TOUGH FRONTS

THE IMPACT OF STREET CULTURE ON SCHOOLING

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Fear of the Dark

The Vilification of Urban Students

Race has become metaphorical—a way of referring to and disguising forces, events, classes, and expressions of social decay and economic division far more threatening to the body politic than biological "race" ever was. Expensively kept, economically unsound, a spurious and useless political asset in election campaigns, racism is as healthy today as it was during the Enlightenment. It seems that it has a utility far beyond economy, beyond the sequestering of classes from one another, and has assumed a metaphorical life so completely embedded in daily discourse that it is perhaps more necessary and more on display than ever before.

—Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*

"OH SHIT! GANG BANGERS!!!"

One fall evening around 8:30 P.M., I was driving four of my "little brothas" or "mentees" back to their respective residences. My teenaged passengers were ninth graders at the time. Two self-identified as Black American (even though both had one parent who was White and another that was Black), one self-identified as Cape Verdean, and the other described himself as Dominican (from the Dominican Republic). All four teens were frequently racially categorized as Black by onlookers who knew nothing about their specific racial-ethnic origins. Earlier that day, I had picked them up after school at approximately 2:00 P.M. They had spent from midafternoon to early evening hanging out with me in the college residence house where I served as a resident assistant. They had played basketball at a university gym, then I had treated them to dinner in the residence house dining hall. After dinner, they had played video games and watched television in the common room of the dorm. Eventually, against their protests, I had announced that it was time for me to take them home. All of them had unanimously sighed. "Ah Tomni . . . c'mon. We want to chill a little longer." I had retorted, "Y'all know I love ya, but it's getting late and I'm going out tonight." Shortly thereafter, all five of us were in my car. I, the driver, and one of my little brothas sat comfortably up front after the other three had crammed into the backseat of my sporty Subaru X-T Coupe, a backseat designed to comfortably seat two people. My front seat passenger had found a rap tune on my car radio, and all five of us were nodding our heads to the bass-filled beat of the music. As I stopped for a red light, the driver in the car behind me applied his brakes a second too late and bumped into the back of my car.

I got out of my car to inspect the damage as the driver who bumped my car—a man who appeared to be European American and in his late twenties or early thirties—jumped out and asserted in a tone that conveyed arrogance, "It was just a little bump. Your car is okay!" My little brotha in the front opened the passenger-side door of my car, pulled his body half way out, and inquired, "Is everything alright, Tonni?" I responded, "Yeah ... everything's fine." At that moment, this arrogant driver looked up and suddenly realized that I was not the only passenger in the car. The only one of my little brothas' faces that he could see was the one who got out of the car. But this arrogant driver glanced briefly through the back window at the other three heads—heads covered with knit skullcaps due to the cold weather and tapping to the beat of the rap tune playing on the car radio—and his arrogance turned to fear. "OH SHIT! GANG BANGERS!!!" he exclaimed, jumped quickly into his car, and drove around my car through the red light. I got back in my car and, once the light turned green, continued en route to take my passengers home. We all laughed at this driver's ignorance and cowardice. Sadly, the misconception that this driver had about my little brothas was so typical that, though a bit startled, I was not surprised when he recoiled in fear. However, after a wonderful evening of hanging out with my little brothas, laughing at their jokes and vicariously enjoying their stories about being in the ninth grade, I drove back to my residence dismayed, angered, disappointed, concerned, and overcome with several other discouraging emotions. That driver's hallucination that my ninth grade passengers were gang bangers was but a drop in a pool of similar delusions held by many others including teachers, social workers, local store owners and employees, and the police.[1]

The previous chapters of this book brim with quotes, vignettes, and narratives from my formal interviews and observations with street-savvy youths. However, there are hours of interactions, like the vignette above, that remain undocumented in field-notes because these interactions occurred when I was hanging out with these teens as their friend, mentor, or "big sister," not as a researcher. There were seven students in particular, four with whom I am still in contact to this very day, to whom I became a mentor. The non-research—based context of the vignette above is the reason why I have not identified my little brothas with pseudonyms used earlier in this book. And it was often when I was hanging out with my mentees on their terms that I witnessed violent assaults upon them like that recounted in the vignette above. The assaults were not those of physical violence; they were assaults of symbolic violence.

Symbolic violence, as defined by Pierre Bourdieu, manifests through "the subtle exercise of symbolic power waged by a ruling class in order to 'impose a definition of the social world that is consistent with its interests.'"[2] The exclamation, "Oh shit! Gang bangers!," would be relatively harmless if it were merely the outcry of a random individual. It would be justifiable if my mentees had actually been gang bangers. But, my mentees were not, are not, gang bangers and the arrogant driver's outcry is anything but the sentiment of a random individual. As I elaborate in this chapter, it is the tendency to look at Black and Brown males, not see them and, then, assault or insult them with stereotypes and negative racial icons that exemplify the subtle and pervasive exercise of symbolic power wielded by the American mainstream.

