

Losing The Race: Self-Sabotage in Black America

A Talk by John McWhorter, JANUARY 27, 2001

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(Dan Klein is introducing Professor McWhorter)

. . . John S. McWhorter, well, I pulled his bio from off the web, and aside from being an expert in pidgin and Creole languages, language change, sociolinguistics and language contact, he is also an expert in grammaticalization – which I think I pronounced properly – and I consider myself a junior linguist at that. Anyway, Professor McWhorter has written *Losing the Race, Self-Sabotage in Black America*, obviously an important topic, a provocative book. I have had the pleasure and opportunity to spend some time with it. I regret that there are not enough copies here – we have worked on that too. I know that this book was very highly praised in a recent review in the Wall Street Journal. This book follows up to some extent a previous book that Professor McWhorter wrote called *The Word on the Street*, which had to do with ebonics.

Please join me in welcoming Professor John McWhorter.

John McWhorter commences his talk:

I had no sleep last night – I was in a different place, and I'm sure I look like hell and I probably sound like it, and I'm sorry. I'll perk up – this is not me. Anyway, I'm going to talk about *Losing the Race*. This is a book that I wrote, It came out about three months ago, and is about a lot of things, there are a lot of topics in it, but I think the one that gets the most press is some of the middle chapters, where I talk about the issue of race and education. It's an important issue these days, especially African-American students in education.

I take some positions in this book, and which, and particularly they have been misrepresented in the media, and I understand that, but I want to share some of them with you guys today, and I'm not going to talk for very long but any questions or comments that you have are welcome, and we'll just see where it goes.

Anyway, probably the most controversial part of that book, and the one that gets me yelled at the most, is the position I take on the policy that you hear so much about, and that policy is affirmative action. Affirmative action is something that – I was born in 1965 – you grow up with that, and if you are an African-American it's not that you choose to take advantage of it, you basically cannot help but be affected by the policy. You accept it, and until fairly late in my life, I thought it was a good thing, in higher education in particular. And then as time went by, I started to wonder, but I kind of felt that you weren't supposed to wonder, not if you're a good person. So I spent all kinds of time working against the misgivings I'd developed, particularly after I started teaching at

Berkeley, where I started teaching in the mid-90's. And then finally I realized that I was working too hard against myself, and that my particular experience suggested to me that the policy was working against what it was supposed to do. And so, that is something that I wrote about in *Losing the Race*. I didn't expect the book to get as much attention as it has, but now that it has, here.

Basically, the way I feel about affirmative action is not the way other people who attack the policy feel, in general. I do not find myself very comfortable with a lot of other people who attack the policy, because we have different reasons. It seems to me the most urgent thing in the country today as far as education goes is to bring black students and white students together. There are some unfortunate statistics that we see, and you look at those and what we think is, we don't want this, we want to fix this. And, it seems to me that affirmative action was a great way to start fixing those things in the mid-60s. It was a healthy policy, and if I had been around, and anybody had asked me, I would have instituted the policy too. But the issue is, when do you let it go? After thinking about it for a long time, my conclusion is that it's about time, because that is the only thing that will continue to help. And this is what I mean. First of all, when you look at the affirmative action policy, and this is not going to be one of those talks where I rail away at the media, the media have a way of distorting this, and so do general discussions of the policy. If you evaluate the policy, whatever side of the policy you come down on, it helps to have the basic facts.

One of the things that it helps to know, when you think about this policy, and it is very mundane, is that usually when affirmative action is brought up the assumption is that basically black people are poor, cause most black people are poor. We all know plenty of black people who are poor. But it's assumed that probably most of us are poor, or if not poor, close to poor. Any African Americans who are what we call middle class, or upper middle class, these are the exceptions. You don't think about them when you make your policy. Basically, black is poor. And that was true.

In 1940, nine out of ten black people were poor, not just struggling but poor. In 1960, depending on what statistics you consult, 55% of African Americans were poor, and then you had a layer that was close to it. And that's the United States when affirmative action was instituted. Basically, black was poor was an overgeneralization then, but you could see where it came from. We're still told that. We're generally told whenever an issue comes up, that we are talking about disadvantaged people. But one thing that it helps to know is that, in the year 2000 - still too many black people are poor - there's no doubt about that. But the number is not as large as one might think.

When we're talking about the black population today we are talking about a different composition of people than you are forty years ago. One out of five African Americans live in an inner city. That's one statistic that it helps to know. When you open up a magazine, chances are that the black person you see, if it's not somebody in a suit running a corporation, it's somebody in the street.

Polls have been done, testing young black people and almost half of the African Americans polled thought that three out of four African Americans lived in the inner city. A reasonable suspicion. This is the way these things are talked about. Only one in five. You know, this is too many but still it is not most of us. In terms of poverty, one in four, actually it is a little bit less. Most black people are not poor, not even close to it. That's a

victory. We have done that. That is something that has happened over the last thirty years.

Now we haven't come far enough. There's no doubt about that, but more progress has been made than we are often told and I think that's an important fact when you think about affirmative action. Very often when you open a pamphlet that talks about affirmative action, all of a sudden all black people live on somebody's front steps. That's not true so we can't evaluate policy based on that.

So that's one thing, and the second thing that's important is something which is uncomfortable but it is something that has to be thought of. Sometimes we are led to believe that whenever affirmative action is discussed and we're talking about bettering the African American race, that what we're talking about is what we call putting the thumb on the scale. You have a white person, and a black person and they have the same qualifications, you give the nod to the black person. I don't know who would argue against that. But that's not a good policy. It strikes me as a little too intellectual. It's clearly . . . (unintelligible) . . . But that's not what affirmative action always is and the reason it isn't is because there are some serious discrepancies that we don't want to think about but they are there, and this is the sort of thing that I'm - SAT's. Depending on, we can talk about whether SAT's matter or not, but for whatever it's worth, but it's been found that, for example, African American families where there is two-parent family and the income is \$70,000 a year. The median SAT score for an African American child, student, in such a family is lower than the one for a white family where there is a two-parent family and the income is \$10,000 per year. This, there are reasons for this, and it has nothing to do with any of the things that you might sometimes be told, but still we need to know this – when you talk about solving a problem, this is the kind of problem that we are talking about.

Another kind of problem that we want to solve, is that even in really plush suburbs around the country, and more and more of these suburbs are coming onto the media radar screen, we find that in middle class suburbs very often if you look at the school, even when there is a good representation of African American students in the school, the African American students tend to cluster at the bottom, and once again, we are not talking about the poor students. It is easy to understand why somebody who grows up basically in hell is not going to do well in school. That's understandable. That's a very important problem. But then we have the rest of the African American student population. There's also this. Don't forget this. And in these situations we still have these kinds of problems. And so the issue is not to criticize it and not to complain about it, but to think -what can we do about this problem where we see a persisting - you know, regardless of class, and regardless of income.

Now there are a lot of ways of looking at it. It's a very complicated issue, but some of the things that we're told basically explain this sort of thing, especially the way the dialogue is carried out at Berkeley, which is the school where I teach. They just aren't true, they really aren't true. These are the things that I consider not true either, and once I realized there had to be a different way of approaching the problem. For example, very often, one is told, you hear about white scores and black scores and white grades and black grades and things like that, and you are told, the problem is that African American students are overrepresented in underfunded schools. That is true, there are too many. But this brings us back to the other issue, which is that usually when you talk about kids who

go to college, you are not talking about the ones who go to terrible schools in South Central etc. It's a shame that people have to go to those schools, and, thankfully, over the past three or four years, we've seen a lot of efforts to fix those situations. But the fact is, that we still see these problems even in situations where there is wonderful funding for the schools, so the underfunding problem has a way of missing the real issue.

