularly in Upstate New York (Gangi, Ziedenberg, and Schiraldi, 1999, 8). Additionally, crime rates over the last quarter-century of prison build-up indicate both periods of increase and periods of decrease (Gonnerman, 2000).

In summary, this section explored some of students' attitudes and beliefs about the use of force by New York City police and about the criminal justice system. While strong sentiments were articulated about the overall excess use of force toward all communities, the evidence of racially discriminatory practices appeared to be simultaneously recognized and resisted. Most white respondents had difficulty in acknowledging differential treatment because their own experiences with the excesses of police force led them to believe that they understood the experiences of people of color. They did, however note several concerns about structure and policy in relation to officers' lack of familiarity with the neighborhoods they patrol, and about department policy that dictates, "Shoot to kill." Students were aware that racialized images about crime in the media rouse

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fear and when combined with a quick-draw policy have devastating consequences. However, there was little recognition among whites of the broad implications of this for communities of color. This disconnection between everyday thinking and the material consequences allows these patterns to continue.

Opportunity, Equality, and Fairness

This section examines the attitudes and beliefs about whether society has a responsibility to take measures to equalize opportunity, and if everyone should be given a fair chance to succeed. The difference between ideals and their implementation was part of the discussions. As participants expressed their thoughts many comparisons were drawn about how different groups were treated.

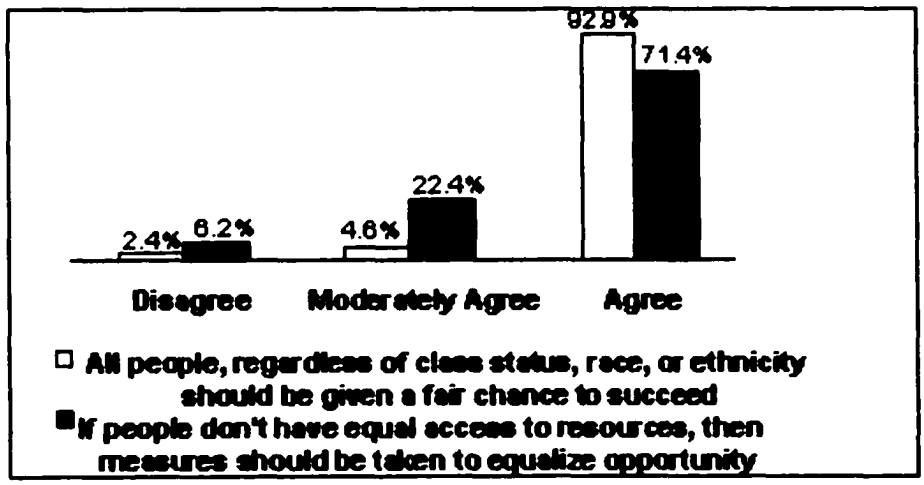

Figure 7.8 Fair Chance to Succeed / Take Measures to Equalize Opportunity. Survey Questions: 25 and 27

The divergence illustrated in Figure 7.8, between students who believe all people should be given a fair chance to succeed and those who believe that if people don't have equal access to resources, measures should be taken to equalize opportunity, seems significant. Perhaps while many people may be willing to

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acknowledge specific inequalities or injustices, viewing them as a systemic problem is less acceptable. It is also possible that people agree in principle with universal equality, but worry that measures to equalize resources inevitably lead to having to give something up, oneself. The following comments reflect this sentiment.

> *When I was younger, the worst thing happened. They had certain quotas to get into a school and they couldn't take me. I had a decent average but they had a quota to fill. It was not fair. When my great-grandparents came over, the generation had no money. It took four generations. You got to be around longer.*
>
> —John, white male

> *That happened to my brother. He was waiting for a scholarship but found out that it was only given to black kids because they wanted to have a certain number of black kids there because the school is expensive. The only way that some of these black kids could pay was to get the scholarship. That's just crazy because some of them have more money than my family. That's what my brother needed, the scholarship, but he didn't get it because he was a white kid.*
>
> —Catherine, white female

John's conveys that while everyone should be given a fair chance, people should wait their turn, implying perhaps that blacks and Latinos are impatient. In a discussion with white staff, feelings about whites being treated unfairly emerged:

> *In a lot of the offices all the new people coming in are majority black. Certain offices are mainly black. It's probably pressure from elsewhere to hire black students. I don't think these jobs pay enough. A lot of white people, who would be willing to take them, couldn't live on them. It snowballs. It depends who's doing the interviewing, who's doing the hiring. If you look around at offices, that the top person in the department is a black person, you'll see that the majority of people in there are black. Black people tend to want to hire their own, more so than white people. I think white people will hire the better-qualified person for the person, and I think black people tend to like to hire their own.*
>
> —Barbara, white female, staff

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These comments naturalize the pay differentials for blacks and whites such that they seem to assume that it is acceptable for whites to expect a higher standard of living than blacks. Average wages for whites are higher than for blacks, so whites know they can get higher pay, so why settle. This becomes clear in that while 29 percent of white households survive below the poverty line, 39 percent of black households do so (Shapiro, 1998, 298). This alludes to a presumption that there is one standard of living acceptable for whites but not expected for blacks, presuming a hierarchy. The idea that blacks hire discriminately, whereas whites hire by qualifications was also evident:

> *White people in administration tend to hire more white people but I think they hire qualified black people just to fill the quota. It's the same way with the blacks but I think black people maybe are more so because they feel they've been down so long that they have not had the opportunities that when one black person gets in, they're going to like hire only blacks, because they do have that unity.*
>
> —Doreen, white female, staff

> *I don't think it's fair either way, really. White people would probably pick more qualified people and take a qualified black person but I think that black people will take black people even if a white person was more qualified. They would take the black person, to give the black person the opportunity, only to pull them in, because they have this unity thing.*
>
> —Ted, white male, staff

> *Right, they want to keep the club, because I think that's how they look at it. Like what Barbara was talking about in her office where three black people said, "Well, you wouldn't understand." Now that more black people are in that office, they can all stand there and say, "Well, you don't understand", and not even care to explain because they all understand and you're the individual who doesn't.*
>
> —Doreen, white female, staff

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It is important to frame these comments in the context of whether whites or people of color have most control over hiring decisions within the workforce and the racial concentration within different sectors. For example, nationally, among university professors, 86.8 percent are white (Hartmann, 1998) and whites are highly concentrated in most professional and management positions.

The perception that whites are fair and blacks are biased was discussed in chapter four. These comments suggest other ways of viewing hiring patterns:

> *We had a white supervisor, and they had one black girl. Now I have a black supervisor and we have two black girls. You know, it's like three black people and before there was, like one black person and now they're hiring more people and we'll see what comes from it.*
>
> —Barbara, white female staff

> *But maybe white will hire white and black will hire black because that's who they feel more comfortable being with, associating with or maybe they feel like they have a better understanding of them.*
>
> —Doreen, white female staff

This attempt to reconcile hiring presumes a level playing field. This expresses some of the sentiments of intergroup segregation as natural but does not take into account historical power dynamics. This workplace negotiation conveys underlying tensions that are articulated through a racialized lens with an eye always kept on who is getting which jobs. In fact it is historically the case that occupations have often been slated for different groups, with the higher income jobs reserved for whites. An example of this contrast is that 27.5 percent of white males hold managerial and professional jobs as compared to 14.7 percent

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of black males, whereas 9.8 percent of white males hold service jobs compared to 20 percent of blacks. This pattern intensifies in the upper class, where the higher the income, the higher the concentration of whites (Patchen, 1999, 126-138). While white men are 33 percent of the population, they are 88 percent of tenured professors, 85 percent of partners in major law firms, 95 percent of Fortune 500 CEO's, 97 percent of school superintendents, 90 percent of the U.S. Senate, 99.9 percent of professional athletic team owners and 100 percent of U.S. presidents (Hahnel, and Pai, 2001). At all levels of employment, this pattern is significant. In sectors where this reality is less polarized, there is more competition for employment and for mobility that gets expressed on a micro-level as tensions within interpersonal relationships. The following statement suggests that this inequity actually functions to support the upward mobility of blacks.

> *Blacks take advantage of tuition benefits because they realize for them that is their guarantee of getting a better job. Blacks are more motivated to rise above things that would keep them down. Isn't that what everyone's struggle is, to rise above what is keeping them down? Someone black might be more motivated because of their past history, the real history of segregation, and not being able to have an education and a sense of pride.*
>
> —Doreen, white female staff

This comment led to a discussion of why whites are concentrated in certain jobs rather than others. It appears that this was not something that had been previously thought about or discussed. In fact, Ted describes a realization that he came to in this discussion, yet concludes that his experience is unique:

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It's interesting, because as a student I took many classes, what a hundred and some odd credits, half at Brooklyn College. I only had one black professor. I think that's really odd to me, that all of these classes and I would have only one black professor? Maybe it's because of the course, time and sections that I chose, not being aware of who the teacher was, but I'm sure there's many more faculty which are not, you know, white.

--Ted, white male staff

Shelia counters this example and an explanation for why whites are concentrated in certain sectors.

It's like the baseball team managers are mostly white. But I think there are just not the people out there to hire.

—Shelia, white female staff

This opened up concerns about equality in the workplace and reverse discrimination. Ted describes his own situation below and articulates why, although he is resentful, he has not asked for clarification from his supervisor:

In my office, two same positions have different job descriptions. I am a white male, and there is a young black woman who occupies the other position. Her job has less responsibilities and her rate of pay is higher. We both have college degree. I don't know why that is. I think part of the problem is that you're afraid to ask because is it going to become a race thing. Is somebody going to say, Are you asking because she's black and you're white", so you don't ask. Animosity builds up and now I feel well, she can handle that task because she's getting a dollar more than me, so it's discouraging. I don't want someone to think I'm racist.

This provided an opportunity for others to speak about reverse discrimination and what they described as feeling intimidated enough to avoid seeking clarification from a supervisor. As Doreen pointed out:

There's some situations where people don't even need a degree and if they are black they will make a title for them to give them more money. They don't have any background. There's no uniformity or rhyme or reason to why some people are paid more than others. I think race has a lot to do

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with it. I think that if a black supervisor is able to get raises for their people they will. I think white people tread very lightly because it is always this issue about black and white, but black people could feel whites get raises because we're white. It works the other way around too. And sometimes it works the opposite too, so I don't understand. But to me, if you can create titles for unqualified black workers, then why can't you create titles for unqualified white workers. They are just as unqualified.

—Doreen, white female staff

Continuous comparisons and competition was evident. In this context one can understand a belief in equality but a relative unwillingness for measures to be taken to equalize opportunity. In the focus groups, it appeared that whites feel vulnerable and resentful that measures taken to equalize opportunity work to disadvantage them. Therefore, they will believe in the ideal that in their minds may help them, but not in the measures that they feel may hurt them.

Comparisons between how blacks and whites, in particular, are regarded were frequently drawn in a variety of contexts. The following are just a few:

A lot of black comedians make puns in terms of white jokes and they're taken as funny, but if a white comedian tells one black joke that is a little bit far-fetched, he's gonna be a racist for the rest of his life. I don't think it's right.

—Alex, white male

Look at the "Million Man March" and Louis Farrakhan, nothing happened to them, but the KKK rally was stoned.

—Sharon, white female

I've been pulled over several times, too. Why is it that when I am pulled over it is because I have done something wrong but when a black guy is pulled over, it's because the cops are racist?

—Angelo, white male

You have to watch what you say. When you're talking to a friend, you got to make sure he's your friend before you tell him something racist. I mean,

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what I'm going to say is not racist. It's like a black person saying to a black person "Hi — blank" or whatever, if a white person comes up to a black person and says the same thing, it's turning into, "Oh, what are you saying now, are you being racist? Are you saying something about me?" We have to watch what we're going to say. That's how it is in this world. If you step outside and you say something wrong, you never know what's going to happen. . . I've seen it happen a lot of times.

—Sam, white male

Because of society, you find, okay, you are joking around with your friends and you could say certain things to them but if an outsider comes and says something, you're going to take it as an insult and I think that's what happens just with racism.

—Jeanne, white female

White respondents said they feel confused about how to act, that they didn't know when they can raise the issue of race, and when it is okay to say "black." They feel unsure about the rules and appear resentful that they would be expected to be sensitive, or needed to educate themselves. It is as if they are saying, "Why can't we be left alone. We're not hurting anybody. We feel victimized by having to watch what we say." These comments reflect this sentiment:

Why is it - I don't feel insulted if somebody says, "Oh, he was a white guy" - why is it an issue? Why do you have to worry about what words you use - like if you say black or African-American, or if you say, whatever, I mean, as long as they don't call me idiot, or a terrible name.

—Doreen, white female, staff

I think black people have a problem. I think it's hard for them - African-Americans, I think they have a problem that you're trying to - it's demeaning, or something. If I called him a nigger - that's a definite bad thing, but if you call me - honkey, they have some white expressions.

—Barbara, white female, staff

But colored was more of a word, because they used that as a slavery term.

—Doreen, white female staff

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The gap between believing everyone should have a fair chance and that measures should be taken might be explained by a perspective that assumes we are all starting at the same place. Whites tend to express the view that progress has taken place, so any advantaging or accommodation is now reverse discrimination to the exclusion and detriment of whites. Their resentment is apparent even as they struggle to understand different perspectives.

