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On the Cover: Naturalization ceremony. Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy handing immigration booklet to boy with his parents, circa 1963. Source: United States Customs and Immigration Services History Office and Library.

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Racial Tug of War: The Enduring Conflict over Affirmative Action

Amaka Okechukwu

In October of 2019, U.S. District Court Judge Allison Burroughs decided that Harvard College's consideration of race in undergraduate admissions was constitutional. The decades long conservative-led legal challenges to affirmative action had finally landed at Harvard College. This was significant because the landmark Supreme Court decision in *Bakke v. Regents of University of California* (1978) upheld Harvard's affirmative action as the ideal application of race-conscious admissions. This plan centered on holistic review, or the consideration of race amidst a broad range of factors—and with race not being the determining factor.

However, this challenge to affirmative action at Harvard differed from previous cases and the lawsuits launched by the same body, Students for Fair Admissions, and its parent organization, the Project on Fair Representation. In *Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard College*, conservative activist Edward Blum had selected Asian plaintiffs rather than White women, the preferred lead plaintiffs in anti-affirmative action cases since the early 1990s. In this case, Asian plaintiffs claimed that affirmative action, or the consideration of the race of underrepresented applicants—Black and Latino candidates—discriminated against Asians, violating their equal protection under the law.

Rather than motivated by an organic, sincere concern regarding anti-Asian discrimination in admissions—a legitimate matter considering the lower scores on subjective characteristics such as likability and courage of Asian applicants—it is important to consider this matter as yet another test case in challenging affirmative action throughout the field of higher education, with modifications made to federal court tactics. In my book, *To*

Fulfill These Rights: Political Struggle over Affirmative Action and Open Admissions (Columbia University Press 2019), I consider these admissions policies as primary locations of race and class conflict in the post-civil rights period, and I examine a variety of tactics and racial political strategies utilized by conservative organizations to eliminate affirmative action and open admissions in a variety of local and national contexts.

Much literature on affirmative action centers debate over its moral implications, righteousness, and effectiveness. These works ask: is affirmative action actually reverse discrimination? Does affirmative action violate (ostensibly) meritocratic admissions? Does affirmative action disadvantage underrepresented students? Yet these works tell us little about why we are constantly hearing about a policy that is only implemented at selective, elite institutions and thus impacts a small percentage of college-educated American students.

Why has political conflict persisted so long and what does it tell us about racial politics in the post-civil rights period? *To Fulfill These Rights* answers these questions by analyzing fifty years of political contention over the adoption and rollback of affirmative action and open admissions (or open enrollment policies at less selective institutions).

Edward Blum's challenge to affirmative action at Harvard builds upon a long legacy of conservative-led federal court cases that aimed for a Supreme Court elimination of affirmative action across the nation.

Through political struggle, a variety of political actors (including conservative organizations and think tanks, liberal administrators and legislators, and progressive and radical students) uphold and challenge the racial common sense of post-civil rights America. In contrast to the Jim Crow period, in which outright racial domination primarily characterized the racial landscape, the conflictual racial logics of diversity and colorblindness play a particular role in consolidating power in the post-civil rights era. These racial logics have been primarily shaped through struggle over affirmative action, with conservative organizations aiming to assert colorblindness through the elimination of affirmative action, and with selective universities aiming to uphold the legally defensible practice of diversity on campuses, now a commodity that signifies a well-rounded, progressive education.

…research shows that Asian applicants with disproportionately higher test scores are admitted at rates lower than White applicants…

As the racial logic of diversity has been institutionalized in higher education and beyond (however vaguely and underspecified), conservative challenges to affirmative action have been met with considerable opposition. *To Fulfill These Rights* traces this highly publicized tug-of-war through attention to adoption and rollback of affirmative action at University of California, University of Michigan, and University of Texas-Austin, and open admissions in the senior colleges of the City University of New York system.

Thus, Edward Blum's challenge to affirmative action at Harvard builds upon a long legacy of conservative-led federal court cases that aimed for a Supreme Court elimination of affirmative action across the nation. As civil rights activists mounted hundreds of legal challenges to "separate but equal," culminating in *Brown v. Board of Education* which declared Jim Crow unconstitutional, conservatives appropriating civil rights legal tactics aim to chip away at affirmative action until the federal courts finally declare it unlawful.

