

ABSTRACT

Title of dissertation: LEARNING TO DIVIDE IN THE WORLD:
 YOUTH EXPERIENCES IN A
 MID-ATLANTIC COMPREHENSIVE
 HIGH SCHOOL (1950-2000)

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 This history interprets and critically examines the cross-gender, cross-racial, and cross-class relationships of serial generations of students, who attended a Mid-Atlantic comprehensive high school between 1950 and 2000, as revealed in the oral histories of thirty-seven alumni, African-American, white and Eastern European, richer and poorer. Miller High was chosen for its early integration, in 1956, and for its location in a community that transformed, over the last half of the twentieth century, from rural, to suburban, to urban-suburban; and from a predominantly white middle-class town along which lived a small African-American community established since the nineteenth century, to a multicultural population that by the

1990s included Russian immigrants, and African-American youth newly arrived from city schools.

Alumni's recollections revealed three generations of students who, bound in time by different demographic configurations, different levels of school disciplinary measures, and different shades of hierarchy in student-teacher relations, constructed their associations with peers and school authorities markedly differently: "The Divided Generation" (1950-1969), "The Border-Crossing Generation" (1970-1985), and "The Re-divided Generation" (1986-2000). Of the three generations, "The Border-Crossing Generation" most freely crossed class, gender, and race divides. They attended Miller High at a time when school policies were relatively lax, graduating classes were still relatively small, and mostly neighborhood students from integrated feeder schools attended against the national backdrop of the civil rights movements.

This analysis identifies how Miller High students across generations and across diverse backgrounds who felt exposed or alienated within school-imposed associations with peers, either when herded in large spaces such as the cafeteria or divided into tracks, or who could not find a place within youth-generated peer-groups that privileged shared interests and affinities over racial, and class identities, sought refuge within communities of shared ethnic, class, or racial backgrounds. It further identifies, within generational time periods, the role played by demographics and school authorities' disciplinary measures in loosening or reinforcing students' segregating tendencies.

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HIGH SCHOOL
1950-2000

by

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To Emmanuel, Francesca and Joseph,
my family, home and anchor.

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¹ “Terrains of Freedom” is a term coined by Professor Barbara Finkelstein to express spaces carved by agents within structural constraints whereby they demonstrate autonomy; demonstrate *agency*.

INTRODUCTION

This work is about serial generations of high school students and their lives in a comprehensive high school over the last half of the twentieth century. It interprets and critically examines the high school experiences of thirty-seven alumni, female and male, African-American, white, and Eastern European, richer and poorer, who attended Miller High, a Mid-Atlantic comprehensive high school, between 1950 and 2000. It explores the meanings that Miller High graduates ascribed to their social relations with peers, teachers, and administrators, and the values they attributed to their education and their diplomas, from their perspectives *as* females and males of different racial, ethnic, and socio economic backgrounds. It highlights the relational nature of students' experiences and tracks connections, affiliations, and circulation² of individuals from diverse backgrounds, across diverse groups, within the institutional spaces of Miller High and at their immediate periphery.³ Finally, it links broader demographic, economic, and cultural forces to the ways that Miller High organized its students, and the ways that students organized themselves.

This study not only advances our understanding of student life, but also illuminates features of the history of the comprehensive high school, in particular its role in the evolution of gender, class and race relations in a diverse democratic society. More broadly it contributes to histories of youth by situating students within their cultural time periods, and to histories of desegregation by tracing race relations

² I borrow the terms "connections, affiliations and circulation" from postcritical ethnographer Susan Talburt. See Susan Talburt, "Time, Space, and Ethnography Without Proper Subjects" in *Postcritical Ethnography*, eds., George Noblit, Susana Flores, Enrique Murillo (Cresskill, New Jersey: Hampton Press, Inc., 2004):107-123.

³ Because Miller High integrated early, in 1956, I was able to follow race relations among students over a substantial forty-four years.

over almost a half-century. It is a work, furthermore, that offers possibilities for expanding conceptual frameworks of analysis in histories of education, because it privileges students' voices and their interpretations of their high school experiences.

This study draws directly from the intellectual influences of educational historians who seek to recover the yet unheard or underprivileged voices,⁴ and more broadly from the intellectual influences of oral historians⁵ whose works "give back to the people who made and lived history, through their own words, a central place."⁶ Since the 1970s, only a handful of historians of education have made use of sources other than the more readily accessible public and official documents,⁷ and they have not sought systematically to collect and interpret oral histories of school goers. To my knowledge, this is the first effort to generate a history of education that pays close attention to student experiences across diverse backgrounds in one comprehensive school from 1950 to 2000, through the production and analysis of oral historical data.

⁴ The works cited here are those that have addressed the lives of students in the comprehensive high school: Barbara Finkelstein, "Is Adolescence Here to Stay?: Historical Perspectives on Youth and Education" in *Adolescence and Society*, eds. T. Urban and F. Pajares (New York: Information Age Press, 2003:1-33); Barbara Finkelstein, *Regulated Children/Liberated Children: Education in Psychohistorical Perspective* (New York: The Psychohistory Press, 1979); Kenneth Fish, *Conflict and Dissent in the High School*. (New York: Bruce Publishing Company, 1970); V.P. Franklin, "Black High School Activism in the 1960s: An Urban Phenomenon?" *Journal of Research in Education*. 10, 1 (2000): 3-8; and E.F. Frazier, *Negro Youth at the Crossroads: Their Personality Development in the Middle States* (NewYork: Scholar Books, 1967).

⁵ Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); Michael Frisch, *A Shared Authority* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990). Also see Alan Peshkin, *Places of Memory: Whiteman's Schools and Native American Communities* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1997).

⁶ Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988.), p.3.

⁷ To illustrate: some historians have excavated the private realms of biographies and diaries in new ways: see work by Michael Coleman, "The Responses by Indian Children to Presbyterian Schooling in the Nineteenth Century: An Analysis Through Missionary Sources," *History of Education Quarterly* 27 (1984): 473-497. I know of only one historian of education who has made use of ethnographic interviews in his history of a high school: Gerald Grant in *Hamilton High* (1988). Most historians of education build their analyses around legislative and administrative reports; around demographic data; or quantitative analyses of aggregate data.

Historians of education have hereto privileged the broader institutional histories that highlight the structural forces of political agendas, policies and reforms.⁸

Historians of youth have submerged students' agency under the weight of economic, demographic, and political analyses.⁹ While cultural historians have paid attention to youth experiences, they have preferred to situate young people outside the parameters of high school, and have represented them one dimensionally.¹⁰ The few histories that do situate youth within the high school setting, and that attempt to address gender, class, and racial differences,¹¹ cover at most two decades and do not reveal spaces of interaction between students across gender, race, and class boundaries.

Moreover, historians of education have rarely concentrated their efforts on single institutions. To my knowledge, there is only one other work that examines deeply one institution in the second-half of the twentieth century: Gerald Grant's *The World We Created at Hamilton High*.¹² While Grant's history explores intersections of school regulations and lived experiences, as does this history, it does not analyze in depth the relational nature of students' experiences between and across borders of gender, race, class and ethnicity.

⁸ See (Bowles and Gintis 1976); (Tyack and Hansot 1982); (Hampel 1986); (Anderson 1988); (Labaree 1988); (Reece 1995). The exception is Grant's *Hamilton High* (1988), where students' voices are given equal weight along those of teachers and other stake holders, although more to support structural analyses than to explore their experiences.

⁹ See (Platt 1969); (Gillis 1974); (Kett 1977); (Shlossman 1977); (Gilbert 1986); (Modell 1989); (Cohen 1997).

¹⁰ See (Palladino 1996); (Bailey 1998); (España-Maram 1998); (Garcia 1998); (Kelley 1998); (Sears 1998); (Austin and Willard 1998).

¹¹ See (Frazier 1967); (Fish 1970); (Fass 1998); and (Franklin 2000).

¹² Gerald Grant, *The World We Created at Hamilton High* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1988).

It is in the literature produced by educational ethnographers that young people's experiences of high school vividly come to light.¹³ However, ethnographers' accounts, lacking the historical dimension that establishes analytic linkages across time periods, do not capture transformations and continuities in students' experiences; furthermore, educational ethnographies have hereto provided snapshots of students according to monolithic groupings, either by racial or ethnic background, by gender divisions or according to class-dimensions. To my knowledge, they have not attended to the relational nature of students' experiences with each other across gender, racial, and class boundaries over time.

If one is hard pressed to find historical works that capture the relational nature of high school goers' experiences across generations of graduates, it is perhaps because, as youth historian John Gillis wrote: "The task [writing the history of youth] is further complicated...by the fact that at any point in time the demographic and economic experiences of differently situated class and status [youth] groups are also so varied."¹⁴ Thus historians of education have preferred to write about the American comprehensive high school, its genesis, curricular reforms, and the competing ideologies that tug at it, than about the experiences *of it* from the points of view of those who attended within and across time periods. Until now, historians of education have been more interested in exploring the structural forces that frame and constrain educational experiences. They have borrowed from *reproduction theories* to explain

¹³ For ethnographic accounts of students' experiences of high school that shed light on questions of social justice and equity as these are understood by students who, acting as rational protagonists, craft a range of behaviors that span, on a continuum, from accommodating to rebellious, see: (Lynd 1929); (Hollingstead 1949); (Coleman 1961); (Willis 1977); (Fine 1991); (Bratlinger 1993); (MacLeod, 1995); (Davidson 1996); (Price 2000).

¹⁴John Gillis, *Youth and History: Tradition and Change in European Age Relations 1770-Present* (New York and London: Academic Press, Inc., 1974), p. x.

how educational systems reproduce social inequalities;¹⁵ from *human capital* theories to explain how schools, as meritocratic institutions, prepare students for needed social roles;¹⁶ and more recently from the *market perspective* of education, to explain the “educational consequences of a system in which credentials count more than knowledge in the struggle to get ahead and stay ahead.”¹⁷ These analytic lenses, however, cannot capture the mosaic of meanings ascribed to the comprehensive high school by differently situated students, neither within nor across time periods.

To explore *experience* requires digging at ground-level, and hearing people’s voices. In this work I attempted to recover students’ experiences with each other and school authorities, across their situated positions, by collecting the oral histories of serial generations of alumni, male and female, of different racial, ethnic and economic backgrounds, who graduated from one same comprehensive high school, the demographics of which over time increased in cultural complexity. Examining the differently situated recollections of Miller High alumni across a period of fifty years, allowed me to navigate “the demographic and economic experiences of differently situated class and status [youth] groups”¹⁸ as they varied within a setting that transformed from rural, to suburban, to urban-suburban; and from a predominantly middle-class white community along which lived a small black community with deep

¹⁵ See S. Bowles and H. Gintis, *Schooling in Capitalist America* (New York: Basic Books, 1976).

¹⁶ Human capital theory draws from sociologist’s Emile Durkheim’s construction of educational selection as necessary, a benefit to society. Schools prepare human beings to assume necessary and needed roles in society.

¹⁷ See David F. Labaree, *How to succeed in school without really learning* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), p. 4. Labaree’s analysis of market force influences on education is grounded in and inspired by Max Weber’s “status-competition theory, which focuses particular attention on the effect of markets and the role of educational credentials.”(p.3). Also see Arthur G. Powell and Eleanor Farrar, *The Shopping Mall High School* (Boston: Houghton Mcfflin Co., 1985). Powell and Farrar discuss how high schools go out of their way to ensure holding power and “customer satisfaction.” (p.1).

¹⁸John Gillis, *Youth and History: Tradition and Change in European Age Relations 1770-Present* (New York and London: Academic Press, Inc., 1974), p. x.

roots that reached back into the nineteenth century, to a multicultural population of often disparate economic backgrounds. It allowed me to explore high school-goers' meaning-makings against those of an institution which integrated relatively early, in 1956, and which, as a comprehensive high school, was originally created in an effort to "serve the needs and interests of all in a diversified curriculum."¹⁹

The last half of the twentieth century is a particularly fecund period within which to investigate student life in high schools, because it offers an arc of time that began with one of the greatest expansions of lawfully sanctioned student rights with the Supreme Court decision in *Brown versus Board of Education* in 1954, and later with the ruling in *Tinker versus DesMoines* in 1969,²⁰ only to end with almost unprecedented restrictions on their actions and their civil rights with the implementation of *Zero Tolerance Policies*²¹ in the nineties. It is also a time period during which the *high school* and the *adolescent* acquired a symbiotic relationship in social imagination. One could not be conceived without the other.

