chapter four
naughty by nature

What are little boys made of?
What are little boys made of?
Frogs and snails
And puppy-dogs' tails,
That's what little boys are made of.

—*Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes*

What makes the presence and control of the police tolerable
for the population, if not fear of the criminal?

—MICHEL FOUCAULT, *Power/Knowledge*

In order for me to live, I decided very early that some mistake
had been made somewhere. I was not a "nigger" even though
you called me one. . . . I had to realize when I was very young
that I was none of those things that I was told I was. I was
not, for example, happy. I never touched a watermelon for all
kinds of reasons. I had been invented by white people, and I
knew enough about life by this time to understand that what-
ever you invent, whatever you project, that is you! So where
we are now is that a whole country of people believe I'm a
"nigger" and I don't.

—JAMES BALDWIN, "A TALK TO TEACHERS"

Two representations of black masculinity are widespread in society and
school today. They are the images of the African American male as a
criminal and as an endangered species. These images are routinely used
as resources to interpret and explain behavior by teachers at Rosa Parks
School when they make punishment decisions. An ensemble of histor-
ical meanings and their social effects is contained within these images.

The image of the black male criminal is more familiar because of its prevalence in the print and electronic media as well as in scholarly work. The headlines of newspaper articles and magazines sound the alarm dramatically as the presence of black males in public spaces has come to signify danger and a threat to personal safety. But this is not just media hype. Bleak statistics give substance to the figure of the criminal. Black males are disproportionately in jails: they make up 6 percent of the population of the United States, but 45 percent of the inmates in state and federal prisons; they are imprisoned at six times the rate of whites.[1] In the state of California, one-third of African American men in their twenties are in prison, on parole, or on probation, in contrast to 5 percent of white males in the same age group. This is nearly five times the number who attend four-year colleges in the state.[2] The mortality rate for African American boys fourteen years of age and under is approximately 50 percent higher than for the comparable group of white male youth, with the leading cause of death being homicide.[3]

The second image, that of the black male as an endangered species, is one which has largely emanated from African American social scientists and journalists who are deeply concerned about the criminalization and high mortality rate among African American youth.[4] It represents him as being marginalized to the point of oblivion. While this discourse emanates from a sympathetic perspective, in the final analysis the focus is all too often on individual maladaptive behavior and black mothering practices as the problem rather than on the social structure in which this endangerment occurs.

These two cultural representations are rooted in actual material conditions and reflect existing social conditions and relations that they appear to sum up for us. They are lodged in theories, in commonsense understandings of self in relation to others in the world as well as in popular culture and the media. But they are condensations, extrapola-

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1. *New York Times,* September 13, 1994, 1.
2. *Los Angeles Times,* November 2, 1990, 3.
3. G. Jaynes and R. Williams Jr., eds., *A Common Destiny: Blacks in American Society* (Washington, D.C.: National Academic Press, 1989), 405, 498.
4. See, for example, Jewelle Taylor Gibbs, "Young Black Males in America: Endangered, Embittered, and Embattled," in Jewelle Taylor Gibbs et al., *Young, Black, and Male in America: An Endangered Species* (New York: Auburn House, 1988); Richard Majors and Janet Mancini Billson, *Cool Pose: The Dilemmas of Black Manhood in America* (New York: Lexington Press, 1992); Jawanza Kunjufu, *Countering the Conspiracy to Destroy Black Boys,* 2 vols. (Chicago: African American Images, 1985).

tions, that emphasize certain elements and gloss over others. They represent a narrow selection from the multiplicity, the heterogeneity of actual relations in society.

Since both of these images come to be used for identifying, classification, and decision making by teachers at Rosa Parks School, it is necessary to analyze the manner in which these images, or cultural representations of difference, are produced through a racial discursive formation. Then we can explain how they are utilized by teachers in the exercise of school rules to produce a context in which African American boys become more visible, more culpable as "rule-breakers."

A central element of a racist discursive formation is the production of subjects as essentially different by virtue of their "race." Historically, the circulation of images that represent this difference has been a powerful technique in this production.[5] Specifically, blacks have been represented as essentially different from whites, as the constitutive Other that regulates and confirms "whiteness." Images of Africans as savage, animalistic, subhuman without history or culture—the diametric opposite of that of Europeans—rationalized and perpetuated a system of slavery. After slavery was abolished, images of people of African descent as hypersexual, shiftless, lazy, and of inferior intellect, legitimated a system that continued to deny rights of citizenship to blacks on the basis of race difference. This regime of truth about race was articulated through scientific experiments and "discoveries," law, social custom, popular culture, folklore, and common sense. And for three hundred years, from the seventeenth century to the middle of the twentieth century, this racial distinction was policed through open and unrestrained physical violence. The enforcement of race difference was conscious, overt, and institutionalized.

