Honor Code

By DAVID BROOKS

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1 Henry V is one of Shakespeare's most appealing characters. He was rambunctious when young and courageous when older. But suppose Henry went to an American school.

2 By about the third week of nursery school, Henry's teacher would be sending notes home saying that Henry "had another hard day today." He was disruptive during circle time. By midyear, there'd be sly little hints dropped that maybe Henry's parents should think about medication for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. Many of the other boys are on it, and they find school much easier.

3 By elementary school, Henry would be lucky to get 20-minute snatches of recess. During one, he'd jump off the top of the jungle gym, and, by the time he hit the ground, the supervising teachers would be all over him for breaking the safety rules. He'd get in a serious wrestling match with his buddy Falstaff, and, by the time he got him in a headlock, there'd be suspensions all around.

4 First, Henry would withdraw. He'd decide that the official school culture is for wimps and softies and he'd just disengage. In kindergarten, he'd wonder why he just couldn't be good. By junior high, he'd lose interest in trying and his grades would plummet.

5 Then he'd rebel. If the official high school culture was über-nurturing, he'd be über-crude. If it valued cooperation and sensitivity, he'd devote his mental energies to violent video games and aggressive music. If college wanted him to be focused and tightly ambitious, he'd exile himself into a lewd and unsupervised laddie subculture. He'd have vague high ambitions but no realistic way to realize them. Day to day, he'd look completely adrift.

6 This is roughly what's happening in schools across the Western world. The education system has become culturally cohesive, rewarding and encouraging a certain sort of person: one who is nurturing, collaborative, disciplined, neat, studious, industrious and ambitious. People who don't fit this cultural ideal respond by disengaging and rebelling.

7 Far from all, but many of the people who don't fit in are boys. A decade or so ago, people started writing books and articles on the boy crisis. At the time, the evidence was disputable and some experts pushed back. Since then, the evidence that boys are falling behind has mounted. The case is closed. The numbers for boys get worse and worse.

8 By 12th grade, male reading test scores are far below female test scores. The eminent psychologist Michael Thompson mentioned at the Aspen Ideas Festival a few days ago that 11th-grade boys are now writing at the same level as 8th-grade girls. Boys used to have an advantage in math and science, but that gap is nearly gone.

9 Boys are much more likely to have discipline problems. An article as far back as 2004 in the magazine Educational Leadership found that boys accounted for nearly three-quarters of the D's and F's.

10 Some colleges are lowering the admissions requirements just so they can admit a decent number of men. Even so, men make up just over 40 percent of college students. Two million fewer men graduated from college over the past decade than women. The performance gap in graduate school is even higher.

11 Some of the decline in male performance may be genetic. The information age rewards people who mature early, who are verbally and socially sophisticated, who can control their impulses. Girls may, on average, do better at these things. After all, boys are falling behind not just in the U.S., but in all 35 member-nations of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

12 But the big story here is cultural and moral. If schools want to re-engage Henry, they can't pretend they can turn him into a reflective Hamlet just by feeding him his meds and hoping he'll sit quietly at story time. If schools want to educate a fiercely rambunctious girl, they can't pretend they will successfully tame her by assigning some of those exquisitely sensitive Newbery award-winning novellas. Social engineering is just not that easy.

13 Schools have to engage people as they are. That requires leaders who insist on more cultural diversity in school: not just teachers who celebrate cooperation, but other teachers who celebrate competition; not just teachers who honor environmental virtues, but teachers who honor military virtues; not just curriculums that teach how to share, but curriculums that teach how to win and how to lose; not just programs that work like friendship circles, but programs that work like boot camp.

14 The basic problem is that schools praise diversity but have become culturally homogeneous. The education world has become a distinct subculture, with a distinct ethos and attracting a distinct sort of employee. Students who don't fit the ethos get left out.

15 Little Prince Hal has a lot going on inside. He's not the unfeeling, uncommunicative, testosterone-driven cretin of common boy stereotype. He's just inspired by a different honor code. He doesn't find much inspiration in school, but he should.

