CAN WE TALK ABOUT RACE?

And Other Conversations in an Era of School Resegregation

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In Search of Wisdom

Higher Education for a Changing Democracy

Where is the wisdom
  we have lost in knowledge?
Where is the knowledge
  we have lost in information?

These lines from T. S. Eliot's poem "Choruses from 'The Rock'" were written more than seventy years ago, yet they still resonate with power today.[1] Our students have grown up in the information age. They have easy access to so much information —but will they use it wisely? There are difficult decisions to make in our increasingly complex world. How do we adequately prepare our students for wise ethical and responsible leadership?

This is an important question, because while there are certainly wise students among us, their development may have occurred in spite of our efforts, not necessarily because of them. At colleges and universities across the nation, too often we see students seeking success at any cost, reflected in the rising tide of plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty. We are confronted by the loss of civility in increasingly diverse com-

munities. We witness the feelings of fragmentation and increased psychological distress reported by campus counseling centers around the country.[2] We see a loss of balance, too often a lack of integrity, and limited vision. And yet we need all of these—balance, integrity, vision; a clear sense of collective responsibility and ethical leadership—in order to prepare our students for wise stewardship of their world and active participation in a democracy.

The technological advances of the twenty-first century will provide unanticipated opportunities for our students. They will have increasing access to ever larger quantities of information, but will they have the wisdom to use it for the common good? How do we cultivate the knowledge of self and others, the clarity of vision, the sense of perspective needed to make wise choices? Further, how do we do this in the context of ethnically and religiously diverse student communities, where we cannot assume shared cultural norms and values?

These questions are especially important in the context of a changing world order. We need an educated citizenry prepared to join an increasingly interdependent world. The American psychologist and educator John Dewey told us long ago that education could prepare people for life in a democracy only if the educational experience were also democratic. Louis Menand, in "Reimagining Liberal Education," drew from the wisdom of Dewey when he wrote, "You cannot teach people a virtue by requiring them to read books about it. You can only teach a virtue by calling upon people to exercise it. Virtue is not an innate property of character; it is an attribute of behavior."[3] We must ask if our learning environments create opportunities for practicing the behaviors required in an effective democracy.

And what is the relationship between wisdom and social justice? In my mind, you cannot have one without the other. There is no wisdom in inequity. Justice seeking requires the

recognition of multiple perspectives and the opportunity for thoughtful reflection and dialogue. To quote the education leaders Lee Knefelkamp and Carol Geary Schneider,

> Justice depends on and emerges ultimately from the quality of our interactions with and sense of responsibility to other human beings. A society riven by deep divisions is hard pressed to provide meaningful justice to all its citizens. If civic relationships are characterized by segregation, strangeness, and an assumption that some of us come from cultures that are intrinsically inferior, how is it possible to respond appropriately to the moral and social circumstances of one another?[4]

Again, how do we create the opportunities for reflection, integration, and application of ideas that lead to greater self-knowledge and social understanding, that help students gain perspective and a greater recognition of the interdependence that necessarily exists within communities? What curricular and pedagogical strategies will lead us to the cultivation of wisdom? If wisdom is our goal, how can we be more intentional in our practice to facilitate its emergence? These are questions that should be at the heart of what we do as educators.

Throughout this book I have tried to suggest ways in which we are at an important historical moment with regard to education and our nation's legacy of dealing with race. It is a moment that contains both dangers and opportunities. We can allow the forces leading to greater segregation to drive us further apart as a nation; or we can use our leadership—as educators or as active citizens—to use and value higher education as a location where crucial connections can be forged. I started the book with a recounting of the drama of desegregation and now de facto resegregation that has played out in my lifetime. As the current president of a great institution of higher educa-

tion who has spent a lot of time working with and studying the work of K–12 educators, I see important and overlooked connections between what happens in schools and what happens in colleges and universities. I want to end the book with some thoughts on what this historical moment means for higher education.

