



# Baltimore

by Kirsten Greenidge

Directed by Josh Glenn-Kayden

## **Study Guide**

**Compiled by Shaila Schmidt**

**University of Massachusetts, Amherst  
Department of Theater**

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As we prepared for this production, our focus was on understanding who these characters were in terms of not only how they saw themselves, but how the other characters saw them and how our audience might view them. The main conflicts of this play stem from other characters—and perhaps by extension, society—only see parts of a complex identity. These characters are challenged to see each other in their full humanity in order to have an honest and open conversation about how the different parts of their identity—especially race and ethnicity—influence how they walk through and experience the world around them.

This study guide provides students and teachers resources on how to engage with these themes and will hopefully provide an opportunity for the conversations this play sparks to continue beyond the theater and the classroom.

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## THE PLAYWRIGHT



Kirsten Greenidge is a playwright from Boston, Massachusetts. Growing up, she regularly wrote and produced plays with the other kids in her neighborhood, as well as her sisters and began taking theatre classes at Wheelock Family theatre while still in high school.

She attended Wesleyan University as a United States History Major, where she studied playwriting and won her first playwriting award.

Soon after, Kirsten moved on to the Playwright's Workshop at the University of Iowa, where she studied with Naomi Iizuka, Erik Ehn, Sydne Mahone, among others.

More often than not, Kirsten's work explores the intersections of race, class, and gender and seeks to place stories and language that are inherently theatrical on the American stage. She seeks to create more multidimensional roles for underrepresented actors of color, more roles for women, and more plays that challenge mainstream audiences and provoke change.

Currently, Kirsten is playwright-in-residence at Company One Theatre in Boston, Massachusetts, as part of the Mellon Foundation's National Playwright Residency Program administered in partnership by *Howlround*, where in addition to writing a play for Company One, she works in conjunction with C1's dramaturgy team to facilitate Playlab, C1's program for new and emerging playwrights.

She was also recently named Boston's Playwright Laureate by Roxbury Community College. Kirsten is working on commissioned projects from La Jolla Playhouse, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Huntington Theatre Company, and Playwrights Horizons.

Kirsten is Assistant Professor of Theatre at the School of Theatre at Boston University and lives in Westborough, Massachusetts with her husband, two children, sister, and mother in their writing compound named Gwendolyn.

## **We Talk with Kirsten Greenidge about BALTIMORE, Her Black Lives Matter-Inspired Play**

Jay Muldoon  
Playscripts Blog  
Oct 14, 2016

In Kirsten Greenidge's new play *Baltimore*, a racially-charged incident divides students on a college campus, and reluctant resident advisor Shelby must decide if she will enter the fray. We spoke with the playwright about the inspiration behind the play, the Big Ten Theatre Consortium, and her advice for aspiring writers.

### **What was the inspiration behind Baltimore? Why this play now?**

When Alan MacVey, the Chair of the Theatre Department at the University of Iowa, approached me about the Big Ten commission, we talked about what the play I would write might be about. I more often than not write about race and how it intersects with class and history and, usually gender as well. Around the time I began writing and thinking about the play Ferguson and the Black Lives Matter movement exploded onto the national landscape.

I will not say that America began to think about race at this moment. America is and always has been preoccupied by race, skin color, sex, class, gender. These things are woven into our fabric. I think they are woven into the fabric of any society, but in the United States, they are often embedded, deeply embedded, with violence. And Michael Brown's death and the pain that overflowed for many people after that, exposed this in ways that made silence and complacency about racism impossible to endure in the same ways that maybe they might have been before that moment.

And then the moments kept coming in very public ways because the media became attuned to them. They have been happening for years. Parents of children of color would not be so vigilant about their children in public spaces and their children's interactions with law enforcement if they didn't. I remember talking with my mother, when I was very young, about John F. Kennedy's assassination. I am from Boston. Talking about John F. Kennedy's assassination is very serious business around here. And one thing I remember her saying is that as a young person in 1963, unlike perhaps her white classmates, who were horrified by the violence (they said), my mother was not. Black people were used to unexpected violence happening to loved ones. It was that it could happen to the president. Violence, death, the accumulation of black bodies, is not new. It is that finally, the world as a whole, is taking notice, which is why I think this play exists now. It exists at a moment where we are perhaps, more than we did a bit ago, examining how we got here, how we interact with one another, and wondering, hoping, working to do better.