While in graduate school, I frequently invited my mentees to my dormitory and visited them in their homes.[3] As I helped these students to navigate mainstream institutions like schools, colleges, courts, governmental agencies (for example, the Department of Social Services), and businesses of potential employment, two things became even more apparent to me: (1) the agents of mainstream institutions often regarded these students as "little thugs"; (2) these students were disappointed that the agents of mainstream institutions regarded them as "little thugs." Sometimes these students joked about these vilifying hallucinations and threatened to say "Booooo!" to those who held them in fearful regard. When these students felt that the only way to gain respect was through fear, they would joke about using this fear to their advantage instead of being victimized by it. But most of the time, they complained that it was difficult to prevail against the wild, vilifying imaginations of teachers, social workers, probation officers, judges, police officers, and mainstream citizens. Despite these students' best efforts, they were often caricatured as little Black thugs on their way to becoming big Black menacing thugs or gangsters or gang bangers or drug dealers or criminals.

Several sources have led me to conclude that the vilification of Black males is a common, yet taken-for-granted, American practice. This conclusion is not a news flash. In this chapter, however, I draw attention to the symbolic violence embedded in this American practice. This exercise of symbolic violence is evident in (1) the racialized alibis of individual American citizens who, like Susan Smith and Charles Stuart, have committed heinous crimes; (2) the political strategies and agendas of presidential campaigns; (3) news media accounts of urban crime; and (4) even in the supposedly creative imaginations of science fiction writers. This list does not begin to exhaust the manifestations of this American pastime, but it does reveal its pervasiveness.

Over the years of researching and writing this book, I have endeavored to make sense of this practice. My quest has been encouraged by those who persist, "You're the expert. Why do you think people are so afraid of these kids?" In this chapter I answer this question as well as another: What's Star Trek got to do with symbolic violence? I add my voice to scholarly claims about the racialization of Black males.[4]

"BASEBALL, HOTDOGS, APPLE PIE AND [BLACK VILLAINS]"

In the 1970s, Chevrolet aired a commercial that sang the American traditions of baseball, hotdogs, apple pie and Chevrolet.[5] By linking the name of Chevrolet to these icons, this car company sought to emphasize its line of cars as an American tradition. The insertion of Black villains into this Chevrolet dirty strikes a dissonant chord and makes audible another American tradition, a tradition that Americans would rather ignore than sing about. Those who vilify urban teens would likely deny that Black villains belong in this dirty; Joe Feagin and Hernán Vera (sociologists), Katheryn Russell (a criminologist), and Toni Morrison (a Nobel Prize-winning literary scholar) are merely four scholars among many who argue otherwise. The vilification of Black males is as American as apple pie and is an older tradition than baseball and Chevrolet.[6]

In *White Racism: The Basics*, Joe Feagin and Hernán Vera document several examples of how Blacks in general and Black men in particular have been maligned as "negative racial icons of national dimensions."[7] For instance, in Dubuque, Iowa, where Black residents make up less than one percent of the overall population, White residents opposed a city council diversity plan to attract a modest number of Black families by conjuring the "fictional black threat to jobs" as well as stereotypes of Blacks as "welfare queens" and "criminals."[8] Feagin and Vera elaborate:

> For a city whose population included such a small proportion of black residents, the range of antiblack myths that surfaced seems substantial. One local rumor warned that armed gangs were coming to Dubuque from Chicago, and in the language of racism "gang" can become code for "any group of young black men."[9] Several young white Dubuque men interviewed by a *Toronto Star* reporter about their support for the white supremacists movement spoke in stereotyped terms of blacks threatening the purses of older women, of black male advances to white women, and of black vandalism.[10]

In addition to White supremacists in Dubuque, Iowa, Feagin and Vera reveal how the racialized culture that pervaded the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) contributed to the dehumanization and brutal beating of Rodney King in March of 1991. Apparently, in the eyes of the police officers who beat Rodney King, he epitomized the Black villain. Yet Feagin and Vera substantiate that though King's physical stature—Rodney King stands six feet tall and weighs 225 pounds—"could be intimidating to some ... he is not the giant monster that White officers portrayed him as at the Simi Valley trial."[11]

Some may counter Feagin and Vera's claims by arguing that the White supremacists in both Dubuque and the LAPD represent a racist fringe in the United States, a fringe that reveals nothing about core American ideals and traditions. But the most indicting evidence Feagin and Vera provide of this American tradition is not the examples of White supremacists in Dubuque, Iowa, or the racist culture within the Los Angeles Police Department. More compelling evidence is revealed by the actions of mainstream Americans like Charles Stuart, and powerful Americans like Presidents George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton.