¹⁹ Gerald Grand, *The World We Created at Hamilton High*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1988) p.210. Also see David Labaree, *How to succeed in school without really learning*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), p.22. Labaree offers a more critical spin on the creation of the comprehensive high school when he writes that it was created in "an effort to make the school curriculum more responsive to the needs of the occupational structure," grounding its creation in a social efficiency theory of education.

²⁰ See Roger, J.R. Levesque, *Dangerous Adolescents, Model Adolescents: Shaping the Role and Promise of Education* (New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, 2002). In *Tinker vs Des Moines Independent Community School District, 1969*: "students challenged a school's prohibition against wearing black arm bands in protest of the Vietnam War" (p. 54). Students won as it was judged that "minors were persons protected by the Constitution" (p. 53).

²¹ Zero Tolerance Policies (which spread in the mid-nineties) targeted possession or use of drugs or alcohol, as well as possession of arms by students on school premises. For opinions in support of Zero Tolerance Policies, see *National Safety Guard and Security Services*, "Zero Tolerance". http://www.schoolsecurity.org/trends/zero_tolerance.html. For critiques see Dennis Cauchon, "Zero Tolerance Policies Lack of Flexibility," *USA Today*, April 13, 1999. Also found on website: <http://www.usatoday.com/educate/ednews3.htm> (May 10, 2005).

Following World War II, a confluence of social conditions²² combined to raise the social prominence of high schools. By the 1950s, secondary education fully joined elementary schools as a “common expectation.”²³ With the norm of high school graduation, the pejorative term *dropout* emerged,²⁴ an index of the shift in popular imagination of the role of high schools in teenagers’ lives.²⁵ By the 1960s, amidst the Viet Nam War, Cold War, and the *Great Society’s War on Poverty*, amidst urban uprisings and college and high school protests,²⁶ amidst increasing sexual freedoms and liberalization of laws regarding reproductive rights, many students’ influences expanded even as “critics singled out schools as harmful institutions that extended the adolescent period and created a minority group excluded from meaningful participation in society and political life.”²⁷ The word *dropout*, appropriated by Timothy Leary and the newly discovered counterculture youth, acquired during that time, new, more positive, even glamorous meanings in some urban settings.²⁸ During the 1960s, many high school students as some historians have noted, became a constituency whose input, if not always sought, could no longer be ignored.²⁹

²²Following World War II, demographic changes, changes in relations between families and schools, the shifting nature of work (de-industrialization of city work leaving youth without jobs), the GI Bill and the growing civil rights movements completed the transformation of the high school, in the 1950s, from elite to universal, common institution. See Joseph F. Kett, *Rites of Passage: Adolescence in America, 1790 to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 1977).

²³Sherman Dorn, “Origins of the “Dropout Problem,” *History of Education Quarterly* Vol. 33, No.3 1993.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ The terms “teenster”, and then “teenager” were originally coined by a marketing executive in the 1940s. The term “teenager” owes its genesis to the American consumer culture. See Grace Palladino, *Teenagers: An American History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

²⁶ See Kenneth Fish, *Conflict and Dissent in the High School* (New York: Bruce Publishing Company, 1970); and V.P. Franklin, “Black High School Student Activism in the 1960s: An Urban Phenomenon?” *Journal of Research in Education* Vol.10 No.1 (2000):3-8

²⁷See Roger, J.R. Levesque, *Dangerous Adolescents, Model Adolescents: Shaping the Role and Promise of Education* (New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, 2002).

²⁸See Sherman Dorn earlier cited.

²⁹See Roger, J.R. Levesque, *Dangerous Adolescents, Model Adolescents: Shaping the Role and Promise of Education* (New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, 2002). See Tinker vs Des

Things changed with the decades following the rebellions of some students in the 1960s, decades that as historians tell, witnessed “a revival of conservative educational policies.”³⁰ However, even as high schools increased control over teenagers’ freedoms,³¹ their power in popular and political imagination to solve social ills steadily decreased. The term *dropout* unambiguously regained its pejorative connotation even as, throughout the 1970s, the economic usefulness of the high school diploma and high schools’ commitment to democratic ideals were being seriously questioned.³² The discrediting of high schools intensified during the eighties and nineties, with attacks emanating from both the right and left of the political spectrum, as persisting school inequalities and perceived rise in violence of students against students intensified in public debates.³³ What began in the 1950s as a universal embrace of the comprehensive public high school, developed into a move *away from* the common high school and toward privatization by the end of the last century.³⁴

Thus this period, 1950-2000, captures a momentous and frenetic cycle in the history of the high school and the lives of its students. High school attendance became a universal expectation, effectively bounding the experience of adolescence

Moines earlier referred to. Also see, in the same work, 1971 rulings in *Goss v. Lopez*. Also see Kenneth Fish and V.P. Franklin, earlier cited. “

³⁰ See Roger, J.R. Levesque, *Dangerous Adolescents, Model Adolescents: Shaping the Role and Promise of Education* (New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, 2002), p. 50.

³¹Ibid., pages 55-57.

³²See Ivan Illich, *Deschooling Society* (New York: Harper & Rows, 1972). Also see Joseph Kett earlier cited.

³³Refer to: *A Nation at Risk* (1983); Jonathan Kozol's *Illiterate America* (1985); Jeanie Oake's *Keeping Track: How Schools Structure Inequality* (1985); Alan Blom's *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987); Jonathan Kozol's, *Savage Inequalities*(1991). See also media reports of school violence by youth against youth [i.e. Shootings at Columbine in 1999].

³⁴ "The comprehensive high school would disintegrate further as parents sent their children to narrow specialty schools." See William Wraga, *Democracy's High School: The Comprehensive High School and Educational Reform in the United States* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1994), p. xv.

with the experience of school,³⁵ even as the high school itself increasingly struggled for its legitimacy.³⁶ This period has been the era of youth and of the high school,³⁷ the institution through which all Americans, since the 1950s, have been expected to live their adolescence.

Within this arc of time also, the real and symbolic power of *Brown versus Board of Education* would be diluted. By the turn of this century scholarly works began alerting to a nation-wide trend toward segregation and inequality,³⁸ some historians tracing it back to the seventies.³⁹ Other works began revealing the effect on suburban schools of what has come to be known as the “urbanization of suburbs,” whereby more affluent whites as well as more affluent people of color, move out of suburbs as city dwellers move in, seeking the good life and escape from poor city schools and crime. The result, as some researchers have pointed out, is that city escapees do not find opportunities for a better future for their progeny, but instead an extension of urban life into the suburb. Then too, while originally the Supreme Court

³⁵Kett explains how an adolescent could be a fourteen year old *young man* working in the city or a seventeen year *old boy* working on the farm--neither attending school nor high school. See Joseph F. Kett earlier cited.

³⁶See Tyack and Cuban, *Tinkering Toward Utopia: A Century of Public School Reform* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp.44-45. As Tyack and Cuban remark about the politically conservative periods of the 1950s and 1980s: "Policy talk about schools stressed a struggle for national survival and international competition...In such periods, policy elites want to challenge the talented, stress the academic basics and press for greater coherence and discipline in education." The authors suggest that "liberal eras such as the 1930s and 1960s stress" ideology of access and equality." The authors remark however that by the close of the twentieth century, in "late 80s and 90s...conservatives and liberals alike...called for national standards." (p.45). These cyclical, pendulum-like criticisms of high school performance reach, by the end of the twentieth century, the highest level of attack on the legitimacy of the high school within the 1950-2000 period. Again see work by William Wraga earlier cited,

³⁷See Grace Palladino, *Teenagers: An American History* (New York: Basic Books, 1996).

³⁸ See report by Gary Orfield and Chungmei Lee, “Brown at Fifty: King’s Dream or Plessy’s Nightmare,” *The Civil Rights Project Harvard University*, (17 Jan. 2004)
<http://www.%20civilrightsproject.harvard.edu/research/reseg40/resegregation04.php> (Jan.31, 2005).

³⁹ See Clayborne Carson, “Two Cheers for Brown v Board of Education”, *Journal of American History* (June 2004, Vol.91, No.1)
[http://www.stanford.edu/articles/Calyborne%20Carson%20%20Two%20Cheers%20forBrown%20v%20Brown%20of%20Educatoin%](http://www.stanford.edu/articles/Calyborne%20Carson%20%20Two%20Cheers%20forBrown%20v%20Brown%20of%20Educatoin%20) (Jan.31, 2005).

decision in *Brown v Board of Education* spoke directly to the black and white divide in America, by the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty first century, the landscape of diversity had expanded to include not only people of races beyond black and white, but people who while they shared one race, came from very different cultural backgrounds, and spoke languages unintelligible to each other. In some schools, over a hundred different languages could be heard spoken between parents and children. By the end of the century, the meanings attached to racial categories of identity gained complexity.

Thus not only did I want to trace continuities, and identify differences in students' experiences of high school over almost a half century "under" *Brown versus Board of Education*, as alumni would reveal them from their situated positions relative to each other and school authorities, but I also wanted to know if serial generations of students transformed, through proximity and forced association, social prejudice into acceptance of difference, or reproduced it; and if certain conditions or time periods were more propitious for one or the other. I wondered whether alumni's recollections would confirm or disprove what Carnoy and Levin have pointed out, that "schools continue to provide Americans with a social experience that is markedly more egalitarian and more open to free choice and possibilities of self-realization than anything that is available to them in the realm of work."⁴⁰

This work then espouses a philosophy of historical analysis that considers no recovery of the past as unmediated, but rather, an active production of "visions of the

⁴⁰ Carnoy and Levin quoted in David F. Labaree, *How to Succeed in School Without Really Learning* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997) p.49.

past.”⁴¹ Thus, far from producing an exhaustive account of students’ experiences, I sought to capture a possible, plausible and illustrative account. Because what I sought to recover was students’ interpretations of their high school experiences, their perceptions of one another, the meanings they attributed to their relationships with peers and school authorities, and the values they ascribed to their education, evidential issues surrounding the question of memory, while sensitive of course, held less weight than they might have would I have attempted to investigate, for example, the reputation of a particular Miller High teacher or administrator through students’ remembered oral testimonies. Furthermore, since the memory process depends, as research in cognitive psychology suggests, “not only on individual comprehension, but also upon interest,”⁴² Miller High alumni’s recollections became valuable data in the context of my inquiry *precisely* because they were recollections. It is within the world of recollections that that which was most striking and of greatest interest would have been preserved, whether vividly so or buried. If buried, then memories’ conspicuous absence would be valuable data in itself. Still, the oral history interview is a joint production of conversations created in spaces between two strangers who themselves, within the process of the interview, address and experience each other from their respective situated positions.⁴³ Thus it is not inconceivable that what some alumni shared as *being remembered* might have been concocted alternately to impress, or to mislead. In turn, it is not inconceivable that regardless of my

⁴¹ J.W. Scott, *Feminism and History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996,) p.9.

⁴² Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p.131; Also see Peter H. Lindsay and Donald A. Norman, *Human Information Processing: An Introduction to Psychology* (New York: Academic Press, 1977).

⁴³ I further elaborate on the oral history interview as both reconstructing a past, while constructing a present form of data, in the Addendum: *Methodology*.

intentions, and in spite of my preparedness, I might have communicated through body language or an inadvertent turn of the phrase what might have been perceived as an expectation or even judgment, altering thus an alumni's attitude and candor.