**Why did you decide to set this play in college? How is the setting important to the story?**

Well, the most obvious answer is that the parameters of the Big Ten commission are to create a play that can be performed by college-age students. This is important because the Big Ten commission's purpose, as conceived by Carol Macvey and instituted by the University of Iowa, is to create more roles for female actors in BFA programs.

In many programs, female students can go four years possibly never having performed a role with a full arc, even a smaller role. One could say, well, that's unfortunate, but even in the field, casting is not guaranteed, so that is just the way this business is. But we owe students more than that, if their male counterparts, who often, in numbers, make up less of their class in number, do get those roles and so get more experience and therefore learn their craft in a different, perhaps even unequal way. So, the commission stipulates that the play must have at least six roles for female actors. In *Baltimore*, not all parts have equal stage time, but I worked hard to make sure the roles have arcs. Early drafts were wildly uneven, but eventually they got fleshed out (I hope).

Another part of the setting that was important was that actors were playing parts meant for them in terms of age—that is, “age appropriate”. Many times, college-aged actors play roles that are much older than they are, or much younger, and the purpose of this particular play was to create a piece where that was not the case.

However, the setting did then need to be purposeful. *Baltimore* is set in a college because for many people, college is the first place—and maybe the only place—where you live and work with people who are very, very different from those you grew up with, especially in those first few weeks of school. Maybe after that people get shy or scared or find the people “more like them” again, but those first few weeks are like a giant mixer—as those in my parents' generation might say—and so that is why I chose the setting I did.

**Each character in *Baltimore* has a distinct background and perspective on race. How did you approach the challenge of writing from so many perspectives? And why did you feel it was important to give voice to each perspective?**

I actually wish I could have included more perspectives, but then I wonder if the play would have been three hours long. I wanted to write about stereotypes without perpetuating them. And I wanted to make sure, as much as possible, that while the actors might find the material difficult, that they did not find it untruthful. The University of Maryland and Boston University held workshops, and these helped me to get students' perspectives on our current moment from their points of view. I blended their stories. Some stories overlapped in really surprising ways in terms of where students were from

and what their experiences were. But it was important to me that I include as many perspectives as the play could hold.

Ambivalence, as seen through Shelby's actions and inaction, plays an important role in *Baltimore* and seems to speak to the particular pressure people of color can feel to define themselves.

I wanted a person of color to be the central character but I did not want a person of color to have to figure it out on her or his own and I definitely did not want the problem solved in 90 minutes so audiences could go home feeling good about race or having sat through a play about difficult issues.

I think what Shelby represents is the impulse many in the generation below mine (or maybe a few below mine) who are reluctant to put labels on themselves and yet are also called to act and speak up. And I think this does create feelings of conflict and ambivalence and sometimes confusion. I think an easy answer is to say that Shelby is sheltered. But a more nuanced answer is to say Shelby is part of a very complicated world where identity is constantly visible and on display and her life has been curated in a way that does not allow for mistakes or missteps. There is real risk for her if she is wrong in public, and so the answer for her is to just coast and never truly use her voice to question at all.

### **How did you first get involved in theatre?**

I've been creating plays since I a preschooler, but I did not take my first playwriting classes until college. I have been writing in some form for basically my entire life. In high school I took classes and performed at Wheelock Family Theater in Boston. And in college I did as much theatre as possible, even though my major was U.S. History.

### **Any advice for aspiring writers?**

Keep writing no matter what. There are a million things that will conspire to make you stop writing: time, money, rejection letters, illness, kids, messy houses, dogs needing to be walked...everything. Keep writing, even if it is only five minutes a day. Write for that five minutes.

Another is to find training. I think this means different things for different people. For some it means a solid BFA program. For others an MFA or low residency MA and for others it might be a series of classes at the exceptional theatre that happens to be in their hometown.

Plays are written, sure, but they are also wrought. They are crafted. We learn our craft from those that came before, and to do that, you need to take classes and sit in rooms with

other people who have written and had their work produced and most likely you need to do this more than once and over the span of a few years. You also need to hear your work out loud often. So seek out workshop opportunities, not just productions and prizes.