While the consideration of race in admissions for the purpose of constituting diverse classes is still legal, conservatives have effectively restricted the means by which universities implement affirmative action, have legally elevated colorblind methods for achieving diversity, and have legally legitimated notions of White victimization by affirmative action. Tactically, Blum conflates Asian discrimination with perceived White victimization, as a means to overturn affirmative action at Harvard. Mobilizing the model minority stereotype, Blum pits the test scores of Asian applicants against those of Black and Latinx applicants, arguing that Black and Latinx students do not deserve admission. Yet research shows that Asian applicants with disproportionately higher test scores are admitted at rates lower than White applicants, demonstrating that Asians are held to higher standards than White students (Chin et al 1996; Kidder 2006).

This is an important reminder that we cannot understand anti-affirmative action cases in isolation.

Thus, even if affirmative action was eliminated, Asians would likely still be disadvantaged in admissions as compared to Whites, especially in elite universities where legacy status, wealth, and social networks play an important role in admissions.

Additionally, these anti-affirmative action lawsuits assume that admissions to elite institutions are (and have historically been) meritocratic, when, in reality, elite institutions have always developed admissions criteria in accordance to their own institutional priorities, rather than solely by grades and test scores (Karabel 2005). Universities are motivated to preserve affirmative action because diversity has become an important commodity, and also, because universities aim to maintain institutional autonomy.

These conservative challenges are part of a larger movement to limit civil and social citizenship in the neoliberal post-civil rights period.

By potentially limiting which students can be admitted, universities might lose the ability to target tuition-paying legacy students, wealthy donor families, and profitable student athletes. This is why, when a race-neutral admissions policy had been implemented in the University of Texas system (the Texas Ten Percent Plan) after an affirmative action ban, the University of Texas-Austin admissions director and university president still publicly rejected the policy. The new policy had been relatively effective at maintaining similar numbers of underrepresented students at the flagship institution (Thompson and Tobias 2000). To the university president and admissions director, the ban interfered with their ability to compose their classes, with the majority of the student body automatically admitted by being in the top ten percent of their high school classes. For this reason, elite institutions will always appeal legal decisions that reject their ability to consider race in admissions.

It is a contemporary example of what critical race theorists refer to as interest convergence—where Black interests in achieving racial equality are supported when it converges with the interest of Whites (Bell 1980). Here, the interest in maintaining affirmative action (originally developed as a means of desegregation) aligns with university administrators' desire to maintain institutional autonomy.

As the Supreme Court currently leans rightward, and Donald Trump is still president, this is an advantageous time for an anti-affirmative action case to be heard in the highest court. Blum will appeal the *Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard* decision, and is also engaged in a variety of other anti-civil rights cases, including a challenge to affirmative action at the University of North Carolina, a challenge to the California Voting Rights Act, a challenge to minority representation on the Texas State Bar, and other cases in earlier stages of development. This is an important reminder that we cannot understand anti-affirmative action cases in isolation. These conservative challenges are part of a larger movement to limit civil and social citizenship in the neoliberal post-civil rights period.

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Morris Rosenberg and DCSS's Outreach to High Schools

Tomisin Fasosin's paper in this issue, which extensively cites the research of Dr. Morris Rosenberg, is a wonderful example of the substantial contributions and continuing relevance of Dr. Rosenberg's research focusing on the adolescent mind. Ms. Fasosin is a 12th grade student at Marriotts Ridge High School in Maryland, and she wrote her paper in fulfillment of requirements for independent research course taught by Mr. Paul Eckert, Resource Teacher at Marriotts Ridge High. In the fall of 2018, Ms. Fasosin reached out to the editor of *The Sociologist* for guidance in "researching in the field of sociology". In many email and telephone conversations with the editor, Fasosin asked thoughtful questions about sociological research, and her paper reflects her budding skills as a sociologist. In 2019, the District of Columbia Sociological Society (DCSS), guided by the vision of Sally Hillsman, DCSS president, began an outreach program, in cooperation with the American Sociological Association (ASA), to engage High School students and teachers.

