Also by Beverly Daniel Tatum, Ph.D.

**Assimilation Blues: Black Families in
a White Community**

"Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?"

**And Other Conversations
About Race**

Beverly Daniel Tatum, Ph.D.

Continuing the Conversation

In the years since the publication of this book, I have received many e-mail messages from readers interested in having a conversation with me. Some found it hard to believe that being White was still an advantage in the United States and asked me to offer more statistical evidence than they found in the book to support this assertion. Fortunately, the National Research Council, an institution chartered by Congress for the sole purpose of providing research to inform public policy, has made that task easy. The council recently issued a two-volume compendium of up-to-date data and authoritative analysis on the state of race relations in America today.[1] Among the statistical conclusions reported in *America Becoming: Racial Trends and Their Consequences* are these:

> First, race and Hispanic origin continue to be defining characteristics for many Americans. They are correlated with educational and economic opportunities, with health status, and with where people live and who they live next to. The magnitude of these differences, especially for Blacks and Hispanics, is extremely significant on average, suggesting that these disparities are widely experienced. Relative to the White and Asian population, the Black population on average has only two-fifths as many college graduates, three-fourths as much earnings, and only slightly more than one-half as much income. The Hispanic population fares even worse. Although we do not have as much comparable information for American Indians and Alaska Natives, their data tends to be closer to those of Blacks and Hispanics than to those of Whites. Whatever their causes, these are substantial differentials; they shape our life opportunities

and they shape our opinions about and behaviors toward each other . . . race continues to be a salient predictor of well-being in American society.[2]

As the quote suggests, these data do not tell us why disparities exist, only that they do. So, some might ask, how do we know it is racism that is fueling these differences in life opportunities, and not simply the result of lifestyle choices made by individuals within these groups?

Not surprisingly, there are racial differences in perceptions of discrimination and its causes. In a review of national survey data about racial attitudes, Lawrence D. Bobo reported that Whites tend to minimize the contemporary persistence of patterns of discrimination, whereas Blacks, Latinos, and, to a lesser extent, Asians perceive these patterns in most areas of their lives. Further, people of color are much more likely to attribute these problems to racial bias; Whites are more likely to attribute them, to the extent they acknowledge them, to the level of individual effort or cultural values within the disadvantaged groups.[3]

Sorting out the role racism plays in complex social problems is not easy. An example of this complexity is the discussion of racial disparities in the criminal justice system. A statistic frequently cited is that approximately one-third of Black males in their twenties are under the control of the criminal justice system, either in jail, on parole, or on probation. A particularly sharp increase in the rates of Black male incarceration began in the mid-1980s, coinciding with the implementation of stiff federal and state laws aimed at the control of crack cocaine (the less expensive and powerfully addictive form of cocaine commonly available in inner-city communities). As Harvard Law professor Randall Kennedy has explained:

A federal statute enacted in 1986 criminalizes the distribution of crack cocaine with unusual severity. Under that law, a person convicted of possession with intent to distribute 50 grams or more of crack must be sentenced to no fewer than 10 years in prison; by striking contrast, a person has to be convicted of possession with intent to distribute at least 5,000 grams of powder cocaine before being subject to a mandatory minimum of 10 years—a 100:1 ratio in terms of intensity of punishment. Moreover, under a federal statute enacted in 1988, a person merely possessing 1 to 5 grams of crack cocaine is subject to a mandatory minimum sentence of 5 years in prison, which makes crack the only drug for which there exists a mandatory minimum penalty for a first offense of simple possession.[4]

The racial disparity embedded in this particular law becomes apparent when we also note that in 1992, more than 90 percent of the defendants convicted for crack cocaine offenses nationwide were Black, while approximately 5 percent were White. Conversely, 45 percent of those convicted for powder cocaine offenses were White, and only 21 percent were Black.[5] Did racial bias play a role in the enactment of these laws? Attempts to eliminate this sentencing disparity through legislative changes have failed. Would the response of our predominantly White body of lawmakers be different if 90 percent of crack users were White? Or is there something about the destructiveness of crack cocaine in urban communities that justifies the stiffness of these penalties? If cocaine (in either powder or crack form) is harmful, why should there be such a discrepancy in severity of punishment? Regardless of how one explains this and other racial disparities, the conclusion of the National Research Council analysts that "race continues to be a salient predictor of well-being in American society" seems well founded.