Something else that we've seen is that there are other immigrants, you know there are other minority immigrants who go to horrible schools – they shouldn't have to – but when they do, the fact is that on the average they tend to excel. Now the issue when you see something like that is not to think, "Well, darn it why can't black kids do better?" That's not the point. The issue is, what is the reason for this, and how do we form policies to fix this? That's the issue.

So the Southeast Asian kids. We don't mean the sort of – no, not Chinese, Japanese, Korean. We're talking about Southeast Asians, a very different, and in many ways a very difficult story. Often these children don't speak English fluently and yet, peeling paint, the water fountain doesn't work, even violence in the schools, it's a shame, but they do well. So we're often told that the reason that there are these lags is because black students go to these terrible schools. For one thing, quite a few, most, don't; and for another, even if you are in that kind of school, it's not necessarily true that a crummy school condemns you to not do well. You might think it was true, but it turns out it isn't, over and over again.

One might say that things are different for black people than for Southeast Asians in which case it's also important that African Caribbean black students and African black students also do very well in terrible schools. So clearly and this also shows we are not dealing with something Negroid, so there's no bell curve or IQ issue here. There is something going on in this country, there is something going on right here, and so what is it?

So, the underfunding issue. There's a book that Jonathan Kozol wrote called, *Savage Inequalities* and it talks about how some schools get lots more money than others and it is a very important book, and it's a good book and he's written that book several times. But it is not the complete story. Jonathan Kozol is a wonderful scholar and his politics are provocative but that doesn't explain what is going on with race and education today. Jonathan Kozol will not explain this, so let's put that book over here, and lay that down.

Now, another issue that we hear, once we get beyond the underfunding, is - and my mother used to tell me this - that with black families that are middle class, the idea is that - the term that is put to this these days is cultural capital - that these families may have a middle class income, but that because the parents were working class when they grew up, they are unable to pass on something which allows students to excel, and that therefore we have to take the word class with a grain of salt. Now of course we do have to take the word class with a grain of salt. But, that argument again doesn't work when you just blindly use it. You would think it would work. There is such a thing as a class income black, but the question is, is that something that condemns a person to not doing well in school, and the fact is no.

African Americans are human beings, and so if we are going to try to figure out what is going on with us, we have to compare ourselves to other human beings. And so imagine for example, and I'm stereotyping here, hopefully for a purpose and hopefully in

a benign way. Take a Chinese student whose parents perhaps own a restaurant. And the parents you know sit behind a cash register, and there are no magazines when they go home. You know, we are often told, well black students, the parents don't subscribe to magazines, they are poor. If you take the student I just talked about, there is no Harper's on the table. There is no book line. Nobody is talking about the Arab-Israeli peace negotiations over dinner. None of that is happening. These parents could be – you know we tend not to think of class when we think of Asians sometimes, but these parents are working class people. And yet, as we know, Asians have a tendency to do better at school than African Americans. And so, these working class parents, apparently something is going on where we don't have this lag. That same thing is going on with Caribbean and African black students as well. So clearly there is something else going on than this issue of cultural capital. That is a very good term. I don't know who made up that term cultural capital, but I don't think it explains what we need to do.

Then there's another explanation, this is the third of just four, and that is teacher bias, racism basically. It is often said that white teachers will size up a black student and toss them into a lower track class immediately, just because they're black. They will give them lower grades just because they're black, and that the cumulative effect of this will turn a person off from school. That is often said. And I think you are an African American, you've gone on in school, you have your stories, you know, teachers where maybe you and the white weren't being treated the same, that does exist. The question is does it create the sorts of problems, the sorts of differences in achievements, and the evidence doesn't really, it doesn't really support that.

For example tracking – very often it is often said that tracking all white or Asian students in an upper track and black students in a lower track. That's true but a lot of studies have been done on tracking, and not by biased people, not by conservative think tanks or anything like that, and they all show over and over again that at least in these studies, teachers are documented to put students in tracks based on performance, and not just on sizing them up. And then you also come back and say Caribbean blacks, where the same attitudes apply, especially black students whose parents are Caribbean but who grew up in this country, so it's not Caribbeans with accents, but people who just have parents who are Caribbean, and they suffer from the same biases and they'll tell you, and yet there isn't the school problem in this group. And so, yes, there is some teacher racism, I've felt it, but the thing is, is that enough to change a student's performance, is that enough to keep a person down? And, I don't know if it is.

Finally, there is something else I want to mention, and this is from a psychologist at Stanford, his name is Claude Steele, and he has a theory, and you can call it the stereotype effect. The stereotype effect is, according to him, that the middle class black student tends to feel haunted by the stereotype that blacks are mentally inferior. There is that stereotype. His idea is that this little voice in your ear tends to make you choke in performance and he did experiments showing that if black students are given a test saying this is a test on black intelligence, then they do worse on that test than if the test just says this is just a test. As a control he gave white students a test and white students don't do as well if the test says this is to see whether white students are as smart as Asians and white students didn't do as well on that test. So the test results are normal. If any of us have to take a test that plays on our stereotypes that affects us in our lives, sure we're not going to do as well. But the issue is does this carry over into real life. Is that how an African

American student feels in society as they sit down to write a paper about John Adams or whatever the assignment is.

Really, there is a lot of evidence against that. You know one thing being that women are well known, or girls, or women, I don't know which term I should use, starting from the age of four almost until twenty one, are well known for there being confidence issues. Society tends to have a stereotype, particularly when it comes to math and the hard sciences, that women are not supposed to be very good at these things. And this is something educators have been very concerned about, particularly for the last forty years and it tends to show up on tests that there is this confidence problem, and yet, actually, according to the latest figures, and no offense to the men here, but women are higher achievers than men overall in the United States. And so what this means is that a human being, it means life is hard, but a human being can triumph over things.

So the question is, is the stereotype that we're talking about against African Americans so difficult and so overwhelming that an African American student can't get past it. I do think that often in our moment we are taught that to be African American is to be very weak. That is not the direct message, that is the underlying message. If there is any obstacle in society, other people can jump over it, like, ah, what's the nursery rhyme where something jumps over something, right, the cow, Hey Diddle Diddle, I forget, anyway, jumping over an obstacle, whereas if you're black you can't. Everything is just so awful you just can't get over the moon. I don't know if that's as true as often as people tell us, and I don't mean just me, I mean any human being, and that's something wrong with stereotypes too.

So anyway, there are all these explanations that are given where, if you widen the lens, they don't really hold up very well and I'm not the first person to say these things but the fact is that often these things are said and it's not heard and often it is not heard because it is supposed that people who bring these things up have malicious intentions. Maybe some of them do, but I don't.

