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**BUILDING COMMUNITY ON CAMPUS: THE INTERDEPENDENT THEORY AND
PRACTICE OF THE MULTIRACIAL UNITY LIVING EXPERIENCE—MRULE**

By

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ABSTRACT

BUILDING COMMUNITY ON CAMPUS: THE INTERDEPENDENT THEORY AND PRACTICE OF THE MULTIRACIAL UNITY LIVING EXPERIENCE---MRULE

By

Jeanne Gazel

Racial tension has remained a consistent problem throughout the 1990's on college campuses and Michigan State University has been no exception. Asked by the Provost of the University in 1995, to develop programming that would build community among the diverse student body, I set out to study what would happen if students were given opportunities that challenged their racial thinking and corresponding behaviors. The research question I posed that subsequently guided the creation and maintenance of a vibrant undergraduate race relations program-- the Multiracial Unity Living Experience (MRULE) was: Can a multi-faceted university experience that engages a diverse group of college students to: learn, travel, interact and serve together empower them to become active change agents in their college years and beyond?

Using three major fields of scholarship: history, sociology, and women's studies in an interdisciplinary paradigm, the MRULE program is designed to exemplify the interdependency of theory and practice in an academic living/ learning environment. Based on the following three pillars: social justice, human agency, and action research, the program educated over three hundred students in a five year period. Using Action Research methodology we identified problems together and took steps towards solutions, continually shaping and reshaping both theory and practice as the learning community evolved. Thirty students participated in an in-depth interview that focused on their

family backgrounds and their experiences since coming to Michigan State University. The outcomes from these interviews, focus groups, and student evaluations demonstrated that students: (1) acquired increased knowledge of history and contemporary social problems, (2) experienced inspired activism around racial/social issues, (3) formed new and genuine friendships, and (4) made life-changing decisions.

Several foundational conceptual and practical components shape the theory and practice of MRULE. The conceptual components challenge conventional norms in racial thinking and are studied in depth to empower students with applicable knowledge. These include: (1) studying history from a multiracial lens, (2) understanding historical agency, (3) contrasting the social construction of race and the oneness of the human race with fixed and distinct racial categories, (4) interrogating racial hierarchies, power and privilege, (5) exploring expansive definitions of unity in diversity which problematizes unity as sameness and diversity as divisiveness, and (6) looking at genuine, authentic interracial relationships based on mutuality and trust in both historical and contemporary settings. The MRULE practical components include: (1) substantial skill building in dialogue around sensitive and controversial issues, (2) building and sustaining genuine relationships, (3) developing leadership skills, and (4) community outreach.

This study outlines how the MRULE program is a living, breathing example of scholarship and activism. Those concerned with the responsibility of higher education to create and sustain inclusive living and learning programs that: (1) attract a thoroughly diverse learning community, (2) provide academically challenging material on racial/social issues, and (3) offer meaningful opportunities to build genuine relationships across traditional racial lines, may find these discoveries compelling.

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Dedicated to the students of the Multiracial Unity Living Experience (MRULE) for their willingness to shine a light on the continual need to struggle for social justice.

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I am greatly indebted to my Committee chair, Dr. Richard Thomas who has been a colleague, friend, and stalwart support through the years leading up to and throughout this study. He challenged me consistently from the moment he suggested that my consulting work in race relations was scholarly material, crying out to be structured in a doctoral program. Once I entered the program, I had the honor to work with some of Michigan State Universities' most distinguished scholars. Committee members: Dr. Maxine Baca Zinn, whose meticulous and careful reading of all my work inspired precision, organization, and intersectional analysis. Dr. Darlene Clark Hine, whose passion for speaking the truth through African American women's history immediately caught my attention and provided a road map to refocus the historical lens that has subsequently influenced all my work. Dr. Joyce Ladenson provided years of scholarly exchange on feminist history and theory that became integral to the pedagogy of the MRULE program. Although she could not remain on the committee, I owe thanks to Dr. Gloria Randle for the guidance and scholarly inspiration she gave to me as I looked at race relations themes in American literature.

If it were not for Provost Lou Anna Simon, this dissertation would more than likely have been something entirely different. It was her vision that called for the creation of a community building program on campus that provided me the opportunity to work in an Action Research mode. She has consistently sent a message through the years that University Administration valued the MRULE program and that support has been invaluable to the development of the theory and practice. Dr. Robert Banks in the early years and Dr. Lee June in the later years, have been sounding boards, problem solvers,

and strong supporters of MRULE's growth and development.

In the early years as we sought to find a university unit to house MRULE, former Dean of Urban Affairs Programs, Dr. Joe Darden graciously offered the support. Throughout the years he has remained interested in MRULE and my professional development. This interest continued with acting Dean Dr. Dozier Thorton who shared office space and staff assistance. I am grateful to Administrative Assistant to the dean, Gloria Simmons who provided invaluable assistance with financial and procedural matters, and computer assistant, Harsha Gangadharbatla, who responded competently to several help calls throughout the writing process. Graduate Assistant Shiela Rodolfo assisted with data collection and organization. Graduate Assistants, Ron Byard and Shannon Hefter helped in leading MRULE dialogues and worked on community building assignments.

Working hand in hand with the Departments of Residence Life and Housing at Michigan State University has given the MRULE program much appreciated support. The sudden and untimely death of Ann Bolger, Director of Residence Life—1999 and 2000, left a void in my heart as I had learned so much from our interactions during her 18-month tenure. I looked forward to a partnership with her that would have strengthened the connection between MRULE and Residence Life through the vision and scholarship we shared, and still call upon the memory of our many exchanges as I problem solve today. Ann's short stay here at MSU has profoundly affected me. The MRULE of today feels the influence of her spirit. Former Director of Residence Life, Mary Haas, made implementing MRULE possible in the first place with her keen interests in student development and diversity. Her encouragement was a model for Residence Life Staff

who wholeheartedly embraced MRULE's ideals and helped to get the message to their constituencies. Her choice to place the MRULE pilot program in Wilson Hall under the leadership of Teresa Isela-Vandersloot was simply the best. Teresa's hard work and enthusiasm contributed to the great success of that first year and helped me to envision continual growth. I will always look to that brief partnership with Teresa as the healthy seed from which so many of MRULE's successes have sprouted. I thank all of the Residence Life staff but would like to name those whose support has particularly stood out. Dr. Kate Murphy, Dr. Cindy Helman, George Athanas, and Angela Todaro. I thank director of Housing, Angela Brown, and director of the Office of Minority Student Affairs, Rodney Patterson, who have been supportive through the years.

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ensure an MRULE sponsored event was successful.

When Tiffany Gridiron walked into her first MRULE meeting in 1997 as a freshman, I was struck by her radiance. Skeptical that MRULE was another feel good group with little ability to make a difference, she reluctantly agreed to give it a chance and from that moment I could see what was possible with MRULE. Tiffany embodied the principles of MRULE and through the years has demonstrated outstanding and courageous student leadership. I cannot think of how this dissertation would have been completed without her constant feedback. She kept it real and immediate for me throughout the entire process.

I am so indebted to Kamala Kiem for her assistance with formatting, proofreading, defense presentation, and overall companionship through the last phases of completing the work that I can find no words to adequately express my gratitude. I only hope that the mentorship I have provided her these past two years will propel her further into achieving her academic, professional, and personal goals, and that somehow it will begin to repay her for the countless hours she spent helping a technical neophyte produce state-of-the-art work.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AR:	Action Research
ANC:	African National Congress
ASWPL:	Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching
CIC:	Commission for Interracial Cooperation
FUBU:	For Us By Us
MCSUI:	Multi-City Study of Urban Inequality
MRULE:	Multi-Racial Unity Living Experience
NAACP:	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
NDI:	New Detroit Incorporated
SNCC:	Student Non- Violent Coordinating Committee
WDL:	Worker Defense League
WPA:	Works Progress Administration

Chapter One

Converging Theory and Practice—What does it Look Like?

Introduction

Calling on the inspirational vision of Black feminists and activists, Patricia Hill Collins (2000) explains how Black feminism is a “self-conscious struggle that empowers women and men to actualize a humanistic vision of community” (p. 39).

We take our stand on the solidarity of humanity, the oneness of life, and the unnaturalness and injustice of all special favoritisms, whether of sex, race, country, or condition . . .

Anna Julia Cooper (Lowenberg and Bogin 1976, p. 330-31)

The lesson of history that human rights are indivisible and that the failure to adhere to this principle jeopardizes the rights of all is particularly applicable.

Pauli Murray (1970, p. 102)

. . . feminism is. . . a commitment to eradicating the ideology of domination that permeates Western culture on various levels. . . a commitment to reorganizing U.S. society so that the self-development of people can take precedence over imperialism, economic expansion, and material desires.

bell hooks (1981, p. 194)

Throughout her seminal work *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, Collins invokes her readers to remember that thought and action are interdependent processes in the human experience. Black women have historically been exemplary in demonstrating that, however powerful ideas are they can be shaped, changed, even eradicated by individual and collective action in pursuit of greater human freedom and dignity. The humanistic vision of creating community is very much in line with my own life-long beliefs in the organic unity of the human race. It is the process of creating unity in diversity while promoting equity and social justice that inspired my colleague Richard Thomas and me to found the Multi-

Racial¹ Unity Project at Michigan State University in 1995. We were confident that, if given sustained support and attention, the Multi-Racial Unity Living Experience (MRULE) could provide students with an experience that would transform their racial thinking and inspire them to become active change agents in improving race relations. In a world characterized by the simultaneous forces of increasing interaction and polarization among people from diverse racial backgrounds there is a vital need for change agents who can competently build community among diverse groups. Certainly a Big Ten, world-class, Land Grant University supplied students with both possibilities. More often than not, racial polarization appeared a stronger force, particularly in the wake of the 1995 Simpson verdict (Hunt 1999, Hutchinson 1996). Polarization simply got more press and it was much more visible in daily life: the famous segregated cafeteria tables (Tatum, 1997), scathing letters to the *State News Editor*, social settings, even classrooms sent a message to students that it was easier, safer, and more “natural” to “hang” separately. The invisible hand of pluralism (Waters 1990) was not able to bring students together even though they were occupying similar spaces.

Provost Lou Anna Simon asked us if we could work on a community-building aspect to the many diversity projects that had been underway throughout MSU for the past seven years. There was a strong institutional commitment to diversity and multiculturalism, but there was much confusion over what that meant. Did it encourage separatism? Why was there still so much tension around Minority Student Affairs? Were diverse groups vying for self interests only? Why were African Americans labeled the “majority-minority” in sometimes-negative terms as if they were receiving special

¹ When referring to the MRULE program I use the hyphenated version of Multi-Racial. Otherwise, I use the one word multiracial.

treatment that set them apart from the others? Why were there so many hostile White students? How/Where did they fit in? We acknowledged the importance of these questions and decided that the most effective way to find answers was to provide an alternative forum and, in the best of the “*Field of Dreams*”² tradition, see who would come.

Our first challenge was to identify the willing participants in the 40,000+ student body filling lecture and residence halls. It was here that we decided on a division of labor. Thomas would concentrate on the classroom experience; I would focus on the living experience in the residence halls. Since my research interests centered around building genuine, authentic relationships across traditional racial lines in both historical and contemporary settings, the living environment would be fertile ground for me to look at how relationships are developed and sustained and to what degree they affect racial thinking and, consequently, social and political action. I started out with the following research question that has guided the development of theory and practice for the MRULE program throughout the years.

Research Question

Can a multi-faceted university experience that engages a diverse group of college students in a Racial Project requiring that they learn, interact, travel, and serve together empower them to become active change agents committed to social justice in their college experience and beyond? If so, what has to be in place in such an experience? Who are the players? What is the nature of their interactions? What is the appropriate

² The 1989 movie that popularized the notion of fulfilling dreams by acting on them with the confidence that they will be fulfilled—thus building the baseball stadium for the movie’s hero was the action that brought Shoeless Joe Jackson back to tell the truth of his story.

amount of time? What are the key components of the project? These are the questions that I answer through this study.

Simultaneously pursuing my doctoral work in American Studies provided me with an academic climate that continually challenged and inspired my thinking as I set out to bring something tangible, meaningful and sustainable into being. A multidisciplinary approach to race relations gave me a comprehensive background as I drew upon works in history, literature, sociology, feminist and cultural studies, and was able to demonstrate how bodies of work complemented one another and provided students with several pathways to greater understanding. An example of this can be found in the increase of contemporary texts in my three major fields of study: history, sociology, and women's studies. All of these fields have begun to systematically include scholarship on diverse people as well as personal voice pieces as an integral part of the epistemology (Kerber & De Hart, 2000, Andersen & Collins, 1998, Takaki, 1998, Golden & Shreve, 1995).

It was my consulting work in the public and private sectors³ that led me to want to explore race relations in greater depth with a clear focus on genuine, authentic interracial relationships and with more attention to interdisciplinary works. I consistently discovered that however genuine an organization's willingness to embrace diversity was, there remained a good deal of unfinished business around race relations that prevented meaningful and long-term change. The 1996 Texaco racial discrimination case came to light at this time (Roberts and White 1998) and silenced many of the critics who believed in the "end of racism theory" (D'Souza 1995). Healthy interactions across traditional racial lines leading to genuine relationships were rare, while a plethora of diversity

³ From 1990 to 1998 I was Director of Training and Development for a race relations consulting firm and designed program for a range of clients on diversity in the workplace.

training workshops were the norm. Over several years the expectations to learn how to “appreciate” or “manage” diversity left many believing that you could understand individuals different from you if you knew something about the characteristics of the group they were historically and culturally tied to. However, this formula could not possibly account for the range of diversity in individuals. For example, genuine efforts to understand the historical contexts of oppressed peoples in the United States created real and unpopular discomfort. Consequently, many diversity training programs moved away from educating around race and gender inequality and more towards a broader diversity, including personality types, skills, and educational background (Thomas, 1992).

Although this may have been important work to help people understand each other better, many of these programs did little to address persistent racial polarization, which in turn has an effect on work place relationships. Through the years, I understood that much of the resistance to taking on race and gender inequality in the diversity training programs had to do with a fear of getting caught up in an endless quagmire of “oppression studies” (Boot, 1994, Glazer, 1993.). This resistance coupled with a lack of understanding of the history and structures of racial inequalities pointed me to the university environment. It was here, it seemed that the greatest opportunities to educate were being missed.

Notwithstanding increasing racial/ethnic and national diversity in the Michigan State University student body during the 1990’s, there was little emphasis on bringing these diverse elements together in a unified community. As a result the need arose for a college campus race relations program. In general, few White students and students of color share meaningful interracial connections that enhance their educational experience. The increased enrollment of students of color has also meant an increased visibility of the support systems designed to help them succeed. These “minority aide” programs generate

heated discussions among MRULE participants as many students believe they are set up to encourage separatism and have no idea of the historical and social context in which they were created (MRULE Round Table Discussions, 1997-2000). Every year we educate all MRULE students on the need for these support groups and the need for experiences that bring diverse people together in the same forum. We strive to get this message out to the larger campus environment as well but it is not an easy task. It is not uncommon at Michigan State University for White students and students of color to remain socially segregated. They frequently speak about the “racial clusters” in the cafeterias and in classrooms. They enter on separate racial tracks (coming primarily from segregated areas in the state of Michigan) and for the most part exit on those same tracks (Gurin 1999). This contributes to a racial process that reinforces racial segregation in the larger society. The lack of any intervening educational experience to develop multiracial social skills contributes by default to racial polarization. For Whites it does not come up as an opportunity lost until they enter the work force and find themselves having to deal with a diverse work team, unprepared to understand social issues that have a range of effects on their working relationships. For students of color, separate tracks reinforce the social isolation they have come to expect as the norm in predominantly white settings. This point was brought home when I was consulting with a major corporation in Detroit who hired heavily from MSU. When I asked this new management class—90% White--to share something about meaningful interactions with someone of a different background than themselves, there was little said. There were some experiences with international students but very few had meaningful experiences with fellow Americans of different backgrounds. “It just never came up,” they would say. “It’s not the kind of thing you can force. You

can't pick your friends because of their race or ethnicity" ("Diversity in the Workplace," New World Associates Training Course, 1997).

Race Relations on College Campuses—The Larger Context

As with many critical social issues the college campus has been a battleground where opposing views on racial equality find intense expression. Through the late 1980's and early 1990's racial conflict was all too commonplace—over 100 college campuses reported incidents and caught many university administrators off guard (Hurtado 1992). Incident after incident reported racial hostility directed most vehemently to the African American student population with an underlying message that they did not belong. Each incident prompted the university administration to look at its policies and practices and design and implement programming to insure the recruitment, retention and inclusion of students of color. Consequently campus diversity programs have mushroomed over the last decade. These programs range from curriculum transformation resulting in new course requirements on multiracial historical and cultural studies, to inter-group dialogues in and outside the classroom, to rigorous recruitment and retention programs for both students and faculty of color (<http://www.inform.umd.edu/DiversityWeb/>). In addition race relations dialogues on college campuses have been a concern nation wide as the President's Initiative on Race: *One America* has established National Campus Week of Dialogue in 1998 and 1999 (<http://www.ed.gov/campusdialogue/>).

Along with increased numbers of diversity programs and their corresponding web sites with links to a plethora of resources is the research on program need and effectiveness. I will mention a few of these here to set the MRULE project in the larger context of race and ethnicity in U.S. tertiary education. According to the extensively researched 1999 report "Compelling Interest: Examining the Evidence on Racial

Dynamics in Higher Education” released after the Stanford University conference on: “Facing the Courts of Law and Public Opinion: Social Science Evidence on Diversity in Higher Education,” the need for systematic intervention to insure parity remains great.

An impressive team of scholars concluded:

- (1) there is clear evidence of continuing inequities in educational opportunity along racial categories;
- (2) test-based definitions of merit are incomplete;
- (3) race is a major social psychological factor in the American consciousness and behaviors; and
- (4) racially diversified environments, when properly utilized, lead to improvements in educational outcomes for all parties
(<http://www.aera.net/reports/dynamics.htm>).

The wide scale attack on affirmative action in college admissions has generated a substantial number of expert reports and testimonies as to the overall benefits of a diverse college campus in determining learning outcomes. University of Michigan Professor Patricia Gurin (1999) has researched the impact of a diverse college campus on learning using multi-institutional national data, extensive surveys of University of Michigan students and data from a classroom program.

It is clear from all three analyses that interaction with peers from diverse racial backgrounds, both in the classroom and informally, is positively associated with a host of what I call "learning outcomes." Students who experienced the most racial and ethnic diversity in classroom settings and in informal interactions with peers showed the greatest engagement in active thinking processes, growth in intellectual engagement and motivation, and growth in intellectual and academic skills
(<http://www.umich.edu/~urel/admissions/legal/expert/toc.html>).

Former Princeton University President William Bowen (1999) concluded in the study which he co-authored with Derek Bok⁴ that: "the data in our study prove what I have observed that diversity is valued and that "learning through diversity" actually occurs. Our study indicates that diversity is a benefit for all students, minorities and non-minorities alike" (<http://www.umich.edu/~urel/admissions/legal/expert/bowen.html>). University programs that emphasize diversity in a "student centered" environment where faculty takes a personal interest in the student's learning are showing more positive outcomes for the overall undergraduate experience (Hurtado 1996). Despite the evidence over the last fifteen years that diverse learning environments are key to preparing students to live and work in an ever-increasing global society, resistance to change in the racial status quo continues to cause tension. According to Hurtado:

At the same time that institutions and individuals are engaged in conversations about the future and their role in educating a diverse citizenry, practices to promote diverse student enrollments are being called into question. This seemingly contradictory state is not inconsistent with our history on diversity issues. Both resistance and change are inevitable parts of the major transformation that is under way in the mission of post-secondary institutions--a mission that includes diversity as a key component (p.28).

Nowhere is this resistance more acute than on the ideological battlefield over affirmative action in college admissions.

The most recent attack on affirmative action in universities began in 1995 with the University of California Board of Regents and has resulted in a significant decrease in minority enrollment (*Daily Californian* U. California-Berkeley, July 21, 2000). Both the

⁴ *The Shape of the River: Long-Term Consequences of Considering Race in College and University Admissions*, Princeton University Press (1998).

states of California and Texas (1996) have made it illegal to consider race as a factor in admissions. This past July the University of Georgia followed suit. (Associated Press: Web Posting, July 25, 2000). All eyes are upon what has been characterized as the suit that will determine the fate of affirmative action in admissions throughout the country—the two lawsuits against the University of Michigan both set to go to trial in 2000-1 (<http://www.umich.edu/~urel/admissions/legal/index.html>).

Affirmative action has consistently been a key discussion topic in the MRULE Round Table Discussion. We focus on distinguishing myth from fact in a historical context. So that students are less apt to fall prey to the trap of the United States of America as a colorblind society we unpack the mythology of colorblind constitutionalism (Siegel 1998). With the national attention upon the University of Michigan and the significance of these cases in determining the future of affirmative action, Michigan State University MRULE students are poised to challenge their thinking, know what they believe and how to discuss it. They know from studying history that affirmative action is a remedial policy meant to increase the pool of diverse candidates. Whatever its flaws or abuses, it is clear that the diversity we do have on predominantly White campuses would have been much less had affirmative action not been used. We encourage them to critique the flaws with facts but always in a context of the larger community. After we present data on the historical and institutional patterns of exclusion towards people of color, we engage them in an interactive exercise by asking them to design an alternative to affirmative action that would meet their standards of fairness and remedy racial inequities. “What would you do differently? How would you insure that the individual and community are served? What would you give up? What would you expect others to give up?” This discussion places affirmative action in both a collective and individual paradigm and is one of the first

lessons MRULE students encounter in the social justice ethical framework that defines our mission and purpose.

Social Justice Ethical Framework

The interdependent theory and practice of a race relations program with social justice at the center demands a constant examination of the individual within the community in a both/and conceptual framework (Collins 2000, Miller 1999, Harvey 1996). According to Iris Marion Young:

Justice should refer not only to distribution, but also to institutional conditions necessary for the development and exercise of individual capacities and collective communication and cooperation (1990, p.39)

Social justice theorist David Miller discusses the plurality of justice and embeds his theory in the “modes of human relationships.” It is by association in an increasingly complex global world that principles of social justice must be understood.

Human beings can stand in different kinds of relationships to one another, and we can best understand which demands of justice someone can make of us by looking first at the particular nature of our relationship. In the real world such relationships are very often complex and multifaceted, but it is possible to analyze them in terms of a small number of basic modes. If our aim is to discover what social justice means to the denizens of modern liberal societies, we need to consider three such basic modes: solidaristic community, instrumental association and citizenship (1999 p. 26).

The notion of individuals in a community engaged in the process of defining and establishing social justice implies moral values and responsibility. Among several psychological theories used to explain why people chose moral values over other values is: “the experience of living in a just community and in caring relationships. Having these experiences leads a person to prize these relationships among other values” (Narvaez & Rest, 1994). Acting morally and responsibly is foundational to a healthy democracy. The

vitality of a democracy over time and into each new generation is dependent on how well young people embrace democratic practices. Whatever language we speak concerning diversity, social justice, and democratic values it must be a language understood by today's youth. Educational theorist Henry Giroux states it clearly:

We need a language to make youth in all its diversity a central focus for addressing how we take up the relationship between social justice and democracy. Youth have increasingly been left out of discussions about democracy, rights, justice, and compassion. As educators, we need to create spaces for youth to speak, represent themselves, and organize. Social justice in the curriculum must be rooted in a sense of hope, connected to the future, solidarity with others, and a willingness to fight for what one believes in. . . . social justice can frame our work as educators only to the degree that it connects with the experiences and histories of the students we teach and work with (1998, p. 290).

MRULE came into being to give voice to and capture the real lives and experiences of a group of college students in order to inspire them to value the opportunities they have to create thriving diverse communities and empower them to "fight for what they believe in." My task was to come together and step by step figure out how.

Action Research

From the onset of the MRULE project the research agenda was driven by the belief that research must be done *for* students and *not* on students (Spalter-Roth & Hartmann 1996). Influenced by qualitative research methodology and feminist research, I sought to apply the theory and practice of Action Research in education to the MRULE program. The process of MRULE demonstrated how theory and practice inform one another, what some researchers have called a "feedback loop" (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1996). The challenge for me was to structure the knowledge I was certain students needed to acquire in order to

function effectively in an increasingly diverse world. This would mean applying knowledge experientially so that it would complement their course work and reinforce learning in multiple settings. In addition, I had to look at the impact that gaining new knowledge and experience would have on students' lives. This meant starting with an understanding of the lives of the students, wherever they began in the program, and continually evaluating at several stages in their individual development, as well as in the development of MRULE as a whole. Action Research in education literature provided several principles to guide this process. Those most salient are: (1) research that is for the purpose of improving practice, (2) research that is collaborative and participatory in nature using planning, observing, action and reflection and, (3) research that is concerned with social change (Kemmis & Wilkinson 1998, Smith, Willms, Johnson, 1997, Selener 1997, Stringer 1996).

Outline of Chapters

Each chapter is set up to discuss the theoretical framework and corresponding practices—examples in the field— as they have been developed in the Multiracial Unity Living Experience. Chapter Two looks at the theoretical basis, organizing themes and principles that provide the foundation of the MRULE program. I focus on how and why social justice, human agency, and social change in the scholar-activist tradition are key components of MRULE's goals and objectives. I use an action research model to help develop and sustain the work and demonstrate the collaboration among students and faculty in the process. Chapter Three looks at the concepts involved in understanding the social construction of race and the related themes of whiteness, privilege, and power. I outline those concepts that are fundamental for the students to grasp in order to prepare them for in depth and meaningful discussions and cite some of the most illustrative

examples in the field. Chapter Four discusses the role of history in understanding present conditions. I define what it means to reconfigure the historical narrative by calling on several prominent historians who have trail blazed this path, using African American women's history as one example. I look at what is missing in how history is taught and focus on the traditions of anti-racism and interracial cooperation as critical historical realities deserving of attention. This approach is particularly vital for the MRULE students as knowing history is at the core of the work we do. Chapter Five takes us into an in-depth discussion of unity in diversity and the role of difference. Definitions of how these terms and concepts are used in MRULE are important as they are all easily misrepresented and misunderstood. Since creating unity is central to what we are about, we make sure we have a vision and understanding of what we mean by unity in our multiracial context. Chapter Six looks at the role of genuine relationships across traditional racial lines in both historical and contemporary settings. Again, I define important terminology and share a concept I have developed and used with corporate clients called the "relationship continuum" where we look at how relationships move through phases and some of the particular pitfalls that make interracial relationships vulnerable. Chapter Seven is based on my interviews with thirty MRULE students, women and men, from diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds. In this chapter I weave together their stories that explore their racial thinking and action before and after their participation in the MRULE program. I conclude this chapter and the entire work by highlighting the strengths of the program and those aspects we wish to develop further. The MRULE students and I share a vision and hope of sustainability of the MRULE and other such programs of its kind.

What we have learned in the four years that we have shaped the Multi-Racial Unity Living Experience is the subject matter of this study. Demonstrating that theory and

practice are interdependent processes in the development of educational experiences dedicated to equity and social justice, drives the work. Providing students with alternatives to the racial status quo they find in the residence halls, classrooms, and social worlds at a Big Ten University is the practice. Ensuring this practice is tied to scholarship and activism are the critical components. Those concerned with higher education's responsibility to create and sustain inclusive living and learning programs that: (1) attract a thoroughly diverse learning community, (2) provide academically challenging material on racial/social issues and (3) offer meaningful opportunities to build genuine relationships across traditional racial lines, will find the discoveries outlined below helpful. Although I am speaking directly to administrators and faculty looking to explore interdependent theory and practice in an undergraduate race relations program, most importantly this study is intended to serve as a guide to the students who lives and future are inextricably linked to breaking the cycle of racial polarization. They have unprecedented opportunity to do so and I wish to offer them this work as a humble road map for at least the first leg of the journey.

Chapter Two

Social Justice, Human Agency, Activist Research and the Multi-Racial Unity Living Experience

We don't have to engage in grand, heroic actions to participate in the process of change. Small acts, when multiplied by millions of people can transform the world.

Howard Zinn—*You Can't be Neutral on a Moving Train*, p. 208

Because social worlds result from human agency, they remain inherently dynamic and changing.

Patricia Hill Collins—*Fighting Words*, p. 96

Organizing Themes and Principles

The Multi-Racial Unity Living Experience came into being to address campus race relations because there were clearly many missed opportunities both institutionally and individually for raising consciousness and providing alternative ways to be in a racially diverse campus environment. The MRULE project is grounded in: (1) a vision for social change relational in nature and informed by historical realities (Donati 1995), (2) principles of social justice set in an ethical framework (3) educational theory that speaks to the developmental nature of the human being (Murphy 1998), simultaneously capable of reflection and action (Freire 1970), and (4) the acknowledgement that human beings have agency to construct meaning from the events in their lives and act upon those meanings (Griffiths 1998). We do not come to MRULE with any kind of blank slate or as some scholars call it the premise of “optional inequalities” (DeVault 1995). We are up front with our interest in challenging racial thinking and expanding what is possible to do in race relations as individuals conscious of our collective reality.

We draw heavily upon scholarly literature in the fields of sociology and action research for social justice that builds theory and practice without dichotomizing the individual and social structure, thought and action, theory and practice (Collins 1990, Omi

& Winant 1994, Harvey 1996, Griffiths 1998, Kemmis & Wilkinson 1998). Scholarship and activism are used as two interdependent processes to aid in the development of both theory and practice. One without the other is not sufficient to address the complex issues of social justice that define MRULE.

Vision of Social Change

Aware that two of my major fields of study, history and sociology treat social change differently, I set out to find the strengths in both to support my vision of the kind of world I would like to help create and leave for future generations.⁵ I have also drawn liberally from the action research literature as I am most aligned with scholars concerned about change as praxis. I'll begin with a brief theoretical discussion.

Theories of social change abound but as sociologist Donati characterizes, they often remain ambiguous or exclusionary.

Social change was seen as society passing from one social order to another (for instance, from the “ancient regime” to democracy, from an agrarian society to an industrial one, from capitalism to socialism, etc.) This called for a description of how society constructed each new social order. It was usually assumed that this change or construction was subject to some form of more or less “finalism” (pg. 52).

Although I find the discussion of social change theory fascinating from the holistic⁶ paradigms in the Marx, Durkheim, Parsons, Luhman interpretations to the methodological individualism⁷ paradigm where Weber, Simmel, and Habermas weigh in, it is not the purpose here to debate these positions. Donati has offered another way to conceptualize social change—one that does not accept or deny either the holistic

⁵ Fundamental to this vision is: Equity and Justice understood and practiced by individuals and institutions of society to ensure all people have access to education and opportunity and can prosper peacefully, with dignity, free from violence, aggression, tyranny, oppression, and exploitation.

⁶ Holistic paradigm is based on the conceptual framework of a totality (social structure—historic or systemic “laws”) which acts upon its component parts thus producing social change (Donati p. 60-1).

symbolic, structural interpretation or the individualist position. In his effort to align historical and sociological aspects of social change he shifts paradigms to engage in relational thinking.

Citing the work of neomarxist Jurgen Habermas, Donati suggests that sociology has been slowly moving towards an integrative approach between the structural and individualistic arguments. However, Habermas' reliance on communication theory narrowed his field so that it was impossible to fully integrate the structural and interpersonal. Scholars continued to battle with the micro-macro link, making intellectual contributions to the field but still according to Donati coming up short in connecting them. Influenced by postmodern trends at "unprecedented differentiation of relationships" in a socially complex and rapidly changing world demands that to fully understand social change we need to observe both the individual and society in relationship to themselves and with one another. Departing from an either/or conceptualization, a relational theory validates aspects of both while creating a new paradigm, one that focuses on the relationality.

. . . any current relational theory must take as its starting-point Simmel's concept that for an understanding of social change an element must be found that functions both as a differentiator and as a point of union. It must be different and distinctive from what it "does" (inasmuch as it "is") society, and it must be an integrator of agents (individuals in relation to one another) and of structures or social mechanisms (forms) (p. 70).

From the relational point of view, the social change involved in the passage from modernity to post-modernity represents an overflow of society beyond its proper limits, an excess which cannot be understood or explained on the basis of a "totality" (as well as perhaps what is described as a culture of difference") or on the basis of individual choices. On these lines, then, one can

⁷ Social change is the result of individual agents, their subjectivity and intersubjectivity (Donati p. 64).

begin by defining social change in terms of social relations, that is to say, as a way of redefining the forms of relations in society (p. 80).

The practice of history by professional historians and the telling of histories by ordinary people speak to this relationality without necessarily naming it so (Takaki 1993, Harding 1994, Lerner 1997.) Human history is the recollection of human actions, individually and collectively, in social structures of time and space that give specific meaning to those actions. Social relations are at the core of the historical process as we seek to advance civilization. History chronicles change from the big picture of world systems (macro history) to the everyday world of individuals (micro history). As explained by macro historian Galtung:

History is the story of how “things human” hang together through time diachronically, and more particularly, how they change. The individual is the most micro, even indivisible, human thing there is, so evidently the story of the individual through time, with a particular emphasis on change, is microhistory. Then there is structure, particularly the microstructure of G.H. Mead’s “significant others,” but also the macrostructure of local, domestic, and global society. Finally there is culture, the values, norms, and rules; the microculture of the immediate age, gender, race, class and ethnic surroundings, and the macroculture or civilization in which the individual is embedded, with an inner core of “deep culture” or “cosmology.” (Galtung 1996, 1997—pg. 221)

With an understanding of (1) a relational theory of social change and (2) the role of macro/micro history in creating social change, we sought out a research agenda that best reflected the process we were creating. From the action research/social justice literature we found MRULE to be suitably aligned with the “cultural revival and social movement theory of social change” (Selener 1997, p. 264). Selener’s discussion on social change

theories and participatory action research has been helpful to the theory building process in the MRULE project. Citing the work of Paulston (1977) on social movement theory Selener describes the unique features of six theories categorized in two paradigms:

Paradigm One: Equilibrium

Theories: 1. Evolutionary and non-evolutionary, 2. Structural-functional, 3. Systems

Paradigm Two: Conflict

Theories: 4. Marxist and neo-Marxist, 5. Cultural revival and social movement, 6. Anarchistic and utopian (p.262).

The six theories are presented here as distinct approaches to social change. Upon careful analysis it is clear that there are useful components in all six and some overlapping features. For example systems theory focuses on making society more efficient through innovation that responds to new social needs. This is used most often in the business world by organizational development specialists and can address many structural issues that transform organizations to be among many things more inclusive of a diverse work force (Kanter 1983, Senge 1990). The difference among the theories in the equilibrium paradigm— which see the process of change as one in which social structures are balanced into a uniform order— and the conflict paradigm in which change comes as a result of a struggle for power and control, is the salience of power relations. Those in the equilibrium paradigm tend to downplay social inequalities and thus differences among those who hold power and those who do not, while those in the conflict paradigm center upon it. Although we can gain insight into social change theory from those frameworks in the equilibrium paradigm, in MRULE we are more closely aligned with the conflict paradigm since understanding social inequalities and ways to address them are key components of the MRULE educational process. We gain valuable insight into power relations from Marxist theory and agree that we have to have a vision of the kind of society we would like to create as the utopian theorists do. But it is the cultural revival

social movement theory that speaks directly to our goal of “bringing into being new cultural norms based on new social norms and behaviors” (p. 264). Selener explains what a research agenda in cultural revival theory might look like:

...focus on the unique contributions of different people, elements of their knowledge, culture, ideologies, values, and experiences that promote change in the name of social justice. Change is not necessarily a structural phenomenon, but can take place in consciousness, in the way people think, behave, and perceive reality, i.e. in social and cultural behavior” (Selener 1997).

A relational view of social change and a theory that looks at change in thinking and behavior, is critical to the MRULE project as it places value on the individual who is fundamentally located in social structures (that many students are only beginning to name and understand). It is the consciousness that they develop within themselves, the relationships with each other and with the material, that clarifies this. Knowledge empowers them and engenders commitment to the work. It is a dynamic process, involving give and take, trial and error, and the development of communication skills that contribute to creating sustainable relationships. Some may enter and leave with only a slight raise of consciousness. Several may find their racial thinking challenged, no longer able to substantiate a simplistic worldview that attaches labels and undermines human dignity carelessly. Others may be so moved by what they learn and see is possible that they end up committing their lives to working for racial and social justice. At whatever level they enter and depart, our charge is to awaken and inspire them to use their knowledge and experience to affect change in their immediate circles of influence and beyond. Relationality is at the core of this work. Otherwise we might be hard pressed to engage the students beyond themselves out of the larger cultural influences that reinforce the mantra: *success is all about getting your own.*

Social Justice

Increasing controversy around issues of racial justice particularly fueled by affirmative action in admissions and special minority-based recruitment and retention programs provide a baseline of confusion whereby MRULE participants explore the tension around individualist and collective worldviews. Few of today's college students are prepared to think in terms of community as growing up in the United States in the 1980's and 90's has schooled them well in the belief system that individualism reigns. As Levine discusses in *When Hope and Fear Collide: A Portrait of Today's College Student*, (1998) the 20th century experienced periods of ascendancy of community: Progressivism, the New Deal Era, and the Civil Rights Movement followed by periods of individualist ascendancy: post WWI and II, and Vietnam. Building on Locke's social contract theory⁸ Levine argues that all democratic societies struggle to find the balance between individual and community and this is reflected in all of society's institutions. Since young people today attend college in record numbers in U.S. history--over 50%--the college experience is fertile ground for the playing out of the larger society's social and political issues (Levine 1998).

Despite swoons of uncertainly and instability throughout the past two decades as witnessed by increased globalization, up close and personal world conflict through television, environmental deterioration, job insecurity learned through downsizing, unprecedented corporate mergers and restructuring, in the midst of the internet revolution and a wave of political scandals, this generation of college students has seen time and again the United States reign supreme on the world scene, economically, militarily, and

⁸ Members of society are bound together by a tacit agreement, a compact among individuals, in which they cede a portion of their autonomy for the "greater good." In exchange they receive common services, protections, and agreed upon freedoms. (Levine, pg. 147.)

socially. They have witnessed a change in demographics also unprecedented with increased numbers of immigrants from Southeast Asia, the Middle East, Latin America, and the Caribbean (*Time*, Fall 1993 pp. 14-15). The message that many young Americans get from this is that despite the problems in the United States, it is one of the most sought out places to live by immigrants from all over the world. It is built on the promise of freedom and democracy for all. Those who work hard can make it. Those who can't should quit complaining and try harder.

It is precisely at this juncture where the principles of social justice must be laid out as a necessary road map for all to travel on if we hope to affect meaningful change. Here, individualism is put to the test. Although forces of individualism are powerful and influential on the world, they cannot be allowed to overshadow structural inequalities, domination and oppression as critical components of our social world. Race relations discourse is often impeded by tendencies to individualize and personalize social reality. This can lead to blaming the victim or denying the existence of group identity. Though seemingly benign, erasure of group identity in favor of treating everyone as an individual in a racialized world does not bring about the desired outcome of social justice for all. Iris Marion Young explains:

Assuming an aggregate model of groups, some people think that social groups are invidious fictions, essentializing arbitrary attributes. From this point of view problems of prejudice, stereotyping, discrimination and exclusion exist because some people mistakenly believe that group identification makes a difference to the capacities, temperament, or virtues of group members. The individualist conception of persons and their relationship to one another tends to identify oppression with group identification. Oppression, on this view, is something that happens to people when they are classified in groups. Because others identify them as a group they are excluded and despised. Eliminating oppression thus requires eliminating groups. People should be treated as individuals, not as members of groups, and

allowed to form their lives freely without stereotypes or group norms (pg. 46-7).

Young captures what is so often expressed by most students despite their backgrounds struggling with racial issues. Treating everybody as an individual makes sense as a way to address racial injustices across the board (MRULE Round Table Discussions 1998, 99, 2000). Once the formula is applied to all, a clean slate is created and everyone will know that it is their individual behavior that will determine their success or failure--nothing more, nothing less. What a relief to all the wrangling, many students believe. Finally we can move on! But it is not that simple of a move. We have to upset the apple cart when we explain that of course individuality exists and should be valued and nurtured, while at the same time acknowledge that individuals exist in assigned social places where access to opportunity is socially and historically situated. Individualism as a formula cannot stand on its own because of larger social forces that do not allow individuals to simply be individuals. It must be aligned with the understanding of social structures, the individual in the community. There must be an ethical framework that reflects this vital connection between the individual and the community.

The goal here is to help the students see themselves as a part of a community where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. The whole cannot be truly whole when parts are disadvantaged and excluded. Upon knowing this, we then cultivate a sense of caring, a deep feeling that starts with self-awareness and expands outward towards a concern for the welfare of others. The quest for social justice can not be a theoretical process alone. It has to move people to action. Patricia Hill Collins draws upon the example of Sojourner Truth where “thinking and feeling do not live at cross purposes but rather seem to energize one another” (pg. 244). The energy needed to conquer injustices is great—there can be no minimizing of this reality. At the same time as history has shown

us ordinary people have harnessed this energy to battle oppressive systems and transform social and political relationships. They have done so because they *believed* it was right, they were spiritually and morally compelled. “When feelings are involved—when individuals *feel* as opposed to *think* they are committed—and when those feelings are infused with self-reflexive truths as well as some sort of moral authority, actions become fully politicized” (Collins 1998, pg. 244).

Anthropologist Ashley Montagu has studied race and racism for the greater part of the 20 century. In his 1997 sixth edition of *Man's Most Dangerous Myth: the Fallacy of Race*, he warns us to not underestimate the power of the human being's loving capacity. He acknowledges that precisely because scientists have not valued the study of love in solving human problems, it propelled him to devote so much attention to it. Critiquing an educational system that is more caught up in technology than nurturing and developing human beings, he states:

In the name of education our schools have become institutions for the promotion of illiteracy in the most important of all the areas: the art of being a warm, loving human being. Our educational system is largely responsible for producing a population of illiterates in a time when it has become imperative for each of us to care for others and think of the world not as full of strangers, but as full of friends we have not yet met.

There is only one way to express a deeper truth or meaning than words themselves can do—by action! The meaning of a word is the action it produces.

If we are ever to extricate ourselves from the slough of despondency into which we have fallen, we must recognize that there is only one way; through education, education as love, the deep involvement in the welfare of others. It is only through learning to love that we find our true identity (p. 517-8).

How do we engender this level of caring in a university community particularly when the energy is so concentrated on material and technical education? It is by no means

an easy task. The first step is modeling. To the degree that we as faculty demonstrate the value of caring for the welfare of others in our professional and personal lives is the degree that we are “walking the talk” and thereby getting the attention of students. The next step in bringing it home for students is by helping them to make the connections between their local world and the larger world in which people experience quite different realities. That some of us are more privileged than others simply by where we were born, family stability, access to education, and employment is one of those differences. That some of us are born in a country where we can worship freely, protest against injustices, choose and shape a future based on our own independent thinking is another level of difference that we often take for granted. We have to know these things about ourselves and our world in order to build a genuine learning community.

To illustrate this point upon their arrival at the university we ask the students to consider the following questions: Did they have to face barriers to get to come to the university? If so, what were they? If not, why not? To what degree did they have control over how the barriers got there or what had to be done to overcome them? Why do they have differences in experience? Does race, class, or gender have anything to do with it? In most cases, where honest dialogue takes place, coupled with the articles we provide, there is consensus that injustice does exist in the United States. Some people experience it regularly, some occasionally and some not all. Arousing the sense of injustice can often move people to action where a discussion on justice as an ideal condition may merely be contemplative (Greene 1998).

The sense of injustice does not arise mainly because of some cognitive recognition. The reasons lie much deeper, below the threshold of feeling. Moreover, the experience of the sense of injustice is fundamentally social, involving a recognition that what may or may not affect the individual human being in his or

her immediate situation will inevitably touch someone somewhere.

Opened, by means of the arts or an “almost common language” to what the suffering of others may mean, brought through active and collaborative learning to name the cause of it and the expanding consequences, students may come to see that each one’s status really depends on a just order (Maxine Greene, p. xiv).

An ethical framework that values the individual in the collective whole and requires thinking and acting upon the knowledge of a whole is where we begin. Our next move then is to figure out what we can do about it and act.

Human Agency

I’m here because I know that what I’ve been told about people from different racial backgrounds in my home and community isn’t all true.

(MRULE Participant, White female, freshman, September, 1998)

I remember listening to this young woman explain the reason for attending a Multi-Racial group meeting in the residence halls. Her graphic depictions of the rural Michigan environment where she grew up were imprinted upon all of us listening. “There were clear labels for Black people. We knew they weren’t to be trusted or respected. We knew these things *about* them but we didn’t know them.” My mind wandered as she spoke and I tried to remember that the year was 1998 although her comments could have been representative of any previous decade. The durability and embeddness of racialized thinking was striking. This young woman was the same age as my own daughter.

Although her descriptions of the negative education she received were more detailed than many of the others, it was clear that her experience was not an aberration. As I contemplated the fact that these students were products of my generation’s parenting, I was bewildered. What happened to the energy and ideals of my generation? Why was the seemingly obvious work of eradicating useless, hurtful stereotypes, accepting the dignity

and humanity of all people, and thriving on diversity such an elusive prospect? Was it arrogance? Did we assume change would be guaranteed by the consistent recitation of our lofty ideals? Upon listening to story after story of students coming into the Multi-Racial Unity Living Experience project since 1996, it was clear that my generation did not figure out that we had to *live* differently in order to be engaged in meaningful change of the racial status quo. And we had to be engaged if we wanted to impart anything of significance upon our children. Of course, there were many of my generation that were not particularly interested in change as long as their interests were served. Most institutions were set up to uphold the racial status quo until individuals made enough noise to challenge them. We will discuss this in detail in subsequent chapters. Additionally, there can be no underestimating of the power of apathy and disinterest aligned with the belief that particular social problems are permanent fixtures of our social world. These forces can immobilize agency and send the message that all is well, and even if it's not there's nothing much we can do about it. Comments on racial climate surveys like "Racism has always been here, it always will be" or "Surveys like this create problems where they don't exist" or "Things would be fine if people would just leave us alone and stop shoving it down our throats" alerted us to these sentiments. (In-house Racial Climate surveys, 1996.)

Despite these forces, something led these young people from a variety of backgrounds to the MRULE project. For several, it may have been curiosity, for others it was the need to challenge the status quo. Many were looking for a group to gain a sense of belonging, others were determined to have their peers of different backgrounds hear *them* out. Whatever reason brought them in the door they had a similar lesson to learn about human agency and social change once inside.

The pivotal question for the students that had to be asked and answered through the process of committing and engaging in a multi-racial project was the classic “What’s in it for me?” That this answer would differ for students depending upon social location was one of the first aspects that captured my attention. The challenge was to find ways to nurture differences while staying focused on a vision of equity and social justice. The “what’s in it for me?” became paradoxical because the answer was intertwined with another question—what can you give of yourself to further the cause of equity and social justice for all people because what’s in it for you depends on what you give it. And these were followed by more questions: What do you need to know about yourself and your racialized thinking in order to engage in dialogue and activism across racial lines? Where are you socially located? Why is understanding power and privilege so critical to effective race relations dialogue? What is it about the racial status quo that you need to understand? What are the historical factors concerning race in the United States that continually shape our social world? How does that affect you? How does it play out in the residence halls, the classroom and even more importantly, how will it play it out in your future professional and personal life? What are the contemporary global issues that affect race relations today? Once you know these things, what can you do about it? How can you use your knowledge to engage in meaningful change?

I began to ask some of these questions of myself as an undergraduate studying race/ethnic relations. However, it would be a decade later as a Fulbright Research scholar in South Africa that I would grasp the meaning of agency in a way that would make an indelible impression on me. Living there while the apartheid regime gasped its last dying breaths in 1989 finally to lose its hold with the release of Nelson Mandela in 1990, taught me how intense race was lived by all members of that society. There were no places to

hide or retreat as conscientized South Africans worked tirelessly to change the racial status quo at every turn. There was daily vigilance on the part of those fighting for their freedom and those determined to hold on to the status quo. Every aspect of life in South Africa at the time was poisoned by the oppressive structures of apartheid. Racism was expressed overtly and covertly in daily interactions and among all aspects of the infrastructure from the bank to the grocery store to the petrol station, throughout the housing, education, and employment sectors with impunity and directly in the open for all to see. I was powerfully influenced by the tension created among those with resolve working to dismantle apartheid at all costs and those determined to hold on to it to a bitter end that they could not see beyond.

I distinctly remember the culture shock I experienced upon my return to the States when I had to relearn that complacency and dedication to the status quo were the order of the day. The United States was gearing up for the 1991 Gulf War. The clear message rallying the country was that U.S. interests and way of life were to be maintained at all costs and we would wage a high tech war to make sure the whole world understood this. It would be quick and easy and we would get right back into acceptable social stability with even more resolve of U.S. supremacy. The war on CNN as it came to be known would soon fade in our memories. While all this was going on, my mind and spirit remained in South Africa. It took quite some time for me to embrace the U.S. as home, part of me will always be connected to and inspired by those lessons in agency from that time and place.

I had studied liberation theory and pedagogy in class but was given the opportunity to see and experience it practiced in raw and immediate circumstances in South Africa. My experiences there and my untimely return to the States intensified the

need for me to answer difficult questions as to how I would use what I had learned. How would I refrain from falling into complacency? It was now my responsibility as a scholar/researcher/educator to bring this praxis into my circles of influence. I was determined to make my mark in some way that nurtured my own agency and empowered me to nurture it in others.

As I set out to create and research this racial project that came to be known as MRULE, I knew one thing for certain. We would attract a range of diverse students. Some would embrace it wholeheartedly, others may come to check it out and stay long enough before something else comes their way. If I successfully answered my research question with one group, I would have to find ways to replicate it so that other sets of groups could have a similar experience. As the numbers of groups involved increased, I would have to determine if the principles and objectives were achieved while they were in the program and what they took away as they moved on from the university into their professional lives. The real sign of accomplishment was what students did outside of the group meetings in their circles of influences. Human agency would be progressively understood and practiced by the students as they engaged in the MRULE project and beyond.

