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INTRODUCTION¹

Black and Asian together, you know, it's like, united, like all mens [. . .], I mean like all ethnic mens, [. . .] we don't like Mexicans right now. You know, Mexican used to be in a lot of trouble with us.

—*Joey and Mickey, Cambodian American students at Roosevelt High School*
The image right here is, "If you're White, you're in the gifted program." [. . .] If you're in there, you can have a good education. If you are in regular, you're right where everybody's at. [. . .] I think they should have a good education for everybody. [. . .] I sort of got a second-rate education.

—*José, Mexican American student*
We all get along here. We don't have the racial problems that other schools have. [An hour earlier, a serious fight had broken out between Cambodians and African Americans against Latinos at the other end of the school yard.]

—*Melissa and Kathy, two White students*

Roosevelt High School (RHS) was located on a busy, four-lane street and surrounded by a bustling commercial neighborhood.² The school was flanked by a public housing complex on one side and a gas station on the other. Across the street from Roosevelt High was an elementary school surrounded by a tall fence and with an asphalt playground without trees or grassy areas. The neighborhood was dotted with small Cambodian, Vietnamese, and Mexican restaurants, auto repair shops, Filipino groceries, taco and burger stands, check-cashing places, and numerous churches. In contrast to this colorful but poor urban immigrant community, Roosevelt High, with its wrought-iron front gate, its art deco tiles, and its landscaped campus, had the air of a more affluent period.

Newtown—the city in which RHS was located—is one of the most ethnically and racially diverse cities in the country. This diversity was concentrated in the neighborhoods from which Roosevelt High drew its students. Unlike many other U.S. schools in similar urban environments, it was an integrated school. According to the school district's official statistics, Roosevelt High had about equal percentages of African Americans, Whites, and Asians, and a smaller number of Latinos and Filipinos. But these official racial categories did not reflect the richness of RHS's cultural mosaic. In addition to a medley of European immigrants, who moved to the area at the turn of the century, it included Asian Americans whose ancestors were from China, Korea, and Japan, as well as more recent immigrants from Vietnam, Laos, Burma, Thailand, and Cambodia. Another large segment of the residents were Latinos whose parents or grandparents were born in Mexico, and others who were from Central and South America. Besides a sizable number of African American students, many of whom had moved to Newtown from the

South during World War II, Newtown also had a small but visible community of Pacific Islanders.

One of the most prominent topics in conversations among educators, Newtown's politicians, the local media, and Newtowners generally was youth, violence, and gangs. Since the mid-1980s, gang fights between and among Asians and Latinos had taken numerous lives, and conflicts between African American and Latino gangs, as well as between Latinos and Pacific Islanders, seemed to be daily news. White supremacist activities in and around the city had shaken some Newtowners' belief that violence was safely contained on the crowded, poorer eastside. The result was a siege mentality among many residents, and even adults often were afraid to walk on the street at night. With almost daily reports of youth violence, from race-based pencil stabbings to drive-by shootings, schools were a prime location for these conflicts.

Amidst such tensions, Roosevelt High was widely regarded as a haven of peace and racial tolerance. Roosevelt High celebrated its racial and ethnic diversity with an annual multicultural fair, where students sold homemade food, performed traditional dances, staged ethnic fashion shows, and engaged in numerous other activities that represented their culture. The school had also replaced the institution of Homecoming Queen—a source of racial conflict in the past—with “Cultural Ambassadors,” whose task was to represent the variety of cultures on campus. Moreover, RHS sponsored events during the Black and Latino History Months, provided a course on multiculturalism, and had been a trendsetter for the school district by spearheading a weekend camp where students could explore diversity issues.

So RHS had a reputation for racial harmony; and it also had a reputation for academic excellence: it was recognized by the state as an outstanding school for its ambitious academic programs, and its graduates were regularly accepted by Ivy League colleges.

Yet despite this public image of multicultural harmony, racial integration, and academic success, Roosevelt High was also the site of deep racial fault lines. Mickey and Joey, the two Cambodian students quoted in the epigraph, articulated an identity of “Blacks and Asians together” as “ethnic mens” against their rivals, “Mexicans.” For José, a Mexican American senior, race determined what kinds of courses and programs one was likely to be enrolled in. In contrast, for two White seniors, Melissa and Kathy—apparently unaware of the groundswell of tensions building among Latinos, African Americans, and Cambodians—race was “not a problem.” They felt that everybody got along and that racial segregation and isolation were not as prevalent at RHS as in other schools. These commentaries, chosen because

they represented student voices from different educational tiers, reflect their varied experiences.³

On the one hand, they illustrate how some students internalized racial categories, although by lumping “Blacks and Asians” together as “ethnic mens” against Latinos, they drew boundaries counterintuitive to common sense notions of race. Others challenged the idea that RHS was an integrated school and criticized RHS for not giving them equal access to educational opportunities. Still others agreed with the public image of the school as racially tolerant and peaceful, although their judgment was called into question by the racial conflict about to erupt with an intensity and scope not witnessed at Roosevelt High in several decades.