Privilege and Discrimination

This chapter explored how race is understood within three specific areas of everyday living: media, education, and the justice system. Poverty is generally seen as natural and assumed. Racial inequality is most frequently believed to be the fault of unmotivated individuals and culturally weak groups. While the ideal of equality is generally supported, measures to level opportunities are viewed as benefiting people of color and discriminating against whites. Significantly fewer people are willing to support proactive measures, perhaps because they fear it means having to give something up.

Explanations for inequality and racism are needed to keep patterns of discrimination and injustice hidden. Contradictions often emerge within one sentence. Statements such as, "It's not race; it's human nature" or "It's not race; it's class" provide rationales for why poverty exists, but doesn't explain the racialized patterns of inequality.

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This chapter points to the way that struggles around multiculturalism and diversity can distract attention away from discussions of the structures of inequality that have historically racialized the global social organization. "Ours is a society that routinely generates destitution — and then, perversely, relieves its conscience by vilifying the destitute" (Ehrenreich, 2002, 9). If people are ideologically prepared with an understanding of economic forces and how they influence politics, they may be more willing to understand race as a smokescreen for the elites who manipulate whites into believing that blacks are to blame.[15]

The next and final chapter summarizes the conclusions of this research and provides an analysis of roles that higher education can play in fostering a deeper understanding of the racial dynamics of the dominant political and social system. Education for transformation involves not only curricular inclusion of the history, struggles, and accomplishments of people of color, but education about the social, political, and economic forces of history. White students clearly have some awareness of the structural causes of racial inequality but draw upon ideological explanations to draw upon that place blame on individuals and groups. They are able to acknowledge injustice and inequality when it is not examined locally or for underlying causation. They appear to accept structural arguments about what is going on globally but they feel they must act individually because they believe that if they play their cards right, they can succeed. They may feel a little guilty but

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15. Thanks to Dr. Donald Robotham for a clarifying discussion about this topic on 4 December 2000,

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they don't act on it because they feel things are not going to change. Generally speaking the system works for them, just the way it is.

Education can and should play a more sophisticated role in fostering awareness about the dynamics of power rather than to feed people's illusions about their future. This can take the form, for example, of engaging the public discourse about the dynamics of global capitalism, corresponding racialized structures of power and subordination, and the impact that these systems has on ordinary people's lives. The stakes are high because as the system shifts in a downward trend many whites who previously felt secure find themselves in increasingly precarious circumstances. Unless persuasive alternative discourse is available and ideological explanations for what they are experiencing on an everyday basis, the dominant white supremacist explanations will continue to reign supreme.

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CHAPTER 8 - CRACKS IN THE WALL OF WHITENESS: DESPERATELY SEEKING AGENCY AND OPTIMISM

"There's no use trying," Alice said; *"One can't believe impossible things."*

"I daresay you haven't had much practice," said the Queen. *"When I was your age, I always did it for half-an-hour a day. Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast."*

—Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass* (1995 [1871])

As participants shared their beliefs and perspectives about the role of race in their lives, a multitude of mechanisms that influence their everyday thinking about how who they are, how they should conduct themselves and what they can expect from society became apparent. Also evident were moments when there appeared to be openings for increasing awareness about the processes and patterns of racialization, racism and inequality. These mechanisms, openings (or as I label them, "cracks") and corresponding recommendations for academia are the subject of this chapter.

Ultimately, this project sought evidence of agency within the perspectives of white students. Locating "cracks in the wall of whiteness" help to locate hope and optimism about the possibilities for challenging the vast inequalities and racial injustice systemically structured throughout our society and sustained by dominant ideological narratives that reinforce and reproduce racialized patterns.

This dissertation explored the accommodation, acquiescence, and collaboration of whites with pro-system ideology as well as their ambivalences and apparent sites of resistance. The project explicitly sought to contribute to current

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scholarship on whiteness in three ways. Firstly, by placing an ethnographic study within the theoretical framework of political, social, and economic transitions of the last three decades of the twentieth century, this study examined white racial consciousness at a historic moment when ideological narratives that explain why inequality exists are being reformulated. In doing so, I link hegemonic symbols, everyday consciousness and theoretical analysis through an exploration of intergroup relations, media influences, patriotic identification and beliefs about poverty and wealth. Secondly, I examine race to understand the mechanisms of privileging and subordination, and believe that the lessons drawn from this study can be generalized to other axes of power. I suggest for example, that many of the conclusions can help us understand the dynamics of power in gender and class relations. Finally, this project sought to identify how structural patterns of inequality are held intact by the everyday thinking of ordinary people. In this way, I looked at how racial identity is utilized to serve the political interests of the powerful and, in turn, can be used to locate agency in service of humanity.

Through reflection upon the students' accounts, I identify circumstances in which there appear to be openings for raising awareness and label these, "cracks in the wall of whiteness" — moments when we might intervene to shift dominant narratives and corresponding imagery enough that a white police officer would hesitate before presuming guilt based on racialized notions of criminality. In doing so, I framed this research within a vision of a world built upon just and equal

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relationships of shared power and community. This may be idealistic; what are our options?

In the final analysis, this project is about dismantling the construct of racial domination and subordination. In my mind, there is no doubt that institutions of education in general, and higher education, in particular, can support interventions that have the capacity to challenge mechanisms that reinforce racial processes. I believe it is urgent to find spaces for intellectual engagement, and place the issue of identity within a political and economic framework from the perspective of world's peoples rather than the rich and powerful.

Mechanisms of the Reproduction of Racialized Patterns

If we can identify the processes by which race is constructed and reproduced on an everyday basis, we can determine the means by which to interrupt them. In this section I summarize mechanisms that became apparent in this research, including, but not limited to the dominant narratives about race that are reinforced through the attitudes and beliefs held particularly although not exclusively, by whites. While there is a spectrum of views about any issue and some are more extreme than others, most perspectives fall within a general range as whites daily negotiate the contradictions that become apparent when people believe in ideals and don't see them actualized. These mechanisms include mainstream ideological assumptions that prevent deconstruction and are integrally related to each other. In the process of upholding these beliefs, patterns of racial inequality

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and injustice are reproduced and reinforced on an everyday basis. While they often function through the use of discourse, I label them "mechanisms" because they are structured into the social fabric of everyday living and the political economic institutions that govern society.

The first mechanism is the **naturalization and mystification of poverty, wealth and inequality**. Throughout the discussions, students acknowledge that poverty exists, and that racial inequality is "still" problematic, but their overall attitude is that this is "just the way things are." Inequality always has been and always will be a part of our society and the world as a whole. They appear resigned and since they have their "own problems" to deal with, they feel there is nothing they can do. Discussions are left on the level of the individual, as students express the feeling that they did not create the unequal conditions so why should they be responsible for addressing them? They articulate little understanding about how wealth is accumulated, of the connections between rich and poor, or privilege and discrimination. The participants did not appear to be aware of how the notion of an American Dream emerged, or that the criteria for having achieved the Dream has dramatically expanded, even over the last two decades. There was no apparent connection made between the structural lack of resources and the vilification of people who are homeless, ill, or illiterate. These states of being just happen to some people, and not to others.

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To the extent that students acknowledge that poverty exists, they consistently provide explanations of poor work ethic, or that people of color use race as an excuse for their own lack of motivation. White students repeatedly argued that claims of bias are used as a tool to blame white society for racial inequality because they believe that opportunities for people of color are abundant. The consistency with which blame is placed on people themselves for being poor was very striking. Therefore, it is not just that poverty is mystified, but for some groups, it is naturalized. It is generally considered to be the character or weaknesses of these groups that leads to their impoverishment.

The second mechanism is the **naturalization of whiteness and American identity**, and the **invisibility of race-dominance** that hide the processes of privileging. There are several components of this mechanism including that whites tend to assume that everyone has access to the same resources and receive the same treatment as they do and that there is a common American experience; race relates only to people of color.

A significant proportion of white participants say they rarely discuss or think about race and don't feel that race impacts their life experience (see Figure 4.2), however they do recognize unfair treatment of people of color (see Figures 7.2 and 7.3). By acknowledging racism, yet detaching themselves from its consequences (unintentionally or otherwise), whites participate in allowing the inequality to persist. How else might they say they are aware of the role of race,

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yet simultaneously choose to deny or ignore it? This process allows whites to perceive race as something they are not part of and reinforces the status quo. They can thereby receive the benefits of being white, without feeling responsible to do anything about those who do not, because (the line of thinking goes...) race is something that doesn't personally affect whites. This mechanism functions similarly with American identity, as people born outside of the U.S. and people of color born in the U.S. are not considered truly "American". As in recent times, someone of Arab descent, even if born in the U.S. may be challenged in his or her claim to an American identity. That "God blessed America" as opposed to any other nation, also expresses this naturalization and Ameri-centrism. That the borders and the definitions of being "white" and being "American" have changed over time, and continue to do so, is yet another expression of this process of naturalization as these identities bestow status differentially depending on the circumstance.

Another component of this naturalization of whiteness is that once illuminated or questioned, the relationship of racialized power is inverted, suggesting that whites, now, are the victims. Various participants spoke about feeling confused, especially when they attempted to compare their experiences with those of people of color who they believe more easily receive scholarships, jobs and other benefits. White participants also often compare themselves to wealthier peers at private schools or colleges out of town. They express feelings of victimization, both by those more fortunate, and those people who are less so.

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Many of the white participants made comments alluding to students of color such as that "they" always: try to separate, raise their flags, want their history included, insist on the validity of their languages and dialects, want "us" to worry about "their" issues like police brutality, and inequality. Several whites asked, "Isn't that divisive; aren't we all American?" In this way, national identity, linguistic distinction, activism and protest are viewed as "a black or Latino thing," exclusive and self-serving, while accommodation was viewed as white, inclusive and generous. Within the context of a general belief that we have achieved racial equality, this mechanism suggests that challenges to the status quo are greedy and opportunistic.

The **rigid regulation of discourse** is a third mechanism that reinforces and reproduces racialized patterns within the structures of society. The boundaries for acceptable exploration of issues such as poverty and wealth, justice and democracy, structure, agency and possibilities are established with strict borders. Origin and development narratives about how the United States became a global power and how the social structure became racially configured, are explained and rationalized in fine detail such that to question them is objectionable. Ideological order is considered a priority, so that perceptions are treated as truths and ambivalence, ambiguity, or confusion, are rendered unacceptable. Mainstream discourse presumes the vantage point of the corporate elite (such that layoffs of two million people is considered a moral good as it protects profits). One's status is ascertained from one's individual positionality, and not acknowledged from the

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perspective of society as a whole. This way, an upper middle class person can feel they are poor because they observe the wealth of the rich and a Brooklyn College student can feel victimized because they could not attend school out of town or a private institution. They look to students from community colleges to make themselves feel better.

In the public sphere, there are four particularly targeted sites where this mechanism is orchestrated. These include the educational system, the media, the judicial and political arenas and employment. Within these domains, images of equality, colorblindness, and of individual and group responsibility either for success or failure dominate. Misinformation and a lack of information are routine. It is therefore not unusual that poverty and wealth are mystified, or that whiteness and American identity are naturalized for the narratives that are presented to the public at large are "truths." The expansion of criteria for achieving the American Dream, assimilation and upward mobility are assumed virtues. Images of interracial harmony and the notion that blacks, Latinos and Asians have achieved equal status to whites are often portrayed in the media. This evidence is used as a means to communicate that inequality is a thing of the past. Euro-centrism is naturalized within a conservative academic curriculum that perpetuates the origin and great society myths of America and white superiority.

The fourth mechanism is one that draws upon many techniques to ensure the transmission and regulation of social values and relations between people in

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society. These include coding of language to camouflage the racial component of policy and actions; the use of fear and silences as means of control; the use of oppositional and dichotomous ways of thinking (Brewer, 1993, 16); the strategies of public versus private personas, defense-consideration-defense, and the hard cop / soft cop technique.

As discussed in chapter one, coding has become a useful mechanism whereby notions of work ethic, crime, standards, merit, welfare, and urban areas conjure up definitively racialized images, but can be raised without the stigma of racism. "It is now possible to perpetuate racial domination without making any explicit reference to race at all. Sub-textual or 'coded' racial signifiers, or the mere denial of the continuing significance of race, may suffice" (Winant, 1994, 19).

The use of fear as a mechanism for the reproduction of racialized patterns in society was evident in several ways. The concern that something one said might be deemed "racist," was referred to multiple times by white focus group participants. When race is discussed among whites, most people indicated that it is done in whites-only settings to avoid what they describe as being "misunderstood." This apprehension makes it very difficult to engage in conversations about privilege, assumptions or to critique dominant narratives because discussions become very personalized and people become defensive. Like the clerk minding the company store, whites guard the register. The tentative tone that was evident is a manifestation of this fear that allows whites to retreat if their comments are not

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well received. This is also communicated through a stigma against talking about these topics because whites perceive that conversations make one vulnerable, hence the position that talking about race perpetuates racism. Whites appear to be more concerned about being called a racist than the impact of racism or that they might learn something.

