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HANDBOOK OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH—CHAPTER 11

Ladson-Billings & Donnor: The Role of the Moral Activist

## **Chapter 11**

### **THE MORAL ACTIVIST ROLE OF CRITICAL RACE THEORY SCHOLARSHIP**

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It doesn't matter who you are, or how high you rise.

One day you will get your call.

The question is how will you respond?

#### **African American University Senior Administrator**

The epigraph that opens this chapter comes from a colleague and friend who serves as a top administrator at a major university. His use of the term “your call” is his reference to what in African American vernacular would be known as a “N-word” call. Rather than focus on the controversy over the term and its appropriateness (see Kennedy, 2002), this chapter looks more specifically at the meaning of the “call” and the ways it should mobilize scholars of color<sup>1</sup> and

others who share commitments to equity, social justice, and human liberation. This friend was referring to the way African Americans almost never are permitted to break out of the prism (and prison) of race that has been imposed by a racially coded and constraining society. Clearly, this same hierarchy and power dynamic operates for all people of color, women, the poor, and other “marginals.”<sup>2</sup> The call is that moment where regardless of one’s stature and/or accomplishments, race (and other categories of otherness) is recruited to remind one that s/he still remains locked in the racial construction. Below we provide examples from popular culture and each of the authors to demonstrate how the “call” is mobilized to maintain the power dynamic and hierarchical racial structures of the society.

The first example comes from the 1995 murder trial of Orenthal James Simpson, more commonly known as O.J. Simpson. Simpson was an American hero. He was revered for his exploits on the football field at the University of Southern California, and with the professional football franchises in Buffalo, and San Francisco, coupled with his good looks and “articulatness.”<sup>3</sup> The latter two qualities allowed Simpson to turn his post competition years into a successful sports broadcast career and a mediocre but profitable acting career. Simpson moved comfortably in the world of money and power—the White world. He was said to be someone who “transcended race” (Roediger, 2002) which is a code expression for those people of color that Whites claim they no longer think of as a person of color. Michael Jordan and Colin Powell also are considered in this vein. They are, according to Dyson (1993), “symbolic figures who embodied social possibilities of success denied to other people of color” (p.67).

Some might argue that Simpson did not get a “call,” he was a murderer who got the notoriety and degradation he deserved, while also getting away with a heinous crime. Our point is not to argue Simpson’s guilt or innocence (and from where we stand he indeed looks guilty), but

rather to describe his devolution from White to Black in the midst of the legal spectacle. Simpson learned quickly that the honorary White status accorded to him by the larger society was tentative and ephemeral. Some might argue that anyone charged with murder would receive the same treatment but consider that Ray Carruth, an National Football League player who was convicted of a murder for hire of his pregnant girlfriend was regarded as “just another Black hoodlum.” His actions barely caused a collective raised eyebrow in the larger society. We argue that Simpson’s crimes are not only the murder of Nicole Brown and Ron Goodman, but also the perceived “betrayal” of White trust.

Simpson went from conceptually White to conceptually Black (King, 1995)—from a “Fresh Prince of Brentwood” to the “Pariah of Portrero Hill” (the San Francisco community in which he grew up). One of the weekly newsmagazines admits to “colorizing” Simpson’s police mug shot on its cover that gave him a more sinister look. We read that editorial decision as a symbol of Simpson’s “return to Black.” He no longer transcended race. He was just another N-word who was dangerous, sinister, and unworthy of honorary White status. O.J. Simpson received his call.

Of course the bizarre and circus-like circumstances of the Simpson trial make it an outlier example of receiving a call. Thus, we use more personal examples that better situate this argument in our everyday life experiences. Ladson-Billings (1998a) describes her experience where she was invited to a major university to be a speaker in the distinguished scholars lecture series. After the speech she returned to her hotel and decided to unwind in the hotel’s concierge floor lounge. Dressed in business attire and reading the newspaper, she noticed a White man who popped his head in the door. “What time are y’all serving?” he asked. As the only person in the lounge it was clear that he was addressing Ladson-Billings. She politely, but firmly replied, “I don’t know what time *they* are serving. I’m here as a guest.” Red-faced and clearly embarrassed, the man quietly left.

One might argue that he made a simple mistake. Perhaps he would have asked the same question of any one who was sitting in the lounge. But, the moment reminded Ladson-Billings that no matter what her scholarly reputation, at any time she could be snapped back into the constraining racial paradigm, complete with all the limitations such designations carry.

Donnor asserts that one of his many calls came when he served as an instructor for a “diversity” class that enrolled all White, middle class teachers. As a graduate course Donnor expected the students to adhere to the rigors of a master’s level class. After assigning homework following the first class meeting, Donnor was challenged by one of the few male students about the amount of homework. When Donnor told the student that he expected the students to complete the assignment, the inquirer responded, “It ain’t going to happen.” At the next class meeting, the program’s site coordinator, a White woman, arrived at the class, ostensibly to share some program information with the students. However, as she addressed the students she began to talk to them about modifications in assignments and contacting her if they had issues and concerns regarding the course.

The issue with the student’s complaint about the volume of work is a common one in a society that regularly rejects intellectual pursuits. However, graduate students typically exercise some level of courtesy and skill in negotiating the amount of work they are willing (or able) to do. The blatant remark that “it ain’t going to happen” may reflect the certainty with which the student approached the racial power dynamic. As a White male approaching an African American male, this student understood that he could challenge Donnor’s credentials and abilities. More pointedly, the experience with the site-coordinator underscored the fact that although Donnor was hired to teach the course, authority flowed to the White woman. Students could essentially discount Donnor whenever he did anything they disagreed with. Both incidents serve as powerful reminders for

Donnor that despite his academic credentials and experience, his racial identity always serves as a mitigating factor for determining his authority and legitimacy.

Receiving a call is a regular reminder of the liminal space of alterity (Wynter, 1992) that racialized others occupy. But it is important not to solely regard the liminal space as a place of degradation and disadvantage. Wynter (1992) assures us that this place of alterity offers a perspective advantage where those excluded from the center (of social, cultural, political, economic activity) experience “wide angle” vision. This perspective advantage is not due to an inherent racial/cultural difference but is the result of the dialectical nature of constructed otherness that prescribes the liminal status of people of color as beyond the normative boundary of the conception of Self/Other (King, 1995).

In the previous iteration of this chapter Ladson-Billings (2000)<sup>4</sup> cited King (1995) who argued that the epistemic project that scholars of color and their allies must undertake is more than simply adding on multiple perspectives or “pivoting” the center. Such scholars occupy a liminal position whose perspective is one of alterity. This liminal position or point of alterity that we inhabit attempts to transcend an “either/or” epistemology. Alterity is not a dualistic position that there are multiple or equally partial standpoints that are either valid or inexorably ranked hierarchically. Recognizing the alterity perspective does not essentialize other perspectives such as Blackness, Indian-ness, Asian-ness, Latino-ness as homogenizing reverse epistemics (West, 1990).

Ethiopian anthropologist Asmaron Legesse (1973) asserts that the liminal group is that which is forcibly constrained to play the role of alter ego to the ideal self prescribed by the dominant cultural model. This dominant model sets up prescriptive rules and canons for regulating thought and action in the society. Thus, the “issue is about the ‘nature of human knowing’ of the social reality, in a model of which the knower is already a socialized subject” (Wynter, 1990, p.26).

The system-conserving mainstream perspectives of each order (or well-established scholarship) therefore clash with the challenges made from the perspectives of alterity. . . . For, it is the task of established scholarship to rigorously maintain those prescriptions which are critical to the order's existence (Wynter, p.27).

This focus on the ways of the dominant order is important in helping us explore the ways such an order distorts the realities of the Other in an effort to maintain power relations that continue to disadvantage those who are excluded from that order. As Wynter (1990) so eloquently argues, this liminal perspective is the condition of the dominant order's self-definition that "can empower us to free ourselves from the 'categories and prescriptions' of our specific order and from its 'generalized horizon of understanding' (p.27).

In this iteration of the handbook we move away from solely describing the epistemological terrain (both dominant and liminal) to advocating the kinds of moral and ethical responsibilities various epistemologies embody. We do this in hopes of mobilizing scholarship that will take a stance on behalf of human liberation. The subsequent sections of this chapter examine the position of intellectuals as constructors of ethical epistemologies, the discursive and material limits of liberal ideology, new templates for ethical action, moving from research to activism, reconstructing the intellect, moving from research to activism, and the search for a revolutionary habitus.

