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Educating for a Diverse Society in "Post-Race" America

President Obama and the American Dream

In November 2008, Barack Obama, a man with visible African ancestry, was elected the 44th President of the United States. Around the country, headlines heralded the dawning of a new age: "Change Has Come," "A New Dawn," "A Changed Nation," "A Dream Realized," and "Race is History." Following his inauguration, Americans of all colors and creeds have expressed increasing optimism about the state of race-relations – with some going so far as to boldly claim that we have successfully moved past the most painful chapters in our national history into a new "post-race" America (Bai; McWhorter). Some of Obama's most ardent supporters were early advocates of this idea. After his win in the South Carolina democratic primary – a win that came in the wake of racially charged accusations between him and his primary rival Hillary Clinton – supporters at his victory party began chanting: "Race doesn't matter" (Thompson). African American commentator Michele Martin similarly sounded the death knell of racial discrimination; after his victory in the Iowa primary, she declared: "Even if the Obama steamroller ends tomorrow, his success so far has proven that race is no longer the determinate of human potential in this country. A passion for excellence is – or can be" (Martin). And on election night, right after television newscasters patted the country on its back for having elected our first black president, they interpreted long-time African American activist Jesse Jackson's tears as regret for his own impending irrelevance.

But does Obama's meteoric rise to power truly reflect a changed racial landscape? Assuming that it *has* changed, what does the terrain actually look like? More importantly, how will we prepare ourselves for the new world we live in? With these questions in mind, I turn to one of the greatest challenges faced by the United States today – how to educate for a racially and culturally diverse society in the context of increasing global interdependence and a decline in Euro-American hegemony.

I begin with a consideration of "The American Dream." It is an appropriate launching pad both because President Obama is widely seen as a

21st century exemplar of this national myth, and also because, for many racial minority people, education has figured so centrally in the attainment of that dream. Although it has many versions, the basic plot of the American Dream can be summed up in a single sentence. It says that no matter who a person is or where he comes from, if he works hard enough, he can achieve whatever he wants to in the United States. It is a story that has been repeated in countless variations in our literature, movies, theatre, music, and government documents and proclamations. It is such a powerful narrative that it gives hope to people from all over the world; it has been, and continues to be, the motivating story for millions of global migrants who set out for our shores, or for our borders, every year.

Importantly, the American Dream embeds within it a number of assumptions about what kind of person a good American should be; it values individuality, honesty, strength, and initiative over aristocratic origins, restraint, and social niceties. Consider, as an example, the protagonist of Henry James's 1877 novel, *The American*. The aptly named Christopher Newman is as comfortable in the great outdoors of the American west as he is with asserting his presence in the salons of Paris. He might be brash, but he's brave. He is rugged and not very polished, but – who cares? What matters is that he is honest, forthright and a real go-getter. A true believer in the triumph of meritocracy over aristocracy, Newman exudes confidence in his native ability to succeed in any situation. He is, after all, a New Man for a New (that is, post-European) World. He has attained his high status not because he was born into it, but because he made his own fortune. Like every good American from Benjamin Franklin on, Newman is a self-made man. Of course, also like Benjamin Franklin, the character of Christopher Newman is white, male, and Christian. The part of the American Dream that goes unremarked upon (and perhaps unnoticed) by the part of the population that has succeeded in attaining it, is that for the largest part of United States history, the American Dream was available to only a very select group of people – that is, men of European ancestry.

However much we might mythologize ourselves, U.S. Americans have never had a true meritocracy. Rather, we have had a society where social, economic and political rights and privileges have been largely distributed according to a person's racial designation and gender identity. Slavery, immigration restrictions,[1] racially restrictive housing covenants, bars to citizenship of non-white people, the disenfranchisement of women and non-whites, and the internment of people of Japanese ancestry during World War II – all of these government-sponsored and/or endorsed practices effectively institutionalized and enforced a situation of

white, male advantage for the largest part of the history of the country. It was not until the passage of the 14th amendment in 1868 that blacks were granted due process and equal protection, and not until the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts of 1964 and 1965 that these rights were finally enforced. Women were excluded from voting until 1920, schools were legally segregated by race until 1954, and people of Asian ancestry were barred from naturalization until the mid-20th century. For much of U.S. history, then, access to the American Dream has been decidedly group-based.