In the contemporary period, the production of a racial Other and the constitution and regulation of racial difference has worked increasingly through mass-produced images that are omnipresent in our lives.

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5. See, for example, W. E. B. Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk* (1903; reprint, New York: Bantam, 1989); Frantz Fanon, *Black Skins, White Masks,* trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967); Stuart Hall, "The Rediscovery of 'Ideology': Return of the Repressed in Media Studies," in *Culture, Society, and the Media,* ed. Michael Gurevitch et al. (New York: Methuen, 1982); Leith Mullings, "Images, Ideology, and Women of Color," in *Women of Color in U.S. Society,* ed. Maxine Baca Zinn and Bonnie Thornton Dill (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994); Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1978).

At this moment in time it is through culture—or culturalism[6]—that difference is primarily asserted. This modern-day form for producing racism specifically operates through symbolic violence and representations of Blackness that circulate through the mass media, cinematic images and popular music, rather than through the legal forms of the past. The representational becomes a potent vehicle for the transmission of racial meanings that reproduce relations of difference, of division, and of power. These "controlling images" make "racism, sexism, and poverty appear to be natural, normal, and an inevitable part of everyday life."[7]

Cultural Representations of "Difference"

The behavior of African American boys in school is perceived by adults at Rosa Parks School through a filter of overlapping representations of three socially invented categories of "difference": age, gender, and race. These are grounded in the commonsense, taken-for-granted notion that existing social divisions reflect biological and natural dispositional differences among humans: so children are essentially different from adults, males from females, blacks from whites.[8] At the intersection of this complex of subject positions are African American boys who are doubly displaced: as black children, they are not seen as childlike but adultified; as black males, they are denied the masculine dispensation constituting white males as being "naturally naughty" and are discerned as willfully bad. Let us look more closely at this displacement.

The dominant cultural representation of childhood is as closer to nature, as less social, less human. Childhood is assumed to be a stage of development; culture, morality, sociability is written on children in an unfolding process by adults (who are seen as fully "developed," made by culture not nature) in institutions like family and school. On the one hand, children are assumed to be dissembling, devious, because they are more egocentric. On the other hand, there is an attribution of inno-

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6. Gilroy, *Small Acts*, 24, argues that "the culturalism of the new racism has gone hand in hand with a definition of race as a matter of difference rather than a question of hierarchy."

7. Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 68.

8. While many of the staff at Rosa Parks School would agree at an abstract level that social divisions of gender and race are culturally and historically produced, their actual talk about these social distinctions as well as their everyday expectations, perceptions, and interactions affirm the notion that these categories reflect intrinsic, *real* differences.

cence to their wrongdoing. In both cases, this is understood to be a temporary condition, a stage prior to maturity. So they must be socialized to fully understand the meaning of their acts.

The language used to describe "children in general" by educators illustrates this paradox. At one districtwide workshop for adult school volunteers that I attended, children were described by the classroom teacher running the workshop as being "like little plants, they need attention, they gobble it up." Later in the session, the same presenter invoked the other dominant representation of children as devious, manipulative, and powerful. "They'll run a number on you. They're little lawyers, con artists, manipulators—and they usually win. They're good at it. Their strategy is to get you off task. They pull you into their whirlwind."

These two versions of childhood express the contradictory qualities that adults map onto their interactions with children in general. The first description of children as "little plants," childhood as identical with nature, is embedded in the ideology of childhood. The second version that presents children as powerful, as self-centered, with an agenda and purpose of their own, arises out of the experience adults have exercising authority over children. In actual relations of power, in a twist, as children become the objects of control, they become devious "con artists" and adults become innocent, pristine in relation to them. In both instances, childhood has been constructed as different in essence from adulthood, as a phase of biological, psychological, and social development with predictable attributes.

Even though we treat it this way, the category "child" does not describe and contain a homogeneous and naturally occurring group of individuals at a certain stage of human development. The social meaning of childhood has changed profoundly over time.[9] What it means to be a child varies dramatically by virtue of location in cross-cutting categories of class, gender, and race.[10]

Historically, the existence of African American children has been constituted differently through economic practices, the law, social policy, and visual imagery. This difference has been projected in an ensemble of images of black youth as not childlike. In the early decades of this century, representations of black children as pickaninnies depicted

9. See, for example, Phillipe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (New York: Vintage, 1962).

10. Thorne, *Gender Play;* and Valerie Polakow, *Lives on the Edge: Single Mothers and Their Children in the Other America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

them as verminlike, voracious, dirty, grinning, animal-like savages. They were also depicted as the laugh-provoking butt of aggressive, predatory behavior; natural victims, therefore victimizable. An example of this was their depiction in popular lore as "alligator bait." Objects such as postcards, souvenir spoons, letter-openers and cigar-box labels were decorated with figures of half-naked black children vainly attempting to escape the open toothy jaws of hungry alligators.[11]