A second way that the use of fear is implicated in the reinforcement of racialized patterns is through the impact that hate crimes have on the regulation of boundaries as to who is allowed where, and under what circumstances. Students express the sentiment that if you break the rules, anything can happen and frequently refer to incidents such as Yusuf Hawkins' murder or when houses were burned down either of black families who moved into white neighborhoods or of whites who socialized with blacks. This fear functions like the terror that lynchings instilled among poor whites - to set the tone and ground rules for interaction between whites and people of color.

Another aspect of the coding, silences and fear is the way that the older generation functions to communicate social values to the younger generation. The children learn how to conduct themselves by observing and listening, whether to a grandparent's reaction to Bill Cosby, or to a parent's off hand comment, tone or actions. It is evident that direct conversations about race don't often occur; yet attitudes and beliefs are clearly transmitted from one generation to the next.

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A partial acknowledgement of structural relationships of power sometimes occurs when, in public forums, one person says something that allows others to be critical because the more controversial position has already been voiced. I repeatedly observed a "hard cop/soft cop" dynamic that was apparent when people made what appeared to be contradictory statements during different parts of a discussion. This mechanism might also reflect that people feel ambivalent about the issues being discussed. Another circumstance when this occurred was in the tendency for whites to initially be defensive when a claim of racism is made, then to consider the assertion, and finally return to a self-defense, such that it appears that the process of consideration clears one's name. This occurs not just in relationship to individuals, but also in situations where the dynamic of a defense of white innocence, consideration of responsibility and then reversion back to a defense happens frequently. Finally, it appears that when students were not sure whether something they were saying was acceptable; they spoke with a very tentative voice. By doing so, they navigate discussions while maintaining the option to retract their statements if an objection was raised.

The fifth mechanism that I will describe is the use of **racialized narratives of invidious distinction** that bestow positive and superior status (benefits of the doubt) to whites and impugn negative and inferior status (presumed guilt) to blacks, Latinos and Asians. These narratives apply different standards to different groups

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and allow whites to be seen as individuals, but people of color are representatives of their race. Stated below as (white/black) polar opposites, they flow as follows:

Whites don't murder, steal, speed or take drugs; blacks do them all

Whites are generous; blacks want more than their fair share

Whites are patient and work hard; blacks are lazy and like to complain

Whites are good; blacks are bad; Latinos and Asians are invisible, in-between and homogenous

Whites are inclusive and reach out to all; blacks are exclusive and self-segregate

Whites are objective; blacks exaggerate

Whites are peaceful; blacks as violent

Whites hire by ability; blacks hire by race

Whites vote by issue: blacks vote by race

Whites are in positions of authority; blacks are subordinate

Whites can't make "black" jokes; Blacks can make "white" jokes

Whites are philanthropic; blacks are activists

Whites run society, don't have time to complain, or to fight injustice; Blacks waste time complaining

Whites are realistic; Blacks are idealistic

For whites, Italians and Jews are mixed or different; but all blacks look alike

Whites are safe and orderly; blacks are dangerous

Whites are authentic and honest; blacks are phony and manipulative

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Whites succeed on their own; blacks need help

Whites as moral; blacks are immoral

These narratives are communicated through discrete and implicit imagery and discourse. The centering of whiteness provides significant advantage and positive unearned advantage while it marginalizes, vilifies and objectifies blacks, Latinos and Asians reflecting a differential valuation of these groups. The implicit and moral presumptions of white as superior and black as inferior emerged repeatedly as whites described themselves as multicultural, realistic, relevant, open-minded, caring, educated, and honest, in contrast to blacks who were characterized as self-centered, unrealistic, irrelevant, close-minded, selfish, and dishonest. At times this took a blatant form: "They are incompetent; we need to correct their spelling"; "Why are their national flags so important that they have to march around with them. You don't see us draping the US flag over us and marching"; "We chose relevant and realistic issues, not outside concerns"; "They are imbeciles, what does police brutality have to do with BC." Facts are rarely presented and perceptions are expressed as truths. The dearth of close social contact contributes to a lack of understanding, but the more superficial contact functions to provide a defense for whites to say they do know and understand what people of color experience, and therefore they feel justified to pass judgment. In political campaigns such as in the attacks on the public sector of the past decade,

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these invidious comparisons are drawn upon to garner support from whites through coded yet racialized imagery to reinforce systemic patterns.

A sixth mechanism is the belief in ideals and apparent awareness of racial inequality, but a lack of willingness to actualize the ideals or acknowledge the consequence for not doing so. Many whites openly agreed that inequality exists, but hesitate to accept structural inequality. They believe that schools educate, police protect, the government directs and when things go wrong, it's the individual's fault. The belief that the United States is a model democracy provides a defense against assertions of inequality. The foreign-born experience of European immigrants is held up, like the model minority myth, to show that all people can make it if they work hard, ignoring differential factors of whether they are documented, refugees, transmigrants, educated, skilled, traveled of their own free will, have family ties or receive transition benefits.

It appears as if conceding to a systemic problem would too dramatically challenge assumptions (or justifications) about why some people do better than others. This process is constantly negotiated depending on the circumstance (who one is speaking to, and who is listening) and on the context so that one individual may acknowledge and deny the impact of race within a single conversation. This mechanism supports the status quo, because it prevents a thorough discussion of structure and political economy. There is an implicit disconnect between one's beliefs and the consequences or implications thereof.

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Individuals who have experienced other forms of subordination based on gender, sexual orientation, or class status can often draw upon personal experience to reflect upon racial processes. However, if these experiences are not theorized in the context of power relations, they can have the reverse effect such as, "As a woman, I have overcome the challenges of a male dominated society so why can't you as a person of color overcome the challenge of a white-dominated society?" or "Class relations are worse than race." Understanding relations of power and patterns of dominance and subordination from any point of entry can provide an opening for a more systemic understanding of capitalism. A deepened grasp of the mechanisms of power and its consequences has the potential to dismantle the ideological justifications used in its defense.

It appears as though to openly acknowledge white privilege would mean chaos and the disassembling of the "order of being" in society. The notion of structural inequality appeared to be overwhelming, so while people acknowledge unequal circumstances, they dismiss institutional or systemic analyses that may leave them feeling personally implicated or responsible. One senses that they feel they can acknowledge things are not perfect, as long as it is someone else's problem. Admitting structural inequality means we, as a society, need to do something. This is more of a commitment than most people seem willing to make.

Yet another example of the dynamic of willingness to recognize inequality, but not the structural component, was that participants acknowledged the role of

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media in shaping views, yet they found it more difficult to identify the media's impact on the way people act. In explaining the "White Fairness Understanding Gap," Paul Street says that misleading and provocative news stories that exaggerate white suffering from affirmative action combined with images of a black middle class, give people the sense that society is now equal (Street, 2001, 9). Street says that for blacks and other people of color life experience counters these messages, but for whites, often living segregated lives, these media images become reality. Bill Cosby and Oprah Winfrey were the most consistent people of color raised in the focus groups. For white students with little interaction with people of color off campus, they provide the images of what most black people's lives are like today.

The divergence between an agreement with grand notions of equality, democracy, and fair treatment and the relative unwillingness to support measures to equalize opportunity (Figure 7.8) is another example of the apparent awareness of racial inequality but a lack of acknowledgement about its material implications.

The *segregation of most aspects of daily living* and casual interaction between whites and people of color is the seventh mechanism that reinforces racialized beliefs rather than challenges them. Students spoke about how the campus is segregated but felt this was due to human nature and too difficult to change. While it is apparent that contact does not necessarily increase understanding, it also does not appear to increase tension. In some ways, going to

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school or living in a diverse environment functions to lessen white people's sense of the need to better understand the everyday experiences of blacks, Latinos, and Asians. The public interaction sometimes provides justification for whites to feel that they "know," and can judge the daily experiences of people of color. This contact gives them the justification for being able to make broad generalizations because they believe they "know" from someone they work or go to school with. Exposure lends itself to being used as a defense against having to examine one's own attitudes and beliefs. Students acknowledged that the visible diversity of the student body does not necessarily represent intertwining of people's lives. They agreed with the survey data, which indicated that people predominantly interact with different groups on campus but with their "own" when they leave. When personal contact is positive, it is often attributed to individuals rather than to challenge the dominant racialized narratives implicitly portrayed in the media.

The eighth mechanism that contributes to the reproduction of racialized patterns of inequality and injustice is the evidence of "unwritten rules" that dictate the parameters for interaction between people from different groups. These are the implicit *modus operandi* utilized for intergroup relationships. They are driven by the fear of consequence, rejection, or pressure from family or friends, of discomfort, making a mistake, of not understanding or being understood, and a concern about the risks involved in operating outside the bounds of assumed conduct.

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The rules are taught to young children but not enforced until young adulthood when economic pressures in a competitive labor market drive a wedge into relationships. At this point, whites often explain their job search and scholarship difficulties as resulting from an unfair advantage given to blacks, Latinos and Asians. However, they know that the rules dictate that they can say this privately, to their friends but they need to be cautious in public, as racially explicit language is not generally considered acceptable. Other rules include that one does not bring home people of another racial group (particularly blacks) because one's parents would not allow it or one knows it is not acceptable; interact only in public and/or safe spaces; handle business as business and do not presume ideological agreement; friendliness is acceptable but intimacy is not. Internal struggles (dirty laundry) don't get aired in public; they are kept within the family. It's okay to resist the rules, but not to openly challenge or defy them. "Winks" and silent nods indicate agreement; explicit complicity is not necessary and in fact not preferred as it might confer heightened vulnerability.

Just as we learn not to discuss politics or religion, we learn the boundaries of discussing opinions about justice and inequality otherwise we would have to reckon with race (and class). Relationships are established and maintained instrumentally. Casual contact maintains a veneer of positive relationships between groups and functions as a disincentive to intergroup dialogue about tensions and segregation.

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I thought everybody was equal and happy, like, you don't pay attention; you're only a little kid, you know, you don't pay attention to these things.
—Catherine, white female

Several whites explained that they want to do the right thing, but unspoken rules interfere.[1] They spoke of their good intentions, which made critical analysis difficult because everything is focused on the individual and the intention, rather than on the outcome or the structure.

Social pressures supporting both individualism and competition function simultaneously as a ninth mechanism and reinforce historic relationships between groups of people and between individuals. Human nature is characterized as selfish, greedy, and competitive (everyone wants to feel better than someone); that people prefer to stay "with their own kind" and sort people into categories of same versus different. In this view, interracial relationships are deemed deviant as though the individuals couldn't find someone of their own kind to date or marry. To encourage intergroup contact and interaction is to mess with "what's normal." Explanations for overt racism include that "some people just hate."

Students described feeling that even if they could care for society as a whole, doing so was not practical. They said that they did not have enough flexibility and personal security to watch out for other people, and anyway, "Significant progress has been made, so why are black people always complaining?" "It is expecting too much for us to have to take care of everyone." "It would lead

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to my own demise and I will end up in their place." There is little encouragement to consider what is best for the community as a whole, or to think about what society as a whole should be doing to support the well-being of all its members.

This mechanism also operates to set the discussion within terms of the individual. Racism then, has been eliminated if everyone "gets along." Relationships between people and the social status of groups and individuals are dehistoricized and decontextualized. No one, and nothing is responsible, therefore also de-fuses the capacity of individual and group agency and the possibility for social change.

The illusive nature of race, expressed through ambiguities, ambivalences and shifting borders functions as a tenth mechanism Students express conflicting notions that while they realize race matters in everyday living, it does not really exist (or at least it doesn't exist anymore). They are able to explain why people tend to associate with their own group, and why they support the policies they do, maintaining plausible deniability about the process of their racialized thinking. Many white students express the belief that race exists only in the minds of those who keep talking about it and those people of color who want to use it for their own advantage. They explain that while it appears that race separates people, it is really a desire for comfort, familiarity, and human nature.

In this way the roles that race plays are fluid though definitive, tangible yet

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1. Walter O. Weyrauch has also referred to the notion of unwritten rules in relationship to the legal academy, in Wildman (1998, 9).

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elusive. The process of racialization performs a distinct function by dividing people but yet remaining camouflaged. The white male who described himself as a Brooklyn American, deconstructs race's role through his geographic identification with a place that holds racialized imagery, yet he still proceeds as a white male in society. In this manner, white participants provided much evidence about their attempts to reconcile their recognition that race matters with their denial that it exists. They acknowledged racialized generalizations but then made statements such as "it's not that I'm racist," "some people think," or "it's not that I think all black people," to legitimate their statements. Ambivalence undermines the ability to engage in principled dialogue as often times contradictory or incongruous beliefs exist simultaneously. The pressure to simplify or solely deal in the realm of intentions makes it very difficult to critically analyze perspectives or circumstances. The emphasis on dichotomous and oppositional thinking (e.g. either you are or you aren't racist; either no blacks have been upwardly mobile or all blacks have been so) prevents sophisticated analysis of how different axes of power and subordination function and how race is structured into the fabric of society.

