BEYOND ASCRIPTION

Racial Identity, Culture, Schools, and Academic Achievement

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Amanda E. Lewis, *Race in the Schoolyard: Negotiating the Color Line in Classrooms and Communities*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003, 243 pages, ISBN: 0-8135-3225-6, Cloth, $60.00, and Paper, $22.00.

John U. Ogbu, *Black American Students in an Affluent Suburb: A Study of Academic Disengagement*. Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2003, 320 pages, ISBN: 0-8058-4516-X, Cloth, $69.95, Paper, $32.50.

Douglas Massey, Camille Charles, Garvey Lundy, and Mary Fischer, *The Source of the River: The Social Origins of Freshmen at America's Selective Colleges and Universities*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003, 283 pages, ISBN: 0-691-11326-2, Cloth, $29.95.

Sarah Susannah Willie, *Acting Black: College, Identity, and the Performance of Race*. New York: Routledge Press, 2003, 210 pages, ISBN: 0-415-94410-4, Paper, $22.95.

In the year of the fiftieth anniversary of the landmark Supreme Court decision *Brown* v. *the Topeka Board of Education*, many social scientists, educational researchers, and policymakers find themselves revisiting discussions about the links between race and educational outcomes. As ever before, they are preoccupied with concerns of equal educational opportunities and access for all students in a democratic society. Many find themselves fixated on the problem of an academic achievement gap among the races, and much debate ensues about their causes (Hallinan 2001). Studies confirm enduring disparities among Asian, African, Latino, and White Americans, with Asian and White Americans scoring better on tests than African and Latina/o Americans (Jencks and Phillips, 1998; for an extensive review, see Kao and Thompson, 2003).

Du Bois Review, 1:2 (2004) 377–388.
© 2004 W. E. B. Du Bois Institute for African and African American Research 1742-058X/04 $9.50
DOI: 10.1017/S1742058X04042109

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1742058X04042109 Published online by Cambridge University Press

For some, these gaps have been particularly perplexing since different racial and ethnic minority groups, originally prohibited from equal schooling access, have not kept apace of one another after relatively better schooling opportunities.

The problem of the achievement gap has produced a research enterprise, perhaps even an obsession, among social scientists seeking to account fully for the disparities in test scores, grade performances, and school attainment among different racial and ethnic groups. As yet, no one has been able to account completely for differences in mean test-score averages and grade point averages by race and ethnicity, despite numerous explanations, running the gamut from the contextual and familial (Phillips et al., 1998) to the cultural (Ogbu and Simons, 1998) to structural and institutional (Fischer et al., 1996; Massey and Denton, 1993) to social psychological (Steele and Aronson, 1995). But perhaps, the very reason that these thinkers cannot fully account for the test-score and grade performance gaps is because some have been limited by parochial and homogeneous views about race and all of its manifestations in schools, families, and in students' lives.

Several recent books push the discourse and analysis on race and achievement in various ways that should compel thinkers to move beyond simple, ascriptive markers and to consider the multiple dimensions of race and identity. Subdividing race into its various dimensions may not ever fully explain why "Blacks" and "Latinos" in the aggregate do not score as high as "Asians" and "Whites." Yet, economic, historical, political, and social experiences both between and within these groups are so varied that perhaps a more enlightening empirical investigation may be found in within-group analyses—that is, focusing on why some members of ascribed racial groups succeed and others do not. Perhaps, the key to encouraging success among those who do not attain high academic achievement may be found in more specific, contextual analyses. Four new books—sociologists Amanda Lewis's *Race in the Schoolyard*; Sarah Susannah Willie's *Acting Black*; Douglas Massey, Camille Z. Charles, Garvey Lundy, and Mary Fischer's *The Source of the River*; and anthropologist John Ogbu's *Black American Students in an Affluent Suburb*—provide food for thought about how race and achievement are linked. The first two books are explicitly about the dynamic, context-specific nature of racial meaning making in schools and its indirect effects on achievement, while the last two books seek causal explanations for the achievement gap.