We admit at the outset that this is an ambitious project and that we are likely to fall short of our stated goals. However, because a task is hard does not imply that we should not undertake it. Similarly, Derrick Bell (1991) argued that even though racism was a permanent fixture of American life, we must still struggle against it. Our success will not necessarily come in the form of a tightly constructed scholarly treatise but rather in the form of scores of other community, student, and scholar activists who continue or take up this cause rather than merely waiting for "the

call.”

## **Intellectual Marginals as Constructors of Ethical Epistemologies**

The special function of the Negro intellectual is a cultural one. He (sic) should . . . assail the stultifying blight of the commercially deprived white middle-class who has poisoned the structural roots of the American ethos and transformed the American people into a nation of intellectual dolts.

Harold Cruse (1984/1967, p.455)

We would be remiss if we did not acknowledge the incredible volume of work that scholars of color have produced that we regard as ethical epistemologies. Clearly in a chapter of this length it is impossible to do justice to all (or even most) of this work. Thus, we will attempt to make this “review of the literature” more a grand tour (Spradley, 1979) to outline the contours of the foundation on which we are building. We start our foundational work with a look at W.E.B. DuBois’ (1953/1903) construct of “double consciousness” where he argues that the African American “ever feels his two-ness . . . two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings (p.5). David Levering Lewis (1993, p.281) addressed the importance of DuBois’ conception stating:

It was a revolutionary concept. It was not just revolutionary; the concept of the divided self was profoundly mystical, for DuBois invested this double consciousness with a capacity to see incomparably farther and deeper. The African American . . . possessed the gift of “second sight in this American world,” an intuitive faculty enabling him/her to see and say things about American

society that possessed heightened moral validity.

Ladson-Billings (2000) argued previously that DuBois' work had an important synchronic aspect in that he raised the issues of double consciousness prior to the formation of the Frankfurt School out of which critical theories emerged. Coincidentally, DuBois had studied at the University of Berlin in the late 1800s yet his name is never mentioned in the same context as Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, and Herbert Marcuse. DuBois remains a "Negro" intellectual concerned with the "Negro" problem but it was in Germany that DuBois recognized the race problems in the Americas, Africa, and Asia, and the political development of Europe as one. This was the period of his life that united his studies of history, economics, and politics into a scientific approach of social research.

DuBois' notion of double consciousness applies not only to African Americans, but to all people who are constructed outside the dominant paradigm. Although DuBois refers to a double consciousness, we know that our sense of identity may evoke multiple consciousness and it is important to read our discussion of multiple consciousness as a description of complex phenomena that do impose essentialized concepts of "blackness," "Latina/o-ness," "Asian-American-ness," or "Native American-ness" on to specific individuals or groups.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to DuBois' conception of double consciousness we rely on Anzaldua's (1987) perspective that identities are fractured not only by gender, class, race, religion, and sexuality, but also by geographic realities such as living along the U.S.-Mexico border, in urban spaces, or government created Indian reservations. Anzaldua's work continues a long intellectual history of Chicanas/os (see Acuna, 1972; Almaguer, 1974; Balderrama, 1982; Gomez-Quinones, 1977; Mirande & Enriquez, 1979; Padilla, 1987; Paz, 1961) and extends what Delgado Bernal (1989) calls a Chicana feminist epistemology. This work includes writers such as Alarcon (1990), Castillo

(1995) and de la Torre & Pesquera (1993) to illustrate the intersections of race, class, and gender.

Our reliance on these scholars is not to assume a unified Latino/a (or even Chicano/a) subject. Oboler (1995) challenges the amalgamation of Spanish speakers in the western hemisphere under the rubric “Hispanic.” The Hispanic label belies the problem inherent in attempts to create a unitary consciousness from one that is much more complex and multiple than imagined or constructed. According to Oboler:

Insofar as the ethnic label Hispanic homogenizes the varied social and political experiences of 23 million people of different races, classes, languages, and national origins, genders, and religions, it is perhaps not so surprising that the meanings and uses of the term have become the subject of debate in the social sciences, government agencies, and much of society at large (p.3).

Oboler’s (1995) argument is enacted in a scene in Rebecca Gilman’s (2000) play, *Spinning into Butter*. In one scene a college student is told that he is eligible for a “minority” fellowship. When the student objects to the term, “minority” the dean informs him that he can designate himself as “Hispanic.” He becomes more offended at that term and when the dean asks him how he would like to identify himself he says, “Newyorican.” The dean then suggests that he list “Puerto Rican” but he explains to her that he is not Puerto Rican. “I have never been to Puerto Rico and I would be as lost as any American tourist there.” They continue to argue over what label or category is appropriate. The dean cannot understand that a key feature of self-determination lies in the ability to name oneself. The failure of the dean to recognize Newyorican as an identity does not de-legitimize it, except in her mainstream world which not insignificantly controls the resources that the student needs to be successful at the college.

American Indians grapple with these same questions of what it means to be Indian. Despite movements toward “Pan-Indianism” (Hertzberg, 1971) the cultures of American Indians are both broad and diverse. While we warn against essentializing American Indians we do not want to minimize the way the federal government’s attempt to “civilize” and de-tribalize Indian children through boarding schools helped various groups of Indians realize that they shared a number of common problems and experiences (Snipp, 1995). Lomawaima (1995) stated that “since the federal government turned its attention to the ‘problem’ of the civilizing Indians, its overt goal has been to educate Indians to be non-Indians” (p. 332).

Much of the double-consciousness Indians face revolves around issues of tribal sovereignty. A loss of sovereignty is amplified by four methods of disenfranchisement experienced by many American Indians (Lomawaima, 1995). Those four methods included, relocation by colonial authorities (e.g. to missions or reservations), systematic eradication of the native language, religious conversion (to Christianity), and restructured economies toward sedentary agriculture, small scale craft industry, and gendered labor.

Warrior (1995) asks whether or not an investigation of early American Indian writers can have a significant impact on the way contemporary Native intellectuals develop critical studies. He urges caution in understanding the scholarship of Fourth World formulations such as Ward Churchill and M. Annette Jaimes because it tends to be essentializing in its call for understanding American Indian culture as a part of a global consciousness shared by all indigenous people in all periods of history. Warrior’s work is a call for “intellectual sovereignty” (p.87)—a position free from the tyranny and oppression of the dominant discourse.

Despite the attempts to eradicate an Indian identity, the mainstream continues to embrace a “romantic” notion of the Indian. In Eyre’s (1998) adaptation of Sherman Alexie’s (1993), *The Lone*

*Ranger and Tonto fistfight in Heaven*, which became the film, “Smoke Signals,” we see an excellent example of this. The character Victor tells his traveling companion Thomas that he is not Indian enough. Playing on the prevailing stereotypes that Whites have about Indians, Victor instructs Thomas to be “more stoic,” to allow his hair to flow freely, and to get rid of his buttoned-down look. We see the humor in this scene because we recognize the ways we want Indians to appear to satisfy our preconceived notions of “Indian-ness.”

Among Asian Pacific Islanders there are notions of multiple consciousness. Lowe (1996) expresses this in terms of “heterogeneity, hybridity, and multiplicity” (p.60). She points out that:

The articulation of an “Asian American identity” as an organizing tool has provided unity that enables diverse Asian groups to understand unequal circumstances and histories as being related. The building of “Asian American culture” is crucial to this effort, for it articulates and empowers the diverse Asian-origin community vis-à-vis the institutions and apparatuses that exclude and marginalize it. Yet to the extent that Asian American culture fixes Asian American identity and suppresses differences—of national origin, generation, gender, sexuality, class—it risks particular dangers: not only does it underestimate the differences and hybridities among Asians, but it may inadvertently support the racist discourse that constructs Asians as a homogenous group . . . (pp.70–71)

Espiritu (1992) also reminds us that “Asian American” as an identity category came into being within the past thirty years. Prior to that time most members of the Asian descent immigrant population “considered themselves culturally and politically distinct” (p.19). Indeed the historical enmity that existed between and among various Asian groups made it difficult for groups to

transcend their national allegiances to see themselves as one unified group. And, the growing anti-Asian sentiments with which the various Asian immigrant groups were faced in the U.S. caused specific groups to “disassociate themselves from the targeted group so as not to be mistaken for members of it and suffer any possible negative consequences.” (p.20)

Trin Minh-ha (1989) and Mohanty (1991) offer postmodern analyses of Asian Americanness that challenge any unitary definitions of Asian American. Rather than construct a mythical solidarity, their work examines the ways that Asian-ness is represented in the dominant imagination. One of the most vivid examples of the distorted, imagined Asian shows up in the work of David Henry Hwang, whose play, *M. Butterfly* demonstrated how a constellation of characteristics—size, temperament, submissiveness—allowed a French armed services officer to intimately mistake a man for a woman.