How could students attending the same school differ so much in their perception of the school? Why did they embrace racial identities as means to draw lines between friend and foe, when the school was supposedly a showcase of racial harmony?

LEARNING RACIAL DIFFERENCES IN SCHOOL

This book explores how race is formed and how it functions within an intensely multiethnic and multiracial urban high school. It is an ethnography of a school in metropolitan California, in a city where Whites have become a minority and where there is no longer a clear racial majority. Focusing on a school celebrated for its academic success and racial integration in an inner-city area, it is a story about the adolescents whose lives coalesce at this site, and about the political and institutional forces to which they are subjected. It shows how their lives are influenced by conflicts over busing and anti-immigrant politics in the city, by desegregation policies in the school, and by racial politics among their peers. They encounter racial struggles that victimize some, privilege others, and leave others relatively untouched. But it is also the story of how adolescents adopt, generate, and sometimes manipulate racial meanings to accomplish certain goals and navigate through the social minefield of the school.

Thus it is a study that links an analysis of racial structures of schooling with an analysis of how adolescents themselves actively shape racial meanings and structures to maneuver through this space. They do so by managing relationships with other racialized groups, both individually and collectively.⁴ Examining the interplay between institutional structures, representation, and social agency in the domains that constitute adolescent lives at school helps us to recognize both the dependence and the independence of the domains in which race is formed. It shows how racialization emerges and is maintained in the links between indi-

viduals and social structures. This helps us to comprehend the mechanics of race in the making.

In the post-civil rights era, and increasingly since the mid-1990s, the new concept of multiculturalism has gained broad acceptance as a means to acknowledge and celebrate diversity. However, celebrations of multiculturalism often go hand in hand with a discourse on color-blindness along the lines: since we are integrated, we don't need to talk about race any more.⁵ This view is representative of the broader argument that the civil rights struggle and the policy changes it brought about abolished racism and that race has lost its significance.⁶ In fact, a broad segment of the population believes that racial inequality is a matter of the past and has been successfully overcome.⁷ Yet, rather than signaling the end of discrimination, color-blindness often works to implicitly endorse White privilege by denying the structural racism to which people of color are widely subjected.⁸

A number of studies have focused on how schools themselves are racializing institutions. Rather than using students' own cultural backgrounds or their particular "learning styles" to explain their behavior in school,⁹ these studies have described the ways in which schools socialize their students into adopting specific racialized identities, whether through discipline regimes, course assignment, or intentional or unintentional institutional neglect.¹⁰ This book goes further in examining the connections between students and schooling. Departing from the contrast between a school's public image and students' experiences, it examines the means and criteria by which a school produces this public image and compares it with students' experiences. It asks whose voice is represented and who benefits and loses through such a public representation, and it explores the structures that underlie these representations. In the process, this study illustrates the subtle but pervasive racializing effects of an apparently integrated and multicultural institution in the post-civil rights era.

The organizational structure of RHS and its labeling of students illustrates that color-blind labels such as "gifted" and "at risk" function as code words for race. I argue that organizational reforms meant to desegregate schools serve a public image of excellence and integration, but do so by effectively keeping students of different races apart. Besides producing unequal access to education, these reform structures contribute to a sense of second-class citizenship among those who are excluded, while bolstering Whites' "sincere fictions" about others and about themselves, particularly the belief that their educational privileges are based on merit alone.¹¹ The language of color-blind educational labels becomes the very means by which racial exclusion is perpetuated and through which a dialogue over inequalities is effectively silenced.¹²

Masked by this current of color-blindness is a new surge of race consciousness, evident for example in the White backlash against affirmative action as reverse discrimination victimizing Whites,¹³ in the continuing resistance to busing,¹⁴ or in the everyday language and interactions of people when they are not on guard, as illustrated by many of the protagonists of this study. Thus if color-blind labels racialize students and subject them to a pernicious justification of exclusion and difference, it is also through explicit racial discourse among students and teachers that racialization takes place.

We have learned from studies of race and schooling that students engage in a variety of strategies to deal with the status ascribed to them.¹⁵ What we know less about is how adolescents engage in racializing practices and discourses in their interactions with each other, and how they do so collectively. There are some possible reasons for this absence. Studying identities has become a central focus for understanding race in recent years. Identity, after all, provides a rationale for action and thus can explain why people do what they do.¹⁶ However—possibly out of a concern to not reproduce stereotypes—research on identity has often focused on individuals as if they were independently functioning entities within a broader social sphere.¹⁷ Such a focus helps to challenge the notion of identity categories as monolithic blocks and provides a safeguard against wholesale racial generalizations. But identities are also informed by collectives and form collectives. Like-minded people joining hands can mobilize spontaneous or concerted action.¹⁸ Such dynamics are most visible in social movements, or in large-scale conflicts, where people willingly sacrifice their individual needs and desires for the collective cause. But they occur on every level of association, from gangs to football teams, and from religious organizations to ethnic and national groups.