Lewis provides an institutional analysis and carries the reader behind the scenes into three different elementary schools on the West Coast, describing in thick detail the (re) productions of racial meanings and racial inequality in their day-to-day activities. Students who share the same ascribed racial or ethnic identities in wider society have differential experiences from one schooling context to another, Lewis finds from a yearlong ethnography in 1997–1998 of three different schools ("Foresthills," "West City," and "Metro2," all pseudonyms) in "southern California" where "racial logic, racial practices, and racial understandings" operated (p. 10). In the book's first three empirical chapters—a dedicated case study of each school—she captures descriptively these schools' inner workings and their interracial group dynamics.

Foresthills Elementary is a well-resourced school where 90% of its student population either self-identifies or is ascribed as White or Caucasian and where the educators think of themselves as colorblind. In the process, they succumb to massive oversights in the school's curriculum, one with limited multiculturalism and token nods to the different histories, social and economic realities of its students via cursory acknowledgements of Black History Month, and "the practice of counting to ten in different languages during physical education class" (p. 17). Lewis uncovers the insidious nature in which Whiteness gets mapped onto knowledge and intelligence,

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1742058X04042109 Published online by Cambridge University Press

and subsequently critiques the school's color-blind policy. "In many ways color-blindness is powerful precisely because it espouses the ideal of Martin Luther King in his "I have a Dream" speech," she writes. "Yet, it is particularly troublesome because it operates in a context . . . in which color consciousness remains pervasive and pernicious, just more covert than during Jim Crow" (p. 34). Lewis concludes that color-blind schools like Foresthills, where teachers intimate that there are only a few racial beings present, place the responsibility to solve racial and equity issues on those who have been most raced—Black and Brown children and their families.

On the other end of the spectrum is "West City" Elementary, a fairly small elementary school located within an almost exclusively White and upper income neighborhood with 250 students, 90% of whom were mostly poor and of color (namely Black and Latino), and bussed in daily on yellow school buses. In the style of a highly competent ethnographer, she documents both covert and overt ways in which racial ideology operates there. For example, to avoid the appearance of racism, many White teachers maintaining low academic expectations of poor Brown and Black students employ code words to describe underperforming students, such as the ones from the dysfunctional families, or the "welfare ones" or the "urban" and "inner-city" students to denote these youth who live daily in low-income, government-subsidized housing projects. The fear of race talk and explicit discussions of a glaring racial achievement gap, Lewis argues, jeopardizes the academic well being of the students in these schools (c.f., Pollock 2004). "People cannot fix a problem that they do not see," she writes. "Until white teachers at West City can recognize and confront their own whiteness, the limits of their understanding of others, their fears of being called racist, and the racist notions that inevitably pervade their understandings, students will not be well served" (p. 85). Lewis calls for consciousness in a way that few teachers may even know how to develop. Much of what she saw was not even evident to them, yet they collude in the processes of racial inequality, stereotyping, and ascription.

In the last of the three school case studies, Lewis introduces Metro2, a Spanish language-immersion school that openly wrestles with issues of ethnic difference, culture, language, and power. Metro2 is characterized as an "alternative school" not only in its academic make-up, but also in the way in which "current racial hierarchies and meanings were acknowledged and contested rather than ignored" (p. 87). Yet, even when a school openly acknowledges the inequalities that correspond to racial differences, they are not without their problems. Lewis somewhat negates her description of Metro2's ability to discuss racial differences and disparity when she reveals that in practice, ethnicity and culture supplant race. As the school struggled with the language and power issues that emerged from its mission as a dual-medium school, its staff dealt with inequities through open discussions of cultural differences between its Latino and White students, and its middle class and poor ones. Meanwhile, the dialogue often ignored and marginalized their darker skinned students, whom Lewis discovered were slipping through the cracks academically. Critically, Lewis finds that although on the discursive level, this highly sought after school located in a predominantly working-class Latino neighborhood dealt with issues of race, powerful resource issues, such as parents' levels of social, cultural, and economic capital, counteracted the race work that the teachers and students were doing at this school. Students who benefited most from this school were the ones whose parents had the means and resources, middle-class pupils who lived outside of the school's neighborhood.