Dr. Morris Rosenberg is honored every year by the DCSS with an award in his name, presented to a sociologist with outstanding achievement in the field. It is therefore appropriate (and serendipitous) that DCSS's outreach efforts to engage high school students and teachers coincides with a paper by a local high school student who found much relevance in research on the adolescent mind by Dr. Morris Rosenberg, and reached out to *The Sociologist* as an authoritative source.

DCSS's nascent High School Outreach program builds on efforts by the ASA and its involvement with the National Council for Social Studies (NCSS), whose membership includes K-12 classroom teachers, university faculty, and curriculum designers. In 2018, ASA organized a half day symposium at the NCSS Annual Meeting in Chicago. The symposium consisted of three sessions: (1) Dr. Laura Beth Nielsen, from Northwestern University, spoke about hate speech and free speech in the classroom. (2) A representative from Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR) gave a presentation on data literacy and ICPSR resources for teachers. (3) Two high school teachers (who are long-term leaders in the high school sociology community) shared lesson plans. At the 2019 NCSS Meeting in Austin, Texas, the ASA organized three sessions about (1) gun ownership and how to talk about guns in the classroom based on research by Dr. Harel Shapira at the University of Texas, Austin; (2) free data resources for elementary and secondary school teachers presented by Dr. Kevin Dougherty of Baylor University and Diego de los Rios of ASA; and (3) informational exchange on lesson plans.

During 2019, DCSS and ASA also made several attempts to reach out to several high schools in the Maryland suburbs and the District of Columbia.

The advantages of membership are not clear or even tangible to many high school sociology or social studies teachers and instructors.

It has been difficult to engage high school teachers and instructors because we believe there is little incentive for them to become involved with DCSS or ASA. The advantages of membership are not clear or even tangible to many high school sociology or social studies teachers and instructors. We have learned that many high school teachers do make long-term commitments to the discipline. Our outreach efforts are ongoing as we develop new strategies for engagement.

A Cultural Look on the Adolescent Mind

Tomisin Fasosin

Culture and Self-Esteem

Multiple studies conducted by researchers in the field of sociology have revealed that culture's moderation of self-esteem in adolescents is unlike its moderation in any other age group. The discrepancies across age groups can be supported by the fact that teenagers are impressionable at such a young age and lack secure identities (Bleidorn et al. 2016). Self-esteem is something all humans possess and are constantly striving to improve (Flynn 2003). It is important to look at self-esteem from a cultural aspect to pinpoint where adequate behavioral changes should be made to improve it. Not only do the behaviors, attitudes, and values of adolescent culture have a direct correlation with their self-esteem, culture undoubtedly fosters the development of an adolescent's sense of self in society.

Culture moderates the level of self-esteem in an individual because it contains certain aspects of their lives, such as their values and beliefs, which become the forefront of how one measures their worth. Self-esteem is a holistic concept, and it is not only impacted from within, but by one's surroundings as well. This social construct encompasses cultural values and how society places importance on those values (Louis 2014). It reflects the dominant values in any given individual's culture (Becker, et. al 2016). Many professionals in the field of sociology, have researched the significance of one's environment on the overall self-concept. The former Professor of Sociology at University of Maryland, Morris Rosenberg, often asked questions about how social life, daily interactions, and social structures all play a role in shaping who an individual is and wishes to be (Rosenberg 1965).

Culture contains all the factors that could play a role in developing one's self-esteem including race, socioeconomic class, gender and age (Myers et al. 2011). Looking at the race aspect, African Americans generally receive personal self-esteem because of reflected appraisal from their community but receive a lower personal efficacy because of social and economic inequality. This reveals that race can influence the level of self-esteem. From a socio-economic aspect, a study of 918 early adolescents from lower and upper middle-class families in Colombia and Quebec was conducted on how they would fare on a self-esteem scale (Santo et. al 2013). Researchers found that the self-esteem of teenagers was affected by contextual factors like race, gender, familial background, and social class. These factors ultimately cause the discrepancies in self-esteem across cultures.