Today's representations of black children still bear traces of these earlier depictions. The media demonization of very young black boys who are charged with committing serious crimes is one example. In these cases there is rarely the collective soul-searching for answers to the question of how "kids like this" could have committed these acts that occurs when white kids are involved. Rather, the answer to the question seems to be inherent in the disposition of the kids themselves.[12] The image of the young black male as an endangered species revitalizes the animalistic trope. Positioned as part of nature, his essence is described through language otherwise reserved for wildlife that has been decimated to the point of extinction. Characterized as a "species," they are cut off from other members of family and community and isolated as a form of prey.

There is continuity, but there is a significant new twist to the image. The endangered species and the criminal are mirror images. Either as criminal perpetrator or as endangered victim, contemporary imagery proclaims black males to be responsible for their fate. The discourse of individual choice and responsibility elides the social and economic context and locates predation as coming from within. It is their own maladaptive and inappropriate behavior that causes African Amer-

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11. Patricia Turner, *Ceramic Uncles and Celluloid Mammies: Black Images and Their Influence on Culture* (New York: Anchor, 1994), 36.

12. A particularly racist and pernicious example of this was the statement by the administrator of the Alcohol, Drug Abuse, and Mental Health Administration, Dr. Frederick K. Goodwin, who stated without any qualms: "If you look, for example, at male monkeys, especially in the wild, roughly half of them survive to adulthood. The other half die by violence. That is the natural way of it for males, to knock each other off and, in fact, there are some interesting evolutionary implications. . . . The same hyper aggressive monkeys who kill each other are also hyper sexual, so they copulate more and therefore they reproduce more to offset the fact that half of them are dying." He then drew an analogy with the "high impact [of] inner city areas with the loss of some of the civilizing evolutionary things that we have built up. . . . Maybe it isn't just the careless use of the word when people call certain areas of certain cities, jungles." Quoted in Jerome G. Miller, *Search and Destroy: African American Males in the Criminal Justice System* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 212–13.

icans to self-destruct. As an endangered species, they are stuck in an obsolete stage of social evolution, unable to adapt to the present. As criminals, they are a threat to themselves, to each other, as well as to society in general.

As black children's behavior is refracted through the lens of these two cultural images, it is "adultified." By this I mean their transgressions are made to take on a sinister, intentional, fully conscious tone that is stripped of any element of childish naïveté. The discourse of childhood as an unfolding developmental stage in the life cycle is displaced in this mode of framing school trouble. Adultification is visible in the way African American elementary school pupils are talked about by school adults.

One of the teachers, a white woman who prided herself on the multicultural emphasis in her classroom, invoked the image of African American children as "looters" in lamenting the disappearance of books from the class library. This characterization is especially meaningful because her statement, which was made at the end of the school year that had included the riots in Los Angeles, invoked that event as a framework for making children's behavior intelligible.

> I've lost so many library books this term. There are quite a few kids who don't have any books at home, so I let them borrow them. I didn't sign them out because I thought I could trust the kids. I sent a letter home to parents asking them to look for them and turn them in. But none have come in. I just don't feel the same. *It's just like the looting in Los Angeles.*

By identifying those who don't have books at home as "looters," the teacher has excluded the white children in the class, who all come from more middle-class backgrounds so, it is assumed, "have books at home." In the case of the African American kids, what might be interpreted as the careless behavior of children is displaced by images of adult acts of theft that conjure up violence and mayhem. The African American children in this teacher's classroom and their families are seen not in relation to images of childhood, but in relation to the television images of crowds rampaging through South Central Los Angeles in the aftermath of the verdict of the police officers who beat Rodney King. Through this frame, the children embody a willful, destructive, and irrational disregard for property rather than simple carelessness. Racial

difference is mediated through culturalism: blacks are understood as a group undifferentiated by age or status with the proclivity and values to disregard the rights and welfare of others.