Forms of collective identification are illustrated in students' narratives about an event referred to by many at RHS as "the school riot." Their stories show how they invoke racialized identities to interpret events and motives, thus using race as a strategic means to position themselves and to interpret the existing power structures and hierarchies. Students use race as a tool with which it is "good to think,"¹⁹ because it provides a shorthand for identifying motives, interest groups, and antagonists, and it generates fictions that easily catch on. In fact, in students' conflict-ridden relationships with each other, race and racial identity are used as a political means to draw boundaries, profess allegiances, and create alliances, where race functions as both a stigma and a form of social capital based on one's access to networks of people.²⁰ Adolescents' narratives revealed them to be political actors with an analytical acumen for assessing and forming power structures, recognizing and establishing hierarchies, and ascribing political motives to larger collective identi-

ties. All the while, though, these collective racial identities remained fluid and subject to political maneuvering and sometimes did not match racial categories used elsewhere.

The cultural fabric of Roosevelt High School and its multiple possible alliances, boundaries, and exclusions was complex. Within that context my study examines how students engaged in racializing practices and to what extent these differed from practices occurring in other contexts. I found that adolescents did not merely replicate how race was practiced in the media or other domains, but instead rearticulated new notions of racial identity, with which they sometimes acquired tangible benefits. The picture emerging from students' notions of race and racial identity points to a bipolar continuum with blackness on one end and whiteness on the other. Other racial identities are aligned along this continuum. But it also shows that racial configurations in one context do not necessarily map onto racial configurations in other contexts. This illustrates a degree of independence between the different domains of race-making and underscores our need to understand race as a multi-sited process.

RACE AND SCHOOLS IN THE MULTIRACIAL CITY

The demographic composition of American cities and schools has become increasingly multiethnic and multiracial.²¹ The 2000 census revealed that among schoolchildren Whites had dropped to 60 percent nationwide, while the number of Latinos and Asians had grown steadily throughout the 1990s. This trend is most prevalent in metropolitan areas. In such a rapidly changing social landscape, identities shift, new alliances are forged, and positions of dominance and power are renegotiated. The arrival of new immigrants might intensify these processes. Newcomers might adopt existing racial categories, as nineteenth-century Irish immigrants did by learning to identify themselves as White and as recent second-generation West Indians did by learning to identify themselves as Black.²² Increasingly, the argument has been made that Asian Americans are becoming honorary Whites and that both Latinos and Asians are seen and see themselves as White.²³

Schools are sites where adolescents undergo a formative period of their identity formation and socialization.²⁴ The institution lays the foundations—or as scholars of social reproduction say, lays the tracks—for their future social and professional lives.²⁵ Schools are also sites where the state, through such means as curriculum design, obligatory attendance, testing, and issuing credentials, exerts a direct influence on young people and their parents. In their mandate to provide equal access to education for everyone, schools are a prime instrument for de-

mocracy and social progress. They are often described as great “social equalizers” and are one of the few institutions with the potential to bring people from different racial, ethnic, and class backgrounds into intimate and sustained contact with each other, although since the mid-1980s a trend toward segregation has returned.²⁶

An integrated school such as Roosevelt High mixes youth from different parts of the city and with different racial and ethnic backgrounds who otherwise have little opportunity to interact. Such a desegregated school provides a “hyperspace” that transcends the residential and social segregation endemic in so many American cities and in society generally. Through this, desegregated schools are spaces of possibility that have the potential to undo racial inequality.²⁷ Such a vision was embraced in the Supreme Court’s *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling, which provided a starting point for legally dismantling segregation. Schools themselves, then, are testing grounds for our society’s dedication to the ideal of a nation “indivisible, with justice and liberty for all.”

But if schools provide an important testing ground for the nation’s commitment to social justice and racial equality, students and their relations with each other also provide a glimpse into the future of our society. Yet few studies exist that help us understand these increasingly multiracial institutions. More often, studies of race and schools have focused on youth of color, or on the relationship between Whites and students of color.²⁸ But as the United States and other countries become more multiracial and the Whites are becoming a minority in many urban areas, research needs to take account of those dynamics. Approaching identity as a relational construct requires us to take account of this demographic shift as it changes the fabric of racial identity and of racial formation more generally. It also requires a theoretical framework that goes beyond the Black-and-White or minority-majority conceptualizations of race relations and focuses instead on the emerging dynamics of a multiracial environment.²⁹ While dealing with these complexities, we also need to remain vigilant about the role of power and White privilege,³⁰ and about the extent to which entrenched structures of White domination and Black stigma set the stage for emerging racial formations.³¹

This ethnographic study of Roosevelt High promises to teach us important lessons. It shows us how adolescents are engulfed by racial and racist policies in the city and their school and how elusive racial equity is for many, even though their school’s public image makes it appear otherwise. Racist outcomes are reproduced by educators and administrators who for the most part consider themselves to be racially progressive and liberal, and through policies that have grown out of school integration efforts. It illustrates how White privilege is reproduced and internalized, even where Whites have become a minority; but it also shows how White privilege has been challenged. In this multiracial space youth renegotiate racial

identities, alliances, and hierarchies and thereby also actively participate in the making of their own racial identities. This is evident in their comments about their racial positions within the school and reflected in their analyses of a serious racial confrontation that occurred there; it is also evident in the ways they carve out spaces of racialized masculinities. Instead of being only the victims of racializing structures, they also creatively use and manipulate them.

