

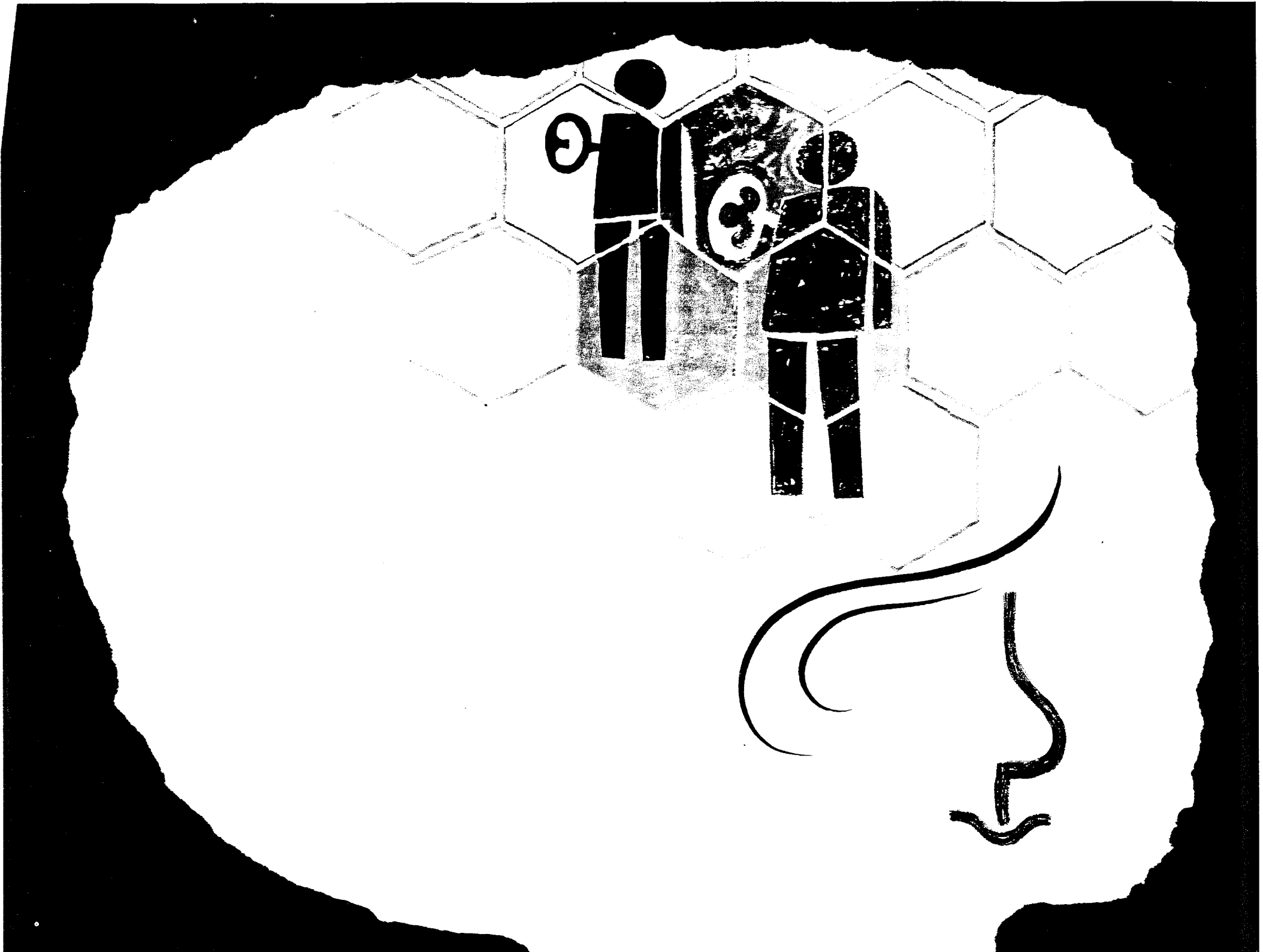
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# **“what students perceive”**

A Report of the U.S.  
Commission on Civil Rights

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# Teachers



## **Kris**

*Kris is a white student in her senior year in a small city school on the west coast. The school is predominantly white with a minority enrollment of approximately 15 percent. Kris is taking academic courses and plans to go to college.*

There are a lot of teachers who are here because they know the system and they're willing to go along with it. They don't ask questions and they follow orders. You might as well have a tape recorder or some kind of computer because it's not a human being relating to other human beings. In fact, it does more harm than good because so many kids are being alienated from the whole idea of education.

The most important thing of all is that a teacher respect the students and their ideas. All the way through school I got the same kind of thing. I'm sitting in that chair, part of the class, and I'd better find out that the teacher is sitting higher than I am, and that I am supposed to follow—ultimately follow—his rules.

The teacher may have some feelings of how he's more liberal than most of those in authority and that he respects his kids, but there's always a place where the line is drawn, and this is as far as you can go. If you try to approach him in a human relationship, he gets too uncomfortable. He can always send you someplace else, complain to your parents, lower your grade, or send you to the dean. You have to call him Mister; he doesn't call you Miss. He is always one step above you.

If my English teacher says that this is the interpretation of a poem and she gives us this point to do as a test, I miss the boat if I've analyzed the poem differently. She'll say, 'That's wrong. Well, you have some interesting ideas here, but I think you've missed the entire point.' It never enters her mind that it's possible that we could both be right. Sometimes, it gets to the point where they'll tell me that it's possible for the two of us to be right, but, 'I'm grading you, dear.' They actually openly admit this kind of hypocrisy, but it still exists and there's no way of bucking it.

I'm not satisfied to sit in my English class and learn a very sterile rigid program of authors and plays. Students have a

universal interest in what is going to connect in their lives because of this age. It's like we were doing memorization during our American literature class last year, and a girl had memorized Bob Dylan's poetry because she really liked it a lot. The teacher said, 'Fine. Okay, I'll give you credit for your 60 lines;' but then proceeded to portray Bob Dylan as being a phoney and a sellout. Immediately, the girl was turned off to that teacher, that class, and to the whole business of American literature.

I would enjoy teaching, but not in a regular public school, because I would feel really stifled under the kind of system that I have been through. All the teachers I have had in high school, almost without exception, have felt pressures from the administration that certain controversial subjects shouldn't be talked about in the classrooms because they will cause arguments. There is controversy outside about welfare and about all kinds of programs, and these same kinds of conflicts will come up in the classroom. Teachers are given a State-recommended textbook and a curriculum that they are supposed to cover for the year, so they do the best they can with what they are allowed, I guess. The kids in turn are really boxed up and kept away from controversial subjects.

I think I created a lot of trouble for my teachers all the way from the beginning, because I argued about things that concerned me about presentations in the texts, and the films, particularly the anti-Communist, pro-America kind of film. They are older films which, in general, are slanted and don't give a realistic picture of the world and how we fit into it now and in the future. I am not getting the things that I want to learn, and I just get so disgusted seeing the rest of the kids absorbing this kind of education without any doubts in their minds, and, not having a chance to talk about it with other people, these kids may never question it.

Most of the teachers feel the obligation of Friday-bring-a-news-clipping-and-talk-about-it-day, but that doesn't expand into an effective coverage of controversial issues, because usually, you give a little review of your article, but that's all. You don't get much chance in the classroom to talk about these issues unless the teachers individually buck whatever pressures are put on them and carry on the classroom the way they want to talk

about the things they want to talk about.

I know of one counselor who ignored the textbook and spent almost all the time talking about outside things, and they weren't always directly connected with history, though he did tie the things in with the curriculum. The kids were really excited with that teacher and with that class. This was about the only class that they felt really excited about; the rest of it was wading through, getting the required things done. Every single history class I have ever had, the teacher starts at the beginning of the textbook and works his way through it, and lots of times, we never make it through the books, never get to the 20th century.

Kids are aware of how irrelevant grades are. They come to class and their first 2 weeks is an orientation period to figure out what kinds of things the teacher is going to ask them, how much they have to and don't have to do to get the kind of grades they want. You figure it all out and you can snow a teacher. I have been through 4 years of high school with maybe two or three grades that meant anything to me at all. I have gotten A's and B's all the way through, and it's really frightening for me to see my grades coming out like that and get commended for it. As a result I am funneled into college prep courses, the honor roll, and other kinds of things that I am being given because of my grades, and I see another kid in my social studies class, or some other class who is killing himself. He gets C's just because he doesn't quite get the hang of this, how to get through the maze, how to get on the right side of the teachers. That kid far more deserves the credit that I get and the grades that I get than I do because I haven't really worked. It is hard for me to understand why teachers don't see this big problem of orientation to college and do something about it, because it just seems as though this is the whole idea in high school. If you are successful, that means you are going on to college, you learned to beat the game, you have not really learned how to study, but what to study for individual teachers. I can pass my chemistry tests now without learning any chemistry, because I know my chemistry teacher. It is the same in all the other courses.

A lot of teachers concern themselves with the middle section of people. They are all the time addressing these students with the realization that they are the middle and you have the top and

the bottom students that are stuck there.

The kids come tramping in and they sit down and she expects them to cut up and not to have the same kind of thoughts as the other kids. You can't expect this low English class to use the same tools as effectively as the high English or they wouldn't have been put in there in the first place, but their thoughts are equal or maybe better because they are aware of things that are far more realistic as far as seeing how people act and what's really happening around them; more so than the kids in the higher class who may have just been aimed in on their own little game and are so involved in it that they don't see what is happening outside. They don't realize what is happening outside of their own little world. That may be where the discrepancy is, that the teachers are expecting inferior thoughts, inferior mental ability from these kids, which isn't true at all.

I don't think you can even blame the individual teachers, because they are not consciously doing this. It is automatic for the teacher who is handed a class that is a high English class to give them different material. She has more of an identification with them than she has with her next period that is classified as a low English class.

### **Kevin**

*Kevin is a white student who attends a school in which the black, Indian, and Oriental enrollment is about one-half. The school is located in a large city in the Northwest. Kevin is a senior and plans to attend college.*

They're still running our school the same as they're running an all-white school. And the teachers just don't understand the students—by and large, I mean, there are exceptions. And they're, you know, very outdated I think.

There are some specific teachers that have teaching methods that, you know, they give you a book and you memorize a chapter and you learn things and write them down. The students come from different cultural backgrounds. The teachers just don't identify with students and the students don't identify with the teachers. There's one incident I can recall. A teacher started getting down on a black student because of his accent. It was a

history class, and he was talking about walking a certain distance, a mile. The teacher said the word is mile and wrote it on the board and just spent about 2 minutes trying to get this guy to pronounce m-i-l-e instead of mahl. That's a small thing and maybe it's not in itself bad, but just the whole idea that some teachers here really, just don't grasp why students are the way they are, particularly the black students and minority race students.

They are there to teach but teachers come to the classroom and the student doesn't want to learn and so they say, well I'm not going to teach them. They don't make any effort to understand that student and why he doesn't want to learn; why he sits on his butt and shoots spit wads and chatters with the girls. The teachers see it as not wanting to learn. They don't want to learn what the teachers are pushing at them. I mean, I think everybody wants to learn. But there's nothing they can identify or relate to as far as the teachers go, because they grow up from birth—you know their parents, et cetera—it goes back and back.

They come from a different environment. Their ways of talking, their ways of eating, you know, the way they sleep, what kinds of activities they have outside the school, and the facilities they have for studying, things are just not the same as maybe a white student's are. When you get a white teacher in the class, he's brought up the same way as most of the white students are—relative to the times. And the black student just cannot identify with the teacher who comes back after a weekend and says, 'Well, how many of you went skiing?' Most of them spent their time in a pool hall or something.

If you were white middle class—and there weren't many as far as the total population of our school goes—these white middle class students were his pets. You could see it; this is the way the whole teaching staff seemed to be to me, that they'd go into a class and automatically rate students. If you're white and dressed nicely and cleanly, you're at the top.

There are teachers who've done quite a bit to try to get things changed. They've had a lot of squabbling in faculty meetings and things. I talk to certain teachers that don't mind telling what goes on behind the doors who tell me that they argue for hours on things and nothing ever gets accomplished.

I think the majority of the teachers just want to sit back, and if a guy gets into trouble, kick him out. You don't get any heat from anybody outside the school, so everything's fine, and they have only those guys in class that supposedly want to learn or those guys that will sit there like rocks and listen to them.

There are some teachers that I have respected for making attempts at having some kind of education go on in school, teachers who can't understand or fully comprehend what's going on in minority students' minds because they are white. Maybe they don't need to. They are a lot more flexible and they allow a lot more freedom in the classroom. It's not really necessary that the teacher identify in every aspect with the students, but the more so, the better. Teachers, at least, have to recognize the difference.

The way some teachers overcome this has been to recognize and employ the differences, and let the student function in relation to his upbringing and environment. So instead of in an English class, writing an essay and having the teacher correct it and comparing it to Winston Churchill's essays, she might look at it from the viewpoint of where this guy comes from, how he has grown up, what kind of person he is, what facilities he has, what kind of thinking he does, and how his thinking has developed. It might be a good essay despite obscenities or so-called grammatical errors.

But for the most part the teachers that really need to go period, are teachers who come in the classroom with mimeographed question sheets. If you lose one, you pay a dime because someone has to go out and run a few more off the mimeograph machine. They have set courses and set patterns and nobody can disrupt these. They don't realize that, for good or bad, it's changing on the outside and you need to adapt yourself and your teaching methods. And they don't allow any flexibility. There's just one set of rules. The teacher will only allow certain results whether the group be white middle class, Chinese kids who don't speak English, or a special class. They just can't see that there are differences. There are needs to be met other than those to which they would direct themselves in other schools. The teachers don't come from an environment which coincides in any way with the environment of most of the students they

are dealing with. That's partly it. Others of them are just ignorant of the problems. Even within racial groups or any group, a person is an individual, and teachers are incapable of dealing with a person as an individual.

### **James**

*James is a white student in his junior year at a racially mixed school in a large city in the Northeast. Having received several offers of athletic scholarships, he plans to attend college to further his education.*

I have a thing where I feel teachers out as soon as I come in there the first day. If they can't take a joke, what is he? Does he have feelings down inside? I mean, does he just come to school in the mornings and punch in and just come down to the class and teach a bunch of kids all day and then walk out. I like to see if they have feelings deep down inside.

This year I have an electronics teacher who is really a good teacher. He told everybody the first day that he wanted total cooperation. I have him three periods a day. Our first period is supposed to be theory, but before he starts talking about theory he gives us a little message. He tells us what he did when he was in the war and all that. He talks on our level, and tells us about how he was educated and his likes and dislikes. People respect him for it. But if I get one of these teachers that walk in and say, 'There is the book, this page, do it. That's nice, I'll check it again at the end of the period,' he is not putting the lesson across to you.

My history teacher puts the lesson across to me. He puts it down in kids' terms. He knew what the kids' problems were and that's why I think he is the 12th grade class sponsor this year. I went to meetings with him and we participated in a lot of activities together. I think he is a hell of a guy. Even when I'm not in his class and I see him in the halls he comes up to me and talks to me. I tell him what I think. He respects my opinion and I respect his. I think he is a pretty intelligent man.

I don't put down the Negro teachers, because a teacher is a teacher. I don't care what color he is. Some teachers put the lessons down a different way. I had this teacher one year, a

Negro teacher, who put down a white guy. I could see that she had this hate against white people. I couldn't even say one nice thing about her—that's just how mean she was. I don't like a teacher who is going to put you down for everything you are going to do. She didn't have a kind word for nobody. I really do think she hated white people. She did treat the colored boys in the class a lot better. I have met a lot of prejudiced teachers; it is nothing new to me.

I think that all the teachers should be required before they come in the school to take a psychology course that would clue them in on what is really happening. They should have textbooks made up with facts on what to do in certain situations, like when a fight breaks out in a class she might faint or something. But I think they should be required to take this kind of course before they are allowed to teach in the system.

A perfect teacher is a guy that puts the lesson across to me and I get something out of the lesson, something that I can take with me until the day I die; one that wouldn't be prejudiced at all, you know, just put the facts down; not giving too much time to one student than he would to another student. I like a good discipline teacher, a real good mean teacher. I have had teachers that when you walk in a room you'd say you can't stand her, but I would like her because she kept her class intact. Nobody would step on her. As soon as they start stepping on you, you lose your respect. I like a good teacher who is going to really lay down the law. I am going to school to be taught, and I figure if I've got to be here eight hours or whatever is required, I'm going to get something out of it. If you are disciplined right, you are going to learn and get the full value of the process of learning.

### **Edna**

*Edna is a Mexican American student who attends a school with a large black enrollment and a few Anglo and Mexican American students. The school is located in a large midwestern city. Edna is a senior and plans to attend college to study mathematics.*

My English teacher will say, "We will have a spelling test today," and the kids will say, "No, let's not have it today, let's

have it some other day." She will either go along with it or not give it at all. She doesn't go by the rule of the head office here at school. For instance, there is a paper we have due next week. We were getting it all ready and she found out this other teacher wasn't having it due until sometime in December, so now she changed her mind and said we could have it done in December. Well, this is good for the kids that didn't have it started, and it is still good for the ones that have it finished already, but she shouldn't have changed her mind. That is giving the students a lot more leeway than we really deserve. Maybe she is trying to be responsive to what the class says rather than to the school office.

I haven't learned any English since the 9th grade, and I haven't had a good English teacher since then. My English teacher gives us a spelling test every week and then a make-up spelling test the same week. We do have a little bit in our grammar book and read a little bit of literature. The rest is just a fun session. She will start some discussion and, for some reason, it will be changed. Then everybody starts talking about something else. People are bored.

We have an economics class and the kids just go to sleep in there. There is at least five asleep there every day. It is just too boring. There is nothing to make us listen. The teacher just lectures and brings his personal life into the subject. He used to own a business, and tries to show us the way you can apply our economics to his business. It's a good example, but you just get tired of the same example.

The other day we had a substitute because he was absent. We kids really liked that substitute. He was teaching us out of the book, telling us about the Interstate Commerce Commission and explaining how it worked. Then he would read out of the book and explain it. We had a discussion about rates and everything and when everybody went out of the class, they hoped our teacher would be absent again so we could have him as a substitute because he was teaching us something. But the regular teacher came back the next day and things started over again like they were.