What did I understand about human agency that I wanted to apply to the MRULE project? There are five key points that informed what I believed human agency looked like and how I would know when it was applied.

1. **Student participants are agents of knowledge who would inform the project on several levels** (Collins, 1998, Griffiths, 1998). They were both tellers of their own histories and potential makers of new and different histories especially as it related to the patterns of racial thinking and acting they had learned up this point. Starting from

their lives and experiences, we formed a learning community that would have to work with whatever they brought to the table (Palmer 1998). Although I uncompromisingly set out to take them from where they were to another place where more critical thinking and acting would develop, it had to be with their buy-in at some level. Every member of the learning community had to be patient with every other member since there were such vastly different starting points.

2. **Students are active participants in a dynamic learning process where reflection and action are simultaneous processes** (Freire 1970). **They construct meaning around the events in which they participate** (Griffiths 1998). As they are presented with knowledge and experiences that expand and challenge their thinking, reflection is required. Since our subject matter concerns self-awareness in a socio-political environment, this reflection and consequent action results in a raising of consciousness or as Freire calls it conscientization.⁹ More than the acquisition of knowledge conscientization has transformative power to set agency in motion. Conscientization questions previously formed mental constructs and continually serves the learner to search after deeper meanings about who they are and how they can make a difference in their world.
3. **To uphold agency we need to understand something about the nature of human capacity for change.** We are often met with cynicism when students discover what we have set out to do. “It is human nature for people to stick with who they are comfortable with, it has nothing to do with race” would be the comment we would hear relentlessly. “Human nature is lazy and selfish, it hasn’t changed much and it

⁹ The term conscientization refers to learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality (Freire, pg. 19).

won't in the future" are other common statements. We categorically disagree with these positions and have based our work in the principle that human beings have a dual nature, capable of altruism and selfishness, with the free will to choose which they will develop. Without engaging in endless debate that forces an either/or explanation, we once again work within a both/and relational paradigm. Whatever belief system a person subscribes to, all can acknowledge that growth and change are driving forces in the human being as demonstrated by the history of social movements and the heroic individuals who built them (Zinn 1994, Harvey 1996). History is full of those who terrorized and those who triumphed over terror, dominators and resisters, oppressors and freedom fighters, the selfish and the selfless. All is possible. How we direct our will to develop qualities that nurture, sustain, and honor human life and the healthy development of communities speaks to the capacity of our evolving human nature.

We are intelligent, rational, self-aware creatures who, because of the tools evolution has provided have some dynamic potential within the evolutionary process of which we are a part. And this potential is essentially not only a possibility in a process but a possibility *in process*, itself ongoing and open-ended (Murphy, pg. 49).

4. **Agency is employed when participants are co-creators and take ownership of the process.** Not unlike Freire's concept of the critical co-investigator of problem posing education, we have placed many aspects of the MRULE's development in the hands of the student participants. We consistently reinforce that the quality of their learning involves an interdependent relational process and ask two questions: What do you expect to get out of your participation in MRULE and what do you expect to be giving to MRULE to ensure this happens? As they complete one or two years of participation in the program, they may be selected to serve as Student Leaders, which

increases their responsibility to themselves and their fellow participants. In this role, they demonstrate to their younger colleagues, that students can confront one another about contemporary and historical racial issues. They can openly discuss issues, realize that they may not know all there is to know, expand their knowledge base, open themselves up to different experiences by developing relationships with people from different racial/ethnic backgrounds, and change their way of thinking about what is possible in race relations.

5. **Agency requires a sense of responsibility to the larger community.** Once transformative thinking and behavior begin to take place, it is critical to ensure that participants have an outward vision. Throughout the four years of our program, whenever we go on a trip into the larger community, we are a unique sight to behold. We are a thoroughly diverse large group, “hanging out” in diverse small groups, learning about our multiracial history and culture together. Visits to historical Underground Railroad sites, cultural centers or activities, even restaurants have consistently aroused interest from those we come in contact with. They inevitably ask who we are and what we are about. At least once a semester the MRULE groups engage in a community service project in the greater Lansing area. We have worked with Habitat for Humanity and the Council Against Domestic Assault. Students learn that community service is a key component of the MRULE. It is a way of building community based on caring for others and brings us closer to the kind of education Montagu, Greene, Freire and others are calling for.

Examples from the field

The following examples from the field are recorded in field notes and in MRULE student evaluations (1997 -2000). In all cases, I have had individual conversations with those directly involved and many others who watched situations unfold. Although each case study focuses on one or two students it is important to note that the whole MRULE community was at one point or another sharing the discoveries of these students sometimes directly through close friendship circles and sometimes indirectly in the larger group. The examples cited here reflect the five principles discussed above to greater or lesser degrees.

Case Study One

In the first year of the program we had one student Sheryl, a White female, repeatedly say things that made some Black students cringe. The Black students felt that, even though she seemed to mean well, she talked down to them, especially when she used the words “you guys” they heard a derivative of “you people,” while Sheryl intended a reference to the specific people she was talking to.¹⁰ This went on for several sessions and was brought to light one day when things got tense with one of the Black students, Terri, who was consistently irritated with everything Sheryl said. “I can’t stand her, she grinds on my nerves,” were her often repeated words to herself, her friends, and on occasion, to me. For Terri, it wasn’t just Sheryl’s personality; it was that it was embodied in whiteness, which was synonymous with irritating ignorance. For Sheryl, it wasn’t just being misunderstood; it was being misunderstood by a group of Black women after successfully building several interracial friendships last year as a freshman.

When it was time to assign small groups for teambuilding and to prepare for the Community-Building Trip, I put Terri and Sheryl in the same group. I knew this was risky because they could have walked out from our volunteer project at any point. My colleague suggested that I not push it too fast: if they had an explosion it could potentially scare them and others away. But I didn’t want to wait. I wanted to know if what we were trying to do could work at least in this very specific situation. I was confident I could handle the fall out.

Upon getting their assignments, Terri complained, and Sheryl resigned herself, but they went about their group business of doing personal profiles on one another’s lives with the other three members of the group. They balked at the realization that they were going to be traveling and rooming together. The bottom line was that they wanted to go to Toronto more than they wanted to antagonize each other, so they accepted that they were going to have to figure something out.

¹⁰ MRULE roundtable meetings, Wilson Hall, April 1997.

The long bus ride gave them plenty of time. They engaged in several activities together that gave them the chance to see each other as human beings. Terri was struck with Sheryl's genuine desire to build a friendship even though she treated her as an irritant. Sheryl's patience put the ball in Terri's court. She knew that as long as she was in MRULE she couldn't back away from the effort. She was going to have to do her part to make it work. So she jumped in. They started talking seriously in an interactive game. One thing led to another and they emerged from the trip as friends. Though Sheryl left MRULE the following year to concentrate on her job and studies, Terri remained and developed leadership skills. On her final evaluation that spring she wrote: "I now believe that anything is possible for Whites and Blacks. I think everyone can change" (MRULE evaluations, Spring, 1997).

This happened in MRULE's first year and was the kind of boost that propelled us forward as Terri was not someone who was known for her optimism particularly when it came to interacting with Whites. We know that one experience, however enlightening, cannot be responsible for sustaining life chances. We also know that we are engaged in a process whereby each valuable step made along the way gives us reason to hope that people can change rigid patterns of racial thinking and acting. We cannot know the full impact that this experience had on Terri and Sheryl but can be sure that the both learned valuable lessons that will remain with them well into their futures.

Case Study Two

Shortly after the program began I received a call from a Black student who heard about MRULE from the Residence Life staff and was moved to question me directly before he attended. Eager to know what we were "really about," John confidently asserted, "I don't believe it is possible for Blacks and Whites to come together other than to argue. . . I mean if it is going to be real there has got to be a lot of conflict." I spoke to him for some time encouraging him to give it a try. I assured him that he should feel free to bring up his concerns and if they were confrontational we would handle it. He attended that very evening and came prepared to challenge the White students in the group as well as the entire concept of creating unity among diverse people. "I wanted them to hear me. All my life I never thought White people listened to Black people. We always had to listen to them. They're everywhere, our teachers, our bosses, on the news, in the stores. They make the rules, we're supposed to follow. I was angry at the whole system and I wanted those White students in MRULE to know that." (Interview with John, Spring, 1997).

John attended MRULE regularly and found himself intrigued by the fact that he could argue and more often than not leave with a greater understanding of an issue than

he came with. There were several White students in the group who were engaging in extended conversations with Black people for the first time in their lives. There were bi-racial students who found comfort in the group because they didn't feel forced to choose loyalties. John was consistently one of the most involved contributors to the dialogue. He challenged the group and in turn the process challenged him. We knew John was hooked when within the next month, several new Black men joined the group on his recommendation. "In looking at the initial sign advertising MRULE I never would have imagined that I would have taken part in so many different experiences and met so many people. I intend to continue to be a part of this program and venture outside of my comfort zone trying to establish relationships outside of my race and also to stay in touch with my new peoples" (MRULE Student Evaluations, 1998).

Case Study Three

Mark was dragged to an MRULE meeting by a friend who didn't want to attend alone. He wasn't sure what the group stood for or why it was needed on campus, but once there he liked the people and came back consistently. Mark grew up in a racially segregated working class community and didn't think about race much. Coming from a working class White family, he knew that many things in life didn't come easy for him and just figured it was similar for others. Joining MRULE opened worlds of knowledge to him. He began to notice when race and class intersected and when race remained salient in spite of class similarities. He found himself questioning all that he thought he knew, specifically the purpose and practice of affirmative action. At the beginning of the year, he was arguing against using information he received from others about how unfair it was. By the end of the year he was arguing for affirmative action with someone who was using the same information he had used earlier to knock down. As he listened to the argument he was struck with how much opinion and little fact were used. Mark got excited about his new knowledge and eagerly pursued learning more through dialogues with us in and after the meetings. This led to course work where he would challenge himself to delve deeper into the historical and sociological aspects of race in the United States.

One of the most difficult aspects of Mark's experience in MRULE was dealing with the bigotry he was exposed to by family members. They thought he was wasting his time dedicating his life to a concept of working for racial equality. They laughed at what they called his naivete about the world—he didn't seem to understand that racial inequalities are the natural order of things, simply the result of innate characteristics—whites are on top because they are superior, everyone else beneath them, getting what they deserve. Over the years, Mark challenged them but it seemed to always result in them telling him he was too young and inexperienced in the real world. His college education and his racial idealism may sound good in the books but it had nothing to do with day to day life in the world.

The contradictions that many of his family members used came to light when recently his father asked him to help a cousin who was incarcerated for breaking and entering. He got a ten-year sentence and was coming upon parole soon after eight years. While in prison, racial tensions have been extremely volatile with clear racial/ethnic group separatism. The cousin is angry and bitter and frequently uses racial slurs carelessly. Upon hearing this, Mark's father asked Mark if he would be willing to correspond with the cousin and try and strike up a renewed relationship. He thought Mark

could influence him positively so that upon his release from prison he might have a chance to survive and carry on with his life. As Mark told me this story I smiled thinking now that is quite a tall order for a “naïve, racial idealist” from Michigan State University (MRULE Student Evaluations, 1998, 1999 and interview with Mark, Summer, 2000).

Educational Principles and Action Research

With a vision for social change, driven by social justice, fueled by human agency, there is one additional component to complete the theoretical framework used to create MRULE. What were the educational principles? How would they shape practice and how would they be researched? As an educator with years of experience teaching in diverse settings, I have always been motivated by educational principles. As a scholar/activist I had to ensure that I could research the process and outcomes, improve at each juncture and replicate on larger scales within each new phase of development. The following principles are based on lessons I have learned about true education throughout my professional career. This includes a wide range of teaching positions: English as a Second Language adult education, multicultural pre-school, theater arts college instructor, race relations consultant, teacher of university race relations history course and director of MRULE.

1. Transformative, empowering education is an interactive process—involving thought and action. The original meaning to “bring or lead forth” captures the essence of the educative process and as Freire so powerfully critiques human beings are not empty vessels to dump knowledge in (banking method) but rather “co-investigators” of their own learning (Freire 1997). Genuine learning takes place when students *interact* with teachers, other learners, and the material.
2. Education is about expanding the mind’s capacity and using that greater capacity to develop healthy social relations. It is for the purpose of conscientization. Technical

training to learn a skill or trade is an important aspect of learning but does not substitute for understanding the human condition, the social and political ramifications of the quest for equity and social justice and the continual development of creative and innovative thought that can advance community.

3. Educational programming that seeks to change the “status quo on the ground” needs to be shaped by collaborative efforts among faculty/staff and the student participants. A learning community in which all share ownership for the qualitative development of the program is necessary to carry out the work.
4. The more diverse the learning community is, the more opportunity for “real life” examples to be brought to light, the more accessible the material becomes and the more substantial is the learning experience. In this context diversity refers specifically to racial/ethnic diversity as MRULE is a racial project but we are also concerned with gender, class, sexuality, and ability. This diversity must be thorough. It cannot be a majority of one group with a sprinkling of difference. It must be diverse enough so that students learn that there is no monolithic community of any group of people despite their similar historical and cultural ties. This thorough diversity challenges an in-group-out group paradigm by expanding the definition of the in-group to include everyone present to develop community.
5. Both teachers and learners have a responsibility to the process. In a truly functional learning community they are interchangeable roles. A teacher succeeds when the learner is empowered to take hold of the learning process, master the material and maximize the experience by taking it outside of the learning community and into the circles of influence in his/her life.

Once we began to get the MRULE project off the ground, we had to decide research methodology that would help to determine whether: (1) We were meeting our goals and having an impact on the students and the community whenever possible and (2) We could replicate what we were doing on a small scale to an increasingly larger scale. Our first attempt was to do a survey questionnaire with students who lived in the building where we piloted MRULE and a control group in another building that did not have the project. We had our research methodology in order but we were over optimistic about the impact our pilot project could have on the whole building in its first year. It would take much more time and attention. As this was our first survey conducted in the residence halls we were not prepared for the degree of resistance and outright disinterest on the part of the students. Even with the incentive of pizza bought for the floor with the most returned surveys we had less than a 20% return rate. Some of this was due to the fact that they felt “surveyed out” by the various questionnaires that continually come their way and part was due to the disdain many had for the subject matter of race relations in the residence halls. Since we were just getting the program started we did not have well-developed relationships with the students and staff of the buildings. Consequently our influence over the process was weak. The attempt at survey research taught me that it was too soon to get the kind of data we were hoping for. Much more relationship building would have to be done. Meanwhile we looked at other forms of evaluation.

The next phase of research was to develop an evaluative instrument where the students self report on their experience. (See Appendix A for the latest version of this instrument that is given at the end of the year throughout the MRULE program.) In 1998 and 1999 a focus group was held by outside researchers to evaluate key components of the

program. The results varied depending on the individual experience—in general the focus groups told us they had interest in and commitment to MRULE. It needed some tweaking here and there but for the most part MRULE had captured the attention of the students and they were both grateful for the opportunity and determined to do their part to help it to grow (MRULE Student Evaluations, 1997-2000).

From the onset MRULE developed through the interaction and contributions of the faculty and students, unfolding organically. Initially, I knew very little about participatory action research, although one thing was always made clear to me as I struggled to develop, evaluate, change, develop and evaluate. This was the realization that no matter what I did, success was defined by how well the students owned the work, internalized the principles, reflected on their roles, shared with others in and out of the group what their learning meant to them, and committed to a different way of being as they confronted racial issues. Studying this process led me into Action Research (AR) in education. Although much of this literature focuses on public school curriculum, pedagogy, administration and functioning, I found pockets of helpful information to draw from. I wanted to find a research methodology that would assist me in developing an interdependent model of theory and practice for the MRULE project.

Participatory and/or Action Research are research methods primarily concerned with action or practice that seeks to solve problems that have been identified by the community through collaborative means. (Stringer 1996, Selener 1997, Kemmis & Wilkinson 1998). Action research came into its own during the 1960's as researchers concerned about issues of dominance and subordination became increasingly salient between researchers and subjects. Traditional quantitative survey research came under

criticism as well intended researchers found themselves missing the mark either because the complexity of human feeling and experience were reduced, respondents forced answers in structured interviews or questionnaires that did not accurately reflect their perceptions, or survey instruments were ahistorical, lacking in content, structuring individuals as if they had no past or future. (Hall, lecture at MSU, February 2000, Selener 1997). The most striking criticism of all was that often this research did not focus on solutions to the problems but rather prided itself on increasingly more precise and intricate definitions of the problem. For those being researched it reinforced the power relations between those who could arrive to study the problem, write it up, publish and vanish and those in the community whose conditions did not change whether the researchers had been there or not.

Participatory research combines three principled activities: research, education, and action. It is a research method in which people are actively involved in conducting a systematic assessment of a social phenomenon by identifying a specific problem for the purpose of solving it. It is an educational process because researcher and participants together analyze and learn about the causes of and possible solutions to the problem addressed. It is an action-orientated activity since findings are implemented in the form of practical solutions. All three processes are conducted in a participatory way between outside researcher and participants (Society for Participatory Research in Asia, 1982).

There are some distinct differences between MRULE and most communities who have successfully used participatory action research to understand and solve problems. The first is that our community is not an established one but rather one that comes together for a short time and changes constantly. Given the tremendous fluidity, this time is critical in the ideological and social development of the young adult. We have them in our space

from anywhere between a semester and four years. Second, our community is a relatively privileged one, university students. Although many students of color have and continue to experience racial oppression, they are, in most cases in positions where they will have opportunities to do something about it at the university and beyond. They don't come to us because they are conscious of needing to solve problems. Third, only a small percentage seeks us out because they want an alternative academic/social experience. The majority of our students happenstance upon the group and are not quite sure what they are up for learning. They soon discover that they are in positions to learn something about structural inequalities and everyday acts of racism and do something about them (MRULE Student Evaluations, 1997-2000). There is, during these years, a heightened opportunity for conscientization (Freire, 1970, Smith, Willms, Johnson, 1997, Murphy, 1998) in the pursuit of social justice. Together they learn to name phenomenon that many students of color live on a daily basis. For example, White students are challenged with the notion of whiteness as the norm--in a way most have not previously thought about. We will discuss the content of this material in Chapter Two. The important thing to note here is that the concepts are not only learned in an intellectual way but the learning community creates social relationships where the concepts are experienced. This leads us to our stated problem and methods of inquiry.

Can a multi-faceted university experience that engages a diverse group of college students in a Racial Project requiring that they learn, interact, travel, and serve together empower them to become active change agents committed to social justice in their college experience and beyond? If so, what has to be in place in such an experience? Who are the players? What is the nature of their interactions? What is the appropriate amount of time? What are the key components of the project?

Our first step as in any research project is to understand the problem. As was discussed in Chapter One, racial polarization as evidenced by animosity, segregation, and

tensions on campus are all aspects of the problem that MRULE was created to address.

There are several critical steps in this process.

1. Ensure that students understand the historical and social contexts of this polarization.

Help them with key definitions: race, racism, anti-racism, power, privilege, racial status quo, social change, activism, community. (See Appendix D for full list of terms.)

2. Create practices that seek to reduce polarization and create interracial unity. These include: the weekly round table discussions, monthly social activities, semester community building trips, and community service. In addition to the above the Student Leaders participate in: weekly race relations seminar, recruitment and retention activities for group members, acting as liaisons with other student groups, making presentation to relevant classes, serving larger university “Building community through diversity” initiatives.

3. Evaluate the development of understanding and actions for meaningful and sustainable change.

4. Adapt these changes to practice accordingly.

This is how the interdependent theory and practice of the MRULE program came into being. Next, we will turn to an example from the field that demonstrates how we engaged in the process of learning by doing.

Example from the field

Upon successfully completing the pilot of MRULE in one building with 24 students in the 1996/97 academic year, we entered the next year eager to take on another residence hall and build upon our small victories. We concentrated on the content of the program and bringing graduate advisors onto the scene and did little to recruit. To our astonishment, the group of 24 became a group of 48 in one building and an additional 25 in the other. Immediately it became clear that we were growing fast and were going to need to empower the undergraduates to take leadership roles if we expected to survive.

Our small family was expanding and as new people came in, the dynamics that we carefully cultivated by having dinner once a week, intimate, open and frank discussions and trips together were challenged. The numbers alone made it impossible to have the same degree of intimacy. The first year students complained that it wasn't the same experience, the new students were filled with expectations as they listened to stories of the previous years, and graduate students struggled when they led discussions and were compared with Dr. Thomas or me.

I conducted one-on-one interviews with all first year participants that year because I felt I needed to get to know them better. I smile at this now since our subsequent numbers render this impossible. Several students made it a point to tell me they remembered those interviews and felt uncharacteristically valued. I used their feedback to help me conceptualize changes in our day to day functioning. We also held a focus group with a cadre of Black women who felt the discussions were not relevant to them. We heard them out, explained some of the terminology and took their feedback back to the whole group, which made a qualitative difference in that discussion.

At the end of the academic year, there were mixed feelings. We retained our numbers and there seemed to be a strong commitment to the group and its growth. Our diversity was impressive, a thorough mix of Black and White students and several who identified as bi- or multi-racial. The graduate student group leaders were an invaluable asset to me but it was a one-year deal. The undergraduate students who were now going into their second or third year were eager for the chance at leadership. Focus groups were held and evaluations were studied. Discussions with students and residence life staff about the potential of the group were frequent. There was interest on the part of the university to start two more groups so we would be represented in the four major areas of the campus. The student leader teams of the 1998/99 academic year were formed that summer. With great enthusiasm I took on the growth challenges, unaware of the degree of internal problems that may arise in the student cadre. I offered student leadership to a large number of students, those who had shown interest and commitment. My goal was to maintain diversity on the leadership teams.

I wanted the teams to be thoroughly diverse for two critical reasons. (1) Students who come into the program need to see us model the principles we are teaching. We know from social learning theory that role modeling has an important role in shaping behavior (Bandura, 1977). We saw the effect that Dr. Thomas and I had on them as they watched us worked together, agree, disagree, never afraid to get our hands dirty or confront the difficult issues whether we had to do it alone or together, always willing to be there, always supporting the other. (2) Student participants needed to see someone they could relate to in a leadership role, someone they thought represented to the degree possible their experiences.

I formed the teams with second and third year students, with an impressive racial/ethnic and gender balance. There were five teams with five to six members per team. Commitment to the program was the only criteria as this was our first cadre of student leaders. As a new director of a new program I could not begin to fathom what could go wrong. I enthusiastically entered the year, prepared for the kick off summer retreat and entered a quagmire of difficulties.

Sparing all the gory details and there were many, I will outline here what we discovered did not work with our Student Leader teams.

1. The teams were too big. They did not develop a sense of cohesiveness because for the most part they had interpersonal problems with one another that they could not work out. The responsibility of being a leader did not in their minds afford them the time to work on these issues. Most of them had to do with personality conflicts and previous history they had in their relationships. Very little, if any, of their conflict was related to race.
2. They had varying degrees of commitment. Enthusiasm in undergraduates can wane quickly when another exciting opportunity comes along. The screening process was inadequate. Interest in the program did not necessarily translate into leadership ability and staying power.
3. The work of a student leader is time consuming and impossible to monitor if the students “work” as volunteers. The majority of students work while going to school and MRULE added at least another 6-10 hours to their week depending on how thorough they were. When corners had to be cut, MRULE was often the first to go.
4. Student leaders who did not live in the buildings where the program was running were ineffective because it was impossible to make the necessary connections with residents. This was particularly problematic in the new buildings where we did not have a program in the previous year.
5. Where our relationship with the Residence Life staff was strong, our program had more chance for success. Some leaders were more willing to make those connections than others.
6. There was grossly inadequate training. . .this was due to primarily to the volunteer nature of the work where I had limited time I could demand of them. They were under trained, under prepared, making obvious the uneven development between those who brought skill to the table and those who did not.
7. There was confusion over their role as a leader. Despite my definitions and job descriptions, they struggled with role identity. Do they share who they really are with their participants (*YES, I SAID OVER AND OVER*) or do they play the neutral facilitator? (*NO TO THE NEUTRALITY I EXPLAINED, NOT IN THIS WORK, THE PARTICIPANTS HAVE TO KNOW WHAT YOU THINK WHILE YOU WORK TO HELP THEM ALL EXPRESS WHAT THEY THINK. DISAGREEMENT IS NOT ONLY OKAY IT IS DESIRED AND THAT IS HOW WE CAN GET CLOSER TO THE TRUTH.*) Do they hang out with their participants? Do they go to parties with them? Do the older ones invite the younger ones to parties where alcohol is served? Do they date each other or their participants?

8. Many of them were not prepared for leadership as service. They thought of leadership as an opportunity to develop skills, get a plus on the resume or an excellent letter of recommendation but service and all that it demands for many of them was a whole different world.
9. Related to the above, many of them were not ready for activism while some were so eager for activism that they could not ground their feet in the content.

In response to the rapid growth, I formed the teams and directed every ounce of energy I had to nurturing them to form and maintain healthy groups. We succeeded in one of the buildings although we lost student leaders rapidly—with 50% attrition. I spun a lot of wheels, but saw the trouble early enough in the process to know that changes had to be made. In the action research tradition we paid attention to what each group was saying to one another and me. We listened to the participants and heard what sparked and waned their interests. We took the necessary actions immediately. By the following year:

1. The teams were reduced in size to three—diversity remained a core value.
2. Volunteer positions were abolished as student jobs were created.
3. Training increased from a once a month seminar to a once a week seminar. Extensive summer training for new leaders coming in was added to the 2000 group.
4. Responsibility was increased. The voices of leaders were encouraged. Active participation with other student groups and university wide activities was set in motion.
5. Ownership of the groups became more the responsibility of the leaders than mine, as they were the ones on the ground making the connections. I kept the connections strong with them and attended as many meetings of all groups as possible—some meet simultaneously.
6. The role and responsibility of the leader was made clearer. Dating was restricted. A leader was asked not to date a participant or fellow leader on a team while they were in a leadership role for their assigned academic year. If a leader didn't feel it was possible to wait till the year was over, they could step down from leadership, otherwise they could concentrate on the friendship aspect of the relationship while they were serving as leaders. It became policy that the older MRULE student leaders could not invite underage MRULE participants to parties where alcohol was served.

“This project is a living project and is always changing” (MRULE participant evaluation, 1998). I was pleased to read this from a student who had grasped the ever-changing nature of MRULE. Students cannot help but learn that they are co-creators of the change and because of this their ownership in the process is more immediate. We are driven by our purpose to bring their academic and social worlds together while igniting a spirit of racial/social justice activism that will endure throughout and beyond their college years. We are learning from the practice how to breathe life into theory. We are learning from theory what must substantiate practice. As we document the process we engage in action research and develop the techniques that respond to the needs of the program. According to Kemmis and Wilkinson (1998), seasoned scholars in the field of action research, this approach is commonly used.

What makes action research ‘research’ is not the machinery of research techniques but an abiding concern with the relationships between social and educational *theory* and *practice*. Before questions about what kinds of research methods are appropriate can be decided, it is necessary to decide what kinds of things ‘practice’ and ‘theory’ are—for only then can we decide what kinds of data or evidence might be relevant in describing practice, and what kinds of analyses are relevant in interpreting and evaluating people’s real practices in the real situations in which they work. On this view of action research, a central question is how practices are to be understood ‘in the field’, as it were, so they become available for more systematic theorizing. Once having arrived at a general view of what it means to understand (theorize) practice in the field, it becomes possible to work out what kinds of evidence, and hence what kinds of research methods and techniques, might be appropriate for advancing our understanding of practice at any particular time. (p. 34)

Social Justice, Human Agency, and Action Research are the pillars that provide the MRULE project with a structure to develop an interdependent theory and practice. It is most helpful for me to conceptualize it as a road map that seeks to guide students on that

journey towards becoming active change agents. As mentioned earlier, we have the goal of going from one place of intellectual and emotional development to another. Our destination is that place where thought is more critical and in-depth, where feelings to understand and act are nurtured and encouraged, where action is self-initiated and generative of more action and interactions. There are important steps in the journey that are structured around key concepts in race relations. We now turn to a detailed discussion of the critical elements of understanding race and racism that students encounter when they commit to at least one year of participation in MRULE.

Chapter Three

Conceptualizing Race, Power, and Privilege

The history of the concept of race is a truly dreadful one. From its beginning and by its very existence, the term has served to narrow the definition of humanity through the establishment of a hegemonic hierarchy of discrete entities. These entities, the so-called races, were primarily based on differences in physical traits. Such physical traits were soon linked with cultural and social differences, educability, and intelligence.

Ashley Montagu, *Man's Most Dangerous Myth*, p. 515

To argue that race is myth and that it is an ideological rather than a biological fact does not deny that ideology has real effects on people's lives. Race serves as a "global sign," a "metalanguage," since it speaks about and lends meaning to a host of terms and expressions, to myriad aspects of life that would otherwise fall outside the referential domain of race.

Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, "African-American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race," p. 3

To challenge the racial status quo in the thinking and actions of individuals while simultaneously assisting them to understand social structures that perpetuate inequalities in a way that inspires them to want to act is by no means an easy process. It demands as clear of a road map as is possible and as was discussed in Chapter One, adaptability at every turn. The conceptualization of race, power, and privilege has several components. The first is the centrality of race in relationship to ethnicity, culture, class, and the most popular buzzword of the 90's—diversity. Second, the social construction of race and its counterparts; the social construction of whiteness, white supremacy and white privilege are the underlying pillars to the ideology and practice of everyday and institutionalized racism which are situated in dynamic power relations. Breaking it down for the students requires teaching and using each concept and making vital connections with their own experience. This is done with the help of history, anthropology, sociology, and current events.

The Centrality of Race

After two semesters of participation in the MRULE project a student commented on her evaluation. “I was attracted to this group because of the name...I think multiculturalism is important.” I read over this response several times. We have always used the term multiracial, but somehow for this student it was multicultural. In another situation we were asked to change the word Multi-Racial in our title to multicultural to be more inclusive. We insisted that this was a racial project that included everyone because, as far as we could tell, everyone was racialized in this society. “But people don’t really like the sound of the word race. It’s loaded...It’s too close to racism, and people want to move beyond that” were the comments I heard. Educator Ann Dummet says it succinctly: “ ‘Race’ makes everyone lose their nerve.” (p. 11)

By the time we started the MRULE project in 1996 I was well versed in a variety of unnerving comments.¹¹ I encountered this reality directly upon returning from South Africa where I had grown accustomed to race relations of some kind or another filling every waking moment of existence. It was the norm so to speak, no one could escape it, and no one expected to. When I reentered the U.S. in 1990 the cultural diversity movement was just getting off the ground. (Loden & Rosener 1991, Fernandez 1991). At first I was excited anticipating that there was a renewed vitality in the air around racial issues and we were going to make some profound movement toward equality, social

¹¹ Prior to starting the program I worked as a race relations/diversity consultant in the public/private sector and was the recipient of many attacks for the program we delivered. We always persisted and managed to educate a good number of people who started the class under protest and without concern for the subject matter. My favorite story with one client was reported to me several years after the class took place. One of the participants who was angry and resistant told a co-worker that she wished she hadn’t been so resistant because much of what she learned in the class, has been reinforced by subsequent experiences on the job and in her life.

justice and all around more healthy race relations, whether it be the work place, educational, or social environment.

It wasn't long working in the field as race relations consultants that my colleague and I were made aware of the degree to which race had been diluted in the diversity discourse. We had a variety of clients from the public and private sectors: city and state government, public schools, hospitals and corporations. Although our particular approach was far from an "in-your-face tirade on white racism, we were not prepared to dilute race or racism from either a historical or sociological perspective. We presented a broad view of a "changing America" while keeping race in the forefront of the material. Inevitably complaints abounded. "Why did we insist on focusing on race since diversity was so much more than race? Weren't we reinforcing racial problems by reminding people of the history? Aren't we way past that? Why does everything have to come back to Black/White issues? What about women, gays and lesbians, and the disabled? What about poor people, overweight people, ugly people? After all everyone is different and has some reason or another to be excluded or marginalized."

We acknowledged that many of the issues the diversity project was tackling were important and should not be diluted. Likewise we did not want race diluted. Precisely because of our history and the patterns of resistance to changes in the racial status quo, we could not back down. So we titled our class "Diversity: the Unfinished Business of Race Relations" and demonstrated that if by focusing on other aspects of diversity, we push race under the carpet, it will emerge again, still unfinished and unnerving, and quite able to adversely affect the constructive possibilities of the diversity work.

We received a considerable amount of support for this message in 1997 when President Clinton instituted Executive Order No. 13050 which created the Initiative on Race and authorized the creation of an Advisory Board to advise the President on how to build one America in the 21st Century. “The President recognizes that, even as America rapidly becomes the world's first truly multiracial democracy, race relations remains an issue that too often divides our nation and keeps the American dream from being real for everyone who works for it”

(<http://www.whitehouse.gov/Initiatives/OneAmerica/about.html>). The national attention given to race relations, and the corresponding statistics on racial and ethnic inequalities, the need to learn our multiracial history and study persistent discriminatory practices in housing, employment, and the criminal justice system challenge the argument that we have resolved racial problems in the United States.

The university environment is ripe for controversy over the centrality of race. We hear on a regular basis students telling either their own or their friend's story of how they did not get accepted to the University of Michigan because they were White. (This is why they attend their second choice—Michigan State University.) In the scenario all things being equal as of course they are in the United States of America, these students are being unfairly discriminated against. They have better grades, better test scores, more AP classes so the story goes. “It is no wonder that race relations on campus are tense and deteriorating as you can't correct a wrong with another wrong,” they repeatedly tell us.

A skillful response is required in this debate if we hope to keep the student engaged. Many times they aren't looking for engagement but rather a place to vent. Once they've completed that goal, they usually leave. But every so often a few linger on

looking for answers to this seemingly pinnacle of injustice. I will most likely mention something about the history of racial discrimination so that we can be closer to the same page regarding how we got to the state we are in today but that doesn't always catch their attention. "What does that have to do with us now? We can't keep living in the past," they declare. (We will discuss the dismal relationship this generation of students has with history in detail in Chapter Three.) So I move on to other bodies of research.

Social science researchers have been looking at these questions diligently over the last decade and thanks to the joint sponsorship of the Russell Sage and Ford Foundation *Multi-City Study of Urban Inequality (MCSUI)* has recently been published (Spring, 2000). With a team of over forty researchers from fifteen universities collecting data from 8000 households (African American, Asian American, Hispanic, and White) and 3,200 employers in Atlanta, Boston, Detroit, and Los Angeles, they have documented persistent trends in housing and labor markets. They also look at racial attitudes by interviewing both employers and employees and people in a range of neighborhoods.

In all four cities, the multi-city study found that persistent racial stereotyping constitutes an important barrier to integration and to labor market opportunity, whether reflected in employer's beliefs about potential workers, or households' resistance to living with social stigmatized groups. For example, while 54% of Boston area Hispanics would not move into an all-white neighborhood, as many as 85% would not move into an all-black neighborhood. The evidence points to a widespread sense of a racial hierarchy, that consistently ranks African Americans below others and routinely ranks whites at the top. (Preliminary Findings from the Multi-City Study of Urban Inequality)
(http://www.russellsage.org/special_interest/point_9_divide.htm)

Many White students who attend MSU have no context in which to place this kind of information and often retreat to what is accessible in their memory. "It's because those people are poor and don't have opportunities to compete—they don't have the same

values and that's why they are stigmatized. It wouldn't be so bad if we concentrated upon helping them. But that's not how it is. It's not only about race because there were Black kids in my school who had more money than I did. They still got the chances over me. And that has nothing to do with those poor kids you were talking about" (MRULE Round Table Discussions 1999, 2000).

There is much going on in this statement and we cannot unpack it all at the same time. It is our hope that this student will stay with the MRULE program so we can work on the layers over time. The first thing we are concerned about is conveying that race has much to do with those poor kids as well as having something to do with the Black kids that have more money than they do. Throughout the prosperous 90's race still matters (West 1993) —this is not merely our sentiment. We invite them to look at the evidence. The data from the MCSUI helps here. In the Detroit study for example researchers found that it took unskilled, unemployed white workers an average of 91 hours to generate a job offer while it took Blacks 167 hours (Farley, Danziger, Holzer 2000, p. 139). Why is this? The study finds that persistent stereotypes on the part of the employer makes it harder for Black men to secure jobs. And this does not only occur in the unskilled labor market but in the professional world as well. Black executives report "a cornucopia of discontent" which includes consistent exclusionary practices, questions as to whether a person of color really belongs in the corporate world, has competency to move up or is just the right fit (Cose 1993, p. 77, Thomas & Gabarro 1999).

We present contemporary data which highlights the centrality of race not to the exclusion of other factors, but sometimes on its own or more accurately intersecting with other factors, as the meaning of race persists in social structures and interpersonal

relationships. As has been discussed it is our goal to understand and transform these racial meanings in the MRULE project. To do this we need clear concepts of the social construction of race from anthropological, historical, and sociological frameworks. Building on the work of Omi and Winant (1994) we look at: “the social nature of race, the absence of any essential racial characteristics, the historical flexibility of racial meanings and categories, the conflictual character of race both at the “micro-” and “macro-social” levels, and the irreducible political aspect of racial dynamics” (p. 4). As they convincingly argue attempts at solely characterizing racial reality in either an ethnicity, class or nation paradigm reduces and distorts racial dynamics.¹² Although many White students enter the university wishing for the erasure of race in the debate about access, opportunity, and fairness we insist that they cannot escape it. We must have an accurate road map of the racial landscape, complete with land mines and gold mines, desert and oasis if we hope to be effective at challenging the racial status quo. We have to insist upon this because as studies have shown and continue to show we remain a racially divided country that adversely affects all (Hacker 1992).

¹² Ethnicity theory reduces race to ethnicity and is based on the premise that different ethnicities come together and create a pluralistic society where the many become one. . . this gave rise to the melting pot theory which falsely subsumes racial minorities in a group which they were historically and systematically excluded from. The class theory explains race by “reference to economic processes, understood in the standard sense of the creation of and use of material resources.” (p. 26) The nation theory explains race in the relationship between the colonizer and colonized and explores power dynamics of this oppressive relationship. Although the nation theory is the most constructive of three because it does not make assumptions about the primacy of its factor to explain race, Omi and Winant introduce a new theoretical construction—racial formation—“processes as occurring through a linkage between structure and representation.” Racial projects are the link and are defined as: “simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial dynamics, and an effort to reorganize and redistribute resources along particular racial lines. Racial projects connect with what race *means* in a particular discursive practice and the ways in which both social structures and everyday experiences are racially *organized*, based upon that meaning.” (p.56)

The Social Construction of Race

The remarks of reporters, scientists and politicians announcing that they had mapped over 90% of the human genome in the decade long Human Genome Project on June 26, 2000 once again captured our attention over the reality of race. Sponsored by the federal government with the assistance of private corporations and the cooperation of several other countries, the Human Genome Project is making unprecedented progress into understanding human DNA with the goal of matching diseases with their genetic source. What struck me was that in two reports it was stated enthusiastically what has been known for some time by scientists and anthropologists— from Weber to Boas to Du Bois to Park that race has no genetic basis and is a *social* construct (Omi and Winant 1994). Yet, in 2000 it is still necessary to state it publicly. Commenting on the make up of DNA, one science reporter put it like this: “Human DNA is 99.9% identical from human being to human being” (NPR, *Morning Edition*, June 26, 2000). That is certainly something to ponder while studying the vast social structures created to uphold differences. Celera Genomics President Dr. J. Craig Venter reported the details:

We have sequenced the genome of three females and two males who’ve identified themselves as Hispanic, Asian, Caucasian, and African American. We did the sampling, not in an exclusionary way but out of respect for the diversity that is America and to help illustrate that the concept of race has no genetic or scientific basis (June 26, 2000 National Public Radio, *All Things Considered*).

It is the 21st century and much scientific inquiry has been put into verifying this throughout the past century (Montagu 1997, Gould 1994, Turner 1994, Murchie 1978). Yet it was only recently (1994) that scholars once again had to bring forth the evidence in full steam to fight off the assault of *The Bell Curve* fury. Many of us remember the ABC

Nightline footage of the printing press as large book sales were advertised. It didn't matter that the authors Herrnstein and Murray were clearly rehashing pseudo-scientific racist theory linking "race" to genetic disposition and intelligence as they had learned from their old mentor Arthur Jensen, supported primarily by one journal *The Mankind Quarterly* of avowed racist contributors (Montagu 1997, Daniels 1997). *The Bell Curve* hit a nerve for the "well-meaning whites who fear they are closet racists" and for the rest of us who mistakenly believed the fallacy had been put to rest.

This "manifest reality"—in which physical appearance, individual ability, and group achievement are inseparably linked by heredity—is what is generally understood by "race." It is in other words, the popular, or social, concept of "race."

What is wrong with the social or racist view of "race" is that, among other things, there happens to be no genetic association or linkage between genes for physical appearance, individual behavior, and group achievement. Nevertheless, believers in the doctrine of "race" choose to take it for granted that such linkage exists (Montagu, p. 156).

Perhaps it is for those "racial" doctrine believers that Dr. Venter made his statement. I am not so sure. Somehow it doesn't seem that *The Bell Curve* could have caused so much of a stir if many people did not in some way or another see "race" as a determinant of individual and group success. They may or may not make the connection to the lack of a biological and/or genetic basis. It may just be socially constructed "common sense" (Montagu 1997, Omi & Winant 1994). It makes salient the question: How do we know what we know? Citing sociologists Berger and Luckman, Montagu discusses their support for his long held conviction that knowledge is socially constructed. Omi and Winant cite Italian philosopher Gramsci's definition of hegemony in which "ruling groups must elaborate and maintain a popular system of ideas and practices—

through education, the media, religion, folk wisdom, etc.—which he called “common sense.” It is through its production and its adherence to this “common sense,” this ideology (in the broadest sense of the term), that a society gives it consent to the way it is ruled (Omi & Winant 1994, p. 67).

This is a helpful tool of analysis for us in multiple ways. We look both at historical and contemporary examples to help students grasp how knowledge is constructed and why race as a concept came to be what it is through socially constructed institutions and practices. We take the position that although there is only one race—the human race—people have been historically and socially divided and conquered based on assigned ethnic-racial constructs with tangible consequences. These consequences take many forms—racism, discrimination, segregation, hate crimes, self-hate, poverty, despair, violence, and must be acknowledged and dealt with if we ever hope to remove barriers and create a socially just world. How do we break it down for students so they understand the constructs and the consequences?

Either/or Thinking around Essentialist vs. Illusionary Racial Reality

“So, if it’s socially constructed, what is the big deal? Why can’t we deconstruct it and get on with the business of being human beings?” This was a frequent articulation of a particular frustrated MRULE student. Whenever he had the floor in the dialogue session, he would passionately speak to the fact that race was false, had no biological basis, was a complete distortion set up to validate white supremacy, which none of us buys, etc. I remember watching him during the first few meetings, wondering if he was going to stick it out, because while we were teaching the social construction of race, we spent more time dealing with the tangible consequences of racism. Over the course of the

year, he grew to understand that these *real* consequences were embedded in complex systems and could not be erased or easily dismantled, though it was our goal to identify and act on those we could (Frankenberg 1993, Higginbotham 1995).

Omi and Winant created the concept of racial formation precisely to define the space between the extreme positions of race as illusion and race as a fixed characteristic. They argue that: “Racial formation is a process of historically situated *projects* in which human bodies and social structures are represented and organized” and “linked to the evolution of hegemony, the way in which society is organized and ruled” (1994, p.55-6). The institutions of slavery, legal segregation in education, employment, and housing are all examples of these projects that were based on the representation of human bodies, (people of African or Asian descent--Native Americans had their own set of oppressive structures tailored made for them). Social structures were created and maintained that essentialized human bodies through phenotypical, cultural and national characteristics, and ties. Those who created the structures determined the rules, who belonged and who didn’t while attaching and imposing significant meaning to the experiences. The institution of slavery was primarily responsible for many of these and the aftermath is still present in contemporary society. The one-drop rule¹³ was established by slave owners, many of who were fathering children with slave women. They had great economic interest in building up their property especially after it became illegal to import slaves into the United States in the 1830’s. Therefore any child born to a slave mother, would be a slave based on status and condition of the mother—1662 law of Virginia passed throughout the colonies and the fictitious notion that blood was transmitted from the mother to the child (Kerber &

¹³ Phipps was designated “black” in her birth certificate in accordance with a 1970 state law which declared anyone with at least 1/32nd “Negro blood” to be black (Omi and Winant 1994, p. 53).

DeHart 1995, Hine & Thompson 1998, Zack 1998). One drop rules remains the policy as Susan Phipps discovered in 1983 when she unsuccessfully sued the state of Louisiana to be able to change her racial classification from Black to White. The mixed-race battleground as to what constitutes a Black or White person is still very much with us even though it “is estimated that between 75 percent and 90 percent of all African Americans have some White ancestry” (Williamson 1980). People will self-identify or be forced to identify depending on how they are treated in society. A Black male with one White parent is still a Black male if he has the slightest phenotypical characteristics and can potentially be subject to racial profiling, harassment, and discrimination in a variety of contexts (Bain 2000).

It is these tangible consequences that make the discussion of eliminating racial groups fruitless at this point in time. There is much work to be done to rectify inequalities that will get lost without a clear map of the racial landscape. This is not the time to erase the experience of people of color in favor of a fictitious colorblind philosophy that in most cases is centered in the notions of White Supremacy.

Persistence of Racial Stereotypes and their Impact on Social Relations

We are often reminded in the MRULE seminar that what seems to be “ancient” history to today’s college students is still right in front of our faces. We teach the origins of the classifications of humankind by introducing the concept of the Great Chain of Being, an order to the universe with God at the pinnacle followed by human beings with divine souls, then animals and plants. In the 1730’s natural philosopher Carolus Linneaus became occupied with the classification of created things and was the first to publish the categories of the four races of humankind: Americanus, Eurpaeus, Asiaticus, and Afer.

By the end of the 18th century Johann Frederick Blumenbach the father of anthropology expanded upon Linneaus' classifications by adding a fifth race—the Malay (Polynesians, Melanesians of the Pacific and Australian aborigines.) As the story goes according to scholars neither Linneaus nor Blumenbach were dedicated to a racial hierarchy when putting forth their classifications (Jordan 1968, Gould 1994). However, this really isn't the important point because embedded in their classifications was a superiority/inferiority ranking with the Caucasian at the center from which all other categories degenerated. Although Linneaus did not rank racial groups he attached values to them according to personal observations based primarily on physical characteristics. "The American ruled by habit, the European by custom, the Asian by opinions, and the African by caprice" opened the door for pseudo science to make further claims about the relationship between physical characteristics and human capacity (Gould 1994). Whether Blumenbach valued the moral and intellectual capacity of black Africans or not, skirts the issue that departing from Linneaus' geographical order introduced into the classification system an "implied worth that has fostered so much grief ever since" (Gould 1994). As Jordan points out the Great Chain of Being and its idea of continuity through creation—with humans and animals connected on the chain but the human soul operating as the distinguishing factor between them, simultaneously created possibilities for the conceptualization to go either way—i.e. that it was impossible to compare men to beasts or that it might be possible on the chain for there to be different gradations of human beings. When Linneaus contemplated this possibility he immediately distanced himself from it. Although most knew that Negroes were human beings there were accounts of European travelers making comparisons to the features they saw in Africans to those of beasts throughout the eighteenth century. Again,

seeds of doubt were planted that slave societies eventually grasped and cultivated once the cruelty of slavery disassociated slaves with their humanity (Jordan 1968, Gosset 1969).

A chilling contemporary example of the dehumanization theme in an MRULE forum came to light when students were discussing a recent article from the *New York Times* series “How Race is Lived in America,” June 5, 2000. This particular article entitled “Best of Friends, Worlds Apart” followed the lives of two Cuban immigrants in Miami who had been lifetime friends, one black, one white. The different experiences they encountered in the States primarily because of their racial backgrounds taxed their friendship and brought to light racial conflict that had existed throughout their lives. Describing the racial landscape in Cuba, the article reports that a group of college students of all colors form a human chain around a dance troupe... a dancing rainbow reflecting Cuba’s best and brightest. But all is not as it seems.

At first blush, Cuba might seem to be some kind of racial utopia. Unlike the United States, where there is limited cultural fusion between blacks and whites, Cuban culture—from its music to its religion—is as African as it is Spanish. But despite the genuinely easy mixing, despite the government’s rhetoric, there is still a profound and open cultural racism at play.

The same black students who were part of that dancing rainbow say it is common to call someone “un negro,” or “black,” for doing something inappropriate. “When a man insults a woman in the street, I will shout at him, ‘You are not man, you are black!’” said Meri Casadevalle Perez, a law student who is herself black. (p. 17)

As the students discussed this several of them expressed their disbelief, fairly sure that this did not go on in the United States at least none of them had ever heard it. Then one White student who spends a considerable amount of time in a particular all White community looked at his fellow students as if they were on another planet. “I hear this all the time,” he

declared. “I can’t believe you haven’t.” This led to a more detailed discussion of their different experiences. One of the Black students unsure whether or not this was a common thing or an aberration in certain all White areas, probed further by asking one of her White friends who is not in the MRULE. “Do you hear this in conversation today—people equating Black with wrong and less than human?” Without hesitation her friend responded that yes she has heard it, in fact recently her boss scolded an employee saying “You’re not acting like a human being, you’re acting like a Black.”

Further highlighting the grief that Gould referred to when reflecting on the impact the social construction of racial categories and their durability, we had another incident that same week in the MRULE group. Felicia, an MRULE participant, reported this story to me. She and Dan, also an MRULE participant, were planning a trip to vacation in an area of the state that is known to be all White. As they were developing their plans and figuring out who would actually pitch up and go on the trip it looked like Felicia would be the only person of color in the group. In fact it looked like they might be the only two going at all. Making light of this, Dan commented: “I can just hear my family now. Dan is hiking in the woods with a monkey.” Felicia froze, overwhelmed with shock and confusion. As she recounted to me “I expected nigger but monkey threw me for a loop.”