In October of 1989, Charles Stuart plotted to murder his pregnant wife, injure himself, and then blame these heinous crimes on a Black male attacker. Once Stuart's plan was carried out—apparently Stuart shot his wife and injured himself shortly before driving to the Mission Hill area of Boston, Massachusetts—he carphoned the Boston police. Stuart described his fictitious attacker as a Black man "with a wispy beard, about 5'10" tall ... wearing a black jogging suit with red stripes and driving gloves with the knuckles cut out."[12] The Boston police conducted a massive search for a Black criminal who existed only in Stuart's imagination and arrested a real man, William Bennet, identified by Stuart in a police lineup.

A year before Charles Stuart's racial hoax, during the 1988 presidential campaign, George H. W. Bush's television advertisements aired images of Willie Horton, a convicted felon who was Black and male. In addition to these television ads, the Bush campaign used Horton's image in brochures, campaign letters, and campaign speeches to defeat Michael Dukakis for the presidency of the United States. The common hallucination encouraged by the Bush campaign was that if Dukakis were elected president, then the "Willie Hortons"—that is, Black male criminals—would run wild in the streets and communities throughout the United States. Bill Clinton also manipulated mainstream fears of Black violence. During the 1992 presidential campaign, Bill Clinton attacked Sister Souljah, a Black female activist and rap artist, "for comments she reportedly made to *Washington Post* reporter David Mills."[13] In an attempt to explain the anger, frustration, and alienation of urban Black gang members, Souljah implicated the disregard that White Americans have for the loss of Black lives in urban communities. She explained that those Black gang members who believe and resent that the (white) government does not care if Blacks kill Blacks, may care even less if Blacks kill Whites.[14] By condemning Sister Souljah's comment, Bill Clinton proved "he could stand up to the so-called interest groups (code words used increasingly to mean black, latino, feminist, and gay groups) in the Democratic Party."[15] However, Clinton's attack upon Sister Souljah also suggested that he was less sensitive to the actual loss of black life in inner-city communities than to mainstream voters' hallucinations about black-on-white crime. The Clinton campaign viewed attacking Sister Souljah and thereby allaying mainstream delusions as a politically advantageous strategy.

Hence, in a country where White Americans comprise 70 percent of all arrests and where "80 percent of all crime involves a victim and offender of the same race,"[16] Charles Stuart, George Bush, and Bill Clinton tapped into a mainstream belief in Black male criminality, a myth that each one of them manipulated for personal gain. Stuart's hoax as well as Bush and Clinton's campaign strategies "depended on the common white belief in black criminality, and [they] worked."[17]

The cases of Dubuque, Rodney King and the LAPD, Charles Stuart, George Bush, and Bill Clinton are just a few examples elaborated by Feagin and Vera, and they elaborate them with far more detail, complexity, and evidence than the summaries above. Feagin and Vera observe, "It is likely that a majority of whites today view young black males in most everyday situations as potentially dangerous."[18]

The "Criminalblackman"

In *The Color of Crime: Racial Hoaxes, White Fear, Black Protectionism and Other Macroaggressions*, Katheryn K. Russell refers to this common white belief in black criminality as "the myth of the *criminalblackman*."[19] Russell explains how this abstraction or myth is rendered more concrete—or in more scholarly terms, is reified—by a variety of sources including "reality" police television shows like *Cops*, rap music videos, and many local nightly news programs. Like Feagin and Vera, Russell provides ample evidence of a common belief in black criminality by enumerating several white-on-black racial hoaxes like that committed by Charles Stuart.[20]

In addition to Stuart, Russell enumerates sixty-seven racial hoaxes reported in newspapers across the United States that occurred between 1987 and 1996. Russell points out that "these sixty-seven cases represent only a fraction of all racial hoax cases, since most racial hoaxes are not classified or reported as such."[21] One of the

most infamous examples was the racial hoax perpetuated by Susan Smith. In 1994, Smith drowned her two sons—Michael, who was three years old, and Alexander, who was fourteen months old)—by restraining them in their car seats, and allowing her car to roll into the John D. Long Lake located outside of Union, South Carolina.[22] As reported by Barbara Vobejda of the *Washington Post*, Smith claimed "a black man forced her at gunpoint from the car" and kidnapped her sons.[23]

Out of the sixty-seven hoaxes listed by Russell, 70 percent "involve Whites who fabricated crimes against Blacks."[24] Russell admits that though a racial hoax may be perpetuated by a member of any racial-ethnic group and against a member of any racial-ethnic group, white-on-black hoaxes, like those committed by Charles Stuart and Susan Smith, are particularly problematic. Russell elaborates:

Anyone, of any race, who perpetuates a hoax with a Black villain should face criminal punishment.... Racial hoaxes that target Blacks, create a distinct, more acute social problem than hoaxes that target people of other races. Blacks in general and young Black men in particular are saddled with a deviant image.... Racial hoaxes are devised, perpetuated, and successful precisely because they tap into widely held fears. The harm of the racial hoax is not limited to reinforcing centuries-old, deviant images of Blacks.