The United States where Barack Obama could be elected President, Sonia Sotomayor could be confirmed as a United States Supreme Court Justice, or even where I (a Latina from the economically-depressed state of New Mexico) could be tenured in the English department at Stanford University, is thus a very recent one. Importantly, none of us – President Obama, Justice Sotomayor, or myself (they are, after all, in my age cohort) – would have had the opportunity to attend the excellent and highly selective institutions of higher education that have been so key to our eventual achievements were it not for the affirmative action programs that were in place when we were doing our schooling. I do not mean to equate myself with Obama and Sotomayor, both of whom are extraordinary people. Rather, I hold myself up as one of a number of relatively anonymous ethnic minority people who – through government intervention in the realm of educational equity – had the chance to acquire an excellent education *and* the cultural capital we needed to be accepted within the halls of power and privilege.

Still, national myths persevere, in part because they do crucial ideological work. Not surprisingly, the predominant framing in the mainstream American media for the successes of both President Obama and Justice Sotomayor has been that they are 21st century exemplars of the American Dream. They are viewed, and have been actively promoted by the Obama campaign and Obama administration, as living examples of the triumph of meritocracy and individual initiative. It makes perfect political sense for the Obama administration to frame President Obama's and Justice Sotomayor's rise to the top in terms of the vitality of the American Dream and the triumph of individualism; after all, this is the framing that most U.S. Americans prefer. Most people in the United States want to believe that an individual can overcome any obstacle on her way to success; they are, moreover, deeply uncomfortable with the idea that a person might be in some way advantaged or hampered by an association with a group of people she may not even want to be identified with. Indeed, the most serious objections Justice Sotomayor faced in her confirmation hearings were based on her past support for racially-based

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[1] E.g., the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and the National Origins Act of 1924.

affirmative action programs – a position premised on the actually quite reasonable idea that one's racial and ethnic associations matter for the opportunities one is likely to have. Texas Representative John Cornyn, for example, lauded Sotomayor's personal accomplishments but pronounced her unfit for the Supreme Court because, he said, "Justice should be colorblind" (Kirkpatrick). And right-wing ideologue Rush Limbaugh seized upon Sotomayor's past endorsement of affirmative action programs as proof that she is "racist," and suggested that she should therefore resign from consideration (Limbaugh).

Putting aside Cornyn's and Limbaugh's politically-interested condemnations of both our new President and our newest Supreme Court justice, the more crucial issue is that viewing Obama's and Sotomayor's triumphs in individualist terms presents a very partial picture of how some limited progress in the realm of racial equality has been achieved. Without discounting either Obama's and Sotomayor's considerable talents or their individual initiative, a more accurate framing of their successes requires us to view them as individual beneficiaries of generations of collective racial struggle. The advancements in social justice represented by Obama, Sotomayor and several generations of racial or ethnic minorities must be set in the context of government interventions such as school busing, affirmative action, and minority set-asides. They must, that is, be set in the context of group-based remedies for group-based exclusions.

Race, Education, and Inequality

The questions of how much progress has been made toward achieving equality of opportunity for people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds in the United States, or of how best that progress can be achieved, are far from idle questions. The United States is facing important changes both globally and domestically that will require us as a country to do a better job of preparing a broader diversity of our population to compete in the 21st century global economy. Globally, we are watching the emergence of India and China as economic powerhouses, the rise of Islam as a world religion, and the appearance of leftist and indigenous governments in Latin America whose leaders increasingly reject the historic leadership of the United States in the American hemisphere. India, currently Asia's third-largest economy, far exceeded economic growth forecasts of 6.3% in the last quarter of 2009 to post a 7.9% increase from a year earlier (Reuters 2009). China, which recently surpassed Germany as the world's largest exporter of manufactured goods and the United States as the world's largest market for new cars, is on the path toward becoming the world's second largest economy by the end of 2011 (Wines; Wong). Hugo Chavez, the socialist president of Venezuela, has been a loud and vocal critic of the U.S. while extending his own influence across Latin America. One of Chavez's allies is Evo Morales, the indigenous President of Bolivia who during his first term nationalized key industries and enacted wide-spread agrarian reform by redistributing land to the long-dispossessed Aymara majority, and who was just inaugurated into his second term in office after having won re-election with 64% of the vote (AFP; Loewentheil). And in what can only be described as a sign of the times, indigenous Bolivian merchants are learning to speak Chinese as they forge direct trading relationships with businessmen in China rather than working through middle-men in other countries (Murphy). Lest we imagine that we can dig our heads deep into the sand and ignore these shifts in economic and political power, we have to remember that our world is more interconnected than ever before – a fact amply demonstrated by the Great Recession of 2008-09, ongoing major climate change, and terrorist plots targeting the United States that are launched from half a world away. In such a context, knowing how to interact positively with people who have different ethnic associations, cultural traditions, and religious beliefs – whether those people are within or outside the borders of the United States – would seem to be a basic survival skill.