My physics teacher is a swell guy. He is not really strict, but he doesn't have to be strict because the kids get along with him

so well. When he tells us to turn something in, we just turn it in. The kids don't try to cut his class, you could, if you wanted, but you don't want to. There would be no sense in it. Sometimes when we don't want to do the work we will say, "Why pound it on us, we will do it next week." And he will say, "I am getting paid to teach you and if I don't teach you, I am just getting paid for nothing."

First he will lecture, then he will give you some problems to do, and then if you can't do them, he will help you. He won't show you exactly how to do them, but he will help you. After everyone is finished, he will go to the board and go through all the problems. If you didn't get them the first time, you will get them the second time. That way, by the time you get to the test, you will know how to do them.

There's around 20 students in the class and out of those 20 there's four whites. The teacher is white, but he treats us all alike. In another class the teacher tries to be more easy on the colored students. Like some white kids could get something that would be better than the mark of the colored students, but she would give the colored students a higher grade. She is white; I can't see why she would do it.

Our civics teacher was a good teacher. We went through the whole Constitution and what we didn't understand, he would explain. We didn't go by the book in that class, either, but what he lectured on pertained to the material that was in the book. He brought up current things, often enough for us to realize what was going on. We were talking about the racial conflict right when they were having the riot and nobody walked out on his class. He was a strict guy, and nobody had the nerve to walk out. I don't see why anybody would be scared of him, but while they were walking out and busting windows and everything, there we sat discussing the problem.

## **Daniel**

*Daniel is a junior in a school which is located in a large city in the Southwest. Daniel is Mexican American and attends a school with black, Anglo, and Mexican American students. The Mexican American student enrollment is the largest. Daniel*



*plans to attend college and become a lawyer.*

We have an old school faculty; there are a lot of old teachers. About 50 percent of them are Mexican American and about 50 percent are Anglo. On the whole, they are real nice and try to help in every way they can. Some don't care what kind of education the students get or how much just as long as they put in their day at school, but some are interested in the students.

I had an American history teacher who was a real nice man and seemed to be interested in the students and the community. He is an Anglo, but spends most of his life with Mexican Americans. He expressed ideas to us that we never realized about things that are being done wrong in our society. We didn't use a book, we just studied. He taught us from his research notes because the books we had were very old and didn't show both sides of the actual story. He pointed out both sides, not just Mexican Americans were wrong like we had been taught in other books. He didn't have to be strict because he was a very interesting teacher; he didn't have to tell the class to be quiet or anything like that because he let us talk. He could relate to students very well; I guess he had been working with them for so many years. He was trying to help get changes in the school and tried everything he could. He got in trouble and was called into the principal's office because he let us talk about outside issues in class.

My Spanish teacher was born in Mexico, but in her early years, came to the United States. She is an Anglo and a real nice lady who has tried to help us in everything we tried to do. She is a very good teacher and lets us speak out in class about things that we want to talk about. She never had to discipline any students. When she tells us to settle down to learn, we always do. We only had to study one literature book, but in the book reports we could select our own books and read whatever we wanted to. She didn't stress grades too much.

I think it would be good to have a Mexican American principal and teachers for Mexican Americans because when you are late for school or something and try to explain to an Anglo, "Well, I had to take my little brother to school or I had to do a lot of chores about the house before I left," the Anglo may have never

had to do that when he was going to school. Maybe he had a maid around his house and never had to make up a bed or anything before he left for school. If he has never done that, he would probably think that you are lying, whereas a Mexican American has gone through the same thing and knows the problem. If you have never had the problem, you can't understand it from an outside point of view.

I think students could evaluate a teacher's ability to teach school, not because we are authorities on education or anything, but we do know when we understand a teacher. There could be a teacher with a Ph.D., but if he didn't know how to present his material or pass it on to us, what he knows is doing us no good. The only way to know how good a teacher is, is by the kinds of students he produces.

## **Rosa**

*Rosa is Mexican American. She is a senior in a suburban school near a medium-sized west coast city. About 50 percent of the students are Anglo. Mexican Americans and blacks comprise the remaining school population. Rosa has been taking business courses but wants to go to college next year to study elementary education.*

When I first transferred last year, I couldn't stand the Spanish teacher because he was real strict. He won't let you get out of your chair for anything. If your purse falls, there it stays. I started talking to him and told him I wasn't used to being treated like that; I like to be respected just like an adult, and if he wanted me to respect him, he had to respect me. He explained that it was just a discipline thing; he had to keep discipline in his class and he couldn't show favoritism, so we had an understanding. I told him that the students are very afraid of him as if he would be a dictator. He started laughing, but I was really angry. He said that he hadn't realized he was being that hard on us. The next day in class he mentioned what I had said and the students all laughed. Since then, he is real nice. It is a very disciplined class, but we get to talk and laugh a little, and he talks with us and jokes.

He is a great teacher and gets along well with all of the stu-

dents. He showed films from Mexico and Spain because we are studying about them, but we haven't had any lectures. He gives a lot of tests, a quiz practically every day. I think that is important, I really do. If he asked us to do a certain assignment and didn't test us or quiz us, we would take it for granted and study the day before the test. Now we are all studying the material while he is giving it.

I had two teachers that I disliked very much because they were very prejudiced. One was in the ninth grade when I was going to summer school. I was the only Mexican in the class, and there was one colored boy. When I have makeup on, I look like an Oriental. I went into this class and the teacher started talking about Mexicans being blanket-wrappers and chili beans, and things like that. He was saying Mexicans didn't apply themselves and wouldn't be good students and the colored kids were worse. I was getting steamed up, but since it was my first year, I was kind of timid. So I says, "I will just keep quiet." And he just keeps talking and talking. Then he mentioned something about Mexicans being the dumbest ones he has in his classroom and at that time I was holding a B+ average. I said, "I don't think I am dumb," and he just looked at me and said, "Are you Mexican American?" I said, "Yes, I am Mexican American from head to toe," and he just looked at me and said, "Well, there are some exceptions." I told him I didn't think it was nice for him to talk like that in class and he said, "Well, I will talk to you after class." I said, "Well, if you have the nerve to talk about us in class, I don't see why you shouldn't discuss it with me now. I don't know whether this young man, the colored boy, will stand up for his rights, but I am going to stand up for mine. I am not dumb and I don't even think I will ever be." Now, he is real nice with me, he is always calling me "sweetheart" and "sweetie" and all this. I think he is phoney to the core; he is phoney. I never thought of myself as being dumb or smaller than other people just because I was Mexican American.

The other teacher I disliked was my Business English teacher. That was last year. I would be in an honor society if it wasn't for her. I had an A in there and I knew I had an A in there. I would get straight A's in all my tests and everything I handed

in and still she would give me a B+. She said she didn't think I deserved to be a member of the honor society because I had a bad attitude.

When we asked her to show us how to do an assignment, she would never help us. She would say, "You are supposed to know." One time when she told me I was supposed to know some fact, I said, "Well, they told me I was coming to school to learn. I wasn't supposed to know everything. You are the ones that have the degree; we don't." She got mad and told me to meet her after class. That's when she told me that she would never give me an A because I had a bad attitude. She knew I needed that A, that's the only reason she gave me a B+. I didn't speak to the principal or to my guidance counselor about it, because, you see, they are always on the teacher's side. I figured if I keep on getting good grades, maybe she will feel differently about me but she never did.

The history teacher we have is very interesting and very intelligent. What I like about him is that he tells us about past experiences and what he used to do, and he doesn't go by everything that the book says. He lectures on a certain day. He always puts the schedule on the board, and we always know what is going to happen the next day until the end of the week. He grades you by points. You get certain points on the tests and if you participate in class, he gives you points for that, too. He won't ever ask you to make up a test; he will leave it up to you. I told him one time that I had to take two tests, and asked if I could take his test a week later. I took it a whole week later, and he didn't say anything. He is not prejudiced at all. The reason why I said that is because some teachers, once a student is absent from school and he is Mexican or colored, they give him an F and say, "Well, you didn't come; you should have known."

My music teacher is real nice with the Mexicans, but he calls the colored people savages. He won't say it to them, but he will say it to me. I am always telling him I have a lot of friends that are colored, and I don't appreciate it anyway. I tell him to shut up, because we are pretty close friends. He is not prejudiced at all with me, but with a lot of the colored kids, he is.

If I were rich and had money, I don't think that I would

consider teaching because I would tend to be prejudiced. The best teachers are the ones that come from a similar background and know the kids' problems and how they feel about certain things. I feel that the person that is going to teach at a school that is composed of minority groups should be somebody that at least knows or has studied the problem, and not one that goes in there thinking he is going to tear all those little ignorant people up.

### **Lucy**

*Lucy is a black student who attends a school in a large city in the Northeast. Her school is predominantly white. She is a senior and plans to attend college.*

Teachers don't give you a bad mark because you're black. But that's funny, too, because the education is white middle class type education and most of the black students who go there from black junior high schools are not prepared to do the kind of work that the teachers ask them to do. They fail to achieve—not directly because they're black, and not directly because the teachers are prejudiced against them, but because of inferior education in most black elementary schools and junior highs.

I had one very good English course in the black junior high school I went to. The teacher was very interested in things that meant something to us. And she would ask us to express ourselves in writing about things that really meant something to us, whereas, at the white high school we're asked to be able to write nice words on a nice piece of paper. The teachers are set on getting you through these college boards and into college and that's about it. It doesn't seem that they're that much interested in their course, but they want you to be able to do your reading comprehension on your college boards and do it well.

My French teacher is my best teacher. She teaches very well and she knows how to manage a class. I'm in a class that isn't particularly interested in French and a lot of them are younger students. I'm one of the few seniors in class—and she really has to be a talented person to keep the class going. She talks to us a lot, rather than just teaching us grammar. She wants

us to speak the language and talk back to her. It's not a dull class because she keeps us busy. She's very good at teaching her material and getting it across in class, so that even the little homework she does give is very easy because you know your French.

My English teacher is black. I'd rather not talk about her. She's very nonchalant and really not very interested in teaching. I think she's there to draw the salary like so many teachers. Once in a while she communicates with the kids, but the class is more like a study hall. We're asked to read some books and once in a while we have a discussion, but very little if anything goes on in the class.

My government teacher thinks that rules are becoming too lenient, that the criminal is being allowed to get away in too many cases with all the court decisions saying that police have to tell the criminal or the accused person his rights and various things like that. And, well, I think that her feeling against what she calls leniency is subtle prejudice on her part, because all these things were formerly used against black people who don't know their rights in court. We are the people who have been taken advantage of so much. She brought the case of the looting and property damage out in saying that this was part of the new leniency. She took no recognition of the fact that what these storekeepers were doing was wrong. She and the class didn't want to even try to understand the looters' position or any of the feelings that people in the black community have, but just wanted to recognize the people who had spent their lives building up businesses that were destroyed. Until I or another black student brought it up, no mention was made of these people cheating the neighborhood people out of their money for years and years and years, the inferior quality of the goods, and all this. We had to just hammer at the students and the teachers before they would even concede a little bit that we were right about the suffering. You have to admit that the black community is in bad shape and that the people have been held down and cheated. People had to finally admit that this was right, that whites just want to hold on to their illusions, and their righteous feelings. They hold onto it until somebody just smacks it out of their hands.

If I were teaching a group, I'd want to know what they want to learn as individuals. I would find out what they already know, and then I would try to start with that and branch out into other areas. Because usually, as people learn what they want to know, they find out something else. Make it interesting. Compare something happening back then with something that's happening today. Make some kind of connection with people's everyday life. This keeps people from getting sleepy. Kids make noise because they think what they have to say is more important than what the teacher has to say. And they just don't feel like listening to her because she's boring or they're failing in the class and they're mad, and they just don't pay any attention.

A teacher should be able to stimulate interest in his students. It's fine to say that people should come to class interested. They'll get more out of it if they come interested, but if you have a system where you have to take certain courses, a lot of people are going to come to those courses without any interest and a teacher who teaches a course such as English, should be able to stimulate those students who aren't interested. It's hard. It's one of the most difficult jobs in the world.

### **Clifton**

*Clifton is a black student in a predominantly white school in a large southwestern city. He is a senior and wants to go into journalism.*

Teachers should update their methods of teaching. That was one of the problems I had with one of my teachers; she had such antique methods. She used force rather than bringing the student out on his own, therefore, you never really learned anything. Most of the kids cheated because they were forced to learn.

A good teacher must have an objective attitude toward the students. Unfortunately, they are human. Many teachers, the minute you walk in grab an impression, and it sticks with you for the rest of the year. I can count the nonprejudiced teachers on my fingers. Many took the attitude, "Poor little Negro boy! I've got to help him; it's my obligation to help the poor little Negro boy." This angered me, and I had nothing to do with teachers like that. I tried not to get any teachers that I knew

were like that.

A number were quite violent toward Negroes. One of them bumped into a Negro one day and practically knocked him down the hall. I had a very prejudiced history teacher, but for some reason I just couldn't see that she was prejudiced. I thought she was the average white person. One day I told her something about Martin Luther King and she called him a Communist. I was very infuriated and told her that if he was a Communist then I was too, and I was damned proud of it. I got called into the office for claiming that I was a Communist.

I was in ROTC and I think that was the biggest farce I've ever run into. They gave all the authority to the guys running the corps and it was so crooked. I was busted twice before I got my first stripe. The first time I was busted, they had me on cleaning detail. I was disgusted with it because I was in third period, and three other guys come before me and clean the same place, yet they assigned me to clean that place. This was the same for everybody, but I was disgusted because I didn't see any need for it. I overheard the officers telling darky jokes, and I went in and told them what I thought about their darky jokes. I was busted for talking out of proper language.

One day I left a notebook in a room and two or three teachers were using the same room. I went back to get my notebook and the teacher said, "Excuse me, what is your name?" I told her. "Are you a nigger? I was wondering because I saw you eating with some niggers, and I was just wondering were you a nigger." I said, "Oh, no, ma'am, I'm a Negro." She took that to the administration, and the administration called my history teacher, with whom I had become very close, to explain to me that I can't act belligerent. That was all right for my two-cent Negro school, but it wasn't all right for their school!

In the mornings the black population of the school congregates in one section and, strangely enough, this is the only time that we segregate. We don't actually segregate; we just like to be with our friends one time during the day. This was the only time we could actually get together and have a lot of fun.

The white kids had things like chess games and checkers that they liked to play, but a couple of the Negro guys got together and wanted to play dominoes. The teacher came over

and took one look and said, "Why don't you play something like chess?" The students wondered, "Well, what's wrong with dominoes?" The teacher told them, "I just don't like the connotation of Negroes playing dominoes." The following week the guys got a little rowdy over the game and the teacher told them, "Get away, get away. Clear the aisles, clear the aisles. I don't ever want to see you on this side of the cafeteria again." And as she'd move some of the kids away, the guys she'd move said, "What're you going to do? Send us back to Africa?" She didn't bother us any more because she was afraid of an incident.

## John

*John is a black student in his senior year at an all-black school. The school is located in a medium-sized city in the northeastern part of the country. John is in the honors program.*

My first year at school, I ran into some difficulty with a few teachers because I challenged their thoughts and they didn't like some of my opinions. One teacher in particular, who taught me English, was more interested in performing duties on the yearbook staff than in teaching her students.

We were in the honor section and she thought that we should just learn on our own and that we really shouldn't need a teacher with us, so she would tell us to do something and then leave the classroom and stay out the whole period. This would go on for 2 and 3 weeks. She'd just come in and say, "Read this and we'll talk about it later." That later might be 3 or 4 weeks later. When I approached her about this and told her that we weren't learning anything in the class, she didn't say anything to me about it, but my grades suffered severely.

The same teacher spent 3 months going over one book called *Ivanhoe*. It only took us about a week to read the book, but we spent the rest of the year discussing what went on in the story. It wasn't necessary, but she wouldn't accept the fact that most of the students could read and understand what was going on. If you didn't agree with her ideas, she didn't like you. She didn't want a student to voice his own opinion, and when I voiced my opinions about what was going on in *Ivanhoe*, she didn't go along with them, and wouldn't accept them, and

wouldn't let anybody else accept them.

You are told that you are wrong but she doesn't explain why you are wrong. You can't approach her and talk about anything after school because she is never there. The only thing she came to school for was the yearbook work. The reason why I say that is that this year they took the yearbook assignment from her and she resigned.

It is strange that the teachers that usually stay after school are the white teachers; the black teachers are the first to go home. The black teachers don't give a damn about the students. They like any student who does everything they tell him to do and accepts everything they say. If you wear a white shirt and tie to school every day, they love you. The black teachers tell me that I should not wear dungarees in school—"What would the neighborhood think if they saw a whole bunch of people running around the school with dungarees on." This doesn't have anything to do with teaching; it's just a status symbol. This is the thing about our school—they are so status conscious.

There was a program called "The Advanced Humanities Seminar." Every teacher that stayed after school for this program was white. There were maybe 30-35 students in the classroom and 10 teachers, and I could never find a black teacher in one of them. This alarmed me a lot because I think that black teachers have some points that they should bring up, but you find that the black teachers don't like to talk about the racial problem in front of the white teachers for fear that the white teachers might not associate with them afterwards because of what they say. They want to be liked by all the white teachers in the school; they want to be accepted by the white people. If you can get more participation from black teachers in after-school activities and get more discussion groups going inside of the school, then you can probably get something done, but usually you can't find the black teachers to participate.

I take English right now, from a young black teacher. In class she talks very militant, but she's never around after school. I think that if she talked with more of the students, a lot of students would start thinking for themselves instead of accepting what everyone says.

I find that when a student doesn't question a teacher or when

a student doesn't criticize or challenge something that a teacher says, they're just pulling in everything and keeping it in their minds. But the only way that you can really make up your own mind about things is to question the teachers' viewpoints, what you think, what you read, and what you hear from other people.

I am taking a course in black history, and we have a teacher who is white and has written a book on the black man in America. His attitudes are different from ours; we don't think the same way. He seems to be naive and I don't think he should be teaching Negro history to us. I don't feel that white teachers should teach a black child any of the social studies—no history, no government, nothing of that nature—because the white person is going to have his different prejudices, and the black child is supposed to be thinking a different way because he is the person who has been subjugated all these years. I think that white people might be good in teaching things like math and science where you just have to know facts, but not anything that will influence the way you are going to think later on.

About 15 to 18 of the 37 teachers at our school live inside the black community. The others live in the suburbs or in the white areas of the city. It is funny that all of the white teachers who claim they sympathize with black problems and try to be liberal do not live in the black communities. You have about three-fifths of the teachers who don't give a damn about anything that happens in the school. They just come in there to get their pay checks, and you find out that these teachers usually don't teach you anything, either. These are the teachers with the attitudes of "I have mine; you have to get yours." They give you what is required. That's all and that isn't too much.