Hoaxes also create these images for each new generation.[25]

As eloquently phrased by Charles Laurence, a reporter for the *Daily Telegraph*, Smith, like Stuart, gave her hoax "initial credibility by picking just the right character for the role of carjacker. A black man, of course: the bogeyman of honest Americans, of all races, who live in fear of crime.... The carjacker in the sinister knitted cap, of course, existed only in Smith's imagination and the national prejudice."[26]

Feagin and Vera, as well as Russell, argue that this myth of Blacks as deviants predates contemporary television images, presidential campaigns, racial hoaxes, and white supremacists in Dubuque, Iowa, and the LAPD. Feagin and Vera argue that the "tendency to view people of African descent as deviant or criminal is centuries old."[27] Feagin and Vera elaborate:

[A]nti-African images were imported by the colonies, where images born in European ignorance were used to justify the subjugation of Africans bought and sold as slaves. Negative images of African Americans were accepted by the framers of the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution. Prominent European Americans in the early history of this nation were slave holders, including the southerners George Washington, James Madison, and Thomas Jefferson.... Writing in *Notes on Virginia*, Jefferson argued that what he saw as the ugly color, offensive odor, and ugly hair of African American slaves indicated their physical inferiority and that their alleged inability to create was a sign of mental inferiority.[28]

Russell maintains that the slave codes, black codes, and other statutes institutionalized racist ideas about Black Americans. The slave codes were enacted in various states from the early 1600s to the mid-1800s in order to dehumanize and regulate the lives of American slaves; formal and informal black codes were enacted from the mid-1800s through the mid-1900s to dehumanize and regulate the lives of African Americans. Russell explains that as time marched forward from the 1600s to the

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1900s, "[o]ne constant remained as the slave codes became the Black codes and the Black codes became segregation statutes: *Blackness itself was a crime.*"[29]

When the driver in the opening vignette of this chapter bumped my car and fled the scene after vilifying my teenaged passengers as "gang bangers," he invoked symbolic violence and continued an age-old American pastime or tradition. This dehumanizing tradition should be socially condemned, but is as taken for granted as "baseball, hotdogs, apple pie, and Chevrolet." The case of Ryan Harris that follows further substantiates and updates Russell's assertion: blackness, especially urban blackness, itself is still a crime.

The Murder of Ryan Harris

The news media are instrumental in disseminating villainous images of Black males. Presidents Bush and Clinton, as well as individual citizens like Charles Stuart and Susan Smith, have relied upon print and broadcast media to animate sentiments and symbols that vilify Black males. Though examples of the new media's complicity abound, the coverage of the Ryan Harris murder case exemplifies vilification run amok.

Ryan Harris, an eleven-year-old African-American girl from the Englewood section of the South Side of Chicago, was brutally murdered in July of 1998. Two African-American boys, ages seven and eight, were arrested for her murder. Evidence eventually cleared these little boys of her murder. This evidence included semen found on Ryan Harris's body that the boys were too young to produce, as well as the degree to which her head had been bashed using a force that exceeded the strength a seven- or eight-year-old boy could muster. However, had it not been for DNA evidence that linked a twenty-nine-year-old convict to the scene of the crime, these two preadolescent boys would have probably been falsely accused of this heinous crime. This time, instead of a fictitious Black criminal conjured up by Charles Stuart or Susan Smith, the news media (and police) projected the mythical image of the *criminalblackman* upon *preadolescent boys*! Alex Kotlowitz, one of the journalists who initially covered this case, acknowledges the news media's complicity and his jump to unfounded conclusions.

Like many other journalists, I was drawn to the case: What went wrong in these two boys' lives? What do we do with such young killers? But as my colleagues and I would learn, we should have been asking, "Were they guilty?"[30]

Kotlowitz continues:

Had these boys been white or middle class, would other journalists and I have looked at our own children and asked the obvious: Were children so small (the tallest was 4'2") capable of such brutality? Were such young children capable of sexual assault? We often didn't listen particularly well to voices that don't sound like our own. And in fact, from the moment these boys were arrested, Englewood residents were telling reporters they didn't believe these boys had killed Ryan Harris. Were we really hearing what they were saying?[31]

The answer to Kotlowitz's question, "Were [the journalists] really hearing what [residents] were saying?" is, "No." "The journalists (and police) paid little attention to the residents of Englewood. In the midst of the media frenzy surrounding the case, the little boys were transformed into criminalblackmen. Though all signs pointed to their innocence, it took DNA evidence to exonerate them. Richard Roeper, columnist for the *Chicago-Sun Times*, initially stoked the frenzy. He now describes the media response as an "invasion of Englewood" during which journalists ignored Englewood residents, jumped to conclusions, and presumed the boys were guilty.[32] In addition to the myth of the criminalblackman, another force behind the media frenzy was the desires of journalists to make their careers. Roeper admits, after retrospection, that he and other journalists should have taken a different approach than presuming the boys were guilty.