When Felicia expressed her discomfort to Dan about him feeling the need to tell her how his family might think of their friendship he tried to convince her that it would be great for them to go together and show the family, friends, and community how stupid their racism was. Felicia explained that she was just looking for a vacation and good time and did not want to be a “sociological experiment” for those who have no contact with Black people. In addition, she reminded Dan that before they had even started to make

plans she expressed her need for a certain amount of shielding from racist attitudes as she wasn't on any campaign to challenge people. When Dan made what he thought was a funny comment about the monkey she knew that he did not understand her request. She also knew then that she would not be able to go on the trip. When she explained this to Dan he did not understand her decision and their friendship suffered a fracture. In many interracial relationships this would serve as a breaking point particularly because of the undue burden placed on the Black person. "It's just easier not to engage... I don't want to be the teacher of Whites . . . it's not worth the trouble," I've heard on numerous occasions.

However from an MRULE perspective Dan and Felicia's story does not end here. The hard work is yet to happen as we support them through the process of developing a genuine relationship. This case study will be continued in Chapter Five where we focus on the developmental stages of genuine relationships and the independent and interdependent work both Felicia and Dan will have to do to cement a relationship where mutuality, care, and true knowledge of the other's experience reign.

"Coercion and Consent"

How do we explain the resilience of these harmful social constructs? How do they survive from generation to generation—seemingly traveling through various stages of overt and covert practices? Students need to understand something about this process or they will too easily feel powerless as if change to the status quo was impossible. This is where the discussion of Gramsci's coercion and consent in determining "common sense" is helpful (Omi and Winant, 1994, p.67). It raises many useful questions that engage us to *reflect* on what we say and do, one of MRULE's main objectives. What do we give our

consent to and why? What happens if we refuse to give our consent? How do we know what we know?

One of the most explosive discussion topics questioning what we give our consent to and why for this generation of college students is the common use of the words “nigger” and “nigga” and other traditional pejorative labels aimed at women and racial/ethnic groups. The debate centers around opposing positions. On one hand, there is the belief that through hip hop music and culture Black people have reclaimed and redefined the word “nigga” to mean “homey” (close friend). On the other hand, just as strong is the belief that the original derogatory meaning has not been erased; all people use it to refer to the ignorant and less desirable. White students find themselves confused about when/where and how to use the word. Since it is so prevalent in the songs they listen to and sing along with, they are in constant contact with a word that many have been raised to abhor. They don’t know if they should use it to show their Black peers that they can “be down with them” or not. When they are singing the words to songs out loud, some have expressed that they knew they could not sing those words in front of their Black friends and yet most of their Black friends use it freely (MRULE Round Table Discussion, January 2000). Black students who oppose using the word because of its history and potentially harmful impact express that those who use it are denying what truly goes on in Black-White relations as well as Black-Black relations. The fact that it can be an endearing term to refer to a “homey” does not strip the word of its history so at any one time or place there are multiple meanings at work generating confusion. Hip hop artist Lauryn Hill and comedian Chris Rock have clearly made it known in popular culture that it is still used to characterize the ignorant and lowly.

And even after all my logic and my theory,
I add a muthafuckker so you ignint niggas hear me.
(Lauryn Hill, from *Zealots*, 1996)

There's like a civil war goin on with Black people and
there's two sides: Black people and niggas. I love Black
people but I hate niggas. (Chris Rock from *Chris Rock
HBO Special "Bring in the Pain,"* 1996)

This discussion took place in several MRULE forums and inevitably led to a discussion about the common use of the word “bitch” and “ho” (short for whore) when referring to women. When I explained to them my horror at the resurgent and widespread use of these derogatory words that women of my generation fought so hard to eradicate I got their attention. I asked them to consider what happens when you buy and listen to the music that defines you as a sexual object? When you use these words to refer to each other, when you allow others to label you as such, men or women, are you giving your consent and allowing the market forces that commodify people for the sake of profit to define you and shape your race and gender relations? Do you have to consent to this or can you question? Can you unpack the practices to identify the coercion in the process? What do you accept because you believe it is expected of you? What do you believe because it has been handed down as knowledge from previous generations? What are you willing to question? What kind of world do you want to give your children?

At first I felt that I was lecturing them and that only a few really made the connection to the language and the social institutions that constructed identities and shaped relationships based on those identities. But as we probed further using the Omi and Winant text we began to see some breakthroughs. They understood that they had a certain degree of ownership in the process. If they wanted a world of “niggas” and “bitches” they

could get that by consenting to be defined as such and then playing into those expectations at every turn. Or they could accept it in degrees as some would explain, let it go on the outside while internally knowing who and what you are. Some clearly felt that there are much greater battles to fight and were not going to take on their peers or refuse to engage in the common cultural practices that used the derogatory language. But there were those who made conscious choices to refuse to use the language or let others use it in reference to them at all times. They would not support the music with the offensive language but would instead search out those artists who had a message they believed in. They could, and we discussed this on several occasions, potentially break the cycle at least for themselves and their circles of influence.

The question continually comes back to what we consent to in dealing with social construction of race. The persistence of harmful stereotypes that can lead to racial epithets, hate speech and crimes, consistent racial polarization based on notions of what means to be White, Black, or Brown today, and the common practice on campus of social self-segregation have become expected norms. There is no shortage of programs, publicity and course work that seeks to capture students' attention emphasizing the importance of multiculturalism as they jest about the now infamous Rodney King quote: "Please, can we all get along?" There is however, a gap that must be addressed if we expect the work to go beyond a surface embrace that claims racial equality and social justice, but lacks an in-depth consciousness of what that means or how it can be achieved on both a macro-micro level. This gap is situated in the "unmarked, unnamed" world of whiteness (Frankenberg 1993, p.1). For MRULE students this means exploring the terrain of the political and social institutions created in the belief of white supremacy and

those institutional practices that maintain it throughout contemporary society. It also means examining one's personal experience to understand one's role in either maintaining or changing the racial status quo.

The Social Construction of Whiteness and White Privilege

One of the most common misperceptions about the MRULE Project is that it is a special program for minority students. White students have told us that when they see *Multiracial*, they don't see themselves. We have several dedicated White students helping us change these perceptions by actively participating in all aspects of the MRULE program and modeling for other students. We are up against a system where white has always been synonymous with "all right" all finished, no need to do any more. Many White students enter with armor that distances them from confronting racial issues. They wonder why they would need to join a group whose organizing theme does not include them. When they first encounter the concept of the social construction of race they may recognize the exclusionary experiences of people of color as they are historically and socially situated but often miss the system of white supremacy that created and maintains these experiences.

Excavating the internal landscape of whiteness and its relationship to power and privilege is lifelong race relations work. The recent explosion in scholarly literature has contributed to a critical examination of whiteness and its "masquerading as universal. . . rationalized, legitimized, and made ostensibly normal and natural" (Frankenberg 1997, p. 3). Although it is not a comfortable place to be, many White American students attending increasingly diverse universities are facing the realization that they, too, are racial beings (Ortiz and Rhoads 2000). This is a multifaceted phenomenon with individuals on a fluid

continuum from acceptance to rejection. There is quite some distance to travel for those unexposed to difference, who see White as normal and everything else a deviation. This can range from extreme sensitivity expressed or held back for the fear of being labeled racist at the drop of a hat. It can mean not knowing whether to refer to Black people as Black or African American. It can take the form of outright denial that racism exists while arguing that the tension is a creation of whiny Black and White liberals who are determined to turn the tables on innocent Whites. Or it can be seated in anger and frustration at what appears to be a loss of opportunities for Whites in favors of minorities. Wellman (1993) discusses how the “taken for granted norm of whiteness” is under assault (p. 246). The very definition of what it means to be an American is contested.

What it means to be White will be different depending on class, gender, and sexuality and exposure to the multifaceted nuances of the experience. But there is something that none of the other axes of experiences can erase: White Skin Privilege.

Peggy McIntosh’s (1988) invisible knapsack of unearned privilege published in her article “White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to see Correspondences through Work in Women’s Studies” has been a gold mine to race relations literature and a mainstay in the MRULE program. Inspired by her thinking about how hierarchical interlocking systems of oppression operate *systemically* and how specifically male privilege permeates daily life in disguise as the natural way of things, McIntosh made the connection between the systems of male privilege and White privilege. She tested it by making a list of those things she, as a White woman, can do or have without regard to race. Here are three from a list of forty-six:

Whether I use checks, credit cards, or cash, I can count on my skin color not to work against the appearance that I am financially reliable.

I could arrange to protect our young children most of the time from people who might not like them.

I did not have to educate our children to be aware of systemic racism for their own daily physical protection (McIntosh in Andersen and Collins 1998, p. 97).

There is something in her knapsack for everyone, if you're White. These daily privileges that Whites don't have to think about create a system of advantage that people of color cannot fathom, since they do not have the option to choose whether or not they *want* to pay attention to their race on a particular day. She argues that in spite of the recognition of racism disadvantaging people of color in contemporary society, there remains a lack of consciousness about the system that perpetuates privilege advantaging White people in the process. It is invisible because it is informed by the message that says, 'These aren't privileges; they're the natural way of the world.'

In my class and place, I did not see myself as racist because I was taught to recognize racism only in individual acts of meanness by members of my group, never in invisible systems conferring racial dominance on my group from birth (p. 104)

McIntosh indicts another privileged system in the process—education.

One factor seems clear about all the interlocking oppressions. They take both active forms that we can see and embedded forms that members of the dominant group are taught not to see" (p. 104).

So how do we teach differently? Primarily, we insist that White students come to understand white skin privilege in its own right. Professor Andrew Hacker conducts a powerful exercise in his classes in which he uses a parable to explain to Whites that they

must consider a possibility that there has been a mistake in their identity. One day a member of the organization that has come to rectify the situation visits them. Even though they have been living as a White person up until this point, the mistake has to be corrected and they will henceforth have to live their life out Black. Since it was not their fault, the organization is prepared to pay for the inconvenience but they must determine the cost. How much would you request, the visitor asks the students. In other words, what is the value of your white skin? \$50 million or \$1 million every year for the next fifty years was a common reply (Hacker 1992, p. 31-32).

For many students this could seem like an academic exercise with little connection to real life experience. So to underscore the point we turn to Gregory William's story *Life on the Color Line* (1993). William's graphically depicts his life as a White child until he was ten years old when his mother left him and his younger brother Mike with their father who had been passing as Italian throughout Gregory's life. The divorce forced Gregory's father Tony (Buster) back to his hometown, the black side of Muncie, Indiana in 1954. When their background was discovered both boys were thrust into life on the color line, rejected by Whites and suspected by Blacks. What Williams learned on the color line was that being Black meant you couldn't do all the things that Whites did and no matter what you did do it was less valued. You were expected to learn your place and accept the status assigned to you. Williams knew he was the same person but he experienced his identity created by others as soon as it was known that he had African American heritage. His story chronicles the victories and defeats he endured while trying to make his own way against strict racial lines. Williams reflects on how he would make his way, detesting the racialized lines his father upheld with him and his younger brother Mike. . .Greg a white

boy, Mike a “nigger” (p.156). When told by his father and his friends: “Greg. . .you belong with them smart white folks,” he responded “But I don’t want to be white.” They would hear nothing of this and told him he had a choice so make it right and get out of black Muncie. Although he wanted greater opportunities than Muncie could offer, he understood that he didn’t have to accept whiteness and all its trappings to go after them.

I hadn’t wanted to be colored, but too much had happened to me in Muncie to be a part of the white world that had rejected me so completely. I believed that most of Dad’s problems stemmed from his attempt to “pass for white” in Virginia. The charade created incredible turmoil for him. “Passing” hadn’t worked. Why did he want it for me? I also knew being black didn’t mean I couldn’t be successful. Just the week before, Dad told me about one of the most famous Negroes in America—Walter White. White had been the executive director of the NAACP for ten years until he died in 1955. He traveled throughout the country speaking against prejudice and discrimination. Negro communities around the nation greeted him with open arms. Yet he had blue eyes, blond hair, and most of all, white skin. He was only 5/32 Negro, but he was “black.” If Walter White could choose to remain in the black community and make a difference, so could I. No matter what Bobby, Dad, or anyone else said or thought. I knew who I was and what I wanted to be (p.157).

On an ABC Nightline “America in Black and White” series, Ted Koppel conducted a town meeting with groups of Blacks and Whites asking questions about controversial issues in particular white skin privilege. Predictably the groups had very different perspectives about what it meant to be Black and White in the late 1990’s. Mr. Koppel brought Gregory Williams into the discussion and asked him to answer the question “How much is white skin worth in 1996?” Williams replied that it is still worth quite a bit as he recounted a very recent event in his own life. Upon receiving his deanship of the Ohio State University Law School, he was congratulated by colleagues, one in particular who commented that he must be proud of his achievement. . .the pinnacle of his

career. Later this same colleague discovered that Williams was Black and was reported to have said, “So that’s why he got the position.” (ABC *Nightline*, “America in Black and White,” May 21, 1996).

MRULE is charged with teaching White students to recognize the nature of these enduring racialized patterns that sustain a racial hierarchy based on illusion, prejudice, and ingrained social practices. It may come as a bit of a surprise since many students seek us out to learn about different cultures. As was discussed earlier, a focus on diversity that lacks a focus on equity and social justice trivializes the real lived experience. Looking at white supremacy and privilege is often not comfortable but it is critically important to the process. Educator, Enid Lee, captures it best as she responds to fellow teachers who hope that multicultural/diversity training will help them learn more about other cultural groups.

You need to look at how the dominant culture and biases affect your view of non-dominant groups in society. You don’t have to fill your head with little details about what other cultural groups eat and dance. You need to take a look at your culture, what your idea of normal is, and realize it is quite limited...You have to realize that what you recognize as universal is, quite often, exclusionary (Miner, Andersen & Collins 1998, p. 538).

Being White in the United States at the turn of the century most certainly has its advantages but not without creating some disorientation. Though “optional ethnicities” are available to most Whites (Waters 1990), they are often immobilized to recognize meaning in their neutralized cultural experiences. On a college campus in contrast to the cultural experiences of American minorities and international students, White students may feel left out of the loop and labeled as “oppressors of the nation.” As students commented in a 1991 University of California, Berkley survey: “Being White means that you’re less likely to get financial aid. . .it means that there are all sorts of tutoring groups and special

programs that you can't get into, because you're not a minority" (Pedraza & Rumbaut 1996, p. 475). We will certainly hear out this perspective in MRULE while simultaneously paying considerable attention to the historical legacy of race and racism in the United States. Empowering students with the knowledge of how whiteness and white supremacy has been constructed and is still in many forums unchallenged and dangerous helps them to see the complexity of it all (Daniels 1997). Our work would be seriously impaired if we could not sort out myth from fact, and ensure all students understand how and why White privilege, despite claims to the contrary, has remained very much in tact.

Attention to the construction of white "experience" is important, both to transforming the meaning of whiteness and to transforming the relations of race in general. This is crucial in a social context in which the racial order is normalized and rationalized rather than upheld by coercion alone. Analyzing the connections between daily lives and discursive orders may help make visible the processes by which the stability of whiteness—as location of privilege, as culturally normative space, and as standpoint is secured and reproduced. In this context, reconceptualizing histories and refiguring racialized landscapes are political acts in themselves (Frankenberg 1993, p. 242).

Since MRULE is a multi-racial learning community all students are engaged in the process of understanding these social constructs, recognizing how they operate and sharing experiences that help them to make connections in their lives and in the larger society. Students of color enter this dialogue on whiteness from many diverse places, some have direct experience and make the connections immediately, others do not. Some find relief and comfort in the fact that MRULE makes this discussion on whiteness and privilege pivotal to the dialogue process. Even while stating this it is equally important to clarify that within each community of students of color, there is no monolithic group and no guarantee that they will be aware of systems of oppression. We saw an example of

this last year. During an exercise on privilege students were asked to take a step forward if they enjoyed certain privileges off McIntosh's list. The privilege was read aloud and if it pertained to you, you took a step. There were several African American students in the exercise including the student leader. Half way through the exercise all students were far ahead of the leader. When the following was called out: "I see myself widely represented in the media of the United States" and all students, except the leader moved forward, it was clear it was not the experience but consciousness of that experience that mattered. Their subsequent discussion sought to illuminate this by defining what wide spread representation meant. (MRULE Round Table discussion, Spring 2000).

Racism

The most tangible consequence of the social construction of race is living with racism (Essed 1991, Frankenberg 1993, Feagin & Sikes 1994, Higginbotham 1995). Racism is perhaps the most loaded term in all of race relations discourse. The first task is to define, redefine, and unpack the nebulous, diluted, and politically charged notions that students bring to the table. In several forums that I have conducted with undergraduates prior to an MRULE experience, I have noted that racism and prejudice are used interchangeably. It is not just racial prejudice but any kind of prejudice as some of the following comments illustrate:

I don't want to be racist but I don't know what to call Black people. Should I say Black or African American?

*I feel like if I say anything about people being different, that is racist.
I don't want to sound racist or anything but women and men are different and I don't think it is right to act like they are all the same.*

A lot people are treated in a racist way, not just because they are Black but because they are poor or disabled or overweight.

I don't understand why minority students have all these exclusive activities and organizations just for them. Isn't that racist? (MRULE Round Table Discussions, 1998, 1999, 2000, Freshman Seminar, 1999)

It is critically important for students to have working definitions of racism that are situated in historical and social reality. Once again the centrality of race is salient as we see the tendency to neutralize race into general prejudice. The micro-macro perspective discussed in Chapter Two is needed here so that both aspects of racism, the structural and interpersonal can be understood. Distinctions between the meaning of racism and prejudice must be made clear. The blurring effect created by the interchangeability of these meanings contributes to diluting race that inevitably leads to more problems as we have discussed above.

The definition of racism used in the MRULE program is straightforward and shared by many scholars. Audre Lorde says it succinctly: "Racism is the belief in the inherent superiority of one race over all others, and thereby the right to dominance" (Zinn, Hondagneu-Sotelo, Messner 1997, p. 539). Building on this we incorporate the work of Essed who looks at everyday acts of racism, those that are embedded in social structures and individual practices (1991). Essed problematizes traditional distinctions scholars make between institutional and individual racism and forges a conceptual framework that gives weight to the "mutual interdependence of macro and micro dimensions of racism" (p. 39).

Everyday racism does not exist as single events but as a complex of cumulative practices. Specific instances acquire meaning one in relation to the sum total of other experiences of everyday racism. Another major feature of everyday racism is that it involves racist practices that infiltrate everyday life and become part of what is seen as "normal" by the dominant group. Analogous to everyday life, everyday racism is heterogeneous in

its manifestations but at the same time unified by repetition of similar practices. (p. 288)

These everyday practices are oppressive and repressive although Essed acknowledges human agency in determining their impact, underscoring the critical importance of naming these practices and recognizing individual and societal complicity in them. Putting a face on oppression is particularly important for students since it can ring hollow in ever changing, multidimensional contemporary race relations. Iris Marion Young (1990) does this powerfully by characterizing the forces that define the structural components of oppression: “Exploitation, Marginalization, Powerlessness, Cultural Imperialism, and Violence.” Young argues that marginalization is “perhaps the most dangerous form of oppression” and where increasingly racial oppression is situated. The emphasis here is not that any form of oppression takes primacy over another but more that marginalization can render large groups of people to “severe material deprivation and even extermination” (p.53). This severity is found endemic in many communities of color throughout the world where simultaneous interactions with multiple forms of oppression are in constant motion. Although each of Young’s descriptions of faces of oppression are by no means exclusive to “racial others” they do disproportionately and powerfully affect people of color. The critical element for students to understand is that racism—the belief in the superiority of one race over and the right to dominate—operates as a system whether the agents of the racist practices are individuals or institutions, whether they are conscious or unintentional (Essed 1991, Collins 1998).

Once students are introduced to the systemic and ubiquitous nature of racism, we can facilitate an understanding of racial prejudice, how it is embedded in the system, but

clearly how it does not represent the whole picture. Many scholars decry the focus on prejudice as the source of racial inequality and may find themselves dichotomizing two interrelated processes. Though many prejudice reduction theorists owe much to the seminal work of Gordon Allport in *The Nature of Prejudice* (1954), Allport did not condone an either/or treatment to the social problems created by racial stratification. His useful definition of prejudice and his thorough analysis of the irrational human being capable of acting on those prejudices is a priceless contribution to the field. “Ethnic prejudice is an antipathy based upon a faulty and inflexible generalization. It may be felt or expressed. It may be directed toward a group as a whole, or toward an individual because he is a member of that group” (p. 9). Since Allport dedicated his life’s work to understanding the roots of prejudice and set the stage for social psychologists to follow, it is understandable how his focus might be narrowed at some points. However, it is important to note that Allport, as many scholars are doing today, struggled against dichotomizing the role of individuals and the social structures in which they are embedded.

Some authors stress the interlocking dependence of both the personal and social system. They say that one must attack an attitude with due regard to both kinds of systems, which in combination, hold the attitude embedded in a structural matrix.¹⁴

Whether sociological, psychological, or both the structural point of view has great merit. It explains why piecemeal efforts are not more effective than they are. It tells us that our problem is stitched into the fabric of social living.

Yet if we are not careful, the structural view may lead both to false psychology and to false pessimism. It really is not sensible to say that before we change personal attitudes we must change total structure; for in part, at least, the structure is the product of the attitudes of many single people. Change must begin

¹⁴ T.R. Vallance. “Methodology in propaganda research,” *Psychological Bulletin*, 1951, **48**, 32-61.

somewhere. Indeed, according to the structural theory, it may start *anywhere*, for every system is to some extent altered by the change in any of its parts (p. 506).

As has been discussed throughout, we strive for a multidimensional analysis of the problem of racism and solutions toward racial equality. The durability of racial stereotypes and their negative impact on real lived experiences is undeniable. Another key and complex factor to consider is that although racism has a core definition, it is experienced differently by different individuals and groups precisely because of its changing face through historical periods. There is always a socially constructed racial hierarchy that is not static (Bonnilla-Silva 1997).

Bobo and Kluegel (1996) argue convincingly that we are presently experiencing a “Laissez Faire Racism” which serves a dual purpose of acknowledging positive social change while anesthetizing sensibilities to enduring racial inequalities. They make a strong connection between the ubiquitous racial attitudes rampant in the dominant culture that claim the “end of racism” (D'Souza 1995), and upholding the myths of meritocracy and an even level playing field.

Rather than relying on state enforced inequality as during the Jim Crow era, however, modern racial inequality relies upon the market and informal racial bias to recreate, and in some instances sharply worsen, structured racial inequality. Hence, the phrase “Laissez Faire Racism” (p.2).

In the wake of the collapse of Jim Crow social arrangements and ideology, the new ideology of Laissez Faire Racism began to take shape. This new ideology concedes to African Americans basic citizenship rights. However, it takes as legitimate extant patterns of black-white socioeconomic inequality and residential segregation, viewing these conditions, as it does, not as the deliberate products of racial discrimination, but rather as outcomes of a free market, a race-neutral state apparatus, and the freely taken actions of African Americans themselves (p.21).

segregation, viewing these conditions, as it does, not as the deliberate products of racial discrimination, but rather as outcomes of a free market, a race-neutral state apparatus, and the freely taken actions of African Americans themselves (p.21).

This era of “laissez-faire racism” lends itself to a belief in a race neutral world that operates fundamentally the same for all. Ongoing racial inequalities have to be either overstated, or caused by each down trodden group’s failure to capitalize on the abundant opportunities. This has been confirmed by several racial attitudes surveys, many which Bobo and Kleguel quote, that show Whites and Blacks polarized as to the prevalence of racism in contemporary society. In the *New York Times* most recent poll, (July 11, 2000) surveying 2,165 adults; 1,107 who said they were White and 934 who said they were Black, there were a range of responses that reported progress in some areas and stagnation in others.

On many questions, particularly those related to whether blacks are treated equitably and whether race plays too large a role in the national discourse blacks and whites seemed to be living on different planets. Blacks were roughly four times more likely than whites to say they thought blacks were treated less fairly in the workplace, in neighborhood shops, in shopping malls and in restaurants, theaters, bars and other entertainment venues. (“Poll finds optimistic but enduring racial division,” p. 2)

Building on Blumer’s (1958) theory of racism (prejudice as he called it) as a sense of group position, Bobo and Kluegel suggest that to maintain some sense of order to a racial hierarchy that seems to be losing ground, Whites have to maintain something familiar. Here is where privilege strives to rule even as legal and political conditions change.

Under the group position theory the crucial factors are, first, a sense among members of the dominant racial group of

proprietary claim or entitlement to greater resources and status and, second, a perception of threat posed by subordinate racial group members to those entitlements. Together, the feelings of entitlement and threat become dynamic social forces as members of the dominant racial group strive to maintain a privileged status relative to members of a subordinate racial group (p. 8).

Wellman (1993) extends this discussion further by questioning what it means to be an American. In the group position theory, individuals as members of groups are defined in contrast to others—thus “Other” in the literature.

Therefore racism in America is not only about maintaining privilege or a sense of group position. It is also a defense of a particular notion of American-ness: a conception of America that defines who it is not. For example, being middle-class American, as many Black Americans have recently discovered, means *not* being black. The inability of salespersons to “see” middle-class Black consumers as legitimate customers means they see Black which through their eyes is interpreted as being *not* middle class. Thus in American culture, middle class means *not* black (p. 245-6).

Historian Ronald Takaki opens his comprehensive study on multicultural America with a story of a taxi driver in Virginia driving him to a conference on multiculturalism, checking him out and asking “How long have you been in this country?” “All my life” he explains, something he does frequently as the bewildered taxi driver tried to imagine how someone who looks so “foreign” could be American (1993, p. 1).

We have two anecdotal examples in MRULE that resonate with the above situation. The first was during a discussion on what it means to be Black when choosing clothing. It was stimulated by the controversy over the FUBU (For Us By Us) designer line, who should wear it, whether Whites should violate the ‘For Us’ part of the deal by trying to wear the clothes. Some White students felt deliberately excluded and did not like that feeling. Black students then said, “we feel excluded all the time.” This opened the

door for one Black student to share that she shopped frequently at a famous brand name store which made many of the Black students wince as it had a reputation for being unwelcoming to Black customers. After waiting for some time for service she was finally able to make her purchase. The clerk neglected to remove the security tag and when she exited the alarm went off. The same clerk approached her with a suspecting attitude and then proceeded to remove the tag. When she asked him what the deal was since he sold her the merchandise he asked her coolly, “Why are you here?” (MRULE Round Table Discussion, March 2000).

The second situation happened to an MRULE student while in a required humanities core course. The topic was immigration. The students were playing a game in which they had to identify well-known immigrants. Students threw out the names of Selena, the slain tejano star and Jennifer Lopez, actress and singer.

“Wait a minute,” the MRULE student said. “How can these women be immigrants? They were born and raised in Texas (Selena) and New York (Lopez).”

“But they speak Spanish” the students retorted.

“Selena’s first language was English. She had to learn Spanish to sing the music.”

“But it is immigrant music that she sings.”

“No, she sings tejano which has its roots in Texas and the last time I checked Texas was in the United States.”

No other student, not even the Teaching Assistant, an international graduate student, could counteract the image of who could be a bona fide American. The majority ruled. Selena and Lopez were immigrants and the message was conveyed to the class that you could determine who was an American by applying the criteria of the look, language,

and cultural practices. A seemingly innocent approach to perpetuating the world of the “other.” (MRULE, Student Leader Seminar, November 1999).

Racism and Power

When Omi and Winant speak of “social projects which create or reproduce structures of domination based on essentialist categories of race” they are positioning a definition of racism which include individual acts in social structures.

In order to identify a social project as racist, one must in our view demonstrate a link between essentialist representations of race and social structures of domination. Such a link might be revealed in efforts to promote dominant interests, framed in racial terms, from democratizing racial initiatives. But it might also consist of efforts simply to reverse the roles of racially dominant and racially subordinate. There is nothing else inherently white about racism (p.72).

The meaning of power is usually contested ground as students come in the door. The battle for them centers on issues of racism. Some of these include whether Blacks can be racist, the difference between prejudice with and without power, and individual vs. institutional acts. We let them debate this, but we ask them to consider the following: Racism is the belief in the superiority of one race over another and the right to dominate; anyone is capable of having this belief and acting on it. How well and to what degree these actions impact individuals and communities differ depending on many variables. Those variables have to do with social location, access to resources and opportunities, and the degree of institutional support behind the actions.

Racism encompasses the attitude of prejudice but it is more than prejudice as *domination* is configured into the definition. Is domination something only White people

are capable of? Of course not! Why did Nelson Mandela reiterate his famous Rivonia Trial statement of 1964 upon his release from prison in 1990?

I wish to quote my own words during my trial in 1964. They are true today as they were then: 'I have fought against white domination and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die' (Nelson Mandela's Address to Rally in Cape Town on his Release from Prison, 11 February 1990).

Certainly Mandela knew that there was not an inkling of Black domination during his twenty-seven year imprisonment as the apartheid regime was in high gear, destroying countless Black lives to ensure White domination. But he also understood very well the dialectical aspect of oppression. The dialectical implies an interactive relationship between oppression and freedom, dominance and resistance (Collins 2000, Harvey 1996, Greene 1988). Neither of these states are static or permanent. Unless the value of democracy and freedom *for all* is owned *by all* to provide *for all*, the right to dominate and thereby oppress characterizes the relationship between those with the most access to power and those with the least. Mandela commented on this again after the first free national elections took place in 1994. When his party, the African National Congress (ANC) won with a significant majority of the vote: 62.6%, just shy of the two thirds needed to draw a constitution without the input of the other parties, he was not disappointed. He knew that a new constitution constructed through a multiplicity of voices would represent all of South Africa, not just the ANC and would therefore protect the ANC from the drive to dominate (Mandela 1994, p.539).

Looking at power through a relational lens is critical to race relations discourse. It is another example of not settling for an either/or answer. Once again it is the both/and analysis that helps make meaningful connections to the complexity of power dynamics. To illustrate this to students we present the following example:

Can a Black person believe in Black superiority and act upon that to another individual or a group? Let's say a White employee has a Black manager who does not like White people and wishes to undermine their success in the company. The Black manager can in subtle or overt ways make that known to the White employee and consequently the employee feels discrimination and labels it racism. Let's reverse the situation: a Black employee has a White manager who does not like Black people and wishes to undermine their success and makes that known in subtle and overt ways—the Black employee consequently feels discrimination and labels it racism. Is this the same situation for both employees?

When first presented with this example before students understand how power and privilege work together to systematically disadvantage people of color, they would say yes. When we unpack it, we are able to show that the same action— animus from members of one racial group toward members of another racial group—can have a very different impact depending on where the individual is socially located. In most cases, the Black manager who doesn't like White people cannot possibly undermine the success of them all or he/she will have no organization. Even if the Black person believes in the superiority of Black people he or she has a limited ability to impact White people's lives with that belief. In contrast, the White manager can more easily single out Black employees than the reverse. The White manager to a large degree has institutional support for the belief in White superiority and can therefore do more damage. If the White

employee leaves the job and searches for another, he/she is still favored over his Black counterpart as we have seen in the *Multi-City Study—Detroit Divided* (2000).¹⁵ The White person may encounter this animus occasionally, the Black person routinely. These conditions make the *experience* of the same situation *different*. This does not change the fact that the individual encountered discrimination or animus. Rather it situates it in a larger social racialized context in which the power to dominate especially in the U.S. workplace still remains primarily in the hands of Whites (U.S. Department of Labor, *Report on the Glass Ceiling Initiative*, 1993 p. 14). That institutions have more power to affect greater numbers of people than individuals is at issue. At the same time it is important to consider that the individual is not powerless. Resistance and compliance can be expressions of power (Omi & Winant 1994). Human beings are complex realities embedded in even more complex social relations with multiple power dynamics. Patricia Hill Collins characterizes resistance as oppositional knowledges, which may be invisible to individuals but collectively impactful.

When my mother taught me to read, took me to the public library when I was five, and told me that if I learned to read, I could experience a form of freedom, neither she nor I saw the magnitude of that one action in my life and the lives that my work has subsequently touched. As people push against, step away from, and shift the terms of their participation in power relations, the shape of power relations changes for everyone. Like individual subjectivity, resistance strategies and power are always multiple and in constant states of change (p.275).

Collins (2000) makes another very important contribution to the conceptualization of power and domination that has been used in the MRULE program to situate racial

¹⁵ The Multi-City in Detroit found that Black males fare worse than Whites and Black females when it comes to securing employment (p. 119).

identity, oppression, and resistance in the context of multiple intersecting identities, oppressions, and forms of resistance. At the core of the “mutually constructing features of social organization” is the intersection of race, class, gender, sexuality, and nationality in a “matrix of domination.” This refers to a hierarchical arrangement of systems of oppression and a particular organization of its domains of power, e.g., structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal (p. 299). Using Black women as an example she explains:

Because oppression is constantly changing, different aspects of an individual U.S. Black woman’s self-definitions intermingle and become more salient: Her gender may be more prominent when she becomes a mother, her race when she searches for housing, her social class when she applies for credit, her sexual orientation when she is walking with her lover, and her citizenship status when she applies for a job (p. 274-5).

This poses several questions to students: When does my race matter? Gender? Sexual orientation? When am I privileged because of who I am? When am I at a disadvantage? (Kendall 1999)¹⁶. What are the power dynamics at play? How do I interact with them? What can I shape and what shapes me? All students can ask and answer these questions. As they share their similar and different answers and grasp the reasons behind these answers, we begin to make significant progress towards creating a genuine and diverse learning community where change in racial thinking thrives.

As the MRULE develops, we have made more systematic connections between patriarchy, white supremacy, elitism, and homophobia in sustaining a system of unequal access and uneven development. Teaching these systems from an intersectional analysis has been helpful although students often resist conceptual frameworks that demand

¹⁶ Unpublished intersectional power grid

extensive reading or study in an unfamiliar jargon.¹⁷ It is a continual process of breaking it down for them. The focus remains on the relationship between individuals and institutions and their access to resources that affect the quality of their lives. Once it is understood that individuals experience inequalities at many levels and that inequalities are perpetuated by institutions, the door is open for exploration into causes and consequences. Ultimately, it is individuals who make up institutions and can, when the will is there, harness the power to change them. To demonstrate this we turn to our multiracial United States history—the mainstay of the MRULE curriculum. This is where we challenge the notion that history is about “old dead guys” and outdated institutions that have nothing to do with today’s world.

¹⁷ It is important to note that the MRULE program attracts students from a variety of disciplines. This is both one of its strengths and challenges, as some students do not have the background or interest to master the sociological theories. We compromise by presenting the information in a variety of ways—from reading of the texts to interactive exercises.

Chapter Four

How MRULE uses History: Historical Agency in the Formation of a Multi-Racial Society

History teaches us that it is not the rebels, it is not the dissidents who endanger a society but rather the accepting, the unthinking, the unquestioning, the docile, . . . the silent, and the indifferent. This lesson, as I have tried to convey to my students, not only in Berkeley but in Moscow, Beijing, and Oxford, Mississippi, knows no state or national boundaries. And it remains timeless.

Leon F. Litwack, "The Making of a Historian,"
(Cimbala & Himmelberg 1996, p. 31).

Whether the topic is affirmative action in college admissions, the Confederate flag, or the Civil Rights Movement, today's students for the most part enter the university with a dismal understanding of United States history. We often play an interactive game in MRULE where we place the name of a historical figure on the back of each student and they have to ask yes/no questions of one another to determine whose name is on their back. The last time this game was played with a group of first and second year students, I walked around the group, listening to their questions and answers and interjecting when they could not answer accurately. I was amazed at how often they would label their person a "civil rights leader" as if this was the only way to characterize a historical figure. These were the descriptors repeatedly placed on W.E.B Du Bois, Frederick Douglas, and Sojourner Truth. The positive aspect was that they knew these leaders struggled for civil and equal rights, the negative was that there was no understanding of a historical context, everyone blended together.

In the debriefing session, we tried to probe them to share what they knew about their historical person. We heard things like Frederick Douglas freed the slaves, information about Martin Luther King Jr. wasn't taught in high school so they didn't

know anything specific about him, and Ceasar Chavez was not as commonly known name as we had thought. One student could not guess who he was even after being given hints like: he's Mexican American and worked to improve conditions for migrant farm workers using tactics learned from Martin Luther King, Jr. (MRULE, Round Table Discussion, April 2000).

"I hated history in high school. It was the most boring subject. I can't remember a thing about it. I don't see what use it has for us today." I cannot accurately count the number of times I have heard students tell me this. When they discover that history is at the core of the MRULE program and they will have to get a command of it, some of them shut down. Most learn to tolerate what they have decided is the boring part of MRULE. This is usually a temporary situation until we can show them that there are many ways to learn and remember history. We are uncompromising about helping them to understand why history is at the core of our program. We explain that although the weekly round table discussions are the forum for them to share their opinions, it cannot be limited to that. We are an institution of higher learning and as important as opinions are, they are not the pinnacle of knowledge. Learning our history will guide us to be able to have more informed, enlightened opinions. Without a sense of our history, we cannot move our discourse beyond opinions and will inevitably lose interest. Deprivation of knowledge of history leads to the complacency and unthinking, unquestioning indifference that Professor Litwack speaks of. Since our charge in the MRULE program is to bring knowledge to bear on our thinking and our actions, we make the connection for students that learning an inclusive multiracial history is the vehicle that makes this possible.

Shifting the Historical Lens—Reconfiguring the Historical Narrative

I began my doctoral studies in 1994 and have had the fortunate and sometimes frustrating experience of trying to keep up with the prolific publishing going on in the fields of race/ethnic and women's history. While in the middle of a course in Women's Studies, a fourth edition of one of my main texts, *Women's America*, was published. In fact, the fifth edition (2000) is now available. As each new edition came out, editors Kerber and De Hart grew increasingly concerned with the degree of inclusivity and the complexity of women's different experiences. It became critically important to answer the questions: Who were the women who made up America? How different or similar were their experiences? How often did the narrative of white middle class women dominate the discourse? What were the comparative stories of women and men who were in the same time and place, and yet not, because in most cases, regardless of race or class status, women were excluded from centers of power and rendered invisible? Kerber and De Hart look to historian Gerda Lerner who was one of the first to explore these questions and write history that sought to address them. Lerner characterizes four stages of development in the writing of women's history on a journey towards inclusivity. The first is "compensatory history" – the historian looks for women and all their activities that have been systematically excluded from the historical record. The second stage is "contribution history" in which historians describe women's contributions to major themes and movements usually as helpers to the main actors—men. This approach left many upcoming historians in the 1970's and 80's wanting. Though it was important to discover women and their contributions, the context in which their stories were told and meaning constructed remained male dominated.

Things we thought we “knew” about American history turn out to be more complex than we had suspected. For example, most textbooks suggest that the frontier meant opportunity for Americans, “a gate of escape from the bondage of the past.” But it was men who more readily found on the frontier compensation for their hard work; many women found only drudgery. (In fact, women were more likely to find economic opportunity in cities than on the frontier) (Kerber & De Hart 1995, p. 5).

The historical lens by which to examine the westward movement would need another refocusing when we consider the Black experience. As they moved west, Black women did not escape the hard work they were already so accustomed to or freedom from racialism “but they did find a world that much closer to the democratic ideal than the Jim Crow South they left behind” (Hine & Thompson 1998, p. 172). Lerner and the many great women historians who followed her took up the challenge to “reexamine the social relations of the sexes, to reconstruct many historical generalizations, and to reconfigure the historical narrative.” This led to the fourth stage, which is understanding the social construction of gender and the complexity of historical interpretation of this reality. (It is not our purpose here to thoroughly discuss gender. Rather it is to draw a parallel with the social construction of race as discussed in Chapter Two.) A lack of such understanding limits the ability to conceptualize the complexities, nuances, and changes throughout history—why these changes occur, the power relations and dynamics that influence the changes and the historical agency of those in the throes of struggle to resist oppression and maintain human dignity.

Black, Latino, Asian American, and Native American history have also traveled through the same stages of absence, obscurity, recognition, and contribution and are key in the “corrective” and “revisionist” sense, there still remains much work to do where we can clearly see the interrelationships among all players in the making of a historical moment. Responding to Oscar Handlin’s discovery that “immigrants were American

history” historian Ronald Takaki set out to capture the immigrant (from the East, West, and South), the Native American and African American experience in the first multicultural history of its kind: *A Different Mirror*. Inspired by the work of several historians including Handlin, Takaki saw the limitations of separate studies.

These books and others like them fragment American society, studying each group separately, in isolation from the other groups and the whole. While scrutinizing our specific pieces, we have to step back in order to see the rich and complex portrait they compose. What is needed is a fresh angle, a study of the American past from a comparative perspective (p. 6- 7).

Takaki was concerned with both the differences and similarities of each group’s experience, when they worked together, when they competed, the agency they had individually and collectively to resist and transform exclusionary practices in the struggle to be Americans. This is what is meant by reconfiguring the historical narrative.

This reconfiguration is not synonymous with balkanization of people based on race, ethnicity, class, gender, nationality, as some critics have argued claiming that this “new history” is chiseling away at our nation’s motto—“E pluribus unum”—‘Out of one many’” (Takaki 1993). Rather it calls for an honest treatment of people’s diverse experience and a recognition on the part of scholars and educators of liberal and conservative traditions that the melting pot metaphor cannot tell the story of all of America’s peoples. As historian Lawrence Levine reminds us: “It was over seventy-five years ago Horace Kallen suggested that the United States could best be understood not as the unified product of a melting pot but as a more complex “democratic commonwealth” of peoples, a “democracy of nationalities,” a “multiplicity in a unity” (Levine 1993, p.865). Even while the melting pot metaphor was being created, laws, institutions, and social practices were being reinforced all over the country to exclude people of color

from enjoying full citizens rights with European Americans (Steinberg 1989, p. 48). How do people melt when they are constantly reminded of their “outsider” status? What would they melt into? Citing eighteenth century French immigrant Hector Crèvecoeur historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. calls it a “new race of man” but that could hardly be achieved in a society where race, class, and gender stratification define access and opportunity (Schlesinger 1992, *passim*). He argues against a “multicultural” treatment of history and calls for a “true, honest” history, suggesting that the two are incompatible—seemingly unaware of and/or unconcerned about how this dichotomous thinking *erases* genuine *lived* experience. Even as he argues that Americans are one people and an emphasis on their differences through a multicultural lens will drive them apart, he acknowledges the bitter welcome that Native and Black people received throughout history (p. 58). He makes brief mention of racism as the “great national tragedy” (p.19) but does not make the connection that white supremacy and the institutions created to uphold it ensured people of color that they would not melt into and share the status of White people. He glosses over the very different experiences that White immigrants and people of color experienced in the process of becoming Americans. Scholars of White ethnics, particularly the Irish and Jews who had the greatest barriers to assimilation, have demonstrated that white skin eventually gave them access to opportunities from which they had been historically excluded (Iganatiev 1997, Brodtkin 1999). Schlesinger does little in his essay to acknowledge this and spends a good deal of time attacking “feel good history” that builds self-esteem, Afrocentrism in particular. Schlesinger’s arguments are not convincing. Unless he acknowledges and validates the difference in the racialized experience of all Americans, and notes that the legacy of racism is more than a tragedy to

lament but has living consequences that continually demand to be reckoned with, his call for the “one in many” will fall upon deaf ears.

Reconfiguring the historical narrative shakes the apple cart, let there be no doubt. One of the most repeated arguments supported by gatekeepers of the status quo is that bringing the new heroes and heroines on the historical scene—people of color and women of all backgrounds—will diminish or eradicate the parts of the old heroes and distort history in favor of a “politically correct” version. This is not the case as many historians are demonstrating by uncovering entire new worlds that have always been there, even though absent from the historical narrative. As Lerner argues:

Advocates of the new, more inclusive history point out that there is room in the American narrative for a broader range of heroes and heroines than we have hitherto included and that Abraham Lincoln’s stature would not be diminished by the inclusion in the narrative of story of Frederick Douglass. In fact, discussion of contending and contradictory narratives would more accurately reflect the tensions that existed in the lives of ruling elites and ordinary folk under a system in which both slavery and free institutions coexisted (Lerner 1997, p. 203).

Historians are facing enormous challenges as new approaches to “creating a history that is faithful to the realities of our ambiguous past, our contentious present, and our rather uncertain future” are demanding to be heard (Harding 1994, p.4). Levine builds a case for how and why a deeper, more nuanced and complex history must be told by a multiple of voices.

To teach a history that excludes large areas of American culture and ignores the experiences of significant segments of the American people is to teach a history that fails to touch us, that fails to explain America to us or to anyone else. We need, not a new history, but a more profound and ... more complex understanding of our old history. This need presses down upon us relentlessly, and we will ultimately be judged by how well we meet it, by how able we are to keep our understanding of the

American past open, dynamic, and responsive, free of the weight of fixed symbols, rigid canons, and useless shadows (Levine p. 867).

Vincent Harding calls Takaki's work, *A Different Mirror* a pioneering effort to do this and contemplates the possibilities of a new master narrative that can be built upon the strengths and weaknesses of Takaki's bold adventure. Everyone could not be included in this work, nor could Takaki give equal weight to all historical periods. As Harding points out Takaki could not really bring this multicultural narrative to a fitting close, though he touches upon current issues faced by people of color in central cities and reservations. Educational and economic barriers to opportunities have continually plagued all historically disadvantaged groups in varying degrees. Takaki's exploration in *A Different Mirror* cannot come to an end in light of the fact that new immigrants are continually arriving in the United States. They will live and tell new and different experiences—with clear connections to the past and a strong hold on the "American Dream" for a better future. Still they face barriers imposed by racism and classism and problems of underemployment, inadequate education and health care as well as increasing tensions among groups as was demonstrated in the 1992 Los Angeles riot which social critic Richard Rodriguez labeled a "race riot that had no border, without nationality"(p.423).

This particular message seems to be the very thing that Schlesinger misses, the imperative to study the American experience in search of the narrative that represents a diverse array of individual and collective voices in various relationships among themselves and to one another. It cannot be an either/or scenario, nor can the expectation be placed upon historians and educators to erase experiences from the record so as to discourage separatism. At its core, the narrative must be thoroughly inclusive and uncompromisingly audacious about confronting all of America's past.

Here again, his work (Takaki's) is important for the proposal that there can be no approach to a new master narrative of the American experience without an attempt to deal forthrightly with the persistently destructive power of white supremacy and the exploitation of racial differences in the midst of all attempts to create a national union more perfect than the one bequeathed to us by the original founders (Harding p. 9).

As Harding poses these matters to himself, his fellow historians and citizens he concludes by suggesting that this reconfiguration may not in the future be a master narrative, but rather a:

...new "servant narrative," a new "democratic narrative," or the more possibly neutral-al metanarrative (p. 10)—where we would not be tempted to ignore or deny the ways in which we Americans are reflections of each other, refusing to recognize the ambiguous and frustrating channels by which we have entered into each other's lives, sometimes bloodily, sometimes lovingly, sometimes in liminal engagements that defy categories and create new realities (p. 8).

Another aspect of reconfiguring the historical narrative is looking at the role of agency. As has been noted throughout Chapter Two, human agency is a critical component of the human experience and a key element of the historical narrative. Eric Foner discovered this as a young historian when studying "new social history" in England in the early 1970's and used this to his advantage to write a definitive work on Reconstruction that others attempted to do and failed (Cimbala & Himmelberg 1996, p. 102). When he discovered boxes of correspondence capturing local social and political life of former slaves, up-country farmers, planters, and Klan members all engaged in activity to either change or maintain the status quo, he was convinced that Reconstruction would have to be told so that it was understood that freedpeople were the central actors in the drama. As he characterizes it:

Rather than simply victims of manipulation or passive recipients of the actions of others they were agents of change whose

demand for individual and community autonomy helped to establish the agenda of Reconstruction politics (p.103).

Building on the work of W.E.B Du Bois, John Hope Franklin and others, Foner shifted the lens even further by focusing on the labor question—how former slaves struggled to secure economic autonomy. This led to the development of the unique aspect of Reconstruction, enfranchisement of former male slaves within a few years of emancipation. Foner believed that because Reconstruction failed to bring Black people freedom and dignity the power inherent in the Fifteenth Amendment is often overlooked (Cimbala & Himmelberg 1996, p.104).

Historians of Black women's history are quite aware of the significance of the Fifteen Amendment as it captured the pivotal debate among opposing views during the abolitionist movement between those who believed women should push forward for their right to vote and those who believed that women should wait their turn and rally around ensuring the rights of Black men (Hine & Thompson 1998). This same debate takes on another major historical battle: that of middle and upper class White women fighting for their rights with very little concern about Black women. The racism that Black women continually endured from their White suffragist "sisters" gave them sufficient reasons to make eradicating racism their primary focus. This tension has remained throughout the 20th century, through the second wave of feminism, and still lingers in some contemporary discourses (Brown 1995, Terborg-Penn 1995).

Post-Reconstruction history takes on even greater nuances at the hand of Glenda Gilmore in *Gender and Jim Crow* (1996). Here Gilmore shows how Black women, hopeful for a future in which they would enjoy full citizenship rights became politically active in North Carolina. Once Black men met with disenfranchisement and the exclusionary practices set in motion by Jim Crow, these Black women (and men but the

focus of the work is on the women) fought even harder with continual resistance strategies that contributed to their survival. In fact it was the work of Black women in temperance unions, social and civic service, and the suffragist movement, that kept activism alive when the political doors began to close for Black men. Gilmore grew up in North Carolina and was quite aware of the white Southern version of this critical historical period. She was compelled to tell another story.

In the segregated South whites invented a past for posterity by making up on a daily basis a multitude of justifications and rationalizations for racial oppression. Growing up there as a white girl in the 1950's, I lived that fiction. The subsequent separation of self from lies consumed much of my post-adolescent, post civil rights movement life, as I painfully peeled away a tissue of falsehoods and cut through many connections to my upbringing in the segregated South. After that I believed no truth and took no evidence at face value. Fiction in the archives? What else? Basing Southern political history on white archival sources has rendered African Americans as passive recipients of whites' actions. Black middle class men have appeared as exceptions in the narrative, while Black women have disappeared altogether (xvi).