## Pat

*Pat is a black student who attends a predominantly white school in a medium-sized city in the Southwest. She is a senior and plans to attend college to prepare herself for a career in social work.*

Well, we all hate to say it, but it is a fact that Negro schools are inferior. It is the fault of the white power structure, but it is a fact. Separate but equal—that was the joke of the century. Maybe it sounded bad of me to say it, but it is true. And if the

black teachers can't realize their schools are inferior, they have no desire to do anything about making them any better. In our city they take the top Negro teachers and put them in white schools. They take the scum from the white schools and put them in the black schools. This doesn't solve anything. The black students need the very best teachers.

I had some of the best teachers at the predominantly black school that I attended; they do have good teachers. By the same token, there are many teachers who are teaching because this is something one can always do. This is bad, because I hear so many people say, "Well, you can always teach," you know, as if they aren't really preparing themselves for this and putting their whole heart into it. This is a last resort; if you can't do anything else, you can teach.

There is this social thing in the black school. You know, everybody is conscious of their clothes, and the teachers are in the halls talking about their parties. It just warped everybody—everybody in the whole school, because the values were wrong. Some teachers placed a great deal of emphasis on learning for the sake of learning—because you really want to learn, not because there is a grade. This is an important part of it, but very few teachers emphasized the satisfaction that you get from learning.

Comparatively, the teachers in the integrated school are much better prepared. Three-fourths of them have their master's degrees and are working on their Ph.D.'s. One English teacher has her Ph.D.—in a high school! These teachers just know how to teach students, how to say "I do not know," and how to make you think. They aren't bogged down with a lot of other stuff that doesn't really matter. The important thing, because it doesn't mean anything to sit there and memorize facts out of the book—but you should know how to relate ideas and associate them, and they really know how to do this.

History is the only class that I really enjoy or tolerate, because of the teacher. It is not that I don't enjoy my other classes, but history was like something I lived. I left class and it never stopped being alive to me, you know. I went out in a picket line and there was history. I came home and thought and this was history. This was my class. You know, everything I

did was my history class, because of the way she taught it. There were nine students in the class; one Negro, two Jews, and one Unitarian—you know, a wide variety of people. And we would talk about things the way they should be talked about. I mean nobody evaded issues. A few students did, but the teacher didn't. I really think that she is a free woman, because she doesn't feel like she has to answer to anybody. I mean she knows what she believes. She knows herself; what her convictions are and her limitations and she accepts them. She sat up in class one day and said something about a "nigger". I wasn't offended, because I admire her for saying it and not running around apologizing to me and saying "No offense," and all that, you see.

And we talked about black people and what the history books fail to say, and how zero the books are that the standard classes use. She talks about Jews, too, depending on what the situation is. She says whatever the facts are. I can admire this about her, because my other teachers flinch when they have to say "Negro", or if anything of a racial nature comes up they just skip it. You don't solve problems by skipping, you know. I am not saying teachers should sit up and just out of the blue say, "All right, let's have a civil rights discussion," but whenever anything comes up I don't see any reason not to talk about it. And they give you the excuse that the parents don't like it, you know. And I just tell them, "If the parents don't like it, they can take their children out. I mean, if that is the case, my mama doesn't like the fact that you won't talk about it. But you don't care about my mama; all you are concerned with is the white children's mothers." And this, to me, just shows the failure to reach everybody.

The other teachers are very good as far as good teachers go, but they have a hang-up. They aren't ready for us, black students, and are having problems getting adjusted, just as we are. I get very angry with them, because I always felt that adults were infallible; I looked up to them and worshipped adults, and now I am finding out that isn't the way it is. It is hard to accept this, and I feel like, "Well, there is nothing wrong with me. Why can't you accept me for what I am?" But they don't do this.

My reading teacher was also my English teacher. Her views

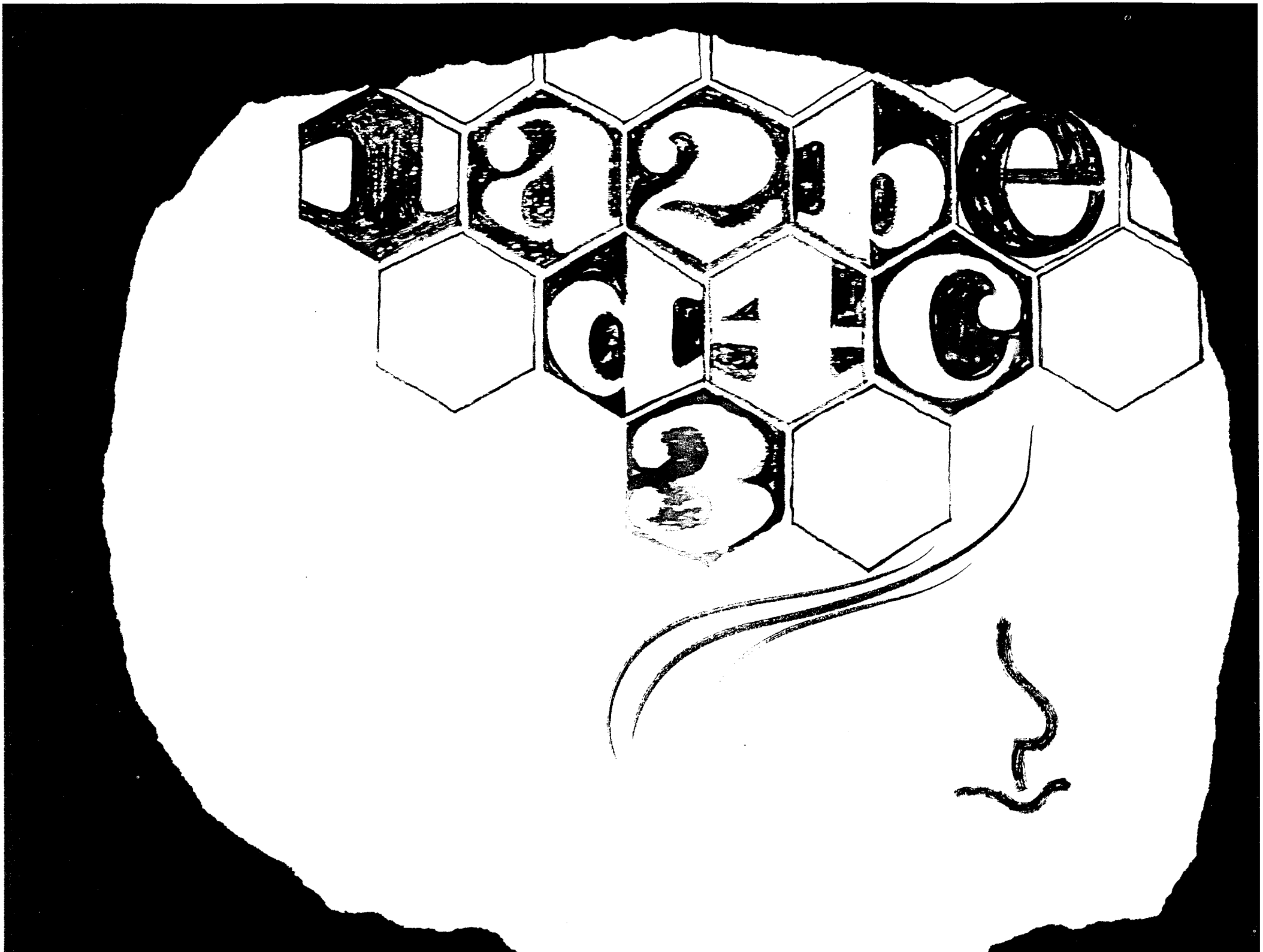
are not with the times. And I have to understand that she is from a different age. Although I wish she could see my point of view, I don't really expect her to, you know. She talked to me over an hour about how Mark Twain loves Negroes. I thought, "Thank you, are you going to tell some of your white students about it?"

In my reading class this girl was discussing some striking workers and she said, "I don't understand it, these men are making more than the minimum wage and I just really don't think they deserve any more." This is the one time my English teacher discussed anything like this in class, but she said the wrong thing—that she didn't think people who have undeveloped minds need money. She said, "You spend all your life maybe preparing to be a doctor or something, and then you deserve the money you make." But I pointed out that if you are making \$2 an hour, if you can't feed your family and clothe them and have the bare necessities, it is still not the way it should be. I don't like the fact that I am studying hard and have to help feed some of my classmates who wasted their time, but this is something that exists that we have to accept, and there is always this thing about "love thy brother," whether he is black or white. They tell me that the strikers are making more than the minimum wage—well, who said the minimum wage was enough?

Having well-rounded teachers who have really had training in how to deal with students is more important than knowledge—more important than two-times-two-is-four. It is important to get teachers who can make the student realize what he has to do to fit into society and find his place, whether it be as a sanitation worker or as a lawyer.

# Curriculum





## **Bernadine**

*Bernadine, a senior, is a black student at a school in a large northeastern city. The racial composition of the school is about 65 percent black and 35 percent white. She takes academic courses and plans to major in philosophy in college next year.*

The schools are just racist. Every time I mention that everyone has a fit because they think they are getting the *best* education possible—they aren't! There are a lot of black kids that are coming up now who can't read or write, and they are going to be the ones who are going to feel the thrust of this whole racist system.

Now that I look back, the funny thing about tracking, was when we left kindergarten, it seemed like all the students who lived on my block were put in one class and all the kids who lived in homes were put in another. After junior high school all the kids who lived in the projects were almost all placed in one school. The track system seemed to be based solely on your economic status. All the kids in the middle-income were placed in one track and all the kids who were poor were placed in another. Somehow or other they put me in the track with all the kids who had middle-incomes and who lived in homes.

When I got in junior high school, they put me in something like "track one" and said I was "honors" and I said that was nice and all. The kids in my neighborhood didn't particularly like me because they said I was uppity, and the kids in class didn't like me because they said I wasn't uppity because I wasn't like them. It was kind of a trying thing for me because it seemed as if I was alienated from the kids on my block and even from the kids in school. I'd never bring my friends home because the block was so dirty and at the same time, the kids I'd grown up with on 54th Street wouldn't play with me. They said that I used too big words and so I got to have a deep inferiority complex.

I know that the guidance department is a great failure—the department isn't saying anything except that you ought to take advanced math, but, other than that, the department isn't giving the type of guidance which is going to be beneficial to students. And there's always this thing about, "Take industrial arts, take business courses, because you're not fit for college

preparatory,"—that's insane! We're always told, "College preparatory's not for you," and many believe it, see, because there's this image that whatever the "Man" says is correct. They just can't see that the "Man" really is not interested so he hasn't taken time to really be correct. Many of those students who have been fooled into taking business courses are getting "A's" and "B's" and then at graduation they decide that, "Oh, man, I wanted to be a chemistry teacher," but they haven't had any college prep courses.

In the ghetto schools especially, oftentimes you have white guidance counselors trying to counsel black children. I wouldn't trust a white counselor though I've been depressed about things and really wanted to talk with somebody. The counselors here treat us like we are, "Oh, you poor Negroes." And, "Here we are, letting you come to our school. We are really going to work with you and try our best to mold you into what we think you ought to be. And then, if you are nice little Negroes, we might let you be part of our society." This is the way they feel. And doggone it, if I had a problem, I would go and talk to a tree first!

I remember when I first got to high school, I was put in an honors track. I really didn't want to go because I knew I would have a time. When you're in "honors" in a Negro school it's completely different from being in honors in a white school. In a Negro school, we couldn't possibly expect the teacher to teach with the same capacity as a white teacher. For one thing, she got so little funds and hardly any new equipment. All the money was poured into new white schools, so she couldn't teach the way she was supposed to. I'm pretty sure that made the teacher frustrated.

We had this book, *Adventures in American Literature*, and they had one Negro poet in there, James Weldon Johnson. I did a term paper on him and compared him to Paul Lawrence Dunbar who wrote that beautiful dialect poetry. I really like it, and I remarked at the end of the paper that I liked Paul Lawrence Dunbar better than I did James Weldon Johnson, because James Weldon Johnson had this idea that any time a Negro said "dis and dat," he was illiterate. Now Paul Lawrence Dunbar knew that that's the way Negroes speak, and that we still say "dis and dat." I happened to mention this in honors English class,

which is 90 percent white and they had a fit. Then, we talked about how James Weldon Johnson showed that the Negro was being assimilated, but he isn't—he isn't even in the mainstream of American society today!

We were also doing a bit of philosophy in there, reading *Lord of the Flies*. Up to then I had had no philosophy, no method of reasoning. I wasn't trained to take one sentence and get a logical conclusion from that first sentence. I had nothing like that because in my black junior high school, we simply looked in the book and got the answers. We never actually had to think; the answers were right there for you. It was like, "What word would you put in this sentence? Go back to the story and find the correct word." It was never, "What word would you place in the sentence? Think of a word that would connote the meaning."

We had a discussion in student council recently about whether we should inculcate black history with white history. I told them it was highly unfeasible because I have a notion that whoever does teach Negro history will be white. A lot of those white teachers have the missionary zeal where going to ghetto schools and upbringing little black kids becomes their mission for life. And this is the way they've been all through history. Secondly, you would still have people who are prejudiced, and who would perhaps mention one or two Negroes but then just go right on. In order to get the full benefit of black history, you have to teach it as a separate course.

The humanities teacher asked us what we would like to see in such a course and I said, "Well, when you get to the part of the slavery days in the United States, don't skip over it and make some nicey-nice statement like 'It was terrible. It was the most inhumane act against any man that man has inflicted!' Just don't say anything like that. We all know that it was inhumane. Just tell us the facts and don't pass over the Negro as if he were a chair or something. Talk about his problems. The teacher tried, but he didn't succeed. We had this series of books and one was a history of the 1920's. It talked about America's morals and the end of World War I, but it had nothing in there about the Negro renaissance of the 1920's, or the Negro migration from the Southern rural areas to the Northern

urban ones. It had nothing about that. I just can't read books like that, which are so racist. I just won't read books like that any more!

I guess the major change I'd like to see in the schools is with the books. Some of them are in awful condition but it's not the condition of the book that bothers me so much, it's what's inside of them. They're going to have to start talk about blacks, and not in a token manner, you know. The teacher's going to have to change all the books he uses. Whenever he finds a bit of tokenism in there, he's going to have to point it out. Like my history book was supposed to be multiracial but it really wasn't. It pointed out what some white man said about Negro Senators: "They were worthy to be in any race," and it sounded as if we were completely different—which we really aren't.

You might take Far Eastern Problems, but you never hear of the history of Africa or the history of Latin America. It's always the history of Europe or the history of Germany or the history of the United States—never about black people. They might throw a little chapter in there about how England went into Africa and westernized the people by taking them out of their savage conditions. The only time it seems anything was ever achieved is when the white man did it—this is what they teach us in school and that's racist!

If we could ever get an accurate history of America before the white man came—perhaps we'd have to go to the Indian reservations and ask them about it, not in a condescending manner, you know, "Okay, now what did your ancestors do?" We're going to have to talk to them like they're people. See, Americans don't talk to each other as if they're people—it's as if you're simply an object or something existing for the good of the country.

I wouldn't put any explorers in the books because Indians were traveling up and down the St. Lawrence River before Jacques Cartier came. I'm sure they were, so don't even put the explorers in there. I'd start from 1619, the first time the blacks came over, and take the history from there. I actually believe that the history of the black man in America is the history of America itself, for if it weren't for the toil and sweat of the

black people, America just wouldn't be. I'd change the whole history course.

The whole class took a trip to Vermont once, to an all-white school. Two Negroes and one white student happened to walk into this all-white class. It was comparable to our basic track and the kids were talking about slavery, everyone started giggling, like, "Here comes some Negroes and we're talking about slavery."

The teacher had "The Advantages of Slavery" on the board because the day before he had talked about the disadvantages of it. This girl asked us if we thought Negroes would do whites like whites did them? I told her, "We don't want to do you all like you did us—that's completely dehumanizing. Not only did they dehumanize us, but they dehumanized themselves when they enslaved us. All we want now is self-determination." The teacher was trying to get them to recognize the "Negro problems." I don't like that word, "Negro problems"—it's not our problem! The white man created it and he's going to have to solve it. But I was thinking: is that happening all over the country, you know, in classes? Are white kids thinking that if we ever got free, we're going to do them like they did us? We aren't really out to do evil for evil.

You know, it's a requirement to take a government course to get out of high school. It was a great big farce! For example, here I was learning about democracy, but how can you learn about democracy if there is no democracy? How can you teach something which isn't? Sure, you can read the Declaration of Independence, but realize that Thomas Jefferson had slaves when he wrote it. You've just got to know those little picayune points which people think don't matter. Don't talk about some freedom and democracy, knowing I don't have it. I'm all for democracy if we're going to be a democracy.

## Clarence

*Clarence is a black student who attends a predominantly white school in a medium-sized southern city. He is a senior and is enrolled in an academic course. He plans to attend college and major in science.*

School's all right, I guess. See, I don't like it that much any-

way. I can't explain that. I don't know. You just, after a while, get tired of it. Education in high school is just the beginning to show you what life is going to be. Math, English, and medieval history are best for that. I think you need just about everything they teach you—you will need them in the long run.

They have Plan I and Plan II. Plan I is for college and you got to take algebra, history, and all that. Plan II is you can take 2 years of science, general math, and all. I am in Plan II. I didn't want to be taking all those hard courses and then wouldn't go to college. I think I need them, but I just didn't want to take them right now. I've had all the science I need. I'll be taking math next year, and the only reason I'll be taking that is because I lost a half this semester and a half last semester. I don't think you need them all in business college. Really, to tell you the truth, I don't see any sense in staying 4 years in college and taking all those other subjects you don't need. In business college, you just take that one subject.

I have a C plus average. I really don't see much importance in grades. When you learn—like you have an A plus average, you're going to forget it right after the summer. It will just be new to you the next year. I really don't see what the grades are doing anyway. If you know it, you are going to learn it. For most, they are just going to memorize it for that time just to pass the test. That's about what everybody does.

A system without grades would be all right but I think they would have to be more strict than they are now because if most of the people know they could pass without doing anything at all, they wouldn't do any work. If a student was interested in something he would study.