While my own experience of all thirty seven interviews conducted with men and women, African-American, white and immigrated Russians, poorer and richer, who graduated from Miller High between 1954 and 2002, suggested to me that these were honest people sharing authentic memories, it was the echoed memories, and patterns of recollections within and across categories of identity that suggested as much sincerity as an interview setting allows.⁴⁴ To complement alumni's testimonies, I also proceeded to systematically analyze Miller High yearbooks, referred to the community newspaper, and read the histories of peoples of the county, all held in the archives of the town library. Finally, I also interviewed three veteran teachers, and the current principal, and held numerous informal conversations with long time Miller Town neighbors and community members.⁴⁵

That the study is bound to one institutional setting, limits the possibility of generalizing any claims across geographic areas, but conversely, enables a simultaneous and deep exploration of Miller High's structural influences (i.e. school authorities, policies, curriculum, rituals and regulations) on the school experiences of its students, and conversely, the influences of students' choices, behaviors and associations on the organizational structures of Miller High. Moreover, the institutional structures shared across high schools and the identified shifts in demographics offer possibilities for comparisons across similar settings. The

⁴⁴ Details of interview process are described and analyzed in the Addendum: *Methodology*.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

methodological question regarding *generalizability* is best considered here as ethnographer Goetz suggested, in terms of "comparability."⁴⁶ My goal was to *enrich our understanding* of high school goers' experiences over time.

When I began the study, I worried that the perspectives recovered might only reflect those of alumni whose experiences with Miller High had been positive, assuming that only they would be eager to remember and reminisce. Thus I worried I would be missing the perspectives of "drop-outs" and more marginalized students. Then too, while I could identify alumni by gender and race through yearbooks, I could not as easily identify them by economic status. Serendipitously, perhaps beginner's luck, I was able to interview alumni poorer and richer; and while I interviewed only two alumnae who dropped out of Miller High during the early days of integration, those students whose lives were lived at the borders of Miller High, the pregnant girls and the very poor, among others, came into focus obliquely through the recollections of the alumni interviewed.

Entering the worlds of alumni's recollections was at times surrealistic, like entering a cinema theatre to watch a movie in which the protagonist remembers painful scenes, and other actors come in and out of focus, as images shift in the protagonist's mind. That was the case when Doris Right and Annie Cole, two African-American alumnae, the former who graduated in 1958 and the latter who dropped-out the same year, recalled Miller High as a foreign and treacherous place. At other times, it was more like witnessing a confession, as when Robert Heart, a white alumnus who graduated in 1956, confided about having a "chip on his

⁴⁶See Elliot W. Eisner and Alan Peshkin, eds., "Increasing the Generalizability in Qualitative Research" *Qualitative Inquiry in Education* (New York: Teachers College, 1990).

shoulder” for having been ridiculed at school for being poor and fatherless. Sometimes I felt as if I were being appointed “messenger to the world,” one who might tell about a wrong that needed correcting, as when Sophie Baker, white alumna of 1985, warned about male teachers taking advantage of female students. Alumni’s memories were worlds alive, and of consequence. I felt privileged to have been allowed into their worlds. Bourdieu’s thoughts best sum up my feelings and experiences as I interviewed Miller High alumni:

At the risk of shocking both the rigorous methodologist and the inspired hermeneutical scholar, I would willingly say that the interview can be considered a sort of *spiritual exercise*, aiming to obtain, through *forgetfulness of self*, a true *transformation of the view* we take of others in the ordinary circumstances of life. The welcoming disposition, which leads to share the problem of the respondent, the capacity to take her and understand her just as she is, in her distinctive necessity, is a sort of intellectual love...⁴⁷

As “larger issues of inequality and oppression”⁴⁸ persist, there is urgent need to recover possibilities of freedom, and make visible opportunities for self-realization for *all* young people. While I began my study with the belief that integrated schools and the integrated high school in particular, as it harbors minds and energies at the brink of full citizen participation, have the *potential* for being sites of emancipation for *all* students,⁴⁹ the stories alumni shared revealed an institution that over the course of the fifty years remained a holding place for the majority of its students. It remained unrelentingly hierarchical, dividing students into privileged and herded, into

⁴⁷ In Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.239.

⁴⁸ Jeremy Price, *Against the Odds: The Meaning of School and Relationships in the Lives of Six young African-American Men* (Stamford, Connecticut: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 2000) p.7.

⁴⁹ Precisely because it is within the purview of public schools to socially engineer opportunities, “more egalitarian and more open to free choice and possibilities of self-realization” than anything that is at any given point in time available in the broader social realm. David F. Labaree quoting Carnoy and Levin in *How to Succeed in School Without Really Learning* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997) p.49.

girls versus boys, winners and losers, and by the end of the century, into accepted versus expelled. Alumni's testimonies revealed little evidence that Miller High was a place that created an environment conducive to, or supportive of cross-gender, cross-race, cross-ethnic, or cross-economic status relationships, although there were instances sprinkled across time periods, and the one aberrant period of the seventies and early eighties, when students did forge friendships across gender, class and race divides.

Recollections in general revealed a school where the majority of young people were left to their own devices within the spaces of the cafeteria, or within the general tracks across time, to get along or not, with no role-modeling for relating across categories of identity. Some students, in particular those in the general track who lived one foot in the labor market and one foot in school, black and white, and by the late eighties, also Russian immigrant, imported the inequalities and divisions to which they had been exposed.

Violence, in some form or another, always featured in alumni's stories across time-periods; however, by the nineties, incidents of violence, in particular racial violence pervaded alumni's accounts. Alumni's recollections also revealed that students for whom school might have been a rewarding experience in that they succeeded in visible ways, in sports or academically, progressively lost any sense of "school spirit" between the 1950s and the 1990s, suggesting that even generations of those who benefited from the hierarchical system no longer experienced the social rewards of their positions by the end of the century. Proportionately, the role of the *prep*, as the organizer of social events, planner of proms, producer of yearbooks,

which yielded significant social power in the fifties evidenced by the support that students gave with their participation in the preparation and attendance of “prep” orchestrated events, by the nineties seemed a futile role as preps complained about investing so much effort for no attendance. As school spirit diminished, students’ relationships with school authorities, across situated positions, hardened over time, to where by the end of the century, students and teachers, as alumni’s recollections suggested, constructed each other into overarching abstractions, as “the system and the law,” or as rule-abiders and “troublemakers.”

However, alumni’s recollections also revealed more hopeful moments in time. Within the overarching account that told of segregation rather than integration, alumni also told of students who forged friendships across borders of race and class: whether on sports fields or in the upper academic tracks across time periods; or during the hiatus period of the seventies and early eighties, when against the backdrop of a national mood stirred by civil rights movements, many re-created their associations, across racial, class, and even tracking divides.

Demographics also played a crucial role in shaping students’ relationships with school authorities and their possibilities for interactions with peers across diverse backgrounds. Over the course of fifty years, demographic changes toward a more populous student body were met by greater distancing of administrative authorities as they retreated into policing roles. Deployments of increasingly more rigid disciplinary technologies reached their peak in the nineties, with the sudden population explosion which almost overnight transformed Miller High into an overcrowded, multi-racial, multi-ethnic student body of often disparate economic

backgrounds; a student body which included Russian immigrants and African-American youth recently migrated from city schools, young people who had not attended integrated schools. The result was that punitive disciplinary actions were not so much met with compliance as they were met instead with an increase in students' loyalties to each other along ethnic, racial, and even nationalistic divisions.

While by and large the overarching story of the relational nature of Miller High students' experiences over a half-century is one of young people who learned to divide one another even as they were being divided, alumni's recollections suggested three distinct generations of students who, bound in time by different demographic configurations, different levels of school disciplinary measures, and different shades of hierarchy in student-teacher relations, constructed their experiences markedly differently: "The Divided Generation" (1950-1969), "The Border-Crossing Generation" (1970-1985), and "The Re-divided Generation" (1986-2000).

How Miller High students of diverse backgrounds negotiated, organized and carved relational spaces for themselves, with each other and school authorities, is the story of this history. It is the history of one comprehensive high school from students' points of view, as revealed through diverse students' relational experiences. A history that identifies the dynamic interplay between demographics, school disciplinary policies, teacher behavior, the architecture of large herding spaces, and the power of social class in loosening or reinforcing students' self-segregating tendencies. A history further that *problematizes* the comprehensive high school of the second half of the twentieth century⁵⁰ as a devolving institution, progressively more harmful than

⁵⁰ While Miller High remains but one example of a comprehensive high school, its demographic transformations and adoption of ever more punitive disciplinary measures are not unique to it.

helpful to either a democratic [or] capitalist society, in a demographic landscape of accelerated diversity.

The analysis that follows proceeds in three parts: Part I, “The Divided Generation,” is developed in two chapters. In Chapter One, “Dimensions of Difference,” I examine the situated perspectives of Miller High students as young men *or* women, black *or* white, richer *or* poorer, perspectives that proved significant to graduates who attended between 1950 and 1969. In Chapter Two, “Terrains of Freedom,” I analyze the spaces, real and imagined, within which Miller High students of “The Divided Generation” attempted to cross boundaries of race, class and gender, and within which they explored alternate identities, with peers and teachers.

Part II, “The Border-Crossing Generation,” is also developed in two chapters. In Chapter Three, “Affiliations: Jocks, Potheads, Fire-heads, Preps, Musicians and Others,” I examine how students re-organized their identities around shared affinities, which subsumed categories of race, class, and gender, as revealed by those graduates who attended between 1970 and 1985. In Chapter Four, “Hybrid Communities / Bounded Communities,” I analyze how students of “The Border-Crossing Generation” navigated between the various peer-groups; and how this generation experienced greater equality in peer relations than the previous or following generations ever did.

Finally Part III, “The Re-divided Generation,” is also developed, following the organization of the previous two parts, in two chapters. In Chapter Five, “Dimensions of Difference: The Rigid Borders of Religion, Ethnicity, Nationality, Race and Class,” I examine yet another re-organization of student identities,

according to dimensions suggested by the Chapter's title and as revealed by recollections of those who attended between 1985 and 2000. In Chapter Six, "Parallel Worlds," I analyze the reemerged separation between youth groups of "The Re-divided Generation;" and the cultural complexity as well as rigidity that the separation acquired, by the end of the twentieth century, when compared to that experienced by "The Divided Generation" of the fifties and sixties.

I follow the body of analyses with a Summation, a Conclusion, and a Methodological Addendum. In the summation I narrate the salient elements of this history and I provide an uninterrupted story line from which to more readily build concluding remarks. In the Conclusion I discuss the erosion over time of Miller High's capacity to "provide Americans with a social experience that is markedly more egalitarian and more open to free choice and possibilities of self-realization than anything that is available to them in the realm of work."⁵¹ Finally, in the Addendum, I explain the methodological design of this study, and discuss the challenges for data interpretation of what is known among historians engaged in collecting oral histories as *oral history doing*.⁵²

⁵¹ Carnoy and Levin quoted in David F. Labaree, *How to Succeed in School Without Really Learning* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997) p.49.

⁵² See Donald Ritchie, *Doing Oral History* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995).

PART I
THE DIVIDED GENERATION
(1950-1969)

CHAPTER 1

DIMENSIONS OF DIFFERENCE: THE SMALL WORLDS OF RACE, CLASS, AND GENDER (1950-1969)

In the 1950s and 60s, Miller High students attended a school that had been twice renamed and relocated, and several times over built and rebuilt.⁵³ Its history extended into the early decades of the twentieth century, and was punctuated by landmark investments, among which one that in the 1930s transformed Miller Town's older 1914 high school building into the "most modern and best equipped educational plant,"⁵⁴ to be modernized yet again in 1960, as population grew. Throughout its transmutations, it remained a "Main Street" High school, an integral part, both structurally and culturally, of Miller Town, where many of its white middle-class teachers and administrators lived, and students could easily cross paths with school authorities on streets, in grocery stores and in churches. The oldest high school in Merry County, Miller High of the 1950s and 60s was also the only one within a twenty miles radius, a lone educational establishment in the middle of farm country. One alumna remembered funnily how: "There was a farm behind the high school, and every now and then the cows would get out in the fields... you had to watch out where you were running."⁵⁵

⁵³ <Miller> High was first known as <Miller> Academy, founded in 1820. It was renamed <Millertown> High School in the 1840s, and then again <Miller> High, in 1950s. For details about the various site and building transformations of the high school see: C.P., <Miller's> *Century of Progress 1878-1978* (<Miller Town>: C.P., 1978), located in <Miller Town> Library archives.