Lowe (1996) reminds us that “the grouping ‘Asian American’ is not a natural or static category; it is a socially constructed unity, a situationally specific position assumed for political reasons” (p.82). But it co-exists with a “dynamic fluctuation and heterogeneity of Asian American culture . . .” (p.68)

What each of these groups (i.e. African Americans, Native Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans) has in common is the experience of a racialized identity. Each group is constituted of a myriad of other national and ancestral origins but the dominant ideology of the Euro American epistemology has forced them into an essentialized and totalized unit that is perceived to have little or no internal variation. However, at the same moment, members of these groups have used these unitary racialized labels for political and cultural purposes. Identification with the racialized labels means an acknowledgement of some of the common experiences group members have had as outsiders and others.

In addition to this notion of double-consciousness that we argue pervades the experience of racialized identities, we believe it is imperative to include another theoretical axis—that of postcolonialism. For while double consciousness speaks to the struggle for identities, postcolonialism speaks to the collective project of the modern world that was in no way prepared for the decolonized to talk back and “act up.” As West (1990) asserts, decolonization took on both “impetuous ferocity and moral outrage” (p.25). Frantz Fanon (1968) best describes this movement:

Decolonization, which sets out to change the order of the world, is obviously a program of complete disorder . . . Decolonization is the meeting of two forces, opposed to each other by their very nature, which in fact owe their originality to that sort of substantification which results from and is nourished by the situation in the colonies.

In decolonization, there is therefore the need of a complete calling in question of the colonial situation. (p.35)

Fanon (1994) helped us understand the dynamics of colonialism and why decolonization had to be the major project of the oppressed:

Colonial domination, because it is total and tends to over-simplify, very soon manages to disrupt in spectacular fashion the cultural life of a conquered people. This cultural obliteration is made possible by the negation of national reality, by new legal relations introduced by the occupying power, by the banishment of the natives and their customs to outlying districts by colonial society, by expropriation, and by the systematic enslaving of men and women (p.45).

Post-colonial theory serves as a corrective to our penchant for casting these issues into a strictly U.S. context. It helps us see the worldwide oppression against the “other” and the ability of

dominant groups to define the terms of being and non-being, of civilized and uncivilized, of developed and undeveloped, of human and non-human. But even as we attempt to incorporate the term “postcolonial” in our understanding of critical race theory we are reminded of the limits of such terminology to fully explain conditions of hierarchy, hegemony, racism, sexism, and unequal power relations. As McClintock (1994) asserts, “. . . ‘post-colonialism’ (like postmodernism) is unevenly developed globally. . . . Can most of the world’s countries be said, in any meaningful or theoretically rigorous sense, to share a single ‘common past,’ or single common ‘condition,’ called ‘the post-colonial condition,’ or ‘post-coloniality’ (p.294)? Indeed, McClintock (1994) reminds us that, “the term ‘post-colonialism’ is, in many cases, prematurely celebratory. Ireland may, at a pinch, be ‘post-colonial,’ but for the inhabitants of British-occupied Northern Ireland, not to mention the Palestinian inhabitants of the Israeli Occupied Territories and the West Bank, there may be nothing ‘post’ about colonialism at all”(p. 294). As Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1998) queries, “Post . . . have they left yet?”

### **“Is-ness” versus “Us-ness”:**

#### **The discursive and material limits of liberal ideology**

To the extent that we interpret our experience from within the master narrative, we reinforce our own subordination. Whether [people of color] can counter racism may depend, finally, on our ability to claim identities outside the master narrative.

Lisa Ikemoto, 1995, pp.312–313

In the previous section we addressed axes of moral and ethical epistemology on which much of the work of scholars of color rests (i.e. double consciousness, sovereignty, hybridity, heterogeneity, post-colonialism). In this section we point toward the problems of dichotomy that current political and social rhetoric provoke.

After the September 11, 2001 terrorists attacks on the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and a plane that crashed in Pennsylvania, George W. Bush addressed the nation (and ostensibly the world) letting the audience know that there were but two choices—to be with “us” or with the “terrorists.” Those dichotomous choices were not nearly as simple as Bush suggested. For one thing, who is the “us?” Is the “us,” the United States regardless of the situation and circumstance? Is the “us” the U.S. even when it oppresses you? Is the “us” the supporters of the U.S. Patriot Acts I and II? Second, who are the terrorists? Clearly, we are not confused about Al-Qaeda or the Taliban but does objecting to U.S. foreign policy place us in league with them? If we stand in solidarity with the Palestinian people are we with “with the terrorists?” If we acknowledge the legitimacy of the claims of the Northern Ireland Catholics have we lost our claim on being a part of “us?” In the face of this sharp dividing line, many liberals chose George W. Bush’s “us.”

Choosing this unified “us” is not unlike Lipsitz’ (1998) argument that the United States has been constructed as a nation of White people whose public policy, politics, and culture are designed to serve the interests of Whites. Such a construction serves to maintain white privilege and justify the subordination of anyone outside this racial designation. Thus, even in the reporting of war casualties we list the number of Americans (read: White, even if this is not the actual case) killed while ignoring the number of “the enemy” who are killed. What is important here is that Whiteness is not attached to phenotype, but rather a social construction of who is worthy of inclusion in the circle of Whiteness. The enemy is never White. His identity is subsumed in a nationality or

ideology that can be defined as antithetical to Whiteness (e.g. Nazis, fascists, communists, Muslims).

In one of her classes, Ladson-Billings used to show students a videotape of the Rodney King beating and following the viewing distributed copies of blind editorials about the beating. She then asked the students to determine the political perspective of the writers. Without benefit of newspaper mastheads or authors' names, many of the students struggled to locate the writers' ideological views. Predictably, the students divided the editorials into "liberal" and "conservative." No students identified moderate, radical, or reactionary perspectives. Their failure to see a broader ideological continuum is indicative of the polarization and dichotomization of our discourses.

We make a specific assumption about where the discursive battles must be fought. We do not engage the conservative ideology because we take for granted its antagonism toward the issues we raise. We understand that conservative rhetoric has no space for discussions of ethical epistemologies, double consciousness, hybridity, or post-colonialism. Our battle is with liberals who presume the moral high ground and have situated themselves as "saviors" of the oppressed while simultaneously maintaining their White skin privilege (McIntosh, 1988).

A wonderful literary example of the moral vacuum in current liberal discourse appears in a novel by Bebe Moore Campbell (1995), *Your blues ain't like mine*. The novel is a fictionalized account of the horrible Emmitt Till murder of the 1950s. Instead of focusing solely on the victim's family and perspective, the author gives us multiple perspectives on the book including that of the perpetrators, the various families, and the townspeople. One character, Clayton, is a classic White liberal. He is from a privileged family and is afraid to truly relinquish his access to that privilege. So, although Clayton tries to "help" various Black characters, at the end of the novel when Clayton discovers he is related to one of the Black characters he adamantly refuses to share his inheritance

with her. Clayton's behavior is a metaphor for White liberalism. It is prepared to only go so far.

