AMERICAN CONFLICTS AND STRUGGLES

Just so, I recall the points at which some of my boyhood friends were finally seduced by the perception of themselves as tough guys. When a mark cowered and surrendered his money without resistance, myth and reality merged—and paid off. It is, after all, only manly to embrace the power to frighten and intimidate. We, as men, are not supposed to give an inch of our lane on the highway; we are to seize the fighter's edge in work and in play and even in love; we are to be valiant in the face of hostile forces.

Just Walk on By: A Black Man Ponders His Power to Alter Public Space,
brent staples

I remember the first time I heard the word *nigger*. In my third-grade class, our math tests were being passed down the rows, and as I handed the papers to a little boy in back of me, I remarked that once again he had received a much lower mark than I did. He snatched his test from me and spit out that word. Had he called me a nymphomaniac or a necrophiliac, I couldn't have been more puzzled. I didn't know what a nigger was, but I knew that whatever it meant, it was something he shouldn't have called me.

A Question of Language,
gloria naylor

Americans are a rootless people. Each year one in six of us changes residences; one in four changes jobs. We see nothing troubling in these statistics. For most of us, they merely reflect the restless energy that made America great.

Rootlessness,
david morris

Many Hispanos see their lives and those of their children as unfolding in this country. To them, Puerto Rico is something of the past, and for many of the children who are growing up or have grown up in the United States, Puerto Rico is less than an echo; it is a land they have never visited, a "foreign country."

Profound Changes,
elena padilla

Prettier babies are treated better than homelier ones, not just by strangers but by the baby's parents as well. Mothers snuggle, kiss, talk to, play more with their baby if it's cute; and fathers of cute babies are also more involved with them.

The Face of Beauty,
diane ackerman

BRENT STAPLES

Just Walk on By: A Black Man Ponders His Power to Alter Public Space

Educated at Widener University and the University of Chicago, where he earned a doctorate in psychology in 1982, Brent Staples is a journalist who has served on the editorial board of the New York Times *since 1990. A prolific writer, he has been published in such magazines and journals as* Down Beat, Harper's, New York Woman,

and the New York Times Magazine. *"Just Walk on By" was first published in* Ms. *magazine in 1986.*

Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing

1.
To people who don't know you, in what ways is your personal appearance misleading about the person deep inside, the person who you really are?

2.
Write about discovering that your first impression of someone else was wrong. On what facts did you base your initial judgment? What caused you to change your mind? What, if anything, did you learn from this event?

3.
If you are walking all alone at night and a black man in jeans and a beard is following close behind you, what thoughts might go through your head? If you are alone at night and a black man in a conservative suit is walking behind you, do you have the same thoughts? What if each of these men were white? What if each were a black woman (minus the beard, of course)? A white woman? Explain the differences and similarities in the responses you describe.

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My first victim was a woman—white, well dressed, probably in her early twenties. I came upon her late one evening on a deserted street in Hyde Park, a relatively affluent neighborhood in an otherwise mean, impoverished section of Chicago. As I swung onto the avenue behind her, there seemed to be a discreet, uninflammatory distance between us. Not so. She cast back a worried glance. To her, the youngish black man—a broad six feet two inches with a beard and billowing hair, both hands shoved into the pockets of a bulky military jacket—seemed menacingly close. After a few more quick glimpses, she picked up her pace and was soon running in earnest. Within seconds she disappeared into a cross street.

That was more than a decade ago. I was twenty-two years old, a graduate student newly arrived at the University of Chicago. It was in the echo of that terrified woman's footfalls that I first began to know the unwieldy inheritance I'd come into—the ability to alter public space in ugly ways. It was clear that she thought herself the quarry of a mugger, a rapist, or worse. Suffering a bout of insomnia, however, I was stalking sleep, not defenseless wayfarers. As a softy who is scarcely able to take a knife to a raw chicken—let alone hold it to a person's throat—I was surprised, embarrassed, and dismayed all at once. Her flight made me feel like an accomplice in tyranny. It also made it clear that I was indistinguishable from the muggers who occasionally seeped into the area from the surrounding ghetto. That first encounter, and those that followed, signified that a vast, unnerving gulf lay between nighttime pedestrians—particularly women—and me. And I soon gathered that being perceived as dangerous is a hazard in itself. I only needed to turn a corner into a dicey situation, or crowd some frightened, armed person in a foyer somewhere, or make an errant move after being pulled over by a policeman. Where fear and weapons meet—and they often do in urban America—there is always the possibility of death.

In that first year, my first away from my hometown, I was to become thoroughly familiar with the language of fear. At dark, shadowy intersections in Chicago, I could cross in front of a car stopped at a traffic light and elicit the *thunk, thunk, thunk, thunk* of the driver—black, white, male, or female—hammering down the door locks. On less traveled streets after dark, I grew accustomed to but never comfortable with people who crossed to the other side of the street rather than pass me. Then there were the standard unpleasantries with police, doormen, bouncers, cabdrivers, and others whose business is to screen out troublesome individuals *before* there is any nastiness.

I moved to New York nearly two years ago and I have remained an avid night walker. In central Manhattan, the near-constant crowd cover minimizes tense one-on-one street encounters. Elsewhere—visiting friends in SoHo, where sidewalks are narrow and tightly spaced buildings shut out the sky—things can get very taut indeed.

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Black men have a firm place in New York mugging literature. Norman Podhoretz in his famed (or infamous) 1963 essay, "My Negro Problem—And Ours," recalls growing up in terror of black males; they "were tougher than we were, more ruthless," he writes—and as an adult on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, he continues, he cannot constrain his nervousness when he meets black men on certain streets. Similarly, a decade later, the essayist and novelist Edward Hoagland extols a New York where once "Negro bitterness bore down mainly on other Negroes." Where some see mere panhandlers, Hoagland sees "a mugger who is clearly screwing up his nerve to do more than just *ask* for money." But Hoagland has "the New Yorker's quick-hunch posture for broken-field maneuvering," and the bad guy swerves away.

I often witness that "hunch posture," from women after dark on the warrenlike streets of Brooklyn where I live. They seem to set their faces on neutral and, with their purse straps strung across their chests bandolier style, they forge ahead as though bracing themselves against being tackled. I understand, of course, that the danger they perceive is not a hallucination. Women are particularly vulnerable to street violence, and young black males are drastically overrepresented among the perpetrators of that violence. Yet these truths are no solace against the kind of alienation that comes of being ever the suspect, against being set apart, a fearsome entity with whom pedestrians avoid making eye contact.

It is not altogether clear to me how I reached the ripe old age of twenty-two without being conscious of the lethality nighttime pedestrians attributed to me. Perhaps it was because in Chester, Pennsylvania, the small, angry industrial town where I came of age in the 1960s, I was scarcely noticeable against a backdrop of gang warfare, street knifings, and murders. I grew up one of the good boys, had perhaps a half-dozen fistfights. In retrospect, my shyness of combat has clear sources.

Many things go into the making of a young thug. One of those things is the consummation of the male romance with the power to intimidate. An infant discovers that random flailings send the baby bottle flying out of the crib and crashing to the floor. Delighted, the joyful babe repeats those motions again and again, seeking to duplicate the feat. Just so, I recall the points at which some of my boyhood friends were finally seduced by the perception of themselves as tough guys. When a mark cowered and surrendered his money without resistance, myth and reality merged—and paid off. It is, after all, only manly to embrace the power to frighten and intimidate. We, as men, are not

supposed to give an inch of our lane on the highway; we are to seize the fighter's edge in work and in play and even in love; we are to be valiant in the face of hostile forces. Unfortunately, poor and powerless young men seem to take all this nonsense literally. As a boy, I saw countless tough guys locked away; I have since buried several, too. They were babies, really—a teenage cousin, a brother of twenty-two, a childhood friend in his midtwenties—all gone down in episodes of bravado played out in the streets. I came to doubt the virtues of intimidation early on. I chose, perhaps even unconsciously, to remain a shadow—timid, but a survivor.

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The fearsomeness mistakenly attributed to me in public places often has a perilous flavor. The most frightening of these confusions occurred in the late 1970s and early 1980s when I worked as a journalist in Chicago. One day, rushing into the office of a magazine I was writing for with a deadline story in hand, I was mistaken for a burglar. The office manager called security and, with an ad hoc posse, pursued me through the labyrinthine halls, nearly to my editor's door. I had no way of proving who I was. I could only move briskly toward the company of someone who knew me.

Another time I was on assignment for a local paper and killing time before an interview. I entered a jewelry store on the city's affluent Near North Side. The proprietor excused herself and returned with an enormous red Doberman pinscher straining at the end of a leash. She stood, the dog extended toward me, silent to my questions, her eyes bulging nearly out of her head. I took a cursory look around, nodded, and bade her good night.

Relatively speaking, however, I never fared as badly as another black male journalist. He went to nearby Waukegan, Illinois, a couple of summers ago to work on a story about a murderer who was born there. Mistaking the reporter for the killer, police hauled him from his car at gunpoint and but for his press credentials would probably have tried to book him. Such episodes are not uncommon. Black men trade tales like this all the time.

In "My Negro Problem—And Ours," Podhoretz writes that the hatred he feels for blacks makes itself known to him through a variety of avenues—one being his discomfort with that "special brand of paranoid touchiness" to which he says blacks are prone. No doubt he is speaking here of black men. In time, I learned to smother the rage I felt at so often being taken for a criminal. Not to do so would surely have led to madness—via that special "paranoid touchiness" that so annoyed Podhoretz at the time he wrote the essay.

I began to take precautions to make myself less threatening. I move about with care, particularly late in the evening. I give a wide berth to nervous people on subway platforms during the wee hours, particularly when I have exchanged business clothes for jeans. If I happen to be entering a building behind some people who appear skittish, I may walk by, letting them clear the lobby before I return, so as not to seem to be following them. I have been calm and extremely congenial on those rare occasions when I've been pulled over by the police.

And on late-evening constitutionals along streets less traveled by, I employ what has proved to be an excellent tension-reducing measure: I whistle melodies from Beethoven and Vivaldi and the more popular classical composers. Even steely New Yorkers hunching toward nighttime destinations seem to relax, and occasionally they even join in the tune. Virtually everybody seems to sense that a mugger wouldn't be warbling bright, sunny selections from Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*. It is my equivalent of the cowbell that hikers wear when they know they are in bear country.

Suggestions for Writing and Discussion

1.

In his opening paragraph, Staples describes a woman who was so nervous because a black man was walking behind her that she took off running. Do you think her reaction is a common one? Is it justified? Explain your answers.

2.

Why, at the age of twenty-two, is Staples, a black man, surprised at the reaction that people have toward him on his nightly walks? Besides the reaction of surprise, what other feelings might he have when people avoid him or hurry away from him, simply because he is a black man?

3.

In paragraph 5, Staples cites two pieces of literature that convey the image of black man as mugger. When people fear someone because he is a black male, where does their concept of "black as dangerous" come from?

4.

Staples admits that women are "particularly vulnerable to street violence, and young black males are drastically overrepresented among the perpetrators of that violence." So what is his point in this essay? Does he seek to place blame or analyze causes? Or does he have another purpose for writing?

5.

According to Staples, in what ways do the concepts of being male and having power connect? Do you agree with his point that men are supposed to be tough?

6.

Briefly summarize Staples's solution to walking at night without intimidating other pedestrians. Explain why this tactic apparently works to ease a stranger's fear. What does this solution say about Staples himself? Consider, for example, the implications in Staples's final comparison between the purpose of his whistling on his nightly walks and the purpose of hikers' cowbells.

Suggestions for Extended Thinking and Research

1.

Watch prime-time television for several weeks. Notice how many shows and commercials include black male characters, and note the types of roles these characters play. From your observations, what categories do these characters fall into? Are any of the roles stereotypes? Are any of the characters "real" people? Come to some conclusion about how black men are portrayed on television.

2.

Staples explains why he did not get pulled into the life of a street mugger. Research the reasons why many youths today join street gangs. By using a variety of reliable sources (concentrate on interviews and current journal articles), come to some conclusions about why a young person today might be drawn to a life of crime and violence.

GLORIA NAYLOR

A Question of Language

After earning a graduate degree in Afro-American Studies from Yale University, Gloria Naylor worked as a columnist for the New York Times. *In addition, she has been visiting professor and writer in residence at Princeton University, New York University, the University of Pennsylvania, Boston University, and Brandeis. Her first novel,* The Women of Brewster Place *(1982), won an American Book award. "A Question of Language" was first published in the* New York Times *in 1986.*

Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing

1.

What do you think has had more influence in your life—the spoken word or the written word? Explain by using specific incidents from your past that support your answer.

2.

In your household, what topics were or are taboo as far as children are concerned? Explain.

———

Language is the subject. It is the written form with which I've managed to keep the wolf away from the door and, in diaries, to keep my sanity. In spite of this, I consider the written word inferior to the spoken, and much of the frustration experienced by novelists is the awareness that whatever we manage to capture in even the most transcendent passages falls far short of the richness of life. Dialogue achieves its power in the dynamics of a fleeting moment of sight, sound, smell, and touch.

I'm not going to enter the debate here about whether it is language that shapes reality or vice versa. That battle is doomed to be waged whenever we seek intermittent reprieve from the chicken and egg dispute. I will simply take the position that the spoken word, like the written word, amounts to a nonsensical arrangement of sounds or letters without a consensus that assigns "meaning." And building from the meanings of what we hear, we order reality. Words themselves are innocuous; it is the consensus that gives them true power.

I remember the first time I heard the word *nigger*. In my third-grade class, our math tests were being passed down the rows, and as I handed the papers to a little boy in back of me, I remarked that once again he had received a much lower mark than I did. He snatched his test from me and spit out that word. Had he called me a nymphomaniac or a necrophiliac, I couldn't have been more puzzled. I didn't know what a nigger was, but I knew that whatever it meant, it was something he shouldn't have called me. This was verified when I raised my hand, and in a loud voice repeated what he had said and watched the teacher scold him for using a "bad" word. I was later to go home and ask the inevitable question that every black parent must face—"Mommy, what does 'nigger' mean?"

And what exactly did it mean? Thinking back, I realize that this could not have been the first time the word was used in my presence. I was part of a large extended family that had migrated from the rural South after World War II and formed a close-knit network that gravitated around my maternal grandparents. Their ground-floor apartment in one of

the buildings they owned in Harlem was a weekend mecca for my immediate family, along with countless aunts, uncles, and cousins who brought along assorted friends. It was a bustling and open house with assorted neighbors and tenants popping in and out to exchange bits of gossip, pick up an old quarrel or referee the ongoing checkers game in which my grandmother cheated shamelessly. They were all there to let down their hair and put up their feet after a week of labor in the factories, laundries, and shipyards of New York.

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Amid the clamor, which could reach deafening proportions—two or three conversations going on simultaneously, punctuated by the sound of a baby's crying somewhere in the back rooms or out on the street—there was still a rigid set of rules about what was said and how. Older children were sent out of the living room when it was time to get into the juicy details about "you-know-who" up on the third floor who had gone and gotten herself "p-r-e-g-n-a-n-t!" But my parents, knowing that I could spell well beyond my years, always demanded that I follow the others out to play. Beyond sexual misconduct and death, everything else was considered harmless for our young ears. And so among the anecdotes of the triumphs and disappointments in the various workings of their lives, the word *nigger* was used in my presence, but it was set within contexts and inflections that caused it to register in my mind as something else.

In the singular, the word was always applied to a man who had distinguished himself in some situation that brought their approval for his strength, intelligence, or drive:

"Did Johnny really do that?"

"I'm telling you, that nigger pulled in $6,000 of overtime last year. Said he got enough for a down payment on a house."

When used with a possessive adjective by a woman—"my nigger"—it became a term of endearment for husband or boyfriend. But it could be more than just a term applied to a man. In their mouths it became the pure essence of manhood—a disembodied force that channeled their past history of struggle and present survival against the odds into a victorious statement of being: "Yeah, that old foreman found out quick enough—you don't mess with a nigger."

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In the plural, it became a description of some group within the community that had overstepped the bounds of decency as my family defined it: Parents who neglected their children, a drunken couple who fought in public, people who simply refused to look for work, those with excessively dirty mouths or unkempt households were all "trifling niggers." This particular circle could forgive hard times, unemployment, the occasional bout of depression—they had gone through all of that themselves—but the unforgivable sin was lack of self-respect.

A woman could never be a *nigger* in the singular, with its connotation of confirming worth. The noun *girl* was its closest equivalent in that sense, but only when used in direct address and regardless of the gender doing the addressing. *Girl* was a token of respect for a woman. The one-syllable word was drawn out to sound like three in recognition of the extra ounce of wit, nerve or daring that the woman had shown in the situation under discussion. "G-i-r-l, stop. You mean you said that to his face?"

But if the word was used in a third-person reference or shortened so that it almost snapped out of the mouth, it always involved some element of communal disapproval.

And age became an important factor in these exchanges. It was only between individuals of the same generation, or from an older person to a younger (but never the other way around), that "girl" would be considered a compliment.

I don't agree with the argument that use of the word *nigger* at this social stratum of the black community was an internalization of racism. The dynamics were the exact opposite: the people in my grandmother's living room took a word that whites used to signify "worthlessness or degradation and rendered it impotent. Gathering there together, they transformed *nigger* to signify the varied and complex human beings they knew themselves to be. If the word was to disappear totally from the mouths of even the most liberal of white society, no one in that room was naïve enough to believe it would disappear from white minds. Meeting the word head-on, they proved it had absolutely nothing to do with the way they were determined to live their lives.

15

So there must have been dozens of times that the word *nigger* was spoken in front of me before I reached the third grade. But I didn't "hear" it until it was said by a small pair of lips that had already learned it could be a way to humiliate me. That was the word I went home and asked my mother about. And since she knew that I had to grow up in America, she took me in her lap and explained.

Suggestions for Writing and Discussion

1.

Naylor begins this piece by stating, "Language is the subject." What, then, is the major problem that this subject presents? What is Naylor's main point about this subject?

2.

When, according to Naylor, can language be powerfully effective? When can it be powerfully destructive?

3.

In your own words, what are the different connotations of the word *nigger* when Naylor heard it used among her own people, in her own household? Why wasn't she puzzled by the meaning of *nigger* at these times in her life?

4.

Why does Naylor condone black people using the word *nigger* but finds it derogatory when used by people outside of this race? What gives one group a "right" to a word, while the use of it by an outside group is considered "wrong"?

5.

At the end of this piece, when Naylor's mother takes her on her lap to explain what the white boy meant by the term *nigger,* what do you think she says? Consider writing your response in the form of a dialogue between mother and daughter.

Suggestion for Extended Thinking and Research

Each of the words in the following list contains various levels of meaning. Choose one word from this list and interview fifteen people, asking each for his or her definition of the word. Have those you are interviewing use each word in a sentence to clarify its meaning, and feel free to ask any questions based on the meaning they've assigned to this

word. Take careful notes during each interview, and then write an essay in which you synthesize the various meanings people associate with this word.

Foreign
Dominance
Clever
Ambition
Culture
Feminist
Feminine

Polite
Duty
Politician
Glamorous
Habit
Masculine
Progress
DAVID MORRIS

Rootlessness
David Morris is the author of The New City States *(1983) and coauthor, with Karl Hess, of* Neighborhood Power: The New Localism *(1975). Morris currently serves as codirector of the Institute for Local Self-Reliance in Washington, D.C., writes an editorial column for the* St. Paul Pioneer Press-Dispatch, *and contributes frequently to other magazines and journals, particularly those concerned with social issues. "Rootlessness" was first published in the* Utne Reader *in the May/June 1990 issue.*
Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing
1.
What was your hometown like when you were growing up? What is it like today? Have the changes been for the better or for the worse?

2.
Could you survive without a car? Write a piece in which you imagine what today would be like if the automobile had never been invented.

3.
Most Americans feel as if they know television celebrities better than their own next-door neighbors. Do you fit into this category? What explanations do you have for this phenomenon, in general?
———

Americans are a rootless people. Each year one in six of us changes residences; one in four changes jobs. We see nothing troubling in these statistics. For most of us, they merely reflect the restless energy that made America great. A nation of immigrants,

unsurprisingly, celebrates those willing to pick up stakes and move on: the frontiersman, the cowboy, the entrepreneur, the corporate raider.

Rootedness has never been a goal of public policy in the United States. In the 1950s and 1960s local governments bulldozed hundreds of inner city neighborhoods, all in the name of urban renewal. In the 1960s and 1970s court-ordered busing forced tens of thousands of children to abandon their neighborhood schools, all in the interest of racial harmony. In the 1980s a wave of hostile takeovers shuffled hundreds of billions of dollars of corporate assets, all in the pursuit of economic efficiency.