⁵⁴ *Alumni Directory* (New York: Bernard C. Harris Publishing Inc., 2000) p.ix. The 1930s building is further described as housing: "the widest variety of educational equipment ever seen in this section, making it possible for the school to offer courses of instruction in practically every phase of academic, cultural, commercial, and industrial secondary education."

⁵⁵ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Sherry Parson (1958-1962), p.1.

Miller High students in the fifties inherited an institution with over one hundred years of history⁵⁶ deeply rooted in the white community of Miller Town. This was a high school with long established rituals. Students then and to this day looked forward to: “The ringing of the bell the first day of school...[when] the teacher who had the most tenure rang the bell.”⁵⁷

The equally deep roots of Miller Town’s African American community, which extended into the nineteenth century, ran parallel to those of their white neighbors. Generations of black citizens of Miller Town had owned small businesses, barber shops and shoe repair stores, had trained race horses for wealthy land owners in the area, driven trucks, and provided domestic work for affluent white households.⁵⁸ While they lived mostly clustered along Hard Avenue, a road within easy walking distance from the town’s high school building, Miller Town African Americans, until 1956⁵⁹ when Merry County desegregated its public schools, sent their teenagers on one-and-a-half-hour long bus trips to and from the all black high school in Suntown.

In the nineteen fifties and sixties, when “suburbs replaced cities as the fastest-growing residential sector,”⁶⁰ Miller Town was still a predominantly rural town, and would continue to be so into the early seventies. As one alumna described: “We were

⁵⁶ C.P., <Miller’s> *Century of Progress 1878-1978* (<Miller Town>: C.P., 1978).

⁵⁷ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Sherry Parson (1962), p.11. The bell from the original Academy, built in the early nineteenth century, was preserved and kept in the high school throughout its transmutations. It is presently in a small garden, and it continues to be rung every beginning of school year.

⁵⁸ From conversations with Millie Arms, 85 year-old African-American woman whose family tree extends into the nineteenth century. Also see <Don Louis,> *Holding on to their Heritage* (<BM>: Don Louis, 1996).

⁵⁹ Compared to other counties across the State, and certainly across the nation, Merry County integrated fairly early following Brown versus Board of Education.

⁶⁰See Linda Eiseman, *Higher Education for Women in Postwar America, 1945-1965: Reclaiming the Incidental Student* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press (In Press), p.19.

very middle class white rural...Oh yeah, we used to get called farmers.”⁶¹

Immediately following integration, and into the late seventies, only a handful of African American students would attend Miller High, all of them children of long time established black families of Miller Town whose livelihoods were deeply interconnected with those of their white neighbors, and vice-versa.

Thus throughout the fifties and sixties, Miller High served an overwhelmingly white population within a predominantly rural setting. Accordingly, it offered, until the late sixties, courses in horticulture and animal husbandry, as well as the *Future Farmers of America* club. It also offered extracurricular activities that reflected the broader national politics of the time with concerns for international peace, *The Foreign Exchange* program and the *United Nations Youth Organization*, and others such as *Students for the American Way*, *Future Teachers of America*, *Future Business Leaders of America* and *Future Nurses of America*⁶² that reflected the local demographics, economics and conservative politics. Miller High provided Miller Town’s labor force of farmers, clerks, teachers, laborers and business men⁶³, educated the college bound elite, and served as a center for performances, celebrations, fairs and expositions⁶⁴.

Thus when black students began attending Miller High in 1956, they entered a world that had been comfortably inhabited by a majority of white middle-class students, and their white middle-class elderly teachers, many of whom had careers

⁶¹ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Linda Moss (1965-1969), p. 5.

⁶² From yearbook data.

⁶³ Schools at that time would still hire a high school graduate for teacher, if that graduate promised to acquire a bachelor’s degree through night school. “I could get a job in teaching in Rosemount County without a degree.” Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Dorothy Kaufman (54), p.11.

⁶⁴ Plays were performed not only by students, but by faculty and community members, and would be featured regularly, annual fairs would be held where live stock were presented and goods could be bought, sport matches would be cheered, art work displayed, local musicians would perform, and on.

that extended back to the early decades of the century. White middle-class girls in particular, whom teachers and administrators favored, suffused Miller High with their sensibilities and personalities throughout the fifties and sixties. To understand Miller High students' differently situated experiences during this integration period, one must first understand the high school world that white middle-class girls participated in creating, for it is against the backdrop of that world that white male students', poor students', and black students' experiences contrasted.

White middle-class young women⁶⁵ were at home and at ease at Miller High, an institution that for them held porous boundaries, and which they easily entered and exited. These girls moved in a high school world of fluid roles and organizational structures that sustained easy border crossings between school, community and family life. Student, teacher and staff could swiftly change to errand girl, grandmotherly figure or parental authority. As alumna Dorothy Kaufman remembered, permission slips were readily available:

“Mrs. Smith would invariably say “you want to get out of your study?” Sure. So she’d write a note, and we’d run up to the principal’s office and she’d send us to the drug store to get whatever she needed. I walked right by my father’s grocery store and I waived and he waived back... We’d go buy for her and she’d give us money to have a coke while we were there.”⁶⁶

They attended an institution drenched for them with ancestral memories, where generations of older siblings, mothers and fathers, and even grandparents, lived their high school lives before them;⁶⁷ and they frequented a high school whose principal,

⁶⁵ In order to get a sense of the school climate at Miller High in 1956, I interviewed alumni who graduated in 1954 and 1956. These graduates' experiences covered the full first half of the 50s. For complete list of graduates interviewed across time periods, see Appendix / Methodology.

⁶⁶ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Dorothy Kaufman (1950-1954), p.4.

⁶⁷ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Sandy Eycke (1950-54), p.1: “You had teachers who had taught most all of us. A lot of teachers lived in the community...A lot of them knew parents,

Mr. Lancaster, a “very popular man, both with kids and school...,”⁶⁸ they loved and respected. They lived in a world where their elderly teachers might send their favorite girls on errands to the drug store in the middle of school days for headache pills.⁶⁹

White middle-class adolescent girls at Miller High in the fifties and sixties set the pace and flavor of the school *academically, socially and representationally*. *Academically*, [in that] they worked harder than the boys, filled the ranks of national honors societies,⁷⁰ and never contested assignments, raising thus the bar for achievement, a phenomenon corroborated and reported on by educators of the time.⁷¹ Moreover, they often took care of their male counterparts by offering to do their class work, a habit that would persist into the early eighties. As one alumna remembered:

*“I had a couple of girls in the classroom that would either take notes for me or sometimes they would give me what they had written as their assignment. And I would copy it or I would change it.”*⁷²

They set the tone *socially* in that they were May Queens, Homecoming Queens, and Miss Senior High,⁷³ took over the planning of dances,⁷⁴ filled the majority of student

brothers and sisters. You basically knew everybody and were friendly with everybody.” All alumni interviewed reported as much.

⁶⁸ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Dorothy Kauffman (1950-54), p. 5. All alumni recalled Mr. Lancaster fondly, including African-American alumni.

⁶⁹ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Dorothy Kaufman (1950-1954), p.4.

⁷⁰ Yearbooks consistently reveal a majority of white women in honors society pictures.

⁷¹ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with alumna Robert Heart (1952-56), p.12: “They expected less of the boys...They [the teachers] weren’t going to get anything out of [the boys]...”Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with alumna Judy Law (1950-1954), p.8: “Girls were considered to be smarter”; Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with alumna Alice Web (1950-54), p.7: “Girls were the better students.” Also see James B. Conant, *The American High School Today: A First Report of Interested Citizens* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959), and his second report *The Comprehensive High School: A Second Report* (1967).

⁷² Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Robert Heart (1952-1956), p.4. Tim Whittle, alumna who attended in the late seventies, also recalled girls doing boys’ homework (see Part II / Chapter III).

⁷³ Refer to testimony by Judy Law (1950-1954) in this chapter.

⁷⁴ From testimonies across white alumnae interviewed. When they weren’t planning the dances they participated in decorating and preparing.

council seats,⁷⁵ and could “almost get away with murder.”⁷⁶ Alumna Alice Web recalled how easily she duped her teacher by simply being of “respectable background:”

“I was looked upon as a good kid, and so I could get away with murder...people whose parents were professionals, or who seemed more respectable [narrator gestures quotation marks as she speaks the word “respectable”]...I would miss the bus on purpose to walk to school ‘cause then I’d get there at about ten o’clock and I’d just say ‘Oh, Mrs. Reece I missed the bus again.’ “Alright”, and she’d write me an excuse, you know. And she never said “you sure miss the bus a lot.” You know, I was very rude because nobody stopped me.”⁷⁷

They also set the tone *representationally* in that they overwhelmingly determined the content and layout of the *The Key* yearbooks,⁷⁸ and forged the opinions of *the Miller Chronicle*.⁷⁹ Thus they extolled pride in their school, presented authority figures with reverence, portrayed students fast at work in classrooms, posing for sports or club group pictures facing the camera straight on in orderly rows. Linda Moss, a 1969, captured these young women’s involvement when she shared:

“We were the doers. We were the people that were on the teams, we were the people that were putting out the yearbook, were the people doing that, you know, class officers...Maybe we were snobs, or elitiste, or something like that, but I don’t remember feeling that way...”⁸⁰

⁷⁵ From yearbook data.

⁷⁶ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Alice Web (1950-54), p.10.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Name of yearbook has been changed to protect agreements of confidentiality.

⁷⁹ The name of the newspaper has also been changed to protect agreements of confidentiality.

Yearbooks and alumni’s stories reveal a consistent majority of young women editors, writers and illustrators of yearbooks, as well as editors and writers of the school newspaper. This analysis of yearbooks was inspired by the previous analyses of distribution of students across curricular activities by race and ethnicity conducted by Paul Fass. See Paula Fass, “Creating New Identities: Youth and Ethnicity in New York City High Schools in the 1930s and 1940s,” in *Generations of youth: Youth culture and history in twentieth century America*, eds., J.Austin &M.N.Willard (New York: New York University Press, 1998): 95-117

⁸⁰ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Linda Moss (1965-1969), p.11.

These young women shared an easy transition into a high school where they continued long time friendships established since elementary school, and where authority figures were familiar extensions of parental care.⁸¹ They were also most likely to be chosen to receive awards on behalf of the school, such as the then prestigious *Freedoms Foundation Award*, “organized in 1949 to further the ideals of American democracy...to create a love of freedom...and to build an understanding of the Constitution and The Bill of Rights.”⁸²

While in most every way, as alumnae reported, white middle-class females made Miller High their home, were considered smarter than their male counterparts, were privileged in the responsibilities awarded them, highly visible in almost every social aspect of the school life, intimate with teachers, and even allowed to “get away with murder,” they differed significantly in what they could do with their high school education, and in what a high school diploma meant to them given the track they attended.

For college-bound young middle-class women throughout the fifties and sixties, Miller High, as alumnae recalled, was a stepping stone. Alice Web, graduate of the class of 1954 remembered: “I never questioned that I would go to College...No

⁸¹ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Sandy Eycke (1950-54), p. 1: “A large portion of my class started 1st grade...went all through all twelve grades...everybody went to Miller at some point in my family...You had teachers who had taught most all of us. A lot of teachers lived in the community...A lot of them knew parents, brothers and sisters.” Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Betty Land (1964-1968), p.1.: “My mom is a Miller High graduate as is her mom and dad and parents. So I have a long line of Miller graduates in my family. I have two children of my own that have graduated from Miller High, and I have one there now and one in the middle school.” Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Linda Moss (1965-1969), p.10: “They were role models...the relationships were great...and it was so relaxed but firm, and everybody did what they were supposed to do.”