Be the kind of person with which you would want to work with. This one is can be difficult for us writers. We spend a lot of time in our heads, hashing things out, and I know that activity can make me grumpy. Not because the writing goes badly, but because it takes a lot of energy. I often emerge from a writing session, bleary-eyed and drained, and sometimes forget to tell this to myself. But it is worth telling it to myself as I sit down to work with actors, directors, designers; as I give my family the rundown of what is cooking for dinner and where the clean pajamas are. Be kind (not the same thing as a pushover, by the by). When you are a playwright, to get the thing really done, you are not the only one in the room.

## On Seeing and Being Seen

Kirsten Greenidge  
Howlround  
30 April 2019

*This article is adapted from a keynote address I delivered at the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival (KCACTF) Region One on 29 January 2019.*

KCACTF is an organization that has meant so much to me, for so many years. As a national network of colleges that showcases an astronomical amount of theatre created on American college campuses, KCACTF can easily, easily be mistaken as only a place where work goes to be seen. But it has been during my years and years associated with the organization, that I have come to appreciate KCACTF as a place where we can also come to see.

Really see. Not just be seen.

Because in doing so, in really seeing, we see ourselves within others, and we move that much closer to knowing; we move that much closer to empathy; and we hopefully move that much closer not just to understanding another's troubles, another's predicament, but that much closer to demanding more and more to make life for that person better.

We are moved to action on behalf of that other person, because we have seen them.

Maybe we like them. Maybe we don't. But we now know them to be human.

We understand how complex, how terrible, how wonderful, how joy-filled, how exquisite, that existence can be; and that, perhaps, our time on this planet should not be made more difficult by the time we spend living on it together.

Theatre can be a helpful tool for seeing other people. My mother took me to see lots of theatre—lots of children's theatre—but I saw my first professional full-length show when I was twelve, and it was August Wilson's *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* at the Huntington Theatre Company in Boston, MA for a field trip.

I repeat: My first professional full-length show was when I was twelve and it was August Wilson's *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*. This. Was. Amazing: Black people telling these stories on their own terms—okay, Mr. August Wilson's terms. But it was the first time I had ever seen a story about black people that was not a musical and I was transfixed.

And I knew I wanted to be able to do what August Wilson did. I wanted to create stories for black people where we were not on the peripheries but in focus.

But I had no idea how.

Which is ridiculous.

I know one reason, aside from it being a wonderful play, our seventh grade teachers brought us to the theatre was to see this work by a black writer; to be able to show us this work could be done. But instead, I didn't think being a black writer was possible. And I thought being a black female writer was absolutely impossible.

So I kept my ambition to myself. It was much easier to tell people I wanted to be a doctor (I entered college as pre-med), than allow anyone to see the real parts of me that were hungry for this creative life that was unusual and risky and provocative to the people of suburban Arlington, MA.

Thanks to some inspiring teachers in high school and college, though, I ended up in playwrighting workshops at Wesleyan and on to the Playwright's Workshop at Iowa.

Since Iowa is in the middle of the corn, basically, the MFA Writing program at that time brought in a lot of guest artists for its students to work with, and that first year it brought in Oscar Eustis, who is now the Artistic Director at the Public Theater. Oscar read all of our plays and then had one-on-one meetings with us.

I'd given him a play that had gotten me a lot of attention—it had gotten me into grad school, won some awards—and Oscar, during our one-on-one, said, this is a good play.

I said, "Thank you."

Oscar said, "But, I want to ask: Where are you from?"

I said "Boston."

"No, really."

"Um, Arlington. The suburbs."

"And what do your parents do?"

"Um. My mom's a social worker and my dad was a lawyer?"

"These characters. This play sounds like you're not from there. It's okay to write about you."

Seen.

It was one of the most affirming things; one of the things that has most changed my artistic trajectory in my life.

That, and, around the same time, reading Suzan-Lori Parks' *The America Play* and the essays that accompany it where she posits that just having black bodies on stage is in itself a political act.

I realized that to want to do what Wilson does; I did not have to make myself in his image, and that to create plays for actors to see themselves I did not need to go outside of myself.

My form began to change.

My use of language began to change.

And I began to be able to use Iowa as a place to try and to fail and to try again.

This is a gift we give ourselves as creative people: try and fail and try again. Forgive when all goes wrong. Celebrate when the lights shine bright.

My "career" has come from many instances of the people I sent all those queries to saying I see, and yes. And committing to craft when I get letters from people like that agent whose words I still hear in my head.