I like to read American history books. I read one book by a black author but I can't think of the name of it right now. Come to think of it we don't ever talk about Negro history at school. Not much at all, nothing but the Civil War—that's about all the history we talk about. In American history, we talked about things that were going on in the world. But about Negroes and whites, we talked about this just all the time. Every time we get a chance we would talk about current events. It was like a course. They would ask you your opinion on the subject, they have the questions on the paper, then we would have a discussion

on it.

They have training over at the high school now. They get you a job like salesmanship, outdoors work, plumbing, and all of that. You can work during school. You get out around 12 or 2 and you get credit for it. Then after the end of every year, you can put an ad in the paper finding these jobs. Two of my cousins and two other guys applied for jobs through the school but the jobs they got, they didn't like them. Most of it was housework, you know, or something like that. I think they tried them out, but they didn't like them, so, they just quit.

Work really doesn't matter as long as it pays good. Like that data processing—that's real good money. I'd like to do it but if I would find an outdoors job, I would do it before I would the IBM because I like to use my hands. The students who is taking the data processing course have to go to a special school to use that machine. I can't stand an inside job hardly though I know there is where the best opportunities are. With electronics or something like that, I know I have to go on indoors, but as long as I have any kind of choice, I will take outdoors any time.

I keep my problems pretty much to myself. I think I could have gone to the counselors, people go to them easily. I've seen my counselor several times to get my schedule for next year, but the counselors couldn't do anything about your problems because you couldn't change classes just like that. It was no use going to them because they would have so many students over there, you had to take whatever they had already given you.

## Randolph

*Randolph, a black student, is a senior at an all-black school in a large midwestern city. The school is vocationally-oriented and has been closely associated with an industrial firm where Randolph plans to work after graduation.*

This year—actually I could have graduated last June, but I had another season of eligibility to play football so I came back and played football. I was through with my English, math, and history. This semester I took something just to keep me in school: I took business law, business arithmetic, sociology, and physics.

My sociology class is very interesting. Some of the kids don't think it is too interesting because the teacher is pretty old, but I feel she does her work, and the students have to do their jobs. At the present time and at the beginning of the sociology class we were not doing too much about the conflict between the black and white people. We just talked about the world, you know; culture, behavior patterns, where you find different people in different situations and attitudes of society in general.

I like history and I think it is an interesting course. When I was a freshman and a sophomore my history courses didn't have too much about the Negro, about his accomplishments, and all the things that he had done in the past. He just seemed to fly over us, you know, and I didn't pay much attention. But now that I have had Negro history, things have begun to come to life and I can look back and see how we were kept down. I would say every school, not only in the city—but in the State and country—should have a class on Negro history. It is very interesting not only to the colored people but it would give white people a chance to actually see the beginning of the trouble, the causes of the problem, and by knowing the causes, people would take a different view of the situation. I think it also would be a better way to solve the problems. A few years back before this walkout they didn't have a Negro history class, but after the walkout it started.

Negro history was such a large class and the course covered so much that we didn't actually have the chance to get up to the present time, but we did discuss the riots of last summer. We talked about the causes of the rioting and looked back through history at the tension as it built up. And these things were building up and building up. Also, we talked about low paying jobs and the family situation. A lot of parents get so frustrated because they see no way out and they break up and then the kids are left all confused. Then when something breaks like the riot, the kids feel like, "Here is my chance to get something, to get out and let loose," and everything explodes. It's just a vicious circle and it is hard to get out of this circle, you know.

We needed something to inspire students to do more than just hang around. We had programs and stuff, but it just

seemed like it didn't get to the students for one reason or another. They would go to another school and see the modern buildings and things that those kids had—just the physical features. While here, the school is old; the place was tearing down; the tenth floor was the worst gym in the city. It all kind of made the students feel, "What the heck"; you know. Since the walkout we had, it has gradually been getting better and better; they've been trying to modernize. They put in a new gym floor, fiberglass backboards for basketball, new desks, and they're giving out free textbooks. When I came, we had to buy them; it cost about \$25 for school supplies. Now they pass them out and you give them back at the end of the semester.

The counselor that I have been assigned to is white. He's been great to me. He has been interested in the students—not just the high academic ones, but also those who have problems. And he really cares, you know, and he'll do everything in his power to help you, even if you don't show no interest. He's white, but I like him. He's one of the best counselors here. Although they want high school graduates to go right into work, I think they should put more emphasis on going on with a higher education. Generally, that is about my only complaint.

Getting a job is good; you get a lot of prestige working in an office rather than working in a factory and places like that, that don't have prestige; but still, by going to college and coming out with a degree you can still go back to the office and be in a better position than you would be after graduation from high school.

I believe that there are quite a few students who just went to work because they had the opportunity to get a job right now, a good job, with a lot of prestige and which paid well. But they had the ability to go to college. That is why I say they ought to emphasize college a little more than just coming out of high school and going to work.

## **Rosa**

*Rosa is Mexican American. She is a senior in a suburban school near a medium-sized west coast city. About 50 percent of the students are Anglo. Mexican Americans and blacks comprise the remaining school population. Rosa has been taking business*

*courses but wants to go to college next year to study elementary education.*

This year I have been taking business, government, English, Spanish, music, and p.e. but these courses are not preparing me for what I want to do. That's what I hold against my counselors when I first started, I got them blindfolded. See, I was going to start as college prep, but everybody was telling me how hard it was and they discouraged me, so I'm taking office and business courses. I regret it now as I will have to take them in college. I could really pass those college prep classes just as well as anybody can. I'm not conceited, that's just the way I feel, and that's the only way to be. I remember when I was going into the ninth grade, they told me not to take English 1A—that's high English, but to take English 1B. And I was pretty good, because I was getting real good grades in grammar school. In fact, I got an honor trophy. So then I told them, "Why couldn't I take English 1A?" They said that was for the very high students. So, I said, "O.K., I will take English 1B." I took it and within 2 weeks I was changed to English 1A. I showed them.

My guidance counselors have been lousy. They wouldn't tell me anything—that's what makes me so angry. If I were a counselor and some child was getting bad grades, I would try to show him other courses that would maybe interest him and that later on, in the future, he would be able to become something, you know. Not get into a college prep course and do lousy—that's ridiculous—you're wasting your whole 4 years there. Like me—I wasted my whole 4 years trying to be a secretary, and here I want to become a teacher now. When I wanted to find out about colleges I had to look up everything for myself. Sometimes I would have trouble filling out some blanks; I couldn't understand some things. I figured that if I would have learned about all those scholarships, I could have applied for them. My counselor kept telling me I didn't know anything. I think he was doing it for my own good, but still, he could have looked into the matter a little more, and tried to help instead of discouraging me, because for a while, I wasn't even thinking of going to college any more!

A lot of the guidance counselors don't like us period. They

feel that since we are Mexican Americans, they don't want to help. Students figure that counselors think they're dumb and ignorant, and wouldn't get anywhere anyway. They said that they were going to get us a Spanish counselor and a colored counselor. That I want to see! At my junior high they have a colored counselor for the colored kids and this counselor is a very good counselor. He's—well, I think he is good because he comes from the same background as most of these kids, and even though he is a middle class citizen now, he was poor before and he knows what has been going on and understands those problems.

I really don't think that grades are that important. I think that what you get out of the class is more important than grades. All the time when I am taking a test that I am timed at, I cannot do good. I have never been able to do that because I have to hurry, and I do lousy on it. In Spanish he gives us a whole period, I time myself so I am not under pressure. I do very well then.

I don't think I go and choose my friends because they are smart or for their good looks but, at school, if you want to get anywhere you have to get good grades. If you are going to be popular, you have to have good looks or have real good grades or be a teacher's pet. In our school, the only Mexican Americans who care are the ones getting high grades. All the rest don't really care that much. They have an inferiority complex; they figure they can't do something, so they just forget about it, you know. I don't think that is right at all. There are some kids who probably have bad study habits, but it is probably not even their fault that they have these habits and just because of their background, a lot of kids don't even hang around with them.

Our government teacher tells us about minority groups in his class. In our California history section he was telling us about Murieta and all the bandits. That's what I like! When he was talking about Murieta, he says that a lot of people think that those stories are just a bunch of hearsay but he says that some so-called "Mexican bandits" were good leaders, Mexican American leaders. Any other teacher would have said, "vandalism" or "they are no good, they shoot and kill people." He would always tell us that they weren't all bad. I think that

pointing these things out is part of learning about American society. Otherwise it's all Anglo people who talk about foreigners—French and English, and once in a while they throw in a Mexican, but very rarely. I always ask questions about the bandits. I thought that was the most interesting part of the whole course.

I don't like government very much. I don't like to know about the past, I like to know something about what we are going to do in the future. We don't learn anything about American life, society, or politics today. There is one teacher in business class that would always bring up racial disturbances and things like that and he told us one time not to speak so loud because he might get reprimanded. That really surprised us. We were talking about the Bible and how slaves got treated and it was all legal. He told us he could get in trouble for that discussion, too.

I work with four colored kids, and they talk about school and how unfair it is, and how they would like to have some Negro history. They can't read their novels or have a class in Negro literature. I always agree with them because I think it is only fair that they have their literature, too. In fact, I would probably enjoy the class. I would like it because I don't know much about Negro history.

In English class we were going to read a book suggested by a colored boy. He is always interested in reading books. The teacher tried, but, just because the book cost five cents more, the administration wouldn't let her get it. I think that is ridiculous!

### **Pablo**

*Pablo is a Mexican American student in his junior year at an all-Mexican American school in a large city in the Southwest. He wants to become a teacher.*

When I started junior high they tried to advance us, but only a certain amount of the students got a chance to be pushed a little bit. When I was in the ninth grade there was one class taking Algebra I and there was a class taking world history and these were considered sophomore courses. Then we go back to the Mexican American school and find out that you don't have trig. We fought for trig and they are going to have

it next year. We also demanded that Algebra I and world history be taught at our school in the ninth grade. Why should we have to fight? We got a smell of a better education, so why can't we have it here at this school? That only proves how the teachers and the administration are behind. They don't think that the Mexican American has the ability to take courses like that. We don't have the ability because when we started elementary they don't try to advance us.

In our school they have two classes in chemistry. One, like the class I was in, had 18 people in it. If we could get trig, we will have a terrific chance at having harder courses. You take Algebra I in the ninth grade, in the tenth grade you take geometry, in the eleventh grade you take Algebra II, and in the twelfth grade you take trig. It is a great idea. You can take math courses, because nowadays math is very important. Students before us had tried to get enough students who were ready to take trig, but nobody is prepared for it. The education is behind. You go to some Northside school and, wow, you have two or three classes in trig because they are prepared.

With English, it's the same thing, kind of retarded. In elementary school they say don't speak Spanish because it's bad. They say that there is a law against speaking Spanish. Well, we looked it up and it only stated that all classes should be conducted in English. There is also a treaty that says that Spanish can be used. You start off bad when they tell you, "No, only English." I'm sure that everybody wants to learn it, but when they tell you that you have to learn it, it makes it difficult. They try to force you to learn English, but if you want to learn, you will learn.

What do you get from English? In literature class, I didn't get anything. I joked around in the back, and this and that. It is a big bore. You can't make a person do something by force. You can, but he is not going to try his best. I started reading this summer when I wasn't working. I read the Communist Manifesto. Why should I read a lot of fiction? They give you a list of fiction books that students should be reading, but why read a lot of fiction books? Why can't you read and find out the real truth? I didn't finish it.

The Spanish course was good, but they really ought to teach

you how to speak correctly but they always say, "Learn the conjugation." They ought to let you speak it correctly, they ought to let you talk among yourselves.

You get some courses in junior high like world history, and you are learning it here in American history. It is the same thing over and over. They don't try to get it up to date. When you are studying in the Mexican Revolution, they say, "The Mexican is bad, bad, bad. The United States comes and helps Texas," and this and that. They aren't trying to put in the things that are really happening now. You get a book, and the last thing you might get in the book was Kennedy's assassination. That's I don't know how many years back. Things are changing so fast that those books are beginning to be prehistoric.

### **Tom**

*Tom is a white student in a large city in the northwestern part of the country. The school has only a few blacks and Oriental students. Tom is in the academic track. He is a junior and expects to continue his education at a military academy.*

The counselors really don't do anything for you. You go down to the counseling office and they give you a book—they don't really talk to you. You get in, 5 minutes later you get out, and somebody else is waiting. It's so impersonal. There are a lot of kids—2,100—and something like six counselors; that's about 300 kids to a counselor and, brother, you just don't see them unless you're in trouble. If you get in trouble a lot, you see the counselor a lot.

It's the middle class kids who are most disgruntled, not the rich or the poor. Rich kids don't need counseling as much—if they want help, they can go to a psychiatrist. The emphasis here has been on the poor kids. We have vocational programs and other things for them, but for the lower class and the middle class, nothing is done for them in the way of college counseling. Like they're the forgotten class, and most kids in my school are going to college. It's kind of an accepted thing here that this is a college preparatory school. There have been a lot of complaints about the fact that it is a pressure school and geared to the C+ student with a 2.5 average or better. In a school with such wide ranges of abilities and interests, honors courses are



a good thing because there are kids who are interested and regular kids who think that the subject is dead because of the kind of teachers they have had. A lot of teachers treat honors class just as a regular class but you have to work harder and there's that pressure to get an "A". It's always kids competing because you have all the kids who can do it together. Competing could be a good way to learn. If you were an "A" student in the regular class, you would get a "B" in honors. It should be all "A's", "B's" and maybe a few "C's". If the kid's not getting it, kick him out; put him in a regular class.

We have one Negro and one Oriental in our honors program. I don't know if the other minority students are all in vocational programs, but there are not too many in the honors classes. It's mostly white kids in this program. I don't know why, but it might be because of backgrounds. Most of the kids in the honors classes are the ones who get places at the university and intellectual discussion is done at home. I took psychology this year and we talked a lot about educational systems. We finally came to the conclusion that honors classes should be abolished as the best way to help those who haven't had that kind of cultural background. When you put them with a lot of kids who are smart, it brings them up. You might say it rubs off. They work harder, but then you find that the smart kids don't work quite as hard, and it also sometimes stifles discussion.

Blacks should have just as good an educational system as whites. If blacks aren't learning as fast as whites, it's not because they're black. In psychology, we studied that black intelligence is just as good as white, even though the black intelligence scores on Army tests rate them as morons. You'll find that it's not because they're black, it's because they live in slum areas. Whites who live in slum areas have just as low an intelligence. You take the blacks and whites out of the slums, put them in the Army and you'll find their scores are tight up there.

Instead of the usual six periods a day like most schools, we're trying a new experimental thing. We have seven classes, but only five a day and an extra period called "E" period which is supposed to be "Enrichment"—to get help from your teachers

if you need it, time for a little extra study, or time to make up work if you're behind. I like it because it puts a little more variety into school. You're not always having history first period every day, and you're not always dragging through a foreign language the last period.

I don't feel we have to be always having teachers supervising. I know I've learned a lot of stuff when I was supposed to be studying. It's kind of hackneyed, but I learned things about drugs, politics, and about things going on in the world with this rotating schedule. Like we talk more about other things than history, though the teacher doesn't really have time to cover all the materials required by the teaching manual.

On the other hand, having gone through both schedules, it feels that you might learn a little less with this one. You take more classes but you get less depth in each one, and each teacher has to cut down the things he teaches. I imagine it made a lot of teachers cut out the deadwood in their courses, but you also lose the small things that made it interesting.

We have a course on "Minorities" that they instituted this year. It's an elective that's offered to juniors and seniors, but it should be open to everyone. I signed up, but the class was just too full. Now, I'm having second thoughts about signing up for it again. The new teacher isn't—well, she's white. I don't think that makes as much difference as the fact that she's not the type of teacher for that course. She's the "busy work" kind, "See those questions in the back of the chapter. Write them all out!" If there is anything kids hate, it's something like that! A "Minorities" class has to be taught through issues; it can't be a lecture course or you might as well forget you're having it. They had mostly magazines and there were a few books like *Black Like Me* and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Being a contemporary issue sort of thing, they also learned about the minority groups that contributed to the history of the United States. I think it should be incorporated into the regular history courses. The two cultures aren't really separate; they're both American and they should both be in the history books.

Being an honors course, we talked about where Frederick Douglass' and Booker T. Washington's views differed and things. History nowadays mainly covers the great generals or the great

leaders in Congress; they leave out the great black philosophers and black inventors though Booker T. Washington always seems to spring up in any history course. We kind of took our history in units. At first, we talked about the Revolutionary Period but we just didn't talk about American Revolution; we talked about the effects of revolution on societies, and how our society compared with the Russian, French, and the Glorious Revolution in England. We never came out and said, "I think this is best," and the teacher acted as a moderator.

The regular history classes didn't go into Reconstruction; while our honors class spent about a month on it. We realized that in history there aren't any cold, hard lines like knowing that Abraham Lincoln and George Washington weren't all pearl white and other people, like Jefferson Davis, who we think of as bad guys, weren't all bad. You had to sift these things out so that you were challenged to learn and it was left up to you to decide. In regular classes, the teacher always feels that kids can't decide for themselves. I really don't see why we learned about Reconstruction and kids who aren't smart enough to be in honors didn't.

One of our electives is psychology which I took because it is an easy "A". It turned out to be a tough class, but I really liked it. We discussed the psychology of education, the psychology of crowds, and how people like Hitler could move the German Nation into war. We also talked about the psychology of races and nationalities, especially last semester when Martin Luther King died. We went into what was happening in the cities and urban problems like overcrowding as a cause of mob violence.

We studied how a personality is built up and it was really very interesting because you could relate it to things around you. The basic problem of so many schools today is that it's so hard to relate school to the things around you. Like imaginary numbers in trig, I don't retain those because it has no relation to what's happening around today. I wouldn't even use trig unless I was going to be an engineer, so I don't bother to learn it too well. I took it because it is required for college and if I want to go to a high scholastic college, then I have to have trig and all this stuff. Math is theorems, formulas, and computations, and so you can't expect a kid to get excited about it.

## Lori

*Lori, an Anglo, is a junior in a school located in a large city in the Southwest. Her school is approximately 70 percent Anglo and 30 percent Mexican American. Lori is taking business courses and had planned to become a secretary. At the time of the interview, she had just decided to go to college instead.*

I am so sick of school. It seems like every year you do the same thing over and over, and the classes and textbooks are so old. This business law course that I had this year used books copyrighted in 1946—they are really old! It was an elective, and I was curious to see what it was like. The course was kind of general. It was mostly about torture and what kind of punishment you have when you commit a certain kind of crime. We also learned all about insurance. It was real basic and boring.