⁸² *The Key*, 1958, p.74.

question I would go. Anybody who had the money could go.”⁸³ Fifties’ graduates Dorothy Kaufman and Alice Web, and sixties graduates Sherry Parson, Betty Land and Linda Moss, alumnae whose fathers could afford college tuitions, took it for granted that they were going to attend institutions of higher education. While Dorothy applied herself and sought good grades, Alice, bored and restless, did minimal work and misbehaved, still never doubting that college awaited her.

*“If I was interested in the class, then I would pay attention and behave. If there was nothing going on that interested me, I was very apt to get into trouble...⁸⁴There was no pressure to get good grades...never worried about it [about getting into college]”.*⁸⁵

After graduation however, fifties alumnae Alice and Dorothy, and sixties alumnae Sherry and Linda went on to become teachers. The historically documented trend of women enrolling in teacher programs in higher education since the nineteenth century, continued throughout the fifties and sixties in Miller Town.⁸⁶

For lower middle-class adolescent girls with no allotted budget for college, the academic track was not an option. While they may have excelled academically and widely participated in extracurricular activities, not having money for college meant choosing the next best thing, the commercial track. By default they prepared to enter the business world as secretaries or took art classes.⁸⁷

⁸³ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Alice Web (1950-54), p.11.

⁸⁴Ibid., p.4-5.

⁸⁵ Ibid.,p.11.

⁸⁶ Alumnae who graduated in the fifties (Judy Law and Dorothy Kaufman) as well as alumna Linda Moss who graduated in 1969, reported options for women’s employment fairly restricted around secretarial work for non-college bound young women, and teaching and nursing for the college-bound.

⁸⁷ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Sandy Eycke (1950-54), p.4: “I probably would have gone to higher education if we could have afforded it. I think that was by default...if you weren’t going to college, this is what was left.” Some, like Nora Jones, who was artistically inclined, completed their studies within the general track, and availed themselves of an “absolutely wonderful art program...[and] great art teachers.” Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Nora Jones (1955-59), p. 18.

Whether they attended the academic track to eventually become teachers, or the commercial track to be hired as secretaries, looking the middle to upper-middle-class part was of essence. It is because Judy Law was able to look the part and hide her lower-class status that she could be at home at Miller High. She explained how lucky she had been:

“ I was very lucky in one respect, because I was considered to be a cute girl...I was Miss Senior High⁸⁸...My family didn’t have any money and they didn’t have any status. I was lucky in the respect that I had a grandmother that sewed for women in the Valley. I had gorgeous clothes...My family was very poor and they cared about the image they put out in the community. They wanted me to be clean and well dressed.”⁸⁹

While she knew from the start that college was out of reach, Judy, safely camouflaged in her middle-class look, went about being smart, working hard, and getting involved in a myriad of school activities. She shared:

“I was an honor roll student...[in the business track].⁹⁰My best girlfriend and I were selected [by the principal] to accept an award for our school. It was called the Freedom’s Foundation Award. And we went to Valley Forge with our principal. I have a news-clipping of that.”⁹¹

I was involved in student council, I was involved in sports, and I was involved in the Future Business Leaders of America. As I got older I was president of that. Because of my background, coming from a family that didn’t have money, I was not put on that track [referring to academic track]. I always knew that my parents didn’t have the money to send me to college.”⁹²

In general, as the recollections of alumnae interviewed suggested, high school life for middle-class and middle-class-looking young women was an empowering

⁸⁸ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Judy Law (1950-54), p.1.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p.7

⁹⁰ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Judy Law (1950-54), p.1.

⁹¹ Ibid., , p.3.

⁹² Ibid., p.1. Alice Web, in reminiscing about her friend Judy Law, shared: “she didn’t go to college...and she was one of the brightest in the class. She never thought she was going to go to college...we were to a certain extent in our slots.” Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Alice Web (’54), p.11.

experience, whether academically or socially. It provided the social and virtual spaces to practice life roles, some with direct correspondence to adult roles that awaited them, and others with no theatres available for them to play out in the immediate and broader cultures of their times.⁹³ Thus they practiced creating dances to socialize with their male counterparts, actively participated with them in developing “going steady” dating patterns⁹⁴, and immersed themselves in organizing fund raisers and a multitude of social events. Such social skills, practiced throughout their high school years, could then easily be put to use by these young women as future middle-class housewives. Presiding over the *Future Business Leaders of America* club, or being editor of *The Miller Chronicle*, however, held no equivalent positions in the business communities of the time for these young women. Some of them, soon after graduation, felt cheated by such disparities in high school-to-world correspondence, as if they had been lied to.⁹⁵

Miller High was the molding ground for a way of life for these young women. They were supported by a network of older middle class women teachers, who, at the end of their careers, looked the other way when their charges transgressed, often elicited from them granddaughtery behaviors, and spoiled them with privileges and extra money for treats. A network of social players kept things in place for them. As Dorothy explained: “you had all your role models; you had parents, and you had your

⁹³ Carnoy and Levin quoted in David F. Labaree, *How to Succeed in School Without Really Learning* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), p.49.

⁹⁴ Alumni’s recollections echo historian Beth Bailey’s findings regarding the social practice of dating and “going steady”. See Beth Bailey, *From front porch to back seat: Courtship in twentieth century America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).

⁹⁵ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Judy Law (1954): “The biggest negative for me at high school is that it didn’t really prepare me for the real world....it didn’t prepare me question authority.” p.11.

teachers, if you went to church you had those people...it sort of gobbled you up, you know, took you in.”⁹⁶

Judy shared how she “had a lot of encouragement especially from the older women teachers,”⁹⁷ and all alumnae echoed Nora’s testimony when she shared: “Our teachers took interest in us”.⁹⁸

White middle-class and middle-class-looking adolescent girls were *at home* at Miller High, and *made it their home*. They saturated its clubs, extracurricular activities and classrooms with the sights of well groomed appearances, accompanied by semi-docile, semi-mischievous behaviors. They knew the rules well, and knew their teachers’ tolerances well, as one knows one’s parents’ limitations and weaknesses. Their favored position at Miller High was further corroborated by males’ points of view. Alumni Nat Right and Bud Land recalled how:

*“The girls were treated much better than boys. Girls seemed to get the good side of everything. You had an argument, the boy was always wrong. I don’t care what happened. I don’t think I’m being prejudiced. That’s what they showed me. The girls always right no matter what.”*⁹⁹

*“From a male standpoint, you know, they [faculty and administration] were always easier on the girls.”*¹⁰⁰

They navigated the emotional life of school with ease, fluently read the hidden cultural messages of allowable transgressions, and they dexterously manipulated the boundaries of acceptable behaviors across authority figures, and school contexts.¹⁰¹

⁹⁶ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Dorothy Kauffman (1950-54), p.10.

⁹⁷ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Judy Law (1950-54), p. 14.

⁹⁸ Quote from transcript of audiotape of group interview with Nora Jones and Lou-Anne Kensington (1955-59 and 1953-57), p. 11.

⁹⁹ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with African-American alumnus Nat Right (1957-1963), p.2.

¹⁰⁰ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with white alumnus Bud Land (1964-1968), p.7.

¹⁰¹ Refer to Alice Web’s description of purposefully missing the bus and never being reprimanded for it, earlier cited.

Dorothy captured the level of comfort that these young women enjoyed in the presence of authority figures when she fondly recalled the time when she and her future husband skipped school to see a basketball game only to meet with Mr. Lancaster who had stepped out of his principal role to be the ice cream vendor:

...championship basketball game came up between Miller and I think it was in Kenwood...So, my husband and I were dating at that point and we decided we were going to go to the game...So we took off and there's Mr. Lancaster [the principal] standing there and he says: "Now Jim and Dorothy, enjoy the game, I'll see you tomorrow in detention. By the way, I'm selling ice cream." [Doris laughs heartily].¹⁰²

They judged teachers' professional skills apart from their personalities, and confidently assessed their abilities regardless of teachers' pleasant or unpleasant dispositions.¹⁰³ Whether instrumentally "good" or "bad", the girls could count on their teachers paying attention to them, and helping them. However, while they shared the world of appearance, of comfortable relationships with authority figures, and possibilities for self-expression and leadership roles within Miller High, they did not necessarily share the meanings of their attendance.

For the fifties graduate Judy Law whose parents were poor, the daily escape from isolation and boredom of country life, opportunities to practice being someone else, and the welcoming atmosphere created by teachers and administrators, made going to school an experience of deliverance,¹⁰⁴ and the high school diploma *was* the

¹⁰² Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Dorothy Kaufman (1950-54), p.6.

¹⁰³ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Alice Web (1950-54), p.6. "...the English teachers that I had were really, really good and social studies...but the math was just rote...math and science was not well taught...I would have been really interested in biology...I had Mr.B. whom everybody loved, but he was not a good teacher."

¹⁰⁴ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Judy Law (1950-54), p. 2-3:"For me it was a saving grace to be able to come to school. I got to dress up and came to school all pretty and clean in something my grandmother had made me...I traveled. I mean, it was travel from the country to the city...Oh, it was a big social time."

social stamp of approval of her indisputable rights to autonomy.¹⁰⁵ For non-college bound young women like Judy, the high school diploma not only attested to one's official crossing into adult status, but also brought honor to the young adult's family, elevating her in the eyes of the community. Parents whose child graduated from high school were vindicated for past failings, and simultaneously acknowledged for the shared success in their daughter's achievements.¹⁰⁶

For Dorothy and Alice who were college-bound, high school was a place to have fun on the way to college. While Dorothy worked hard, "two to three hours in the evening, and homework on the weekend,"¹⁰⁷ and assiduously practiced for music recitals and theatre plays, she enjoyed every moment of it. It was a time when she met her future husband with whom she participated in theatre productions. Alice, on the other hand, took advantages of her advantages and got into mischief. She confided: "I'd say come on, we can do it...so we'd sneak off and go swimming, or sneak off and go to the drugstore and get a soda."¹⁰⁸ For sixties college-bound graduate Sherry, high school was as a "rite of passage that you have to go through", one that she thoroughly enjoyed and during which she "gained good friendships...learned [her] academics [and] to get along with others, leadership skills, those kind of things."¹⁰⁹ For Betty, it was her group of friends that made high school a good experience, and

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 12: "[The diploma] meant that I had a job. And that I was free...to leave home. That was what it meant to me. My freedom. When they think of freedom most people think of it as a patriotic thing. I think of it as a very personal thing."

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p.13. "It was a big deal that I graduated...I think it gave them an elevated level of prestige. My father wanted me to graduate because he never had, my mother wanted me to graduate because it was her school and because, I guess, it reflected on her in some way."

¹⁰⁷ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Dorothy Kaufman (1950-54), p7.

¹⁰⁸ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Alice Web (1950-54), p.10.

¹⁰⁹ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Sherry Parson (1958-1962), p.6.

for Linda, it was the support of the faculty and learning that she could “succeed at stuff.”¹¹⁰

Whether serious students or not, they shared fun times, at ease with themselves and their environment. These were confident young women for whom, “it was a very nice status quo community,”¹¹¹ “really a great place.”¹¹² They lived as elite students in the rarified air of the top of the hierarchical totem pole. Dorothy explained that:

*“In those days... if you didn’t go academic, it almost infringed upon your intelligence... People who go to college are it... Of course that’s not true, but then...”*¹¹³

For them, school spirit soared at Miller High,¹¹⁴ and graduation was “pomp and circumstance,” an acknowledgement of their indisputable appurtenance to Miller High.¹¹⁵

By contrast, some white girls did not feel “tied to” Miller High. Girls who got pregnant, girls with learning disabilities and poor girls often dropped out. Indirect

¹¹⁰ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Linda Moss (1965-1969), p.11. “I had a good support system with the advisors...our newspaper advisor had a big impact on me...my coach, she was a great role model. So I learned a lot of self confidence that way...I learned to work hard...it was good for me...I’m a better person for it.”

¹¹¹ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Dorothy Kaufman (1950-54), p.4.

¹¹² Ibid., p.2.

¹¹³ Ibid. Also, quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Alice Web (1950-1954), p.10: “Every time you had a class, she’d rearrange the class, and the person that got the best grade on the test would sit in the first seat in the first row. And then, it would go all the way to the person that got the worse grade in the back of the room...I guess that shows you the advantage that the bright kids had, and very often the bright kids were also the ones who had more advantages at home too. And got more support at home.”