Like Foner, Gilmore found an archival gold mine in the voices of the Black women and men who were determined to build whole and dignified lives in their promised freedom, no matter the obstacles white supremacy laid on their paths (Gilmore 1996,p. xxi-ii).

The burgeoning field of scholarship in Black women's history in the last two decades has opened the door for understanding that reconfiguring the historical narrative is vital in our quest for honest and true history. Historian Darlene Clark Hine, in her own words, straddles between the two burgeoning fields of Black and women's history. She characterizes it as paradigmatic shift—a “flowering and legitimization of black history” and the “maturation and entrenchment of women's history—not yet complete” (Cimbela & Himmelberg 1996, p.52) and tells the moving story of how she began to study in Black

history. As a young historian she was approached by Shirley Herd, a schoolteacher in Indiana and president of the local chapter of the National Council of Negro Women to write a history of Black women in Indiana. When she replied that she did not know anything about Black women's history since she had taken no courses in her training Herd said bluntly: "You are a Black woman? You are a historian? You mean to tell me you can't put those two things together and write us a history of Black women in Indiana?" (Cimbela & Himmelberg 1996, p. 60). Hine took the challenge and when she told one of her colleagues of her newly found interest in Black women's history and her intention to embark on a major research project, she was warned that she would be making a big mistake in her career. "Black women didn't do all that much and what they did do didn't matter all that much" (Hine lecture, Graduate Seminar, November 1997). She has since received an apology from this colleague but the story illustrates an ever abiding need for vision and belief in reconfiguring the historical narrative to include those who have been rendered invisible.

African American Women's History and Inclusive Historiography

To study women's history, then, is to take part in a bold enterprise that can eventually lead us to a new history, one that, by taking into account both sexes, should tell us more about each other and, therefore, our collective selves. (Kerber and De Hart, p. 21)

It is not explicit what women Kerber and De Hart are referring to—it can be assumed that they are speaking of all women and that indeed would inform us of our collective selves as members of the human race. As noted above, accurate particularization is needed to ensure integrity of the whole. The development of Black women's history has made an invaluable contribution to an inclusive historiography. In this section we will look at three works that serve as illustrious examples of reconfiguring the narrative. Although we focus on Black women we could have used women from any

background to make the point. These are examples that inspire and guide. The key concept to understand is that any one work of inclusive history cannot include everyone, rather it introduces the conceptual framework that opens the door for all voices to be raised.

Historian, Elsa Barkley Brown, likens the teaching of African American women's history to African American women's quilting whose qualities include variation of patterns moving in different directions, non-linear, and polyrhythmic. Building on work of Bettina Aptheker's "pivoting the center" and Jacqueline Dowd Hall's "releasing multiple voices rather than competing orthodoxies," Brown addresses the concern that repeatedly surfaces as we strive to help students transcend their ideas of what is normative and "center in another's experience."

I do not mean that white or male students can learn to feel what it is like to be a Black woman. Rather, I believe that all people can learn to center in another experience, validate it, and judge it by its own standards without need of comparison or need to adopt that framework as their own. Thus one has no need to "decenter" anyone in order to center someone else; one has to constantly, appropriately, "pivot the center" (Brown, p. 922).

We will look at three examples chosen from three different styles of work—this helps to give us a methodologically comprehensive approach. The first, Hine and Thompson's *A Shining Thread of Hope: A History of Black Women in America*, (1998) is a survey history and is written for academic as well as a lay audiences. The second, Gilmore's *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920*, (1996) is a monographic work that centers on the experiences of African American women and men (more focus on women) and the resistance strategies they employed to overcome white supremacy. The third is Murray's, *Pauli Murray: The Autobiography of a Black Activist, Feminist, Lawyer, Priest, Poet*, (1989) that walks

through race relations in some of the most turbulent times of the 20th century, through personal experience. From these works we will build the case for historical agency. All of the stories here focus on historical figures that would for the most part be invisible in the narrative had it not been for these authors' meticulous reconfiguration. They break the silence and sharpen our vision so that we can better see the complex and multi-dimensionality of our collective history (Levine 1993).

A Shining Thread of Hope: The History of Black Women in America

In this first comprehensive African American women's history, authors Hine and Thompson meticulously give us American history as lived by Black women. A useful organizing theme that runs through the work is how Black women fought against "three enemies—law, custom, and violence."

Law made black women and their children slaves, robbed them of their human rights, and bound them to often cruel and exploitative owners. Custom constrained them within limitations of gender and race and rendered their attempts to protect their sexual integrity virtually useless. Violence permeated their lives. These three enemies have worked together, and black women have seldom been able to attack one without finding themselves painfully ensnared by the others. (p. 166)

Following this work is to be alongside Black women's struggle through slavery, Reconstruction, Jim Crow, the Great Migration, the Great Depression, two World Wars, and the Civil Rights Movement. With the richness that all this entails it is difficult to bring it to a close. There is some mention of women's achievement through the closing decades of the twentieth century, particularly highlighting the successful Black woman. However, the beauty and strength of the work is how it brings two hundred years of U.S. history to life through the lens of Black women, free and slave, rich and poor, educated and illiterate, married and single, laborer, professional, artist, community organizer,

politician and almost always the educator. Black women were primarily responsible for their family's survival despite the meager resources most of them had. This narrative looks into the lives of extraordinary and ordinary women and the educational practices they creatively and painstakingly devised with support of their communities of extended family and fictive kin. Sometimes they had White allies, in most cases they did not. That they triumphed against extreme odds, from the underground schools they ran for slave children to academies for free blacks to the schools they founded and integrated through Jim Crow and desegregation to breaking into all white, male fields of medicine and law as early as the mid 19th century, is the untold story of traditional history (p.160-3).

Doing further research into any one of the great women highlighted in *A Shining Thread of Hope* would make an excellent project for MRULE undergraduates needing to understand historical agency. We draw upon the inspiration of these women fighting the law, custom, and violence that laid heavy constraints upon their freedom and dignity. Perhaps most immediately applicable to our work today is the story of the women of the Civil Right Movement: Ella Baker, Diane Nash, JoAnn Gibson Robinson, and Anna Arnold Hedgeman. It was Hedgeman who requested that a Black woman be allowed to present a major address at the 1963 March on Washington. After all, if we take a look at the role women had been playing leading up to this historical era we would see Septima Clark, director of the first integrated citizenship schools (Highlander) where some of the greatest civil rights leaders were trained. Among them was Fannie Lou Hamer who co-founded the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, challenging white political domination of the Mississippi Democratic party. The Montgomery Bus Boycott was successfully carried out due to the preparation of women on the ground (Jo Ann Gibson Robinson, Rosa Parks, and others) who were as Parks' stated "tired" of the unequal

treatment that continued to make their days longer and their lives harder. Daisy Bates was behind the effort to usher the Little Rock Nine through the trauma of integrating Arkansas Public Schools in 1957, and it was Ella Baker's vision to empower young people in participatory democracy strategies that inspired the Student Non Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) into being in 1960 (Crawford, Rouse, Woods 1993). Hedgeman's request to include a woman as a keynote speaker was not based on a whim or a kind of female solidarity for the sake of appearance. It was in honor of the women who worked to make that 1963 historical event possible. When it was denied by the male leadership, it brought home the point to Hedgeman that Black women were viewed as "second-class citizens" (Hine & Thompson 1998, p. 281). That the women leaders of the Civil Rights Era made tremendous contributions to the victories won is undeniable. That they could have achieved more if they had been welcomed as partners to the men is also true.

Hine and Thompson have made accessible to an undergraduate audience of all backgrounds the lives of many Black women who resisted domination from White oppressors and fought for equality with their men. We know that this journey, though well traveled, is not yet ready to end, as there are many battles yet to fight. These women are shining examples of how the battle for equality must be fought and won at all levels of human interaction, a fundamental lesson taught and reinforced throughout the MRULE project.

Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920

We highlight this work in MRULE because it is a lucid and powerful example of "pivoting the center." Gilmore stands Post Reconstruction history in North Carolina leading up the nineteenth amendment on its head. Determined to uncover what happened

during this period from the perspectives of African Americans fighting against the machinery of white supremacy as it tried to rid them of all hopes of becoming full citizens, she rewrites a compelling, impeccably documented narrative.

Gilmore begins the narrative by following the life and writings of her “main character”—Sarah Dudley Pettey, educator, writer, and activist through the 1880’s and 90’s. Dudley Pettey, her husband Charles Pettey and other educated Blacks believed they had a fair chance at full citizenship and worked diligently through education, the church, and other social institutions to develop the capacities to be outstanding members of their communities. Law, custom, and violence made sure that they would have great difficulty succeeding. White supremacy was at its zenith, with its zealous supporters determined to create a new and legal form of slavery that began with the disenfranchisement of Black men, economic disempowerment, and the segregation of all public facilities. Supreme Court Case *Plessy vs. Ferguson*, the Separate but Equal doctrine of 1896 put legal teeth into the web of actions and counter actions created to keep Blacks in their place. As middle class Black men and women demonstrated the highest “Christian” values: education, stability in family life, modesty and a prudent Victorian life style, becoming what they called “Best Men and Best Women”, they stirred up fear and resentment in Whites who believed that they alone could occupy these places. Custom demanded that Whites remain on top. Black mobility threatened the racial order that many of this generation felt their Confederate fathers abandoned. The sons of these fathers were determined to pick up the pieces of their father’s defeat and recreate a new social order where Whites would unquestionably reign supreme. The Best Black men and women like Charles and Sarah Pettey would have to be brought down to size.

Throughout the twenty-four year period of Gilmore's study, African American resistant strategies were plentiful. There was nothing more important to the emerging Black middle class than enfranchisement. With the vote they could continue to move forward and would be empowered to assist poor Blacks as well. Their determination, hard work and persistent endurance to build their lives and communities even under the shadow of white supremacy did not falter. Violence was one sure strategy Whites used to retard Black progress. Upon a few incidents of black on white rape they concocted the myth of the Black male rapist set upon destroying the purity of White womanhood. They created a rape scare that was hardly founded in fact. According to Gilmore:

For the previous two years, 1895 and 1896, the attorney general had counted twenty-eight rape cases statewide. Neither he or his successors specified the race of the rapists. They did, however, list the race of those lynched and executed. In 1895 and 1896, one black man was lynched for attempted rape, and none executed. If we can assume that any black man accused of raping a white woman would have been either lynched or executed, that leaves twenty-seven cases that did not involve black on white rape. Many of those twenty-seven convicted rapists must have been white men who raped white women since black men's rapes of black women were less likely to be prosecuted and white men's rape of black women rarely resulted in convictions (p. 86).

These facts did not matter to those set upon shattering the hopes and dreams of full citizenship for North Carolina's African Americans. Creating the image of the Black man as a rapist monster who was lurking around every corner to strike down White womanhood was a strategy sure to capture attention and harness mass support for those desperately trying to regain unfettered White rule. Black leaders were blamed for not being able to control the Black rapists and even Black soldiers were labeled sex symbols and harassed by White gangs (p. 81-2). Tensions built and led up to the 1898 racial massacre in Wilmington when White Supremacist, Alfred Moore Wadell, led an army of

men into the city, burned the Black press and either shot or ran Black leaders out of town. Many leaders like the Petteys concluded that they could “no longer live in North Carolina and be a man” (p. 117).

Gilmore makes the case for “pivoting the center” as historians examine this turbulent period in Southern history. To understand this period, the violence, resistance, defeat and survival, and the complex web of relationships where Black and White men and women of all classes played their parts, one must widen the lens.

Examining the race wars of the 1890’s exclusively through the eyes of white supremacists does more than neglect the African American experience, it distorts the campaign’s meaning by ignoring its context. What white men did and thought is important because they held the preponderance of power and used it so brutally. White men knew, however, what historians are discovering: that they did not act with impunity in a lily-white male world; rather, they reacted strategically in racially and sexually mixed location. Moreover, the victories they won were not ordained or complete but began as precariously balanced compromises that papered over deep fissures in Southern life (p. 118).

Pauli Murray: The Autobiography of a Black Activist, Feminist, Lawyer, Priest, and Poet

Pauli Murray¹⁸ was one of the most extraordinary Black women of the 20th century. Poet, lawyer, activist, feminist, and priest, she battled racial and gender oppression and exclusion throughout her life and trail blazed through many obstacles in her path. Of Murray and her autobiography, Eleanor Holmes Norton states:

¹⁸ I discovered Pauli Murray in a round about way. I was doing research on the relationship between Eleanor Roosevelt and Mary McCleod Bethune. I continually came upon the name Pauli Murray and the letters she wrote to Mrs. Roosevelt about racial injustices. I was so intrigued by the audacity and tenacity of Pauli Murray that I knew I would have to research her further. In fact, from the evidence that I have seen, I believe that that the relationship between Murray and Roosevelt was much closer, more dynamic and genuine than the one between Roosevelt and Bethune. They seemed to have transcended the “polite racial etiquette” and got down to some very real and painful issues. This will be discussed further in Chapter Five.

In effect, she recorded her life not at the end but as she went along, keeping records and notes of events small and great. It is a testament to her need to remember, her regard for history, and her insistence to learn from her past. But Pauli never lived in the past. She lived on the edge of history, seeming to pull it along with her (xi).

This autobiography is a living testimony to the historical study of race relations leading up to the Civil Rights Movement and beyond. Born in 1910, the same year of the first publication of the newly founded National Association for the Advancement of Colored People's (NAACP) magazine *The Crisis*, she witnessed and/or experienced some of the most pivotal moments in the pursuit of racial justice in the country. The themes of custom, law, and violence played their part in her life and those around her as she weaves her story. In MRULE, we use her work on several levels, one as an autobiography and what it has to offer the student of history. We also use it to show how the personal and political are interwoven and to demonstrate the intersectionality of race, class, and gender in the quest for social justice.

Murray's narrative is dense, though several chapters can be read as independent essays. This works well with the chapters entitled "A Sharecroppers Life" and "A Sharecroppers Death." Here Murray tells the story of Odell Waller who in 1940 shot and killed Oscar Davis, the Virginian white farmer he shared land with, after an altercation over Davis confiscating Waller's wheat crop. Through the Workers Defense League (WDL), Murray became involved in helping to raise money for an appeal after Waller is convicted of first degree murder and sentenced to death by an all white jury of non poll tax payers—obviously not Waller's peers. This takes Murray from New York to Virginia where she had recently been jailed twice for the "crime" of standing up to segregation on the bus just months before. (Murray and her friend MacBean did this together using non-violent direct action techniques that she recently studied through Ghandi's *Satyagraha*.)

Through the WDL in both cases Murray and others tried to bring constitutional rights to bear on Jim Crow in public transportation and the plight of Southern sharecroppers. At the time they lost both battles. Murray and MacBean were fined for not sitting in the “colored” row of the bus. Odell Waller was put to death for premeditated murder despite the fact that the evidence leaned strongly on the side of fear and self-defense as his motives for the shooting. Actively involved in planting the seeds, it would be a number of years before Murray would witness the fruition of justice being served to insure Black people’s constitutional rights. She was there in 1954 when the Supreme Court decision to dismantle legal segregation became law of the land and again in 1966 when the poll tax was eradicated.

To read Pauli Murray’s autobiography is to follow the who, what, where, why, and how of pivotal moments in 20th century race relations. Her encounters with Thurgood Marshall are a good example. She first meets him in 1938 when he considered taking her denial of admission to the University of North Carolina Law School as a test case to go after “separate but equal.” There was renewed hope for the NAACP legal team around suing universities based on the 1935 Supreme Court ruling in the Gaines case: “that the state of Missouri was obligated to provide facilities for legal education substantially equal to those which the state provided for White students or it must admit Gaines to the University of Missouri law school” (p.114). As it turned out Marshall and the NAACP decided that Murray’s case wasn’t strong enough because she was not a resident of North Carolina and they did not want to risk losing on that technicality. Their paths cross again when he came to Richmond, Virginia, to help prepare for the Waller case. Murray’s work with the WDL reactivated her interest in law school and with Marshall’s letter of recommendation she entered Howard University Law School in 1941. Although she

couldn't secure work with the NAACP upon entering the legal profession due to their small staff, she struggled in private practice to continue with civil rights work. In 1951 she published the first comprehensive book on racial laws entitled *State Laws on Race and Color* which painstakingly listed all racial laws and codes which had never before been compiled in one document—746 pages. She was told that Marshall called the book the “bible” during the final stages of the NAACP’s legal attack on “separate but equal.” It soon became dated by all the legislative changes instituted after the Brown decision of 1954. “During its brief existence, however, it helped to further the developments that made it obsolete” (p 289).

Murray characterizes her participation in a way that still resonates with the contemporary struggles we face today.

The events of my final days as a student in Washington climaxed six years of intense personal involvement in the struggle against segregation that had begun in 1938 with my application for admission to the University of North Carolina. If there were moments of deep despair in those years, there was also the sustaining knowledge that the quest for human dignity is part of a continuous movement through time and history linked to a higher force (p. 232).

Any one of Murray’s accomplishments would be an inspiration to students interested in the struggle for racial and gender justice. The fact that she has developed so many sides of herself and her abilities make the study all that more comprehensive and interesting. Her life captures the continual journey, complete with pitfalls and victories at every juncture. She *personifies* historical agency, showing us that each defeat can be transformed into a victory when the vision is clear and principles of justice are uncompromised.

Our purpose in using these exemplary works from Black women’s history is to help students grasp the reality that a society stratified by race, class, and gender demands

that we refocus the historical narrative or we will not get the full story. If we don't get the full story, we can't possibly understand the conditions that define our present and will remain deprived of those examples that can assist us to overcome similar barriers we face today. If we are disconnected to our past, we cannot make sense of the present and remain indifferent toward the future. Hence, we are left with a distorted, one-dimensional history. It was this image of history that inspired historian, James Loewen, to examine how history is taught in secondary schools—the place where many of our young people learn to loathe history.

Clarifying the Distortions, Examining the Silences

Every second Monday in October the university atmosphere buzzes with the perennial debate over celebrating Columbus Day. The university is open, all employees work but because it is a national holiday it sends a symbolic message of value. Native American students and others often use the occasion to make statements about the truth of Columbus' exploits in North America and why he doesn't deserve a holiday. This usually leads to rumblings about the upcoming Martin Luther King Jr. holiday in January by those opposing what they see as displacing one set of heroes for another. Glaringly absent from those who oppose exposing the real Christopher Columbus is a sense of history. Heroes are meant to be worshipped for their great heroic deeds, not analyzed for every little misdeed. There is often the overused phrase "if you don't like it, go back to where you came from" or "where would you be if Columbus didn't discover America?" When a Native American student begins to answer this question the opposition is temporarily quieted. Made uncomfortable for the moment this student may or may not listen to where Native Americans would be without Columbus. What they do know is

that this explanation does not represent the majority of fellow students. And even if it is legitimate that Native peoples cannot celebrate Columbus, they wonder why most Americans have to lose him as their hero, especially in light of the fact that “another race can celebrate their hero and classes are cancelled to do so”. Often the reply to the horrific stories of Native American annihilation at the hands of Columbus and his men is that “we can’t dwell on the past—we have to get over it and move on” (Michigan State University *State News*, Letters to the Editor: October 15, 1997, October 12, 1998, October, 14 1999).

Historian, James Loewen, has made a tremendous contribution toward helping us understand why incoming college students have such a shallow, distorted, and/or absent sense of history. *In Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything your American History Textbook Got Wrong*, (1995) he analyzes twelve of the most commonly used high school history texts and explores several key themes that speak directly to the work we are doing in MRULE. These include: (1) how history as herofication misrepresents the truth, (2) why the history of ideas is missing from the narrative, and (3) why a feel-good “Disney” version of history driven by American progress and optimism rules text books and what limitations this kind of history puts on teachers, students, and the general way we perceive ourselves in the United States of America.

Loewen likens the process of heroization to calcification, a degenerative process that makes people into heroes through myths, omissions and outright lies (p. 19). He demonstrates this formidably with Christopher Columbus by citing a commonly found description of Columbus in the text books and then repeating this description by italicizing the words that there is solid reason to believe are true. This comes down to the fact that he was born, his name, his occupation, his voyage and the name of his three ships, his landing date in the West Indies of 1492, and the fact that he died. Everything

else in the 800-word description, usually with maps and photos is fabricated because much of Columbus' life remains a mystery. We do have evidence through Columbus' diaries as well as the recorded and preserved documents of his contemporary, the first great historian of the Americas, Bartolome de las Casas. The cruelty with which Columbus conducted his violent expedition upon the Arawak peoples is something that mysteriously doesn't make its way into the history books although it is well documented.

In Columbus's son Ferdinand's own words:

[The Indians] all promised to pay tribute to Catholic Sovereigns every three months, as follows: In the Cibao where the gold mines were, every person of 14 years of age or upward was to pay a large hawk's bell of gold dust; all others were each to pay 25 pounds of cotton. Whenever an Indian delivered his tribute, he was to receive a brass or copper token which he must wear about his neck as proof he had made his payment. Any Indian found without such a token was to be punished (p.62).

Loewen explains further:

With a fresh token, an Indian was safe for three months, much of which time would be devoted to collecting more gold. Columbus's son neglected to mention how the Spanish punished those whose tokens had expired: they cut off their hands. All of these gruesome facts are available in primary source material... Most textbooks make no use of the primary sources. A few incorporate brief extracts that have been carefully selected or edited to reveal nothing unseemly about the Great Navigator (p. 62-3).

These historical examples are presented to MRULE students so that we can more accurately represent the multiracial encounters of Europeans and Native Peoples. Of course we refute the idea of a "discovery" of America since a land where people have been living for thousands of years cannot be discovered. As Loewen points out while explaining why Columbus is not celebrated in Mexico as a hero even though there are more Spanish people in Mexico. "Mexico is also much more Indian than the United

States, and Mexicans perceive Columbus as white and European. Cherishing Columbus is characteristic of White history, not American history” (p.70).

Loewen’s chapter on Columbus is full of horrific details of the man and his exploits but Loewen doesn’t advocate a one-dimensional demonization. Columbus’s expedition to the Americas, though certainly not the first resulted in the one with the most impact because of Europe’s economic interests and the military capacity *at that time* to forward those interests throughout the world. Columbus is an extremely important figure to the student of race relations, not for the reasons usually associated with him and certainly not the cause for celebration. Loewen asserts:

Christopher Columbus introduced two phenomenon that revolutionized race relations and transformed the modern world: the taking of land, wealth, and labor from indigenous peoples, leading to their extermination, and the transatlantic slave trade, which created a racial underclass (p.60).

This leads to the second and third themes that speak directly to our work in MRULE: the absence of racism and anti-racism in the teaching of history, and the drive to present America always moving in a positive direction, guaranteeing progress for all. Though Loewen found that the history textbooks he studied now admit that the Civil War was fought over slavery we consistently come upon students who do not have a clear understanding of this. Even as textbooks have improved upon the handling of slavery since the Civil Rights Movement a noticeable silence of its legacies remain: “the social and economic inferiority it conferred upon blacks and the cultural racism it instilled in whites” (p. 143). And perhaps just as harmful as fabricating or omitting details around the institution of slavery is the tendency for textbooks to minimize White complicity in it. “They present slavery virtually as uncaused, a tragedy, rather than a wrong perpetuated by

some people onto others” (p.145). As for the “nadir of race relations”¹⁹, the period between 1890 and 1920 when African Americans were again put back into second class citizenship, ten of the twelve textbooks ignore it. Loewen suggests that perhaps this may be due to the increase of White racism during this period. He critiques the omission and the content-free vagueness that at least one of the texts uses: “The authors make no connection between the failure of the United States to guarantee black civil rights in 1877 and the need for a civil rights movement a century later. Nothing ever causes anything. Things just happen” (p.161).

Perhaps one of the biggest challenges we face in anti-racism education is the lack of understanding on the part of the White majority of the historical roots of racism and their contemporary manifestations and hopelessness on everyone’s part as to what can be done about it. From Loewen’s findings it is no wonder, since not one textbook connects history to racism. One text implied “that it is natural to exclude people whose skin color is different.” He continues:

White students may conclude that all societies are racist, perhaps by nature, so racism is all right. Black students may conclude that all whites are racist, perhaps by nature, so to be anti-white is all right. In omitting racism or treating it so poorly, history textbooks shirk a critical responsibility. Not all whites are or have been racist. Levels of racism have changed over time. If textbooks would explain this, they would give students some perspective on what caused racism in the past, what perpetuates it today, and how it might be reduced in the future (p 145).

As university professors we certainly don’t expect high school history textbooks to do all the work, although Loewen notes that five-sixths of all Americans never take a course in American history beyond high school (p.16) . In the MRULE program we

¹⁹ Rayford Logan coined this term

attract at least half of our student body from disciplines where they study history. The other half groans at the mention of it. Even at the university there is still a chance that students may miss much of what we have been discussing throughout this chapter. Unless they take a special course in African, Asian, Latino, Native American, or women's studies they may not be exposed to "a different mirror" a reconfigured narrative in which they will learn about the multidimensional experiences of diverse Americans. They may know very little of the encounters that brought people together, particularly class interests that at times transcended racial and ethnic barriers. They will be accustomed to a section of Black or Latino history that happens at a certain time of year but unable to see the interconnectedness of all people in U.S. history in the struggle to make this country the great democracy it is so often hailed to be. This is one of the major casualties of the feel good Disney version of history pushed by textbooks. History is void of the struggle of ideas. As Loewen characterizes it history is a "done deal"(p.35).

Another very important area of study that we can be certain students will know nothing about is what historian Richard Thomas has called the "other tradition" in race relations (Thomas 1996). Based on the work of Lerner, Aptheker, Ovington, and others, Thomas asserts that the tradition of interracial cooperation and its legacies are just as worthy of study as is the history of racism and its legacies, albeit that the latter has been the source of countless studies while the former remains a footnote in comparison. Precisely to address this dearth in the literature, historian Herbert Aptheker wrote his last major work: *Anti-Racism in U.S. History: The First Two Hundred Years* (1992). Inspired by a youngster who was shocked to hear that John Brown was White after Aptheker gave a lecture on Brown, he was determined to attack the idea of the universality of racism and

make evident stories of the many Whites who acted upon their belief in the equality of all humankind. In some ways, Aptheker documents “everyday acts” of anti-racism in the 17th, 18th, and mid-19th centuries by profiling those Whites who opposed slavery as well as the racist ideology of Black inferiority that upheld it. He qualifies his focus on Whites throughout the work because this remains an untold story. African American belief in equality and their activism to achieve it has consistently been more prevalent in the literature, although as we have discussed throughout the chapter the continual refocusing of the lens is required so that all players on the scene are brought to light.

Citing works that have examined Black-White relations in the colonial period, Aptheker emphasizes the point that free Blacks and Whites had extensive interactions and built lives together (Sobel 1987, Breen & Innes 1980). Interracial marriages were not uncommon throughout the period before there were laws created to prevent them. It is interesting to note this data in light of contemporary discussions²⁰ of interracial relationships as Aptheker cites several examples of White women/Black men and Black women/White men, choosing to live openly with one another (p.29). In fact he even includes a footnote on Richard Johnson, a member of Congress and vice president under Van Buren, who lived openly with a Black women and had two daughters with her (p.201).

The rising opposition of pro-slavery forces to the anti-slavery movement made interracial relationships increasingly more difficult and dangerous, culminating in the

²⁰ Many of our discussions today point to the imbalance of partner selection with White women—Black men (WW/BM) being substantially more prevalent than Black women—White men (BW/WM). U.S. Census Bureau tracking from 1960 to 1998 shows a definite trend of WW/BM increasing over BW/WM from a 25/26 in 1960 to a 210/120 in 1998. Numbers are in thousands (www.census.gov/population/socemo/ms-la/tabms-3.txt).

violent oppression in the post - Reconstruction years. Aptheker acknowledges this but insists that the whole story cannot be told unless attention is given to those who fought with their lives, minds, pens, talents, and resources for a country free from racism.

In the most personal and private components of human existence, evidence exists to deny the universality of racism in the United States. That such evidence does exist in this area, despite recurrent legislation making miscegenation criminal and despite persistent racist propaganda that permeated every social avenue and institution, points to the artificiality of racism and makes absurd notions of racism's "instinctual" quality (p.35).

Viewed through another lens, historical figures outlined in Aptheker's and Thomas' later works, speak to the notion of historical agency. This is the relevance for the MRULE student. The examples illustrate that human beings act upon social structures to change them. They may be everyday acts demonstrated in interpersonal relationships or they may be the writing of critical theory, the establishment of organizations such as the NAACP, the publication of newspapers and journals dedicated to theory and practice of liberation. There can be no underestimating of the power of any of these figures or their actions on the slow progress we have made towards achieving a multiracial just democracy.

Aptheker cites how French revolutionary Grégoire, through a series of letters to President Thomas Jefferson, ridiculed the notion of Negro inferiority and challenged Jefferson to *think differently*. This may be one of the causes of Jefferson's ambivalence and willingness to admit as he does in the *Notes of Virginia* that slavery is "harmful with odious peculiarities" and he "trembled" for his country when he considered what a just God will do to those who uphold it (p. 49-51). We know that in spite of his "waffling"

Jefferson did not resolve “the American dilemma”²¹ embedded in the Declaration of Independence that he co-authored. How could “*all* men be created equal, endowed with certain unalienable rights: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” as long as some men and women were held as property of others? How could the United States live with itself when such piercing contradictions between words and deeds were in plain view for all to see?

As has been noted throughout this work the Multi-Racial Unity Living Experience at Michigan State University was founded because of the belief that we can inspire agency in young people to recognize, challenge, and transform racism. At the beginning of the 21st century with the “problems of the color line” (as Du Bois had characterized the 20th century) still looming, we are challenged to make the most of the country’s racial idealism and the technological, economic, and geo-political forces that are shrinking our world. Although they may not have developed the tools and lacked the benefit of hind sight, the idealists of the past had a vision of a racially united nation as the following words of Abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison invoke: “If he has ‘made of one blood all nations of men on the face of the earth’, then they are of one species, and stand on perfect equality. . . .By the blissful operation of this divine institution, the earth is evidently to become one neighborhood or family” (*Liberator*, May 7, 1831 cited in Aptheker, p. 32). Those of us who watched the televised coverage of the turn of the century, (or as some say millennium) on New Years Day, 2000 can attest to this remarkable sense of planetary connectedness.

²¹ The term coined by Swedish economist Gunnar Myrdal whose massive study by the same name was based on the moral contradiction between the values of the “American Creed,” (thinking, talking, acting under the influence of high national and Christian precepts) and the values of individuals dominated by personal and local interests, (economic, social, and sexual dominance and exploitation (Southern, p. 55).

Since the onset of the MRULE program we have been concerned about inspiring students with a spirit of activism. Students need to know that, just as they can be descendants of slave owners and slaves, they can be descendants of freedom fighters. We use Thomas' (1996) exploration of the legacy of those who fought for racial justice and the role of interracial cooperation in the 20th century. Similar to Aptheker, the strength of this work lies in its angle, highlighting Whites who stood up for abolition, desegregation, and civil rights by working in partnerships with Blacks. This can inspire both Black and White students who know little about the interracial struggle for racial justice. It can also help dismantle the myth that essentializes all Whites as oppressors. Thomas covers several of these illustrious individuals but in our limited time in MRULE we have selected those that most succinctly capture the courageous, uncompromising qualities needed in an historical change agent.

Sarah and Angelina Grimké were the first two female anti-slavery agents and uncompromisingly fought against slavery and for racial equality. Born and raised in the wealth and privilege of a South Carolina plantation, they left the South as they could not stand to witness the atrocities of slavery. They became Quakers to remove themselves from the contradictions they experienced in the Episcopal and Presbyterian churches in which they worshipped and served. From what they could see, Christian brotherhood was extended only to other Protestants. Black people were of no consideration. While virtue of the highest order was preached on one hand, cruelty and degradation toward the slaves was quite acceptable (Lerner 1967). One of Sarah Grimké's most memorable childhood experiences is when she was caught teaching a slave girl to read and was sternly lectured by her father as to the seriousness of her transgression. To Sarah it made perfect sense—

why shouldn't the girl be able to read the gospel firsthand? As Lerner summarizes it was Sarah's lesson to learn the limitations placed upon both her and the slave child. As a girl it was not befitting for her to be busy with books and it was blatantly illegal to be sharing literacy with a slave. Although she had to obey her father at that point, the spirit of defiance she possessed was fueled by the pangs of injustice she felt. This would remain in her throughout her life and something she would share with her younger sister Angelina.

Angelina and Sarah Grimké did not *only* oppose slavery because it was morally wrong as many Christians, including Quakers were apt to do. They opposed it because they believed in the full equality of their Black brothers and sisters, which many of their Christian brethren did not necessarily believe. They fit well in William Lloyd Garrison's Anti-Slavery Society because they knew first hand that Black people were human beings—their equals. They worked side by side with Black abolitionists, developed relationships, and wrote courageous commentaries on the horrors of slavery based on lived experience. As women they were not always well received or respected in leadership positions and found themselves in the center of the controversy that would split the abolitionist movement between those who thought women's rights should be simultaneously fought and those who wanted to remain focused on ending slavery.

According to Lerner:

Refusing to be merely instruments of the policies of others, they became shapers of events and leaders of a new cause. The controversy they created has, to this day, obscured the remarkable accomplishments of their mission. To some, Angelina and Sarah Grimké would become the women who split the abolitionist movement. To others, they would be the abolitionists who added the cause of women's rights to the cause of abolition, to mutual benefit (p.164).

The Grimké sisters knew that educating White women as to the horrors of slavery would be a necessary step in ensuring its demise despite the fact that women were not making or enacting laws. Speaking to White women's experience and their obligation to use the relative privilege they are afforded Angelina declared:

Women ought to feel a peculiar sympathy in the colored man's wrong, for, like him, she has been accused of mental inferiority, and denied the privileges of a liberal education.

The denial of our right to act; and if we have no right to act, then may we well be termed 'the white slaves of the North' for like our brethren in bonds, we must seal our lips in silence and despair (Lerner, p. 162).

Mary White Ovington was not yet born when Angelina Grimké wrote these words in 1837²² and was fourteen years old when Grimké died in 1879. Ovington was a living testimony to the call to activism that the Grimké sisters labored so tirelessly to inspire among White women.

"What would the Great Emancipator (Lincoln) find if he returned on his 100th birthday, February 12, 1909?" *New York Evening Post* editor Oswald Villard asked in a public appeal and then proceeded to answer: "Disenfranchisement reinstated in the South. The Supreme Court of the land putting its stamp of approval on the discriminatory separation of the races. Lawless attacks on the Negro, in the North and in the South" (Wedin 1998, p. 107). Bringing this reality to the attention of a "large and powerful body of citizens" of New York City were first steps in rallying those interested in finding ways they could address persistent racial injustice and unrest. Mary White Ovington, a social worker long dedicated to the ideals of interracial activism, was central

to the networking that brought a small group together in 1909 to examine the social realities facing African Americans. The conditions she encountered through research on the economic and housing conditions of Black people led her to reach out to the leading Black social scientist of the day: W.E.B. Du Bois. What was to become a long and eventually embattled friendship began in 1903 when she wrote to him about her research and asked him for assistance in starting a Black settlement project in Manhattan. She was sure that to improve conditions for Black people there needed to be strong interracial effort. Although her plans for a settlement house did not materialize she continued her work in the racially mixed tenements and moved into the Tuskegee Tenement in 1908, the only White in the all Black building (Ovington 1995). It was a tumultuous time for race relations with increasing demands for racial justice and heightened violence to maintain the status quo as was seen in the 1910 Atlanta riot. It was also the time when the Du Bois/Washington debates and tension over strategies for Black advancement were prevalent. The timing was right, Ovington thought, to bring the small group of intellectual, political, legal, and business leaders to found an organization that would fight racial injustices on an increasingly more systematic level. Thus the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People was born (Wedin 1998, Ovington 1995).

In 1919 after a tumultuous ten-year growth period, Ovington became Chairman of the Board of the NAACP. Membership reported 56,345 from 220 branches across the country. *The Crisis*, the NAACP's monthly magazine edited by Du Bois went out to

²² *An Appeal to the Women of the Nominally Free States: Issued by the Anti-Slavery Convention of American of American Women & Held by Adjournment from the 9th to the 12th of May, 1837* (1st ed.; New York: W.S. Dorr, 1837).

100,000 readers (Wedin, p.176). She had learned some substantial lessons about how to keep the organization going with so many competing interests on the part of the powerful individuals, particularly Du Bois. As much as she respected him, there were times she held her ground in opposition to an idea or plan she did not think was in the best interest of the NAACP. She also stood up to Oscar Villard who complained about “inefficiency” but did not contribute to assisting since he was not in control. Ovington told fellow board member Joel Spingarn: “I confess that there is one thing since I have been in social service work that has always greatly irritated me--the criticism of work by those who are not actively engaged in it, nor closely in touch with it” (Wedin, p. 161).

By the 1920's, the NAACP had evolved from a mostly White volunteer organization to a mostly Black middle class salaried run organization. Ovington worked closely with the first Black executive field secretary, James Weldon Johnson, one of her most valued colleagues throughout her long tenure in the NAACP. During her twelve year chairmanship, Ovington witnessed increased violence perpetrated on African Americans and brought the gruesome details to the public eye through her many published works specifically; *Half a Man: The Status of the Negro in New York*, (1911) and *The Walls Come Tumbling Down*, (1947). She pleaded with her Black colleagues as they moved into positions of leadership within the organization to not exclude Whites as they would be needed to ensure permanent change. “Why not educate Whites” she argued especially given their “abysmal ignorance.” “Don’t blame people too much for being indifferent to your ills when you don’t ask them to drop their indifference and join you” (Wedin, p. 266).

Like the Grimké sisters before her, Ovington understood the connection between the struggle for Black rights and Women's rights. In fact, following Ovington's activism is a lesson in understanding the intersection of race, class, and gender. She believed Suffragists needed to include working women in their cause, and the male dominated Socialist party needed to support women's rights. According to Wedin, she fought on multiple levels for the inclusion of Black women in the NAACP (p. 182). Even after the falling out with Du Bois, who accused her of hoarding power and secretary Walter White of mismanagement and dishonesty, the organization stood behind her. Charges against either could not be substantiated and Du Bois was asked to withdraw them but he did not. Shortly after this at the February 8, 1932 meeting the Board resolved:

Mary White Ovington is one of the two or three people in whose brains and hearts of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People was originally conceived and out of whose conference and cooperation it was born nearly a quarter century ago. She has served as a member and an officer from the beginning and as its chief executive in the capacity of Chairman of the Board of Directors from 1919 to the end of 1931.

Throughout this period she has given unselfishly and unsparingly of her thought, her active services, and her means, to the success of the Association's work,--and through all this time and years before she interested herself in the welfare of the American Negro. She will abide in our histories and in our recollections as the "Mother of the New Emancipation" (p. 258).

It is the kind of scholar-activism referred to in Chapter one, embodied in Mary White Ovington that continually inspires our social justice work in the MRULE program today. Ovington fought indifference and resistance to change. She had to transcend the impact of powerful individual personalities and egos ever present in the process of social reform. She had to find her place as both servant and scholar in a cause that she thoroughly

believed in but still had the privilege to back off from if she so desired. That she stayed focused and committed throughout her life speaks to the reality that those of us working in the field of race relations know and wish to impart to others. Results take time, the road is often long and thorny, but once traveled, it is difficult to get off, it begins to define the way one looks at the whole of one's life, not for a fleeting moment but for a lifetime.

Studying the life of historical figures like John Brown, the Grimkés, William Lloyd Garrison, Thaddeus Stevens, and Mary Ovington builds the case for more refocusing the lens to look further into the role of anti-racism in the making of U.S. history. Aptheker and Thomas have made valuable contributions to this work but there is much more to do. Thomas takes us up to the middle of the 20th century highlighting the critical work of the Black and White lawyers working for the NAACP. These lawyers include White men such as Jack Greenberg, Moorey Storefield, Arthur Spingarn, and Nathan Margold and an impressive cast of African American lawyers: Thurgood Marshall, Charles Houston, and William Hasties. Together they laid the foundation for civil rights legal history (p. 188). Thomas ends this work with a profile of Esther Brown, a Jewish housewife, who became conscious of the unequal conditions Black children and families endured in their schools and neighborhoods. Brown took it upon herself to appeal for change, including raising money for a lawsuit against the school system, helping with the boycott of the run-down Black school, and the setting up a private school with certified teachers. Not surprisingly she faced intense White opposition and criticism. For them a White person who challenged the prevailing racial status quo warranted harsh reprisal. However, Brown did not back down. She continued her fight through a cross burning, her husband's loss of his job, and a miscarriage (pp. 190-1).

Brown serves as another example of an ordinary person moved to act to change the structures that perpetrate injustices on some while others remain “indifferent and silent.” Aptheker and Thomas have brought these stories to light to provide a balance, and honor the complexity in the historical narrative that we call U.S. history. As historian Howard Zinn sees it:

What we chose to emphasize in this complex history will determine our lives. If we see only the worst, it destroys our capacity to do something. If we remember those times and places—and there are so many—where people behaved magnificently, this gives us the energy to act, and at least the possibility of sending this spinning top of a world in a different direction (1994, p. 208).

MRULE students who stay with the program learn that Zinn’s description speaks directly to us. We set a goal to learn about our capacity and to “behave magnificently.” We often go against the tide by demonstrating in meaningful ways that we can change our thoughts and subsequently our actions. We can at the end of the day make a difference, first in our own lives and subsequently in those in our circles of influence. Studying history has taught us that our work in MRULE does not come out of an empty notion of “political correctness” or a surface rendition of *We are the World*, but a long legacy of heroes and heroines who put working for social justice at the center of their lives, and by so doing changed the course of history.

Example from the Field

History 480—The Training Ground—Learning Why History Matters in Theory and Practice

Even while we were laying the foundation of the MRULE program we knew that the structure of a volunteer, extra-curricular experience would not give us time to cover the material in sufficient depth. Transformation of racial attitudes and behaviors requires

a knowledge base, an understanding of the history of racism and anti-racism, and the role of social reform. To address this we created a companion course that was also a history senior seminar on special topics, designed to equip MRULE students and others with the prerequisite historical knowledge to become student leaders. We ran the first course in the Fall of 1996 and the Spring of 1997. Thereafter, we ran the course every Spring. We went from an average enrollment of fifteen the first year to a consistent enrollment of twenty-five, we try to cap it there. We designed the course with both the history major and MRULE student leader in mind. Several MRULE student leaders plunged in even though they did not have an extensive history background. Over the years, the course came to be called “the signature course” of the MRULE program. This “signature course” represented an important and necessary stage in the evolution of the program. It connected the students to a knowledge base involving a pedagogy of social action (Freire 1977, Greene 1998). The course objectives are reflected in the following course description and structure.

Course Description

As the present generation struggles over multiculturalism, biracialism, identity politics, affirmative action, and perennial racial/ethnic/gender myths and stereotypes, many have lost sight of a need for a unifying vision that incorporates social justice and unity in diversity. This course will examine the historical roots of the present crises in our evolving multiracial society through the experiences of those who have been traditionally marginalized. Through historical events, and analyses as well as autobiographies and individual voices of marginalized peoples, we will look at how these diverse experiences have shaped contemporary U.S. society, and discuss their implications for the future. Students will be encouraged to develop an understanding of these historical processes and to think of themselves as shapers of history, leading to a future where social justice and unity in diversity prevail.

Course Structure

The course was run like a graduate seminar. The majority of the students attending were history majors in their senior year. There was approximately four to eight MRULE student leaders per year. Students were responsible for reading the assigned material—averaging about 80 pages per week. They were asked to take detailed notes of the major points of the reading and hand them in weekly. Their grade was based 50% on their participation and 50% on the midterm and final.

In-class participation consisted of discussions that were faculty guided and student centered. We would provide guidelines for points of discussion in the material and ask them to work in small groups to design questions for their peers that would engender a qualitative exchange of ideas. For example, in breaking down Takaki’s *A Different Mirror*, we would give each group a chapter and ask them to devise a discussion question to pose to another group that would lead to an informative, in-depth discussion. To rally enthusiasm for the assignment, we challenged them to try to outdo one another with thought provoking questions. We required that all members of the group contribute to the discussion, and that they monitor themselves to ensure this happens. We

would find them in other empty classrooms and in hallways, huddled in their groups, grappling with the material, excited about challenging themselves and their classmates. We would listen to their discussions, give input if needed and then float to the next group. When they came back to the large group, we probed further when necessary but often they had done enough ground work to challenge each other sufficiently.

Students grew to accept that they would be active learners in the class or they'd be wasting their time. There were some lectures but they were interwoven with class discussion. There is standard role play exercise we do every year using figures from Takaki's, *A Larger Memory*, (1998). They are assigned one character from the book, asked to read about them and put him/her in the context of what they learned in *A Different Mirror*. They are expected to come to class prepared to engage in a group discussion as their character. This exercise reinforces Takaki's main theme of the work: that a "diversity of voices has contributed to creating a community of a larger memory" as each engaged in the "process of becoming American" (p. 28).

Student Testimonials: Feedback on the Process

The course had become popular with students—many tell their friends to take it. We are pleased that many of them have had such positive experiences, despite the fact that they often complain about the rigorous academic demands. Since we are so often told that the class deeply affected the way they think about our multiracial history, and how they will teach it as history teachers some of their comments are included here. They are taken from the MSU Department of History Course Evaluation Forms, 1998 and 1999.

I am someone who likes to learn the truth and this class shed a lot of light on true history.

Of the ten history courses I have completed, this course is one of the top three in content and applicability to life. In terms of interracial cooperation and the potential for interracial unity, this course is invaluable. The class discussions were well organized and challenging. I do not remember ever looking at my watch, the time went by so fast.

I think the way this class is structured really expands one's mind and perception in our society.

This course was certainly one of the most intellectually challenging course I've taken at the University, let alone within the history department. The subject matter is a refreshing perspective on history that should be included in a university-required general education course—it would prove useful to every student.

Overall this was quite clearly one of the best courses I've had at MSU. Good profs, books, and analyses.

The format was good, as it made students be sure to be prepared for class or look stupid.

Core of the course was radically different from most history courses. After going through it I say it should be a REQUIREMENT for all history majors. American history, not just Eurocentric history but that of marginalized peoples is an important lesson for all Americans.

Through personal conversations with students throughout the years I have been told on several occasions that this course helped them to know how to teach U.S. history in an inclusive, invigorating way. They leave the course convinced that history does not have to be dull and boring, but can reflect the living connections between our past, present, and future. It is satisfying when they thank us for bringing the concept of historical agency to their attention as they enthusiastically find their role in the change process. Furthermore, the course has fulfilled our objective of producing a historical knowledge base, “signature course,” for both MRULE student leaders and history majors interested in how historical knowledge can affect social change.

Chapter Five

Unity in Diversity and the Role of Difference

Re-envisioning and exercising power to bring about social change requires a sense of purpose and vision that encourages us to look beyond what already exists. We must learn to imagine what is possible. . . Taking a long view, seeing the connectedness among all sorts of people, and involving people across race, class, and gender— and beyond—will be necessary to bringing lasting change. Clearly this will not happen tomorrow. But if people do not try to make a difference, “it just doesn’t happen” at all.

Anderson & Collins 1998, p. 514-5

Choosing language to name a project dedicated to promoting positive race relations was and still remains a challenge. Unity, diversity, and difference are contested terms packed with a variety of meanings depending on social and historical contexts. To keep our vision in clear view, it is imperative to show how these terms reflect several pivotal principles in the MRULE as discussed in previous chapters: Social justice, the centrality of race, the persistence of racism, and the intersectionality of mutually constructive social locations (Collins 1998). This chapter focuses on work unity and diversity as complimentary aspects of the process of promoting equity and social justice. The role of difference can effectively serve this process when understood and applied in its complexity.

What to do about difference? This has captured the attention of feminist scholars across disciplines from those who wish to bring difference to the center (Lorde, 1984, Fox-Genovese, 1994, Lerner 1997,) to those who problematize the reality of endless differences (Maynard, 1994, Gordon, 1999) to those who see decentering difference as necessary to disabling essentialist thinking in anti-racist, anti-sexist discourse (Dugger 1995). Wherever scholars fall on this particular “difference continuum,” one common thread can be found in most analyses—the role of hierarchical power relations situating individuals and groups differently depending on the shifting structures of race, class, and

gender (Zinn and Dill, 1997). To understand the multidimensionality of difference in contemporary race relations, it is necessary to understand the range of thinking across the continuum. This chapter will explore this range in some detail. First though, it is necessary to set the discussion on difference in the “both/and” conceptual framework of unity in diversity, building on the works of scholars and activists who have seen the need for such a framework.

Unity in Diversity—the Conceptual Framework

Before creating the MRULE program, I had worked consistently over time with interdependent definitions of unity and diversity. All of my work in the field of race relations had been based on a conceptual framework that posits unity *in* diversity for the purpose of creating equity and social justice. In this paradigm diversity becomes a unifying force.

The term unity usually conjures up an image of sameness. Dictionary definitions of unity list several aspects of the meaning around the process of creating oneness, wholeness, or totality. In a tenth edition of *Merriam-Webster Collegiate* (1993) there are six definitions, each with internal explanations, none that contain any derivatives of the word *same* although oneness and singleness are used. Oneness has been a term I have used in race relations dialogues and course work to explain the anthropological reality of the “oneness of the human race.” I have met with a good deal of confusion and resistance when using the terminology “one human race” or “oneness of the human family.” This occurred primarily because for many people oneness meant sameness; sameness meant being the norm; and the norm for what the human family looked like in the United States was associated with the expectation of being White. This did not define the meaning of

oneness that animated the work in MRULE. Understanding required a continual break down of the terminology.

The first point to consider in conceptualizing unity is to differentiate it from sameness. Building on definitions **2 a** and **3 a** from the tenth edition we have: “a condition of harmony: accord” and “the quality or state of being made one: unification.” These definitions suggest that *difference* and *process* are key components of unity. Harmony suggests the congruent arrangement of different parts in both music and literature. Unification or “being made one” suggests that there is a process in which different elements come together to become one—otherwise there would be no need for “being made one,” that state would already exist. The process of becoming implies motion, change, and growth of diverse elements.