LOOKING FOR RACE

Walking across the campus of Roosevelt High School during one of my first visits, it occurred to me that a good way to start my project would be to map the pattern of racial distributions in the school yard. Walking out into the school yard, I noticed teenagers clustered in groups on the lawns and crowded in front of the McDonald's and Pizza Hut franchises. They sat on benches with their sweethearts, or moved busily from one group to another. What I saw was an ocean of faces; what I could not discern was any pattern of racial distribution that I had anticipated.

As I moved through the crowd, I passed a White boy squatting on one of the concrete pathways, eating his lunch. He was staring at a wall, which was about three feet in front of him, his back turned to the bustling school yard. I felt suddenly very uncomfortable clutching my notepad and pencil; I felt hopelessly out of place, visible, different, and conscious of my movements. Should I sit down on one of the benches? But maybe the benches were already claimed by someone and I would be regarded as an intruder. Would I be less noticeable in the denser crowd in the cafeteria? But it seemed impossible to find an empty seat there. No matter where I went, I felt thousands of eyes examining me, assessing me, recognizing that I, like the White boy facing the wall, was out of place.

Suddenly a White girl asked me curiously whether I was a researcher and what I was sketching. I felt my posture straightening; the pencil and notebook in my hand became my credentials; all of a sudden my mapping effort was legitimate. I felt welcomed, acknowledged. I had a role now, something that I could use to identify myself as a grown up, a researcher. I passed again by the White boy squatting on the path and found myself looking at him, now with pity and detachment, as I no longer identified with him.

This rapid shift from a self-conscious identification with a social outcast to a self-assured identity with a role to play puzzled me. How could I go through such intense yet opposite emotions in such a short period of time? Was this just the fear of entering a new and unfamiliar site, or was it that I identified with the boy facing the wall and with the welcoming girl who had asked me about my sketching because they were White, in a place where Whites were a minority? Why was I, then

a woman in her early thirties, unable to distance myself from the youngsters I had set out to study? Why did I slip back into my own school persona, letting my own high school experience take over? In retrospect, this moment exemplifies for me the terror of the crowded space that is the school. It lost its frightening character as soon as I was identified as inhabiting a legitimate role and as soon as I had—at least imaginary—allies.

Many scholars of adolescence and schools have written about the importance of schools as sites of identity formation, as places where we undergo a thorough socialization of our racial and gender identities through institutional structures and peer cultures.³² This process is not unproblematic. In fact, schools can be oppressive environments, as I was reminded during my initial walk across the campus. We are reminded about this too when we read descriptions of urban schools as dumping grounds for poor and minority children. Such schools, often crowded, dilapidated, and with inadequate resources, send a loud message to students about their status in society.³³ But we also are reminded of schools as oppressive environments when we hear of tragic incidents, such as the 1999 shooting at Columbine High School in Colorado, where two students killed many of their classmates to avenge years of ostracism and then turned the guns on themselves.³⁴

Schools forge identities and rule hierarchically by organizing the relationships between adolescents and the institution. In school, adolescents become students who are supposed to learn and internalize a school identity. This is accomplished not only in the classroom, but also through the display of school colors, in athletics and in other activities that are designed to inculcate in students a sense of institutional allegiance.³⁵ Schools are also densely populated environments, where everyone is always in plain sight of peers, teachers, administrators, and other adults. Schools are places where vigilant surveillance and a system of norming and ranking generates a student identity that internalizes the school's discipline regime.³⁶ But adolescents are not only under pressure to identify with the school. They also are under pressure to identify with a peer group, because nonaffiliation and isolation can lead to ostracism, and even social death or physical harm.

In the course of the next eighteen months I would learn just how central race was in structuring adolescents' identities at RHS; it was reflected in the acuity with which students identified racialized space, groups, and motives. Observing and interviewing students and school adults, participating in their daily lives, and developing fledgling friendships with some of them taught me how students maneuvered through this space, sometimes using race as a vehicle.

Contrary to common sense notions of race as a category based on how people "look," it was only after I had learned the language of race as it existed at Roosevelt High, and only after I had learned from others the contours of racial boundaries

relevant in this context, that I was able to see the racial geography of the space myself. My experience of race in the United States up to this point had been limited to the campus of the University of California, in Santa Barbara, which was predominantly White. That environment had not provided me with a racial “common sense” useful at Roosevelt High School. Rather, the head-on collisions I would have with school personnel, as well as with some students, made me keenly aware of how inappropriate my racial common sense was in this setting, and that I needed to adjust or learn a new way of looking at things.

