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# Blinded by the White: Soul-Searching for the Pedagogical Possibilities of Otherness in the White Hearts of Parents Raising Children of Color

Debra Clark Sukaratana

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BLINDED BY THE WHITE: SOUL-SEARCHING FOR THE PEDAGOGICAL  
POSSIBILITIES OF OTHERNESS IN THE WHITE HEARTS OF PARENTS RAISING  
CHILDREN OF COLOR

by

DEBRA CLARK SUKARATANA

(Under the direction of John A. Weaver)

ABSTRACT

This study explores the possibilities for those who have been Otherized (minorities). I refer to possibilities in this study as the potential for minority children to prevail in the aspects of life that have been hindered by those who are white. My own personal whiteness is explored as a mother and an educator. Additional exploration in this study comes from the voices and experiences of those white parents who are raising children of color and how they are dealing with their own whiteness as it relates to the upbringing of their children. This study takes a glance at the educational impacts these children are facing today and calls for the creation of a critical multiculturalism.

INDEX WORDS: Others, Parents, Children of color, Reconceptualization, Whiteness, Privileges

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by

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Georgia Southern University in  
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the Lord who has who has been my peace in the midst of the struggles of everyday life. It is also dedicated to my wonderfully loving and supportive family. To Tom, my husband; thank you for pushing me forward and providing everything necessary so that I might succeed. The sacrifices have been many but you never once wavered in your encouragement of me pursuing my goals. (I am especially grateful to you for taking over the washing of the clothes.)

To my son Clark, the inspiration for my work; thank you for being the sweet and loving child that you are. All the evenings when you told me, “Focus mom, focus!” kept me going and reminded me of why I was going through this process. You are a true blessing from God.

To my parents, Pete and Ginger; thank you for instilling in me Christian values and principles. It is this base that sustained and guided me through my writing. Your faith in me never went unnoticed and I will be forever grateful for your unending love.

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**CHAPTER I**  
**WHITE EYES OPENED**

**My Letter, Part One**

*My dear son Clark,*

*What you are about to read is going to give you a more personal look at me and some things I have learned about myself. My wish is that the words I put down will help prepare you to handle what lies ahead in this unfair life of ours. You will see how your mom has evolved and how this evolvment all began with you and one of your friends. I will continue writing to you after I set this plan in motion. You'll understand better by the time you get to the second part of this letter, so bare with me. Here it goes.*

*Love,*

*Mom*

**Purpose of the Study**

The road through the Curriculum Studies program has been one of many revelations about myself and what I seek to do with the knowledge that I have gained and uncovered during this journey. The purpose of this study was to explore my personal whiteness as a parent of a child of color. I wanted to uncover the impact that whiteness and racism has had, and continues to have on the lives and education of minority students living in the south. Most importantly, the purpose of this study was to encourage teachers and parents to recognize and understand their own biases in regard to children who are Otherized so that they will make a change toward a true multicultural education of learning and living for all students. This study was accomplished through personal stories and from the stories of other white parents of minority children. My research

differed from what currently exists in that it took a personal look at those people who are experiencing both sides. That is, white people who experience privilege on a daily basis but must balance this with the fact that their own children do not have the same privileges afforded to them. (For the purposes of this study, Others and those that are Otherized refers to minorities; those not belonging to the white race.)

While looking at racism and inequalities in education is not a new concept, focusing on whiteness both personal and otherwise, along with its accompanying privileges, can bring about much needed conversation. The type of research that I have conducted must continue because educators and law makers alike still seem not to get it. A hard look needs to be taken at the racist and white privileged views and perceptions that still prevail in the American educational system. One need only look at the most recent standardized test results which reveal that disparities still exist between black and white students. No bill or referendum is going to change these disparities if educators do not come to grips with reality. With this in mind, it is crucial to look back at where society has come from and where it is currently. It is important that the white voices of parents who are raising children of color be heard. It is through this study that discussions were brought to the table in order that parents and educators may become more enlightened of that which has been, that which is, and in turn change that which can be for children regarded as Others.

### **Context of Study**

There are many components that when put together, make the person that I am as a whole. Many of these components spill over into who I have become as a researcher. It is important that the reader(s) know that I am a white, female educator who was born

and raised in South Georgia. I married a man from Thailand and together we have one son who is, and will always be considered a minority. It is within this context that my research began. Even after being married to a man not of my race and then not having a son until six years after that, it wasn't until my son was four years old that the beginnings of my research unwittingly began to come into fruition.

About seven years ago when my son was four years old, he and I were at the swimming pool. We had not been there long when another child, also my son's age, and his grandmother arrived at the pool. I knew who they were, but my son had never met them. In fact, this child had just come to live permanently with his grandmother. He, who was half white and half Hispanic came running up to my son, put his arm up to my son's arm and happily shouted, "Hey! You and I have the same color skin!" As children will do, they instantly became friends and began playing together. Until that very moment, I had not given much thought to the fact that my son would have issues of Otherness to contend with as he grows up. Not only was I now awakened to this reality, but my son had now been exposed to it. Being white and having grown up in the south, I have never had to deal with issues of being the minority. Even though I married a minority, I had not faced any issues because of it. But here was a reality check. Now I knew that there were things I needed to face and delve into so that I could be the parent that my son would need.

Another event that brought me to this topic of interest occurred around my twelfth year of teaching. There was a horrible crime that happened here in my hometown of Hinesville. Two women and a child were violently stabbed and murdered in a low rent apartment complex in my town. The event was uncovered because two other children

that were also in the apartment escaped unharmed. They had been in a bedroom, unknown to the assailant, and heard all of the horrible events unfold. The children stayed throughout the night until they were sure the assailant was gone. The next morning they opened the bedroom door to find that their mother, her friend, and her friend's child had been killed. They fled back inside the bedroom and crawled out of the window. A police officer found the children still in their pajamas, walking down the road next to the railroad tracks. About a week after this news hit our small town, I received a new student that happened to be black. I'll call her Shanda. She was the eldest of the two children that were in the apartment on that deadly night. Shanda was only eight years old. Upon learning more about Shanda's circumstances, the pain, grief, and yes the guilt that I felt for her was almost unbearable. It hit me the hardest one night during the evening news. She was not in school that day because she had gone to Macon to testify in the trial of her mother's murderer. And there she was, her little eight year old innocent body dressed sweetly in a cheap dress, walking up to the witness stand to take on a task that most adults would not be able to handle. The sight of her at this moment in her short-lived life punched me in the heart. It was a blow like I have never felt before. It was a sting so great that I hope to never feel it again. I think it was a revelation in my life as a white person because for the first time in my life, I felt a sting of guilt for being white. I couldn't understand why there was guilt mixed in with the sorrow. My mind knows that part of what I felt was human compassion, but I could not help but feel that if she were a member of the dominant culture, my culture, this most likely would not have happened to her. Were my southern-bred stereotypical views getting the best of me? Did tragedies only happen to low-income black families? Of course not. But these events have led me

to a place in my life where I want to understand what the non-dominant culture confronts on a daily basis; issues that I personally do not have to face. Furthermore, I am looking at the experiences of other people who, like me, want their children taught beyond the lines of whiteness and into the culture of the diversity. He (2003) so eloquently states the following:

When we live our everyday stories in our own culture, we generally pass through this development without any reflection or understanding. When we leave our home cultural river and flow into a new one, our storied experience of everyday life becomes highlighted. (p. 75)

How awesome it will be if one day, my child and all students, white and minority alike will be taught beyond the lines of whiteness and into the diverse cultural pool of many.

### **Research Questions**

The overarching research question in this dissertation is: How can white parents recognize their white privilege and dominance and develop a culture of competency in raising their children of color? Additional research questions are:

- Do white parents of minority children have purposeful conversations with their children in regard to issues of color?
- Are white parents of minority children keenly aware of the challenges their children may face?
- How does whiteness, combined with its dominance and privileges, impact the lives of minority children living in the south?
- Does the South help or hinder how white parents raise minority children?

- How can white parents help schools create equal opportunities for children of color to thrive?

### **Making the Connection to Curriculum Studies**

My notions of what the reconceptualization entails have developed tremendously over the course of this doctoral journey. At the time that I was contemplating what area I should get my doctoral degree in, it seemed only natural that it be in the area of curriculum studies. After all, I already had the necessary educational foundations in early childhood education and educational leadership. What better way to tie it all together than with learning how to develop curriculum? I would learn the process that textbook companies go through in creating their products and how they hire their writers. Heck, this new-found knowledge might even open doors for me to eventually work for a textbook company. Without a doubt, the words curriculum and textbook were synonymous for me. Had I been asked what the reconceptualization of curriculum meant to me at that time, at best my answer would have been that it meant an improvement in a textbook or at best, an improvement in a school or county's textbook adoption plan. I had prepared myself for the exploration and examination of endless reading and language textbooks. I had no idea what I was in store for. When I chose to get my degree in curriculum studies, my honest belief was that it would be a regurgitation of what I had learned in under grad school, but bumped up a couple of notches. The journey that I so blindly delved into has been anything but.

To say that I was a bit intimidated in the beginning would be a gross understatement. Just the mention of Plato made my heart race. What had I gotten myself into? The first two classes that I took in this program seized any grains of knowledge

that I thought I had about curriculum reconceptualization and hurled them completely out of the window, never to be returned again. My concept of the reconceptualization has taken a full turn; an overhaul if you will. I realize that with the world being the curriculum, it is vital for me to give my child and the students I assist a sounding place. This place must be a safe environment in which students not of the dominant culture can speak openly and honestly of that which confronts them on a daily basis. This may mean that the issues that are relevant in their lives do not necessarily give me a warm, cozy feeling, but I can facilitate and listen in a way that supports them. Before this voyage I would have put a strong fist down and said that the classroom is no place for discussion beyond the text. I would probably have drawn a line as to what kind of questions and thoughts my own child has. But I know better now. As a school administrator and parent, I have the power and obligation to facilitate and promote an environment where pedagogical conversations take place both at school and in the home. The reconceptualization has made this clear to me. Weaver (2004) said it well:

To embrace this world we have to rethink not only what curriculum planners and designers do but also what forms of knowledge we sanction through our work and the illusions we impose upon the world thereby limiting what can be created and imagined in schools and universities. (p. 28)

The reconceptualization is an awakening to the untouched power that has always been at my finger tips; a power that holds the key to release the bottled up conversations. “The results of not having these fundamental types of discussions is that schools cling to the notion that there is value-free education. Clearly there is absolutely no education that is value free.” (Reynolds, W. M. 2003, p. 22). The reality is that not all students will learn



the ideals needed to be successful and productive in society today. The school setting has the ability to change that. It is a society within a society where students learn to play the game of life on a much smaller scale. Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman (1995) state that, "Yes, the curriculum field is about what happens in schools, but in being about schools it employs and is comprised by the language which both reflects and determines what "being about schools" means." (p. 7) The reconceptualization is the bringing forth of the lived experience into the realm of the complicated conversation that now matters most. Not only does it lend itself to free the tongues of those within the confines of the school walls, but it gives those that will, the tools to continue the conversation on the outside. The reconceptualization, as I have come to know it, requires serious introspection. Beliefs that I have stood by and even rooted myself in have been shaken. Daily experiences are now more than mere happenstances. They have become instances of learning who I am. Grumet's (1980) thoughts are that:

Reconceptualization of curriculum requires a more than reflexive somersault that scoops up our old, flat ideas and turns them over. It is a reflexive project that attempts to reclaim curriculum as we have lived it and to test our conceptual schemes and descriptions of it against the evidence of our experience. (p. 25)

It necessitates that I confront who I am to myself. The reconceptualization is an awakened consciousness of the mind with an intentional action against the status quo. As Pinar (2004) states, "We have reconceived the curriculum; no longer is it a noun. It is instead a verb: *currere*." (p. 19) It is the lived experience acting for change.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### History of Whiteness

The literature that exists today on whiteness is wider than ever before. The approaches taken by the authors in attempts to explain this blurred subject matter vary distinctively. The voices imbedded in the literature lend themselves to the discussion on whiteness. Dissonant though they may be, they bring to the table the beginnings of the complicated conversation needed today. The literature explored lends itself greatly in disclosing the urgent need to address issues of whiteness. In *Changing Multiculturalism*, Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997) make the point:

The reason why the study of whiteness has become so important at the end of the twentieth century is that so few white people have seen a problem with it over the past couple of decades. As a common-sense norm, whiteness-like all hegemonic impulses- is able to represent itself as conventional and safe. (p.216)

It is time to force the awareness of the issues that whiteness carries. No longer is it okay to sit back and accept whiteness as a universal standard for which the world turns.

It is commonly taught in educational settings that a person can not know where they are headed if they do not know where it is they have come from. So it is the same with whiteness. A great majority of the authors on race and whiteness approach the subject historically. This is understandable. It would be difficult to explore the topic of whiteness without taking a look at its historical roots. Within these roots is a stigma attached to my home, the south; one that may never be overcome. Hale (1998) appropriately found that, "The South has been, to use the language of our racial

orderings, the darkness that has made the American nation lose its color” (p. 3). For hundreds of years the south has inadvertently symbolized one face of America. In spite of the existing multitude of colors, this face has not been that of the original Native Americans, but of the white man; his whiteness encompassing a nation like no other. The beginning of whiteness can be traced back to the days when the colonists began to occupy southern soil and literally enslave the black race, as well as figuratively enslaving the races of all those that have been Otherized. W. J. Cash’s (1991) work brings to the reader an understanding of the conception of white superiority:

If they did not actually drift into thinking of their own forefathers as having been aristocrats-and they sometimes did-their identification of themselves with the master class was so close that the practical result was very much the same; that their pride did attach itself to the notion of the South’s aristocratic heritage nearly as militantly as did that of any real scion of the plantation. (p. 128)

Having the perception of being well-bred and descending from the upper echelon of European society, firmly planted the seeds of supremacy over minorities. White extremists have fertilized and pruned the thorny blooms from these seeds, watering them with a constant sense of entitlement which has resulted in the growth of an evil garden of slavery, bondage, and oppression. This link that Cash has made to the presumption of entitlement via European lineage makes it even more lucid to me where the concept of white superiority first reared its ugly head. It delves deeper than the traditionally taught, simplistic ideas of the white plantation owner needing laborers. Smith (2006) puts a different spin on the ideas of whiteness. His thoughts portray the white man as somewhat

blind, one who did not (and still doesn't) give much credit to the thinking of the black individual and the possibilities that they held:

Slaves understanding of the world was shaped, first, by the fundamental belief that racial identity was more fungible and plastic than many whites were willing to admit and, second, by the notion that their senses could be used to resist bondage. (p.29)

It was the writings of authors like W. E. B. DuBois, Frantz Fanon, David Roediger and others that have paved the path so that future writings and discussions on whiteness could occur. DuBois's work through *Black Reconstruction* is noteworthy in that in 1935, it brought to the front a look into the cerebral element of whiteness. As Monroe (2004) states:

Nearly seven decades after its publication, the full impact of this book is still being felt at the academy. *Black Reconstruction* was hardly given its due when it came out, but it ultimately set the terms of debate over the Reconstruction period, as well as over the relationship between race and class in the United States and on a global level. The book, of course, inspired David Roediger's theoretical approach to white identity in *Wages*.

Additionally, Monroe (2004) goes on to say that *Black Reconstruction* motivated the work of David Roediger in his 1999 book entitled *Wages of Whiteness* where he gave a more academic approach to white identity.

Frantz Fanon's work in the 60s showed that slaves as well as those marginalized, no longer wishing to be controlled by the colonizers, found within them the motivation to

demonstrate that there really existed a potential alternate path of life other than the one dealt by the white man. Fanon's (1963) work states that:

The Negro, never so much a Negro as since he has been dominated by the whites, when he decides to prove that he has a culture and to behave like a cultured person, comes to realize that history points out a well-defined path to him; he must demonstrate that a Negro culture exists. (p. 171)

Much of whiteness blocks the efforts of the black population, forcing them down a self-driven course. Fanon knew that there was already a destiny laid out for those that do not dominate to follow. In order for a new route to become an option, it was going to have to come from within for there would be no initial assistance from those that dominated.

Fanon felt that blacks and others colonized were being ruined psychologically and therefore had the right to defer to violence to ensure their freedom. Fanon seems to have had incredible foresight. Those that have been Otherized are still fighting to stay off the white-constructed path.

Coming out of the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s 1970s and as a branch of Critical Race Studies, the study of whiteness began to blossom through a multitude of authors. In 1968, Winthrop D. Jordan brought to the literary world his work entitled *White Over Black* and then its off-shoot, *The White Man's Burden* in 1974. In *White Over Black* Jordan discusses the feelings that Americans had toward blacks from the 1500s to the 1800s and how they began to question whether or not slavery was okay. *The White Man's Burden* addresses reasons for racism toward black people as well as the attitudes and difficulties that white people had. It was during this time that such writings were being published that integration efforts and changing laws were resisted by many

whites who found it hard to let go of the thinking of their forefathers. As George Lewis (2004) wrote:

The joint experiences of the races in the South, paternalistic whites argued, had helped to forge a mutually dependent relationship between the two. Attempts to establish a new, separate homeland for southern blacks, therefore, or to enforce integration, would only jeopardize the common understanding that the races had constructed. Whether inspired by communists or not, changes in southern racial practices were thought to be detrimental to black and white alike. (p. 20)

This is how many whites still think today; that things should remain the way they are. Integration and other efforts have done nothing more than jumble up the mutual understandings that those of the white race and minorities have between them. This type of thinking has also perpetuated the negative perceptions of what the word whiteness represents, preventing it from standing as a legitimate culture on its own, free of racism. White extremists view the white race as the only true and pure race. Leroy Gardner (2000) examines this thinking:

They adduce that interbreeding with the black man is the underlying cause of the low standard of living, the cruel poverty, the lack of scientific achievement, and lawlessness in Latin American countries. They therefore conclude that interbreeding with blacks would have a deleterious effect upon the racial purity of white America, resulting in disastrous social, political, and economic consequences. (p. 12)

According to this type of mindset, whites and those that are Otherized should remain in their respective places in society; permitting reproduction between them serves only to

desecrate the purity of whiteness and all that is good in society. This, I feel, is the crux to the whole idea of white racism and how those that are marginalized view whiteness.

Gardner's text brings to light the fears that many encompass. Those that dominate are fearful of having their race soiled and those that are the dominated fear being viewed as the soilers. These points made by Gardner validate the many spoken and even more unspoken beliefs that exist today. However, in reading Gardner's (2000) work more in depth, I found some blatant overtones of anger ringing through:

Further, because of the looser and less formal organization of the black family, the illegitimate issue of unions between white males or females and black males and white females are invariably accepted into the black family unit. Perhaps you're wondering; don't black folk have any moral standards? Of course we do, but under the amoral white-controlled socio-economic circumstances imposed upon us in America we have to often compromise for the sake of survival. (p. 140)

My immediate reaction to the author's form of tenor made me question the true intent of his text. At first his anger seemed misplaced. I started to delegitimize his work because at face value, it sounded as if it were a gripe session of sorts; a blame game. I am guilty of being desensitized. However after further thought I had to remind myself that this is the type of daily existence I do not have to face. Fortunately, there are numerous authors in the area of whiteness that are helping keep alive the dialogue that is so crucial in supporting the enduring race of the marginalized. In the 90s, the work of Ruth Frankenberg in *White Women, Race Matters* discussed the advantages that whiteness provides for women. Her work is important in that it has encouraged women to openly

discuss racism and the problems with discrimination against women. Through Frankenberg's interviews with white women of varying backgrounds, stories have been shared that will certainly make better the situations that women face on a daily basis. Frankenberg's work meets head-on the ideas that women have of race and whether it is relevant or not. She brings to the table the need to specifically name whiteness. Frankenberg's (1993) states, "By examining and naming the terrain of whiteness, it may, I think, be possible to generate or work toward antiracist forms of whiteness, or at least toward antiracist strategies for reworking the terrain of whiteness." (p.7) Through this confrontation of whiteness comes optimism for social change that is positive. *White Reign* by Joe Kincheloe, Shirley Steinberg, Nelson Rodriguez, and Ronald Chennault brought right into the face of readers the thoughts that so many have about what whiteness is, where these thoughts have come from, and who the thoughts are perpetuated by. Their work is crucial as it boldly brings about an understanding of whiteness as a social construct that is non-permanent and able to be changed. It digs beyond the surface of what may be brought to one's mind when discussing whiteness and brings about a thoughtful purpose. As Kincheloe, Steinberg, Rodriguez, and Chennault (2000) emphasize, "Here a key goal of critical pedagogy of whiteness emerges: the necessity of creating a positive, proud, attractive, antiracist white identity that is empowered to travel in and out of various racial/ethnic circles with confidence and empathy" p. 12. Their work sets out to unite instead of divide while not being afraid to address the deeper issues often skirted around. Launched by these authors is a completely relevant, non-sugarcoated dialogue; relevant especially now when there is a



strong possibility that America will elect its first black president. Most importantly, it makes progressive strides toward social change.

Through reading the various works that address whiteness, it has become apparent to me that a certain portion of white people have only themselves to blame for the notions that people not of the dominant culture have of their race, particularly in the south. Additionally, the actions of many of these whites throughout history, has given much material for authors, filmmakers and the like to make fun of. Graham's (2001) research found that, "By the mid-1960s, the image of the southern lawman had become so estranged from national identification, so discredited as a point of view, that satire seemed the most appropriate mode for depicting the upholders of segregation" (p. 156). Graham's book shows how whiteness was equated with dim-wittedness all-the-while shaping a portion of popular culture. More recently, Michelle Fine and Lois Weis's 2004 research in *Off White* discusses how whiteness is created through institutions. Notably, Peggy McIntosh's work in *White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack* generated a white privilege checklist that is used in social research projects, forums, and other venues to promote the conversation that is so often avoided in today's society, especially by whites.

### **Up Against Whiteness**

The earliest thoughts that I can conger up of my realizing I was white came from an experience when I was about six years old. My family had a black housekeeper who was also in charge of babysitting my brother and myself while my parents were at work. There was one particular afternoon when I wanted my housekeeper to play with me. She had promised to do so, but first needed to go to the restroom. While she was in the

restroom I began knocking on the door to hurry her up. During this episode of childhood impatience I called her a nincompoop. I thought it was a funny sounding word as I had heard it at school. I do not remember much more of the incident other than being called into my parents' bedroom later that evening. Here my mother told me that the housekeeper had quit and asked me what I called her earlier that day. I told them that I had called her a nincompoop and she asked me if I was sure that I didn't call her a "nigger" instead. Because I didn't know what it meant, this vulgar word had to be defined for me. Whether the housekeeper misunderstood me or associated the word nincompoop with the "n" word will always be unknown. However, I will never forget that moment. McLaurin's (1987) writings help explain, "Often such perceptions are not a result of either education or training but are instead mere happenstance, accidents of understanding, and are as unwelcome as they are unintended" (p. 34). This happenstance drew an invisible line for me between whites and blacks and was the launching point of my journey into whiteness. At that point I knew without a doubt that I was white.

For most of my life I have given very little thought to the origins of the word "white". Spring (2001) says, "In the minds of some early leaders, the term "white" was primarily reserved for those of British Protestant descent. By the early twentieth century, most Americans applied the term "white" to all Americans of European descent" (p. 7). I never thought about myself as being a European descendent. As strange as it may sound, it has only been in recent years that I have come to truly internalize that I, a southern white girl, really do have a heritage. I have not internalized it because it has not been an issue of survival for me. Wise (2005) is very frank in his assessment:

And for every ounce of racial wisdom contained in the mind of a black child barely ten years old, or even seven for that matter, there is a corresponding void in the mind of a similar white child, the latter having never had to contemplate her racial position or identity in most cases, and thus remaining gleefully ignorant of the role of race in the warp and woof of her society. (p. 23)

I agree with Wise. Minority students are keenly aware that they are somehow different than white children and they know that they have a specific game to play; whereas white students are simply oblivious to the reality of the struggles that their marginalized peers face. While I now realize that I have a heritage as a white person (although I have not traced my own personal lineage) I know that I and other white people of different heritages (i.e. Irish Americans, etc.) do not truly understand what it means to not have an associated heritage that labels you as different on a daily basis. The heritages of the dominant race do not stand out on ivory skin. The pigmentation of the marginalized however, shine as a neon sign. The heritages of the dominant do not require validation as does that of the shaded. The baggage that comes with the heritage of Others is difficult to carry.

What many white students do know about these students has come from the classroom. It is not commonly taught in schools, as Jordon (1974) states that, “White and black connoted purity and filthiness, virginity and sin, virtue and baseness, beauty and ugliness, beneficence and evil, God and the devil” (p.6). It is these origins of coloring that need to be communicated to students. This type of instruction was not communicated to me as a student. Like the majority of many white students, my early childhood education included the typical black history month celebrations as well as

random book reports and projects on those unlike myself. The unspoken implication was that my whiteness was the norm. I knew of nothing other than people like myself when I opened my textbooks. It was never a surprise to see a white male and/or female on virtually every page that I turned. This was the unconscious expectation that I had and still have today, just as opening the newspaper or turning on the television virtually always brings to front my dominant race. These are common privileges that the marginalized know little of unless (quite often) they are pictured in a mug shot or in handcuffs.