Hundreds of thousands of informal gathering spots that once nurtured community across the country have disappeared. The soda fountain and lunch counter are gone. The branch library is an endangered species. Even the number of neighborhood taverns is declining. In the 1940s, 90 percent of beer and spirits was consumed in public places. Today only 30 percent is.

This privatization of American public life is most apparent to overseas visitors. "After four years here, I still feel more of a foreigner than in any other place in the world I have been," one well-traveled woman told Ray Oldenburg, the author of the marvelous new book about public gathering spots, *The Great Good Place* (1990, Paragon House). "There is no contact between the various households, we rarely see the neighbors and certainly do not know any of them."

The woman contrasts this with her life in Europe. "In Luxembourg, however, we would frequently stroll down to one of the local cafés in the evening and there pass a very congenial few hours in the company of the local fireman, dentist, bank employee, or whoever happened to be there at the time."

In most American cities, zoning laws prohibit mixing commerce and residence. The result is an overreliance on the car. Oldenburg cites the experience of a couple who had lived in a small house in Vienna and a large one in Los Angeles: "In Los Angeles we are hesitant to leave our sheltered home in order to visit friends or to participate in cultural or entertainment events because every such outing involves a major investment of time and nervous strain in driving long distances. In Vienna everything, opera, theaters, shops, cafés, are within easy walking distance."

Shallow roots weaken our ties in the neighborhood and workplace. The average blue-collar worker receives only seven days' notice before losing his or her job, only two days when not backed by a union. The *Whole Earth Review* unthinkingly echoes this lack of connectedness when it advises its readers to "first visit an electronics store near you and get familiar with the features—then compare price and shop mail order via [an] 800 number."

This lack of connectedness breeds a costly instability in American life. In business, when owners have no loyalty to workers, workers have no loyalty to owners. Quality of work suffers. Visiting Japanese management specialists point to our labor turnover rate as a key factor in our relative economic decline. In the pivotal electronics industry, for example, our turnover rate is four times that of Japan's.

American employers respond to declining sales and profit margins by cutting what they regard as their most expendable resource: employees. In Japan, corporate accounting systems consider labor a fixed asset. Japanese companies spend enormous amounts of money training workers. "They view that training as an investment, and they don't want

to let the investment slip away," Martin K. Starr of Columbia University recently told *Business Week*. Twenty percent of the work force, the core workers in major industrial companies, have lifetime job security in Japan.
10
Rootlessness in the neighborhood also costs us dearly. Neighborliness saves money, a fact we often overlook because the transactions of strong, rooted neighborhoods take place outside of the money economy.
reduces crime. People watch the streets where children play and know who the strangers are.

Neighborliness saves energy. In the late 1970s Portland, Oregon, discovered it could save 5 percent of its energy consumption simply by reviving the corner grocery store. No longer would residents in need of a carton of milk or a loaf of bread have to drive to a shopping mall.
lowers the cost of health care. "It is cruel and unusual punishment to send someone to a nursing home when they are not sick," says Dick Ladd, head of Oregon's Senior Services. But when we don't know our neighbors we can't rely on them. Society picks up the tab. In 1987 home-based care cost $230 a month in Oregon compared to $962 per month for nursing home care.
Psychoanalyst and author Erich Fromm saw a direct correlation between the decline in the number of neighborhood bartenders and the rise in the number of psychiatrists. "Sometimes you want to go where everybody knows your name," goes the apt refrain of the popular TV show *Cheers*. Once you poured out your troubles over a nickel beer to someone who knew you and your family. And if you got drunk, well, you could walk home. Now you drive cross town and pay $100 an hour to a stranger for emotional relief. The breakdown of community life may explain, in part, why the three best-selling drugs in America treat stress: ulcer medication (Tagamet), hypertension (Inderal), tranquilizer (Valium).
American society has evolved into a cultural environment where it is ever harder for deep roots to take hold. What can we do to change this?
•**Rebuild walking communities.** Teach urban planners that overdependence on transportation is a sign of failure in a social system. Impose the true costs of the car on its owners. Recent studies indicate that to do so would raise the cost of gasoline by as much as $2 a gallon. Recently Stockholm declared war on cars by imposing a $50 a month fee for car owners, promising to increase the fee until the city was given back to pedestrians and mass transit.
•**Equip every neighborhood with a library, a coffeehouse, a diversified shopping district, and a park.**

Make rootedness a goal of public policy. In the 1970s a Vermont land use law, for example, required an economic component to environmental impact statements. In at least one case, a suburban shopping mall was denied approval because it would undermine existing city businesses. In Berkeley, citizens voted two to one to permit commercial rent control in neighborhoods whose independently owned businesses were threatened by gentrification.

Reward stability and continuity. Today, if a government seizes property it pays the owner the market price. Identical homes have identical value, even if one is home to a third-generation family, while the other is occupied by a new tenant. Why not pay a premium, say 50 percent above the current market price, for every 10 years the occupant has lived there? Forty years of residence would be rewarded with compensation four times greater than the market price. The increment above the market price should go not to the owner but to the occupant, if the two are not the same. By favoring occupants over owners, this policy not only rewards neighborliness, but promotes social justice. By raising the overall costs of dislocation, it also discourages development that undermines rootedness.

Prohibit hostile takeovers. Japanese, German, and Swedish corporations are among the most competitive and innovative in the world. But in these countries hostile takeovers are considered unethical business practices or are outlawed entirely.

Encourage local and employee ownership. Protecting existing management is not the answer if that management is not locally rooted. Very few cities have an ongoing economic campaign to promote local ownership despite the obvious advantages to the community. Employee ownership exists in some form in more than 5,000 U.S. companies, but in only a handful is that ownership significant.

And above all, correct our history books. America did not become a wealthy nation because of rootlessness, but in spite of it. A multitude of natural resources across an expansive continent and the arrival of tens of millions of skilled immigrants furnished us enormous advantages. We could overlook the high social costs of rootlessness. This is no longer true.

Instability is not the price we must pay for progress. Loyalty, in the plant and the neighborhood, does not stifle innovation. These are lessons we've ignored too long. More rooted cultures such as Japan and Germany are now outcompeting us in the marketplace, and in the neighborhood. We would do well to learn the value of community.

Suggestions for Writing and Discussion

1.
Morris begins this piece by calling Americans a "rootless people." What reasons does he give for this restless condition? Can you supply any others?

2.
As a result of this rootlessness, Morris sees Americans as becoming a disconnected people as well. What is your evaluation? Do you agree with the effects Morris believes result from this disconnection? Do you see other effects? Explain.

3.
Why does Morris believe so strongly in neighborhood and community unity? What difference does it make to the average person? Compare his view of neighborhood and community unity with your own view.

4.
According to Erich Fromm, bartenders work just as well as psychiatrists to calm people's fears and release them from their anxieties. This comparison implies that it is easy for people to pour out their troubles as long as they are talking to professionals or to friendly acquaintances rather than to intimate friends or family. Do you subscribe to this view that it's easier to talk about problems with someone who doesn't know you well than with someone who does? Explain, using examples to illustrate your ideas.

5.
Evaluate Morris's suggestions for rebuilding community closeness. Which one do you feel is most important? Which is most feasible? Are any of his ideas unrealistic? Idealistic? Explain.

6.
What is Morris's main purpose in writing this piece? Who is his intended audience? What details from the article might appeal particularly to the audience you have defined? What type of reader might not be receptive to this piece? Explain your answer.

Suggestions for Extended Thinking and Research

1.
In the last paragraph, Morris states that we should learn about community and the success it breeds from countries such as Japan and Germany. Research either one of these countries, focusing specifically on communities and work opportunities. After doing this research, write an essay in which you explain why you do or do not support Morris's claim.

2.
Research the roots of your hometown. Find out what life was like before 1950 by conducting interviews with several of the town's oldest residents. Your purpose is to find out what once existed. Then in an objective essay, synthesize all of your primary sources and come to some conclusion: How have progress and change affected your town's sense of unity?

3.
Morris doesn't analyze how malls changed the downtown shopping districts in many small towns and cities. Write an essay based on one of these two options:

a.
Compare the atmosphere of an older established shopping area downtown with that of a mall. Use direct observations and interviews for your sources.

b.
Explain why a mall, as a life source all its own, can or cannot serve as a community that encourages a sense of connection and unity among those who shop and work there.

ELENA PADILLA

Profound Changes

Born in 1923, Elena Padilla is a sociologist interested in the changes that are part of the immigration process. In Up from Puerto Rico *(1958), the book from which this excerpt is taken, Padilla explains her study of the evolving views and behaviors of individuals who emigrate from Puerto Rico to the United States.*

Suggestions for Prereading and Journal Writing

1.
To you, what is more important: remaining loyal to old friends and past places or risking change with new friends and new places? Explain.

2.
From the following list, choose three conditions that most families need in order to be "healthy"—communication, love, money, respect, cooperation. Briefly explain your choice.

3.
Write for ten to fifteen minutes on the following: For me, a good life is when. . . .

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Many Hispanos see their lives and those of their children as unfolding in this country. To them, Puerto Rico is something of the past, and for many of the children who are growing up or have grown up in the United States, Puerto Rico is less than an echo; it is a land they have never visited, a "foreign country." Some migrants consciously decide at some point or other to make their homes here, to stay in this country permanently, never again turning back to look at Puerto Rico. These are to be found even among recent migrants. They are the people who view their future as being tied up with whatever life in New York may offer. We can call these Hispanos settlers, and can distinguish them from transients or those who regard their future life as gravitating toward Puerto Rico and who hope to return to live there later on, after their children have grown up or when they have enough savings to buy a house or start a business.

Settlers who have migrated to New York as adults are those who have lost or who give little importance to their relationships with their home towns, their friends and relatives who are still in Puerto Rico or are recent migrants to New York. They have cut off their emotional ties with the homeland, but they may still have significant interpersonal relationships with their kin and within cliques that may consist largely of persons from their own home town who are residents of New York. The settler fulfills or expects to fulfill his social needs in relation to living in New York.

One sort of settler has in his formative years moved away from his home town, rural or urban, in Puerto Rico to another town or city in the island itself. He started to break away from the primary relations and bonds of his home town then. By the time he comes to New York, he has already experienced life situations in which primary groups derived from his home town contexts have no longer operated for him, in which he has developed new social bonds, wherever he may have been. The primary group relationships of this kind of settler lack the continuity and history of those of the settler who, throughout his life, whether in Puerto Rico or New York, has been able to continue depending and relying on persons known to him for many years.

The consequent social adjustments that the settlers here have made are the outcome of a gradual process of adaptation to living in New York, and of recognizing that home, friends, and other interests are here and not in Puerto Rico. The settler may be oriented within the ethnic group of Puerto Ricans in New York, partially by his participation in the cliques and other small groups of people from his home town and in those of his New York neighbors. But the one who has lost his primary ties with a home town and has been exposed to a greater variety of group experiences in Puerto Rico through moving about there is likely to become involved in New York in groups and cliques that are not derived from any particular home town context. The kinds of adjustments he can make to these changing group situations is related to his own background experiences as a migrant in Puerto Rico itself. There he may have reacted to and resolved the social stresses of the uprooting he underwent as a migrant, acquiring as a result the social techniques for making it easier to establish satisfactory social relationships outside of home town and family settings.

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The migrant who is essentially a transient, on the other hand, still maintains ties with the homeland: he has a strong feeling of having a country in Puerto Rico, a national identity there, and there he has friends and relatives whom he writes, visits, and can rely upon. "If things get bad" (*si las cosas se ponen malas*), he can go back to Puerto Rico and get sympathy and help from those he grew up with. The transient migrants can be expected to feel obligated to their Puerto Rican friends and relatives, should these come to New York. The settler, on the other hand, is likely to say that he will "not return to Puerto Rico even if I have to eat stones in New York," and he will feel less bound to friends and relatives left in the island.

But becoming a settler does not necessarily involve a conscious decision. Transients may change into settlers as life orientations and social relations that are satisfactory and meaningful to them become part of their life in New York. The fundamental difference between settlers and transients is that the settler's life is organized in New York, while that of the transient is both in New York and in Puerto Rico.

In New York the lives of Puerto Ricans must, obviously, undergo profound changes. For those who learn American life in a slum like Eastville, the experience is one thing. For Puerto Ricans who were in better circumstances and had better life-chances in the island, it is another: they can begin life in New York as members of the middle class and avoid the particular cultural and social difficulties that beset the residents of Eastville. Yet all have their difficulties. Many overcome them. Many Eastvillers have made their way out of the slum into satisfactory fulfillment of their aspirations for themselves and their children. Others have returned to Puerto Rico.

One of the matters that concern Eastville Puerto Ricans is what has happened and is happening to Puerto Ricans in New York. Among migrants, social and cultural changes among Hispanos are a conscious preoccupation. They see the results of change in their own lives and in those of their friends. It is on this basis that they evaluate social behavior. Their awareness also reflects the conflicting values, orientations, and ambivalence of New York Hispanos. True, old migrants and Hispanos who have grown up in New York regard recent migrants as representing a departure from their culture and as being socially inferior; on the other hand, recent migrants, in turn, express discontent with the ways Hispanos "are"—behave—in this country. George Espino, a New York-

born man of Puerto Rican parents voiced a sentiment frequently heard from others who like himself have grown up in New York: “The Puerto Ricans that are coming over today, well, they’re the most hated people . . . the most hated people.” Migrants, particularly those who have come as adults, contrast and evaluate the changes they experienced in their lives in Puerto Rico with those they are experiencing in New York. To them, changes here in family life, in the expectancies of what family members can demand of each other, in the ways children are brought up, in marital behavior, and in the behavior of men, women, and children—all these factors that govern daily life—are of concern. Migrants are conscious of these changes and speak of how they have something to do both with modern life and with living in New York. Some of these changes are acceptable and “good,” while others are disapproved of and considered “bad.”

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Migrants write of their experiences in New York, tell of them on visits to Puerto Rico, or show in their behavior the new ways they have adopted. In Puerto Rico some of these types of behavior are considered to be for the best, others for the worst. Potential migrants in the island know their future life in New York is going to be different from their life in Puerto Rico. How, and to what extent, however, is part of the adventure and “changing environment” they will find in New York.

The impact of New York life on Puerto Rican migrants is described in fact and popular fancy, but whether it is described glowingly, soberly, or depressingly, depends on the aspirations, frustrations, hopes, and anxieties of the one who is speaking. Men, women, and children change in New York, it is said. How?

Clara Fredes, now a mother of three, who migrated after the Second World War when she was a teen-ager, replied to a member of the field team when asked if there were any differences between “the way people act here and in Puerto Rico,” that “when women get here they act too free. They go out and stand in the street and don’t cook dinner or anything. Puerto Rican women in New York City are bad. They talk to other men beside their husband, and just aren’t nice. They boss the men. In Puerto Rico a wife obeys her husband, and keeps house, and takes care of her children. But here they run wild. [They are] all day long in the candy store talking and forgetting about their houses. Men here don’t always support their wives and children. They are too free too. They think they can get away with everything, but I think it’s the woman’s fault. They are so bad. They don’t take care of the children right. The children [are] out on the streets at all hours of the night.”

Another informant, Gina Ortiz, said that Puerto Rican women in New York like to go dancing the mambo and drinking and that “they don’t do it in Puerto Rico. In Puerto Rico the woman who smokes and drinks is a bad woman.”

Rosa Burgos also explained changes in the behavior of women migrants. “[It is] because they work and they have too much freedom. In Puerto Rico the wife is always in the house. Here they go out, they go to work, get together with another girl, drink beer, and so on. In Puerto Rico they don’t do that.”

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Women who want to be rated as “good” do not admit to having changed in these directions. They would claim that they do not drink, smoke, or work outside the home, though they may acknowledge having changed in such areas as child-rearing, including giving greater freedom to their children.

Among changes that men undergo in New York, Dolores Miro mentioned that "some of them take friends. The friends like to drink and has women in the street. They change. They like to do same thing the friends do. . . . In Puerto Rico they have the same friends always, but here they have friends from other places, other towns. Some of them are good friends, some bad."

Good men are expected not to change in New York, but to continue recognizing their obligations to their wives and children. They may say they do not have friends in New York because friends get a man in trouble.

A couple that consider themselves good and as having a satisfactory relationship with each other and their children may deny changes in their lives in New York. Manuel and Sophia Tres, in telling a fieldworker about themselves, said, "We don't have any change. We still the same." Manuel continued, "Some of them [Hispanos] when they come here they want to go to the bar and drink, are drunk people and have plenty girl friends," to which Sophia added, "because they make more money to spend. We are not changed, we have the same customs."

In New York children also change, in a variety of ways. It is more difficult to make them respect their parents and elders, and one must keep them upstairs in order to prevent their becoming too uncontrollable and bad. For Juana Roman: "In Puerto Rico the fathers don't want the children to do what they want. They are strict; is better there. In Puerto Rico if your kids do anything wrong, the father punishes. Here you can't punish a big boy. . . . One day my boy went with another boy and they took a train and got lost, and when I got to the Children's Shelter, the lady said, 'Don't punish the boy' and I said, 'Oh yes [I will punish him], I don't want him to do it again.' I see many kids that they do what they want."

Antonia Velez, now in her mid-thirties, finds that in this country people are nice to old people, but says that in Puerto Rico old people are more respected. Her children do not respect in the same way she respected her father and mother in Puerto Rico when she was a child. Yet she is acceptant to some of the changes in patterns of respect she finds among her children. Says she, "Everybody is nice with the old people here in this country. They take care better of the old people and the children. I didn't pay too much attention to it in Puerto Rico. They are nice too. Everybody respects old people. The children are more respectful to old people in Puerto Rico than here . . . I know. I never used to argue with my mother in Puerto Rico. If she had a reason or no, I keep quiet. And with my father too. The word that he said was the only word to me. If he said not to go to a movie, I didn't discute [argue] that with him. I didn't go. No here. The children are more free here. Tommy, when I say, do that, and he don't want to and he explains me why, I don't mind that. I think it is better for him. You know, we didn't do that but it was not good inside. I think so, because they are human beings too. I love my father and mother because they are so good to me. If I didn't go to movies they may have the reason to say no, but I don't know it. Maybe that way, if I know it, I would have been better."

Children who have migrated recently at ages when they had friends and were allowed to play in the yards and streets in their home towns and now are being reared "upstairs in the home" speak of their past life in Puerto Rico with nostalgia. Lydia Rios, age twelve, says that "here one cannot do anything," referring to having to remain at home, sitting

and watching from a window the play of other children, except when she goes to church or school.

Advantages listed of living in New York are the higher wages and income, better opportunities to educate the children, better medical care, more and better food, more and better clothes, furniture, and material things here than in Puerto Rico. In New York one can even save money to go back to Puerto Rico and purchase a house. Which place is better to live in is contingent on whether the migrant has realized or is on his way to realizing the aspirations and hopes connected with his coming to New York.

For Emilio Cruz it is better to live in New York than in Puerto Rico. "I think life in New York is better. We have better living in New York and can give the children the food they want and need. When we work we have more money. We spend more here but we earn more so we can live better. In Puerto Rico we rent a house [for] $10.00 or $12.00 a month, and here we [pay] so much [more] money and [must have] a lease too, [of] two or three years in New York."

Migrants speak of the future with reference to a good life, and a good life can be realized either in New York or in Puerto Rico, though one must search for it. As Rafael Dorcas put it, "A good life is when we work and we has the things we need for all the family. I think that's a good life."

Suggestions for Writing and Discussion

1.

Discuss the author's tone, approach, and position in this piece. How effective do you find this piece in general and why?

2.

Explain the basic differences between a transient migrant and a settler. Based on your journal response, what category would you be most likely to fit into were you to move from your homeland to a new country?

3.

For Puerto Ricans, what are the advantages of moving to New York and what are the disadvantages? From this reading, which experience is more dominant?

4.

Out of all the changes that occur in moving to a new homeland, what one change is the most profound? Explain.

5.

Discuss whether and how these changes might be different if the Puerto Rican immigrant family settled in some place other than New York City—some place like Dubuque, Iowa, or Coral Springs, Florida, for instance.

Suggestions for Extended Thinking and Research

1.

Interview several members of an older generation in order to discover what changes have taken place in the family during the last three decades in America.

2.

Working as a small group, conduct a survey in which you aim to discover how individuals would define "the good life." Try to discover trends in thinking among several groups: males and females; teenagers, the middle-aged, and the elderly; Anglo-Americans and other ethnic groups.

3.
Based on your experience as well as three or four magazine or academic journal sources, write an essay answering the following question: What is more important in shaping the values of the individual: the family or the outside environment?
SETH MYDANS

Not Just the Inner City: Well-To-Do Join Gangs
Born in 1946, Seth Mydans has worked as foreign correspondent in such countries as England, Thailand, the Philippines, and Russia. Currently, he lives in Los Angeles where he serves as national correspondent for the New York Times. *His articles on immigration, racial conflicts, and other urban problems have been particularly praised.*
Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing
1.
Based on what you have read, heard, and seen in the media, write a profile on a typical teenage gang member today.