Domestically, the population of the United States is undergoing a major shift. Following the lifting in 1965 of discriminatory national immigration quotas that favored the countries of northern Europe, the population of the United States has changed dramatically. Demographers estimate that by 2050, over half of the population of the United States will be non-white (Passel & Cohn). Already, the three states with the largest Latino populations are majority non-white: California (where I live now), Texas (where I lived during the 1980s), and New Mexico (where I was born and grew up). Yet, despite the fact that most of the available jobs in the United States call for the kind of specialized skills and high levels of literacy that require training past high school, our society is not adequately preparing young people of color for these jobs.

According to educational researcher Linda Darling-Hammond, the educational achievement of racial minority students has fallen considerably over the last three decades. She notes that for a short period in the mid-1970s college attendance rates were actually equivalent for white, black, and Latino students. This was a time during which gaps in school spending and access to qualified teachers and higher education were smaller than before or since (Darling-Hammond). Since about the mid-1980s, however, four-year graduation rates for minority students have

declined precipitously. In some states where high stakes testing has been put in place, graduation rates for black and Latino students has fallen to below 50% (Darling-Hammond; Orfield). Moreover, despite concerted efforts over the past sixty years on the part of civil rights activists to achieve equal opportunity via legally mandated racial integration in the public school system, our nation's primary and secondary schools are rapidly re-segregating.[2] Additionally, the per-pupil spending gap is widening between the richest and the poorest school districts. Darling-Hammond reports that currently in the United States the top 10% of districts spend ten times as much as the bottom 10%. And because racially segregated schools with minority student populations generally have high concentrations of poverty, students of color are more likely than ever to attend schools that are in poor repair and lack even the most basic instructional materials. As a result, fewer and fewer young people of color are graduating with either the credentials or the skills to enter the job market (Darling-Hammond).

Equally alarming is the fact that as funding for public schools (and especially for minority-majority schools) continues to fall or stagnate, the national investment in prisons has virtually exploded. During the same period in which per-pupil expenditures for schools grew by only 26 percent, federal, state and local spending for corrections grew by 990 percent (Darling-Hammond; Miller). Not surprisingly, the decrease in high school graduation rates is negatively correlated with the increase in incarceration. According to one report, 68% of state prison inmates in the late 1990s had not received a high school diploma (Western, Schiraldi & Ziedenberg). The same report noted that the connection between lack of education and incarceration was particularly pronounced for African American men: in 1999, fully 52% of African American male high school dropouts had prison records by their early thirties (Western, Schiraldi & Ziedenberg; see also Bobo & Thompson). "How," Darling-Hammond rightly asks, "can we imagine sustaining a knowledge-based economy with a third of our young people unable to earn a living wage, and a large share placed on what has come to be known as the 'school-to-prison-pipeline'?"

Recent educational policies have only made a bad situation worse; instead of working to reverse the disturbing trends discussed above, federal education reforms have tended to reinforce them. Over the past several decades, U.S. state and federal policy makers have responded to the growing crisis by enacting punitive, rather than ameliorative, educational policies. The Bush-era No Child Left Behind educational reform act, for example, required all schools receiving federal funding to test students annually and then to withhold resources from schools whose students performed poorly on the tests. The negative impact of these disciplinary policies have fallen with disproportionate weight on black, Latino, and Native American students, since they are the young people who are most likely to attend poorly-resourced, poorly-performing schools. Subsequent research has shown that schools under pressure to show improvement in test scores have responded not by doing a better job of educating their charges (a task for which the schools already lacked sufficient resources), but by holding back or forcing out those students who were performing most poorly on the tests. This accounts for a primary reason why the drop-out rate among blacks and Latinos has increased so dramatically in recent years (Darling-Hammond; Haney; Wheelock).