Self-esteem occurs when a person internalizes cultural values (Becker et al. 2014). Since all people are different in their own ways, the way they perceive the world and themselves in it will differ as well. The relationship between culture and self-esteem is critical in understanding its influence on adolescents. The environment of a teenager ultimately impacts how they perceive their worth because of different aspects of their surroundings.

> The presence of cultural differences was more prominent during adolescence than any other age period.

When looking at self-esteem, one must consider the ever-growing adolescent mind. As the adolescent mind is underdeveloped, cultural differences have a substantial impact on the evolution of their psyche. In a study included in the *Archives of Scientific Psychology*, results showed that sociocultural differences actually moderate self-esteem across the ages. The presence of cultural differences was more prominent during adolescence than any other age period. (Helwig and Ruprecht 2017). "Adolescence can be a time of disorientation and discovery" as the adolescent experiences

opposing ideals from many different environments (Tsui 2015). These environments represent the cultural clashes a teenager encounters as they grow older.

Adolescence

Since adolescence is a time of new and ever-changing experiences, one's surroundings have the most impact on their values and beliefs. A study from the *Journal of Adolescence* tested early and mid-adolescents on how age impacted culture's influence on self-esteem. Researchers noticed that culture's influence decreased as their respondent's age increased (Benish-Weisman et al. 2015).

They alluded to the fact that culture's effect on an individual's behavior is strongest during adolescence. Experts claim that their self-concept is still malleable; therefore, cultural pressures will have a larger impact on their development (Bleidorn et al. 2016). These pressures reflect biological and sociocultural influences placed upon young individuals.

It is interesting to analyze the behaviors of immigrant children or children of mixed race in particular, as cultural clashes in their lives are more apparent.

During adolescence, one's self-esteem constantly fluctuates, and cultural differences have more of a presence at that time…

Immigrant children in the United States often face cultural differences in their multiple environments at school, home, and other areas. These all add up to cultivate their identity (Flynn 2003). A switch in environment will likely result in a switch in social constructs and values (Daniel et al. 2016), which is why most foreign children find themselves struggling to define themselves as individuals. Similarly, teenagers of mixed race often find themselves at ends with their self-concept. Racial categories have formed the basis of the identities of many, and "what" a person is seems more important than "who" they

are (Tsui 2015). Value differentiation is the idea that helps us understand that the value a culture places on certain concepts can influence and cause discrepancies in self-esteem across adolescence (Daniel et al. 2016). Comparing these values can aid in determining the level of self-esteem exhibited within adolescents.

…it will take more than facts to make a change.

It is important to compare and contrast the differences across cultures surrounding adolescent self-esteem to get a closer look on how they impact the youth. Self-esteem might not be present in the same way in certain groups of people simply because it is not valued in the same way in their culture or environment (Daniel et al. 2016). This relates back to value differentiation; the idea that the importance a culture places on a certain idea will dictate how they perform on tests surrounding that idea (Daniel et. al 2016). Even certified tests like the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) might not be as effective because different cultures have various understandings of self-esteem and the overall self-concept (Gnambs et al. 2018). The RSES might not be as relevant to their cultures' values or beliefs.

The paper *Seeing Oneself Positively in Different Cultural Contexts* compares Western cultures to Eastern cultures; the former values individual freedoms while the latter values conformity and tradition (Becker, et al. 2014). Western culture prides self-esteem as something everyone possesses and should constantly strive to improve (Flynn, 2003). In the *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, studies revealed that adolescents of Eastern cultures like China, Japan, and India scored lower on the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale than their Western counterparts in the Americas or Western Europe.

The idea is that culture has such a large impact on adolescent self-esteem, that the beliefs or values of that culture can determine a teen's perception of their worth. These concepts are fairly evident, but it will take more than facts to

make a change. During adolescence, one's self-esteem constantly fluctuates, and cultural differences have more of a presence at that time (Helwig, et. al). If one's environment depletes one's sense of self and accomplishment, one's self-esteem will be low (Manning 2007).

Promoting resilience in teens…will undoubtedly promote positive self-esteem and behavior in adolescents.

In America, consumer culture of the modern era has altered the adolescent mind. The possession of popular commercial brands has a great impact on the modern adolescent's self-esteem and how they feel they fit into society. This is just one of the many examples of how the values and social constructs associated with a group of people can alter the self-esteem of a young individual.