What all of that leads me to is that there is something that happens to an African American. This is something that, it seems like a joke but it is very much a part of the culture. It happened to me, not very much. I learned how to avoid it fast, but I definitely watched it happen to other people. The very first memory of my life is something that I cannot share, but the second memory came a little bit after that. I'm four years old and it was in one of the first integrated neighborhoods in the United States, in Philadelphia, about half white and half black. I didn't know the white kids, I was sort of in the black circle, and I was walking down the driveway and these black kids came up, and I was new to the neighborhood, and they said "John-John how do you spell concrete", and I think it was cause we were on it, and I figured, well, if you want to know, so I spelled it for them, and I was a very, very good child (laughter). When I had spelled it, they all laughed, and the ringleader, who was nine, to me he looked fourteen feet tall cause I was only that tall, he had his little sister and he picked up his little sister, who was also four, and he told her, "Hit him", and so she walked up and she kept hitting me on my arm. I cried and I didn't rise, I just took it, and everybody laughed, and I got hit and I don't remember what happened after that, but the point was, I wasn't supposed to spell. If you spell you get the heck smacked out of you. And so it was this kind of rule.

Now I learned from that that for some reason around black kids you don't spell, but I had other friends who didn't know that, and especially as we got older, and it is

documented that this particularly begins in the fifth grade. Now I had friends who were tortured. Like I had one, I think he was either a masochist or he was really into his own head, cause he kept running into this again and again. The kids would surround him, they would say “How far is it from New Jersey to Florida”, and he would tell them, you know, and they would kick him, and hit him, and smack him, and take away his clothes, you know, all these sorts of things. And what’s important is that in the neighborhood the white kids weren’t doing that. The white kids weren’t doing that to the white nerds, they weren’t doing that to the black nerds. That wasn’t going on.

This is a, this is a -why my voice is cracking at the age of 35, I don’t know (laughter) – this is a Very Important Issue. And the reason is because this trait, I think, well, I know it has a way of turning a lot of black kids away from school. It’s a big issue. And when race and education comes up, this tends not to come up for a lot of reasons. One of them is that it seems trivial. Adults are not walk around punching each other out for spelling. So you think that happened when we were little. But it’s a prevalent phenomenon. It’s very well documented.

Since I wrote this, in this age of e-mail, you get responses to your book much faster, and I get about 15 e-mails and letters and phone calls about *Losing the Race* every week, and I got 15 today and it’s just normal, and half of them are from black people. At this point I’ve got 116 e-mails from black people all over the country saying “Oh, yeah, I’ve this seen this”, or “This happened to me and I’ve never seen this written about”. I wasn’t the first person to write about it, but I have a good publicist so a lot of people think I’m the first to write about it. But really, it’s been written about by a lot of black people, and it’s an important issue, because all over the country what happens is that, a student goes to school, and if an African American student displays signs of nerdiness, spelling concrete, and interested in Ulysses S. Grant, whatever, then what happens is they get teased. Very, very often they get teased.

What happens is a choice has to be made. You can either become a nerd and have no friends, no black friends, or maybe one black friend, but let’s face it you want more than one. You can go over there, or if you join the group, then often you are not going to do well in school. Now there are exceptions to this, but this is a general trend. This is a real problem. Often there is that choice, and especially if you are a young kid, peer acceptance is very important, it is to all human beings at all ages but particularly, as we know, at that age. So the choice gets made to either be with us which is your comfort zone for it is your only culture, or you’re not going to be with us and you’re only going to have white friends, or no friends. Well, the choice that most kids make is to be with their peers. Of course they do, that’s what human beings do. And as a result, teachers have often told me that it is around fifth grade that you begin to lose black kids, boys in particular, but girls as well. There are some exceptions but the exceptions, unfortunately, prove the rule. It is a major issue, because what it means is that there is a culture factor, a cultural factor that has a way of turning African Americans kids away from school, regardless of what ‘whitey’ is doing. That is something that a lot of people don’t want to hear, but it is true, and in *Losing the Race* I talk about it at length because I sincerely believe that we cannot fix the race and education problem unless we look that in the eye.

Why do these kids do this? Well, it’s not because they are stupid, and it’s not because they are lazy, they are none of those things. Where this comes from, is first of all, it begins with slavery. It begins with the fact that this race was in chains, at first

formally, and then essentially, until really, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, but depending on how you want to count it, the fact is that education was denied slaves in particular for centuries, a long time. There were some slaves who knew how to read, yeah, but they were the exception that proved the rule. If you were a slave you were not supposed to read books, you were expected to do other stuff. So, naturally, education is what white people do, and it doesn't exactly have a chance to take root in a culture which is condemned to servitude.

The mid-60's focused this and what happened in the mid-60s was that there was the black power movement. Thank God for the black power movement, because the black power movement helped us to get to a sense of black identity as a sovereign entity of it's own, a different way of being a person, instead of a kind of a deviation from the mainstream which is the way we were often thought of before, not by black people, but by the mainstream of society. Black power gives us the idea – you know nowadays people talk about multiculturalism, we talk about the other, we talk about differences. This isn't the way even educated people spontaneously spoke before the mid-60s. If you go back in a time machine to a discussion at a university in 1940, all sorts of things would be missing, you know there are ways of thinking that people just did not have. Things were talked about. Just like sexual harassment - a term that became current really only about ten years ago. Now the practice itself certainly existed but there wasn't as much of a way to talk about it. Same thing with multiculturalism. That wasn't the way. In the mid-60s that began, and the black power movement speared it.

But there was a baby that went out with the bathwater, because if you are going to define a new identity, define an identity as that which is not white, and you can certainly see, if you think of a black grainy newsreel of black protesters being hosed, of course you are going to have an identity which is that which is not white, but the fact of the matter is that, what was education associated with? Well, white people, naturally, that's the way it had been, and so at that time, that is exactly when this teasing among kids is documented. It is a pretty precise split. I've heard from literally hundreds of African Americans over the past three months. Now there are very few exceptions. There are African Americans who came of age before 1965, and they may have been teased for being nerds, that's a universal trait. I know white people and Asians who have been teased for it too. But in African American culture there is that issue not of just that it's funny that you're spelling concrete, but you're acting white. It's not just ha-ha, you're a nerd, but, you're acting white. Do you think you are better than us? Most black kids asked that question say no, and so that's the difference. That issue of do you think you're white, that began around 1965. I've even had some African Americans say they went to high school in the early '60s and they never experienced that, but watched their younger siblings or cousins experience that in 1968 and '69. So it starts then. And it is a serious problem. It's been going on ever since then. It's happening now, it's happening today, it's all over the country, just as a little reminder, this is not about the inner city. This is not a ghetto problem. The neighborhood I was in, it looked like the set of, I would say, "Growing Pains", but that show is about 400 years old, but I bet you've seen it in syndication, or "Full House", I can't think of one, but you know what I mean, sitcom house. It looked like "Malcolm in the Middle". That's exactly what it looked like, except there were black people in it, not just one black kid, like on that show. So, that's what it was. Middle class. It was not that we were middle class in income but that everybody really was poor. It was

a middle class neighborhood, and yet there was that issue. There was nothing strange about it.

Now what all that means is that if we're looking at the race and educational issue, that what we have is this internal factor, and it continues. This factor continues on. You know, this becomes a kind of a badge. At Berkeley, as many of you probably know, Proposition 209 banned affirmative action in the UCs. I had one student, a black woman, and she was active in the recruiting of black students after the ban had happened. The first year it was found out that the number of black students had fallen, and I asked her when she was in my office how come nobody seems very excited about the black students that did make it in. I said it's not great what happened, but it's not like nobody made it, but, you don't seem very excited about the ones who are coming. She said very casually, a smart, well-spoken person, she said, "well, the thing is we're afraid that the African American student who performs at that level will not be interested in the African American presence at Berkeley." A very interesting statement. What she meant, and this was not a heated discussion, she said it very casually, what she meant was that the black kids who hadn't needed affirmative action were going to be Oreos, they weren't going to be black. They wouldn't count, and therefore nobody was really terribly interested in them.