Adultification is a central mechanism in the interpretive framing of gender roles. African American girls are constituted as different through this process. A notion of sexual passivity and innocence that prevails for white female children is displaced by the image of African American females as sexual beings: as immanent mothers, girlfriends, and sexual partners of the boys in the room.[13] Though these girls may be strong, assertive, or troublesome, teachers evaluate their potential in ways that attribute to them an inevitable, potent sexuality that flares up early and that, according to one teacher, lets them permit men to run all over them, to take advantage of them. An incident in the Punishing Room that I recorded in my field notes made visible the way that adult perceptions of youthful behavior were filtered through racial representations. African American boys and girls who misbehaved were not just breaking a rule out of high spirits and needing to be chastised for the act, but were adultified, gendered figures whose futures were already inscribed and foreclosed within a racial order:

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13. The consensus among teachers in the school about educational inequity focuses on sexism. Many of the teachers speak seriously and openly about their concern that girls are being treated differently than boys in school: girls are neglected in the curriculum, overlooked in classrooms, underencouraged academically, and harassed by boys. A number of recent studies support the concern that even the well-intentioned teacher tends to spend less classroom time with girls because boys demand so much of their attention. These studies generally gloss over racial difference as well as make the assumption that *quantity* rather than *quality* of attention is the key factor in fostering positive sense of self in academic setting. See, for example, Myra Sadker and David Sadker, *Failing at Fairness: How America's Schools Cheat Girls* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1994). Linda Grant looks at both race and gender as she examines the roles that first- and second-grade African American girls play in desegregated classrooms. She finds that African American girls and white girls are positioned quite differently vis-à-vis teachers. In the classrooms she observed, white girls were called upon to play an academic role in comparison with African American girls, who were cast in the role of teacher's helpers, in monitoring and controlling other kids in the room, and as intermediaries between peers. She concluded that black girls were encouraged in stereotypical female adult roles that stress service and nurture, while white girls were encouraged to press toward high academic achievement. Most important for this study, Grant mentions in passing that black boys in the room receive the most consistent negative attention and were assessed as having a lower academic ability than any other group by teachers. See Linda Grant, "Helpers, Enforcers, and Go-Betweens: Black Females in Elementary School Classrooms," in *Women of Color in U.S. Society,* ed. Maxine Baca Zinn and Bonnie Thornton Dill (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994).

Two girls, Adila and a friend, burst into the room followed by Miss Benton a black sixth-grade teacher and a group of five African American boys from her class. Miss Benton is yelling at the girls because they have been jumping in the hallway and one has knocked down part of a display on the bulletin board which she and her class put up the day before. She is yelling at the two girls about how they're wasting time. This is what she says: "You're doing exactly what they want you to do. You're playing into their hands. Look at me! Next year they're going to be tracking you."

One of the girls asks her rather sullenly who "they" is.

Miss Benton is furious. "Society, that's who. You should be leading the class, not fooling around jumping around in the hallway. Someone has to give pride to the community. All the black men are on drugs, or in jail, or killing each other. Someone has got to hold it together. And the women have to do it. And you're jumping up and down in the hallway."

I wonder what the black boys who have followed in the wake of the drama make of this assessment of their future, seemingly already etched in stone. The teacher's words to the girls are supposed to inspire them to leadership. The message for the boys is a dispiriting one.

Tracks have already been laid down for sixth-grade girls toward a specifically feminized responsibility (and, what is more prevalent, blame) for the welfare of the community, while males are bound for jail as a consequence of their own socially and self-destructive acts.

There is a second displacement from the norm in the representation of black males. The hegemonic, cultural image of the essential "nature" of males is that they are different from females in the meaning of their acts. Boys will be boys: they are mischievous, they get into trouble, they can stand up for themselves. This vision of masculinity is rooted in the notion of an essential sex difference based on biology, hormones, uncontrollable urges, true personalities. Boys are naturally more physical, more active. Boys are naughty by *nature.* There is something suspect about the boy who is "too docile," "like a girl." As a result, rule breaking on the part of boys is looked at as something-they-can't-help, a natural expression of masculinity in a civilizing process.

This incitement of boys to be "boylike" is deeply inscribed in our

mainstream culture, winning hearts and stirring imaginations in the way that the pale counterpart, the obedient boy, does not. Fiedler, in an examination of textual representations of iconic childhood figures in U.S. literature, registers the "Good Bad Boy" and the "Good Good Boy" as cultural tropes of masculinities:

> What then is the difference between the Good Good Boy and the Good Bad Boy, between Sid Sawyer, let us say, and Tom? The Good Good Boy does what his mother must pretend that she wants him to do: obey, conform; the Good Bad Boy does what she really wants him to do: deceive, break her heart a little, be forgiven.[14]

An example of this celebration of Good Bad Boy behavior, even when at the risk of order, is the way that one of the student specialists at Rosa Parks School introduced a group of boys in his classroom to a new student:

TEACHER: Hey, they're thugs! Hoodlums! Hooligans! Gangsters! Stay away from these guys.

BOY (ACTING TOUGH):   Yeah, we're tough.

TEACHER (REALLY HAVING FUN):   You ain't as tough as a slice of wet white bread!