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES)

These examples should be more than simply identified; concrete information and data surrounding them should be collected. Surveys aid sociologists in gathering data from sample groups to create complex ideas involving prevalent topics in their environment. Questionnaires like the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) have helped spread knowledge about the presence of culture on self-esteem (Gnambs et al. 2018). The RSES comprises 10 questions with answers ranging from "Strongly Agree" and "Agree" to "Disagree" and "Strongly Disagree."

A study from the *Archives of Scientific Psychology* utilized the RSES to reveal the relationship between cultural backgrounds and age when it comes to self-esteem (Helwig et al. 2017). Data from this study helped reveal that socio-cultural backgrounds actually moderate the presence of high or low self-esteem across age groups. Wellness models like the "indivisible self" promote positive behaviors in teens and unveil tools that will help improve their self-esteem (Myers, et al. 2011).

Specifically, this model includes creative, physical, essential, social, and coping mechanisms for maintaining one's self-esteem. If these models were distributed in schools across the country, and taught to students, its impact would be extraordinary. A scale was given to 18 individuals on a 3-part survey to rate the level of importance of different ways used to promote resilience. Significance was placed on the positive command climate. Placing importance on culture and positive environments will help promote positive self-esteem. Resilience is the capacity to cope with a crisis or recover from difficulties (Meredith, et al. 2011).

Most importantly, resilience promotes a positive self-esteem and self-concept. Another concept similar to resilience is hardiness. Created by Suzanne Kobasa, hardiness suggests that there are cultural buffers that affect self-esteem, and are directly related to one's psychological resilience (Kobasa 1982). This concept confirms the influence of culture on self-esteem as it pertains to adolescents. It all goes to show that one's environment, one's culture, has a great impact on their personal resilience. Promoting resilience in teens utilizing these surveys and models will undoubtedly promote positive self-esteem and behavior in adolescents.
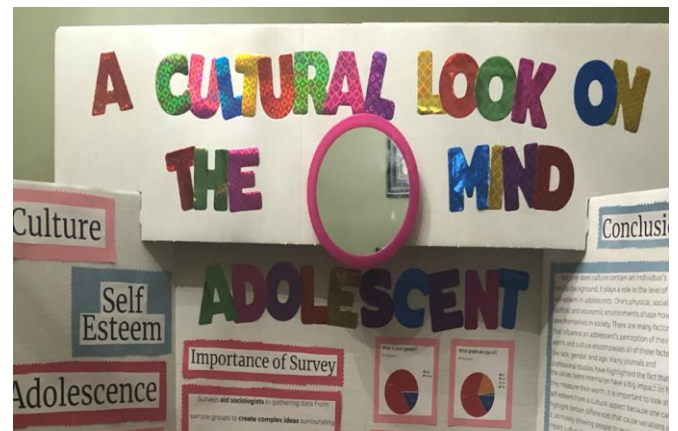
Survey and Results

For research purposes, I conducted a survey at my high school. The survey served to identify different cultural aspects of the target group, and it utilized self-conceptual statements to measure the level of self-esteem in my target group and how their environment impacted self-

esteem. I asked demographic questions to get a feel for the target group, and then incorporated the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) to determine the level of self-esteem of the respondents.

> Over three-quarters of students wish they could have more respect for themselves, and the same number of students feel useless at times.

There was a total 80 recipients: 67 were female and 13 were male. Regarding grade levels, 12 students reported to be in 9th grade, 52 in 10th, 14 in 11th, and 2 students in 12th grade. On average, many students had 4 to 5 people in their family. About 88 percent of students reported participating in after-school activities, and a majority claimed to take part in 2 to 3 activities. A majority of students felt that they possessed a number of good qualities, and only 8 percent disagreed with that statement. Over three-quarters of students feel positive about themselves and their abilities. Although this is good, there are many variances. Over three-quarters of students wish they could have more respect for themselves, and the same number of students feel useless at times. Over half of students feel that they are no good at all.

These differences support the claim that cultural aspects can lead to fluctuation in self-esteem. One's gender, race, family size, and outside activities can all affect how they see themselves in relation to their peers and society. Now with this information, respondents will be able to analyze how their internalized values and outside activities can influence their self-esteem.