While many people use African Americans or Mexican Americans to reference themselves, neither I nor my friends or family used places of origin to indicate who we were. I would say that I spoke of myself only in terms of being an American. This was my concept of whiteness. Frankenberg's (1993) thoughts in *White Women, Race Matters The Social Construction of Whiteness* are that, "Whiteness is inflected by nationhood, such that whiteness and Americanness, though by no means coterminous, are profoundly shaped by one another" (p. 233). It is as if being white has been the only true American race and that I have subconsciously thought anyone of any other shade or color needed some accompanying explanation as to their origin. Nelson Rodriguez (2000) found the following:

The implications of this strategic rhetoric are at least two: First, by conflating Americanness with whiteness, and vice-versa, there is at work here a policing of identity whereby people who engage in and/or adopt this strategic rhetoric attempt to generate a narrative about race that is essentialist and stagnant—a strategy, in my view, used to avoid the messiness of overlap in any discussions about race (that is,

the possibility of a white person having black blood). It is also used to name oppressed groups such as Blacks as the Other, by juxtaposing the latter to a fictitiously generated pure and unified white body. (p.45-46)

For many whites, their nationality *is* being white which is synonymous with being American. Anything else desecrates, such as when terminologies like African American are used by those that are black. Blood boils in many of those that dominate because this type of terminology is viewed as divisive and unpatriotic; separating the true Americans from pseudo-Americans. It challenges the power of being white. As Rodriguez (2000) continues to say:

Any attempt to *singularize* national identity across race, class, gender, and sexual orientation lines is a fabrication that attempts to create a hierarch precisely along any one of these lines. All these lines *intersecting* contribute to American life, not any one of them in isolation. (p. 46)

Referencing people by color keeps everyone in their place, and blocks out any involvement they have had in making America what it is. Additionally, people like me, those who are white, demand descriptions of minorities. This only adds to the presupposed power. Often, white parents avoid the conversation of their children's multiple races by simply telling them they are Americans. I agree with the following points made by Nakazawa (2003) concerning this, "They don't know how to converse with their kids about it, and the identity that they're most concerned their kids internalize is that they're 'an American'. Race is secondary to the issue of becoming part of mainstream culture." (p. 19) White parents like me want their children to fit in with

society and calling them American seems the safest and most accepting way to accomplish this goal.

I have been guilty of referring to people by their skin color when they were not white, but not conversely. Only in the past few years, though, have I actually caught myself doing so. Even though I see this type of referencing as another step in the process of discovering my whiteness, I can't help but feel I have been a major contributor in blocking the conversation. Pinar (2004) believes that, "Whiteness has deprived whites of their history just as it had deprived African Americans of theirs" (p. 42). It is important to acknowledge Pinar's point as valid. For so long, whiteness has been equated with power and oppression. Many people avoid vocal claims to a white heritage for fear of being viewed a racist. Additionally, claiming a white heritage also requires one to open up to discussing the sins of our fathers. However, as Berger (1999) points out:

But nothing is going to change so long as white people feel they can evade the real issues with tangents about class and blithe proclamations about how *they're* certainly not racist and 'why do we have to talk about interrogating whiteness?'

It's so uncomfortable. You don't know uncomfortable. (p. 86)

Being white is to be comfortable on a regular basis. I can only remember one time in my life when I was not comfortable being white. It was an experience never to be forgotten. Being born and raised in South Georgia and having lived here all of my life, I have not traveled much at all. When I was about twenty-three years old, a friend of mine was getting married in San Antonio, Texas. I was to be one of her bridesmaids. I was excited about my first trip to Texas. When I stepped off of the airplane, I found myself in a sea of Otherness. I knew no one and my friend was nowhere to be found. Immediately I

noticed a great deal of Spanish being spoken over the airport speaker system. I felt very lost and as though people were staring at me, wondering why I had entered their territory. I recall the overwhelming sense of panic beginning to build inside of me. Of course my friend eventually showed up and it ended up being a good trip, but I will always remember the suffocating feeling of not fitting in. It is unfortunate that more white people don't encounter this type of feeling. What is not realized by so many is that those that are minorities feel this way quite frequently, if not on a daily basis. Shannon Sullivan approaches this idea more severely with the following:

And indeed, one of the privileges of whiteness is for it to seem to a white person that no historico-racial schema is at play in the constitution of her lived body. For a white person, *qua* white, the world presents no barriers to her engagement with the world.

While I concur that being white presents few barriers, I would argue that being white presents barriers that prevent candid conversation with the people not of the dominant culture as well as with other white people. Although Ms. Sullivan too is white, many of her words throughout her writing come across very biting and pompous. This harsh approach made for difficult reading.

White privilege is a term that I have heard before but basically dismissed as an excuse for why people of the non-dominant culture can't seem to make it in society. It has only been through the curriculum studies program that I have come to situate myself with these words. There are those authors though, that differ on what the words white privilege actually convey. Zack's (1999) work finds:

Furthermore, the use of the term *white privilege* makes it seem as though white people have advantages and status that only white racists think that they should have. To speak as though these privileges exist puts the comparative disadvantages of nonwhites in their face in a way that would seem (to me) to add further insult to injury. (p. 80-81)

Here the author used a compilation of narratives from various women and their experiences. In Ms. Zack's narrative the reader finds that she believes terminology other than white privilege should be used to describe the advantages white people have over those that are not white; as if the opportunities that exist for white people have been somehow contrived by the dominant group. In thinking about this perspective, I can not think of any other word to replace the term white privilege that would be any easier to digest by those who are not white as the outcome would still remain the same. In McKinney's (2005) work, I found the opposite of my initial personal thoughts on whiteness, "When linking the white identity to other identities, the effect is also to deny the importance of whiteness, in this case asserting that there are no areas of social life in which whiteness in and of itself is a privileged status" (p. 107).

I have found the discussions on whiteness to be a compilation of many things. Will society ever get away from this type of race-mindedness? In some ways, I think we are, at least in the physical sense. The population today is more widely mixed than ever before. I see a day coming where the dominant race will no longer be. I know that I have been a contributor to this fact by marrying outside of my race. My son will then carry this mixed race forward. Gilroy (2000) makes the point that:



The political will to liberate humankind from race-thinking must be complemented by precise historical reasons why these attempts are worth making. The first task is to suggest that the demise of “race” is not something to be feared. Even this may be a hard argument to win. On the one hand, the beneficiaries of racial hierarchy do not want to give up their privileges. (p. 12)

Many in the dominant group will be hard to sway in terms of moving away from race-thinking. As Gilroy notes, many of these people do not want to give up their white privileges. Among these people are the white parents of multiracial children. For many of them, race is not spoken about in the household. Nakazawa’s (2003) work reveals this idea, “But perhaps the most troubling reason why some parents avoid the topic of race is because they want their multiracial children to accept one heritage while rejecting their other racial background” (p. 19). I see it as an avoidance of the truth in order to remain in power. I have had to question my mindset. I admit I have not encouraged my own child to embrace the part of his heritage that is Thai. Is this because I selfishly want him to only acknowledge his white half? Has it been a subconscious goal of mine? What privileges am I afraid of losing? Fortunately for my son and those like him, many of these privileges will slowly die away as the ever changing population continues to mix. Mixed race families and white parents who hide behind the power of privilege will have no choice but to come out onto a more level playing field and engage in these discussions on race.

### **Multiculturalism as a Purpose for Change**

The theoretical framework for my study is built upon critical multiculturalism. I find multiculturalism to be suited for my research because it is all-encompassing. It

reaches out to more than those like myself and goes beyond the walls of the classroom. While I have been presented with and have explored a multitude of theoretical frameworks, critical multiculturalism suits the needs of my research for these additional reasons as noted by Jay and Jones (2005) in the following:

Critical multiculturalism analyzes the inequalities of power that both motivate and result from practices of racial, ethnic, gender, class, or sexual discrimination; it is antiracist, dedicated to social justice and structural change, and connects ethno-racial conflict in the United States to its global contexts. (p. 100)

Critical multiculturalism is more than being aware; it is about doing what is right with the truth. I investigated the influence that whiteness has had on how white parents are raising children of color as well as the influence it has had on the education of these children. Within this framework are strands of critical whiteness which I explored through the use of my own autobiography since I too, am raising a child of color. This, in turn, will allow me to interrelate that which I am and need to know more about, with possibilities of change for those that are Otherized. For the purposes of this study, I use the word critical in the context of ethics that challenges hidden human interests and ideas in pursuit of change. (Sirotnik, 1991, p. 245) I feel that I now have a moral responsibility to pass on that which I have come to realize about myself and whiteness and challenge that which I confront in my personal life as well as work life on a daily basis. I have no other option if it is truth that I seek. Joe Kincheloe and Shirley Steinberg (1997) speak frankly in their writing, "Confronting racism is not a matter of choice for white people, critical multiculturalists maintain, for it is a force that shapes their experience and identities whether they like it or not" (p. 206). Whiteness is difficult to define in one

specific way. It is a construct of many beliefs and perceptions. However, it is something that has come to define oppression for non-whites. I agree with Berger's (1999) point:

The colorless multi-coloredness of whiteness secures white power by making it hard, especially for white people and their media, to "see" whiteness...It is the way that black people are marked as black (are not just "people")...that has made it relatively easy to analyze their representation, whereas white people-not there as a category and everywhere everything as a fact-are difficult, if not impossible to analyze qua white. (p. 89)

I can't help but feel that I have been a major contributor in blocking the complicated conversation due to my whiteness; therefore, introspection is essential. Without it, I can not proceed to talk to others with any true depth. My desire is to face whiteness head on and communicate the findings from my research with other white educators, encouraging them to face their identity as well.

Critical multiculturalism is at the heart of my research. It has forced me to go beyond looking at myself and those like me towards reaching out with knowledge of myself to those *not* like me. As a white parent of a multiracial child, I have been made to look closely at my true thoughts in order that I might do justice to the raising of my son. "In order to raise confident multiracial kids, we first have to examine our own inner prejudices" (Nakazawa, 2003). This scrutiny of the inside has launched me into actuality. The reality is that it is necessary to face issues of race; for race will never go away. Race will remain regardless of attempts to brush by or ignore it. "The founding absurdity of 'race' as a principle of power, differentiation, and classification must now remain persistently, obstinately in view" (Gilroy, 2000). Society must be constantly aware of

race and reminded of its significance in the everyday issues of being. So goes the same for educators. To ignore race or to stand by the common thought of teaching all students the same will no longer work. Race and issues of race must be faced although many in the dominant group refuse to do so. As Jay and Jones (2005) found:

They think it is not about them. They think they are being made to feel guilty. They think racism is something that happened in the past. They believe that since they are not personally racist, race has nothing to do with them. They have been taught that multiculturalism is a “celebration of differences,” analogous to a folk-fair or food court where you get to taste all the nice things “those people” create. They believe that in America anyone can make it if they just work hard and play by the rules, and thus that people who are poor or illiterate or in jail or stuck in dead-end jobs got what they deserved. (p. 204)

Using critical multiculturalism as the framework of my research and incorporating strands of whiteness lends itself well to demystifying some of these thoughts; thoughts that I myself have also had. He, Phillion, and Connelly (2005) concurred that:

Multiculturalism, for us, is not only the key issue across disciplines including education but also the way people live their lives in an increasingly diversified world. People of different cultural beliefs and values are in continual interaction, and, as in North America, multiculturalism is a concept increasingly found around the world for addressing equality and justice in living among people of different cultures. (p. 291)

The theory of multiculturalism has evolved. It has become an ethical stance. As stated previously, it is now an obligation that I have to my family, students, and co-workers.

This stance must be introduced and discussed with those that would think otherwise. It sets forth the way in forming needed relationships in this complex world. While I, personally may not make a global difference, I can be that stone that makes the first ripple in the water. Aoki (2005) had this to say, “It seems that the quest for inspiring multicultural curriculum and pedagogy calls for our openness to the historicity and multiplicity of meanings of the word ‘multiculturalism’” (p. 386).

In using multiculturalism, there must be a purpose, a purpose for change. In that comes the critical aspect.

The perspective of what I am calling critical multiculturalism understands representations of race, class, and gender as the result of larger social struggles over signs and meanings, and in this way emphasizes not simply textual play or metaphorical displacement as a form of resistances but stresses the central task of transforming the social, cultural, and institutional relations in which meanings are generated. (McLaren, 1995, 126)

Indeed, there must be an effort by society, and educators in particular, towards pressing forward a development of societal change. (McLaren, 1995) Critical multiculturalism seeks to do just that. There must be a change. While there have been attempts at change in how students learn via our government and No Child Left Behind, there seems to have been no conscious effort in looking at the bigger picture. The endeavor to bring all children to the table of education has failed. “Our solidarity must be affirmed by shared belief in a spirit of intellectual openness that celebrates diversity, welcomes dissent, and rejoices in collective dedications to truth.” (hooks, 1999, 239) In order for real change to occur, both educators and those in power must come together in one accord for the

common good of the educated child. According to McLaren (1995) “the key issue for critical educators is to develop a multicultural curriculum and pedagogy that attends to the specificity of difference yet at the same time addresses the community of diverse Others under the law with respect to guiding referents of freedom and liberation.” (p. 210)

Some believe that the roots of multiculturalism began with the Civil Rights Movement and the conflicts within this country regarding the truth in textbooks. During this time in the 1960s and 70s, civil rights activists worked for factual and equal representation of races. These activists were working an uphill battle against the southern, white males’ version of history that dominated the books. Publishing companies were reluctant to accept books that included integration as they felt it was too soon to push the issue. These companies have made great strides over the years. Cross-cultural representations are more common, regional depictions are more frequently illustrated, and a variety of voices are now speaking through the printed text. However, will textbooks ever be totally truthful? Not likely, as they will always be written by people who have their own perceptions and points of view. This makes teaching from the text problematic. Unfortunately, many educators rely solely on the textbook as the source of truthful information. If educators would use textbooks as launching pads for open discussions then *the* truth might ultimately be realized by those who seek it.

Also during the 1960s and 70s, the women’s movement was in full force, fighting for equality as well. (Pinar, 2004) Activists were working for one thing, social justice. It is through multiculturalism that the proponents wanted to see a transformation. James

Banks (1989), one of the fathers of multiculturalism and author of *Multicultural Education: Issues and Perspectives*, found the following:

Multicultural social justice education deals more directly than the other approaches with oppression and social structural inequality based on race, social class, gender, and disability. Its purpose is to prepare future citizens to take action to change society so that it better serves the interests of all groups of people, especially those who are of color, poor, female, or have disabilities. (p.71-72)

Multiculturalism is more than occasional cultural reference and celebration. In fact, there are those that would call what I refer to as a true multiculturalism, diversity. In *What You Don't Know About Schools*, Quintero (2006) answers how it is that there is a connection between diversity and community:

The simple answer is that because diversity is personal, it is right there, up front and on the table, in most (if not all) human relationships. And frankly, with the exception of a hermit meditating on a hillside, a medical researcher in quarantine, and the rare human who has determined that he has no need for any communion with others, relationships are relevant to all learners, all humans. (p. 214)

True multiculturalism requires interaction with intention to make a change. Through this change, it is hoped, will come a respect for that which is different. He, Phillion, & Connelly (2005), concurred that:

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and, as in North America, multiculturalism is a concept increasingly found around the world for addressing equality and justice in living among people of different cultures. (p. 291)

Ming Fang He (2003) makes the point in her book *A River Forever Flowing: Cross-Cultural Lives and Identities in the Multicultural Landscape* that multiculturalism's position is that it is essential for educators and society as a whole to begin making a concerted effort to reach minority students beyond the standard, white-dominated ways. "There is a need for new ways of looking at these issues, a need to nurture new methods, and new forms of representation more appropriate to cross-cultural phenomena in multicultural society" (p. 148). Often, these needs are recognized, but because the gap is so great and the dialogue so little between those who are white and minorities, the fostering of these needs remains stagnant. Gibbs (2003) concluded:

Disparities in social and cultural backgrounds sometimes make it difficult for whites and people of color to communicate and to understand each other's viewpoints. Even more relevant to interracial and interethnic families, these background differences pose a special challenge to parents, who must transmit to their children knowledge about their family history and continuity, a positive sense about their dual heritage, and an integrated sense of an ethnic identity. (p. 151-152)

White parents of children of color have the responsibility of helping convey constructive information of their children's heritage to them. This can be complicated for the white parent due to a lack of knowledge of the Other. It is essential though, and attempts must



take place in order for multiracial children to have a strong sense of belonging and security in knowing who they are.

The voices of multiculturalism are many. Cameron McCarthy, author of *Uses of Culture: Education and the Limits of Ethnic Affiliation*, Gloria Ladson-Billings, author of *Dictionary of Multicultural Education*, and Geneva Gay, author of *Becoming Multicultural Educators: Personal Journey Toward Professional Agency and Culturally Responsive Teaching* all call for a unification of the human spirit with an open mind toward the Other. According to McCarthy (1998), “It is the fecund source of metaphors and allegories about the contested lives of human beings, their oppression of one other, and the open possibilities that reside within collective action, and communal spirit and determination” (p.22). The potential for solidarity is there. Multiculturalism aims at being more than a poster child. It wants the past and the present to come together and make a difference. Multiculturalism wants voices to be heard. As Ladson-Billings (1997) stated in her work:

Multiculturalists believe that all students have the right to speak and provide differential cultural knowledge. To deny students voice limits equity of outcome, impedes access to equality of educational opportunity, and hampers the development of the skills needed to become active, critical and productive change agents in society. (p. 252)

Here it is evident that voices are a key component in multiculturalism. Without the voices, the process of transformation can not take place. It is imperative for whites to vocalize as well toward a cohesive effort for positive social change. It must be noted

however, that when voices are raised, disagreement will likely ensue. In her more recent work, Geneva Gay (2003) stressed the following:

Other tensions may arise around how to promote multicultural change without causing controversy and how to cultivate ethnic diversity and unity, educational equity and excellence simultaneously. The point is not to squash or eliminate conflict from your mind, but to bring it out in the open, confront it, critique it, and work to resolve it. (p. 216)

This type of disagreement or controversy can be healthy. If dialogue is guarded then it is likely to be contaminated, not allowing all that needs to be discussed to come out. Multiculturalism advocates honest, raw discussion in order that resolution may occur and solidarity may begin. Grant and Sachs (1995) make it clear, “Multiculturalism calls into question unity-if modernity has failed, it has done so by allowing the splintering of the totality of life or unity of experience” (p. 102). Multiculturalism fosters harmony. It is through this harmony that the understanding can completely come into fruition. It is easy for the legacy of minority children to get lost in the dominant culture. Many educators do not recognize students for their cultural differences and successes as they should. The dominant culture has its successes plastered everywhere, from textbooks to the daily consumption of television. Sure, the expected black history month activities take place in classrooms nationwide. Some will even break a piñata during Cinco de Mayo, but other than that, where has the legacy gone?

Even with well-intentioned educators, not only our children’s legacies but our children themselves can become invisible. Many of the teachers we educate, and

indeed their teacher educators, believe that to acknowledge a child's color is to insult him or her. (Delpit, 1995, 176)

I find this thought troubling. I find it troubling because to not acknowledge a child's color, his or her identity, is to not give validity to the existence of the child. The meaning and the heritage from where that child originated has no meaning. I have heard some teachers say that they are color blind. These teachers say that they see all children as the same. What a grave injustice. The color of skin is important. It is a distinctiveness like no other. If the dominant culture fosters a society in which color is obsolete, then so does the human become obsolete. Will the dominant society ever truly recognize the differences between minorities and those in the dominant culture as legitimate and worthy of being celebrated? Will schools ever begin to foster a true road to multiculturalism?

Men who see each other's bodies sharing the same space, treading the same earth, splashing the same water, making the same air resonant, and pursuing the same game and eating out of the same dish, will never practically believe in a pluralism of solipsistic worlds. (James, 1981, 191)

To me, James is saying that people see each other on a daily basis doing the same activities, utilizing the same parts of the world in the same manner. These people are oblivious to the reality that there are other groups in the same society. That these groups are actually different from each other and although they breathe the same air they have unique qualities about them. I think that James is saying that these types of people will never get it. They will only attest to the belief that they themselves are of existence. Everything else and everyone is relative in their eyes. These people are the teachers who

claim to be color blind. They have no concept of reality. They do not know because they do not think. It is sad because these unknowing teachers will pass the unknown on to others.

The plight of minority students is much like that of early day slaves. They have been hunted and trapped for mere human power. Laws exist for the protection of the Otherized, but there are always the poachers who refuse to follow the laws. Like the slaves, there are scars on the backs of the students. They have been marked by the whips of the dominant culture that lash out at them. Oh sure, my culture says it wants to assist these students. Money is given as a boastful gesture to such groups as the NAACP and the United Negro College Fund to help their plight. Programs with various acronyms are put into place at the school level (EIP, SST). This is merely a façade. It seems as though a transparent game is being played with the non-white students starring as the pawns. Look at me! I have become transparent as well; playing the game alongside those like me. I can be seen for who I really am on the inside. My southern-bred racism is glaring through as it becomes more and more evident who I am. The shaded have been stamped for life; as slaves were branded to show which master they belonged to. It is time to remove the stamps from those I have helped brand. I must help educate those like me on how to protect the marginalized. Educators have the power to provide protection for students who are Otherized. Without the utilization of this power, the risk of extinguishing a fair and attainable education for all minority students is run.

Humans world-wide are unique in the languages that they speak. Native tongues help in the understanding of each other; a communication heard and understood by those of their own culture. Within our society, we have what is known as standard American

English. By whose standard is it? Who created this language? For all intents and purposes, it is the language of the dominant culture. It is the language that is referred to as the correct language. Those who do not speak this language are viewed as uneducated or as a part of society that does not belong. Another dilemma appears. What am I portraying to my students when I correct their language? I correct what I consider to be mistakes, if in fact measured against the rules of standard American English. I verbally correct Black English. But who am I to say that this is incorrect? The textbooks tell me what is correct language, the very same textbooks that have been written by dominant culture standards. In *White Reign*, Brents and Monson (1991) state, “But more than that, we live in a society where the life experiences of the dominant group are made to seem representative of all.” (p. 218) A false picture has been painted for those that wish to learn the truth. Who has told us which textbooks we must use? It has been the dominant group. And little is being done to re-paint the picture. Teachers must also give credence to the way in which students of other cultures communicate with each other. Dialogue between students and teachers needs to occur for an understanding of the differences in what is considered “proper” English and what is not. Lines of communication need to be open as to why one language is considered correct over the other. (Delpit, 1995) The longer I remain in the Curriculum Studies program, the more liminal I become. The connection between government, power, education, corporatization, and globalization continue to astound me. I feel duped, cheated, and taken advantage of. As one who has always been a believer of doing as you are told by authority, I am finally beginning to understand that authority (i.e., government, etc.)

doesn't always have my best interests at heart, and without a doubt that includes the education of all students in the American public education system.

My first crude introduction to the realities of governmental control and corporatization in education came when I was still a teacher and selected to be on the county textbook adoption committee for my grade level. What began as an enthusiastic endeavor on my part ended with an extremely sour taste in my mouth for the entire process. After meeting for a few days and breaking up into small groups, discussing what we educators thought were essential in elementary reading textbooks, we finally came to the point in which we were told to start applying those crucial elements that we had come up with to our assessments of the textbook samples that were already strategically placed in the conference room. To our surprise, there were only four or five different textbooks in the room. However, we took several days to examine that which we had been provided with. In the end, we came back together and collectively decided that each textbook had some important elements, but we were not satisfied completely with any one textbook that had been provided. We then asked that we be given more choices. This is the point at which administration reared its ugly head, literally. The director of curriculum (fondly referred to as the wizard from *The Wizard of Oz* due to his uncanny resemblance with the character) brought us back together and for lack of a better descriptor, chastised us for about one hour. We were strongly reminded that all of the textbook samples that had been provided to us for review were research based materials. Materials, that is, that the National Reading Panel strongly recommended as being the best for reading instruction. In other words, there would be no other choices. This was it. Besides, how dare we question the National Reading Panel? Needless to say, the

educators that were in the room that day were perplexed, angry, and feeling as though all of our time and energies had been a complete waste. If they (the administration) had already narrowed down the choices to four or five textbook companies which we were bound to, then what was our real purpose for being there? We felt extremely powerless. Aronowitz (2000) explains:

Instead, as we have seen, the learning enterprise has become subject to the growing power of administration, which more and more responds not to faculty and students, except at the margins, but to political and corporate forces that claim sovereignty over higher education. (p. 164)

Indeed the choices had been narrowed down. They were narrowed down by the National Reading Panel (not necessarily our immediate administrators). This panel had become the force for which we weren't even allowed to reckon with. At the time, I didn't make the connections between the National Reading Panel, government, and corporatization. Unfortunately, it wasn't until now that a light bulb has gone off. It wasn't until this class that I ever even thought to do any research into what the National Reading Panel is really all about. It is a panel comprised of fourteen members. It was established in 1997 by, you guessed it, our government. This panel of educators took two years to examine research-based reading knowledge on the instruction of reading. At the end of the two years, the panel gave recommendation on the best ways in which to teach children how to read. With this recommendation are the four or five major textbook publishing companies in which the panel endorses. (National Reading, 2001) Among these companies is the well known Houghton Mifflin Publishing Company. What I have found fascinating among all of this since researching is that Riverside Publishing is a

division of Houghton Mifflin. Riverside Publishing is the company that makes our infamous standardized tests such as the C.R.C.T. and the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. All of these initiatives have been put in force by the No Child Left Behind legislation which of course was put in place by the President of the United States. The full circle and the chain of connections are now clear to me. It isn't about the best ways in which children can better be instructed in reading, it's all about the money. I wish that someone had tapped me on the head a long time ago and said, "Wake up McFly!"