The final mechanism that I will describe is the way that resistance is stigmatized, marginalized, and racialized, with the ultimate message that things are the way they are because that's the way they should be and they won't and can't change. Students in primary and secondary schools are deemed good when they are quiet, and "well-behaved." "Nice" people are deemed superior; people who "make

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waves" or challenge the status quo are deemed an irritation. Strict notions of what is possible are conveyed such that to envision substantive social change is viewed either as unrealistic, idealistic or ignorant.

This mechanism dictates the boundaries of potential and contributes to sustaining the status quo. Students' feelings about being overwhelmed compound this perspective. They ask, "Even if you did want to do something, what could you do that would make a difference?" and assert that there are no means to intervene in society-wide or global problems. Their heightened sense of powerlessness functions to reinforce the status quo and uphold dominant narratives and racialized discourse rather than to identity true loci of power.

Whether in a diverse setting such as Brooklyn College or in a predominantly white environment, the everyday experiences of whites tend to reinforce these mechanisms and provide disincentives to questioning the status quo. It is deemed acceptable for whites to acknowledge racial injustice and inequality on a macro level, but less acceptable to acknowledge it in everyday living. Whites appear to be able to understand and accept structural arguments but they act individually. In a national survey conducted by the 2001 Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) of the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at the University of California, Los Angeles, 30 percent of Brooklyn College students indicated that "Realistically, an individual can do little to bring about changes in society." This compares to 28.7 percent of students at four-year public colleges nationally (CIRP,

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2001). Paul Rogat Loeb suggests that another factor in students' feelings of what he calls "learned helplessness" is the way that history is portrayed as single acts of extraordinary individuals, rather than as many small acts that support a public and visible action or movement that creates change. He cites the example of Rosa Parks and the Montgomery Bus Boycott as a part of a long-term effort that involved many people. He suggests that this perspective on history undermines people's sense of their own power and defuses the will to resist (Loeb, 2001, 4).

As described in chapter seven, in a forum about the struggle for access to CUNY, and why Jewish students and organizations should be involved, Edith Everett, former CUNY Trustee, said, "In order to participate in resistance and critical action, one must believe that the whole population suffers from poverty, illness and lack of education" (Everett, 1999). She urged students to take action and to believe that things can change. However, few of the students in attendance that day responded to her call. Is it possible that as long as they are doing well, this group of young people feels they can detach themselves from social concerns such as access to public higher education? To this question, a student in one of the focus groups responded,

> *This discussion validated my own feelings. It is not just me who feels the way things are, is unacceptable. It helps to talk; it makes me stronger. I feel surer of myself. I know my confusion and distress are reasonable. The issue of race is better to be on the table. I really believe in that story about the starfish — if you throw back just one into the sea you have made a difference. But you can't pressure people to talk or to be involved, so it is not easy.*
>
> —Karen, white female

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Ultimately, whether it is easy is not the issue. The process of talking increases awareness, and if we do believe that there are ways to intervene, we have no choice but to attempt to do so. With these mechanisms and corresponding ideological explanations in place, opportunities to challenge structural and system-wide dominance and subordination based on race or any other axes of power are constrained. Answers are provided up front about whom we should interact with, when, under what circumstances.

Cracks in the Wall of Whiteness

Inherent within many of these mechanisms, lies the potential that they could be utilized to challenge, rather than to reinforce and reproduce patterns and structures of racialized inequality. A variety of openings for the engagement of whites became apparent in this research. This subsection will summarize these "cracks in the wall of whiteness."

IDEALS: Strong beliefs in the principles of equality, justice, and democracy, and expressions of caring for those less fortunate were apparent both in the quantitative and qualitative findings of this research. Students expressed pride in diversity, and wanted to be seen as part of a nation and a community where all people are cared about. Their ambivalence emerged in the question of whether this was a realistic goal. This general idealism, however, provides opportunities to contrast what they believe should be, their perceptions of what is, and what

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actually is the status of different groups of people. Students clearly understood that as a doctor, teacher or a businessperson, it is useful to understand different languages and cultures, as contact between people in the public sphere is more frequent. Their exposure to different ideas and perspectives reinforces new possibilities. A crack, or an opening, therefore exists.

AMBIGUITIES: There were many points of contestation where students acknowledged multiple realities and incongruous attitudes. They appeared to simultaneously uphold dominant narratives for example, that the attacks on CUNY, or public education were part of a campaign for standards, yet were also aware that increases in tuition made completing their degrees much more difficult. Those who were aware of the shift in funding from education to the prison industrial complex, were both upset at the legislators, and at the people they held responsible for the need for more prisons: generally black and Latino youth. They frequently vacillated in their allegiances, knowing someone is to blame for their difficulties but not being so sure who that someone is. These incongruities provide openings for more thorough dialogue to analyze the implications of holding individuals or groups, or the structure itself responsible.

AMBIVALENCE: A related, but additional "crack" is the uncertainty that was evident in the beliefs and attitudes held by whites as they navigate both their own increasing financial insecurities and as they are exposed to alternative perspectives. This is sometimes expressed in a tentative tone or by thinking out

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loud that I suggest reflects some level of awareness of the contradictions of mainstream narratives about race and the very meaning of being white in this day and age. The mechanism whereby racism, status, and morality are measured solely through polar and dichotomous concepts mean that if whites are aware they have some privilege, they hesitate to acknowledge it. Their ambivalence therefore functions as an opening as it reveals awareness and a sense of vulnerability that can be drawn upon to heighten consciousness about current realities and future possibilities.

AWARENESS: Students reveal their recognition of the contradictions within mainstream narratives. They grappled with trying to explain the United States as the land of opportunity while acknowledging discrimination in the spheres of educational access, employment opportunities and in relationships with the police. Herein lies an opening to draw upon this awareness of individual circumstances to theorize about institutional and structural relationships of power in society. Similarly, their sensitivities to or experiences with other forms of dominance and subordination (gender, language, sexuality, religiosity) can translate into a broad understanding of system wide patterns. Intellectual and social engagement has been shown to result in powerful cognitive development, critical awareness and sense of social responsibility, all key factors in the development of agency.

SYSTEMIC DOWNTURNS: As whites increasingly feel the economic and political pressures that have resulted in a range of transitions in employment patterns, their

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sense of vulnerability is heightened. While these circumstances can in fact lend themselves to further entrenching the dominant narratives about who is to blame, so do they also provide opportunities for broad-scale public engagement about global economic and political forces. An opening thereby exists to increase awareness and understanding about racism and racialized patterns of inequality.

CONFUSION: Similarly, the uncertainty that many whites seem to feel about why they feel vulnerable provides an opportunity to discuss structural causality. When they realize that they really did not understand how the current social organization came to exist, many whites appeared to be open to alternative narratives that perhaps have the potential to shift their basic beliefs, which tend to follow the culture of poverty framework.

CREATIVITY, POSSIBILITY AND NEW INVENTIONS: Last but not least, I suggest that cracks in the wall of whiteness exist in the many formulations and interrogations of the tenets of the racial order that has existed over the last five hundred years. Whether be the notion of Brooklyn Americans, wiggahs, crossover hip hop culture, multiracial identities and unions or new abolitionists, there appears to be increased categories and blurring of borders that complicate notions of race. While not inherently, these formulations provide openings through which whiteness can be examined and potentially challenged as presumed superior and supreme.

None of these cracks, alone or even together, provide the impetus or the transformation necessary in everyday consciousness such that structures of white

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supremacy might all of a sudden get challenged and transformed. However, I suggest that by understanding the mechanisms of reinforcement and the possibilities for change, we have a better chance. We are up against immense powers and need to draw upon every individual, in every capacity that we can, to challenge the patterns of inequality that have been built into both national and global history.

CONCLUSIONS

By identifying mechanisms that function to reproduce and reinforce patterns of inequality in society, we are able to locate points of entry for broad-scale engagement about the forces that result in the pressures that most whites have increasingly felt during the last three decades. This is critical to our ability to counter the dominant ideological campaign that continues to blame people of color and immigrants as the cause of the economic strain.

This section suggests ways to counter the master-narrative and disrupt current patterns of conversation about race, racism, and racialization. We must engage, not preach, as we draw upon our understanding of the experiences of both subordination and dominance, discrimination and privilege, prejudice in its negative and positive forms, inclusion and exclusion. We need to analyze race through a multi-layered paradigm, so that while it is understood in its centrality to the maintenance of the capitalist world order, race and racialization are not re-

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essentialized. To do so would only reflect in the very same relations of dominance and privilege but just in a reformulated configuration.

In chapter one I raised several questions, and while I have responded to them indirectly throughout this chapter, I now explicitly articulate my conclusions:

Have the political, social and economic transitions of the last quarter of the twentieth century led to an acute sense of victimization and of the world being stacked against white citizens, as portrayed in the media? I would answer yes, albeit with two qualifications. While the gains from the Civil Rights era and the social movements of the 1960s increased the visibility of the black and Latino middle or upper class, racial inequality still exists in relatively similar proportions to that which existed in the 1960s. However, the segregation of communities (e.g., housing, education, and employment) and media images of middle-class blacks and Latinos renders the reality of racial inequality largely hidden. Whites fairly consistently believe that equality has been achieved or that opportunities are so extensive that grievances about racism are now unjustified excuses to blame whites for the lack of motivation of people of color. This conclusion is drawn both from the quantitative and qualitative data of this research project, as well as from other national studies (Sack and Elder, 2000, 1; Roper Center, 2001, R29A; National Opinion Research Center, 2001b, Question 154; Morin, 2001, A1). However, upon close examination of the data, it is also evident that there are times when whites question the discourse about who is to blame for their feelings of economic strain,

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and moments when the contradictions between what they think and what they observe become visible. One example of this is that 62.6 percent of Brooklyn College freshmen believe that "Wealthy people should pay a larger share of taxes than they do now," indicating some understanding of the economic dynamics of U.S. society today (CIRP, 2001).

What role does and can education play in shaping beliefs and attitudes about race? The answer to this question is discussed below, in the section on Policy and Programmatic Implications for Academia. It is my belief that education plays a major role in shaping beliefs and attitudes about race in the absence or inclusion of the history, concerns, and perspectives of people of color within the curriculum; in various pedagogical styles; in the absence or inclusion of faculty of color; and in the access to opportunities for programs, dialogues, and engagement between groups. Academia provides (or does not provide) the means for intellectual exploration of the concerns and experiences that influence students' perspectives about significant issues in their lives.

Students need opportunities to learn in environments that allow for critical analysis of their daily experiences, and the application of theory learned in the classroom, to their everyday world. Without opportunities for both experiential and theoretical growth, ideas remain abstract and do not bear the true power of knowledge. Ideas and facts can be forgotten after an exam or turning in a paper if they have not been integrated into an individual's life. At the same time, exposure

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to diversity without opportunities to theorize the causes or significance of inequality or difference, interactions with people from different groups are easily personalized without any grappling with the meaning of democracy, diversity, power, or civic duty. This contact, then, is seen as an individual interaction with a nice person who may or may not be "like the rest of 'them'".

The case for co-curricular involvement must be that it is inseparable from the curricular training in the pursuit of the broad intellectual mission, particularly of higher education. It is central, not marginal; it is where ideas may be tested and experiences understood without concern for grades or retribution. Without this opportunity, it is difficult to achieve the true value of education. Students need space for intellectual engagement where the social context is discussed and personal experiences may be understood.

The greatest possibilities lie in the connection between the agency of individuals and their ability to understand structure and system, and between the application of theory and the theorizing of application. There is a synergy in this learning process. Positive interchanges are only personal interactions unless they are understood within a framework that can reckon with the structural and institutional forces of inequality that mitigate against those very interchanges. It is through the power resident within the broad masses of people that social inequalities can be challenged. However, as long as whites see themselves allied

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with a power structure and the status quo, few of the true questions about how our world today is structured will ever receive adequate attention.

I believe that whites who identify themselves with the dominant power structure do so not out of a malicious desire to impose the tragic consequences on the masses of people of color throughout the world. Yet, they so much want to protect what they have that they are willing to sacrifice the idea and possibility of working toward a greater good for all, if they need to do so to achieve a sense of security, themselves. Each mechanisms and narrative identified above contributes to a worldview that holds the current pattern as their only option, and replicates, reinforces, and reproduces structures of inequality. If we could interrupt and expose these mechanisms, narratives and structures, we might have a chance at building a world where hunger, homelessness, and fear of violence would no longer be an issue for so many people. What we need, Arundhati Roy, author, suggests:

> *What we need to search for and find, what we need to hone and perfect into a magnificent, shining thing, is a new kind of politics. Not the politics of governance, but the politics of resistance. The politics of opposition. The politics of forcing accountability. The politics of joining hands across the world and preventing certain destruction. In the present circumstances, I'd say that the only thing worth globalizing is dissent* (Roy, 2002).

We have little option but to believe that given the opportunity, and as part of a moral campaign for what is right and loving and good, people can care about more than just themselves.

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This dissertation is about exposure and about agency. I refer not just to the everyday contact that occurs while interacting in a classroom or on a train, but the type that encourages and supports thorough exploration of the structures, history and systems of assumptions, biases and ideological presumptions about why poverty exists. I refer to poverty in general, and racialized poverty, in particular, as inequality is embedded into the structures of society.

