

# THE HISTORY OF DISCRIMINATION IN U.S. EDUCATION

*Marginality, Agency, and Power*

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EDITED BY EILEEN H. TAMURA



THE HISTORY OF DISCRIMINATION IN  
U.S. EDUCATION

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## CONTENTS

About the Contributors	vii
Acknowledgments	ix
Introduction <i>Eileen H. Tamura</i>	1
1 The Racial Subjection of Filipinos in the Early Twentieth Century <i>Hannah M. Tavares</i>	17
2 Containing the Perimeter: Dynamics of Race, Sexual Orientation, and the State in the 1950s and '60s <i>Karen L. Graves</i>	41
3 "It Is the Center to Which We Should Cling": Indian Schools in Robeson County, North Carolina, 1900–1920 <i>Anna Bailey</i>	67
4 Searching for America: A Japanese American's Quest, 1900–1930 <i>Eileen H. Tamura</i>	91
5 The Romance and Reality of Hispano Identity in New Mexico's Schools, 1910–1940 <i>Lynne Marie Getz</i>	117
6 Using the Press to Fight Jim Crow at Two White Midwestern Universities, 1900–1940 <i>Richard M. Breaux</i>	141
7 Breaking Barriers: The Pioneering Disability Students Services Program at the University of Illinois, 1948–1960 <i>Steven E. Brown</i>	165
8 Mothers Battle Busing and Nontraditional Education in 1970s Detroit <i>Heidi L. Matiyow</i>	193
Index	221

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# INTRODUCTION

EILEEN H. TAMURA

The soul is actively produced  
and positively shaped and consummated  
only in the category of the *other*.

—Mikhail M. Bakhtin<sup>1</sup>

Power—no matter how great—  
was never absolute, but always contingent.

—Ira Berlin<sup>2</sup>

IN THE 1920S AND '30S, THE SOCIOLOGIST ROBERT PARK CONCEPTUALIZED the notion of marginality as a core experience of ethnic and racial minorities.<sup>3</sup> According to Park, the “marginal man” is caught between two societies that are “antagonistic.”<sup>4</sup> As he navigates his way between these two societies, he experiences a “conflict of cultures,” and with it, “inner turmoil and intense self-consciousness.”<sup>5</sup> Park’s notion of the “marginal man” had a strong influence on American social thought.

While Park focused on the inner conflicts of marginal people as they lived between two worlds, more recent scholars have tended to shift the emphasis away from the inner self and notions of individual ambivalence and uncertainty to the inequities and conflicts between those at the center and those on society’s perimeter—dissidents, women, ethnic groups, radicals, and other minorities.<sup>6</sup> The essays in this volume on American education during the past century examine the disparities and conflicts between center and periphery and at the same time attend to individual self-consciousness.

Unlike many works on education, which are concerned solely with schools, this volume uses a broader definition of education—“the deliberate, systematic, and sustained effort to transmit, evoke, or acquire knowledge, attitudes, values, skills, or sensibilities, as well as any outcomes of that effort.”<sup>7</sup> This definition includes schooling but also goes

beyond it. Conversely, it is more limited than the larger processes of socialization and acculturation. The broader definition of education used here is important for those concerned with formal policies and actual practices as they affect minorities, because so much of education occurs outside the schools.<sup>8</sup>

As they delve into their historical subjects, the authors provide different “angles of vision”<sup>9</sup> on two major themes that form the conceptual core of this book. The themes are captured in the passages that lead off this introduction: the self-other relationship and the fluidity of power.

### **BAKHTIN: THE SELF-OTHER RELATIONSHIP**

The passage from Bakhtin underscores the dialogic nature of the relationship between those at the margins and those in the mainstream. According to Bakhtin, the self can only exist and have meaning in relationship to the other.<sup>10</sup> In this light, those on the periphery develop their sense of themselves and their aspirations in terms of those at the center.

