PART III

Discrimination in Everyday Life

Part III, composed as it is of recent articles taken directly out of newspapers, magazines, and web sources, attempts to address students' desire to dismiss issues of race, class, gender, and sexuality as problems of the past. After grappling with complex terms and coming to some understanding of how ideology operates in American society, many students feel overwhelmed. The essays in Part III ground the previous explorations of oppression, prejudice, discrimination, and so on, in real-life terms. When students read about a group of women workers being discriminated against in their jobs at Wal-Mart or a gay football player who is unable to come out about his sexuality for fear he will be kicked off his team, issues of sexism, homophobia, and the like, are made concrete. Students are then able to go on and discover for themselves how such inequalities are a day-to-day reality for many people in this society. Part III also provides a fine introduction to the personal narratives of Part V. For courses that have a research component, this section gives students a great deal of material that they can use as examples in their own work. Part III also provides a wide range of sources that students can use to support their arguments in their writing projects.

ISSUES AND QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

• Before discussing individual essays, spend some time with your class answering Rothenberg's question in her introduction: "Why . . . do so many people, in particular, so many young people, seem to believe that racism and sexism are largely things of the past?" Do or did your students feel this way? Why? Why is it easier to think this way than to see discrimination as an ongoing problem facing Americans? Have their feelings changed since doing the reading in this part? How?
• "The Problem: Discrimination," a 1981 report, usefully outlines three levels of discrimination in the United States. Spend time with students
discussing the definitions of these levels. Does this piece help students map out the ways discrimination functions structurally and systemically in American society? How?

- Devote some time to talking about the differences between intentional and unintentional racism, sexism, homophobia, and so on. What constitutes intentional? What constitutes unintentional? Are people who commit unintentional acts off the hook? Why or why not? How do people become aware of their own biases and try to address them in order to avoid committing hurtful acts of prejudice?

- Is striving for a “color-blind” or “gender-neutral” society the solution for the problems outlined in Part III? Why or why not? What do both of those terms imply? Do they eliminate racism and sexism? Or do they sidestep racism and sexism? What other solutions might there be for dealing with institutional and individual discriminatory practices and attitudes?

- Have students read the newspaper or watch or listen to the news every day to monitor acts of discrimination. What do they see or hear when they do this? Ask them not only to read about and watch for incidents but also to pay attention to how the stories are written or reported on. Remind them that the media is another institution that has potential for discrimination built into it. What are journalists’ assumptions and biases when they report a story? What is their worldview, their own ideological perspective? Whose side do they seem to be on?

ASSIGNMENTS

Generating Ideas/Small-Group Discussions

ASSIGNMENT 1. “The Problem: Discrimination,” a 1981 report by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, outlines three systemic levels of discriminatory practices, individual, organizational, and structural (III, 22). By breaking discrimination into three levels, the report’s authors are trying to make distinctions between various practices and also complicate events to avoid any sort of easy answers. Your instructor will split the class into several small groups; with your group members, discuss one of the examples in the article all the way through its three levels. After you have done this, choose an article from Part III that lends itself to this sort of systemic analysis. Reconvene with the rest of the class and discuss your examples.

ASSIGNMENT 2. For homework, write one to two pages in which you discuss how one of the pieces in Part III either did or did not help you visualize one of the concepts explored in Parts I and II. How do real-life exam-
Discrimination in Everyday Life

Ples aid people in understanding the ways various forms of oppressions manifest themselves? How does the event or situation in your article illustrate the ways socially constructed identities can be harmful?

**ASSIGNMENT 3.** Your instructor will break the class into small groups. Each group will choose a reading from Part III and, using a concept or term from Part II, discuss what form or forms of discrimination the incident in the reading manifests. Group members should also talk about what interested them particularly about the reading—why did they choose it? Each group should present its discussion to the rest of the class.

**ASSIGNMENT 4.** As a class, using “The Problem: Discrimination” (III, 22), categorize the readings in Part III to understand how patterns of discrimination operate in this society. Why, for example, do you think there are several articles about hate crimes and stereotyping? Or about discriminatory hiring practices? Or about financial inequalities? How does power operate in and through institutions?

**Writing Assignments**

**ASSIGNMENT 5.** Read “Asian American Journalists Association Objects to Syndicated Cartoonist’s Use of Racist Stereotypes of Asians” (III, 30) and “Asian American” by Sonia Shah (V, 62). In an essay, analyze some of the stereotypes surrounding Asian Americans. On the one hand, following the article about racist cartoons in Part III, what are some traditional stereotypes associated with Asian people? Where did they come from, do you think? On the other hand, why are Asian Americans also termed the “model minority”? What does Shah mean when she states that: “While an education can be had and a living made based on model minority myths (at least for some), it is at the cost of indulging the racist delusion that there can be some ‘good minorities’ in implicit contrast to those other ‘bad minorities,’ who have only themselves to blame”? You might also look at Janice Mirikitani’s poem, “Suicide Note” (V, 63), which is written from the perspective of a young woman who kills herself because she doesn’t achieve a perfect academic record. Mirikitani outlines the brutality inherent in the “model minority” stereotype when someone internalizes its oppressive implications. What consequences do all of these depictions have for Asian Americans and for their relationships with other ethnic groups?