There is, at this moment in time, a great need to listen, not just talk. We need to draw upon common values of safety, strength, respect for human life, and for justice to connect and to foster understanding about the mechanisms of power that underlie current and past events such as the U.S. government's response to the tragedy of September 11. Mainstream media has worked in concert with corporate interests and have generally followed the lead of President George W. Bush in setting a moral tone in framing the military response within notions of patriotism and righteousness. Many grassroots, youth, community, progressive, and academic groups and individuals have worked to focus current public discourse on issues of peace and justice. However, powerful forces are at work to discourage, stigmatize, and undermine voices of dissent (We Interrupt This Message, 2001).

We Interrupt This Message is a non-profit organization dedicated to "build[ing] capacity in public interest and community-based organizations to generate positive news coverage and challenge unfair media images." Recently they called for a reframing of the public debate by replacing the questions, speaking to

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shared values, and returning to points of agreement as techniques to engage the general public about the range of issues involved. They suggest that we must first lay the groundwork by speaking to an agenda that the American public can support. When people feel the country is weak, we need to speak to the question of how to build safety, strength, and respect for human life and justice. Building a case for peace grounded in shared concerns and values, addressing the moral high ground by framing discussions oriented toward institutional accountability, are ways they suggest to engage mainstream discourse about the post-September 11 response. However, these approaches also apply in educating the public about the everyday impact of race, and social, political, and economic forces that underlie historical patterns of inequality. In a presentation at the African American Institute of Columbia University on December 10, 1999, Dr. James Jennings, scholar and author, advocated for the need to change civic discourse about the invisibility and blaming of victims, about the true nature of policies and practices oriented to compensate for past discrimination, and about civic participation. He described mainstream discourse as a political tool used to disarm and diffuse the political power of poor and working people.

Theoretical discussions or analyses of structural inequality generally do not adequately convey the consequences or causes as they impact personal and daily life. Positive interactions between groups do not necessarily illuminate what must change in society nor do they eradicate structural inequalities. It is solely the

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continuous and dialectical flow of theory and practice that these two critical components can be bridged in forging a new public awareness, in particular among whites who, as a group, most vehemently defend the status quo, as illustrated throughout this dissertation.

MULTICULTURAL AMERICA: THE SYSTEM AND ITS SYMBOLS

This research provided significant evidence of differences in attitude between native and foreign-born whites that I had not anticipated. The divergences include that foreign-born whites defend the system more consistently than U.S.-born whites, even if U.S.-born whites appear to defend the symbols more vehemently. Perhaps foreign-born whites feel that their experience upon arriving in the United States has generally been positive. Their access, resources and encounters lead them to view the country as a land of opportunity. They less often recognize discrimination, more often believing that all people are treated equally when applying for jobs, housing, when approached by police, and in the media. As distinguished from foreign-born blacks, they believe more than other groups that all people can be assimilated into U.S. society, that the U.S. cannot be both multicultural and have an American identity and that eliminating remediation in the University impacts all students equally.

The defense of symbols by U.S.-born whites appears to reflect their allegiance and loyalty to the positive principles articulated as what it means to be American, and at the same time articulates their complicity with the notion of

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white superiority and supremacy. National identity functions as another axis from which to understand the imposition of patterns of dominance and subordination upon which all other axes also cross, at times contradicting, other times enhancing the status of the holder. American national identity often functions like race where the holder lives in an assumed state from which all "others" depart, as American identity is white and English-speaking. The stark images of the whiteness and maleness of the police and fire departments, construction crews, and the political administration is what being American is all about. This apartheid-like labor structure has rarely been exposed. While this pattern of unequal employment has been alluded to, it has not been widely discussed in the press. The very definition of an American hero is starkly racialized but rarely challenged. Discussions, then, that express the perspective that the U.S. can not be both multicultural and American particularly exclude people of color, especially immigrants who have drawn from the Asian, Latin and African diasporas during the last forty years.

Racialization has also been expressed in the relationships between West Indians, South Asians, Haitians and African Americans. While often this mechanism is oversimplified as an expression of these immigrants' attempt to distinguish themselves from African Americans, who, in the racial order of the United States have been viewed as the most undesirable group, this dynamic is actually much more complex. Winston James, a historian, speaks to the impatience

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that many West Indians have felt upon arrival in the United States when confronted with racism, which led to a significant history of black radicalism. He asserts that this activism however, developed through a slightly different path than that of African Americans who had experienced this pattern of racism throughout their lives (James, 1998). James criticizes the notion that relationships with African Americans have solely been characterized by tension and argues that they have been shaped by the political context of different historical periods. He documents significant collaboration and interaction between the two groups (Elliot, 2000).

As immigration patterns shift toward increasing numbers of Latinos and Asians in the United States and as political interests attempt to use this change to their advantage, the mechanisms of race, racialization, and racism will continue to be in transition and complicated.[2] Within this current day context as well as historically, the meaning of being American shifts continuously between something tangible and specific (place of birth, naturalization or citizenship) and something ambiguous and constructed (belief system, loyalty, patriotism).

When one claims to be an American and defines this identity as the embodiment of democracy, freedom, generosity, hard work, etc. there is an implicit assertion of superiority over anyone who does not make this claim. It is difficult to critique the concept of being American because it is so integrally linked to

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2. See Foner (2001a); Waldinger (1996); Prashad (2000,38-39); Bobb (2001, 212-238).

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individual self-worth and self-definition that it appears that when founding myths are questioned, a void is left in its place.[3] This phenomenon occurred during the fall of 2001 as freedom of speech and the right to dissent emerged as critical civil rights principles that were immediately challenged by forces looking to impose a narrative about how such a tragedy could occur. CUNY Trustees were part of this ideological campaign to squelch the intellectual interrogation of the myths of America, as they labeled faculty who raised questions about the history of U.S. foreign policy at a City College Teach-In "seditious" (Perez and Barrera, 2001, 2). In another incident, Lynne Cheney, wife of the Vice President and former Chairwoman of the National Endowment for the Humanities denounced Deputy Chancellor of the New York City schools, Judith Rizzo, for saying the terrorist attacks demonstrated the importance of understanding Muslim culture. Cheney said this statement implied that Dr. Rizzo believed the attacks of September 11 were America's fault because of its failure to understand Islam (Rothstein, 2001, A20). In yet another example, Clear Channel Communications, a media giant that owns more than 1,100 radio stations nationally suggested that John Lennon's song, "Imagine" should not be played in the aftermath of September 11. "Apparently, you *can't afford to go around imagining 'no countries' and 'nothing to kill or die for' now, with so much killing and/or dying for your country to be done*" (Masley, 2001, C2).

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3. For an outstanding exploration of founding myths, see Martinez (1998).

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Powerful forces set forth to work to protect the positive image of the United States and to ward off challenges.

For native-born whites, the influences of a primary and secondary education in the United States and various forms of media have ingrained a belief in the natural order of society, and where "America" fits in. Yet, at the same time, all whites regardless of where they were born, more often and more strongly articulate a belief in ideals but less so a willingness for action to be taken to insure these ideals. A discrete calculation among whites about how to best position oneself individually was evident, with little concern for the consequence to society as a whole (Street, 2001, 9-11). A pragmatic approach is taken by whites toward upholding "truths," so that what is important is not a clearly defined set of beliefs but an implicit understanding of the consequences that correspond to adopting one or another way of thinking. Otherwise, whites could be held responsible for inequality, and for them, this burden may be too great to bear (Street, 2001, 11).

THE FOCUS GROUP EXPERIENCE

In the process of identifying opportunities for engagement, this section summarizes feedback that students gave regarding their experience participating in this project's focus groups. Their comments indicate that they had not consciously thought about many of these issues before, but appreciated doing so. Since no grade was assigned, no positive or negative reward given, there was no reason that they needed to say that they valued the experience.

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Overall, students acknowledged that they felt uncomfortable, and even put somewhat on the spot. However, they clearly valued the chance to hear diverse opinions about aspects of everyday living. Repeatedly students said they came to talk but ended up doing more listening because they felt they had something to learn from each other. While this was particularly true for students who participated in the mixed groups, it was also true in the all-white groups, where students were able to hear different opinions among white participants. Several specific topics consistently arose as ones that they wanted to think more about. This included the meaning of the flag, "race stuff" and being American. In future studies it would be useful to include a follow-up session so that students have the chance to process and reflect upon what they had heard in the first session. It would also be interesting to note whether beliefs or opinions had changed.

It was a good experience. I never thought about these questions before. I don't know, it makes me think that maybe we should get more involved.
—Allen, white male

It was a good experience, hearing everybody's points of view, because I never really thought about things from other peoples' perspectives and the stuff about the American flag, I never really thought about that.
—Joan, white female

I never thought about the American flag symbolizing unity and all that stuff. That stuff never crossed my mind.
—Don, white male

It was a good opportunity because I never had the chance before to sit with a group of people from different backgrounds and discuss unusually controversial issues. It was interesting to hear everybody's opinion.
—Helen, white female

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Some students acknowledged that they found it uncomfortable to talk about race. They appeared to feel self-conscious, were concerned there might be conflict and were worried about how they would be perceived. These sentiments are illustrated in the following comments:

> *The last question was a little uncomfortable, in terms of if whites are advantaged in our society. It's controversial and it's a topic that might lead to an argument. I wanted to avoid arguing.*
>
> —Zena, white female

> *It was a good conversation because everybody got to think and hear what everybody else has to say with different backgrounds. It was a little uncomfortable to talk about the race stuff, you never know how people are going to perceive what you're saying, so you have to be careful.*
>
> —Jeff, white male

Participants express the need for forums where they could raise questions and know they would not be attacked for their ignorance or beliefs. They are concerned and troubled by the ways that race impacts their daily lives. A significant number voice a desire to get answers for questions they had, but were afraid to ask. The staff roundtable spoke extensively about this issue:

> *I want to be open about whatever. I want to try to bring you into my community, my white whatever world, because of the equality thing, but I don't feel like I'm being let to. Do you understand what I'm saying? I want to be more accepting.*
>
> —Barbara, white female staff

> *I want to be accepting but I don't feel that's being taken in the right way. I want to be able to say whatever I want to say and not feel like it's going to be offensive to someone if I mention a word. Why can't I say, "black"?*
>
> —Doreen, white female staff

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I found that once people realized that some of the things I was able to bring up, were very close to what they were [concerned about], *I feel I was accepted, if that's the right word to use. Now they're less of that "You-wouldn't-understand" kind of thing and more a little bit including me, because they realize I do understand. But the barrier has to come down.*

—Barbara, white female

Do black people care as much as we seem to care whether they are accepted by us, as if we are accepted by them? I'm hearing us say "We want to get along and things to be more equal." Do they feel the same way? Do they want to get along or do they want to keep the segregation?

—Doreen, white female

If the only issue were segregation, perhaps the answers to these questions might be simpler. These comments, while not reflecting an understanding of the experience of racial subordination that is consistent and perpetual within daily life do however reflect a concern, and a desire for a better world. This is the essence of what I mean by a "crack in the wall of whiteness." These conversations open the possibility of dialogue and deepened understanding of the devastating impact of racism in its personal and its institutional forms. They also provide an opportunity to find common ground among people who share class or gender experiences. However, what incentives exist to motivate open discussion? I believe that our collective future is at stake; perhaps the events of September 11, 2001 make that more apparent.

IMPLICATIONS FOR ACADEMIA

Throughout this chapter I have discussed what I see as the significant role that education (particularly higher education) can and should play in addressing

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issues of social inequality that underlie the relationships and ideological framing of race in our society. I have stated with some urgency the need for collaboration between academic and student affairs so that theoretical and experiential learning are viewed as a partnership and not as two separate pursuits. This research was specifically aimed at understanding white racial consciousness and at identifying the everyday mechanisms that reinforce and reproduce dominant narratives about race, racism, and racialization, not at proposing a diversity initiative. However, I would be amiss if I did not express my support for what has been shown to be the most effective strategy in supporting diversity as a core component of the academia mission. That strategy involves comprehensive and multi-layered initiatives that enhance the many different structural elements, including positive campus climate, diverse staffing, inclusive curriculum, support for students from underrepresented groups, to improve access and success as well as the quality of education provided. In this way, we can draw upon what has been described as "Academics of the Heart," in the education of the whole person and as a balance of reason and spirit.[4]

I focus on academia because while higher education has generally emphasized the benefits of higher learning (intellectually and economically) to the individual learner, the benefit to society as a whole in enriching the quality and

4. The philosophical underpinnings of this draw from Aztec culture. Laura I. Rendon describes the five key features in "Academics of the Heart," *About Campus* (July-August 2000): 3-5.

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vitality of communities and fostering engagement in democracy and civic involvement is just as great (Schneider, 1995, xiii-xiv). Additionally,

> *While other institutions in society are also fostering diversity, higher education is uniquely positioned, by its mission, values and dedication to learning, to foster and nourish the habits of heart and mind that Americans need to make diversity work in daily life as a value and a public good.*[5]

In the next subsection, I make some specific recommendations drawing directly from the thoughts of students who participated in this research.