2.
Describe the group of friends with whom you associated in high school. What were the typical interests, backgrounds, dress, behavior, language, philosophies of this group? In what ways did you fit in with this group? In what ways did you differ?
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In suburban Hawthorne, social workers tell of the police officers who responded to a report of gang violence, only to let the instigators drive away in expensive cars, thinking they were a group of teenagers on their way to the beach.
In Tucson, Ariz., a white middle-class teenager wearing gang colors died, a victim of a drive-by shooting, as he stood with black and Hispanic members of the Bloods gang.
At Antelope Valley High School in Lancaster, Calif., about 50 miles north of Los Angeles, 200 students threw stones at a policeman who had been called to help enforce a ban on the gang outfits that have become a fad on some campuses.
Around the country, a growing number of well-to-do youths have begun flirting with gangs in a dalliance that can be as innocent as a fashion statement or as deadly as hard-core drug dealing and violence.
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The phenomenon is emerging in a variety of forms. Some affluent white youths are joining established black or Hispanic gangs like the Crips and Bloods; others are forming what are sometimes called "copy-cat" or "mutant" or "yuppie" gangs.
The development seems to defy the usual socioeconomic explanations for the growth of gangs in inner cities, and it appears to have caught parents, teachers, and law-enforcement officers off guard.

Police experts and social workers offer an array of reasons: a misguided sense of the romance of gangs; pursuit of the easy money of drugs; self-defense against the spread of established hard-core gangs. And they note that well-to-do families in the suburbs can be as empty and loveless as poor families in the inner city, leaving young people searching for a sense of group identity. Furthermore, "kids have always tried to shock their parents," said Marianne Diaz-Parton, a social worker who works with young gang members in the Los Angeles suburb of Lawndale, "and these days becoming a gang member is one way to do it."

A member of the South Bay Family gang in Hermosa Beach, a twenty-one-year-old surfer called Road Dog who said his family owned a chain of pharmacies, put it this way: "This is the nineties, man. We're the type of people who don't take no for an answer. If your mom says no to a kid in the nineties, the kid's just going to laugh." He and his friends shouted in appreciation as another gang member lifted his long hair to reveal a tattoo on a bare shoulder: "Mama tried."

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Separating their gang identities from their home lives, the South Bay Family members give themselves nicknames that they carry in elaborate tattoos around the backs of their necks. They consented to interviews on the condition that only these gang names be used. The gang's leader, who said he was the son of a bank vice president, flexed a bicep so the tattooed figure of a nearly naked woman moved suggestively. Voicing his own version of the basic street philosophy of gang solidarity, the leader, who is called Thumper, said, "If you want to be able to walk the mall, you have to know you've got your boys behind you."

From Cool to Dead

For young people who have not been hardened by the inner city, an attitude like this, if taken into the streets, can be dangerous, said Sgt. Wes McBride of the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department, who has gathered reports on the phenomenon from around the country.

"They start out thinking it's real cool to be a gang member," he said. "They are 'wannabes' with nothing happening around them to show them it's real dangerous, until they run afoul of real gang members, and then they end up dead."

In California's palm-fringed San Fernando Valley, said Manuel Velasquez, a social worker with Community Youth Gang Services, a private agency, "there are a lot of kids who have no business being in gangs who all of a sudden are going around acting like gang members."

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"They play the part," he went on. "They vandalize. They do graffiti. They do all kinds of stuff. But when it comes down to the big stuff, it's: 'Wait a minute. That's enough for me. I want to change the rules.' And then they realize it's a little bit too late."

There are few statistics on middle-class involvement in gangs, and officials are reluctant to generalize about its extent or the form it is taking. But reports of middle-class gang activity come from places as disparate as Denver, Seattle, Tucson, Portland, Dallas, Phoenix, Chicago, Minneapolis, Omaha, and Honolulu.

Sgt. John Galea, until recently the head of the youth gang intelligence unit of the New York City Police Department, said that although there was no lack of youth violence in the city, organized street gangs as such were not a serious problem.

The South Bay Family, in Hermosa Beach, has evolved over the past five years from a group of bouncers for a rock band to a full-fledged streetwise, well-armed gang. But for the most part, white gangs, or white members of minority gangs, have just begun to be noticed in the past few months.

"Parents Are Totally Unaware"

"I think it's a new trend just since the latter part of 1989, and it's really interesting how it's getting out to suburban areas," said Dorothy Elmore, a gang intelligence officer for the Portland Police Bureau in Oregon. "We've got teachers calling up and saying: 'We've got some Bloods and Crips here. What's going on?'

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"It's definitely coming from two-parent families, working class to middle class to upper middle class, predominantly white," she went on. "The parents are totally unaware of the kind of activity these kids are doing."

In Tucson, Sgt. Ron Zimmerling, who heads the Police Department's gang unit, said that "Kids from even our country-club areas were suddenly joining gangs."

After the drive-by shooting last summer in which a white teenager was killed, he said, he asked a black gang member about another white youth who had attached himself to the gang. "I don't know," the black member replied. "He just likes to hang out."

The phenomenon is better established but still relatively new in the Los Angeles area, the nation's gang capital.

"We have covered parties where I'm totally shocked at the mixture of people who are there," said Mrs. Diaz-Parton, of Community Youth Gang Services in Lawndale. "Your traditional Hispanic gang member is next to this disco-looking person who is next to a preppie guy who looks like he's getting straight A's on his way to college."

Bandannas and Baseball Caps

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Irving G. Spergel, a sociology professor at the University of Chicago who studies gangs, emphasized that the phenomenon accounts for a very small part of the nation's gang problem, which is centered in inner cities. He said the four thousand to five thousand neo-Nazi skinhead groups around the country, which have their own style and ideology, were a separate and worrisome problem.

More trivial, but still troubling to school officials, is a trend toward gang fashions in some high schools and junior high schools. In Los Angeles, Phoenix, Tucson, and several California suburbs, students have staged demonstrations to protest bans on wearing certain colors, bandannas, jewelry, or baseball caps that can be a mark of gang membership.

Bare chests, tattoos, Budweiser beer, and a televised hockey game seemed to be the fashion one recent Saturday evening at an extremely noisy gathering of members of the South Bay Family in a small house in a middle-class neighborhood near the Pacific Coast Highway in Hermosa Beach. There were knives and a deer rifle in evidence, and some said they had pistols.

Asked about the gang's philosophy, Bam Bam, the son of a professor at the University of Southern California, shouted, "Right or wrong, your bros are your bros!"

“Another thing that goes good here is peace,” said Road Dog loudly.
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“Peace by force, man,” shouted Porgy, who said his father was vice president of a plastics company.
“No drug dealing!” shouted Tomcat, the son of a stockbroker.
“Quit lying to him, man,” said Little Smith. “There’s drugs everywhere.”
On a more reflective note, away from the crowd in a small back room, Porgy said: “There is no justification. We do what we do because we want to. I don’t blame my mother. She did the best she could.”

Suggestions for Writing and Discussion

1.
Compare your gang profile in your journal with the profile that Mydans provides here.

2.
In general, what is your “gut” reaction to these middle-class gang members? Compare their attitudes and experiences to your own high school group experience.

3.
In paragraph 6, Mydans lists several possible reasons why young people might join these gangs. On your own or with two or three peers, think of three or four other possibilities he fails to mention.

4.
While middle-class gang involvement is cited in cities such as Denver and Minneapolis, Mydans reports that according to the New York City Police Department, such activity is “not a serious problem.” Why might some people find this fact surprising? What might explain the lack of middle-class gangs here?

5.
Based on the readability level of this piece, for whom is Mydans writing this piece? Consider two or three other audiences and publications that would also be interested in this topic. With these audiences in mind, what revisions would Mydans have to make in order to reach them?

Suggestions for Extended Thinking and Research

1.
Write a response to Mydans in which you argue that he is making “much ado about nothing” as far as this problem is concerned. Use facts and statistics to support your stance, as well as current media profiles and articles regarding teenage gang members.

2.
Interview members of your town’s local police force in order to understand the specific problems teenagers in your area are experiencing. Besides merely explaining the basic problems, aim to discover the causes for these problems.

3.

Write an essay in which you analyze the possible causes for middle-class teen gang involvement, and argue for one deeper cause.

4.
Write a proposal that includes solutions for middle-class teenage gang involvement, and come to a decision about the most effective solution.

DIANE ACKERMAN

The Face of Beauty

Born in 1948, Diane Ackerman earned a Ph.D. in English at Cornell University. Following graduation, she began her career as a natural history writer and poet. In addition, she frequently contributes essays to the New Yorker. *Her published works include a volume of poetry,* Jaguar of Sweet Laughter *(1991),* A Natural History of Love *(1994), and* A Natural History of the Senses *(1990), from which this selection is excerpted.*

Suggestions for Prereading and Journal Writing

1.
As specifically as you can, describe the features on what you would consider the most beautiful face of all.

2.
Women: What would you rather be: stunningly beautiful and mildly intelligent or incomparably intelligent and basically plain? Explain.
Men: What would you prefer to be: strikingly tall and somewhat intelligent or dazzlingly brilliant and short in stature? Explain.

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In a study in which men were asked to look at photographs of pretty women, it was found they greatly preferred pictures of women whose pupils were dilated. Such pictures caused the pupils of the men's eyes to dilate as much as 30 percent. Of course, this is old news to women of the Italian Renaissance and Victorian England alike, who used to drop belladonna (a poisonous plant in the nightshade family, whose name means "beautiful woman") into their eyes to enlarge their pupils before they went out with gentlemen. Our pupils expand involuntarily when we're aroused or excited; thus, just seeing a pretty woman with dilated pupils signaled the men that she found them attractive, and that made their pupils begin a body-language tango in reply. When I was on shipboard recently, traveling through the ferocious winds and waves of Drake Passage and the sometimes bouncy waters around the Antarctic peninsula, the South Orkneys, South Georgia, and the Falklands, I noticed that many passengers wore a scopolamine patch behind one ear to combat seasickness. Greatly dilated pupils, a side effect of the patch, began to appear a few days into the trip; everybody one met had large, welcoming eyes, which no doubt encouraged the feeling of immediate friendship and camaraderie. Some people grew to look quite zombielike, as they drank in wide gulps of light, but most seemed especially open and warm.[1] Had they checked, the women would have discovered that their cervixes were dilated, too. In professions where emotion or sincere interests need to be hidden,

such as gambling or jade-dealing, people often wear dark glasses to hide intentions visible in their telltale pupils.

We may pretend that beauty is only skin deep, but Aristotle was right when he observed that "beauty is a far greater recommendation than any letter of introduction." The sad truth is that attractive people do better in school, where they receive more help, better grades, and less punishment; at work, where they are rewarded with higher pay, more prestigious jobs, and faster promotions; in finding mates, where they tend to be in control of the relationships and make most of the decisions; and among total strangers, who assume them to be interesting, honest, virtuous, and successful. After all, in fairy tales, the first stories most of us hear, the heroes are handsome, the heroines are beautiful, and the wicked sots are ugly. Children learn implicitly that good people are beautiful and bad people are ugly, and society restates that message in many subtle ways as they grow older. So perhaps it's not surprising that handsome cadets at West Point achieve a higher rank by the time they graduate, or that a judge is more likely to give an attractive criminal a shorter sentence. In a 1968 study conducted in the New York City prison system, men with scars, deformities, and other physical defects were divided into three groups. The first group received cosmetic surgery, the second intensive counseling and therapy, and the third no treatment at all. A year later, when the researchers checked to see how the men were doing, they discovered that those who had received cosmetic surgery had adjusted the best and were less likely to return to prison. In experiments conducted by corporations, when different photos were attached to the same résumé, the more attractive person was hired. Prettier babies are treated better than homelier ones, not just by strangers but by the baby's parents as well. Mothers snuggle, kiss, talk to, play more with their baby if it's cute; and fathers of cute babies are also more involved with them. Attractive children get higher grades on their achievement tests, probably because their good looks win praise, attention, and encouragement from adults. In a 1975 study, teachers were asked to evaluate the records of an eight-year-old who had a low IQ and poor grades. Every teacher saw the same records, but to some the photo of a pretty child was attached, and to others that of a homely one. The teachers were more likely to recommend that the homely child be sent to a class for retarded children. The beauty of another can be a valuable accessory. One particularly interesting study asked people to look at a photo of a man and a woman, and to evaluate only the man. As it turned out, if the woman on the man's arm was pretty, the man was thought to be more intelligent and successful than if the woman was unattractive.

Shocking as the results of these and similar experiments might be, they confirm what we've known for ages: Like it or not, a woman's face has always been to some extent a commodity. A beautiful woman is often able to marry her way out of a lower class and poverty. We remember legendary beauties like Cleopatra and Helen of Troy as symbols of how beauty can be powerful enough to cause the downfall of great leaders and change the career of empires. American women spend millions on makeup each year; in addition, there are the hairdressers, the exercise classes, the diets, the clothes. Handsome men do better as well, but for a man the real commodity is height. One study followed the professional lives of 17,000 men. Those who were at least six feet tall did much better—received more money, were promoted faster, rose to more prestigious positions. Perhaps tall men trigger childhood memories of looking up to authority—only our parents and

other adults were tall, and they had all the power to punish or protect, to give absolute love, set our wishes in motion, or block our hopes.
The human ideal of a pretty face varies from culture to culture, of course, and over time, as Abraham Cowley noted in the seventeenth century:
Beauty, thou wild fantastic ape
Who dost in every country change thy shape!

But in general what we are probably looking for is a combination of mature and immature looks—the big eyes of a child, which make us feel protective, the high cheekbones and other features of a fully developed woman or man, which make us feel sexy. In an effort to look sexy, we pierce our noses, elongate our earlobes or necks, tattoo our skin, bind our feet, corset our ribs, dye our hair, have the fat liposuctioned from our thighs, and alter our bodies in countless other ways. Throughout most of western history, women were expected to be curvy, soft, and voluptuous, real earth mothers radiant with sensuous fertility. It was a preference with a strong evolutionary basis: A plump woman had a greater store of body fat and the nutrients needed for pregnancy, was more likely to survive during times of hunger, and would be able to protect her growing fetus and breastfeed it once it was born. In many areas of Africa and India, fat is considered not only beautiful but prestigious for both men and women. In the United States, in the Roaring Twenties and also in the Soaring Seventies and Eighties, when ultrathin was in, men wanted women to have the figures of teenage boys, and much psychological hay could be made from how this reflected the changing role of women in society and the work place. These days, most men I know prefer women to have a curvier, reasonably fit body, although most women I know would still prefer to be "too" thin.
5
But the face has always attracted an admirer's first glances, especially the eyes, which can be so smoldery and eloquent, and throughout the ages people have emphasized their facial features with makeup. Archaeologists have found evidence of Egyptian perfumeries and beauty parlors dating to 4,000 B.C., and makeup paraphernalia going back to 6,000 B.C. The ancient Egyptians preferred green eye shadow topped with a glitter made from crushing the iridescent carapaces of certain beetles; kohl eye liner and mascara; blue-black lipstick; red rouge; and fingers and feet stained with henna. They shaved their eyebrows and drew in false ones. A fashionable Egyptian woman of those days outlined the veins on her breasts in blue and coated her nipples with gold. Her nail polish signaled social status, red indicating the highest. Men also indulged in elaborate potions and beautifiers; and not only for a night out: Tutankhamen's tomb included jars of makeup and beauty creams for his use in the afterlife. Roman men adored cosmetics, and commanders had their hair coiffed and perfumed and their nails lacquered before they went into battle. Cosmetics appealed even more to Roman women, to one of whom Martial wrote in the first century A.D., "While you remain at home, Galla, your hair is at the hairdresser's; you take out your teeth at night and sleep tucked away in a hundred cosmetic boxes—even your face does not sleep with you. Then you wink at men under an eyebrow you took out of a drawer that same morning." A second-century Roman physician invented cold cream, the formula for which has changed little since then. We may remember from the Old Testament that Queen Jezebel painted her face before embarking on her wicked ways, a fashion she learned from the high-toned Phoenicians in

about 850 B.C. In the eighteenth century, European women were willing to eat Arsenic Complexion Wafers to make their skin whiter; it poisoned the hemoglobin in the blood so that they developed a fragile, lunar whiteness. Rouges often contained such dangerous metals as lead and mercury, and when used as lipstain they went straight into the bloodstream. Seventeenth-century European women and men sometimes wore beauty patches in the shape of hearts, suns, moons, and stars, applying them to their breasts and face, to draw an admirer's eye away from any imperfections, which, in that era, too often included smallpox scars.

Studies conducted recently at the University of Louisville asked college men what they considered to be the ideal components in a woman's face, and fed the results into a computer. They discovered that their ideal woman had wide cheekbones; eyes set high and wide apart; a smallish nose; high eyebrows; a small neat chin; and a smile that could fill half of the face. On faces deemed "pretty," each eye was one-fourteenth as high as the face, and three-tenths its width; the nose didn't occupy more than five percent of the face; the distance from the bottom lip to the chin was one fifth the height of the face, and the distance from the middle of the eye to the eyebrow was one-tenth the height of the face. Superimpose the faces of many beautiful women onto these computer ratios, and none will match up. What this geometry of beauty boils down to is a portrait of an ideal mother—a young, healthy woman. A mother had to be fertile, healthy, and energetic to protect her young and continue to bear lots of children, many of whom might die in infancy. Men drawn to such women had a stronger chance of their genes surviving. Capitalizing on the continuing subleties of that appeal, plastic surgeons sometimes advertise with extraordinary bluntness. A California surgeon, Dr. Vincent Forshan, once ran an eight-page color ad in *Los Angeles* magazine showing a gorgeous young woman with a large, high bosom, flat stomach, high, tight buttocks, and long sleek legs posing beside a red Ferrari. The headline over the photo ran: "Automobile by Ferrari . . . *body by Forshan.*" Question: What do those of us who aren't tall, flawlessly sculpted adolescents do? Answer: Console ourselves with how relative beauty can be. Although it wins our first praise and the helpless gift of our attention, it can curdle before our eyes in a matter of moments. I remember seeing Omar Sharif in *Doctor Zhivago* and *Lawrence of Arabia,* and thinking him astoundingly handsome. When I saw him being interviewed on television some months later, and heard him declare that his only interest in life was playing bridge, which is how he spent most of his spare time, to my great amazement he was transformed before my eyes into an unappealing man. Suddenly his eyes seemed rheumy and his chin stuck out too much and none of the pieces of his anatomy fell together in the right proportions. I've watched this alchemy work in reverse, too, when a not-particularly-attractive stranger opened his mouth to speak and became ravishing. Thank heavens for the arousing qualities of zest, intelligence, wit, curiosity, sweetness, passion, talent, and grace. Thank heavens that, though good looks may rally one's attention, a lasting sense of a person's beauty reveals itself in stages. Thank heavens, as Shakespeare puts it in *A Midsummer Night's Dream:* "Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind."

Suggestions for Writing and Discussion

1.

Compare your definition, or description, of beauty with the one mentioned in this article. What features did you agree with? What did you fail to mention? How do you account for any differences here?

2.
Which one of the "discoveries" in paragraph 2 is most shocking or appalling to you? Explain why.

3.
After reading this piece, which facts or interesting details stay with you? Why do you think this is?

4.
Who is Ackerman's intended audience, and what is Ackerman's purpose in writing this piece? How do her audience and purpose compare to Padilla's?

5.
According to Ackerman, what are the differences in male and female beauty? In what way did your journal writing support these differences? After reading this piece, would you make changes to your original "choice"? Why or why not?

Suggestions for Extended Thinking and Research
1.
Analyze several magazine ads that have a female face as their central focus. In what ways do these examples support or dispel Ackerman's contentions about beauty?

2.
Analyze several magazine ads that contain both male and female models. In what ways do these examples support or dispel Ackerman's contentions about beauty and attractiveness?

3.
Analyze two or three popular American sitcoms. In what ways do the male and female characters support or dispel Ackerman's contentions about beauty?
HISAYE YAMAMOTO

Seventeen Syllables
Born in 1921 in Redondo Beach, California, to Japanese immigrant parents, Hisaye Yamamoto was interned in a detention camp for Japanese Americans during World War II. During her time in the camp she edited and wrote articles for the camp newsletter and published a serial mystery. After the war ended, she became a columnist for the Los Angeles Tribune *and continued to write in support of social justice issues, particularly pacifism. "Seventeen Syllables" was first published in a volume of Yamamoto's short fiction by Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press in 1988.*
Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing
1.

Discuss the ways in which both a husband and wife can find happiness and fulfillment in marriage.

2.
Choose one of the following topics—love, respect, friendship, freedom, jealousy—and try to express your feelings about this topic in seventeen one-syllable words. Then freewrite for ten minutes on this same topic. Now go back and reflect on both of these writing processes. Which one came more easily to you? Which one was more demanding, more frustrating? Why do you think this is?