Some readers thanked me for taking the discussion of race beyond simply a Black–White framework. We can see from the preceding data about incarceration rates that dichotomizing the analysis of racial problems in our society in Black–White terms is a persistent trend in social science. However, researchers increasingly are recognizing the

need to collect data on other groups of color, thereby broadening our understanding of racial dynamics in the United States. This more inclusive trend is important because by 2050 a dramatic shift in the racial distribution of our population will have occurred. Michael Omi noted this in his essay "The Changing Meaning of Race": "Demographically the nation is becoming less White and the dominant Black–White paradigm of race relations is challenged by the dramatic growth and increasing visibility of Hispanics and Asians."[6]

There are approximately 265 million people in the United States—1 percent American Indians, 3 percent Asians, 11 percent Latinos (Hispanics), 12 percent Black, and 73 percent White. By 2050, Whites are projected to make up only 53 percent of the population. As a consequence of both immigration and birthrate patterns, the size of the Latino and Asian population will increase significantly, and by 2010, Latinos are expected to surpass African Americans as the largest racial/ethnic group of color. Although the Asian population is smaller than either of these groups, it is expected to increase in number more rapidly than any other group.[7]

The dynamics of racism in the United States have always extended beyond Black–White relations, but that reality has not been acknowledged. The growing presence of Latinos and Asian and Pacific Islanders underscores the need for a broadening of conversations about race in our society. Frank Wu's book *Yellow: Race in America Beyond Black and White*[8] is one important contribution to that conversation, and the collaborative effort of Lani Guinier and Gerald Torres in *The Miner's Canary: Enlisting Race, Resisting Power, Transforming Democracy*[9] is another.

One college student wrote to me to ask why I had said in Chapter 5 that although I maintain many of the friendships I made with students of color in college, I didn't remember the names of my White classmates. "Why would you say something of that nature? Are you proud of the fact that you can't remember their names?" the student asked me. I appreciated the question, and was sorry my statement could be misinterpreted as a declaration of pride. It was really just a statement of fact, reflecting how immersed I was in a network of

Black and Latino friends and simultaneously uninterested in White social networks. In 2000 I attended my twenty-fifth class reunion and had the opportunity to talk about this experience with one of my Black friends, June, and a White classmate, Cynthia, who reintroduced herself to me at the event. As Cynthia commented, "There were many of us whose paths did not cross much, and we each built our own networks." Although June, Cynthia, and I shared the same campus and were part of a diverse college community, our social groups were very often—intentionally or unintentionally—racially or ethnically defined. Indeed, my path and June's crossed frequently, outside of the classroom, but we rarely encountered White students. Twenty-five years later, has the situation on college campuses changed?

One thing is certainly different: Our college communities have become much more diverse. According to Deborah Wilds and Reginald Wilson of the American Council on Education, college enrollment among students of color has increased by 22.2 percent since 1991 and by 61.3 percent since 1986.[10] Today, students of color represent approximately one-fourth of those participating in higher education in the United States. Although geographically isolated campuses still struggle to increase the diversity of their student body, almost all colleges and universities have felt the impact of the changing demographics in the United States.

However, the schools and communities from which many of these students come remain socially segregated. More than forty-five years after the landmark U.S. Supreme Court *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, school segregation in the United States persists. In fact, it has been on the rise since the early 1990s. There is a strong relationship between racial segregation and concentrated poverty. National data show that most segregated African American and Latino schools are dominated by poor children, but that 96 percent of White schools have middle-class majorities.[11] Such segregation cuts children of color off from educational and employment networks of opportunity.