BOY (SIDLING UP TO THE TEACHER CHEST PUFFED OUT):   I'm tougher than you.

TEACHER: Okay! Go on! These are a bunch of great guys.

The newcomer looks at home.

African American boys are not accorded the masculine dispensation of being "naturally" naughty. Instead the school reads their expression and display of masculine naughtiness as a sign of an inherent vicious, insubordinate nature that as a threat to order must be controlled. Consequently, school adults view any display of masculine mettle on the part of these boys through body language or verbal rejoinders as a sign of insubordination. In confrontation with adults, what is

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14. Leslie A. Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (New York: Criterion, 1960), 267.

required from them is a performance of absolute docility that goes against the grain of masculinity. Black boys are expected to internalize a ritual obeisance in such exchanges so that the performance of docility appears to come naturally. According to the vice principal, "These children have to learn not to talk back. They must know that if the adult says you're wrong, then you're wrong. They must not resist, must go along with it, and take their punishment," he says.

This is not a lesson that all children are required to learn, however. The disciplining of the body within school rules has specific race and gender overtones. For black boys, the enactment of docility is a preparation for adult racialized survival rituals of which the African American adults in the school are especially cognizant. For African American boys bodily forms of expressiveness have repercussions in the world outside the chain-link fence of the school. The body must be taught to endure humiliation in preparation for future enactments of submission. The vice principal articulated the racialized texture of decorum when he deplored one of the Troublemakers, Lamar's, propensity to talk back and argue with teachers.

Lamar had been late getting into line at the end of recess, and the teacher had taken away his football. Lamar argued and so the teacher gave him detention. Mr. Russell spelled out what an African American male needed to learn about confrontations with power.

> Look, I've told him before about getting into these show-down situations—where he either has to show off to save face, then if he doesn't get his way then he goes wild. He won't get away with it in this school. Not with me, not with Mr. Harmon. But I know he's going to try it somewhere outside and it's going to get him in *real* trouble. He has to learn to ignore, to walk away, not to get into power struggles.

Mr. Russell's objective is to hammer into Lamar's head what he believes is the essential lesson for young black males to learn if they are to get anywhere in life: to act out obeisance is to survive. The specter of the Rodney King beating by the Los Angeles Police Department provided the backdrop for this conversation, as the trial of the police officers had just begun. The defense lawyer for the LAPD was arguing that Rodney King could have stopped the beating at any time if he had chosen.

This apprehension of black boys as inherently different both in terms of character and of their place in the social order is a crucial factor in teacher disciplinary practices.

Normalizing Judgments and Teacher Practices

Teacher enforcement of rules results in differential treatment for children in general. Teachers must weigh immediate practical considerations about classroom management as well as more abstract imperatives of imparting social values and standards of interaction as they define the actions of a child as rule breaking.

A teacher decides whether to "notice" the behavior at all. Each time a child breaks a written or unwritten rule, the teacher has to make a decision about whether to take the time for disciplinary action. Another important consideration is the larger effect that this action might have on spectators in the public arena of the school.[15]

Hargreaves, Hester, and Mellor, in a study of how teachers come to label some children as deviant, analyze the function that rules play in these labeling practices. They identify two principles of rules by which teachers decide to intervene.[16] The first is a "moral" principle grounded in the belief that rules teach children values. The second, a "pragmatic" principle, recognizes rules as an efficient and effective way for imposing order and affirming teacher authority. The researchers also found that when and whether these principles came into play were highly dependent on the perception that the teacher had of a pupil. Teachers not

15. Teachers are also held in the grip of rules. One important consideration is the teacher's own presentation of self as a competent teacher. Teachers are assessed according to how well they control children and keep classroom order. Teachers, as well as children, are expected to show a respect for the rules, to be consistent in enforcing them. Adult conformity to the rules, their allegiance to them, is never taken for granted, as unproblematic, but must be publicly affirmed over and over. Just to be an adult, to occupy that status, is not enough. At one of the in-service workshops dealing with school discipline, several teachers blamed school discipline problems on the fact that some teachers did not wholeheartedly support the rules: "It doesn't help when some people just let the kids do whatever, just ignore some of the rules when they don't agree with them. I've been making my kids keep their caps off in the classroom, then when we go to assembly there are other classes where the kids are wearing their caps, which makes it impossible for me. I end up looking like the bad guy. We've all got to agree to the rules and then we've all got to stick by them."

16. Hargreaves, Hester, and Mellor, *Deviance in Classrooms,* 222.

only ranked rules according to their significance, but ranked individual pupils according to an evaluation of their culpability: what was tolerated in some pupils might be punished in others.[17] Most significant for this study is that the researchers found that the criteria used for determining hierarchies of culpability were highly subjective, including elements such as facial appearance, physical size, likability, friends, and style of presentation of self.