It was not because I went in color-blind that I did not see race. In fact, I went in deliberately looking for race. But I needed to learn the local meaning of race before I could see its spatial pattern. Thus, just as RHS transformed the adolescents that entered its gates, it also changed me. It forced me to confront my own whiteness and taught me to be on guard in a way I had not been before.

LEARNING ABOUT RACE—CONCEPTUAL TOOLS AND RESEARCH ISSUES

Before unpacking how race is formed at school, the basic concepts of race and identity need to be clarified. In our everyday language, we often speak of race and racial identity as if they were monolithic, universal, and unchanging phenomena. We speak as if race could be identified by how one “looks,” an ascribed category, imposed on us by others on the basis of specific phenotypical characteristics such as skin color, hair, or facial features. While I could guess which racial identities were in use at Roosevelt High based on a generalized racial order in American society, this was not enough to understand the racial geography of the school. As an outsider, I first had to acquire the local lens for seeing race. My experience provides one example of the localized production of racial constructions and their relative instability and reveals the ongoing, multilayered, and often contradictory processes by which racial meanings and structures emerge.³⁷ Understanding the formation of race as an evolving and multilayered process requires us to understand race as a relational construct, which necessitates an outside or “other” from which to demarcate an inside or self.³⁸ It requires us to recognize race as formed both through structures and through meanings, and it requires us to look not for inventories of racial identities, but for the mechanisms by which people’s identity is created.

Amanda Lewis describes schools as institutions where race is produced as a social category “both through implicit and explicit lessons and through school practices.”³⁹ But these mechanisms are not limited to the classroom and the relationships between teachers and students. They are also rooted in urban politics,

residential segregation, and school desegregation policies. Most important, they emerge in relations between people, and between groups of people, as they unfold in the school yard, the hallways, and the neighborhood.

Racial Formation

Racial formation theory provides a useful framework for understanding and studying the making of race. It argues that race is a fluid category that is continuously “created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed” and understands race as the product of multiple construction sites—or “racial projects”—that occur simultaneously and on many different levels. Such racial projects, Michael Omi and Howard Winant say, are always historically anchored and together form an inter-related web that constitutes racial formation. Racial projects are therefore the “building blocks” of racial formation, specific to a particular historical and societal context.⁴⁰ Based on concrete and tangible structures, they inform ideas of race and thus contribute to the bigger and seemingly coherent picture of racial differences. Racial projects always consist of both structure and meaning and link the two: as structures emerge and influence meanings, meanings evolve and in turn shape social structures. Understanding racial projects as building blocks of racial formation recognizes race as the product of relations between people and groups of people, but also situates those relations within embedded structures, organizations, and discourses. By breaking down the complex phenomenon of race-making into specific, tangible racial projects, the theory of racial formation helps to identify the different construction sites of race and the links between them.

The concept of racial formation has commonly been used to explain macro-structural political and historical phenomena between the state and social movements.⁴¹ While macro-structural phenomena such as residential segregation, differential wealth accumulation, and other forms of institutional racism have a pervasive impact on our lives, they are often experienced as indirect, intangible, or elusive. Instead, it is at the micro level, in our interactions with local institutions and people—individually and as groups—that racial structures become tangible and racial meanings are enacted.⁴² At the micro level, racial projects operate through “common sense” and the way we “notice” race as our preconceived notions of a racialized social structure provide the basis for interpreting racial meanings.⁴³

School, one of the central institutions of the modern state for shaping individual identities,⁴⁴ provides an ideal site for studying the link between the macro-structural perspective of the state expressed in its educational and racial policies and the micro-structural perspective of students and school adults’ lives and interactions. The school site allows us to both witness and understand the experiences and interactions of people in the institutional and larger political context

where they operate and to which they have to accommodate. But in addition to the constraints that these schools put on their students, they show us the diversity of representations, interpretations, and forms of agency that students and adults engage in, and which in turn feed back to the structural organization of schools.

One central problem of social theory is to explain the links between the micro level of personal experiences, ideas, and beliefs and the macro level of politics and social structures.⁴⁵ In this case study, racial formation theory provides a conceptual framework that shows the interdependence of both in the constant remaking and shifting of what race means and what race is: it oscillates between its manifestations in the state and its institutions on the one hand, and in the micro-level domains of representations and individual identities on the other.

Thus this book shows one way in which racial formation theory can contribute to empirically grounded, ethnographic studies of race. However, while racial formation theory helps to pose questions and provide conceptual tools for disentangling the processes by which race is formed, it is less applicable in arenas of social relations that are more removed from the direct access of the state. In the phenomena of school yard politics and masculinities, where the role of the state is indirect, the conceptual framework of racial formation is more difficult to apply. This area between micro-level personal experiences and macro-level projects of the state is the realm of collective identities, where common experiences are articulated and discourses formed.