Conclusion

Not only does culture contain an individual's familial background, it plays a role in the level of self-esteem in the adolescent. One's physical, social, political, and economic environments shape how one sees themselves in society. There are many factors that influence an adolescent's perception of their worth, and culture encompasses all of those factors.

Many journals and professional studies have highlighted the fact that the values teens internalize have a big impact on how they measure their worth. It is important to look at self-esteem from a cultural aspect because one can highlight certain differences that cause variations in it, ultimately allowing people to realize what a huge impact culture has on self-worth.

With my research, I now have a better understanding of the topic, and my own study supports the claim of some of the scholars. Promoting positive self-esteem creates a generation of socially conscious individuals who can grow together as a community. With collaborative coping mechanisms and avid discussions concerning cultural differences, adolescents will not only improve their self-esteem, but encourage others to as well.

Source: pixabay.com

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Oppressive Societies and Social Justice Warriors: Conversation With Joe R. Feagin

On January 2, 2020, The Sociologist (TS) interviewed Dr. Joe R. Feagin, Distinguished Professor in sociology at Texas A & M University. Professor Feagin has done much internationally recognized research on U.S. racism, sexism, and urban political economy issues. He has written 73 scholarly books and 200-plus scholarly articles. His books include Systemic Racism (Routledge 2006); Liberation Sociology (3rd ed., Paradigm 2014); White Party, White Government (Routledge 2012); The White Racial Frame (2nd ed., Routledge 2013); Latinos Facing Racism (Routledge 2014); How Blacks Built America (Routledge 2015); Elite White Men Ruling (Routledge, 2017); Racist America (4ᵗʰ ed., Routledge 2018); and Rethinking Diversity Frameworks in Higher Education (2020). He is the recipient of the 2012 Soka Gakkai International-USA Social Justice Award, the 2013 American Association for Affirmative Action's Arthur Fletcher Lifetime Achievement Award, and three major American Sociological Association awards: W. E. B. Du Bois Career of Distinguished Scholarship Award, the Cox-Johnson-Frazier Award (for research in the African American scholarly tradition), and the Public Understanding of Sociology Award. He was the 1999-2000 president of the American Sociological Association.

TS: What are the most important insights you can share from your distinguished career?
Joe Feagin: Probably the most important one is in regard to sociological research and analysis on the deeper realities of highly oppressive societies like the United States. Sociology as a discipline has probably done more to uncover the surface cover-ups and concealing of the underlying realities of this country than any other academic discipline. At least, a critical progressive stream in sociological research and analysis has done that. But too much mainstream sociology, especially since the 1930s or so, has moved in the direction of instrumental-positivism and emphasized statistical methods, and focused on too narrow subjects so that people can get grants from mainstream grant agencies.

I think the main insight I have gained over the years from my own research, and the critical research of many other sociologists, is just how deeply and foundationally oppressive this country is, in terms of systemic racism, systemic classism, systemic sexism/heterosexism. We have very deep foundational realities of oppression that are covered up regularly by the mainstream media, by churches, by political and educational institutions, and by other societal means that elite white men at the top of society generally use to maintain oppression today.

TS: Did you say churches, as in religious institutions?
Joe Feagin: Yes. The original intellectuals in this country—when you go back to the

They often framed this thinking in Christian religious terms, even before there were explicit "race" categories…

1600s when slavery was being built into our country—were mostly clergymen. Jonathan Edwards, for example, the famous evangelical 17th century preacher, and many others like him, worked to rationalize slavery. And they really started the broad white racial framing I write a lot about, which on the one hand sees white people as superior and virtuous, and on the other hand views black Americans and Native Americans as inferior racially and unvirtuous. They often framed this thinking in Christian religious terms, even before there were explicit "race" categories during the 1600s; early on, they preferred to talk about "uncivilized savages" referring to black people being brought as slaves and the Native Americans being killed off on the move westward.