As if it were written for a different audience, Lewis uses a different language in the book's latter half. Theoretically, she delves into a discussion that employs Pierre

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Bourdieu's topology of the different capitals. Though Bourdieu and others primarily use the capital metaphor to discuss socioeconomic status or class, Lewis reminds us that the distribution of these capitals—economic (the monetary resources of a students' family and neighborhood); social (the connections and ties to people with information about how to negotiate and navigate schools); cultural (familiarity with the cultural know-how of White, middle-class society upheld by the schools' gatekeepers)—is greatly correlated with one's racial and ethnic background, as well. Moreover, Lewis argues that one's racial identity, in and of itself, holds a symbolic capital, a sign of a certain status that either earns or precludes access to certain privileges. In her overall assessment, Lewis believes that Whiteness functions as a symbolic resource in certain schools, "providing all those who possess it with the benefit of assumed knowledge and ability" (p. 126).

At first glance, Bourdieu's relevance to the stories laid out in the previous chapters is not readily apparent in the book's second half, which I attribute to its organization. Still, Lewis flexes her muscle as a sociologist here and contends that access to these various capitals mediates the effects of a stigmatized and ascribed racial identity on Black and Latino students' achievement. While this claim is highly plausible, Lewis' three school studies seem to provide her with little access to students (i.e., Black students) from middle- and upper-income brackets with greater amounts of capital and whose school experiences would also support this assertion. And as she continues her argument, we hear her saying that schools aid in the reproduction of racial inequality among schools by rewarding those with capital and penalizing those without its various forms. But is it race or it is class or both that determines who has capital and who does not? One infers from Lewis that the students without these forms of capital in various urban school contexts are usually Black, Latino, and poor. By speaking more explicitly in terms of how race and phenotype shaped students' identities, the effects of class occasionally get trumped in Lewis' analyses, perhaps because the two are so inextricably linked.

Sarah Willie deals more explicitly with the heterogeneous experiences of students, specifically Black college alumni. And those myriad forms of Blackness correspond to these former students' socioeconomic statuses, the regions and neighborhoods where they grew up, their gender, and skin color, among other factors. Not only does Willie come across these contextual differences, but she also explodes the static image of an "authentic" Black person by discussing the myriad and dynamic forms of Blackness in our society. Like Lewis, Willie also finds that Black students, even those who make it into higher educational institutions, have complicated relationships with their schools and with other the groups. Moving from the autobiographical to the empirical, Willie explores the connections between racial identity and higher education experiences in an interview study of fifty-five African American alumni from two well-known universities in the U.S. founded in the mid-nineteenth century, one predominantly Black (Howard University), and the other predominantly White (Northwestern University). Importantly, she focuses on both interracial and intraracial dynamics on these two college campuses between students and faculty.

Willie's Northwestern University alumni described their alma mater falling "short of facilitating a positive multiracial environment for all students," with negative ramifications particularly for Black students (p. 46). On the one hand, her methodology limits what she can actually say about what actually happened behind the walls of these universities. On the other, Willie's informants provide her with repeated commentary about latent and overt signs of racism that created conflict for them, from racial epithets being written on walls to students being subjected to teachers' stereotypical comments and low expectations to lack of mentorship. All of

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these experiences, Willie surmises, shaped how these alumni thought about themselves not only as students, but also as persons. Yet, the institutional did not overly determine their academic and social experiences, and Willie discusses how their agency operated. For instance, Black alumni recalled choosing not to cultivate relationships with students beyond their own racial community. Although those at Northwestern did "not remember European-American students reaching out to them, neither did they characterize themselves as sitting idly by waiting for the outstretched hand of fellow White students. African-American students nurtured a world unto themselves, where rejection by White students and by the Black students who socialized with them [Whites] was rationalized, and that, in turn, justified their own separatism" (p. 53).