Identity and Difference

The idea of identity formation as a boundary maintenance process⁴⁶ provides a theoretical basis for understanding this meso level⁴⁷ of social theorizing, the fertile ground where individuals develop collective identities and strategies in response to concrete racial projects. But identity formation may be better understood as identification. Learning differences involves one's ability to identify and differentiate. To identify oneself with a group or an identity means to differentiate oneself from something that is "other."⁴⁸

Identity therefore always requires an outside that defines an inside, or a "we." At the basis of identity is the question of how to conceptualize the self. But rather than being already there with a stable core, or being created in isolation, identity emerges through relations and within discourse.⁴⁹ Just as relations with people provide the interactions through which we identify and differentiate ourselves, discourse provides the language and common sense with which we explain ourselves and the world. Both are the means by which we perform what we want to portray, and both also operate through the material conditions and relations that shape our everyday lives. But while identities can be self-determined, they can also

be imposed from the outside, or “ascribed.” This occurs when people are identified by others on the basis of criteria they might or might not want to adopt, and that often subject them to forms of discrimination. Racialized identities, by the very fact that they are based on phenotypical characteristics, are to a significant extent ascribed.

A focus on racial identity based on identification and difference explores race-making processes at the level of collective identities: as urban communities, as students tracked in particular educational programs, as friends of close-knit groups, as employees in the workplace, or as members of a racial group. Locating identity-making processes within collective frames of reference allows racial identification to be perceived not only as a question of personal experience, but also as a collective action, a reaction, and a perception of people who identify with each other.

By exploring racial identity as a critical facet of personhood, the collective aspect of identity-making has sometimes been overlooked in favor of a perspective that treats identity as a largely individualistic project. Such an approach, however, runs the risk of missing what is maybe the most critical dimension of identity-making: its embeddedness in relations with others. Identity as identification requires an ongoing assessment of who is inside and outside, and an ongoing dialogue with those with whom one identifies. However, contrary to the notion of race as a homogenizing force and homogeneous category, a focus on the collective aspects of identity-making also reveals the heterogeneities, contradictions, and negotiations that mark racialized identities, even if they emerge as a unifying front against a specified other. Last but not least, by recognizing that identities can be mobilizing forces that generate discourse and collective action, collective identities can also lead to transforming social processes and counter emerging or existing structures of racial exclusion.⁵⁰ Understanding race as an ongoing and multi-sited project requires us to untangle the different domains that coalesce in the institution and setting of the school: urban space and neighborhood politics, classrooms and educational programs, peer groups, masculine performances of dominance, and the larger discourses and policies of race operating at the state or national level. These different domains often reinforce each other; this is most evident in the accumulation of privileges associated with whiteness, where interlocking spheres produce a mirage of normality.⁵¹ But they also can work at cross purposes. Dominant racialized identities in one context can be subordinated identities in another, as I will show in the analysis of the school yard hierarchy that challenged and even reversed the educational hierarchy. Specific racial projects thus create spheres with their own, individual power dynamic.

The study of racializing processes in a multiracial context also raises important questions about the location and formation of racial fault lines that go beyond the

more familiar context of majority-versus-minority or White-versus-Black relations. Several racial groups in Newtown were not clearly identifiable as either minority or majority, and unexpected interracial alliances challenged more familiar conflicts. Thus Roosevelt High provides a view into a new era of racial formation.

Masculinity

If the social category of race is often compared to gender, its parallels to masculinity are even stronger. Both race and masculinity are linked to power and to the body. Bob Connell's contention that masculinity is "fundamentally linked to power, organized for domination, and resistant to change because of power relations"⁵² can be equally applied to race. Both masculinity and race justify domination through difference, and both are based on differences that are thought of as embodied. Yet both embodied identities are abstractions that cannot be mapped neatly onto biological or individual boundaries. Finally, both masculinity and race have been theorized as performance.⁵³ Thus, rather than being essentialized categories in and of themselves, they are relational identities that depend for their enactment on an audience, and to be conceptualized they depend on a repertoire of discursive and bodily practices. But if race and masculinity bear similarities, what is the relationship between the two?

In this book, I look at manhood as an important staging arena of race. Performances of masculinity are used to demarcate identities, to draw boundaries between inside and outside, and to establish hierarchies.⁵⁴ This makes masculinity a prime arena in which to recognize power relations in the making. As we have learned from studies of masculinities, the ways by which men—and sometimes women—demonstrate that they are masculine, in control of situations, and "good at being a man" depend on their cultural milieu and social position.⁵⁵ Both create opportunities and pose certain demands, as they also impose restrictions on how manhood can be performed.⁵⁶ This means that specific racial formations and the different projects within such formations generate their own forms of masculinities.

If race shapes expressions of masculinity, masculinity also shapes racial structures and meanings. Masculinities, in their relational construction and collective identifications, and in their ability to portray or synthesize a collective consciousness, open a window onto the tangible aspects of collective identity in the making. The boundary-making processes that Frederik Barth has described for the development of ethnicity—which, he argues, are intensified in times of contact, not isolation⁵⁷—are particularly visible in the competition over racialized masculinities that different groups of students carve out for themselves. Thus, how students

create, live, and use masculinity, individually and collectively, is another racial project that links structure and meaning.