The English colonists who founded what became known as Jamestown mostly considered themselves Christians. They considered themselves civilized. They considered the people they encountered, the Native Americans, as uncivilized and un-Christian. So, the first racialized framing really was in religious terms. They considered themselves *virtuous* Christians, and in their minds, they were encountering unvirtuous, uncivilized others. Pretty soon, in 1619, the white colonists in Jamestown bought about 20 Africans off a Dutch-flagged pirate ship. For the first decade or so, some of those early enslaved workers could work themselves out of slavery, but

after that, pretty quickly, by about 1650, most black people were enslaved, including the children of those who had come earlier. The white colonizers also bought into the old religious myth about Ham, Noah's son—that Ham had looked upon a naked Noah and had not covered him up, and thus Ham was cursed by Noah. It is a myth developed outside the Bible. The myth makes Ham an African, and Africans, later on, as inferior and justly punished with suffering. So, being enslaved is God's just and divine punishment. And this is just one racist narrative, one myth whites used to justify slavery that was built into that dominant white racial frame.

…sociologists have done a lot to help us understand racial mythologizing…

They also took negative words like "black" from a deeper, older European tradition, and soon they started describing Africans negatively as "black," with ministers like Reverend Samuel Purchas making color-coded references to what soon became the "races." So, you have the leaders of the European colonists, who were often ministers, crafting this first white racial framing of Native Americans and Africans. To some degree, they import ideas from cultures in Europe. And then you get this color-coding that is imposed on everybody by the white leadership. If you go back into English culture, the term black is used in a lot of negative ways—the devil is black for example in Christian theology, and the angels are white. Other religious ideas are used to justify the killing of Native Americans.

And now, to the question of sociology. I would say sociologists have done a lot to help us understand racial

mythologizing and racism generally; we have greatly developed ideas of prejudice and stereotyping. But the reason I started talking about white racial framing is that it is a broader way of looking at this oppression in terms of the racist interpretations, racist ideology, and racist emotions as well.

…the situation is like two trains on the same track headed toward each other…

The white racial framing is more than just prejudice, which is just one key feature in rationalizing oppression. You've also got to add into that white framing the racist interpretations, narratives, and the emotions and racist imagery.

TS: How has sociology improved our world?

Joe Feagin: I think we have created more *social justice warriors* than just about any other academic discipline. By the way, social justice warriors should be a good term, but it has become a very negative term used by the alternate-right, by white supremacists, by white nationalists these days. Yet, earlier critical thinker-activists like David Walker, Harriet Martineau, W. E. B. Du Bois, Anna Julia Cooper, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, and many others were social justice warriors. Thinking about sociology, it is amazing that numerous black civil rights leaders have been sociologists—they have been sociology majors, or they took a lot of sociology courses.

Dr. Martin Luther King was a sociology major at Morehouse. With a strong sociological bent, Ida B. Wells-Barnett did the first systematic study of lynching called *The Red Record*; she was attacked and threatened many times for her anti-lynching activities. Her printing press was destroyed because whites didn't like what she was writing. Du Bois, one of the first black sociologists, did very important race-critical analysis. Oliver Cromwell Cox, a brilliant African American sociologist—who was trained at the Chicago School by white sociologists but became very critical of them on racial matters—wrote the first thorough and extended study of institutional and systemic racism (in his book *Caste, Class and Race*). I think one of the very good things sociologists have done for this society—both mainstream and more critical public sociology—is to bring the subterranean reality of racial oppression (and other oppressions) into the light of day.

TS: In terms of racial and ethnic relations, do you think the United States is moving closer to the diversity within unity ideal or are we moving closer to the American apartheid?

Joe Feagin: I would say the situation is like two trains on the same track headed toward each other. On the one hand, you have a large proportion of white Americans that has always been white nationalist—holding onto strong ideas of white supremacy, holding onto the extreme versions of the white racial frame. Generally speaking, the Republican Party, especially since the Reagan era, has become the white party in America, and it has attracted whites who hold these strong white nationalist, supremacy views.

The demography train that is coming down the track has already arrived in California, in New York state, and in Texas.

For a while in the 1980s and 1990s, the extreme white supremacy ideas held by

many whites were expressed mainly in the all-white *backstage*—that is, for the most part, at that time, many whites would not openly tell aggressively racist jokes or make aggressively racist statements in the more public *frontstage.* But since about the George H. W. Bush era, more whites have become willing to express openly and aggressively white nationalist, supremacist ideas.