¹¹⁴ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Betty Land (1964-1968), p.4: “Every Friday we had basketball, boys’ basketball and that was really a big thing then. And everybody would go to the games¹¹⁴...Big school spirit. And we always had the cheerleaders. We always had a girl that was dressed up like an...”; Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Linda Moss (1965-1969), p.10: “We had great plays. We had great pep rallies.” Dorothy Kaufman (’54), Nora Jones (’59) and Sherry Parson (’63) reported as much.

¹¹⁵ Also, from transcript of audiotape interview with Alice Weber (1950-1954), p.16: “And we all knew the whole story of graduation and we all just loved it, you know, the pomp and circumstance of it. We sang “I’ll never walk alone”...it was a tradition...I knew it was a place I was really tied to, it was part of my life”

descriptions of their lives, through others' remembered accounts, sketched vague impressions of timid young girls lost, alone, with no place to fit in.¹¹⁶ Pregnant girls were gossiped about, and whether they disappeared or graduated, they lived a peripheral life in the memories of solidly integrated white girls. Usually more than one girl got pregnant by senior year. The boys who impregnated the girls remained anonymous in narrators' remembered accounts, accounts that well capture the already historically and sociologically explored onus on women of the time period for getting pregnant.¹¹⁷

If you couldn't dress the part and appear middle class trim and proper, you were not included. Teachers' support and encouragement, generously lavished on girls who played their parts, were withheld from those who "might not dress well...[and] smelled bad."¹¹⁸ Familiarity, intimacy and trust, easily extended to the "right looking" girls, were denied to the visibly poor. Obliquely, through Alice Web's memory, situated in a middle-class perspective, the very poor came to view:

*"...the poor kids...who might not...dress well and so on...smelled bad...there was a kind of snobbery about the poor kids. They [the poor] were people who lived in shacks. The teachers didn't try to bring them out...people would talk about poor kids having bugs and that kind of stuff...when they'd do the hair to check the lice, it was always the poor kids who would have the lice, and they would smell funny."*¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Dorothy Kaufman (1950-54), p.3. "I do remember one girl who...dropped out. Because her parents insisted that she [girl with learning disability] be allowed to come to school and to, you know, have the social experience. She was a sweet heart. But she was so lonely, you could tell she was lonely because she wouldn't come join in, unless you went to get her. You know, she didn't have the confidence."

¹¹⁷ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Alice Web (1950-54), p.8: "...there was one girl who was pregnant when we graduated, but she was wild, you know...everybody knew she was wild...She was like four or five months pregnant...That was Lancaster. I don't know if any other principal at that time would have done it [allowed her to graduate];" Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Dorothy Kaufman('54), p.6: "...one pregnant girl...just disappeared"; Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Linda Moss (1965-1969), p.4: "There were pregnant girls in our class. Was pretty scandalous."

¹¹⁸ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Alice Web (1950-54), p. 3.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

Among those shunned by students and teachers were the poorer white farm boys. Within the predominantly rural community of Millertown, farm boys represented a significant portion of the student population. However, while Miller High offered agricultural classes and the Future Farmers of America Club, raised its own pigs and sponsored the yearly fall fair where stock could be displayed,¹²⁰ predominantly those young men whose fathers were landowners took advantage of these activities. Boys who would not be inheriting a big farm, and for whom training to show prized cattle, or choosing the best fertilizers for crops was not useful, visited school between jobs. While middle-class boys whose fathers could afford college wore “khakis and...drove their daddie’s cars,”¹²¹ James Dean look-alikes like alumnus Robert Heart wore jeans and white under-shirts with rolled-up sleeves, where they tucked in their cigarettes, and drove their bikes to school until they mustered enough money to rebuild old beat-up cars. High school was not a priority for Robert Heart and his friends. They could get through it by just showing up. Robert explained: “I could care less about school...I said: I’m not going to college. So I don’t care what I do. I just need to get out, okay?...Just show up.”¹²²

Robert’s recollections of his high school experiences and of those of his friends revealed that the lives of poor farm boys revolved around jobs that made ends meet. There was barely any time to catch-up on sleep, let alone school work.¹²³ For

¹²⁰ Descriptions found in transcript of audiotape interview with Nora Jones (1955-59), p.9; also in yearbooks 1954;1958;1962.

¹²¹ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Robert Heart (1952-1956), p.9.

¹²² Ibid., pgs. 7-8. Robert also reflected on his friends being in the same circumstances.

¹²³ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Robert Heart (1952-1956), p.3:“ I would go on my paper route from 1 to 3 o’clock in the morning. Come home, grab a couple of hours sleep, then milk 6 cows from 5:30 to 6:30, then go to school. Get off school. Go home, milk 6 cows and then work for Shellborn in Miller Town at the gas station, from 7 to 11 at night...I did that every day. And

these young men, school was a system to endure, retaliate against, reject, feel embarrassed about, or humiliated by. At their best, they suffered teachers, at their worst, they fought them. As Robert put it: “I had a teacher that kicked me out of his class three times... And he had a Volkswagen...And we just picked the Volkswagen [up] and put it on the front steps of the school...”¹²⁴ Pride gave some a Hollywood-like bravado as they punched out the villain teachers, and sometimes walked off into the sunset, vindicated, off to become successful entrepreneurs, never to return to the old stomping grounds. Remembering one of his more aggressive friends, Robert shared:

*“The phys.ed. teacher...kept picking on us... and he screams at us, and you know, take three more. And I said, I can’t do it. I’m going to work...So we just walked off the field. So he came over and he got in one of the guy’s face, and the guy smacked him and broke his nose, walked right out of the school, and kept on going. He never came back...he is a very successful business man right now.”*¹²⁵

These young men studied in the general track, and took shop courses. It was in “shop” that Robert and many of his friends found a school authority who spoke their language, a male authority figure that simultaneously appealed to their rough edge, and nurtured their talents.¹²⁶ Many, too, learned early on to fight and fend for

then, when the weekends came around, I would help on the weekend paper. That’s what I did. That’s how I got through high school...I was always sleepy....” Also, p.10: “Most of the farm boys didn’t have time to do their homework...They knew we didn’t do it...We only got to learn what’s in the class.”

¹²⁴ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Robert Heart (1952-1956), p.11.

¹²⁵ Ibid. There was also a sexual edge to these boys from which they did not shy away, and for which, as “red blooded American boys,” they expected to be understood. From transcript p.13: “I got kicked out of one my English classes and I got sent to the principal’s. And he asked me: “What is going on in that classroom for you to be kicked out?” I said. All of the boys are sitting in the front of the classroom...she wanted us to sit in the front of the classroom. And she sits on the desk swinging her legs. Now, none of us could concentrate on anything...So he walked down the hall. She was sitting on the desk with the boys in front. Well, after that I had no problems with her. I still got a D...They liked to pick on the farm boys...their dads weren’t educated.”

¹²⁶ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Robert Heart (1952-1956), p.5 and 17: “One of my favorite teachers was the shop teacher...He covered for us all the time...He got me through high

themselves. Robert Heart, whose father's death forced his mother to be on welfare for seven years while she cleaned churches, and who remembered coming home from school "and having to take the shoes off and go barefooted because you only had one pair of shoes"¹²⁷, recalled:

"I used to show up at the bus stop, and there was all these seniors...I was always the guy being picked on...they would throw my books over the fence and make me climb over the fence and get them [just before the bus would come]...I was the littlest guy...My mother said to me "...you have to learn to fight for yourself..."¹²⁸

Poor farm boys learned to retaliate when they were picked on and they were picked on a lot. When peers called them "rednecks and hillbilly,"¹²⁹ they "...would end up knocking the living hell out of them."¹³⁰ Major fights usually happened "on the front lawn of the school."¹³¹ When reflected through the perspectives of those who called some poor farm boys "hillbillies," these were bigoted youth who hated blacks. Sherry Parson remembered:

"Hoo. The fights that went on. There was a bar named Franky's and it was kind of unsavory...and it usually was between a black person and a hillbilly, that's what we called them back then."¹³²

The African-American alumnus Nat Right identified the white student who had knocked his teeth out, as we shall see later in greater detail, as a "hillbilly":

"But honest, when I became an adult, I probably would have hurt him. I thank God our paths did not cross...I forgave him... Not being accepted by the

school...Instead of spending two hours in detention, he would say: "Come down here I need you. I need this work done. I need you to draw the floor plan...So I would go down to the shop class, sit at the drawing table and draw...He got me pretty much through high school...He'd say "I'd love to grab you by the ear and say this is what you have to do to get out of here." He helped me through a lot."

¹²⁷ Ibid., p.1.

¹²⁸ Ibid., p.2.

¹²⁹ Quote from transcript of audiotape of interview with African-American alumna Annie Cole (1957-'59), p.11.

¹³⁰ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Robert Heart (1952-1956), p.15.

¹³¹ Ibid., p.15.

¹³² Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Sherry Parson (1958-1962), p.6.

whites or blacks, see, that's where they're coming from. We [the blacks] had a hard time being accepted by the whites. They [the hillbillies] had a double stance. See what I'm saying?¹³³ The hillbillies were supposed to be the lower class whites. I can't think of any other way to say it. That was the way it was."¹³⁴

The racism of some of these white boys would be alluded to by alumni across time periods. They were boys who grew up tough and became sensitized to class differences.¹³⁵ Still, while some dropped-out, more at ease in the work place where they spent most of their time and reaped needed monetary rewards, incentives that found no equivalent match in school, many did graduate. For those who stayed, attendance and diploma were about beating the system and proving one's endurance. Robert shared: "I was determined to be there and to finish the system, even if I had to beat the system somehow."¹³⁶ Paradoxically, and in hindsight, as Robert's memories revealed, Miller High was also a place that anchored his life, no matter how unappealing, not unlike a military service.

"I mean, what would I be, who would I be if I didn't go to some kind of school that gave you some regimentation. You know, something that you had [narrator's vocal emphasis] to do, something that forced you to do. Some place that took you to an end."¹³⁷

¹³³ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Nat Right (1958-1963), p.10.

¹³⁴ Ibid., p.7.

¹³⁵ Robert Heart shared how he would try mimicking the ways of those with money. He was acutely aware of being shunned by those whom he called "upper-class" people; and he tried to date "rich" girls who continually refused him. It is essential to underscore that while Robert was a poor farm boy most likely to be called "redneck," Robert himself never alluded to the fact that anyone called him "hillbilly" or "redneck." Instead, he consistently referred to himself as a "poor farm boy." It is also essential to point out that while farm boys, across time periods, were remembered as "hillbillies," and "rednecks," and revealed by alumni as racist, that there was no evidence I could find in Robert Heart's recollections to suggest that he was a racist farm boy. It is equally important to note that Robert graduated in summer of 1956, a couple of months before integration.

¹³⁶ Ibid., p.9.

¹³⁷ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Robert Heart (1952-1956), pgs. 20-21. Suggestions of high school as a prison-like or regimented place were echoed by other white lower-class male students across time periods, in particular Tim Whittle, graduate of 1981 (see Part II / Chapter III).

School was not only a daily battle with some peers, but also with teachers, “teachers who wouldn’t bend for [one].”¹³⁸ Unlike the “right-looking” white adolescent girls who often wrapped teachers around their fingers, white farm boys felt “picked on” by them.

*“They would call on you four times in the class, knowing that you didn’t know any of the first questions. And he would continue calling on you for the rest of the day. Trying to make a fool out of you...they were picking on us [farm boys].”*¹³⁹

For them, teachers’ personalities and attitudes toward students were inextricably linked to their efficacy as teachers. While middle-class white girls could have a personal rapport with teachers and still consider their teaching ineffective, working class farm boys expected a teacher to be at once personable, compassionate and understanding, as well as be able to deliver differentiated instruction. These young men did not separate a teacher’s personal and professional personas.¹⁴⁰ They attended Miller High not as recipients of instruction, but as critical consumers of its deliverance. For them teachers were not familiar people one was to please or receive praise from, but paid agents of a system that owed them.¹⁴¹

Other white males of Miller High who were not headed for college, were not part of the academic track, and who were not necessarily farm boys, lived their high

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Robert Heart (1952-1956), p.8.