Eileen H. Tamura’s “Searching for America” examines the efforts of a Japanese American in the first three decades of the twentieth century as he sought to identify himself in terms of his notions of what “true” Americans were like. He was an American citizen by virtue of his birth; nevertheless, most European Americans refused to accept him and other Asian Americans as true Americans. He responded to this mind-set by enrolling in schools that he believed would model American values and behaviors and by embracing European American ideas of true Americanism. Lynn Getz’s “Romance and Reality of Hispano Identity” shows that leading educators defined the Hispano community in terms of the Anglo majority.<sup>11</sup> They portrayed Hispanos as a nonthreatening people who sought to keep their cultural traditions while accommodating themselves to Anglo domination. This benign portrait, while mitigating antagonism between two groups, failed to challenge the status quo. Richard Breaux’s “Using the Press to Fight Jim Crow” reveals the disparities black university students witnessed as they compared their position on the fringes of campus life and in the larger society with whites who had greater access to resources and privileges. They were like the aspiring students with physical disabilities in Steven Brown’s “Breaking Barriers,” who sought to reshape the mental and physical terrain at their university so that they could have the opportunity to participate fully in campus life.

While those on the periphery of society develop their selfhood and their aspirations in terms of those at the center, they also develop their identity in terms of others also on the margins. Anna Bailey's "It Is the Center to Which We Should Cling" illuminates the ways in which the Croatan Indians, in their push to gain acceptance and greater access to quality schooling, defined themselves as different from and superior to African Americans in the North Carolina community of Robeson County. Bailey examines the Indians' effort to define themselves in terms of both whites and blacks—positioning themselves midway between those most privileged and those least so.

But even those at the center, who have greater access to resources, define themselves in terms of those on the fringes of society. Hannah Tavares's "The Racial Subjection of Filipinos" discusses early twentieth-century texts, in which European Americans objectified Filipinos as primitive. This characterization provided an important image with which those in power used to contrast themselves. Karen Graves's "Containing the Perimeter" analyzes the efforts of the Florida Legislative Investigation Committee to vilify members of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and gay and lesbian schoolteachers. Politicians used racism and homophobia to target two outlier groups and, by doing so, distinguished themselves from the two groups.

When two groups embrace differing worldviews, each is able to define itself more clearly in opposition to what it sees before it. In Heidi Matiyow's "Mothers Battle Busing and Nontraditional Education," the mothers who took to the streets defined their perspective in relation to the ideas of those in positions of power. In this case the mothers rejected what they believed were unacceptable notions pressed onto their children by educational leaders. Taking matters into their own hands, they protested vigorously against both busing and the curriculum in their children's schools.

### BERLIN: THE FLUIDITY OF POWER

The second passage that leads this introduction comes from Ira Berlin's book on slavery, *Many Thousands Gone*. Berlin notes that even in the "most extreme form of domination," the relationship between master and slave was constantly negotiated and renegotiated, because power was "never absolute, but always contingent."<sup>12</sup>

Tamura's "Searching for America" sets forth the actions of a young man, stigmatized because of his ancestry, who did not hesitate to assert himself and even engage in fistfights when assaulted. His actions and reactions enabled him to navigate his way through the power shifts that occurred between him and those around him. Bailey's "It Is the Center to Which We Should Cling" shows how the Croatian Indians negotiated with state and local leaders to improve the educational opportunities and academic achievements of their children. Bailey further shows how the Croatians took advantage of national policy loopholes that allowed them to send their children to public schools in the state rather than to Indian boarding schools.

Like the Croatians, who acted to control the schooling of their youths, New Mexican educators found ways to support the learning needs of Hispano students. Getz's "Romance and Reality of Hispano Identity" shows how directives from above could be deflected by educators in the field. For example, New Mexico Department of Public Instruction officials attempted to enforce an English-only policy and to segregate Hispano students in order to teach them English, but teachers in rural schools far away from the reach of government officials continued to use Spanish as the language of instruction. In addition, educators who were sympathetic to Hispano interests implemented programs that countered the English-only policy and promoted cultural preservation.

Another illustration of the relativity of power can be seen in Brown's "Breaking Barriers." In the 1950s, when people with disabilities were largely invisible to the larger population, there were those who refused to accept this status and who understood the value of constant renegotiation as they took action to convince university officials to accommodate their educational aspirations and thus their subsequent desired entry into mainstream postuniversity life. Likewise, Breaux's "Using the Press to Fight Jim Crow" shows the ways in which a minority of black college students and their supporters used the press to help them push through the barriers of university policies that separated them from full participation in campus life.