When you say that a class is required, kids say, "Oh, ick! What do you have to take that for? It's boring." If they go into class with that attitude it's bad. But I don't really think that students should be able to take whatever courses they like. I think I should take some classes that are really going to help me, like English, and it wouldn't be a good idea for me to decide about required courses. Some kids might say, "We don't have to take it, so we are just going to sit there and take shop and home economics and stuff just to get through by the skin of our teeth." I think you should be required to take certain classes; that's sort of contradictory, come to think of it, but I think you should. Next year will be good because there is only one required course. I'm taking, "Social Problems." I don't really know what it is about.

I don't think that grades are important to learn. It seems like you can really try and really be interested in what they are talking about, but when it comes to tests and stuff—maybe you are not up to it that day, so you get a bad grade on a test. I don't think it really shows what you know or what you don't know. The grade scales are so dumb; I just don't understand how they grade. For instance, you get so many points on each test and if you get enough, then you get an "A." Well, I think that is sort of dumb. I don't like their grades, but I don't think

that the pass or fail system is very good either. Evaluations might be good—I don't really know; we have always had grades.

We had a film on sex education last year that didn't tell us anything we didn't already know. It seems like they are keeping you away from it or something, but if you are curious, you are going to find out anyway, whether they tell you or not. I think they should really have a class on sex and a teacher that is really interested in explaining everything to you. Sure your parents do plenty of it, but in a class you can discuss and find out what people are thinking.

I wouldn't even take American history if it wasn't required for college credit. History is important, like about what happened and everything, but when I got in there I didn't like it because it was really a long time ago and not very interesting. We didn't just use the textbook; we would go to the library every week or every 2 weeks and read different material on what we were studying. I think it was mostly domestic history. We talked about the Depression but didn't read any books about what it was like to live then; we just went by the text and read things like how the labor unions didn't get off to a good start in the twenties and thirties. When we got to World War II, we read different books, and had some choices. We read mostly about Hitler and Mussolini; we read about Roosevelt too—about how he introduced the CCC and WPA for people who didn't have enough money.

We stopped our history in 1944 and learned nothing about modern times or [what happened in] the last 25 years. I don't think we have any courses that go up to the present so I don't feel I know much about what's been happening from 1950 to 1968. It would be better to find out what we are living in today. When you go so far back in history it doesn't really get through to you because you can't experience what those people felt. I do have a sense that riotings and burnings have taken place before and that history is just repeating itself now. I remember when we read about Negroes in the twenties. Everybody was prejudiced against them and they always used to riot and stuff like that. I think other people started those riots, but people just keep on remembering and keep on hating and it just drives Negroes to it again.

During the first semester in American history, when we were talking about the Civil War, my teacher sort of got across that the North wasn't against Negroes being slaves in the South; it was just that they didn't have the same cheap labor.

We don't have any special course on Mexican American or Negro history—it's all in the one history course. The Mexican American kids in our history class say this history is only about white people; that all the textbooks only give one side—the whites'. I think that they are sort of propaganda myself.

In English we read *In Cold Blood*, *Catcher in the Rye* and *Grapes of Wrath*. We had to read the book and write a paper on it at the end. We didn't read any Baldwin, Ellison, or Richard Wright though we did read *Black Like Me*. I thought that was really interesting. The author went into the Negro area and wanted to really find out what it was like, what prejudice was, and how people treat you. It was really good.

The guidance counselor always calls us in, and discusses what classes we need to take, what classes we have to take, and then what our electives are. He asks you what you want to go into and then tries to encourage you to take classes that would help you in that field. I really haven't decided what I want to be. I don't know, I sort of wanted to be a secretary, then I decided not to, but I am still going to keep up my business classes. My guidance counselor has really helped me. During my sophomore year, I really goofed up in biology. I would always go in to him and he would sort of give me a pep talk, you know. He was really good; I really liked him. I've heard many bad comments from my friends about their guidance counselors—how they only call them in when they have to make up their schedule for the next year and never to see how they are doing. They're always too busy or they are down in the lounge drinking coffee and just don't have time, you know.

### **Sharon**

*Sharon is a senior at a school in a large northeastern city whose student body is becoming increasingly black. Sharon is white. She is in regular classes in the commercial program.*

I am taking a commercial course. I have stenography, typing, office practice, and English. In all my classes, like my stenog-

raphy class, and typing class, there are a lot of black kids. We get along pretty good.

In your senior year, when you graduate, they get you lined up for a job. They have this work program for seniors where you work a week and go to school a week or you can work half a day and go to school half a day. You get credit for working and also get paid. Really, the counselor's no help at all. She just tells you, "What do you want?" and then you tell her what you want, and then they say, "Well, you can't have it!" This friend of mine went down and wanted the trade prep. They told him that he could either have the commercial or the trade prep. He asked for the trade prep and they gave him commercial, so he has typing—not even stenography—a boy doesn't type! He went down to change it and they said it was too late. They just give you what they want to give you.

A guidance counselor should be someone you can talk to and bring in problems. The student counselor helps you get your courses. If you don't like your teacher, they don't help you enough. Everybody says, "Go to your counselor, go to your counselor, don't tell me." You go and you wind up getting something they want to give you. I went last year and haven't gone since. A couple of friends left school because they just don't have any interest and figure they would be better off if they got a job. A lot are just disgusted about school.

This year I have big classes—maybe 30 or 35. I like it because everybody gives their opinion. My history class is the only one that isn't. It's about 17. I don't like it because it's practically all boys and only about six or seven girls. The kids are sort of weird; they're different. They don't talk; they just sit there. You have to bang them in the head to make them say something!

Last year, I had one of the discipline officers for English. He was very strict. You knew he meant business so you just sat there and acted adult. Mostly it was like, Shakespeare, "Romeo and Juliet" and all that poetry. I think English should be required, but like the Shakespeare bit, no. You don't need that to go out and get a job, you don't have to know Shakespeare.

Tests make people study. I know that. First you read a chapter and then have a quiz on it, then you read four chapters and have quizzes on each one, and at the end of the fifth chapter

you have a big test on all those little chapters, and you learn it better. It's easier to study for each chapter than to cram it all in your head at once. A lot of kids don't study unless they have a test but if it was something I liked, like queens or that ancient stuff, I'd read the book. The Civil War isn't interesting to me so if we weren't having a test, I wouldn't read the book.

It wouldn't be good not to have grades because you wouldn't know what level you'd be in or anything. Like, they have the "star class"—that's what they call all those that's ahead, you know, advanced. They have harder books, harder words, and all that. They have three star classes and they have regular classes, and if they didn't have grades, it would hold the smarter ones back. And then if you put the ones that really can't do it in a smart class, then they'd just flunk. It's better to have them with their own grade level. I've never wanted to be in a star class because I just want to go with the regular speed.

I'm in a history class that's sort of like history, but it's really not. It's called sociology, and through the year we will get economics, geography, and something else. Right now, we're on sociology, it's about the world and crime, and all that. It's pretty good. I like that, but they should not put that under American history because a lot of kids don't know what it is and don't want to take it. Parts of the book are about the Negroes, you know, what you think about intermarriage; what it does; why shouldn't it be done. In the beginning, it was like heredity—black and brown eyes—and then it went into the different kinds of marriages, like the Chinese marrying a white girl, and what would come out. We have black and white in our class and the teacher always has discussions of what's going up and down, like if you are under 21 and you murder somebody, should you get juvenile court or a regular court. We discuss stuff like that and also about dope, though there's no big deal with the pushers at school. Everybody's too wrapped up in the racial bit to worry about that. I like that class.

### **William**

*William is a white student at a predominantly black school in a large midwestern city. He was a junior at the time of his interview and expected to go into the Armed Forces after gradu-*

tion. *He is in one of the lower academic tracks.*

Our school is primarily colored—there's about 80 percent of them and 20 percent of us, but in ROTC class, there's more white people percentagewise. See, if you take ROTC, you get out of gym and also get two and a half more credits than if you would be taking the other. The white kids don't play basketball or nothing because the colored kids take over, so the white join ROTC which is mostly drilling and it learns you how to become a soldier. They teach us about rifles and how to use them. When you get into the Army you become a private first class instead of a buck private. We only wear uniforms on Wednesdays, Fridays, and special days. The ribbons mean that I volunteered for detail service; the blue star means our colonel inspected us. We have a fancy drill book that tells about all kinds of drillings, and then we have the rifle manual which our sergeant calls "the Army prayer book".

It doesn't matter what grade you're in when you start ROTC as long as you are 14 years old. You have got to go for 4 years if you want it to help you in the Army and then you are one rank higher than anybody else. We meet every day for one period. Sometimes they make you come early in the morning before class and make you drill all day too, until maybe 5th or 6th hour. Then, we get excused from other classes, and when we have football games or teachers' meetings, we make sure there is no trouble. We stand in front of the gates and when people try to sneak in, we throw them out. Then once a semester we go out and shoot and have inspections in our uniforms. We get to win ribbons. We learn with M-14's, but when we go out shooting, we use 22's. The M-14's are real without the firing pins; they aren't allowed to bring those to school.

I'm going to transfer to aeromechanics school next year where they teach you to work on planes. You get your high school diploma and a technical diploma and then you can go into the air force, go to college, or become an engineer because you've got two diplomas. I don't think they have ROTC up there—that's one thing I'm sure going to miss. I like ROTC.

I go to my counselor every other day. After school if I don't have nothing to do, I go in and talk to him. He helps the kids.

He don't just sit there like some counselors. My friend's counselor says, "Come back another day." Mine wouldn't do that unless he has to go to a meeting. When I got kicked out of world history, he talked to me about it, and went down and got me back into it. And whenever I have a problem or something, like if I get in a fight or something like that, I go up to him and talk to him about it and he will help. He don't make the kids go to the principal. I like it better if you can talk to him; he can help you more.

I got an "E" in Spanish at first, but now that I'm doing the work I like it a lot. It's a lot of fun to learn a different language. Once in a while, my teacher keeps the same work up too long. You repeat after her and then you say it by yourself. It's kind of a good method of teaching. We have a test every other day and homework every day.

In English we read poems about Negro history—that's all we ever read about—I don't like poems; I like debating class or a teacher who gives you hard problems and keeps you busy. Once in a while in English class my teacher'll give us a story. We always read, that's all we ever do—that and take vocabulary tests, and she'll also give us five or six hundred word pages, poems that we have to write by hand—for handwriting. I don't like that either. I got bad handwriting, but I don't like to write and write and write. It doesn't help me. The only ones who ever complain are my English teachers because we write more in that class than in any other. She says, "Until we get a 'B' in handwriting we are going to keep on writing." If she gave us a 50 word essay a week I wouldn't mind it. But there's a couple of hundred words in that other assignment and it takes a long time to write it—usually about 2 days for me and then with the other homework, you can never get it all done. Almost every student in the class has to do handwriting. We've never complained to her about it because we thought, you know, that if we smart off, we'd get kicked out. This teacher would probably kick us out!

In world history, we have debates all the time. I like debates. We talk about racial problems, but most of the white kids are afraid to speak up because they think once they get outside of school, they'll get jumped if they say anything against the black

people. And this is true. There's too big a percentage of blacks in the school to really get your say-so in. Kids in our class mostly say that they don't think it's right for the colored people to beat up on white people. The colored people are asking for separate States—we debated that in world history and all the colored kids were against the idea. They said that if whites gave them separate States, it would be foolish because once we were divided, somebody else would come in and take over the country. They said they should learn to live together instead of fighting all the time. Then America would be a better place to live.

Once in a while our world history teacher brings up the subject of race and tries to put more Negro history into the schools. In most classes, though, they don't say nothing about it. I think they should bring it up in every class. Like our teacher brought up the Revolutionary War where they threw snowballs at the guards in Boston and the war started. Well, one of the first persons shot was a colored person. Negroes were as important as white people in American history. They should bring more of that up and have the Negroes be part of the people instead of being ashamed because they were slaves. Then maybe they wouldn't try so hard to beat white people up. If you bring too much colored—Negro—history into the school, white kids will stop listening and say, "Who wants to hear about some nigger?" And that's exactly what all the kids are already saying. They'll just sit there and mope around and won't listen. Tomorrow, we've got to see a play. They want all the white kids to go. They're making it a rule—I don't think it's fair. You just shouldn't have to see a play you don't want to see. They always have the colored plays because the colored people set them up. They got to pick the plays but they never have nothing about a famous white person or something like that. So I usually don't go to none of them.

# Racial Perceptions



## Mark

*Mark is a senior at a suburban school which was nearly all-white until recently, when a number of black students were bused from the inner-city. The school is in the northeastern part of the country. Mark, who is white, is an above-average student and expects to go to college next year.*

School life, by its very nature, is unnatural and integration is no more unnatural. . . . Education is not just pure facts; it is with people, for what good are facts going to do if you can't get along with people? Go off and be a hermit, a hermit with a Ph.D. or something! You can't do that, you have to be able to get along with people.

This is the second year of a busing program, but I don't think it's working out nearly as well as it should. The Negroes are just not able to mingle with the white students, or very little. When you go down to the cafeteria at lunch time, you see all the Negro students sitting together in one corner, and completely disassociated from the whites. Very rarely will there be a white student sitting with them. It's not hostility, but I think they have the feeling that they just don't quite belong with the white kids. The suburb is nicknamed, "Wealthy Town," and perhaps it is the feeling of economic and cultural differences that separates them. I don't know, but there is a feeling that they just don't quite belong with white students.

One problem I am having is that I had always spoken of them as "Negroes" because it seemed to me that "colored" was offensive and "black" was offensive. Riding home on the bus from a music convention the day King was assassinated, they said they didn't like being called "Negro", they liked "black". But I'm having trouble saying "black". It doesn't—it seems offensive. I don't know. I really don't know. I know that "Negro" was a word that the white man gave him and I get the impression that "black" is the name they have chosen for themselves. I don't know who gave them the name, "colored"; I don't know if they choose that or if the white man gave that to them. They didn't like that name; I never have, and I have always spoken of them as "Negroes". I don't like "Afro-Americans"; it sounds unnatural. I would like to say what they want me to call them

and I honestly don't know what to call them now.

I sort of wonder if they want this new identity. Maybe they don't want integration; maybe they want to keep their identity. This suburb is predominantly Jewish but there is also a Catholic and a small Protestant community. At the high school, you can't tell one from the other except hearing names like "Goldberg" and "Silverstein" and things like that. Other than that, they've lost their identity. I am Jewish, but I don't think of it when I am walking down the street. Though I have kept my Jewish faith, I have become integrated so that I am considered an American, not a Jew, and the same with the Catholic and the Protestant.

And I think that the Negro wants to keep his identity, just by the very fact that he doesn't look like the rest of us—it keeps him apart. By now wanting to be called "Afro-American", he's even further alienating himself from society, so I wonder if they really do want to be by themselves. Somebody's always coming out with, "Put them on an island. Put them on an island and let them stay there." I know that I'm not in favor of it, but I wonder if that is what they want. I can always go and say, "Well, some of my best friends are Negro," but I like them. One of my father's friends is a Negro psychiatrist and one of our first violinists at school is a Negro girl—her name is Pearl and she lives here; she is not bused in from the city. After Martin Luther King's assassination, she was scared to death of what was going to happen. She was afraid of the riot.

Several times in English we started to have discussions about the riots but we really never got far—not even in government class. Outside the English and social studies departments, the teachers couldn't have cared. I happened to be in math class this morning and the teacher was really pretty wishy-washy—she didn't have any feelings one way or the other. She just kind of said, "Well, it's a horrible thing," because everybody says, "It's a horrible thing." The French teacher said, "We have to go to language lab today," and the chemistry teacher had a big lecture planned. By the time it got to our history class I guess the topic had died.

There was a lot of tension. Everybody was just about ready for the school to blow up. After school that day, we had a silent



memorial service. What surprised me was that the first students to leave were the black students. They stayed maybe 10 minutes. Then, one by one, they left. I think it left some of us feeling a little ridiculous. Here he was their leader and they weren't going to stay, so why are the white people staying? Are they doing it just so they can look good? King was doing a good job; he was a man to save the world—he was the man to do it. I really felt he cared. I didn't want to leave; I don't know quite why and I don't think anybody said a word to me the whole time. It was sort of beautiful—it really was. And now, as soon as he is dead, Stokley Carmichael is saying, "Get out there and burn and loot." If black power is not violence, and if there are Stokley Carmichaels and H. Rap Browns, it must be that some Negroes want Stokley Carmichaels and H. Rap Browns. They are not forcing themselves on anybody. I don't quite know why this is what some Negroes want.

I think—I think the people doing the looting are financially red about the eye. I don't see it as senseless; I see that they hate their life. Like I can understand it's a hot summer night and a gang of kids get together and a policeman comes along and beats one of them up—but I doubt if anybody else knew why they rioted. I think the trouble with looting is that it's fun—it's fun to smash windows, take clothing and TV sets—but they are not doing it for civil rights. It's used as an alibi. If the Negro is going to burn, loot, and smash windows, why does he do it in his own neighborhood? Why does he destroy what is his? Someone living in a rich suburb is not going out and loot because he has everything that he wants. So why doesn't the Negro come out to the rich suburbs? It doesn't make sense to me. The stores that were looted belong to the white owners. You see, they hate the white man, but they really don't know why they hate him. They just want to hate, I think.

I was afraid of the rioting but I thought, "Maybe now we are going to have to do something because we are going to be afraid not to. The white man is getting too afraid not to do anything. He is not going to dare to just sit there and hope it's going to blow over." And it seems to have done something. I don't know; I have no evidence, but civil rights has been stirred up again. People were starting to forget and, like myself, getting a little

irritated with it, you know, "Here they go, looting again. They don't even care about civil rights." But the assassination sort of woke up everybody—sort of jabbed them in the arm.