Co-Curricular Programming

As noted above, students felt they had benefited from being in an environment with people of different opinions and/or from different groups and talking about issues of race, identity, and inequality. Having a facilitator meant that there was an element of protection and safety that would otherwise not be present were a group of people who did not know each other to sit down and discuss these topics. Dialogues need to be a regular part of the college experience and perhaps in primary and secondary schools, too. They can be moderated and guided by faculty and student co-facilitators, incorporated into first-year experience courses but also continuously throughout the academic career. Special emphasis needs to be placed on the involvement of white students in these types of activities, as it has been shown that when they do not perceive a problem, they are less likely to get involved. It has been shown that "face-to-face interaction in the higher education

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context can play a key role in developing genuine interracial understanding and tolerance" (Alger, 1997, 20), and that "dialogue about racism can be a powerful catalyst for change" (Beverly Daniel Tatum as quoted in Humphreys, 2000, 14).

Knowledge that emanates from daily experience and is then theorized, and political and economic theory applied to everyday living, has the power to transform individuals and, in turn, society. The following quotes further demonstrate how students felt about the discussions:

> *It's healthy to be in a situation where you're kind of forced to talk to people that you wouldn't normally be talking to. It heightens awareness.*
>
> —Dmitri, white male

> *If I'm in charge in a perfect world, I would force people to relate to each other.*
>
> —John, white male

> *When we were first introduced. . . I was very eager to express my own opinions. Then, after I heard different people talking, I realized that there were a lot of important things being said, and it was more important for them to be said, to try to learn more. The things that were said, they were a bit surprising to me. All of these things were going through my head and I think I'm going to go home and still try to digest all these things, information I got here. It was a good experience.*
>
> —Craig, white male

> *This is the type of discussion that you really don't talk about outside. You talk within a group where you know it's safe to talk. You wouldn't go outside and talk with your friend about this because you'd be scared that someone might have overheard you. So you just discuss it within a group where you feel safe and where you would never discuss it anywhere else. This is something that's going to be in the room and it's not going to leave.*
>
> —Jeanne, white female

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5. Frank Wong, late chair, American Commitments, national panel, Association of American Colleges and Universities as quoted in Humphreys (2000).

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I am sure everyone did a lot of thinking here today, it's very interesting I think it's a very open-minded topic, and it opens up your mind. You think about other things and realize some things about this country. Maybe it's not as free as people think it is, in a way. But then again - I think it's a lot of controversial issues.

—Sam, white male

At the college level, particularly, students need opportunities to discuss their opinions and perspectives with people who disagree and with people who have had different life experiences. They need the chance to explore and examine their thinking as adults. This is a critical period in a person's life where intellectual growth mandates challenge, particularly from peers. We must become masters at learning from each other, and not just, hearing each other speak. Students offered their ideas and suggestions about what is effective in heightening people's awareness of each other, particularly white people's understanding of the experiences of people of color:

If you're in an organization, like in a club or any organized group, you get along better with people. There's a sense of more understanding.

—Marianne, white female

Colorblindness is a possibility, but not for everyone. We need group therapy and building bridges. Group work helps.

—Etienne, black male

We should establish cross club internships. Force students in the African club and the radio station to switch places for a semester. If we are segregated as leaders, there is no chance to integrate students.

—Michael, Latino and white male

If I was president of Student Government I would hold events so [students] *get to know each other. I personally deal with this because I go to parties. I know all the minorities and everyone's like "Wow, you know everyone." I'm like," Why don't you come to the parties? Why, cause*

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you're scared of minorities? What are they going to do, kick your ass?" And they're like, "No; we just don't hang with them." I'm like, "So why don't you? They don't have a disease." People are uncomfortable. I was, at first, but now I'm used to it. I still feel uncomfortable but he's just a person, just because he's black doesn't mean, you know, he's going to totally come out and be like, why are you talking to me?

—Catherine, white female

The impact of these types of programming can be extremely positive for all students. However, it is particularly of value for white students whose daily experiences provide them with little ammunition or reason to question mainstream images and narratives as they relate to race. Similarly, hiring practices must increase the representation of people of color in all disciplines. Having faculty, administrative, and staff who reflects the community as a whole brings tremendous strength to institutional efforts to address issues of racial inequality and provides long-excluded perspectives and experiences that form a significant part of the learning process. If whites only take classes from white professors, the mechanisms described above will remain intact. This is not however to essentialize race. Simply hiring increased numbers of Latinos, Asians, African and Native Americans will not eliminate other structural imbalances, nor necessarily provide widespread engagement about racial domination and subordination nor the political and economic theoretical analysis that I refer to, however, it will nevertheless be an important step toward inclusion and representation on an institutional level.

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Curricular Recommendations

During the focus groups students repeatedly spoke of the classes they described as favorites, because these courses provided tools to understand current events, personal experiences, and both national and global history. Students consistently said, "We need more classes like Core 3."[6] We should expand courses dealing with social issues. One student even recommended that we eliminate the geology core to do this:

> *Core 3 opens people's minds up and makes them think about they way they think. Core 3 changed my perspective for the way I look at life. It is long, but it flies. I learned from it; I learned different points of view.*
>
> —Hernan, Latino male

> *Classes like that reaffirm that something is there. It shows that this is not made up. There is a long history behind it. For white people, it shows that this is not made up. The only way we're gonna change is don't do the things we did in the past. If the person is willing, then they will change their mind.*
>
> —Jenny, white female

In an interview with Paul Montagna of the Department of Sociology, he indicated that a study of the Core Curriculum after ten years of existence revealed that the most popular course among students was Core 3. He says, "They felt it was most beneficial because it exposed them to different perspectives."[7]

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6. Core 3: "People, Power and Politics" is part of the Brooklyn College Core Curriculum and " . . . provides an introduction to the social sciences through the study of power, authority, and social organization in American society" (Brooklyn College, 1994, 75).
7. Paul Montagna, Professor of Sociology, Brooklyn College, interview by author, 15 September 2000.

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Inclusion of multiculturalism in the curriculum is generally viewed as an issue of self-esteem, as individualistic enhancement for those people who have been historically left out, or as enriching whites' understanding of history. While these are important functions, multiculturalism and diversity training do not necessarily challenge structural or systemic power dynamics. I believe the biggest threat is a broad-based understanding of the economics of social and global inequality. If education included information about how Wall Street functions, about the cyclical nature of capitalism, de-industrialization, of profit on a global scale and of the concrete implications of these processes for real people's lives, then what was described as the "White Fairness Understanding Gap" might be narrowed.[8]

This call, for deepening the curricular emphasis on diversity and race within an economic framework differs from most of the scholarship that focuses on politics, culture, or identity. More emphasis is needed on developing students' understanding of the nature of society from an economic perspective, which has often been marginalized within the social sciences yet actually plays a central role in determining students' futures as well as that of the society. Additionally, Carol Geary Schneider, President of the Association of American Colleges and Universities says, "Very few courses in the contemporary undergraduate curriculum directly address democratic principles and/or aspirations" (Schneider, 1999, 9).

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8. From a discussion with Don Robotham, Professor of Anthropology, CUNY Graduate School and University Center, 1 December 2000 and Street (2001, 9-11).

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She further asks where in the curriculum are students engaged about concepts of justice, democracy, equality, opportunity, and liberty, and suggests that these challenging topics belong in general education as they are integral dimensions of American pluralism and must be understood in the context of their historical connections (Schneider, 1999, 9). This engagement is central to the development of civic responsibility and social awareness as a core tenet of higher education.

Overall, every opportunity to advance a broad-based and deepened understanding about the global dynamics of white racial domination, including its material impact on the lives of all people, should be pursued. This effort could cultivate a counter-narrative that deals with white racism from "cradle to grave."[9] It can also provide incentive to the large numbers of white people outside the ruling class, whose acceptance of the status quo contributes to the entrenchment of the patterns of racial inequality and injustice that threaten our future to perhaps redefine their allegiances.

Directions for Future Research

Deconstructing the construct of whiteness means to take up the struggle in every arena to show how white privilege is maintained through unequal resources being allocated to schools, hospitals and social facilities: how job discrimination functions; how environmental waste gets handled; how the death penalty and criminal justice system are administered; and who gets admitted to institutions of

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higher education. One direction for future research would be to explore specific examples where white privilege in the past and today has been challenged. Social activism that addresses this idea include: the lawsuit related to the differential funding between CUNY and SUNY (described in chapter seven), the Health Care for All Coalition, which raises the issue of unequal allocation of healthcare resources; the Same Boat Coalition; student activism to uphold affirmative action in admissions; movements against the prison industrial complex and the death penalty and the many other community-based projects that address the privilege of whiteness. As we are able to document when and how challenges to racist policies have occurred, and as we are able to analyze when and how the codes and mechanisms of whiteness has been broken, we will be able to better support future challenges to systemic white domination. For, in many ways, the subscription of most whites to this worldview increasingly does not make sense, especially as they face the effects of a global economic crisis and heightened political disempowerment. While racism has allowed the ruling elite to maintain a race-stratified labor force, and has functioned as a useful tool to poor, working and middle class whites as willing gatekeepers, this strategy is vulnerable during periods of economic down turn (Kushnick, 1981, 192). Hernan (Latino) recognizes this and says,

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9. Joe Feagin, Professor, and President of the American Sociological Association (ASA) used this phrase at the annual ASA meeting in 2000.

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I'll be honest, even to this day, I still don't understand it. Why do people have a racist prejudice? It's the year 2000 and I don't even know what's going to happen tomorrow.

If whites do not reckon with this illogic, they will continue to live with the paradox described by James Baldwin, that "those who believed they could control and define Black people divested themselves of the power to control and define themselves" (Baldwin, 1984, 92). Research that could identify when and where this pattern is challenged can help further our ability to intervene in the processes and mechanisms that reproduce and reinforce racialized structures of power.

Also emerging from this research are questions (listed below) that require thorough study with direct connections being drawn to concrete social change through policy and program. If we believe in the power of knowledge, and the potential of social science research to impact society, it will be through popular engagement that we may witness shifts in the consciousness of everyday people. It is my hope that these questions provide talking points for understanding the significance of this study and the implications for future work in this area. These queries take the conclusions of this project to the next step where critical engagement is necessary in the process of changing minds. Talking, reflecting, and experiencing are crucial components of that process of individual change and can impact structural patterns. These questions include:

- How do status and quality of life impact one's perceptions about the world?
  How much diversity of opinion is there within families?
  What factors influence white's understanding of fairness in U.S. society?

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- What effect do programs, curricula and policies about diversity have on belief systems?
  What is the impact of consistent dialogue and intergroup interaction?
  Do attitudes change as a result of exposure to these types of experiences?

- What leads to despair?
  What leads to the decision to do something?

- How do we theorize the racialized experiences of foreign-born whites as compared to that of foreign-born people of the African, Latin and Asian diasporas?

- What are the similarities and differences in the experiences of foreign-born versus U.S.-born whites?

Each question alludes to a project in and of itself, as they relate to the role of race in everyday life at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

In closing, social science research that identifies and articulates the mechanisms through which institutional inequality is maintained by the day-to-day consciousness of ordinary people has the potential to contribute to its dismantlement. We can best understand the everyday forms of whiteness as a response to a fundamental historical transformation that includes economic pressures, an extended period of conservative ideological onslaught, and increasingly limited opportunities for all peoples. Our hopes about the potential success of liberal reform have been diminished by the dramatic events of the last quarter of the twentieth century. The myth that upward mobility and the American Dream can be achieved by anyone who works hard is no longer espoused with the same vehemence and sense of truth as it was three decades ago. Instead, some communities have been criminalized and depicted as lazy, unworthy, the cause of

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"our" (and their own) troubles, and beyond the scope of our concerns. Many people accept this narrative, although it is clear they have many questions about it. They have been historically and currently are seduced to a position that accepts these depictions, and that defends the status quo and the polarization of wealth. This research measured the effectiveness of this ideological campaign.

Upon reflection on the meaning of the stories, statistics and history revealed in this research, I ponder what our vision for humanity must be and suggest ways to utilize the venue of higher education to equip ourselves and our youth to function in today's world and to build a better tomorrow. We must listen, reflect, and develop the intellectual strategies to foster the social awareness needed to challenge the history of inequality and injustice within our society. This project is dedicated toward this end. The issue, once again, is agency — to connect consciousness and structure without re-essentializing race.

Ultimately, all we have is our desire for a better world, and the strength of breath between us. If we believe in human goodness, we must fight for it, tapping every crack so that it may shatter the picture of a world that presumes some people as better and more worthy than others. All of us matter.

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Dream of Freedom

There is a dream in the land
With its back against the wall.
By muddled names and strange
Sometimes the dream is called.

There are those who claim
This dream for theirs alone —
A sin for which we know
They must atone.

Unless shared in common
Like sunlight and like air,
The dream will die for lack
Of substance anywhere.

The dream knows no frontier on tongue,
The dream no class or race.
The dream cannot be kept secure
In any one looked place.

This dream today embattled,
With its back against the wall —
To save the dream for one
It must be saved for ALL —
Our dream of freedom!

—Langston Hughes (Rampersad, 1994, 542)

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AFTERWORD

The events that occurred on and after September 11, 2001 have impacted the global economic and political reconfigurations that have been underway for the last thirty years and described throughout this dissertation. Writing during this period lent a heightened sensitivity to the ways that daily events provided further evidence of my central arguments. This Afterword is devoted to my reflections about the meaning of this project as it relates to this moment in time and to the illumination of some of the most apparent connections between my conclusions and this juncture in world history.