The second point in conceptualizing unity is understanding that the state of being made one is an organic process. Organic means “relating or derived from living organisms” and organisms are “complex structures of interdependent and subordinate elements whose relations properties are largely determined by their function in the whole” (*Merriam-Websters 10th edition*, 1993). Again, we have individual and diverse parts engaging in an interdependent process to become whole.

The third point requires that we look for examples of unity in diversity in the natural world and test our notions. Consider the limbs and organs of the human body. Each part of the body has a distinct function that is necessary for the functioning of the whole. If any part of the body is injured or sick, the whole is affected. The whole—mind and spirit—coordinate the different functions of each part hence the unity of functioning is strengthened by the diversity.

Another illustration is a garden. The most beautiful gardens are the ones that contain diverse flowers and foliage. Each plant may be redolent individually but is more noticeable for all its properties as part of the whole garden in contrast to the other plants. A garden of one kind of flower or one color, no matter how healthy, cannot provide the depth and breadth of beauty than that of a garden filled with a wide variety of plants. The beauty of the garden and each plant's contribution to it is not static but changes through the seasons depending on conditions of water, sunlight, and temperature. It is the diversity that strengthens the unity. This example reflects what takes place in the natural world when there are no hierarchical structures that place any one part above another and as such does not represent the human condition in the social world. It is meant to show what is possible when we conceptualize unity in diversity as interdependent aspects. It illustrates that unity—oneness/wholeness does not depend upon sameness and that diversity does not require divisiveness, but rather unity and diversity depend upon one another to posit a sustainable state of becoming whole.

The process of becoming implies creative action. As anthropologist Ashley Montagu, has so powerfully stated: "The meaning of a word is the action it produces" (1997, p. 517-8). In human societies, that action, also known as human agency is vital to social organization. As discussed in Chapter Two, human beings are not merely acted upon by outside forces but producers of knowledge, structures, and activities that shape their social worlds (Freire 1977, 1998, Collins 1998, Griffiths 1998, Murphy, 1998). Nowhere is agency more critical than in creating human unity in diversity to promote equity and social justice since it cannot be attained without a shared vision of community and participation of all in the process (Chang 1999).

What kind of action gives meaning to the word unity in the social world? How does it remain a living concept that is continually shaped and reshaped to honor the process of diverse elements becoming one? Critically important, what does that oneness look like? We have several descriptors based on visions and commentaries that address these questions: Interdependence, interconnectedness, understanding commonalities and differences in individual and collective histories, mutual cooperation and reciprocity, solidarity, world embracing loyalties and allegiances, and “other-preservation” taking precedence over “self-preservation” so as to infuse vitality into the whole (Martin Luther King Jr. in Washington 1986, p. 625). As King states:

From time immemorial men have lived by the principle that “self-preservation is the first law of life.” But this is a false assumption. I would say that other-preservation is the first law of life. It is the first law of life precisely because we cannot preserve self without being concerned about preserving other selves. Self-concern without other-concern is like a tributary that has no outward flow to the ocean. Stagnant, still and stale, it lacks both life and freshness (Washington, p. 625).

When Martin Luther King Jr. wrote *Where Do We Go From Here Chaos or Community?* (1967) he was grappling with this issue of unity in diversity although he did not name it so. For example, in Chapter Six “The World House” he outlined the present state of humanity’s global reality prophetically alluding to a technological age that will continually bring us closer together in a “large world house” characterized by interdependence.

All men are interdependent. Every nation is an heir of a vast treasury of ideas and labor to which both the living and dead of all nations have contributed. Whether we realize it or not, each of us lives eternally “in the red.” We are everlasting debtors to known and unknown men and women. When we arise in the morning, we go into the bathroom where we reach for a sponge which is provided for us by a Pacific islander. We reach for soap that is created for us by a European. Then at the table we drink

coffee which is provided for us by a South American, or tea by a Chinese or cocoa by a west African. Before we leave for our jobs we are already beholden to more than half the world.

In a real sense, all life is interrelated. 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 (Washington 1986, p. 626).

Throughout this chapter, King discusses the critical need for the elimination of poverty, charging that it is not a lack of resources but lack of "human will" that keeps world poverty alive (p. 624). He calls for nations to come together and realize the futility of war as a means to solving problems. "It is not enough to say, "We must not wage war." It is necessary to love peace and sacrifice for it. We must concentrate not merely on the eradication of war but on the affirmation of peace" (p. 628). He reinforces his long-standing belief in non-violent direct action to continue the global fight for freedom and civil rights by the world's oppressed peoples. Outlining the limitations of both capitalism and communism he calls for a "genuine revolution of values" that honor both individual and collective rights and freedoms.

A genuine revolution of values means in the final analysis that our loyalties must become ecumenical rather than sectional. Every nation must now develop an overriding loyalty to mankind as a whole in order to preserve the best in individual societies.

This call for a worldwide fellowship that lifts neighborly concern beyond one's tribe, race, class, and nation is in reality a call for an all-embracing and unconditional love for all men. This often misunderstood and misinterpreted concept has now become an absolute necessity for the survival of man. When I speak of love, I am speaking of that force which all the great religions have seen as the supreme unifying principle of life (Washington 1986, p. 632).

Over the last thirty-three years since King wrote these words, tribal, racial, economic, and national conflicts continue to plague the well being and security of humankind. Limited loyalties remain deeply entrenched on several battlefields around the world. The horror of the Rwandan and Bosnian genocides in the last decade of the twentieth century reminded us that there is no cap on human beings' abilities to inflict atrocities upon one another. Wielding power for the moment offers fleeting glimpses of hope, followed by ever widening depths of despair in the aftermath of death and destruction. A *vision* of love as a unifying principle for all humanity cannot be dismissed or jettisoned to the realms of fantasy. It is *vision* that beckons us to rise up and demand of ourselves what is in our capacity: to rise in solidarity to uphold human dignity, equity and social justice. All human beings long for and deserve peace and prosperity.

For the past two decades sociologist, William Julius Wilson, has been grappling with a race relations vision of unity in diversity to address the ever increasing problems of the urban poor. His work throughout the 1980's focused on the economic and societal conditions that gave rise to increased poverty, joblessness, crime, family dissolution, and welfare dependency in central cities. Calling upon policy makers to pay attention to societal economic and social reform as well as racial considerations to uplift the conditions of the predominantly Black underclass, he states:

I see little prospect for substantially alleviating inequality among poor minorities if such a workfare program is not part of a more comprehensive program of economic and social reform that recognizes the dynamic interplay between societal organization and the behavior and life chances of individuals and groups—a program, in other words, that is designed to both enhance human capital traits of poor minorities and open up the opportunity structure in the broader society and economy to facilitate social mobility (Wilson 1987 p. 163).

Continuing with his extensive research on inner city poverty, Wilson found increasing joblessness and the decline of real wages producing more entrenched ghetto communities ruled by limited opportunities and social isolation from the larger society. By the time he wrote *When Work Disappears* in 1996 Wilson concluded that an even stronger call for interracial unity was order.

A vision of interracial unity that acknowledges distinctively racial problems but nonetheless emphasizes common solutions to common problems is more important now than ever. . . This vision encourages Americans to see that the application of programs to combat these problems would benefit everyone, not just the truly disadvantaged; to recognize that the division between the suburbs and the central city is partly a racial one and that it is vitally important to emphasize city-suburban cooperation, not separation; and, finally to endorse the idea that all groups, including those in the throes of ghetto joblessness, should be able to achieve full membership in society because the problems of economic and social marginality spring from inequities in society at large and not from group deficiencies (Wilson, 1996 xxi-ii).

The years of scholarship concerned with policies and practices that make a difference in the lives of people on the ground—be they positive or negative—led Wilson to determine that nothing short of multiracial political coalitions, dedicated to the common plights of ordinary citizens adversely affected by globalization, stagnating wages, and job insecurity could address the magnitude and complexities of social inequality. Though he maintains racial inequality is still fueled to some degree by racist ideology, there are global economic forces at work that affect all groups who are struggling economically. Those concerned with the increasing poverty and despair in inner cities must be cognizant of these forces and think strategically about ways to address them. Wilson argues that an emphasis on what people share in common would go much further towards effective social change than continual focus on traditional racial/ethnic boundaries. Too often cultural diversity rhetoric makes general statements about “different values” amongst

groups overlooking the fact that there are cultural values and practices common to all Americans which immigrant and refugee families hasten to adopt in the acculturative process so that they can increase their access to opportunities and life chances (Rumbart 1996). Citing studies that have looked at what people value, what problems they find most pressing, and what policy preferences for congressional action they would like to see in place to address those problems he states:

National Opinion Research Center's General Social Survey since 1982 reveals only marginal racial differences in core values pertaining to work, education, family, religion, law enforcement, and civic duty. Except for affirmative action and abortion, there are no notable differences across racial and ethnic groups on reported strong preferences for congressional action—with overwhelming support for balancing the budget and changing the welfare system, less enthusiasm for cutting personal income taxes and reforming Medicare, and even less for business tax breaks. Finally, there is considerable convergence in views across racial and ethnic groups with regard to policy preferences for solving particular problems, including education, crime, gang violence, and drugs²³ (Wilson 1999, p. 78-80).

This “values” discussion takes on different meanings when it comes to the culture of young people. In their world, there are several places where cultural practices fuse—hip hop music, MTV, and a host of servings from popular culture through popular music, movies, television, food and fashion (Chideya 1999). There is also all the issue of fluid identities where young people choose their identity based on how they feel and express themselves through a range of factors: dialect, dress, music, and “attitude.” (Anner 1998 in Anderson and Collins, p. 562). It would do scholars and practitioners well to consider this data as they shape their thinking around the impact that commonalities and differences have upon creating and recreating culture and the common spaces where diverse people meet.

Wilson builds his case for multiracial coalitions by citing scholarship that shows that the process of collaboration promotes mutual interaction and cooperation. Participants learn from the experience how to promote differentiated and common concerns and interests.

As the Harvard sociologist Marshall Ganz has pointed out, “acknowledging differences is essential to collaborating around common interest. . . It is important not to pretend that we are all the same.” He notes that racial and ethnic groups have important differences, “but these become resources rather than liabilities if we come up with ways to [build] on our commonalities” (Wilson 1999 p. 82).

This discussion, as in all race relations discussions, must be set in the context of the social construction of race as many of these “important differences” are the results of the experiences and conditions of living in a racially/ethnically stratified society and are not essential to individual or groups. On the contrary the value of work, education, family, safe and healthy communities are essential to the well being of all citizens. This is another way to think about unity in diversity.

In the national climate of the earliest years of the 21st century, Wilson may at times feel he is a lone voice in the wilderness. He has made extensive contributions to the study of race and poverty in urban settings. He can explain the causes and consequences of current conditions from the “disappearance of work” to deteriorating schools to hyper segregation in housing. Unlike many scholars who master the study of the problem ad infinitum, he is looking for solutions. His call for strong multiracial coalitions is one that is shared by many who have been working for social justice throughout the post civil rights period. We will look at a few of those examples here.

²³ This is based on data from Hochschild and Rogers to be published in forthcoming book: *NewDirections: African Americans in a Diversifying Nation*, ed. James Jackson.

Multiracial Coalitions

In the heat of debate over the lack of solidarity among women through the second wave of the women's movement, scholar, activist and professional singer Bernice Johnson Reagon called upon women to share space together in a movement that must make room for all.

We've pretty much come to the end of the time when you can have a space that is "yours only"—just for the people you want to be there. Even when we have our "women-only" festivals, there is no such thing. To a large extent it's because we have just finished with that kind of isolating. There is no hiding place. There is nowhere you can go and only be with people who are like you. It's over. Give it up (based on a presentation at the West Coast Women's Music Festival, 1981, reprinted in Anderson and Collins 1998, p. 518).

Reagon confronts racism, homophobia, and the "essential woman" paradigm that posits all women share commonalities because they are women. She doesn't leave it at this juncture but rather calls upon coalition building as the tool for greater solidarity and social change. It's all got to be there—the commonalities, the differences and their ever- changing aspects. The commitment to coalitions has to be one for the long haul and must be understood that it is not necessarily a place of comfort, but one of hard work and relationships that may not otherwise have been sought out (pp. 520-523).

John Anner reports on and evaluates grass-roots labor and community organizing in communities of color. Organizers use several common strategies to build successful multicultural alliances. Knowing that coalitions just don't happen but are the result of hard and deliberate work is a repeated theme. On going education and training in anti-racism, developing leadership capacities and challenging notions of limited community to be replaced by a broader sense of community while engaging in activism together are key

components of these strategies (Anner in Anderson and Collins 1998, p. 554). An excellent example of this came from New York-based Pan-Asian Community Organizer Saleem Osman when he had to educate his constituency about a city ordinance that would allow taxi drivers to refuse to pick up individuals because of their appearance. “That was a law aimed directly at African Americans. So we said ‘no, we won’t support it because it’s racist.’ But first we put together a video to educate drivers. The best way to overcome prejudices between [communities of color] is to work together in solidarity with each other to build unity” (Anner in Andersen & Collins 1998, p. 557).

Similar motivation brought the Chinatown-Harlem Initiative together in the late 1980’s. Historian and founding director of the Chinatown History Project in 1980, John Kuo Wei Tchen, designed the initiative on an experimental basis to bring the African-American and Chinese American communities together to foster greater understanding and mutual cooperation. Through dialogues, networking, and pilot projects centered around the education of each communities history and current issues the Chinatown-Harlem Initiative sought to expand understanding of what it means to be an American and provide the “unifying notion of cultural citizenship in a multicultural democracy” (Kuo Wei Tchen in Brecher and Costello 1990, p. 189-190).

The definition of ‘cultural’ is broad, and can include multiple and sometimes opposing determinations of nationality, ethnicity, gender, race and class memberships. It draws upon difference as well as commonality and helps us to understand the heterogeneity of constructed identities.

Diversity, therefore, should not be understood simply among groups and individuals, but also within individual and group experience. Once this is recognized, deeper connective insights such as the migration experience, the breakdown and reformation of families, the subjugation of cultural “otherness,” or the forging of new shared identities in movements advocating greater social justice, can be understood to undergird apparently “different” experiences (p. 189).

Kuo Wei Tchen posits a critically important component to the unity in diversity paradigm, i.e. the intersection of various aspects of experience that render essentializing any one aspect of the experience, i.e. race or gender meaningless.

The first urban multiracial coalition in the United States has endured for thirty-three years and is still going strong. New Detroit Inc. (NDI) was founded in the aftermath of the 1967 Detroit riots, the most violent in U.S. history, by businessman J.L Hudson and thirty-nine interested citizens—nine who were African American. NDI set out immediately to work on conducting a study on police/community relations. Through the years they have survived through tense race relations fueled by increasingly despairing conditions for poor minorities. Their focus on race and community relations, citizenship and technical educational programming, police relations, desegregation initiatives and economic development has been consistent through the years with a more recent minority focus on youth programming (New Detroit Inc. Annual Reports, 1967 –1999).

NDI was instrumental in taking on the difficult situation of bridging relations between the inner city and suburbs by instituting a series of exchanges designed to foster communication and understanding. The summer camp for primary school children from both city and suburb and the youth leadership training focusing on reducing violence were two successful programs throughout the 1990's. As in most urban areas around the country demographic changes forced organizations to expand their notions of race relations by including people from Asian, Middle-Eastern, Native, and Latino backgrounds as the traditional Black/White binary shifted. NDI has risen to this challenge by instituting cultural collaborative programs from dialogues, to artistic celebrations. Concerts of Color was established in 1998 and is an annual musical event that reflects

and draws in several cultures, emphasizing that the power to change race relations lies within the collaboration among them (New Detroit Newsletters, 1991, 1992, 1998).

As we have been discussing throughout this work, a race relations vision with unity in diversity as its watchword demands that we refrain from either/or thinking and embrace a position that values individuals and groups in a collective whole. It is now time to look at who these individuals are and how they occupy multiple locations due to the intersection of race, class, gender, and nation. How is it possible to reconcile multiple layers of difference in continual modes of change, the capacity to be both the same and different referred to as “the changing same” by Stuart Hall (Lubiano 1997, p. 294)? How does any semblance of unity in diversity remain in tact? Traditional and contemporary uses of difference must be examined. The meaning of difference is poorly served by descriptors such as: (1) Less than and/or other and (2) Non-existent, illusionary as in the popularized term: colorblindness.

The Role of Difference

Less Than, Other

Historian Gerda Lerner argues that the system of patriarchy—institutionalized male dominance over women and children—came about through the process of turning difference into dominance. In her study of the origins of slavery in the archaic state she found that the group to be enslaved had to be marked “other.” This at first was attached to those from different tribes and later developed into a “mental construct” that meant “other than human.” The social relations between men and women were characterized by the oppression of women. Women belonged to men, either fathers, brothers, or husbands and were bought and sold through marriage contracts—their sexuality and reproductive labor was acquired to serve entire kinship groups. If for any reason a woman was

deprived of her attachment to male kin, her value would decrease; she could be sold, traded or killed. “At the very beginning of state formation and the establishment of hierarchies and classes, men must have observed this greater vulnerability in women and learned from it that differences can be used to separate and divide one group of humans from another” (Lerner 1986, p. 77). Before the invention of slavery, the inferior status of women was an accepted state, explainable by “natural” physical differences and weaknesses. Lerner posits that this set the stage for men to dominate women of their own groups and later men and women of foreign groups. Common conquering practices involved men killing men and acquiring women and children as the spoils of war. “There is overwhelming historical evidence for the preponderance of the practice of killing or mutilating male prisoners and for the large scale enslavement and rape of female prisoners” (Lerner 1986, p. 81). Women were the first group of people to be enslaved and their subordination to men, slave or not, “provided the model out of which slavery developed as a social institution” (p. 99). Lerner makes a solid case for understanding how the seeds of categorizing difference as “less than” were planted and nurtured in the psyche of the patriarchal state. There had to be a basis for choosing who and how to dominate. There was a systematic method applied to creating hierarchies that excluded and oppressed the marked “other.”

It is upon this assumption of the inferiority of presumed “deviant” groups that hierarchy is instituted and maintained. Hierarchy is institutionalized in the state and its laws, in military, economic, educational, and religious institutions, in ideology and the hegemonic cultural product created by the dominant elite. The system which has historically appeared in different forms, such as ancient slavery, feudalism, capitalism, industrialism, depends, for its continuance on its ability to split the dominated majority into various groups and to mystify the process by which this is done. The function of various forms of oppression, which are usually treated as separate and distinct, but which in fact are aspects of the same system is to accomplish this division by offering

different groups of the oppressed various advantages over other groups and thus pit them one against the other (Lerner 1997, pp. 137-8).

Creating and dehumanizing the “other” and pitting them against each other became signature practice in U.S. history from the earliest contact among the English settlers with the Native peoples and Africans. Scholars point to several recurring themes most common in establishing the meaning of difference between the English and those they encountered and sought to control in the New World: Christian vs. heathen, civilized vs. savage, industrious vs. lazy (Jordan 1968, Takaki 1993). As the slave trade became a lucrative business institutionalizing slavery into the American way of life, despite Christian sentiments that opposed it, the marked difference of skin color between white and black became increasingly important. Historian Winthrop Jordan discusses several factors contributed to setting Blacks apart.

Virtually every quality in the Negro invited pejorative feelings. What may have been his two most striking characteristics, his heathenism and his appearance, were probably pre-requisite to his complete debasement. Even if the colonists were most unfavorably struck by the Negro’s color, though, blackness itself did not urge the complete debasement of slavery. Other qualities—the utter strangeness of his language, gestures, eating habits, and so on—certainly must have contributed to the colonists’ sense that he was very different, perhaps disturbingly so. In Africa these qualities had for Englishmen added up to savagery; they were major components in that sense of difference which provided the mental margin absolutely requisite for placing the European on the deck of the slave ship and the Negro in the hold (Jordan 1968, p. 97).

One of the best historical examples of how assigned “racial” differences are exploited to mean “less than” and “other” is seen in the experience of Irish Americans. Since the English invaded Ireland as early as 1166, the Irish were looked down upon as “loose, barbarous, and most wicked,” and living “like beasts,” criminal, an underclass

inclined to steal from the English (Takaki 1993, p. 27). Throughout the centuries the English brutalized the Irish and conducted violent massacres to reduce them into submission. With extremely high death tolls, the English had more access to vacant lands. The hatred between the groups continued and was replayed throughout the period of Irish mass emigration to the New World—1815-1920. The labels that characterized the Irish as different, savage, brutish, lazy, drunk, worthless, and fit only for the dirtiest jobs structured their American experience. They fought back with a weapon unavailable to them in the homeland. In the New World they found themselves competing for placement as the lowest of the low with Blacks. They were continually compared, sometimes called Irish niggers (Takaki 1993, p. 150). Determined that they would not be at the bottom of this rung, the Irish developed hatred for Blacks and worked to set themselves apart.

Targets of nativist hatred toward them as outsiders, or foreigners, they sought to become insiders, or Americans, by claiming their membership as whites. A powerful way to transform their own identity from “Irish” to “American” was to attack blacks. Thus, blacks as the “other” served to facilitate the assimilation of Irish foreigners (Takaki 1993, p. 151).

Even though Irish immigrants faced more competition from new immigrants than they did from free Blacks, they were determined to “elbow out” Blacks from every sector they could. Because they were white and could be granted citizenship, the Irish dug in their heels and in the spirit of resistance that they demonstrated against their English oppressors in Ireland formed power bases in cities where they were concentrated. By 1890 this “Green power” soon opened doors in several employment sectors previously closed to them. Entrance into high skilled wage work and the subsequent networking of jobs to family and friends led them to the victory they sought in the North industrial cities: Irish over Black. Fully embracing whiteness and thus learning to erase difference was their ticket out of their racial assignment of white “nigger.” They could only do this

in juxtaposition to Blacks who at the time of severe disenfranchisement, violence, and degradation had the “least ability to strike back” (Roediger 1999, p. 147-150).

These historical examples of “turning difference into dominance” do not engender an attraction for difference and can certainly explain why most immigrants from European ancestry worked so hard to assimilate into whiteness. The erasure of difference was the most expedient way to rise up out of impoverished, restrictive physical and social locations. As has been discussed in Chapter Four this option was not open to Asians, Africans, Latinos or Native peoples. Their fight against the oppressive systems that sought to exclude and otherize them at every turn has made the embodiment of difference integral to our multiracial history. It is for this reason that the rhetoric of color blindness rings hollow, an ahistorical selective ideology that perpetuates the popular myth of the “now more than ever” even level playing field.

Color Blindness

The rhetoric of color blindness has permeated race relations literature, dialogues, and as legal scholar Patricia Williams observes, the racial thinking among Whites. Because legal barriers to housing, jobs, and schooling have been removed, any disparities between groups are perceived to be the result of their own efforts or lack thereof (Williams 1995, Crenshaw 1997). More often than I’d like to recount, I’ve heard the phrase, “I don’t see color” to explain an ideology of racial equality. And although it is used more frequently by White students, it is not uncommon for students of color to use it as they describe their friendships with people from a wide range of backgrounds and struggle to find a language that fosters understanding (MRULE Round Table Discussions 1998-2000). In addition to pointing out that unless one has impaired vision, it is a lie to

say “I don’t see color,” we have to be the bearer of the bad news that not seeing color does not help us move towards racial equality, it in fact serves to perpetuate a racial status quo that conveniently seeks to neutralize race while the structures created by racial assignments continue to thrive (Collins 2000).

The history of colorblind rhetoric is found in the debates around the meaning of the Fourteenth Amendment granting citizenship to all natural born Americans and equal protection under the law. For some Whites emancipation from slavery meant civil and political rights for African Americans but for most this did not translate into social equality (Seigel 1998). Social equality was greatly feared because close association was equated with the “amalgamation”²⁴ of the races, threatening the purity and superiority of the white race. As Supreme Court Justice Harlan of the 1896 *Plessy vs. Ferguson* decision states in his dissent:

The white race deems itself to be the dominant race in this country. And so it is, in prestige, in achievements, in education, in wealth and in power. So, I doubt not, it will continue to be for all time, if it remains true to its great heritage and holds fast to the principles of constitutional liberty. But in view of the Constitution, in the eyes of the law, there is in this country no superior, dominant, ruling class of citizens. There is no caste here. Our Constitution is color-blind, and neither knows nor tolerates classes among citizens. In respect of civil rights, all citizens are equal before the law (*Plessy vs. Ferguson*, 163 U.S. 537 (1896), quoted by Seigel in Post and Rogin 1998, p. 50).

This false dichotomy between legal and social equality was the pillar of the 1896 *Separate but Equal* doctrine which the Supreme Court eventually turned around in the

²⁴ Reva B. Seigel cites Republican congressman during the early days of Reconstruction. “The great source of strife in this matter seems to be the fear of social equality and a personal mixing up and commingling of the races; but. . .it is folly to assume. . .that because a citizen is your equal before the law and at the ballot-box he is therefore your equal and must needs be your associate in the social circle.” *Congressional Globe*, 40th Cong., 3^d Sess., app. 241 (1869) (remarks of Rep. William J. Blackburn), quoted in Alfred Avins, Social Equality and the Fourteenth Amendment: The Original Understanding,” *Houston Law Review* 4 (1967): 640, 644, n. 27.

1954 landmark *Brown vs. Board of Education* when lawyers proved that separate *was not* and *could not* be equal. Legal scholar Seigel points out how throughout these years and still even to some extent today the rhetoric of color-blind constitutionalism serves to maintain a racial hierarchy rather than dismantle it. In this philosophy racial hierarchy is created out of the superiority and inferiority of people who all have equal rights under the law (Seigel in Post and Rogin 1998, pp. 51-3). Law professor and critical race theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw agrees: “The same interpretative strategy deployed to legitimize segregation is now being deployed to immunize the racial status quo against any substantive redistribution” (Lubiano 1997, p. 282). The doctrine of color blindness is at the heart of this matter as it continues to divide public and private spheres reducing racial equality to market forces. According to Crenshaw and critical race theory there can be no “free market of race that determines relationships between blacks and whites. There is no free competition between blacks and whites in part because the law actually structures those relationships across a wide range of societal competitions over certain social resources.” In effect she argues just as race matters, law matters. (Lubiano 1997, p. 287).

Color-blindness is probably one of the more confusing concepts in race relations discourse as many people have been conditioned to believe it is the ultimate goal of racial equality. It is not an easy discussion when it is pointed out that color-blind ideology is more a contributor to the racial status quo rather than a progressive avenue for change. Sociologist Ruth Frankenberg posits that the language around color-blindness—“a mode of thinking about race organized around an effort to not “see,” or at any rate not to acknowledge, race differences—continues to be the “polite” language of race” (Frankenberg 1993, p. 142). Through a series of in-depth interviews with White women on racial matters she notes that several developed “color-evasive” and “power-evasive”

language and thinking as they spoke about race. This meant that they often sought to down play differences associated with race as well as any hierarchical structures put in place as a result of racial stratification. “We are all the same under the skin” or “we all bleed red” captures this mode of thinking. For these women, there was a comfort in the denial of the significance of difference. Frankenberg points out this may happen for a variety of reasons. An effort to distance oneself from essentialist racism—the belief in the inherent superiority and inferiority of racial groups—is one sure motivation for denying differences. Another very prevalent one is the emphasis on individualism that places all people in a unique package of the individual self—totally independent of social forces. This world-view breaks down quickly when it is unpacked. If in fact social forces play no role in shaping that individual self because it has been primarily done in the home and family—that home and family would have to be insulated in a bubble untouched by the social world to have remained unaffected by social forces. This is an absurd notion.

As we have discussed in earlier chapters this belief in the individual self, conquering all obstacles with determination and hard work detached from social structures remains a strong ideological position of many U.S. citizens. We see it played out today in the debate over affirmative action in university admissions as White students try to make sense out of the conundrum that they may not be able to attend their first choice school even with high grades and test scores. Because they believe so strongly that it is all about “raceless”²⁵ individuals competing for spaces in a university where the

²⁵ I use this term to refer to the perception that race has no meaning or impact on individual efforts. “It’s a free country—opportunity abounds for everyone, you just have to work hard and try your best and not wait for a hand out” (Student comments, Michigan State University, MRULE presentations, Fall 2000). This is classic color and power-evasive thinking.

modus operandi is meritocracy, there is great dissonance caused when their hard work and determination does not result in admission to their first choice school. Rather than see it as a social reality that competition for admissions is increasing and diversifying, it is much easier to insist that there are no significant racial differences and therefore no need to deliberately seek to increase enrollment of underrepresented minorities. Many believe this is what the Civil Rights Movement taught and often use the famous line of Martin Luther King, Jr. as he dreamed of “the time when a man will be judged by the content of his character and not for the color of his skin”? In eagerness to achieve this state, the significance of racial differences must be reduced. Herein lies the problem. How do we set our sights on a vision of racial equality without erasing the differences that uphold inequalities? How are Whites to rally around such a vision if they are ideologically pulled in opposing directions—to see or not to see difference?

Frankenberg’s study highlights an important concept that addresses this difficulty. The thirty women she interviewed had very different world-views about race and racism. Thinking about difference was the impetus for much of their discourse. “For some, seeing race differences at all made one a “racist,” while for others, not seeing the differences race makes was a “racist” oversight (Frankenberg 1993, p. 138). As she unpacked the latter, she found that “race cognizance—the importance of recognizing *difference*—but with difference understood in historical, political, social, or cultural terms rather than essentialist ones” was something several women shared. Though these women’s understanding of the practice of race-cognizance may have differed they shared two interrelated convictions: “first the ability to recognize the importance of difference in people’s lives and second, that racism is a significant factor in shaping contemporary U.S. society” (p. 157). For several women, race cognizance was in direct contrast to

color and power evasiveness as it clearly “acknowledges the existence of racial inequality and white privilege and does not lean on ontological or essential difference in order to justify inequality or explain it away” (p. 160). Frankenberg goes on to discuss various ways in which the women came to know these two pivotal points and what they decided to do about, both in individual and collective terms. I highlight it here because race cognizance must be understood at the core of any endeavor to implement unity in diversity. There can be no compromise with this however compelling the argument for “we are all the same under the skin” seems to be. As long as we live in a racially stratified world we are responsible for knowing—being cognizant of— how it became stratified and the structures that maintain it. Similarly, we must know the historical and contemporary efforts made to dismantle inequality so as to not lose sight of a vision where racial equality and justice reign.

Integrating Theories of Difference—Intersectionality

Now that we have explored definitions of unity in diversity both separately and interdependently it is time to move on to an examination of difference from an intersectionality framework. This will further specify how race cognizance applied to understanding and working with commonalities and differences strengthens a “both/and,” unity in diversity approach. Perhaps more than any other structure of analysis in race relations literature, intersectionality helps lift critical issues from dualistic thinking. It empowers all to pay attention to their social location, how and when it changes or remains static, how difference matters and what commonalities and differences can be simultaneously harnessed for meaningful social change.

The term intersectionality was introduced to the literature by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) as she challenged the notions of race and gender as essential

separate categories. She focused on women of color and presented several cases of violence and abuse that were experienced qualitatively *different* because of race and class. Systems of domination converge on these women. Examples include: poor women of color who lack job skills, have child care responsibilities, and face employment and housing discrimination. They have few options and little access to a support system when seeking shelter from battering. An even deadlier plight is experienced by immigrant women who remain in the hands of an abusive husband because of fear of deportation. To some women death in the United States is preferable to the conditions they face in their home countries (Walt 1990).

Centering power relations at the core of this analysis she critiqued superficial discussions of difference and challenged White feminists who were concerned about violence against women to see how race, class, and gender intersected and mutually constructed experience differently. Crenshaw argues that the intersected experience calls for a range of interventions and can be a life and death matter.

The struggle over which differences matter and which do not is neither an abstract nor an insignificant debate among women. Indeed, these conflicts are about more than difference as such; they raise critical issues of power. The problem is not simply that women who dominate the antiviolence movement are different from women of color but that they frequently have power to determine, either through material or rhetorical resources, whether the intersectional differences of women of color will be incorporated at all into the basic formulation of policy. Thus, the struggle over incorporating these differences is not a petty or superficial conflict about who gets to sit at the head of the table. In the context of violence, it is sometimes a deadly serious matter of who will survive -- and who will not (Crenshaw 1991 p. 1282).

The social construction of the racialized experience for Black and White women began in slavery. Black women were constructed to be hyper sexual, sub-human creatures. White women were constructed to be pious, pure, domestic and submissive—

the qualities that made up the 19th century definition of true womanhood (Welter 1966, Lerner 1979). Historically Black women have been the victims of sexual violence as everyday occurrences. In slavery they were forced to provide sexual services for slaveholders on demand. Terrorized by both master and mistress, they were labeled as the licentious “jezebel” that men couldn’t possibly resist (Collins 2000, Dugger 1995). The deadly combination of white supremacy and patriarchy gave White men the permission to construct Black women as un-rapable (Guy-Sheftall 1990). They imposed a highly sexualized, animalistic image upon Black women which conveniently made them ready and willing participants for all men. First, as sexual playthings for the master to exercise power over his property as he pleased, and second as breeders to insure the viability of the slave system well into the future (Jacobs 1987, White 1985, Davis 1971). In contrast were White women who were imaged to be pure and angelic with a highly controlled sexuality, and most importantly needing to be protected from the licentious influence of Blacks, especially the men who were labeled hyper sexual rapists, coveting them. This racist and sexist ideology justified tremendous violence committed to contain Black men and women throughout slavery and legalized segregation, and to some extent still in today’s world. As scholars argue, racial profiling, police brutality, public scrutiny of what’s wrong in America with eyes fixed upon poor Black women, and excessive criminalization of Black and Latino men and women continually reinforce a deeply embedded racism in the American psyche that has strong historical roots (Davis 1997, Collins 1998). Any serious discussion of gender and/or racial equality has to factor in these critically important differences that have shaped and continue to shape day to day experience for people of color. Whether it is violence or abuse, access to work and education, or the struggle for legal and political rights, all women experience these

differently depending on their race, class, sexuality, and nation. There has been a good deal of scholarship throughout the 1990's that builds on intersectionality and makes evident that it is a necessary conceptual framework for understanding the role of difference in building a common struggle for equality. We will turn to some of those works so that we can both broaden and specify the terms.

Relational Nature of Differences

Race, class, and gender differences have not been socially constructed in a vacuum but rather in a social context in relation to one another. Several scholars have critiqued the additive approach to understanding difference by emphasizing this relationality. Historian Gerda Lerner argues that in order to maximize the interrelatedness of men and women in the teaching of history one has to ask “what were the women doing while the men were doing what we are teaching? and, going an analytical step further, how did the women interpret what they were doing?” (Lerner 1997, p. 143). Feminist scholars have posed this question repeatedly as they have sought to expand notions of women and men, race and ethnicity, economic status and sexuality. Elsa Barkely Brown calls for a non-linear approach to the interweaving stories of all women, critiquing those works that acknowledge differences and subsequently ignore them. The only way to get the whole picture is to pay attention to the relational aspects of difference—how the histories coexist simultaneously and in dialogue with one another (Brown 1995, p.43).

The increased labor force participation of white middle-class women has been accompanied, indeed made possible, by the increased availability outside the home of services formerly provided inside the home—cleaning, food, health, and personal services. These jobs are disproportionately filled by women of color—African American, Latina, Asian American. Middle class Black women were hired to perform social service functions in the public sector at the same time that white middle class women

were moving from performing these functions, often as volunteer work, to better paid and higher status positions in the private sector (Brown 1995, p. 43).

Evelyn Nakano Glenn's exploration into the racial hierarchies of reproductive labor clearly demonstrates how race, class, and gender are interlocking systems of oppression in which White middle class women, disadvantaged by gender but clearly advantaged by race and class exploited that advantage in relation to women of color. Rather than challenge the inequitable distribution of reproductive labor placed on them, middle class White women helped to "elaborate the domestic code" and pushed off the "dirty work" to subordinate women. Palmer observes that in the first half of the twentieth century "most white middle class women could hire another woman—a recent immigrant, a working class woman, a woman of color, or all three to perform much of the hard labor of household tasks" (Glenn, 1993 p. 409). White women's relative movement was directly related to the abundance of women of lower status who would perform the work they were responsible for. Similarities among women of color, regardless of the racial/ethnic group or region were built into the hierarchy.

In regions where there was a large concentration of people of color, subordinate-race women formed a more or less permanent servant stratum. Despite differences in the composition of the populations and the mix of industries in the regions, there were important similarities in the situation of Mexicans in the Southwest, African Americans in the South and Japanese people in northern California and Hawaii. Each of these groups was placed in a separate legal category from whites, excluded from rights and protections accorded full citizens. This severely limited their ability to organize, compete for jobs, and acquire capital. The racial division of private reproductive work mirrored this racial dualism in the legal, political and economic systems (Glenn p. 409).

This racialized work made it impossible for White women and women of color to share any universal female experience. This was especially true around the role of motherhood which was severely compromised for domestic workers who were expected to sacrifice the needs of their children for those of their employer. It was commonly assumed by White employers even as late as the 1960's that women of color had extended family that would care for their children, so it was reasonable to expect them to devote themselves entirely to the demands of their desperately needed job. This created an environment for exploitation and there is no indication that middle class White women did not take full advantage of the situation (Glenn 1994).

These historical patterns are why scholars theorizing difference insist that the discussion be centered in power relations. Historian Linda Gordon cautions against the trend to celebrate differences as if they exist in a "lineup of separate identities" (Gordon 1999, p. 46). Perhaps one of the most convincing critiques of multiculturalism are those expressed through alignment with "benign pluralism" an endless array of diverse experiences, labeled "cultural diversity" in a cultural relativistic "anything goes" framework (Maynard 1994, p. 11, 18). Such an approach makes it difficult to see the relationality of difference and clearly decenters power relations. It ignores how "difference and dominance intersect and are historically and socially constituted" (Zinn & Dill 1997, p. 28). This becomes problematic and self-defeating as pluralism suggests co-existence and tolerance but not necessarily interaction and relationship. Perhaps this is why in the popularized diversity discourse so much emphasis is placed upon different cultural components—food, dance, dress rather than historical and contemporary relationships that are built around the normative White and deviant "other" (Miner 1998, Liu 1994). When considering relationships among people, whether exploitative, intimate

or both, theories of difference must take into account relationality or as Gordon describes it “the roles of blacks in making whiteness and the roles of whites in making blackness” (p. 45). Without a relationality perspective we are left with a distorted, limited view of who we are and how we came to be. Using African American women as an example Gordon explains:

African-American women don't only inherit patterns of work, family, childbearing and child rearing that are somewhat different from those of white Americans. These patterns arose in the context of relationship to whites, a context that includes exploitation, domination, fear, and exclusion, but also, often, intimacy. . . . Difference often implies separation, but these relationships frequently involved proximity. A single historical “fact” that can be seen as an artifact of difference—say, that a higher proportion of black women than of white women were professionals in the early twentieth century—was created by relationships between black women and men, between black and white women, between white women and men, between white and black class structures. From this perspective it is a step backward to think about the experiences of white women and women of color, lesbians and straight women, Jews and Catholics and Protestants, rich and middle class and poor, lawyers and service workers, as merely different. These groups have intersected in conflict and in occasional cooperation but always in mutual influence (Gordon 1999, p. 46).

This mutual influence is the key component of the unity in diversity paradigm—the both/and answer to the seemingly paradoxical question ‘how can we focus on difference while espousing unity?’ Mutuality does not require sameness but does depend on the understanding of everyday individual experience and the social relations that give meaning to both the individual and collective experience. As we have discussed throughout this section individuals do not only experience one aspect of their identity. Race, class, gender, sexuality and nationhood intersect and are shaped through continually changing social relations. They construct one another within a hierarchical system that values White over Black, men over women, rich over poor, etc. The problem

is not differences per se but the greater/lesser value placed upon them. For unity in diversity to function, we need to deconstruct the false value system that created and maintains this hierarchy. We must also reconceptualize between the two extremes—one which posits that there are endless differences and no meaningful commonalities—the other which upholds a false universalism, constructing imagined similarities because of any one common experience. Gerda Lerner calls for a “multi-layered approach.”

We must ask not only what is unique about a particular group, but also what this group has in common with other, comparative groups, keeping both the particular and the general in perspective. The key to such an approach is to understand that people do not define themselves by a single identity but by a number of interacting identities and that the various aspects of people’s identities which are being manipulated by the systems of dominance are interconnected and mutually constitutive (Lerner 1997, p. 191-2).

The benefits to such a reconceptualization are wide spread for all. Several scholars have addressed this as they try to breathe life into the meaning of inclusivity and community building. (Jordan 1992, hooks 1998) There is no victory in leaving anyone out of the loop.

In summary, an intersectional analysis provides the framework to see difference as multifaceted, socially constructed, continually changing over time and in relationship to other differences. Difference has historically been embedded in power relations, a system of domination that created a “norm” (originally white male property owner) and “deviant other” (everyone else) and assigned greater and lesser value to individuals and groups depending on their relationship to the norm. This structured access to resources and opportunities for all—in general, the “norm” and those closest had the most access, those marked “other” were excluded through a wide variety of legal and social practices. Intersectional analysis does not prioritize one form of oppression over another but rather

sees them in relation to one another in mutually constitutive ways. Hence someone could be both privileged and oppressed simultaneously as “the intersection model unsettles the notion that discrete and separable identities are based on the fixed divisions of race, class, and gender” (Dugger 1995, p. 145). An intersectional approach does not minimize any one aspect of an individual or collective experience. Rather it ensures that all aspects are considered and that the salience of any one aspect over another is historically and socially contextualized.

Example from the Field—How it Works in MRULE?

The MRULE program at Michigan State University has been an excellent laboratory to test out the conceptual frameworks discussed above. A university environment with 43,000 + students, 77% who are White, 8% Black, 4% Asian-American 2.5 % Latino, 0.6 % Native and 6.4% International is a ripe environment for “benign pluralism” to thrive (Michigan State University Office of the Registrar, Fall, 1999). For many students, the college experience is the first time they have the opportunity to interact with students from diverse racial, economic, or national backgrounds. Diversity as an exotic “spice to liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture” (hooks, 1992, p. 21) has become an accepted motif on the campus. In conversations with students in classrooms I have observed that diversity is welcome as long as the discourse around it does not raise unpleasant issues such as structural inequality, white privilege, or affirmative action. It should be delivered in manageable dosages and not be “shoved down our throats” (MRULE--ATL presentations, Fall 2000).

The MRULE’s guiding principles of unity in diversity driven by a vision for social justice cannot meet the needs of those looking for programming centered around diversity as the spice of life. The demographics of the university, the predominant racial

thinking around controversial issues like affirmative action, and the continued segregated social climate create a fair amount of confusion and hostility even before students hear anything about the MRULE program. We are presented with a pivotal challenge in MRULE. Since we have 'multiracial' and 'unity' in our name, we are expected to be a diversity group benignly acknowledging differences while celebrating all that we have in common. Our strong emphasis on race cognizance stirs up a good deal of consternation in an environment where color and power evasiveness reign. We are not as popular as we could be if our agenda was less concerned about racial matters and more satisfied with celebrating diversity. The following example from the field demonstrates what a sample of students (predominantly White) said to us when presented with challenges to their racial thinking.

During Fall semester of 2000 MRULE student leaders and I were invited to present our program to several sections of the introductory required writing course entitled American Thought and Language. We presented to eleven sections out of the over one hundred offered. Seven sections were the Evolution of American Thought, two were the American Ethnic and Racial Experience and two were America in Public Thought. Professors brought us in because of general interest in our subject matter as well as to help them discuss difficult racial issues that came up in the course. We noted some troubling factors that it made it difficult for us to attract genuine interest in our work.

1. In every class, out of 20-25 students, with the exception of the two sections specializing in the Ethnic/Racial experience, there were no more than two or three students of color. Some had less. This made it impossible to have a meaningful discussion that spoke to issues faced by students of color because a few confident White students tended to speak for everyone. We noticed consistently that when there was one or two students of color, in all but two cases, they did not speak at all. During the affirmative action part of the discussion consistent complaints were expressed over their understanding that minorities are given unfair advantages. They repeatedly said: "There is no need for such a program, race should be removed from all applications, how can we go back to a system where race matters?" We asked them to take a look around the room and notice who was in the classroom and who was not, and to consider how these advantages were playing out at Michigan State University with such percentages as 6% African American, 4% Asian and 2% Latino.

2. Engaging students in discussion with race as a focal point was difficult. There was obvious discomfort over the centrality of race accompanied with disbelief that a program such as ours could possibly make a difference and change anyone's views.
3. There was no understanding of existing inequalities and a good deal of resistance towards discussing power relations—diversity meant controversy over affirmative action and other unfair practices targeted at minorities that leave Whites out of the loop. This came up repeatedly with two examples: (1) The recent Black Power Rally on campus brought concern—what if we tried to have a White Power rally they asked? and (2) The very existence of the Black caucuses in the residence halls as exclusionary and preferential. If Whites had caucuses it would be considered racist they say repeatedly despite the explanation that the entire campus and the majority of its organizations are designed for Whites.
4. Meritocracy was accepted as the predominant determinant for access to opportunity. Individualism was the reigning philosophical framework. Although in one class, a student was sure that it was the luck of the draw—game of chance. Mary Maynard describes this as a characteristic of pluralism and captures what is the major stumbling block in breaking through the resistance to other possibilities for explaining the social world.

Under pluralism, differences in access to resources or life chances etc. become largely explicable in terms of personal culpability or luck. The possibility of offering more structured socio-political explanations disappears, except in a localized sense, because these, necessarily, must be rooted in generalizations which cannot be made. There is, therefore, the danger of being unable to offer any interpretations that reach beyond the circumstances of the particular (Maynard 1994, p. 18).

A prevailing view in every class we visited was that students could only speak about the world according to their high school or hometown. Of course this is to be expected to some extent, since we were dealing with almost entirely with freshmen and sophomores. However, it takes on an extreme form when students constantly hold on to their local world, unwilling to broaden it even though they no longer live there and are presently dealing with a new set of circumstances on campus. It is precisely for this reason that we work so hard to offer all students an alternative learning community in MRULE but is precisely because they want to hold on to their comfortable world view

that they resist. As has been stated in Chapter One, the high degrees of residential segregation that students experience before coming to Michigan State University shape their world views and offer few opportunities to challenge the status quo.

Of all the presentations made there was one incident that stands out above them all that deserves mention. I had presented the introduction to MRULE and proceeded to ask for questions, encouraging controversial ones. Inevitably affirmative action came up. I defined the terms and presented to them a philosophical position that MRULE has adopted this year as we conduct affirmative action teach-ins. Inspired by the expert report of historian Eric Foner²⁶ for the University of Michigan law suit, we adopted the motto: ***You cannot have an intellectual discussion about affirmative action unless you know the history.*** MRULE Student Leaders created a timeline from 1619 to the present to show periods of history that demonstrated who was getting rights and freedoms and who was not. The timeline highlights the years when Black people were included in the rights movement—eleven years during Reconstruction and the thirty plus years since the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts of 1964 and 1965. Despite my presentation around these themes, there were strong voices of resistance, coming from a few White men. One insisted that merit was all that ever ruled this country and all that continues to determine who should have access to what. Others questioned how we could justify one form of discrimination—affirmative action— while other forms have become illegal. I had answers for them all and I continued to explain using solid historical and sociological data. But nothing I said was as powerful as when one of their classmates, a White male burst out with a story that exposed the fallacies of the meritocracy argument.

²⁶ See <http://www.umich.edu/~urel/admissions/legal/expert/foner.html>

I've been sitting here listening to this and I don't believe you guys are serious. I know what she is talking about when she talks about White privilege because I have it. I didn't work that hard in high school and I'm not working that hard now and I'm here at Michigan State nice and comfortable. And I know when I'm ready to leave here I'll have plenty of opportunities to do what I want to do. This summer I had the chance to work in the city, a place with all Black workers and I got to see first hand what they have to deal with—these were things I've never thought of. I saw the job discrimination, the treatment, getting stopped by police for driving, etc. Whites deny this because they don't have to enter this world. Once you see it, you understand. You think there isn't such a thing as racism still in existence? My uncle hooked me up with a job as an electrician's assistant. I didn't know what I was doing and the Black guy (who had been there for years) came and showed me so I wouldn't electrocute myself. When I found out that I was getting paid more than him, it made me sick. I'm not from a super wealthy family and I see everyday the privileges I have. We should stop lying about this.

Of course I wanted to package this young man and take him with me on all my future presentations as his experience demonstrated how critical race cognizance was to meaningful discussion. I noticed a distinct difference when he was speaking. A few of the men, who questioned my agenda, seemed to give him the benefit of the doubt. All in all the experience was productive, because there were some students who did pick up on the material and began to process it. I left feeling both drained and exhilarated. Drained because of the constant denial and arrogance that White privilege bestows and exhilarated because there was someone who admitted having it and possibly using it the future to expose how and why race still matters.

Although in total we did not leave the ATL presentations with too many new recruits to the MRULE, we did demonstrate an important principle despite the degrees of resistance. The process of creating unity in diversity is just that: a process that takes time and attentiveness. Learning the history, understanding social forces, and being able to engage in open and frank dialogue in a diverse group where experiences are different

make it possible. If I had more time with this group, much more would have been shared that would have engendered relationship building that would make it difficult for people to walk away indifferent. For this reason, I have dedicated a considerable amount of time into creating an MRULE environment that would allow for the development of genuine relationships. To this chapter we now turn.

Chapter Six

Durable Bonds: Exploring the Dynamics of Genuine, Authentic Interracial Relationships

Friendship. We know it when we feel it but we can spend years trying to put it into words.
Letty Cottin Pogrebin, 1987

Even though I had studied race and worked on a study of social class identification, it was not until I met Elizabeth and Bonnie that I first began to see clearly the connections between my work and my self.