Howard University alumni, in comparison, recalled their undergraduate years with enthusiasm and pride, as a time that instilled group pride and confidence. However, while most of them shared a similar ascribed racial identity and thus did not deal with the various manifestations of racism at school, they confronted issues of colorism, classism, and gender inequality. Inter-class conflict emerged between the more socioeconomically privileged Howard students and poorer Blacks living in the immediate environs of the university. Furthermore, internalized racism reached out across Blacks on campus as colorism pitted light or fair-skinned Blacks against darker skinned ones.

We have to read through about 100 pages before we get to the crux of the book's title—Willie's argument about the performance and variable nature of Black identities. Racial identity, she asserts, is a constructed social phenomenon with structural (external ascription, institutions' allocation of resources, and expectations), meso-structural (familial, regional, and community-based), cultural (styles and tastes), and individual determinants (personality and ideological components). Furthermore, one comes away from Willie's book with the idea that predominantly Black schools like Howard provide more opportunities for students to express and view themselves as different types of Black beings; whereas multiracial and predominantly White schools compel Black students to cohere and even contest different forms of Blackness. She explains that in places where threats of racism and racial subordination exist, subordinate communities often find ways of reclaiming power by naming themselves and others in the group. In the process, they come to define the contours of Blackness and the behaviors that they expect to see exhibited by their in-group members (c.f., Carter 2003). Northwestern alumni mentioned struggling over what it meant to be "authentically Black" more often, while predominantly Black Howard University facilitated students' abilities to see themselves differently in terms of cultural tastes and styles, class, experiences, and peer group formations.

Willie's writing about how the school's racial makeup influences the links between racial identity and students' social and educational experiences has implications for the research of John Ogbu. Anyone who writes about race, culture, identity, and achievement is most likely familiar with his work and would probably be curious about the last book he wrote before his untimely death, *Black American Students in an Affluent Suburb: A Study of Academic Engagement*. Here, we have another chance to read Ogbu's assessment of the racialized achievement gap and much of it echoes his earlier arguments, especially the development of his now-famous cultural-ecological theory used to explain differential achievement among various racial and ethnic groups. As the book's subtitle states, Ogbu observed that Black students at Shaker Heights High School in Ohio are disengaged from education. In his conclusions, the primacy of cultural forces emerges; institutional effects get discounted; and the threat of homogenizing the academic experiences of Black students looms.

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In the book's first section, plausible structural explanations for Black students' school disengagement at Shaker Heights such as the roles of counselors' and teachers' expectations and the effects of leveling or tracking by academic ability, and disciplinary policies—are mentioned. Low teacher expectations, Ogbu acknowledges, possibly have an adverse effect on students' school performance (p. 37). Still, he argues that some researchers overlook students' agency, their roles in creating teacher expectations, whether low or high. He surmises if students are unwilling or refuse to do the work and if they lack the drive to be in honors or Advanced Placement (AP) classes, then why would teachers not have low expectations? Moreover, students inform Ogbu and his colleagues about how patterns of ability grouping, which begin in elementary school and continue throughout high school, affect their and their peers' interests in AP and honors classes later in high school (p. 96). The author allows us to hear their interpretations, but limits his own analytical input at this stage. He admits he does not agree with many of these students' perspectives. While they speak frequently about the roles of their teachers, the school milieu, and other societal forces that affect their school engagement, Ogbu believes that their agency and cultural forces have greater explanatory power. Thus, he exercises the social scientific license to report his "own construction" of these students' academic realities, since, according to him, "the construction of the natives [students and their parents] is not more valid" (p. xx).

Though cultural ecological theory is an integrative framework that incorporates societal, community, and individual factors to explain academic achievement differences among racial groups, Ogbu reserves most of his analysis for *community forces*, such as racial and cultural identity, parental support, Black American culture, and Black peer influence. Black youth, according to the author, have begun to look for alternative mobility in arenas because they feel excluded, looking to role models in sports, drug dealing, and entertainment. In his observations, celebrity athletes and hip hop musicians have become the bane of Black students' educational achievement, since these students, he believes, spend less time on academic work, and more time on developing their athletic and rapping ability.