Is the United States facing an inevitable decline? Possibly – even certainly – if our country does not commit itself to educating a greater proportion as well as a greater diversity of our population for an increasingly technological and globalized economy. The question to ask is this: Why have state and federal policy makers tended to pursue policies that worsen, rather than improve, the educational achievements of students of color? One possible explanation is that the people in power, who historically have been white, fail to identify with the well-being of children from non-white racial groups. Their circle of concern simply does not extend to groups of people they perceive to be marginal to the lives of the predominantly white voters who propelled them into office. Another possible explanation is more pernicious, and is related to the way U.S. Americans understand the relationship between intelligence and race. As typical members of the society, our state and federal educational policy makers may well believe that resources expended on students of color who do not perform well on standardized tests are effectively wasted. Indeed, a recurring explanation for why students associated with some racial or ethnic groups do better than students associated with other groups is that the students who are doing well have more ability, intelligence, motivation, and merit than the students who are doing poorly (Darling-Hammond). Even well-meaning educators sometimes assume that the racial achievement gap is merely a reflection of the innate capacities of the students under consideration. Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that state and federal educational policy makers often fail to create the conditions for success in schools where students of color constitute the majority of the population.

As a society, we need to commit ourselves to the goal of educating our changing population, and to figuring out more effective ways of helping young people of color achieve academic success. Doing so will require

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[2] Racial segregation in the schools is now *de facto*, rather than *de jure*, and is principally a result of racially segregated housing patterns – a different issue that cannot be treated in this essay.

policy makers, teachers, *and* students to dispense with some serious mis-conceptions about race and intelligence. The familiar way of explaining disparate outcomes among racial and ethnic groups, I contend, depends on two erroneous assumptions: 1) that race is a stable or essential charac-teristic located inside the body or culture of the individual; and 2) that intelligence is a fixed capacity of which every individual has a measur-able amount. These two misconceptions, when taken together, have had, and continue to have, devastating effects on the lives of people of color and society as a whole. The way these two ideas work together can be seen in the statement by Nobel Prize winner James Watson, who helped discover the double helix structure of DNA. In a speech he gave in 2007, Watson noted that he was "inherently gloomy about the prospect of Af-rica" because "all our social policies are based on the fact that their intel-ligence is the same as ours – whereas all the testing says not really." He added that while many of us have a natural desire to believe that all hu-man beings should be equal, "people who have to deal with black em-ployees find this not true" (Dean). Watson was strongly criticized and he apologized for his remarks. Nevertheless, the fact that a highly respected and accomplished scientist would make this kind of statement shows that confusion about what race and ethnicity are, and what they mean for human intelligence and behavior, is still frighteningly widespread.

I begin by addressing the mistaken idea that race is a biological or cul-tural essence located inside the body of an individual, before discussing recent work in the discipline of social psychology that reveals intelli-gence as malleable and socially constituted, rather than fixed and essen-tial attribute of individual people.

Race and Ethnicity as Social Processes

Drawing on the latest research in the biological, social, and humanistic sciences, social psychologist Hazel Markus and I have developed a framework for understanding race and ethnicity not as things that people *have* or *are*, but as actions that people *do*. We show that race and ethnic-ity are complex systems of ideas and practices that do important personal and societal work. Our account draws on research showing that if a per-son is associated with a particular race or ethnicity, and if he or she be-haves in particular ways, it is not because of what is inside him or her, but because of his or her participation in a web of social relations (Moya & Markus).

As terms, "race" and "ethnicity" designate two overlapping but differ-ent processes – one negative, one positive – involving the countless and quotidian interactions that people, as individuals and members of social

groups, have with each other. Hazel Markus and I have chosen to associ-ate the term "race" with the negative process because it has historically been tied to asymmetries in power and privilege – to inequality. In the same spirit, we define the term "ethnicity" positively because it is more often used, in the United States at least, to refer to endorsed or claimed differences. In actual practice, however, the distinction between the two processes, and between the two terms, is much muddier.[3] I offer our defi-nitions below before returning to the question of how they overlap.