First, I must point out that the affirmative action era that opened the doors of historically White public and private universities in the early 1970s changed higher education significantly. For example, a sample of twenty-five selective public and private universities whose Black enrollments averaged 1.0 percent or less in 1951 had increased their share of Black undergraduates to approximately 7.0 percent by 1998.[5] One might argue whether that pace of growth in a forty-seven year period is equivalent to "all deliberate speed," but certainly it is change.

However, the retreat from school desegregation that is occurring at the K–12 level is certainly also a threat to higher education. It is a threat because both White students and students of color will come to college without the preparation that they need. Many students of color will have had reduced access to high-level college preparatory courses and the facilities that support such a curriculum. Many White students will have had less effective social preparation for diverse campus life. Further, the current legal assault on affirmative action in higher education can be seen as parallel to the resegregation of public education effected through the Supreme Court. Just as one legal case after another chipped away at the possibility of full implementation of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision for public elementary and secondary schools, the anti–affirmative action cases directed toward higher education threaten to further the restrictions that have already been placed on special recruiting efforts and other affirmative action initiatives designed

to increase the enrollment of students of color at predominantly White institutions.

Yet those of us who were the beneficiaries of *Brown,* both White and of color, and who came of age before the retrenchment of the 1990s, are now in positions of influence. We can use our spheres of influence to interrupt this backward movement. Those of us in higher education have a particular obligation to do so. The decision makers of the future are the college students of today. They need to have an understanding of the social history that has shaped their current context of racial isolation, and the choices they can make to change it.

Because of the persistence of elementary- and secondary-school segregation fifty years after the *Brown* decision, today's American youth have had few opportunities to interact with those racially, ethnically, or religiously different from them before they go to college. In a recent conversation I had with a White male colleague who lives and works in a largely White community, he lamented that his son had no Black friends, and to his dismay, his son was expressing some negative attitudes toward the African American students he did encounter. My colleague, also in his fifties, was like me a child of *Brown* who had been able to develop close cross-racial friendships in school, and he was worried that his son would not benefit from such an experience himself. His son's story illustrates well the fact that lack of direct experience means that what one learns about the "other" is too often secondhand information, conveyed in the form of media stereotypes. Even when parents have positive racial attitudes, children can absorb the prejudices of their peers and the wider cultural milieu. The specific content of those prejudices, and their targets, will vary depending on where students have grown up and what their life experience has been. But we can be sure that all members of our campus

population have come to college with stereotypes and prejudices about some other segment of our student body. How could it be otherwise when there is so much misinformation circulating in the environment?

As a result, colleges, of all the institutions in our country, have some of the greatest responsibility to challenge misconceptions and explore differences—and to help our students develop their capacity to connect across them. Most of our students do not come with this capacity for connection already developed, yet it is a capacity that *can* be developed. Increasingly, educators are recognizing the need to foster this capacity as an essential outcome of a quality education. A recent study conducted by leaders at the nation's institutional accrediting bodies in conjunction with several higher education associations revealed a remarkable consensus on fifteen key outcomes that all students, regardless of major or academic background, should achieve while in college. Among them were civic responsibility and engagement, ethical reasoning, teamwork, and intercultural knowledge and actions.[6] Each of these competencies requires or is enhanced by the opportunity to engage with those whose perspectives and life experiences are different from one's own—perspectives and experiences that when shared can challenge and stimulate one's own critical thinking.

Empirical research has supported what many educators have observed through our classroom experiences about the educational benefits of learning in a diverse community.[7] Drawing on national data from colleges and universities across the country as well as from data specific to the University of Michigan, the social psychologist Pat Gurin and her colleagues concluded that those students who experienced the most racial and ethnic diversity in and out of their classrooms benefited in terms of both "learning outcomes" and "democracy outcomes."[8] Greater engagement in active thinking processes,

growth in intellectual engagement and motivation, and growth in intellectual and academic skills were among the benefits to students actively involved in a diverse campus community. These students also showed the most involvement during college in various forms of citizenship, the most engagement with people from different races and cultures, and they were the most likely to acknowledge that group differences are compatible with the interests of the broader community—all outcomes important to the health of our democracy. When we consider the problems posed by the current trend of school resegregation, it is encouraging to know that students who had the most diversity experiences during college continued that pattern of cross-racial interaction—in their neighborhoods and at work—several years after their college graduation.