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phylosophe

By Judith Butler
Transcript of *YouTube* clip, February 23, 2007

1 There's a story—that came out around, I don't know, eight years ago—of a young man who lived in Maine, and he walked down the street of his small town where he had lived his entire life. And he walks with what we call a "swish"—a kind of . . . his hips move back and forth in a "feminine" way. And as he grew older—14, 15, 16—that swish, that walk became more pronounced, OK, and it was more dramatically feminine, and he started to be harassed by the boys in the town. And soon two or three boys stopped his walk, and they fought with him.

2 And they ended up throwing him over a bridge and they killed him.

3 So then we have to ask: Why would someone be killed for the way they walk? Why would that walk be so upsetting to those other boys that they would feel that they must negate this person, they must expunge the trace of this person, they must stop that walk, no matter what, they must eradicate the possibility of that person ever walking again?

4 It seems to me that we are talking about an extremely deep panic or fear, an anxiety that pertains to gender norms.

5 And if someone says you must comply with the norm of masculinity, otherwise you will die, or I kill you now because you do not comply, then we have to start to question what the relation is between complying with gender and coercion.

The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action*

By Audre Lorde
An excerpt from *The Cancer Journals*

1 I would like to preface my remarks on the transformation of silence into language and action with a poem. The title of it is "A Song for Many Movements" and this reading is dedicated to Winnie Mandela. Winnie Mandela is a South African freedom fighter who is in exile now somewhere in South Africa. She had been in prison and had been released and was picked up again after she spoke out against the recent jailing of black school children who were singing freedom songs, and who were charged with public violence... "A Song for Many Movements":

2 Nobody wants to die on the way
caught between ghosts of whiteness
and the real water
none of us wanted to leave
our bones
on the way to salvation
three planets to the left
a century of light years ago
our spices are separate and particular
but our skins sing in complimentary keys
at a quarter to eight mean time
we were telling the same stories
over and over and over.

3 Broken down gods survive
in the crevasses and mudpots
of every beleaguered city
where it is obvious
there are too many bodies
to cart to the ovens
or gallows
and our uses have become
more important than our silence
after the fall
too many empty cases
of blood to bury or burn
there will be no body left
to listen
and our labor
has become more important
than our silence.

* Originally given as a speech, December 28, 1977, at the Lesbian and Literature Panel of the Modern Language Association.

4 Our labor
has become more important
than our silence.

(from Audre Lorde's *The Black Unicorn,* W.W. Norton & Co., 1978)

5 I have come to believe over and over again that what is most important to me must be spoken, made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it bruised or misunderstood. That the speaking profits me, beyond any other effect. I am standing here as a black lesbian poet, and the meaning of all that waits upon the fact that I am still alive, and might not have been. Less than two months ago, I was told by two doctors, one female and one male, that I would have to have breast surgery, and that there was a 60 to 80 percent chance that the tumor was malignant. Between that telling and the actual surgery, there was a three week period of the agony of an involuntary reorganization of my entire life. The surgery was completed, and the growth was benign.

6 But within those three weeks, I was forced to look upon myself and my living with a harsh and urgent clarity that has left me still shaken but much stronger. This is a situation faced by many women, by some of you here today. Some of what I experienced during that time has helped elucidate for me much of what I feel concerning the transformation of silence into language and action.

7 In becoming forcibly and essentially aware of my mortality, and of what I wished and wanted for my life, however short it might be, priorities and omissions became strongly etched in a merciless light, and what I most regretted were my silences. Of what had I *ever* been afraid? To question or to speak as I believed could have meant pain, or death. But we all hurt in so many different ways, all the time, and pain will either change, or end. Death, on the other hand, is the final silence. And that might be coming quickly, now, without regard for whether I had ever spoken what needed to be said, or had only betrayed myself into small silences, while I planned someday to speak, or waited for someone else's words. And I began to recognize a source of power within myself that comes from the knowledge that while it is most desirable not to be afraid, learning to put fear into a perspective gave me great strength.