Schooling practices such as achievement-based ranking, sports, and discipline regimes,⁵⁸ as well as intense competition among peers, make schools function as both agents and settings that generate a “marketplace of masculinities.”⁵⁹ The pressure on masculine performance as a form of dominance is intensified in urban schools, where structural forces such as poverty, segregation, tracking, and other institutional pressures provide few niches for more playful assertions of dominance, and where “respect” is a most precious resource of masculinity, carefully guarded and fervently defended.⁶⁰ Following the racial politics in the school yard to the micropolitics of cultivating relational masculinities in peer groups illustrates how racial identity provides a foundation for cultivating a specific code of masculinity and how competing masculinities actively contribute to the structure and meaning of racial identities.

DOING ETHNOGRAPHY AT RHS

While race is a collective issue, it is also an intensely personal one. When I began my fieldwork at RHS, I had not previously thought of myself as White. Coming to California as a graduate student from Germany several years earlier, I thought of “White Americans” as a research topic, not a description of my own identity. By the time I left RHS, this had changed: I had become aware of my whiteness and had learned that it opened some doors—some very comforting and convenient, others that I did not want to be opened—and closed others. I had also found that while my German accent did not make me an outsider with Whites, it made me a person of somewhat ambiguous whiteness for others, noticeable when my interlocutors offered to explain the U.S. racial order, and evident in their probing pauses.

I learned that my biracial child and occasional meal of black-eyed peas and yams gave me, in the eyes of some, an honorary “Black fictive kinship.”⁶¹ This became evident once when an African American student told me that she had seen me with my son. “So you’re down with us,” she said; “why didn’t you tell us that?” I had not made public this aspect of my personal life in the school environment because it seemed not necessary and too transparent a means to try to gain acceptance with African American students. Having a biracial child does not automatically mean that I am a nonracist person, but it might have signaled a degree of familiarity, comfort, and exposure to African American culture.

I started conducting fieldwork at RHS as a relative newcomer to the American racial order. But I was even more of a newcomer to American high schools, which

I had never seen from the inside. So when I found out that schools wanted volunteers, I thought this would be a good way to get a first exposure. To my surprise, wherever I offered my help, no one knew quite what to do with me. If schools were so strapped for resources, why would nobody accept my offer to work for free? I came to realize later that school administrators did not readily trust someone who was neither a parent nor a future teacher. After explaining to one principal that I wanted to become a volunteer because I planned to do research in schools, he told me that he did not like people who came with “ulterior motives.” His fear of outsiders gaining entry into the institution was precipitated by a public meeting at his school, in which students had criticized him for not addressing racist practices, an event that might have contributed eventually to his demotion. His fear was representative of many schools and their administrators, who, terrified by negative publicity, kept a vigilant eye on anyone who could spoil their public image.

Between waiting to become a volunteer and later waiting to get the school district’s permission to conduct research, I participated in activities all over the city to get a better understanding of American youth and schools. I attended city and community events of many sorts: a human relations camp for youth sponsored by the city; a manhood/womanhood training workshop for African American youth organized by a former member of the Black Panther Party; school board meetings; and neighborhood meetings against busing. I found my way to numerous city-sponsored youth conferences where I listened to discussions of how to improve race relations; I attended church services, picked up trash with Latinas and their children in police-sponsored neighborhood clean-ups, and ate hot dogs with them afterward; I worked for gang prevention services, and I tutored Southeast Asian teenagers at a local cultural center. Later on, with my financial support dwindling rapidly, I worked as a substitute teacher in the area, and a few times also at RHS itself. This allowed me to compare Roosevelt with other schools and opened up the perspective of teachers.

By the time I received permission to conduct research, I had come to know the city and some of its neighborhoods from a number of angles. During the next eighteen months, I would go to the school every day, or every other day. The principal of RHS, Mr. Brown, was welcoming and supportive and gave me much leeway to move around the school and attend classes and other school activities. In the first few months, I visited a wide range of classrooms and hung out in the school yard, attended sports games, cultural performances, and the school’s interracial parent committee, and had lunch in one of the burger joints in the adjacent mall frequented by many RHS students. Gradually I came to know the school campus, its people, and its spaces—its classrooms, offices, and detention halls—as well as its hierarchy of educational programs.

After several months of attending a cross section of classes and activities, I selected four different groups of friends to study who were representative of the racial composition of the different educational programs. These friendship groups usually hung out together in the school yard and sometimes met outside of school. I accompanied at least one student from each peer group through an entire school day and spent many hours in their classes. During those times, I observed their daily routine, engaged in classroom teamwork, joined their friendship groups during breaks, and watched their interaction with their classmates and with their teachers and other school adults. I also conducted open-ended interviews, lasting from half an hour to two hours, with five to eight members of these peer groups, which I taped and later transcribed. In total I interviewed about sixty-five students: forty-five males and twenty females. With sixteen of them I conducted follow-ups, which usually took place one-on-one, but sometimes friends or other people joined us. The interviews were loosely structured, containing a set of standard questions about their socioeconomic background, their residence, their family life, and the educational program they were enrolled in. I also asked about stereotypes associated with their own and other racial groups.