The last finding is a particularly powerful one in light of the self-perpetuating power of segregation in U.S. society. Those who grow up in segregated environments tend to stay in them. As Pat Gurin commented in her expert testimony in the University of Michigan affirmative action case, "If institutions of higher education are able to bring together students from various ethnic and racial backgrounds at the critical time of late adolescence and early adulthood, they have the opportunity to disrupt an insidious cycle of lifetime segregation that threatens the fabric of our pluralistic democracy."[9] These are the students—today's young college students—who have the potential to interrupt our well-established patterns of residential segregation and can perhaps begin to make the ideal of *Brown* a reality.

This may seem like an odd point for me to make, given that I am the president of Spelman College, the oldest historically Black college for women. If cross-group interaction is so important, why are Black colleges still relevant fifty years after *Brown*? For me, the answer lies in the clear pattern of resistance

to desegregation. Racism (and certainly sexism) persist in ways that leave Black women (and men) on the margins of too many learning environments.

Consider this: In the summer of 2005, six young Black women represented Spelman College at the International RoboCup, an annual robotics competition in Osaka, Japan. There they competed with twenty-four other teams from around the world, including technology giants like Georgia Tech and Carnegie Mellon. The SpelBots, as the team is called, made history as the first ever all-female and all-Black team to compete in this competition. Would six Black women be leading the robotics team anywhere else? It is unlikely. In a world where, as recently as 2005, an influential educator such as Lawrence Summers, then the president of Harvard University, can publicly question the intrinsic aptitude of women to excel in science, it seems quite unlikely.[10] Yet what a fantastic opportunity it has been for young Black women from Spelman to pursue excellence in robotics and other sciences without the barrier of lowered expectations to impede them. We still need such environments where those who have been historically left out are expected and encouraged to stretch themselves to their highest potential. There is still power, and empowerment, that comes from the historically Black college experience, just as there is still power in the mentoring and leadership opportunities offered by women's colleges. At Spelman, both of these aspects of identity are affirmed for young women of African descent in a powerful way.

Another example comes from a student who sent me an e-mail message about transferring to Spelman. She wrote:

> This past summer I had the opportunity to read your book *"Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?"*

> I was able to identify with many of the points that you made. In fact I am one of the exact products of your book. I went through the entire experience in my high school. I had what most people would have considered then to be a diverse reality; however, in many areas having a decent mix of people just wasn't enough. Our cafeteria was divided in half, with Blacks on the left and Whites on the right, and so were all of the events like games, pep rallies, etc. The Black people gathered together for many of the reasons that you discussed in your book. We were a support group, we were large enough, and we had a "voice." Many of us held positions in which we could input our ideas about policy and about administrative decisions.
>
> However, I am now a sophomore at [a historically White college in a southern city], and I am in a similar situation. The only difference between my college and high school experience is that now I am battling segregation along with racism from the administration, faculty, and the students, while trying to obtain a degree simultaneously. The Black people who attend my school do not have a voice, and we operate on a day to day basis in an environment that is resistant to change and consciously racist. This environment has stalled my growth on many levels, and the worst part of all is that I am a Gates Millennium Scholar, meaning that I can go anywhere in the U.S. and have my tuition paid for in full. So, I am sure that you will understand me when I say that I would rather not put my scholarship money into an institution that is not facilitating my growth. All of these points bring me to my final dilemma. Everything that I lack at this institution, support as a Black female and a facilitated learning environment, I know that I can find at Spelman. I believe that I am qualified, and have a great deal to contribute to the college and community.