Now, where did she get that idea? Now the fact is, that she may have gotten it from her life experience, because of that choice that African American kids all have to make in school, either you hang with us, or you go off and all of your friends are white, you date white, and you have white plays and the Shakespeare whatever, and there you go, and then you are someone this person who is in my office wouldn't have liked. That's the saddest thing in the world, but I believe we are seeing some true trends.

So, then you get to the issue of affirmative action. I personally think that in this day and age, affirmative action is not healthy if you want to close the gap between white and black students, and this is why. There was a time when affirmative action was a good thing because you wanted to create a black middle class, a large black middleclass, and the idea was we are going to lower standards, and we're just going to get these black people into these institutions by hook or by crook and that made sense. Sometimes you've got to round off some corners. And so starting in the mid 60s this is what happened, and here we are today.

But today we've got that black middle class. It's huge. The most conservative estimates are two fifths, the most liberal estimates are two thirds. Two thirds is probably too much. It's probably about half. Roughly every other African American is what we call middle class today. If you think about your experience in your life, that's about it. You know, you are told over and over that all black people are poor, but imagine, just go to a movie. Kind of think about all the black people you see around you. Some of them you might want to call poor. Some of them are not. That's about half. That's really about it.

So that middle class is on it's way. It's always getting bigger, and in the meantime that middle class, that generation, that first generation of affirmative action beneficiaries, their kids are having the same issues with school that they did a generation before them did. And set asides and quotas cannot fix that problem. That's the important issue. If it weren't, then African American students are barred from these institutions. You're going to keep affirmative action. Like, in the business world I think affirmative action is very

important, because there are ways in which racism can keep a person from getting a job. But it is a different world today from what it was in 1965, and today there is this trait. It's a legacy of racism, but it's there nevertheless, and it tends to hold African American students back, regardless of what the white teachers are doing. Racism, slavery have serious echoes. But the fact is, what do we do about it now? We've all heard the history, but what do we do about the problem now?

It seems to me that it is like Psychology 101. The reason people do their best at something is because they have the incentive to do it. We're talking about the very, very best. And what I want to see is African American students getting as good an education and in parity with white or Asian students. And we're going to have that. As often as we're told, the fact is that pumping the schools full of funding, from what we've seen, it won't even help. From what we've seen we have other problems. Purging white people of all residential bias. Well, you know, I don't think that is going to go away. You can yell, you can scream, you can point, you can have workshops, there's only so much you can do. That is probably going to keep going. So the issue is you have to surmount that kind of residual racism. What do we do about this.

Incentive is the only thing that works. Let's say you are riding a bike, this is one analogy that I use. I had training wheels till I was like eight. It feels like till I was 17, but I probably had them till I was 7. All the other kids were rolling around without the training wheels, but I was kind of timid, and finally my mother said, "John, it's time for you to learn to ride without training wheels", and so my Dad took them off, and we went off this hill, and the idea was that we just went and he ran beside me for a while then he said, "Go!", and I said, "No!", and he said, "Yes!" Down the hill I went. And we all have that experience and you're riding along, and somehow there's that magic where you've got that bike between your legs, and you're not falling down. If you're a physicist you can probably explain why you don't fall down, but you should fall down. Bikes shouldn't work, but they do and you lose your fear and you stay up. The only way to discover that is without the training wheels. You can't be rolling down the hill with the training wheels clattering alongside and thinking, "Boy, this is just as if the bike were standing up by itself." It doesn't work that way. You have to take the training wheels off.

Learning a language is another example. If you are a junior or actually if you are a senior you have to check this out. There are always a bunch of kids go to go to France and they are going to learn French. And there are two comments. Some people go to France and live in a dorm with a bunch of American students and date them and eat at Burger King and take French lessons. And they come back and their French is worse than it was when they left. They really didn't get it, cause you have to go and live in the language. There are other people who go and live in a family, and actually spend time with the family, date somebody who speaks the language, don't eat at Burger King. They live in the language. They come back fluent. The only way that you can learn another language, really speak it, is you have to live in it. You can't do it with records, you know, it certainly isn't going to happen in a classroom. Records - that is SO old. You can't do it with tapes - CDs (laughter) I've been through all three of these things. You have to live in it.

Unfortunately it is the same way with the school thing. It's about obsession for example. From what I've seen in all my students, whatever color, the topic is an obsession. Let's say that you assign somebody a paper on some random topic, the

alignment of - no, I can't think of anything, oh, on Ulysses S. Grant, President Ulysses S. Grant. I keep thinking about him today. Well, who cares about him? But let's say the teacher says you have to do that. Well, the good students are the ones who can really pretend to be interested. They can really get into it. What was his wife's name? What did he die of? What did he smell like? Ulysses - Was he tall? And they get into it, and as soon as they turn in the paper, forget that. That's really not very - well, if any of you are historians, I'm sorry. Ulysses S. Grant is not a very compelling topic.

For other students, that obsession doesn't happen. The key to being a great student is to be able to develop an obsession over something you don't give a damn about. Some students don't do that. And if you don't do that, then the grades are not going to be your really top stuff. The really top grades come from that type of immersion.

If you have been teased, or if you have watched people being teased, or just kind of smelled it, if that's the culture you grow up in, then unless you make certain choices or unless you have rather unusual parents, then the fact is when you grow up there is going to be a little voice whispering in your ear kind of like the black woman in my office. And what she was saying was that an African American student who really hits that top note is not one of us, and is not someone who I exactly want to be. It doesn't mean you're going to be a disaster of a student but it does mean it's going to pull you down a bit, it's going to weight you down, and as much as I hate to say it that is what I have seen in my teaching experience thus far. There is a difference between white and black students and I'm sorry but over and over again in my experience I have seen that. It's nothing about IQ. It's not about lazy, because often there is effort put in, a lot of effort, but what makes the difference is that obsession issue. I've seen all sorts of things in my brief life thus far, which suggests to me that the culprit is that sense that nerd is a threat. It's not just a nerd, but nerd means that you think that you are better than the rest of us, which is a charge that few people want to deal with.

For that reason alone, you know, Ward Connerley and all these people, it's, affirmative action is offensive to democracy, affirmative action is discrimination against white people. Those are not my arguments. That sums it up.

My argument is very focused. I don't believe with that policy in place, that the race that I belong to will have the incentive to do exactly as well in the same proportions as everybody else. There is no incentive to reach that high. There is no incentive for teachers to really work on the problem, as in California when Prop. 209 suddenly goes by the roadside. There is no incentive for parents to develop new habits. There is no incentive. Not to indict those in here who are not black or Asian, or white, basically, who are administrators, but one of the saddest things is to see white administrators scratching their heads. They say we've got this policy where all the students at this school are going to have to post these grades and scores except African American students. And golly, we just don't know why so few black students do any better than that. Why is that a question?

Imagine telling that to a Martian. Talking to somebody named 'Flzkk'. "Well, look, Flzkk. We have all these students and then we have this other group of students and they have a bad history and it's partly my ancestor's fault and so all the other students, they have to do this well". Scratch it on the board in the margin. "And then the black students, well, we'll have them only do this well." And, you know, golly, for some reason this is only as good as they do. There's nothing mysterious.