The bourgeoisie...has left remaining no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous "cash payment." It has drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervor, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism, in the icy water of egoistical calculation. (Marx, Engels, & Lindsey, 2002, 216)

The group of teachers that our county pulled us together in an effort to make it look like we had say so in the textbook selection, but in reality we were used as a front. A front that helped and continues to help pad the pockets of the corporations.

Through the National Reading Panel and as part of NCLB, an initiative entitled Reading First was also funded at a tune of five billion dollars. A few years ago when Reading First got shoved down the throats of educators it entailed of huge notebooks and accompanying computer programs. We used these items in an effort to make our students more proficient in the area of phonics and fluency. I would say that this costly initiative stayed in place approximately two years. Just recently, while cleaning out my school's bookroom, many of these notebooks were thrown in the trash. It seems as though our government is really good at hopping on bandwagons, spending exorbitant



amounts of money to support them, only to see that money wasted. In my recently acquired new job as an assistant principal, I was asked to collect all unused textbooks from the teachers. Hundreds of textbooks were piled up in the hallway. When I asked if I could take some of the discarded reading textbooks to a local private school that I knew still used them, I was told that was not allowed. They were going to be picked up by the county maintenance staff and then discarded. We were not allowed to give them to anyone who needed them. No, they had to be trashed. Literally, dollars were thrown away. No one, no child, could now benefit from the use of any of the books. What was I thinking? How silly of me in thinking that our system could sustain reading for children in the community. Our schools should no longer be called public schools, but George W. Bush public schools. Americans are a far cry from the thinking of the Frankfurt school of thought. As Wink (2000) notes:

The Frankfurt School of Critical Theory of the 1940s believed schools were a vehicle for reproduction whereby the workers who were needed in the existing power structures of society were prepared. These critical theorists postulated that the schools not only reproduce what skills society needs, but people with the corresponding social and personal demeanor as well. (p. 85)

Are we preparing the students of today for society's power structures? I don't believe so. It seems as though our government gets in the way. If only we were permitted to prepare them in a way to be free, yet critical thinking members of society. If only educators truly had a voice in the decision making processes that blast their way into schools across America daily. I think the Frankfurt theorists had it right. Schools *should* be preparing students to replicate the tasks that are required to be successful citizens as well as the

socialization skills that are necessary. Instead, schools are hindered by the heavy hand of the corporate government whose grip seems to get tighter and tighter with each passing year, and as is usually the case, the white culture dominates. Discussions are not held between governmental forces and educator, nor are they held between educators and students thus, voices are suppressed. When voices are suppressed, turmoil begins to stir. Soon the turmoil will boil until it erupts. Turmoil can erupt like a volcano, flowing slowly but deliberately and destroying everything in its path. Our society is at a volatile point in its progression. Educators must work toward awareness and validation of uniqueness in its minority students. I must do this. I must be deliberate in my responses to my students. I must be accepting of their differences. I must look at my differences and not think of myself as better because of my place in society. It is essential that I get involved in the understanding of the languages of all of my students. They must know that I care. They must believe that I care. If they do, then the students and I begin to build a trust. A trust between student and teacher that is unbreakable. I must let the students teach me. I am not in existence merely to educate but also to be educated. Student and teacher can learn from each other. It is with this that the channels of understanding become clearer. Other members of society (and those in governmental positions) will hopefully see the learning that is taking place between the two of us and will question it. They will want to follow suit.

Treating all students the same is different than treating all students fairly. I believe that all students should be treated fairly. Students should be treated fairly, but because they live in a white dominated society their race and culture should be taken into account. This can be difficult to do. As a white educator, I have to put forth more effort

into trying to understand that which is being brought to the table by my minority students. Because of this, I can not treat all of my students the same. It is just like being the parent to two children. The parent will have different expectations from each of the children based on a number of factors such as age, maturity level, and experiences that child has had in the world. Speaking from a Native American point of view, Krall (1994) said: “We were not all treated the same. Some of us were chosen; others of us were discounted, and in turn we discounted ourselves. (p. 34) I believe this statement would have been more accurate had the word ‘same’ replaced ‘fairly’. As an educator, if I do not treat my students fairly then I disregard them. When a student feels disregarded, then self-worth is shattered. I do not know of much else on this earth that is more important than self-worth. Self-worth gives us reason for being. As an educator, I must do my very best to make every one of my students feel deserving of an education. I must show them that we, teacher and student, are worthy of each other. I must prove to them that my white privilege will not get in the way of their worthiness. It is through the existence of self-worth that educators and politicians will begin to see the results they so desire on the standardized tests. Educators must take to the task of nurturing the self-worth. Like a plant, it must be watered, fertilized and given sun. When the teacher falls down on the job and takes away one of its basic needs, the student will droop, lose its color, finally shrivel up and die. It is going to take a concerted effort on the teacher’s part, on my part, not to let that happen.

Do I still feel guilty that I belong to the dominant culture? Yes, at times, but I am moving past it. I think I have begun to turn this word into an action word that seeks change and feels empathy. Whatever guilt I may feel in the future is going to be healthy

for me. It will make me stay constant in my attempts to keep myself at ground level and keenly aware of my surroundings. In referring to Foucault, Albritton (1998) states, “His goal is to force us to question the very structures and relationships to which we have become so accustomed, and of which we are so accepting.” (p. 26) I concur. If I am forced to question my daily existence, to question the bonds that I build with others, then I do not become complacent. I will not so readily accept that which is considered the norm of the dominant culture, my culture. There are still going to be days when I slip into coast mode, just as a weary driver who has no idea how it is that she arrived home. It will be that swerve of a steering wheel that gives me the wake up call. It is these days of reality that I will need the most. It will be a reminder of who I am and the privileges I am blessed to have. It will keep me sensitive to the needs of those not in the dominant culture and help me keep my focus on the most important aspects of my job as an educator. It will assist me in becoming a bridge that begins to mend the gap. The daily dialogue and questioning of that which is will become useful and vital tools that assist me in creating a culture of true multiculturalism for the students I touch and the son I raise. Stephen May (1999) eloquently states:

In the end then, a critical multiculturalism must foster, above all, students who can engage critically with all ethnic and cultural backgrounds, including their own. Such an approach would allow both minority and majority students to recognize and explore the complex interconnections, gaps and dissonances that occur between their own and other ethnic and cultural identities, as well as other forms of social identity. (p.33)

It is this dialogue among the two groups that will bring about an awareness and cohesiveness so desperately needed for the survival of the future.

### **The Manifestation of Southern Racism**

Racism that began in the south hundreds of years ago has set a standard that permeates itself in both education and society today. As is shown through Watkins' (2001) work, even after emancipation, white men have decided what type of education was best for the black population:

It was felt that the naturally inferior Black must always occupy a socially subservient position. Industrial education, therefore, was right for the Blacks, and they for it. More significant, industrial education was presented as progressive reform. After all, wasn't it a step up from slavery? (p. 40)

Furthermore, Watkins makes the point that black people were not considered upstanding and therefore were incapable of receiving any other type of education. Perhaps this is the basis for much of the white thinking today in regard to educating minority students.

Expectations are low because along the generational path of teaching, it has been either literally taught (or at the very least inferred) that the role of the Otherized is to make life more comfortable for the dominant; for this is their strong suit. To give the non-dominant any intellectual responsibility would be a waste of time. This type of thinking continues to hover today because it has been passed down from those in our genealogy that we love and respect.

When I reflect back to my days in high school and the courses I took in which I was to prepare myself for either a vocational track or a college track, I vividly recall being one of very few other white people in specific classes. Because I was interested in

pursuing the field of interior design, I took many art, drafting, and home economics type classes. It was here that I began truly interacting with people who were not of my race. I do recall wondering what was wrong with me at times. I felt inferior; not nearly as smart as many of my friends for they were in classes such as chemistry and trigonometry. The association of myself with non-whites was part of the reason for the feeling of inferiority. I recall one incident in particular that stemmed from an American history class. The assignment was to make a project that represented Georgia history. I was excited because I knew that this was something that I was good at as I would be able to use my artistic abilities, something that most of my friends did not have. After consulting with my art teacher on what I might do, I finally decided to paint a picture of a Cherokee rose. I spent many hours working on this flower. When finished, I felt very confident with the end result. On the night before the project was to be turned in, one of my best friends who was also my neighbor and later became our high school valedictorian came knocking on my door. She wanted to know if I had an extra canvas and paints that she could borrow to do something for the project that was to be turned in the next day. Inwardly laughing at her procrastination, I let her borrow my supplies. In fact, she sat at my kitchen table to create her history project. Within ten minutes she had literally splattered a multitude of colors on the small, borrowed canvas and painted one thin line as a border around it. It looked like a Jackson Pollock gone terribly wrong. When I asked her what it was supposed to be, she nonchalantly said she didn't know but would think of something. The next day came and we all displayed our projects around the classroom and took turns presenting them to the class. I was complimented on my painting at the end of my presentation. When it came time for my friend to present her

painting, she had concocted an amazingly intellectual explanation for what her painting represented. I do not remember all of the details now, but it had something to do with citizens of the country being controlled by the government. The history teacher was blown away. In the end, my artistically challenged friend got an A for the assignment and I got a B. I definitely felt betrayed by the teacher. I also felt stigmatized because of the non-traditional classes that I was taking. I believed that I was looked at as a lower-class white person not worthy of the grade of an A. After getting advice from my art teacher, I approached my history teacher about the discrepancy in the grades. She refused to talk about it and blew me off. This white teacher was definitely a southern, old-school teacher who I felt saw me as a student with little future. Graham's (2001) words illustrate her type of thinking well:

The rhetorical linking of blacks and poor whites as easy targets of propaganda reveals an underlying assumption on the part of many southern whites about the role of public education in the region. The centuries-long denial of education to black southerners, of course, supported the logic of slavery and racial hierarchy, but the historically inadequate education afforded working-class whites extended the logic to encompass an entirely class-bound notion of educability. (p. 94)

This teacher made me feel as though I was uneducable and not college material. So often, this message is passed on to students, especially those that are non-white. It is presumed by many educators today that most minority students will thrive only in a vocational type of job and little is done to encourage higher education. By my former history teacher refusing to discuss the situation, she was showing her accent. Marx's (2006) work reveals:

However, because Whiteness and racism are so thickly woven together, just talking about Whiteness and race with Whites can readily illuminate beliefs in the inferiority of people of color and the superiority of whites. In fact, showing our racism is a lot like showing our accent. It is something that is neutral to our own ears, yet marked to those from a different place. (p. 53)

In so many ways, I was from a different place, not nearly as significant though as the places from which those unlike me are from. I also believe that my teacher was deaf as to how deep her actions were impacting me and mostly likely had affected students before and after me. This type of non-acknowledgement continues in society and education today. Very few want to talk. Specifically speaking, defenses automatically rise as if any discussion about race will reveal true thoughts and feelings. Masking one's true feelings and thoughts only goes so far. It may be easy to fool one self, but disguising inner beliefs to the marginalized man is virtually impossible. This may also be a contributing reason as to why white teachers are reluctant to hold open discussions among their co-workers and within classrooms today; fearful that their true whiteness will be revealed.

Educators as well as executives in the workplace often try to conceal the disparities that exist in the racial makeup of school enrollment and among hired employees. This is nothing more than a vain effort to disguise existing racism. Sullivan (2006) found that:

White high schools-as well as other schools, such as colleges and universities-that honestly confronted the existence of white privilege and domination would do a great deal more to challenge white racism than ones that stubbornly held to the



popular view that white privilege and domination can be eliminated by the sheer presence of a few non-white students sprinkled in the midst of white people.

(p.184)

For years since *Brown vs. Board of Education*, efforts have been made to have a racial balance in classrooms as well as in the workplace in order to dismantle white racism. However, few in the dominant position have taken these efforts seriously. The phrase “token black person” has been whispered among those onlookers who know the truth. Throwing in an occasional Otherized student here and there has been no more than a band-aid on a gaping hole. Most recently, as seen on the nightly news, the United States Supreme Court ruled that schools could not use a child’s race in determining which public school they would attend. Many people view this as a set-back to all that has been worked toward. The ruling, interestingly, was a split decision among the justices with the majority being held by those considered to be conservatives. Is this not an example of the dominance of the Southern, white male rearing its head still today? Trepagnier (2006) sheds more light through her text as to how the once upon-a-time Democrats have turned into the Republicans that so represent much of the South:

The southern strategy proposed by Richard Nixon in the 1972 presidential campaign is related to these ideas. Called positive polarization, the strategy for Nixon was to pit angry white voters in the South against black voters. The strategy worked, and the South has since largely backed Republican conservative candidates, many of whom use the southern strategy. (p. 17)

Could it be true that this strategy is still in play today? This is possible. There are people that want to pit members of the human race against one another. It is this kind of tactic

that can get in the way of issues and cloud those that are trying to investigate their options. The more I read, discuss, and listen, the more I see and understand. It is as if there is an unspoken message secretly playing, like the evils of a back masking record; unheard by the naked, white ear but absorbed by the soul. It seems to be playing softly on the turntable of school vouchers. Under the guise of giving students an ‘opportunity’ they might not have otherwise; vouchers have been put into place in many states so that parents may take their children out of failing public schools and place them into more ‘successful’ (or should I say whiter) private schools. What is happening in many instances however, is white parents are using school choice as a basis for moving their students from public schools into schools that are more racially segregated where white students are the majority race. Sadly, many minority parents are doing the same for there has been brainwashing on both sides of the racial divide to believe that ‘whiter’ schools are better.

It is a wonder that there has been no major backlash between whites and those that have been Otherized since the days of the race riots when Dr. Martin Luther King, Junior was still alive. Yes, there are still protests and cries of angry frustration at the inequalities that still exist. However, they are not nearly as vocal as our country once experienced. Many minorities seethe in their resentment. Take Gardner’s position for example. He speaks of a childhood incident in which he was riding in a streetcar in Oklahoma and attempted to sit in an empty, segregated seat located at the front of a streetcar. Gardner (2000) states:

While we rode, my aunt gave me my first lesson in white/black relations in the South. She emphasized that white folks always come first; that I must always use

“Yes, sir” and “Yes, ma’am” in addressing white persons; and I should never forget “my place,” which wasn’t made clear to me at that tender age. And I confess, it hasn’t been satisfactorily defined to me yet. (p. 52-53)

Gardner goes on to show his obvious resentment of the south by stating that he has never returned to his place of birth since this incident. In spite of the deep roots of hatred and racism, for the most part southerners, no matter their race find comfort in calling the south home. Those who live in the south will tell you that there is one common thread among the majority of southerners. Kincheloe and Pinar (1991) state it well:

While Southerners have traditionally found themselves divided by lines of race, class, and gender, a sense of ambivalence (a sense that frustrates attempts to generalize about the South) renders such divisions problematic. This elusive southern consciousness of place seems to cut across racial and class lines, forming a tacit alliance between the South’s professors, journalists, Black preachers, and hot rodders with Confederate flags on their rear bumpers. (p. 133)

It is a place where hospitality abounds and the pace of life is slowed down at an enjoyable stride. There is a prideful identity that can be found. In *Away Down South*, Cobb (2005) speaks of the writer Keenan Randall and his reference to southern identity, “A lot of it is fragile and in danger, and a lot of it is so much a part of us that we don’t even see it” (p. 282). There is an inner southern pride. However, the pride differs. For some, this pride comes from being a dominant super-power of the south; for Others, it is a pride of resilience and triumph over that which has been endured in the past and that which is intended to be conquered in the future.

Gardner (2000) also made mention of a custom that has not been discussed much in texts on whiteness and the south; the usage of ma'am and sir. Strangely, Gardner talks about it in the context of speaking to white people only. However, being a Southern girl myself, I have always viewed saying ma'am and sir merely as a regional custom, spoken to show respect to adults or to those in authority. I have never thought of it in terms of race. Growing up, I was always taught to say ma'am and sir to all adults with no mention of race attached. I, in turn, have required the same of my son. When I first began teaching, I had to make a concerted effort not to scold students who did not use these same practices when speaking to me. Even today, I sometimes cringe when I do not hear a student saying ma'am or sir to me or to other teachers, administrators, and adults. I was taught that the lack of these responses shows a total disrespect. Therefore, I feel a deep desire and a responsibility to pass these teachings on to the children whom I have in my charge. Unfortunately, this enforcement is something that takes place in classrooms around our nation every day; the enforcement of governmental agencies' and educators' own ideals and practices upon vulnerable students waiting to be shaped with unbiased hands. Many of these principles have merit, but are not necessarily in the best interest for each student.

### **Educational Impact**

In order to meet the needs of the individual child, educators must seek assistance from those unlike them. Delpit's (1995) views can be found in the following:

I am also suggesting that appropriate education for poor children and children of color can only be devised in consultation with adults who share their culture.

Black parents, teachers of color, and members of poor communities must be

allowed to participate fully in the discussion of what kind of instruction is in their childrens' best interest. Good liberal intentions are not enough. (p. 45)

While the system of education may think it knows what all students need, such as with the No Child Left Behind bill, it is a sad mistake to think that education can be a one size fits all process. Educators and those that have authority over education must be accepting to the idea of getting input and seeking assistance from those unregulated, governmental people who have differing perspectives. These viewpoints will give support to the students whose needs are unlike those of white students. Multiracial and other minority children require different approaches. Many have issues of identity to deal with. It is important for white teachers to validate their distinctiveness. Maria Root (1996) maintains that these students call for a pedagogy that sustains them for positive growth and development. "Thus a multicultural curriculum must respond to the unique needs of these children." (Root, 1996. p. 384) It is imperative that educators take a stance on those elements that are essential to be accomplished. Not only should educators be acutely aware of that which must be accomplished, but they should know why it is to be accomplished.

Spring (2001) shines a light on the thoughts of multicultural educator James Banks, "In addition, multiculturalism should pervade the curriculum, including the general life of the school—bulletin boards, lunchrooms, and assemblies. In other words, all teachers and subjects should reflect a multicultural perspective" (p. 114). I feel that Banks' proposal is important. In order for real change to occur, multiculturalism must permeate a school environment. Educators must make a concerted effort to become immersed in the varying cultures of all of their students. With this taking place, students

are then exposed not only to the standard education of the dominant, but to that which they experience every day away from the school setting. Additionally, as was found by Meier (1995), “Some research indicates that minority children do much better on test items whose content relates to familiar cultural experience” (p. 181). Any student, whether a minority or not, is bound to show greater success on that with which he or she has some prior knowledge. Why is it that our test makers and legislators turn a blind eye to this? Instead, the white dominated curriculum is not only taught, but tested as well. The discrepancies in test scores and misrepresentations march on. The truth has been lost. Or more accurately, the truth has been concealed! It has halted at the doorstep of the American educational system. The words of James Baldwin (1998) can be aptly applied:

What is upsetting the country is a sense of its own identity. If, for example, one managed to change the curriculum in all the schools so that Negroes learned more about themselves and their real contributions to this culture, you would be liberating not only Negroes, you’d be liberating white people who know nothing about their own history. And the reason is that if you are compelled to lie about one aspect of anybody’s history, you must lie about it all. (p. 683)

For both whites and blacks to know the truth about America’s history in public education would be cathartic for its students, its citizens. It has taken me thirty-something years to realize that the truth has not been portrayed to me nor millions of students through the American school system. I sat for years under the white-dominated pretense of truth in instruction through textbooks. Where better to find the answers to the questions of youth than through the textbooks?

Those in power who seek to control and dominate do not want the truth known. Some of these people make the choice, the ethical decision to hide the truth from those who seek to be educated. The power of the white male has contorted the history of our nation. The denial of factual history has taken place in order that their power remain in place. Those that are marginalized have been situated throughout textbooks with their history and culture being denied rightful positions in society. The messages that the vulnerable have received have come via many sources. Weaver (2005) found, "Schools and mass media outlets became conduits through which people were persuaded that those in power were the legitimate heirs to rule" (p. 39). This is what I learned myself as a student, and as a consummate consumer of media. This is what students today still absorb. Lies in fonts of all sizes leap from textbooks on a daily basis. Likewise, the makers of the daily news barrage our ears with that which benefits the agenda of the white race. Headlines such as "Is America Ready for a Black President?" flood the internet. The media coverage of missing people focuses mostly on white people. Are they the only missing persons that matter? The criminal faces that are paraded across the newspaper come in various shades of brown. Even though society as a whole is now more aware, little is being done to change the message being received. A disservice is being done. "Here, our failure as a country, as a system, to meet the needs of people of color is blatant, transparent" (Landsman, 2001, p. 12). Educators have within them and their institutions to begin making the difference in the way young people learn today. Although it is often impossible to make literal changes in mandated curriculums as sold by the textbook companies, educators can begin to infiltrate these ideals with the consideration and truth. As Reynolds (2003) states, "Misery, poverty, disease, hunger,

racism, sexism, and war are the problems with which a curriculum of compassion would deal: This would be a true back-to-basics” (p. 49). With a curriculum of compassion would come empowerment; empowerment that not only the Other needs, but that those who are in a dominant position by birth need to come to terms with. Pinar (2001) feels, “The future of the nation depends, I think, upon unraveling these conflated currents and thematics and taking pedagogical action to dissolve them” (p. 33). Once both black and white students are taught the truth in schools, revelations and discussion can begin. “We must carefully seek to understand the implications of our rhetoric for the healing work of social justice and personal transformation” (Howard, 1999, p. 111). People such as myself must make a choice as to how the non-dominant group is going to be treated. A decision must be made as to whether whiteness is going to be used for promoting truth and fairness for all Others or to continue the oppressiveness of the dominant forefathers. Further exploration and research will reveal the path that I will ultimately take.

The research that I have conducted has a broader place in all that encompasses society.

Knowledge of minority cultures, knowledge of the dominant culture, and knowledge of the teacher’s role as a mediator in the cultural reproduction process represent important areas of liminality where educational theorists must be prepared to step forward by taking a position on *what* “must” be done, and help to frame the larger discussion of *why* it must be done. (Kohl, 1995, p. 322)

As Kohl points out, educators must be consciously aware of all that is done. It is essential for white educators to know the cultures of the minority, otherwise they will teach only that which they know. Once knowledge of Others is gained, teachers will



begin to take on perspectives that do not follow a straight white line. There must be action however, on the part of the government to see that the educators get the aptitude that is needed.

Politicians may do all they want to increase testing and accountability requirements and consequences, but if we as a nation fail to raise the cultural competence of our teachers to work effectively with diverse students, then the entire reform effort becomes a merely hollow exercise in futility. (Howard, 1999, p. 2)

White teachers must be provided with the tools necessary to teach those they really do not know. Those in control need to pave the way for this type of internal education to take place. It is then that schools will be freed to open their doors to those of color and experience; allowing them to come inside and share their stories and know-how.

Dialogue can then take place that will begin to supply teachers with an understanding of children of color. Not only teachers, but administrators as well must confront prejudice and stereotypes existing in the school's curriculum and climate. In order for this to successfully take place, educators must agree to face their feelings and advantages.

(Howard, 1999) When this type of introspection takes place, white teachers will then begin to be more in tune with the requirements of their students of color.

Educators have the responsibility to see to it that minority students feel as successful in their educational experiences as do students of the dominant culture. "One of the most important elements of any culture is a tradition of achievement along a particular line-a tradition which the group imposes upon the young and through which the powers of the young are focused." (Counts, 1932, p. 12) People have the inherent need to

be validated. It is through success that one receives validation. This is demonstrated in our society today by schools' award systems. In schools, students are rewarded mostly for academic achievement; that is how well they do in daily and end of term progress in core subjects. This is a direct result of what the dominant culture views as important in the grand scheme of things. Rarely are rewards given for anything else other than maintaining a pre-determined, qualifying score in specific areas. Accolades are not awarded to those who simply make progress. Efforts are not recognized in those that have climbed out of struggling predicaments and made great strides in their situations. Kudos are only given to those that meet a pre-determined 'white' numerical score and not to those who have poured their hearts into overcoming insurmountable obstacles. Look at the overwhelming importance that politicians and our President are placing on the outcomes of the standardized tests that take place in the public schools each year. This is the particular line (as mentioned by Counts) that the dominant group is inflicting upon students today. In doing this, the dominant culture is invoking its pre-determined white line into the lives of minorities. Students are being forced to learn at the same level although educators know that this is an impossible feat. "The critique of culture is of its effects in destroying any true individuality, any capacity of autonomous reasoned thought and mature, responsible action." (Wexler, 2000, p. 69) What Wexler says here seems to be true of the dominant; my culture. The standardization of today's students is at an all-time high. Educators are creating cookie cutter students who are void of the ability to think critically and creatively. Teachers are forced to teach as the standardized tests dictate. In doing this, educators' hands are tied with regard to being able to expound

upon that which interests their students and is applicable to their lives. There is little to no time for teaching that which will not be on the test. Hence, their growth is stunted.

“It takes courage and faith in the future to persist in such an essentially uncertain occupation. But faith and courage alone are not enough. We must constantly be reflecting on our responses and their consequences.” (Dewey, 1983, p. 22) According to Dewey, it is essential to be continuously reflective. Educators should seize a moment at the end of each day to reflect on the interactions with students; a review of the choices that were made within the day and their end results. Dewey (1983) stated that, “For any theory and set of practices is dogmatic which is not based upon critical examination of its own underlying principles” (p. 22). Dewey’s point is important. Educators must be conscious of why they do what they do. It is critical for those that teach to feel their convictions. If educators go forward with their own ideas without a complete internal investigation and understanding of core beliefs particularly in regard to their own race and the races of non-whites, then they can become rigid and dictatorial.

The effects that the lies, incarnated in the nation-wide accountability movement, have had on the educational system in this country are numerous. One such effect that still seems to be the great constant is the need to continue to be superior to all others. In this drive for superiority many sacrifices have been made along the way.