¹⁴⁰ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Robert Heart (1952-1956), p.8: “If you made a mistake at the beginning of the first problem, you failed it...and then you would go back and do the problem, but he wouldn’t do the problem for the speed of the slowest. He would do the problem for the speed of the fastest...So I failed his class...So I switched to Mrs. Hill, and she knew where I was coming from, o.k., [fatherless farm boy on welfare]...and then all of a sudden it makes sense...that’s what she did and I got threw it with no problems.” This memory illustrates the allowances Robert expected precisely because of his life circumstances.

¹⁴¹ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Robert Heart (1952-1956), p.11: “[We were] telling the teachers—look, we’re going to school. Care about us. We may not be paying attention, but we are going to school.”

school career on the edge of their classroom seats, ready to spring out of them when the local Fire Department alarm went off. Not one teacher stopped these young men from exiting, sometimes through school windows,¹⁴² when the alarm in town rang. There was a tacit understanding that they would be indispensable to the town in the near future as volunteer firefighters, and therefore, should be excused without question from school in the immediate present. Still other white males missed school during hunting seasons,¹⁴³ yearly rituals inherited from earlier times, and so thoroughly integrated into the cultural expectations of the community, that again, no penalties were exacted for missing school on those days. These were often boys who became the local firemen, mechanics and construction workers.

Miller High school was not a place that working class white adolescent men made their own, rather it was a place they visited, a place where middle-class and middle-class- looking white girls ruled, and where in care-taking fashion they often did homework for their male counterparts. Robert summed up the white boy-girl divide when he recalled how teachers “expected less of the boys...[and] they weren’t going to get anything out of [the boys]...”¹⁴⁴

In general, poorer white male students lived on the edge of Miller High School boundaries, often missing classes to work, serve as firefighters in training, or go hunting with their fathers. While some had it harder than others, they were expected to find work in the community after graduation.¹⁴⁵ Overwhelmingly too, they filled the general track; as one alumna recalled: “it was mostly the guys that

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Robert Heart (1952-56), p.12.

¹⁴⁵ Alumni’s accounts revealed the quick integration into the community labor force of Miller High graduates.

were in the general with shop.”¹⁴⁶ It was the track that in the fifties and sixties was considered by those students who did not attend it to be a dumping ground for the unable and the unwilling student. Bud Land, who had been college-bound, described how general track was meant: “... for those who were just going to go out and work as laborers. They were the slower kids and the ones that didn’t really care about what they were doing.”¹⁴⁷ Bud’s testimony¹⁴⁸ suggested that middle class students at Miller High in the fifties and sixties had integrated the notion that those attending the general track were naturally inferior. Ironically, Bud’s own memories revealed a young man disinterested in the school curriculum, one who could not wait to get out of Miller High.¹⁴⁹

Bud Land and his friends were part of a group of white male students who lived through the academic track with ease and nonchalance. Although college-bound, they felt no pressures to prove themselves. Bud shared how he “didn’t always do what [he] was supposed to...”¹⁵⁰ But he knew how far he could deviate from the “conformist” behavior of those he identified as white females, among them his future wife and her friends,¹⁵¹ before he turned into a seeming “radical.” By the end of the sixties, a group of white male students, as Bud remembered, were “really out there...they were the ones that were experimenting with some of the drugs...[had]

¹⁴⁶ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Sherry Parson (1958-1962), p.5.

¹⁴⁷ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Bud Land (1964-1968), p.6.

¹⁴⁸ Refer also to Dorothy Kaufman’s earlier cited quote: “In those days... if you didn’t go academic, it almost infringed upon your intelligence...People who go to college are it...”

¹⁴⁹ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Bud Land (1964-1968), p9-10: “I had had it [with high school]. Literature? I don’t want to use it at all. I don’t want to deal with it. Where is it going to fall into my life?”

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., p.3.

¹⁵¹ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Bud Land (1964-1968), p.3: “Betty went along with the very conforming group... You can look at the yearbooks and see Betty and her friends hanging around in 9th grade, and it’s the same group in twelfth grade...” Betty, as earlier discussed was part of the white middle-class girls who understood themselves to be, as Linda Moss expressed: “the doers”.

long hair...really long hair...the radical group.”¹⁵² These radicals were part of the general track, as Bud recalled. Just as other alumni recalled, Bud’s testimony also revealed that tracking determined one’s associations: “All the time. That was one thing about school. You just moved through with the same group.”¹⁵³

Bud, a white male college-bound graduate of the late sixties who put little effort into his studies, shared with Robert Heart, a poor white male graduate of the late fifties who barely attended school, a perception of teachers as representatives of a system that ultimately did not side with students. Bud recalled: “It was always us versus them—teachers and administrators. I don’t remember the teacher getting in trouble for anything. The teacher was the administration, and then there were the students.”¹⁵⁴ White males of the fifties and sixties, whether rich enough to go to college or poor, in the academic track or the general track, as recollections suggested, identified themselves as students *against* teachers. White middle-class girls identified themselves as students *with* teachers. In either case, these young people spoke of their place in school in reference to teachers, and as such, reflected on their place in high school as *students*. Alumni’s testimonies suggested that white males, such as Robert and Bud, who were poor¹⁵⁵ students, and who perceived a strong bias on behalf of school authorities in favor of girls, tended to develop more or less antagonistic relationships with teachers. For them, high school was irrelevant to life, and its teachers, out of touch with students.

¹⁵² Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Bud Land (1964-1968), p.3.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 7.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 17.

¹⁵⁵ “Poor” does not refer here to economic background.

For black students entering Miller High in 1956 however, school was anything but irrelevant. The first generation of black students who attended Miller High in the first five years or so immediately following Merry County's 1956 implementation of desegregation, reported absorbing a swell of suspicion, and in some cases, outright animosity. The first years of desegregation at Miller High were particularly difficult for black female students.

African-American alumnae Annie Cole and Doris Wright entered, in 1956, an institution forced by law to teach them. Unlike their white female counterparts who experienced an easy transition into high school, Annie and Doris recalled living through a traumatic border-crossing, the pains of which scarred their memories. Abruptly uprooted from the all black school they had been attending, they entered an institution with a foreign tradition and alien history. It was 'like being in another world.'¹⁵⁶ Annie vividly recalled the first day at Miller High:

*"So this particular day...the principal at Washington High said "everyone that rides the Miller Town bus from grades 7 to 11, I want you to go to the auditorium, and he said we were to get on the bus and don't ask questions...we did come back to Miller Town and the bus turned into Miller High...so we all went to the auditorium and he [Mr. Lancaster] said: "this is the school you will be attending". My heart went Oh God. I was terrified."*¹⁵⁷

The fearful experience sealed in them, longings for the comforts of *their* traditions and a sense of home as they knew it. Annie and Doris remembered missing their old school.

"I missed Washington so much. Oh boy. The programs we had, and the different things we did, and sometimes, we even could walk and get a hamburger, and do different things. But it wasn't like that here [at Miller

¹⁵⁶ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Doris Right (1956-58), p. 1.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., p.1.

High]...It was more stiff [at Miller High]... ”¹⁵⁸ I think I would have rather graduated from Washington because I had been there from 7th grade.”¹⁵⁹

Unlike the fluid ways in which white adolescent girls traveled Miller High’s social and academic boundaries, African American adolescent girls, as Annie reported, were restricted, their behaviors tightly bound to performance in a nonsense, business-like fashion: “learn and behave.”¹⁶⁰ To them, Miller High felt strict and harsh, devoid of warmth, emotionally disconnected from the familiar. Its boundaries were rigid, and hard to penetrate, so hard that, as Annie’s recollection suggested, black moms did not visit:

“My mom used to bring lunches and hot dogs...and she would make cake and bring it to us [at the old school]...it wasn’t that kind of atmosphere at Miller High. It was strictly a learning thing. You just had to learn and behave.”¹⁶¹

Annie walked the hallways fearfully, assailed with spit and unsavory handling by white male students. She spent her energies protecting her body and her feelings, all the while having “to learn and behave.” Going to an all white school took every ounce of effort, took a lot, and finally took too much. Annie dropped out after about a year and a half. She remembered the assaults:

“There was a whole lot of name calling and spitting on you...They had stairways...you’d go all the way down and you could feel the spit drop on your head and people [boys] would feel your behind, and you know, my mom used to starch and iron my blouse...and it would be ink all over...I couldn’t stand it... You know, I left. I graduated from home.”¹⁶²

¹⁵⁸ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Annie Cole (1956-57), p. 3.

¹⁵⁹ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Doris Right (1956-58), p.4.

¹⁶⁰ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Annie Cole (1956-57), p.3

¹⁶¹ Ibid, p. 3.

¹⁶²Ibid., p.3-4.

Now and then however, as Doris recalled, a black girl might be tentatively greeted by a white girl timidly reaching out across the racial divide, more in symbolic gesture than actual friendly contact:

*“...she [white adolescent girl student] used to wave at me [Doris makes the gesture of hand waving timidly with elbow glued to the side of the body], because she was afraid to really talk to me because some of the [white] kids didn’t want her to talk to us...”*¹⁶³

It was within classrooms and during physical education that black teenage girls, as alumnae recalled, found safer spaces, moments of intimacies with some teachers, and moments of equanimity with other teachers whose standards for, and behaviors toward students remained equal, regardless.¹⁶⁴ Subject instruction and teachers’ personalities were two separate experiences for Annie and Doris, just as they were for white middle-class or middle-class-looking girls as earlier shown. Whether a teacher was liked or not, strict or not, did not determine students’ assessments of the teacher’s instructional abilities. However, unlike the experiences of white-middle-class girls for whom neither help nor instruction were ever denied, regardless of the quality of instruction, or personalities involved, access to teachers was often denied to black young women, as it was to the visibly poor white women. For Annie, relationships with teachers were uneven. Within the engineered racial

¹⁶³ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Doris Right (1956-1958), p. 3.

¹⁶⁴ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Doris Right (1956-1958), p.4: “My experiences with the teachers were great. As far as I knew them, I had no problems with the teachers, they appeared very helpful, especially Miss R., whom I understand is deceased now..[Then there was] Miss T. was her name. She was my speech teacher...she made¹⁶⁴ me talk...she was a sweet lady, she really was.” Also, Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Annie Cole (1956-57), p. 6: “I was a good baseball player. And the gym teachers liked me a lot...Mrs. Streesby, she was a very nice teacher. She was one of the teachers that you could go and talk to. And she didn’t take sides with anybody. She didn’t like nobody to be called names, and you did get in trouble if you called names and she heard you. She was good like that...But it was a few of them.”

encounter¹⁶⁵ of the time, and within an all white school with a long history of being “nicely status quo,”¹⁶⁶ an African American adolescent girl might be denied instruction altogether, not just given poor instruction, because she was black:¹⁶⁷

“I remember my home economics teacher. She wouldn’t help me with my work and I just felt out of place... But would say: “I’m busy now. You’ll have to wait until I get to you.” But that day never came.¹⁶⁸ If you knew an answer to a question...and if you wanted to know something from the teacher, and you raised your hand to participate in the class, you never got called on. Never.”¹⁶⁹

Doris and Annie moved through an unpredictable, unstable, contradictory and somewhat surrealistic world inside the walls of Miller High, where peers might assault them on their way to classes, or reach out through secret, timid hand signals. Where teachers might support and receive their confidences, or withhold instructional assistance. They were *not at home* at Miller High, a shifting, *Alice in Wonderland* sort of place. Doris and Annie described:

“...going to an all white school is like being in another world...No, it was just like you were in another world. [Doris shakes her head in disbelief and wonderment].”¹⁷⁰

“Some of the teachers understood, and some of them didn’t and some of them just didn’t give a damn...just very uncomfortable situation.¹⁷¹ It was like everybody had to do this thing because the law said so...And that’s the way it was. It wasn’t because we’re happy. No...it was very hard.”¹⁷²

¹⁶⁵ “It was like everybody had to do this because the law said so.” Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Annie Cole (1956-57), p.5

¹⁶⁶ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Dorothy Kaufman (1950-54), p.4.