That student did indeed transfer successfully to Spelman. We must support those learning environments that continue to foster the achievement of those who have been historically marginalized even as we work to improve learning environments for students of color across the spectrum of education. It has been my goal throughout my career to help institutions like the one described above to become healthier places for both students of color *and* their fellow White students. That is still my goal even as I work to ensure the strength of Spelman College and other institutions like it. *It is not an "either-or" choice, it is a "both-and" solution.*

THE ABC'S OF CREATING A CLIMATE OF ENGAGEMENT

I want to come back to the ABC's of creating inclusive environments that I described in Chapter 1—affirming identity, building community, and cultivating leadership, three critical dimensions of effective learning environments in which students feel invested and engaged, not just during the college years but through all levels of education.

AFFIRMING IDENTITY. As noted in Chapter 1, it is often harder for those students who have been historically marginalized in our culture to see themselves reflected positively in school. This continues to be true at many predominantly White colleges and universities, and the demand for ethnic studies courses on campuses around the United States can be understood in part as a need for one's presence to be acknowledged in the institution. The establishment of cultural centers is another common approach to addressing the need to affirm marginalized identities on predominantly White campuses. Along with the specialized programming that is often based in such centers, they provide

a physical location to which students can briefly retreat from campus environments that, despite an institution's best efforts, are alienating at times.

BUILDING COMMUNITY. Students also need to sense that they belong to a larger, shared campus community, and some observers argue that while the existence of cultural centers and related programs affirm identity, they work against building community, encouraging separation rather than the cross-group engagement we seek. As paradoxical as it may seem, the opposite is more often the case. Students who feel that their own needs for affirmation have been met are more willing and able to engage with others across lines of difference. When an important need is met, we don't have to spend energy pursuing it. Rather we can use our energy to push ourselves academically and socially. Most of us are more willing to engage in the often-taxing work of crossing social borders when we are operating from strength. Affirming identity is not contradictory to but a prerequisite for building community. Learning to build community, to think inclusively, to cross borders, is both a challenge and a benefit of being part of a diverse campus community.

The challenge at many institutions is that there are not enough structured opportunities for the affirmation of identity or for border-crossing conversations to take place. Interestingly, cultural centers can serve both purposes. For example, when my oldest son was a freshman at Wesleyan University, he chose to live in the Malcolm X House, a cultural center with residential capacity for about thirty students. At the end of his first year, in the spring of 2001, he asked me if I would come to Wesleyan to facilitate a dialogue, not for the Black students alone, but a campus-wide dialogue to be held at the Malcolm X House. I tried to talk him out of it, because it was the end of the semester and I imagined that everyone would be studying for

exams and there would be limited participation. He assured me that it was very important to him, and that he was confident that the gathering would be well attended. I agreed to come, and indeed my son was right. The large lounge in the Malcolm X House was packed with a very diverse group of students. Clearly they were hungry for dialogue, and the Malcolm X House was the perfect place for it to happen. For some White students, it probably felt like entering foreign territory, but it provided the opportunity to risk some discomfort in a way that could foster the kind of growth that Gurin and her colleagues described. And a larger sense of shared purpose was emerging through their dialogue—they were building a multiracial community.

Although during the conversation some White students questioned the value of cultural centers like the Malcolm X House, I thought about what a benefit it had been to my son, who had grown up in a predominantly White community, to have the opportunity to immerse himself in the social milieu of the house, even as he continued to experience the mostly White learning environment of his daily coursework. *Because* of his experience in the Malcolm X House, not in spite of it, he was getting exactly what he wanted and needed during that first year at Wesleyan. As his own needs for affirmation were met, he began to emerge as a leader in the larger campus community. Organizing the year-end dialogue was just one manifestation of that developing leadership. Although I did not have the opportunity for follow-up conversations with the White students at Wesleyan, one of my former students at Mount Holyoke College shared these reflections about her ventures into campus spaces where she was in the minority:

> Many people on campus feel like events hosted [by students of color] are only for those who identify with that group. I too used to think this, but now I know the community is always welcome to attend any event. Although I was at first hesitant to show up at a cultural house, this semester I have attended several social events there. I had a great time. . . . Although as a White woman, I will never know how it feels to be a minority, I was certainly not in the majority at [the Black student cultural center]. . . . I now feel more at ease at these parties. Likewise, I believe cultural houses help women of color to feel more at ease on [our] campus. . . . I used to think because I was not affiliated with the group who maintains the house that I was not welcome. Cultural centers represent an important educational site for White students. All students should take advantage of the excellent opportunity cultural houses provide to rid them of fear.