A real-life example of this moral vacuum was exemplified in the Clinton presidency. We are not referring to his personal transgressions and sexual exploits but rather his retreat from the political left. By packaging himself as a "New Democrat" which can only be described as an "Old Moderate Republican"—think Nelson Rockefeller, George Romney or Lowell Weicker. The actual Clinton presidency record indicates according to columnist Steve Perry (1996), that [he] . . . co-opted the great middle while leaving liberals with no place to go" (p.2). And Randall Kennedy (2001) suggests:

For all Clinton's much-expressed concern about social justice in general and racial justice in particular, his programs, policies, and gestures have done painfully little to help those whom Professor William Julius Wilson calls "the truly disadvantaged"—impoverished people, disproportionately colored, who are locked away in pestilent and crime-ridden inner cities or forgotten rural or small-town wastelands, people who are bereft of money, training, skills or education needed to escape their plight. True, Clinton had to contend with a reactionary, Republican-led Congress for much of his presidency. But, even before the Gingrichian deluge of 1994 he had made it plain that his sympathies lay predominantly with "the middle class." For those below it, he offered chastising lectures that legitimated the essentially conservative notions that the predicament of the poor results primarily from their conduct and not from the deformative deprivations imposed on them by a grievously unfair social order that is in large part a class hierarchy and in smaller part a pigmentocracy.

Progressive columnist Malik Miah (1999) argues that Clinton's ease and fellow feeling with African Americans should not be interpreted as solidarity with the cause of African American or other people suffering oppression:

While it is true Clinton plays the sax and is right at home visiting a Black church, his real policies have done more damage to the Black community than any president since the victory of civil rights movement in the 1960s.

. . . On the issue of families and welfare he's ended programs that, while inadequate, provided some relief for the poorest sections of the population. Ironically, Nixon, Reagan and Bush—who all promised to end welfare—couldn't get it done. Clinton not only did it but claimed it as a great accomplishment of his first term in office.

. . . He pushed through Congress a crime bill that restricts civil liberties and makes it easier to impose the death penalty.

. . . The strong support [of African Americans] for Clinton is thus seen as “using common sense” and doing what's best for the future of our children, much more than having big illusions in Clinton and the “new” Democrats. The new middle-class layers in these communities also provide new potential voters and supporters for the two main parties of the rich.

Like Campbell's (1995) fictional character, Clayton, Bill Clinton was only prepared to go so far in his support of people of color. His liberal credentials relied on superficial and symbolic acts (i.e. associating with Blacks, attending Black churches, playing the saxophone) thus, at those places where people of color were most hurting (e.g. health, education, welfare), he was unwilling to spend political capital. Such a retreat from liberal ideals represented a more severe moral failing than afternoon trysts with a White House intern.

With the George W. Bush, Jr. administration people of color and poor people are faced with

a more pressing concern—the legitimacy of their being. Rather than argue over whether or not they are “with us” or “with the terrorists,” we must constantly assert that we *are* rather than reflect a solidarity with an overarching “us” that actively oppresses. At this writing we are watching a movement in California to prohibit the state from collecting data that identifies people by racial categories (California Proposition 54). Passage of this proposition would mean that the state would not be able to report about the disparities that exist in school achievement, incarceration, income levels, health concerns, and other social and civic concerns between Whites and people of color. Thus, this so-called “color-blind” measure effectively erases the races while maintaining the social, political, economic, and cultural status quo. The significance of this Proposition is lost in the media circus of the California gubernatorial recall and cast of characters seeking to be governor of the most populous (and one of the most diverse) states in the nation.

At the same moment that the society seeks to erase and ignore the Other, it maintains a curious desire to consume and co-opt it. The appropriation of cultural forms from communities of color is not really flattery. It is a twisted embrace that simultaneously repels the Other. The complexity of this relationship allows White people, as performance artist Roger Guenveur Smith (Tate, 2003, p.5) suggests, to love Black music and hate Black people. The mainstream community despises rap music for its violence, misogyny, and racial epithets but spends millions of dollars to produce and consume it. The mainstream decries illegal immigration from Mexico and Central America while refusing to acknowledge its own complicity in maintaining their presence through its demand for artificially depressed produce, domestic service, and the myriad of jobs that “Americans” refuse to do. The mainstream fights what it sees as the “over representation” of Asian descent people in certain industries or high status universities but cultivates fetishes over “Oriental” artifacts—martial arts, feng shui, sushi, and “docile,” “petite” women. The mainstream remained

silence while the indigenous population was massacred and displaced onto reservations but now runs eagerly to participate in sweat lodges and pow-wows. Such fascination does nothing to liberate and enrich the Other. Instead, they remain on the margins and are conveniently exploited for the political, economic, social, and cultural benefit of the dominant group. We are not a part of the “us” or “the terrorists.” We are the struggling to exist—to just “be.”

## **New Templates for Ethical Action**

“The past history of biology has shown that progress is equally inhibited by an anti-intellectual holism and a purely atomistic reductionism.”

Ernst Mayr (1976)

In his book, *Ethical Ambition*, legal scholar Derrick Bell (2002) addresses the question that plagues many scholars of color, “How can I succeed without selling my soul?” He argues that the qualities of passion, risk, courage, inspiration, faith, humility, and love are the keys to success that maintain one’s integrity and dignity. He contends that scholars must consider these as standards of behavior in both scholarship and relationships. Clearly, this is a different set of standards than those the academy typically applies to research and scholarship. But, how well have the usual standards served communities of color?

From 1932 to 1972, 399 poor black sharecroppers in Macon County, Alabama were denied treatment for syphilis and deceived by physicians of the United States Public Health Service. As part of the Tuskegee Syphilis Study, designed to

document the natural history of the disease, these men were told that they were being treated for “bad blood.” In fact, government officials went to extreme lengths to insure that they received no therapy from any source. As reported by the *New York Times* on 26 July 1972, the Tuskegee Syphilis Study was revealed as “the longest nontherapeutic experiment on human beings in medical history.” (Tuskegee Syphilis Study Legacy Committee, Final Report, May 1996).

The Health News Network ([www.healthnewsnet.com](http://www.healthnewsnet.com)) details a long list of unethical and egregious acts in the name of science. For example, in 1940 four hundred prisoners in Chicago were infected with Malaria to study the effects of new and experimental drugs to combat the disease. In 1945 Project Paperclip was initiated by the U.S. State Department, Army Intelligence, and the CIA to recruit Nazi scientists and offer them immunity and secret identities in exchange for work on top secret government projects in the U.S. In 1947 the CIA began a study of LSD as a potential weapon for use by U.S. intelligence. Human subjects (both civilian and military) were used with and without their knowledge. In 1950 the U.S. Navy sprayed a cloud of bacteria over San Francisco to determine how susceptible a U.S. city would be to biological attack. In 1955 the CIA released a bacteria over Tampa Bay, Florida that had been withdrawn from the Army’s biological warfare arsenal to determine its ability to infect human populations with biological agents. In 1958 the Army Chemical Welfare Laboratories tested LSD on 95 volunteers to determine its effect on intelligence. In 1965 prisoners at the Holmesburg State Prison in Philadelphia were subjected to dioxin, the highly toxic chemical compound of Agent Orange used in Viet Nam. In 1990 more than 1,500 six-month old Black and Latino babies in Los Angeles were given an “experimental” measles vaccine that had never been licensed for use in the U.S. The Center for Disease Control later

admitted that the parents were never informed that their babies were receiving an experimental vaccine.

While these examples in the life sciences are extreme, it is important to recognize that social sciences have almost always tried to mimic the so-called “hard sciences.” We have accepted their paradigms and elevated their ways of knowing even when they themselves challenge them (Kuhn, 1962). The standards that require research to be “objective,” precise, accurate, generalize-able, replicable do not simultaneously produce moral and ethical research and scholarship. The current calls for “scientifically based” and “evidence-based” research in education from the United States Department of Education have provoked an interesting response from the education research community (Shavelson & Towne, 2003).