So what I am saying is, it is important to find your people. Not the yes people. The people who see you and support you.

And it is also important, very important, to open yourself to see. The power to make work that can change our world, does not rest solely in others' hands. You hold that power. You. Each of you.

One of the opportunities I received from sending work out was a development opportunity at this very large, very fancy regional theatre, and it invited me to work on the play it commissioned from me and I had been out of school for a few years and during the weeklong festival where my play was being presented, I met a fellow writer who had just graduated from Iowa.

"Hi, hi," she said, during a meet and greet event. She seemed so excited.

It had been a long week. I was teaching part time and writing and the strain of both was difficult and the week was difficult and I was sick and I was trying to grade papers and rewrite my play and be this thing called a playwright.

"I just graduated from Iowa. Just like you."

And I think I smiled. I know I said hi. But I was worried about my play, which ultimately ended up getting yanked from this theatre's season (yes, the week was that bad), and I was worried about my students, and I had a fever, and I can honestly say I did not see her at all.

Years later, when we met again at a function. "Hi," she said.

I looked at her blankly.

"We met a few years ago."

I did remember.

"That was one of the most damaging moments ever," she said.

And I did not know what to say. I like to think I am very kind. I like to think I am not the jerk. But that is not always true. It cannot always be true. We are all human. There is only so much of each of us to go around.

But it stuck with me. I had not taken the time to take her in.

I did not like to think of myself this way. I have been given so much, I do not like think I am unable to give when asked.

It took me years to really examine this interaction. Because really, I was examining my relationship to my career, and to myself as an artist. It is easy, in our line of work, to think of each experience as a stepping stone. What's next, who's next? Next, next, next.

Theatre as an industry devours in this way, and it is dehumanizing. It is demoralizing. It often makes me want to go sell real estate instead, where this behavior is expected and the boundaries clear.

For how I was often—sometimes—no, often—treating people at I was coming into contact with, was as stepping stones in my own personal industry.

Who are you to ME?

Next, next, next.

Dehumanizing.

Demoralizing.

Rather than stopping, and being able to say: hello. It's nice to meet you. Even if only for a moment.

Hello. How are you. Nice to see you.

For while I do believe the theatre we create has the power to change the world—I really do believe that—I also believe how we practice our craft absolutely positively also matters just as much.

One cannot place human truths on stage if one does not value humanity in one's neighbors.

Who you are in the audition room, in the rehearsal studio, in the classroom, in the sound booth, in the writer's room, at the tech table, in the director's chair, in the box office, in the boardroom, in the green room: it all matters.

Both the world and the theatre need much more of that.

## **SECRET HISTORIES**

### **ARTS-IN-EDUCATION PROGRAM OVERVIEW**

**Secret Histories** is an educational program adapted from Undesirable Elements™ an ongoing series of community-specific interview-based theater works by internationally acclaimed theatre artist, Ping Chong.

#### Our Lives Tell A Story: River Story

#### **GOALS**

- Students will create a visual and written outline of their personal narrative based on events in their own lives.
- Students create an outline for their story by listing ten events in their life from birth to the present that they think are important and then put them in chronological order.
- Students will gain understanding and sensitivity to others through students' sharing their stories with their peers.

#### **ACTIVITY: River Stones** (25 min)

Students will take out a pencil and a sheet of paper and draw two lines starting from the top left corner all the way to the bottom right corner. This should resemble a flowing river going down the paper.

At the top left corner, students write their birth date and draw a small stone to represent the beginning of their river timeline. They should include a few words that describe their birth, such as the city or hospital they were born in, the exact time they were born, what they looked like etc. Then, at the very end of the river on the bottom right corner, have the students write today's date.

Next, ask the students to think of a time when they felt like they did not belong. Have students draw a small stone in the river corresponding to the time in their life this occurred. (For example, if it was when they were 5, then it is closer to the beginning or top of the river, if it was yesterday, it would be close to the bottom of the river.) Now, ask them to add another stone about a moment they felt included, or felt like they belonged then a third stone about a moment they felt loss.

Once their rivers have these three stones, give them the opportunity to add at least five (5) more moments in their life that were important or meaningful to them. Students can record a brief description of these stones on their river or create a map key for them.

## **Sharing River Stones**

Students will then work in pairs or groups to share their River Stones and determine the two events between their birth and the present that were most important for each of them.