Creating opportunities to master one's fear of difference should be a part of the college experience, and that can happen at any kind of institution.

CULTIVATING LEADERSHIP. Leadership in the twenty-first century not only requires the ability to think critically and speak and write effectively, it also demands the ability to interact effectively with others from different backgrounds. The development of each of these abilities requires opportunities to practice. The Intergroup Relations (IGR) Program at the University of Michigan is an excellent model of one successful strategy. This multifaceted program offers a course for first-year students that incorporates five key conditions: the presence of diverse others, a change from pre-college experiences, equality among peers, discussion under guidelines of civil discourse, and normalization and negotiation of conflict. In addition to the usual lectures, readings, and papers, the students participate in face-to-face intergroup dialogues. Heterogeneous groups of students are brought together to engage one another in ac-

tive discussion of often controversial topics, confronting multiple points of view in the process, and fostering the capacity for the perspective-taking needed for collaborative problem-solving.[11] The student facilitators who are trained to lead these discussion groups emerge with a sophisticated understanding of group dynamics and well-honed leadership abilities. Everyone benefits from the practice.

FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

Whether at a historically Black college or a predominantly White institution, we all must ask ourselves, "How do we create and sustain educational environments that affirm identity, build community, and cultivate leadership in ways that support the learning of all students?" Translating the ABC's into action requires us to routinely ask one another important questions: Who is reflected in our environment? Who is missing from the picture? What opportunities exist for building community, for encouraging dialogue across difference? How are students involved so that they are honing leadership skills in a diverse context?

At Spelman, though 97 percent of our students are racially categorized as "Black," the student body is, in fact, quite diverse. Spelman students come from all regions of the United States and many foreign countries, from White suburban and rural communities as well as urban Black ones. All parts of the African Diaspora are represented, and the variety of experience and perspectives among the women who attend the college creates many opportunities for important dialogue. There is a developmental moment in the lives of young people of color when "within group" dialogue can be as important, or perhaps even sometimes more important, than "between group" dialogue.

And, even in the context of a historically Black college, it is possible to create opportunities for both.

For example, at Spelman, an institution with deep Christian roots, I acknowledge the significant presence of Muslim students on our campus by cohosting with the Dean of the Chapel an iftar (a "break the fast" meal) during Ramadan for Muslim faculty, students, staff, and their guests. We have developed a program for interfaith dialogue as a way to address the religious diversity within our population of Black students, and have created occasional opportunities for interethnic dialogue among African, African American, and Afro-Caribbean students through our Center for Leadership and Civic Engagement. For many years, the Spelman College Women's Research and Resource Center has been a location on campus that fosters important and challenging conversations about racial and gender equity, heterosexism and homophobia, and the role of Black women as agents of change, through coursework, featured guest speakers, and workshops throughout the year. These few examples illustrate multiple points of entry—curricular and cocurricular—into conversations that will help students challenge their own assumptions and help prepare them for leadership in a diverse world.

In our efforts to foster student capacity to connect with others across lines of difference as a critical component of leadership development, we must remember that timing is important. Our students will need time to practice these skills—and their time with us is short, which means we should begin from the moment they arrive on campus. Orientation is a natural starting point, as new students are meeting one another and also learning about the values of the institution. If inclusive values are important, that should be apparent from the very beginning.

For example, when I served as dean at Mount Holyoke College, I had oversight of our orientation planning. My staff and I struggled to bring together a diverse group of first-year students, many of whom were international students. We wanted to both affirm the identities of students who literally came from all over the world, and also build a shared sense of community. We experimented with asking students to bring something from home that represented their culture to be used in a small group exercise on the first day of orientation. We learned however that some White students from the United States were completely stumped by this request because they believed they did not have a culture. They could see that students of color and international students had a culture to share, but their own culture was invisible to them. If we are to engage with one another as equals, we all have to have something to bring to the table—and surprisingly, some White students did not feel they had anything to bring.