The National Research Council Report, *Scientific Research in Education* (Shavelson & Towne, 2003) outlines what it terms a “set of fundamental principles” for “a healthy community of researchers” (p.2). These principles include:

1. Pose significant questions that can be investigated empirically.
2. Link research to relevant theory.
3. Use methods that permit direct investigation of the question.
4. Provide a coherent and explicit chain of reasoning.
5. Replicate and generalize across studies.
6. Disclose research to encourage professional scrutiny and critique (pp.3–5)

On their face these seem to be “reasonable” principles around which the “scientific”

community can coalesce. And, while it is beyond the scope of this chapter to do a thorough review of the NRC report, we do want to point out some of the problems such thinking provokes, particularly in the realm of ethics and moral activism. The first principle suggests that we “pose significant questions that can be investigated empirically.” We cannot recall the last time a researcher asserted that s/he was investigating something “insignificant.” Scholars research that which interest them and no one would suggest that they are interested in insignificant things. More important, this principle assumes the supremacy of empirical work. Without taking our discussion too far into the philosophical, we assert that what constitutes the empirical is culturally coded. For example, many years ago a researcher from a prestigious university was collecting data in an urban classroom. The researcher reported on the apparent chaos and disorder of the classroom and described her observation of some students openly snorting drugs in the back of the classroom. Later, a graduate student who knew the school and the community talked with some of the students and learned that the students knew that the researchers expected them to be “dangerous,” “uncontrollable,” and “frightening.” Determined to meet the researcher’s expectations, the students gathered up the chalk dust from the blackboard ledge and began treating it like a powdered drug. What the researcher actually saw were students who decided to fool a researcher. This may have been empirical work, but clearly it was wrong.

In a less extreme example, an anthropology of education professor regularly displayed a set of photographic slides to his class requiring them to describe the contents of each slide. In one slide, a photo of a farmhouse in a small German village, there is a huge pile of manure (at least one full story high) in front of the house. Not one student out of a lecture section of about 100 noted the manure pile. Even if one might argue that it was difficult to determine what it was in the slide, not one student noted that there was a “pile of something” sitting in front of the farmhouse. Our point

here is that our ability to access the empirical is culturally determined and always shaped by moral and political concerns.

Popkewitz (2003, in press) argues that the NRC report rests on a number of assumptions that expose the writers' misunderstanding of scientific inquiry. These assumptions include:

(1) There is a unity of foundational assumptions that cross all the natural and social sciences. This unity involves: (2) the importance of rigorous methods and design models; (3) the cumulative, sequential development of knowledge; (4) science is based on inferential reasoning; (5) the empirical testing and development of knowledge. Finally, the assumptions provide the expertise of what government needs—showing what works. This last point is important as the Report has a dual function. It is to outline a science of education and to propose how government can intervene in the development of a science that serves policy reforms (pp.2–3).

Popkewitz (2003, in press) is elegant in his rebuttal of the NRC report and we are limited in our ability to expend space to offer additional critique. However, our task is to point out that with all of the emphasis on “scientific principles” the NRC report fails to include the moral and ethical action that scholars must engage. Is it enough to follow human subjects protocols? That sets a very minimalist standard that is likely to continue the same moral and ethical abuses. For example, in a recent National Public Radio broadcast of *All Things Considered* (Mann, 2003) entitled, “New York weighs lead-paint laws” the reporter indicated that researchers were testing children for the levels of lead in their blood. While there was consensus that many of the children had elevated levels of lead, the researchers rejected the recommendation that the levels of lead in the building be tested. This second, more efficient method would allow for class action on the part of the building residents. But the researchers chose to persist in examining individuals. Rather than raise the moral bar by insisting that it is unsafe to live in buildings with lead-paint and to test the buildings for

lead-paint, individuals (many who are poor and disenfranchised) are responsible for coming forth to be tested. One might argue that the researchers are abiding by the standards of scientific inquiry, however these standards are not inclusive of the moral and ethical action that must be taken.

In addition to Bell's (2002) call for ethical behavior in the academy, Guinier & Torres (2002) have argued that it is important to move past the current racial discourses because such discourses invariably keep us locked in race-power hierarchies that depend on a winner-take-all conclusion. Instead Guinier & Torres (2002) give birth to a new construct—"political race"—that relies on building cross-racial coalitions and alliances that involve grass roots workers who strive to remake the terms of participation and invigorate democracy. Their work points to the coalition of African Americans and Latinos who devised the 10-percent decision to address inequity in Texas higher education. We would also point to the work of the modern civil rights movement of the 1960s and the anti-apartheid work in South Africa. In both instances we saw broad coalitions of people working for human liberation and justice. The aim of such work is not merely to remedy past racial injustice but rather to enlarge the democratic project to include many more participants. In the case of the U.S. the civil rights movement became a template for addressing a number of undemocratic practices against women, immigrants, gays and lesbians, the disabled, and second language speakers. The point of moral and ethical activism is not to secure privileges for one's own group. It is to make democracy a reality for increasing numbers of groups and individuals. Such work permits us to look at multiple axes of difference and take these intersections seriously.

In *Miner's Canary*, Guinier & Torres (2002) point out that our typical response to inequity is to feel sorry for the individuals but ignore the structure that produces such inequity. We would prefer to prepare the dispossessed and disenfranchised to better fit in a corrupt system rather than rethink the whole system. Instead of ignoring racial differences as the color blind approach

suggests, political race urges us to understand the way race and power intertwine at every level of the society and only through cross-racial coalitions can we expose the embedded hierarchies of privilege and destroy them ([www.minerscanary.org/about.shtml](http://www.minerscanary.org/about.shtml) retrieved 12/01/03). Guinier & Torres (2002) call this notion of enlisting race to resist power, political race. It requires diagnosing systemic injustice and organizing to resist it.

Political race challenges the social and economic consequences of race in a “third way,” ([www.minerscanary.org/about.shtml](http://www.minerscanary.org/about.shtml) retrieved 12/01/03) that proposes a multi-textured political strategy rather than the traditional legal solutions to the issues of racial justice. The authors argue that, “political race dramatically transforms the use of race from a signifier of individual culpability and prejudice to an early warning sign of larger injustices” (*ibid.*) When they speak of political they are not referring to conventional electoral politics. Rather, their notion of political race challenges social activists and critical scholars to rethink what winning means and if winning in a corrupt system can ever be good enough. Instead their focus is on the power of change through collective action and how such action can change (and challenge) us all to work in new ways.

We seek a methodology and a theory that as Gayatri Spivak (1990) argues, seeks not merely reversal of roles in a hierarchy, but rather displacement of taken for granted norms around unequal binaries, e.g. male-female, public-private, White-non-White, able-disabled, native-foreign. We see such possibility in Critical Race Theory (CRT) and we point out that CRT is not limited to the old notions of race. Rather CRT is a new analytic rubric for considering difference and inequity using multiple methodologies—story, voice, metaphor, analogy, critical social science, feminism, post-modernism. So visceral is our reaction to the word, “race” that many scholars and consumers of scholarly literature cannot see beyond the word to appreciate the value of CRT for making sense of our current social condition. We would argue that scholars such as Trin-T Minh-ha, Robert Allen

Warrior, Gloria Anzaldúa, Ian Haney-Lopez, Richard Delgado, Lisa Lowe, David Palumbo-Liu, Gayatri Spivak, Chandra Mohanty, and Patricia Hill Collins all produce a kind of CRT. They are not bogged down with labels or dogmatic constraints. Rather they are creatively and passionately engaging new visions of scholarship to do work that will ultimately serve people and lead to human liberation.

Thus we argue that the work of critical scholars (from any variety of perspectives) is not merely to try to replicate the work of previous scholars in a cookie cutter fashion but rather to break new epistemological, methodological, social activist, and moral ground. We do not need Derrick Bell, Lani Guinier, or Gerald Torres clones. We need scholars to take up their causes (along with causes they identify for themselves) and creatively engage them. We look to them because of their departure from the scholarly mainstream, not to make them idols.

### **Moving from Research to Activism—Street Level Research in Ivory Towers**

Conflict—the real world kind, I mean—can be bloody, misguided, and wholly tragic. It behooves us always to try to understand how and why bloodshed breaks out as it does. But the very narratives and stories we tell ourselves and each other afterwards, in an effort to explain, understand, excuse, and assign responsibility for conflict, may also be, in a sense, the source of the very violence we abhor.

Lisa Ikemoto (1995, p.313)

Earlier in this chapter we referenced Harold Cruse and *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual* (1984/1967) and indeed we recognize the crisis that Cruse identifies is a crisis for all intellectuals of color. Cruse's point that "While Negro intellectuals are busy trying to interpret the nature of the black world and its aspirations to the whites, they should, in fact, be defining their own roles as intellectuals within both worlds" (p.455) is applicable to all scholars of color. Novelists such as Toni Morrison, (1987), Shawn Wong (1995), Ana Castillo (1994), and Sherman Alexi (1993), Jhumpa Lahiri (1999) deftly accomplish what Cruse asks. They sit comfortably within the walls of the academy and on the street corners, barrios, and reservations of the people. They are "cultural brokers" who understand the need to be "in" the academy (or mainstream) but not "of" the academy.