The students then write about their two events on two separate pieces of paper answering these three questions:

- 1) What happened?
- 2) When did it happen?
- 3) How did it make you feel?

When students have answered these questions, they will work independently to select one story that holds the most meaning for each of them and share it with their partner/group. Pairs/group members then work together to stage their stories and perform them for the class.

## **“The Danger of a Single Story”**

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, TEDtalk

WATCH and DISCUSS – link to video: ["The Danger of a Single Story"](#)

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

*“The unintended consequence was that I did not know that people like me could exist in literature.”*

- When was the first time you encountered a character that looked like you in a book, on television, or in a film? How did that make you feel?
- Who is most often represented in the stories you see in books, on television, or in films?
- Why is diversity and representation important in media?

*“The problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete.”*

- What assumptions have people made about you? What assumptions do you make about others?
- Why do you think stereotypes exist?
- What can you do to help combat stereotypes?

*“Power is the ability not just to tell the story of another person, but to make it the definitive story of that person.”*

- Whose stories are being told and whose are not? Who is telling them?
- What does this tell us about the relationship between power and storytelling?

# The Complexity of Identity: “Who Am I?”

**Beverly Daniel Tatum**

The concept of identity is a complex one, shaped by individual characteristics, family dynamics, historical factors, and social and political contexts. Who am I? The answer depends in large part on who the world around me says I am. Who do my parents say I am? Who do my peers say I am? What message is reflected back to me in the faces and voices of my teachers, my neighbors, store clerks? What do I learn from the media about myself? How am I represented in the cultural images around me? Or am I missing from the picture altogether? As social scientist Charles Cooley pointed out long ago, other people are the mirror in which we see ourselves.<sup>1</sup>

This "looking glass self" is not a flat one-dimensional reflection, but multidimensional. How one's racial identity is experienced will be mediated by other dimensions of oneself: male or female; young or old; wealthy, middle-class, or poor; gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or heterosexual; able-bodied or with disabilities; Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu, or atheist. ...

What has my social context been? Was I surrounded by people like myself, or was I part of a minority in my community? Did I grow up speaking standard English at home or another language or dialect? Did I live in a rural county, an urban neighborhood, a sprawling suburb, or on a reservation?

Who I am (or say I am) is a product of these and many other factors. Erik Erikson, the psychoanalytic theorist who coined the term *identity crisis*, introduced the notion that the social, cultural, and historical context is the ground in which individual identity is embedded. Acknowledging the complexity of identity as a concept, Erikson writes,

We deal with a process "located" *in the core of the individual* and yet also *in the core of his communal culture*.... In psychological terms, identity formation employs a process of simultaneous reflection and observation, a process taking place on all levels of mental functioning, by which the individual judges himself in the light of what he perceives to be the way in which others judge him in comparison to themselves and to a typology significant to them.<sup>2</sup>

Triggered by the biological changes associated with puberty, the maturation of cognitive abilities, and changing societal expectations, this process of simultaneous reflection and observation, the self-creation of one's identity, is commonly experienced in the United States and other Western societies during the period of adolescence.<sup>3</sup> Though the foundation of identity is laid in the experiences of childhood, younger children lack the physical and cognitive development needed to reflect on the self in this abstract way. The adolescent capacity for self-reflection (and resulting self-consciousness) allows one to ask, "Who am I now?" "Who was I before?" "Who will I become?" The answers to these questions will influence choices about who one's romantic partners will be, what type of work one will do, where one will live, and what belief system one will embrace. Choices made in adolescence ripple throughout the lifespan.

## Who Am I? Multiple Identities

Integrating one's past, present, and future into a cohesive, unified sense of self is a complex task that begins in adolescence and continues for a lifetime.... The salience of particular aspects of our identity varies at different moments in our lives. The process of integrating the component parts of our self-definition is indeed a lifelong journey.