With this in mind, the following year we tried a different approach—a poetry exercise developed by the educator Linda Christensen that can be done with little advance preparation.[12] Using the stem "I am from" for each stanza, we asked students to describe familiar items found around their homes, sights, sounds, and smells from their neighborhoods, names of foods and dishes enjoyed at special family gatherings, familiar family sayings, and names of relatives or other important people who are a link to their past. The act of writing the poems helped to make each student's culture visible, not only to others but also to herself. To illustrate this exercise, here are some sample verses of my own poem:

I am from books, books, and more books,
long afternoons spent at the library,
traveling way beyond the limits of my small town.

I am from stone walls, and dairy farms,
brilliant autumn leaves and church school hayrides,
the sound of my brother's saxophone at 5 a.m.,
and the cheers of the Saturday afternoon football crowd
across the street.

I am from tofu balls and biscuits, grits and eggs
pancakes every Saturday,
coconut cake on my birthday,
and pizza, pizza and more pizza if J. T. has his way.

I am from "Treat people the way you want to be treated,"
"If you don't have something nice to say, don't say
anything at all,"
and "We are pleased but not surprised" when I share
good news.
I am from "Eat your vegetables" but *not* the lima beans!

I am from Hazel and Maxwell, Bob and Catherine,
Victor Hugo and Constance Eleanor
a long line of educators,
I am from proud men and women working for change.

After writing their poems, an activity of about ten minutes, the students shared them in small groups of six or seven students, each group facilitated by an older student-orientation leader. Following the small-group discussion, students were invited to come forward to microphones set up around the meeting room and read their poems to their new classmates. It was exciting and inspiring to see how many students wanted to share their poems, sometimes with their papers shaking in their nervous hands, yet still stepping forward to the microphone. Although the diversity in the room was apparent, the less obvi-

ous similarity of experiences started to emerge as students quickly made connections to one another's lives. When given a chance to evaluate the activity later, the students' comments revealed what had been learned: "Even White suburbia has culture"; "Although we have a lot of differences, we also have many things in common. This is an amazing group of people!" Embedded in this activity were all three of the ABC's—affirming the identities of each woman as she read her poem, building community as they found common ground, and cultivating leadership of the student volunteers who honed their facilitation skills in this very diverse context.

Sometimes we allow students to wait too late to partake of what we are offering them. As dean, I often met with seniors who were trying to make sure they had taken all the required courses needed for graduation. I observed to my disappointment that some of the seniors I talked to had waited until the last semester of their senior year to satisfy the "multicultural" requirement. Although the requirement was broadly defined to include a wide variety of courses focused on people of color in the United States or in Africa, Asia, Latin America, or the Middle East, some students seemed to have delayed as long as they possibly could before exploring this new territory. My concern about this delay was that if you wait until your senior year to broaden your perspective in this way, you lose the opportunity for your new learning to inform your interaction with your fellow students over an extended time. Wouldn't it be better if students could get exposed to multicultural perspectives in their first year, perhaps as part of a first-year seminar, so that their new learning might help provide context for the interactions they would have with students from the communities about which they were learning?

I tested this idea of early intervention in my own teaching by shifting the enrollment from seniors to sophomores in my

Psychology of Racism course, a popular elective course that I taught for many years. Because the course was often oversubscribed, I had given preference to seniors, recognizing that it might be their last opportunity to take it. But when I started giving priority to sophomores instead, the benefit of the course to the campus community increased. The sophomores who emerged from the course with a better understanding of the historical context of racism and the meaning of racial identity in a race-conscious society were able to use that understanding in their interactions with fellow students in ways that positively impacted the campus. These were the students who initiated dialogue groups on campus, brought a multicultural perspective to their student organizations, and began to expand their own horizons by seeking out friendship networks more diverse than those they had before taking the course, and still had two more years to practice those skills before they moved on to the next phase of their lives. Courses that actively encourage cross-group dialogue can be very useful, but they need to happen early in the young person's college experience for maximum benefit.