Even when those directing the flow of events have the authority of government on their side, their power was contingent on the actions and reactions of those defamed. In "The Racial Subjection of Filipinos," Tavares shows that Filipino opposition to the U.S. takeover of the Philippines forced imperialists to expend extraordinary efforts to convince the public that their actions were justified. In "Containing the

Perimeter,” Graves demonstrates how members of the NAACP were able to resist state power and compel legislators to end hearings aimed at discrediting black civil rights activists.

Finally, as Matiyow’s “Mothers Battle Busing and Nontraditional Education” shows, the fluidity of power can mean that people once considered marginal may well, over time, become a dominant force in society.

### MARGINALITY, AGENCY, AND POWER

To further illuminate the two themes of this book—Bakhtin’s notion of the self-other relationship and Berlin’s idea of the contingency of power—the authors respond to a central question: How have power and agency been revealed in educational issues involving minorities? More specifically, how have politicians, policymakers, practitioners, and others in the mainstream used and misused their power in relation to those in the margins? How have those in the margins asserted their agency and negotiated their way within the larger society? What have been the relationships, not only between those more powerful and those less powerful, but also among those on the fringes of society? How have people sought to bridge the gap separating those in the margins and those in the mainstream?

Tavares’s essay examines an instance of the abuse of power in the early twentieth century, when the U.S. government moved to conquer the Philippines in the aftermath of the Spanish-American war. In fierce opposition to this colonial agenda, Filipino resistance fighters battled U.S. troops in a three-year war. In the United States, anti-imperialists protested loudly. Given such strong opposition on two fronts, U.S. government officials and their supporters felt compelled to respond systematically to the challenge. They justified U.S. military aggression in the Philippines by issuing reports and studies and by creating elaborate Filipino exhibitions at world’s fairs, all aimed at producing a racist stereotype of Filipinos as subaltern and lacking the ability to govern themselves. Tavares demonstrates the ways in which hegemonic discourse and representation can dominate what she refers to as an “image-repertoire” of a subordinated group. While the events she examines in her essay took place over a century ago, her analysis offers a rich source for present-day critical understanding of the power of dominant discourses and the need to listen to and heed “other circuits of thought” that widen perspectives and challenge assumptions.

Fast-forward sixty years later to Florida and its state legislators. Graves's essay analyzes another concerted effort to denigrate less-powerful groups. Politicians had first attempted to link the NAACP with Communism. The idea was to use people's fears in the 1950s to halt efforts at desegregation. "Containing the Perimeter" illustrates the sophistication and deft responses of NAACP activists to questions posed to them at the Florida legislative hearings. Despite their precarious position, black civil rights activists who were called to testify kept their composure while evading questions politely, stalling the process, and otherwise frustrating committee interrogators. When the NAACP demonstrated that they had the ability to resist state action against them, legislators targeted a more vulnerable group, gay and lesbian schoolteachers, who lacked legal protection and the organizational strength to push back and resist the assault. The invisibility of gays and lesbians during the mid-twentieth century made them easy targets for legislators in the smear campaign that would sustain a level of support for the investigation committee, floundering in its anti-civil rights agenda. As it was then, there are instances today in which those in positions of power use tactics of distraction and fear mongering to play on sentiments of unease in the country. As Graves so aptly states, "Holding this shell-game strategy up for examination is one way to disrupt" efforts to manipulate public thinking.

Bailey's essay provides yet another instance of the abuse of power. To further their political objectives, leaders of the Democratic Party in North Carolina tapped into the Croatan Indians' desire for better educational opportunities. They made a political bargain with the Indians: they agreed to support the Indians' efforts to gain increased funding for their public schools if the Indians agreed to support Democratic Party leaders' efforts to disenfranchise blacks. The Croatans agreed with this pact. For them, the school represented their ticket to the mainstream. Thus—at the expense of North Carolina's blacks—the Indians were able to gain much-needed funding to shore up their schools. Bailey's essay shows how a dominant group can misuse its power by exercising a strategy of divide and conquer.