Now, culture admits the necessity of the movement towards fortune-making and exaggerated industrialism, readily allows that the future may derive benefit from it; but insists, at the same time, that the passing generations of industrialists, - forming, for the most part, the stout main body of Philistinism, -are sacrificed to it. (Arnold, 1994, p. 41)

America's educational system must move ahead to keep up with the industrialization of our nation and the world. If not, it will be left in the wake of other nations. It is not unreasonable to press for high expectations from our students. Benefits will arise from keeping up with the advances in technology and such. Still, sacrifices will and are being made along the way. Educators are being required to force-feed knowledge entirely too fast into the minds of students. Other students, in particular, have been dumbed-down. Their interests are not being allowed to be fully engaged; their cultures not validated. That which has been taught has been compacted into only what is necessary for high test scores. It has been reduced to tiny particles. Students are not being given adequate time to absorb knowledge. Many students will keep up with the force feeding, but those who can't become the sacrificial lambs of the day. Those sacrificial lambs ultimately become the citizens that are sent into the world to try and make their way. There are ways that educators can ensure that students do not lose that which is being swept away by the government. Educators can see that students are provided with the experiences necessary for them to make those critical thinking connections.

The term "learning experience" refers to the interaction between the learner and the external conditions in the environment to which he can react. Learning takes place through the active behavior of the student; it is what *he* does that he learns, not what the teacher does. (Tyler, 1949, p. 63)

A student must encounter that which is going to be forever retained. She must be willing to absorb what is provided and feel securely free to question that which the educator makes available. It is in conjunction with what both the student and the educator put forward that the pedagogical learning can begin to take place. Educators must be the

conduits of the learning and keenly astute in the needs of their students. Dewey (1983) explains:

A primary responsibility of educators is that they not only be aware of the general principle of the shaping of actual experience by environing conditions, but that they also recognize in the concrete what surroundings are conducive to having experiences that lead to growth. (p. 40)

Without environments free of pervasive, white-dominated teaching, minority students will not be able to achieve growth within the classroom experience. As noted here:

We need compassion for the child as child. A curriculum should allow both teacher and student to develop a critical, caring, compassionate conversation rather than treat human beings as objects to be manipulated by prescribed and pre-fashioned technical rationales that reduce human beings to mere raw material to be fashioned and formulated into information receptacles for the global corporate economy. (Reynolds, 2003, p. 43)

Teaching requires a great deal and many do not feel like putting up the investment.

However, an investment in the totality of students is what is required. Fanon (1961/1963) makes the analogy, “For when you domesticate a member of our own species, you reduce his output, and however little you may give him, a farmyard man finishes by costing more than he brings in” (p. 14). Many students have little output because their learning is so controlled. Educators must see that their students are given a voice. This voice though, must have been empowered with knowledge based on truth. This truth can only come through a pedagogical relationship. Additionally, into this relationship, the parent must at least be invited. Delpit (1995) explains:

The clash between school culture and home culture is actualized in at least two ways. When a significant difference exists between the students' culture and the school's culture, teachers can easily misread students' aptitudes, intent, or abilities as a result of the difference in styles of language use and interactional patterns. Secondly, when such cultural differences exist, teachers may utilize styles of instruction and/or discipline that are at odds with community norms. (p. 167)

In order to redirect that clash, it is essential that educators provide the means necessary to allow students to express themselves in a safe environment. The school can then become the catalyst that allows open dialogue to begin. "As we know, teachers and parents often reproduce the worse-as well as the best-of what they themselves experienced as children." (Pinar, 1996, p. 233) Because this is true, many parents may never have had a pedagogical experience as a child in school. Therefore it becomes important for them to give this concept a try. Teachers have to now be more aware than ever before to the needs and voices of their students as well as having a pipeline to the parents. "Teaching is a contextual and situational process. As such, it is most effective when ecological factors, such as prior experiences, community settings, cultural backgrounds, and ethnic identities of teachers and students, are included in its implementation." (Gay, 2000, p. 21) Teachers must be constantly looking and listening for the true needs of their students. They have to reach beyond paper and pencil. "Our students have few opportunities in their lives to take charge of their learning. They have often been conditioned in school or jobs to respond to orders or to other people's initiatives." (Wallerstein, 1987, p. 41) While the point made here is true, it is a situation that can be overcome with persistent parenting

and truthful teaching. When parents gird their Otherized children with historical truth; and when teachers partner with the parents in truthful teaching, great things can happen. As Aoki (2005) said, “Authentic teaching is watchfulness, a mindful watching overflowing from the good in the situation that the good teacher sees. In this sense, good teachers are more than they do; they are the teaching” (p. 196) Teachers who truly watch have come to grips with their own race and in turn seek to understand minority and *all* that they bring to the table. A great disservice is being done in the education of non-dominant cultures and all students today. As Shor (1987) suggests:

The education crisis is thus an expression of the social crisis of inequality. As one solution, equality empowers people and raises aspirations in school and society.

Power and hope are sources of motivation to learn and to do. Motivation produces student involvement and involvement produces learning and literacy. (p. 13)

Students will only become motivated though, when those that pledge to educate them are motivated as well. Sincere introspection by all educators will free them to teach in a way that is liberating to all. “Our solidarity must be affirmed by shared belief in a spirit of intellectual openness that celebrates diversity, welcomes dissent, and rejoices in collective dedication to truth.” (hooks, 1999, p. 239) The government is not going to make this solidarity a reality. This solidarity must come in the form of a partnership between parents and educators so that children they are charged with shaping will grow up in a more culturally responsive world. (Gay, 2000, p. 10)

### **CHAPTER III**

#### **METHODOLOGY**

This journey that I have taken through my research has been put into place to serve several purposes. First, has been to reveal who I am as a white person and my perceptions of whiteness. Secondly, to confront my own prejudices while cognizant of my responsibilities as a white parent who is raising a child who is a minority. Thirdly, as an educator, I wanted my research to uncover the impact that whiteness and racism has had, and continues to have on the lives and education of minority students living in the south. I have taken all that makes me who I am; white, wife, mother, and educator and shared with those like me, in candid conversation, that which I have learned and experienced. In the end, I want this study to have made a difference not only in my life, but in the lives of the people who are a part of this research so that all might recognize and understand their own biases in regard to children who are Otherized. The literature that I have read has helped tremendously on this journey. It has opened my eyes to dialogue that I did not realize was taking place around me in regard to whiteness. It has shown me that what I always perceived as truth really wasn't. The literature has encouraged me to engage openly in discussions using a knowledge I have not previously had.

#### **Narrative Inquiry**

The methodology that I explored to investigate my theoretical framework is auto/biographical narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry permits a candid look into the lives of those I interviewed. "Narrative, they say, is the closest one can come to experience. For them, experience, not narrative, is the key term." (Connelly, Phillion, & He, p. 254)



Whereas autobiography gave me the tools needed to reciprocate. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) found , “One of the starting points for narrative inquiry is the researcher’s own narrative of experience, the researcher’s autobiography. This task of composing our own narratives of experience is central to narrative inquiry.” (p. 70) The participants that I spoke with are people that I am already acquainted with in one way or another. This, I believe added to the sincerity of the discussions. Also, we have in common the fact that we are white parents of minority children. Because of this commonality, experiences were shared; not just one-sided interviews spouted. At no time did I attempt to tell my personal stories before they did. When participants struggled with understanding a question or seemed to want an example of what I was asking; it was then that I would share my personal story. There were also instances in which participants would ask me what my thoughts were on a question after they had answered it themselves. After I gave my thoughts and/or opinions it seemed to make some of the participants feel more at ease and in return, expound on their answers even more; as if they then felt more comfortable to open up further. Even though I was acquainted with all of my participants, time could not be rushed and full trust had to be earned. “A sense of equality between participants is particularly important in narrative inquiry.” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1991, p. 126) Here is where autobiography came into play. I shared with the participants that which I have come to learn about myself through my exploration of whiteness and my hopes for my son and those like him. “The redefinition of the self through the writing of autobiography places power into the hands of the writer to define who she is and to share her self-identity with the readers.” (Phillion, He, and Connelly, 2005, p. 37)

Empowerment is something I have begun to experience as I have come to be more cognizant of my own thoughts. As this journey has continued and as I expected; this empowerment has grown. I ran the risk of making myself vulnerable to those I conversed with, but it was a chance that I feel was worth taking. I relate with the following that Phillion, He, and Connelly (2005) found:

I also examine my autobiographical writings in light of the many ways I identify myself. The impact of these facts also affects how I respond to my life events today, not only in my personal interactions but also in my interactions as an educator, with my colleagues, and with my students. (p. 36)

It is through the autobiographical sharing that I have come to have a truer understanding of who I am as a female, mother, and educator. The beauty of the narrative inquiry was that people other than myself now have a voice. As Connelly and Clandinin (1991) state, “Narrative inquiry is, however, a process of collaboration involving mutual storytelling and restorying as the research proceeds.” (p. 127) The alliances that were formed through this reciprocity have hopefully begun a ripple effect that will lead to awareness not seen before. Eyes have been opened to that which can be; the cultivation of a new curriculum. As Grumet (1991) pointed out in speaking about autobiography, “Curriculum reclaimed in this manner is, of course, inevitably reconceptualized, even in the most meticulous and ingenuous retelling” (p. 25). The methodology of auto/biographical narrative inquiry laid the groundwork to enable this to take place.”

### **Collecting the Stories**

As stated earlier, participants in this research were people who are much like me. Originally intended to be a group of eight, I interviewed seven white parents and/or

caretakers who have children that are now considered minorities. One of the interviews did not prove to be useful or add to the research in any way. Instead, I used my own answers to the questions as a replacement. The backgrounds of the participants range from that of educators, secretaries, and retired military to a florist. All participants are currently living in Townsville, Georgia. Some were raised in the south while other participants are transplants from elsewhere in the United States. My strategy, as such, was to use narrative inquiry with phenomenological interviewing in literal discussions with the participants. The reason for phenomenological interviewing can be found through the works of Marshall and Rossman (1999), "The phenomenological genre tends to focus in depth on the experiences of a few individuals to explore in detail and, often, over time, their deeply held understandings of some facet of their lives. This suggests a series of long, in-depth interviews that explore the past and the present and that integrate aspects of the individual's experience into a coherent account." (p. 63) The interviews that I conducted did not occur within one sitting. It was a non-rushed process, giving the participants time to reflect on the questions. Locations of each interview varied, depending on what best met the comfort level of the participant. Further rationale for using phenomenological interviewing is that "The primary advantage of phenomenological interviewing is that it permits an explicit focus on the researcher's personal experience combined with those of the interviewees." (Marshall and Rossman, 1999, p. 113) This type of interviewing permitted my autobiography to be a part of the stories. (Marshall and Rossman 1999, p. 5) Along with the in-depth interviews that were audio-recorded, I took field notes as I observed families going about their daily lives. Because I associate with the majority of the participants in some form or the other, much

of my observations were anthropological in nature as one could say that I lived among them. I encouraged the participants to share items with me such as photographs and personal mementos, etc. that gave me a view into their lives that can not necessarily be expressed orally. In addition to questions and informal observations, I used a portion of Peggy McIntosh's (1988) white privilege checklist that came from her essay entitled *White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack*. This work about the unearned privileges whites have has been used in workshops and classrooms for many years. Twelve of the twenty-six privileges were read to the participants. The participants were asked to give their reaction to each privilege that was read.

### **The Setting**

At first glance, Townsville, Georgia is an unlikely place to be looking into the lives of multi-racial families. It is a small town in southeast Georgia, tucked away forty miles southwest of Savannah and two hundred forty miles southeast of Atlanta. It is loved by many for its arm's length reach to the coastal waters and loathed by some because of its influx from the Fort Soldier military base. It is this base that has actually made Townsville known for its racial diversity with 63% of its population being categorized as Others. Somewhere is known for having a population rich in southern history. Townsville and Freedom County boast of having supplied two of the signors of the Declaration of Independence; Lyman Hall and Button Gwinnett. Since its establishment in 1837, Townsville has grown from a population of five hundred people to a population of over 34,000. While there are local industries such as a paper mill, a gift wrap factory, and a distribution center for a major department store that draw many people to jobs, the majority of employment in Townsville comes from the Army base, the

utility companies, and the local educational system with a median income of \$36, 221. Somewhere has two public high schools, three middle schools, eight elementary schools, a Pre-K center, and two alternative schools. Additionally, there is one private school that houses Pre-K students through the eleventh grade.

When driving into the town of Townsville, one is greeted by a sea of fast food restaurants, auto parts stores, pawn shops, and various other small businesses that cater to young soldiers. Most first time visitors would not be impressed with initial appearances of the town. Very few original structures and older homes still exist within the city limits. They have been replaced instead by overnight subdivisions. The physical beauty of Townsville is hidden in the outer-lying parts of the county as one drives away from the burger places and towards the coast. This is where some of the few remaining older homes can be found among the moss-draped, live oaks. Continuing on this drive, one will pass historical cemeteries, churches, and eventually come to the waters of coastal Georgia. Here modern meets shanty in a sporadic mix of homes that compete to get the best view of the Atlantic inlets.

### **Participant Profiles**

It is in this unique town that I call home that I have met the people whom I interviewed. I have changed their names so as to protect their privacy. Let me introduce you:

**Pammy-** Pammy is a white female in her late forties. She is married to a white male and together they have one natural son who is in his early twenties. This son still lives with Pammy and her husband and helps out with the family income. She has been a teacher for more than nineteen years. Pammy is a very intelligent person but seems stressed quite

often due to health and financial issues. I have known Pammy since 1991 when I began teaching at the elementary school where she was employed. She is currently a kindergarten teacher at the school where I work.

Pammy and her husband became legal guardians of a black child about five years ago. This came to be through circumstances other than foster care or adoption. It was during a time that Pammy was a middle school teacher. Teddy's mom was Pammy's student in a self-contained, at-risk class during the seventh and eighth grades. It was during her eighth grade year that Teddy's mom became pregnant. Pammy noticed that her pregnant student wasn't eating or taking care of herself and took the pregnant teen under her wing in order to make sure that she received good prenatal care. On the last day of eighth grade, Teddy's mother went into labor. On the way to the hospital, she called Pammy and asked her to go to the hospital and also to be Teddy's godmother. Pammy agreed and Teddy was born. From the time he was three weeks old, Pammy and he husband were often called upon to babysit. Eventually, Teddy's mother had a second child. Occasional babysitting of Teddy turned into sending Teddy to Pammy and her family every weekend. Teddy began reaching out for Pammy instead of his mother. Pammy believes this is also in part due to a possible bond that could have been formed during the gestational period while Pammy taught her pregnant student. It was during this time that she believes Teddy heard her voice day after day, that a bond began to form. When Teddy entered pre-school, he began staying with Pammy's family during the week as well as the weekends. Teddy's mother was struggling financially (and was now pregnant with her third child) and signed over temporary guardianship to Pammy and her husband. Teddy soon entered kindergarten. At the end of this particular school

year, Pammy decided to retain him because of his academic struggles. His mother became very angry at this decision by Pammy. She rescinded the guardianship and took Teddy and moved to Kentucky. This move was short lived and Teddy and his mother soon returned. Teddy's mother was incapable of providing for Teddy and full guardianship was given to Pammy and her husband. Now he lives permanently with Pammy but visits his mother and brothers on the weekends. Pammy says that he only wants to visit them because his youngest brother recently almost drowned and he wants to make sure that his brother is being taken care of. Teddy is currently a third grade student at the school where Pammy and I work.

It was decided that our interviews would be held in her classroom at the end of the work day. Pammy and her husband only have one car and she and Teddy often wait until 5:00 or 6:00 pm to be picked up by him. She lives about twenty-five minutes away from the school and since she would have to wait on her husband in the afternoons, the school was chosen out of convenience. The interview took about two hours. Although it was designed to take place in several sittings, Pammy asked that we complete it in one day. Informal observations of Pammy and Teddy took place during the school day at the school that we both work and Teddy attends.

**Marty-** Marty is a forty-three year old white male. He is a retired Marine Colonel. He is married to a black female who is an active Army Colonel at Fort Soldier. They live on the military base, but have purchased a home in Townsville where they plan to live when his wife retires. Marty and his wife have one twelve year old son. He is a person who likes organization and intelligence. He has spent a great deal of time as a single father

due to his wife's deployment overseas. He and his family are very well traveled and have offered their son a multitude of experiences. I have known Marty for about two years.

It was decided that we would meet at Marty's home on the military base. It was convenient for him and also allowed us to look at numerous family photos that were stored on the family's home computer. Looking back, I think that having conversations on his 'turf' made him feel as though he were in control of the interview. We sat at the kitchen table to talk while his wife sat in the kitchen as well, working on the computer. The interview took a little over two hours. Marty has a very busy schedule and preferred to complete it in one sitting. Observations of family interactions took place on overnight and out of town soccer trips and in social settings.

**Bernice**-Bernice is a white female in her mid-forties. She is married to a man from the Phillipines. They have two children together. She is the secretary at the church that both of us grew up in and still attend here in Townsville. Bernice's husband is an emergency medical technician. Her late father was *the* local dry cleaning business owner when I was growing up. Bernice has strong southern roots. I have known Bernice practically all of my life. She has a girl who is fifteen and a boy who is nineteen.

Although Bernice agreed early on to do the interview, it was hard to confirm an actual interview day. Her mother is very ill and she was spending a great deal of time taking care of her. Bernice preferred that we meet at the church one Sunday evening while both of our children were at youth group. We went into an empty Sunday school classroom and were able to have our interview undisturbed. I think she wanted to have it here out of convenience. She hesitated when asked about interviewing in her home so I did not push the issue. I know that they live in a modest brick style home. I can only



assume that it is pretty typical on the inside with American décor. The interview took about an hour and a half. She wanted to complete it within one sitting. Observations of Bernice and her children took place at the church and in social settings.

**Marsha-** Marsha is a white female in her early thirties. She was once married to a black male and together they had two children. She is currently raising her nine year old daughter and twelve year old son with the help of a white male who is her fiancé.

Marsha is originally from New York and came to live in Townsville because her former husband is in the military. Marsha works as a bookkeeper for a governmental agency.

Marsha is a hardworking female whose life revolves around her children. I have known her for about three years through our sons' involvement in soccer.

Marsha came to my house for the interview. She and her fiancé are heavy smokers and they have always met us at the door and kept us there any time my husband or I have gone to their home to drop off their son or soccer paperwork. So I wasn't surprised that she had no intention of having the interview in her home.

**Fifi-**Fifi is a white female in her late twenties. She is married to a black man who is in the military and together they have two children. She has one boy who is eight and one daughter who is five. Fifi was once in the Army which is where she met her husband. Fifi is a new kindergarten teacher at the school where I work. She decided that she wanted to complete the interview at school in her classroom. We completed it over a period of three days. Two of the interviews took an hour and one of the interviews took approximately thirty minutes. Observations took place at a school dance and during a week of Bible School. She is the only participant that received the questions prior to the interview. This was done because of her hesitancy in agreeing to the interview. She

wanted to know what kind of questions I would be asking, so I felt she should have the opportunity to view them and then reconsider if she wanted to do so. She liked this idea and was much more comfortable with the idea of being interviewed after she read the questions. The photographs that Fifi showed me portrayed a happy family. Pictures of the children's birthday parties showed them surrounded by children of multiple races. Pictures with grandparents showed the love you would expect any grandparent to have for their child.

**Leonard**-Leonard is a white male in his sixties. He is a retired military man and currently works on our local military base for civil service. He is married to a woman who is from Japan. They have three daughters who are now grown. One of their children is my age. We went to high school together and are still very good friends. I have not known Leonard personally, but still have known him for a long time. He is a very strong family man. It was decided that we would meet at Leonard's home when he got home from work. His daughter Erin arranged the meeting for us. I arrived early (at her request) so that our children could play with a newly purchased Wii. Erin stayed as well and popped into the den periodically where we were talking as her dad would call out to her. There were moments when he was getting off of the topic and Erin would yell from the other room, "What does that have to do with anything?"

The family room is the room that you enter when you walk in the front door of Leonard's home. Upon entering, I immediately noticed all of the family photographs on the walls. Photographs covered every wall up to where the ceiling line began. Indeed he was proud of his children and grandchildren. On the floor to my right was a very large statue of a Buddha. It was about two feet wide as well as tall. This surprised me because

I know that Erin and her sisters are Christians. I assumed the same was true of Leonard and his wife. As I continued looking around the room, there was no doubt that this was a home of mixed cultures. Japanese figurines mixed in with American military service awards. I laughed inwardly at a small sign that stated, "This is an American home run Japanese style. Please take off your shoes and stay a while." I was welcomed into the home by his wife. She stayed quietly (almost submissively) in the kitchen when we began the interview. This was the longest of the interviews that I conducted. It took almost three hours. I attempted to get Leonard to let me continue the interview on another day, but he insisted on finishing within that evening. As I left at the end of the evening, Leonard's wife gave me a gift bag of food items from Japan. She wanted me to take it home to my mother in law. She also gave my son some Japanese candy. She was extremely hospitable. Observations of Leonard and his family have took place in social settings.

**Lea**-Lea is a white woman in her sixties. She is married to a white male and they are legal guardians of their grandson who is part Hispanic. Their daughter had previously been married to a man from Mexico. Lea and her husband are now raising their grandson. This is the same grandson whom I tell the story about in the beginning of my paper. He is the same age as my son and they go to school together as well as play soccer together. I have spent a great deal of time around this child and his grandparents. Lea and her husband are completely dedicated to raising their grandson in the best possible of circumstances. They will spare no expense for him. Lea and her husband are from the south. I have known Lea since I was a child as she lives in the same neighborhood that I grew up in. The interview with Lea took place poolside at a hotel in a suburb of Atlanta.

We were there for the weekend for a soccer tournament. It lasted about two hours. Sue wanted to complete the interview within one sitting. Informal observations of Lea and her grandson have taken place during soccer trips, at church, church trips, and other social settings.

### **Posing Questions**

The questions that I posed gave me insight into the lives of those that I interviewed and how they view themselves as white parents of minority children. The questions began with finding out how it is they came to marry someone who is a non-white and what issues they have faced themselves in that regard. For the parents that have guardianship over children of color, I asked them to explain how this came to be. I found out what their personal views are toward race and multiculturalism and what they are or are not teaching their own children. The questions directly asked those that I interviewed about the privileges of being white. This then lead into matters of living in the south and confronted how (if at all) this has influenced the way their minority children are being raised. I moved on to questions about education and what they feel their role is in this part of their child's life. For those participants that are teachers, I also asked specific questions as to how they are teaching students who are considered Others and if being a parent of a minority child has made a difference in the way they teach. I read twelve statements from Peggy McIntosh's (1988) white privilege checklist and asked the participants to respond to each one. I also asked participants to share photographs that gave me a personal look into their lives. I spent a good bit of informal time with most of those that I am interviewed and used my observations to assist me with my reflections and findings.

The interviews with my participants were tape recorded. This enabled me to participate in unrestricted and uninterrupted dialogue with the participants. I transcribed the interviews by playing the tapes back and typing word for word their responses to the questions. The results were presented in this research as letters written by the white parents to their children.

## CHAPTER IV

### LETTERS FROM THE WHITE-HEARTED

The pages that follow are interviews with the participants written in fictional letter format. They have been written based on actual interviews of white parents and/or guardians of minority children. The words as they appear in quotation marks are the actual words spoken by the participants. Words not appearing in quotation marks are either paraphrased words of the participants or are text written by the researcher to allow the words to flow in letter format. The letters scrape the surface of what are very complex family situations. The letters have been written in an attempt to better understand the thinking of these white parents of children of color. While the children were not a part of the interview process, observations of family interaction did take place. The indirect and inferred voices of the children will be heard through the reflection portions following each letter. The last letter in the series is written by me to my son. It is part two of three.