Teacher perceptions of students are grounded in their own location in social categories of race, class, and gender. They make sense of their interactions with pupils and the conditions of their work from these social locations.[18] Teachers bring different experiences and knowledge of racial structures into school that provide a framework from which to interpret, to organize information, to act. These factor into the creation of hierarchies of culpability of rule-breakers.

In the case of African American boys, misbehavior is likely to be interpreted as symptomatic of ominous criminal proclivities. Because of this, teachers are more likely to pay attention to and punish rule breaking, as "moral" and "pragmatic" reasons for acting converge with criteria of culpability. On the basis of "moral" reasons, teachers use troublemakers as exemplars to mark boundaries of transgressive behavior; this also has practical effects on general classroom order.

Black teachers are especially likely to advocate and enforce ways of presenting self in the world, strategies of camouflage, that will allow African American children not only to blend into and become a part of the dominant culture, but have survival value in the real world. Black boys must learn to hide "attitude" and learn to exorcise defiance. Thus they argue for the importance of instilling fear and respect for authority.

There are real consequences in terms of the form and severity of punishment of these social fictions. The exemption of black males from

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17. Ibid., 227.

18. A substantial body of studies on teacher expectations have demonstrated that gender, class, and race have considerable influence over assumptions teachers have about students. For examples of gender bias, see Sadker and Sadker, *Failing at Fairness;* for class and ethnicity, see Ursula Casanova, "Rashomon in the Classroom: Multiple Perspectives of Teachers, Parents, and Students," in *Children at Risk: Poverty, Minority Status, and Other Issues in Educational Equity,* ed. Andres Barona and Eugene E. Garcia (Washington, D.C.: National Association of School Psychologists, 1990); for class, see Ray C. Rist, "Student Social Class and Teacher Expectations: The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy in Ghetto Education," *Harvard Educational Review* 40, no. 3 (1970).

the dispensations granted the "child" and the "boy" through the process of adultification justifies harsher, more punitive responses to rule-breaking behavior. As "not-children," their behavior is understood not as something to be molded and shaped over time, but as the intentional, fully cognizant actions of an adult. This means there is already a dispositional pattern set, that their behavior is incorrigible, irremediable. Therefore, the treatment required for infractions is one that punishes through example and exclusion rather than through persuasion and edification, as is practiced with young white males in the school.

The point must be made here that the power of the images to affect teachers' beliefs and behavior is greatly exacerbated because of their lack of knowledge about the black children in their classrooms. None of the teachers at Rosa Parks School were a part of the community in which they taught; only the custodians and the "Jailhouse Keeper" were resident in the neighborhood. Teachers rarely visited children and families in their homes. Though school adults had many stories to tell me about the families of the boys I was interviewing, these were typically horror stories. Sad, shocking tales of one family's situation would become emblematic of "those families."

As a result of these stories, I was at first anxious about going into homes that were described as "not safe." After visiting with several families, I began to realize that school people had never stepped into any of the children's homes and knew nothing about the real circumstances in which they lived. This distance, this absence of substantive knowledge, further contributed to their adultification of the children and the fear that tinged their interactions with them.

Let us examine now more closely some widespread modes of categorizing African American boys, the normalizing judgments that they circulate, and the consequences these have on disciplinary intervention and punishment.

Being "At-Risk": Identifying Practice

The range of normalizing judgments for African American males is bounded by the image of the ideal pupil at one end of the spectrum and the unsalvageable student who is criminally inclined at the other end. The ideal type of student is characterized here by a white sixth-grade teacher:

Well, it consists of, first of all, to be able to follow directions. Any direction that I give. Whether it's get this out, whether it's put this away, whether it's turn to this page or whatever, they follow it, and they come in and they're ready to work. It doesn't matter high skill or low skill, they're ready to work and they know that's what they're here for. Behaviorally, they're appropriate all day long. When it's time for them to listen, they listen. The way I see it, by sixth grade, the ideal student is one that can sit and listen and learn from me— work with their peers, and take responsibility on themselves and understand what is next, what is expected of them.

This teacher, however, drew on the image of the Good Bad Boy when she described the qualities of her "ideal" male student, a white boy in her class. Here the docility of the generic ideal student becomes the essentially naughty-by-nature male:

He's not really Goody Two-shoes, you know. He's not quiet and perfect. He'll take risks. He'll say the wrong answer. He'll fool around and have to be reprimanded in class. There's a nice balance to him.