In the foreword of Cruse's book, Allen & Wilson (1984) summarize the central tasks that this book outlines for "would-be intellectuals" (p.v):

1. To familiarize themselves with their own intellectual antecedents and with previous political and cultural movements;
2. To analyze critically the bases for the pendulum swings between the two poles of integration and [black] nationalism, and try to synthesize them into a single and consistent analysis;
3. To identify clearly the political, economic, and cultural requisites for black advancement in order to meld them into a single politics of progressive black culture. This process requires greater attention both to Afro-American popular culture and to the macroeconomic, structural context of modern capitalism in which group culture either flourishes or atrophies;

4. To recognize the uniqueness of American conditions and to insist that one incorporate this uniqueness when studying numbers 1 through 3 above.

Despite Cruse's (1984/1967) focus on African Americans and their experiences in the U.S., it is clear to us that such work is important for any marginalized group. All scholars of color must know the intellectual antecedents of their cultural, ethnic, or racial group. This is important for combating the persistent ideology of white supremacy that denigrates the intellectual contributions of others. All scholars of color must look to the epistemological underpinnings and legitimacy of their cultures and cultural ways of knowing. They must face the tensions that emerge in their communities between assimilation into the U.S. mainstream and the creation of separate and distinct cultural locations. For example, the construction of Asian Americans as articulated previously by Lowe (1996) and Espiritu (1992) are powerful examples of the synthesis Cruse speaks of. All scholars of color need to acknowledge the salience of popular culture in shaping our research and scholarly agendas, for it is in the popular that our theories and methodologies become living, breathing entities.

Martin Luther King, Jr. had a theory about “non-violence” that came from his study of Ghandi and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, but the theory was actualized in the hearts and minds of ordinary people **\*\*[Text quoted in Part II intro]**—Fannie Lou Hamer, Esau Jenkins, Septima Clark, and many others. So great is the desire for survival and liberation that it transcends geo-political boundaries, languages, and cultures. The modern civil rights movement in the U.S. was replayed in China's Tianamen Square, in the cities and townships of South Africa, and in liberation struggles the world over. In each instance, the power of the popular bring the music, art, and energy to the struggle. Ordinary people become the “street-level bureaucrats” (Lipsky, 1983) who translate theory into practice. However, we want to be clear that we are not suggesting that such “street level

bureaucrats” begin to behave as functionaries of the state where they become the new power brokers. Rather, we are suggesting a new vision of Lipsky’s (1983) concept where people from the community represent a new form of leadership that is unafraid of shared power and real democracy.

But scholars who take on the challenge of moral and ethical activist work cannot rely solely on others to make sense of their work and translate it into usable form. Hill Collins (1998) speaks of a “visionary pragmatism” (p.188) that may be helpful in the development of more politically and socially engaged scholarship. She uses this term to characterize the perspective of the working class women of her childhood:

The Black women on my block possessed a “visionary pragmatism” that emphasized the necessity of linking caring, theoretical vision with informed, practical struggle. A creative tension links visionary thinking and practical action. Any social theory that becomes too out of touch with everyday people and their lives, especially oppressed people, is of little use to them. The functionality and not just the logical consistency of visionary thinking determines its worth. At the same time, being too practical, looking only to the here and now—especially if present conditions seemingly offer little hope—can be debilitating (p.188).

Scholars must also engage new forms of scholarship that make translations of their work more seamless. Guinier & Torres (2001) speak to us of “political race” as a new conception we can embrace. Castillo (1994) offers magical realism as a rubric for Chicano coalescence. Lowe (1996) has taken up notions of hybridity, heterogeneity, and multiplicity to name the material contradictions that characterize immigrant groups—particularly Asian descent immigrants—who are routinely lumped together and homogenized into a unitary and bounded category. Espiritu (2003) helps us link the study of race and ethnicity to the study of imperialism so that we can better understand transnational and diasporic lives. Similarly, Ong (1999) warns of the growing threat of

global capital that destabilizes notions of cultural unity and/or allegiance. Instead, the overwhelming power of multinational corporations create economic cleavages that force people, regardless of their racial, cultural, and ethnic locations to chase jobs and compete against each other to subsist.

Promising scholarship that may disrupt the fixed categories that whiteness has instantiated appears in work by Prashad (2002) who examines the cross racial and inter-racial connections that reflect the reality of our histories and current conditions. Prashad (2002) argues that instead of the polarized notions of either “colorblindness” or a primordial “multiculturalism,” what we seek is a “polyculturalism,” a term he borrows from Robin D.G. Kelley (1999) who argues that, “so-called ‘mixed-race’ children are not the only ones with a claim to multiple heritages. All of us, and I mean ALL of us, are the inheritors of European, African, Native-American, and even Asian pasts, even if we can’t exactly trace our bloodlines to all of these continents” (p.6). Kelley (1999) further argues that our various cultures, “have never been easily identifiable, secure in their boundaries, or clear to all people who live in or outside our skin. We were multi-ethnic and polycultural from the get-go” (p.6). This challenge to notions of ethnic purity moves us away from the futile chase for “authenticity” and troubles the reification of ethnic and racial categories. We begin to understand as political activist, Rev. Al Sharpton has said that, “all my skin folks, ain’t my kin folks.” Just because people look like us by no means implies that they have our best interests at heart.

At the street level, we must acknowledge the power of hip-hop culture. It is important that we distinguish our acknowledgement from the negatives that the corporate interests promulgate—violence, racism, misogyny, and crass consumerism—from hip hop as a vehicle for cross racial, cross cultural, and international coalitions. Organizations such as El Puente Academy for Peace and Justice in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn, NY and the Urban Think Tank Institute

([www.UrbanThinkTank.org](http://www.UrbanThinkTank.org)) provide a more democratic and politically progressive discourse.

Urban Think Tank Institute argues that the Hip Hop generation “has become more politically sophisticated . . . [and needs] a space whereby grassroots thinkers, activists, and artists can come together, discuss relevant issues, devise strategies, and then articulate their analysis to the public and to policy makers” (see Yvonne Bynoe on Urban Think Tank website). Such organizations have corollaries in the earlier work of Myles Horton (Horton, 1990; Horton & Freire, 1990), Paulo Freire (1970), Septima Clark (with Brown, 1990), Marcus Garvey’s Universal Negro Improvement Association (Prashad, 2001), and the Boggs Center (Boggs, 1971). It also resembles the worldwide liberation movements we have seen in India, South Africa, China, Brazil, Zimbabwe, and most everywhere in the world where people have organized to resist oppression and domination.

The Hip-Hop movement reminds us of the stirrings of the youth and young adults in the modern Civil Rights Movement. When it became clear that the older more conservative leadership was unwilling to make a space for young people in the movement, we began to see a new form of liberation work. Instead of attempting to assimilate and assert our rights as Americans, young people began to assert their rights to a distinct identity in which being an American may have been constitutive of this identity but it was not the all encompassing identity. Hip-hop’s wide appeal, across geopolitical and ethnic boundaries (we found hip hop web sites in Latvia, Russia, Italy, and Japan) makes it a potent force for mobilizing young people worldwide. Unfortunately, most scholars (and for that matter most adults) have narrow views of hip-hop.<sup>6</sup> They see it merely as rap music and “gangsta” culture. However, the power of hip-hop is in its diffuse-ness. It encompasses art, music, dance, and self-presentation. Although much of the media attention has focused on notorious personalities such as Biggie Smalls, Snoop Dog, P.Diddy, 50-Cent, Nelly, and others, there is a core group of hip-hop artists whose major purpose was to provide social commentary and

awaken a somnambulant generation of young people from their drug, alcohol, and materialistic addictions. Some of these artists sought to contextualize the present conditions of the African American and other marginalized communities of color and call for action by making historical links to ideas (e.g. Black Power), social movements (e.g. cultural nationalism), and political figures (e.g. Malcolm X, Che Guevara). The need for this kind of work is not unlike the call of Ngugi wa Thiongo (1991) who argued, in speaking of the emerging independent African nations, that we needed a radically democratic proposal for the production of art, literature, and culture based on our political praxis. Looking the the U.S. scene, Dyson (1993) argues:

Besides being the most powerful form of Black musical expression today, rap music projects a style of self into the world that generates forms of cultural resistance and transforms the ugly terrain of ghetto existence into a searing portrait of life as it must be lived by millions of voiceless people. For that reason alone, rap deserves attention and should be taken seriously (p.15).