Segregation and inequality are strongly self-perpetuating, yet the ideal of democratic education is to create an environment in which

such patterns can be interrupted. The first step in interrupting this cycle of inequity is mutual engagement. We will not be able to effectively dismantle systems of oppression—systems of inequity—without working in coalition with one another across lines of difference. Yet because of persistent residential and school segregation, the opportunities young people in the United States have had to interact with those racially, ethnically, or religiously different from them have typically been quite limited. This lack of direct experience means that what one learns about the "other" is based on secondhand information, information too often conveyed in the form of media stereotypes or parental prejudices. Exactly who the "other" is varies, depending on where students have grown up and what their life experience has been. But we can be sure that all members of our campus populations have come to college with stereotypes and prejudices about other segments of the student body. Such preconception is unavoidable when there is so much misinformation circulating. And these biases are a barrier to meaningful engagement across lines of difference.

Why does engagement matter? It should be clear that diversity is not the end in itself. It is not *just* about being friends. It *is* about being allies and becoming effective agents of change. To work effectively as an agent of change in a pluralistic society, it is necessary to be able to connect with people different from oneself. Most students do not come with this capacity for connection already developed, yet it is a capacity that can be developed. In the context of the self-perpetuating nature of inequity, meaningful engagement is an important step, a prerequisite for the transformative education we need for a more just society.

Increasingly, faculty, students, and administrators alike are recognizing the importance of engagement across difference as an essential dimension of preparing the next generation for effective participation in a pluralistic world.[12] This focus on diversity is supported by a growing body of empirical research demonstrating the educational benefits of learning in a diverse community.[13] After analyzing national data drawn from nearly 200 colleges and universities as well as data specific

to the University of Michigan, social psychologist Patricia Gurin concluded that students who experienced the most racial and ethnic diversity in and out of their classrooms benefited most in terms of both "learning outcomes" and "democracy outcomes." In learning outcomes, these students showed the greatest engagement in active thinking processes, growth in intellectual engagement and motivation, and growth in intellectual and academic skills. In democracy outcomes, they showed the most engagement during college in various forms of citizenship and the most involvement with people from different races and cultures, and they were the most likely to acknowledge that group differences are compatible with the interests of the broader community. These results persisted beyond graduation. Students with the most diversity experiences during college had the most cross-racial friends, neighbors, and work associates nine years after they entered college.[14]

The benefits of engaging diversity are compelling, but are enough students taking advantage of these formal and informal learning opportunities? Are students learning to negotiate across lines of difference, lines defined not only by race but also by class, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or religion? Or are they still building their own homogeneous networks, operating in circles that rarely intersect, and failing to engage meaningfully with those whose backgrounds differ from their own?

The popular perception is that the latter situation is more common, particularly in reference to race. Newspapers and magazines regularly feature stories about the dilemma of so-called self-segregation on college campuses, a reality reflected in the title of this book. Despite this perception, there is some evidence that students desire more cross-group interaction than a quick glance at the cafeteria may indicate.

In a recent study of friendship groups within a diverse campus community, researcher Anthony Lising Antonio found that more than 90 percent of the 638 third-year students he surveyed reported that students predominantly cluster by race and ethnicity, but almost half (46 percent) described their own friendship groups as racially and ethnically mixed. Clearly, these students did not view their behavior

as the norm. They still perceived segregation as the rule, a perception reinforced by the fact that African American students were the most likely to report racially or ethnically homogeneous friendship groups, and one in three White students also reported having racially homogeneous friendship groups.[15] The pattern of social isolation of both Black and White students is a visible symbol of the continuing legacy of past and present systems of inequity.

This pattern is also an expression of different goals for interracial contact. In a study of Berkeley undergraduates, Troy Duster and his associates found that most students express interest in more interracial experiences, yet how that interest is engaged varies along racial lines. White students wanted to make friends with African Americans, but they wanted to do so in informal settings, and were less likely to want to participate in special programs, courses, or activities that structure interethnic contacts. In contrast, African Americans were far more likely to want special programs and activities and were less interested in developing cross-racial friendships and social activities. Both groups wanted interracial experiences but on different terms. Duster concluded, "The task is to provide all students with a range of safe environments and options where they can explore and develop terms that they find comfortable. In the absence of such opportunities, the tendencies remain for each group to see the others from a distance, in terms of images, stereotypes, stories, and myths that are not informed by direct contact and experience."[16]

We know, empirically and experientially, that the challenge of educating a diverse student body that will be ready to live and work together in an increasingly complex and pluralistic society requires us to interrupt patterns of social isolation. We must provide opportunities for students to practice, opportunities to understand multiple perspectives as well as individual ones during the college years. How, then, can we create campus environments in which engagement across lines of difference is perceived as the norm rather than the exception? How can we maximize the learning opportunities created by the diversity of our communities?