———

The first Rosie knew that her mother had taken to writing poems was one evening when she finished one and read it aloud for her daughter's approval. It was about cats, and Rosie pretended to understand it thoroughly and appreciate it no end, partly because she hesitated to disillusion her mother about the quantity and quality of Japanese she had learned in all the years now that she had been going to Japanese school every Saturday (and Wednesday, too, in the summer). Even so, her mother must have been skeptical about the depth of Rosie's understanding, because she explained afterwards about the kind of poem she was trying to write.

See, Rosie, she said, it was a *haiku*, a poem in which she must pack all her meaning into seventeen syllables only, which were divided into three lines of five, seven, and five syllables. In the one she had just read, she had tried to capture the charm of a kitten, as well as comment on the superstition that owning a cat of three colors meant good luck.

"Yes, yes, I understand. How utterly lovely," Rosie said, and her mother, either satisfied or seeing through the deception and resigned, went back to composing.

The truth was that Rosie was lazy; English lay ready on the tongue but Japanese had to be searched for and examined, and even then put forth tentatively (probably to meet with laughter). It was so much easier to say yes, yes, even when one meant no, no. Besides, this was what was in her mind to say: I was looking through one of your magazines from Japan last night, Mother, and towards the back I found some *haiku* in English that delighted me. There was one that made me giggle off and on until I fell asleep—

It is morning, and lo!
I lie awake, comme il faut,
sighing for some dough.

5
Now, how to reach her mother, how to communicate the melancholy song? Rosie knew formal Japanese by fits and starts, her mother had even less English, no French. It was much more possible to say yes, yes.

It developed that her mother was writing the *haiku* for a daily newspaper, the *Mainichi Shimbun*, that was published in San Francisco. Los Angeles, to be sure, was closer to the farming community in which the Hayashi family lived and several Japanese vernaculars were printed there, but Rosie's parents said they preferred the tone of the northern paper. Once a week, the *Mainichi* would have a section devoted to *haiku*, and her mother became an extravagant contributor, taking for herself the blossoming pen name, Ume

Hanazono. So Rosie and her father lived for awhile with two women, her mother and Ume Hanazono. Her mother (Tome Hayashi by name) kept house, cooked, washed, and, along with her husband and the Carrascos, the Mexican family hired for the harvest, did her ample share of picking tomatoes out in the sweltering fields and boxing them in tidy strata in the cool packing shed. Ume Hanazono, who came to life after the dinner dishes were done, was an earnest, muttering stranger who often neglected speaking when spoken to and stayed busy at the parlor table as late as midnight scribbling with pencil on scratch paper or carefully copying characters on good paper with her fat, pale green Parker.
The new interest had some repercussions on the household routine. Before, Rosie had been accustomed to her parents and herself taking their hot baths early and going to bed almost immediately afterwards, unless her parents challenged each other to a game of flower cards or unless company dropped in. Now if her father wanted to play cards, he had to resort to solitaire (at which he always cheated fearlessly), and if a group of friends came over, it was bound to contain someone who was also writing *haiku,* and the small assemblage would be split in two, her father entertaining the nonliterary members and her mother comparing ecstatic notes with the visiting poet.
If they went out, it was more of the same thing. But Ume Hanazono's life span, even for a poet's, was very brief—perhaps three months at most.

10
One night they went over to see the Hayano family in the neighboring town to the west, an adventure both painful and attractive to Rosie. It was attractive because there were four Hayano girls, all lovely and each one named after a season of the year (Haru, Natsu, Aki, Fuyu), painful because something had been wrong with Mrs. Hayano ever since the birth of her first child. Rosie would sometimes watch Mrs. Hayano, reputed to have been the belle of her native village, making her way about a room, stooped, slowly shuffling, violently trembling (*always* trembling), and she would be reminded that this woman, in this same condition, had carried and given issue to three babies. She would look wonderingly at Mr. Hayano, handsome, tall, and strong, and she would look at her four pretty friends. But it was not a matter she could come to any decision about.
On this visit, however, Mrs. Hayano sat all evening in the rocker, as motionless and unobtrusive as it was possible for her to be, and Rosie found the greater part of the evening practically anaesthetic. Too, Rosie spent most of it in the girls' room, because Haru, the garrulous one, said almost as soon as the bows and other greetings were over, "Oh, you must see my new coat!" It was a pale plaid of grey, sand, and blue, with an enormous collar, and Rosie, seeing nothing special in it, said, "Gee, how nice."
"Nice?" said Haru, indignantly. "Is that all you can say about it? It's gorgeous! And so cheap, too. Only seventeen-ninety eight, because it was a sale. The saleslady said it was twenty-five dollars regular."
"Gee," said Rosie. Natsu, who never said much and when she said anything said it shyly, fingered the coat covetously and Haru pulled it away.
15
"Mine," she said, putting it on. She minced in the aisle between the two large beds and smiled happily. "Let's see how your mother likes it."

She broke into the front room and the adult conversation and went to stand in front of Rosie's mother, while the rest watched from the door. Rosie's mother was properly envious. "May I inherit it when you're through with it?"
Haru, pleased, giggled and said yes, she could, but Natsu reminded gravely from the door, "You promised me, Haru."
Everyone laughed but Natsu, who shamefacedly retreated into the bedroom. Haru came in laughing, taking off the coat. "We were only kidding, Natsu," she said. "Here, you try it on now."
After Natsu buttoned herself into the coat, inspected herself solemnly in the bureau mirror, and reluctantly shed it, Rosie, Aki, and Fuyu got their turns, and Fuyu, who was eight, drowned in it while her sisters and Rosie doubled up in amusement. They all went into the front room later, because Haru's mother quaveringly called to her to fix the tea and rice cakes and open a can of sliced peaches for everybody. Rosie noticed that her mother and Mr. Hayano were talking together at the little table—they were discussing a *haiku* that Mr. Hayano was planning to send to the *Mainichi,* while her father was sitting at one end of the sofa looking through a copy of *Life,* the new picture magazine. Occasionally, her father would comment on a photograph, holding it toward Mrs. Hayano and speaking to her as he always did—loudly, as though he thought someone such as she must surely be at least a trifle deaf also.
20
The five girls had their refreshments at the kitchen table, and it was while Rosie was showing the sisters her trick of swallowing peach slices without chewing (she chased each slippery crescent down with a swig of tea) that her father brought his empty teacup and untouched saucer to the sink and said, "Come on, Rosie, we're going home now."
"Already?" asked Rosie.
"Work tomorrow," he said.
He sounded irritated, and Rosie, puzzled, gulped one last yellow slice and stood up to go, while the sisters began protesting, as was their wont.
"We have to get up at five-thirty," he told them, going into the front room quickly, so that they did not have their usual chance to hang onto his hands and plead for an extension of time.
25
Rosie, following, saw that her mother and Mr. Hayano were sipping tea and still talking together, while Mrs. Hayano concentrated, quivering, on raising the handleless Japanese cup to her lips with both her hands and lowering it back to her lap. Her father, saying nothing, went out the door, onto the bright porch, and down the steps. Her mother looked up and asked, "Where is he going?"
"Where is he going?" Rosie said. "He said we were going home now." "Going home?" Her mother looked with embarrassment at Mr. Hayano and his absorbed wife and then forced a smile. "He must be tired," she said.
Haru was not giving up yet. "May Rosie stay overnight?" she asked, and Natsu, Aki, and Fuyu came to reinforce their sister's plea by helping her make a circle around Rosie's mother. Rosie, for once having no desire to stay, was relieved when her mother, apologizing to the perturbed Mr. and Mrs. Hayano for her father's abruptness at the same time, managed to shake her head no at the quartet, kindly but adamant, so that they broke their circle and let her go. Rosie's father looked ahead into the windshield as the two

joined him. “I’m sorry,” her mother said. “You must be tired.” Her father, stepping on the starter, said nothing. “You know how I get when it’s *haiku*,” she continued, “I forget what time it is.” He only grunted.
30
As they rode homeward silently, Rosie, sitting between, felt a rush of hate for both—for her mother for begging, for her father for denying her mother. I wish this old Ford would crash, right now, she thought, then immediately, no, no, I wish my father would laugh, but it was too late: already the vision had passed through her mind of the green pick-up crumpled in the dark against one of the mighty eucalyptus trees they were just riding past, of the three contorted, bleeding bodies, one of them hers.

Rosie ran between two patches of tomatoes, her heart working more rambunctiously than she had ever known it to. How lucky it was that Aunt Taka and Uncle Gimpachi had come tonight, though, how very lucky. Otherwise she might not have really kept her half-promise to meet Jesus Carrasco. Jesus was going to be a senior in September at the same school she went to, and his parents were the ones helping with the tomatoes this year. She and Jesus, who hardly remembered seeing each other at Cleveland High where there were so many other people and two whole grades between them, had become great friends this summer—he always had a joke for her when he periodically drove the loaded pick-up up from the fields to the shed where she was usually sorting while her mother and father did the packing, and they laughed a great deal together over infinitesimal repartee during the afternoon break for chilled watermelon or ice cream in the shade of the shed.

What she enjoyed most was racing him to see who could finish picking a double row first. He, who could work faster, would tease her by slowing down until she thought she would surely pass him this time, then speeding up furiously to leave her several sprawling vines behind. Once he had made her screech hideously by crossing over, while her back was turned, to place atop the tomatoes in her green-stained bucket a truly monstrous, pale green worm (it had looked more like an infant snake). And it was when they had finished a contest this morning, after she had pantingly pointed a green finger at the immature tomatoes evident in the lugs at the end of his row and he had returned the accusation (with justice), that he had startlingly brought up the matter of their possibly meeting outside the range of both their parents’ dubious eyes.
“What for?” she had asked.
“I’ve got a secret I want to tell you,” he said.
35
“Tell me now,” she demanded.
“It won’t be ready till tonight,” he said.
She laughed. “Tell me tomorrow then.”
“It’ll be gone tomorrow,” he threatened.
“Well, for seven hakes, what is it?” she had asked, more than twice, and when he had suggested that the packing shed would be an appropriate place to find out, she had cautiously answered maybe. She had not been certain she was going to keep the appointment until the arrival of mother’s sister and her husband. Their coming seemed a sort of signal of permission, of grace, and she had definitely made up her mind to lie and leave as she was bowing them welcome.

So as soon as everyone appeared settled back for the evening, she announced loudly that she was going to the privy outside, "I'm going to the *benjo!*" and slipped out the door. And now that she was actually on her way, her heart pumped in such an undisciplined way that she could hear it with her ears. It's because I'm running, she told herself, slowing to a walk. The shed was up ahead, one more patch away, in the middle of the fields. Its bulk, looming in the dimness, took on a sinisterness that was funny when Rosie reminded herself that it was only a wooden frame with a canvas roof and three canvas walls that made a slapping noise on breezy days.

Jesus was sitting on the narrow plank that was the sorting platform and she went around to the other side and jumped backwards to seat herself on the rim of a packing stand. "Well, tell me," she said without greeting, thinking her voice sounded reassuringly familiar.

"I saw you coming out the door," Jesus said. "I heard you running part of the way, too."

"Uh-huh," Rosie said. "Now tell me the secret."

"I was afraid you wouldn't come," he said.

Rosie delved around on the chicken-wire bottom of the stall for number two tomatoes, ripe, which she was sitting beside, and came up with a left-over that felt edible. She bit into it and began sucking out the pulp and seeds. "I'm here," she pointed out.

"Rosie, are you sorry you came?"

"Sorry? What for?" she said. "You said you were going to tell me something."

"I will, I will," Jesus said, but his voice contained disappointment, and Rosie fleetingly felt the older of the two, realizing a brand-new power which vanished without category under her recognition.

"I have to go back in a minute," she said. "My aunt and uncle are here from Wintersburg. I told them I was going to the privy."

Jesus laughed. "You funny thing," he said. "You slay me!"

"Just because you have a bathroom *inside,*" Rosie said. "Come on, tell me."

Chuckling, Jesus came around to lean on the stand facing her. They still could not see each other very clearly, but Rosie noticed that Jesus became very sober again as he took the hollow tomato from her hand and dropped it back into the stall. When he took hold of her empty hand, she could find no words to protest; her vocabulary had become distressingly constricted and she thought desperately that all that remained intact now was yes and no and oh, and even these few sounds would not easily out. Thus, kissed by Jesus, Rosie fell for the first time entirely victim to a helplessness delectable beyond speech. But the terrible, beautiful sensation lasted no more than a second, and the reality of Jesus' lips and tongue and teeth and hands made her pull away with such strength that she nearly tumbled.

Rosie stopped running as she approached the lights from the windows of home. How long since she had left? She could not guess, but gasping yet, she went to the privy in back and locked herself in. Her own breathing deafened her in the dark, close space, and she sat and waited until she could hear at last the nightly calling of the frogs and crickets.

Even then, all she could think to say was oh, my, and the pressure of Jesus' face against her face would not leave.

No one had missed her in the parlor, however, and Rosie walked in and through quickly, announcing that she was next going to take a bath. "Your father's in the bathhouse," her mother said, and Rosie, in her room, recalled that she had not seen him when she entered. There had been only Aunt Taka and Uncle Gimpachi with her mother at the table, drinking tea. She got her robe and straw sandals and crossed the parlor again to go outside. Her mother was telling them about the *haiku* competition in the *Mainichi* and the poem she had entered.
55
Rosie met her father coming out of the bathhouse. "Are you through, Father?" she asked. "I was going to ask you to scrub my back."
"Scrub your own back," he said shortly, going toward the main house.
"What have I done now?" she yelled after him. She suddenly felt like doing a lot of yelling. But he did not answer, and she went into the bathhouse. Turning on the dangling light, she removed her denims and T-shirt and threw them in the big carton for dirty clothes standing next to the washing machine. Her other things she took with her into the bath compartment to wash after her bath. After she had scooped a basin of hot water from the square wooden tub, she sat on the grey cement of the floor and soaped herself at exaggerated leisure, singing "Red Sails in the Sunset" at the top of her voice and using da-da-da where she suspected her words. Then, standing up, still singing, for she was possessed by the notion that any attempt now to analyze would result in spoilage and she believed that the larger her volume the less she would be able to hear herself think, she obtained more hot water and poured it on until she was free of lather. Only then did she allow herself to step into the steaming vat, one leg first, then the remainder of her body inch by inch until the water no longer stung and she could move around at will.
She took a long time soaking, afterwards remembering to go around outside to stoke the embers of the tin-lined fireplace beneath the tub and to throw on a few more sticks so that the water might keep its heat for her mother, and when she finally returned to the parlor, she found her mother still talking *haiku* with her aunt and uncle, the three of them on another round of tea. Her father was nowhere in sight.

At Japanese school the next day (Wednesday, it was), Rosie was grave and giddy by turns. Preoccupied at her desk in the row for students on Book Eight, she made up for it at recess by performing wild mimicry for the benefit of her friend Chizuko. She held her nose and whined a witticism or two in what she considered was the manner of Fred Allen; she assumed intoxication and a British accent to go over the climax of the Rudy Vallee recording of the pub conversation about William Ewart Gladstone; she was the child Shirley Temple piping, "On the Good Ship Lollipop"; she was the gentleman soprano of the Four Inkspots trilling, "If I Didn't Care." And she felt reasonably satisfied when Chizuko wept and gasped, "Oh, Rosie, you ought to be in the movies!"
60
Her father came after her at noon, bringing her sandwiches of minced ham and two nectarines to eat while she rode, so that she could pitch right into the sorting when they got home. The lugs were piling up, he said, and the ripe tomatoes in them would probably

have to be taken to the cannery tomorrow if they were not ready for the produce haulers tonight. “This heat’s not doing them any good. And we’ve got no time for a break today.” It *was* hot, probably the hottest day of the year, and Rosie’s blouse stuck damply to her back even under the protection of the canvas. But she worked as efficiently as a flawless machine and kept the stalls heaped, with one part of her mind listening in to the parental murmuring about the heat and the tomatoes and with another part planning the exact words she would say to Jesus when he drove up with the first load of the afternoon. But when at last she saw that the pick-up was coming, her hands went berserk and the tomatoes started falling in the wrong stalls, and her father said, “Hey, hey! Rosie, watch what you’re doing!”

“Well, I have to go to the *benjo,*” she said, hiding panic.

“Go in the weeds over there,” he said, only half-joking.

“Oh, Father!” she protested.

65

“Oh, go on home,” her mother said. “We’ll make out for awhile.”

In the privy Rosie peered through a knothole toward the fields, watching as much as she could of Jesus. Happily she thought she saw him look in the direction of the house from time to time before he finished unloading and went back toward the patch where his mother and father worked. As she was heading for the shed, a very presentable black car purred up the dirt driveway to the house and its driver motioned to her. Was this the Hayashi home, he wanted to know. She nodded. Was she a Hayashi? Yes, she said, thinking that he was a good-looking man. He got out of the car with a huge, flat package and she saw that he warmly wore a business suit. “I have something here for your mother then,” he said, in a more elegant Japanese than she was used to. She told him where her mother was and he came along with her, patting his face with an immaculate white handkerchief and saying something about the coolness of San Francisco. To her surprised mother and father, he bowed and introduced himself as, among other things, the *haiku* editor of the *Mainichi Shimbun*, saying that since he had been coming as far as Los Angeles anyway, he had decided to bring her the first prize she had won in the recent contest. “First prize?” her mother echoed, believing and not believing, pleased and overwhelmed. Handed the package with a bow, she bobbed her head up and down numerous times to express her utter gratitude.

“It is nothing much,” he added, “but I hope it will serve as a token of our great appreciation for your contributions and our great admiration of your considerable talent.”

70

“I am not worthy,” she said, falling easily into his style. “It is I who should make some sign of my humble thanks for being permitted to contribute.”

“No, no, to the contrary,” he said, bowing again.

But Rosie’s mother insisted, and then saying that she knew she was being unorthodox, she asked if she might open the package because her curiosity was so great. Certainly she might. In fact, he would like her reaction to it, for personally, it was one of his favorite *Hiroshiges.*

Rosie thought it was a pleasant picture, which looked to have been sketched with delicate quickness. There were pink clouds, containing some graceful calligraphy, and a sea that was a pale blue except at the edges, containing four sampans with indications of people in them. Pines edged the water and on the far-off beach there was a cluster of thatched huts

towered over by pine-dotted mountains of grey and blue. The frame was scalloped and gilt.
After Rosie's mother pronounced it without peer and somewhat prodded her father into nodding agreement, she said Mr. Kuroda must at least have a cup of tea after coming all this way, and although Mr. Kuroda did not want to impose, he soon agreed that a cup of tea would be refreshing and went along with her to the house, carrying the picture for her.
75
"Ha, your mother's crazy!" Rosie's father said, and Rosie laughed uneasily as she resumed judgment on the tomatoes. She had emptied six lugs when he broke into an imaginary conversation with Jesus to tell her to go and remind her mother of the tomatoes, and she went slowly.
Mr. Kuroda was in his shirtsleeves expounding some *haiku* theory as he munched a rice cake, and her mother was rapt. Abashed in the great man's presence, Rosie stood next to her mother's chair until her mother looked up inquiringly, and then she started to whisper the message, but her mother pushed her gently away and reproached, "You are not being very polite to our guest."
"Father says the tomatoes . . ." Rosie said aloud, smiling foolishly.
"Tell him I shall only be a minute," her mother said, speaking the language of Mr. Kuroda.
When Rosie carried the reply to her father, he did not seem to hear and she said again, "Mother says she'll be back in a minute."
80
"All right, all right," he nodded, and they worked again in silence. But suddenly, her father uttered an incredible noise, exactly like the cork of a bottle popping, and the next Rosie knew, he was stalking angrily toward the house, almost running in fact, and she chased after him crying, "Father! Father! What are you going to do?"
He stopped long enough to order her back to the shed. "Never mind!" he shouted. "Get on with the sorting!"
And from the place in the fields where she stood, frightened and vacillating, Rosie saw her father enter the house. Soon Mr. Kuroda came out alone, putting on his coat. Mr. Kuroda got into his car and backed out down the driveway onto the highway. Next her father emerged, also alone, something in his arms (it was the picture, she realized), and, going over to the bathhouse woodpile, he threw the picture on the ground and picked up the axe. Smashing the picture, glass and all (she heard the explosion faintly), he reached over for the kerosene that was used to encourage the bath fire and poured it over the wreckage. I am dreaming, Rosie said to herself, I am dreaming, but her father, having made sure that his act of cremation was irrevocable, was even then returning to the fields. Rosie ran past him and toward the house. What had become of her mother? She burst into the parlor and found her mother at the back window watching the dying fire. They watched together until there remained only a feeble smoke under the blazing sun. Her mother was very calm.
"Do you know why I married your father?" she said without turning.
85
"No," said Rosie. It was the most frightening question she had ever been called upon to answer. Don't tell me now, she wanted to say, tell me tomorrow, tell me next week, don't tell me today. But she knew she would be told now, that the telling would combine with the other violence of the hot afternoon to level her life, her world to the very ground.