8 I was going to die, if not sooner then later, whether or not I had ever spoken myself. My silences had not protected me. Your silence will not protect you. But for every real word spoken, for every attempt I had ever made to speak those truths for which I am still seeking, I had made contact with other women while we examined the words to fit a world in which we all believed, bridging our differences. And it was the concern and caring of all those women which gave me strength and enabled me to scrutinize the essentials of my living.

9 The women who sustained me through that period were black and white, old and young, lesbian, bisexual, and heterosexual, and we all shared a war against the tyrannies of silence. They all gave me a strength and concern without which I could not have survived intact. Within those weeks of acute fear came the knowledge—within the war we are all waging with the forces of death, subtle and otherwise, conscious or not—I am not only a casualty, I am also a warrior.

10 What are the words you do not yet have? What do you need to say? What are the tyrannies you swallow day by day and attempt to make your own, until you will sicken and die of them, still in silence? Perhaps for some of you here today, I am the face of one of your fears. Because I am woman, because I am black, because I am lesbian, because I am myself, a black woman warrior poet doing my work, come to ask you, are you doing yours?

11 And, of course, I am afraid—you can hear it in my voice—because the transformation of silence into language and action is an act of self-revelation and that always seems fraught with danger. But my daughter, when I told her of our topic and my difficulty with it, said, "Tell them about how you're never really a whole person if you remain silent, because there's always that one little piece inside of you that wants to be spoken out, and if you keep ignoring it, it gets madder and madder and hotter and hotter, and if you don't speak it out one day it will just up and punch you in the mouth."

12 In the cause of silence, each one of us draws the face of her own fear—fear of contempt, of censure, or some judgment, or recognition, of challenge, of annihilation. But most of all, I think, we fear the very visibility without which we also cannot truly live. Within this country where racial difference creates a constant, if unspoken, distortion of vision, black women have on one hand always been highly visible, and so, on the other hand, have been rendered invisible through the depersonalization of racism. Even within the women's movement, we have had to fight and still do, for that very visibility which also renders us most vulnerable, our blackness. For to survive in the mouth of this dragon we call america, we have had to learn this first and most vital lesson—that we were never meant to survive. Not as human beings. And neither were most of you here today, black or not. And that visibility which makes us most vulnerable is that which also is the source of our greatest strength. Because the machine will try to grind you into dust anyway, whether or not we speak. We can sit in our corners mute forever while our sisters and our selves are wasted, while our children are distorted and destroyed, while our earth is poisoned, we can sit in our safe corners mute as bottles, and we still will be no less afraid.

13 In my house this year we are celebrating the feast of Kwanza, the African-American festival of harvest which begins the day after Christmas and lasts for seven days. There are seven principles of Kwanza, one for each day. The first principle is Umoja, which means unity, the decision to strive for and maintain unity in self and community. The principle for yesterday, the second day, was Kujichagulia—self-determination—the decision to define ourselves, name ourselves, and speak for ourselves, instead of being defined and spoken for by others. Today is the third day of Kwanza, and the principle for today is Ujima—collective work and responsibility—the decision to build and maintain ourselves and our communities together and to recognize and solve our problems together.

14 Each of us is here now because in one way or another we share a commitment to language and to the power of language, and to the reclaiming of that language which has been made to work against us. In the transformation of silence into language and action, it is vitally necessary for each one of us to establish or examine her function in that transformation, and to recognize her role as vital within that transformation.

15 For those of us who write, it is necessary to scrutinize not only the truth of what we speak, but the truth of that language by which we speak it. For others, it is to share and spread also those words that are meaningful to us. But primarily for us all, it is necessary to teach by living and speaking those truths which we believe and know beyond understanding. Because in this way alone we can survive, by taking part in a process of life that is creative and continuing, that is growth.

16 And it is never without fear; of visibility, of the harsh light of scrutiny and perhaps judgment, of pain, of death. But we have lived through all of those already, in silence, except death. And I remind myself all the time now, that if I were to have been born mute, or had maintained an oath of silence my whole life long for safety, I would still have suffered, and I would still die. It is very good for establishing perspective.