#### Pammy's Letter

*Dear Teddy,*

*This letter comes to you out of my desire to express to you those things I have never actually put into words. Even though you are not my child by birth, I want you to know I will always love you as if you are. Even though you haven't said anything, I know that it must be hard for you to deal with the fact that you are black and that me, Pappy and Mike are white. I hope you will always "understand that the love is there and it is the love that is important" even though our skin colors are different. There have been times when people have given us strange looks when we have been out in public. I am*

*proud of the way that you have handled these situations. When you were much younger, I could tell that it bothered you, but now that you are older, you stare right back.*

*“You know that you do act one way when you are in the black neighborhood. And when you are in my neighborhood you are learning to distinguish what is acceptable in society as a whole. Yes, there are some things that maybe grandma or your brothers and sisters and cousins might say, but it is not acceptable when we go out in public because people look at you and they listen to you and they judge you based on the persona you put out in front of people. And they do judge you and I am trying to teach you that.”*

*I want you to understand that “yo mama and talking like that in the neighborhood is not appropriate in public because people will look at you as a young black male who is not educated and not well taken care of. I am trying to get you to understand that society will look at you in a different way.” The older black males that I have brought into your life have been role models to show you “that there are appropriate ways to behave and appropriate mannerisms and whether you are white, purple, green, or blue, people look at you in a certain way based on the way you act and speak.”*

*There are so many hopes and dreams that I have for you. It is no secret that no one in your birth family has ever graduated from high school; not your grandmother, nor your mother or your father. More than anything, I want you to go forward with your education and accomplish this goal. I believe you can do it. Your birth mother was angry with me for holding you back in kindergarten. But I did it because I felt it was best. You are still struggling in your school work and that is something that I will pledge to help you overcome, but one thing that gets in the way is your behavior. You “have had*

*some anger issues to deal with because” you’ve “had a rather rough upbringing.” I can not do anything to change this. I feel like your anger is the reason for your behavioral issues at school. I have to admit, sometimes I get very stressed and frustrated when these issues of anger are exhibited at school. I thought that this school year would be better because you are with a teacher that you seem to like a lot more. The fight that you were in the first week of school has nearly put me over the edge. I have told the assistant principal that the next you get into trouble and are sent to the office, I will have no choice but to put you in the \*\*STAR program. I really don’t want to do this, but I am desperately trying to prevent you from going down the same path that your birth family has gone down. I’ve begged you to behave and tried to reason with you. I’ve offered you rewards, but none of it ever works.*

*I feel like I have been sensitive to your needs as a black child. Pappy, Mike and I have let you watch television shows that portray black families even though we would not normally watch them. We’ve also allowed you to listen to rap music even though we prefer country music. During the holidays, I try to teach you about Kwanzaa. I also try to provide you with biographies on famous black men because you “need to know that there are respectable black men.”*

*Teddy, I plead with you.....you can have a bright future if you just try. The path before you doesn’t have to be as difficult as you are making it. Our southern town has come a long way. “We have a black mayor, a black school board chairperson, and there is now a possibility that our country will have a black president. There are so many respectable and educated black adults who are successful. I have even worked for two black females which in the south is unusual. All of this to say....there are endless*



*possibilities.” I also want you to know that you may not hear about the successes of those that are black while you are in school. I am trying to do my best to ensure that what you don’t learn in school, you learn from me. “History is not one-sided.” The textbooks will not always tell you the truth. “When I was teaching middle school history, I felt like if I taught what was in the textbook, I was teaching a lie.” Remember this as you go through your school journey. “Education is still geared toward the white child.” And if you ever feel like you are not being taught like everyone else, you need to speak up.*

*Teddy, you have made such a difference in our family. Before you, “my mother had never been around black people too much. She really had a hard time the first year or so that she was around you because you wanted to crawl up in her lap and things and she did not know how to respond to you. As the years went on, you became like a grandson to her. Even during her last days when she was about to pass away, you crawled up in the bed with her and she patted you. You touched her life. She became more conscious of her own beliefs. During her last days, we had a black lady come in and help take care of her. This would have never happened if you had not come into her life. She fell in love with you.”*

*Teddy, I am going to close this letter now. I am sure this won’t be the last time I write to you. There is a lot that we need to work on, especially with your behavior at school. I have seen some improvement but we have so far to go. I only want the best for you and I want you to do your part so that the positive things will happen. I hope that this letter helps bring some understanding into your complicated life. I will always be here for you.*

*Love,*

*Mamaw*

\*\*STAR-Student Transition and Recovery-This is a short-term program geared for students in the second through twelfth grades who are having behavioral issues. Parents request that their children be placed in the program. It is boot-camp like and students attend one day a week. Part of the requirement is that parents drop their children off at 5:30 am and they engage in physical training for a period of time with officers barking orders at them. STAR officers have permission from parents to check in on students during the regular school day to see how they are behaving.

### **Reflections**

I interviewed Pammy in her kindergarten classroom at the school where we both work. It was a quiet afternoon after all of the students had left for the day and most of the employees had also clocked out. Teddy was in the classroom as I first entered, but Pammy shooed him away to go play on the playground soon after I arrived. As we sat down and got into the first questions and answers, I got the distinct feeling that she was trying to answer in a way that she thought I would approve of. Pammy would often follow up an answer with “you know how it is”. Pammy was very quick to give herself pats on the back. Of course, I had to keep in mind that she had taken on a big responsibility by agreeing to raise Teddy.

I had many occasions to observe Teddy and Pammy’s relationship. Teddy has been a student at the school where I am an assistant principal as long as I have been there. During this time he has had numerous discipline referrals. Most of the time, the referrals have been written for issues of disrespect to adults or for bullying types of behaviors

towards other students. He has even had a couple of fist fights. When trying to talk to Teddy, I get a real sense of deep anger within this child. He has never cried or opened up to me when I have had to discipline him; he has only either sat in utter silent defiance or has been rude and disrespectful to me as well denying any wrong doing. Because Pammy works at the school, she has been called into the office when he has gotten into trouble. The majority of the time she has handled it by either taking him into the restroom to give him a spanking or by grabbing him by the arms and yelling at him. After yelling at him for a while, she has then resorted to pleads of “I have tried so hard” or “you are really a good boy but you are making bad choices”. Many times she will cry in front of him. None of these ‘scoldings’ ever work to deter Teddy’s inappropriate behaviors. Teddy’s typical response to Pammy is that of defiance. He does not appear to respect her or fear her. He seems to be confused and angry about where his place is in this world.

Even though he lives with Pammy and her family, she sends him to his biological mother’s house randomly on the weekends. It is after these visits that there is often an escalation in misbehavior at school. Pammy recognizes this fact. She has stated that Teddy wants to go there simply to make sure his younger siblings are okay, but also makes note that his mother shows no real love for him. Teddy’s behaviors speak volumes. They are very telling of his inner turmoil. He is confused by the two worlds that he lives in. He lives by the rules of one culture on the weekends and another during the week days; he is not quite sure where it is that he belongs. Although Pammy claims to be sensitive to Teddy’s needs as a young black male, this does not show in her interactions with him. Her pleas for him to behave put Teddy in control. When she tells

him how hard she is trying and reminds him of how much she loves him, his eyes spit at her with brutal unappreciation.

Pammy's discussion of how she teaches children in her classroom seemed to be pre-constructed answers to anticipated questions that I would ask. She did not come across as sincere. It was hard to break through to honesty. Pammy has been a teacher for many years and came up with answers that she seemed to think were fitting to our discussion. It was when I switched the questioning and asked her about issues of white privilege that she hesitated in her answers; as if she had not realized I would go down that path. The majority of her responses to the white privilege statements were simple agreements with them and little commentary.

I came away from Pammy and Teddy's story with the realization that there have not been great strides in improving Teddy's life. His very basic needs are provided for, but even those can be sporadic. Pammy does not hide the fact that her electricity often gets cut off and they have to stay with the neighbors when this happens. Her own physical appearance is disheveled and she wears clothes that fit poorly and are dated. To add to this, she has a chronic cough and problems with asthma. Her husband does not stay with one job very long, often getting "laid off". So not only does Teddy carry the burden of worrying about his siblings, he also worries about his legal family and their daily needs. Mixed in with this is the confusion of the messages that the two worlds are sending him. She continues to hold on to stereotypes of black males and uses them as her guide to raise Teddy. I believe Pammy's intentions are heartfelt and that she loves Teddy very much, but that she is still partially blinded by her own personal issues as well as her whiteness.

### **Marty's Letter**

*Dear Christian,*

*I am not sure if writing you this letter is really necessary, but I am going to go ahead with it in case it will help answer any questions you may have as you grow older. Maybe it will benefit you to know more about how I grew up, came to marry your mom, and what I see for you as you head into your future.*

*My dad was in the Marines so we moved around a lot, but he retired in Tallahassee and this is where I spent most of my childhood. When I was your age, I had friends that were black and white but I mostly hung out with the kids in my neighborhood and they were all white, but "I've never really thought about being white." The only thing that really sticks out is when my grandmother told me "she didn't mind if I married an Asian girl, but I was never to marry anyone that was black. Obviously it didn't matter me because I ended up marrying a black woman anyway." I met your mom when I was in the Marines and she was in the Army. We were both going through the same course that officers go through and were in the same class. We dated for about two years and then got married in 1994. During the time that we dated, my family never really talked to me about the fact that I was white and marrying a black woman. Even though there are people who believe you should marry only within your race, my family didn't have a problem with it. By the time that I had met your mother, my father had already passed away. A few months before your mom and I actually got married, we were at a family gathering at my brother's house during a Memorial Day weekend. It was here that "my mother pulled me aside and I didn't know what she was going to tell me, she said she*

*approved of your mother and that she thought she was a nice lady. I am glad that she pulled me to the side that day because it was the next month that she passed away.”*

*In regard to race, I don't have much to say because “We don't talk about race. It's never been an issue for us.” Once when you were small and still in a car seat, you said, “Mom, you're brown.” But that's it. Because we are a military family and have moved around so much you've been exposed to many races. Your first in home care provider was from Morocco and then after that a black couple took care of you. You've always had black and white friends. “You've had no orientation towards race for friends. You don't care. You know, it's never been an issue for us. We don't talk about it.” If I've told you anything it's been “that it's not the color of your skin, it's the person and the color of your skin has nothing to do with it. You're a very smart, perceptive kid. You get it. We don't need to continue talking about it.” Before I had you, when I was dating your mom, “I used to think a lot about having a child and having you grow up as a multiracial child and what the impacts of that would be on you and not only as a white person but as a black person and the mixing and the possibility of not being accepted by both. Once upon a time, my perception was that maybe a child would be more accepted as a multi-racial female. But obviously you are a boy and “I haven't thought about it much since you were born.”*

*Christian, “who knows what the future will hold. I don't have a crystal ball so I can't sit here and say that you will not have something because you're not white. I think that the way society is now, we are a more multiracial culture and we have a lot more intermixed going on than we used to, but I don't believe you will be negatively impacted because you are a mixed race child.” You should never have a problem being around*

*other people like yourself because “I think that you can arrange to be with people of your race no matter what race you are.” Even when I open the pages of the newspaper, I see people of various colors represented. Now, there are those that say what you get taught in school is written predominantly from a white perspective, so maybe you won’t see a variety of representation there. Even though “I am not an educator” I guess I can see that because “history is written by the winner.” The good thing about your school is that even though it is a private school you are in a class with at least three boys who are a mix of black and white. I haven’t been too worried about your heritage being taught at school because you don’t seem interested in it. Besides, heritage is so abstract. “You are American from the United States. I don’t think about it racially. When I think of heritage, I think of people who come to America from other countries and that simply isn’t the case with you. So I really don’t think you are missing out on anything in school. “You’ll have the opportunity as you grow up and if you are interested to do all the research you desire.”*

*Many people have assumed that it would be difficult to raise a child in the south who is multiracial. I disagree with this. “I guess you could say that I’m a southern boy. I have lived mostly in the south. I don’t believe living in the south has impacted how I have raised you at all.” Maybe it’s because we are a military family and have lived on military bases most of your life. The only time I can remember anything unusual is the time I went with your mother into a comedy club in southern Alabama. I remember us getting a lot of looks. But other than that, living in the south has been great for raising you.*

*It will be interesting to see how it all turns out for you Christian. I haven't talked about things much with you because you haven't seemed interested. I really hope that you become like me. "I'm not your typical white male. I married a black woman and I don't look at race first. I don't even think about it." These are the qualities that I want you to have too. As I see it "the white race is not going to be the majority soon anyway so I don't see where you will have any issues" to deal with. Always remember that you live in a great country. "It seems to me that in the United States, you can be successful no matter what your race is." I want you to take advantage of this fact as you grow into the successful man that I know you are going to become.*

*Love always,*

*Dad*

### **Reflections**

As I drove up to Marty's home on the military base, I immediately took notice of the sign in the yard that stated his wife's position and rank. Because she is a high ranking officer, their home was in the nicest of the available military housing neighborhoods. I was welcomed into the home by both Marty and his wife. Their son Christian was at home and but remained in his room doing homework the entire time I was there. We sat in the kitchen at the table to conduct the interview. As we did so, his wife sat in the kitchen as well, working on the laptop at the kitchen bar. I noted early on into the interview that although her back was turned to us, Marty's wife was listening very intently.

Marty was quite difficult to interview. He was very analytical and seemed to think some of the questions were so generalized that they were hard to answer. This was



especially true when I began to read Peggy McIntosh's statements on white privilege. When I asked Marty to respond to the statement about arranging to be around people of your race, he said that there were too many factors to consider and that it depends on what environment McIntosh was talking about. He wanted to know if she meant in the privacy of somebody's home or going out someplace. After I read McIntosh's statement "I can arrange to be in the company of people of my race most of the time" Marty responded by saying that he "can choose to go anywhere and hang out with anyone he chooses to in this country." It seemed as if he purposely wanted to buck every white privilege checklist item. When asked to respond to this statement, "Whether I use checks, credit cards, or cash, I can count on my skin color not to work against the appearance of financial responsibility," he said he couldn't really agree with it. Marty then told a story of the time he took Christian to the dentist. The dental office required that he pay up front before any work would be done, even though he had insurance. This, he felt, proved that his whiteness did not help him in regard to the appearance of financial responsibility. I am not sure if he just didn't get it or didn't want to get it. Marty repeated the statements from McIntosh's work to me in a patronizing way after I read each one to him. This made me feel uncomfortable and even defensive. As I attempted to give examples of possible situations that McIntosh might be referring to, I was shot down and cut off. Marty really didn't want to hear what I had to say. I truly felt as though he was in an intentional phase of denial. This was especially made clear to me after he stated "I don't hear racial stereotypes anymore." As the conversation moved on, I had the distinct feeling that Marty's wife's views were probably quite different than

her husband's. I told myself that one day I would get her to the side and ask her what she really thought about these issues.

When the interview ended, Marty and I moved to the bar in the kitchen where his wife was working on the laptop. Here is where she had the bulk of their family photos stored. I was shown many photographs. What I noticed in these was a child who indeed had variety of friends and who has been places and done more than I will probably ever do in my entire life. Marty has done the majority of child rearing due to his wife's frequent and lengthy deployments. During these times he has taken his son to the best ski resorts, parasailing, golfing at the finest courses, traveled to places such as the Grand Canyon, and the list goes on and on. The few photographs that included all three of them showed a very happy trio. The majority of the photos were of father and son though. As we viewed the photos, Marty talked extensively about them and always made a point to show me the children of mixed races as if to prove a point. It was also made very clear to me by Marty that Christian was a highly intelligent boy who should have no problems growing up.

I had several opportunities to watch interactions between Marty and his son as well as Marty with both his wife and son. Marty oversees virtually all of Christian's activities. He is constantly at the private school that Christian attends; volunteering for this and that. Marty is also at all of the soccer practices and games, parties and outings that Christian attends. He is not there merely as a parent or a spectator, but seems to always involve himself in a way that will ensure he has some say so in the event that is taking place. He wants to control the environment so that it will affect Christian in a way that is advantageous. Christian is often irresponsible in keeping up with personal items.

Marty always seems to re-supply these things without any repercussion no matter the cost or significance of the item. On one occasion, Christian left his hand-held gaming device that cost well over one hundred dollars in his pants pocket. These pants were washed in the washing machine. Marty replaced it within days. When Christian was asked by one of his peers why he left it in his pocket, he replied that his dad always checks his pockets for him.

I noticed that Marty seems to want to ensure that Christian not miss out on anything. If there is a gathering of any kind, he makes sure Christian is there for its duration and has the most money or best equipment necessary for the occasion. It is almost as if Marty is trying to be proactive in compensating for any issues that could possibly arise. Either consciously or subconsciously (and even though I feel sure he would never admit it), I believe Marty may be trying to protect Christian while he can from being set apart from everyone else. Christian is a very vocal child and quickly corrects anyone who he feels has a differing opinion from him. He often tells his peers “my dad said” to prove the point he is making. He is an intelligent child that makes friends with peers of all races.

I picked up on a difference in the way Marty and his wife interact with Christian. Marty often allowed Christian to argue with him where as his wife did not. Marty’s wife was also much quicker to tell Christian no; Marty gave in to virtually all of Christian’s requests. This particular observation took place on a trip to Atlanta with the soccer team. I also noticed that Christian was much more loving and affectionate toward his mother; giving her frequent hugs and kisses and hanging onto her often.

It seemed Christian doesn't mind his dad's constant involvement in his life, and is extremely dependant on him to take up any of his slack. In my view, Christian has not been permitted to experience any trials due to his father's constant overseeing and quick preventive interventions. This stifles the realities of life for Christian and gives what may be a false sense of security in Marty's mind for his son.

### **Bernice's Letter**

*Dear Jerry and Megan,*

*This letter comes at a time in your lives when you are both almost grown. I can't believe that you are already in college Jerry. I am so proud of you. And Megan, you have turned out to be a thriving young lady. I wish I could slow down the life's clock as it won't be long before you are off to college just like your brother. I wanted to take this time in your lives to tell you some things that we have never sat down and talked about. Sometimes it is easier for me to put my thoughts down on paper instead of into conversation so that is why I chose to write you this letter.*

*Let me begin with my childhood. "When I was growing up I thought we had it made. With your granddaddy running the cleaners, there were a lot of black people working for him." In my head I felt "they were supposed to work for us. I thought that we had everything we ever needed or ever wanted; but these people, they have to work to get what they want. I just thought we had it made because we were white people." I never wanted for anything and I have tried to do the same for the both of you.*

*Megan, lately you've been asking a lot of questions about mine and your dad's relationship and how we came to eventually marry. Well, "we actually met in Sunday school. He was in the Army at the time and he was gone a lot, but we got engaged and*

*then he had to leave a few months later and go to Germany. While he was in Germany I broke up with him, but came to visit him to see if we could put things back together. We decided that we still wanted to get married and he came home that next August and we got married.” You know that your dad is Filipino, but I have to say that my family always liked him. “If they talked about him because of his race, they did it among themselves when I wasn’t around.” They actually never showed any concern over the fact that I was marrying someone who was not white. As you know, your dad “was married before and it was actually a bigger issue than what color he was. And that wasn’t a huge issue either; it was just what concerned me.”*

*“I try to raise you both like I was raised. Your dad was raised very poor, but whatever I wanted, I had so I have always tried to get you all whatever you wanted.” There have never been any issues for us in regard to your skin. “Now, when you were small Jerry and we lived in Hawaii and I worked at the church there, we had an English as a second language school there. I remember when the principal there said to me, “you’re not taking that child back to Georgia” and I said to her, “yes I am, why wouldn’t I?” The principal told me that you were going to be teased all the time. I have to admit, I dreaded coming to Georgia because I didn’t know. “As far as I was concerned, you were white. And that’s how I have raised you, just like I was raised. Now when you were little, you were always considered white.” Jerry, do you remember the time that you were in Mrs. Dasher’s fourth grade class? You all were getting ready to take a standardized test. Mrs. Dasher called you up and asked you what race she should put on the form. “You had always put white, but that time you said you were Pacific-Islander. You realized you weren’t white. And now, even today you refer to yourself as Hawaiian*

*although your dad is from the Philippines. You love living in the south and say that is where you want to raise a family when you grow up, but because you were born in Hawaii you like to say that you are Hawaiian. I think we are fortunate that we live in a military community in the south. There are a lot of multi-racial families here. I hadn't really thought about it until now, but I guess things could have been a little different if we lived in a smaller, non-military southern town. Here, you both would have stood out more as being different. Megan, when you were in first grade in Mrs. Long's class, she came to me and said "you have to put her down as being a different race, she can't be white. That's when I put you down for Pacific Islander. That allowed you to be in Mrs. Long's class. That kind of upset me. But now I understand that this could get you scholarships. You do have an advantage. There may come a time when you are discriminated against, but I haven't seen it so far. Other than the ability to get scholarships, I think you have the same privileges that I have.*

*I look back at your life in grade school and realize that your heritage has never been studied or celebrated while you were in school. There was the one time that your dad came to the school and did the hula, but that was part of the Hawaiian culture, not the Filipino. "I guess that I could have gone to the school and talked to the teachers and asked them to incorporate it, but there aren't that many Filipino children so if you have one in a class, why would a teacher want to do a whole study on it?" I know that the two of you have asked me why you have to spend a whole month studying black history and that you didn't think it was fair. You thought that it should be taught every day, not just once a month. I think I see your point now. Maybe teachers should do a better job of incorporating the history of all into the classrooms instead of just during certain times. I*

*guess I should have done better at helping this along, but it never occurred to me what was really taking place. "I have always tried not to be prejudiced. There are some people you like and there are some people that you don't like. My views have not really changed" since having you two. I don't really see the two of you having issues of race to contend with in the future. However, Megan there is the one problem that you and I know you are going to have to deal with; that anemia that was passed on from your dad's genes. Because of it, when you get married you will have to marry a "full white person." You can not marry "anyone else that has anything in them." As I've told you before, if you do marry someone who is not fully white, the baby will be deformed. "I've always drilled into you that you have to have a full white boyfriend. You can not find someone that has anything else in them." I guess you have really listened to me. Do you remember the time that you were in the third grade? A little black boy that liked you brought you some jewelry and you wouldn't take it. I remember the teacher telling me that he cried and cried, but you didn't want anything to do with him. Recently, a black boy called you at home and asked you to go to a dance. You said no. "You know, it's just something that you don't do." So you will live with this all of your life Megan. That's just the way is. But Jerry, I don't see that you will have any problems. You have already accomplished so much. You are in your second year at the University of Astate and you are the drum major. You are doing great things.*

*I am proud of both of you and see your future as very bright. I honestly can't think of any problems that I might need to warn you about. If I turn out to be wrong about this please let me know. I love you so much.*

Mom

### Reflections

I was most surprised with my interview with Bernice. I have known her longer than anyone else that I interviewed. I expected her sense of southern roots to really be strong and voiced in the interview. I also expected her to speak of some family resistance to her marriage to a Filipino man. Additionally, I thought she would have more to add to the conversation on raising children who are considered minorities.

As has been mentioned, Bernice's family once owned the only dry cleaning business in our community. As a child, I remember going with my mother to the cleaners. Bernice's father was always there and extremely friendly. I liked the coat hangers because they were covered with a paper that had a cute flower on it along with a saying about the clothes being as fresh as a daisy. Her family was very prominent in the community and in our church. In fact, they are still highly regarded today. When I decided to interview Bernice, I assumed that their long ties to a southern town would add much to the interview. When I asked her to tell me what her idea of southern pride was, she gave me a long moment of silence. Because I wasn't sure if she didn't understand the question, I explained it a little more thoroughly and told her my own story of how I once equated southern pride with the rebel flag. Even then, she could not give me any response, so I ended up skipping the question. Because she has such strong southern roots, I found it odd that she could not define southern pride in some way.

Bernice's children are very active children in the community and church. They are well liked and well known by many. Jerry has been a drum major in his high school and college bands and a youth leader in the church among other things. He is five years older than Megan. Jerry is an outgoing and dependable person; known for helping those



in need. He has many friends of various races. His best friend is from Mexico however, his girlfriend is white. He seems extremely comfortable in his skin and with who he is as a young man. Jerry has his hair grown out and has that surfer kind of look. I suppose this goes along with the fact that he refers to himself as Hawaiian. Bernice said that he calls himself Hawaiian instead of Filipino or white because he thinks it sounds better. Although Bernice thinks of her children as white, she is okay with however they choose to refer to themselves.

I think the discussion on whiteness caught Bernice off guard, even though she had read and signed the consent form prior to the interview. Constantly she said that she hadn't ever thought about the things I was asking her. There were many silent moments and she always wanted to see the printed form of my questions after I asked them. Much of what we discussed, I believe, was somewhat of a revelation to her. When I asked how the children's Filipino heritage was celebrated at home, she laughed and said that they eat the food. Other than that, they do not celebrate at all. In fact, she said that they only eat Filipino food when her husband's mother comes to visit. She said that her husband never shows any interest in celebrating his heritage and added that it might be different if they lived in Hawaii. I know her husband to be a very quiet man and Bernice even stated that she did the majority of the child-rearing. It's as if he and his Filipino heritage have always been in the background and no one in the family has been interested in bringing it out.

When I read the first few white privilege checklist statements, Bernice had little to say. Most of the time, she hesitantly said, "I guess that's true". It seemed as though she didn't want to agree with the statements, but did not know how to counter them. Bernice

had previously told me she felt her children would have the same privileges that she has had. I got the distinct feeling though that she was thinking more about a white privilege verses black privilege and not the disadvantages that her own children may encounter because of their minority status. When we talked about inequalities in education, she asked me the following question, “Minorities, okay, I’m talking about the black children. They get a whole month of black history so what about our children?” After I explained to her that textbooks show white history on a daily basis and that this is pushed as the norm to students, she seemed to have an ah-ha moment as all of these thoughts and ideas seemed very new to her.

It troubled me that she played down the potential problems Megan may have in the future by being told she can only marry what she called “a full white” person. I asked Bernice if it was one hundred percent sure her daughter would have a deformed child if she in fact married someone who was not white. She said the papers they received were in a safety deposit box and hadn’t been looked at in a long time so she couldn’t remember the percentage. She did note that this trait was common among Filipinos and was either passed from the father to the daughter or from the mother to the son. I began to wonder if I was getting the true story or if it were embellished a bit so I consulted with a doctor friend of mine. After giving him the little bit of information that Bernice had divulged to me, he said that what she described sounded much like Thalassemia. This is an inherited blood disorder that can be found in people of Mediterranean and Southeast Asian descent. It causes the body to have an iron overload. There are several types of it ranging from mild to severe. It has the potential to cause bone disorders which may be the “deformity” that Bernice was talking about. However, the doctor stated that there are treatments for

Thalassemia and a healthy pregnancy is possible no matter who the carrier of this disease marries and conceives with.

Bernice implied a distinction between her children and black children. Early on in the interview she said that she always viewed her children as white. So I believe that there may be some hidden racism that even she doesn't realize is there. She sends the message to her daughter that she is not to date or marry anyone who is non-white and has this great excuse to justify it. I believe Bernice has put an unjust fear in her daughter in order to have her stay true to the white part of her heritage. Megan is only fifteen at the time of this writing, but has a heavy weight to worry about in the near future.