A great example of a first-year seminar that affirms identity, builds community, and cultivates leadership is the African Diaspora and the World (ADW) course at Spelman. Established in 1992 as a writing-intensive seminar required for all first-year students, its creation was a faculty-directed effort to reimagine the World Civilization (History) and World Literature (English) core course requirements in ways that would (1) place the African Diaspora at the center of the student's sociohistorical, literary, and cultural studies; (2) reflect the shifting demographics of the United States and the world; and (3) prepare Spelman women for a new era of diversity and global interaction. Described in the Spelman course catalog as a two-semester course that "seeks to examine the major themes

associated with the African Diaspora within a global context and from perspectives that are both interdisciplinary and gender-informed," ADW is now a signature course at Spelman, considered by many Spelman students to be one of their most powerful and personally defining educational experiences at the college.

A foundational course that speaks to the identity issues that motivated many of them to choose Spelman College, ADW is frequently the one course that alumnae say has most influenced both their career success and dedication to promoting social justice. It connects directly to the Spelman College mission of "empowering the total person," who not only understands and appreciates the many cultures of the world, but also has a deeper understanding of her own and other cultures of Africa and its Diaspora.

The connection to identity is clear, but it also builds community as a shared intellectual experience, and helps students to understand the diversity within the Spelman community, as our students represent various communities of the African Diaspora. As their understanding of their global awareness expands, their capacity for leadership is enhanced.

As curricular and programmatic innovation is considered, we must also remember that this is not work that can be done well quickly. You can't bring a complex conversation about race to closure in the two hours of a single afternoon workshop, or even a whole day of resident adviser (RA) orientation. Too often what is accomplished in that period of time is just enough to generate anxiety, and anxiety often leads to avoidance. Put simply, "I don't want to talk about it" becomes a common response. An article I wrote in 1992 describes the emotional responses that students, both White students and students of color, are likely to have to race-related information, and what

we can do to keep them in the dialogue long enough to get to the place where they actually feel the benefit of the conversation.[13] Trying to shortcut the process is a bit like treating a child for an ear infection. The doctor will tell you to give the child antibiotics for seven days, but after the second day of medication, the child's ear feels better and the child's fussing is no longer about the pain in his ear but about the taste of the medicine. There's a temptation to stop giving the medicine—after all, the child feels better. But if you don't give the whole prescription, the ear infection will return and it will come back more virulently. And the next time that antibiotic is not going to work at all. Diversity training, or antiracism training, can be like that. If you just give a little dose, you simply build up resistance. You have to give enough to make some real progress, to get past the initial discomfort, and persist to the point where you can really begin to see the benefits.

If we really want to have these conversations, and have them in ways that help us, it has to be an ongoing dialogue. It is one reason that I recommend the framework of a course as one strategy—a semester includes adequate time to provide context for important social issues, an opportunity to explore the individual and societal implications of the issue, and even help students strategize about what they can do to effect change.

It may seem that implied in these comments is the assumption that we—faculty, staff, administrators—know how to facilitate these conversations ourselves. The reality is that a lot of us don't. But we can learn. And we can support one another in the process. When I first began teaching about racism in 1980 I was a novice instructor, and I know I made mistakes. But even in my inexperienced state, my students told me that I was changing their lives by giving them permission to talk about

race—powerful feedback for a then twenty-six-year old instructor! That conversation is still needed, perhaps more now than ever.

Although some progress has been made, the road to racial equality is not complete, and it appears that some have abandoned the task. But as a child of *Brown,* I know that change is possible, even if it is sometimes slow and not easily made permanent. My father could not attend the graduate school of his choice. His daughter did, as did his grandson. *More* change is still needed. As the door of school desegregation closes, perhaps a new door of dialogue-driven action can open, enabling us to build bridges across divided communities and meet the educational needs of all of our students. We owe it to ourselves and the generations that follow us to try. *Can we talk about race?*