Lynn Weber, 1997

It was Ruth Frankenberg's "profound connection" with a woman of color that propelled her on her journey to discover White women's role in the reproduction of racism (1993, p. 4). This caught my eye because I have been interested in exploring the depths of interracial, non-romantic²⁷ relationships throughout my career. I was struck with how Frankenberg's relationship opened doors of understanding that seemed closed to her and her friends as they struggled with the new revelations of racism in the feminist movement. I am convinced—and Frankenberg is a great example, since her work has contributed immensely to the field of race relations—that genuine, authentic interpersonal relationships across traditional racial lines have transformative power that if harnessed can truly impact the racial status quo.

"Engaging oneself at the personal level is critical to this process of thinking inclusively. Changing one's mind is not just a matter of assessing facts and data, though that is important; it also requires examining one's feelings" (Andersen and Collins 1998, p. 17). Sociologist Barbara Laslett dedicated a considerable amount of her life's research to the role of the relationship between the objectivity and emotion. She was convinced at

²⁷ Non-romantic because I want to look at those qualities other than sexual that bring people together to become genuine friends, not just acquaintances or colleagues.

the onset that the latter had little or no importance in sociological inquiry but discovered something very different through several years of intense study and personal experience.

I came to see the sociological relevance of emotion, gender, and sexuality to issues of human agency and social action. Furthermore, I saw a need to move away from explanations that favored structural forces *or* human agency and be more attentive to their intersections (Laslett 1997 p. 64).

Human beings are social creatures. We engage in critical thinking, learn new things, and explore a range of feelings in relationships with others. Most people accept this without blinking an eye. There is much less thought given to *who* we interact with and to what degree we benefit from going out of our socially structured world to someone else who experiences the world quite differently. We cannot learn to think inclusively if we only think in circles of people who look, act, and experience life like as we do. And yet, the vast majority of the friendship literature does not concern itself with this.

Friendship Literature

For several years I have been interested in interracial relationships and their impact on changing the racial status quo in day to day experiences. I have tried to keep abreast of the literature in the field and have always experienced frustration when I put the key words ‘interracial friendships/ relationships’ into the electronic journal databases. Interracial friendship comes up with no matches, interracial relationships show well over a hundred articles, with the vast majority describing sexual interracial relationships from miscegenation to multiracial identity. At the time of this writing, interracial friendship does not seem to be a research topic attracting interest. There are two immediate problems caused by this void. First, it erases race as a lived experience that has an effect on friendship formation and maintenance. Second, and even more detrimental, when race and

ethnicity are not considered, an interesting thing happens. All the research subjects just so happen to be White.

Even as Frankenberg and other White feminists have worked to eradicate the color evasion prevalent in their respective fields, there remains much ground to cover. Literature in the sociology of friendship is primarily representative of the experience of White women and men, of various socioeconomic backgrounds. These studies reinforce the erroneous and counterproductive thesis that White people are the norm by which social phenomenon is measured and understood (Allan 1979, Gouldner & Strong 1987, Blieszner & Adams 1992, Duck 1994, Adams & Allan 1998). Several of these writers have studied friendships throughout their careers and made slight changes in their analysis to give mention to race in their later works, but do not discuss race with any depth and do not consider interracial friendships as a category of analysis. They do, however, spend a good deal of time on friendship across class, gender, and age. In fact there are two publication series on relationships, neither which contain any work on interracial friendships. *The Sage Series on Close Relationships* has sixteen works and the *Guilford Series on Personal Relationships* has eight works. In both these series, gender has salience as does age, marital status, sexual orientation, and family relationships. One work in the Guilford series deals with intercultural communication based on ethnographic data collected in Bogotá, Columbia. The author mentions racial stratification in connection with the development of an “elaborate code of class defined behavior” (the more Spanish lineage a person had, the higher class he or she was in, the more indigenous, the lower) but does not

deal with whether or not anyone crosses these hierarchical boundaries to develop meaningful relationships (Fitch 1998, p.19-20).²⁸

Perhaps the greatest disappointment to me in reviewing the friendship literature was found in a more recent edited work entitled *Placing Friendship in Context*, (Adams & Allan 1998). I was sure that by 1998 no scholar could ignore the social context created by racial stratification. Other than quoting Stack (1974) and Liebow (1967) who describe friendship among poor Blacks in their classic studies: *All our Kin* and *Talley's Corner*, the only clear statement about race comes in the epilogue.

Most importantly, the impact of ethnicity on friendships and other informal ties is noticeably absent in the essays included. The existence of racism in all its forms is clearly of consequence in framing informal solidarities, just as, more positively, ethnic identity and commitment are also likely to influence the overall construction of friendships. Outside childhood ties, sociologists have in the main failed to analyze at all fully how ethnicity affects informal solidarities, or indeed how informal relations of friendship help sustain or counter wider divisions, be these between Protestant and Catholic in northern Ireland, Afro-and Euro-Americans, or Asian and white British (Adams & Allan 1998, p. 185).

Although acknowledged at the end of their book, the omission of race as an analytical category remains a tremendous opportunity missed. It is at the same time a call for serious work to be done. This void in the research is particularly glaring when it comes to studying friendship development among college students. In an earlier work Adams and Blieszner use a network analysis to understand a variety of adult friendships—college students as one of the many they look at. Network analysis expands the focus from the friendship dyad to larger societal contexts. According to them:

²⁸ This is not a critique of the quality of research per se. The reason these authors do not deal with the interracial aspect is clearly because it is not included in their research question. My critique has more to do with why it does not occur to researchers to bring race to the forefront as they do class, gender and age.

Networks have many structural dimensions. In this book we discuss only the basic structural characteristics of friendship networks. In addition to degree of hierarchy, homogeneity, and solidarity, these include the number of participants (*size*), the proportion of all possible friendships that exist among members (*density*), and the patterns of connections among an individual's friends (*configuration*) (Blieszner & Adams 1992, p. 9).

This becomes problematic when looking at the ever-changing demographics of U.S. college campuses over the past three decades. These authors claim that college students may have more homogeneity on the dimensions of class, age, and race than their young adult counterparts that do not go to college.

Knowing about the structure of the friendship networks of college students is thus not the same as knowing about the friendship of young adults in general. Compared to other young adults college students probably have larger, more homogeneous, denser, and more intimate friendship networks. Nonstudent young adults may, in fact, have networks that resemble those of mature adults more than they resemble those of their age peers enrolled in college (Blieszner & Adams 1992, p. 43).

This analysis assumes that mature adults are engaged in more heterogeneous friendship networks, which their own body of research does not support. It ignores the social phenomenon of racial residential segregation that has remained entrenched in cities and suburbs throughout the country, which significantly limits the possibility of developing interracial friendships (Orfield 1997, Feagin & Sikes 1994). They do not discuss the well publicized increased efforts on the part of public and private institutions of higher education to open doors to those who have been historically and systematically excluded by implementing affirmative action in admissions programs, thus creating more heterogeneous campuses. And there is no mention of the persistence of racial/ethnic animus among a range of sectors of U.S. society that tends to make forming friendships

with someone perceived to be the “other” less likely. I would argue that genuine interracial relationships come hard in all sectors. However, the U.S. college campus, even with its emphasis on same group organizations, be it the Greek system, racial/ethnic support groups or the gay/lesbian alliance, provides a unique opportunity to encourage the development of meaningful and genuine interracial relationships. Sociologist Troy Duster has studied the increasing diversity on the University of California Berkley campus and offered this insight.

We asked Berkeley's students and they told us. First they gave us the Don'ts. Don't, they said, try to fix things by putting us through three-hour sensitivity sessions designed to raise our consciousness about gender or racial issues or homophobia. Those are too contrived and short-lived to make much of a difference. And don't force matters by asking different cultures to party together. Black students told us Whites are too busy drinking to want to dance up a storm. White students said Chicanos and Blacks would rather be raucous than sociable. The perfectly integrated, all-university "We Are The World" dance party is a bad idea, all sides told us, mainly because we don't all like the same music.

What then, did Berkeley's diversity seekers remember as their most positive experiences when they reflected on their four year here? Again and again, they would describe the time when an instructor had the class break into groups and work on joint projects. Engaged in a collective enterprise, they learned about other student's ways of thinking and problem solving, and sometimes they found friendships forming across the ethnic divide (Duster 1991, p. 64).

Seen through the lens of scholar/activism as the MRULE program does, these relationships must be based on race cognizance rather than evasion (See Chapter Five). Despite the Berkeley students' distaste of multiracial dance parties MRULE has made some slow progress toward creating them. Engaging in community service, activism, and taking trips together are also activities that have engendered the development of

meaningful relationships. The university racial climate (created by administration, faculty, and students) would have to be supportive of a variety of efforts to increase the likelihood of meaningful interracial interaction. However in most cases, this would mean a significant conscious effort to navigate an increasing complex racial/ethnic landscape. It is unfortunate that the process of going the extra mile to work through the structural and personal environmental barriers created by racial stratification has not caught the attention of those who study the social phenomenon of friendship.

A notable exception to this repeated omission came from feminist writer Letty Cottin Pogrebin in her 1987 exploration of adult friendships: *Among Friends: Who we like, why we like them and what we do with them*. Using observation, interviews, and information from surveys, studies, polls, and diaries, Pogrebin describes friendship in its many complexities. She dedicates two chapters to the social context of race and ethnicity and the impact they have on friendships. The first chapter looks at friendships within a racial/ethnic group and discusses friendship cultures from Black, Latino, Asian, and Jewish perspectives. Though these perspectives are not representative of all people who share a similar racial/ethnic background there is much in the accounts that rings true. I have selected three perspectives that are helpful in understanding some of the friendship needs that come out of lived racialized experiences. This is from an interview with a Black psychologist.

Middle class Blacks have to be tri-cultural: We have to be sensitive to the white world, the Black world, and the class issues in both worlds. Take my schizophrenic reaction to being confronted by a wino or some other antisocial, threatening looking Black man in the street. I have three simultaneous responses: One, I'm ashamed because I see him as white people see him—as a living stereotype; two, I'm angry at white society, which is in many ways responsible for his condition; and three,

I'm angry at the man because I think you should work hard and do better even if the odds are against you. When I'm with a Black friend, I can express any of those three responses and my friend will understand that the one I show isn't my only one. A white person would misinterpret and oversimplify my reaction and thereby distort it (p.168-9).

A Chicana academic:

Our friendships reflect the we/they feelings that most of us have in the United States. Chicanos are a racial ethnic group, a people of color who have been colonized. We need ethnic friendship for cultural regeneration, for like-self affirmation of our roots, sometimes even for survival. Our *compadrazgo* system provides for godparents and co-parents, who have more social than religious significance. They are friends who will take care of you and your children in times of need when the rest of your family can't. I am a scholar and a modern woman, but in a crisis, what matters to me is being Mexican and having compadres (p. 174).

A Chinese American bartender:

The big difference is how much blood and geography counts to us. One of the first things we know is that we are part of a group related to other groups. For the Chinese to feel comfortable, they want to know where you stand and where they stand. The word 'friend' is much too simple for these relations. Our first responsibility is to our family, then our extended family, then our village relations, then occupational brotherhoods. Also, if two people have the same last name there is automatic warmth and obligations between you. I can ask a member of my clan for anything; they know I will bend over backwards for them. Because Americans consider themselves not as members of a group but as individuals, they see only our obligations, not the pleasure of belonging (p. 179).

The key to listening to these accounts is to gain a better understanding of the complexities of friendship and to challenge the notion that White friendship patterns are the norm. The formation of genuine interracial friendships will be impossible if it is not understood at the onset that racialized experiences color the world differently depending on where one falls

on the racial hierarchy. Pogrebin summarizes this by introducing the concept of “pluralistic friendship” which she defines as an “ideal that celebrates *genuine* differences arising out of life experience and culture but rejects *socially constructed* differences resulting from stereotypes or discrimination” (p. 187). This serves as a lead in to her subsequent chapter on “crossing friendships” (p. 190). Here she discusses some of the complications in interracial relationships, the push/pull factors between having a genuine friend of another background, yet desiring connection with one’s own group and not wanting to compromise a sense of loyalty. She explores the difficulty in reading cultural signs when one person has one set of meanings attached to an action while the other person has a different set? Citing the example of a new Spanish immigrant psychiatrist and a Black female colleague:

When we first went out for meals together, my impulse was to pay for both of us. It wasn’t that I thought she couldn’t afford to pay; we were equally able to pick up the check. It was just that the cultural habit of paying for a woman was ingrained in my personality. But she misconstrued it. She felt I was trying to take care of her and put her down as a Black, a professional, and a woman. *In order for our friendship to survive, she had to explain how she experiences things that I do not have to think about* (p. 200). (emphasis mine)

This last statement is loaded with insight and must be continually unpacked in genuine interracial relationships. Although she does not give it extensive attention, Pogrebin mentions the existence of racism as a barrier to the development of friendships and uses the chasm between Black and White feminists and their concerns as an example. “Some doubt that true friendship is possible between the races until institutional racism is destroyed” (p. 201).

In a similar vein social critic Benjamin DeMott (1995) has written a book severely critiquing what he calls “friendship orthodoxy” in American race relations. He argues that White Americans have found great comfort in the “we are all the same under the skin” ideal, using it to perpetuate the myth that racial equality has been for the most part achieved, driven by White America’s ability to conquer their historical racial animus towards Blacks and thus “get along” (p. 53). DeMott indicts this ideology because it ignores history and politics and reinforces the false notion that once legal barriers were removed the playing field was equalized and hand in hand White and Black dismantled racial and social stratification in the United States. Though his arguments concerning the role of history and politics are critical to any serious destruction of institutional racism as the quote above calls for, he often finds himself in an “either/or” paradigm. He does not consider that it is quite possible to study history, sociology, literature, and public policy while developing genuine interracial friendships and that the outcome of both of these processes may be effective social change agents. Also omitted from his analysis is the impact that genuine interracial relationships have had upon scholars, particularly Whites, who have dedicated their scholarship to dismantling racial stratification. DeMott misses the point because he dismisses the possibility that two processes can develop simultaneously. He is correct to posit that developing interracial friendships alone cannot be a “solution” to racial inequality. But in this analysis he fails to see that there is a connection between individuals and the social institutions that they create and perpetuate. The development of authentic interracial relationships based on race cognizance rather than color and power evasion, albeit through several obstacles can have an effect on dismantling institutional barriers. Again it not an either/or scenario but rather a both/and—

genuine relationships can be formed and developed while combined efforts towards transforming institutional racism are at work.

We have had seen some examples throughout history that are worth noting and will be discussed in the latter part of this chapter. We will now turn to an explanation of what is meant by genuine, authentic interracial friendships.

Genuine Relationships

A genuine, authentic friendship is one in which both parties have mutual attraction to one another and get mutual satisfaction from the relationship. Both parties are able to influence the other and no hierarchy of characteristics sets them apart in a superior/inferior construct, whether conscious or unconscious. Both have permission to communicate frankly and openly, taking care to be kind and considerate, but not obligated to maintain an always-pleasant veneer. Both are committed to ensuring the well being of one another and consequently have a trusting bond that creates and maintains safety and security. They can make mistakes with one another and be given the space to grow and learn from those mistakes. They can make sacrifices for one another without jeopardizing their own person, because they know their friend will be looking out for them and not expect or desire unbalanced self-deprivation. Of critical importance, genuine, authentic friendships can endure through a lifetime of trials and ordeals. Though each individual may have grown and changed dramatically, they are connected to one another in mutual love and respect that grows and develops with them.

Genuine, authentic relationships are developmental in nature. It is important to understand the social contexts in which they thrive as well as those contexts that prevent them from becoming truly authentic. Residential segregation and social isolation has

made the development of authentic interracial relationships a great challenge demanding conscious and affirmative steps be taken if there is any hope of affecting the status quo. Simultaneously, in the United States the increasing multiracial landscape coupled with geographical and social mobility, displaces the notion of a monolithic community of any one racial or ethnic group that behaves in predictable, uniform patterns. We must therefore make adequate space for a wide range of diverse peoples and relationships that have and continue to develop in the human experience. Some people are content to tolerate a certain degree of interaction but avoid building genuine relationships. Others are interested in transcending barriers but lack the skill, confidence, and courage to plow through personal and group histories where mistrust and misunderstanding have dominated relationships. Many are occupied with survival and self-preservation and unmotivated to reach too far out of their comfort zones. And still others may perceive themselves involved in a mutual friendship while the other party has quite a different perception and subsequently the relationship remains superficial and disconnected. How does a truly genuine relationship develop out of these variables?

Genuine Relationship Continuum

The friendship literature is consistent about the fact that friendships come in many forms and develop through stages from casual acquaintance to companion/buddy/pal to true friend (Allan 1979, Pogrebin 1987, Blieszner & Adams 1992). As has been stated above, there is not enough research about the interracial aspect of friendship to derive definitive explanations about how they may be similar and different from the homogenous examples used in the studies. Through the years that I had been working in race relations I found it necessary to design educational programming that looked at both structural and

interpersonal forces. This was especially helpful with the public and private sector clients that I consulted with. They were looking for a way to understand some of the potential pitfalls of their interpersonal employee relationship where race and ethnicity were concerned. This led me to develop my own model.

The genuine relationship continuum²⁹ was developed from a series of experiences based on the years of race relations and relationship building throughout my career: These include: 1.) Knowledge gained from the study of race and interpersonal relationships through history, literature, women's studies and sociology and 2.) My own lived experienced as an individual committed to having meaningful genuine relationships with people from different backgrounds throughout my adult life.

I grew up in a working class suburb of Detroit through the 1960's. As a Lebanese American, I knew I was different from my White Protestant and Catholic friends because I was darker than all of them and didn't blend into the crowd as easily. My grandparents could speak only broken English and called Americans White people to distinguish them from the Lebanese. Nevertheless I was still accepted in my friend's circles, enduring only minor comments about my distinct features, (big nose, frizzy hair.) Hearing stories about Jewish and Black people in Detroit, spoken in Arabic words when we weren't supposed to understand created a burning sensation within me even as a child. Something was not right about what I was hearing.

The 1967 riots received some up front attention in my extended family as my uncles gave up on their party store that was not destroyed but suffered enough damage to

²⁹ This relationship developmental model was adapted from M. Scott Peck's model of genuine community which he describes in the following stages: pseudo community, chaos, and authentic community in *The Different Drum: Community Making and Peace: A Spiritual Journey Toward Self-Acceptance, True Belonging and New Hope for the World*, 1987.

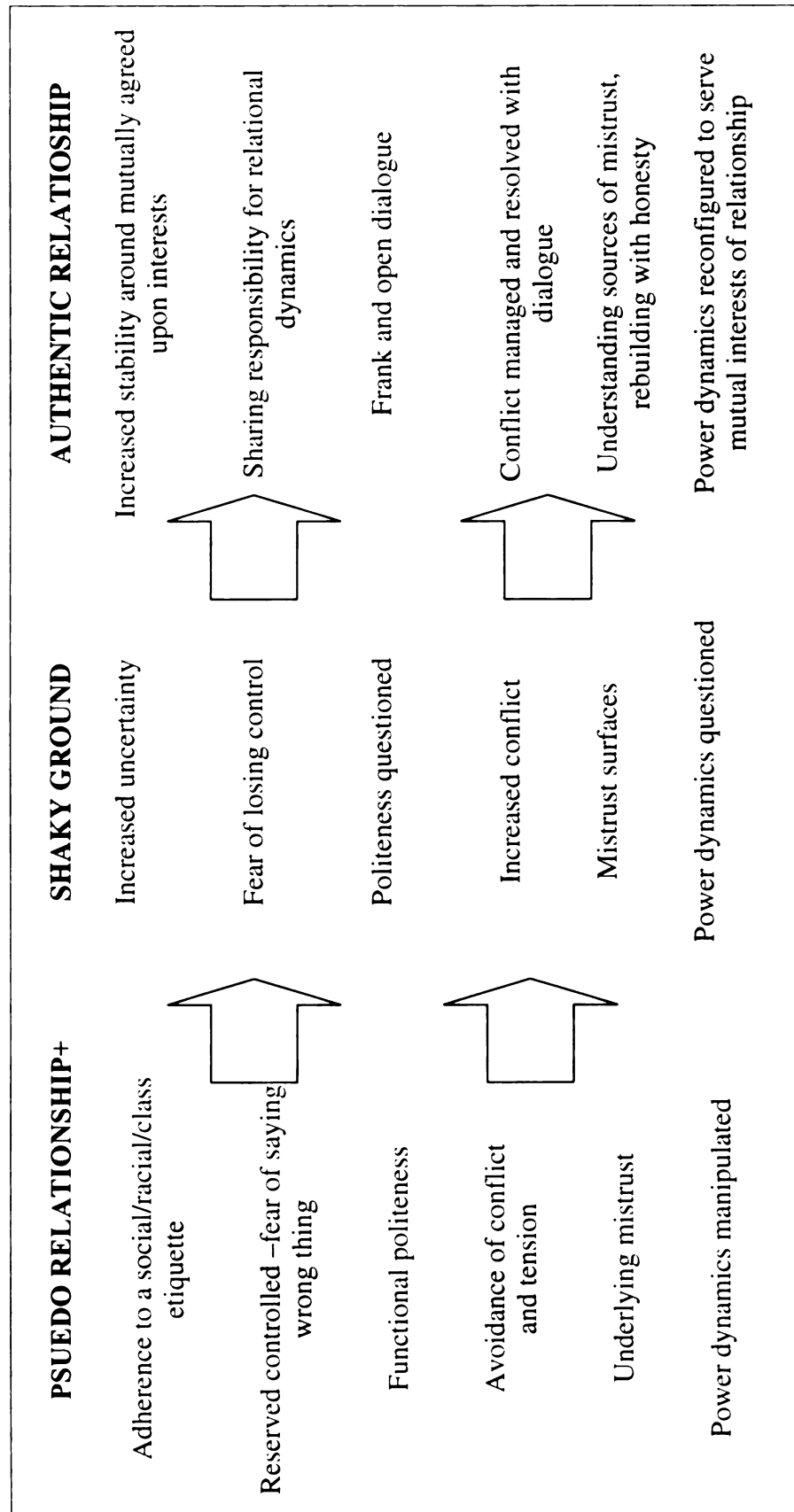
be closed and my cousin's wedding had a "home before dark" curfew imposed. Though diffused, racial tension reached us in the suburbs. Most significant for me was the battle I had with my mother who forbade me to baby-sit for a family in our community because they adopted a bi-racial baby and she feared for my safety. In my helpless frustration and tears I vowed to myself that somehow, someday I was going to make these wrongs right. My all white neighborhood and school did not provide much chance for activism but upon arriving at Michigan State University as an undergraduate I joined a multiracial religious community and began taking race relations courses that supplied me with constant opportunities to develop relationships. I jumped in with both feet. By the mid-1980's I was involved with the anti-Apartheid movement while producing educational theatre that focused on issues of racial and social justice. This led to the opportunity to live in South Africa on a Fulbright research scholarship for two academic years where I developed such close friendships that we remain like family today. When I returned to the United States I informally adopted a South African youth who had lost her mother and needed an opportunity to focus on education away from the violence and turmoil she experienced in Soweto. There has not been a time in my adult life where my intimate friendships and extended family were not multiracial. My insights into the process of interracial relationship building have thus come from over twenty years of living and learning.

The genuine relationship continuum is based on the following premises.

1. Interracial relationships involve a dimension that same race relationships do not, i.e. the experience of race in a racially stratified society.
2. This experience of race differs depending on gender, class, nation, and sexuality. It is not a monolithic experience for members of a racially assigned group although there are common themes and patterns to the experience that most will share.

3. All human relationships develop through stages, though these stages may vary depending on social location, personal environment, and individual personality.
4. Human relationships can only grow when nurtured through consistent actions.
5. Healthy relationships can only thrive when they are mutually nurtured.
6. Mutually does not mean sameness. In a racially stratified, racially coded social world the actions required of those who don't experience racial animus may be different from the actions of those who do.
7. Power dynamics affect the development of relationships and must be recognized and understood.
8. Racial dynamics, including the social construction of race, the social construction of whiteness and white skin privilege must be understood regardless of an individual's belief system or behaviors.
9. Commitment to work over time, through difficulties, including challenging racial thinking and behavior is a necessary part of the process.
10. It is possible, if people so choose, to create and develop healthy relationships across a range of traditional barriers if they commit to the process and engage openly and frankly in dialogue and activities to increase their understanding of one another and the forces that impact the social world.

Figure 1
RELATIONSHIP CONTINUUM



On the interracial relationship continuum pseudo relationships are those centered in a functional politeness. In this stage people are primarily concerned with keeping a lid on potential hot buttons or conflict. They often choose to interact as little as possible so as to avoid situations in which they may be caught with their guard down. There is

Commentary on Relationship Continuum

On the interracial relationship continuum pseudo relationships are those centered in a functional politeness. In this stage people are primarily concerned with keeping a lid on potential hot buttons or conflict. They often choose to interact as little as possible so as to avoid situations in which they be caught with their guard down. There is learned racial etiquette in which it is understood what you do and do not say in public or in multiracial settings. For Whites who have little genuine experience with people of color there is often concern about saying the wrong thing and being perceived as racist. People of color often harbor an imposed indifference as noted in “I don’t let them bother me” or subdued anger with a healthy dose of suspicion that they may be the target of someone’s animus. Or they may expect Whites to generalize, trivialize, or stereotype their experiences and consequently wear protective emotional armor. Historian Darlene Clark Hine discusses a powerful example of this as seen through the experiences of Black women who created a “culture of dissemblance” as a form resistance to insulate themselves from the constant racism and sexism they were forced to endure.

Clearly Black women did not possess the power to eradicate negative social and sexual images of their womanhood. Rather, what I propose is that in the face of pervasive stereotypes and negative estimations of the sexuality of Black women, it was imperative that they collectively create alternative self-images and shield from scrutiny these private, empowering definitions of self. A secret, undisclosed persona allowed the individual Black woman to function, to work effectively as a domestic in white

households, to bear and rear children, to endure the frustration – born violence of frequently under-or unemployed mates, to support churches, to found institutions, and to engage in social service activities, all while living in a clearly hostile, white, patriarchal, middle-class America (Hine in Ruiz & Du Bois 1994, p.344).

Certainly a hostile racial environment whether overt or covert would lend itself to some form of artificiality making it impossible for genuine relationships to develop. Sociologist Joe Feagin conducted interviews with a range of middle class Blacks to get at the bottom of what they are truly experiencing even though some of the doors of the White world have been opened to them. The following commentary by a college student captures why pseudo relationships are so prevalent. Feagin called this a common example:

Student's Commentary: Here in my dorm there are four black girls. My roommates and me look nothing alike. And the other two are short, and I'm tall. They [white students] called me by my roommates' name the whole semester, and I didn't understand that. [Maybe] I understood it, but I didn't want to deal with that whole thing. That's really upsetting. It's like they put their shutters on when they see a black person coming. And the few black people that do get along with the other students, they seem to sort of put on a façade. They pretend to be something they're not.

Feagin's commentary: Whether the differential treatment is subtle or unconscious discrimination does not matter; it is still painful and enervating. One reaction is to confront it verbally. Another is to be resigned to it and put on a mask that hides one's true feelings (Feagin & Sikes 1994, p.100-1).

The key to this phase is control and manipulation of true feelings. If there are power dynamics involved they are manipulated carefully to maintain the status quo.

Some people chose to move out of the pseudo phase, others are forced by circumstances. Whatever the reasons, it is not typically a smooth transition since politeness and etiquette are called into question and some of the comfortable artificiality

exposed. I call this transitional phase ‘shaky ground’ because there is uncertainty about direction. Feelings get hurt and there is a good chance that people will walk away from the relationship once it becomes clear there will be discomfort and hard work. This is a necessary stage of the friendship development because it is here that underlying mistrust surfaces and can be named. Fear of saying the wrong thing is challenged and more expression of real experience takes place. Confusion and uncertainty shape this shaky ground phase and power dynamics are recognized and questioned. In Chapter Three, I discussed an example arising in MRULE in which Dan and Felicia were caught in this phase. Felicia, hurt that Dan may use her as an entertainment piece to see how his family deals with him having a Black friend, was ready to walk away from the relationship believing that Dan was not and probably could not be her true friend. Dan was unaware of the impact of these behaviors and the power dynamics at play. Because he looked up to Felicia and saw her as a most competent individual, he did not consider her vulnerability. Dan thought, as many Whites do, that he was “down with” Felicia and she would join in on the fun unfazed by the old-fashioned, outdated racism of family members. Tension ensued between them and their interactions became less frequent. Eventually the work in MRULE demands that any relationship discomfort receive some attention since there is so much to do together. It is not easy to avoid one another or to simply tolerate someone’s presence. Slowly, Dan and Felicia began moving out of the shaky ground phase by engaging in talks about the seriousness of being a target of racism. Dan is becoming less able to tolerate the racist comments and attitudes he experiences in his former friendship circles. He challenges them to consider the racism in their language and attitudes as they flippantly dismiss the need for meaningful race relations. This move towards authenticity

in Felicia's and Dan's relationship would not have occurred to them in the pseudo phase. Dan would have lost the opportunity to understand the issues in any significant depth and Felicia may have lost the opportunity for a true ally in the fight for racial justice.

Those committed to enduring relationships enter the genuine authentic relationship phase when they mutually share responsibilities for the health of the relationship. Though more stability comes with this phase, the key to authenticity is a willingness to work through conflict and mistrust by understanding the sources that create them and discussing them openly and frankly. This phase does not guarantee that trust is a given but rather that it is a mutually agreed upon goal of the relationship. It is understood that it must be built over time through open and frank discussion. Through honest dialogue power dynamics can be continually reconfigured in a give and take mode. This means that if even if one member of a friendship dyad, is intellectually, psychologically, or temperamentally stronger, he or she does not dominate but rather empowers the other. The genuine relationship settles for nothing short of mutuality, responsibility and accountability. Most likely there will be strengths and weaknesses in each person that vary depending on the situation. Interpersonal interracial relationships are particularly vulnerable because White people who "don't know" often put the burden on their Black/Latino/Asian/Native friend(s) to enlighten them. This can be a litmus test to measure the health and authenticity of the relationship. When White people take full responsibility for their own learning of race cognizance whether in the presence or absence of their friends of color they are well on their way to becoming genuine in the relationship. When all are free to engage in their own learning process from their vantage point without fear of judgement, ridicule, or labeling and when fear and mistrust give way to support, consideration, and kindness a genuine connectedness evolves. It is this

connectedness that allows for personal, collegiate, and spiritual growth. It is here that people laugh, cry, vent, debate, assure, challenge, and ultimately create durable bonds.

The Role of Dialogue

Scholars who conduct social change research have to be concerned about methodologies. As discussed in Chapter Two, action research methodology questions how people work through their common problems to effect change and learn from that. In every case of action research be it community based or in educational forums, consulting about the problem through dialogue is pivotal to the process. “People in dialogue become more fully aware of underlying assumptions, emotions, and the various dimensions of a situation or idea” (Smith, Willms, & Johnson 1997, p. 227). Dialogue is pivotal to MRULE’s goal to serve the interconnectedness and sense of community we continually strive to create. In the words of Paulo Freire:

Dialogue requires an intense faith in human beings; their power to make and remake, to create and recreate. . .Founded on love, humility and faith, dialogue becomes a horizontal relationship of mutual trust. . .[that] cannot exist unless the words of both parties coincide with their actions. Nor can dialogue exist without hope. Hope is rooted in our human incompleteness, from which we move out in constant search, a search which can be carried out only in communion with other people. . .Finally, true dialogue cannot exist unless it involves critical thinking which sees reality as a process, in transformation... [and] constantly involves itself in the real struggle without fear of the risks involved (Freire 1970, 1990, p. 80).

As Patricia Hill Collins sets forth an Afrocentric feminist epistemology, she looks at dialogue, empathy, and accountability as pillars to the process. These are ways that Black people have come to know and engage in social change. Understanding individual uniqueness, the role of emotions in dialogue and the capacity for caring give meaning and

structure to community. Personal accountability attaches an action component that empowers one to “walk the talk” (Collins 2000, p. 260-266).

Similarly, MRULE is built upon the process of engaging in open and frank dialogue with respect and sensitivity. It demands a long-term commitment—minimal one year, though the ideal is four years—so that participants will deepen their understanding and abilities to engage in this form of dialogue, build relationships, and develop leadership skills. We define these skills broadly, primarily as those useful in future jobs: working on diverse teams; solving seemingly intractable problems around personalities and perspectives which often, though not always, involve race and gender relations; following through on responsibilities; holding oneself and one another accountable; etc.

In the weekly roundtable discussions, students meet to discuss topics that center around the issues of race. These discussions have a threefold purpose: (1) to listen to and speak to critical racial issues in a safe forum; (2) to learn more about racial issues through the materials and knowledge brought to bear on the discussions; and (3) to get to know one another and begin forming friendships. The following ground rules are guidelines for MRULE dialogues and overall participation.

1. Listen with the intent of understanding before being understood. (Covey 1989)
2. When you share an idea, you give it to the group. Whether you agree or disagree with the idea, allow the group to respond to the idea, and do not engage in personal glorification or attack toward the person who shared it.
3. Make sure what is shared in the group stays in the group. Refrain from backbiting about individuals in the group, as this can be divisive and demeaning.

4. Be conscious to not dominate the conversation. If you are someone who likes to speak, make sure you do not excessively engage in your own conversation with one or two others. If you are someone who is less likely to speak, make an effort to try to share something. We need you to help us with those who tend to dominate.
5. Offer your ideas with kindness and sensitivity, but do not be afraid to disagree. We believe we can find the spark of truth from the clash of different perspectives.
6. Be patient with one another and the process. You may feel that you're covering familiar ground because we constantly have new membership, especially from year to year, but remember that this is life long work and that none of us knows it all. There is always something new to learn. Make it your goal to find out what that is for you at each session.
7. Take your small group assignments seriously. Strive to engage everyone in the group.
8. Communicate any concerns to the student leaders or Jeanne at any time. We have to keep communication flowing for MRULE's health.
9. Bring yourself to account at the end of each meeting and after an MRULE activity to check how well you engaged and participated in the process.
10. Since MRULE is a process, remember that you are an active co-creator. It's an interdependent process. This means that you will get from MRULE what you give to MRULE.

We know that MRULE is succeeding in the critical skill building that dialogue demands once students have internalized the guidelines to the extent that they can apply them to various situations, or at least know what should be applied when and where. It is vital to MRULE as well as to each individual student that they develop these skills to assist them in a range of academic experiences. I found it interesting to note research that points to a relationship between race relations dialogue, community building, and academic performance. Retention is always a top priority for any academic program and although at

this point I have only anecdotal evidence of the impact MRULE has had on student's academic life, it is important to include the work of other scholars in this regard.

Perhaps one of the greatest barriers to the development of genuine, authentic interracial relationships is deep-seated inherent sense of superiority and inferiority that still plagues race relations today. Psychology professor Claude Steele and colleagues have done extensive studies to measure the impact of stereotype threat on standardized test performance. They found a direct correlation—Black students performed better when they were told they were going to solve problems on a test rather than have their ability measured. White students performed worse when they were told right before the test that Asians perform better in math than Whites. These findings led Steele to explore interventions. Interestingly enough one intervention was a weekly dialogue session where students shared their personal stories and thus began to build relationships.³⁰

One tactic that worked surprisingly well was the weekly rap sessions -- Black and White students talking to one another in an informal dormitory setting, over pizza, about the personal side of their new lives in college. Participation in these sessions reduced students' feelings of stereotype threat and improved grades. Why? Perhaps when members of one racial group hear members of another racial group express the same concerns they have, the concerns seem less racial. Students may also learn that racial and gender stereotypes are either less at play than they might have feared or don't reflect the worst-feared prejudicial intent. Talking at a personal level across group lines can thus build trust in the larger campus community. The racial segregation besetting most college campuses can block this experience, allowing mistrust to build where cross-group communication would discourage it.

Our research bears a practical message: even though the stereotypes held by the larger society may be difficult to change, it is possible to create niches in which negative stereotypes are not felt to apply. In specific classrooms, within specific

³⁰ I thought for a moment that MRULE may have a counterpart at the University of Michigan where Steele ran this pilot program. As it turned out, Steele's program only ran for one semester. Based on similar ideas as MRULE, it lacks one critical component: durability.

programs, even in the climate of entire schools, it is possible to weaken a group's sense of being threatened by negative stereotypes, to allow its members a trust that would otherwise be difficult to sustain. Thus when schools try to decide how important black-white test-score gaps are in determining the fate of black students on their campuses, they should keep something in mind: for the greatest portion of black students -- those with strong academic identities -- the degree of racial trust they feel in their campus life, rather than a few ticks on a standardized test, may be the key to their success (Steele 1999, Volume 284 No. 2).

Lessons from History—Interpersonal Situations between Black and White Women in the Struggle for Racial Justice

Examples of the process of creating genuine interracial relationships can be seen in several historical interpersonal situations between Black and White women. These examples highlight those relationships that were authentic relationships and those that were not. They are set in the historical context of white supremacy and invoke the earlier discussion in this chapter about whether friendships can develop as long as institutional racism exists. Each example illustrates a range of different relationships on the continuum. The one common thread throughout all is that someone stood up confidently against the social expectations of their time and uncompromisingly set a new standard. The insights gained from the struggles that both Black and White women faced as they broke molds of traditional expectations remain useful today for a multiracial constituency of women and men. Some of the White women rose up to own their role in dismantling racial oppression as they engaged in genuine relationships. Others sought social reform without social equality and could be no means engage in mutually satisfying interracial relationships. In both situations they leave us insightful lessons about what it takes and what is at stake in the process of developing genuine interracial bonds.

Acknowledging the place of Sarah and Angelina Grimke in the anti-slavery and women's rights movements has become mainstream. For at least the last five years secondary education history texts books used in a competitive school system (East Lansing) note their contributions. It is disappointing, though not surprising, that there is no mention of Sarah Douglass, an African American founding member of the Female Antislavery Society in Philadelphia and close friend of the Grimkes. This friendship sheds much light on the question of who is making history and how. In her discussion of this relationship, Gerda Lerner points out that close relationships between nineteenth century Black and White women were rare. Sarah Douglass and the Grimke sisters distinguish themselves in several ways. Unlike many of their abolitionist counterparts, the Grimkes were as committed to the principle of equality among Black and White people as they were to the abolition of slavery. At one point, the sisters protested the "colored" bench at the Philadelphia Quaker meetings by sitting with Sarah Douglass and her mother. As they grew more personal with one another, their commitment to social equality was put to a test when Sarah Douglass cautiously accepted an invitation to stay in the home of the newly married Angelina and Theodore Weld. After one day, she returned home, thanking them for hospitality and "Christian conduct." When the sisters asked Sarah Douglass if she doubted that she was an "acceptable visitor" in their home a frank discussion ensued that rose above the polite racial etiquette they had been accustomed to. Subsequently their relationship grew closer and Sarah Douglass visited the Weld home and stayed for several weeks (Lerner 1979, p. 99-100).

This degree of interracial intimacy was rare for nineteenth century Black and White women. Much more common were Black and White women's interactions around antislavery, temperance, or educational uplift that were functional to the causes but

situated in a white supremacy modality. Examples can be found in the antislavery, women's suffrage, anti-lynching, and the civil rights movements.

When Mrs. Margaret Douglass, a White Virginian woman was indicted, tried and sent to prison for one month because she schooled slave children, the abolitionist press featured her story prominently. Upon first glance, Mrs. Douglass appeared to be a champion for the cause of antislavery, so much so that she was willing to go public with her defiance against the oppressive slave laws. In her self-defense she indicted the amalgamation of the race as the cause of "opposition of the education of the colored race." Mary Ann Shadd, African American editor of Canadian newspaper *Provincial Freeman*, printed her court testimony in a December 16, 1854 column. Shadd exposed Mrs. Douglass's appeals for the cessation of the master's abusive sexual practices upon their female slaves, as motivated by her belief in upholding the racial purity of Whites rather than the humanity of Blacks. Mrs. Douglass believed that providing religious instruction for the Negroes would empower them to fight off the "shamelessly, beastly practice" and restore peacefulness in the Southern system. Shadd states:

Mrs. Douglass then—as do all pro-slavery people—is endeavoring to fan the flames of prejudice. . .at the same time that she would rivet the chains on the slave. Note the process by which they are to be riveted and the remedy for the evils, which is in the hands of the southern woman. That remedy is the instruction of the Negroes in their duty to their *masters*. . . (Lerner 1979, p. 102-3)

Lerner points out that the burden of educating Whites in shared radical causes rested heavily on Blacks. This made it difficult for trusting relationships to develop as African-Americans were consistently on guard. They often did not know the degree to which their White "sisters" were committed to their freedom and equality. As in the case above,

Mrs. Douglass was willing to go to jail, not to abolish the slave system but to ameliorate it in such way that White privilege would prevail.

Perhaps one of the most dramatic battles between a struggling sense of sisterhood and the maintenance of white supremacy was fought during Suffrage. Historian Nell Painter explores how the Stanton/Anthony camp deliberately distanced themselves from Frances Ellen Watkins Harper when she confronted their platform head on. Speaking at the 1866 Women's Rights Convention she challenged White suffragists to recognize how Black women were treated on a daily basis.

You white women speak of rights. I speak of wrongs. I, as a colored woman, have had in this country an education which has made me feel as if I were in the situation of Ishmael, my hand against every man, and every man's hand against me. Let me go tomorrow morning and take my seat in one of your street cars. . .and the conductor will put up his hand and stop the car rather than let me ride. (Painter 1996, p. 224)

Harper went on to explain the details of a grievous experience Harriet Tubman had with a train conductor who brutally tried to eject her from her place. "The woman, whose courage and bravery won a recognition from our army and from every black man in the land, is excluded from every thoroughfare of travel." Despite Harper's strong appeal she was unable to secure White women's understanding and unless they acknowledged Black women's predicament, she would dismiss woman's suffrage as a whites only affair (Painter, p. 225).

This was a particularly tense moment in the battle for rights for women and Blacks as the leading suffragists were opposed to the passing of the Fourteenth Amendment with the word *male* in it. Nell Painter argues that Frances Harper's outright refusal to side with women over Blacks left an obvious void in the Stanton/Anthony camp for a Black woman's representative which they sought to fill with a less confrontational person. They found this in Sojourner Truth who could disagree indirectly

and was uncompromising about her equality with Black men. (Truth was sure that what Black men needed, Black women needed, most importantly their own income.)

Painter points out that during the 1860's and later, there were occasional White champions for Black women's issues but more often than not, these came at the expense of Black men. In the long run, these relationships were fragile as the battle over rights and privilege began to define who was worthy and ready for the vote and who was not. By refusing to separate her sex identity from her race identity, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper exemplified the struggle for Black feminist women to come. White feminists would remain distant to this struggle well into the Second Wave of the Women's Movement. This would and to some extent still does define many parameters of the working and interpersonal relationships between Black and White women.

Although, we do not know much about her interpersonal relationships with Black women, we know that there was one suffragist who rose above her colleagues over the battle of who was worthy to vote. Jane Addams' work with foreign born, immigrant women convinced her that the only way they could maintain family stability was to have some voice in their surroundings. She challenged the notion that suffrage was a responsibility of the educated and reinvigorated the fundamental egalitarian principle that abolitionists put forth in defense of Negro suffrage.

The statement is sometimes made that the franchise for women would be valuable only so far as the educated women exercised it. This statement totally disregards the fact that those matters in which woman's judgment is most needed are far too primitive and basic to be largely influenced by what we call education (Kraditor 1965, p. 142).

Addams' uncompromising devotion to settlement work kept her in the front lines of working families' hard lives. She was unmoved by arguments put forth that pitted working class foreign born ("ignorant and depraved" as Stanton characterized them in her

1894 letter to the *Women's Journal*) against upper and middle class women who obviously had more developed abilities to exercise political rights. While this ideological battle heated up Jane Addams continued to positively affect the daily lives of families through her exemplary Hull House, seeing suffrage as a "tool for social regeneration." (Kraditor, p. 150)

Whether Elizabeth Cady Stanton could foresee that the educational prerequisite argument was going to lead Northern suffragists into a difficult, compromising relationship with Southern white suffragists is hard to know. As the Stanton/Anthony camp was determined to remove the word *male* from the Fourteenth Amendment, their Southern counterparts were determined to insert the word *white* into Suffragist Legislation. From 1899 to 1918 the suffrage movement was wrought with white supremacists. Black women were consistently marginalized and worked more effectively in their separate organizations. Aileen Kraditor cites a chilling example of how this played out. In 1913, Mrs. Ida B. Wells Barnett, president of a Negro women's suffrage club was asked by NAWSA leaders not to march with the suffragists at the Washington parade on the day before President Wilson's inauguration because certain unnamed Southern women refused to march in a racially mixed contingency.

The request was made publicly during the rehearsal of the Illinois contingent, and while Mrs. Barnett glanced about the room, looking for support, the ladies debated the question of principle versus expediency, most of them evidently feeling that they must not prejudice Southerners against suffrage. Eventually Mrs. Barnett was banished to the Negro women's contingent. She replied that she would march with Illinois or not at all. When the parade began she was nowhere to be seen, but later she quietly stepped out from the crowd of spectators and joined the Illinois ranks. Two white Illinois women then took their places on either side of her, and the rank composed of these three women finished the parade without further incident. (Kraditor, p. 213)

Of course, not all examples of white supremacist practices in the Women's Movement are this obvious. New scholarship may propel us to ask the questions: who were those two White women who joined Mrs. Barnett and what happened to their relationship subsequently? How did Black women continue to fight along side White women for anything in these racially hostile climates? What did Black women endure at the hands of their White counterparts and how can understanding this illuminate contemporary issues between Black and White women? The Anti-Lynching Campaign provides another poignant example.

In 1892 Ida B. Wells was exiled to the North for her agitating work on white supremacist and barbaric practices particularly demonstrated through lynching. From Chicago she activated an unrelenting anti-lynching campaign that cleverly attacked white male superiority at its base. . . western civilized behavior and mores. Playing on Victorian sentiments Wells argued that rather than protecting true womanhood, those engaged in the barbaric practice of lynching were compromising their manhood. It was a successful campaign that brought international attention to the horrific racial violence practiced in the United States South. Many Northerners got on board and began to actively object to lynching practices but the road to eradication would prove long and hard. Gail Bederman points out that although Wells' campaign did not stop lynching, "most Northern periodicals stopped treating lynching as a colorful Southern folkway. It became a truism that lynching hurt America in the eyes of the civilized world." (Bederman, 1995, p. 423)

In her dissertation on Southern reformer Lugenia Burns Hope, historian Jacqueline Rouse explores an institution that may have been a potential institution for positive race relations--the Commission for Interracial Cooperation (CIC). In 1930, Jessie Daniel Ames, director of women's work in the CIC formed a new organization, the

Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching (ASWPL). After a slight period of decline, lynching was again on the rise. The women attracted to ASWPL felt it was time for a newly organized women's group to demonstrate their horror at this violent practice in their midst. It was time to challenge the common belief that lynching was a necessary practice to uphold true womanhood, as the 19th century definition of purity, piety, domesticity, and submission lingered on. Women were determined to show that they no longer needed or wanted such chivalry to protect them. Since 1922 a group of dedicated White Southern women had been meeting with Black women leaders from the CIC Women's Division and worked successfully on the development of Black educational programs. When Ames became director she was determined to take on lynching through educational programs. At this time there was much activism around the Costigan-Warner bill that proposed federal trials for mob members when local authorities did not act. Ames, like many Southerners opposed federal intervention on social issues. Although her male CIC counterparts supported Costigan-Warner, she encouraged ASWPL members to remain neutral. Black women were excluded from ASWPL membership but firmly expressed their opposition to the position of neutrality on this important bill. Black women leaders took turns trying to educate White women on how to work more comprehensively to bring about freedom for Blacks. But Ames and the ASWPL would not budge. Lugenia Burns Hope, frustrated and disappointed working tirelessly in the anti-lynching campaign wrote: "Honestly my heart is so sick and weak over it that I don't know whether I can say anything. I do think that the stand that the Southern women took will hold back our interracial work and everything else in the South." (Rouse, 1989, p. 117)

Once again we see how white supremacy interfered with efforts to promote racial equality. That the members of the ASWPL could be so confident in their leaders as better informed than the Black women leaders in the front lines speaks to the racialized chasms embedded in the American psyche. Many interracial cooperative reform efforts lacked a critical component that limited their effectiveness: genuine mutuality among all parties. As Paula Giddings characterizes it: racial harmony rather than equality was the goal of the CIC and ASWPL. (Giddings, 1984, p. 208) That Black women had to expend so much energy convincing their White counterparts to support anti-lynching legislation illustrates a recurring theme in Black and White women's relationships. White women would help black women improve conditions of Blacks so long as it served White women's interests. Giddings describes one of Jessie Ames's purposes in her most notable accomplishments, a better housing project in Dallas's black community, as one "to prevent encroachments into White neighborhoods" by middle class Blacks. Race relations scholars must confront these situations head on just as Black women activists consistently had to do. We are not served well to scratch surfaces and report what we wished may have happened. A glaring example of this is found in Wilson and Russell's 1996 poorly researched book entitled *Divided Sisters: Bridging the Gap between Black Women and White Women*. Here the authors state:

Not all Southern White women were racist. Some worked alongside Black women in various social reform groups, and many joined in the campaign to fight against the lynchings of Black men. In 1902, the White women's societies of the Southern Methodist Church openly criticized Southern racial attitudes contributing to such lynchings, and a year later, a White woman named Jessie Daniel Ames founded the fully integrated Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching. At its peak, the group had over forty thousand members (p.32).

In light of what we know of Ames and the exclusivity of the ASWPL, it is highly suspect to use her as an example of non-racist Southern White women. But it is even more disturbing to misrepresent the source. Wilson and Russell use Giddings as the source for this passage. They misquote the year as 1902, (Giddings cites 1930), and throughout this passage Giddings does not mention women's societies openly criticizing Southern racial attitudes. Most importantly Wilson and Russell describe ASWPL as fully integrated when Black women were clearly excluded from membership. (Giddings 1984, Rouse 1989). Giddings' discussion of Ames (as noted above) is consistent with Rouse's work on Lugenia Burns Hope. It is true that through ASWPL Ames galvanized support of over 35,000 Southern White women that had an impressive dampening effect on the pro-lynching climate. It is also true that her insistence on protecting women from political engagements and upholding states rights had a dampening effect on the spirit of cooperation with Black women and their comprehensive approaches to eradicating lynching. Though it is important to mark those historical moments when racial barriers were transcended for the advancement of social and racial justice, it is harmful to create them when they are not there. As bell hooks points out one of the consistently troubling issues preventing deeper bonds between Black and White women is the lack of knowledge of the depths of the history of their social relations (hooks 1995, p. 220). In their commendable effort to bring Black and White women together Wilson and Russell have sold themselves and the integrity of the subject short by substituting the actual history for a mythical one.