It doesn't have to be a Martian. Try explaining affirmative action to a foreigner. You know we've got policy that we grow up with and that we're used to. Just try to explain it to somebody who is German. Just try to start from the beginning. Inevitably, they'll say, very liberal-minded Germans, they'll say, "Actually, I don't quite see the sense in that policy. I mean, how are you going to have the incentive?" Well, how? Well, you think, well, he's foreign. No, I think here again, whoever that is, is often making sense.

This is my view on this. There was a review in the San Francisco Chronicle a couple of weeks ago by a gentleman and he said that John McWhorter doesn't like affirmative action because he thinks that it is specifically designed to keep African Americans barefoot and sociologically pregnant. This is what he said that I said to the entire Bay Area. At no point in the book do I talk about anybody being barefoot or pregnant. That has nothing to do with my views. And wouldn't you know I was in New York City, which is why I am so tired, and I was talking at a school about different issues, and for some reason, at dinner that person wound up next to me. It turned out that he has some sort of position at that school and I talked to him about this barefoot and pregnant issue. I was really rather upset. That's a digression, I'm sorry.

That is not what I think. The point is how do you create the parity? And I don't think this policy is any longer doing that. All, right. I'm out of steam, and so I'm going to take questions from you guys.

Question 1: I concede the notion that kids who are afraid of acting white in terms of education . . . (unintelligible) . . . most eleven or twelve-year olds thinking about admission to colleges such as UC as they are enacting whatever child culture. Why do you believe that changing college admissions will affect some important transition that is happening basically in elementary school . . . (unintelligible) .

A: Well, first of all, take the main part first. It certainly isn't that at that young age an African American child is thinking about . . . (unintelligible) . But the point is that if you have this trait, then often what is said is that you need to have the highest expectations possible for minority students. That is always said. High expectations. Affirmative action is lowered expectations. I mean especially when we concede that often the discrepancies in terms of what the allowances are, are rather large. That constitutes a kind of a lowered expectation right there. And so the issue is not that there is a direct conflict. The idea is not that these kids are saying we are going to get affirmative action therefore we can be successful. But if we are going to work against this, if it's going to be really urgent that we work against this, wouldn't the last thing that you would want in place would be a policy up top that says however you only have to do so well, and we will bend over backwards and just kind of shave the points. You see? What is the point of affirmative action given the situations that we have in the year 2000? Can you answer that question?

Q1: . . . (unintelligible) . . . several things

A: Give me several, keeping in mind that it's not about underfunding in schools, that we're never going to do anything about residual teacher bias, and that role modeling is something that not all minority students are considered to need, and one other thing, that

you do not have to go to a top school to be successful in this world, and this is proven statistically. What's it for?

Q1: I don't see residual teacher bias notion, but I don't think that . . (unintelligible) . . But affirmative action can be used to control my reflex reactions . .(unintelligible) . .

One thing which is dramatically seen is that circumstances . . seem to underpredict minority performance or . . particularly GPA of minority undergraduate student who has done well in college will still produce a lower LSAT than a similar GPA will produce for a white student or an Asian student. The measures may not work as well for reasons that are required I'm sure you know, that suggest that we have a difficulty measuring. I really want to know, I want to know how good a law student . . (unintelligible) . . We can imagine a policy that says we will try to figure out what LSATs mean which might mean you take an African American students at a particular school with lower LSAT numbers, cause it is a guess about performances. That (isn't more) affirmative action so it's not about identifying less good law students. Does that distinction make sense to you?

A: Yeah, it does, except are you familiar with the statistics on the bar exam broken down by race?

Q1: I'm vaguely familiar with the statistics on the bar exams.

A: And you're talking about how what you want is something that will predict better. But it seems that what has been going on which is this policy - which makes everybody feel so good - well, the rates of African American students failing the bar exam is so alarming I'm not even going say that, and this is regardless of preparation, and you know this. So do you think that the policy we have so far therefore is good, and if not, how is it helping?

Q1: Many people suggest these types of , you could know someone's score on the multi-state bar examination by ignoring their LSATs which is to say the loss will add no value on that test. In fact the test correlates very tightly. And then you measure something which is . .

So I may dispute the bar exam. The bar exam doesn't make a choice. It actually predicts . . It has some minimum standards.

A: You don't think the test . .

Q1: I think that multiple choice tests . . There is a lot of variance between the multiple choice test performance and what most people see as quality in almost any area in which tests apply.

Q: I think I'm supposed to go on to other questions, but I want to say with all due respect, and this is going to sound so condescending but I don't mean that, cause you and me could go like ping pong. I used to think that. I accepted that. I don't know if it is true. There is counter-literature about the SATs. However, Ma'am -

Q2: I have a question. You said there was a time when this idea came about that children started teasing each other about being smart. Where did they pull that from?

A: Oh, you mean what is the source?

Q2: Where did it come from altogether?

A: You know, I don't know the answer to that question. I am actually actively engaged in trying to figure out where it came from. Because, yeah, you start from it not happening much to suddenly it is happening a lot and yet clearly the children were not sitting at the feet of Stokely Carmichael being told to do this. I don't know why that particular thing started then. I know at this point that it did kick up then. What the conflict was? I genuinely don't know. I was too young to be able to tell --

Q3:(This question is clear as the person speaking was sitting very close to the microphone on the videocamera) I wasn't too young, and I'm disagreeing with what you're saying. I'm a 32 year veteran from the Oakland Public Schools. This concept of acting white is misinterpreted by John Ogbu and Signithia Fordham. This concept is a metaphor. In the traditional African American cultural tradition it meant don't come back thinking you're better than someone else because the concept of white is that you're better than the rest of us. It's not about getting an education, it's about thinking you're better than someone else. I'm an educator, you're a linguist. You're speaking of authority on education totally out of the realm of educational research. Educational research has disproven everything you've said over the last ten years.

A: First, of all, I think that, I agree with you about what acting white means in the culture, however I can't agree that it doesn't have to do with education. It's not whether or not someone goes to school, it's about what it means to do well in school. I completely respect your years in education of public school students which I don't have, however I must also say, and I don't mean this as a rhetorical ploy, but, hundreds of African American public school teachers would disagree with you that his does not exist, if I am interpreting you correctly. Now I'm not saying that your experience isn't valid, but I am saying that I am not just pulling this out of the air.

Q3: Ah

A: And wait, no, no, I'm not finished. Don't worry, I'm going to address everything you said. Next, as far as educational research not supporting what I am saying, that is utter nonsense, and I don't know whether or not you read the book, but if you did happen to read it, and maybe you wouldn't be inclined, but if you did happen to read the book, you could see that I am basing my conclusions not

only on my own little stories, but upon a great deal of research done by very qualified people and very few of them -

Q3: could you name a few of the researchers you?

A: as biased.

Q3: Could you .

A: On what particular point?

Q3: On the style you are quoting in education, on educational style.

A: About the issue of acting white.

Q3: John Ogbu and Signithia Fordham, they've been disproven. Give me scholars, a teaching scholarship, I'm asking for the references -

A: How have John Ogbu and Signithia Fordham been disproven? Please tell me.

Q3: there are anumber of scholars that have disproven - .