### Norman

*Norman is a white student in a large city in the northwestern part of the country. He has been attending a nearly all-white school although he plans to transfer to a racially mixed one for his senior year. Norman hopes to major in psychology when he goes to college.*

One thing I really envy about the Negroes is that they have a sense of purpose: they know what they want. They are not, you know, frustrated about being a rebel without a cause; you know, having this feeling of energy but not knowing where to direct it. They really have something that they want and are fighting for it. I kind of envy them because I don't have anything like that. I go from one thing to another and nothing really seems to have any permanent relevance. I started thinking seriously that I really kind of felt guilty about, you know, it's easy to talk and say, "Oh, I'm not prejudiced" and "I'm open-minded," but it doesn't do anybody any good if it is just a theoretical discussion. The only way you can accomplish anything is really by doing something. I just kind of started feeling guilty. I've been brought up with the principles of being open-minded—that's really what makes me sick about my friends.

None of my friends seem very concerned and as a matter of fact, I am coming to the conclusion that the majority of them are pretty much racists. They're so bigoted and everything and I know that they are going to teach their kids to be exactly the same way. They may never meet a Negro through their whole life but they know they will hate them, and that they're dirty and don't keep their houses up. They just don't care. One kid asked, "Well, how come everybody gets so upset when Martin Luther King got shot when nobody cares when George Lincoln Rockwell is killed—it's just the same thing." People don't think about it; they don't want to think about it, so they just dismiss it from their minds. I get kind of a hopeless feeling about changing those kids' attitudes at school because it is obvious that these guys who feel this way don't want to talk about it.

They just—they don't want to think about it, you know. They just get uncomfortable and want to pass it off.

There is an awful lot that I haven't learned and there is no way that I can learn it by going to an all-white school or an almost all-white school. Though academically, it is probably the best school in the city, I feel like it is kind of socially stiff and narrow. The worse part about it is that it is so homogeneous. Probably the kids from the richest districts go there; I can think of maybe two or three Negroes who live in the area. I mean, I have grown up with middle class white kids, I went to grade school with them, and I really have to admit my ignorance about the racial problem. I am transferring to a school that has a big cross-section for my senior year. I know it's not going to be a natural setting because I am not a minority race in this country and I'm going to be a minority when I am at that school. It would be a good experience to know what it's like, but I don't want to stay a minority race because there is no point in making myself suffer any more than I have to.

It's probably more important for my school than for any other in the city to have programs that go down to the central area. Not so much with the attitude of helping the Negroes, just for learning what is going on. But they don't have anything like that—at least not that I've heard of. I realize that I can't bring the poor black out of his poverty; I realize it's a false idea but—I just kind of want to understand, you know. It is kind of scary to have all this black power around and have no idea exactly what they are advocating.

Black power is getting to mean that Negroes want a separate society and they don't want to take white standards; they want to keep their own culture separate—they talk of improving their own economic conditions, taking over for themselves, but not being absorbed into the white community. I read about Negroes during and after Reconstruction when they didn't think of themselves as being equal with whites because they had always been taught that they weren't equal. They didn't want to be black and if there was one thing they could have, it was to be white.

It seems to me, though, that the reason they would want to go to white schools is just being practical. They realize that if

black schools aren't as good, it is not because blacks aren't naturally as good; it's because, you know, they haven't had the opportunity to be educated as well and don't have as good facilities. It is not so much a matter of pride in being black or not; it is just being pragmatic.

Now it's their right if they don't want to be integrated. They sure are not giving the impression that they want to be. They don't say, "We want to," you know. I mean, they seem to be making a choice, taking a stand, "Forget it, white! We don't want your help. We are going to do this on our own. You don't understand us and you are not doing us any good. We don't want you as allies; we don't trust you and we don't like you." That's the big thing that seems to be the most frustrating—it may be a little out of desperation—well, not desperation, just that it hasn't worked the other way, I mean, they haven't been integrated. It seems to me that if they want to be integrated, they are not going to get it by saying that they don't want to do it.

I doubt very much if the majority of Negroes feel that way. Speeches by Rap Brown or someone would say, "Well, go and get a gun because you are going to need it this summer." I read it in the paper—though it is usually just parts of their speeches. I realize that they're taken out of context, but it seems to me that what he says is so emphatic, it kind of seems like violence—I mean, I am not saying that it is scary to me. I would much rather have things happen nonviolently, but I realize that non-violence really doesn't get too far.

## **Beth**

*Beth is a white student in a school located in a large city on the east coast. The student body is almost evenly divided between blacks and whites. Beth will graduate in June. She describes herself as an average student and plans to study nursing.*

I think the racial disorders are Communist-instigated. I mean, I think there are Communist attitudes in among the racism. There must be some kind of Communist power down deep in the heart of the black militants and the black people because I am very close to a couple of colored kids and—I like colored people—I do. I don't have anything against them, and I think they are equal to everybody.

I was talking to some colored kids—they don't want black power; they just want equal rights; they just want to have their pride restored. I had down-to-earth talks especially with one boy in my advisory and history classes. I'm very close to him and feel free to talk to him about the racial situations. He likes to talk to me about it, too. From what he says, it seems to me that there are so many colored people who don't know what to do that they follow militants or they follow the people that are making trouble just because they don't know what else to do and don't have enough background to stand up for what they believe. They don't know what they believe in exactly because it's so mixed up nowadays.

Colored kids say equality when they describe black power. I don't know exactly how the definition is set in my mind. "Power" is a very strong word and if you said "Black Power" right away, if you don't know what it means, you think that it's a force that is going to overpower you. That's what it sounds like, like an overtaking of the white people; but they want too much power, I think. White power is almost gone now. White power is slave holders, white racists, and white employers who wouldn't employ blacks. White power is segregation.

There's a definite gap now between the coloreds and the whites in this school. There is fear, especially on the white people's side. It's like an overwhelming feeling. Even if they try to overcome it, it's impossible because there's so much tension now. I can't understand what's happened because every teacher I know treats every kid equally. I mean, there's no discrimination at all. Maybe between a few ignorant whites, there's discrimination, but it's always been that way, and always will be that way. I can't see why the blacks want anything different than what they were having before—especially in this school. They never made an effort to change anything and there wasn't anything to be changed. I don't think there is a way to change things now. It's horrible to just think of it.

There was supposed to be a man talk in assembly—a black militant or something—and he stirred up the colored kids so much that they just shoved every white person out of the auditorium including the teachers. The whole school was crowded by whites and blacks, and everybody was screaming, and you

could hear the screams through the third floor. I had my history class during that time and we discussed it in there only half the kids weren't there to discuss it. I think there was two colored people and they were saying that it was nothing—it was nothing; just a couple of trouble-makers stirring up trouble. It now turns out that almost every colored person in this school has joined the other side. That's what I call it, "the other side"—it was like they were a traitor if they didn't go with them because they are blacks, so no matter what they were doing, whether it was wrong or right, they went with them anyhow.

And now the worst ones have made a decision and everybody follows the decision. It's crazy! They want 50 percent of the students in the school to be black and they want their own lunch period. If you ask me that sounds like segregation. My choir is now all-black—it never used to be that way; it used to be integrated, but now—I—don't like it that way because there's hard feelings for the whites. They are always talking about wanting to be equal and integrated, but that isn't integration. Whites feel they are being left out and a lot of blacks are saying, "You ought to be left out. We were left out for so long, now it's our chance to get ahead." It's kind of carried away. In my eyes, they are all equal, but I think black power is crazy.

Ever since then, there has been nothing but hate for both sides; like these people lost their senses. You used to be able to walk through the hall and pass colored people and think nothing of it, but now you feel like they're going to say something sarcastic to you. In fact, the other day I was walking in the girl's room and a colored girl comes behind me and says, "We're going to get you." I didn't even know her; I never did anything to her that would make her say that. I don't understand what they're doing. It's so hard to grasp all this.

We talked a lot about equality among the races in history class and what we thought would happen in the future, and it came out that to have colored people live peaceably with white people, there's going to have to be intermarriage between the two races. Of course, I don't think it's going to happen soon, but it's going to work out that way. You'll see more and more of it as the years go by. The white people would marry the colored people; the colored people would marry the white people

—I never thought about what the kids would turn out to be. We never talk about that.

The teacher used to ask what would I do if a colored guy asked me out. I have had that happen to me. Most white girls wouldn't accept a date right away by a black guy because he's colored. It's like, "You stand on your own side and I'll stand on my side: you marry blacks and I'll marry whites." A lot of colored kids I know have asked me out and I felt funny. I didn't know how to act. It wasn't that I had anything against them. I think I would have gone out with them if I wasn't worried about what people would think because there are a lot of colored kids in school that are so close to me that I don't even see their color. I think I'll change as time goes on, but that's why I turned down a few guys. I explained it to them. Most of the times, we both felt the same way about it. You can't just live your life in a fishbowl; you have to consider other people.

That history teacher made us care and everybody knew what was going on. Black students got to say what they wanted; he let them say anything they wanted to say; he didn't hold us back. It was a really good class because we found out how the colored people really felt and the colored people found out how the white people in that class felt. I think all teachers should encourage discussions like that because, you know, some white people hate colored people just because they're colored and some black people hate white people just because of their color. It shouldn't be that way.

I think the idea of having history is good because it brings a lot of people out of the dark, especially white people. Because, you know, the study impresses on whites as being the ones that hurt the colored people the most. I mean, because people just hate colored people because of their skin, that's not right. If they learn from the beginning how it really is, the colored people—no matter what they were taught from childhood—can learn to forget it and, you know, learn new things. That's the way it should be and it turns out better for both sides.

It's now getting to a point where I know they have equal opportunities, maybe not in the South as much as in the North, but it's growing rapidly. I don't think any colored person has any excuse for not having a good paying job or going to a good school

or getting a good education because they have as many, if not better, opportunities than white people have. I went to apply for a job this summer. I had to wait and see if a colored person applied first and if he wanted the same job, I would be turned down. That's crazy opportunity! And the situation is like that all over the country with all employers. It happened to me and I know in the city they do it all over the place.

Race doesn't make much difference any more—that's why I can't understand what's happening. Everybody I know used to get along. It's just like a volcano erupted. It never used to be like this—there never used to be a feeling of hate, I don't know what's happened.

### **Roxanne**

*Roxanne, an Anglo, is a junior at a nearly all-Anglo school in a suburban area outside a large city in the Southwest. The school has a substantial number of blacks and Mexican Americans. Roxanne is planning to graduate early so as to attend a neighboring teachers' college with her friends.*

I don't know all I should about the conditions in the schools on the other side of town. I do know that they have many problems because the kids are poor. They can't educate them as much. They can't require a person to buy a workbook because the child can't.

I don't think their education is—well, it's not offered like it is in the better schools because the district they live in can't pay the taxes, and without this you can't get the fine books and all the materials you need for a fine school. I wouldn't say it was exactly fair, but many of these people bring it on themselves. Their religion believes in having many kids. In a way this is good; in a way it is bad. If you can afford the kids, then by all means have them, you know. But if you can't then they shouldn't be brought into this world. Unwanted children are something else.

If a poor American really wants to do something about his education, I think he should try to talk to someone who can help him. He can go into town, look up councils, or talk to a school principal or a superintendent. If you tell him that you really want to learn, that you think you have the potential and all you

need is the chance, then I am sure he'll help you.

When you are born in America, you have a chance. But in so many countries like Japan and China, a person's life is not so important. In America a person's life is something, but if a person dies in Japan, that is just one more to be done away with—it's not too important. I feel that human life is valued. Although they sit around on their porches and—well, like the winos, are not too worried about anything but their drinks—the others, the children, even when they are getting into trouble, they want to live. The value of life is important. They don't have the high ideals or the high goals that the better cared for kids do, you know, those who are middle class or rich. Of course, they do dream of a fine car and money, but as far as becoming something—going to college, and being a leader of people—I don't think this is something that they look to. It's because of their environment. I don't think they are made to love people either; I don't think they get the feeling to love others because the others around them aren't too loveable.

Poverty for the people on the west side and those in Japan and China is different because, at least, the Americans are a free people. We have freedom of speech and freedom of action, as far as keeping in the law. Countries have to have laws, but they are free people—poor people do have this in their favor. I have nothing against colored people, but I feel that people should be given equal opportunities. What they do with these opportunities is up to the person. They claim they are being treated unfair; that they couldn't get a job every place they went. And I said, "Well I've tried to get lots of jobs and couldn't, you know, because I wasn't qualified." That was the thing I tried to get across to them. It's not because you're black.

There are about six colored people in my English class and I noticed that when we write papers, they always end up with something to do with black power or the difference between white people and the colored, the Negro. Some things don't even pertain to this, but they find a way of bringing it out. When school first began, we wrote a paper on ourselves—what we like and don't like—and the colored boy told about how he doesn't like the mistreatment with the Negro. Then we wrote a character sketch, five out of the six in our room wrote on Martin Luther

King. When black power and demands for equal rights started, I thought it was right. In a way, they had a legitimate complaint—now, I don't. I think they want superior rights, not equal rights.

One of my best friends in the band is a colored boy. He's a nut. I really like him. We argue all the time about equal rights and civil rights. Well, I wouldn't say that we argue, we debate it. He will tell me what he thinks and I usually define the white people. I didn't before. I agreed to a lot of things he said, but it seems that the colored person now has a closed mind. What they feel or what their leaders say is what they believe. They do not look for themselves to see what's going on. They have a closed mind to other people, "Don't confuse me with facts, my mind is made up." They don't welcome suggestions or other people's opinions.

Larry's mind is made up. I don't think I can ever change him. I thought I might have a chance, but he has his opinions and won't change them under any circumstance. Now, I believe that a person should stand up for his rights and have principles; by this I mean moral principles—that's good—but not having an open mind is not good. Oh, he says that Negroes are treated inferior. He says that they are not given a chance. He says this and he believes this, and nobody is going to change his mind. In many cases, I think that the Negro has a better chance at getting a job than a white person. If there were discrimination, our city would have riots. We would have all sorts of defiance against the law and we haven't. There hasn't been much trouble with racial problems and our school doesn't seem to have many either.

### **Kathy**

*Kathy attends a nearly all-white suburban school outside a medium-sized southern city. She is white. Kathy has been an honors student all through school and after graduation in June, plans to spend a year in Europe as an exchange student with a church-related program before beginning college.*

I've got a good friend who's a Negro, his name is Larry. He's a top basketball player and he mixes well with the students. He's just one of us. Larry's always the center of attention.

Everybody likes Larry. He's real nice and the boys don't mind rooming with him, you know, when they're on basketball trips. Larry's not a top-notch student—he's about the average class, but he gets along real fine. Larry's kind of disturbed to see white people and colored people fighting and arguing because he has so many good white friends. If more people were like Larry we wouldn't have any trouble at all.

I don't think it's really important to have Negroes in the school, but if they had to be there, I wouldn't want it to be just half-white and half-Negro, you know—I'd want them to just gradually build up in the school. Most of the Negro students stick together. They're always in their little bunch and in class they'll kind of veer away. I think if they had—if they liked people, they'd get to know people. In class, you know, they kind of stick to themselves. Just seeing them in the hall, they're not the kind of people—you know, there are a lot of "all American" Negroes that you'd really enjoy knowing, but these don't seem like the top-notch students, except for Larry and another fellow in the band.

Riots are senseless to me. I think quiet, intelligent talk will do twice as much as a riot, but they get so emotional about it and end up yelling. When Martin Luther King was killed we talked till we were blue in the face. It was just on everybody's mind. Some people thought that it was good that he had died. Before he was even shot, some people said, "Oh, I wish somebody would shoot him." But then he really was shot and they were kind of shaken up because of all the riots. He's played up to be such a peace-lover—Nobel Prize winner and everything—but everywhere he's gone there's been a riot. Nothing was going wrong in Memphis until the union stepped in and King and Abernathy came down. They kind of told them that, "You ought to be mad; you ought to get riled up," and the Negroes did. They didn't know what was going on.

We've talked in church for the last three Sundays straight on the racial situation. We talked about what we can do to help end the bitterness, and so we're planning on having some colored Sunday school come visit us and talk it over with them, you know, just have an open session and find out how they feel about what's been going on.

## Virginia

*Virginia is a sophomore in a small city on the west coast. She is Mexican American. Blacks and Mexican Americans at her school comprise about 11 percent of the total student population. Virginia wants to become a librarian.*

I have some friends that are colored. I never had anything against them before, but sometimes they bother me, you know. I like them all right as long as they leave you alone and talk to you fine. Like, well, I had gone to places and I was with my friends and we were just fooling around or something and they would start following us everywhere we went—I don't know, I just don't like that.

After Martin Luther King was shot they all got together on the Senior patio because it was a white who had killed him. They were pretty mad at the whites. After Kennedy was shot, we sat out there too and they said, "Why should we have to sit with the whites?", and we said, "We aren't asking you. If you want to sit with us, you can. Why don't we become as one? That is what Kennedy always wanted." They said, "Well, why didn't you guys come and sit with us?" We said, "We tried, but you guys said no." So, you know, it works both ways. There are some black who are prejudiced against whites. I never thought of it that way before until this past year, you know, that coloreds could ever be prejudiced against whites, but the coloreds were pretty mad after King was shot and then somebody said, "It's a man against man killing." They said, "Remember it was a white that killed a black, and it was a white that killed Kennedy, so it is not man against man. It is white against white; not white against black."

Not all the blacks are for this racial rioting and the burning of buildings and everything. Some of them are good, but this one crowd, they are getting a group together to get a riot up. They say, "Well, I will do it because you will." They argue together too. I can't figure out why they burn. I mean, they've got homes—I mean, maybe their house will be burned. They are just causing more trouble; they are getting themselves killed, the whites are getting killed, and there is not going to be much left. Maybe some of the reason they do this is because

they say, "Well, you guys want your rights, you don't think we are as good as you," and so they show that they are good and that they can do what they want and not get caught. There is more to it, I know there is, but I really don't know why.

We were talking about the black students yesterday. They feel they shouldn't be in school on time. Not all of them have a reason, they are just late because they want to be late. They really don't care if they are on top or what kind of grades they get because they have to go to Vietnam and fight the war, and then they come back here and are not treated the same. So all they do is come to school and somehow get into discussion talking about black and whites and the history of the blacks. The blacks don't want to learn about themselves. They know about their past history. Who wants to learn about his own nationality, I mean race, rather than learn a subject?

There are quite a few Mexican kids, but only about 12 colored kids and you find that a lot of white kids won't associate with them. Now, I will, but no matter what color you are, you step on me, I am going to step right back. If you treat me good, I will treat you good. I am not prejudiced or anything like that—that's another thinking that is kind of bad with the school; a lot of kids think, "Well, gee, I am lighter than you, so I won't say hello. You say hello to me first. I am better than you; I am superior because I am white." I don't dig on that. I don't think anybody's any better than anyone. When God made men, he made them all equal; if somebody came out a little darker, it's not the kid's fault. We are made the same, but only there is a different color. Their lips may be bigger or their noses wider, but they can't help it, I mean, that's how they were born. Some Negroes are mixed, white and black—I don't know what they do. I really don't. I think it is worse for them in a way, I don't know. Like when it comes time for a girl to get married, who is she going to go with, a black or a white? It's really a big mess.