It was like a story out of the magazines illustrated in sepia, which she had consumed so greedily for a period until the information had somehow reached her that those wretchedly unhappy autobiographies, offered to her as the testimonials of living men and women, were largely inventions: Her mother, at nineteen, had come to America and married her father as an alternative to suicide.

At eighteen she had been in love with the first son of one of the well-to-do families in her village. The two had met whenever and wherever they could, secretly, because it would not have done for his family to see him favor her—her father had no money; he was a drunkard and a gambler besides. She had learned she was with child; an excellent match had already been arranged for her lover. Despised by her family, she had given premature birth to a stillborn son, who would be seventeen now. Her family did not turn her out, but she could no longer project herself in any direction without refreshing in them the memory of her indiscretion. She wrote to Aunt Taka, her favorite sister in America, threatening to kill herself if Aunt Taka would not send for her. Aunt Taka hastily arranged a marriage with a young man of whom she knew, but lately arrived from Japan, a young man of simple mind, it was said, but of kindly heart. The young man was never told why his unseen betrothed was so eager to hasten the day of meeting.

The story was told perfectly, with neither groping for words nor untoward passion. It was as though her mother had memorized it by heart, reciting it to herself so many times over that its nagging vileness had long since gone.

"I had a brother then?" Rosie asked, for this was what seemed to matter now; she would think about the other later, she assured herself, pushing back the illumination which threatened all that darkness that had hitherto been merely mysterious or even glamorous.

"A half-brother?"

"Yes."

"I would have liked a brother," she said.

Suddenly, her mother knelt on the floor and took her by the wrists. "Rosie," she said urgently, "Promise me you will never marry!" Shocked more by the request than the revelation, Rosie stared at her mother's face. Jesus, Jesus, she called silently, not certain whether she was invoking the help of the son of the Carrascos or of God, until there returned sweetly the memory of Jesus' hand, how it had touched her and where. Still her mother waited for an answer, holding her wrists so tightly that her hands were going numb. She tried to pull free. Promise, her mother whispered fiercely, promise. Yes, yes, I promise, Rosie said. But for an instant she turned away, and her mother, hearing the familiar glib agreement, released her. Oh, you, you, you, her eyes and twisted mouth said, you fool. Rosie, covering her face, began at last to cry, and the embrace and consoling hand came much later than she expected.

Suggestions for Writing and Discussion

1.

The theme within a short story usually centers on one character who finds himself or herself in conflict with either the self, the society, or nature. With this thought in mind, who is the central character in this piece, and what is the central conflict?

2.

Describe the dynamics within Rosie's family in the beginning of the story. What can you tell about the relationships within this family? What can you tell about the emotions in this family?

3.
Compare or contrast the male-female relationships within this story: Rosie's mother and father, Mr. and Mrs. Hayano, and Rosie and Jesus. What similarities do you see in all three relationships? What differences are most striking? What difference do these differences make?

4.
What explanation can you offer for Rosie's behavior at Japanese school, and how might this behavior compare with that of her mother?

5.
Why, when Mr. Hayashi destroys his wife's prize, does she remain "very calm"? What explanations can you offer for this behavior?

6.
Slow down on the last paragraph and imagine this is the final scene of a play. What is the message here, and what are the implications behind these final words: "and the embrace and consoling hand came much later than she expected"?

Suggestions for Extended Thinking and Research

1.
Choose one of the symbols in this piece—haiku, the name Rosie, tomatoes, hands, teacup, fire, or any other—and explain how this symbol reflects one of the themes in this story.

2.
Research the origins and artistic demands of haiku. Write an essay in which you explain the heart of this artistic form and its relationship to Japanese culture.

3.
Working with two or three peers, form a haiku writing group in which each member writes and revises three or four poems. After collaboration and conferencing, publish your tiny volume of haiku, complete with authors' backgrounds and comments on each writer's process, and distribute your publications to the class.

GARY GILDNER

First Practice

Gary Gildner teaches creative writing at the University of Iowa. He has published several volumes of poetry, including First Practice *(1970), from which this poem is taken. Following a year of teaching American literature in Poland while on a Fulbright Scholarship, Gildner wrote his latest novel,* The Warsaw Sparks *(1990).*

Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing

1.

React to each of the following quotes:
“Winning isn’t everything; it’s the only thing.”—*Vince Lombardi*
“Nice guys finish last.”—*Leo Durocher*

2.
In your opinion, what are the drawbacks with competitive sports, and what are the benefits?

———

After the doctor checked to see
we weren’t ruptured,
the man with the short cigar took us
under the grade school,
where we went in case of attack
or storm, and said
he was Clifford Hill, he was
a man who believed dogs
ate dogs, he had once killed
for his country, and if
there were any girls present
for them to leave now.
No one
left. OK, he said, he said I take
that to mean you are hungry
men who hate to lose as much
as I do. OK. Then
he made two lines of us
facing each other,
and across the way, he said,
is the man you hate most
in the world,
and if we are to win
that title I want to see how.
But I don’t want to see
any marks when you’re dressed,
he said. He said, *Now.*

Suggestions for Writing and Discussion

1.
Write a quick, two-minute reflection to this poem. How does this reflection compare with your first journal response?

2.
Jot down a list of the most powerful images or words in the first sentence. Then jot down another list of powerful words or images from the second sentence. Categorize the words in the first sentence according to connotations, and do the same with the second list. Based on these lists and categories, what can you see as the emerging theme of this poem?

3.
Besides the obvious coach-player relationship, what other underlying suggestions emerge, based on the images you've isolated?

4.
In what way does the language reflect the type of person this coach is? What can you deduce about his personality, his intelligence, his emotions?

Suggestions for Extended Thinking and Research

1.
Using outside sources as well as your own experience and observations, write a persuasive argument that upholds and defends the value of young people participating in competitive team sports.

2.
Using outside resources as well as your own experience and observations, write a persuasive argument against young people participating in competitive team sports.

3.
A poem can be like a bouillon cube. Drop it into a pot of welcoming water and watch it explode into a full-fledged soup. Take this poem, then, and with the strength of your imagination and the flavor of this cube, explode it into a short story. Publicly share this expanded version with your classmates.

———

TOPICS FOR MAKING CONNECTIONS:
AMERICAN CONFLICTS AND STRUGGLES

1.
Several of the writings in this chapter deal with culture and how it affects the relationship between a child and a parent. Analyze the inner conflicts, the discoveries, and the resolutions that occur within this framework.

2.
Use at least three of the selections in this chapter to analyze the different processes by which we come to know who we are.

3.
To what extent should one's identity—sense of self—relate to and draw upon the past (including ethnic and religious traditions and beliefs)? In addition to using several sources from this chapter, draw upon your own experiences and observations to answer this question.

4.
Compare the differences between being rooted and being uprooted. Examine both the positive and the negative aspects of each, and come to some conclusion about how each state of being contributes to what we know and who we are.

5.
Analyze the effects of being caught between two identities. Besides using the sources in this chapter for references, rely on your own experiences and observations. What happens when we are caught in a struggle of who we know we might be with who we used to be or with who someone else wants us to be?

6.
Many of the writings in this chapter deal with the struggles one undergoes upon encountering a new culture and trying to be accepted as a member of this culture. Examine the conflicts that one often endures in these initiation rites, and come to some conclusion about this process of fitting in: Is it harmful? Too painful? Unnecessary for one's identity? A necessary rite of passage? Something else?

7.
Review the selections in this chapter that you have read. Select the piece that you enjoyed the most and the one that you liked the least. Now try to analyze why you enjoyed the piece you did: Was it the topic? The theme? The style? The language? Also, analyze why you didn't favor the other piece. In other words, what are the major differences between these two pieces as far as you, the reader, are concerned?

8.
From all of these readings, choose the person or character you most admired and the character or person you least admired. Compare these two and demonstrate the reasons for your evaluation.

9.
All of us belong to many cultures, cultures which give us our identity and help shape our values. However, in belonging to one culture, we are naturally excluded from others. Look at several of your favorite selections in this chapter, and analyze the part that prejudice plays in shaping who we ultimately become.

[1]An alkaloid extracted from henbane and various other plants of the nightshade family, scopolamine has also been used as truth serum. What a perfect cocktail for a cruise: large pupils continuously signaling interest in everyone they see, and a strong urge to be uninhibited and open to persuasion.

ERIC LIU
A Chinaman's Chance: Reflections on the American Dream
Eric Liu (born in 1968 in Poughkeepsie, New York) earned a bachelor's degree at Yale University and then went to Harvard to work on a doctorate. While in Cambridge,

Massachusetts, he founded Next Progressive, *a magazine featuring political and cultural commentary by writers in their twenties and early thirties, the generation coming of age, in Liu's words, "just as the American Dream is showing its age." He collected sixteen of those essays, including the one here, into a book,* Next: Young American Writers on the New Generation *(1994). Liu has also worked as a speechwriter for the White House and the National Security Council (1993–94) and written* The Accidental Asian: Notes of a Native Speaker *(1998).*

Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing

1.
Describe your American dream, and reflect on your chances of actually achieving this dream.

2.
What five words come to mind when you think of young Americans today—those between the ages of sixteen and twenty-one? Explain your choices.

———

A lot of people my age seem to think that the American Dream is dead. I think they're dead wrong.

Or at least only partly right. It is true that for those of us in our twenties and early thirties, job opportunities are scarce. There looms a real threat that we will be the first American generation to have a lower standard of living than our parents.

But what is it that we mean when we invoke the American Dream? In the past, the American Dream was something that held people of all races, religions, and identities together. As James Comer has written, it represented a shared aspiration among all Americans—black, white, or any other color—"to provide well for themselves and their families as valued members of a democratic society." Now, all too often, it seems the American Dream means merely some guarantee of affluence, a birthright of wealth.

5

At a basic level, of course, the American Dream is about prosperity and the pursuit of material happiness. But to me, its meaning extends beyond such concerns. To me, the dream is not just about buying a bigger house than the one I grew up in or having shinier stuff now than I had as a kid. It also represents a sense of opportunity that binds generations together in commitment, so that the young inherit not only property but also perseverance, not only money but also a mission to make good on the strivings of their parents and grandparents.

The poet Robert Browning once wrote that "a man's reach must exceed his grasp—else what's a heaven for?" So it is in America. Every generation will strive, and often fail. Every generation will reach for success, and often miss the mark. But Americans rely as much on the next generation as on the next life to prove that such struggles and frustrations are not in vain. There may be temporary setbacks, cutbacks, recessions, depressions. But this is a nation of second chances. So long as there are young Americans who do not take what they have—or what they can do—for granted, progress is always possible.

My conception of the American Dream does not take progress for granted. But it does demand the *opportunity* to achieve progress—and values the opportunity as much as the achievement. I come at this question as the son of immigrants. I see just as clearly as

anyone else the cracks in the idealist vision of fulfillment for all. But because my parents came here with virtually nothing, because they did build something, I see the enormous potential inherent in the ideal.

I happen still to believe in our national creed: freedom and opportunity, and our common responsibility to uphold them. This creed is what makes America unique. More than any demographic statistic or economic indicator, it animates the American Dream. It infuses our mundane struggles—to plan a career, do good work, get ahead—with purpose and possibility. It makes America the only country that could produce heroes like Colin Powell—heroes who rise from nothing, who overcome the odds.

I think of the sacrifices made by my own parents. I appreciate the hardship of the long road traveled by my father—one of whose first jobs in America was painting the yellow line down a South Dakota interstate—and by my mother—whose first job here was filing pay stubs for a New York restaurant. From such beginnings, they were able to build a comfortable life and provide me with a breadth of resources—through arts, travel, and an Ivy League education. It was an unspoken obligation for them to do so.

10

I think of my boss in my first job after college, on Capitol Hill. George is a smart, feisty, cigar-chomping, take-no-shit Greek-American. He is about fifteen years older than I, has different interests, a very different personality. But like me, he is the son of immigrants, and he would joke with me that the Greek-Chinese mafia was going to take over one day. He was only half joking. We'd worked harder, our parents doubly harder, than almost anyone else we knew. To people like George, talk of the withering of the American Dream seems foreign.

It's undeniable that principles like freedom and opportunity, no matter how dearly held, are not enough. They can inspire a multiracial March on Washington, but they can not bring black salaries in alignment with white salaries. They can draw wave after wave of immigrants here, but they can not provide them the means to get out of our ghettos and barrios and Chinatowns. They are not sufficient for fulfillment of the American Dream. But they are necessary. They are vital. And not just to the children of immigrants. These ideals form the durable thread that weaves us all in union. Put another way, they are one of the few things that keep America from disintegrating into a loose confederation of zip codes and walled-in communities.

What alarms me is how many people my age look at our nation's ideals with a rising sense of irony. What good is such a creed if you are working for hourly wages in a dead-end job? What value do such platitudes have if you live in an urban war zone? When the only apparent link between homeboys and housepainters and bike messengers and investment bankers is pop culture—MTV, the NBA, movies, dance music—then the social fabric is flimsy indeed.

My generation has come of age at a time when the country is fighting off bouts of defeatism and self-doubt, at a time when racism and social inequities seem not only persistent but intractable. At a time like this, the retreat to one's own kind is seen by more and more of my peers as an advance. And that retreat has given rise again to the notion that there are essential and irreconcilable differences among the races—a notion that was supposed to have disappeared from American discourse by the time my peers and I were born in the sixties.

15

Not long ago, for instance, my sister called me a “banana.”

I was needling her about her passion for rap and hip-hop music. Every time I saw her, it seemed, she was jumping and twisting to Arrested Development or Chubb Rock or some other funky group. She joked that despite being the daughter of Chinese immigrants, she was indeed “black at heart.” And then she added, lightheartedly, “You, on the other hand—well, you’re basically a banana.” Yellow on the outside, but white inside.

I protested, denied her charge vehemently. But it was too late. She was back to dancing. And I stood accused.

Ever since then, I have wondered what it means to be black, or white, or Asian “at heart”—particularly for my generation. Growing up, when other kids would ask whether I was Chinese or Korean or Japanese, I would reply, a little petulantly, “American.” Assimilation can still be a sensitive subject. I recall reading about a Korean-born Congressman who had gone out of his way to say that Asian-Americans should expect nothing special from him. He added that he was taking speech lessons “to get rid of this accent.” I winced at his palpable self-hate. But then it hit me: Is this how my sister sees me?

There is no doubt that minorities like me can draw strength from our communities. But in today’s environment, anything other than ostentatious tribal fealty is taken in some communities as a sign of moral weakness, a disappointing dilution of character. In times that demand ever-clearer thinking, it has become too easy for people to shut off their brains: “It’s a black/Asian/Latino/white thing,” says the variable T-shirt. “You wouldn’t understand.” Increasingly, we don’t.

20

The civil-rights triumphs of the sixties and the cultural revolutions that followed made it possible for minorities to celebrate our diverse heritages. I can appreciate that. But I know, too, that the sixties—or at least, my generation’s grainy, hazy vision of the decade—also bequeathed to young Americans a legacy of near-pathological race consciousness.

Today’s culture of entitlement—and of race entitlement in particular—tells us plenty about what we get if we are black or white or female or male or old or young.

It is silent, though, on some other important issues. For instance: What do we “get” for being American? And just as importantly, What do we owe? These are questions around which young people like myself must tread carefully, since talk of common interests, civic culture, responsibility, and integration sounds a little too “white” for some people. To the new segregationists, the “American Dream” is like the old myth of the “Melting Pot”: an oppressive fiction, an opiate for the unhappy colored masses.

How have we allowed our thinking about race to become so twisted? The formal obstacles and the hateful opposition to civil rights have long faded into memory. By most external measures, life for minorities is better than it was a quarter century ago. It would seem that the opportunities for tolerance and cooperation are commonplace. Why, then, are so many of my peers so cynical about our ability to get along with one another?

The reasons are frustratingly ambiguous. I got a glimpse of this when I was in college. It was late in my junior year, and as the editor of a campus magazine, I was sitting on a panel to discuss “The White Press at Yale: What Is to Be Done?” The assembly hall was packed, a diverse and noisy crowd. The air was heavy, nervously electric.

25

Why weren't there more stories about "minority issues" in the Yale *Daily News*? Why weren't there more stories on Africa in my magazine, the foreign affairs journal? How many "editors of color" served on the boards of each of the major publications? The questions were volleyed like artillery, one round after another, punctuated only by the applause of an audience spoiling for a fight. The questions were not at all unfair. But it seemed that no one—not even those of us on the panel who *were* people of color—could provide, in this context, satisfactory answers.

Toward the end of the discussion, I made a brief appeal for reason and moderation. And afterward, as students milled around restlessly, I was attacked: for my narrow-mindedness—How dare you suggest that Yale is not a fundamentally prejudiced place!—for my simplemindedness—Have you, too, been co-opted?

And for my betrayal—Are you just white inside?

My eyes were opened that uncomfortably warm early summer evening. Not only to the cynical posturing and the combustible opportunism of campus racial politics. But more importantly, to the larger question of identity—my identity—in America. Never mind that the aim of many of the loudest critics was to generate headlines in the very publications they denounced. In spite of themselves—against, it would seem, their true intentions—they got me to think about who I am.

In our society today, and especially among people of my generation, we are congealing into clots of narrow commonality. We stick with racial and religious comrades. This tribal consciousness-raising can be empowering for some. But while America was conceived in liberty—the liberty, for instance, to associate with whomever we like—it was never designed to be a mere collection of subcultures. We forget that there is in fact such a thing as a unique American identity that transcends our sundry tribes, sets, gangs, and cliques.

I have grappled, wittingly or not, with these questions of identity and allegiance all my life. When I was in my early teens, I would invite my buddies overnight to watch movies, play video games, and beat one another up. Before too long, my dad would come downstairs and start hamming it up—telling stories, asking gently nosy questions, making corny jokes, all with his distinct Chinese accent. I would stand back, quietly gauging everyone's reaction. Of course, the guys loved it. But I would feel uneasy.

What was then cause for discomfort is now a source of strength. Looking back on such episodes, I take pride in my father's accented English; I feel awe at his courage to laugh loudly in a language not really his own.

It was around the same time that I decided that continued attendance at the community Chinese school on Sundays was uncool. There was no fanfare; I simply stopped going. As a child, I'd been too blissfully unaware to think of Chinese school as anything more than a weekly chore, with an annual festival (dumplings and spring rolls, games and prizes). But by the time I was a peer-pressured adolescent, Chinese school seemed like a badge of the woefully unassimilated. I turned my back on it.

Even as I write these words now, it feels as though I am revealing a long-held secret. I am proud that my ancestors—scholars, soldiers, farmers—came from one of the world's great civilizations. I am proud that my grandfather served in the Chinese Air Force. I am proud to speak even my clumsy brand of Mandarin, and I feel blessed to be able to think

idiomatically in Chinese, a language so much richer in nuance and subtle poetry than English.

Belatedly, I appreciate the good fortune I've had to be the son of immigrants. As a kid, I could play Thomas Jefferson in the bicentennial school play one week and the next week play the poet Li Bai at the Chinese school festival. I could come home from an afternoon of teen slang at the mall and sit down to dinner for a rollicking conversation in our family's hybrid of Chinese and English. I understood, when I went over to visit friends, that my life was different. At the time, I just never fully appreciated how rich it was.

35

Yet I know that this pride in my heritage does not cross into prejudice against others. What it reflects is pride in what my country represents. That became clear to me when I went through Marine Corps Officer Candidates' School. During the summers after my sophomore and junior years of college, I volunteered for OCS, a grueling boot camp for potential officers in the swamps and foothills of Quantico, Virginia.

And once I arrived—standing 5′4″, 135 pounds, bespectacled, a Chinese Ivy League Democrat—I was a target straight out of central casting. The wiry, raspy-voiced drill sergeant, though he was perhaps only an inch or two taller than I, called me "Little One" with as much venom as can be squeezed into such a moniker. He heaped verbal abuse on me, he laughed when I stumbled, he screamed when I hesitated. But he also never failed to remind me that just because I was a little shit didn't mean I shouldn't run farther, climb higher, think faster, hit harder than anyone else.

That was the funny thing about the Marine Corps. It is, ostensibly, one of the most conservative institutions in the United States. And yet, for those twelve weeks, it represented the kind of color-blind equality of opportunity that the rest of society struggles to match. I did not feel uncomfortable at OCS to be of Chinese descent. Indeed, I drew strength from it. My platoon was a veritable cross section of America: forty young men of all backgrounds, all regions, all races, all levels of intelligence and ability, displaced from our lives (if only for a few weeks) with nowhere else to go.