…white people have disproportionate power that allows them to impose racial identities.

This happened because of the fear of more aggressive civil rights enforcement and the *browning* of America. The other train coming down the same track is the non-white demography train.

The demography train will happen no matter what. It is simply that each year the white percentage of the population goes down. And since most whites are not trained to value multi-culturalism, and most whites do not have an honest understanding of white racism, and most whites do not understand what it is like to be black or Latino/a in this country, it is easy for whites to be fearful, isolated, and afraid. They believe that once people of color are in power in the country, they will do to white people, what white people have done to people of color. That is not likely. California is a very good example of the change that's coming.

When I was a young professor there, the state was conservative, now it is one of the most liberal and progressive states. There is a minority of whites who do not mind a multiracial, multicultural society. Then you have a great many whites now

becoming more openly racist. Little has really changed for the latter whites, except their openness. The demography train that is coming down the track has already arrived in California, in New York state, and in Texas.

TS: What are the problems of group identity (hyper-group identity), when it comes to fostering inter-community relations?

Joe Feagin: There's a long conversation there. I think back on the role of sociology. Sociologists have been kind of at the forefront (together with psychology) in dealing with racial identity and ethnic identity issues. A lot of that work has focused on *self-chosen* identities—the identity that people choose themselves, how they see themselves. Much less research, analysis, and theory has been done on *imposed* identities. These are identities that are imposed on you by people with greater power and the ability to do that. Within a racial-ethnic group (and this is true of racial identity groups), there are often ethnic divisions in terms of national origin; it is certainly true for whites.

However, people of color run into the reality that white people have disproportionate power that allows them to impose racial identities. That's the problem of identity politics in this country. Now, the most important identity politics is what we don't talk about, it is *white* identity politics. That is what white nationalism is about. When whites talk negatively about U.S. identity politics in reference to people of color, they are really indirectly featuring white identity politics.

TS: Who is your hero or mentor; who has inspired you?

Joe Feagin: Sadly, I have never had very good mentors. At least, not since the 7th grade. And that was true in college and in graduate school. I think (and this might be a bit arrogant) one of the things I do well is

academic mentoring; I have learned how to do that pretty well, because I have not had good mentoring. I had some partial mentoring, but rarely. At Harvard, Gordon Allport was the closest to being a mentor; he was in his last faculty years, but he helped me get some modest research funding as a student. He was a kind and generous man, and one of the founders of modern social psychology.

…Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Ture), and many others…had a profound influence on me.

Most of the people who have inspired me a great deal have been scholars and scholar-activists in the black critical tradition, like Du Bois especially. When I started reading Frederick Douglass and other black critical thinkers as a graduate student and young faculty member in the 1960s— for example Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Ture), and many others—they had a profound influence on me. The 1960s and early 1970s were a very dynamic time for critical sociologists. Lots of critical sociology analyses, a lot of it outside of mainstream sociology.

And a lot of the (especially younger) sociologists of various backgrounds were beginning to read critical analyses of racism, classism, sexism. Kwame Ture's book with Charles Hamilton (*Black Power*) dealing with institutional racism had a major effect on my research. And when I got to know about and study some of the early women sociologists, like Jane Addams and Harriet Martineau, I began to understand just how systemic sexism also was in this country.

My theory class had Durkheim, Weber, but no Marx.

I also had a political economist friend who got me to read Karl Marx for the first time in the 1960s. When I was in graduate school taking social theory classes, Marx was a non-person. My theory class had Durkheim, Weber, but no Marx. Talcott Parsons was a towering figure then at Harvard; and George Homans was my theory professor. Neither had any use for Marxist ideas and analysis.

I had one little course on the sociology of the Soviet Union, where Marx was at least mentioned and that was the only place I encountered Marx's ideas during my undergraduate and graduate school years. You know, that was at the tail end of severe McCarthyism, which pretty much wiped out much Marxist thinking in universities. These historical and contemporary scholarly and activist figures were not personal mentors, but they have had powerful intellectual influences on me and my research over the years.