In the years since the first publication of this book, I have tried to answer these questions in very practical terms. In 1998 I became intrigued by an administrative opportunity to translate the theory about which I had written into practice. Could we create a model, a transformative environment in which young people could explore and expand their understanding of what justice means? Could we create an environment that truly prepared them to take their place as agents of change? With a vision like that in mind, I left full-time teaching to become dean of Mount Holyoke College.

My administrative role bridged the world of the classroom and the world beyond the classroom where students are engaged as part of a residential learning community. As dean, I had to assess how the cocurricular life on campus reinforced and supported our curricular goals as an educational institution. As a psychologist, I have spent most of my professional life studying identity and its role in student development, and it was exciting to be able to spend the better part of every day exploring these issues in a pragmatic way.

I called our task the ABCs—we sought to affirm identity, build community, and cultivate leadership in a way that would prepare our students for the twenty-first century. This simple mnemonic device provided the outline for three critical dimensions of effective learning environments, not only during the college years but also through all levels of education. "A," affirming identity, refers to the idea that students need to see themselves reflected in the environment around them—in the curriculum, in the faculty and staff, and in the faces of their classmates—to avoid feelings of invisibility or marginality that can undermine student success. "B," building community, highlights the importance of creating a sense of belonging to a larger, shared campus community. The goals of affirming identity and building community are often perceived as being contradictory, but they are in fact complementary. Students who feel that their needs for affirmation have been met are more willing and able to engage with others across lines of difference. Learning to build community is both a challenge and a benefit of being part of a diverse learning community.

"C," cultivating leadership, refers to the fact that leadership in the twenty-first century requires not only the ability to think critically and speak and write effectively but also the ability to interact effectively with others in a pluralistic context. The development of each of these abilities requires opportunities to practice. Intergroup interaction is an area that has too often been neglected in the lives of students, and they need structured opportunities to practice the requisite skills.

Translating the ABCs into action required my staff and me routinely to ask each other important questions: Who is reflected in each staff member's area and the relevant programs? Who is left out? What opportunities exist for building community, for encouraging dialogue across difference? How are students involved so that they are honing leadership skills in a diverse context?

There were many examples of the ABCs in action at Mount Holyoke; an especially clear one involved not racial diversity but religious diversity. My colleague and friend, Rev. Dr. Andrea Ayvazian, worked hard to put the ABCs into practice. To better understand and respond to the needs of her diverse constituents, she created an advisory board of thirty students, representing all the faith traditions on campus. Among them were Protestants, Catholics, Buddhists, Jews, Muslims, Baha'is, Unitarians, Hindus, and Native American and other Earth-based traditions, as well as a group of what she called "unaffiliated seekers."

As the students began to meet regularly with the dean of religious life, tensions rose around the issue of religious space on campus. Christians were privileged because there was a large Christian chapel in the center of campus, a symbol of the institution's religious roots. Attached to the large chapel was a smaller chapel, also clearly intended for Christian worship. The Christian students could easily see themselves reflected in the campus architecture, but the other faith traditions were missing from the picture.

It was clear that the institution did not have the resources to construct additional worship space. Instead the dean and the advisory board proposed converting the small chapel to an interfaith sanctuary. How could this nineteenth-century chapel with stained-glass windows and bolted-down wooden pews be transformed into space suitable for Muslims who need room to pray prostrate, for Hindus who need visible icons, or for Buddhists who want to sit in a circle on meditation cushions?

The answer was simple: Remove the pews. This "simple" solution was certainly controversial. Comments like "They're ruining the small chapel," "This diversity stuff has gone too far," and "What will the alumnae say?" could be heard around campus. The dialogue that ensued was not always smooth, but it built community among those engaged in it, and the multifaith advisory board learned a great deal about leadership. The students were out in front talking to their peers about why the change was necessary. It was an excellent opportunity for them to experience the kind of leadership needed in a pluralistic community with multiple needs and limited resources, where sharing is required. The e-mail exchanges in the campus chat room were exciting to read as students challenged each other to confront their biases and acknowledge their (in this case) Christian privilege.