17 And where the words of women are crying to be heard, we must each of us recognize our responsibility to seek those words out, to read them and share them and examine them in their pertinence to our lives. That we not hide behind the mockeries of separations that have been imposed upon us and which so often we accept as our own: for instance, "I can't possibly teach black women's writing—their experience is so different from mine," yet how many years have you spent teaching Plato and Shakespeare and Proust? Or another: "She's a white woman and what could she possibly have to say to me?" Or, "She's a lesbian, what would my husband say, or my chairman?" Or again, "This woman writes of her sons and I have no children." And all the other endless ways in which we rob ourselves of ourselves and each other.

18 We can learn to work and speak when we are afraid in the same way we have learned to work and speak when we are tired. For we have been socialized to respect fear more than our own needs for language and definition, and while we wait in silence for that final luxury of fearlessness, the weight of that silence will choke us.

19 The fact that we are here and that I speak now these words is an attempt to break that silence and bridge some of those differences between us, for it is not difference which immobilizes us, but silence. And there are so many silences to be broken.

His Politeness Is Her Powerlessness

By Deborah Tannen
An excerpt from *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation*

1 There are many kinds of evidence that women and men are judged differently even if they talk the same way. This tendency makes mischief in discussions of women, men, and power. If a linguistic strategy is used by a woman, it is seen as powerless; if it is done by a man, it is seen as powerful. Often, the labeling of "women's language" as "powerless language" reflects the view of women's behavior through the lens of men's.

2 Because they are not struggling to be one-up, women often find themselves framed as one-down. Any situation is ripe for misinterpretation, because status and connections are displayed by the same moves. This ambiguity accounts for much misinterpretation, by experts as well as nonexperts, by which women's ways of talking, uttered in a spirit of rapport, are branded powerless. Nowhere is this inherent ambiguity clearer than in a brief comment in a newspaper article in which a couple, both psychologists, were jointly interviewed. The journalist asked them the meaning of "being very polite." The two experts responded simultaneously, giving different answers. The man said, "Subservience." The woman said, "Sensitivity." Both experts were right, but each was describing the view of a different gender.

3 Experts and nonexperts alike tend to see anything women do as evidence of powerlessness. The same newspaper article quotes another psychologist as saying, "A man might ask a woman, 'Will you please go to the store?' where a woman might say, 'Gee, I really need a few things from the store, but I'm so tired.'" The woman's style is called "covert," a term suggesting negative qualities like being "sneaky" and "underhanded." The reason offered for this is power: The woman doesn't feel she has a right to ask directly.

4 Granted, women have lower status than men in our society. But this is not necessarily why they prefer not to make outright demands. The explanation for a woman's indirectness could just as well be her seeking connection. If you get your way as a result of having demanded it, the payoff is satisfying in terms of status: You're one-up because others are doing as you told them. But if you get your way because others happened to want the same thing, or because they offered freely, the payoff is in rapport. You're neither one-up nor one-down but happily connected to others whose wants are the same as yours. Furthermore, if indirectness is understood by both parties, then there is nothing covert about it: That a request is being made is clear. Calling an indirect communication covert reflects the view of someone for whom the direct style seems "natural" and "logical"—a view more common among men.

5 Indirectness itself does not reflect powerlessness. It is easy to think of situations where indirectness is the prerogative of those in power. For example, a wealthy couple who know that their servants will do their bidding need not give direct orders, but can simply state wishes: The woman of the house says, "It's chilly in here," and the servant sets about raising the temperature. The man of the house says, "It's dinner time," and the servant

sees about having dinner served. Perhaps the ultimate indirectness is getting someone to do something without saying anything at all: The hostess rings a bell and the maid brings the next course; or a parent enters the room where children are misbehaving and stands with hands on hips, and the children immediately stop what they're doing.

6 Entire cultures operate on elaborate systems of indirectness. For example, I discovered in a small research project that most Greeks assumed that a wife who asked, "Would you like to go to the party?" was hinting that she wanted to go. They felt that she wouldn't bring it up if she didn't want to go. Furthermore, they felt, she would not state her preference outright because that would sound like a demand. Indirectness was the appropriate means for communicating her preference.