**ASSIGNMENT 6.** After reading “Study Finds the Nation’s Public School Districts Are Resegregating by Race” by Jay Lindsay (III, 40) and “Are America’s Schools Leaving Latinas Behind?”, a report by the American Association of University Women (III, 42), write about the implications of
a built-in disparity among children in American schools. Analyze the article and perhaps draw on current discussions concerning school reform, such as vouchers, charter schools, and the like. Do you think such programs will work? Why or why not?

ASSIGNMENT 7. Several of the articles in Part III reveal rampant sexism, sexual harassment, and racial discrimination at some of the United States’ most revered businesses, such as Wal-Mart and Denny’s. These businesses often rely on low-wage workers to run their operations. What do you make of such hostile work environments? Write a paper in which you first outline the causes of such discriminatory practices, the practices themselves, and some possible solutions. Could the nature of the work foster such behavior? Why or why not, do you think?

ASSIGNMENT 8. The articles in Part III all deal with discrimination that affects the most central aspects of people’s lives: mobility, work, sexuality, education, finances, home, safety, and the like. If you are going into a helping profession such as social work, counseling, nursing, or teaching, how does being aware of the pervasive aspects of discrimination help you think about the people you will be dealing with? What insights can you glean from the readings in this part of the text? Make sure to cite some specific examples from the articles to support your exploration.

Research/Analysis Projects

ASSIGNMENT 9. Research the history of the term “civil rights” and analyze it. What does the term mean? What does it have to do with a democratic society? Make sure to cite specific examples to illustrate your points.

ASSIGNMENT 10. After reading the articles in Part III, you are probably becoming more aware of how pervasive discrimination of all kinds is in our society today. Taking Part III as a jumping-off point, research and analyze a story about discrimination that has happened recently. You may choose to focus on a local event or on one that was reported nationally (like hate crimes against Muslims in the wake of 9/11, which you can also refer to in the article “Anti-Muslim Crimes Jump After Sept. 11 in Jersey and U.S.” [II, 29] in this part). In your paper, make sure to note not just what happened and what you think it means but also how the story was reported.

ASSIGNMENT 11. The two articles “EEOC Sues Arizona Diner for National Origin Bias Against Navajos and Other Native Americans” (III, 31) and “Students Defend Icon That Offends” by Sam McManis (III, 45)
detail some of the entrenched inequities Native American still confront in contemporary U.S. society. While many will view the incidents in the first article with some outrage, they will often dismiss the concerns detailed in the second. In a paper, research the controversy surrounding the use of Native American images as team mascots. What are your attitudes towards this practice? Why do you think the way you do? How are the incidents outlined in these two articles linked, do you think?

ASSIGNMENT 12. Research an issue surrounding affirmative action. In the last few years, citizens in some states, such as California, have voted in mandates to end affirmative action on the state and local levels. Schools such as the University of Texas have eliminated affirmative action admissions policies. In these cases, the justification for the actions was that affirmative action no longer worked. At the same time, the University of Michigan’s law school is under attack, by President George W. Bush no less, for holding on to its admissions policies that utilize race and ethnicity as an enhancement for admittance to its school. Is affirmative action still necessary? Why or why not, in your view? What does your research show? What do the articles in Part III demonstrate? Is the “playing field” now “leveled” enough to give equal access to well-paying jobs and educational opportunities to women and minorities? Why or why not? Be sure to carefully document your sources and to draw from a variety of well-researched perspectives.

ASSIGNMENT 13. While several of the articles in Part III focus on class inequities, especially as they intersect with race and gender, a few show that even in the middle and upper classes, inequities with regard to gender still exist. After reading the articles “Equality at Work Remains Elusive” by Rachel Smolkin (III, 25), “Tee Time for Equality” by Deborah Rhode (III, 37), and “The All-Boy Network: Public Affairs Shows Reflect Shortage of Women in Power” by Howard Kurtz (III, 43), analyze the pervasive aspects of gender discrimination. Do some research on recent statistics to support your discussion. How far have women come? Has there been retrenchment with regard to equality of late? Why?

ASSIGNMENT 14. How does the media contribute to the maintenance of inequalities? Pick a category such as race, class, gender, sexuality, etc., and analyze how television deals with it. Survey recent TV shows—sitcoms, dramas, news shows—and collect data on the ways the media represents these categories. You might look at Howard Kurtz’s article on women in public affairs shows (III, 43) or Matt Zoller’s piece on minorities in television (III, 44) for guidance on this project.
RECOMMENDED MEDIA

- CBS, ABC, and NBC news shows have all done various stories documenting day-to-day racial discrimination. You might consult the networks’ websites to find videotapes of those shows.

- Most of the stories in Part III are from newspaper and magazine articles. Survey a couple of newspapers and magazines, or have your students pay attention to media sources, to bring in more stories to class. This will keep the material constantly up to date; at the same time, it will show that the stories in this part do not represent isolated incidents but, rather, ongoing problems.

- You might go over your school’s code of conduct and sexual harassment policies in class. Why are these regulations in place? What do they demonstrate to students about what the climate was for non-privileged people in the past?

- Compare and contrast the ways race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, bias, discrimination, etc. are reported on Fox News or MSNBC versus the pieces in Part III. Videotape segments from these channels and bring them in for your class to analyze. How do the frameworks of these networks impact the way they deliver information?

- Have your students check out an alternative news website such as www.cursor.org. You might also have them look at Fairness and Accuracy In Reporting’s website (www.fair.org) and newsletter. These sources generally have a vastly different take on important news items than the major news media. Have students compare and contrast these sources.