### **Marsha's Letter**

*Dear Ford and Sissy,*

*I am writing you this letter to help give you more understanding as to the issues you may confront in your life. Because you are children of mixed races and especially because one of those races is black, there will be some things you will have to face and I want you to be prepared for it.*

*I don't know if you realize this or not, but I met your father when I was about your same age Ford. "I was roller skating down a hill while holding onto the back of my brother's bike and I fell. When I fell, I literally landed at your father's feet. We became friends at that point and were friends after that for a long, long time. As I've told you, my brother was shot and killed when he was sixteen. Your dad helped me through that rough time in my life and we eventually got married.*

*My family never showed me that they approved or disapproved of us getting married. What they did do was sit us down and talk to us after I got pregnant. You see, I*

*got pregnant before your father and I got married. They wanted us to know “the different ways the rest of the world could look at a mixed child.” I believe that my parents were open to me marrying outside of my race “due to the religious background in the house and the tolerance they had. I can’t ever remember a time in our home where race was mentioned or even a factor. In fact, I’m not black or white, I am made up of many things. That is also why it was probably never an issue. But I know that people don’t look at other people that way. They look at their skin color.”*

*Because I know that people are going to look at skin color, I have tried to raise you both differently than I was raised. I can say this even more strongly now that we are in Georgia. “When we came here there were some things with the different people we ran into that would make him aware he was going to be looked at as a black child. I told you that you might have to work harder and you might have to be better behaved, to even have a chance. So you are aware of that. Growing up, I was never aware of anything like that. But I’ve had to make you aware. There are times that you’re going to run across it. You are aware that most of the jail population is black and that the statistics on black males are not good. I don’t want you to be a statistic. I know that you know all of this. My hope is that you do not have to face it.”*

*Unfortunately, there are some advantages or privileges that I have simply because of the color of my white skin that you may never have. You probably won’t understand this now, but one day you will. For instance, “I can walk into a store and not be looked at. When you get older, you’re going to be looked at. There’s so much here that I can honestly say I never noticed in New York.” Do you remember the time that the three of us went into Media Play? We were at the register checking out and the cashier*

*“told me it was so nice that I had adopted you two. I was stunned. She got personal and had made an assumption.” I don’t know if you remember all of this or not, “but what made me feel good was that the man behind us, who was an older white male, put his stuff down and walked away. He said that he would never shop there again. I told the lady that I didn’t like her attitude and I put my stuff down and we left. That was my first ugly experience here in Georgia.” I hope you will have the same courage to stand up for what you believe in also one day. One thing I have picked up on down here in Georgia is that in this area it “has a lot to do with family and their roots. It’s really hard to penetrate what’s going on down here. A lot of it’s admirable, the way families stick together, but it doesn’t open up a lot to change or new ideas.” It has been hard for me and Mac to find jobs and I believe it is because we are not from the south. I hope the same is not so for the two of you. Both of you love it here and have made friends in Someplace, so I feel like you will stay in the area as you get older and have jobs. It may be difficult for you to get jobs because of your skin color; but not impossible. It is important that as you are able, you become involved in community activities so that you will be well known by the locals when that day comes.*

*Even though I have children who are non-white, there is something I have to admit, even though I hate to do so. And this is something you are going to have to look at inside of your own selves as you grow older. It’s this prejudice thing. I really think it exists in everyone. For instance, “I never really thought about Arabs before 911. I didn’t think much of them at all. Now I won’t get on a plane if I see them. That troubles me because I don’t feel like that. I don’t think I feel like that. And then it turns out you do feel like that. It’s hard for anyone to say they don’t have prejudice in them, because*

*they do. Somehow now it's like there is a whole 'nother race to hate. So that troubles me. That worries me." It worries me enough that I want to bring it out in the open to you. Not so that you will have prejudice in you, but so you will recognize it when you do. If more people would admit that they have these feelings and then work on changing them, I think the world would be a better place. Ford and Sissy, I want you to be people who contribute to the world being a better place.*

*Strangely enough, I've been pretty pleased with the schools here. Both of you are happy and doing well. Even though I don't like the idea of a black history bowl at your school Ford, I am proud of you for doing so well in it. I would like it better if the school would just include black history in the teachings every day instead of one month a year. It adds to separatism and I don't like that. "I think recognitions like black history month are counterproductive." They don't bring unity at all. Teachers should let the students express themselves on a daily basis, not just one month out of the year. I have to say the only problem I ever had was when we lived in Germany right before we moved here. You probably won't remember this Ford, but you were four years old and in pre-school. Your teacher called me in for a conference because she said you "were being flippant and sarcastic. This was shocking because you're not like that. When I got there, she showed me this picture that was a drawing of pilgrims. You had drawn them all brown. She had tried to tell you that they were from England and you know, fair skin and blonde hair. Even though I think you colored them brown because that's how you related, you told the teacher that they had been on a boat for a long time and that's why they would be brown. So she tells me you were being flippant and sarcastic and I told her that she just wasn't accepting the truth. There was no point getting upset. It's not going to change a kid's*

*color.” When you grow up and have your own children, I hope you will remember this. Children should be able to freely express how they represent themselves. I don’t think we can control this. “The truth is the truth.”*

*The good news for both of you is that you do have a bright future. You have a chance to add to change. You shouldn’t always have issues of race to deal with. It will be up to you whether you allow it or not. “Legally, it race can’t stop you any more. You’ll always have the law on your side. If you don’t allow issues to hold you down, they won’t.” My hope is that you will pass this on to your own children. I love you both.*

*Mom*

### **Reflections**

Before I sat down to speak to Marsha, I had assumptions about how the interview would go. I thought she would be guarded with her conversation. I found this to be just the opposite. I was surprised to hear her say that she had talked to her oldest child Ford, about things he may encounter as he grows up. When I asked her what Ford thinks of her forewarnings she said, “I don’t think it fazes him really because his friends are a good group of kids. I don’t think he sees the truth in it yet. And I hope he never has to.”

There are some deeper issues that Marsha didn’t really speak about in the interview; some issues that I believe do faze Ford only it seems Marsha is not seeing the truth for herself. What is not said in the letter is that Marsha is now divorced from Ford and Sissy’s father (who is black.) She has since become engaged to a man who is white. His name is Mac. Mac now lives with Marsha, Ford and Sissy. They refer to each other as roommates. They have separate bedrooms in the house. Marsha’s son is on a traveling soccer team that travels out of town frequently. When this happens, they either

get two rooms so that Mac and Ford can stay in one and Marsha and Sissy can stay in one or if they need to save the money, they will get one room and Mac will sleep on the couch. This wouldn't sound so strange except for the fact that Marsha and Mac are not just roommates. They do want to get married, but Ford does not want them to. He has told his mother if she marries Mac, he will run away. This situation has gone on for a couple of years now. Marsha refuses to marry Mac and live as "roommates" until Ford gives his approval. Ford is totally in control and Marsha allows this to take place. My sense is that not only does he resent the fact that there is potentially a new man to take his father's place, but there is a white man to take his father's place. Even though Marsha remains on good terms with her ex husband and he has tried to sway Ford to accept Mac, Ford refuses. Ford's father recently came to Townsville for a brief visit. He was on leave from Afghanistan. While he was here, he stayed in the home with Marsha and Mac. This only added to more resentment and confusion on Ford's part. After his father went back to Afghanistan, Ford began to show his bitterness even more so. He has been bullying his peers and has a terrible attitude when things are not going his way. Marsha makes excuses for him and has said on more than one occasion that Ford does not have any male role models in his life. This type of attitude on Marsha's part merely cements Ford's attitudes and behaviors, leaving little chance for him to accept her relationship with Mac and to accept him as a father figure in his life.

When I asked Marsha what privileges she feels she has as a white person, she immediately said that she can walk into a store without being looked at or followed around. I had not even gotten to the white privilege checklist nor had I shown her my questions prior to the interview. When the white privilege checklist items were read,



Marsha agreed with all of them without any hesitation whatsoever. She was the only interviewee to do this and to at least have a firm idea of the ramifications that each statement was presenting. To know that she was so in tune with this really took me by surprise. Just presenting the term “white privilege” to everyone else caused pause, hesitation, and sometimes anxiety. On the other hand, while Marsha seemed to be in-tune with the privileges she has as a white person, there was almost a disconnect with the needs of minorities to be represented equally. She stated that she hated Black History month, thought the NAACP should be abolished, and that there should never be groups like the Eleven Black Men, etc. In her opinion, all organizations or efforts to separate races should be extinguished. Marsha stated that they did not celebrate her children’s mixed heritages at home at all. She also did not feel that there were any real worries in what her children were being taught in school and stated that she was very happy with the schools.

Marsha stated that she definitely had more of an awareness of being white now that she had children who were minorities especially since the experience at Media Play. I think she answered all of the questions very honestly however, I don’t know that she is seeing all of the truth in her own personal life. Her former marriage to a black man and now live-in relationship with a white man has thrown a curve ball into her family. She simply believes her son is not ready for her to remarry, but makes no connection of his anger to the fact that her son’s potential new step-father is white. Her daughter on the other hand would be very happy for her to marry Mac. Sissy is thriving in school and is very well adjusted. She is active in her school’s student council, plays on a traveling soccer team, and has many friends. While Marsha states that she is trying to prepare her

children for life in regards to race and race issues, she is doing little to validate their heritage which is leaving her son to boil in the background.

### **Lea's Letter**

*Dear Jack,*

*You are probably wondering why I am writing you a letter. I see how fast you are growing and how much older your Pop and I are getting and I just want to make sure that you have the answers to any questions you might have if we ever leave the Earth before there is a chance to answer them.*

*I'll start by telling you how I was brought up. "Being brought up in the deep south, I thought white was the superior race. Although I did not look at it personally, I tried to treat everybody alike. When I was small, I played with little black kids that lived behind us, but I knew that there was a distinct separation. Really, accept for the few black kids that lived behind us, and maybe their mom came and helped us in the house once in a while and we played together then; I was just never around them. I mean we went to different schools. It wasn't until your mom and Uncle Jim came along and integration that we were really aware of all the differences."*

*So as you can imagine, you were a surprise to us. "Initially, we didn't really find out that you were part Mexican until you were born. When your mom was pregnant, she was in the Navy in California. She called us and said that she was eight months pregnant and that her husband had left her for someone else. Not until your father's mom called us later and talked to us about getting your mom to stay in Texas and giving her help in raising you did we realize that you might be another race. We thought that your mom would just stay in Texas, especially because your other grandmother really wanted to be*

*involved in helping raise you. However, one Sunday afternoon when you were four months old, you and your mom came driving up and that is how we first met you; when you were four months old. Your Pop just fell in love with you. It was just love at first sight. After that, we never gave it a thought again.”*

*“Now, some of the older members of our family, that was a different story, but after being around you for a while they adjusted. You and your mom stayed with us for a few months. Your mom was out of the Navy and she got a job and then you both moved into your own apartment. Of course by that time Pop was going around to the apartment every day to get you.” Not long after, your mom remarried to a Sergeant in the Army and you all moved to Wisconsin. “It liked to have killed your Pop” when you moved. “Then you all came back and settled into a condominium. It was probably only three or four months then and your mom’s husband got orders to go to Ohio.” You were about four years old then and “you said you didn’t want to go; you wanted to stay with us. But you went to Ohio and only lasted three weeks. You came back. Your mom eventually came back too and got a job at 911. Well that meant terrible hours for her. So you just came and stayed with us and have been with us ever since.”*

*You’ve made me aware of some things about myself that I might not have ever paid attention to. One of these has to do with the color of people’s skin. Jack, you have “used skin as a comparison for years. Sometimes you say to me, ‘their skin is a little bit darker than mine or his is a little bit lighter.’ I remember you came home one day and I was asking you who that little black boy was that sat by you in class. And you said, ‘why did you say black boy; why didn’t you just say who is that little boy sitting by you?’” Do you remember my response? I asked you “how else was I going to describe him?” And*

*you told me that “you don’t describe children by the color of their skin.” You have taught me a lot. “I hope that we are raising you not to look at the color of skin, but to look at the person. I think your biggest realizations have been on the soccer field.”*

*Recently you told me that a player on one of the other teams made a racial slur at you. “I told you then this was something you would just have to deal with and then forget about it. So it’s there and it’s not going to go away. And I really think that with us living in a military town and where you see so much interracial and such; I think that has probably helped our family adjust. Otherwise, I think it would have been difficult. I think my family accepted you because you were Mexican, but if you had been black, I don’t know. I really don’t know. I think that would have been a very hard row to hoe. I don’t know what were going to do.”*

*Sometimes I think that other members of the family “don’t see you as a member of another race, but they do other kids. They’ll say, ‘look at that black and that white. Look at those biracial children.’ And I am thinking.....hello! They are colorblind when it comes to you.”*

*When you were diagnosed with a reading disability in the second grade, “some members of the family said, ‘oh, I’m sure that’s from his father’s side of the family. This happens often, especially with some of the older members of the family.”*

*Now that I have had you as a part of my life “I think that I am more aware of the different races and the interracial marriages and children. I am more sensitive and more accepting now. Before you came along, if a black and white were walking down the street together I would look and say to myself, ‘I don’t get that. What in the world is going on?’ But now we have you and we don’t give it a second thought. So you’ve opened up our eyes to a lot and to different things.”*

*Jack, “you talk about your heritage all the time. We tease you when we see little Mexicans and tell you they are your kin folk. It’s funny because you always innocently respond by saying, ‘I don’t think so.’ Just like at the soccer field the other day, you bought a soccer ball. It had Mexico on it. You also want a soccer jersey that has Mexico on it. I think you are proud of it and we encourage this. When you go and visit your dad and grandmother, I like for them to expose you to the customs and things that they have. I wish they would speak more Spanish to you though. I’d like for you to really get fluent in Spanish so that when you go to visit, you can speak their native language.” Other than encouraging your interest in your heritage and allowing you to feel free to explore it, we do not do anything in our own home to help you learn more about it. I think that your father’s family is more suited to do this than we are.*

*I’ve not ever really thought about any privileges I might have because I am white. As far as I have been concerned, you will have the same privileges that I do. You’ve helped make some changes in my life. For instance, “I am just as comfortable being around my own race as I am with other races.” It wasn’t always this way. “Years ago, when your mom and Uncle were children, we had a maid who was black. Her name was Martha. In fact, they called her Black Martha. She was like a member of the family. When she died, Pop and I went to the funeral. I did feel out of place. We walked up to the church and everybody was standing outside, because no one goes into the church until the body goes in. Well that’s not our custom. When we went in, they escorted us to the front to sit with the family; the only two white faces in the church. And I really felt funny; just sort of uncomfortable I guess because we were strictly out of our element. When they got up and asked people to speak, they looked over at us but that was okay because we*

*loved her very much. We were treated though as if we were one of them. If we were uncomfortable, they were not.” But I have learned from that and I want you to learn that you just have to be yourself and be comfortable with who you are and things will be alright.*

*Something else I would like to mention, and this really won't mean anything to you until you are much older, but there are issues right now with this Presidential race. I'm sure you've heard the news and the talk about John McCain and Barack Obama running for President of the United States. This is very historic for our nation because it is the first time a man of color has been a presidential nominee. Unfortunately, this makes a lot of people uneasy including members of our family. “I view Barack Obama differently than I guess most of my family does. I don't view his skin color. I view his qualifications and my family doesn't. A lot of my friends don't. They see that color and that's it. That's the turn off. He might be the most qualified person ever but they would never ever vote for him.”*

*“I don't really know how often your heritage is taught or celebrated at school. Now in Spanish, they do the heritage thing and in Social Studies also. Do you remember the time when “I got up early and did those fried bananas? Then you took them in Mrs. Lynn's room because you had her second period. She wasn't paying attention and she let first period eat them.” You were upset, but got over it pretty quickly. But I'm glad you like Spanish. I hope you will remember all that is being taught to you in this class. It will help you connect more to your heritage. I know you have a hard time with your schoolwork. But your tutor says you are improving.*

*“I think you are really well adapted. I don't see any problems that you might have. Now I don't know what's going to come up when you start dating. I've given that*

*some thought and I just don't know how your Pop would react if one day you brought home someone and said, 'Meet my girlfriend so and so' and she were black or something. I don't know. I don't know how we're going to face it if that day ever comes." I'm sure this isn't the kind of issue that you are worried about right now in your life though so I won't dwell on it either. That's a bridge we'll cross if we ever come to it in the future.*

*I'm going to close the letter now, but I'll probably write you again one day. I have feeling that I still have a great deal to learn from you. You've been such a joy in our lives and we are enjoying every minute. We would do anything for you and hope you know that we'll always be here for you.*

*Love always,*

*Mom*

### **Reflections**

The interview with Lea was very forthcoming on her part. She divulged personal information about how she and her husband ended up raising Jack. It was information that many people here in Townsville have often wondered about so I felt as though I had definitely earned the trust needed since she did not hesitate for a minute to explain it to me. Lea's daughter (Jack's mother) currently lives in Townsville. She is not an active part of his life. In fact, Jack calls his grandmother 'Mom'. While I got much more information than I expected from Lea in regard to how it is she ended up raising him, I know there are still some missing pieces. It is difficult to understand how his mother can live in the same town with her son, yet not be involved in his life whatsoever. It has crossed my mind that she may be somewhat ashamed that she has birthed a child who is considered a minority. This is something that she hid from her parents until their first

meeting of Jack. Although they loved him immediately, there may be a stigma that Jack's mother is not willing to deal with.

Lea discussed her family a lot. She and her sister as well as an older aunt are very close and spend a great deal of time together. She did not directly name them, but the insinuation was there when she referred to family members who still stick to their southern prejudices on race. Although Lea is in her sixties, it seemed from the interview that she is at a new birth stage in her life. Raising a twelve year old at her age is difficult in and of itself. Additionally, she is dealing with a child who has a learning disability as well as dealing with her own issues and challenges of raising one who is a minority.

As with many of the participants, when I first began to talk about the subject of white privilege, Lea did not seem to think there were any privileges she had in which Jack would not. As I read the white privilege statement about counting on my skin color not to work against the appearance of financial responsibility, Lea stated that she had "never really thought about it, but could see where that might be true." When she was asked about going shopping and not having to worry about being followed or harassed, she told of how customers are handled in the shop where she works. She stated, "no matter if they are black, white, pink, or purple" the customers are first asked if they need help. If their answer is no then they walk away and say "call us if you need us." I pointed out to Lea that while this may be the way her store operates, not all stores operate in the same manner and many people of color face immediate suspicion during their shopping experiences on a daily basis. Lea stated that she could see where that was probably the case.



In regard to the statement about being able to speak with a person in charge and them most likely being white, Lea felt, “this is not necessarily so anymore.” But she added, “I do know people who if they have a problem in a store and they ask to speak to the manager; if the manager is not white they just leave. And that comes from your older generation.” The older generation she referred to here I believe, was her aunt. Lea did not hide the fact that she is now more aware of issues and stereotypes with minorities now that she is raising Jack. However, she never once said that she and her family discuss the differences in their beliefs.

As the white privilege statements were read and discussed, it was if she were slowly being enlightened. She would let each statement soak in as if she needed a moment for them to digest. Most statements she would slowly agree with by saying, “I guess that is probably true” or “I can see where that might be the case.” Lea asked me if I had thought about how I would handle it if one day if my own son brought home a girl that he wanted to date and she was black. I told her that I would most likely tell him that as long as he loves her, we would love her too. I added that I would prepare him by saying the world will most likely not look at it that way. Lea made it clear that Jack’s grandfather would have a very difficult time dealing with this if it were to ever occur. She also voiced that she knew this would send a double message to Jack.

Jack is a child who is very proud of his heritage. Even though he has not been there, he talks of Mexico often. He visits his father in Texas at least twice a year and stays for a week at a time. Recently, Jack’s soccer team was in the state championship finals and Lea and Pop arranged for his dad to surprise Jack and come to the tournament. Jack was ecstatic. Jack’s stepmother took pictures during the tournament and then put

them on a disc to music for the entire team. This involvement made Jack very proud. He talked about their visit and the discs for weeks. It is evident that Jack thinks highly of his birth father and is not ashamed of where he is from, but this is still a child with issues. Jack was diagnosed with a learning disability and struggles a lot academically. He realizes he has a hard time and tries desperately to make up for his intellectual deficiencies in other ways. He is quick to brag about the material items that he has and their cost or about his latest athletic accomplishment. Lea and her husband have hired a private tutor for Jack. She has been working with him for at least three years. Jack is also provided every material item imaginable. They are well off financially, so they can easily afford these items. But it seems because Jack can not keep up with his friends academically, they want to make sure he can keep up materialistically.

Lea was very forthcoming in her interview. She acknowledged her own prejudices as well as her changes of thought. Although she wants Jack to learn more about his heritage and welcomes his interest, she seems to think the father's family in Texas is who should handle it. She doesn't feel as though she can do it any justice. She is pleased that the school has a Spanish class and celebrates his heritage periodically. Lea feels this is sufficient and doesn't have any other real concerns about what is being taught. Even though Lea and her husband are an older couple, they are raising Jack as open mindedly as they seem to know how. Lea admits that she has learned a great deal from Jack and has a lot more to learn. She took the interview seriously and seemed to find comfort in being able to talk about these issues with me.

### Leonard's Letter

*Dear Erin, Mary, and Ellen,*

*You may think your old man is crazy for writing you a letter. I am doing this because a couple of the grandchildren have been asking me questions lately about how I met your mom and what it was like when you girls were little. So I thought that I would write this for you. I figure one day you can share it with your children and that way they will have some advice from me on paper along with a little bit of family history that maybe they don't know about.*

*"I grew up in Superior, Wisconsin. I was not exposed to other races. There was a handful and I mean like three or four black families in the town. My mother and father were very open and direct. I didn't have a prejudiced bone in my body. I had no reason to have it. That's the way I was raised and that's the way my mom and dad were all of their lives." This had nothing to do with my being raised in the north. "It's because of the way my mother and father were period."*

*If it weren't for marrying your mother, you girls would not be here. I am thankful that I met and married her. As you know, I met her in Okinawa when I was in the Armed Services Police and stationed there. It was early in the morning after a night of drinking and me and a buddy of mine were walking around in area looking for a place to get something to eat. We found a place and "there was this startling good looking woman there." She was so beautiful, "I can still remember what she was wearing. It was a red kimono made of flannel cloth and it had Okinawa patterns on it." She was able to understand that we were asking for something with eggs in it to eat. She worked here for her aunt that she lived with. "I met her and then went back that same day and saw her at*

noon. I asked her, 'Do you ever go out with Americans and she said yes, I go out with Americans' and so finally we set up a date to go out. We were going to go to the movies a few blocks away. I came to pick her up and her aunt came out to go with us as a chaperone. I'm American and I wasn't aware of all that I was supposed to do. I asked her if she wanted something to eat and I went and got it and she said to me, 'You didn't get my aunt anything.' So I gave her aunt what I had gotten for me."

"For at least four months, every date we went on was chaperoned by her aunt or a male cousin." Eventually we got more serious and I asked her if she wanted to marry me. I re-enlisted in the Army and we got married. My parents didn't say anything about me marrying outside of my race, but "they never saw my wife. I wasn't in the United States until 1965." Once they did see her "they had no issues."