A: You can't name them -

Q3: John Ogbu and Signithia Fordham

A: Okay

Q3: Gloria Isaac Billings, Joyce King, Joyce Irvin, Asa Hilliard, there are a number of African American scholars that -

A: What did Asa Hilliard say that disproves what John Ogbu and Signithia Fordham -

Q3: OK, we can have this separate debate, because obviously you -

A: Because you want to save your face. And the one other thing that I would like to do. This business of me being a linguist and therefore not being qualified to speak? If I had written a book saying that racism is what does black kids in and outlining all the same arguments THEN all of a sudden I'd be one more brother telling it like it is and there'd be no questions as to my sources or my experience. And the fact that this is what you have come up with now, also having obviously not read the book, shows that your criticism has no validity whatsoever.

Q3: But you can prep well -

A: Yes?

Q4: I asked my question earlier but I wasn't quite finished. I asked because it's been my experience in the black community that . (unintelligible). we supported each other, that we, you know, if I had a friend and I was proud of her and she was proud of me and we had the adults in the community encouraging us to continue, and we weren't told no, it's not cool to be smart. So I don't understand where, how kids saying, putting each other down for being smart . . (unintelligible).

A: That's interesting, and what I'm about to say is true and I'm not just saying this to sort of score some sort of points. And you're right, that is your experience. I have been speaking about this book for about 3 months. I've spoken more places than I can count, I've done 71 radio shows, about 20 of them black-only stations. You are sincerely, sincerely, I'm not just pulling this out of the air. You are the first African American young person who has told me that you have not experienced this. And I don't know where you grew up –

Q4: Is there anyone else like me . . Where are you talking to these people?

A: All over the United States to tell you the truth. Literally every big city in the United States at this point. That's an exaggeration, but I mean pretty wide coverage.

Q5: I feel like, we are not all from here, so we represent different big cities all over the United States. Talking together before this, we haven't had those experiences -

A: Where –

Q4: Well, the black community as a whole, I feel is really supportive of young children doing well, and so I don't get where little kids could be learning this. They aren't gong to go home and say these things and their families say it's okay for you to put other kids down because they're smart. You should . .

A: Well, I don't think that this is being reinforced by the parents. It's not that I'm saying that mothers and fathers tell their children to do this, or that they support their children in doing this but it happens among children. Well, for example –

Q4: And no one notices?

A: Well the parents do notice this. The issue is what there is to do about it. But for example, I'll just take one example, a talk I did a few days ago in New York City at a school called Audrey Cullen College. There were about 100 black mothers. It is essentially a community college and it was just assumed by all of them, at least in that city, that this was a real thing. And people definitely disagreed, there was

some of this, but there was no question that it exists. I mean I'm not saying, I'm not denying what you are saying. I'm really interested – I almost want to ask where did you happen to grow up?

Q4: Well, I grew up in the Bay Area, but I have to say partly on what she was saying that it's like, if I was to do well in school, I wouldn't get teased for acting – they wouldn't say I was acting white. If I did well in school, and left them behind and didn't help them, then I would be considered as a person who was trying to do better. If I turn my back on my community, then I'm acting white.

A: Now that's interesting. There have been, to my knowledge, I can think of three studies that have been done, like in lots of schools throughout the country where they report this in middle class school districts where there is a healthy representation of African Americans. Like in Shaker Heights, New York; Nyack, New York is the last one where they released the figures; Evanston, Illinois; Prince George's County, Maryland. This comes out again and again and again. If this is not happening everywhere, I'm glad. I can definitely say that, but it's common in a lot of places. I'm really surprised. I don't want to break the privacy by saying where did you grow up, but this is very unusual, and I really mean that.

Q4: Well, you'll be happy to know that it doesn't happen everywhere.

A: Good. It definitely happened in Philadelphia. Sir –

Q6: I think I heard you account for some of this problem from slavery, and you also distinguish the Caribbean blacks from the problem as you described it. What were the differences in slavery in the Caribbean as compared to the US to have produced the kind of outcome that you talk about?

A: Well, one thing that seems to have a lot to do with it is what role whites have in the history, and in the Caribbean, generally, these have been, for at least some period of time, societies where there were blacks at all levels, instead of the whites being the ruling class and the blacks below. And so it seems that at in these societies things have been more likely to be like black American society before the sixties, where there wasn't the idea that to be nerdy was to be alien with representative blacks doing that. However, it seems that in England, at this point – coincidentally right when my book came out, there is a young black professor in England who has documented the exact same thing in the British black community there, and it's funny, because he is says the exact same things I do. And it is seems because there, there is the similar dynamic of a white ruling culture that young people might want to define themselves against.

Q7(Klein): Two pieces of the talk thus far struck me. One was your description of the sense of obsession that is required to excel and the other is this idea of being white including being better than other people and I would like to know what exactly being white means because that attitude means, it means being better than

other people, being better than everyone? It seems to that if it is about – there is something to be said for wanting to be better than other people, and it seems to me that that is part of what learning is, specifically you want to be better than you recently were. I want to be better than that person I was before I was in this obsession. I think that is a lot of what obsession is about, is, I want to advance to some, I want to transcend my current knowledge of being, and I just wonder if there might be therefore something in this notion about, which some people call being white, I guess, which is actually worthwhile, or worthy?

A: Yes, there is. I mean, a lot of the issue is just because there is tension between what we like to call diversity and integration. Now, there was a time when the civil rights movement was about integration. I think now we find that kind of threatening. The idea is to preserve differences. That is something that the previous, well, two generations of African Americans ago, mostly were less concerned about. And you know, whether you are for integration or you are for eternal multiculturalism, or a balance, which is where most people are into, the idea seems to be that if white is associated with expanding the horizons into useless knowledge, then that's projected. The idea is that this is not necessary, and that is a problem because . . . (I think I could do a . . . whole orientation) on the organization of the school enterprise in general, but I think that's the best answer I can give there.

Q8: And also, I would just say, that the definition that white is better than other people, isn't the definition that I would use? I don't know if that is your definition but . . . I think for me, when I think of white, I think of the people who have power, and that is what I would associate with white, not thinking they are better than others.

Q9: I think when we use a term like acting white or whatever, I guess I have in my mind it's like you have an idea of superiority towards other black people. You're cutting yourself off from your community saying, "I'm not worried about any of this, I'm better than you now, I'm over you."

Q10: Dignity.

Q11: You call that being white?

Q9: When you grow in a culture, that you learn about the oppression that from history you could be considered bad. If I'm a black person and I treat other black people as if they are less than me, then that is being white.

Q12: But it's not like we're saying every white person, it's just a term, it's just a term. Also I would say that there is a difference between what you were saying about being a better me, than I want to be better than you. There is a difference between that. I excel because I want to learn more, I want to be a better person, not because I want to be better than her or better than her, it's just that I want

myself to be better. So there is also a difference between wanting to be better than your group, and just wanting to be a better person yourself.

A: A lot of it depends on what you define being a better you. There are ways of being a better you than don't involve . . . You know, there are many directions that a person can go in to be a better person. Do I see a hand back there?