Reporters can make careers on a case like this. [But] the career to be made was to maybe step back away from the frenzy and do the solid reporting that some people eventually did that would show us that what we thought at the beginning was not true.[33]

Despite the retrospective regrets expressed by journalists like Kotlowitz and Roeper, the news media's response to the Ryan Harris murder case is more the rule than the exception.[34] These media espouse, build upon, and disseminate mythical images that are powerful, stigmatizing, and symbolically violent. As observed by Martin Sánchez Jankowski, "[T]he sociological consequence [of mythical images] is that images have a way of maintaining themselves in the public's mind and in the absence of quality information and analyses, these images have become the primary prisms through which people construct an understanding of social reality."[35] Images of villainy, criminality, and malevolence were the primary prisms through which the preadolescent boys were viewed despite the existence of quality evidence that the boys were harmless and innocent.

IMAGINARY SPACE, THE FINAL FRONTIER?
(OR, WHAT'S *STAR TREK* GOT TO DO WITH IT?)

I have been a fan of *Star Trek*, the futuristic television series produced by Gene Roddenberry, since I was seven or so years old. I was particularly impressed with Lt. Uhura, the Black female communications officer who diversified the crew with dignity and grace that challenged prevailing stereotypes of Black women. Of course, by today's standards, the original *Star Trek* series and crew of Captain Kirk (of European-American descent), Lt. Sulu (of Japanese descent), Lt. Uhura (of African descent), Ensign Chekov (of Russian descent), and others—notably Scotty, Mr. Spock, and Dr. McCoy—are incredibly Eurocentric and patriarchal, despite this multiethnic cast of characters. This science fiction television show was, however, light years beyond other shows and Lt. Uhura was an inspiring role model. By the way, *Star Trek* producers derived "uhura" from "uhuru," which is Swahili for "freedom."[36]

Three decades after Captain Kirk and crew, there have been four new *Star Trek* series: *The Next Generation*, *Deep Space Nine*, *Voyager*, and *Enterprise*. Of the four,

Deep Space Nine has a 1990s counterpart to Lt. Uhura: Captain Benjamin Sisko. In this twenty-fourth century science fictional universe, Captain Sisko has been freed from twentieth-century stereotypes of Black males; he is the commanding officer of a station in a valuable quadrant of space and he is the emissary to an entire planet of spiritual people known as Bajorans. Captain Sisko is a loving, nurturing single father to his teenaged son, Jake, and was also a loving husband until the death of his wife. Captain Sisko exudes brilliance, charisma, spirituality, as well as a host of other positive qualities including integrity, consideration, and compassion. He challenges the American tradition of characterizing Black males as deviants and villains and is, figuratively, galaxies away from one-dimensional, hard, remorseless, gang-banging characters like O-dog described in chapter 3. In this final frontier of space—or, more realistically, in this final frontier of the imaginations of science fiction writers—Black males are finally freed from traditional, limiting, dismal, symbolically violent characterizations. Well, not exactly. For example there are a couple of episodes—"Far beyond the Stars," and "Shadows and Symbols"—in which Captain Sisko is emasculated or devitalized. In these two episodes, Captain Sisko's emasculation may be pure coincidence. There are other episodes, one in particular, with blatant racialized symbols and undertones. *Deep Space Nine* episode fifty-two, titled "The Abandoned" is one such episode.[37]

Before describing this episode, a bit of background information may be necessary for those who are unfamiliar with the species, or more literally, races of *Deep Space Nine*. Among the many species who inhabit this futuristic world, there is a race of beings called the Jem'Hadar. The Jem'Hadar are a race of genetically engineered warriors. Like human beings, they walk upright, have two eyes, two ears, one nose, and one mouth. But, unlike humans, the Jem'Hadar, all of whom appear to be male, have grayish-colored, lizardlike skin, small horns that frame the periphery of their faces, and long, straight black hair that grows only across the top portion of their skulls. The look of the Jem'Hadar is so non-human and the special effects makeup is so elaborate that sometimes I cannot clearly discern the apparent racial-ethnicity of the actors beneath the make-up. Note other character traits of this genetically engineered race of savage warriors: they are ruthless, remorseless, murderous villains who, by design, desire to hunt and kill others. Furthermore, the Jem'Hadar have been genetically installed with a control mechanism: their bodies are genetically engineered to be addicted to a liquid substance referred to, in accordance with its color, as "white."