As has been discussed in this study, the notion of race has been historically crafted, manipulated, reinforced, reproduced and rearticulated as a means to provide justification for the presumed superiority of white people and as a distraction from the social arrangement that concentrates power and wealth in a very small percentage of the world's population. The instability of U.S. hegemony within the world capitalist system over the last two decades and the consequent vulnerability of western and white supremacy, materially impact poor, working- and middle-class people in concrete and everyday ways.

During times when people ordinary people experience political and economic insecurity, ideology plays a critical role in shaping how they understand and interpret what they feel and where they place blame. Since the events of fall 2001, the structures of power have become more visible than they had been since

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the 1960s. Political leaders moved aggressively to dictate the terms of these interpretations, looking to justify the current social organization and their power within it. We have been told we are not at war with Islam, Muslims, Arabs, or Afghanistan, yet who is profiled, and who is bombed? Would the public reaction be the same if the suspects were French?

Blatant war profiteering occurs in plain sight; corporate bailouts and tax rebates seem now to be routine. These actions are being taken simultaneous to the layoff of ever increasing numbers of working, poor and middle-class people, where the numbers are estimated to reach two million this year. Inequitable compensation payouts for the families of victims of the events of September 11 are based on projections of earnings that reproduce the patterns of unequal valuation of people's lives (Saul, 2002, A6). Despite the efforts to camouflage, disguise and deny the implications of these events, the mainstream media has functioned to expose these contradictions, even if not willingly or deliberately.

Many educators and activists struggled to bring to light the history of the United States foreign and economic policies that form the backdrop for these events. These include for example, continuous interventions in the affairs of sovereign nations over the last 100 years, recent support for Islamic fundamentalists and economic partnerships between the Bush and Bin Laden families.

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Simultaneously, political and media leaders assert narratives about freedom and justice that cloak the economic self-interest of the most powerful in language such as that "What is good for corporations, is good for us all" and "Either you are with 'us' (good), or with the 'terrorists' (evil)." They ostentatiously exclaim their own right to power in plain view. A McCarthy-era type of repression has emerged, attempting to conceal the facts and implications of these events and aiming to squelch dissent.

The contradictions of this dominant worldview have been exposed, though not explicitly articulated. More people died from bombings in Afghanistan than on September 11 (Herold, 2001) and it appears that more U.S. soldiers were killed by "friendly fire" than "hostile fire." At a Memorial Service for those who died at the World Trade Center, Rudolph Giuliani, with a record of one of the most racist New York City mayoral administrations in history, was seen singing "We Shall Overcome" with Oprah Winfrey at his side. The slogan, "United We Stand" reinforces mainstream narratives about our having achieved equality for all people, dismisses the systemic racialized structuring of our society and of the world-system that, if anything, has been heightened by recent events, and stigmatizes and marginalizes voices that challenge patterns of inequality in the U.S. and throughout the world.

Plausible deniability, however, has become an increasingly difficult argument to sustain in relationship to racial inequality in particular and social inequality in general because racialized structures and their consequences are so visible. "Racial

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categories, and racism are closely, if indirectly related to political economic processes" (Robotham, 1997) and therefore need to be understood in order to comprehend the global forces actively at work, today. "With the collapse of communism and the triumph of market relations, the grand categories of global competition have necessarily changed. What prevails in the new context is a sense of an international competition between nations and, implicitly, between 'races'" (Robotham, 1997).

In this context, Jane and Peter Schneider recently analyzed conclusions they drew from their study of the mafia and anti-mafia in Palermo since the late 1980s and several apply in the current situation. They assert that it is important to recognize that power and its tentacles are not monolithic, that "resistance movements are critical to weakening the terrorists political shield and undermining their prestige and that. . . . The world struggle against poverty and desperation is urgent" (Schneider, 2001). The struggle against structural racism can also draw from these lessons. The increasing polarization of wealth witnessed during the last two decades parallels intensified global impoverization. Resources are available to eradicate hunger, homelessness and many illnesses rampant throughout the globe, but they are concentrated within a tiny percentage of the world's population. These realities need to come to the fore as they contribute to the reproduction of racialized patterns in society.

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On Nationalism, Patriotism and Human Nature

Following September 11th, public debate about the meaning of patriotism surfaced. U. S. flags became increasingly visible and choosing to wear or fly one became a measure of one's loyalty. The meaning of being American was actively contested and the reality of war loomed heavily in the hearts and minds of many people. Rigid notions of identity and the interpretation of history left little room for dialogue. The demand for us to "choose sides" between good and evil made it difficult to discuss alternative perspectives, as voicing dissent became grounds for suspicion. The heroes portrayed in the media were overwhelmingly white firefighters and policemen. The question of how this employment pattern came into existence and how it is reproduced today is deemed unacceptable for it sheds light on the deeply stratified (apartheid-like) labor structure that is supposed to remain "hidden" as if we should pretend it does not exist.

Upon reflection on this research that was conducted two years ago, it becomes apparent that assumptions about national identity and its symbols are present even when not conscious or explicit. It is also clear that the dearth of open engagement in society about the meaning of concepts such as democracy, freedom, peace and justice has real consequences when people feel it is time to act. For during these periods, underlying and concealed presumptions determine what people do. Academia can and should play a more active role in developing of social awareness and civic involvement by engaging society (in schools and communities) in

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dialogue about the kind of world we want to live in and how to make it happen. This project is inherently linked to a sense of urgency about the need for a deeper understanding of global and local concerns as individuals, as a society, a nation, and as members of the broadest all-encompassing community of humanity in the twenty-first century.

It is in this context that I responded to my youngest daughter, Sarafina, when she said that prior to September 11th she had really not thought about being proud to be American; yet, the cooperation and generosity that was evident in the aftermath precipitated feelings of national pride within her. I posed to her whether that these qualities might be "human" rather than solely "American" nature. Is it true that only Americans can lay claim to generosity, democratic ideals, the striving for freedom and the passion for equality? I suggest that hope ultimately resides our in our ability to conceive of ourselves as members of a global society, rather than exclusively as "Americans" all the while taking responsibility for the actions taken in our name, and with our taxes. I hold that this is similar to considering oneself as part of the human community, positioned and allied with the world's majority, yet recognizing the social realities of racism, thus rendering particular responsibilities for whites who benefit from the presumption of white superiority.

As J. Krishnamurti, philosopher and educator said when an American woman who had lost a son in one war, wanted to know how to save her other son:

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> *She had to cease to be an American; she had to cease to be greedy, cease piling up wealth, seeking power, domination and be morally simple — not merely simple in clothes, in outward things, but simple in her thoughts and feelings, in her relationships.*
>
> *She said, "That is too much. You are asking far too much, I cannot do it, because circumstances are too powerful for me to alter." Therefore she was responsible for the destruction of her son. . . .*
>
> *So it depends upon you and not on the leaders — not on so-called statesmen and all the rest of them. It depends upon you and me, but we do not seem to realize that. If once we really felt the responsibility of our own actions, how quickly we could bring to an end all these wars, this appalling misery!*
>
> —Krishnamurti, 1975, 182

Martin Luther King, Jr. in his 1967 speech, said, war is a nightmare "for the victims of our nation and for those it calls the enemy." Speaking out against war was the "privilege and the burden of all of us who deem ourselves bound by allegiances and loyalties which are broader and deeper than nationalism, and which go beyond our nation's self-defined goals and positions" (Cohen, 1996, vii-viii). The nationalism of those in positions of dominance, like patriotism and whiteness, is a fabrication with real social consequence constructed solely to bestow value upon its owners. It is, like royalty — an identity propped up to render some people more worthy and righteous than others (Ignatiev and Garvey, 1996).

Perhaps now, more than ever, the need to engage, to discuss, to understand different perspectives, is evident and pressing. Academia can foster these dialogues both within university settings and as part of a broader community. This is an ideal opportunity to allow knowledge to be applied to everyday living, and the knowledge of everyday living to be theorized. We have the responsibility to engage

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the public about the ideals of democracy, freedom, and justice especially in relationship to the values that drive modern-day society.

On Chickens Roosting, Wizards Oz-ing and Sharks Biting[1]

Shortly after the events of September 11th and along with calls for patriotism and unquestioning loyalty, the assertion was made that to quote Malcolm X's famous statement "It was a case of chickens coming home to roost,"[2] (Haley and Malcolm X, 1965, 301) was to disrespect the innocent people who died.[3] I didn't understand this and wondered, is it not actually the reverse? Isn't *understanding* what led to these events showing respect to those innocent people who died? Is it not our moral imperative to investigate the structural factors that contribute to tragedy, so we might know how to prevent further loss of innocent life? Is it not

---

1. Wizards Oz-ing refers to the presentation of the Wizard of Oz as a mysterious power until the curtain was pulled back and his true identity discovered. "Sharks biting" refers to the idea that the recent increase of shark bites is the result of sharks being fed up with the invasion of their waters.
2. Malcolm X contended, "Retaliation in self defense was a natural reaction and normal response of human beings whose dignity was not publicly recognized and respected in the nation of their birth." He spoke of impending disaster because he did not believe that America could continue to exploit the poor and weak, in the U.S. and abroad. In reference to the assassination of John Kennedy he said, "chickens coming home to roost, never did make me sad; they've always made me glad. The seeds that America had sown — in enslavement, in many things that followed since then - all these seeds were coming up today; it was harvest time" (Cone, 1993, 182-184). In addition to, but separate from an analysis of Al Queda and Osama Bin Laden, the historical record of military and imperialist interventions by the U.S. throughout the globe needs to be examined, interrogated and understood by the U.S. public. This does not signify a celebration of tragedy. It is respect for humanity.
3. Notable criticisms about using this phrase include: Christopher Hitchens said "Loose talk about chickens coming home to roost is the moral equivalent of the hateful garbage emitted by Falwell and Robertson and exhibits the same intellectual content" (Hitchens, 2001), The National Leadership of the NAACP pulled back the president of the Durham NAACP for writing a scathing indictment of U.S. policies. He was told to make no more statements on the topic (Herald Sun, 2001). Marc Cooper said that this phrase was "Morally repugnant and politically unviable, this sort of demagogy can only render the left irrelevant" (Cooper, 2001).

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through questioning that we might come upon ways to address or even solve a problem as urgent as world peace?

This pressure against talking about "chickens roosting" bothered me until I awoke one night, mid-December 2001. The relationship between this concept and the processes I had just written about as reproducing and reinforcing patterns of racial inequality suddenly dawned upon me. Being told not to interrogate the root causes of the tragedies of September 11, and to believe President Bush that Bin Laden the individual is to blame, is the same line of thinking that discourages us from understanding the true causes of poverty, injustice, and other forms of social inequality. We are made to understand that either racism no longer exists and we have reached true equality (people "act nice" in public, so stop whining), causes for poverty and privilege are elusive and mysterious or the reason equality does not exist is some people are just plain lazy. The stigma against understanding causality in fact undermines and defuses agency.

Ultimately, whites seem to feel that it does not matter whether we have achieved equality, because whatever *is* just *is*. Explanations for what happened on September 11th were similarly fragmented and projected responsibility everywhere but home. Why would these people hate us? "They are jealous of our freedom." "They are evil." "Don't criticize; don't look at patterns; don't look at history — you're mixing apples and oranges." "Osama Bin Laden and Islamic fundamentalism

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are the problem." The United States represents goodness, generosity, democracy, superiority and freedom, so "they" (whoever "they" are) must personify evil. This dynamic functions with racism too. One is a racist or not a racist. If not, then one must reconcile what one sees, with what one thinks, and since it is irreconcilable, the awareness is overwhelming. "Anyway, then, just forget it. I'll just mind my own business."

The link between everyday thinking and the formation and implementation of policy and its real consequence for the lives of all people however, cannot be ignored. It is not about whether one is nice, or who one's friends are; it is about the structures and patterns of inequality and injustice that persist, both within the U.S. and on a global scale. As long as the gaze is focused on the personal and as long as the measure of racism is whether or not another person of color is brutalized in a highly publicized incident, we are prevented from structural analyses that may provide us with the power to do something about the conditions of daily living around the globe.

This is the tension between agency and structure, for the same discourse that disallows discussions of "chickens roosting" also disallows discussion about the forces underlying inequality along all axes of power. This prohibition defuses agency and makes it difficult for everyday people to reckon with their own power. It is the very same discourse that tells people nothing can be done, that it is too confusing, that it is not their fault and really not a problem, anyway.

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So why do I believe attention has been paid to diverting us from an analysis of "chickens roosting?" It emanates from the same dynamic that allows for the perpetuation of structural racial inequality and blocks a critique of how everyday thinking permits the structural forces and patterns to be reproduced and reinforced. "'The chickens came home to roost' are dangerous words because they make connections that are necessary to transform power relations in a deeply inegalitarian world."[4] If we foster awareness and openness about white adherence to mainstream discourse about race and demonstrate the mechanisms of power that obfuscate structural inequality (utilizing race as one of many tools), we have the potential to dismantle those mechanisms for the betterment of all.