The modal category for African American boys is "at-risk" of failure. The concept of "at-riskness" is central to a discourse about the contemporary crisis in urban schools in America that explains children's failure as largely the consequence of their attitudes and behaviors as well as those of their families. In early stages of schooling they are identified as "at-risk" of failing, as "at-risk" of being school drop-outs. The category has been invested with enormous power to identify, explain, and predict futures. For example, a white fifth-grade teacher told me with sincere concern that as she looked around at her class, she could feel certain that about only four out of the twenty-one students would eventually graduate from high school. Each year, she said, it seemed to get worse.

Images of family play a strong role in teacher assessments and decisions about at-risk children. These enter into the evaluative process to confirm an original judgment. Families of at-risk children are said to lack parental skills; they do not give their children the kind of support that would build "self-esteem" necessary for school achievement. But

this knowledge of family is superficial, inflamed by cultural representations and distorted through a rumor mill.

The children themselves are supposed to betray the lack of love and attention at home through their own "needy" behavior in the classroom. According to the teachers, these are pupils who are always demanding attention and will work well only in one-to-one or small-group situations because of this neglect at home. They take up more than their share of time and space. Donel, one of the African American boys who has been identified as at-risk by the school, is described by his teacher:

> He's a boy with a lot of energy and usually uncontrolled energy. He's very loud in the classroom, very inappropriate in the class. He has a great sense of humor, but again its inappropriate. I would say most of the time that his mouth is open, it's inappropriate, it's too loud, it's disrupting. But other than that [dry laugh] he's a great kid. You know if I didn't have to teach him, if it was a recreational setting, it would be fine.

So Donel is marked as "inappropriate" through the very configuration of self that school rules regulate: bodies, language, presentation of self. The stringent exercise of what is deemed appropriate as an instrument of assessment of at-riskness governs how the behavior of a child is understood. The notion of appropriate behavior in describing the ideal pupil earlier, and here as a way of characterizing a Troublemaker, reveals the broad latitude for interpretation and cultural framing of events. For one boy, "fooling around" behavior provides the balance between being a "real" boy and being a "goody-goody," while for the other, the conduct is seen through a different lens as "inappropriate," "loud," "disruptive."

Once a child is labeled "at-risk," he becomes more visible within the classroom, more likely to be singled out and punished for rule-breaking activity. An outburst by an African American boy already labeled as "at-risk" was the occasion for him to be singled out and made an example of the consequences of bad behavior before an audience of his peers; this was an occasion for a teacher to (re)mark the identity of a boy as disruptive. It was also one of those moments, recorded in my field notes, in which I observed the rewards that children might actually gain from getting into trouble.

This incident takes place in a second-grade classroom in another school which I am visiting in order to observe Gary, who has been identified as "at-risk" by the school and eligible for a special after-school program. The teacher, Miss Lyew, is an Asian woman with a loud, forceful voice. Twenty-five children are sitting in groups of three or four at tables as she goes over the recipe for making "a volcano erupt"—they do this together—she on the blackboard, they on sheets of paper in front of them. Miss Lyew has said she will call on people who have their hands raised. Lots of hands waving in the air and children vying for the right answer. There are always several possible answers for the next step, but only one that is "right." Children are not supposed to shout out the answer, but must wait to be called on. Sometimes, however, a child says the answer before being called on. Sometimes Miss Lyew ignores this, at other times she scolds the student.

It soon becomes clear that Gary is one of those she notices when he calls out. He gets a warning. The next time, Gary raises his hand and simultaneously calls out. She stops the class discussion of volcanoes and for the first time a kind of democracy enters the room. She turns to Gary's peers and asks what punishment Gary should get the next time he calls out an answer.

Now children are waving hands held high to suggest various forms of punishment: send him to the office, take points away from him, call his mother, send him home, send him to stand outside the room, wash his mouth out. There is no end to the various forms of punishment the children can think of. Gary himself gets into the act, he proposes that they take all the points away from his table. This is a punishment that Miss Lyew herself has threatened to use earlier in the day.

Miss Lyew looks indignant, then asks the class if this would be fair. How would the other children at the table feel? They would be punished for something they didn't do. The teacher then asks the children to vote on which one of the punishments they feel Gary should face if he should call out again. The voting begins. I notice that all the girls, but only a few boys, vote, as sympathy breaks down along gender lines. The teacher urges, "Everyone has a vote." It is an amazing and fascinating display because the classroom has suddenly for the first (and for the only time during my observation) taken on the semblance of a democratic operation with chil-

dren actually getting to "choose" how something should be done.

Gary sits dispassionately calm, almost serene. He is the eye of the storm. He has shaped the direction of class activity in a powerful way. The teacher presses the issue so that everyone finally raises their hand in some kind of vote. Finally, it has been decided, if Gary answers out of turn again he will be sent out of the room and the next time his mother will be called. Gary does not look anxious, he does not look humiliated.