In episode fifty-two, "The Abandoned," an infant is found within the wreckage of a ship docked at Deep Space Nine. Although its metabolic rate is accelerated—eventually causing it to grow from infancy to preadolescence to young adulthood in a few, maybe two, weeks—this baby appears healthy. The exact species of this "young visitor" is unknown, and it otherwise appears human, except for an oblong-shaped star or flowerlike pattern in the center of its forehead. The baby (actor) used to represent this unknown species as an infant appears to be a honey-brown, black male, six months of age. Likewise, the actor used to represent this unknown species at eight years old (in human years) appears to be an ebony-brown preadolescent Black male. Similar to the infant, this preadolescent appears mostly human except for a couple of

mall, star-like patterns on his forehead and a slight blotchiness to his dark, grayish-brown, almost black skin.[38] Unlike the baby, whose presence and appearance remind Captain Sisko of his son, Jake, as an infant, the preadolescent's expression is serious and tough; but both the baby and preadolescent are, noticeably, Black and male. The airtime during which the infant's face appears on the screen amounts to ten, maybe fifteen, seconds and the preadolescent's, thirty to forty seconds. The preadolescent briefly questions Captain Sisko in a monotone that is slightly inquisitive but remarkably serious for an eight-year-old: "Who are you? ... I need food.... Where am I? ..."

In a few more hours or so, this young visitor matures from a preadolescent to a teenager who seems sixteen to eighteen years old, a growth rate that appears human or its species. As a teenager, the species of this "visitor" is finally discernible: he is a Jem'Hadar. As a teenager, he has finally developed, as mentioned above, grayish-colored, lizardlike skin, small horns that frame the periphery of his face, and long, straight black hair that grows only across the top portion of his skull. This teenaged Jem'Hadar also manifests symptoms of his genetically engineered addiction to some sort of "isogeneic enzyme": he shivers, feels sick, and has pains in his head and chest. This teenaged male desires nothing but to fight, to maim, to kill; he is tough, arrogant, and remorseless. And despite the attempts of Odo, one of the crew members, to teach this young, ruthless warrior that there is more to life than fighting and killing, this young visitor desires three things: to reunite with other Jem'Hadar, to fight, and to kill. Bumper Robinson, the actor who plays the teenaged Jem'Hadar, is a young Black male.

As an in-class exercise on focus groups, I showed "The Abandoned" to seventeen students who took my graduate seminar on qualitative methods.[39] The racial majority of these students was White/European, and the gender majority was female; however, seven were students of color (Asians and Blacks), five were "international students," and four were males.[40] As moderator, I asked the students, "Which, if any, of the following four messages/stereotypes were the most apparent in 'The Abandoned': gender, race, class, and/or nationality?" In addition to racial stereotypes, and American culture—stereotypes, and a few students indicated that Captain Sisko challenged prevailing stereotypes or messages about Black males. However, ten students identified racial stereotypes or messages as the most apparent in the episode. Admittedly, this response rate may have been influenced by the fact that the moderator was African American, yet there were students—one of whom was also a Black female—for whom race was not the most apparent stereotype. One student, a European-American male, wrote that this episode conveys American racial traditions, traditions that included the vilification of Black males. In the openended portion of the survey re completed after viewing "The Abandoned," this student expressed:

The episode started out heavy on the gender stereotypes. It seems that even thousands of years in the future, a little bit of cleavage or a few soft words can make rich men foolishly part with their money. However, as the show progressed it became less focused on gender and much more focused on race. I should explain that I have always considered the Star Trek "universe" of alien races to be comprised of stereotypical analogies to racial categories on earth today. For instance, on the old show Spock and his race [of Vulcans] were stereo-

typed as Asians: Cold, logical, calculating, emotionless. Klingons were Blacks: Strong, aggressive and irrational. The new Star Trek added, among other [races], the Ferengi: A Jewish stereotype of short creatures with big ears and bulbous noses who make up a merchant class of highly skilled financiers. This show's ["The Abandoned"] racial theme almost worked like an argument from The Bell Curve. As hard as the civilized White master [Odo] tried to help his Jem'Hadar—[another African American stereotype]—pupil on a path to self-improvement, [this Jem'Hadar's] genetic make-up prevented him from learning or overcoming his aggressive, anti-social nature. I think it's no surprise that no Klingons (the other "Black" alien race) were in the episode and that the actor who played the Jem'Hadar was always African-American.[41]

Another student, an African-American female, wrote:

Race [was the most apparent stereotype]. The idea that there is a proclivity towards violence among a certain people that need to be shown a way they can live nonviolently. The way the founder, Odo, tried to deny the inferiority/superiority issue but later admitted that the difference was too great among some [races] to make them civilized, mirrored a stereotypical and racist belief in the U.S. The addiction to a substance controlled by those of a greater species was also disturbing and brought to mind the drug trafficking issues between black communities and whites. And [the most racist belief was] that this violent species was born a black child [who] grew into a science fiction equivalent of a black man.[42]

I acknowledge that the students from this graduate seminar may not be representative of those who view Star Trek episodes on a regular basis, and those who identified the racial stereotypes of "The Abandoned" as among the most apparent may be more sensitized to racial subtexts and traditions than the typical viewer of Star Trek. However, similar to Toni Morrison's content analyses of American literary works, these students saw racial stereotypes reified or rendered more concrete in "The Abandoned." Even in a futuristic television show dedicated to promoting diversity, the age-old "tendency to view people of African descent as deviant or criminal" persists.[43] The failure of Star Trek writers to break away from the practice of vilifying Black males indicates the symbolic and metaphorical utility of this tradition.