It is well known that Eleanor Roosevelt stood out among fellow New Dealers when it came to believing in and acting on social reform regarding the welfare of Black people throughout her tenure as First Lady (Lash 1971). Although Mrs. Roosevelt

seemed at times to be following a gradualist approach to Black advancement, she consistently put herself in situations and relationships that challenged the efficacy of such an approach. In her own words:

It seems trite to say to the Negro, you must have patience, when he has had patience so long; you must not expect miracles overnight, when he can look back to the years of slavery and say—how many nights! he has waited for justice. Nevertheless, that is what we must continue to say in the interests of our government as a whole and of the Negro people; but that does not mean that we must sit idle and do nothing. We must keep moving forward steadily, removing restrictions which have no sense, and fighting prejudice. If we are wise we shall do this where it is easiest to do at first, and watch it spread gradually to places where the old prejudices are slow to disappear (*New Republic*, May 11, 1942, p. 630).

Biographer Joseph Lash characterizes Eleanor Roosevelt as a person concerned about the welfare of all humanity, including Southern Whites who felt threatened by her actions to bring the needs and wants of the Black community to President Roosevelt's attention. There were many times when Mrs. Roosevelt went the extra mile, pressing racial equality issues regardless of the feared Southern political backlash harbored by several of those in the President's inner circle. Her relationships with "Black Cabinet"³¹ member Mary McLeod Bethune and NAACP secretary Walter White were vital to her own education and changes in racial thinking. White gave her Du Bois' book *Black Reconstruction* to provide another perspective than what she learned from one of her favorite books *Gone With the Wind*. When she was chastised by a reader of her column for using the words "darky" and "pickaninny" in her autobiographical articles, she

³¹ The term used to describe the group of Black people that President Roosevelt appointed to help implement New Deal legislation. There were about a dozen ranging in position from advisor, assistant, to director of Negro affairs in one of the many New Deal relief and recovery agencies (Ross in Franklin and Meier 1982, p. 1023). Bethune served as director of the Negro Affairs division of the National Youth Administration.

apologized for the offense, explaining they were her grandmother's words and asked what terms would be preferred (Lash, p. 522). She told her daughter that she knew when she kissed Mary McLeod Bethune goodbye on the cheek after visiting her in the hospital as naturally as she would anyone else, she had begun to conquer some of her own racial prejudice (Lash, p. 523). Both Bethune and White stayed close to Mrs. Roosevelt through the years steadily pushing the FDR Administration as much as possible to consider the plight of Blacks—lynching, job discrimination, exclusionary practices in housing, education, and within the armed forces were some of the most prevalent. Though FDR kept a political distance from Black demands, Mrs. Roosevelt did not hold back sustaining continual criticism from both white supremacist friends and foes of the Administration. About this era and his relationship to Mrs. Roosevelt, Walter White later wrote “when he was ready to give up on the white race, the thought of Mrs. Roosevelt was one of the few things that kept him from hating all white people (Lash, p. 522-3).

Most Black leaders were not content with the pace of the FDR Administration to meet their demands and some were openly critical even to Mrs. Roosevelt. Lash introduces the new generation of Blacks who were not as interested in “what the New Deal had done for the Negro but what the white race had done to the Negro” (p. 523). By including a letter from one of the most articulate voices of the group: a Work Progress Administration (WPA) teacher named Pauli Murray. In this letter to the President, Murray explains how her grandfather fought for the Union Army to ensure the liberation of Black people and that all her family was involved in the education of Blacks in North Carolina. Yet when she applied to University of North Carolina she was denied admission because of her race. She criticized the President who spoke the day before at the university hailing it “as a center of liberal thought and calling on Americans,

especially young people, to support a liberal philosophy based on democracy.” Murray ended her letter by asking the President: “Do you feel, as we do, that the ultimate test of democracy in the United States will be the way in which it solves its Negro problem?” p. (524). This letter affected Eleanor who replied that she understood, encouraging Pauli to fight with conciliatory methods. She invited her to write regularly as well as to visit her at her vacation home Hyde Park, New York. This was the beginning of what grew to be a genuine relationship that endured throughout Pauli Murray’s adult life until Eleanor Roosevelt’s death in 1962.

What makes the Roosevelt/Murray relationship unique and relevant to our discussion here is the degree of honesty and mutuality that existed even with Mrs. Roosevelt’s status. They came together as a result of Murray’s condemnation of the hypocrisy she saw in the American government. They continued to debate tactics and the pace of reform but grew to have a great respect for one another. In the aftermath of the 1943 Detroit riots which killed thirty five people, twenty-nine who were Black, Pauli Murray was enraged by President Roosevelt’s lame public statement that “every true American regrets” outbreaks of violence. She sent him the following poem.

Mr. Roosevelt Regrets

*What’d you get, black boy,
When they knocked you down the gutter,
And they kicked your teeth out. . .
What’d you get when the police shot you in the back,
And they chained you to the beds. . .
What’d the Top Man say, black boy?
Mr. Roosevelt regrets. . . .” (Lash, p. 675).*

Mrs. Roosevelt responded to Pauli: “I am sorry but I understand” (Lash, p. 674). At another point Mrs. Roosevelt chided Pauli for criticizing the President’s weak stance on the Negro question and suggesting that Blacks had their eye on Wendell Wilkie, his opponent in the 1944 presidential election. “For one who must really have a knowledge

of the workings of our government your letter seems to be one of the most thoughtless I have ever read,” Eleanor wrote to Pauli (Murray 1989, p. 190). Over the Administration’s tentative progress toward racial equality, they continued to spar—first through letters followed by Mrs. Roosevelt’s continual invitations to Pauli in to speak with her in person. Of that point in their relationship Murray states:

While such outspoken views gave me a reputation of being hotheaded and Mrs. Roosevelt later referred to me as a “firebrand,” they also earned her respect. As I grew to know her better, it seemed to me that the measure of her greatness was her capacity for growth with herself, and the generosity with which she responded to criticisms this kind.

Several years later when Pauli Murray was researching racial segregation for her work with the NAACP in preparation for *Brown vs. Board of Education* and Eleanor Roosevelt was working with the United Nations and emerging as a world leader, their friendship continued to grow.

During that period, in spite of her crowded schedule, Mrs. Roosevelt found time to invite me to her New York apartment for tea or dinner once or twice a year, or for an occasional weekend at Val-Kill Cottage in Hyde Park, New York. She liked having young friends around, and I think she admired and trusted my habit of not letting her high position prevent me from speaking out on a political issue when I disagreed with her. For me, these visits were like pilgrimages for renewal of the spirit. I sensed an unspoken spiritual bond between us, and I treasured them so much I could not bear to keep them all to myself (Murray, 1989, p. 289).

Mrs. Roosevelt always permitted Pauli to bring someone with her to share in Pauli’s words the “magic of her presence” (p. 289).

Because of her heavy schedule “Mrs. R,” as close friends referred to Mrs. Roosevelt, often squeezed in a purely social visit with me while she pursued weighty matters of international importance (p. 290).

The excitement these social calls generated was a blend of awe and delight in about equal measure, and I enjoyed watching each person who met Mrs. Roosevelt face to face discover, as I had done, that the First Lady of the World was as comfortable to be with as one's own favorite aunt (p. 289).

Pauli Murray trailblazed the way for the next generation of young people who would follow in the Civil Rights Era. Not surprisingly the experiences within the movement vary dramatically along race, class, and gender lines. Relationships were complicated and greatly influenced by the ideological turbulence among many competing social forces and priorities. The Civil Rights Movement not only set the very important stage for the Second Wave of Feminism to emerge, but challenged race relations in unprecedented ways. Recycled versions of the some of perennial problems between Black and White women raised their convoluted heads. Regional attitudes resurfaced though indeed it was a different time. Historian Sara Evans begins her discussion of Women's liberation and the Civil Rights Movement with a chapter titled "Southern White Women in a Southern Black Movement" and draws parallels between these women and the Grimkes. "A new set of circumstances in the late fifties and early sixties forced a few young Southern women into an opposition to Southern culture comparable to that of the Grimke sisters and made them key figures in the articulation of a new feminist impulse." (Evans 1979, p. 28) Joined by their Northern white counterparts in the Black Civil Rights Organizations, particularly SNCC, these women struggled to define new relationships with Black women.

Evans gives first hand accounts of both Black and White women's experience during Freedom Summer and the Voting Registration Campaign. Motivated by a new wave of Protestant liberalism, many white college students joined these movements against vehement opposition from their families. Many were caught up in the hype of the

period and not totally sure of what they were getting into. Others knew from the start that they were in something for the long haul and had to look within as Evans states: “These young women stripped away the social supports of white society, calling upon reserves of strength they didn’t know they possessed, developed a sense of self that enabled them to recognize the enemy within as well--the image of the Southern “lady.” (Evans p.43)

Evans’ account raises several key issues that must be acknowledged in order to understand the relationship dynamics among Civil Rights Movement workers. White students who were involved because they had a sense of the urgency of the moment and their role in it, were more prepared to deal with the internal conflict and tension that arose than those who were caught up in the ideals of freedom and equality with little stomach for the dirty work on the ground. There was serious sexual tension between Black and White women as many White women caught up in the idealism, looking for a place to fit in, found temporary spaces in the beds of Black men. Accounts of the motivating factors for this behavior range from White women’s sexual “looseness” to attraction to the “forbidden fruit” (sex between White women and Black men), to white guilt and fear of rejecting Black males’ demands may be seen as racist. Black women on the other hand had less time on their hands as they took demanding leadership roles more readily and successfully. When White women began to complain about relegated sex roles in the movement, typing and preparing food, one Black woman said she didn’t know what they were talking about. In her view, Black and White women started at opposite ends of the spectrum and tensions were increased because they were treated by men so differently.

I remember discussions with various women about our treatment as one of the boys and its impact on us as women. We did the same work as men--organizing around voter registration and community issues in rural areas--usually *with* men. But when we finally got back to town where we could relax and go out, the men went out with other women. Our skills and abilities were

recognized and respected but that seemed to be a place other than female. Some years later, I was told by a male SNCC worker that some of the project women had made him feel superfluous. I wish he had told me that at the time because the differences in the way women were treated certainly did add to the tension between black and white women. (Cynthia Washington, Evans, p. 239)

As has been discussed in Chapter Four MRULE uses history as a living, breathing encounter with the past in order to make connections with the present and thereby inspire agency in the present and future. These examples of Black and White women show us that some pushed through the obstacles created by white supremacy to achieve genuine relationships while others succumbed to the cruel limitations that the ideology imposed. In either case, they illuminate the processes that still we must encounter as we strive to be simultaneously race cognizant and transcendent of the socially constructed barriers we have inherited.

Now that we discussed in some detail, the definitions and practices of genuine interracial relationships in both contemporary and historical terms it is time to look at what impact they have had upon the MRULE students. Consistent with the theme of the interdependency of theory and practice, the MRULE students have helped to shape the meaning and relevancy of genuine, authentic interracial relationships by sharing their aspirations, disappointments, and ultimately an understanding of the long process involved.

Example from the field

Developing genuine relationships across traditional racial lines is the nucleus of the MRULE program. It is where all the content and process we have previously

discussed comes to a head, the testing ground for students to bring knowledge together with action.

The characteristics of genuine friendships that have been discussed throughout this chapter warrant review here. Mutuality, open and honest communication, trust, patience, and endurance over time and through trials and tribulations are difficult to test in college students who are in transitory phases. Although the college experience can provide fertile ground for studying the formation of friendships, durability is another matter. At this stage of MRULE we are satisfied with the formation of the relationships and the degree to which these relationships can be sustained throughout their MSU experience. We are also looking at what these friendships empowered them to do, both individually and collectively, that they may not have done without MRULE, e.g., the community-building trips, the community service, and social activism. On our trips we are always a unique sight whatever venue we enter. As one student commented:

While the (weekly) roundtable discussions bonded us with respect and honesty, we only slightly felt an emotional bond to each other, until...our trips! Wow! We crossed the lines, and clinging to color wasn't an option. We were the minority—a diverse group of friends traveling together and learning about each other through history. (MRULE Student Evaluations, Spring 1998)

A community member when we came to do a service project in a local neighborhood:

What group are you from? It is really nice to have such a diverse group here in our community. We are a diverse neighborhood and we work with the university quite a bit but we don't often see such a diverse group of students working together.

An MRULE Student Leader on how to balance the sharing of opinions with knowledge:

We facilitate discussions on race relations topics and always welcome differences in opinion. We have always held firm to the ideology that "from the clash of different opinions comes the

spark of truth" and we highly value the individual opinions of everyone participating in our discussions. This does not mean, however, that we will blatantly ignore the history of race or the sociological data that we have access to as young scholars in a research university such as Michigan State. We welcome opinions of all sorts, but we will not hesitate to share the truths that we have studied about race in America. This means that we will challenge all opinions to stay within the boundaries of the racial reality in this society. In doing so, will be challenging ourselves to learn as much about race as we possibly can to help our entire community to grow in truth.

Definitions of genuine friendships from student interviews:

Genuine relationships are work to develop. There are benefits to developing genuine relationships but it's not something that can come just from association. It takes time, honesty, it takes pain sometimes and it takes real work. In the end, I just have no desire for anything but genuine relationships. At this point nothing else is satisfactory (Lisa, April, 2000).

Genuine relationships are trust. And for trust you have to be able to open up and not only show the things you are good at but your faults. When you're real with MRULE people, they open up to you and respond and you have that trust. That is what creates genuine relationships. But also genuine relationships have to be in every aspect of your life and not just MRULE (Heather, April 2000).

Genuine relationships are a true, definite connection (Paul, April, 2000).

Pushing Through the Process

Lisa and Kate had known each other in MRULE for three years. This year they began to work more closely together and their relationship took a new and different turn. There had always been mutual respect but they put very little time and attention into their relationship outside of MRULE functions. They both describe their relationship as nice, though not genuine until this year. They agreed to be interviewed about pushing through some very difficult issues that propelled their relationship into what they both call genuine.

J.G. *How do you know a relationship is genuine?*

Kate: *We can talk about absolutely everything. I haven't found anything that I can't talk to Lisa about. She is involved in all the important aspects of my life.*

Lisa: *It is genuine when it goes beyond my comfort zone. . . when I feel like I'm being stretched.*

Kate: *When I was having some personal issues, I wanted her to understand but I got scared. I knew I would either have to push through and make it real or withdraw.*

Lisa: *I didn't know how to work with what she was going through because it hit so close to home. The issues centered around whether MRULE was going to be a nice college experience or her life. As a White person she can make those choices, as a Black person I don't feel I have those same choices. I couldn't see myself putting my whole self into a relationship that would end after college, especially with all we had been through this year, but I didn't feel like I could push her. I was frustrated and my initial response was okay let her go. However, I decided I cared too much to be satisfied with that.*

J.G. to Kate: *Did you know what she was going through?*

Kate: *I didn't know for sure. I felt the friendship was fragile and I knew I was letting my own fears and insecurities take over. My inaction was pushing her away. I thought I could push my real feelings underground because I didn't want to lose the relationship so I decided to try to put on a happy face, so as not to burden my friends, especially Lisa.*

Lisa: *That wasn't acceptable. She couldn't hide it. I was frustrated with her but I knew whatever was going on, it had to be addressed. I was worried that I would come on too strong and that the last thing she needed was an intense interaction but I decided to take the bull by the horns. I called her and said let's talk. We had argued earlier about the issues of Black people having access to the countryside in Northern Michigan. I tried to tell her that no matter what when I go there, and I have on occasion, I am stared at with a less than welcome feeling. I don't put myself in those situations because I can't enjoy the beauty in the same way she can.*

Kate: *I want to do what I can to make it safe for you. I want you to be able to enjoy the beauty in the same way I can.*

Lisa: *That's what makes interracial relationships, especially Black and White, such a challenge sometimes. You see how society is structured—some Whites are ignorant, some are blatant racists and some know better. There is a responsibility that comes with that knowledge.*

Kate: *If you care so much about one person, you can't cut yourself off from the experience of the group in which they came from. They are connected. I knew that and didn't want our relationship to be about a whole lot of talk. So, when she called to talk I cried my eyes out. It was hard to be vulnerable with the relationship because I was afraid I would lose it and I was angry with myself for letting things get in the way but I just pushed through.*

Lisa: *All of my regular patterns and behaviors said "retreat" and by now I would have. There were many times I got hurt in the past because I trusted someone who didn't get it.*

Almost like I was a conversation piece, not a human being. I knew Kate was for real but I was scared that the forces would pull her in the other direction and she would go off and live her White life somewhere and look back at MRULE as a “thing I did in college.” Do I really want to set myself up for this? I prefer to take safe, predictable risks but in this case I couldn’t cut off. I had to support her through the process.

J.G. How is your friendship affected by race?

Kate: I expect a lot from those who are in MRULE. I expect more out of myself. We came to this program because of our passion, our common interests in social justice. Race cannot be invisible because the consequences are always with us. It doesn’t mean though I won’t still try to get Lisa to go up north with me as long as we are careful and I ensure she is not put in a compromising situation. At the same time, I will have to understand if she chooses not to go.

Lisa: Race can’t be separated out. You can’t take it for granted and just try to deal with each other as human beings because inevitably race comes up. Interracial relationships are so vulnerable and rare but if dealt with can be strong and beneficial because they are a testimonial to new possibilities.

Kate: I was confused and bogged down about how I would use all that I had learned in MRULE in my future. I knew I couldn’t leave it behind but couldn’t make sense of what path I could take. Pushing through with Lisa helped me to see that I may not have all the answers but that I could create my own path that would encompass my passion for what I have come to know to be true in MRULE. I will still be committed to the process in the future, no matter what it takes.

These accounts help to illustrate that the MRULE program, though small in scale, is a living testimony to transformative education. The genuine relationships created here come as a result of hard emotional work, intense intellectual challenges, and the process of taking ownership and responsibilities for knowledge and action. I now turn to my concluding chapter highlighting the voices of the students who have helped to shape MRULE over the past five years.

Chapter Seven

Students Tell Their Stories—How Participation in the MRULE Program Changed Racial Thinking and Enkindled A Spirit of Activism

Knowledge first of all has to be made meaningful to students before it can be made critical.
Henry A. Giroux, *Pedagogy and the **Politics of Difference***

Where would I be if I had not found MRULE? I had no direction and I'm sure I wouldn't have stayed at MSU if it hadn't been for MRULE.

Lisa

I couldn't stay in my declared major any longer. . .it didn't hold my attention. I wanted to do something that would make a difference where I could use what I was learning in MRULE.

Mark

I liked how in MRULE they wanted us to be open and honest, I was looking for that in a group. They weren't trying to cover up anything and look pretty. And that's what I liked about it. It was real.

Heather

Since the inception of the MRULE program in 1996, we have seen over three hundred students come in and out of the program. Of these, over half have stayed with the program at least one, two or three years with a total of five who remained for the entire four years (MRULE evaluations, 1997, 98, 99, 00). Students joined and remained for different reasons. Their experiences with the group varied depending on many factors. Despite these differences, several strong common threads held them together in a learning community that provided both intellectual challenges and social relationships that were qualitatively different than those they had outside the group. This is especially true of the Student Leader cadre.

The stories in this chapter reflect background information of each student, particularly how they experienced race and class growing up and how those experiences did or did not change upon coming to Michigan State University and within the MRULE program. There are 30 interviews—29 were audio recorded throughout the month of April, 2000 and one in December, 2000. Students signed consent forms under the agreement that the information shared could be used verbatim and interwoven with other text but would not be associated with their names.

The demographic breakdown of the students interviewed is as follows:

13 Black, 7 women, 6 men

11 White, 7 women, 4 men

2 Asian American, both women

2 Latino, 1 woman, 1 man

2 International students, 1 African, 1 Middle Eastern

Students ranged in age from just finishing freshman year to graduating seniors. Their social and economic statuses ranged from working class through middle to upper middle. Seven students identified as working class throughout their lives, eleven identified as middle class and five identified as upper middle class. Seven students reported that their socioeconomic status changed as they growing up, usually when they were in elementary school. They remember this by the move from one neighborhood to another. Students are located in several different major fields of study: Education, Business, Social Science, Natural Science, Engineering, Agriculture, Humanities/Pre-law, and International Relations.

Student interviews were based on the following questions. At times, an answer to one of these questions would lead into further probing and clarification, which is noted in the transcription.

Questionnaire for MRULE Student Profiles

These are audio taped interviews. Students were selected from the MRULE Student Leader pool, former MRULE members no longer with the program, and first and second year MRULE participants.

1. Describe the area where you grew up.
2. Describe the social class you grew up in. What did you know about your economic status as a child, adolescent, young adult?
3. When was the first time you were made aware of race? In what context?
4. How did your family think about race? As a child what did you know about people who were different from you? What did you know about people who were similar, i.e. shared your racial background?
5. Describe an incident in your family history where people from backgrounds different from you were described or discussed.
6. Describe an incident where you or members of your family interacted with people from different backgrounds?
7. What did you know about being (*whatever background you identify with*)??? What did it mean?
8. What do you know about being (*whatever you identify with*) now? What does it mean to you?
9. Upon entering the university, what were you most seeking out in terms of:
Social relationships Academic challenges Job/career prep???
10. Describe how MRULE addressed what you were looking for in any of the above categories? Describe how MRULE fell short of meeting your expectations.
11. Upon joining MRULE, what stood out to you the most?
12. If you are no longer with MRULE, are there any aspects of it that you miss? Any aspects that you don't miss?
13. What surprised you the most about your experiences in MRULE?
14. What are three things you learned from participation in MRULE?
15. If you had to describe MRULE to an incoming student, how would you do it?
16. If you had to describe MRULE to a potential employer, how would you do it?
17. What does your family understand about your participation in MRULE?
18. How has your participation in MRULE helped you to understand the following concepts?

Structural Inequality

The Social Construction of Race

The Social Construction of Whiteness

White Privilege

Race/Class/Gender Intersections

Multi-Racial Coalitions

Genuine Relationships

Leadership

Activism

19. What will you take away from your MSU experience now that you have participated in 1/2/3/4 years of the MRULE program?
20. Describe yourself in 5 years? Where will you be working? Living? How will you be applying what you have come to understand to be true about race relations in the U.S. in your life? 10 years+?

This chapter is designed to give readers a sense of the Multi-Racial Unity Living Experience through the voices of the students. To ensure that student voices are clear, there is minimal analysis included. My purpose was to introduce a range of experiences and tie themes together. Passages were selected from students so that each question would be answered from different perspectives. As was expected and has been mentioned throughout this work, racial background shaped racial thinking and day to day experience. To demonstrate this, I explore the first time each student was made aware of race.

First Time Made Aware of Race

For White students it was often something negative they heard about someone else, for students of color it was often something negative directed at them. Black students also had to contend with identity issues wrapped around race, while for White students race was something that had little or no meaning, something that concerned others.

Of course in most cases this first time experience was centered in family dynamics. Parents of these college students are members of the 60's and 70's generation. They may have consciously or unconsciously contributed to reinforcing a racial hierarchy rather than affirmatively seeking to dismantle it. Kate, a White female from a rural area had an emotionally stirring experience as she remembered the first time she was made aware of race.

There is an area in the county where several African Americans settled. All the county around it is White so it stands out. I remember one time we were driving in that area and my Dad said, "Better lock the doors. There's a lot of jiggaboos and jungle bunnies around here." I can't really say how old I was but right away I asked, "what's that?" My mom said, "don't you tell her and don't talk about this." I wanted to know more and my mom finally said that's what your dad likes to call Black people. Having hardly ever seen a Black person only on the streets when we drove through, I really didn't understand it because we weren't in a jungle. None of it made any sense to me then. Even now I can remember thinking that and it scares me that parents have such an unconscious effect on children's beliefs.

Rick, a White male with a middle class background remembers being six or seven years old and watching a *Different Strokes* television episode. Although his mother tried to explain it as something not good, Rick was left befuddled.

Arnold (the character played by Gary Coleman) was in the hospital and he had to share a room with a White child and the adults were having some problems with this so I asked my mom: Why aren't they allowed be friends? Mom said it was because some White people don't like Black people. She couldn't explain it any better than that.

Renee, an international student of Middle Eastern background, recalled television being the first time she saw Black people.

Most films showed Blacks as gang members and thieves. That was what we knew about Blacks because there were only a few Black people in the country. I remember I was once in a store and a Black person came in and a little child of about six started screaming—she had never seen a Black person in her life.

Both international students interviewed experienced a form of American racism whether in their own country or here upon arrival. Kai, a Black female and international student remembers when her East Indian friend, a first generation American told her that she could not bring her home.

When I moved here to America something really stuck out. I was going to spend the weekend with my friend. When it came time to go over, she was crying and just told me that I couldn't come like we had planned. She was very upset. When I asked her what was wrong she admitted that she was embarrassed to tell me that her parents wouldn't let me spend the night over her place because I was Black. We were in high school. I see her parents now, they're friendly, they laugh and talk to me but they don't know that she told me the truth about that.

Karen, a Black female of middle class background remembers when she, along with her sister, were the only Black children at her White friend's birthday party.

Even though we had played together before and I had been at her house, I was more uncomfortable at her birthday party. I think it was because there was more of her family there. They didn't seem as welcoming. I remember feeling different and people were looking at my sister and me.

It is interesting to contrast Derek, a Black male of working class background and Cindy, a White female from an upper class background, both who came from cities on the west side of Michigan. As Derek recounts the first time he was made aware of race:

I went to middle school on the northeast side of town but I didn't live on that side so I had to commute to the other side of town. Sometimes I had to cut routes through this really ritzy, upper class suburb. One day I was coming home and these guys were rolling in their car and they yelled out the window, hey you want a banana? I looked at them and they started laughing and they just pulled off. That's when it really first hit me that there's a big difference in race. Up to that point, I knew that there were different races. I knew that people saw each other as different, had different stereotypes, but to actually see racism first hand like that had never happened to me before. That's when I started to open my eyes that there are some people who really don't like me. They had a chance to knock me down or put me in a situation where they made me uncomfortable. So that was my first experience.

Cindy:

The first time I was made aware had to do with an area around our town that was low class, a poverty area and primarily Black. My parents would drive around areas that used to be nice where they grew up but were no longer nice. This was the only time I saw people from different racial backgrounds. I was told these areas were dangerous and I think I always associated poverty and danger with being Black.

This is a powerful example of the racialized experiences around segregated neighborhoods and how Black people are put in dangerous and inferior positions no matter what they are doing. Derek is ridiculed and threatened on the way home from school while Cindy is driven around and shown how dangerous Black neighborhoods are. At Michigan State University, away from these contrasting neighborhoods and in MRULE, Derek and Cindy end up in the same dialogue circle sharing these stories and suddenly Cindy questions what was really going on while taking those drives. There is a different context—Derek's experience that was never considered when she was learning about the poverty and danger of the Black neighborhood.

Anna, a White female of upper class background from another state had first experiences that sent her the message that Black people and drug dealing were synonymous.

I must have been 7 or 8 when my sister was dating a Black guy from the north side of town whose family was really well known for drug dealing. My dad is an attorney so my dad knew everything that was going on. He knew that this person's father and uncle and everybody under the sun around them were dealing drugs. So I remembered my parents and my sister getting into huge fights and my sister would say it's because he's Black isn't it and my parents would say it has nothing to do with the fact that he's Black. But because in our town to say that someone is involved in drugs it was like synonymous with them being Black. That's what I knew about Black people. Puerto Ricans came later and the same was said about them.

Mark, a White male of working class background remembers racial jokes from family members when he was a teenager. But that was not the first time he was made aware of race as he recalls in the following passage:

When I was about seven, there was another kid in the townhouse that was giving me a hard time and he was half-black and half-white. His dad was Black and his mom was White. I told my mom and she said 'The next time he gives you a hard time, just call him a half-breed'. That was one of the first things I remember about race.

Brandon and Joanne, both Black students of middle class backgrounds remember lessons on the Black experience being their first time made aware of race.

Brandon:

My mother let us know that we were Black boys and that society would treat us differently because of that. My mother would point out that people were following us, that's what they do, so don't steal because they're already watching you. When my mom tried to move into an apartment with two Black boys, they wouldn't let her move in because they said Black boys were trouble.

Joanne:

In elementary school, during history, there was the one chapter on slavery, in the middle of the book. We went over it and then moved on and my parents made it a point to tell me 'we've come a long way.' My parents told stories about our family. We talked about what we had to go through, we've made it far, but we're not there yet when it comes to racial equality.

Several Black students shared experiences relating to identity and where they stood on a Black/White continuum dealing with issues of darkness and lightness and what it means to be Black. Lisa moved from a working class to middle class neighborhood in second grade.

I was born aware of race, the neighborhood I grew up in was completely Black as well as the interactions I had within a Black

private school and in an all Black church. I was surrounded by Black people. But I always had consciousness of race. I was very moved by the media, especially advertising. I would watch television, especially the commercials. You were supposed to look like the person in the ad and no matter what I couldn't look like the person in the ad.

There is a picture of me as a baby. When I was first born I was very fair and was told I had blue eyes. The doctors thought I was a White baby. I looked like a White baby. When I became aware of this fact, I hung on to that picture and I wanted to look like that little girl and didn't understand why the change had to happen.

My first memories are at two. I thought my mother was White because she was light compared to the all the Black people around me. I argued with her and she would tell me 'No, I am not White.' But I really thought that she was and I wanted to be like her because she was one of the prettier women in the church and the prettier women to me were the ones with fairer complexions. It wasn't that I thought I was unattractive because of my brown skin because there were many children who were darker than me. But if I had had my choice I would have been lighter.

Tina, a Black female of working class background was fair skinned and remembers her first experience as being labeled white girl.

As a child I was really fair. I mean I'm fair now in color, but as a child with the things I did to my hair maybe I could have passed. I don't have a specific incident where I remember being made aware of race. I knew that I was the lightest of all grandchildren. Oh all the time, the family would tease me. It was not to hurt me. I knew that, even though they would always call me little white girl. I was made aware when I was young that I was light. They were all much darker than me. They would always made insinuations about my hair and skin color. But nothing that would hurt me. I laughed too.

Andre, on the other hand did not come away laughing when he was called "white boy" by his friends.

I was playing football in the first grade. I was the lightest of all my friends in the group other than the bi-racial kid. We had a confrontation in the game and they ganged up on me and called me white boy. They said I didn't have the right hair. I went home

crying and my mom told me who I was and that there were Black and White people in our family.

Charlene's first encounter was one that made her question who she was.

I was ten years old. My cousin asked me "why are you acting white?" I didn't know what that was but I tried to act Black, whatever that meant. I started to talk slang even though I had never been taught to. It took a lot of work for me to be accepted as Black.

Racial Identity: What it Meant and Means

Students offered several insights on the question of what it meant to be Black, White, Asian American, and Latino. This question was asked in two parts—What did you know as a child and what do you know now? Meghan, a White female from a working class background, who attended a fairly poor school and is aware that her education did not adequately prepare her for the university, still noted a difference between herself and her Black friends.

I knew that I was treated better in school because amongst my Black friends in school they would complain about being accused of things that I wasn't. The drug dogs weren't in any of the clubs that I was in. My Black friends didn't hang out in school afterwards. . . whenever there was a racial fight, people assumed the Black kids started it. My friends knew me and didn't blame me for the treatment. I felt bad, maybe in one sense guilty because I knew them as people and when they were accused things that I didn't see them as doing, I didn't know what to do.

Paul, a White male of middle class background shared an experience that came up with several students. Being White really didn't mean anything. It just was.

I don't have a strong connection anywhere. I'm this White American whose roots don't go very far, that's how I see it. I've always identified myself as White. . . I know a friend that would say, oh yeah, I'm German in a situation where it seemed

advantageous. I've never really done that. That doesn't mean anything to me.

Other White students who had similar responses:

Anna:

I don't remember thinking about it. I think I just thought that White is normal. We did all the Swedish holidays and stuff like that. We would do traditions in our family.

Cindy:

I don't think I knew anything about being White. I'm sure that somehow I felt like I was better, maybe. Being White doesn't mean a lot to me since I came to college. I don't think of it as my own culture. I just know that being White is really valued in this society. I do know how much it's valued. I don't love being White, but I understand how it's valued.

Rick:

I never acknowledged my race. I could see that all the people in my neighborhood were White and that people were scared to go into Detroit that was Black.

When asked what they knew about being White since coming to college and being in MRULE, there was in all cases an increased awareness of White privilege as this following story from Mark illustrates.

My stepmother was shopping in a store where they have detectors on the door that beep when you are stealing something. She was with her daughter and they had two carts full of things they needed. My stepsister wasn't done checking out yet, but the first cart was done and bagged, so my stepmother took it and said 'I'll meet you out in the car' and when she went through the door, the alarm sounded. She looked at the security guard and he said 'Don't worry about it, the alarm system is haywire and it goes off all of the time for no reason, just go ahead and go.' She was halfway to the car and she heard the alarm system go off again so she turned around and looked and it was a Black male pushing a cart that had less stuff in it than hers. All of it was bagged (not all of hers was) and the cop immediately ran over and said 'I need to see your receipt, I need to search your this and that'. Although I wasn't there when it happened, when she told me about it, it reminded me of similar things I've noticed. I wasn't aware of this before I came to college.

Rick:

Now I can see the privilege. I can see it on a daily basis. I can see when there is a boycott going on at the grocery store because of racial profiling and the White students get angry about it, it somehow offends them. They have no clue what it is like to be distrusted because of skin color. They can't fathom it.

Ethan:

Since MRULE, I know a lot about being White. I'm in amazement about what Whites have done to others. The whole concept of White privilege I learned here at MRULE. I never realized how we really are—how that plays out because I never have to worry about how to get a car, or get questioned by the police. The perception that Whites are better than others. . .I have to honestly admit that people really do think that way.

Erin is a White female of upper middle class background. She made continual discoveries in MRULE about White privilege.

Of course now I realize how unbelievably privileged I was. I went in and out of everywhere—every social circle, in and out of every economic opportunity, school choices, job choices, career choices with never a thought. I never really thought that the reason I could do this was because I was White. I knew I was doing these things but never linked my opportunities, economic status—never linked these to White privilege.

To me socially it means I have a very large role/opportunity, fueled with resources that I could make work towards a much larger purpose than myself. Because I am White I will be able to get into situations and revamp those situations that will affect a larger pool—that I could not do in the same way if I were not White.

This question had very different meanings for students of color. Julee discusses what she knew about being Filipino.

As a kid, I just knew that my background was Asian. I didn't really think too much about it. I had the Filipino looks, but the American attitude. Now, it means to me that I have a heritage and a culture that I can look back on and find a stable foundation. It's not so much the race, but it's the history. I know that my grandparents had to work very hard to go to university in the Philippines. If I had been here in the 20s, I may have been

hanged or not even allowed in. If my parents had come here earlier, they would have been working in a factory. I have a history behind me that can sustain me, it gives me my strength.

Teresa, who identifies as “bi-racial”³² spoke about the struggle to include her entire experience when she thinks about who she is and what that means.

I guess it didn’t start to mean anything to me until I hit high school. I really didn’t try to identify because I never really filled out any forms that asked what I thought of myself as. I never really sat down and thought about it and my mom never discussed it. But when I did start thinking about it, I wanted to claim both parts of me. Most of the time when I’m asked, I say that I am biracial. The Latino side is part of my background even though I’m not as close to it. People see that I know Spanish, I know it because I learned it in school not because it was spoken at home. I’d like to continue studying it.

For Black students, the question of what it meant and means today to be Black was embedded in social consequences. Whereas White students could choose whether or not being White meant anything, Black students focused more on the consequences and responsibilities attached to being Black. Andre’s experience with what it meant to be a Black male changed as he grew.

When I got older I noticed there were consequences to being a Black male that I never knew as a child. The way Whites react when they see a big group of us. . .my mom always warned me about hanging out at the mall. She said the merchants would think I was going to be stealing. “Be aware that your skin color has consequences” she told me.

Brandon got similar messages:

³² This is a contested term, particularly as applied to the Anglo-Mexican combination. Once aware of the spuriousness of racial categories, it is difficult to align with the terminology (Spencer, 1999). Latinos as a racial/ethnic group are not commonly understood among students. They see Latinos as a race of people even though we explain the traditional racial categories assigned within the wide diversity of Latino peoples. For the purposes of this chapter, I use the terminology that the students haven chosen to identify themselves regardless of their sociological accuracy. Any biological accuracy is of course an utter fallacy just as monoracial categories are.

For a Black male it meant that you were going to have it different than everybody else. You are going to have it harder. You're going to have to try extra hard to prove yourself. People will try to hold you down.

Joanne's parents worked at counteracting negative information about Black people in the media and made her aware of their historical progress.

My parents told me Black people are not bad, despite what you read in the media and the impression you get in movies and music. It wasn't always like that, Black people are good people. I should be proud, not ashamed. I'll have to struggle in America, the road is not going to be easy, but it can be done. I can't always go by the media to make my conclusions about myself, my education, my class, etc.

Derek spoke about the difficulties he knew that were associated with being Black in contrast to his desire to just live life.

One thing I knew was that we didn't have the best of situations. We didn't have the best of homes. I knew that the schools we went to were nothing like the schools in the suburbs because I went to a school in the suburb once and the school had computers in the classrooms. From the books to the hallways to the lockers this school looked totally different. I knew that Whites lived in a better environment. I knew that there was some tension among races, however I didn't really see too much tension at home. By watching the news, TV, that made me aware of some of the things that were going on. All I cared about was my surrounding environment. I lived there, that's all I knew. Black people were the ones I interacted with on a daily basis. That was my life.

Family Racial Thinking

These early racial experiences took place in a family, school, or community context. I asked the students to consider what they remember about how their family thought about race and if any incident occurred that they could recall. This would give us more insight into the process of shaping racial thinking. In this regard, some students had negative memories, some positive, but they were not as clearly cut along racial lines as

had been their first experience with race. In other words, in White families and in families of color there were incidents that validated some version of a racial hierarchy, just as there were families who denied that hierarchy and tried to teach their children racial equality. More often than not, students of all racial backgrounds reported stereotyping as a central component of how their families thought about race.

Erin:

My parents and I discuss police and welfare or urban education and inevitably race comes up. There are no racial slurs even though I know there are stereotypes harbored—stingy and rich Jews, Blacks in the inner city who have to pull up themselves up from their bootstraps. My father will say when we discuss welfare programs that the economy is so good that there is no reason why everyone should not have a job. I've always heard that. There is no reason that you can't pull yourself up. He'll say 'your mother and I did not start our well, we had to work hard'—My father had to work long hours since he was 14. When I try to bring up that it is not that easy and some of the conditions that have interfered with Black people pulling themselves up, their response is 'because they are not trying hard enough'. I prod and try to get them to look at the bigger social picture but it doesn't happen.

Andre:

My parents have always made me aware that I am Black in a White society. They cautioned: 'Be nice to Whites but you have to look out for your own interests. They'll turn their back on you in a heartbeat.' They noticed I was hanging out with a lot of White friends because I didn't care who my friends were. We like that you have these White friends but just be aware that they can turn their back on you. This was their attitude when I was growing up and it still is today because of what they have been through.

Shana, an Asian Indian recently naturalized remembers that it was okay to be friends with Blacks but not to marry them.

It was clear that my family would not want me to marry a Black person. There was this stereotype that all Blacks were uneducated and not worthy of Asian women. When my mom married a Black man from Trinidad my grandmother was very upset. There was much fighting between them. I had my own prejudices that I never really analyzed until I came here and got into MRULE. I adore my stepfather and have been able to change my frame of thinking about many of these issues. It is not easy—the stereotypes live on.

Rence, an international student had a similar experience.

It centers around seeing the good side of our people and the bad side of other people. My family would not want me to marry outside of our nationality. There are stereotypes of those who don't speak our language, have our name, or our accents. There is a clear message about those 'others' that they are not as good.

Juan, a Mexican American from Los Angeles received several different messages about people while growing up but remembers his dad as someone who reached out across racial lines.

What I heard from older Mexicans was that Black people were bad and that most crimes in LA are done by Black people (at least the ones we know). My parents are not racist, my dad talks to everyone and makes friends. I get it from my dad, this ability to talk to people. I knew White people were rich, they had money, some were good people, some weren't. I knew that older people were nicer than young people. I was in a community service club and sometimes we worked with other schools. There were Asians there and other groups but Whites never reached out to us.

Julee's family was thoroughly diverse in and of itself and prepared her for openness to a range of people and experiences. Both parents are Filipino but there is significant

intermarriage on her mother's side. On her father's side the anti-Black sentiment we have seen on several occasions is overtly noted.

My mother's side of the family is really diverse. My uncle is African American, my godfather is Indian American, my other uncle is Caucasian. So there's no real discussion over diversity. My father's side of the family is all Asian and they are more closed-minded because they've all grown up in all-Asian areas. They've been told to stay away from African Americans.

John, a Black male from a working class background has vivid memories of how his parents suffered. They harbored stereotypes about White people that came as a result of racial animus that began when they were children.

I don't want to say that my parents were racist because to be racist is to think that one race is superior over another. But they harbored some stereotypes. That was based on their treatment and they conveyed that to us very clearly. My father grew up in the South. His parents were sharecroppers in Mississippi. My mother grew up here in Michigan where schools were segregated. And when they were finally desegregated White kids were meeting them at the bus and telling them to go home. They conveyed this to us. They weren't appreciative of the treatment. As a child I knew about people different from me, I knew a lot of the stereotypes about White Americans. They were all negative in content. As a child I really didn't see some of the underlining racial actions that I was exposed to. Like in particular, I was in third grade with this really good teacher. He was always doing neat stuff with his classes. I was the only minority in his class and they pulled me out and they put me in class with one of the three African American teachers in the school who I had already had in second grade. I just wanted to be in his class. Everyone was responsive to him. When I was in the other class, everyone was rude. It was as different as night and day. I performed very well regardless of the situation I was in.

Paul's story is not uncommon for a middle class White family that did not harbor any particular racial animus but did not necessarily find ways to act on their belief of racial equality.

In my family we didn't interact with too many people of different racial backgrounds. I know my dad worked with people from different backgrounds but I didn't and we didn't often socialize. We (as a family) didn't have any best friends that came over for dinner or anything like that. I had a best friend that was Black and I know our parents knew each but they didn't interact or anything. My family always taught me to love everyone and that everyone should be equal. We never had much interaction with people from different racial backgrounds. I came from an area that was White and that's what we knew.

Meghan's parents were divided on the issue as she observed both sentiments.

As a child I was just taught to treat people the way I wanted to be treated and everyone is different in their own way. When my stepfather came in the picture he was racist. I was eight. He wanted us to move out of our house because our town was getting "too dark." Mom fought the issue—she liked it there and did not want to leave. He let it go and at a later point suggested it again to get a nicer home. We looked for a house but never bought.

Ethan feels he grew up in an open-minded environment, though both parents were not necessarily on the same page.

My mom is open-minded. She works in a very diverse environment and has an African American boss. My dad has an underlying attitude, like he is one of the good old boys. If I were to date interracial, I know he'd be more upset than my mom.

The discussion about how families thought about race led into incidents that students remembered when a member of a different racial background was discussed or described or a situation where interactions took place. Every student interviewed had a story to share in this category so I selected a few that represent some of the most poignant.

Lisa:

My Mom would try and tell me there is nothing wrong with you. . .you're beautiful, there is nothing wrong with Black people. I had friends, Asian and Mexican American friends. Some of them I could go to their houses and some I couldn't. My best friend

Teresa, I couldn't go to her house. We had to sneak because her dad and grandfather didn't want her to have Black people over. One day we had this big adventure where we left school before they could pick us up so we could go to her house. It was like we ran away but we got caught in the rain. We were so scared that we were going to get in trouble that we went back to the school.

Julee:

My cousin is bi-racial, her father is African American. We're best friends, she's two years older than me. There was discussion about how she should be raised because she's mixed. They said that she wasn't learning enough about our culture, no one was teaching her Tagalog. They said that she was too American. 'It's good for her to integrate and to have an easy life, but still, she should know about us.' My father's family said that she was Black and not Filipino at all. They talked about what it means to be African, what it means to be Asian. There was a hierarchy, a mentality, it's really unfortunate, but that's how they were raised. My cousin is as Filipino as I am, it's not like you can divide a person. We had this family ritual, the entire clan would meet on Sundays for dinner at this restaurant. We would have discussions and I remember someone saying 'she's never going to be Filipino' and she ran out crying.

Cindy:

My father, (I have trouble saying this because to me, he's a great man) may have held a lot of prejudices about Blacks. Being a judge, I remember asking him the ratio of Blacks to Whites that he saw in his courtroom (delinquents and such). At first he told me he thought there were more Blacks, but when he checked, he found that there were more Whites. I think that that surprised him. He used to joke around about it with me a lot, but there came a point when he took it seriously.

He also had a really good friend who was in line for another judgeship that had been working the courts, and everyone understood that he was going to be chosen. Then the government chose a Black man over this White man and it was a big uproar in the courts. I knew that it really bothered my dad. They thought that it was because of affirmative action because they said this other man came out of nowhere. My dad was a lot more quiet about it than he would've been if I hadn't been in MRULE. Later, when I talked to him about it we discussed that his friend was of course qualified and he was hurt because it was his friend. The

Black man turned out to be a great judge and they are friends now. My dad keeps on being surprised.

Heather grew up in a middle class family whose father got a significant raise when she was still in elementary school. She expressed her complete frustration in family and social circles where she always found herself defending racial equality. They would tease her as being the only “liberal” in the family which translated into “you care about all those other people so we should watch what we say around you.” They rarely did watch what they said as Heather explains.

It’s just hard because a lot of the issues overlap. Whether it was interracial dating or affirmative action, my parents were clear where they stood. I would have been disowned for dating interracial and my father felt affirmative action threatened his job security when his employer was going through some restructuring.

I remember so many times when I just started to cry at the dinner table because I would be so passionate about this and it didn’t seem fair to me. I feel like it’s a no win battle. Even last night, I went out with friends from work and it was just horrible because the maintenance people that work there are primarily Vietnamese and just hearing people talk about them. It’s so hard, but the same time you’re sitting in this room with all these people and everyone thinks it hilarious. I was very uncomfortable. Finally one of my good friends said to me ‘this is really bothering you isn’t it?’ I got up and left the room and I think it was good because people looked at me and thought, maybe we should not be talking like this. It is hard because you feel so outnumbered.

Kai, a Black female, not from the United States often discusses the difficulties she had being accepted among Black Americans.

Well it was a big transition because like I said, I had racial issues when I first moved here. I was not used to hanging out with certain crowds because of the way they looked. I would hang out with everybody. If you happen to have a good personality, I would hang out with you. That was hard because there were some groups of people who did not want to hang out with me because of my race even though they didn’t know who I was, they had the general stereotype which is why I had some problems. And I also

had problems with some of the African American groups here and in my high school since a lot of them did not associate with me. They thought I was trying to be White. They asked why I don't speak Ebonics and when they would speak to me and I didn't understand them, I would say, what are you talking about and they would think that I was trying to act superior to them. So I didn't fit in with a lot of them. I hung out with only two African Americans in my high school. I mostly hung out with the White crowd. They accepted me. They would say 'Oh she's from Africa; she's not African American. She speaks good English. They hung out with me because we had similar personalities. I also had Japanese and Chinese friends. We had our little group because we're not from here; we had something in common.

The varied backgrounds of these thirty students provide us a window to see how lived experienced in the United States is racialized. I will now discuss how these experiences were brought together in MRULE. Students came to MRULE for several reasons. Some sought the group out, others were dragged by friends, some were assigned or encouraged by residence hall staff. Once there, something captivated them and made them want to stay. To get an understanding of what these compelling features were, I asked the question in two ways: What stood out to you and what surprised you about what you were learning in MRULE?

What Stood Out to You?

Lisa:

The thing that stood out was that we had a diverse group of Blacks and Whites—through the dialogue these White students were able to have an experience with Black students that they couldn't have had otherwise. They would leave the meetings knowing there wasn't one Black opinion on a particular issue, that they hadn't just met one Black person, have one Black friend and now they understand diversity and now they know how Black people act. In a society where we are so segregated, a lot of times people are looking for that one friend—to clue them in on Black culture, how Black people think and act in this situation. Then they think that they can go about their day feeling confident that I can maneuver if I ever come in contact with a Black person.

Through the dialogues, they were able to see the commonality of oppression and discrimination that Black people have to go through. They could also see the different ways that is experienced based on class, based on gender and based on individual personalities because that does play into it.

Cindy:

I was surprised at what the Black students had to say. I was surprised at how many stories they had about themselves and their parents' struggles. I was surprised by how much they were still being harassed. All of this stuff that I had seen in history books, was still here. I remember being upset with myself for not having realized that.

Heather:

First of all, the interaction with people that were different from me stood out. That was the big thing because that's what I wanted. I knew I would have to join something that would force me to do it because I wasn't really going to seek it out on my own time. And of course, all the other things, like the socials, the trips. It sounded like a great group to join. I liked the openness and honesty, it was what I was looking for in terms of education. They weren't trying to cover up anything and look pretty. . I liked it because it was real.

Tina:

Before I became a member, I knew some other members; we would often talk about the MRULE discussions in the cafeteria. And people would get so heated up and rattled up and I didn't even know such discussions were going on here. I just decided that I would go to one and see for myself. The first meeting I went to was on affirmative action and people were saying all kinds of things. It was interesting so I came back.

Brandon:

Everybody who was there wanted to be there. They were interested in the same things I was interested in. I liked the dialogues that were discussed. It wasn't just people saying how great everything was, it talked about reality, that things are not how they're supposed to be. That was why I was attracted to it.