Counted among these visionary hip-hop leaders<sup>7</sup> are Grandmaster Flash, Public Enemy, Run-DMC, The Fugees, Lauryn Hill, KRS-1, Diggable Planets, Arrested Development, the Roots, Mos Def, Common, Erykah Badu, the whole host of Nuyorican poets, and the organic intellectuals that produce *YO Magazine* in the San Francisco Bay Area. These are the people who have the ears (and hearts and minds) of the young people. It is among this group that new forms of scholarship that takes up moral and ethical positions will be forged. Scholars who choose to ignore the trenchant pleas of the hip-hop generation will find themselves increasingly out of touch and irrelevant to the everyday lives of people engaged in the cause of social justice.

A number of scholars have made connections with the hip-hop generation. Miguel Algarin with his ties to both the academy and the Nuyorican Poet's Café, Cornel West and Michael Eric Dyson with their face to face conversations with the hip-hop generation, and bell hooks, with her

revolutionary Black feminism. The late poet, June Jordan, Toni Morrison, Pablo Neruda, Carlos Bulosan, John Okada, Diego Rivera, Leslie Marmon Silko, Sherman Alexie and others have deployed their art to speak across the generations.

Social scientists must similarly situate themselves to play a more active and progressive role in fight for equity and social justice. Their work has to transcend narrow disciplinary boundaries if they are to have any impact on people who reside in sub altern sites or even policy makers. Unfortunately, far too many academics spend their time talking to each other in the netherworld of the academy. We write in obscure journals and publish books in languages that do not translate to the lives and experiences of real people. We argue not for the seeming “simplicity” of the political right, but the relevancy and the power of the popular.

### **Reconstruction of the Work of the Intellect**

Don't push me, cause I'm close to the edge

I'm trying not to lose my head.

It's like a jungle sometimes, it makes me wonder

How I keep from going under

From, *The Message*, Grandmaster Flash

It is typical for institutional recommendations to call for a “transformation” of some kind. In this case, were we to suggest that the academy needed to be transformed we imagine that many would agree. However, transformation implies a change that emanates from an existing base. Clark

Kent transformed himself into Superman but underneath the blue tights he was still Clark Kent. Britt Reid transformed himself into the Green Hornet, but underneath the mask he was still Britt Reid. Captain John Reid's brother Dan transformed himself into the Lone Ranger, but under that powder blue, skin-tight outfit and mask he was still John Reid. What we are urging is the equivalent of having Jimmy Olsen, Kato, and Tonto assume the leadership and implement the plan.

Reconstruction comes after the destruction of what was. The Union Army did not attempt to massage the South into a new economy after the U.S. Civil War. The Cuban Revolution was not Fidel Castro's attempt to adapt the Battista regime. The new South Africa is not trying to organize a new form of apartheid with Black dominance. Rather, these are instances where we see the entire destruction of the old in an attempt to make something new. So it may have to be with the academy in order for it to be responsive to the needs of everyday people.

The student movement at San Francisco State College (Prashad, 2001) revolutionized not only that local campus, but also campuses across the country. It formed the basis for the development of what Wynter (1992) called "new studies" in Black, Latino, Asian, and Native American Studies. It provided a template for Women's Studies, Gay and Lesbian Studies, and Disability Studies. It reconfigured knowledge from static, fixed disciplines with the perception of cumulative information, to a realization of the dynamic and overlapping nature of knowledge and a more fluid sense of epistemology and methodology. But, even with the strides made by these new studies, they still represent a very small crack in the solid, almost frozen traditions of the university. Indeed, the more careerist interests have made a more indelible imprint on the colleges and universities in the U.S. Instead of seeing colleges and universities as the site of liberal education and free-thinking, increasing numbers of young people (and their parents) see the university as a job training facility. Courses and programs of study in hotel and restaurant management, criminal

justice, and sports management,<sup>8</sup> while representing legitimate job and career choices, are less likely to promote overall university goals of educating people to engage with knowledge and critical thinking across a wide variety of disciplines and traditions.

A reconstructed university would displace much of the credentialing function of the current system, and organize itself around principles of intellectual enrichment, social justice, social betterment, and equity. Students would see the university as a vehicle for public service, not merely personal advancement. Students would study various courses and programs of study in an attempt to improve both their minds and the condition of life in the community, society, and the world. Such a program has little or no chance of success in our current socio-political atmosphere. Although colleges and universities are legitimately categorized as non-profit entities, they do have fiscal responsibilities. Currently, those fiscal responsibilities are directed to continued employment of elites, supplying a well-prepared labor force, and increasing endowments. In a reconstructed university, the fiscal responsibility would be directed toward community development and improving the socioeconomic infrastructure.

A reconstructed university would have a different kind of reward system where teaching and service were true equals to research and scholarship. Perhaps these components would be more seamlessly wedded and more tightly related. Excellence would be judged by quality efforts in all areas. Admission to such a university would also mean that more complex standards would be applied to evaluating potential students. Instead of strict grade point averages, class rankings, standardized test scores, and inflated resumes,<sup>9</sup> colleges and universities could begin to select students for their ability to contribute to the body politic that will be formed on a particular campus.

Democracy is a complicated system of government and it requires an educated citizenry to participate actively in it. By educated, we are not merely referring to holding degrees and

credentials, but knowing enough to, as Freire (1970) insists, “to read the word and the world.” We recognize the need for “organic intellectuals”<sup>10</sup> to help us as credentialed intellectuals do the reconstructive work. We find interesting (and paradoxical) that education at the two ends of the continuum (pre-collegiate and adult education) seem to be more progressive and proactive (at least from the point of view of the literature they produce and respond to). Colleges and universities seem to function as incubators for the soon-to-be (or wanna-be) guardians of the status quo. Too many of our college and university students want to assume a place in the current society without using their collegiate years as an opportunity to consider how the society could be different; how it could be more just.

Among pre-collegiate educators, Grace Boggs (1971) has developed a “new system of education” that makes a radical break from the current system that is designed to “prepare the great majority [of citizens] for labor and to advance a few out of their ranks to join the elite in governing” (p.32). Boggs’ (1971) vision is for a “new system of education that will have as its means and its ends the development of the great masses of people *to govern over themselves and to administer over things* (p.32). Boggs’ system of education calls for an education that must:

- ◆ Be based on a philosophy of history—in order to realize his or her highest potential as a human being, every young person must be given a profound and continuing sense (a) of his or her own life as an integral part of the continuing evolution of the human species; and (b) of the unique capacity of human beings to shape and create reality in accordance with conscious purposes and plans;
- ◆ Include productive activity—productive activity, in which individuals choose a task and participate in its execution from beginning to end, remains the most effective and rapid means to internalize the relationship between cause and effect, between effort and result,

between, purposes (ends) and programs (means) an internalization which is necessary to rational behavior, creative thinking, and responsible activity;

- ◆ Include living struggles—every young person must be given expanding opportunities to solve the problems of his physical and social environment, thereby developing the political and technical skills which are urgently needed to transform the social institutions as well as the physical environments of our communities and cities;
- ◆ Include a wide variety of resources and environments—In our complex world, education must be consciously organized to take place not only in schools and not only using teachers and technology, but also a multiplicity of physical and social environments (e.g. the countryside, the city, the sea, factories, offices, other countries, other cultures);
- ◆ Include development in bodily self-knowledge and well-being—increased scientific and technological knowledge necessitates more active participation by lay people and a greater focus on preventative medicine. Students must learn how to live healthy lives and work to reverse the devastating health conditions in poor and working class communities;
- ◆ Include clearly defined goals—education must move away from achieving more material goods and/or fitting people into the existing unequal structure. Education's primary purpose must be governing (pp.33–36).