"STICKS AND STONES ... AND METAPHORS"

In contrast to my analysis of the Jem'Hadar episode in which the writers link blackness to ruthlessness, I entertained the idea that Captain Sisko's emasculation in other episodes may have been pure coincidence. However, like Joe Feagin, Hernán Vera and Katheryn Russell, literary scholar Toni Morrison would argue—and I agree—that very little in the American popular imagination about blackness can be chalked up to coincidence. As stated by Morrison, little remains uninfluenced "by the four-hundred-year-old presence of, first Africans and then African-Americans in the United States," a presence that has "shaped the body politic, the Constitution, and the entire history of the culture."[44] Hence, American literary writers are unlikely to link "Whiteness" to impotence. Likewise, Star Trek writers are less likely to link White captains like Kirk, Picard, Janeway, or Archer to the Earth's history of classism or sexism than they are to emasculate Sisko and link him to Earth's history of racism.

re writers are much more likely to cast Captain Sisko, a Black character, in some degree of negative light or, more figuratively, imagine him in some sort of negative and traditional dark. Yet a clearer indication of the "symbolically violent tendencies the American popular imagination manifests in "The Abandoned"; stereotypes materialize in the use of a Black baby and preadolescent male to signify a race of cultural warriors *before* this "young visitor" develops the horns and lizardlike skin that characteristics of its species. These writers and producers used a Black baby and adolescent boy, both of whom wear very little special effects makeup, to allude to symbolize the full-grown Jem'Hadar prone to tough, savage, ruthless behavior addicted to an "isogenic enzyme," a sort of liquid cocaine or crack.

If blackness and whiteness—not to mention maleness—were neutral concepts, in any baby or preadolescent with mere, subtle markings on its forehead could portrayed the Jem'Hadar. If these were neutral concepts, Charles Stuart would blamed the murder of his wife on any criminal, not a "Black" one, and Susan would have claimed that she had been carjacked, without particularly emphasizing that the carjacker was a "black man with a gun."[45] If blackness, whiteness, maleness, or more specifically black-maleness, were neutral, unsymbolic, loaded concepts, there would be no myth of the criminalblackman upon which Bush and Clinton campaigns could rely for political gain. Similar to Stuart, ith, Bush, and Clinton, the writers and producers of *Deep Space Nine* knew that henoypically or symbolically "White" baby and adolescent with very little special ects makeup, flashed across the screen for seconds and uttering a few monotone rds, would not have epitomized toughness, villainy, or ruthlessness in the minds an American television audience. Even in the final frontier of science fictional ce, writers and producers engage in what prize-winning novelist Toni Morrison rs to as "playing in the dark."

Morrison uses the metaphor "playing in the dark" to capture how White erican literary scholars imagine and construct blackness and whiteness to reflect erica's racial hierarchy. The intent of these scholars may not have been racist, per Yet irrespective of non-racist intentions toward Africans and African Americans, ialized metaphors in American literature have, among other things, facilitated or coding and thereby reified racial stereotypes. Although Morrison uses "playing he dark" to apply specifically to American literary writers—and I borrow it here apply to science fiction writers—this metaphor applies to the more general erican mainstream tradition of linking "Black" males and villainy. To figuratively ture this widespread tradition, which extends well beyond works of fiction, the aphor *"playing in the dark"* does not suffice. I would describe Charles Stuart and ers like Susan Smith who concoct racial hoaxes to conceal heinous crimes as ling in the dark." I would describe Bush's and Clinton's campaigns as "politicng the dark." Journalists were "preying or capitalizing upon the dark" as they ered the Ryan Harris murder case. Finally, "fearing, afraid, or scared of the dark" racterizes the actions of the arrogant driver (described in the opening vignette of chapter) and others who fear street-savvy students who are "Black" and male. In chapter, I have cast light upon "the dark" to reveal its violent and stigmatizing act upon street-savvy students.

Why are we so afraid of Black (and Latino) urban students from low-income neighborhoods? "The dark" has become a dehumanizing prism through which Black males are viewed. "The dark" as metaphor and stereotype blinds us to the reality and complexity of the lives of Black (and Brown, that is, Latino) street-savvy students. What does *Star Trek* have to do with symbolic violence? In the final frontier of imaginary, *futuristic* space, writers re-create and reify age-old stereotypes. Urban students compete with pervasive, distorting fictional images from literary and science fictional sources to be seen as fully human instead of monsters or Jem'Hadar.