Notably, Ogbu returns to Signithia Fordham's and his now famous claim about how Black students' resistance to "the burden of acting White" (1986) affects students' achievement. In this latest work, Ogbu appears to retreat some from Fordham's and his 1986 proclamation that Black students consider excelling in schools as "acting White":

> Contrary to what critics think, Black students in Shaker Heights and probably elsewhere did not reject making good grades per se because it entailed acting White, yet they were disengaged from academic work. What these students seemed to reject were certain attitudes and behaviors that they perceived or interpreted as White, but that were conducive to making good grades. The behaviors and attitudes that some Shaker Heights Black students rejected included speaking Standard English, enrollment in honors and AP classes, being smart during lessons, and hanging around too many White students. Before high school, most Shaker students did not equate making good grades with acting White, although they criticized other Blacks with White attitudes and behaviors conducive to making good grades. The reasons given for the labeling had little to do with collective identity (p. 198).

Many of the Black students' responses to questions about the meanings of "acting White" pointed to cultural and interactional styles and tastes (pp. 179–181).

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They commented on the drawbacks of acculturation, the perpetuation of White cultural dominance, and the discomfort that they have with enrolling in AP or honors classes, which have been marked as "White" spaces because so few Black kids are encouraged to enroll in them by counselors and teachers. Previously, others have found similar meanings of "acting White" that Ogbu provides here, although they provide more empathetic discussions of why Black students' views on cultural assimilation and AP and honors courses have emerged and become associated with Whiteness.

Carter (1999, forthcoming) found that many low-income Black and Latino students, resistance to "acting White" connoted more than anything else these youths' refusal to adhere to the cultural default setting in U.S. society, that which is seen as normative or "natural"—the generic American, "White," middle-class tastes for speech and interaction codes, dress and physical appearance, music and other art forms. Tyson, Darrity, and Castellino (2003) have shown that the school context matters in whether students associate Whiteness with more advanced classes such as AP and International Baccalaureate courses. Where students are disproportionately tracked to lower ability classes, and a few exceptional Black students are allowed to enroll in the more advanced classes, and when the latter appear to emulate the cultural behaviors of their White classmates, then they are accused of "acting White" by other Black students outside these classes. On the other hand, when Black students are not disproportionately represented in these classes, then other Black students outside of these classes do not appear to associate Whiteness with AP and honors classes. Though Ogbu's research findings converge with this prior research, he asserts that Black students must grasp some of these "White" cultural styles, which he believes are conducive to doing well in school.

Ogbu does not only hold Black students accountable for their academic underperformance, but he also turns a more critical eye toward Black parents. In Shaker Heights he observed that though they expected their children to do well in school, parents lacked involvement in their children's education because they work long hours, many in two jobs, and thus have little time to assist their children with homework or to encourage them to complete it. Also, he suggests that Black parents do not serve as effective role models for their children and have been supplanted by gangster rap musicians and drug dealers. Perhaps, hearing earlier criticisms about his lack of attention to the effects of class, Ogbu, this time, has written more about it, and the conclusion he reaches is that class seems to have little to no effect in Shaker Heights. Middle-class Black families, Ogbu declares, invest little time in their children's academic careers, as well, and they work long hours. The reader will note that the author does not gather any of his information on parents' involvement from the parents themselves, but rather relies on commentaries from a select group of students to make his points about the role of Black parents. His conclusion about class appears to be drawn from a discussion with one upper middle-class Black student discusses how his parents work long hours and leave many of his course selections to him (p. 249).