Going down the list of names—Courtemanche, Dougherty, Grella, Hunt, Liu, Reeves, Schwarzman, and so on—brought to mind a line from a World War II documentary I once saw, which went something like this: The reason why it seemed during the war that America was as good as the rest of the world put together was that America *was* the rest of the world put together.

Ultimately, I decided that the Marines was not what I wanted to do for four years and I did not accept the second lieutenant's commission. But I will never forget the day of the graduation parade: bright sunshine, brisk winds, the band playing Sousa as my company passed in review. As my mom and dad watched and photographed the parade from the rafters, I thought to myself: this is the American Dream in all its cheesy earnestness. I felt the thrill of truly being part of something larger and greater than myself.

40

I do know that American life is not all Sousa marches and flag-waving. I know that those with reactionary agendas often find it convenient to cloak their motives in the language of Americanism. The "American Party" was the name of a major nativist organization in the nineteenth century. "America First" is the siren song of the isolationists who would withdraw this country from the world and expel the world from this country. I know that

our national immigration laws were once designed explicitly to cut off the influx from Asia.

I also know that discrimination is real. I am reminded of a gentle old man who, after Pearl Harbor, was stripped of his possessions without warning, taken from his home, and thrown into a Japanese internment camp. He survived, and by many measures has thrived, serving as a community leader and political activist. But I am reluctant to share with him my wide-eyed patriotism.

I know the bittersweet irony that my own father—a strong and optimistic man—would sometimes feel when he was alive. When he came across a comically lost cause—if the Yankees were behind 14–0 in the ninth, or if Dukakis was down ten points in the polls with a week left—he would often joke that the doomed party had "a Chinaman's chance" of success. It was one of those insensitive idioms of a generation ago, and it must have lodged in his impressionable young mind when he first came to America. It spoke of a perceived stacked deck.

I know, too, that for many other immigrants, the dream simply does not work out. Fae Myenne Ng, the author of *Bone,* writes about how her father ventured here from China under a false identity and arrived at Angel Island, the detention center outside the "Gold Mountain" of San Francisco. He got out, he labored, he struggled, and he suffered "a bitter no-luck life" in America. There was no glory. For him, Ng suggests, the journey was not worth it.

But it is precisely because I know these things that I want to prove that in the long run, over generations and across ethnicities, it *is* worth it. For the second-generation American, opportunity is obligation. I have seen and faced racism. I understand the dull pain of dreams deferred or unmet. But I believe still that there is so little stopping me from building the life that I want. I was given, through my parents' labors, the chance to bridge that gap between ideals and reality. Who am I to throw away that chance?

Plainly, I am subject to the criticism that I speak too much from my own experience. Not everyone can relate to the second-generation American story. When I have spoken like this with some friends, the issue has been my perspective. *What you say is fine for you. But unless you grew up where I did, unless you've had people avoid you because of the color of your skin, don't talk to me about common dreams.*

But are we then to be paralyzed? Is respect for different experiences supposed to obviate the possibility of shared aspirations? Does the diversity of life in America doom us to a fractured understanding of one another? The question is basic: Should the failure of this nation thus far to fulfill its stated ideals incapacitate its young people, or motivate us? Our country was built on, and remains glued by, the idea that everybody deserves a fair shot and that we must work together to guarantee that opportunity—the original American Dream. It was this idea, in some inchoate form, that drew every immigrant here. It was this idea, however sullied by slavery and racism, that motivated the civil-rights movement. To write this idea off—even when its execution is spotty—to let American life descend into squabbles among separatist tribes would not just be sad. It would be a total mishandling of a legacy, the squandering of a great historical inheritance.

Mine must not be the first generation of Americans to lose America. Just as so many of our parents journeyed here to find their version of the American Dream, so must young

Americans today journey across boundaries of race and class to rediscover one another. We are the first American generation to be born into an integrated society, and we are accustomed to more race mixing than any generation before us. We started open-minded, and it's not too late for us to stay that way.

Time is of the essence. For in our national political culture today, the watchwords seem to be *decline* and *end.* Apocalyptic visions and dark millennial predictions abound. The end of history. The end of progress. The end of equality. Even something as ostensibly positive as the end of the Cold War has a bittersweet tinge, because for the life of us, no one in America can get a handle on the big question, "What Next?"

50

For my generation, this fixation on endings is particularly enervating. One's twenties are supposed to be a time of widening horizons, of bright possibilities. Instead, America seems to have entered an era of limits. Whether it is the difficulty of finding jobs from some place other than a temp agency, or the mountains of debt that darken our future, the message to my peers is often that this nation's time has come and gone; let's bow out with grace and dignity.

A friend once observed that while the Chinese seek to adapt to nature and yield to circumstance, Americans seek to conquer both. She meant that as a criticism of America. But I interpreted her remark differently. I *do* believe that America is exceptional. And I believe it is up to my generation to revive that spirit, that sense that we do in fact have control over our own destiny—as individuals and as a nation.

If we are to reclaim a common destiny, we must also reach out to other generations for help. It was Franklin Roosevelt who said that while America can't always build the future for its youth, it can—and must—build its youth for the future. That commitment across generations is as central to the American Dream as any I have enunciated. We are linked, black and white, old and young, one and inseparable.

I know how my words sound. I am old enough to perceive my own naïveté but young enough still to cherish it. I realize that I am coming of age just as the American Dream is showing its age. Yet I still have faith in this country's unique destiny—to create generation after generation of hyphenates like me, to channel this new blood, this resilience and energy into an ever more vibrant future for *all* Americans.

And I want to prove—for my sake, for my father's sake, and for my country's sake—that a Chinaman's chance is as good as anyone else's.

Suggestions for Writing and Discussion

1.

Based on this reading, what five words would you use to describe Eric Liu? How does he fit in with the words you chose in your prereading exercise?

2.

How might Liu be typical of this generation? How might he be different? Cite examples from the text for support.

3.

What specific factors might have helped shape Liu's philosophy regarding the American dream?

4.

What is his main point about diversity in America? Do you agree or disagree with him?

5.
How would you describe the overall tone of this piece? For whom might Liu be writing this piece? On what occasion might this piece be most appropriate?
Suggestions for Extended Thinking and Writing

1.
In a serious and formal manner, write an essay in which you address a specific group concerning one issue you feel strongly about. Aim to appeal, as Liu does, to your audience on an emotional as well as a moral level.
2.
Write an essay in which you offer an extended definition of one of the following concepts: democracy, freedom, opportunity, responsibility.
3.
Argue against Liu's premise: Write an essay in which you explain why the American dream is indeed dead.

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THE ECONOMIST
Why Willy Loman Lives
Arthur Miller's play Death of a Salesman *first appeared on Broadway in 1949. Its questions about the meaning of success and of the American Dream struck a chord with audiences at the beginning of the prosperous postwar era just as it did when the play was revived on Broadway in the prosperous 1990s. The play is about Willy Loman, a traveling salesman, and his two sons. He believes that having good looks and being well liked are the keys to success and has passed that creed on to his sons. But they have not acquired the knack of hard work and have not been successful. As his career disintegrates, Loman decides that the best thing he can do for his sons is to commit suicide so that they can collect his life insurance policy. The article here first appeared as an editorial in the British news magazine* The Economist *on June 19, 1999.*
Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing

1.
What's your impression of salespeople in general, and is this a career choice at which you might be successful? Explain.
2.
Describe your experience in searching for a new job or in getting laid off from an old one.
3.
Write about your biggest fear for your future.

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Two men stand on a stage. One is the hulking figure of Willy Loman, gradually becoming smaller in front of the audience's eyes; the other is his younger and weedier boss, Howard, gradually downsizing his old employee. "You can't eat an orange and throw the peel away," roars the broken salesman. "A man is not a piece of fruit." Meanwhile, Howard patronizes the old man (who decades before had helped christen him) by calling him "kid."

Most of the muffled sobs from the audience during the current, heavily Tony-ed version of "Death of a Salesman" on Broadway occur during the final reconciliation between Willy and his useless son, Biff. But the moment when Howard sacks Willy still stands out in its viciousness. When Arthur Miller's play opened in 1949, one conservative critic called it "a time bomb expertly placed under the edifice of Americanism." Willy Loman, the relentless competitor, became a symbol of the dark side of the American dream that he so firmly believed in. As his wife, Linda, says to Biff: "He's not the finest character that ever lived. But he's a human being and a terrible thing is happening to him. So attention must be paid."

But who is paying attention now? At first sight it seems odd that New Yorkers are flocking to see such a depressing play. Figures for consumer confidence are sky-high, unemployment at a 29-year low. When people lose their jobs they find new ones pretty quickly. During the interval, young investment bankers sip champagne and express their astonishment that America could ever have been "like that." The most modern figure in the play seems to be the ghost of Willy's brother Ben—an early version of an Internet entrepreneur who keeps on telling his brother how he "walked into the jungle" at 17, walked out at 21, and "by God, I was rich."

Somehow America's chattering classes seem to have forgotten the much-ballyhooed age of uncertainty. Those days in the early 1990s, when the *New York Times* seemed to have a permanent section on insecurity in the workplace and George Bush senior was wandering around New Hampshire mumbling "Message: I care" to laid-off workers, seem almost as distant as the days when salesmen still wore hats. "The current election will be about health care, education, values," one senator says, echoing the views of pollsters. Asked whether her boyfriend, who makes his living selling T-shirt logos round the country, feels insecure, Carol, a fitness instructor who works just round the corner from the Eugene O'Neill theatre, says flatly: "How should I know? He's playing golf in Myrtle Beach."

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Yet the notion that Willy Loman has left the American political scene for the 19th hole in the Carolinas is wrong. To make the obvious point first, as Alan Greenspan, the chairman of the Fed, made it to Congress this week, "The rate of growth cannot increase indefinitely." A nasty stock market correction and slightly higher interest rates, and many families across America could be looking at their Visa and MasterCard bills in the same anxious way that the Lomans fret about the payments on the fridge.

A cyclical downturn would certainly push Willy back to centre-stage. But the salesman's tragedy was set at the start of America's postwar boom. As Mr. Greenspan has pointed out repeatedly, one reason why wage inflation remains relatively low is the simple fact that many Americans are terrified of losing their jobs. And with good reason. Some 55,231 jobs were shed in May, according to consultants at Challenger, Gray & Christmas. The total for job cuts in the first five months of 1999 was nearly 50% higher than the equivalent figure in 1998. The typical worker changes jobs nine times before the age of 32. "Any Monday morning you can be told you are no longer needed," Mr. Miller recently told the *Los Angeles Times.* "The company is moving to Guatemala." If you pick up any book about the Internet, you will be told that "salesmen" are the next class of people to be "disintermediated." Instead of sending out Willy and his suitcase, Howard would only need to set up a website.

Unsurprisingly, the long-term structural trends about insecurity are all up. One poll earlier this year of 500,000 workers showed anxiety about jobs to be three times higher than it was during the 1980–81 recession. And men of Willy's age seem particularly vulnerable. John Schmitt at the Economic Policy Institute points out that if you exclude women (whose careers have become slightly more secure), many of the standard insecurity measures are still worsening. Even if jobs are easy to find, it is hard to take your pension and health care with you. And the older you get, the less likely you are to want to move in search of work.

Nor is it just a matter of losing your job; the problem lies in the whole stress-producing environment of modern corporate America. Mr. Miller once thought of calling his play "The Inside of His Head." It is easy to imagine a modern Willy Loman bemoaning the passing of seniority, being tormented by group evaluation sessions and spending half his day arguing with his HMO. Even Carol, the Manhattan fitness instructor, complains that her job is now judged on the basis of salesmanship as well as muscle tone. Everybody in America, it often seems these days, is on commission and on trial.

And so, in many ways, they should be. Every country in Europe would kill to have a capitalism that spits out inefficient people like Willy as ruthlessly as America does. Willy's frantic desire to compete, his merry recital of the management cliches of the day ("It's not what you sell; it's how you sell"), his determination to imitate the legendary Bill: all these things are what keeps America ahead of its peers.

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Yet the problem of what to do with Willy Loman, and America's other losers, remains. The issues cited by the senator—health care, education, even values—all lead directly or indirectly to the Lomans' door. Last week, Andy Grove, the famously tough boss of Intel (motto: "Only the paranoid survive"), gave a speech on Capitol Hill giving warning to politicians that the social and economic dislocation caused by new technology had only just begun, and that they needed to "grease the skids" to protect the weak. For all its period detail, "Salesman" seems eerily timeless. Willy Loman is far from dead.

Suggestions for Writing and Discussion

1.

If you have read or seen *Death of a Salesman,* give your impression of Willy Loman and the central conflict in his life. If you have not seen the play, what is your impression of this character from what you have read in this piece?

2.

Summarize this piece, paragraph by paragraph, using your own words. Then explain, in one sentence, the central focus of this article.

3.

What are the factors that contribute to the worry that so many people have today about losing their jobs? In what ways can you identify with this worry?

4.

What is the effect of calling Willy and others who lose their jobs "losers"?

5.

What are the specific drawbacks and stresses of losing a job when one is older? Why should younger people "pay attention" to the problems that these workers face?

Suggestions for Extended Thinking and Writing

1.
Read *Death of a Salesman,* and argue that the play is still relevant or is not relevant to issues facing young people in America today.
2.
What is capitalism? Write an essay in which you define, in a clear and exciting manner, this economic principle.
3.
Interview an older worker, one who may be worried about losing his or her job. Aim to understand the pressures facing this person as well as how America has changed since this person joined the job force.

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TED POSTON

The Revolt of the Evil Fairies

Ted Poston (1906–74) was born in Hopkinsville, Kentucky, where his family published a militant black newspaper. After graduating from high school, he moved to New York, where his brothers were active in Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association, a black nationalist movement of the 1920s. Poston worked as a waiter and a freelance writer until he was hired as a journalist for Harlem's Amsterdam News. *In 1937 he became the first full-time black journalist at the* New York Post, *where he worked for more than thirty-three years. In 1940 he was a member of Franklin D. Roosevelt's "Negro Cabinet" in Washington. This autobiographical short story was first published in the* New Republic *in April 1942. In 1991, freelance editor Kathleen Hauke gathered ten of his stories of black children growing up in a southern town at the turn of the century and published them as* The Dark Side of Hopkinsville.

Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing

1.
If you could star as any character from a book, play, or movie, who would you choose to be and why?
2.
Be honest. When you were in school, were you considered one of the "good" kids or one of the "troublemakers"? Explain, please.

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The grand dramatic offering of the Booker T. Washington Colored Grammar School was the biggest event of the year in our social life in Hopkinsville, Kentucky. It was the one occasion on which they let us use the old Cooper Opera House, and even some of the white folks came out yearly to applaud our presentation. The first two rows of the orchestra were always reserved for our white friends, and our leading colored citizens sat right behind them—with an empty row intervening, of course.

Mr. Ed Smith, our local undertaker, invariably occupied a box to the left of the house and wore his cutaway coat and striped breeches. This distinctive garb was usually reserved for those rare occasions when he officiated at the funerals of our most prominent colored citizens. Mr. Thaddeus Long, our colored mailman, once rented a tuxedo and bought a box too. But nobody paid him much mind. We knew he was just showing off.

The title of our play never varied. It was always Prince Charming and the Sleeping Beauty, but no two presentations were ever the same. Miss H. Belle LaPrade, our sixth-grade teacher, rewrote the script every season, and it was never like anything you read in the storybooks.

Miss LaPrade called it "a modern morality play of conflict between the forces of good and evil." And the forces of evil, of course, always came off second best.

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The Booker T. Washington Colored Grammar School was in a state of ferment from Christmas until February, for this was the period when parts were assigned. First there was the selection of the Good Fairies and the Evil Fairies. This was very important, because the Good Fairies wore white costumes and the Evil Fairies black. And strangely enough most of the Good Fairies usually turned out to be extremely light in complexion, with straight hair and white folks' features. On rare occasions a darkskinned girl might be lucky enough to be a Good Fairy, but not one with a speaking part.

There never was any doubt about Prince Charming and the Sleeping Beauty. They were always lightskinned. And though nobody ever discussed those things openly, it was an accepted fact that a lack of pigmentation was a decided advantage in the Prince Charming and Sleeping Beauty sweepstakes.

And therein lay my personal tragedy. I made the best grades in my class, I was the leading debater, and the scion of a respected family in the community. But I could never be Prince Charming, because I was black.

In fact, every year when they started casting our grand dramatic offering my family started pricing black cheesecloth at Franklin's Department Store. For they knew that I would be leading the forces of darkness and skulking back in the shadows—waiting to be vanquished in the third act. Mamma had experience with this sort of thing. All my brothers had finished Booker T. before me.

Not that I was alone in my disappointment. Many of my classmates felt it too. I probably just took it more to heart. Rat Jointer, for instance, could rationalize the situation. Rat was not only black; he lived on Billy Goat Hill. But Rat summed it up like this:

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"If you black, you black."

I should have been able to regard the matter calmly too. For our grand dramatic offering was only a reflection of our daily community life in Hopkinsville. The yallers had the best of everything. They held most of the teaching jobs in Booker T. Washington Colored Grammar School. They were the Negro doctors, the lawyers, the insurance men. They even had a "Blue Vein Society," and if your dark skin obscured your throbbing pulse you were hardly a member of the elite.

Yet I was inconsolable the first time they turned me down for Prince Charming. That was the year they picked Roger Jackson. Roger was not only dumb; he stuttered. But he was light enough to pass for white, and that was apparently sufficient.

In all fairness, however, it must be admitted that Roger had other qualifications. His father owned the only colored saloon in town and was quite a power in local politics. In fact, Mr. Clinton Jackson had a lot to say about just who taught in the Booker T. Washington Colored Grammar School. So it was understandable that Roger should have been picked for Prince Charming.

My real heartbreak, however, came the year they picked Sarah Williams for Sleeping Beauty. I had been in love with Sarah since kindergarten. She had soft light hair, bluish-gray eyes, and a dimple which stayed in her left cheek whether she was smiling or not.
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Of course Sarah never encouraged me much. She never answered any of my fervent love letters, and Rat was very scornful of my one-sided love affairs. "As long as she don't call you a black baboon," he sneered, "you'll keep on hanging around."
After Sarah was chosen for Sleeping Beauty, I went out for the Prince Charming role with all my heart. If I had declaimed boldly in previous contests, I was matchless now. If I had bothered Mamma with rehearsals at home before, I pestered her to death this time. Yes, and I purloined my sister's can of Palmer's Skin Success.
I knew the Prince's role from start to finish, having played the Head Evil Fairy opposite it for two seasons. And Prince Charming was one character whose lines Miss LaPrade never varied much in her many versions. But although I never admitted it, even to myself, I knew I was doomed from the start. They gave the part to Leonardius Wright. Leonardius, of course, was yaller.
The teachers sensed my resentment. They were almost apologetic. They pointed out that I had been such a splendid Head Evil Fairy for two seasons that it would be a crime to let anybody else try the role. They reminded me that Mamma wouldn't have to buy any more cheesecloth because I could use my same old costume. They insisted that the Head Evil Fairy was even more important than Prince Charming because he was the one who cast the spell on Sleeping Beauty. So what could I do but accept?
I had never liked Leonardius Wright. He was a goody-goody, and even Mamma was always throwing him up to me. But, above all, he too was in love with Sarah Williams. And now he got a chance to kiss Sarah every day in rehearsing the awakening scene.
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Well, the show must go on, even for little black boys. So I threw my soul into my part and made the Head Evil Fairy a character to be remembered. When I drew back from the couch of Sleeping Beauty and slunk away into the shadows at the approach of Prince Charming, my facial expression was indeed something to behold. When I was vanquished by the shining sword of Prince Charming in the last act, I was a little hammy perhaps—but terrific!
The attendance at our grand dramatic offering that year was the best in its history. Even the white folks overflowed the two rows reserved for them, and a few were forced to sit in the intervening one. This created a delicate situation, but everybody tactfully ignored it.
When the curtain went up on the last act, the audience was in fine fettle. Everything had gone well for me too—except for one spot in the second act. That was where Leonardius unexpectedly rapped me over the head with his sword as I slunk off into the shadows. That was not in the script, but Miss LaPrade quieted me down by saying it made a nice touch anyway. Rat said Leonardius did it on purpose.
The third act went on smoothly, though, until we came to the vanquishing scene. That was where I slunk from the shadows for the last time and challenged Prince Charming to mortal combat. The hero reached for his shining sword—a bit unsportsmanlike, I always thought, since Miss LaPrade consistently left the Head Evil Fairy unarmed—and then it happened!

Later I protested loudly—but in vain—that it was a case of self-defense. I pointed out that Leonardius had a mean look in his eye. I cited the impromptu rapping he had given my head in the second act. But nobody would listen. They just wouldn't believe that Leonardius really intended to brain me when he reached for his sword.