Eventually the physical transformation was completed. The pews were replaced with a beautiful oriental rug in the open space, ready to accommodate the Muslim prayerful or the Buddhist chanters seated in a circle on their small round cushions. The Christians used attractive stackable chairs, arranged in pewlike rows during Sunday services but lined up against the walls when not in use. Hindu icons were enclosed in a movable cabinet, not visible to those who would find the images unacceptable in their worship space, but easily accessible when needed by the Hindu students. In addition, a Torah was housed in a lovely wooden ark available for Jewish student use, and a small collection of sacred texts from each of the faith traditions was assembled in a corner of the room. Every faith tradition is represented in some way in the space. The result is breathtaking—a beautiful space that is frequently in use, a tangible manifestation of the ABCs in action, and a powerful symbol of the social transformation we seek in a pluralistic society.

My transformation as a college administrator has continued. On August 1, 2002, I began my tenure as president of Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia. Founded in 1881, only sixteen years after the end of legalized slavery, by two White missionaries for the purpose of educating Black women, Spelman College is the oldest and most successful historically Black women's college in the United States.

I am now frequently asked why a "diversity expert" like me would choose to lead such a "homogeneous" institution. Of course, the question is based on a flawed assumption. Although 97 percent of our students are racially categorized as Black, the campus environment is not homogeneous. Spelman students come from all regions of the United States, and many foreign countries, from predominantly White suburban and rural communities as well as urban Black ones. All parts of the African diaspora are represented, and the diversity of experience and perspectives among these young women creates many opportunities for important dialogue. As I discussed in response to the question "Why are all the Black kids sitting together in the cafeteria?" within-group dialogue can often be as important, and sometimes more important, than between-group dialogue. And, even in the context of a historically Black college, it is possible to create opportunities for both. Meanwhile, the intellectual and social empowerment that comes to those who have been historically oppressed, when they are given the opportunity to stand in the center of campus life rather than on the margins, is evident in the accomplishments of graduates of historically Black colleges and universities. I am honored to participate in that process for young women at Spelman.

Although the context of my work has shifted from a traditionally White college to a historically Black one, the ABC questions remain relevant. At every institution, we must ask ourselves, "How do we create and sustain school environments that affirm identity, build community, and cultivate leadership in a way that supports the learning of all students?" The young people we are educating will graduate on the edge of a new frontier. We as educators are naturally inclined to teach the way we were taught, but relying on the lessons of the past will not necessarily take us where we want to go. How will we get there?

A few years ago, I had a dream that illuminated the difficulty of the task we are undertaking. In the dream I was driving a car along a road, when suddenly I found myself driving not on a road but on a pile of rocks. I exclaimed in surprise, "What happened to the road?" A voice answered, "There is no road." When I awakened, it occurred to me that my dream held the perfect metaphor for what we as multicultural educators are trying to do. We live in a time when there is no clear path to where we are trying to go. Yet many of us have a vision of where we would like to be, a vision of schools where all students have the opportunity and the encouragement to achieve at a high standard. It is a vision of multiethnic communities characterized by equitable and just group relations rather than the present deeply ingrained power hierarchies that systematically advantage some and systematically disadvantage others. It is a vision of education that not only should foster intellectual development by providing students the tools of critical thinking, speaking, writing, and quantitative reasoning, but also should provide all students the skills and experiences necessary for effective participation in a diverse society. An understanding of racial identity development, for both White students and students of color, is one important tool in building the road, because it gives us a better understanding of the complex dynamics operating in our daily interactions with one another. Enhanced understanding leads to enhanced cooperation, and this project must be a collaborative effort across racial lines if it is to be successful.

I write this epilogue humbly knowing that our "road" is still under construction. In 1903, W.E.B. DuBois wrote in the foreword to his classic text, *The Souls of Black Folk*, the oft-quoted line, "The problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color line."[17] One hundred years later, his statement regrettably still rings true. It is incumbent upon all of us to engage in the dialogue and take the collective action needed to create a more just and equitable world for all. That is the task of this century. I hope you will join me in that effort.