In the end, Ogbu strongly urges Black families in the Shaker Heights community to become more strongly involved in their children's education. He stands by his conviction that Black students, families, and communities are in an educational crisis because of their orientations toward education. Much of the students' disengagement, Ogbu argues, is attributed to poor social role models, to engagement in behaviors that are not conducive to obtaining a quality education, and to Black youth culture. Thus, Ogbu targets most of his recommendations at Black parents urging them to develop more enrichment programs and to invest more time in their children's education.

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Finally, he strongly urges students and parents to distinguish between the "affective" meanings of the school curriculum (e.g., representation of the Black experience and perspectives) from the "instrumental or pragmatic" meanings of the curriculum (e.g., learning math, science, Standard English, and acquiring useful knowledge linked to future jobs and upward mobility). Pragmatic attitudes, not affective attitudes, according to Ogbu, matter more in the long run to achievement. "Black students and the Black community in Shaker Heights do not relate to teachers as experts in knowledge, skills, and language who have something useful to offer. Instead, they seem to be overly concerned with whether teachers and the school system 'cared' for them. It is important for teachers and schools to care for their students; but caring is not enough," he argues (p. 284). Ogbu's prescription for these students' disengagement is that the students must separate the reality that they need the skills and abilities schooling provides to compete in the adult opportunity structure from the belief that schools ignore the social and cultural realities of Black students.

A balanced analysis of all of the factors with which cultural ecological theory claims to affect student achievement would have made a more powerful read. From the work of Lewis, for example, we know that the ways schools handle students as racialized beings can ultimately influence their school (dis)engagement. Therefore, on a methodological note, Ogbu might have conducted an actual investigation of parents' and teachers' behaviors, rather than extrapolating from the comments of a handful of students. While the Shaker Heights School System commissioned him to investigate the problems, its schools were let off the hook, relatively speaking, receiving less systematic examination, although students' made innumerable assertions about the schools' climate and policies. The currency of John Ogbu's theory remains quite high, nevertheless, as is evident in the fact that his work is cited in all three of the other books reviewed here. And his legacy will live on through the contributions that he has made to social science and the industry of educational research that has emerged in response to his work.

In *The Source of the River*—a book that is sure to become a useful tool in advanced undergraduate or graduate survey research courses on race and education—Douglas Massey, Camille Charles, Garvey Lundy, and Mary Fischer investigate Ogbu's theory, in addition to a host of other theories, to examine racial differences in achievement. They move a stage further academically to investigate performances among college students in a survey study of a random sample of Asian, Black, and White first-year undergraduates attending twenty-eight of the most selective colleges and universities in the United States. A prequel to Derek Bok and William Bowen's study outlined in their 1998 book *Shape of the River*, which examines the paths followed by minority students as they moved through life after college, *The Source of the River*'s focus is on students' earlier influences such as socioeconomic status and family context, high school peer culture, school environment, and how these characteristics shaped their academic progress.

Moving from the indisputable claim that African Americans and Latinos are, on average, less prepared for college than Asians and Whites, and that they achieve at lower rates once they enter college, Massey, Charles, Lundy, and Fischer claim that what is at stake and in contention is the explanation for these intergroup differences. Using both retrospective (they ask respondents to report on their school and family experiences at ages six, thirteen, and in their senior year in high school), cross-sectional (respondents' academic and social experiences at the time of the interview), and prospective (respondents' aspirations and expectations beyond the time of the interview) survey data, they set out to explore the determinative power of several key theories in the areas of race and education. Specifically, they examine 1) capital

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deficiency theory (refer to the discussion of Lewis above); 2) Ogbu's theory about the roles of community and sociocultural forces, especially the purported negative effects of Black and Latino students' peer cultures and resistance to "acting White"; 3) stereotype vulnerability threat, a theory developed by psychologists Claude Steele and Josh Aronson, which states that Blacks and Latinos fearful of confirming stereotypical beliefs about their racial and ethnic groups' intellectual inferiority avoid psychological distress by disidentifying with education and thus underperforming; 4) peer group theory, which holds that powerful adolescent subcultures emerge to challenge adult authority systems and that students susceptible to peer pressure rebel by not living up to their academic potential; and 5) a host of critical theories, which argue that American society is structured such that certain minority groups are allocated to schools by discriminatory process that offer inferior educational resources, which leave them ill-equipped to cope with the demands of higher education (p. 18). Each successive chapter examines one of these particular theories.