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Anyway, he didn't succeed. For the minute I saw that evil gleam in his eye—or was it my own?—I cut loose with a right to the chin, and Prince Charming dropped his shining sword and staggered back. His astonishment lasted only a minute, though, for he lowered his head and came charging in, fists flailing. There was nothing yellow about Leonardius but his skin.

The audience thought the scrap was something new Miss LaPrade had written in. They might have kept on thinking so if Miss LaPrade hadn't been screaming so hysterically from the sidelines. And if Rat Jointer hadn't decided that this was as good a time as any to settle old scores. So he turned around and took a sock at the male Good Fairy nearest him.

When the curtain rang down, the forces of Good and Evil were locked in combat. And Sleeping Beauty was wide awake and streaking for the wings.

They rang the curtain back up fifteen minutes later, and we finished the play. I lay down and expired according to specifications but Prince Charming will probably remember my sneering corpse to his dying day. They wouldn't let me appear in the grand dramatic offering at all the next year. But I didn't care. I couldn't have been Prince Charming anyway.

Suggestions for Writing and Discussion

1.
What does the opening paragraph reveal about the social climate and structure at the time of this story?

2.
How might the colors of black and white be interpreted in this piece?

3.
During what time period do you imagine this event took place? Explain.

4.
How is this story typical of almost any child's school experience? How does it differ from most?

5.
With which character do you most identify: the cynical and realistic Rat, the good and favored Leonardius, or the determined and defiant narrator? Explain with your own "story."

Suggestions for Extended Thinking and Writing

1.
Write a personal narrative about a time when you were not chosen for a part you wanted—either in a school, sport, community, or family situation.

2.
Argue that it was the narrator himself—not the circumstances—that determined the outcome of this experience.

3.
What does it take for a person to use his or her potential to the fullest? Write about someone you know who has, indeed, used all of his or her potential.

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MAYA ANGELOU

Working for the Dream

Originally named Marguerite Johnson, Maya Angelou was born in St. Louis in 1928. From age three to eight, Angelou and her brother grew up in Stamps, Arkansas, under the watchful, loving eye of their grandmother. Unfortunately, her grandmother's boundless energy and affection could not protect Angelou from the pain of poverty, segregated schools, and violence at the hands of both whites and blacks. At age eight, she went to stay with her mother. At her mother's home, she was raped by her mother's lover; subsequently, Angelou refused to talk for more than a year. Shortly after the rape, she returned to her grandmother's home, where she began to read voraciously, memorizing long passages from plays and poems. The cadences and rhythms of her early love affair with poetry weave throughout her works. In 1972 her book of poems, Just Give Me a Cool Drink of Water 'fore I Die, *was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize. In 1993 as Poet Laureate of the United States, she wrote and read a poem, "On the Pulse of Morning," for the inauguration of President Clinton. The following selection comes from her second volume of autobiography,* Singin' and Swingin' and Gettin' Merry Like Christmas *(1976).*

Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing

1.
How would you describe yourself: as one who is trusting or one who is cautious? Explain.

2.
Freewrite about the best job you've ever had. What made it so worthwhile? What did you learn about yourself in that job?

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Music was my refuge. I could crawl into the spaces between the notes and curl my back to loneliness.

In my rented room (cooking privileges down the hall), I would play a record, then put my arms around the shoulders of the song. As we danced, glued together, I would nuzzle into its neck, kissing the skin, and rubbing its cheek with my own.

The Melrose Record Shop on Fillmore was a center for music, musicians, music lovers and record collectors. Blasts from its loudspeaker poured out into the street with all the insistence of a false mourner at a graveside. Along one wall of its dark interior, stalls were arranged like open telephone booths. Customers stood playing their selections on turntables and listening through earphones. I had two hours between jobs. Occasionally I went to the library or, if the hours coincided, to a free dance class at the YWCA. But most often I directed myself to the melodious Melrose Record Store, where I could wallow, rutting in music.

Louise Cox, a short blonde who was part owner of the store, flitted between customers like a fickle butterfly in a rose garden. She was white, wore perfume and smiled openly

with the Negro customers, so I knew she was sophisticated. Other people's sophistication tended to make me nervous and I stayed shy of Louise. My music tastes seesawed between the blues of John Lee Hooker and the bubbling silver sounds of Charlie Parker. For a year I had been collecting their records.

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On one visit to the store, Louise came over to the booth where I was listening to a record.

"Hi, I'm Louise. What's your name?"

I thought of "Puddin' in tame. Ask me again, I'll tell you the same." That was a cruel childhood rhyme meant to insult.

The last white woman who had asked me anything other than "May I help you?" had been my high school teacher. I looked at the little woman, at her cashmere sweater and pearls, at her slick hair and pink lips, and decided she couldn't hurt me, so I'd give her the name I had given to all white people.

"Marguerite Annie Johnson." I had been named for two grandmothers.

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"Marguerite? That's a pretty name."

I was surprised. She pronounced it like my grandmother. Not Margarite, but Marg-you-reet.

"A new Charlie Parker came in last week. I saved it for you."

That showed her good business sense.

"I know you like John Lee Hooker, but I've got somebody I want you to hear." She stopped the turntable and removed my record and put on another in its place.

"Lord I wonder, do she ever think of me,
Lord I wonder, do she ever think of me,
I wonder, I wonder, will my baby come back to me?"

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The singer's voice groaned a longing I seemed to have known my life long. But I couldn't say that to Louise. She watched my face and I forced it still.

"Well, I ain't got no special reason here,
No, I ain't got no special reason here,
I'm gonna leave 'cause I don't feel welcome here."

The music fitted me like tailor-made clothes.

She said, "That's Arthur Crudup. Isn't he great?"; excitement lighted her face.

"It's nice. Thank you for letting me hear it."

It wasn't wise to reveal one's real feelings to strangers. And nothing on earth was stranger to me than a friendly white woman.

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"Shall I wrap it for you? Along with the Bird?"

My salary from the little real estate office and the dress shop downtown barely paid rent and my son's baby-sitter.

"I'll pick them both up next week. Thank you for thinking of me." Courtesy cost nothing as long as one had dignity. My grandmother, Annie Henderson, had taught me that.

She turned and walked back to the counter, taking the record with her. I counseled myself not to feel badly. I hadn't rejected an offer of friendship, I had simply fielded a commercial come-on.

I walked to the counter.

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“Thank you, Louise. See you next week.” When I laid the record on the counter, she pushed a wrapped package toward me.
“Take these, Marg-you-reet. I’ve started an account for you.” She turned to another customer. I couldn’t refuse because I didn’t know how to do so gracefully.
Outside on the evening street, I examined the woman’s intention. What did I have that she wanted? Why did she allow me to walk away with her property? She didn’t know me. Even my name might have been constructed on the spot. She couldn’t have been seeking friendship; after all she was white, and as far as I knew, white women were never lonely, except in books. White men adored them, Black men desired them and Black women worked for them. There was no ready explanation for her gesture of trust.
At home I squeezed enough from the emergency money I kept in a drawer to repay her. Back at the store, she accepted the money and said, “Thanks, Marg-you-reet. But you didn’t have to make a special trip. I trust you.”
“Why?” That ought to get her. “You don’t know me.”
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“Because I like you.”
“But you don’t know me. How can you like someone you don’t know?”
“Because my heart tells me and I trust my heart.”
For weeks I pondered over Louise Cox. What could I possibly have that she could possibly want?
Maybe she offered friendship because she pitied me. The idea was a string winding at first frayed and loose, then tightening, binding into my consciousness. My spirit started at the intrusion. A white woman? Feeling sorry for me? She wouldn’t dare. I would go to the store and show her. I would roll her distasteful pity into a ball and throw it in her face. I would smash her nose deep into the unasked-for sympathy until her eyes dribbled tears and she learned that I was a queen, not to be approached by peasants like her, even on bended knees, and wailing.
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Louise was bent over the counter talking to a small Black boy. She didn’t interrupt her conversation to acknowledge my entrance.
“Exactly how many boxes have you folded, J.C.?” Her intonation was sober.
“Eighteen.” The boy’s answer matched her seriousness. His head barely reached the counter top. She took a small box from a shelf behind her.
“Then here’s eighteen cents.” She pushed the coins around counting them, then poured them into his cupped palms.
“O.K.” He turned on unsure young legs and collided with me. He mumbled “Thank you.”
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Louise rounded the counter, following the little voice. She ran past me and caught the door a second after he slammed it.
“J.C.” She stood, arms akimbo on the sidewalk, and raised her voice. “J.C., I’ll see you next Saturday.” She came back into the store and looked at me.
“Hi, Marg-you-reet. Boy, am I glad to see you. Excuse that scene. I had to pay off one of my workers.”

I waited for her to continue. Waited for her to tell me how precious he was and how poor and wasn't it all a shame. She went behind the counter and began slipping records into paper jackets.
"When I first opened the shop, all the neighborhood kids came in. They either demanded that I 'gi' them a penny"'—I hated whites' imitation of the Black accent—"or play records for them. I explained that the only way I'd give them anything was if they worked for it and that I'd play records for their parents, but not for them until they were tall enough to reach the turntables."
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"So I let them fold empty record boxes for a penny apiece." She went on, "I'm glad to see you because I want to offer you a job."
I had done many things to make a living, but I drew the line at cleaning white folks' houses. I had tried that and lasted only one day. The waxed tables, cut flowers, closets of other people's clothes totally disoriented me. I hated the figured carpets, tiled kitchens and refrigerators filled with someone else's dinner leftovers.
"Really?" The ice in my voice turned my accent to upperclass Vivien Leigh (before *Gone With the Wind*).
"My sister has been helping me in the shop, but she's going back to school. I thought you'd be perfect to take her place."
My resolve began to knuckle under me like weak knees.
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"I don't know if you know it, but I have a large clientele and try to keep in stock a supply, however small, of every record by Negro artists. And if I don't have something, there's a comprehensive catalog and I can order it. What do you think?"
Her face was open and her smile simple. I pried into her eyes for hidden meaning and found nothing. Even so, I had to show my own strength.
"I don't like to hear white folks imitate Negroes. Did the children really ask you to 'gi' them a penny'? Oh, come now."
She said, "You are right—they didn't ask. They demanded that I 'gi' them a penny." The smile left her face. "You say it."
"Give me a penny." My teeth pressed my bottom lip, stressing the *v*.
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She reached for the box and handed me a coin. "Don't forget that you've been to school and let neither of us forget that we're both grown-up. I'd be pleased if you'd take the job." She told me the salary, the hours and what my duties would be.
"Thank you very much for the offer. I'll think about it." I left the shop, head up, back straight. I tried to exude indifference, like octopus ink, to camouflage my excitement.
I had to talk to Ivonne Broadnax, the Realist. She was my closest friend. Ivonne had escaped the hindrance of romantic blindness, which was my lifelong affliction. She had the clear, clean eyes of a born survivor. I went to her Ellis Street house, where she, at twenty-five, was bringing up an eight-year-old daughter and a fifteen-year-old sister.
"Vonne, you know that woman that runs the record store?"
"That short white woman with the crooked smile?" Her voice was small and keen and the sound had to force itself past white, even teeth.
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"Yes."

“Why?”
“She offered me a job.”
“Doing what?” I knew I could count on her cynicism.
“Salesgirl.”
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“Why?”
“That’s what I’ve been trying to figure out. Why? And why me?”
Ivonne sat very still, thinking. She possessed a great beauty which she carried nonchalantly. Her cupid’s-bow lips pursed, and when she raised her head her face was flushed pink and cream from the racing blood.
“Is she funny that way?”
We both knew that was the only logical explanation.
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“No. I’m sure that she’s not.”
Ivonne bent her head again. She raised it and looked at me.
“Did you ask her?”
“No.”
“I mean did you ask her for the job?”
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“No. She offered it.” I added just a little indignation to my answer.
Ivonne said, “You know white people are strange. I don’t even know if they know why they do things.” Ivonne had grown up in a small Mississippi town, and I, in a smaller town in Arkansas. Whites were as constant in our history as the seasons and as unfamiliar as affluence.
“Maybe she’s trying to prove something.” She waited. “What kind of pay she offering?”
“Enough so I can quit both jobs and bring the baby home.”
“Well, take it.”
80
“I’ll have to order records and take inventories and all that.” The odor of an improvement in my life had barely touched my nostrils and it made me jittery.
“Come on, Maya” (she called me by the family name). “If you could run a hook shop, you can run a record shop. . . . Tell her you’ll take the job and then watch her like a hawk. You know white women. They pull off their drawers, lay down first, then scream rape. If you’re not careful, she’ll get weak and faint on you, then before you know it you’ll be washing windows, and scrubbing the floor.” We cackled like two old crones, remembering a secret past. The laughter was sour and not really directed at white women. It was a traditional ruse that was used to shield the Black vulnerability; we laughed to keep from crying.

I took the job, but kept Louise under constant surveillance. None of her actions went unheeded, no conversation unrecorded. The question was not if she would divulge her racism but when and how the revelation would occur. For a few months I was a character in a living thriller plot. I listened to her intonations and trailed her glances.

After two months, vigilance had exhausted me and I had found no thread of prejudice. I began to relax and enjoy the wealth of a world of music. Early mornings were given over to Bartok and Schoenberg. Midmorning I treated myself to the vocals of Billy Eckstine, Billie Holiday, Nat Cole, Louis Jordan and Bull Moose Jackson. A piroshki from the

Russian delicatessen next door was lunch and then the giants of bebop flipped through the air. Charlie Parker and Max Roach, Dizzy Gillespie, Sarah Vaughan and Al Haig and Howard McGhee. Blues belonged to late afternoons and the singers' lyrics of lost love spoke to my solitude.

I ordered stock and played records on request, emptied ashtrays and dusted the windows' cardboard displays. Louise and her partner, David Rosenbaum, showed their pleasure by giving me a raise, and although I was grateful to them for the job and my first introduction to an amiable black-white relationship, I could exhibit my feelings only by being punctual in coming to the shop and being efficient at work and coolly, grayly respectful.

85

At home, however, life shimmered with beautiful colors. I picked up my son from the baby-sitter's every evening. He was five years old and so beautiful his smile could break the back of a brute.

For two years we had spun like water spiders in a relentless eddy. I had to be free to work for our support, but the baby-sitters were so expensive I had to have two jobs to pay their fees and my own rent. I boarded him out six days and five nights a week.

On the eve of my day off, I would go to the baby-sitter's house. First he'd grab the hem of my dress, then wrap his arms around my legs and hold on screaming as I paid the weekly bill. I would pry his arms loose, then pick him up and walk down the street. For blocks, as I walked, he would scream. When we were far enough away, he'd relax his strangle hold on my neck and I could put him down. We'd spend the evening in my room. He followed my every turn and didn't trust me to go to the bathroom and return. After dinner, cooked in the communal kitchen, I would read to him and allow him to try to read to me.

The next day was always spent at the park, the zoo, the San Francisco Museum of Art, a cartoon movie house or any cheap or free place of entertainment. Then, on our second evening he would fight sleep like an old person fighting death. By morning, not quite awake, he would jerk and make hurtful noises like a wounded animal. I would still my heart and wake him. When he was dressed, we headed back to the sitter's house. He would begin to cry a few blocks from our destination. My own tears stayed in check until his screams stabbed from behind the closed doors and struck like spearheads in my heart.

The regularity of misery did nothing to lessen it. I examined alternatives. If I were married, "my husband" (the words sounded as unreal as "my bank account") would set me up in a fine house, which my good taste would develop into a home. My son and I could spend whole days together and then I could have two more children who would be named Deirdre and Craig, and I would grow roses and beautiful zinnias. I would wear too-large gardening gloves so that when I removed them my hands would look dainty and my manicure fresh. We would all play chess and Chinese checkers and twenty questions and whist. We would be a large, loving, hilarious family like the people in *Cheaper by the Dozen.*

90

Or I could go on welfare.

There wasn't a shadow of a husband-caliber man on my horizon. Indeed, no men at all seemed attracted to me. Possibly my façade of cool control turned them away or just

possibly my need, which I thought well disguised, was so obvious that it frightened them. No, husbands were rarer than common garden variety unicorns.
And welfare was absolutely forbidden. My pride had been starched by a family who assumed unlimited authority in its own affairs. A grandmother, who raised me, my brother and her own two sons, owned a general merchandise store. She had begun her business in the early 1900's in Stamps, Arkansas, by selling meat pies to saw men in a lumber mill, then racing across town in time to feed workers in a cotton-gin mill four miles away.
My brother, Bailey, who was a year older than I and seven inches shorter, had drummed in my youthful years: "You are as intelligent as I am" —we both agreed that he was a genius—"and beautiful. And you can do anything."
My beautiful mother, who ran businesses and men with autocratic power, taught me to row my own boat, paddle my own canoe, hoist my own sail. She warned, in fact, "If you want something done, do it yourself."
95
I hadn't asked them for help (I couldn't risk their refusal) and they loved me. There was no motive on earth which would bring me, bowed, to beg for aid from an institution which scorned me and a government which ignored me. It had seemed that I would be locked in the two jobs and the weekly baby-sitter terror until my life was done. Now with a good salary, my son and I could move back into my mother's house.
A smile struck her face like lightning when I told her I had retrieved my son and we were ready to come home. There was a glaze over her eyes. It was unnerving. My mother was anything, everything, but sentimental. I admired how quickly she pulled her old self back in charge. Typically she asked only direct questions.
"How long will you all stay this time?"
"Until I can get a house for us."
"That sounds good. Your room is pretty much as you left it and Clyde can have the little room in back."
100
I decided that a little bragging was in order. "I've been working at the record shop on Fillmore and the people down there gave me a raise. I'll pay rent to you and help with the food."
"How much are they paying you?"
When I told her, she quickly worked out a percentage. "O.K. You pay me that amount and buy a portion of food every week."
I handed her some cash. She counted it carefully. "All right, this is a month's rent. I'll remember."
She handed the money back to me. "Take this downtown and buy yourself some clothes."
105
I hesitated.
"This is a gift, not a loan. You should know I don't do business slipshod."
To Vivian Baxter business was business, and I was her daughter; one thing did not influence the other.
"You know that I'm no baby-sitter, but Poppa Ford is still with me looking after the house. He can keep an eye on Clyde. Of course you ought to give him a little something

every week. Not as much as you pay the baby-sitters, but something. Remember, you may not always get what you pay for, but you will definitely pay for what you get."
"Yes, Mother." I was home.

Suggestions for Writing and Discussion

1.
In the opening line, Angelou writes that "music was my refuge." From what exactly, can you deduce, was it her refuge?
2.
Where is the first place you see Marguerite as one who is not trusting? What exactly does her reaction here reflect about her attitude toward whites?
3.
What is your impression of Louise? How would you describe her, and how might your description of her contrast with Marguerite's in the beginning?
4.
Ultimately, what does Marguerite learn about herself and about others through this experience?
5.
Explain how pride can be both a strength and a weakness for Marguerite.

Suggestions for Extended Thinking and Writing

1.
Explain, through specific examples and scenes, the trait you consider to be both your strength and your weakness.
2.
Read several critiques of Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, and compare the elements found in these reviews to the writing found in this piece. Could you anticipate that the reviewers would note the same issues in this piece, too? Explain.
3.
"No one can hate someone they know." Explain this quote in relation to an experience you have had in which your first impression—or even a long held impression—was found to be wrong once you developed a personal relationship with that person.

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JERRY ADLER

Stars and Stripes—and Stress

Jerry Adler often writes about medical and science topics for Newsweek. *He is also the author of* High Rise: How 1,000 Men and Women Worked Around the Clock for Five Years and Lost $200 Million Building a Skyscraper.

Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing

1.
What is your main source of stress, and how do you deal with it?
2.
Are you an optimist or a pessimist? Explain.

———

It was vital to survival once—an innate response to danger, inherited directly from the primeval veld down to our own lifetimes, where it causes nothing but trouble. Some people make a virtue of stress, under the mantra "that which does not kill me makes me stronger." But science shows this to be a lie. A whole new body of research shows the damage stress wreaks on the body: not just heart disease and ulcers, but loss of memory, diminished immune function and even a particular type of obesity. That which doesn't kill you, it turns out, really does kill you in the end, but first it makes you fat.

Zen masters, of course, have known this for a long time, and techniques such as yoga are still useful prescriptions for stress. But orthodox Western medicine long resisted the notion that a purely mental condition could have measurable effects in the empirical realm of arteries and organs. "When I started studying stress 30 years ago, I was told I was jeopardizing my medical career," says Dr. Herbert Benson, who founded the Mind/Body Medical Institute at Harvard. It was only in the past few years that researchers came up with a quantifiable measure of stress, based on the concentration of certain hormones in saliva, and began tracing the complex neurological and chemical events that lead from a traffic jam on the Santa Monica Freeway to cardiac intensive care at Cedars-Sinai. Research has revealed that men's and women's bodies process stress differently, and provided disturbing evidence about how stress affects child development from the earliest weeks of life. And it has spawned a whole new discipline, psychoneuroimmunology—which, according to Bruce Rabin of the University of Pittsburgh, has reached the point where research on smoking and cancer was back in the 1960s. "You knew there was a link because of the epidemiology, but you didn't know the mechanism. Now there's enough epidemiology to establish the association [between stress and illness]. We're still working out the mechanisms."