"There was a lot of prejudice in Okinawa. We encountered that many times. They would badger her because she was married to an American. Unfortunately for the Okinawan men that got in our face once; they didn't realize that my friends were all Japanese policeman. There was an incident where this guy really got out of control. I was damn near going to subdue him. Your mom talked to him in Japanese and I told him I was a police officer. I rattled off to him who my friends were. The Japanese police made a call in and took this guy to jail. There was another incident where your mother and I were in the car along with you girls and this guy was trying to push us from behind. He actually bumped us. I got out and just flat told him to back off, you need to get out of here or you're going to get hurt." You girls were so young I don't think you would remember it. There was another time that your mom was alone. "She drove into her neighborhood and a taxi driver did the same thing. He bumped into her car. She got out

*and said, 'What are you doing? The guy got in her face. And the folks from the neighborhood came and actually through him in the river.' So we've seen our share of prejudice, but mostly in Japan.*

*I didn't teach you much about race as you were growing up. You experienced it. You lived in Okinawa until 1976. Then we moved here to Townsville, Georgia and that's where we've lived ever since. You all speak Japanese. When you started school Erin, you had to learn how to speak English. You all went to a Catholic school. It was great because you got structure and you were pretty good students. You girls went to school with all Filipino, Japanese, Australian and Hawaiian kids. I mean it was an international school. Then we came here to Fort Soldier where you went to the DoDDS schools. After that it was public school in Townsville. So that was your experience with different races. I didn't need to teach you. Your mom and I are both cup half full, cup half empty kind of people. And that's the way we raised you. We didn't tolerate pettiness." Erin, do you remember how you and Ellen used to go around and punch out boys? You dealt with issues the way they needed to be dealt with and then moved on. "I think living in the south helped us raise you girls. I recognized as soon as we got here in Townsville that this is a church oriented community. There were a number of women from Okinawa that were acclimated here. We just met a bunch of people here and it was obvious to us that they had no issue with it (race). I've never really seen an issue with Orientals at all. I've actually seen very little interracial destruction. I mean it's there and it has happened in the past. But this county seems to have gotten over it on both sides of the ball. Girls, you know what you've encountered as individuals, but I'm too much of an authority figure to let things bother me. I mean I'm going to handle it,*

*period. I expect you to do the same. I was very demanding of you girls. You were athletes and I was your coach, not your daddy. I taught you that you get what you merit. There was never any alteration of that basic fact.”*

*I’ve not noticed any privileges that I have because I’m white. If anything, it’s been the other way around. As you know, I was a race relations instructor in the Army at one time. “I probably know more about black history than most blacks.” I recognize that there’s a quota system in the military. There had to be. There’s a promotion system for whites and there’s a promotion system for blacks, there’s a promotion system for Hispanics and others. I think this is the way it should be because I’m educated about it. I understand it and I understand the necessity of it.”*

*Believe it or not, you are all “really harder on your kids than either I or your mom were on you.” “You may argue with that but it’s really true.” Your children, my grandchildren do five times the homework that you ever did and “get dogged out five times worse. Of course, a lot of it is the times we’re in. You are so traumatized by the media and all the information you get that you don’t even let your kids go two blocks on their own. The media hypes it up, but you need to get over it. Why do I drive around this neighborhood and the only kids I see driving around on bikes are black kids? Your kids are hidden at home playing Donkey Kong. It doesn’t do them any good. How are they going to learn life skills of their own?”*

*A lot of people do not like being around those who are not like themselves. This is not an issue for me. “It’s not even a comfortability issue with me, really. Prejudice is practiced in front of me but not by me. I don’t want to buy in to it. I don’t listen to their jokes. My friends are my friends no matter what their color is. But there are times when*

*I do have to describe people by their color.” You may not have to do this, but it’s just the way it is where I work. “I’ve been to places where is much more evident than it is around here. I went over to Montgomery, Alabama and the discomfort that blacks had in trying to deal with me because I wanted to eat in the restaurants where they were cooking or stay in the hotel where they were the clerks at. I could feel something was going. I wanted to say, “I didn’t do it to you man, you really don’t want to bother me either, though.” And now, as far as the media goes, “I feel that all races are represented. I think it’s pretty balanced. As much of the news is about our black citizens as it is about our white. And actually, I think minorities are catered to more out of necessity.” Take Mr. Davis’s daughter for instance. She was a cheerleader with you Erin and she went to college and you didn’t. “It was like, okay, what’s the deal here? What were you kids supposed to do? Get your eyes pulled back so you could prove you were Oriental or some crap like that? But I understand the system is weighted that way, so good for them I guess.”*

*What I hope you learn from me is that you “need to give your portion within your means to the world.” There are so many other nations that are poor and in dire situations. “They live in conditions that are inconceivably bad.” As Christians, that’s what we are supposed to do. I want you to pass this on to your children as well. I am proud of the fact that as kids, you “never got hung up on who you were playing ball with or who you were going to class with.” You were just kids. “You girls are more Anglo looking. You got more pressure about fitting into the Japanese community. It was kind of a reverse discrimination. People were surprised when you opened your mouths and started speaking Japanese.”*

*There are going to be times where you have to make a bold statement with your children to let them know that you the parents are the ones in control. "You have to do that periodically. You have to do that with your own children, in scale. You have to make a dramatic point with them so that they aren't running the show here. That's another thing you girls knew all your lives. You knew to do what we said as long as you lived in this house. You knew that when you were forty, your mother was going to be calling you up and chewing your ass and that you had better be used to it. You were told that when you were twelve. This will not end. You knew there wasn't some magic place that you could hide in."*

*"You are the greatest kids in the world. I really believe that. I give eighty percent of the credit to your mom and twenty percent to me for backing her up. Years and years went by where you all were just living with your mom and I was deployed. If any racism has been involved in our lives, it hasn't affected us in changing our values. I think your mom and I both have the same values even though we come from totally different cultures. You are how you act. Your kids see what you do all the time. They know how you operate. I was very conscious of that." I want to remind you that you also must be conscious of this as your children are constantly watching you.*

*I know I've been rambling for a while so I'll close now. Please take the time to share this with the grandchildren when they are old enough to read it. In the meantime continue to listen to mine and your mom's good advice. I know what I'm talking about and it will do you good to continue raising your children the way we've raised you girls.*

*Always,*

*Dad*



## Reflections

The interview with Leonard was complex. This was a man who loved to talk. The complexity came in because he strayed from the questions constantly; frequently giving unnecessary information and telling stories unrelated to the topic. Leonard was very sure of himself and abrasive with his answers. Throughout the conversation he would use words that I suppose he felt were intellectual and then ask me if I knew what they meant. I felt as though he were testing me to see if I could meet his match. With the very first question, Leonard let me know immediately that he didn't have a "prejudiced bone in his body." It was as if he wanted to make this clear right away. This bold claim threw red flags up in my mind. I wondered if I was going to believe him by the end of the interview. The deeper we got into our discussion, the more I realized that I was going to have a hard time believing his declaration.

Leonard talked about his dad's job as a miner and then with Boeing. It was very hard to keep him on the topic I wanted to discuss. He talked about his eleven brothers and sisters, his favorite aunt and all of the different places he's lived. He thoroughly enjoyed telling me his stories. His getting off track so much was a major distraction. Leonard talked a lot of bravado especially in regard to the times they encountered trouble in Japan from people who didn't approve of his marrying a Japanese woman. The only prejudice or issues of race that he would admit to ever encountering within his family was that which was received from the Okinawan people. He said that people there, particularly men, did not like the fact that an American was dating and eventually marrying one of their own. When he told of these incidences, it was as though he were bragging about them, not that the events upset him or made him feel any particular way.

He tended to talk more about how he ended up being the hero in each situation. I had the sense that the stories were being embellished a bit.

Leonard did not show any sensitivity to the fact that there may have been issues for his children to deal with. He stated that he did not talk about issues of race because they lived it on a daily basis and learned from it in that way. He made it very clear that if they had any issues, they were expected to just deal with it and move on. "That was life." It was not something he felt they needed to discuss. When asked about the education his children received when growing up; Leonard felt it was adequate. He referred to the fact that they went to an "international school" with children from many other countries and felt this sufficed for their multicultural education.

Leonard was very matter of fact in his answers and took no time to ponder the white privilege statements that I read to him. His reply to the first statement regarding arranging to be in the company of people like myself was, "I don't do that." I tried to clarify the meaning behind the statement and then asked him, "But is it easier to be around people of your own race?" His reply was, "No not really." I think he was either missing the point of the statements or purposely trying to avoid them because it was forcing him to confront his whiteness. This was the type of response that I got from him on virtually every white privilege checklist statement. If I can say that he conceded to anything at all, it was when I read, "I can go shopping alone most of the time, pretty well assured that I will not be followed or harassed." His reply was, "I don't have any feelings like that." In other words, he has never had to face this during a shopping experience however, he would not elaborate.

As the interview progressed, what I felt were his true feelings began to poke through. His statement that he didn't have a prejudiced bone in his body started fading quickly. This was especially true when he made the comment about minorities being catered to and his kids' eyes being pulled back. I noted some bitterness because his black friend's daughter went to college, but his own did not. He said, "It was like, okay, what's the deal here? What were you kids supposed to do? Get your eyes pulled back so you could prove you were Oriental or some crap like that? But I understand the system is weighted that way, so good for them I guess." I found this response rather crude and definitely noted some bitterness. He was not putting his daughter (who is a minority) on the same level as the other female who was black. It was as though he viewed her to be white like him in that instance. Also, when Leonard talked about his visit to Alabama, he made the following insensitive remark, "I didn't do it to you man, you really don't want to bother me either, though." Though he did not elaborate on this, his insinuation was that it was no fault of his that black people were once enslaved by whites. He gave me the impression that somewhere deep inside, he holds some hidden resentment toward those who are not white.

Leonard's feelings on raising his girls in the south were good. Although he is from the north, he likes the values that the community of Townsville has. He attributed a lot of it to being a military community and a mix of different races. I thought it was interesting when he said, "But this county seems to have gotten over it on both sides of the ball." Leonard was referring to issues of race. I found this to be a bit naïve. I do not think any southern town is ever completely over issues of race or racism; especially the

older members of the community. Anyone who is even remotely listening to the goings on in this community would realize this.

Leonard's relationship with his girls is very strong. Even though they are grown, married, and have children of their own there is a close bond. This was evident through the numerous family photographs on the walls of their house. There were very few posed shots. They were candid pictures of a family loving life and each other. In spite of Leonard's tough exterior, his softness was shown through the lens of a camera. As Erin and her children waited on me to complete the interview, there was a comfortability factor. The house didn't belong to Leonard and his wife; it belonged to everyone who walked through the door.

Leonard had stated that his family celebrated their Japanese heritage every day. If anything, there is an infusion of the Japanese culture with the American way of life in this home. The décor spoke volumes. Leonard and his wife also make frequent trips to Japan. His girls speak both Japanese and English. They have taken several trips themselves, along with their own children, to Japan. When you go into Erin's house you will find pictures of her children (Leonard's grandchildren) in traditional Japanese garb. She is carrying on what she has lived. Erin has many friends of various colors and nationalities. They are truly friends; not mere acquaintances. This has been her nature since I have known her in high school. I can remember admiring her ability to get along with so many different people. She and her sisters have passed this on to their children as well. Erin does not seem to have been affected negatively by not having had her parents discuss issues of race with her. She is proud of her heritage and does her best to teach what she has lived to her children. Though he may not have had direct conversations

regarding issues of race with them, Leonard's tough, you-learn-from-what-you-live way of raising his children made a lasting impression on his daughters.

### **Fifi's Letter**

*Dear Devin and Deanna,*

*I have a lot of strong opinions about some issues you might face one day. You are way too young to understand this now. When you are much older, I will give you this letter and I hope it will give you strength and encouragement.*

*You know that I am from Florida. This is where we go visit your cousins all of the time. "I grew up in Lakeland, Florida; a town that was mostly white. In my elementary school there were just a couple of children that were not white. It was just normal to be white. When I was middle school age, I went to a performing arts magnet school. We got bussed to it so I guess you could say this was my first experience with more people of other races. In the magnet schools you had to have a balance of races to make it a legitimate school. In high school we were all mixed.*

*Now I want to tell you about meeting your dad. We met when we were both in the Army. I was working at a tax center at Fort Hunting. "We always closed up shop earlier than we were supposed to. Your dad came in to get his taxes done. I told him that I was sorry, we were closed. I was beyond rude. It wasn't until two months later when I got shipped back to my unit that we met. Your dad approached me one day and went on to tell me that I was the rude little girl in the tax office. I admitted it was me and after that, we basically just fell in love. We got married in 2000." It's strange. A lot of people want to know if my family accepted your dad since he is black. "I think my family knew that I was going to marry outside of my race. Ever since I was in middle school, all of my*

*boyfriends were something other than white. Because where I'm from, once you've dated one person who's not white, you are stereotyped and I never dated any white guys. My mom once told me that I was going to have a harder time in life with biracial children. I was like, I don't care."*

*By the time I actually went to get married, they knew and I didn't really care what they thought. I mean I love my parents, but they never really said much to me. I remember once my mom said something to me about my grandma not knowing and I said I didn't care. If she can't accept my family then she can't be a part of my family. She hasn't even seen you before. I mean, I've talked to her six or seven times in my life. She lives in West Virginia and there's not really any mixing up there. My mom said I could go visit my grandma without your father. That was one time me and my mom didn't talk for a while. After that conversation with my mom I would send extra pictures of you both to my grandmother. I guess I was being bad, but it made me mad. Now, your grandmother that lives in Florida has never said anything if she thinks something about me marrying your dad. I know she loves you both. Now there are a couple of people on your dad's side that I get a funny feeling from, so I just x them off my list." Dealing with family on issues like this can be kind of tough sometimes.*

*There aren't many differences in the way I was raised and how I am raising you. "I do try to incorporate more multiculturalism besides just white and black. My godmother, she's black. And I can see in her family that they more about their heritage than I do. I don't even know my heritage. We weren't raised with any traditions. My mom made cinnamon rolls at Christmas, but this wasn't related to my heritage." I hope that you will teach your own children about their heritage. "We try to incorporate many*

*things in our house for you. I want you to know about Indian things and other races besides what you are. I know I spend a lot of money on you kids, but that's only different because my family didn't have a lot of money when I was growing up."*

*"Devin, when you were first in Pre-K they were talking about heritage or something and one of the teachers made the comment that you were just black. You came home and told me. That is the one issue that I flip out on. If your mother is this and your daddy is that, you are both. You can't choose. I told you at the time that you were both black and white because we both made you. You are exactly as much me as you are your daddy. You're a mix." This fact will never change and don't let anybody tell you otherwise.*

*There have been "other incidents along the way" about your race. Some people think you look Spanish Devin. "I think you could pass for Spanish. Some people say I sound Spanish. I don't know how. I don't look Spanish at all. Sometimes they look at you and say, "Oh look, little Bodequa!" I know you're cute and have curly hair, but you're not Spanish. You are what you are. You've never heard anything negative about your race though. Everything you hear is positive. We've never had any fights or struggles in our family about your race. There's nothing besides having a white mommy and a black daddy to you. This is normal for you."*

*"Sometimes I use my whiteness as an advantage." That's kind of weird I know, but I am telling you so that you will be aware of people in your life who will do the same thing. Sometimes in situations your dad may say to me, "You go ask them since you're the pretty white girl." When I go ask, "I'll get a different answer than if your dad asks." There was one time when we were at the skating rink and they were playing country*

*music. We wanted the music to be changed because it's hard to skate to it. "Your dad went to the counter and asked them to change the music. They said no. I went over there later and asked and they said yes; explaining that they have to play music to appease all people." I felt like they said yes to me because I was white and not to your dad because he was black. A lot of things have changed in society but there are still people out there who are like this. "I've seen your dad treated differently. Even when people don't know the person, they will straight out judge you. Your dad and I have an old white Monte Carlo with big rims. I can drive it all day and not be pulled over. Your dad got pulled over in it once just because he moved from the Lowe's parking lot to the Wal-Mart parking lot. The officer told your dad he pulled him over for not wearing a seat belt, but in a Monte Carlo, it's hard to see and the police officer didn't believe him when he said he had it on. The police officer wrote him a ticket anyway. He was straight stereotyping your dad because he's a black guy." I don't know why people are like that. I've seen issues like this with your dad, but not with you two. Maybe it's because you're still little.*

*I told you "that some people may not like you. Some people don't like me because I'm white and some people don't like your daddy because he's black. Some people don't like Mexicans because they're Mexican. Some people don't like people regardless." As I've said before, "You will love people regardless of their race and if they don't like you, oh well. Too bad for them."*

*Having the two of you has helped me become a better teacher. "I always have multicultural crayons in my class. I never had these kind of crayons growing up. I never even thought about it. I used to think you just color people peach. You know, just get out your yellow crayon and color your people. But now I'm like, wait a minute. If you were*



*in my classroom, I would want you to have crayons that reflect you or your friends that you're trying to draw a picture of. So now I always have them available. We call them our skin color crayons and keep them in a basket. My students know where they are. If they are drawing a person, they'll go get a skin color crayon to use. Some students make themselves very light and some students color themselves very light." This probably sounds like a silly story to you, but I don't want anyone to ever make you think that you have to be the crayon color they choose for you. Your skin color is not yellow or peach. It is a unique blend of me and your dad.*

*I have raised both of you here in Townsville. You haven't lived anywhere but the south. Even though I lived in Florida which is also in the south, Townsville is a little bit different. "It is such a melting pot around here. If we had picked a smaller town like Waterboro or Lukeville it probably would have been a lot different. The feelings would be different and I am afraid you would have been judged differently. Your dad and I decided to stay right here. For one, the schools are pretty good and the environment for you is good. I guess living in the south in Townsville has been a positive thing. There's a lot of biracial children around. It's not like an all white town."*

*Until now, I never paid any attention to political issues. "I've taught you that women have not always had the right to vote and black people have not always had the right to vote." At your school Devin, they did a mock election for the presidential race between Obama and McCain. It bothered me because they said it was a historic event because he's the first black man to run for President. "Excuse me, America! He's multiracial! Why do they keep calling him black? He's the most biracial person. Like Tiger Woods. I was so happy when he said he's not black, that he's a part of his dad and*

*a part of his mom.” Please Devin and Deanna, please never forget that you are a part of both of us! Devin, do you remember asking me why it’s such a big thing that Barack Obama might become President? “We have this placemat at home with all of the past Presidents on it. You were looking the other day and you actually noticed what they were talking about in school. You said to me, ‘Mommy, they were all white guys!’ You were so funny when you finally made that connection.” I took that opportunity to explain to you again how things haven’t always been good for black people. I think the placemat finally put everything into a perspective that you could understand.*

*I hate to say this, but I’ve never made any effort as your mother to see that your heritage is discussed or celebrated at school. “I think maybe subconsciously I still don’t get it. I mean I’m not a minority so it’s hard to think like a minority.” I’m going to try to do a better job of seeing that your cultural needs are met at school. I know I need to be more involved “and do a better job of paying attention. I think your future depends on how I raise you. I have to make conscious decisions on how to prepare you. Remember you’re not going to fit into one category. You’re not just one thing. “All people are God’s people” and as long as I teach you right, you will be strong enough to not care what people think. When you get older, all of this is going to make more sense to you and I will always be here to answer any of your questions. I love you both very much.*

*Mommy*

### **Reflections**

I think Fifi may have been skeptical of my motives prior to the interviews. Although hesitant about agreeing to initially help with this study, Fifi opened up right away with the first question. It took her no time to. The only difficulty came with the

fact that she spoke extremely fast so at times it was difficult to understand what she was saying. The conversations held with Fifi were much different than the rest. She was probably the one white parent who seemed to be most observant of her children's racial differences. Fifi had very firm opinions about being multiracial. In fact, she was extremely passionate about her children being made up of both her and her husband's races. No matter what the question or the answer, Fifi always came back to the point of saying that multiracial children are made of two races and should not ever say they are one or the other. The tone in her voice changed and her face began to turn red each time she spoke about it. When she spoke of how Barack Obama is not technically black but multiracial, I thought she was going to explode. It wasn't anger per say, but extreme irritation that he did not call himself multiracial. Even with that, she stated that she would probably vote for him because our country needs to try something different for once. She stated, "I say this country needs to diversify."

Fifi spoke lovingly of her children and the compliments she gets on their appearances. She said that they are often mistaken for children who are Puerto Rican or "Bodequa." Fifi stated that other white women of multiracial children will come to her to ask advice on what to put in their daughters' hair. She joked that all they needed to do was read the bottle "just like they would do if they were washing a white child's hair." She said some people are afraid to ask black women these kinds of questions because many black women do not like white women who are married to black men. For this reason she feels she is more approachable to other women like herself. Fifi made a point that I found interesting. She said that there are many women who "do not have a black woman mentor". She seemed to think this was important to gain more insight into the

culture that was not her own. Fifi was the only participant to make any statement such as this.

She believes she has become “hypersensitive” now that she has children who are multiracial. Fifi is keenly aware of how people treat each other and seems to be always wondering if people have an ulterior motive when they are trying to get to know her or her children. She said that sometimes in the neighborhood, her son wants to play basketball with the older boys and often they say no. Fifi said she wonders if the boys say no because he’s part black or if it’s because he’s little.

When we talked about raising children in the south, she felt racism in Florida was stronger than here. Southern pride made her think of the rebel flag. Unlike many white people, she sees it as a symbol of hatred. Fifi said when she lived in Florida, anyone who displayed the rebel flag was felt to be linked to the Ku Klux Klan. However, her first boss here in Townsville had a rebel flag sticker on her car and Fifi said she was one of the nicest people she had ever met. She seemed rather perplexed by this. Overall though, she thought the south was a good place to raise her children, especially the town of Townsville because of its racially diverse community.

Fifi and her husband have a great relationship with each other in which they can joke about one another’s race and the stereotypes that are associated with each. They spend a great deal of family time together. At one particular school dance in which Fifi had to work, her husband volunteered to be the disc jockey. For the majority of the evening their two children stayed right with him, helping him throughout the night. I noticed that the attire they all wore to dance was the kind associated with hip hop artists. They were wearing oversized sports jerseys and baseball type caps cocked to the side. It

was if Fifi was trying to blend in more with what is considered the black culture. Many family photos showed the children with both sides of the family. Birthday parties for both children had children of several races attending.

Because her children are so young, they have not experienced much of what life has to dish out. Even though this is the case, she was the only participant that spoke of explaining differences to her children and how society has viewed black people in the past as well as now. She recognized her white privileges without me having to explain what a white privilege was. She didn't hesitate to agree with most of them. Fifi did feel that there are more people of color in managerial and administrative positions than once used to be, but felt it is really seen only in smaller businesses such as local stores but not in bigger corporations. When she stated that there was the possibility that subconsciously, she still didn't get it; I felt this was a raw realization to herself. This came about as we discussed what was being done in schools and the fact that many white parents of multiracial children seemed to be okay with things the way they are.

I could tell that Fifi has evolved in her thinking since having children. She feels like she is more culturally aware of her own students and that this has helped her become a better teacher. She said she makes more of an effort now to provide a safe and comfortable environment in which her students feel free to share their personal stories. As I've watched Fifi around campus with her students, I've noticed her rapport with her students as well as her parents. She is firm, but loving and absolutely provides the safe haven that she spoke about.

## My Letter, Part Two

*Dear Clark,*

*Now it's my turn. Where in the world do I begin? I love you so much and only want to give you the right words. There is no doubt we have a close relationship, but I want to take this time to tell you things we've not really talked about so much. I am going to first start with how I met your dad because if it weren't for marrying him, I would never have had you and I wouldn't be on the journey that I'm on now.*

*I met your dad when I was in high school. I took tennis lessons from him. I began to fall in love, but wasn't allowed to date him because there was such an age difference between us. I was sixteen and he was thirty one. Finally, when I was a senior and it was time for prom, your dad came over to my house one evening to ask Papa and Ma if he could take me to my prom. Surprisingly, they said yes. We began to date. After I graduated from college in 1989 we got married. If Papa and Ma ever thought that I shouldn't be with him because of his being from Thailand, they never said anything. Their main concern was that he was so much older than me.*

*I need to go back a little and tell you about how I was raised by Papa and Ma. Going to Sunday school and church was very important in our family. We went every Sunday. Sometimes when we were on vacation, we would find a church to go to. They instilled in me that my relationship with Jesus should be number one in my life. I'm probably not doing as good a job as they did with this, but I hope you know that I believe the same for you. Papa and Ma also taught me to treat others with respect. I can't say that I remember us having many discussions on race or diversity. We had a couple of housekeepers that were black when I was young. There was the one incident where the*

*housekeeper thought I had called her the “n” word and I didn’t even know what it meant.*

*I went to public schools all of my life except for my first grade year. There was always a mix of races in my classes. Unlike you though, I didn’t have friends that were black. I mean I had acquaintances, but no one that I spent time with or played with on a regular basis. One time we had a group project assigned by a teacher that needed to be worked on outside of the school. Felicia, a black girl in my group, offered to have the group over to her apartment. When I asked Ma if I could go to Felicia’s to work on the project, she told me we would have to ask Papa because she was black. That was kind of weird to me at the time. I didn’t understand why it would matter if she was black or not. Of course, Papa said yes and it didn’t become an issue. The kinds of friends I had are definitely different than the kinds of friends you have now. Your best friend is black and your other friends are white or multiracial. I don’t remember making a conscious effort to choose only white friends, that’s just the way it was for me.*

*I have always lived in the south, here in Townsville. I can’t compare it to anywhere else because this is all that I know. I think it has been a great place to raise you. Because it is a military town, you’ve met people you may not have met in a non-military southern town. When I was younger, I went through a phase of only wanting to listen to country music and collect rebel flag memorabilia. I thought this was showing my southern pride. There were no controversies that I was aware of that time surrounding the rebel flag. As I grew older, I began to learn that for many people of color, it represents hatred. There are a lot of white people who believe they shouldn’t feel this way and are determined to display the flag any way. However, I feel that it is*

*important for us to be sensitive to that which offends others. This is something I would like for you to remember as well.*

*I don't know if you remember or not, but a few months ago you overheard a conversation I was having with Papa. You heard me say the word minority and asked me what it was. I didn't give you an answer. Son, you are a minority. You are different from those that are white. Although it may not be this way forever, those that are white make up the majority of the people here in America. You are not considered to be white. You are looked at as multiracial because you are a part of me who is white and a part of your dad who is Thai. This is not a bad thing, but something you should be proud of.*

*Unfortunately, I've not done as much as I should have to this point in your life in celebrating the part of you that is Thai. I've kind of left it up to your dad and grandmother. When you were just learning to walk, your grandmother attempted to teach you how to speak Thai. She would call you to her by saying, "Mah-nee" which means "come here" in Thai. Your extent of learning the word was to begin calling her "Moni" as her name. Other than that and learning to count and say just a few other basic words, you have not learned the language. I have to say, I've probably been selfish in not encouraging you to learn the language. There is no excuse that I can offer to explain why I've been this way. I do know that you are proud of being part Thai. When your half-brother came back from Thailand and brought you the t-shirt, flag, and bracelet you proudly shared them to your friends and teacher at school. The Thai flag is still hanging in your room and I know you want to go there one day. We will try to do this for you.*



*You've always gone to a private school. In most towns, a private school's student population is mostly white. Your school is unique. It has a diverse population. I've been satisfied with the education you've gotten thus far, but I realize not enough has been done to celebrate the differences of the student population. As a parent, I have done little to make a change in this fact even though I know it is something I must get involved in. I am still becoming aware of my own whiteness on a daily basis and though I have you, I am often oblivious to your needs. I promise you that I am going to make more of a concerted effort to be attentive to your education.*

*You've told me on more than one occasion that some people think you are from Mexico. People who don't know you are always going to be curious as to where you are from. Sadly, there are going to be some people who do not like you because you are not purely white. If I could prevent this from happening, I would. I would do anything in the world to protect you. All that I can do though is make you aware that there are ignorant people out there who are like this and prepare you for it. It is a mindset in many that may never be overcome. Do you remember several years back when you checked out the movie from the library called My Friend Martin? It was a movie for children based on Martin Luther King, Junior. You watched this movie over and over. It was one of your favorites. Well, there are still hateful white people as were shown in that movie. This hatred is still real in the world. If and when it ever crosses your path, I expect you to hold your head high and proud. Hateful people such as this are the ones with the problem. I want you to remember that you love people for who they are, not for what they are even when the same is not reciprocated to you.*

*There is more that I want to say to you about what I've learned about myself and the future that is coming your way. I love you with all of my heart and will continue talking to you soon.*

*Mom*

This chapter was written to convey the thoughts of the participants I interviewed. Following each of the interviews that were written in letter format were my reflections on what I took away from the interviews as a researcher. The letters were written in a way that would convey the sincerity of each participant. Chapter V, the final chapter in this research will present to the reader the findings derived from the interviews. It will connect these findings back to the literature.