Renee:

What stood out to me was the openness, friends confiding in each other. I never had that. In my country, we don't speak openly or honestly about these issues.

Kai:

When you walk in the room, that's the first thing you see. People of different racial backgrounds talking together. It is not very common, especially at this university. If you go in and see a diverse group talking together and having fun, it really stands out.

Joanne:

We talk in the circle, but we also do things. We have trips, we do community service, we sit together in the cafeteria. This is where you can see segregation. When we eat together before meetings, people look and wonder what we have in common, and we prove our point by sitting together. The amount of honesty in the group stood out to me. In the beginning, people are shy, but we talk about everything and people share their opinions. The discussions are structured, but anything goes when we are talking. You can ask anything and not worry about offending anyone because we are there to learn.

Andre:

What stood out to me was the activism. I was involved in MRULE for a short time and we did more than any other group I had been in... we were doing things, not just talking about it.

What surprised you?

Shana:

Realizing my own prejudices, my own racist views and stereotypes that I had of people. I remember thinking why wouldn't I date interracial? I was also surprised by how many students I have met with severe issues—the racism and stereotypes harbored are serious. They believe it, they perpetuate it and they don't understand the importance of understanding slavery, how this country was built. It's hard work to challenge their thinking but that's what we try to do in MRULE.

Kate:

I knew I was going to be learning things but it's really about whether or not you apply that to your lifestyle and I think that's where the surprise came in. I guess I didn't know how it was going to affect everything I do in my life. There are people who I wouldn't date because I know what their views are and I've talked to them and they have hard standing views which I don't agree with at all. I used to let that slide before and now that's a much bigger deal to me.

Paul:

I was surprised that I would be having such a strong connection with people. Surprising how much I've changed in thinking. It's not that I'm brainwashed. I just opened my mind to look at it differently. My thinking is open now and I've been told about experiences that are different from anything I've known before. I've come away with a lot of things. I never would have looked at White privilege or that there is some inequality behind the system.

Charles:

What surprised me the most was that I didn't think I was going to have that much fun with people from different backgrounds. I remember when I was thinking about joining, I was thinking, this is just another group trying to act like everybody is the same and everything is equal. I just wanted to say my peace and leave. But it ended up being very interesting and fulfilling.

Julee:

I was surprised by what people say in the group. You see these people and you make assumptions about what they are like and then they say something completely different and it's really reassuring to you that you just can't judge people by what you initially think of them. The fact that people would come back, even though they might have been offended or annoyed, with the faith or hope that they could continue to communicate, even if it might hurt.

John:

That I'm not uncomfortable being around White people. I don't know if I can attribute it only to MRULE. It may be because I've always spent a lot of time with White Americans. I always questioned their sincerity though based on the teachings of my

parents, until MRULE helped me step out of it. My ideas went completely 180...I didn't expect it. MRULE opened my eyes to a lot of things, stepping out of my comfort zone.

Anna:

I was surprised by how everything that I had taken to arguing about forever was challenged. I just remember being in my government class in high school and arguing that people just had to work harder because that is what I was taught and I saw how hard my parents worked. Recognizing that structural inequality existed was the most surprising thing to me. I could recognize class privilege but I always had the idea that if people from other races worked, they would get there too.

Lisa:

The first thing that surprised me was the program was real. When I was dipping my feet in to see what MRULE was about—it wasn't fake. Since coming to Michigan there was an element of phoniness with my relationships with my White friend and we never dealt with race. There were a lot of people on campus that never had interactions with anyone other than people that looked like them—Black and White included. Well how in the world were we going to have real discussions based on experiences? I thought I knew everything. I had no idea how many issues I had to work through and am still working through.

Heather:

I was surprised by how immersed I became in MRULE. I wouldn't have said that I wanted to live in a diverse neighborhood or work in a diverse school before this. And now it's such a priority to me because I see that it is those everyday things that make a difference. I do not want to work in a school that was like mine...I really don't. Even when I'm done with MRULE and I graduate, it's going to affect the decisions that I make.

Derek:

What surprised me was that I could have a good time with students of different racial backgrounds sometimes better than with students of my own background. It surprised me that I had a better time doing things with Mike than with Dray, who I've known for a couple of years. Without MRULE, I don't think I would have been open to that.

Building on what stood out and surprised students about MRULE, I then asked them to identify three things that they learned—what about MRULE had they made their own.

Lauren, a Black female of middle class background:

I realized that one person really can make a difference. By going to meetings and by learning about these things I can go to my friends when they are talking about affirmative action or something else and I can share what I've learned especially the historical background. Whereas, before I could just state my opinion and have no real facts.

Paul:

One thing I've learned that history is something that you have to know and understand. There's history of oppression and slavery but there are also people in history that worked together. We have to know this history, all history to understand who we are today.

I've also learned that there is a separation between what I have and what other people don't and it's because of where I'm from and not who I am. It's because I was born where I was.

Charles:

I learned there needs to be more discussions like this about race issues because it seems like I meet people everyday but they really don't know about Black people. We're here everyday and we see you everyday and you expect us to join you everywhere even in this university, we join you and then even when we're here, I think they still expect us to come to you for everything. Why don't you come to us? Being in MRULE I realized that until everything is brought in the open and discussed, there won't be any kind of resolution to it. I really liked working together when we did the community service. When Black and White people work together, Whites can see that I can do as much as they can do. Maybe then they'll start treating me differently, as an equal.

Erin:

I am not the norm—I thought it was normal to go to a four year university, have two parents, walk around malls with no problems and to go in and out of the city with no problems.

Cindy:

I learned so much. I definitely learned that the world that I grew up with and my perception of it wasn't correct or full. I learned to be a lot more aware of how I thought about people and how to be careful of the stereotypes and the prejudices that I still use. I learned not be intimidated to talk about racial issues. I used to think that I didn't deserve to talk about them because I wasn't a minority, so what could I say about it? I learned it takes everyone's effort.

Derek:

I've learned that a person, for example a Caucasian person, can come from a racist family and still see an African American person as a human being, as equal. I didn't know that. I thought that if your parents were racist basically you were going to be racist as well

Ethan:

I learned how to feel comfortable talking with people from backgrounds different from mine. I've never really done that before but that's what we do and why we are here and now I'm not uncomfortable at all. I'm not intimidated to ask about another's experience because from the interaction comes progress and growth.

Jeff, a Black male of working class background:

I didn't know that race and class and gender intertwined. I didn't know about how Blacks were systematically kept out of higher cultural status. I didn't know that women were oppressed. I learned that to get the most out of my college experience, you have to step outside of your comfort zones. I know a lot of people who just live inside their own little circle and I'm more comfortable going outside of what I know. I learned how important history is, you always hear the cliché "if you don't know history, you are bound to repeat it", but I've never been a real history buff, I just did it. But I learned how important the process of learning history was.

John:

We debunk a lot of stereotypes. And when I go home I have dialogues with my family trying to tell them “look these are stereotypes.” We talked a lot about stereotypes.

Tracy, a White female from an upper class background:

I’m a bit more ready to check people when they are making a comment or a joke or just like a vibe or an attitude. Before I would ignore it because I didn’t want to embarrass them or myself for not having the information. I was scared that someone would come back with something. Even if I don’t have all the information, I know that I’m ready.

Rick:

I had to learn to accept racial categories. I found this to be submissive to the system. To acknowledge the categories seemed to agree with them. Spiritually and intellectually the ultimate goal is to dismantle the categories but I had to accept the difference of the day to day lived experience. The majority of Whites don’t know anything about race. Those that say racism doesn’t exist make it convenient to uphold the ignorance. People of color don’t inherently have the knowledge either. We are all operating in a system that leaves us no option unless we consciously fight together.

Julee:

I’ve learned that it’s always good to be open to what people say and to give them the benefit of the doubt and not simply stick little faults to them. For example, if someone says something really offensive to you and disagreeable, you can’t just say ‘oh, I hate that person right now and I always will.’ Being in MRULE, you realize these people are coming from different backgrounds from you and they’ve had these things hammered into their heads. They’ve had things subliminally put into their heads, so you really can’t blame people for what they think. It’s not entirely their fault. Communication really is the difference. Many of our problems today could be solved by opening up and communicating to and learning from each other.

Renee:

It doesn't matter who you are—you don't have to be Black to care about racial issues. . . You don't have to be an international student to know what is going on in the world. You can make a difference whoever you are.

MRULE and College Experience

As MRULE participants took ownership of what they learned and began applying it in their lives and in class work, they found that there were many ways that this newly acquired knowledge had fulfilled or exceeded their expectations. I asked them to consider three categories: Social relationships, academic challenges, and job/career preparation. The following responses are samples from all categories.

Social Relationships

Derek:

But I know that in MRULE they were real honest and genuine feelings. It wasn't lies or people holding back their feelings. It was actually an honest, open debate forum. Everybody talked about how they really felt inside, the background that they came from and some of the things that they had to deal with in the past. One of the best things was the trip, the year we went to Toronto. I had a good time. I never went on a trip with such a diverse group. The fact that we bonded, watched a play, ate dinner, just totally had me hooked on the idea that this should happen all the time, not just in a group. I mean our society should be doing this more often, even though I knew it wasn't. MRULE really changed my outlook my freshmen year. Which I think is key because your freshmen year, you're vulnerable to different groups and organizations. And I'm glad that I joined this group instead of some others who had a more narrow-minded view on exactly how campus life should be.

Tracy:

The social relationships are learning about people. From the roundtable discussions in MRULE, I became more ready to share my opinions in group setting in my classes which are in engineering. I never had an engineering background so I wasn't really confident about my engineering and technical skills so I never spoke up. From MRULE you realize that even if you don't have a lot of information and knowledge, your immediate thought about it can help the group. It can help you when other people disagree with you or teach you what they know to fill the gaps in your head. That's what I noticed immediately.

Lisa:

Even though I didn't expect it, my social relationships soared. I was able to meet people that were interested in working on this issue and able to create friendships with Whites specifically with who I didn't have to be the exception to the rule. I didn't have to sugar coat the experiences that I have which have to do with race. As an African American, that's a big part of my life and if I have to take that out of my relationship, it's impossible to have something genuine. I made friends with people from MRULE and I was able to start to deal with real issues about race. I could begin to me. I am Black and that means I have a different day to day experience. I am not an example for Black people, I'm not an exception. It's a difficult balance for people to understand I am Black—do not look at me as not Black. I used to have to hear that you're not really Black. I hate that. Now, that I understand what that means I say no, I am Black and don't forget it, I'm still great, brilliant, and can be a wonderful friend.

Meghan:

MRULE built my social relationships and helped me to realize that just because people aren't from my background doesn't mean I can't relate to them. I am not secluding myself to only people who can relate to me because of a similar background.

Heather:

Because I started to see all these different kinds of people when I first got to the university, I thought I wasn't going to make it here. I felt uncomfortable and did not know what to say, how to relate. I was scared to say the wrong thing. I was worried about being too PC.

Teresa:

I remember coming in and being afraid of making friends. I guess I was never really confident in myself in high school. People would always say you're easy to get along with, you won't have a hard time making friends. But I was really tense and iffy about that. I mean I always really liked my friends back home but people have told me that even though you'll keep a friend or two from high school, the friends that will be long lasting friendships are those from college. MRULE helped me with this.

Charles:

I made a lot of friends there in MRULE. I really like it for that reason. People have scattered but I still e-mail some people. It was a lot of fun especially the trips. I see people that are in MRULE and we just hug each other and we're tight. We know each other basically. It was a real good learning experience because coming here into a college, it's very big, and it's your first year, it's a way to make friends and learn from other people. I think that it's needed for freshmen, especially.

Academic Challenges

Erin:

Academically, HST 480 was by far the most challenging thing I have ever done in this university. While at the same time, being in MRULE and realizing even though I was, I wasn't perfect, that I had my own shortcomings in racial relationships. I had shortcomings in my own thoughts and I was challenged consistently with academic material that proved to me why I had these shortcomings and what I was going to do about it. The writing was so hard. It was so hard to express myself because I knew that you knew me but you didn't know why I thought what I thought and it was hard to explain that without being ignorant, which I was but I didn't want anyone else to know that. The class was the most rewarding and academically satisfying course in the sense that in all one room I was given all the information and how to get more information. There were people that totally agreed, people that totally disagreed, people who completely related to the text, people with no clue what the text was talking about. And we all had to sit in small groups and go into combat together, linking everything we had in our own experiences and

our group experiences and the material and throw it back at the group to try and wrestle with it. It was just a constant three hours of a combination of anxiety, frustration and satisfaction. I wasn't the only one that was confused and there was satisfaction that at times I knew what I was talking about when other people didn't and I could offer them that and they could turn it around and offer me something.

The academic aspect has been weaved in so intricately with the social aspect that you don't really realize it is academic. I can't say this program fell short academically because I know I learned so much that was in books and other things that would never be found in a book that would still be considered academic. I wasn't aware at the time that that's what I was learning. I look back now and I realize that I know who John Brown is because of History 480 and MRULE and I know when MLK was shot because of 480 but I realize the effects of it because of MRULE.

Anna:

The course of study that I ended up taking has been completely shaped by MRULE. I had known a little about feminist consciousness but I didn't have or I really didn't care about it. Being in MRULE, I really became aware of the way gender inequality, all inequality affects all our lives. Academically that was the area of great challenge because there was so much I just assumed. A lot of things that I had taken to be true were challenged by the reality of other people's lives.

Mark:

I came into MRULE and it began challenging the way I thought. Affirmative action was the first one I noticed. I noticed it because within the first month of school, I had a big argument with someone over affirmative action. By the end of my freshman year, I was arguing an entirely opposite side than what I had been arguing and the person that I was arguing with was not only using the same argument, but using the exact same words that I used to use. So, the academic sneaked in there without me knowing it.

John:

As far as academic challenges it reiterated most of what I was learning in sociology and it was in my second year when I changed my major to sociology. I was also taking an ISS class. MRULE reinforced a lot of the things talked about in class. And I didn't expect that. In class we would talk about theory. MRULE made practical links.

Teresa:

I think it helped especially in classroom discussions in my ISS classes about diversity. It helped to correlate things. My classes helped me get backgrounds on different social issues, which we talk about in our MRULE meetings.

Lisa:

I definitely found MRULE to be an academic challenge my freshmen year. It went hand in hand with my social science course. There was the history piece, the scholarly piece and the experience of people's lives that really intensified the learning experience. It would bounce back and forth. I'd hear something in class that would hit me and then I'd go to MRULE and talk about it. Or something in MRULE would remind me of class and I'd take that back to class. So there was a relationship going on between my course and the program.

Derek:

I can't really say it helped pushed me to strive academically, however, it had some influence. For example, I feel more comfortable to communicate and spend time and go out with Caucasian and Asians students. Now, in my class, I would talk to a Caucasian male whereas before I probably wouldn't have said anything. Just by me talking to someone can lead to a study group or going out together. We exchanged notes and I learned some different ways to take notes to study for the tests.

Job and Career Preparation

Terri, a Black female of a working class background:

MRULE challenged me personally to let go of stereotypes and to look at people from the inside and not just by how they look on the outside. That could be academic and job career preparation because it's something I will take with me into the workplace.

Andre:

MRULE gets you to look at things differently. It is one big learning experience, preparing us to work in a multiracial society. Having a better understanding of diversity issues gives me a competitive advantage in the business world.

Mark:

MRULE influenced me to double major, to add a sociology degree to my computer degree. Now after three years in MRULE, I don't want to be where I would have been had I stayed only with a computer degree. I want to be in a community where every other face I see is different in some way. I don't want to be in a community that is 90% white and 10% everybody else. I want to be a part of what I have been a part of for the past three years. I want to be a part of showing people what's going on in the world and that things aren't as simple as they may think. I want to continue doing what I've been doing in MRULE. I can't picture my life without it. It is so much more important than anything else.

Lauren:

Every time I go for a job interview, somebody has asked me about MRULE. When they hear about the program and about my job as a student leader, they make a connection to skills working with diverse individuals and groups.

To examine how well MRULE has imparted key concepts, I asked each to define some of the more frequently used terminology. The terms were: Structural Inequality, Social Construction of Race, Social Construction of Whiteness, White Privilege, Race, Class, Gender Intersections, Multiracial Coalitions, Genuine Relationships, Leadership and Activism. I explained that I was not looking for a right answer but rather how they have come to understand the terms and what meaning they gleaned from them. Throughout the discussion of terms, the most significant connections were made with genuine relationships, leadership, and activism. I have selected a few examples where students demonstrate a connection with the concept and their own understanding.

Key Terminology

The Social Construction of Race

Mark:

The concept that race is not biological, but a social phenomenon. It came about not because there are actual biological differences, but because people picked out traits to distinguish people by. In distinguishing these traits, they valued one trait over the other and they assigned the traits to different races and it helped to build structural inequality. It's a social thing, it holds no biological meaning. It is fluid, it changes as society changes.

Anna:

There is no biological distinction between people of different races. It's a historical term and historical designation that carries a certain connotation of privileges and lack thereof in the United States and other countries. As far as I can remember the social construction of race didn't occur until late 1600s in the United States.

The Social Construction of Whiteness and White Privilege

Erin:

I realize whiteness more than my parents ever wanted me to. I realized how much my family and I attained because we are White. White is right—and something to aspire to. I saw it with my Black friend who was considered more White than Black because he was absorbed in our upper middle class environment.

Julee:

There's a colonial mentality (growing up Filipina) that the whiter you are, the better, and I've had people come up to me and say 'oh, you look so mestiza', mestiza meaning mixed and it's supposed to be a great thing. Mestiza is synonymous with beautiful. It really is White privilege because it's saying the whiter you are, they more privileged you should be. Here in America, when you are born white, you have an easier time of life. You'll get a job faster, it'll be a better job, you won't have any problems walking down the street if you're in the right area.

Brandon:

The privileges of not being judged based on your skin color, not having preconceptions made about you. It opens a lot of doors for you. You never have to worry about your race, period. That's the biggest privilege. You are judged on your merits only.

Genuine Relationships

Tina:

I think this is my favorite thing to talk about. It's about how comfortable you are with a person even if they are from a different background. It's when you're not only friends with this person but also you share certain beliefs, even if they are different from yours. It's not having to change how you would normally engage. That's what genuine relationship is. I'm more curious about that than anything.

Charles:

Being close to people even though you're from a different background. You feel like you can say anything to each other and no one gets offended. After you go through a certain point of comfort, you really understand each other. It's not fake. I met a lot of people who are very open and they said what was on their mind and I really learned from them.

Tracy:

The differences between actually being friends with people of different racial backgrounds or being friends with them in order to just have a token friend so you can tell others. Learning about cultures isn't enough. It takes more.

Terri:

The real relationships where the person comes over to my mom's house. We hang out together, we go out together in public, not just one big group or at work or go to lunch. It's more personal. The person knows things about me that other people don't.

Leadership

Jeff:

I understand leadership as a service. You have to lead by example. That's something I have to work on.

Rick:

Taking MRULE into daily life so people understand it's not a hobby, not just a way to kill time but it is something that I care passionately about. Leadership is inspiring others to be passionate.

Lisa:

Leadership is service. It is not necessarily fun. It is service. It is challenging. There are heartaches. There are times when you don't feel like you want to do it but it is an opportunity for you to assist, especially in this work, to try to change the world. Try to improve the world we live in to make it be the best it can be. It is a sacrifice.

Derek:

MRULE is like an incubator where we are like seeds being planted in society. We are the leaders who have to go out into society and work for racial equality. When I go home and tell my mom things that I've done in MRULE, it's like a seed being planted. In my home I do try and change the views, not only of my parents but also my brothers and sisters who want to go to college eventually. Hopefully they will come in with a different mind set than the mind set I came in with. I tell them you're going to have to interact with people from different racial backgrounds and there's nothing wrong with that. All the stereotypes that you heard from the past, forget about those because this is the real world filled with lots of different people and everything doesn't revolve around African Americans.

Activism

Joanne:

Getting involved for a cause because you want to, not expecting a return, but feeling like you can make a difference. I could be doing something else, but with MRULE I get an experience that I can't get anywhere else. You have to feel like you're making a difference, that's activism.

Brandon:

Activism takes sacrifice. It depends on the person, little steps and big steps are involved. If you truly believe in something, you are going to go out of your way to make sure it happens. You are willing to work for change, you are not satisfied with the status quo.

Lisa:

You can never become comfortable—you have to always press yourself to move outside the comfort zone. You have to take risks. You can get the opportunity to be an activist in MRULE but it is something that each person has to account for on a daily basis. Once you become involved in MRULE and all your friends are MRULE people then it ceases to be activism because that is not moving out of your comfort zone. Just being out in public with a diverse group and people seeing that model does do something, but for me that is not enough.

Rick:

Activism is knowing and committing to working in the world—knowing that the world is socially bigger than you.

To see how knowledge and experience converge in MRULE and to gauge whether or not a spirit of activism has been enkindled, I asked students to consider their future. The questions started out with a focus on what they will take away from MRULE and ended with where they see themselves in five and ten years.

What Will You Take Away After Your Participation in MRULE?

Shana:

The knowledge that I've learned from MRULE is something that will be with me for the rest of my life. It's not something that I can run away from and I'm very grateful for that. It's an experience I consider priceless and I would never change anything. I definitely want to do more with this program here and wherever I end up.

Lauren:

One thing that I learned is that you can't sit back. You have to stand up and do something. I got a better understanding of history. I can honestly say that MRULE has given me back my love for history.

Charlene:

I will take away my determination to know the truth about things and not just accept what people say. I will do my own research to find out the truth and know what people say is not necessarily the truth.

Andre:

I'll take away a lot of knowledge, friends and a great overall experience. I'm actually trying to do something to make a difference. I didn't just come to get a piece of paper—I'll walk away with the accomplishment that I was actively involved.

Kate:

But the experiences from MRULE, both being a leader and even that first year, the distance I feel I've come in terms of how my lifestyle has changed, that's forever going to be with me. The leadership experiences will stay with me. I've incorporated MRULE into so much and so many areas of my life, it affects me everyday now.

Julee:

I'll take away more understanding because I came here and thought I knew a lot. I came to MRULE and realized that there are lot of issues within myself that I need to resolve and fix before I start haranguing others with my opinions and that's something I'll take away.

Erin:

I will take away the combination of leadership skills I have gained and learned from other people around me that were not necessarily leaders. Education and academia and exposure that came as a result of a conversation over dinner. . . the necessity and drive to realize that I have to do something in every possible way to work on social problems. The confidence to stand in front of people, friendships that I never thought I would have and friendships that I knew I would have on a whole new plane. I will take away the appreciation of how much I have been offered and trained and supported thorough all this.

Anna:

I think I will be active in whatever community I'm in. I think the biggest thing that I got from MRULE is the sense of personal responsibility and that if I'm not helping here I should be doing something somewhere. I've learned a lot about people from other racial backgrounds that I would not have gotten had it not been for MRULE.

Ethan:

I think about MRULE when I go to sleep. The program itself has changed the way I view life. I'm much more conscious and aware. I can't wait to keep growing.

Mark:

I joined MRULE in the first three weeks of college, my entire MSU experience is MRULE. I'll take with me a lot more knowledge and friendships. I'll take away a new career. MRULE is the reason that I have gone from where I was in high school to where I am now.

Karen:

I look at people differently than how I ever did before—I have more of an understanding of where people have come from. I'm not so quick to make a generalization or stereotype or knock them for being different from me or anyone else. I'm always still catching myself to not think in a certain way. If friends of mine make comments about people from different racial groups, I call them out on it.

Derek:

I had a great time and not just because I partied and danced the night away. I honestly met a lot of good friends who I know in the future will communicate with each other and have long term relationships. We will bring our families together.

Describe Yourself in The Future—Five Years, Ten Years

Meghan:

In five years I'll be using my skills in MRULE, no matter what. .in my day to day contact with people. If I have children in ten years, they will be raised in a diverse environment and educated correctly about our collective history.

Erin:

I will always live in the areas that I'll be teaching in. That will be my hardest adjustment to go from White flight, upper class suburban sheltered America to an America that I didn't know existed. I could never be the teacher that commutes like I used to commute into Detroit for the novelty of a play and then fly out to my suburban safety net. I couldn't understand my students if I only saw them eight hours a day. I could never understand them if I only saw their world confined to a 20x 20 classroom and then threw them out to their world and then went back to my world. I

would lose complete respect from them and appreciation from them that in any sense I had the ability to link their world to the larger picture. You can't teach where you don't live.

Tracy:

I don't know if I was aware of social problems except by being in MRULE. That's where I started to realize that I didn't want to be just an engineering major but also wanted to deal with these social problems in my career. So I started looking into urban planning. I'll be doing grad school and looking into the transportation field. MRULE definitely had an influence on what I what to do with my major.

Andre:

I will have a steady job and my Masters degree. I would like to be involved in my community. I don't want to look back at my college life and say "I was active back in the day."

Closing Comments

The information collected with thirty interviews, twenty questions per interview, totaled over two hundred pages of written transcripts. The passages I have selected to include in most cases are ones indicating shared experience and clear similarities and differences among the students. These vary depending on the lived experiences that are affected by race, class, gender, and nation. It is apparent from the data that there are several ways to analyze these shared experiences. Each story contributes to a rich pool of information, inside views of racial thinking and behaviors throughout the lifetime of these particular young people growing up in the United States and abroad.³³ The purpose of this chapter has been to tell their stories, with a minimal amount of analysis to complement the proceeding chapters on the interdependent theory and practice of the living and learning experience. I have no doubt that I will continue to refer to the data and glean insights for further analysis. As the chapter title states my greatest concern is to

understand how MRULE participation can inspire a spirit of activism within and beyond college years. Once presented with a vision of social justice and the role of human agency in social change, what do students do when they leave the university? As was mentioned earlier, this will be the focus of a future longitudinal study. To date we do not have enough students, nor have they been out in the world long enough to know anything for certain. For now, we can report what we know of the career choices of the 1999 and 2000 classes. There are eleven students total between the two years. I have been in touch with all of them at one point since their departure and have been actively engaged in mentoring three of them as they work their way through future steps. See figure 2.

³³ In addition to the two international students, two others have become naturalized U.S. citizens as young adults so a total of four of the thirty interviewed grew up outside the U.S.

Figure 2

MRULE STUDENT ALUMNI

Year 1999

Student	Major	Current Job
1	James Madison Social Relations	Boy Scouts of America,
2	James Madison Social Relations	Applying for graduate school
3	Engineering	Arthur Andersen consulting
4	Human Resources	Peace Corps for one year, now working in Social Services in an employment readiness program from welfare to work.

Year 2000

Student	Major	Current Job
1	Education	Internship in Lansing school district
2	Education	Internship in Detroit suburban schools
3	Interdisciplinary Social Science	Peace Corps assignment in West Africa
4	Sociology	Applying for graduate school in Urban Planning
5	Business	Working in Chicago
6	Engineering	Working in City Government in transportation
7	History	Applying for Peace Corps

The Way Forward

The MRULE program is faced with several challenges as we strive to continue to develop a scholar-activist, living and learning race relations model. This last section will discuss some of these challenges in an action research paradigm. The student leader cadre and I have formed a learning community that has been actively involved in shaping our growth and development. With each new strategy we implement, we evaluate its effectiveness. As I bring this chapter to a close, I would like to focus on how we see ourselves meeting some of the most difficult challenges as we strive to establish MRULE at Michigan State University.

How Unique?

I receive regular calls from people in universities around the country asking about MRULE. They would like to know how it's done, how effective it is, and how it fits into an overall university diversity initiative. Inevitably, I am asked if there are other programs like MRULE around the country. Of course I have no way of knowing what every university is doing. However, I have done some digging and so far find MRULE to be unique. More accurately said, MRULE has features that may be common to other programs but are uniquely put together. Race relations dialogues are not unique in and of themselves. Academic vigor offering students a comprehensive program to study race and inequality is something many universities offer. Student life programs that encourage community building among a range of diverse students are more than typical, they are standard. What is unique is that MRULE brings these components together in a context in which all elements operate interdependently. At times these elements work on students when they may not be aware of it. The learning experience is often much richer

than they had thought once they step away from it. While Tracy was on a semester at sea program, visiting countries around the world she came back to tell us how much her experiences in MRULE meant to her abroad.

When I was studying abroad I met people from many different schools. I shared my experiences with everyone about MRULE and no one had a program like this. It seemed like we were the only one. It makes me question why there aren't more programs? I remember that when I first came to school, I didn't think that we needed a group like this until the newspaper started covering issues about racial tensions on campus. I was able to use what I learned in MRULE in so many of the settings I found myself in. Even when I was in MRULE I didn't realize how what I was learning would help me in other settings.

Still, as with any new and innovative initiative, we are concerned about sustainability. The critical questions we must ask are how do we sustain student interest and commitment and generate faculty scholarly contributions? How do we bring all three components: facilitated skilled dialogue, academic vigor, and community/relationship building to bear on a significant number of our student body so that the racial climate can be positively affected? We know for example that there are many race-related problems that take place on a regular basis on campus that we cannot always reach. Residence halls remain targets for racial epithets placed randomly in bathrooms, hallways, and even on individual doors (*State News*, March 3, 1999, *State News*, March 30, 2000.). There is evidence of racial conflict among students who bring their animus to the university and participate in racially segregated social worlds. Some students take pride in their right to blatantly refuse to address the animus (Interview with Joanne, February 2001). Having an MRULE group on campus does not protect every student of color from racist experiences, be they on the streets, in the classroom or the residence halls. It does not guarantee that we can reach a critical mass of students with our message of equity and social justice. We remain faced with the challenge of translating the small and intense

learning experience into something larger without diffusing its power. One of the ways we hope to do this is to work more closely with faculty who are willing to assign students the opportunity to participate in MRULE as a practicum, coinciding with their course requirements. This would insure a larger participant pool and would give us more of a chance to challenge fixed notions embedded in racial thinking that can eventually lead to racial incidents.

Another challenge we face on a regular basis is the potential for MRULE student leader burnout. The job is very demanding for a student who struggles with a myriad of concerns: financing their education, racial/ethnic identity, gender and sexuality issues, but most importantly excelling in their academic programs. In some cases these academic programs lack the inspiration and intellectual stimulation they find in the MRULE weekly seminars and preparation to lead discussions. MRULE student leaders are required to keep abreast of current social issues and make continual connections with a social justice agenda.

In spite of the challenging work we engage in to prepare ourselves, we face the consistent problem of attracting and maintaining student participation. This year in particular, we have noted that it is becoming increasingly hard to find students who are looking for or are available to participate in building community on a regular basis. They may come out for a meeting if the title is appealing and they think it is a one-time program. But to commit to something on a consistent basis taps into a whole other set of priorities that many students are not willing to consider. MRULE student leaders who have taken these steps and made the commitment find it extremely frustrating when they cannot attract their fellow students. There is no doubt that we struggle to create student

activism in a climate where maintaining the status quo is the order of the day. It is a perennial battle between apathy and activism.

This year we had an excellent opportunity to take our beliefs into the streets as we took on the issue of defending affirmative action in higher education in support of the University of Michigan's admissions policies. It started with a march on April 12, 2000 on the University of Michigan's campus where student activism brought to light that in spite of the university's practices, minority enrollment had dropped. This march led to a National Day of Action on October 19th where several national leaders and students from around the country gathered to demonstrate their support for integration in higher education. A message was sent that the public in Michigan would not sit back and allow forces to dismantle the progress made through affirmative action in admissions. Speakers discussed examples from California and Texas, the two states that showed a considerable decline in minority enrollment as a result of the attacks on affirmative action (Orfield 1998). On several occasions we took students to witness the trial between the University of Michigan Law School, the Center for Individual Rights, and the third party Student Intervenor which took place in United States district court in Detroit. They sat in the courtroom with some of the greatest scholars on race in this country: John Hope Franklin, Gary Orfield, and Eric Foner to name a few. The opportunity to listen to these scholars share their insights and research into why the United States remains a racially stratified society, requiring remedial programs such as affirmative action was a privilege none of us expected to receive. For many students, it will be the highlight of their MRULE experience—the ultimate lesson in using scholarship to effect social change.

Despite this high point in our activism, we were disappointed by the lack of concern for affirmative action on the MSU campus. For example we found that in several

MRULE roundtable discussion students thought they were against affirmative action but didn't know anything about it. Through the process of learning what it is, how it is used, why it is still needed some students changed their thinking. But when we took our presentation outlining the importance of history in understanding the current debate about affirmative action into ATL classes, we came upon a good deal of apathy and in some cases, hostility. Many students expressed with confidence that a pure and simple meritocracy (the way it used to be back in the day before affirmative action according to some ahistorical belief) was the only way forward. It became clear to us that much more work was needed, that MRULE has a lot of ground to plow. It speaks to the need for us to build alliances with other student groups, a goal we have been working on throughout the year and have made some progress. It is our hope that the issues of integration in higher education will attract many students from a range of backgrounds. Since this current attack on affirmative action is expected to be appealed all the way to the Supreme Court, it is an immediate to call to students who want to expand the rights movement and continually make their campuses inclusive. This is the platform that MRULE is using as we dialogue with student groups, courses we are invited to speak in, and the individual students who attend our meetings and programs.

The way forward for MRULE is continual focus on social justice and human agency. This will involve, among other plans, to consistently and methodically build our student leader cadre. This building process will tap into lessons learned from each group's experiences as they struggle to attract and retain a diverse group willing to take the extra steps to work for a multiracial democracy, while upholding academic standards using the motto: "knowledge is power." It consistently requires the development and refinement of dialogue skills so that the channels of communication remain open and

sincere. At the center of it all, lies a belief in the possibilities of genuine relationships that transcend racial/ethnic/class/gender/age/sexuality barriers and inspire students to work together. With unity in diversity as their watchword, students look to MRULE for the support they need to take on the social issues of their day. We are successful when it is understood that *they* are the social change agents responsible to themselves and their community.

Heather:

I don't really look at MRULE for what MRULE can do for me. It's more my responsibility than MRULE's responsibility. It's totally the experience of what you make of it, it's your responsibility. I'm not looking at what they can give me but what I can give to them. You get out of it what you put into it.

APPENDIX A

MRULE STUDENT EVALUATION-Spring 2001

We appreciate the time you spend filling this out. It is a very important indicator for us to understand your experience in MRULE.

Name_____ Local Address_____

Gender: Male_____ Female_____

Racial/Ethnic Identity_____

Class Level: 1 2 3 4 Major_____

Permanent
Address_____ Phone_____

Please circle the number of semesters that you have been in MRULE? 1 2 3 4 5+

What semester/year did you join MRULE? _____

(Example: Fall/1999 or Spring/1997)

1. How would you describe the demographic make-up of your high school?

a. predominantly People of Color (over 60%)

b. predominantly White (over 60%)

c. Multiracial—more even distribution

d. other please describe_____

2. We would like to know something about your friendship circles before coming to MSU.

In high school: Mark the answer that most accurately reflects your experience.

A. Frequency (How often did you interact with people from different racial/ethnic backgrounds from you?)

Not at all

Occasionally

Frequently

B. Those I considered my closest friends:

Majority different from me

Majority same as me

C. Of those that were of different backgrounds please rate the degree of honesty and openness by circling the answer that best describes:

Very honest and open

Sometimes honest and open

Seldom honest and open

D. How often would you talk about racial/ethnic issues and concerns?

Often Once in a while Not at all

E. Of those that were of the same backgrounds please rate the degree of honesty and openness:

Very honest and open Sometimes honest and open Seldom honest and open

F. How often would you talk about racial/ethnic issues and concerns?

Often Once in a while Not at all

3. After participating in MRULE:

A. Frequency (How often did you interact with people from different racial/ethnic backgrounds from you?)

Not at all Occasionally Frequently

B. Those I considered my closest friends:

Majority different from me Majority same as me

C. Of those that were of different backgrounds please rate the degree of honesty and openness:

Very honest and open Sometimes honest and open Seldom honest and open

D. How often would you talk about racial/ethnic issues and concerns?

Often Once in a while Not at all

E. Of those that were of the same backgrounds please rate the degree of honesty and openness:

Very honest and open Sometimes honest and open Seldom honest and open

F. How often would you talk about racial/ethnic issues and concerns?

Often Once in a while Not at all

4. How did you hear about the Multi-Racial Unity Living Experience?

Friend _____ MRULE Student Leader _____

Students of my floor _____ Residence Mentor _____

Flyer _____ Heard about it in High School _____

Minority Aide _____ AOP _____ Residence Hall Brochure _____

Other (explain) _____

5. Why did you join the MRULE?

6. Before coming to MSU, had you been involved in a group or organization similar to MRULE? Please describe:

7. Have you had the opportunity to discuss your experiences in the MRULE with family members and/or friends? If so, please describe one such conversation and their reaction. Please be specific.

8. When you reflect on the year, what stands out as the most positive aspect of the experience and why?

9. What stands out as the least positive and why?

10. The requirements for this group are participation in weekly round table discussions, monthly social activities, small group, semester field trip and community service. How have each of these contributed to your knowledge and understanding of race relations in your lives and on campus?

11. What are the benefits of each requirement?

RTD _____

Social _____

SmallGroups _____

CommunityService _____

Community Building
Trip _____

12. What are the drawbacks of each requirement?

13. Were any of your attitudes or beliefs challenged? Yes _____ No _____
If yes, please describe the attitudes or beliefs, how they were challenged, and what the experience was like for you. If no, why?

14. Please complete the following sentence to the best of your ability:
Now that I have participated in the MRULE program I intend to... (do what?)

15. What changes could be made to improve MRULE?

Roundtable discussions: _____

Activism: _____

Social Activities: _____

Small Groups _____

Community Service: _____

Community building trip: _____

16. As a result of your 2000/2001 participation in the MRULE program, what aspects of your thinking and behavior have been challenged or changed.

- Thinking: _____

- Behavior: _____

17. Please comment on what you learned about leadership through interactions with your student leaders. What qualities did you see that you admired that helped MRULE develop?

18. What leadership qualities would you have liked to see more of?

19. Anything else you want us to know:

Thank you and see you in the fall!!!

APPENDIX B

MRULE STUDENT LEADER COMPETENCIES

MRULE Participation Continuum

One semester → One year → Two years →
(two years usually lead to three and four year commitment)

Student leaders are selected from the third year pool although in some exceptional cases from the second year pool. The following list of competencies align with those who are student leaders or who have remained with the program beyond one year.

- Increased knowledge of historical and contemporary racial issues and realities
- Increased vocabulary to understand and thereby discuss racial/ethnic issues*
- Increased opportunities to change racial thinking i.e. experiences in MRULE challenge what is brought from the home environment and what the university environment tolerates and/or encourages and thereby change behaviors in meaningful and durable ways.
- More comfort/skills with having and leading constructive conversations/dialogue dealing with controversial issues around race and culture
- Increased understanding of racial code words and the impact they have on particular individuals
- Practicing the art of distinguishing actions of an individual from the behavior of a group
- Using individual relationships to break down stereotypes as opposed to creating “an exception” to the stereotype
- Consistent interactions with a diverse group of people. . .so that it is eventually seen as a norm rather than an exception.
- Understanding that the process of creating unity in diversity begins with oneself—self initiative and discipline
- Recognizing and experiencing leadership as service
- Increased abilities to develop and sustain genuine relationships across traditional racial lines.

*this includes a wide range, some examples: social construction of race, race, power, and privilege, structural inequalities, current events around race and ethnicity, race relations on college campuses, leadership and activism.

APPENDIX C

The Multi-Racial Unity Living Experience (MRULE) Student Leader Seminar Fall 2000

Objective: To equip student leaders with the necessary vocabulary, historical contexts and theoretical concepts needed to engage as both discussion leaders and participants in intelligent, factual, and comprehensive dialogues about race relations in contemporary U.S. society. This semester there will be two student led modules: one on history and one on intersectionality.

September 8

Week One: Introduction to Race Relations Vocabulary and Discussion

September 15

Week Two: History Module: Session One—Native Americans (Tiffany's Module)

Readings Due: C. Matthew Snip, *The First Americans: American Indians*

September 22

Week Three: History Module: Session Two—Native Americans

Readings Due: *The truth about Christopher Columbus*, James Loewen

September 29

Week Four: History Module: Session Three—African Americans

Readings Due: African American History—Eric Foner—Expert Report for University of Michigan law suit

<http://www.umich.edu/~urel/admissions/legal/expert/foner.html>

October 6

Week Five: History Module: Session Four—Latino Americans

Readings Due: Ricardo Romo: "Mexican Americans: Their Civic and Political Incorporation"

From: Feagin & Feagin: *Racial and Ethnic Relations*, sixth edition
Puerto Rican and Cuban Americans: pgs. 337-374.

October 13

Week Six: History Module: Session Five—Asian Americans

Readings Due:

“Filipino Americans”

Pauline Agbayani-Siewert and Linda Revilla

Pgs. 134-157

“The Other Issei: Japanese Immigrant Women in the Pre-World War II Period”

Evelyn Nakano Glenn and Rachel Salazar Parreñas

Pgs: 215-140

“The Entrepreneurial Adaptation of Korean Immigrants” Pyong Gap Min Pgs: 302-314

October 27

Week Seven: History Module: Session Six—Asian Americans

Readings Due: Rumbaut, R. “A Legacy of War: Refugees from Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia”

Takiki, R. “The Tide of the Turbans: Asian Indians in America” and “The Watershed of World War II: The Myth of “Military Necessity” for Japanese-American Internment”

November 3

Week Eight: Intersectionality Module: Session One: (Stephanie’s Module)

Readings Due: Introduction, Glossary, Timeline of Civil Rights Era

November 10

Week Nine: Intersectionality Module: Session Two:

Readings Due: Unit One--Intersectionality

November 17

Week Ten: Intersectionality Module: Session Three

Readings Due: Unit Two—Intersectionality and Black Power

December 1

Week Eleven: Intersectionality Module: Session Four

Readings Due: Unit Two con’t—Complicity and Agency

Evaluation

The Multi-Racial Unity Living Experience (MRULE)
Student Leader Seminar
Spring 2001

Objective: To equip student leaders with the necessary vocabulary, historical contexts and theoretical concepts needed to engage as both discussion leaders and participants in intelligent, factual, and comprehensive dialogues about race relations in contemporary U.S. society.

January 19

Week One: The legacy of Martin Luther King Jr. What did he leave us besides "I have dream?"

Readings Due:

The World House from Where do we go from here: Chaos or Community
Martin Luther King Jr.

January 26

Week Two: Review Intersectionality

Readings Due:

Hooks, b —*Feminism as a transformational politic*
Eng, P.-Warrior Lessons: *An Asian American Woman's Journey Into Power*

February 2

Week Three: Affirmative Action Teach-In

History, Current Statistics, Facts around the U of M case
Structural Inequalities—View *True Colors*

Readings Due:

Chin et al-*Beyond Self-Interest: Asian Pacific Americans toward a Community of Justice*

February 9

Week Four: Racial Identity

Bi/Multi-racial identities

Readings Due:

Spencer, R. Multi-racial identity
Wardle, F. -Children of mixed race—no longer invisible

February 16

Week Five: Affirmative Action Teach-In (Continued)

Affirmative Action, Residential Segregation, Desegregation

Guest Speaker: Dr. Joe Darden

Readings Due:

Orfield, G.- *Segregated Housing and School Resegregation and Toward an Integrated Future*

February 23

Week Six: The Social Construction of Whiteness (Kamala's Module)

Readings Due:

Horsman, R. - *Race and Manifest Destiny: The origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism*

Barrett, J. & Roediger, D. - *How White people became White*

Frankenberg, R. - *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness*

March 2

Week Seven: The Social Construction of Whiteness (Kamala's Module)

Readings Due:

Howard, G. *We Can't Teach What We Don't Know*

Spring Break

March 16

Week Eight: Race and the Criminal Justice System

View Film: Who Killed Vincent Chen?

Readings Due:

Delucchi, M. & Do, H. - *The model minority myth and perceptions of Asian-Americans as victims of racial harassment*

March 23

Week Nine: Race and the Criminal Justice System (Continued)

Readings Due:

Davis, Angela - *Race and Criminalization: Black Americans and the Punishment Industry*

March 30

Week Ten: Jeanne's Defense

No Seminar

April 6

Week Eleven—Race Conference

No Seminar: Friday, April 13.

April 20

Week Twelve—Final Seminar

April 27

Evaluations

APPENDIX D

RACE RELATIONS GLOSSARY FOR DISCUSSIONS ON SOCIAL AND RACIAL INEQUALITY

✳ **AFFIRMATIVE ACTION** - a governmental policy designed to put teeth in the Equal Opportunity Law by holding employers accountable for opening doors to women and people of color who had been historically and systematically excluded from educational and employment opportunities. What is important to remember is that Affirmative Action is not a be all, end all to racism but an attempt to hold people accountable to support the law of the land--EEO. When affirmative action is applied by an employer, it is applied to candidates who have the necessary qualifications for the job.

✳ **CULTURE**—the integrated patterns of human knowledge, belief, and behavior that depends upon human capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations. Most anthropologists agree that culture is an “evolving process, always changing, always fragmented product of negotiation and struggle that flows from multiple axes of inequality” (Nagengast 1997, Appadurai 1996, Comaroff 1991).

✳ **DISCRIMINATION** – unequal treatment of individuals or groups based on categorical attributes, such as racial, ethnic, religious, or social-class membership.

✳ **DIVERSITY** – a composition of a variety of different features, identities, and elements. Often used in contemporary terms to mean people different from the norm.

✳ **ETHNICITY** - an affiliation to a group of people classed according to common racial, national, tribal, religious, linguistic or cultural origin or background.

✳ **ETHNOCENTRISM** - the belief by members of an ethnic group in the centrality and in many cases the superiority of their group and cultural patterns.

✳ **HUMAN RIGHTS** – rights (as freedom from unlawful imprisonment, torture, and execution) regarded as belonging fundamentally to all persons.

✳ **INEQUALITY** – the differences in treatment and/or resources available to members of groups based on the features of identification of that group.

✳ **INTERNALIZED OPPRESSION** – The belief by members of an oppressed group in the stereotypes and distorted images that have been given to their group.

✳ **PARTNERSHIP** – relationship built on mutual respect, understanding of equality among parties, and cooperation to serve a commonly agreed upon goal or purpose. In healthy partnerships, power is shared.

✧ **POWER** – possession of control, authority, or influence over others.

✧ **PREJUDICE** – an unfavorable attitude toward any category or group of people, which is formed in disregard of facts.

✧ **PRIVILEGE** – a right or immunity granted as a peculiar benefit, advantage, or favor.

✧ **RACE** - a socially constructed concept that is used to group people by phenotypic differences, as well as imagined differences. Although this is not a biological reality, it is sometimes believed to be, or treated as though it were. This belief or treatment has tangible consequences.

✧ **RACISM** – the belief in the superiority of one race over another and thereby the right to dominance. (Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, (Freedom, Calif.: Crossing press, 1984). Can be acted by individual—every day acts or systemic and structural acts which spread further and more powerfully through institutions—legal system, education, government, corporate.

✧ **SEXISM** – the belief in the superiority of one sex over another and thereby the right to dominance. (Ibid.)

✧ **CLASSISM, AGEISM, HETEROSEXISM** – follow the same line of thinking as above:

✧ **CULTURAL RACISM** – the cultural images and messages that affirm the assumed superiority of Whites and the assumed inferiority of people of color.

✧ **RACIAL PROFILING** – 1) the widespread practice of stopping individuals as possible suspects because of their race or ethnic background. 2) “Profile arrest” is the arrest of individuals that “look suspicious” require making categorical judgments that clearly discriminate on the basis of race.

✧ **RELIGIOUS BIGOTRY/ANTI-SEMITISM** – prejudice or discrimination against individuals based on negative perceptions of their religious beliefs and/or negative group stereotypes.

✧ **REVERSE RACISM** - A term commonly used to describe racism and perceived racism directed at Whites. This term is controversial because the creation of it implies that racism directed at non-Whites is the norm. It is also problematic because it is often used to describe affirmative action which is a corrective measure not a systematic exclusion of a group of people based on race.

✧ **SCAPEGOATING** – the deliberate policy of blaming an individual or group when the fault actually lies elsewhere.

✳ **SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION of RACE** – a hierarchical system that assigns value to membership in particular groups based on phenotypical/cultural attributes. The social construction of race was needed to create racial/social stratification particularly since biologically human beings are one species thoroughly diverse in genetic makeup within phenotypically similar groups as well as among diverse groups.

✳ **THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION of WHITENESS** – the social system created by Whites for Whites, which upholds a world in which white is the norm and everything else a deviation. Within this system white privilege reigns.

✳ **STEREOTYPE** – a preconceived or oversimplified generalization usually involving negative beliefs about a particular group.

✳ **UNITY** – a totality of related parts: an entity that is a complex or systematic whole. Organic Unity refers to the living, growing, changing aspects of human unity. Unity in Diversity refers to a concept of unity that fundamentally includes diversity challenging traditional notions that unity means sameness.

✳ **WHITE PRIVILEGE** - An invisible collection of special provisions and assurances that having white skin affords individuals in a society. The message that White is right, good, and a symbol of success permeates American society and. White people are deliberately made to be oblivious of this reality. This is reinforced by several cultural patterns, one of the most widely spread is residential segregation which ensures that Whites remain ignorant of the experience of people of color except through media renditions.

✳ **WHITE SUPREMACY** - the belief that white superiority entitles white people to do whatever is necessary to maintain their systems of privilege and dominance.

✳ **SEGREGATION** – the separation or isolation of a race, class, or ethnic group by enforced or voluntary residence in a restricted area, by barriers to social intercourse, by separate educational facilities, or by other discriminatory means.

All definitions are a combination from Merriam Webster, cited literature and my own words.

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Unpublished Documents:

- Field Notes from MRULE Round Table Discussions: 1997-2000.
- New World Associates: Diversity in the Workplace Training Course, 1997.
- In-house Racial Climate Surveys, 1996.
- MRULE Student Evaluations, 1997-2000.
- Recorded interviews (all transcribed) with 30 MRULE participants, April, 2000 and December, 2000.