7 Japanese culture has developed indirectness to a fine art. For example, a Japanese anthropologist, Harumi Befu, explains the delicate exchange of indirectness required by a simple invitation to lunch. When his friend extended the invitation, Befu first had to determine whether it was meant literally or just pro forma, much as an American might say, "We'll have to have you over for dinner some time" but would not expect you to turn up at the door. Having decided the invitation was meant literally and having accepted, Befu was then asked what he would like to eat. Following custom, he said anything would do, but his friend, also following custom, pressed him to specify. Host and guest repeated this exchange an appropriate number of times, until Befu deemed it polite to answer the question—politely—by saying that tea over rice would be fine. When he arrived for lunch, he was indeed served tea over rice—as the last course of a sumptuous meal. Befu was not surprised by the feast, because he knew that protocol required it. Had he been given what he had asked for, he would have been insulted. But protocol also required that he make a great show of being surprised.

8 This account of mutual indirectness in a lunch invitation may strike Americans as excessive. But far more cultures in the world use elaborate systems of indirectness than value directness. Only modern Western societies place a priority on direct communication, and even for us it is more a value than a practice.

9 Evidence from other cultures also makes it clear that indirectness does not in itself reflect low status. Rather, our assumptions about the status of women compel us to interpret anything they do as reflecting low status. Anthropologist Elinor Keenan, for example, found that in a Malagasy-speaking village on the island of Madagascar, it is women who are direct and men who are indirect. And the villagers see the men's indirect way of speaking, using metaphors and proverbs, as the better way. For them, indirectness, like the men who use it, has high status. They regard women's direct style as clumsy and crude, debasing the beautiful subtlety of men's language. Whether women or men are direct or indirect differs; what remains constant is that the women's style is negatively evaluated—seen as lower in status than the men's.

Prelude: The Barbershop

By Vershawn Ashanti Young
Preface from *Your Average Nigga: Performing Race, Literacy, and Masculinity*

1 While sitting in the only black barbershop in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, on the morning of writing this prelude, trying to think of the best way to acquaint you with what this book is about and who I am as the author behind it, I was struck with just how different I am from a lot of other black men, and yet again I was compelled to acknowledge my desire to be like them. The men I observed walked with that lanky dip I wish I could perfect; they talked casually but passionately about sports, basketball especially, with the deep resonance that reverberates in my hungry ears. Many spoke a spicy black lingo, the hip linguistics that even white kids from Iowa crave. The men wore pants that sagged. Their feet were adorned with the latest two-hundred-dollar sneakers endorsed by Allen Iverson or Shaq. Their self-assurance made me want to mimic them, to give a gender performance that would say unequivocally to everybody—white folks, black folks, everybody—that I too am a black male with balls. That's part of why I was at the barbershop—and to get that fresh bald fade, one of the trendy hallmarks of black masculinity.

2 However, because this barbershop is located smack dab in the middle of Mostly White, Iowa—a state that unapologetically leads in incarcerating black men—my vicarious revel in black masculinity was sobered by the statistics: while only 2 percent of those who live in Iowa are black, blacks comprise 25 percent of the state's prison population. Thus in addition to enchantment, I felt a conflicting fusion of fortune and tribulation—fortune because my language and demeanor often mark me as educated, separating me from those who exemplify the stigmatized (and paradoxically romanticized) black male profile, and consequently excusing me, though certainly not always, from the plight that follows that image. I am troubled because the black men who suffer most from the educational and judicial systems are poor, from the underclass, from the ghetto, like me. And although many flee the big city, looking for a small haven in mid-America, they sometimes find that their situation gets worse. I both identify with their predicament and disidentify with it because I am and am not exactly one of them, and both do and do not want to be.

3 To embrace my blackness, my heritage, my manliness, I identify with men who represent the ghetto. I no longer want to deny my class background or the racial experience associated with it. I identify to belong. I disidentify to escape racism, to avoid the structures that oppress black men. But I also disidentify to retaliate against black men—to punish them for what I perceive as their efforts to disown me. This ambivalence provokes me to imitate and just as often to dissociate from the black men I envy. Both efforts fail. Neither alleviates my racial anxiety. Instead, they heighten the angst I experience. As a result I am hyperaware of how masculine I am (not) and how black I (don't) act.