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARIES AND CONCLUSIONS

Chapter V serves as the finishing point to this study, but not the end of my journey. In this chapter are the six findings which were the product of the study. Implications for this study can be found in part three of the letter to my son which is at the end of this chapter. The six findings that resulted from this study are as follows: **(1)** There is a superficial connection among these white parents and the challenges that their children may one day face. **(2)** Deep and deliberate conversations on issues of race are not often held in these families of mixed races. **(3)** White parents of children of color are generally satisfied with the education that their children are receiving and seem to have no understanding of what a true culture of multiculturalism is about. **(4)** White privilege is a benefit not fully realized by many of these white parents in spite of having racially mixed families. **(5)** White parents raising children of color in the south have seen little negative impact and attribute this to the fact that Townsville is a diverse, military community. **(6)** White parents of children of color are raising their children virtually the same way they were raised.

When I began the Curriculum Studies program at Georgia Southern University, I had not heard of such words as reconceptualization and *currere* and had certainly never entertained the notion of reading Plato. I was stuck in the mundane, standardized thoughts of the educational system for which I had worked so many years and came into the program with this same broken mentality. The reconceptualization and this program awakened me to the influence I never realized I had in my position as an educator. Equally as significant is that it forced me to search reflectively inside my own heart.

This study originated with an epiphany. It was a casual, ordinary day in my life that turned my thought processes in directions I never thought they would go. The day I realized that I was raising a child who would most likely have issues of race to face set me on my journey. It took a young child to set this course in motion. My involvement continued during my teaching days when one of my students had to testify at the trial of the man who had murdered her mother. These events were the beginning to the slow opening of my eyes.

It was necessary to explore the literature on whiteness for this study. Just the word whiteness was a new concept to me. As I delved deeper in my research I became more and more keenly aware of the hate that surrounds me. I have always known that hate is out there, festering in the world, but I never fully understood its origin. Now that I am beginning to get a firm grasp on its origin, I find myself less naïve than before. I understand more fully now, the horrible activities that surrounded slavery and lynchings in the south, the land of my birth. It is still difficult to wrap my mind around why the hatred continues. The brutality that surrounded black lynchings was worse than I ever could have imagined. Pinar's book *The Gender of Racial Politics and Violence in America*, explicitly explained that lynchings weren't clean, smooth, and to the point as the movies would have one believe. They were sickening to the soul. More often than not, lynchings occurred when it was thought that a black man had raped a white woman. But ironically, "as far as southern white men were concerned, rape meant attempted rape, aggravated assault, and even acts as apparently innocent and subtle as a nudge." (Pinar, 2001, 69) It is evident that the white men were merely searching for an excuse to torture and murder black men. This was the type of revelation that assisted me in seeing where

the evils of whiteness began and why the south has such negative connotations attached to it. Knowing this wickedness still exists, it was important to my research that I find out from the participants any affects the south has had on how the white parents were raising their children who are considered Others.

As I explored whiteness and its history, I learned more about the privileges I have as a white person. Like many I interviewed, I first wanted to deny that I had any advantages that Others did not. It took me a while to concede to this. In being brutally honest, my own soul searching revealed that I would hate losing the privileges I have as white person. The difference is that I want my son and those like him to have these same privileges. Not everyone feels the same way. Much of the dominant group that I belong to still feels terribly threatened by the stereotypes that had been conjured up of the people of color. Levin and McDevitt (1993) state:

Stereotypes turn particularly nasty whenever a vulnerable segment of society is regarded as threatening the power, prestige, or privileges of the dominant group. After having experienced a lengthy period of rising acceptance of or at least tolerance for racial and ethnic quality throughout society, Americans are now increasingly concerned instead with cutting their economic losses in relation to other groups. Most Americans, in principle, continue to support equal treatment of blacks and whites in jobs, housing, schools, and public accommodations. But when it comes to supporting these efforts through action, enthusiasm begins to wane. In other words, at an abstract level, most Americans believe in equality, yet in practice we really don't want it-not if it means personal sacrifice! (p. 27)

Being a white parent of a multiracial child takes personal sacrifice. The rhetoric that I tout must be supported with action. Empty words are not going to cut it. White parents (like myself) of multiracial and minority children must begin to step up to the plate.

As I continued to read, things began to become clearer to me about what the role of schools should be. It was apparent that “school should not reflect what society is, but rather school should model what society should be.” (Monroe, 1997, 93) Educators have within their hands the ability to change the world. That pedagogical relationship must be formed within the school setting in order for all students to receive a true education. It is also imperative that students be encouraged to create a visual pedagogy. “A visual pedagogy recognizes that we live in a visual world in which images bombard our minds every day.” (Weaver, 2005, 103) Most schools certainly have the resources available to achieve this visual pedagogy. In my role as an educator, I must be open to letting the students produce works of engagement that enables them to question the world in which they live.

What speaks here in the truest sense is the truest sense of being pedagogues, the being of those who in leading the young abide by the logos of care that tells us what is pedagogically good in our relationship with children. (Aoki, 2005, 193)

What a difference we might be seeing today in the decline of racial hate and prejudice if only racist people had encountered pedagogical learning in school. This could be the vaccination needed for those who grew up learning to hate. As an educator and a parent of a minority child, I hope to be an active facilitator for true pedagogical relationships. I want to be real. I want to be a contributor to the steering away from the racial mindedness of our young people.

This study was based upon the theoretical framework of critical multiculturalism. It was crucial to my work as it laid the groundwork for me to look beyond the surface of myself and the participants I spoke with. It helped me develop the questions I would need to dig deep into the hearts of the parents of Others and challenge their thoughts. This framework reminded me that race and its issues run deeper than celebrating one another's differences. (Jay and Jones, 2005) Multiculturalism is personal and relational. (Quintero, 2006) This study became a stance of principle. It was an awakening of my conscious; a transformation of the soul which is now preparing me to be a better parent for my child. Multiculturalism requires honest dialogue, understanding, and validation. With multiculturalism as my framework, many doors were opened allowing this revolution to begin.

Auto/biographical narrative inquiry was used to investigate my theoretical framework. It gave me an honest look into the lives of white parents like myself. Together we shared experiences that opened up free-flowing conversation. Sharing my own stories with participants encouraged guards to be dropped and understanding to take place. The participants were white parents or guardians charged with raising children of color. All participants were either friends or acquaintances. This supported the trust factor, and allowed candid conversation that I would not have gotten with strangers. My research was limited by not interviewing the children of the participants. Hearing directly from them would have offered more insight into the relationships between the parents and their children. However, it was not the intent of this research to interview the children as the majority of them are under the age of fifteen. I felt it would be

inappropriate and out of line to ask them questions about their differences at such a young age.

### **Findings**

The research that I conducted resulted in six findings. I expected to hear all of the parents talk about concerns they had for their children regarding issues of race and prejudice. Pammy, Marsha, and Fifi spoke only of getting stares or inappropriate questions. Lea knew only of a time that someone had called Jack a derogatory name. Bernice and Marty said that their children had not had any issues and did not feel they would have any to contend with in the future. As the work of Jay and Jones (2005) calls to our attention, they had the attitude that these issues had nothing to do with them and would have nothing to do with their children. Since this was the case, their children would be able to make it in the future just like anyone else as long as they worked hard. Leonard flatly stated that if his children had ever had any of these issues, it was something they were expected to just deal with. He made it seem that if they had ever confronted any issues, he was not aware of them. This supports Wise's (2005) work that there is a void in the thinking of those that are white because they have never had to consider their own racial position. Fifi and Marsha seemed to be the only two that were most aware of the prejudice that exists for children of color. Marsha was the only parent to express concern about her children being able to get jobs when they got older. For the most part, the parents who thought their children would have issues only thought people may or may not like them because of their skin color. The concern never ran deeper than that. In fact, she didn't like the separate recognition of races through such organizations as the NAACP and other minority support groups. There is a superficial connection



among these white parents and the challenges that their children may one day face  
**(Finding 1).**

Part of preparing children to be ready for life is to live the example you want your children to follow. The other part requires giving them the knowledge they need to handle what life sends their way. Only three of these participants stated that they have had conversations with their children about issues of race. Pammy and Marsha said that they have talked to Teddy and Ford about the plight of the black male. Fifi has talked to her children about skin color and the importance of recognizing both races that make up who they are. Lea has not talked to Jack about issues unless he has brought them up as he did when he told her that she shouldn't refer to people by their skin color. *"I remember you came home one day and I was asking you who that little black boy was that sat by you in class. And you said, 'why did you say black boy; why didn't you just say who is that little boy sitting by you?'" Do you remember my response? I asked you "how else was I going to describe him?" And you told me that "you don't describe children by the color of their skin."* (Lea's Letter, Sukaratana, 2008) Lea felt that she had learned a lot from Jack in the time that she has been raising him. Howard (1999) was correct in saying, "One of the greatest gifts of parenthood is that our children offer us so many opportunities to learn from their innate wisdom" (p. 70). Bernice has not talked with her children about issues of race and said she has really always thought of them as being white even though her son tells people he is Hawaiian. Marty absolutely said that his family does not talk about issues of race because there hasn't been a need to. Leonard also said that he never discussed issues of race with his girls when they were growing up. He ignored it. But as Gilroy's (2000) work states, race will always remain. It is not going

away regardless of whether white parents choose to discuss the issues with their children. Deep and deliberate conversations on issues of race are not often held in these families of mixed races (**Finding 2**). Lea felt she couldn't contribute to conversations on race with Jack because she is ill-equipped. She believed it more appropriate for Jack's family in Texas to take this on. In fact, to meet the needs of children of color it is necessary to permit other people of color to come in and participate in the lives of children. (Delpit, 1995) We have to be open to hearing about the trials and experiences of Others so that we as the dominant group can engage in these conversations that are so needed.

I talked with the participants about their feelings on the education their children regarding multiculturalism and inequalities. Pammy acknowledged that textbooks are geared toward the white child as is most instruction. Her remedy was to say that she has made Teddy aware of this. She also supplements his reading with books on famous blacks. Nakazawa (2003) found this an important step, "As parents, we need to make that extra effort to borrow books that reflect multiracial issues from the library or buy them for our children's bookshelves and have conversations about the images in them" (p. 31). However, as noble an effort as this may have been on Pammy's part, it was about the extent of her intervention into Teddy's educational experience. Marty thought that teaching heritage at school was too abstract. He also stated "Christian isn't interested in it" and that Christian is in a class where there are many children of color. This fact seemed to satisfy any "multicultural teaching requirements." Similarly, Leonard felt that because his children went to an "international school" for much of their lives, this was all that was necessary. I found that overall, these parent were not pushing for an education of multiculturalism for their children. In not doing so, they are blocking their children

from becoming social change agents. Ladson-Billings (1997) work believes that transformation is hindered when students are not provided the varying knowledge of their culture. Parents have to be the surrogates for their children. As Fanon's (1963) work presented that blacks had to prove they had a culture. So much of the curriculum is white dominated. White parents must assist their children and the schools by establishing their culture as worthy of teaching about. Bernice and Marsha were both satisfied with the education their children are receiving. Marsha even praised her children's education. Bernice downplayed the importance of her children's heritage and seemed to think any efforts on her part toward an education of multiculturalism would have been a waste of time and irrelevant to the other students in the class. *"I guess that I could have gone to the school and talked to the teachers and asked them to incorporate it, but there aren't that many Filipino children so if you have one in a class, why would a teacher want to do a whole study on it?"* (Bernice's Letter, Sukaratana, 2008) Fifi too, was satisfied adding only that she got upset once when a teacher told her child he was black and not both black and white. Lea was satisfied as well and stated that she liked the fact that there were a lot of minority children where Jack attends school. She was also pleased with the Spanish class and occasional Spanish celebrations held at school. All of the participants interviewed acknowledged or came to grips during the interview with the idea that textbooks have been written by the standards of the dominant culture. Brents and Monson's (1991) work in *White Reign* found that these standards are made to symbolize the experiences of all people. Even so, the parents were complacent about their children's education. To add to this quagmire, it is troubling look at the discrepancy that King and Howard's (2000) research from *Teaching Tolerance* magazine shows.

“Approximately 90 percent of K-12 teachers in the U.S. are White, while 36 percent of the national school population are students of color.” This racial gap is huge and calls attention to the vital responsibility parents have in seeking out what it means for their children to receive a true education of multiculturalism. Additionally, white educators must realize how great the need is for a culture of competency among white teachers because of such a disparity. It is unfortunate that I found the following: White parents of children of color are generally satisfied with the education that their children are receiving and seem to have no understanding of what a true culture of multiculturalism is about. **(Finding 3)**. There has to be an attempt by educators and parents towards moving ahead for a development of societal change. (McLaren 1995)

Frankenberg’s (1993) work demanded specification and examination of one’s whiteness. It was on this thought that portions of Peggy McIntosh’s (1988) white privilege checklist were used to see how aware white parents were of their daily privileges and whiteness. I was surprised at how many of the parents had not really noticed their whiteness and advantages. Berger’s (1999) work found that it is difficult for white people to notice their whiteness. Because these privileges are a part of the daily way of living, they go unnoticed because they aren’t challenged. Pammy agreed in an obligatory fashion with the majority of the statements and gave little commentary on them. She seemed taken by surprise that I had asked about privileges. Marty did not agree that he had any privileges. Leonard quickly dismissed the idea of having any privileges. He stated that he thought that it was “the other way around.” Kendall’s (2006) work supports Marty and Leonard’s attitudes:

We don't have to think about it, and we know that. We learn not to acknowledge it, and yet no other group in our country has that option. Race is one of the central criteria by which our society is organized, and our privilege allows us to ignore its existence as it relates to us. (p. 50-51)

Lea was not aware of any privileges she had. When the statements were read, she agreed to some of them. Marsha and Fifi were the only two participants that strongly agreed with every checklist item. Fifi had experienced situations with her husband and Marsha gave the example of not having to worry about being followed in a store. Initially, I had to explain what I meant by white privilege to Bernice. She hesitated with her replies and said, "I guess so" to each of them. I felt like she wanted to contradict them but didn't know how. White privilege is a benefit not fully realized by many of these white parents in spite of having racially mixed families (**Finding 4**).

All children of these participants have been raised in the south the majority of their lives. Marty felt raising Christian in the south was good, but really no different than any other place they had lived. They have lived on military bases all of Christian's life. He said there was a possibility that life for his family might be different if they were not part of a military community. Fifi thought that overall, living in the south has been a good place to raise her children. However she prior to giving birth, she wasn't sure what the future would hold for her children due to the reputation the south has carried on. Hale's (1998) work supports her thinking. His work found that the south has been the "dark" side of America to many people. It represents hatred and bigotry to an extent that is not found in other parts of America. Fifi felt like Florida was more of a racist state than Georgia. She also believed she could not raise her children in a non-military

southern town due to its lack of diversity. Pammy, Marsha, Lea, and Bernice also felt Townsville was a good place to raise a child and that it helped that this was a military community with great diversity. Lea mentioned that some of her family members still have issues to contend with, but they seem to be colorblind when it comes to Jack. *“And I really think that with us living in a military town and where you see so much interracial and such; I think that has probably helped our family adjust. Otherwise, I think it would have been difficult.”* (Lea’s Letter, Sukaratana, 2008) Marsha’s concern with Townsville was that there are strong southern ties that are hard to break through and this may inhibit her children with getting local jobs in the future. Kincheloe and Pinar (1991) show in their work that there is an unstated thread of alliance that runs across racial lines in the south. This alliance is hard to break through when you are not from the area. Marsha said that these strong roots were commendable, but frustrating at the same time. Although not reflected in the letter, Marsha had stated that she and her fiancé were also having a difficult time finding jobs that were typically held by local people. Bernice stated that her children want to come back to Townsville and raise their families here. Leonard felt that the community of Townsville was a great church-oriented community that had gotten over any issues of race. White parents raising children of color in the south have seen little negative impact and attribute this to the fact that the town of Townsville is a diverse, military community (**Finding 5**).

Prior to the interviews, I presumed that there would be differences in the way white parents are raising their children verses the way they were raised themselves. I looked to these parents for answers for they were voices of experience. He’s (2003) work made the point that remaining within our own culture would only result in stories without

reflection. Leaving our own culture and delving into the culture of others will lend itself to stories and experiences from which to reflect upon and learn from. This is what I hoped to hear about. Unfortunately, for most of these parents, they have not yet stepped out of their own culture and into the other half that makes up who their child is. They are aware of it, but have not embodied it which is why they continue to raise their children the way they were raised. This is what they know. All participants stated that they were raising their children the same way they were raised. Fifi said that she always dated black boys and her parents condoned this. Leonard said that he was raised not to tolerate pettiness. He said his parents were always “open and direct” with him and he raised his girls to be the same way. Lea said she is not really raising Jack any different, but notes he is around children of color much more than she ever was. Marsha said that race was not discussed in her home. They were taught strong religious values. She said she is more communicative with her children with race issues, but other than that is raising her children in the same way. Bernice said that she is absolutely raising her children in the same way she was raised. There was no talk of race in her house as a child and the only talk she’s really had is with her daughter in regard to whom she must marry. According to a University of Memphis study on multiracial students which is found in Nakazawa’s (2003) work:

Young multiracial adults who were raised in homes in which their multiracialness was not talked about and whose parents did not openly address the issues their children might one day face, feel somewhat betrayed by their parents later on in life. (p. 149)

It is essential that in raising children of color, white parents make an effort to discuss issues their children may possibly face. If not, the children may one day resent this lack of dialogue, especially when they have to confront issues they weren't prepared for.

Marty said he is raising Christian in the same way he was. He said that he had mostly white friends, but Christian is growing up around a more diverse group of friends.

Pammy also stated she is raising Teddy in the same way she was raised although her own mother had some issues of prejudice. These issues took a turn when Teddy came into Pammy's life. White parents of children of color are raising their children virtually the same way they were raised (**Finding 6**). They are playing it safe because they were raised within the arena of whiteness and never had any difficulties themselves.

Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997) support this idea through their work. They say that whiteness has become a vital topic to confront because so few white people have had a problem with it. Whiteness has been viewed as the norm and it is now time to face its issues. Parents who face their whiteness head on will be more prepared to raise their children and will do so in a way that doesn't exactly mimic the way they were raised themselves. Fundamental moral principles may remain, but open and honest discussions and confrontation of issues will help them in the up-bringing of their children of color.

I come to the end of this research, grateful that I have been forced to confront the real me. I conclude that the only way white parents of children of color are going to develop a culture of competency in the raising of their children is 1) through serious introspection and confrontation of their own whiteness and 2) through on-going purposeful, meaningful and honest discussions within their homes. This is what the reconceptualization requires; that complicated conversation. It may not be comfortable



and it may not be pleasant, but it is necessary. It is Grumet's (1980) work that demands that the old ideas get turned over and Dewey (1983) who calls us to be continuously reflective.

White parents have a vital role to play in the educational lives of their children of color; this has to be recognized. Not much has been done to assist children of color in this endeavor. In order for them to thrive, there must be active involvement in the education of their children. There must be a joint effort between parents and teachers to develop a multicultural curriculum and pedagogy (McLaren 1995) that takes care of the diverse needs of Others. It must be an endeavor of all. It is the curriculum reconceived; the curriculum is no longer the noun it once was, but the verb *currere*. (Pinar, 2004) I come to the end of this research believing that whiteness continues to prevail in its blinding of the eyes of parents. It is my hope that my own awakening and continued growth has been a pebble that set the waters in motion for change. I am optimistic that pedagogical relationships between the parents that I interviewed and their children will begin to form. I look forward to seeing if this happens. My commitment to my own son and the relationship that must be built between us is stronger than ever. The parents of whom I interviewed will also be watching me to see if I am living up to what I have put on the table for discussion. In closing, I maintain that the possibilities for all our children are endless. Through our loving and nurturing the totality of who they are, their legacy as children of color will live on.

### **My Letter, Part Three**

*My Dear Child Clark,*

*Here I am at the end of a process, but not the journey. I have learned much about myself and others like me. So what does all of this mean? It means I have had revelations about myself that can not be brushed to the side. I must confront them on a daily basis and ask myself what the true intent of my actions are. It means that I must show you by my actions and my words what it means to treat others with respect and dignity. It also means that I have to initiate complicated conversations with friends, family, co-workers, acquaintances and most of all with you.*

*As your mother, your white mother...I am charged with seeing that your Thai heritage is validated. I have to get rid of my own selfishness and make sure you have experiences made available to you at school and at home. I have to make sure that I am loving the totality of you. For you I want a life that is not issue free, for it is only through trials that you will discover who you are and the strengths you have. As your dad says, "Never forget who you are."*

*Son, I love you more than life itself. There are no words to express the love that a parent has for a child. Your arrival into my life has opened my blinded eyes. I am blessed by your sweetness. As I close this letter, I vow to keep the dialogue flowing with you.*

*I love you forever,*

*Mom*

## EPILOGUE

### An Open Letter to all Children of Color

*Dear Children,*

*You are living in a time that our country has not seen before. Soon we are going to have the first non-white President of this great country of the United States of America. While this is a historic moment for us and shows that this country is striving toward acceptance of diversity; there is still much work that must be done towards becoming a more unified nation in the area of race.*

*The unification of our society depends partly upon you. I implore you to begin and keep the complicated conversations alive. It is through dialogue that mutual respect and understanding will occur. Do not let the lack of what you have been taught hinder you from seeking what you desire to know. Challenge those that teach you without blaming them, for as you will soon realize; there are so many that still have blinders on. Form purposeful relationships. Truly get to know people for who they are, not for what they look like.*

*It is in closing that I beseech you not to let anyone prevent you from being the complete person that you are. Go forth and change the world one conversation at a time!*

*Debra Sukaratana*

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**APPENDIX A**  
**INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. What thoughts/perceptions did you have about being white as you were growing up?
2. Describe how you met your spouse and eventually came to marry him/her.
3. Describe how your family showed you that they approved or disapproved of you marrying outside of your race?
4. **For the participant who is the guardian of a minority child.....How have your family and friends shown you that they support you in raising a child who is a minority?**
5. In what ways does the way you were raised as a child differ from that of how you are raising your child in regard to race/multiculturalism?
6. What have you taught your child about issues of race?
7. What privileges do you feel you have (because you are white) that your child will never have?
8. How has your awareness of being white altered since you've had a child who is considered a minority?
9. How would you describe Southern Pride?
10. In what ways has living in the South helped or inhibited you in raising your child?
11. In what ways do you celebrate and/or discuss your child's heritage and differences at home?
12. What stereotypes and/or current political issues trouble you that once did not (in regard to race and multicultural issues)?
13. How often is your child's heritage discussed and / or celebrated at school?
14. **For the participants that are teachers.....How often and to what extent do you celebrate your students' heritages in the classroom?**
15. How can you influence your child's educational experience to ensure that he or she receives an education that meets the needs of multiculturalism and is free of inequalities?

16. **For the participants that are teachers.....**How can you ensure that you are giving each child in your classroom an education that meets the needs of multiculturalism is free of inequalities?
17. Tell me how you think whiteness in general has contributed to any existing inequalities in education and society in general.
18. Now that you are raising a child who is considered a minority, tell me how your own views have evolved toward people and issues of other races?
19. How do you see the future for your child as one who will always have issues of race to contend with?
20. **For the participants that are teachers....**How do you see the future of education for minority students and how do you feel your dual role as a teacher *and* a white parent of a minority child is going to impact that future?

**APPENDIX B****PEGGY MCINTOSH'S WHITE PRIVILEGE CHECKLIST****Portions from her essay *Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack***

1. I can arrange to be in the company of people of my race most of the time.”
2. I can go shopping alone most of the time, pretty well assured that I will not be followed or harassed.
3. I can turn on the television or open to the front page of the paper and see people of my race widely represented.
4. When I am told about our national heritage or about civilization, I am shown that people of my color made it what it is.
5. Whether I use checks, credit cards, or cash, I can count on my skin color not to work against the appearance of financial responsibility.
6. I am not made acutely aware that my shape, bearing, or body odor will be taken as a reflection on my race.
7. I can worry about racism without being seen as self-interested or self-seeking.
8. I can take a job or enroll in a college with an affirmative action policy without having my co-workers or peers assume I got it because of my race.
9. I can be late to a meeting without having the lateness reflect on my race.
10. I can choose public accommodation with out fearing that people of my race cannot get in or will be mistreated.
11. I am never asked to speak for all of the people of my racial group.
12. I can be pretty sure that if I ask to talk with the person in charge. I will be facing a person of my race.