> **Race** is a doing – a dynamic set of historically-derived and institutionalized ideas and practices that:
> - sorts people into ethnic groups according to perceived physical and behavioral human characteristics that are often imagined to be nega-tive, innate, and shared;
> - associates differential value, power, and privilege with these charac-teristics, establishes a hierarchy among the different groups, and confers opportunity accordingly;
> - emerges:
>   - when groups are perceived to pose a threat (political, economic, or cultural) to each other's world view or way of life; and/or
>   - to justify the denigration and exploitation (past, current, or future) of other groups while exalting one's own group to claim an innate privilege.
>
> **Ethnicity** is a doing – a dynamic set of historically-derived and institutional-ized ideas and practices that:
> - allows people to identify, or be identified, with groupings of people on the basis of presumed, and usually claimed, commonalities including several of the following: language, history, nation or region of origin, customs, religion, names, physical appearance and/or ancestry group;
> - when claimed, confers a sense of belonging, pride, and motivation;
> - can be a source of collective and individual identity.

As noted above, the terms associated with the two processes detailed above are sometimes interchangeable. At times, "ethnicity" can be asso-ciated with the negative inequality-producing process we call doing race. For example, the conflict between Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda has been widely reported and understood as an ethnic conflict. Yet at the heart of that conflict – as with most ethnic conflicts – was a long history of Rwandans doing to each other what we call doing race, i.e. creating groups based on perceived physical and behavioral characteristics, asso-ciating differential privilege and power with these characteristics, and then justifying the resulting inequalities. Similarly, "race" can be associ-ated with the positive identity-generating process we call doing ethnicity. This occurs when people who have had a stigmatized racial identity im-

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[3] Our concern in distinguishing these two terms is not to adjudicate which term is "better" than the other for referencing the negative process. Rather, our concern involves learning to recognize the dynamic features of these two processes and to apprehend their world-making effects.

posed on them by others turn around and claim, for example, "black" or "American Indian" as a source of belonging, pride, and motivation.

Furthermore, due to the delicate balance between the positive and negative aspects of noting human ethnic or racial differences, the negative and positive processes we identify above sometimes overlap or even work together. For example, a person who is doing ethnicity, by claiming positive commonalities with others in his or her group, can easily slide over into doing race. This happens when someone who is claiming positive commonalities with others construes his or her group's way as normative or superior while imposing negative characteristics onto people in other groups.

It should be clear from the way Markus and I define ethnicity that there is nothing wrong with recognizing someone else's ethnicity or claiming one's own, because there is nothing negative or pernicious, per se, about ethnic groupings. Ethnic differences are and will continue to be evident in diverse societies. Moreover, because they reflect alternative perspectives and practices, ethnicities can be an important source of vibrancy and innovation. Simply noting an ethnically-associated human difference is not a problem; it only becomes a problem when that difference is "raced" -- when it is used to justify or create unfair distributions of power and resources.

Understanding race and ethnicity as dynamic sets of historically-derived and institutionalized ideas and practices means acknowledging that the perpetuation of racial inequality depends as much on how institutions are set up as on what individual people think and believe. Whether or not people individually have negative attitudes toward those in other groups, the institutions of U.S. society have been set up to perpetuate our current inequitable racial order. What this means is that we *all* do race just by participating in a world that comes pre-arranged according to certain racial categories. We, even those of us who are racial or ethnic minorities, do race (intentionally or not) whenever we think or behave in ways that reproduce the status quo.

We can see the consequences of the fact that people have done (and continue to do) race everywhere we look. We see its effects when we observe that very few black or Latino students in an integrated high school are in the college preparatory classes, or when we observe that the chances of being in poor health, having no insurance, and dying young are much greater for those associated with a minority racial or ethnic group; these are institutionalized patterns that reflect and perpetuate inequality. To the extent that any of us accept these arrangements of the world as natural or neutral, and do not challenge or work to change them, we are responsible for perpetuating racial inequality. While we may not

be actively attributing negative characteristics to individuals, consigning them to an inferior status, and discriminating against them, we are, nonetheless, doing race simply by being part of a larger system that fosters racial injustice.