Q13: Yes, I'm sorry. Sitting in the back here, it is interesting to see this dialogue going on back and forth. Given I don't have your experience growing up in a black community, obviously, but I grew up in a white community that had very much the same feelings about intelligence and I was insulted over and over again as a kid, and in fact your term that you want to be better than us just struck a chord because I heard that over and over growing up, and I don't think necessarily that I agree with you and again I haven't read your book, I'm sorry, I haven't seen the research, but what I felt about that and what I hear you saying about it provides an interesting insight into this, and that when people said that to me, it was just an incentive to go out and kick their butt on the next test, to prove that I could do better than them. But I hear you say it, and I hear you say well, no, no, I want to be a part of this community, I want to be the same of them. Is that part of this cultural identity that you try to identify with the group?

Q9: I want to be a part of the community but not at the cost of my own success. I'm not going to stop excelling because someone might think that, but also, I'm going to take my success back to the community. I'm going to share what I know with my community.

Q13: Yeah, see I didn't have a community to reject. I wasn't forced into this group of people so therefore it didn't hurt me to say, "Fine, I'll do my best on the test." I didn't have that constraint.

Q10: And also, we haven't really experienced that. We haven't experienced people saying that you're acting right cause you're doing this. We haven't really experienced this.

A: I have never known this. When you do as many interviews as I have done, it gets to the point where you enjoy this, you've heard everything. This is, I must admit, I am at a loss for words. I have never experienced this, all the time I have been doing this. I'm glad, but you guys' experience . . .(unintelligible). .

There is this problem in other communities, I mean, the young, there are segments of the white community. So this sort of, don't embrace knowledge because you are not part of the group, is not something that blacks have a lock on by any means, but I do think, especially among the young, it does have a stronger effect because it seems to me that there are this major differentials in scores and grades that, looking at a lot of other things it seems to me that that would have a lot more to do with it than a lot of other factors, just from all sorts of observation from my own life, and those that other people shared. And by the way folks, I

really hope that I haven't given the impression that only people who have read this strange book have the right to comment. With the woman in the back I was defending myself from what I perceived as a personal attack. However, everybody doesn't have the time to read a 300-page book and so if I happen to, if I'm hearing what you have to say, my answer will not be you haven't read the book, and so you have no right to speak. That is something that I felt was necessary for this one particular person. Oh, there's a hand.

Q14 (Iannaccone): You've pointed out, as most of us know, that there are some areas in which African Americans in the United States lag behind other groups, principally in certain measures of educational achievement, and I think probably in business. But you couldn't watch the Olympics or for that matter any athletic event or arts related event and not notice that there are some other areas in which African Americans perform brilliantly and by most measures outperform a lot of these same groups. If your thesis is correct that being sanctioned for excelling in certain areas gets you into trouble and causes people in effect to achieve less than they would, does it apply reversed to these other areas? Do black Americans ever say to kids, ever say to another kid who excels athletically, well, you're acting if not white, I don't know what. Do you get sanctioned for being better at football or basketball or faster than anyone else? Likewise do you get sanctioned for wanting to excel in some area in the arts or music? Do you have any reflections on that, any experience with that?

A: Well, some things are more valued in some cultures than others. And in African American cultures sports has a high value, of course, and music certainly does, and so there is praise, certainly for those sorts of things.

Q14: Do you mean to outpace other people?

A: Oh, you mean outpace other groups.

Q14: Well, outpace – the issue seems to be that if these other areas of achievement, intellectual, vocabulary, whatever, you're getting sanctioned if you stand above other people, but not if –

A: You mean other groups, or other people within your race.

Q14: Within your group. But not in athletics.

A: I don't know what I've missed and I really apologize.

Q7: He's asking so it's not a general sanction against trying to excel. Your point is that it's against an intellectual, that's all.

A: Yes. I don't know of any group where there is ideology against excelling in anything. And so I think there is sort of lock on the school thing, in particular, and there are certain things where there is a lot of promise

Q9: I just want to be clear. So you think the black culture, they value music and athletics but they don't value education?

A: Not education, not as in going to school. But what happens when you go TO school.

Q9: You don't value excelling in school.

A: Yeah, except can I add a little something? This whole thing is generally especially beyond, say, the age of fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth grade, it's more covert than overt. So for example when I talked about the undergraduate recruiter at Berkeley I don't think that if you talked to her, and said do you value education and excelling in school, I'm quite sure she would say, why actually she is a good example, I'm quite sure she would say yes. She is a person who wants to go a certain distance in life, and so she would say yes. But on the other hand, she was a very lazy student when push came to shove. In spite of the fact that she was a wonderful person, she did not value it. As the semester went on, and she's just one person, but this is what I mean when I say it can be covert as well as overt. And then she's the one who said we don't think that the kids who didn't need affirmative action, are going to be precisely black kids. So, there's a difference, and I'm not using this as a kind of a cover, but there are psychological factors that are felt more inside the subconscious than you would actually attest to, and that's what I mean.

With that said, yes, I'm not saying that music and athletics are the only things that the African American culture values, but I would say that when it comes to excelling in school, to different degrees with different people, but with a large effect, there is this sense that to excel is to step outside. That's what I'm trying to communicate. You still look skeptical.

Q9: I just completely disagree with that.

A: That's okay.

Q13: When you say that you were encouraged in school, do you mean middle school, high school, kindergarten?

Q9: Absolutely.

Q13: All of them?

Q14: I don't remember any time when I had, when we're talking about relationships with black friends, I was. In elementary school I was in the Dean's

program. You know what that is? I was with the children who are, I guess, gifted and talented, and my friends weren't necessarily in the Deans class. They were in the regular track, or the low track, it made no difference because when you're that young, you don't communicate, "Oh, I got a A on that test. You're my friend" So, that's why I don't understand where this is coming from.

A: The person behind you.

Q16: Yes, now Gerhard mentions how affirmative action's intent is to excel but it's not supported by it because of false assumptions. Now I'm wondering, how do people do, the people who have been affected by affirmative action do after they get into college?

A: Well, actually for whatever it is worth, there is a lesser performance than white and Asian kids even as the students get into college who are admitted by affirmative action. This is something which - there is a book called *The Shape of the River* by William Bowen and Derek Bok, very much in favor of affirmative action, but it also gives a lot of these sorts of statistics, so it is one of the more real sources on this kind of thing.

Q16: Just a couple more. Umm, have there been any statistics comparing students who have gone in without affirmative action to ones who have gone in with affirmative action?

A: To my knowledge that has not been done explicitly, although the same book talks about these sorts of things. No, it doesn't. I'm not aware of any source that does although there may be one. If you're really interested, I'll give you my card, and I promise you that I'll look it up, but to my knowledge, no.

Q17: In a sense, like, in my experience not a lot of people, it was specific people who were targeted for teasing. Not a lot of girls were teased for being smart, or for getting good grades on a test, but many of the boys and like boys who, well, could you specify the type of people who are teased or ostracized because they do well in school? I mean, boys, or the non-athletic boys, or them more than others, I mean, not all.

A: From what teachers tell me, it does affect boys more. But now I'm getting completely anecdotal because I'm thinking about the few, the very few people who said that. There are some people have said they haven't experienced it, although they all said they have seen it, until tonight. It seems probably if you are large, or if you are particularly graceful, you might be an exception. But in general teachers say this is an issue for boys. Even in gifted programs they say they have black boys who say, "you don't know how much teasing I take from my friends." Now on the other hand I now have about 75 testimonials, and I haven't asked for these, people just send them cause they've read the book, from girls, or from women who were once girls, so I don't know what the breakdown is on this,

but, stereotypically, it seems to be associated more with boys. But I would say, usually not just a small subset, like you might think it's the (erkl?), or you might think it's other reasons a person might get picked on but from what I've seen, it's a lot of different kinds of reasons.

