

## From Division to Diversity; Changing America's Educational Narratives

Nicholas Birns     July 2011    M, T, W, Th 9:30-12:15

**This syllabus is provisional and we be adjusted once we get into the class and gauge each other's strengths and interests. But the readings and assignment due dates will stay the same.**

Form the *Brown versus Board of Education* ruling, which ended school desegregation, the growing diversity of American society has centered on educational integration as an approach to larger social inequalities. But can education solve all of society's ills? What are the rewards and perils of education, and how has the educational system been used both to shatter discrimination and also to hold up social hierarchies?

This course will show how African Americans and other US minorities became empowered and able to speak within the national conversation as a result of these changes. In reading Melba Pattillo Beals's *Warriors Don't Cry*, we will see the triumph and trauma of how desegregation occurred. In reading Rodolfo Anaya's *Bless Me, Ultima*, we will see a Chicano boy in New Mexico encounter discrimination and conflict as he attempts to negotiate issues of family, culture and language.

We also discuss how the white "mainstream" changes how at least aspects of it came to value diversity as a positive quality even in the face-off the conservative backlash that came largely from other quarters of the white population. We will witness world explored by Ron Suskind's *A Hope In The Unseen*, a nonfiction story of a young African American man's odyssey through his first year at an elite college and Daneila Zanzotto's film *Zoned In*, which similarly looks at the interaction of an elite educational universe. Aside from these nonfiction accounts we will also look at poems by writers of various backgrounds, Gwendolyn Brooks, Haki Madhubuti, Seamus Heaney, and Thomas Gray, about the intersection of people's hopes and the realities of the education system. We will read the popular nonfiction story, Jeff Durstewitz and Ruth Miller's *Younger Than That Now*, which discusses the educational narrative of two young white people from narrow and settled assumptions into a larger and more generous view of humanity. and accessible scholarly account, Patricia Gunn's *Defending Diversity: Affirmative Action* at the University of Michigan, which supply narratives of how the education system, and the assumptions behind it, changed as a result of the legal and social changes of the Civil Rights and immediate post-Civil Rights era. Also will we show films about education and life such as *The Class*. All these will show us where we have been, where we are going.

## Schedule of Classes

July 5 Orientation and Introduction

July 6 *Warriors Don't Cry*

July 7 *Warriors Don't Cry*

July 11 *A Hope In The Unseen*

July 12 *A Hope In The Unseen*

July 13 *A Hope in the Unseen.*

July 14 Poems by Gray, Madhubuti.

July 18 *A Hope In The Unseen*

July 19 Movie??

July 20 *Defending Diversity.*

July 21 *Defending Diversity*

July 25 *Bless Me, Ultima*

July 26 *Bless Me, Ultima*

July 27 *Younger Than That Now*

July 28 *Younger Than That Now*

We may read the last three books at the same time, doing a bit each day and mixing each in—we can decide this as we go.

## Writing Assignments

Paper 1 (short paper—Due by Fri the 8<sup>th</sup>, we will do drafts in class). Paper should be two pages (500-600 words)

Topic 1:

On Page 139 of *Warriors Don't Cry*, the experience of three African American students in a formerly segregated university is reported one way by the newspaper, but the students feel things very different “in their day-to-day experience.” What do you think the differences are between what the newspapers reported and how the students might have felt? Please use evidence from the book in making your argument. The paper should be four pages (1000 words).

Or

Pick one of the photographs in *Warriors Don't Cry* and describe what you think is

happening in the photograph and how it relates to what you read in the book.

Paper 2 Due July 15 (1000 words—four pages)

Two choices, both about *A Hope In The Unseen*

Why doesn't Cedric fit in at the college he attends? Is it the school's fault? His fault? The fault of a still-racist society? Nobody's fault? Another option we haven't thought of? Pick one of these and discuss, making sure to use evidence from the book,

Discuss Cedric's relationship with his father. What is working in that relationship, what is not? It is more a strength or a problem for young Cedric as he goes through high school and college?

The paper should be four pages (1000 words)

Paper 3 Due July 25 1000 words (four pages)

Define "affirmative action" and how it works in American education and life. Is affirmative action a good or bad policy? Has it served its purpose, or should it continue? What stereotypes do people have when discussing affirmative action? You should cite *Defending Diversity* and also *A Hope In The Unseen*, but your own life experience and those of others you know can also come into play.

Paper should be 1000 words (four pages).

### **Course Policies**

*(These are aspects of the EnGAGE program and/or The New School that need to be consistent across classes. Please don't vary much if at all from these. If you have language improvements, please share them with us all!)*

#### *Attendance*

You should be on time and present at every class. We only meet for 15 days. Thus, a class in the summer is the equivalent of an entire week of a regular term. Missing a class will negatively impact your grade. More importantly, if we are not all present, the course will not succeed, because we count on all of us to bring our individual and

deepening understandings to the table each day.

If you miss a class, you will also be required to meet with the EnGAGE staff to discuss the absence and plan ways to be sure you will be present all remaining classes. Two absences will, absent exceptional emergency situations, disqualify you from fall participation in EnGAGE. Doctors' appointments, etc. are not emergencies—please schedule accordingly!

If you do miss a class, you are responsible for all of the material presented during that class. You should communicate with me immediately about any potential or actual absence.

### *Building a Respectful Classroom Community*

For our class to succeed, we need an environment of respect. We should all remain open to others' opinions and questions (and critically self-reflective of our own), realizing that we all come with various areas of expertise and have unique perspectives on the world.

Students are expected to follow the New School's student code of conduct and participate in the learning process in a professional, respectful, and courteous manner. **Sending/receiving text messages, using a phone, or surfing the Internet during class is disrespectful and disruptive to the learning environment.** We reserve the right to ask you to leave class if you cannot respect this rule, resulting in an absence or even being dropped from the class.

### *Email*

All communication should be using your New School email address when possible or your EnGAGE gmail address when working from a web-based program that we have registered you on using your EnGAGE gmail address.

### *Plagiarism*

Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use of someone else's work as one's own in all forms of academic endeavor (such as essays, theses, examinations, research data, creative projects, etc), intentional or unintentional. The program will provide everyone with guidance on how to avoid plagiarism, and you should take it very seriously. Plagiarized material may be derived from a variety of sources, such as books, journals, internet postings, student or faculty papers, etc. This includes the purchase or "outsourcing" of written assignments for a course. A detailed definition of plagiarism in research and writing can be found in the fourth edition of the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, pages 26-29. Plagiarism will result in a meeting with the Director of the program to determine appropriate actions.

Repeated plagiarism will result in dismissal from the program and a letter in the permanent file at The New School about the issue.

*Disabilities*

If you have a documented disability and would like to apply for disability services, please contact the IUE and we will connect you with the proper offices.