Early scholars in adult education (Freire, 1970; Horton, 1990; Horton & Freire, 1990) understood the need to develop education imbued with social purpose and grounded in grass-roots, popular organizing movements. While there are a number of such examples, because of space limitations we will focus on the Highlander Folk School. Aimee Horton (1989) documents the

school's history and points out that its relationship with social movements is the key to understanding both the strength and limitations of its adult education program. The two—social movement and adult education—form a symbiotic relationship. As Myles Horton himself suggests:

It is only in a movement that an idea is often made simple enough and direct enough that it can spread rapidly . . . We cannot create movements, so if we want to be a part of a movement when it comes, we have to get ourselves into a position—by working with organizations that deal with structural change—to be on the inside of that movement when it comes, instead of on the outside trying to get accepted (p.114).

Highlander always saw itself as part of the larger goals of social movements while simultaneously “maintaining a critical and challenging voice within” (Heaney,1995). Highlander based its work on two major components—an education grounded in the “real and realizable struggles of people for democratic control over their lives” (Heaney, 1995) and the need to challenge people to consider the present and the future simultaneously as they move toward social change.

One of Highlander's programs, the Citizenship Schools (which functioned between 1953 and 1961) were designed to help African American citizens of the deep South to become literate *and* protest for their rights. According to Horton (1990), “. . . you can't read and write yourself into freedom. You [have] to fight for that and you [have] to do it as part of a group, not as an individual” (p.104). The Citizenship Schools are a far cry from current adult literacy and vocational programs that have no political commitment and encourage individual and simple solutions to major social problems (Heaney, 1995).

We are skeptical of the academy's ability to reconstruct itself because of the complicity of its intellectuals with the current social order. Thus, we agree with Foucault (1977) who insists:

Intellectuals are no longer needed by the masses to gain knowledge: the masses know perfectly well, without illusion; they know far better than the intellectual and they are certainly capable of expressing themselves. But there exists a system of power which blocks, prohibits, and invalidates this discourse and this knowledge, a power not only found in manifest authority of censorship, but one that profoundly and subtly penetrates an entire societal network. Intellectuals are themselves agents of this system of power—the idea of their responsibility for “consciousness” and discourse forms part of the system (p.207).

### **Concluding Thoughts: In Search of Revolutionary Habitus**

“As soon as possible he [the white man] will tell me that it is not enough to try to be white, but that a white totality must be achieved.”

Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (1986)

Our previous section suggests an almost nihilistic, despair about the role of the intellectual in leading us toward more just and equitable societies. Actually, we point to the limits of the academy and suggest that committed intellectuals must move into spaces beyond the academy to participate in real change. Indeed, such a move may mean that academics take on less prominent roles in order to listen and learn from people actively engaged in social change. Thus, we speak to an audience who is willing to search for a revolutionary habitus.

Bourdieu (1990) brought us the concept of habitus that he vaguely defines as a system of:

. . . durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to

function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them. Objectively ‘regulated’ and ‘regular’ without being in any way the product of obedience to the rules, they can be collectively orchestrated without being the product of the organizing action of a conductor (p.53).

Thus, according to Palumbo-Liu (1993) “individuals are inclined to act in certain ways given their implicit understanding of, their ‘feel for,’ the field” (p.6). The habitus “expresses first the result of an organizing action with a meaning close to that of words such as structure: it also designates a way of being, a habitual state (especially of the body) and, in particular, a disposition, a tendency, propensity, or inclination” (Bourdieu, 1977, p.214). This work provides us with both “the flexibility of what might otherwise be thought of as a strictly determinative structure (the field) and the ambiguity of a predisposed but not mandated agency (habitus) [and] signal Bourdieu’s desire to go beyond the usual binary categories of external/internal, conscious/unconscious, determinism/free agency” (Palumbo-Liu, 1993, p.7).

Our call for a revolutionary habitus recognizes that the “field” (Bourdieu, 1990) in which academics currently function constrains the social (and intellectual) agency that might move us toward social justice and human liberation. As Palumbo-Liu (1993) points out, a field is:

. . . a particular grid of relations that governs specific areas of social life (economics, culture, education, politics, etc.): individuals do not act freely to achieve their goals and the creation of dispositions must be understood within

historically specific formations of fields; each field had its own rules and protocols that open specific social positions for different agents. Yet this is not a static model: the field in turn is modified according to the manner in which those positions are occupied and mobilized (p.6).

Thus, despite notions of academic freedom and tenure, professors work within a field that may delimit and confine political activity and views unpopular with university administrators, state and national legislators, and policy makers. Subtle and not so subtle sanctions have the power to shape how individual's habituses conform to the field. We must imagine new fields and new habituses that constitute a new vision of what it means to do academic work. According to Palumbo-Liu (1993), "The habitus we might imagine for social agents has not yet become habituated to postmodern globalized culture that continues to be reshaped as we speak. The field of culture must now be understood to accommodate both dominant and emergent social groups who different and significantly inflect the consumption and production of an increasingly global and hybrid culture" (p.8).

Perhaps our notion of a revolutionary habitus might better be realized through Espiritu's (2003) powerful conceptualization of "home" in which there is a keen awareness of the way racialized immigrants "from previously colonized nations are not exclusively formed as racial minorities within the United States but also as colonized nationals while in their "homeland"—one that is deeply affected by U.S. influences and modes of social organization" (p.1). Espiritu (2003) points out that the notion of home is not merely a physical place but is also "a concept and desire—a place that immigrants visit through the imagination" (p.10). We assert that even those long-term racialized residents of the U.S (e.g. African Americans, American Indians, Latinos) have

experienced (and continue to experience) colonial oppression (Ladson-Billings, 1998b).

What Espiritu (2003) offers is a way to think about the permeable nature of concepts like race, culture, ethnicity, gender, and ability. Rather than become fixated on who is included and who is excluded we need to consider the way that we are all border dwellers who negotiate and renegotiate multiple places and spaces. According to Mahmud (cited in Espiritu, 2003) “. . . immigrants call into question implicit assumptions about ‘fixed identities, unproblematic nationhood, invisible sovereignty, ethnic homogeneity, and exclusive citizenship’” (p.633/p.209).

Thus, the challenge of those of us in the academy is not how to make those outside of the academy more like us, but rather to recognize the “outside the academy” identities that we must recruit for ourselves in order to be more effective researchers on behalf of people who can make use of our skills and abilities. We must learn to be “at home” on the street corners, barrios, churches, mosques, kitchens, porches, and stoops of people and communities so that our work more accurately reflects their concerns and interests. Our challenge is to renounce our paternalistic tendencies and sympathetic leanings to move toward an empathic, ethical, and moral scholarship that propels us to a place where we are prepared to forcefully and courageously answer “the call.”

## Notes

1. We are using the term, “of color” to refer to all people who are raced and outside the construction of whiteness (Haney-Lopez, 1998).
2. Paulo Freire (1970) insists that, “that the oppressed are not ‘marginals’, are not men living ‘outside’ society. They have always been ‘inside’—inside the structure that made them ‘beings for others.”
- 3.”Articulate” is a term seemingly reserved for African Americans and is seen by African Americans as a way to suggest that one speaks better than would be expected of “your kind.”

4. We are re-stating at length portions of Ladson-Billings' (2000) discussion on alterity and liminality that appeared in volume two of the Handbook.
5. We remind the reader that we are aware of the dilemma of using racialized categories and that the boundaries between and among various racial, ethnic, and cultural groups are more permeable and more complex than the categories imply.
6. MacArthur Fellow and Civil Rights Leader Bernice Johnson Reagon asserts that no one has the right to tell the next generation what their freedom songs should be (Moyers, 1991).
7. We are aware that we are not acknowledging all of the artists in this tradition.
8. We want to be clear that we do not disparage these career choices. However, we question whether they represent what is meant by "liberal arts."
9. Increasingly, students seeking admission to selective colleges and universities participate in extra-curricular activities (e.g. sports, clubs, the arts) and volunteer efforts not because of interests and commitments but rather because such participation may give them an advantage over other applicants.
10. We use this term to describe those grassroots people whose intellectual power convicts and persuades the masses of people to investigate and explore new ideas for human liberation. The late John Henrik Clark (New York), Clarence Kailin, (Madison, WI), and the late James Boggs and his wife Grace Lee Boggs (Detroit) are examples of organic intellectuals.

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