My future mother-in-law doesn't like me because of my nationality. It makes me feel like some kind of creep from another world! You can't please somebody that thinks they are superior to you, you know, you are never good enough. Like, she's Irish and she's white—she is milk-white. She doesn't like me because I am Mexican, Filipino, and Spanish—you just can't

judge a person by color.

The coloreds are tired of the whites treating them the way they do. They want equal rights and white people treat them dirty. I think they treat them really rotten. They are not fair to them just because they are darker. Down South, they have separate bathrooms and separate bus stations and separate drinking fountains and stuff like that—I don't think that's fair. I mean, how would like it if someone made you sit on the other side of the bus or made you drink out of a separate water fountain? No white person would stand for it. I think the Negroes are going to just say, "Well, you guys ain't going to do something, so we are going to do something about it ourselves." But I also think that that's the wrong attitude to take.

They should find one man and tell that man what they want and let him go about getting it, but peacefully. I don't think that man was Dr. King; I don't think his people really believed in him that much. A lot of Negroes felt, "Well, if we follow him he has a good chance of getting into a riot." Because you know, very often a lot of his "peace marches" turned into riots. It wasn't that his people were following him, but they just felt that, "If we follow him, well, something is going to give, or if we start a little trouble, here is a chance for a riot." They think they gain recognition by it, but they are only hurting themselves really, because—I think the Negro kind of wants sympathy, that's what the white people might classify it as, "sympathy", but really he just wants equal rights; he wants to be able to look for a job and if he qualifies, to get the job—I think that's part of it, too. Still, they should choose just one man or one woman and have that person go up to Congress and tell Congress, "This is what we want. You don't want us to protest, you don't want us to riot, but this is what we want."

Protests are good in a way and bad in a way. If blacks don't get their way, they are going to keep on burning. They are getting recognition by protesting and all. I think that they should want to help themselves. If I was a Negro, I would feel, "Well, look, they ain't paying any attention to me. If I just sit here, keep my mouth shut, and don't say what I want, I won't get it. Maybe if I go out there and march up and down, they will say, 'Well, these people want something' ". I don't think white people

take time to really find out what the Negro wants. If the Negro leaders and the white leaders sat down and discussed it, maybe something would get worked out. I guess when you get mad enough, and want something bad enough, you are going to get it; and no matter how you are going to do it, you are going to get it. If I were a Negro and I didn't have equal rights, I would end up protesting, but, also, I don't think there is anything that would make me very mad.

In another way, it is still wrong what they are doing—rioting, you know. If white people wanted something, they wouldn't go protest and all this stuff. There is a lot of poor whites too, but you don't see them out really protesting and rioting. The colored people think, "I am darker than you, you have to treat me better, you have to feel sorry for me." They want a lot of sympathy and a lot of free handouts—I don't think that is right either. If you want to be treated equal, go out and work equal. Some of them do want jobs and want to work for themselves. Maybe the young people say they want charity but the older people want to support their families—and they have large families! I mean, I am not prejudiced or anything but sometimes, some of them are no good.

I don't like it if a colored person is better qualified than a white, and they give the job to the white—I don't think that is fair. If a man or a woman is qualified, give him the job. Now that's what I call "equal rights". The Negro wants everything that a white wants in life: happiness, peace, that's what I want in life—just happiness and peace. No more killing; no more prejudice; everybody able to get along. I feel, though, that this will never happen.

## Edgar

*Edgar attends an all-Mexican American school in a large city in the Southwest. He is a senior. At the time of the interview, he was uncertain what he would do after graduation although he was considering applying to a local community college.*

I haven't known that many Anglos. Those in my community is all Mexicanos. If they would blindfold you and throw you in there, you would think you are in Mexico, aside from the signs and all that.

Where I come from, everybody speaks Spanish, and that's all you know, Spanish. And when you are 6 years old, all of a sudden they put you into this Anglo school, and it's English right away—nobody knows how to speak English. Then they try to counteract this by forbidding you to speak Spanish. Spanish is bad, you know, they keep drilling this into you: "Spanish is bad, Spanish is bad." When I was little, I had the idea that Spanish was a dirty language and I felt kind of rotten.

You get so you don't identify. Who am I, you know. Am I an American? No, I'm not. I am a Mexican American. Now, I don't actually know what to call myself because I hate the title, "Mexican American" while I am talking to my friends. When they say "Americano" they mean Anglo but look at me, I am brown—I am not an Americano. And they say, "But Americano means American," so everybody to them in America means an Anglo. There has got to be a problem somewhere when something as simple or as important as what you are, and you don't know. I think the problem is in the schools because they don't teach you anything.

I got this thing. I am as brave as a lion as long as I am not near Anglos. If I hadn't seen any Anglos for a long time and if right away I get thrown in with a bunch of them, you know, I feel kind of funny. I feel alone—all by myself. I feel inferior. And when I mix with Negroes, I can't—I will talk with them, the whole bit, but there is always this little thing about, you know, I feel uncomfortable. I haven't been used to it, that's why. I hang around with nothing but Mexicanos and when you throw in this colored guy, I don't know—he is different. He is not the same type that I am used to dealing with, see? You have to have schools with Mexicanos, Anglos, and Negroes and whatever the city is made out of, so everybody can see how everybody is.

They tell me I could have gone to any school in the city but what would I be doing in an all-Anglo school, you know. I couldn't have gone to any school. I couldn't have gone to an all-Anglo school because I wouldn't have been able to take that workload. I would have flunked like that and my best bet was to stay around the neighborhood because I could find an easy school. The standards aren't as high. Most of the kids all feel like, "I



can't do it." They have been taught to feel like this.

I remember phrases from my history book like, "Santa Anna knew that he was dealing with a superior class of men." It is phrases like that stay in my mind; they stay on the surface, but they keep drilling this junk in your heads until it gets to your subconscious. "Santa Anna knew that he was dealing with a superior kind of man; superior kind of race." And, "He knew that they were too much for him" or, "To the south of our border is a country inhabited by people who like siestas and who take life generally at a very easy pace. This sleepy atmosphere induces a laziness." In other words, God bless the lazy bums. They never will make anything of themselves! What am I— inferior or something?

And I remember the geography book we had in that history class. We got to this town in the United States and it said: "In the city, in the plaza area to the West Side lived many Mexicans." So here is a book that has been approved by the State; they use it all over the place and it comes out with a crazy deal like, "Where many Mexicans live." Am I a Mexican or an American or a Mexican American or a Chicano or what? In the book it says in black and white, "Where many Mexicans live." So I was calling me Mexican. And, you know, what really burned me up was that a lot of people don't mind it any more. They are getting used to it; they are being indoctrinated with this; they don't care any more. They are 6, 7, 8, years old when they start school and can be molded like clay. You tell them, "Man, you are a little bit too dumb," so they think, "Oh, I am dumb." They believe what you tell them. Some of this junk has been going on for so long and is so rotten that they are getting used to being treated like animals.

Some of those teachers who've got names like "Hernandez" are not Mexicans any more. They hate themselves, I think; self-hate, you know. Like, they don't want to be identified with a Mexican, "Don't brand me that." What's so wrong about being a Mexican? Students are coming out like that. The top students are really getting pressure from the teachers not to identify with friends on the West Side; that the only way to get anywhere is to leave the group entirely. Like, you know, become a pharmacist and move out. Forget the group—that's the only way to

get ahead. Then there is the rest. They might not go to college, but they want to make a decent living, yet they retain this identity of being a Mexican. Then, there is the group at the bottom that says, "Oh, I want a beer," and "Don't bother me with all that junk,"—they don't give a hell either way. They are frustrated; they don't think they have a chance. I don't blame them, you know. They come out of real rotten families and real rotten environment, and then they get into trouble and all this Mickey Mouse junk in school about their history, they don't have anything to be proud of. There is always a restaurant where you can wash dishes. I mean, I don't care what they tell me, I go and apply at some department store where there's an opening, an Anglo comes, he is going to get the job. I know that. It's weird. If they need a stockboy somewhere in the back, you know, they might take me, but working with the people up front—it will be an Anglo. People around here feel that it more or less ought to be like that. They are used to it.

The Mexicano has been kind of slow, but once we get the ball going, it isn't going to stop until we get what we want. And a lot of them are waking up saying, "Wait a minute!" I just hope that we get it through the proper channels because—I mean, what I learned out of trying to go through the proper channels is that you can't get anything done. There is more than one way to skin a cat. This town is getting to a point where it's boiling. If the pressure is great enough, they have to change. But when you get that much pressure, it is usually going to be violence. What are people yelling and screaming for—nothing but their rights. All they are asking for is what is supposed to be theirs. I hate to say this, but I don't think that nonviolence is going to work.

No Government is strong enough to suppress the whole country. When you have a Government that is not catering to the wishes of the people it should be straightened out. There always has to be a little trouble. It's good, because if nobody said anything, if nobody asked any questions, if nobody did anything, well what would you have? A state of robots. And no Government is perfect. So actually, when you have a riot it means that there is a problem and people are interested in trying to solve it.

History repeats itself. You have a riot, you have a lot of

burning, you know, national attention is focused upon the problems and everybody wants it solved. Look at King: marching, voter registration drives. I think he was effective when he died; when they shot him that really brought him out. It is kind of a rotten thing to say but here he is nonviolence, you know, and he is shot in the head.

When they were burning, a lot of people used to say, "Well, I was with the Negro all the way—before he got nonviolent." Which means, you know, "I was with the Negro while he was washing my car, or while he was fixing breakfast. I was with him 100 percent then, but when he started doing something about it. . . ." It's kind of hard. What if he doesn't want to give in to violence; what's next? We tried it one way; all our lives we have been nonviolent. We haven't fought; there haven't been that many riots; there haven't been many burnings. We have tried it their way; we are going to try violence.

This country is so mixed up—I mean, you don't have any choice. Either people start practicing what they preach or this country is going to go up in flames. A revolution, that's what you have if you start bringing in the Army. And how many Mexicans are in the Army? How many Negroes? Are they going to be killing their own? Boy, either it works or that's it for the United States. There are no two ways about it.

It is certainly too late for my parents, it might be too late for me, but maybe it's not too late for my kids. I am a sad case right here. I know I could have been somebody. I mean, not that I am not going to be anybody. I know and I don't care who tells me that I didn't have an equal chance with some Bobby Smith or Sally Jones somewhere else. I didn't have those same chances. And I will die with one of those fire bombs in my hand or with a rifle atop a building before I let my kid go through the same junk that I did. It sounds scared to some people, but the Anglos fought in World War I and all that because of what they believed. They made the mistake to teach me to believe almost the same stuff: fight for what's right and for what's good. So I will fight. I will fight anybody. And actually if I do this, I feel I will be making America strong because I am practicing what I have been taught, you know, "the American ideas." So if I were not to do anything, then I would actually be a very

poor American and I would be helping to destroy it. It sounds corny and stupid, but how many people would make a statement like, "I love America?" I do love America. I know that sounds stupid but I love this country and I think it is a great place to live in. It's man's only hope, you know.

America is going to have to straighten out. There are no two ways about it. This country can't go on like this. The schools fail and then the Government wastes more money on all those other training programs. If they straighten out the schools and teach us our culture, our heritage, our role in American life and start treating us as we are, Mexicanos—I mean Americans. That's America's hope as far as I am concerned. If [that] fails, we all go down the drain.

## Vernon

*Vernon, a sophomore, has been attending a nearly all-white school in a southern medium-sized city for 2 years. He takes academic courses and considers himself a fairly good student. Vernon is black.*

The reason I decided to go to a white school was because I had gone to another school the year before and I had a lot of trouble with the teachers and with students in higher grades, and I got into fights all the time. There were only two schools in my district close to me, so I chose the better of the two. The white school has been around longer; it has a longer history, more funds are put into it, and they have the best teachers because the superintendent attended that school and naturally he would want it to be the best in the county. And the school is the best in the county.

This school has about 1,600 and only 13 are Negro. It seems like we ought to have a lot of problems, but we don't. More Negroes ought to come, but they don't want to. A lot of them live close to the school, within walking distance, but they don't want to go, and I can't understand why. Maybe they think they can't compete or are afraid, or just don't want to be around white students.

When I first attended I felt funny around the people; I felt out of place, but in time it got better I wanted to play football,

and I entered when I was a freshman. When I first got on the football team, a lot of the guys wouldn't talk to me, and they acted as if they were scared of me.

I went to the principal about one guy who thought he was tough because I didn't want to get into a fight. The principal told me not to worry, that things would be better and that people had to learn how to adjust. I thought everything would come out all right, but in every class the people wouldn't talk to me. I was quiet in the class and wouldn't say much. All I did was get my lesson. I made the honor roll just about every 6 weeks the first year.

I had two fights that year. The first one was with a guy 2 years older than I was. Every day he call[ed] me names, so one day I fought him in the cafeteria. We didn't fight long; we just exchanged a few licks. A teacher took us to the office and we talked about it. The principal made me promise that I'd never get into a fight again, so I had to promise.

Everything was pretty good and I was adjusting; I had several friends. Most of my friends were on the football team, and everybody was getting along all right. I began talking to some of the girls—friendly conversation. They were the most shy at first. And some guy wanted to fight me. I didn't fight; I backed down, because I remembered the promise I made. But he kept after me every day, so I just had to fight him. We fought, and I beat him up one time. I went to the office on my own. I explained to the principal why I couldn't avoid the fight, and he told me I had to learn to adjust. He told me they would learn.

I didn't think the principal was prejudiced, but I thought he was going slower than he should have been going while not being as direct with the students as he should have been. He would not directly tell them that they shouldn't be prejudiced against Negroes or anything like that. He just beat around the bush. My second year was a little bit better. My relations with the students were better, and I began to talk in class with them hard as I did when I was a freshman, so my grades weren't as high but still, I wasn't failing anything. At the beginning of the year I went to football camp and all the new guys coming on the varsity team have to go through a special initiation. I was the only Negro on the team, and so I thought everybody

was going to be after me, but they weren't that much, but I did have to take something from them like everyone else. At the football camp I learned that they played a lot and that they always didn't mean what they said. If they called you "a nigger" or something like this, it wasn't bad all the time. There's a lot of guys on the football team now that call me "nigger", but I don't get mad at them; I just call them "honky" or something. It's just an exchange of words, nothing more.

Most of the Negro students don't feel the way I do about white students because they haven't come into contact with them. It took the football team at camp to make me realize that they were only kidding about a lot of the things they were doing. A lot of my white friends are not friends with the other Negro students because the other Negro students object to them saying what they consider a bad word once in a while.

I think it's wrong for you to have a friend who would be afraid to say a bad word such as "nigger" around you. A lot of my friends who never say it, sometimes it will slip out and they'll say, "Excuse me; I'm sorry; don't pay any attention." And I say, "It's all right; it doesn't bother me." That's the way it works out, but some of the other students, if they hear it, immediately they'll get all fired up and they're ready to fight and start an argument or something. But I've learned to go the other way, and it's really not as big a problem as people think it is, in my opinion. If people all learn how to get along with each other and learn to give a little and take a little, then everything will come out all right.

Some of the Negro students are prejudiced—I'm prejudiced, in a way, myself—but they aren't as prejudiced as some of the white students that I know. But still everything works out all right, it works out fine. I don't think that prejudice keeps them from getting their lessons. I think they have other reasons that they don't get it, but most of them do get their lessons. Most of the Negro students are doing pretty well. It's not as hard as a lot of white people make it appear. A lot of them say that Negroes can't come to white schools and keep up with white students, but I know this is wrong, because at the school I went to, I wasn't always the smartest in my class, but I was at the top and when I came here, I found out that I could be at the top of

the class if I really wanted to. A lot of other Negro students were just like I was, they weren't so smart at the other schools, but still they do just as well at a white school, and one of the best white schools. I don't think that the learning capacity is any different between the students. You have real smart on both sides, but just saying a person is dumb because he's a Negro is just somebody's way of expressing his racism.

Last year when we had assemblies and things like that the Negro students always got together and sat together, but everyone is adjusting now, and they don't look for each other. They have other friends to go to, and that's making a big difference. In the lunchroom we used to sit together. We still sit together sometimes, but not all the time. We don't go around trying to find each other and trying to make Negroes the only ones we'll sit with, but we have other friends to sit with and eat with.

The white students have accepted us more, and we talk more freely with them. For example, last year when I was a freshman, there was a girl in my homeroom who sat beside me in the auditorium in assembly. She never would sit there because she didn't want to sit beside me. I thought it was funny, but this year she's a real good friend of mine, and we're talking and discussing things. She's changed in a year, and I have, too, toward the opposite race.

There's still one place where I come in contact with people that are afraid of Negroes. That's on the school bus. I haven't had any classes or made friends with any of the students on the school bus, and no one else has. They seem reluctant toward us, and on the bus they won't sit with us. We're not begging them to sit with us, but if there's a seat and a Negro is in it, they won't take it. They'll stand up before they'll take it, and I turn around and laugh at them. Last year when I was a freshman, they threw paper at us because we sat near the front. We took it last year because the bus driver told us he didn't want any trouble on his bus, but this year I've adjusted to the students enough to feel that the people on the bus ought to adjust also. They haven't thrown any paper this year, and if they do, I'd probably get up and hit one of them.

It is wrong to keep Negro history out of the books. Sometimes I tell the white students things that the Negro has accom-

plished and they don't believe me. But I bring proof to them and tell them all the wrong the people are doing by not including Negro history in the history courses. I'm not taking any history this year, but last year I took civics—the study of government—and the only Negro we ran across the whole year was Booker T. Washington. He was a smart man, but there are a lot of people more important than he was that have done things and don't get recognition for it.

There's only one time that I have discussed prejudice with a teacher, and that was in my English class. We were studying about clear thinking and writing, and forming opinions. We got to the part about prejudice and forming prejudiced opinions and biased opinions. The teacher told me to lead the class in discussion. We had a very good debate on George Wallace and a lot of Negro leaders and segregationists. Some of the students, I found, were more conservative than I thought they were, but my teacher seemed to be more liberal than I thought he was.