Because the ideas and practices of race are woven into the fabric of society, *undoing* race will require more than simply changing individual people's attitudes. It will require nothing less than a reworking of our society's basic institutions – of which the educational system is one. But since changing the attitudes of institutional actors is necessary for precipitating institutional change, I turn to recent work in the field of social psychology that shows how students' (and their teachers') psychological situations – including their attitudes about intelligence, their awareness of negative stereotypes, and their sense of self-integrity – can measurably affect students' intellectual performance. Insofar as students and teachers interact with and help shape the educational system, they are important institutional actors whose ideas and practices are central to the doing (and possible undoing) of race in the classroom.

Doing and Undoing Race in the Classroom

The developmental and social psychologist Carol Dweck has done ground-breaking work over the last several decades demonstrating the malleability of intelligence. Dweck's research demonstrates that students' academic achievement is related to the way their views about intelligence influence their motivational structures (Dweck & Leggett). In a paper published in the *Journal of Child Development*, Dweck and her colleagues noted that students who have a "growth mind-set of intelligence" do measurably better in school than do those with a "fixed mind-set of intelligence" (Blackwell, Trzesniewski & Dweck; see also Dweck). Students in the United States tend to think of intelligence in one of two ways. Some students see intelligence as fixed -- as something that they either do (or do not) have enough of, and that can be measured and quantified. Others see intelligence as malleable -- as something that can grow, increase, be stretched and developed. Dweck and her colleagues did an initial study in which they followed several hundred students entering the 7th grade over a two-year period, and found that students with a growth mind-set had steadily increasing math grades. This got Dweck to wondering whether it might be possible to *teach* the growth mind-set to students and so improve their grades. Subsequently, she and her colleagues conducted a second study in which they identified one hundred 7th graders who were doing poorly in math, and randomly assigned them to one of two study groups. Students in the experimental condition were explicitly

taught that intelligence is malleable and were shown that the brain forms new neurons in the process of learning; they were further encouraged to believe that they were themselves in charge of this process. Students in the control condition, on the other hand, were given a lesson on memory, instructed in mnemonic strategies, and engaged in a discussion about academic difficulties and successes. Both groups were given instruction on the anatomy of the brain, presented with an anti-stereotyping lesson, and tutored in basic study skills. What Dweck and her colleagues found was that the students who were exposed to the idea that they could get smarter by working harder did exactly that. Adopting a growth mind-set changed the students' attitudes toward learning, increased their willingness to work harder, and resulted in them getting significantly better grades (Blackwell, Trzesniewski & Dweck).

Dweck's work is important for my argument in this essay not because it focuses on a particular racial or ethnic group, but because it shows that intellectual performance *across groups* is significantly correlated with curricular offerings and students' attitudes about the nature of intelligence. Her work thus exposes the fallacy of a fixed innate intellectual ability even as it highlights the role of the social environment in constituting student achievement.

The social psychologist Claude Steele (recently appointed to be provost at Columbia University), has germinated an internationally vibrant field of study on the phenomenon of "stereotype threat" that similarly highlights the socially constituted nature of achievement (Steele 1995). According to Steele, stereotype threat is activated when "[w]hen a negative stereotype about a group that one is part of becomes personally relevant, usually as an interpretation of one's behavior or an experience one is having" and refers to "the resulting sense that one can then be judged or treated in terms of the stereotype or that one might do something that would inadvertently confirm it" (Steele, Spencer & Aronson). So, for example, a common stereotype about women is that they are bad at math, while a common stereotype about blacks is that they lack intelligence. Over the course of a series of laboratory experiments, Steele and his collaborators compiled data showing that when black students who care about being seen as intelligent, or women students who care about doing well at math, are put into testing situations where their identities as female or black are made salient *and* in which they have to prove themselves as being either good at math (in the case of women) or intelligent (in the case of blacks), they generally do poorly. Through experimental manipulations, Steele and his colleagues were able to demonstrate that the students did poorly not because they were bad at math or unintelligent, but because the anxiety they experienced caused a psychological

stress response that interfered with their ability to perform well on the relevant test. In fact, the researchers were able to reverse the students' poor results merely by altering the testing situation so that the threat was nullified. They did this by simply telling the students that the tests they were taking were "not diagnostic" of either math ability or intellectual ability. Once the students were confident that they were not being judged according to a negative stereotype associated with their gender or racial group, they performed well – on par with, or even better than, the control group against which they were being measured. The phenomenon of stereotype threat is thus not only anxiety producing for the individual student, but it can measurably affect his or her performance in a high-stakes testing situation that might alter the course of his or her future (Steele, Spencer & Aronson; see also Steele 2010).