Tamura's essay moves the reader's attention away from those at the center of power. It highlights the struggles of a Japanese American man who was marginalized by racial stereotypes. Japanese immigrants to the U.S. West Coast, like the Chinese before them, constituted a relatively small proportion of the population, and, like the Chinese, they encountered rabid



hostility.<sup>13</sup> State and federal laws sought to cripple the economic gains made by Japanese immigrant farmers and denied them naturalization rights. Locally, the San Francisco school board attempted to force Japanese American children to attend a segregated public school for Chinese. To be sure, Joseph Kurihara, the young man in Tamura's essay, attended educational institutions—in this case private schools—that opened their doors to Japanese Americans and other minorities, despite intense racial animosity. Nonetheless, anti-Asian and antiminority sentiment prevailed during this period, and it was in this atmosphere that Kurihara was assaulted, spat at, and stoned in the streets. His story illustrates the tremendous energy that marginalized people often expend in their effort to gain acceptance. Just as he did, many on the margins tolerate an incredible amount of ill-treatment meted out to them. As Tamura states, the young man's story provides an account of "the often invisible emotional scars" that immigrant children "can carry as they struggle to adjust and gain full acceptance from the larger society."

Another group seeking acceptance in the decades before World War II were black college students attending predominantly white colleges and universities. Breaux's essay examines instances of campus racism at the University of Minnesota and the University of Kansas, where black students asserted their rights to equal opportunity. Using campus, local, and regional black newspapers, they publicized discriminatory actions by white students, professors, and university officials. Black students and their supporters further challenged the status quo by taking legal action and otherwise bringing discriminatory policies and practices to public view. Breaux's essay shows that decades before civil rights activists began prying open segregated public universities in the Deep South, black students had been studying at Midwestern public universities. As he demonstrates, however, matriculation at these institutions of higher learning was only the first step in the long road to full access and equal opportunity. Relegated to the fringes of campus life, black students undertook the slow and incremental process of transforming the status quo. They were successful in making inroads only after persistent struggle, use of the media and the courts, and intervention from supporters.

Also struggling to change the status quo in the decades before World War II were Hispano and Anglo educators who worked to advance Hispano students' self-esteem and promote their interest in school by implementing programs such as preschool classes and bilingual instruction. At the same time, while emphasizing folklore and crafts in the

curriculum and romanticizing New Mexico's past, these well-meaning educators ignored the discrimination that contributed to the economic subordination of the Hispano community. An exception was the Nuevomexicano George I. Sánchez, who challenged discriminatory policies and the second-class citizenship status of Hispanos. Although his threat to the status quo cost him his job as division director in the New Mexico Department of Public Instruction, his efforts were not entirely in vain, for he has become a model for Hispanic advocates of equal opportunity.

Other instances of activism are revealed in the next two essays. Brown's "Breaking Barriers" recounts the efforts that those with physical disabilities undertook in the 1950s, staging protests and otherwise calling attention to their appeal to be engaged fully as matriculating university students.

In the previous century, policymakers had ignored people with disabilities or placed them in asylums. It was not until disabled veterans of World War I returned home that federal and state officials—understanding the political power of veterans who had risked their lives for their country—initiated programs for individuals with disabilities. Federal assistance to disabled veterans increased even more dramatically after World War II. It was in this context that the University of Illinois began a program in 1948 for students with disabilities. Led by director Timothy Nugent, the program had a rocky start. Early on, when it was threatened with closure, Nugent and the program's students fought back. As Brown notes, this response "typified the attitude that Nugent inculcated in both his program and in his students." Throughout the 1950s, as the program slowly developed, students met with numerous hurdles—personal as well as institutional. The fighting spirit that Nugent promoted enabled students to face their challenges, gain greater confidence in themselves, and persist to ensure the program's survival. Nugent's desire for students to achieve "complete social integration" might be criticized today by advocates of minority rights. And it brings up the question that continues to confront minority groups: to what extent should a group strive for integration into mainstream society and to what extent should it attempt to maintain a distinctive ethnic/cultural identity?