I am the only Negro at school that's in the French Club. The rest of them aren't in clubs. I tried to join one club, but I wasn't accepted; I think it was because I'm a Negro, because there were a lot of guys who had much lower averages than I did who got into the club. I'm not bitter about it. I wasn't really anxious about joining it. There's always going to be somebody prejudiced.

There are some Negro instructors, but they are confined to the freshman class because the administration feels that all the students are inclined to be prejudiced against them. I think that they are wrong in this approach because anyone can adjust in time because I did it and a lot of my friends did it. A lot of my friends were as prejudiced as they could be before I knew them, but now they aren't because I made friends with them.

## **Renee**

*Renee is a black student in her senior year at a predominantly white school located in a large city in the eastern part of the country. She has been taking academic and vocational courses and wants to go to college.*

We have a good time at school, we have a pretty good time. Some of the students are prejudiced and they don't want to be

bothered with you, but others they'd give you their right arm, they were just that good friends. Like when I had left my lunch money at home or something, they would actually loan me money. A lot of the white kids would do it and some of them wouldn't. You know they felt they shouldn't be associated with colored, and they come over there and sit at the table and eat lunch with you just as big and bad. And when they get to talking about colored, they'd rather not say anything than say something against anybody's rights.

They usually keep an even number of colored kids in each class. Like my gym class there are four of us—there were four, one girl transferred, so that makes three. In my Latin class there are two of us. In my Algebra II class there are four of us. They have even numbers so, you know, everybody has a companion. Maybe it's just a coincidence, but that seems like an awful lot of coincidences to me.

For lunch all of us go out to the Waffle Shop, colored kids and white kids, all of us just like a little drove, a couple of colored kids spotted in like pepper and salt. It's not that they'll be trying to do everything for you, but you know, they just look at you as one of them. It doesn't make any difference to them. One colored boy was sitting there drinking chocolate milk, and this white girl came up beside him and said, "That's why you're colored now, you drink too much chocolate milk." See, little things like that, and she gave him a carton of white milk. I don't see anything to get upset about that, it's all in fun. If you can't take that, you don't need to be up there, I don't care what anybody says. A lot of kids feel that the white students are prejudiced, but I don't. Maybe because I can get along with them, and maybe it's because they like me or I like them or something like that, but I never really had any problems with any white persons except for the teachers.

After school everybody will be rushing home, and the way I come home, it's mostly colored kids, because white students live out the other way and all the colored kids come through downtown. There are about three kids up there that don't live out this way.

This white boy had a party over the weekend that was a down-right party. We had a good time. I went. They're forever

having parties and they wouldn't dream of having a party without us being there, because they always call us the soul-timers. We had the phone numbers of our homes up on the bulletin board, and a lot of students look up there and call us. I couldn't invite everybody out, living in an apartment, but we'd be going to so many parties, you don't have time to have any at your home, really. They don't worry about that. A lot of them come out there after school if they're going shopping. Practically all my friends have been out there where I live, and some of them have met both of my parents or know either my mother or my father. Practically everybody knows my father because he's forever up at that school straightening out messes.

That's why a lot of the colored kids have a hard time to go now, their parents don't come up to the school and show any interest. Sometimes my parents show too much, but then, too much is better than not enough.

When Martin Luther King was shot we went to school that Friday and these kids from another school called some students and said that they were coming up there that day and they wanted all colored students to boycott classes. If they didn't boycott class, they were going to come up to school and start rioting. So everybody was running around when they got to school and found this out. All the teachers left. We actually sat in classes with no teachers, because the teachers were afraid. The white students actually left school and they didn't care whether they got marked or cut in school or what, they left. And the others, they jammed the phone booth telling their parents to call the school to let them go home. By the time they had dismissed school that day, there wasn't anybody at school.

I have gone to so many different types of schools. When I went to this school there were about 25 colored kids in the whole school, and I was one of the 25. It didn't bother me. My junior high was mostly Negro. Whether the school is segregated, it doesn't make me any difference, so long as—if its predominantly white—they don't try to rub it in that I'm colored.

### **Dan**

*Dan, a black student, is a junior who attends a school in a large city in the Midwest. The school's enrollment is predominantly*

*white. Dan is an above average student and plans to become an electrical engineer.*

It's a pretty nice school. It's not that old, I suppose it's about 10 years old. I think all the kids that are there seem to be pretty efficient and they're not prejudiced in any way, at least as far as I've encountered. There aren't any teachers that say, "I won't call on him because he's a Negro." They won't do that. In fact they tend to call on me more, because I raise my hand all the time.

We could have more Negro teachers over there, not because the white teachers are prejudiced or anything, but it'd just probably make the atmosphere maybe a little more relaxed, although I feel right now the atmosphere seems to be relaxed.

The church I go to is all-white. When I first went to it, I think we were about the only Negro family in the whole church. The only time that we had any trouble was when that one lady, and she was really an old lady, said, "Why don't you colored folks go to another church?" We just said that this was our church just as well as her church. Since then my whole family's been taken as members of the church.

We can date white girls, too. The school officials don't mind at all. In fact, the only time that you might run into a problem is when the parents don't care for it. In one case I know, a boy was going with a white girl and the principal called the parents to let them know about this. I don't know how necessary it was, but they just might have been prejudiced. Now, I believe this principal is very fair and he's definitely, in my opinion, not prejudiced at all.

## **Celestine**

*Celestine attends a school with a racial composition of equal numbers of black and white students. The school is located in a medium-sized city on the west coast. Celestine, a black student, is a senior and plans to go to college in the fall.*

Negroes don't feel a part of the school. When our school is in the newspaper, you never see a Negro. In fact, a lot of people say that it is an all-white school.

Comparing my freshman year with my senior year, I don't

seem like the same person. I thought all white men are good; I looked up to a white person and [thought] they were better than I was. I always tried to prove myself better than a white person, but I always thought they were smarter than I was; I guess they grow up in an environment where they just naturally have to be smart. Then, again, I always thought that Negroes were lower than they should be. I'm still mixed up, and I was really mixed up then.

I was reading up on a small portion of Negro history. It's just as much a part of history as government is. I found out that a lot of slaves invented things and the white man took it away from them because a slave wasn't allowed to invent things like that. I didn't know that this was true. You should see how they sold the people; it's like they were dogs.

It's not civil rights that we are striving for, it's human rights. Civil rights—I don't know how that ever got into the situation, because we are humans, and just to think about civil rights, what does that really mean? You just think about civil rights because you are human and it is right to do this; to go in and sit in the front of the bus or in the back of the bus. Civil rights has nothing to do with it. I never realized that until I went to a black student conference. It was really beautiful and you talk about Negroes pulling together—correction, black people really pulling together. While I was up there, I really felt like I was someone in this world with something to do. And the black men have more respect for the black women, and the women were so sweet and nice, and everyone was together.

I used to think that the Black Panthers were really bad and that all they thought about was rioting and things like that. Well, I got to meet two or three of them and they were really intelligent. They gave a play, a Negro play, about two Negro men and a white man who were in jail, and the difference in how they treat them and everything. The Negro guy got teed off because he couldn't get out of jail and he said, "Everything that I am today, you made me. I got it all from you." And just to think back and think about the white man—he has taught hate. To kill and steal, and things like this, where do we get this all from? When the white man first came over here, he brought disease—colds, chickenpox—to the Indians.

As far as the skin problem is concerned, they're always trying to get dark like we are, maybe not as dark as we are. We always thought that the light skin was the best skin because the white man sets these standards.

Some Negroes really think they have bad hair, but really it's not bad hair, because if you take a white person's hair, they can't put a hot comb in there and press it out like we do they can't make it frizz all up and things like that, so who's to say who had the worse hair and who has the best hair. When the boys came out with this processed hair—Whew! Have I ever! That was the worst thing that could have ever happened to a Negro. Now that they have the naturals out, the Negro guys—the black guys—the Negro guys really look tough to me. It looks a lot better than this process stuff. And why do they do this? Because the white man set the standard that the straight hair is the best. My sister and I were debating this point straight hair and naturals for the Negro girls, and she said, "You're just saying that the straight hair looks better because the white man set the standard. If you weren't raised in a white America and you were used to tangled hair, you wouldn't think that straight hair was the best." And I said, "Okay, what you said is right, but you said 'if'. But I was raised in this white man's world and I do think that straight hair, on some people, looks better; and I think that the naturals, on some people, look better. When I see a girl with a natural and a girl with straight hair, and the girl in the natural looks worse, I'm not going to lie. To me, she looks bad, and the girl with the straight hair, if she looks better, she looks better. And there's no way in the world that you can tell me differently, unless my environment is going to be around black people with natural hair for the next 50 centuries."

But black people have already stated that blackness is a state of mind; you don't have to wear a natural to be black. You don't have to wear raggedy clothes to be black. You don't have to wear black to be black. It's how you feel. Some people aren't as militant as other people, but they're still black and they're aware of it, and they're proud of it. To some people, black is really if you're proud of your color; if you're accepting what you are.

You go up to a lot of these kids and say, "I'm black and you're black, too," and they say, "No, no, I'm not black; I'm not black. I'm anything but black." They really think that this is a disgrace. A lot of black people say that if you don't think the way they do that you're wrong, you're an Uncle Tom, you've been brain-washed, and stuff like that which is really not right. Everyone should learn to respect the other person's opinion, even though theirs is different; not accept it, just respect it. That's why the white men left their mother country because they didn't feel free over there and they wanted freedom of speech and they respected the others' personal opinion[s]. But they came over here and did the same thing their mother country did. It's going to take all the youth of America to pull together to help this sick world.

We're living in a white America and we have to realize it and try to make it an unwhite America. We have to make it an America, period. We aren't striving to make America just a black man's world, it's just that you have to be aware of blackness, and not ashamed of it.

### **Ollie**

*Ollie attends a school with a large nonwhite enrollment. The school is in a medium-sized city in the Northeast. Ollie is a black student in his senior year and plans to attend college.*

There was one boy from our high school who said that the only way to get something is to play that Uncle Tom role. And he'd come among the black students and tell us that he is aware of this blackness inside. I said, "Well, don't come to me and tell me that you are aware of your blackness. Go to the white man and tell him. Don't play that Uncle Tom role, because to him you are Uncle Tom straight. He don't know what you feel here inside and it don't make any sense. You are not accomplishing nothing to come to me and say that you are with me."

During school you always had to almost plead for something that you wanted, and I was at a point that I really thought that I hated all white people. But then I sat down and thought about it and I discussed it with my mother and saw there was no reason for hate.

I have always been in the kind of environment all through

school, not only just white people doing things to me—hindering me and holding me back—but my own people. That is what really hurts, because you expect the white man to do something. You expect it. But when it comes from your own ranks, it catches you by surprise. That is mainly part of the reason why we are here because the black people we put faith in at that time showed us they were all for us, and all they have done is gotten higher positions.

Every time you pick up a paper it says, this black student did this, and people build their feelings on what they read. In the paper we were dirty dogs; we were hoodlums. A lot of people who don't even know us had the conception, "Gosh, these guys must be really terrible." But they should really be in things, get out there at that high school and sit in on what goes on in the administration, get in the classes and see how they teach and what the kids learn; get in and find out what these kids are fighting about, because nobody is going to get up there and fight for no reason. When you have a riot, you have a problem, you really do.

If I were to come to you and tell you my grievances, you would automatically say, "Okay, we will see about this." If you are shunting me off and I try every way to get across to you peacefully like things should be, and nothing happens, what do I have left to do but violence? Everybody knocks violence, but you can't get anything unless you can bring the white man to the conference table, and that white man is too ignorant to look at the fact of what lies ahead, so there is nothing else but violence.

Black power is not violence, but sticking together. Black power is awareness of yourself, political power, economic power, but a lot of people don't understand this. They just think of it as violence.

I would like to see the day when the black man, as a whole—not just my community, but as a whole—the black man can have something that really belongs to him; if he can just grab his culture and learn it thoroughly, and then pass it on and not feel that anything white is right. Like I would get up to making about \$20,000 a year and come in your neighborhood and tell you, "This is right and this is wrong. I feel for you." And go

back up here in my white neighborhood and forget about you.

Instead of moving into a white neighborhood, build up your own neighborhood. That is what I mean, because the black man pays. The moment he gets some money in his pocket and he can do something with it, he has to go out and marry a white woman or a white man or move in a white neighborhood. Then everything, to him, is great; he has accomplished a goal in his life.

Not the generation now; now the feeling is, "Get up and pull somebody else up with you," and that is what I want. I want to see radical changes in schools. I want to see more institutions, colleges, universities, high schools owned and operated by black citizens, because I feel that the white man can't really teach you about yourself. He can tell you, but he can't really feel it, but if I am black and I am in front of a black person telling him about his culture, then I am interested because I am learning something that makes me feel good. When I talk about black culture, it really is a burden; I just run off. It is something I could just talk about and talk about.

I would like to see the attitude of some of our people change; to stop saying that the white man owes them something; they can get out there and really do something, because if you wait, you are not going to get it. You might as well strive a little bit, and when you get up there, you can do something—that is when you are really operating.

### **Pat**

*Pat is a black student who attends a predominantly white school in a medium-sized city in the Southwest. She is a senior and plans to attend college to prepare herself for a career in social work.*

I transferred to this school as soon as the schools were integrated. I have to admit that it has been the best school that I have attended, and I have enjoyed it in the sense that I learned a great deal, but socially, it falls short. I don't really know if I made any white friends at this school because everybody at the school smiles.

When King was assassinated, I got so sick of people grinning.



I was tired of walking half to three-quarters of the way with my hand extended and not seeing a hand to put in mine. A girl told me, "You have become bitter as a result of King's death," and I said, "What do you expect?" They would say, "Well, here we are; we want to be friends, now." I'd say, "Well, then, you have to understand. We are human; I think we are super-human, as a matter of fact, to take a lot of this junk. But you have to understand that it is hard, by now. It is going to take a little getting used to. Here you come, all of a sudden, and you haven't had nothing to say to me before."

I wore a black mourning band, and they thought it was some kind of conspiracy. I said, "Well, you deserve to think it, if you are that dumb." They don't understand. They don't know why I would burn down their house. All they are going to say is, "Please don't." or "Niggers burning up the city; they are at it again. It's all they can do."

I always have to remember the first day I came to this school. I sat down at my desk and everybody gets up like I have the plague, and after the first grading period when I get A's and B's, they said, "Well, the Negro has sense." Everybody comes to you like you are a magnet, and I don't like to feel they are using me because I can do something for them, because I feel like I am the same person I was when I came here, except now they know a little more about me and what I have on the ball.

White kids do everything. Really I was surprised at the things they do, the way they talk to the teachers and stuff. In black schools, kids would get smacked around for questioning people, and you don't dare contradict the teacher in some classes, or dare say the man in the book is wrong, because there is this thing about, "He wrote the book; obviously, he must know more about it than you." I think it is a question of attitudes, because nobody ever ran around telling me "You are inferior," but I was listening for it all the time, so I could hear it. Teachers read books or something and say, "They probably do like this at the white school, but we aren't able; you people can't do it." Students don't realize it is cutting them down. I didn't see feeling inferior to anybody, especially if you can hold your own; but I did, and I still do, despite everything. I attribute this to

the fact that this is the way my parents have taught me to think and act. I am sure they don't do it on purpose. I can't hate them for it, because I realize this is just a result of living in their times.

The thing that is very sad is that many of the black students are not even aware of the fact that they are black. I think, personally, I was made more aware of my blackness after going to this school, because you can either do one of two things; try to be white or you will be black, as black as you really are.

In our lunch room we have this table, and I call it Harlem, because this is where all the soul people sit. When I first went there I would say, "Ah, this is ridiculous, we cannot all sit together." But now I feel, "Well, why not?" because if whites are really genuinely together, and they want to be your friend, they don't mind coming over and sitting with you. Many of the black students are not willing to say, "You come over here." I am sick of the white students saying, "All right, you can sit with me." I feel, "Well, why don't you come sit with me instead?" It is not that the black students try to be white, it is just that they aren't ready to say, "Look, people, you have got to look at me and try to see things my way for a change."

We wanted to get a club organized for the purpose of black awareness. What we had in mind was a meeting place so the black students could get with the white students and just talk about it—what you think of me and what I think of you, so that you can see that I am good for more than just waiting on you and working in your kitchen and stuff like that. I think the reason a lot of white people act the way they do is because they don't know.

This guy who lives in a very la-de-da neighborhood for white folks came up with this thing about rioting and how ridiculous it is. I said, "Well, I don't advocate rioting. Nobody organizes riots, so I am not for that, but I can understand why it happened. You run around setting up programs for the culturally deprived Negroes, showing them stuff they never can have—take and guide them through your section of town, these big \$50,000 homes; take them to the art galleries and they don't even know what a painting is and take them to the opera when you know

they will never go again." And he is sitting at his big, plush home and has never seen the slums. I said, "We need to get a program for culturally deprived white people to show you what a slum is." They just don't understand it. They don't know. They have had everything they wanted, needed and everything and I guess they can't be expected to know what it's like not to.

I have gotten used to being not in with it, because I was ostracized by black people for going to white schools. There was this thing, "Oh, she thinks she is too good to go here." And then, the white people don't want you, so you are just sort of there. Of course, this is all part of the desegregation experience. I don't consider myself to be really warped or one-sided, but I was last year, because it was such an adjustment. "Here I am; nobody wants me"—and I didn't go anywhere; I just stayed home and studied all the time.

Many, many black people down those of us who go to white schools; because they feel we thought we were too good to go to the black schools. What good does it do to spend thousands of dollars, years in court if you are not going to send the students after you get the schools open?

The whole purpose of education is to go out so that you can prepare yourself to work and live with people and I haven't learned that at this school. The solution to the problem lies in the schools. You can't kill off all the racist parents. They will eventually die, but we don't have time to wait while they are messing up their children's minds. You spend more time in school than you do at home, and if the schools were set up right, if they learned about black people, if we could understand why and talk about the problems, then I think much more would be accomplished. The students could help their parents to understand; I think we could even help influence our parents, unless they are just really zero.

We are being trained, not educated, and this goes back to everything that I said about learning how to live with people and finding your place in the world. I liken what I am getting now to going to the top of the Himalayas with the finest teachers, the finest library, studying for 10 years, and I am all but a genius when I come out. I go into the world, and nothing fits. I am a misfit. I am there tick, tick, ticking.