4 I can't neatly explain why my visit to the barbershop brings all this to mind and spurs my unease. I mean, the barbers are only courteous. They take me ahead of clients who come less frequently. They even call me sir, although I'm not much older than they are and tell them to use my first name. Still, I can't shake the way I feel. For although I know that some of my discomfort is self-induced, a consequence of not conversing much with the barbers and their customers about their racial and gender performances and not allowing them to give their take on mine, I also know there's reason for my worry, that my experience is not unique.

5 Shelly Eversley aptly summarizes part of the reason for my concern in her book *The Real Negro*. Offering an anecdote about the time she felt uncomfortable in a black barbershop in Baltimore, Eversley concludes that the barbershop is "a racial and cultural distinction" from the university campus, the site where we both trained as intellectuals and currently work as professors. Because we participate in both sites, we suffer from the conflict that exists between them. So in order to get along on the (white) campus and in the barbershop, we must alter not the color of our skin but the ways we perform race in each location. These racial performances are most often carried out through language, the way we communicate.

6 Eversley, for instance, was "uneasy in her barber's chair" as "she listened to the men ... discussing their plans to [participate in and] make a political statement" during the Million Man March. In what she terms "her best graduate-student speak," she expressed her belief that the march perpetuated the oppression of black women and gays. "For a few seconds, the men ... seemed to listen," she writes, "[but] then continued with their conversation." Prompted by her barber to persist (he whispered: "Try it again, college girl"), "she offered a picture of her thoughts." She explained that the "sexism and homophobia" of the march "mirrored the logic of white supremacy." As she left, the men told her she was "still 100 percent black." As she made her way to campus, however, she says she "felt triumphant and sad" —triumphant because, although the men "had read the education in her language as proof of her 'imitation whiteness,'" she was able "to shed her academic self-consciousness" and belong, to be seen as "part of the group, as authentic." She was sad because, "when she arrived on campus," her performance of black authenticity lost its cachet; she realized that the benefits she garnered in the shop were now distinct disadvantages.

7 Why did Eversley feel split in two? Had she become the twenty-first-century incarnation of Du Bois's double consciousness, an embodiment of racial schizophrenia? One moment she spoke as an "imitation white woman," and after a switch of the tongue, she became an authentically black one. What endowed the barbers with the authority to make her feel race-fake and then authentic? Did her linguistic performance really have such transformative power? Whatever the answers to these questions are, it's clear that Eversley was compelled to contend with the consequence of her performance: the transformation of her political commitments into identity ambivalence.

8 This racial ambivalence is what makes me so self-conscious about and analytical of other men in the barbershop—because my linguistic performance is rated in relation to theirs. And not only do I feel as if my racial performance is judged, but I know my gender performance is too. Because the barbershop is a masculine space, the performance of heterosexuality is the gold standard. Talking sufficiently black is not enough for me to be heard; I must also speak and act acceptably masculine. This performance is even more difficult for those who are gay or are taken as gay, as I sometimes am, because we are often estranged in these spaces. Quincy Mills offers Eric as an example in this regard in his ethnography of a black barbershop on the South Side of Chicago.

9 Mills describes Eric as "one of the regulars in the shop." But unlike other patrons, "his identity is shrouded in suspicion and innuendo," because "the barbers and many customers assume that Eric is gay." As a result, unlike other regulars who become key players in the discourse community, Mills writes that Eric "is silenced as an agenda setter. . . . When [he] would initiate conversations, the men would turn away, ignore him, or patronize him for a short while only to move quickly to other topics." Instead of engaging Eric, they would "act annoyed by his mannerisms and voice."

10 Mills doesn't describe the particulars of Eric's voice and manner, but it's conclusive that for the others his masculine performance is insufficiently heterosexual. What's interesting about the other men's perception of Eric's sexuality is that it's not based on facts but on how he acts. On this Mills is clear: "Eric never came out to me" or to the other men, he says. "There was no confirmation of his sexual identity in the months I spent at the shop." Eric's insufficient heterosexual performance cast him "outside the boundaries of blackness because his demeanor and speech," Mills writes, "are beyond the narrow definitions of masculinity."