Despite the book's heavy usage of descriptive and multivariate analyses, it is well organized, comprehensible, and accessible, even for the statistics novice. Not surprisingly, given the highly selective and elite sample of students in this study, Massey and colleagues found no significant intergroup (i.e., racial) differences in terms of the students' access to resources. Most came from families with supportive parents, who were actively engaged in cultivating their children's human, cultural, and social capital, which previous research has linked to educational achievement (p. 66).

Among the racial and ethnic groups, similar percentages of these academically competitive students attended public and private schools. In the aggregate, however, Black and Latino students were more likely to attended "segregated" schools (defined as at least 70% minority)—25% and 15%, respectively, while Asians and Whites were more likely to attend schools where Whites were in the majority. Most White students in the study attended schools where 70% of the student population was White.[1] The amount of social disorder and the quality of the courses and teaching for those Black and Latino students who attended "segregated" schools differed significantly from those students attending either integrated or predominantly White schools. Hence, Massey and colleagues all determine that students from segregated school contexts begin at a rather different starting point academically than their peers at other types of schools.

As for peer culture, Massey and colleagues found little evidence that these selective students were exposed to differential levels of adolescent peer culture where academic work and education were devalued. In contrast to John Ogbu's study of Black students at Shaker Heights, they found no evidence that Black students evade "the burden of acting White" by cutting up, acting out, or joking around to deflect attention (p. 119). Logically speaking, it would be surprising if they had found an oppositional culture among this group of students who not only had enrolled in college, but also had chosen to matriculate at some of the nation's most rigorous and difficult places to study. Meanwhile, their data support other reports of nationally representative samples of students which reveal that Black students and their peers do not hold significantly different academic norms than their White counterparts, nor do they find themselves less popular for excelling in school (c.f., Ainsworth-Darnell and Downey, 1998).

The discussion of the paradox of what they call "overconfidence" and lower achievement is one of several striking notes in the book. These researchers found that across the board, whether having attended integrated, mixed, or segregated schools, Black students maintained the highest levels of esteem, efficacy, and confidence in their academic attainment. Yet, in the aggregate, they maintained the lowest

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grade point averages in college. The researchers defined as "overconfident" those respondents who expressed 100% surety of graduating from college, though they had not taken any Advanced Placement courses in high school. In the final analyses of the research, the "overconfidence" factor did not have any significant associations with college grade point averages. Since many American high schools, especially those with limited resources, do not offer AP courses, although they prepare their students for college, the researchers' definition of overconfidence is debatable. Furthermore, social scientists have shown that members of stigmatized racial students maintain high levels of efficacy, self-esteem, and self-confidence, despite a history of social and economic obstacles (see, for example, Crocker and Major, 1989). Thus, only those students most sensitive to the perspectives of those with higher status (such as teachers and Whites) would be less likely to believe in themselves and have lower confidence, which could explain why this group of sociologists found some support for Steele's stereotype threat theory.

In perhaps the first empirical testing of stereotype threat outside of the experimental context (p. 206), Massey, Charles, Lundy, and Fischer constructed a composite variable that examines the educational experiences of a group of students whom they defined as potentially vulnerable to stereotype threat. These are students who are sensitive to teachers' views—i.e., those who were extremely self-conscious about their teachers' perceptions—and simultaneously did not feel that they were good students. Massey and company found statistically significant differences in the first-semester college grade point averages of these students. Compared to other Black and Latino students, those who suffered from "stereotype threat" earned significantly lower grade point averages in their first semester.