Which parts of our identity capture our attention first? While there are surely idiosyncratic responses to this question, a classroom exercise I regularly use with my psychology students reveals a telling pattern. I ask my students to complete the sentence, "I am \_\_\_\_\_," using as many descriptors as they can think of in sixty seconds. All kinds of trait descriptions are used—friendly, shy, assertive, intelligent, honest, and so on—but over the years I have noticed something else. Students of color usually mention their racial or ethnic group: for instance, I am Black, Puerto Rican, Korean American. White students who have grown up in strong ethnic enclaves occasionally mention being Irish or Italian. But in general, White students rarely mention being White. When I use this exercise in coeducational settings, I notice a similar pattern in terms of gender, religion, and sexuality. Women usually mention being female, while men don't usually mention their maleness. Jewish students often say they are Jews, while mainline Protestants rarely mention their religious identification. A student who is comfortable revealing it publicly may mention being gay, lesbian, or bisexual. Though I know most of my students are heterosexual, it is very unusual for anyone to include their heterosexuality on their list.

Common across these examples is that in the areas where a person is a member of the dominant or advantaged social group, the category is usually not mentioned. That element of their identity is so taken for granted by them that it goes without comment. It is taken for granted by them because it is taken for granted by the dominant culture. In Eriksonian terms, their inner experience and outer circumstance are in harmony with one another, and the image reflected by others is similar to the image within. In the absence of dissonance, this dimension of identity escapes conscious attention.

The parts of our identity that *do* capture our attention are those that other people notice, and that reflect back to us. The aspect of identity that is the target of others' attention, and subsequently of our own, often is that which sets us apart as exceptional or "other" in their eyes. In my life I have been perceived as both. A precocious child who began to read at age three, I stood out among my peers because of my reading ability. This "gifted" dimension of my identity was regularly commented upon by teachers and classmates alike, and quickly became part of my self-definition. But I was also distinguished by being the only Black student in the class, an "other," a fact I grew increasingly aware of as I got older.

While there may be countless ways one might be defined as exceptional, there are at least seven categories of "otherness" commonly experienced in U.S. society. People are commonly defined as other on the basis of race or ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, age, and physical or mental ability. Each of these categories has a form of oppression associated with it: racism, sexism, religious oppression/anti-Semitism,<sup>4</sup> heterosexism, classism, ageism, and ableism, respectively. In each case, there is a group considered dominant (systematically advantaged by the society because of group membership) and a group considered subordinate or targeted (systematically disadvantaged). When we think about our multiple identities, most of us will find that we are both dominant and targeted at the same time. But it is the targeted identities that hold our attention and the dominant identities that often go unexamined.

In her essay, "Age. Race. Class. and Sex: Women Redefining Difference," Audre Lorde captured the tensions between dominant and targeted identities co-existing in one

individual. This self-described "forty-nine-year-old Black lesbian feminist socialist mother of two" wrote,

Somewhere, on the edge of consciousness, there is what I call a *mythical norm*, which each one of us within our hearts knows "that is not me." In America, this norm is usually defined as white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, Christian, and financially secure. It is with this mythical norm that the trappings of power reside within society. Those of us who stand outside that power often identify one way in which we are different, and we assume that to be the primary cause of all oppression, forgetting other distortions around difference, some of which we ourselves may be practicing.<sup>5</sup>

Even as I focus on race and racism in my own writing and teaching, it is helpful to remind myself and my students of the other distortions around difference that I (and they) may be practicing. It is an especially useful way of generating empathy for our mutual learning process. If I am impatient with a White woman for not recognizing her White privilege, it may be useful for me to remember how much of my life I spent oblivious to the fact of the daily advantages I receive simply because I am heterosexual, or the ways in which I may take my class privilege for granted.

### **Domination and Subordination**

It is also helpful to consider the commonality found in the experience of being dominant or subordinate even when the sources of dominance or subordination are different. Jean Baker Miller, author of *Toward a New Psychology of Women*, has identified some of these areas of commonality.<sup>6</sup>

Dominant groups, by definition, set the parameters within which the subordinates operate. The dominant group holds the power and authority in society relative to the subordinates and determines how that power and authority may be acceptably used. Whether it is reflected in determining who gets the best jobs, whose history will be taught in school, or whose relationships will be validated by society, the dominant group has the greatest influence in determining the structure of the society.

The relationship of the dominants to the subordinates is often one in which the targeted group is labeled as defective or substandard in significant ways. For example, Blacks have historically been characterized as less intelligent than Whites, and women have been viewed as less emotionally stable than men. The dominant group assigns roles to the subordinate that reflect the latter's devalued status, reserving the most highly valued roles in the society for themselves. Subordinates are usually said to be innately incapable of performing the preferred roles. To the extent that those in the target group internalize the images that the dominant group reflects back to them, they may find it difficult to believe in their own ability.