I cite the stereotype theory research because, by showing how the meanings and practices of race affect student performance, it establishes one important way race is done in educational settings. Moreover, by demonstrating that students' academic performance is responsive to their social situations, it provides further evidence for the malleability of intelligence. Finally, the substantial body of stereotype threat research that has followed from Steele's generative theory indicates that steps can be taken to counter stereotype threat and create situations of "identity safety" (Steele 2010). In fact, several subsequent studies demonstrate how even relatively small changes to a student's psychological situation can dramatically alter his or her academic performance.

In two recent articles published in the journal *Science*, social psychologist Geoffrey Cohen and his research team describe a subtle intervention designed to lessen the psychological threat minority students' experience as a result of being negatively stereotyped in school (Cohen et. al. 2006; Cohen et. al. 2009). What they did was really very simple; they gave a brief but structured writing assignment to seventh graders that focused the students' attention on a value important to themselves. In the affirmation condition, students were asked to choose from a list the one value they cared most about and then to write about it, saying why it was important to them. In the control condition, students were asked to choose from the same list the one value that was least important to them and then to write about why someone else might care about it. That was it. The researchers then tracked the students' grades over the next two years. What they found was that their brief intervention significantly improved the grades of African American students in the affirmation condition, and reduced the racial achievement gap between African American and white students by 40%. The affirmation was especially beneficial to low-performing African American students, while having

little to no effect on high-performing African American students and no effect at all on white students. Cohen and his team conclude that by allowing students in a psychologically vulnerable stereotyped group to affirm their self-integrity early in their middle-school career, they are able to interrupt the negative recursive cycle in which early poor performance influenced later performance and psychological states (Cohen et. al. 2009).

The scholarship resulting from the three research agendas I discuss above puts under suspicion widely-used criteria that masquerade as neutral or unbiased instruments for sorting people into (apparently non-racial) achievement or ability groups. The SAT, for example, is a standardized test that is widely used by admissions offices to help select and sort students into colleges and universities in the United States. Students, teachers, and admissions officers alike frequently assume that an individual's SAT score is, if not a true reflection of his or her intellectual ability, at least a good predictor for how he or she will do in college. However, research shows that it is neither of these things. The SAT is only modestly predictive of freshman college GPA, and its predictive reliability varies according to ethnic, language, and gender groups (Ramist, Lewis, & McCamley-Jenkins). Test results are, on the other hand, strongly correlated with the socioeconomic status of students' parents (Croizet). And, finally, two recent meta-analyses of stereotype threat research combining data from 18,976 students in five countries (Canada, France, Germany, Sweden, and the United States) provide strong evidence that standard measures of academic performance like tests and grades underestimate the true ability and potential of non-Asian ethnic minority students and women in quantitative fields (Walton & Spencer). For all these reasons, an undue reliance on standard academic measures to distribute educational opportunity systematically fosters and maintains racial and ethnic inequality, widens the gap between the wealthy and the poor in the United States, and reinforces the insidious idea that students associated with some racial or ethnic groups have more innate ability, intelligence, motivation, and merit than students associated with other groups.

Educating for a diverse society thus requires important changes not only in what U.S. Americans do, but also in how we understand the causes of educational success and failure. In addition to calling for more abundant and equitable school funding, better-prepared teachers, and updated curricula designed for a more diverse student body, policy makers, educators, parents, and students alike must move away from simple, and scientifically inaccurate explanations of behavior (e.g., she did well because she is smart) toward more informed, scientifically accurate, and comprehensive understandings and explanations of socially motivated

behavior (e.g., she did well because she was expected to do well by scores of family members, neighbors, and friends, and because she attended well-funded, well-resourced schools with well-prepared teachers who welcomed, encouraged, and supported her by creating a sense of inclusion and who, by countering and deflecting negative and marginalizing representations, helped her to develop an identity as a successful student). I am pleased to note that some small hope for change has recently appeared on the horizon. On January 31, 2010, President Obama and his education secretary Arne Duncan announced a broad overhaul of No Child Left Behind (Dillon). Complete details of the proposal are still being worked out, and much more will need to be done to overhaul our nation's educational system, but they have at least promised a change in the system of evaluating and rewarding schools based on student test scores.