I was often surprised by the frankness with which young women and men shared their views with me. It seemed that they not only enjoyed the interviews as a break from the regular school day, but also enjoyed taking on the “expert” role for a change, and talking themselves rather than being talked to. It is their insights and astute observations that helped me understand the complexity of racial formation.

In addition to the more formal interviews, I talked to a wide cross section of students and school adults to gain broader information with which to evaluate the material provided by the peer groups and to gain a better sense of more widely circulating racial discourses. These additional conversations were with students recommended to me by teachers and administrators for their leadership qualities or for their outspokenness and students I came to know during classes or school-sponsored events. When possible, I spoke with larger groups of students, such as student government, student clubs, entire classes, and peer groups. I also conducted interviews with five key administrators and ten teachers and engaged in numerous casual conversations with students, teachers, administrators, counselors, security personnel, and other school staff throughout the course of my participant observation.

While I carefully recorded all of these planned observations and scheduled interviews daily, it was often the haphazard events, unexpected reactions, silences and evasions, and occasional hostilities that provided glimpses of race in the making.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Chapter Two describes the urban context of Roosevelt High School and the larger racial geography of the city: how Newtown became one of the most diverse cities in the country, yet remained as racially segregated as many other American cities. In addition to racial fault lines drawn on the basis of whiteness, wealth, and residence, there were others emerging between Latinos and Cambodians based on gang conflict, and between Latinos and Whites based on the divisive political anti-immigrant rhetoric of Proposition 187. This proposition, strongly supported by former California governor Pete Wilson in his reelection campaign, was based on the idea that undocumented immigrants were a drain on the California economy. It proposed that undocumented immigrants be denied social services such as prenatal care, health care, and education. In this urban environment, racial tensions were widespread, and schools were often at the center of such tensions: from arguments over busing, unequal access to resources, multicultural education, and bilingual classes to gangs and declining property values. All the more surprising was that a school like Roosevelt High, located in the heart of the urban center, was able to steer clear of many of these conflicts.

As I explain in Chapter Three, Roosevelt High's public image was impressive, but also misleading. Comparing two different educational reform programs, one geared to the gifted and the other to at-risk students, I describe how the school and the district's desegregation strategy played a central role in producing racial identities and racial inequalities. Examining how these programs were organized, how they presented a picture of integration and excellence to the wider public, and what kind of interactions they engendered among students and teachers, I show how they contributed to a widespread notion among students that being White was synonymous with being gifted, and being non-White was synonymous with being non-gifted. Thus, educational reform invented to overcome racial inequality became a tool for perpetuating racial inequality.

In Chapter Four, I look at the ways in which students themselves negotiated and created racial identities and constructed racial hierarchies. Examining what had become referred to as the "race riot" at RHS, I examine the emergence of racial coalitions, exclusions, and dominations. I compare the events during the riot with students' insights about the event and their observations about race relations more broadly. This comparison shows that within the structural landscape of race in which they were placed, students also actively produced their own systems of racial order, which reversed the educational hierarchy of race. In this order, White students become the marked, and Black students become the unmarked, while

Latinos and Cambodians positioned themselves along a continuum between Black and White.

Given the prominent role students assigned to males in their interpretation of the events of “the riot” and its causes, I take a closer look in Chapter Five at race and masculinity. Both forms of identities are organized around dominance and power. I ask how racial categories become masculinized, and how interracial alliances, dominations, and subordinations are worked out through masculinities. An intimate portrait of four peer groups shows how each cultivated an ethos of masculinity that created a space in which to establish dominance over others it considered critical. This reveals the creative agency adolescents develop to overcome positions of racial subordination in other contexts, and how masculine ethos can provide a niche in which to reinvent one’s own place in the racial power structures. But one’s place in the racial hierarchy also imposes limitations on what roles one can assume.

This book, then, provides insight into the mechanics of race-making in the multiracial metropolis in one institution, a school. Untangling the different threads of race-making at this site makes visible the interactions between the racial orders that emerge in different contexts. Racial meanings and structures intersect and evolve through the interplay between institutions, individuals, and groups, who are at once influenced by and influence and shape racial structures and meanings. Race operates as an axis of power: a dynamic force—readily available to the institution and those it serves—to organize people, distribute resources, mobilize action, create inclusion and exclusion, manipulate political outcomes, and provide a platform on which to perform masculinity.

The story of race-making as it unfolds at this urban site provides insights into the competing power relations that can unfold and coalesce in a multiracial space. But this story about the formation of racial identities in a multiracial institution is also a cautionary tale about how White privilege is perpetuated, even where Whites have become a minority, and even in the name of desegregation. And finally, by showing how racial differences and identities are made, it shows that these differences are not always antagonistic, but also can provide the basis for interracial alliances at odds with race relations at the level of the community, the city, or the state.