When a subordinate demonstrates positive qualities believed to be more characteristic of dominants, the individual is defined by dominants as an anomaly. Consider the following illustrative example. Following a presentation I gave to some educators, a White man approached me and told me how much he liked my ideas and how articulate I was. "You know," he concluded, "if I had had my eyes closed, I wouldn't have known it was a Black woman speaking." (I replied, "This is what a Black Woman sounds like.")

The dominant group is seen as the norm for humanity. Jean Baker Miller also asserts that inequitable social relations are seen as the model for "normal human relationships." Consequently, it remains perfectly acceptable in many circles to tell jokes that denigrate a particular group, to exclude subordinates from one's neighborhood or work setting, or to oppose initiatives that might change the power balance.

Miller points out that dominant groups generally do not like to be reminded of the existence of inequality. Because rationalizations have been created to justify the social arrangements, it is easy to believe everything is as it should be. Dominants "can avoid awareness because their explanation of the relationship becomes so well integrated in *other terms*; they can even believe both they and the subordinate group share the same interests and, to some extent, a common experience."<sup>7</sup>

The truth is that the dominants do not really know what the experiences of the subordinates is. In contrast, the subordinates are very well informed about the dominants. Even when firsthand experience is limited by social segregation, the number and variety of images of the dominant group available through television, magazines, books, and newspapers provide subordinates with plenty of information about the dominants. The dominant worldview has saturated the culture for all to learn. Even the Black or Latino child living in a segregated community can enter White homes of many kinds daily via the media. However, dominant access to information about the subordinates is often limited to stereotypical depictions of the "other." For example, there are many images of heterosexual relations on television, but very few images of gay or lesbian domestic partnerships beyond the caricatures of comedy shows. There are many images of White men and women in all forms of media, but relatively few portrayals of people of color.

Not only is there greater opportunity for the subordinates to learn about the dominants, there is also greater need. Social psychologist Susan Fiske writes, "It is a simple principle: People pay attention to those who can control their outcomes. In an effort to predict and possibly influence what is going to happen to them, people gather information about those with power."<sup>8</sup>

In a situation of unequal power, a subordinate group has to focus on survival. It becomes very important for subordinates to become highly attuned to the dominants as a way of protecting themselves. For example, women who have been battered by men often talk about the heightened sensitivity they develop to their partners' moods. Being able to anticipate and avoid the men's rage is important to survival.

Survival sometimes means not responding to oppressive behavior directly. To do so could result in physical harm to oneself, even death. In his essay "The Ethics of Living Jim Crow" Richard Wright describes eloquently the various strategies he learned to use to avoid the violence of Whites who would brutalize a Black person who did not "stay in his place."<sup>9</sup> Though it is tempting to think that the need for such strategies disappeared with Jim Crow laws, their legacy lives on in the frequent and sometimes fatal harassment Black men experience at the hands of White police officers.<sup>10</sup>

Because of the risks inherent in unequal relationships, subordinates often develop covert ways of resisting or undermining the power of the dominant group. As Miller points out, popular culture is full of folktales, jokes, and stories about how the subordinate - whether the woman, the peasant, or the sharecropper - outwitted the "boss."<sup>11</sup> In his essay "I Won't Learn from You," Herbert Kohl identifies one form of resistance, "not learning," demonstrated by targeted students who are too often seen by their dominant teachers as "others":

Not-learning tends to take place when someone has to deal with unavoidable challenges to her or his personal and family loyalties, integrity, and identity. In such situations, there are forced choices and no apparent middle ground. To agree to learn from a stranger who does not respect your integrity causes a major loss of self. The only alternative is to not-learn and reject their wodd.<sup>12</sup>

The use of either strategy, attending very closely to the dominants or not attending at all, is costly to members of the targeted group. "Not-learning" may mean there are needed

skills that are not acquired. Attending Closely to the dominant group may leave little time or energy to attend to one's self. Worse yet, the negative messages of the dominant group about the subordinates may be internalized, leading to self-doubt or, in its extreme form, self-hate. There are many examples of subordinates attempting to make themselves over in the image of the dominant group-Jewish people who want to change the Semitic look of their noses, Asians who have cosmetic surgery to alter the shapes of their eyes, Blacks who seek to lighten their skin with bleaching creams, women who want to smoke and drink "like a man." Whether one succumbs to the devaluing pressures of the dominant culture or successfully resists them, the fact is that dealing with oppressive systems from the underside, regardless of the strategy, is physically and psychologically taxing.