In the final analysis, they were unable to fully account for the significant differences in grade-point averages among the four racial and ethnic groups, even with testing all of the theories they had considered. The short of it is that Black and Latino undergraduates maintained significantly lower grade point averages than Asians and Whites, who maintained similar averages, though the overwhelming majority of students in each group was likely to maintain a "B" average or higher and to pass 97% of their courses—another indication of this academically elite group. Is accounting for all of the variance in mean grade point averages, test scores, and the enrollment in AP or honors classes, a futile intellectual and empirical exercise? I would argue that the ability to determine and to avoid actual attainment gaps among racial and ethnic groups is more critical. There is little reason to worry about the graduates of the United States' most selective and elite universities, as Bok and Bowen (1998) have shown. However, there is sufficient reason to worry about the factors that will preclude students across various ethnic and class groups from attaining greater skills, higher education, and access to opportunities in our society.

One conspicuous absence in all of the four works is a better-developed discussion of the intersections between race and gender. For examlple, research shows that the gender gap in achievement between Black males and females is growing at an rapid rate (Cose and Samuels, 2003; Lopez, 2002; Journal of Blacks in Higher Education 1999). Though some gender theory serves as a basis for the framework of Willie's performance and social construction of race, her section on gender leaves much to be desired, especially since she barely discusses how male and female alumni spoke of their identities either similarly or differently. Similarly, Lewis subsumes gender dynamics under race. In her portrayal of West City, she suggests how the process of the African American male criminalization begins at an early age, as these boys constitute the majority of disciplinary cases. Noticeably, Ogbu does little to tease out the gendered dimensions of this explanation, especially given that the social spaces of

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1742058X04042109 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the youth he focuses on are primarily male-dominant cultural arenas (c.f., Ferguson 2000; Lopez 2002; Noguera 2003). Finally, Massey, Charles, Lundy, and Fischer note that African American females outnumbered males two to one in their study, and I was curious about how these two groups differed in academic outcomes. Are males more likely than females to suffer from stereotype threat, or vice versa?

Overall, the year 2003 yielded a bumper crop of books written on race, identity, culture, and education, giving us insight into the power of race and identity in the schooling experiences and educational outcomes of students, from elementary school to university. These books speak to the roles of various actors in the processes of educational achievement, especially as a racialized phenomenon—from structures (schools as institutions with pervasive policies and ideologies disseminated by teachers and principals); to sociocultural forces (families, neighborhoods, peer group formations, collective identity); to individual factors (personal identity and self-confidence). Furthermore, these works speak to one another, filling in each other's gaps and oversights. Intentionally or not, they compel us to think about the heterogeneous experiences of those ascribed the same racial positions: how different types of schools play a role in providing myriad experiences, and how other social identities such as class, gender, and ideology intersect with race to lead to these variable within-race differences.

Do we need more intersectional analyses between racial categories and other social factors? Often, in social science research, the tendency is to speak and write in a singular perspective about students ascribed the identities of "Asian," "Black," "Latino," "Native American" and "White." Yet, racial identity's multidimensionality (see Sellers et al., 1998) can likely lend itself to different patterns in economic opportunities, school performances, job niches, housing patterns, and even political attitudes. Collectively, these works remind us of this point, not an incomprehensible one, but perhaps a reality that scholars and researchers can often forget when they rely too simplistically on simple racial categorizations. Undoubtedly, as long as it remains a force, race will not go away, and various social influences will continue to affect the links between students' racial and ethnic identities and their academic outcomes. The catch is for researchers to comprehend these more complex understandings of racial identity and meaning making in their quests to understand and to alleviate academic attainment gaps among all groups of American students.

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NOTE

1. The definition of "integration" is a tricky and debatable one. The tendency is to equate "Black"- and "Latino"-dominant schools with segregation and White-dominant schools with integration, though in principle, both are segregated. Conventionally, scholars and researchers use these labels as proxies for the school's quality in terms of its infrastructure (school building, classrooms, computers, library, and so forth), teacher experience, and preparation and wealth of the student body. Because of the inextricable links among race, ethnicity, and class, generally Black and Latino students attend poorer and less resourceful schools, which by extension undermines the quality of their schools.

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