The final essay in this book features a group of white working- and lower-middle-class housewives who galvanized themselves out of the home and into the political arena in the 1970s to protest busing and school-initiated threats to their ideas of family values. This was in response to actions taken by policymakers and practitioners who

imposed busing and educational reforms on unwilling parents. While the school board members and judges who decided in favor of desegregation and the educators who offered new curricula for the schools hoped to promote greater equity and social justice, in the eyes of the mothers who protested, these decisions were inflicted on their children without parental approval. Matiyow shows us that what may seem like a clear-cut reason for resistance—in this case, racism—may actually have a complex set of motivations. In the case of the Mothers' Alert Detroit (MAD) members in Detroit, several top-down initiatives—forced busing, sex education, a curriculum that seemed to encourage moral relativism, and the effort to remove sexism in textbooks—dovetailed to ignite the protests of angry white lower-class parents, who saw federal and state authorities as “intruder and oppressor.” Political leaders ignored and discounted these protestors at their own peril. As Matiyow demonstrates, the efforts of activists like MAD served as an early indication of things to come—the growth and activism of neoconservative forces that would take many by surprise. The failure of liberals to understand the concerns of working- and lower-middle-class Americans—and the power of words like morality and family values—would later haunt them, as a once-peripheral segment of society would later broaden its reach to become a dominant force in American society.

While all of the essays in this book discuss the relationship between those more powerful and those less so, three essays also illuminate the relationship between groups on the margins of society. One is the case of the Croatans in North Carolina. To gain increased funding for their public schools in the early 1900s, their leaders sought to differentiate and disassociate themselves from blacks in their community. And the Croatans went further: they prohibited students from enrolling in their schools if they suspected that the students had mixed black-Indian ancestry. Similarly, the Hispanos of New Mexico sought to avoid identification as “mixed-blood” people. In their case, leaders in their community denied any Native American ancestry, promoting instead the notion that Hispanos were whites—descendants solely of Spanish *conquistadores*. One can appreciate the irony of this position when it is placed in juxtaposition to the stance taken by the Croatans of North Carolina, who—in a similar effort to raise their status—denied any mixed black-Indian ancestry.

In the Detroit busing case, black residents were impatient with what they believed were protracted efforts to improve the school climate for

the increasing number of black students in the city's schools. They called for the hiring of more black teachers and administrators, the offering of multicultural curricula, and the desegregation of the schools' student bodies. At the same time, white working- and lower-middle-class Detroiters were becoming increasingly concerned with the changes that were being made to satisfy blacks. When the NAACP filed a lawsuit that protested segregation, conflict surfaced between these two marginal groups, and race trumped class as a defining element in grassroots activism, despite the fact that both black and white parents, although in different degrees, opposed forced busing.

In these three instances, outlier groups refused to recognize common ground with each other. Civil rights advocates such as Lani Guinier and Gerald Torres have pointed to the need to avoid antagonistic, or at best, nonsupportive, relationships. Their analysis offers alternatives that seek interracial coalition building and power sharing. While difficult to achieve, such efforts can provide constructive outcomes that benefit minority groups, as long as they do not harm other marginal groups.<sup>14</sup>

The final question posed in this section of the introduction asks how people have sought to bridge the gap separating the worlds of those in the margins and those in the mainstream. Two concepts embody this effort. One is the bridge concept, which Tamura discusses in her essay. The idea was that immigrants' American-born children, having dual identities, would serve as intermediaries between two sociocultural worlds.<sup>15</sup> As Tamura notes, this idea became a central theme among Japanese immigrants during a time of intense anti-Japanese antagonism in the first three decades of the twentieth century. A similar concept, encapsulated in the phrase "cultural broker," can be seen in the literature on American Indians.<sup>16</sup> During the more than five-hundred-year relationship between native Americans and European Americans, thousands of natives and whites served as cultural brokers—"people between the borders," who were able to "juggle the ways of different societies."<sup>17</sup>

The young man portrayed in Tamura's essay was conversant in the world of Japanese America as well as the dominant European American society. He was able to do this by "keeping one foot inside and the other outside the Japanese community." He adopted what he believed to be European American behaviors and also integrated Japanese cultural ideas into the American context. As an accountant and small business manager, he served as an intermediary between Japanese America and