Q18: I have one more comment. I know that like this discussion is about race, but I honestly don't think the problem is race, I think it is more the stereotype of how we, umm, how have a smart kid, and the smart kid finds a cool kid, and the kids that are in sports, are the cool kids, and I think that's the problem, that's what we need to look at and focus, and we need to change that. Cause I know, cause I grew up in a white school system and I was in the upper division AP classes and I went to a program called (Tetra?), which is the same as what you were talking about, being gifted, and I know I loved that program to death, but when I came back to school I was made fun of for going and for being smart, and I know that if I did well on tests, it was an issue. I think that every race goes through it, I think every kids deals with it at least once and at least one test. And we need to focus more on the media and what we are telling our kids what is cool.

A: There is an overlap here with America in general . I mean certainly there is this sports culture, and it is certainly true that white kids get teased for being nerds too. But the reason I think there is something special going on with black kids, is partly because teachers of all colors seem to see it that way, and since I haven't taught in public schools for years, I am relying on them. And maybe I am looking through some sort of biased lens but I find that hard to believe with as many professional teachers as I have seen, there isn't something special going on in the black community, and then there is the fact, and I can't speak for your experience, but presumably you are not being told that you are being disloyal to your race, like you were teased and that is bad, but you aren't being told that you are leaving something behind, in a way that it would appear that leaving it behind would make you appear that you are being snobby person, and leaving behind the only thing that you know and belong in.

Q18: I just want to offer a comment. I was sort of feeling the same way. It's not that I haven't witnessed children being teased, but I don't think that it's a plague in the black community. If there's a problem, it's a problem with children in general. They need to be teaching our children what is more valuable, you being on the number one football team in the West Coast is not as valuable as your -, and if that's not what the media is telling the children, that's not what America is teaching the children, so I think I have a hard time with saying that it's just . . . There are other things in the black community that add on and make it worse, but

A: Well, let me answer. If you saw a suburban school where money wasn't the problem, and let's say that there were support p[rograms for minority students, and the school is K through 12 school, and there is support from the K level through the 12th level for older minority kids, and the school is 50% black and 50% white and probably some other things in between, but not so many Asians as

we are used to in California cause there just don't happen to be as many in this area, so it is about 50/50. And at the end of the year, and this happens year after year, the black kids, except for a very few, are down at the bottom in terms of performance, and you go and you interview the black kids, and you hear a lot about the teasing and people's grades going down after they join the group that teased them, and then you talk to the white kids, and they talk about what you are talking about, where you are supported for excelling and this is confirmed by two different – this is Shaker Heights, Ohio. Now I'm asking you this not to be a smarty pants, but, given that this is your experience and what you just said, I want to see what your response and anyone who agrees with this analysis would agree? What's holding the black kids back in that school? Because this, I'm sorry, that is true, and that situation is being shown again and again and again. And that's the sort of thing that leads me to think that something is going on within the culture. If it isn't what we are saying, if you're saying that all the kids are getting teased the same way about the same things, and that the interviewer is missing something with the white people, what is holding the black kids back? What do you think?

Q18: Are you saying this is a real setting?

A: This really, this is many studies, this is in many school districts. What factor is it holding these kids back, if it isn't the teasing and the sense that school is a kind of a white thing to do? And I hope that you can come up with an answer because I'm listening to you.

Q18: That's hard because there are so many factors that affect black students outside of the classroom that they are going to take into the classroom with them, that it is hard to say.

A: Like what?

Q18: Like the stereotypes we face every day. There is a lot to overcome.

A: Caribbean kids?

Q18: I don't know anything about Caribbean kids. I'm just saying that I have a problem with the extreme generalization of saying that this not supporting success in education is, like, overtaking the black community. I think that's a generalization.

Q19: That leads me to ask the question of what is going on with the parents? I would never have been allowed to just go along with what other people were influencing me to do. My Mom and my Dad would not have accepted that. So it's a case of what's wrong with the parents.

Q18: Right. If I had gone home and said that Johnny teased me because I got an A on a test, my Mom would have said well, let Johnny get his F, and you go get your As. It's not, it's

A: There is some research on parenting skills between all sorts of races that gets into this whole issue of what values are weighted, etc. A lot of it is connotative, but, generalizations sometimes are fun, but a lot of that research suggests that in order to get ahead sometimes generalizations might have to be made. But I do understand everything that you are saying, and it's interesting to hear something different from what I have seen. It's almost, I'm glad that these experiences, but, umm,

Q: 3 May I just answer your question, why it happened, according to educational research. Again, A.C. Hilliard talks about the achievement gap and the treatment gap that is a systemic problem in the educational system that those of us who are educational researchers are addressing. Not the children themselves. Yes, there is a problem in the middle class schools that the African American children are not doing as well. It's different – equal treatment – same treatment does not mean equal, because as a 32-year veteran educator, I know I have to give different treatment to different kids to have them achieve, and that does not happen in our schools. And if you look at, again I'm going back to the research, there are education scholars who have been addressing these issues for the last 20 years.

A: There has been a lot of research on what you call treatment, and I understand what you are saying, but I also know from all of this research that the thesis that treatment is the issue is not confirmed by research. There are a lot of angles you can go at, not that I have personally gone at it, but people have been going at it for a long time. And the issue is not, I'm not trying to be difficult, but I don't think the issue is as cut and dry as you're implying. It's a very difficult issue and there is a lot of research that suggests that that might not be the way to go. I, maybe we can't agree on that.

Q20: Yes, I was just going to say that I was in a public school until I was in the third grade, and growing up I was one of the only darker-skinned people in my school. I was never teased, and after third grade I was home-schooled, and my parents forced me to be smart, basically, they forced me to learn, and I think every parent, for the norm, would encourage their children to do good in school, and I was also wondering, and I've also lived in a lot of places throughout the United States and elsewhere, and I was wondering if you had talked to schools before, and found the same, or you've never found the same response in a school before?

A: I mean, yeah, you would, I think all parents, if you asked them, would say they want their children to do well in school. I mean once again it is a matter of . . . But there was one study by a man who studied nine schools around the country, nine schools with hundreds of students, and he asked the Asian kids what the lowest grade that their parents would tolerate, and the average grade of all of the Asian kids at the schools was A-. For the African American kids the grade that

they cited was C-. Now, of course, this is taking the kids. But this is what the kids said. Now, what the parents would have said I don't think they are going to study that. What the kids said was this. Now there are all sorts of reasons why the kids might say these things, there are layers that all these things come through. But still it says something that this was the picture that the kids gave. Yes, in other words this is a very unusual response.

Q20: I found it very common for friends of mine to get grounded because they got bad report cards, commonly, very commonly.

A: That's not what I usually heard from African American student communities.

Q7: It sounds like you did not dwell in an African American culture.

Q20: For a while I was in public school, but moving throughout the United States I had friends who went to public school, because it is not usual to be home-schooled, and I had friends that were in public school, and, same thing.

Dan Klein: (Q7)

Well, we've gone way past our deadline and it is late, and I want to say first that universities ought to be a place where ideas really get hashed out, and unfortunately it is really very rare, and so I want to extend our gratitude specially to everyone who was very vocal tonight, and I know our speaker .(appreciates that too) . . and thank you.