11 My personal history is replete with anecdotes like Eversley's and experiences like Eric's, and I'm trying to keep them from adding up, which is why I keep my mouth closed in the barbershop. It's also why I was nervous about reading the novel I brought with me to help pass the wait. It's not that novel reading itself is off-limits in the shop. I've seen other men read. But given my past, my profession, and my dubious masculine performance, I hesitate.

12 Literacy habits, like reading novels of a certain kind and speaking what might appear to be standard English, have always made me seem more queer, more white identified, and more middle class than I am. When I fail to meet the class, gender, and racial notions that others ascribe to me, I'm punished. In some ways, living in a mostly white town and being an assistant professor at a Big Ten school heightens—not lessens, as I had hoped—the conflict that stems from the sometimes converging, but oftentimes diverging, racial and gender expectations that are held out for black men and that we hold for each other.

13 I recognize the problem, and I'm working so that it doesn't consume me. "Hell," I say to encourage myself, "I'm an English professor; that justifies my reading a novel in a barbershop. And what's this nonsense of trying to fit in, to avoid alienation, to avoid name-calling: 'Sissy!' 'Faggot!'" But I wonder: What does not fitting in cost me? This issue of trying to fit in but never succeeding, of being perpetually on the margins of various communities and never finding a way into any one of them, is the trope of my life, making me something of a black Sisyphus. Academic literacy is my heavy rock.

14 You see, my Sisyphean experience in Iowa is a continuation of troubles that began while I was growing up in Chicago, in the late 1970s and '80s, in the notorious Governor Henry Horner Homes, the same site that Alex Kotlowitz writes about in his journalistic ethnography, *There Are No Children Here.* In fact, as Kotlowitz was gathering material for his book, I was still living there. But unlike his subjects, Lafeyette and Pharoah, who are portrayed as boys who must fight the criminalizing lure of the ghetto in order to succeed in school, I was seen as an anomaly. Kotlowitz sees Lafeyette and Pharoah as having identities compatible with the ghetto even as he describes their striving to get out. My identity, however, was atypical, alienating me from my neighbors and hood and excluding me from representations of "authentic" ghetto life. Thus I didn't have to fight to get out of the ghetto. I was kicked out.

15 It might seem like a good thing that I was kicked out. It might seem as if this exile expedited the leave I was seeking. But the problem that this bit of personal history presents, the problem that my monograph theorizes, the problem that my trip to the barbershop illustrates is this: because I ain't no homeboy—though I long to be and would do anything short of killing to gain that identity—I'm not ghetto enough for the ghetto. Because I'm not a white boy, I'm not white enough for white folks. And because I wasn't born into the middle class, I'm not completely accepted by the mainstream. And sometimes, if you can believe it, I'm not ghetto enough for the mainstream or middle class enough for the ghetto or black enough for white folks! The psychoemotional pain that this liminal existence creates, the pain of negotiating multiple cultural and racial worlds, is far too great for many. I've been doing it for a long time and have been able to cope only by transforming my personal problem into an intellectual one. In some ways I'm chipping away at the burden. But far too many are not able to do this. And why should they have to?

16 Perhaps some black men in that barbershop are also trying to avoid racial and cultural punishment. Instead of negotiating two worlds, maybe they have chosen to live in only one—a microcosm, a subculture of white society that accepts and mandates a certain sociolinguistic performance of masculinity. Because they have chosen and are accepted by a community, perhaps they have no need to envy me as I do them. But then what do they lose when they don't try to imitate what I represent? It's my desire to reconcile my ghetto past with my middleclass aspirations and possibly be of assistance to others in the process. I want to expose the factors that make black racial identity incompatible with literacy, especially for males. Thus masculine panic, racial anxiety, and their relation to language and academic literacy (as the prescribed means for class climbing) constitute the three-part theme that I explore in this book.