The class returns to the study of classifying inanimate objects. They are working on shapes. The answers are supposed to be, "It is a cube. It is a rectangular prism," etc. I notice that several other kids call out of turn and Miss Lyew does not pay attention. Enough time has been spent on *that* lesson. In fact, one of the children reminds her about the punishment when someone else calls out of turn, but she does not refocus on the misdeed.

Gary is positioned as an "at-risk" black male in the room. From the teacher's perspective, this carries with it powerful received meanings of who the "at-risk" child is and what he needs to learn in order to succeed. She believes, for one, that boys like Gary need to learn impulse control; that they need to learn respect for authority, self-discipline, to be appropriate, to keep their mouths shut. Gary is not only more visible because of the label, but the recipient of a series of specific remedies and prescriptions about what he needs. That Gary knows the answer and is bursting with the excitement of this knowledge is not as significant here as the fact that in his case conformity to the rule must be enforced.

Most important, moments of public punishment are powerful learning experiences about social location and worthiness for everyone involved. These cultural spectacles signal profound meanings of "racial" difference through a performance that engages audience as well as actors in a reenactment of social roles within relations of power. In these spectacles, the singling out, the naming, the displaying of that which is "bad" affirms the institutional power to stigmatize. Gary becomes a lesson to other children in the room about what it means to be caught in the spotlight of disciplinary power. The spectators learn that to get in trouble with authority is to risk becoming the example, the spectacle for the consumption of others. It is to risk, not mere

momentary humiliation, but the separation from one's peers as different.

Gary is made the object of a lesson. But he uses different strategies to recuperate his sense of self. He tries to reenter the group by proposing a punishment that the teacher in fact uses herself—to punish the whole table by taking away the group points—but he's pushed farther to the margins. Now he is not just someone who is disrupting the order of the room but would drag others down with him as well. For a second-grade boy like Gary, already labeled, the classroom is potentially a place of shame and humiliation in the marginalizing activity of the teacher.

However, the moment is a complex experience. For several minutes Gary is the focus of the entire room. In this moment of trouble and punishment, he has become the counterauthority. The teacher occupies one leadership pole and he another. He proposes his own punishment and he does not protest when a decision is finally made. He is the epitome of grace under pressure.

I, the adult observer, am impressed by his fortitude, his presence. By the end of the confrontation, it is clear to all the children, including Gary, that he receives special treatment, is marked for special attention. His exposure of the arbitrary nature of punishment captivates me.

Getting a Reputation

Children are sorted into categories of "educability" as they get a reputation among the adults as troubled, troubling, or troublemakers. They are not only identified as problems, as "at-risk" by the classroom teacher, but gain schoolwide reputations as stories about their exploits are publicly shared by school adults in the staff room, at staff meetings, and at in-service training sessions. Horror stories circulate through the school adult network so that children's reputations precede them into classrooms and follow them from school to school. I pointed out earlier how Horace's name was invoked at a staff meeting as a benchmark of misbehavior against which other boys would be judged. As in: "That child's a problem. But he's not a Horace."

Once a reputation has been established, the boy's behavior is usually refigured within a framework that is no longer about childish misdemeanors but comes to be an ominous portent of things to come.

They are tagged with futures: "He's on the fast track to San Quentin Prison," and "That one has a jail-cell with his name on it." For several reasons, these boys are more likely to be singled out and punished than other children. They are more closely watched. They are more likely to be seen as intentionally doing wrong than a boy who is considered to be a Good Bad Boy. Teachers are more likely to use the "moral principle" in determining whether to call attention to misdemeanors because "at-risk" children need discipline, but also as an example to the group, especially to other African American boys who are "endangered." The possibility of contagion must be eliminated. Those with reputations must be isolated, kept away from the others. Kids are told to stay away from them: "You know what will happen if you go over there." In the case of boys with reputations, minor infractions are more likely to escalate into major punishments.

Unsalvageable Students

In the range of normalizing judgments, there is a group of African American boys identified by school personnel as, in the words of a teacher, "unsalvageable." This term and the condition it speaks to is specifically about masculinity. School personnel argue over whether these unsalvageable boys should be given access even to the special programs designed for those who are failing in school. Should resources, defined as scarce, be wasted on these boys for whom there is no hope? Should energy and money be put instead into children who can be saved? I have heard teachers argue on both sides of the question. These "boys for whom there is no hope" get caught up in the school's punishment system: surveillance, isolation, detention, and ever more severe punishment.

These are children who are not children. These are boys who are already men. So a discourse that positions masculinity as "naturally" naughty is reframed for African American boys around racialized representations of gendered subjects. They come to stand as if already adult, bearers of adult fates inscribed within a racial order.