Feagin and Vera would probably describe these acts of playing, hiding, politicizing, preying upon, and fearing "the dark" literally instead of metaphorically as white racism: "White racism can be viewed as the socially organized set of attitudes, ideas, and practices that deny African Americans and other people of color the dignity, opportunities, freedoms, and rewards that this nation offers White Americans."[46] I agree with Feagin and Vera, but emphasize that even if those who play, hide, politicize, prey upon, or fear "the dark" view themselves as humanitarians and non-racists—as is probably the case with *Star Trek* writers and producers—their actions have negative consequences for urban students who are young, Black males.

Black urban students, or more specifically the students from my study, frequently interact with self-described "non-racist," "nonviolent" individuals of various racialethnic backgrounds including African Americans, individuals who verbally assault, insult, or imagine them as "gang bangers" or "thugs." My students live and interact within a society that, historically and contemporaneously, labels them as "deviant criminalblackmen." My students compete with pervasive, distorting fictional images from literary and science fictional sources to be seen as fully human instead of monsters. In my expert opinion, Black and Brown urban students' frequent exposure to these multiple mechanisms of symbolic violence is, at the very least, debilitating and frustrating. Even more, as indicated by Malik's story in chapter 2, this violent tradition may contribute to the social forces that push street-savvy students out of school.

As revealed in chapter 1, researchers have clearly identified the social-structural forces (for example, historic discrimination, residential discrimination and segregation, lack of viable job opportunities, concentrated poverty, inadequate school facilities) that limit the life chances of urban students from low-income communities.[47] Fewer researchers have devoted time to exploring, in the words of Dana Y. Takagi, how "race as a constructed ideology—common sense and popular thought [and] stereotypes" is equally as important.[48] This "common sense and popular thought"—these myths embodied in racialized metaphors or symbols impose themselves as real. Metaphorically playing, hiding, politicizing, preying upon, or fearing "the dark" has the illusion of being harmless imaginings, sentiments, strategies, reactions, and so on. Yet, as I have argued from the start of this chapter, these practices are harmful acts of violence. Unlike those who engage in blatantly racist or physical acts of violence, those who engage in symbolic violence may not even be sensitized to or aware of "the many established ways of acting, feeling, and thinking that perpetuate antiblack racism."[49] Many American mainstream practices fall under the rubric of symbolic violence. Feagin and Vera list but a few of them:

Symbolic violence resides in relentless stereotyping, the media's exclusionary standards of beauty, and the educational system's insensitivities to the needs of multicultural communities. Symbolic violence can include white [police] officers' hostile words and body language, which reveal disrespect for black people and culture, as well as white officers' show of force in black communities when they stop and interrogate black men just because they are black. Symbolic violence is expressed in images of blacks as inferior or as "gorillas in the mist." Many whites in all sectors of society acquiesce or participate in acts of symbolic violence even though they disapprove of physical violence.[50]

Symbolic violence also includes fictional constructs of blackness, racial hoaxes, political strategies, news media feeding frenzies, and the exclamations of passers-by who see Black urban youths who are not criminals and recoil, "Oh shit! Gang bangers!" Sticks and social-structural stones may break urban youths' bones, *and violent words, metaphors, and symbols can also hurt them!*

EIGHT

Policy Implications for *Individuals* in Positions of Influence

"TO SEE THINGS AND PEOPLE BIG"

In *Releasing the Imagination: Essays on Education, the Arts, and Social Change*, Maxine Greene borrows novelist Thomas Mann's distinction between seeing the world small and seeing the world big.

> To see things or people small, one chooses to see from a detached point of view, to watch behaviors from the perspective of a system, to be concerned with trends and tendencies rather than the intentionality and concreteness of everyday life. To see things or people big, one must resist viewing other human beings as mere objects or chess pieces and view them in their integrity and particularity instead. One must see from the point of view of the participant in the midst of what is happening if one is to be privy to the plans people make, the initiatives they take, the uncertainties they face.[1]

Tough Fronts, generally speaking, embraces the view of things big and sees schooling and the streets from the students' points of view. The chapters herein have provided access to the plans students make, the initiatives they take, and the uncertainties they face. This is especially true of chapters 2 through 6, where students define the streets, differentiate between hardcore and hardcore wannabe postures, critique unempathetic teachers, praise "down" teachers, and respond favorably to mentors. And though the introduction, chapter 1, and chapter 7 provide more contextual, cultural, and structural findings, these chapters also shed light on the unique situations of urban students. The students of this study have figured prominently throughout this book; they have never been reduced to statistics or percentages or test scores or "accountability measures."

In sculpting a concluding chapter on the policy implications of this study, however, I feel trapped between things small and things big. As a sociologist, and as revealed by chapters 1 and 7, I am trained to see things or students small, from the distanced perspective of a system—for example, a school system or district, a political system, a cultural system, an economic system, an ideological system, and so on. From this things-or-people-small perspective, my policy suggestions should be broad-based and call for school reforms that are fundamental and systematic. I should be "preoccupied with test scores, 'time on task,' management procedures, ethnic and racial percentages, and accountability measures, while [I screen out] the