Breaking beyond the structural and psychological limitations imposed on one's group is possible, but not easy. To the extent that members of targeted groups do push societal limits-achieving unexpected success, protesting injustice, being "uppity"-by their actions they call the whole system into question. Miller writes that they "expose the inequality, and throw into question the basis for its existence. And they will make the inherent conflict an open conflict. They will then have to bear the burden and take the risks that go with being defined as 'troublemakers.'"<sup>13</sup>

The history of subordinate groups is filled with so-called troublemakers, yet their names are often unknown. Preserving the record of those subordinates and their dominant allies who have challenged the status quo is usually of little interest to the dominant culture, but it is of great interest to subordinates who search for an empowering reflection in the societal mirror.

Many of us are both dominant and subordinate. As Audre Lorde said, from her vantage point as a Black lesbian, "there is no hierarchy of oppressions." The thread and threat of violence runs through all of the isms. There is a need to acknowledge each other's pain, even as we attend to our own.

For those readers who are in the dominant racial category, it may sometimes be difficult to take in what is being said by and about those who are targeted by racism. When the perspective of the subordinate is shared directly, an image is reflected to members of the dominant group that is disconcerting. To the extent that one can draw on one's own experience of subordination - as a young person, as a person with a disability, as someone who grew up poor, as a woman - it may be easier to make meaning of another targeted group's experience. For those readers who are targeted by racism and are angered by the obliviousness of Whites, it may be useful to attend to your experience of dominance where you may find it-as a heterosexual, as an able-bodied person, as a Christian, as a man-and consider what systems of privilege you may be overlooking. The task of resisting our own oppression does not relieve us of the responsibility of acknowledging our complicity in the oppression of others.

Our ongoing examination of who we are in our full humanity, embracing all of our identities, creates the possibility of building alliances that may ultimately free us all.

## Notes

1. See C. Cooley, *Human Nature and the Social Order* (New York: Scribner, 1922). George H. Mead expanded on this idea in his book *Mind, Self, and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934).
2. E. H. Erikson, *Identity, Youth, and Crisis* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1968), 22: emphasis in the original.
3. For a discussion of the Western biases in the concept of the self and individual identity. see A. Roland, "Identity, Self, and Individualism in a Multicultural Perspective," in E. P. Salett and D. R. Koslow, eds., *Race, Ethnicity, and Self: Identity in Multicultural Perspective* (Washington, D.C.: National MultiCultural Institute, 1994).
4. *Anti-Semitism* is a term commonly used to describe the oppression of Jewish people. However, other Semitic peoples (Arab Muslims, for example) are also subject to oppressive treatment on the basis of ethnicity as well as religion. For that reason, the terms *Jewish oppression* and *Arab oppression* are sometimes used to specify the particular form of oppression under discussion.
5. A. Lorde, "Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference," in P. S. Rothenberg, ed., *Race, Class, and Gender in the United States: An Integrated Study*, 3d ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 446; emphasis in the original.
6. J. B. Miller, "Domination and Subordination," in *Toward a New Psychology of Women* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1976).
7. *Ibid.*, 8; emphasis in the original.
8. S. T. Fiske, "Controlling Other People: The Impact of Power on Stereotyping," *American Psychologist* 48, no. 6 (1993), 621-28.
9. R. Wright, "The Ethics of Living Jim Crow" (1937), reprinted in P. S. Rothenberg, ed., *Race, Class, and Gender in the United States: An Integrated Study*, 3d ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995).
10. An article in the popular weekly magazine *People* chronicled the close encounters of famous black men with white police officers. Despite their fame, these men were treated as potential criminals. Highlighted in the article is the story of Johnny Gammage, who was beaten to death, by white police officers following a routine traffic stop in Pittsburgh. T. Fields-Meyer, "Under' Suspicion," *People* (January 15, 1996), 40-47.
11. Miller, "Domination and Subordination," p. 10.
12. H. Kohl, "I Won't Learn from You: Confronting Student Resistance," in *Rethinking Our Classrooms: Teaching for Equity and Justice* (Milwaukee: Rethinking Our Schools, 1994), 134.
13. Miller, "Domination and Subordination," 12 .

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