The very concept of stress was formulated only in the 1930s, by the pioneering endocrinologist Hans Selye. It was Selye's insight that organisms show a common biological response to a wide range of unpleasant sensory or psychological experiences. These are called "stressors." Stressors are, in shorthand, whatever you're trying to avoid: an electric shock, if you're a lab rat; the sight of a predator, if you're a prey animal; a 500-point drop in the Dow, if you're a Yuppie. Those are acute stress events; everyone recognizes the adrenaline rush (pounding heart, dry mouth, butterflies in the stomach) that marks their onset. Human beings are equipped to deal with it, if it doesn't happen too often. But when it happens again and again, the effects multiply and cascade, invisibly, compounding over a lifetime.

The classic study linking stress to immune dysfunction was done just in 1991, when Carnegie Mellon psychologist Sheldon Cohen and his colleagues showed that people who ranked high on a psychological test of perceived stress were more likely to develop colds when intentionally infected with a respiratory virus. He repeated the study last year and this time refined his results: although a single, large, stressful event in the preceding year did not affect the subjects' chances of getting sick, chronic stress—ongoing conflicts with co-workers or family members, for example—increased the odds by as much as three to five times. Looking at another measure of immune function, response to a standard influenza vaccine, immunologist Ronald Glaser of Ohio State found diminished antibody production (compared with a control group matched for age) among people caring for a spouse with dementia. "The human body," says Dr. Pamela Peeke of the University of

Maryland, “was never meant to deal with prolonged chronic stress. We weren’t meant to drag around bad memories, anxieties and frustrations.”
5
Other studies have found an association between long-term stress and heart problems. That’s also true of macaque monkeys, favored subjects of stress researchers because they share with humans a hierarchical social structure and a susceptibility to coronary-artery disease. Wake Forest University anthropologist Jay Kaplan studied both high- and low-status male macaques in captivity, and found, as expected, that the subordinate ones showed more atherosclerosis. But when he artificially shook up the social hierarchy, by introducing new animals into the troop, it was the high-ranking males, forced to fight again and again to establish their dominance, who showed the most signs of coronary disease.
Yet the stress reaction obviously serves an evolutionary purpose. It is, essentially, a response to danger, in two distinct phases. The first of these, involving the “sympathetic-adreno-medullary axis” (SAM), is the familiar flight-or-fight response. Your brain perceives a threat—a lion crouched in the brush is the classic illustration—and sends a message down the spinal cord to the medulla, or core, of the adrenal glands, signaling it to pump out adrenaline. In a matter of seconds, the body is transformed. To prepare for exertion, blood pressure and heart rate skyrocket; the liver pours out glucose and calls up fat reserves to be processed into triglycerides for energy; the circulatory system diverts blood from nonessential functions, such as digestion, to the brain and muscles. This is precisely what you need if your goal is to survive the next 10 minutes.
Civilization, by contrast, gives you the opportunity to experience an adrenaline rush at every traffic light. And—since all you’re doing is sitting in your car—the elaborate preparations your body makes are wasted. Worse than wasted: every heartbeat at elevated blood pressure takes its toll on the arteries. The excess fats and glucose don’t get metabolized right away, so they stay in the bloodstream. The fats contribute to the plaques that form inside blood vessels, which can lead to heart disease or strokes; high levels of glucose are a step in the direction of diabetes. “If you mobilize in the first place for a nonsense psychological stressor,” says Robert Sapolsky of Stanford, a leading authority on stress, “by definition your defense becomes more damaging than the imaginary challenge.”
The second phase to the stress reaction kicks in five to 10 minutes later. This “hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenocortical axis” (HPA) seems more closely associated with emotional and intellectual stress. Researchers have many clever ways of producing intellectual stress, such as asking subjects to name the color of ink a word is written in (blue) when the word itself spells out the name of a different color (red). The HPA axis originates in the hypothalamus, in the middle of the base of the brain. The hypothalamus signals the pituitary to produce a substance called ACTH, which stimulates the adrenal cortex to produce a set of hormones known as glucocorticoids: cortisone, cortisol and corticosterone.
The action of these is complex, because hormones almost always work as part of a loop of positive and negative feedbacks. Glucocorticoids seem to stimulate the hippocampus, a part of the brain vital to memory and learning. But an excess of these hormones can actually be toxic to the hippocampus. People with above-average glucocorticoid levels—including those with depression and post-traumatic-stress syndrome—tend to have

impaired memory and cognition. Their hippocampi may actually appear shrunken in an MRI scan. Glucocorticoids also suppress parts of the immune system. Researchers still don't understand why the body should suppress immunity during times of stress—if anything, the opposite would seem to make sense. But the negative effects are clear: chronic stress leaves one more vulnerable to infections.
10
And, amazingly enough, stress can even change the shape of your body. Since the stress reaction involves mobilizing the body's fat reserves for energy, Peeke says, it makes sense to store that fat near the liver, which processes it so it can be metabolized in the muscles. Sure enough, fat cells in the abdomen appear to be especially sensitive to glucocorticoids, and people with a high concentration of those hormones tend to accumulate fat around their middles—a potbelly—even if the rest of their bodies are thin. Researchers think that waist-hip ratio, the relative circumference of those two body parts, could be a useful way to identify people at risk for stress-related disease.
But not everyone gets all of these diseases, or even any of them. People respond differently to the same objective stressors. Individuals' cortisol levels vary (in general, the older you are, the higher the concentration), and they go up by varying amounts in reaction to stress. But, surprisingly, that effect doesn't seem to follow a normal bell-shaped curve, like most physiological variables. Instead, some studies suggest, people fall into categories of "hot" or "cool" responders. A 1995 study subjected 20 men to five grueling days of mental arithmetic performed before an audience. Starting from about the same baseline—a cortisol concentration in saliva of seven to eight nanomoles per liter—one group, comprising seven men, shot up to an average of 29 in the first day; the rest went only to around 19. The first group, researchers reported, "view themselves as being less attractive than others, having less self-esteem, and being more often in a depressed mood." Not surprisingly, they also reported more health problems.

Catherine Stoney of Ohio State has also found significant differences between men and women. Women's blood pressure goes up less than men's in reaction to stress (although their response increases noticeably after menopause or hysterectomy, suggesting a buffering effect from estrogen). But women tend to react to a wider range of outside stressors than men, according to Ronald Kessler of Harvard, who asked 166 married couples to keep a daily stress diary for six weeks. Women feel stress more often, says Kessler, because they take a holistic view of everyday life. A man may worry if someone in his immediate family is sick; his wife takes on the burdens of the whole neighborhood. "Men take care of one thing [at a time]," he says. "Women put the pieces together again."
Apart from gender, early childhood experiences seem to have a powerful influence on how people deal with stress. Children raised in orphanages or in neglectful homes may have elevated levels of glucocorticoids and "hot" responses to stress later in life. "We're finding," says Frank Treiber of the Medical College of Georgia, "that if you come from a family that's somewhat chaotic, unstable, not cohesive, harboring grudges, very early on, it's associated later with greater blood-pressure reactivity to various types of stress." The brains of children up to around the age of 8 are still developing in response to the environment; cells literally live or die as experiences impinge on them. "The early brain can become hard-wired to deal with high fear states," says Dr. Jay Giedd of the National Institutes of Health. "Its normal state will be to have a lot of adrenaline flowing. When

these children become adults they'll feel empty or bored if they're not on edge." Contrariwise, children raised in secure, loving homes learn to modulate the stress reaction, according to Megan Gunnar of the University of Minnesota. Newborns typically show a cortisol spike under the stress of circumcision. But as early as three months, well-cared-for babies can suffer discomfort without evoking a stress response; they'll cry when they get a physical exam, but their stress hormones don't go up commensurately. "Children who are in secure, emotionally supportive relationships are buffered to everyday stressors," she says.

Many authorities think childhood stress is on the rise. Dr. Barbara Howard, a pediatrician at Johns Hopkins, says a quarter of her patients are there for stress-related problems, and the proportion has been rising. "They'll come in with abdominal pain, urinary frequency, headaches . . . a whole variety of complaints which could be mistaken for medical problems and often are." Parents are frequently wrong about the sources of stress in their children's lives, according to surveys by Georgia Witkin of Mount Sinai Medical School; they think children worry most about friendships and popularity, but they're actually fretting about the grown-ups. "The biggest concern," she says, "was that the parents are going to be sick, or angry, or they're going to divorce." And "often and somewhat surprisingly," says Giedd, "children have very global worries"—wars, environmental issues and crime, the same things adults worry about.

15

Which raises the question no researcher dares answer: is increasing stress an inevitable hazard of modern life? In many of the ways that count, Kessler muses, life was more stressful 200 years ago, when children routinely died before reaching adulthood. But life was simpler then, too, he thinks, before "anxiety became a core theme in our lives." People knew their place in society and lived with the support of extended families, tribes and villages. What is certain is that people came into the world then, as they do now, prepared by millions of years of evolution for dangers long gone from our lives. The challenge we face is to master not the threats themselves, but our all-too-human responses to them.

Suggestions for Writing and Discussion

1.
In general, what information in this piece was most helpful or intriguing to you? Explain.

2.
Explain, in your own words, the body's biological reaction to stress.

3.
What are the implied causes of increased stress in our lives today?

4.
In what specific section of *Newsweek* would you be most likely to find this article? Explain why.

5.
List five questions that remain unanswered by this piece. What might be the purpose in writing an article that raises so many questions?

Suggestions for Extended Thinking and Writing

1.

Write an essay in which you try to convince a specific audience to try your own "stress reduction" activity, be it a physical activity or a mental one.
2.
Write an essay in which you examine several possible causes of stress today, and settle on the one you think is predominant.
3.
Students and stress: Interview a random group of students at your school to determine the extent of stress they deal with and the causes of their stress. Write up your findings in an objective report.

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STUART DYBEK

Death of the Right Fielder

Stuart Dybek (born in 1942 in Chicago) grew up in an immigrant neighborhood in Chicago. He was a social worker and a school teacher before he studied writing at the University of Iowa. Since 1974 he has taught English at Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo. He had published two books of short stories, Childhood and Other Neighborhoods *(1980) and* The Coast of Chicago *(1990), about young men growing up in working-class Slavic and Mexican neighborhoods of Chicago.*

Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing

1.
In what ways are sports (professional or amateur) connected with the concept of achieving the American dream?
2.
Why is baseball often described as a sport that is uniquely American? What accounts for the continuing popularity of baseball in the United States?

———

After too many balls went out and never came back we went out to check. It was a long walk—he always played deep. Finally we saw him, from the distance resembling the towel we sometimes threw down for second base.

It was hard to tell how long he'd been lying there, sprawled on his face. Had he been playing infield his presence, or lack of it, would, of course, have been noticed immediately. The infield demands communication—the constant, reassuring chatter of team play. But he was remote, clearly an outfielder (the temptation is to say out*sider*). The infield is for wisecrackers, pepperpots, gum-poppers: the outfield is for loners, onlookers, brooders who would rather study clover and swat gnats than holler. People could pretty much be divided between infielders and outfielders. Not that one always has a choice. He didn't necessarily choose right field so much as accept it.

There were several theories as to what killed him. From the start the most popular was that he'd been shot. Perhaps from a passing car, possibly by that gang calling themselves the Jokers who played 16 inch softball on the concrete diamond with painted bases in the center of the housing project, or by the Latin Lords who didn't play sports period. Or maybe some pervert with a telescopic sight from a bedroom window, or a mad sniper from a water tower, or a terrorist with a silencer from the expressway overpass, or maybe

it was an accident, a stray slug from a robbery, or shoot-out, or assassination attempt miles away.

No matter who pulled the trigger it seemed more plausible to ascribe his death to a bullet than to natural causes like, say, a heart attack. Young deaths are never natural; they're all violent. Not that kids don't die of heart attacks. But he never seemed the type. Sure, he was quiet, but not the quiet of someone always listening to the heart murmur his family has repeatedly warned him about since he was old enough to play. Nor could it have been leukemia. He wasn't a talented enough athlete to die of that. He'd have been playing center, not right, if leukemia was going to get him.

5

The shooting theory was better, even though there wasn't a mark on him. Couldn't it have been, as some argued, a high-powered bullet traveling with such velocity that its hole fuses behind it? Still, not everyone was satisfied. Other theories were formulated, rumors became legends over the years: he'd had an allergic reaction to a bee sting, been struck by a single bolt of lightning from a freak, instantaneous electric storm, ingested too strong a dose of insecticide from the grass blades he chewed on, sonic waves, radiation, pollution, etc. And a few of us liked to think it was simply that chasing a sinking liner, diving to make a shoestring catch, he broke his neck.

There *was* a ball in the webbing of his mitt when we turned him over. His mitt had been pinned under his body and was coated with an almost luminescent gray film. There was the same gray on his black, hightop gym shoes, as if he'd been running through lime, and along the bill of his baseball cap—the blue felt one with the red C which he always denied stood for the Chicago Cubs. He may have been a loner, but he didn't want to be identified with a loser. He lacked the sense of humor for that, lacked the perverse pride that sticking up for losers season after season breeds, and the love. He was just an ordinary guy, .250 at the plate, and we stood above him not knowing what to do next. By then the guys from the other outfield positions had trotted over. Someone, the shortstop probably, suggested team prayer. But no one could think of a team prayer. So we all just stood there silently bowing our heads, pretending to pray while the shadows moved darkly across the outfield grass. After a while the entire diamond was swallowed and the field lights came on.

In the bluish squint of those lights he didn't look like someone we'd once known—nothing looked quite right—and we hurriedly scratched a shallow grave, covered him over, and stamped it down as much as possible so that the next right fielder, whoever he'd be, wouldn't trip. It could be just such a juvenile, seemingly trivial stumble that would ruin a great career before it had begun, or hamper it years later the way Mantle's was hampered by bum knees. One can never be sure the kid beside him isn't another Roberto Clemente; and who can ever know how many potential Great Ones have gone down in the obscurity of their neighborhoods? And so, in the catcher's phrase, we "buried the grave" rather than contribute to any further tragedy. In all likelihood the next right fielder, whoever he'd be, would be clumsy too, and if there was a mound to trip over he'd find it and break *his* neck, and soon right field would get the reputation as haunted, a kind of sandlot Bermuda Triangle, inhabited by phantoms calling for ghostly fly balls, where no one but the most desperate outcasts, already on the verge of suicide, would be willing to play.

Still, despite our efforts, we couldn't totally disguise it. A fresh grave is stubborn. Its outline remained visible—a scuffed bald spot that might have been confused for an aberrant pitcher's mound except for the bat jammed in earth with the mitt and blue cap fit over it. Perhaps we didn't want to eradicate it completely—a part of us was resting there. Perhaps we wanted the new right fielder, whoever he'd be, to notice and wonder about who played there before him, realizing he was now the only link between past and future that mattered. A monument, epitaph, flowers wouldn't be necessary. As for us, we walked back, but by then it was too late—getting on to supper, getting on to the end of summer vacation, time for other things, college, careers, settling down and raising a family. Past thirty-five the talk starts about being over the hill, about a graying Phil Niekro in his forties still fanning them with the knuckler as if it's some kind of miracle, about Pete Rose still going in head-first at forty-two, beating the odds. And maybe the talk is right. One remembers Mays, forty and a Met, dropping that can-of-corn fly in the '71 Series, all that grace stripped away and with it the conviction, leaving a man confused and apologetic about the boy in him. It's sad to admit it ends so soon, but everyone knows those are the lucky ones. Most guys are washed up by seventeen.

Suggestions for Writing and Discussion

1.
The speaker contends that "people could pretty much be divided between infielders and outfielders." Referring to his definition of "infielders" and "outfielders" in paragraph 2, respond to this statement. Would you consider yourself to be an infielder, an outfielder, or something else? Explain your response.

2.
Several paragraphs are devoted to ways the right fielder may have died. Most of these ways involve violence. In what ways do you see violence as related to the American Dream? Has violence ever been used to promote the American Dream? To oppose it? Explain.

3.
What details in this story suggest that the narrator is describing an actual death? What details suggest that the death is meant to be seen as symbolic—and symbolic of what?

4.
What do you see as the role of the next right fielder? Reread the final three paragraphs of the story to help focus your response.

5.
The story ends with the players returning to other parts of their lives and with the statement "most guys are washed up by seventeen." Do you agree? Explain.

Suggestions for Extended Thinking and Writing

1.
Research the life of any professional athlete, male or female, and compare what you discover to some of the details in Dybek's story.

2.
This story uses a baseball game to comment on the lives of the participants, all of whom seem to be male. Can sports themes and metaphors also be used to comment on the lives of women? If so, write a short story that does this. If not, consider themes and metaphors

that might reflect the female American dream, and write a story using these themes and metaphors.
3.
Research a conflict related to professional or amateur sports in the United States, and explain how this conflict relates to the American dream.

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JOSEPH BRUCHAC

Ellis Island

Joseph Bruchac (born in 1942 in Sarasota Springs, New York) is part Slovakian, part Native American (Abenaki), and part English. He has taught English in Ghana, creative writing and African and black literatures at Skidmore College, and creative writing in prison workshops. His poetry, fiction writing, and storytelling focus on northeastern Native American tales and songs.

Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing

1.
What dreams for themselves and their futures do you think any one of your grandparents might have had at your age? Write a letter, from the point of view of one grandparent, describing those dreams.
2.
Think of a public building, memorial, or statue that you have seen. Write a brief description that includes both the physical appearance of this site and your response to it.

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Beyond the red brick of Ellis Island
where the two Slovak children
who became my grandparents
waited the long days of quarantine,
after leaving the sickness,

the old Empires of Europe,
a Circle Line[1]
ship slips easily
on its way to the island
of the tall woman,[2]
green
as dreams of forests and meadows

waiting for those who'd worked
a thousand years
yet never owned their own.
Like millions of others,
I too come to this island,

nine decades the answerer
of dreams.

Yet only one part of my blood loves that memory.
Another voice speaks
of native lands

within this nation.
Lands invaded
when the earth became owned.
Lands of those who followed
the changing Moon,

knowledge of the seasons
in their veins.

Suggestions for Writing and Discussion

1.
Part of Joseph Bruchac's heritage is Slovakian and part is Abenaki (Native American). How does the speaker in the poem reflect the differences in the American dreams of each of these peoples? Does the speaker seem to value one side more than the other, or does he present each dream as equally worthy?
2.
Imagine that you are in New York City, viewing the Statue of Liberty. Write your response to the message carved at the base of this symbolic statue: "Give me your tired, your poor, your teeming masses, yearning to breathe free."
3.
Compare the view of immigration suggested by this poem to the view in Mary Antin's "The Promised Land" (page 82).

Suggestions for Extended Thinking and Writing

1.
The title of the poem is "Ellis Island," and the first lines of the poem describe the immigrants' experiences there. Do research about Ellis Island, and write a paper using your findings to explain how the history of Ellis Island relates to the concept of the American dream.
2.
Do research about the Native Americans who lived in the area that is now New York State. In what ways do their experiences and treatment relate to the theme of American dreams and conflicts?

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TOPICS FOR MAKING CONNECTIONS: AMERICAN DREAMS AND CONFLICTS

1.Write an essay in which you analyze the factors that contribute to one's success in reaching a dream. Rely on any three pieces in this chapter for your support in this essay, as well as your own experience and observations of others.

2.Write an essay in which you analyze the factors that deter one from reaching his or her dream in America. Rely on any three pieces in this chapter for your main support in this essay, as well as your own experiences and observations of others.

3.Analyze the effects of being caught between two identities or between two different cultures by using three different pieces in this chapter. Based on the pieces you have chosen, what conclusions can you draw about the conflicts in which the person often finds himself or herself?
4.From all of these readings, choose the person or character you most admired and the person or character you least admired. Write an essay in which you compare and contrast these two people, and come to a clear conclusion as to why you prefer one over the other.
5.By using three selections from this chapter, including "Working for a Dream," analyze both the causes and the effects of stereotyping.
6.Write a dramatic dialogue in which any three characters or authors from this chapter discuss the American dream and how realistic that dream is in terms of their own American experiences. In conclusion, aim to have each character give an apt metaphor for the American dream that best reflects their experience.

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[1]*tourist boat*
[2]*Statue of Liberty*

Both of these photos show the use of flags as symbols. Discuss the differences you see in the use of these symbols and in the relationship of the individuals in the photos to the symbols.