At a time of tremendous change and uncertainty, it is especially urgent that alternative frameworks for understanding both global and local events, grounded in concern for the greater good, are available to the public, to counter those that reinforce structures of dominance. It is important to recognize that the everyday thinking of whites can function either to support or to challenge patterns of inequality. The current vulnerability of most working, poor and middle-class white people provides an opportunity to educate and raise consciousness about the structural and systemic forces that pattern inequality of all sorts and racial

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4. In a discussion about this topic on 18 December 2001, Roderick D. Bush, Professor, St. John's University, said, "These are dangerous words that got Malcolm X suspended from the Nation of Islam, hunted by assassination squads of more than 200 men; tracked, followed and plotted against by the FBI and the CIA; and ultimately shot before a firing range in public."

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inequality in particular. As individuals concerned with the future of our society, we have a chance to make a difference by providing alternative ways to interpret the political, economic and social events that are shaping people's lives today.

Let's do it.

SATISFACTION

The most beautiful
For those who have fought a whole life,
Is to come to the end and say :
We believed in man and in life
And life and man
Never let us down.

And so they are won for the people.
And so the infinite example is born.

Not because they fought a part of their lives
But because they fought all the days of all their lives

Only this way do men become men :
Fighting day and night to be men.

Then the people open their deepest rivers
And they enter those waters forever.

And so they are, distant fires,
Living, creating the heart
Of example.

—Otto Rene Castillo, Guatemalan poet (1971)

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Appendix A - Survey
"EVERYDAY UNDERSTANDINGS"

Using the following scale, please indicate how often you...
1=Never 2=Once a month 3=Once a week 4=Daily

___1. Work with classmates on assignments.

___2. Socialize outside of campus.

___3. Socialize outside of campus with someone of a different race.

___4. Are in the home of someone of a different race.

___5. Witness racial tension among classmates and friends.

___6. Think about your racial identity.

Using the following scale, please indicate your response to the following questions:
1=No 2=Yes

___7. When you work with classmates on assignments, are they usually from your own racial/ethnic community?

___8. When you socialize, is it usually with someone from your own racial/ethnic community?

Using the following scale, please indicate your response to the following questions:
1=0-10% 2=11-25% 3=26-50% 4=51-75% 5=76-100% 6=Not sure

___ 9. What percentage of Brooklyn is of European or East European descent?

___10.What percentage of CUNY students are of European or East European descent?

Please indicate your response to the following questions using the following scale:
1=Not at all 2=A little 3=A lot

___11. How much do you think your racial identity has impacted your life experience?

___12. How much do you know about the plan to eliminate remediation in CUNY?

Please indicate your response to the following questions, using the appropriate scale:

___13. How has your experience at Brooklyn College impacted your contact with people from other racial groups?
1=Decreased contact 2=Remained the same 3=Increased contact

___14. Do you think that efforts to include more about the historical and current experiences and contributions of people of color in the curriculum raises, lowers or does not change academic standards?
1=Lowers 2=Doesn't change 3=Raises

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How much do you think each of the following factors contributes to the average lower incomes and poorer housing of blacks? *1=Not at All 2=Moderately 3=A lot*

___15. Lack of motivation
___16. Discrimination
___17. Low IQ
___18. Historic inequality
___19. Other _____
___20. Other _____

Please use the following scale to show how much you agree with the following statements: *1=Disagree 2=Moderately Agree 3=Agree*

___21. If someone fails one CUNY placement test he or she should still be allowed into a four-year college.

___22. I consider myself to be colorblind when it comes to race.

___23. The recent emphasis on eliminating remediation in CUNY affects all groups equally.

___24. People of color are treated equally to whites when applying for jobs, housing, and when approached by police.

___25. All people, regardless of class status, race or ethnicity should be given a fair chance to succeed.

___26. The United States can't be multi-cultural and have an American identity at the same time.

___27. If people don't have equal access to resources, measures should be taken to equalize opportunity.

___28. The United States is a land of equal opportunity for all people.

___29. The NYC Police Department uses excessive force.

___30. All people, regardless of color can be assimilated into U.S. mainstream society.

___31. Public higher education is a right to which all should have access.

___32. The American Dream can be achieved by anyone who works hard.

___33. I approve of interracial marriage.

___34. There is equal and fair treatment of all people in the media.

___35. I would consider marrying someone of a different race.

___36. Someone who takes more than 4-5 years to get a bachelors degree is not serious about their education.

___37. I consider myself to be an American.

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How much emphasis should Brooklyn College place on each of the following activities in its diversity initiative? Using this scale, please indicate your response:
1=No emphasis at all 2=Moderate emphasis 3=Great emphasis

___38. Hire staff/faculty of color
___39. Sensitivity Training
___40. Diversify course material
___41. Let things happen on their own
___42. Increase multi-cultural programming
___43. Other_____

Please indicate whether you think the following people should be involved in the diversity process, using the following scale: *1=No 2=Yes*

___44. Everyone
___45. People who experience discrimination
___46. People who want to be involved

Please indicate your response to the following questions, using the appropriate scale:

___47. Do you feel responsible to participate in the diversity process?
1=No 2=Somewhat 3=Yes

___48. Credits Completed: *1=0-30 2=31-59 3=60-89 4=90-120 5=Grad*

___49. Age Group: *1=Under 21 2=21-30 3=31-50 4=51-65 5=Over 65*

___50. Are you working? *1=No 2=Yes (#hours/week_____)*

___51. Do you receive financial aid? *1=No 2=Yes*

___52. Most people identify themselves with a racial, ethnic or national group. With which of the following do you most closely identify: *1=Latino 2=Asian 3=Black (U.S. born) 4=Black (Foreign born) 5=White (U.S. born) 6=White (Foreign born) 7=Other_____*

___53. What is your primary language: *1=English 2=Spanish 3=Russian 4=Chinese 5=French 6=Kreyol 7=Other_____*

54. What newspaper(s) do you read regularly:_____
55. What television shows do you watch regularly:_____
56. What are the last 3 movies you saw: _____
___ 57. Gender 1=Female 2=Male

Additional comments:_____

Please return completed survey to the proctor before leaving the class. Distributed by Melanie Bush of the Office of Student Life to explore the meaning of racial identity in everyday living. Please call 951-5352 with comments or questions.

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Appendix B - Pilot Survey (For Reference Purposes Only)
BROOKLYN COLLEGE STUDENT PERCEPTIONS SURVEY

Class Status: Freshman Sophomore Junior Senior Grad

Age Group: Under 21 21-30 31-50 51-65 Over 65

Are you working? Yes (Please specify the number of hours a week _____) No
Do you receive financial aid? Yes No

Most people identify themselves with a racial, ethnic or national group. With which of the following do you most closely identify: White (U.S. born) White (Foreign born)
Black (U.S. born) Black (Foreign born) Asian Latino Other_____

What is your primary language: English Spanish Russian Chinese
French Kreyol Other_____

Are you supporting children: Yes No
If yes, how many: under 5 years old___ 5-12____ 13-18___ Over 18____

How would you describe your overall experience at Brooklyn College:
Positive Neutral Negative

Do you know about the childcare facilities at BC: Yes No

Have you utilized them? Yes No

Has your need for childcare interfered with your ability to attend class: Yes No

How often do you work with classmates on assignments:
Frequently Occasionally Never
When this occurs, whom do you usually work with: Someone I know Someone new

Are they usually from your own racial/ethnic community or one different from your own:
Own community Different

What activities do you participate in at BC?
Sports Clubs Student Government Social Activities None

How much time do you give to these activities:
Daily Weekly Monthly Once or twice a semester Never

How often do you socialize outside of campus: Daily Weekly Monthly Rarely Never

Do you usually socialize with someone from your own racial/ethnic community or one different from your own: Own community Different

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How often do you socialize outside of campus with someone of a different race:
Daily Weekly Monthly Rarely Never

How often have you been in the home of someone of a different race:
Daily Weekly Monthly Rarely Never

Have you experienced racial tensions among students at BC:
Frequently Occasionally Rarely Never

If so, to what do you attribute them to?
Simple misunderstanding Lack of knowledge Philosophical differences Bias Other

In your experience, do most professors treat you fairly? Yes Sometimes No
(Please explain _____)

Does the staff in most offices treat you fairly? Yes Sometimes No
(Please explain _____)

If you felt you were treated unfairly, did you pursue the matter to your satisfaction:
Yes No (Explain _____)

Last semester, how often did you speak with your professors (not adjunct) outside of class:
At least once a week Once a month Once a semester Never

Have you been able to make an appointment with most professors (not adjunct) if you want one: Yes Sometimes No (Please specify_____)

How do most professors make you feel towards pursuing your academic goals:
Encouraged Discouraged (Please specifiy_____) Neutral

In your experience how often do you get the grade you expected to receive:
Always Most of the time Sometimes Never

If you did not select "always", to what do you attribute this discrepancy?
Personality Misunderstanding Bias(please specify_____) Human Error Other (____)

How do you feel about pursuing the original goals you set out when you began college:
Strong Neutral Frustrated Confused

Would you recommend Brooklyn College to a friend: Yes No (Please explain)_____
Additional comments:_____

Please return by to: GSO/314 SUBO; Info Booth/Boylan Lobby or 1115 Plaza.
Distributed by The Office of Student Life to assess student perceptions of campus life.

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Appendix C - Focus Group Forms

CONSENT FORM

Research is being conducted within the Division of Student Life about the experiences and views of current students on various issues affecting today's world. The results will be used to increase awareness and foster understanding amongst members of our community.

We are asking participants to take part in a focus group discussion. There are no risks to you in taking part, all information will be kept confidentially by the researcher. Any publication of comments will be done using pseudonym unless specific permission has been solicited to include real names. Taking part is voluntary. If you choose to or not to participate, there will be no penalty nor benefit. It will not affect any services or grades that you might receive. If you have questions about the discussion, or results of the research please contact Melanie Bush, Office of the Dean for Student Life, 2113 Boylan, 951-5352. If you have questions about your rights as a volunteer, please contact Dr. Glen Hass, Chair, Brooklyn College Internal Review Board, Department of Psychology, 5401 James, 951-5601.

My signature below acknowledges that I have been informed about my participation in the research being conducted by Student Life. My questions have either been or will be answered. I understand that my participation will not impact the services or grades I receive from the college. I may refuse to answer any questions I do not want to answer. I have received information about where to direct questions if they arise after the focus group. I understand that responses will be kept confidential by the researcher and that my name will not be used in the publication of results, unless I specifically consent to their use. I have received a copy of this form.

_____ I have agreed to allow the session to be audiotaped for purposes of refreshing the memory of the researcher.

_____ I agree to keep the discussion confidential.

_____(Name) _____(Date)

The approved use of this form expires on November 1, 2000.

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FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT FORM

$20 for 1-1/2 hour session

We'd like to know what you think about various issues affecting today's world and how they have affected your life, the lives of people around you, and the history of CUNY. In particular, our focus is on developing an understanding of students' experiences on an urban campus. The results will be used to plan programs that increase awareness and foster understanding in our community. If you're interested in participating in an upcoming session, please complete the form below. REFRESHMENTS WILL BE SERVED!

Don't miss this opportunity to make your voice heard!

1. Last name_____ First name_____

2. ID number_____ College credits so far_____

3. Day phone (with area code if not 718)_____

4. Evening/Other phone(s)_____

5. Address including zip code _____

6. E-mail address_____

7. Most people identify themselves with a racial or ethnic group. With which of the following do you most closely identify: ____Asian ____Black ____Latino ____White ____Other (_____)

8. Please indicate which session you are most able to attend. Rank them from (1) most preferable to (6) least preferable or (NA) I can not attend at that time (e.g. class conflict).

___Monday, April 10th, 6-7:30PM
___Tuesday, April 11th, 5-6:30PM
___Monday, April 17th, 12:30-2PM
___Thursday, April 13th, 11AM-12:30PM
___Friday, April 7th, 1:30-3PM
___Sunday, April 9th, 1-2:30PM

9. These groups may be diverse, all-white, or all students of color. You will be randomly assigned according to the information you provide. Please state if you have a strong preference for one type of group:_____

Thank you for your interest. we'll be in touch with some preliminary questions if we are able to schedule a session for you to join. Feel free to contact Melanie Bush 718-951-5352 or mbush@brooklyn.cuny.edu with questions or comments.

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Information Sheet for Research Participants

Research is being conducted within Student Life about the experiences and views of current Brooklyn College students on various issues affecting today's world. The focus is on developing our understanding about the white student experience on an urban campus. The results will be used to increase awareness and foster understanding amongst members of our community.

Taking part in this research is voluntary. If you choose to or not to participate, there will be no penalty or benefit. The decision to participate or not will not affect any services or grades that you might receive. Access to notes or tape-recording will be given only to the research team.

If you are interested in participating in an upcoming session, or have questions about the research please contact Melanie Bush, 2113 Boylan, 951-5352, mbush@brooklyn.cuny.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a volunteer, please contact Dr. Glen Hass, Chair, Brooklyn College Internal Review Board, Department of Psychology, 5401 James, 951-5601.

Thank you for your consideration and/or participation.

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