Conclusion

Barack Obama's election to the presidency provides the people of the United States with the opportunity to re-commit to our founding ideal of equal opportunity and to change the negative and pernicious meanings associated with having non-European ancestry in the United States. We need to be careful, though, to understand the pace as well as the process of real social transformation. As tempting as it might be, it would be irresponsible to allow the Barack Obama story to blind us to the structures of racial inequality that were present at the founding of our country and remain with us today. The United States has 200+ years' worth of inequality-generating and inequality-reinforcing institutions and practices that support a European racial hierarchy. Achieving real post-racialism, then, will take time. It will take concerted efforts on the part of a broad range of institutional actors working to reform our educational institutions. It will take a renewed commitment to doing a better job of distributing opportunity across a wider swath of our population. And it will require more widespread adoption of understandings of race and ethnicity as dynamic systems of historically derived and institutionalized ideas and practices, and of intelligence as malleable and responsive to the social context.

Marking differences arising from history, language, region, religion, customs, physical appearance or ancestry group will likely always be part of our world. That said, marking such differences need not lead to creating and maintaining some groups of people as less equal or able than others. Instead, it could lead to recognizing as legitimate the different ways of being a person that result from divergent life opportunities and

experiences. If we were to allow it, making the changes necessary for creating a diverse democratic society could lead to a fuller awareness of humans' immense capacities for creativity, imagination, and flexibility.

I believe that U.S. Americans can reform the ideas and practices that have lead to our current racial disparities. I also believe that we can re-commit to our nation's foundational ideal – the equality of individuals – even as we appreciate the fact that insuring equality of opportunity for a wider array of individuals will necessarily be a collective project. President Obama may not have single-handedly dismantled our racial state just by getting elected, but he did make hope, and a "can do" attitude, acceptable once again.

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David Horowitz, Intellectual Diversity, and the Politics of Academic Freedom

Since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the debate on the definitions and the ways to protect academic freedom has again caused considerable controversy. Many academics experienced the aftermath of 9/11 as a period of intense coercion towards an uncritical patriotism and a stifling of critical debate.[1] A chorus of Cassandra cries bemoaned the "rise of anti-intellectualism and a growing acceptance of censorship within the media" (Butler 2004: 1) accompanied by a "massive, coordinated campaign to legislate a conservative, right-wing higher education agenda" representing "the most extreme attack on academic freedom in U.S. society" (McClennen 2006: 47). Beshara Doumani claimed that "[b]uffeted between the conflicting but intimately related forces of antiliberal coercion and neoliberal privatization" (11), higher education was more vulnerable than ever. Several academic organizations issued strongly worded communiqués, of which an American Studies Association resolution in 2003 can serve as a good example. "Intellectual Freedom in a Time of War" sounded an alarm that free academic inquiry was under assault by legislative efforts, by a "chilling effect of secrecy and intimidation in the government, media and on college campuses," and by a hostile public opinion intent on labeling government critics as anti-American. The ASA resolution continued:

> As students of American history and culture, we hear disturbing echoes of World War I and the McCarthy era, when the government imprisoned its critics, and institutions of higher learning dismissed antiwar or 'subversive' professors. The presumption that foreign students and teachers and Americans of Arab, Muslim, and South Asian descent are either 'terrorists' or 'the enemy' evokes shameful memories of the deportation of political dissidents during WWI, and the internment of Americans of Japanese descent during WWII.

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[1] There are many examples when scholars after 9/11 were pressured to revoke statements critical of the U.S. Some were sanctioned, suspended or even fired. Ward Churchill, professor for ethnic studies at the University of Colorado at Boulder, is perhaps the most widely known case. Calling the victims of 9/11 "little Eichmanns," Churchill was removed from his post; ostensibly not for his controversial statement but after an internal investigation found him guilty of "serious research misconduct," including plagiarism and falsification of facts. In 2009, a Colorado jury ruled that Churchill was wrongfully fired. At the time of this writing, Churchill is suing to be re-installed in his old position.