¹⁶⁷ Again a parallel could be established with the aversion that white middle-class teachers felt for the lice-infested white poor students who smelled bad. An interesting array of “bodily criteria” for inclusion into the “nicely status quo” society emerges that might inspire a history of body image. Thus a black skin would not pass muster at all; and if the skin was white, it would have to be devoid of smells.

¹⁶⁸ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Annie Cole (1956-57), p.6.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p.5.

¹⁷⁰ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Doris Right (1956-1958), pages 1 and 3.

¹⁷¹ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Annie Cole (1956-57), p.2.

¹⁷² Ibid.

When teachers did nothing to correct and punish white students' verbal or other assaults on them, Doris actively practiced blocking these students' behaviors out of awareness, while Annie sought the help of the principal.

"I don't remember the cafeteria. Some of the things you just blocked out. I don't remember the cafeteria at all..."¹⁷³ I can do it, I can block out everything around me, and I think I must have been doing it at an early age. Hate to tell you, they'd sit there, talk to me and I didn't hear. I can block things."¹⁷⁴

"I used to go to the principal. And he used to say to me: "You're doing very well, you're very intelligent." But that wasn't what I was there for, you know... "what you need to do is just try to overcome all of this...It's only a handful of you all, and it's two hundred and some white kids." He said. "It's just going to be hard for me to control this. So what you have to do is just try to overlook it all." So I did for a long while. I couldn't, I just couldn't. I left."¹⁷⁵

As Annie recalled, the principal, handcuffed by "some of the families that had been in the community helping the school"¹⁷⁶ for years, didn't do much publicly to help change school-wide racist attitudes. Individually however, he praised black students' works, and made public their achievements through honor rolls.¹⁷⁷

African American young women, in the early days of integration, unlike their white middle-class female peers who outshined their male counterparts, academically and socially, lived in the shadow of their male counterparts, who protected them,

¹⁷³ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Doris Right (1956-58), p.3

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., p.9.

¹⁷⁵ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Annie Cole (1956-'57), p.2.

¹⁷⁶ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Annie Cole (1956-57), p.4: "You know, the parents, the white parents had been there for years. Some of the families been in the community helping the school. It wasn't much he could do. He tried. He made things as comfortable as he could for us. I give him that."

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., p.9.: "I'll tell you what made me really, really feel good. When I was sitting in my classroom one day and Mr. Lancaster called me over the intercom. Told the teacher: "Could you please send Miss Cole down to the office." I said, Oh my God, what have I done? I was trying to remember what I did wrong...He said come in Miss Cole...have a seat and relax and just have a seat and sit down." I said Okay. And so he says to me "I'm very proud of you." I said "Why? What did I do?" He said "You're very bright and you're doing a very beautiful job...I'm going to put you on the Honor Roll...You keep up the good work. I know it's hard, but you're doing a wonderful job. You keep doing what you are doing." So I remember that. That stuck with me."

chided them, and attracted greater attention.¹⁷⁸ Annie remembered going to her track star brother for help regarding a bully white boy:

“Sam DiPaglia. I remember him. He used to bother me all the time. He used to punch me in my back you know...I went and told my brother. My brother said “stop whining, don’t whine, just ignore him.” But he kept on doing it. So I said you’ve got to help me. So he [brother] went and told him and he [Sam DiPaglia] finally stopped...all I had to do was tell [my brother] who was bothering me and he would go to that person and [that person] would stop... My brother, he got along fine with everybody. They loved him because he was the track star.”¹⁷⁹

For Annie and Doris, Miller High was an imposed exile from the comfortable and familiar, a place where one daily braved humiliations and faced potential bully assaults to the body. They navigated the emotional life of school wearily, spending most of their affective energies in self-protection. The moments spent with a friendly principal, teacher or peer, were far fewer when compared to white middle-class and middle-class-looking girls’ easy interactions. None of the black young women studied in the academic track during the early years of integration, although they would begin to by the mid-sixties.¹⁸⁰ Moreover none of them, like almost all of the poorer white students,¹⁸¹ participated in after school activities. Some worked after school; others were required to head home directly as a measure of protection.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁸ Beyond Annie Cole’s recollections, and those of African-Alumnus David Randle, graduate of 1976 (see Part II / Chapter III) informal talks with women and men of Miller Town’s African-American community revealed a tendency, into the early eighties, for black women to have less of a social life at Miller High than their male counterparts. As reported by males and females alike, black women often forewent extracurricular activities and deeper school involvement because they were called to assume care-taker duties early on for the family.

¹⁷⁹ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Annie Cole (1956-1957), p.4.

¹⁸⁰ Bios accompanying senior pictures were examined in yearbooks for “tracking”.

¹⁸¹ The white student Judy Law (1950-54) recalled: “Because I lived outside of town I had to depend on the bus to take me back and forth...it was very difficult for me to do anything after school and I usually didn’t...we had one car and my father worked seven days a week...” Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Judy Law, p.5.

¹⁸² Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Annie Cole (1956-57), p.7: “I worked after school. And I used to leave from school and walk to Emory Grove and I used to clean the cottages over there...a couple of days a week...I was tired when I was finished because I had to walk back

While they shared the anxieties wrought by tenuous relationships with authority figures and peers, and together walked a foreign school world, one they did not visit after school hours, they differed in how much of the Miller school life they wanted, and in their willingness to forge ahead. For Annie, the emotional price exacted for attending Miller High, regardless of her academic achievements, was too high, and the diploma was best acquired in the safety of her home. Thus “dropping out,” for Annie, was not a reflection on her poor academic standing, but rather, a strategy for protecting her emotional integrity.¹⁸³ The energies of the black female honor roll student who had “to learn and behave” while her dignity was daily assailed in school, who was also the babysitter at home and an after-school laborer who actively participated in providing financially for her family, were spread thin. Something had to give.¹⁸⁴ For Doris, who did not have to work but who still could not attend after school activities, there were aspects of Miller High worth exploring, should one have had the time. Albeit an alien and at times dangerous world, it seemed to offer possibilities of making her dreams come true, and opportunities to take advantage of.¹⁸⁵

home...it's quite a walk. The lady used to give me \$8.00 and I used to give \$4.00 to my mom to put up and she let me have \$4.00 for my pocket. And at the end of the year, she'd take me downtown shopping.” Also, quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Doris Right (1956-58), p. 5: “We were very sheltered...we had to go home immediately after school...because my mother had to work at night, and she wanted to make sure that we were home. And my father was a truck driver so he wasn't home that much...She made sure we were in bed, dinner, homework and bed.”

¹⁸³ This finding echoes educational ethnographer Michelle Fine's findings in the late eighties of minority students dropping out pro-actively, in self-preservation, rather than out of failure. See Michelle Fine, *Framing Dropouts* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991).

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., p.4: “Everybody would kind of stay away from the blacks...I couldn't, I just couldn't, I left...I just felt out of place at all times. I just didn't like it. My brother [one year older] liked it. My sister [four years younger] liked it...¹⁸⁴ I graduated...from home.”

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., p.1: “Because I went only 11th and 12th grade...As far as I was concerned, we didn't really have enough time at Miller...A lot of the things that were taught there [at Miller High], we didn't have at Washington in Suntown [narrator's previous all black high school]...we were learning something different...I was interested in going into the corporate world...I joined FBLA [Future Business

For those black young women who graduated throughout the last part of the fifties, and nearly all graduated,¹⁸⁶ the graduation itself was as filled with conflicting emotions as had been their attendance at Miller High. A young black girl could be proud of her accomplishments, and bring pride to her family, yet simultaneously feel disconnected from the school she was graduating from, eager to get out of it. Doris remembered:

“Yes I was [proud of the achievement]. [But] I just wanted to get out of school. I really wasn’t that crazy about school...it was very important because my parents stressed the fact that you will graduate, you will go to college. But, I didn’t go to college”.

While African-American girls of the early years of integration, as Annie and Doris recalled, shared feelings of alienation, and were denied access to academic tracks as were their white female counterparts of lesser means, regardless of their level of participation in the life of Miller High, the experiences of athletic young black males who proved themselves academically were quite different.

Several of the handfuls of African-American young men attending Miller High immediately following desegregation were highly esteemed by teachers and peers alike.¹⁸⁷ They were stars on the playing fields in sports competitions, and honor roll students in academic tracks. Norman Good, graduate of class of 1959, was such a young man. For him, Miller High was a place where teachers helped you succeed, and peers cheered for you...if you proved yourself first:

Leaders of America.” Doris’ memory of the details of the difference in curriculum between Miller and all black high school remained vague, while her emotional memory of the “different things” taught was strongly expressed in tone and inflection.

¹⁸⁶ “All five of us [from class of ‘58] graduated.” Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Doris Right (1956-58), p.2. Throughout the latter part of the fifties and early sixties, most all African American students graduated.

¹⁸⁷ Norman Good’s recollections include memories of another peer Will James, who also excelled and was esteemed by peers.

“...in many instances I did better in mathematics and English than some of the white students. And they accepted me as one of them when they saw that I could compete...”¹⁸⁸

However, proving yourself at first took some finessing. Norman described how he gingerly offered answers to questions he often was the only one to know the answers to:

“When there would be questions with regards to grammar, or whatever, and I would know the answer, I would, you know, look around, you understand, being in a situation where I was the only black, I would look around to see if any of my classmates would have the answer, which they didn’t. I would shyly raise my hand, and the teacher, my English teacher...a rather elderly lady at that time, she was soon to retire...she would, wondering if I knew the answer or not, she would say “Norman?”, and I would answer it. And this would happen a number of times...then my classmates: “this guy, he knows all the answers.”¹⁸⁹

Norman and young black men like him were the first to set *firsts* for black adolescent students at Miller High and in the county. Norman was the first black student to be honored with the *Millership Award*,¹⁹⁰ and the first black student to win first place in the Merry County Science Fair. Norman and Annie Cole’s brother were among the first black students to excel in sports competitions representing Miller High.¹⁹¹

Unlike African-American adolescent girls who suffered at the hands of bullies, and felt “out of place,” black adolescent males who competed well academically and in sports, felt included by their white peers, and never experienced any direct violence against themselves.

¹⁸⁸ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Norman Good (1956-1959), p.3. Also, p.3-5: “When [the teachers] saw that I was able to perform...they encouraged me, they supported me. They couldn’t have been better. I feel as though I got an excellent education at Miller.¹⁸⁸ I was never made to [feel inferior]... I never felt inferior to them because these particular individuals accepted me and really made me feel I was a part of them based on my ability in the classroom.”

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., p.3.

¹⁹⁰ Mentioned in yearbooks

¹⁹¹ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Annie Cole (1956-1957): “My brother, he was the track star...he did a lot of things for the school. He was an Honor Roll student. He was just a bright kid. He really got along fine with everybody.”

*“In terms of picking on other students, you know, there wasn’t. And in terms of violence, there wasn’t any violence per se...I can’t say any that I personally witnessed. I would hear about it. But I think that the school officials, not the least of which the students, the students of good will, they handled it, handled it well”.*¹⁹²

Norman’s recollections of distant rumors of fights were echoed by many alumni in academic tracks within and across time periods, further underscoring the relentlessly insular effect of the academic track.

Norman Good, Willie James and Annie Cole’s brother Jimmy Cole,¹⁹³ were students with reputations as sports stars and scholars. As earlier mentioned, they often played the roles of mediators for younger siblings or other black students whose integration into the social fabric of the school was not so smooth. These young black men participated in after school activities such as track, high jumping, basketball and soccer.¹⁹⁴ Some, like Norman, attributed their scholarly successes to the good training they had received at the all black high school,¹⁹⁵ and they were out to prove to anyone who might have doubted that they were as good as their white counterparts in the classroom as well as on the field. These were highly motivated students: “I would continue to be the best possible student that I could...I competed in a good spirited way for grades.”¹⁹⁶

Thus Norman understood his place at Miller High as that of a student there to do the work of a student. Within the rarified air of the academic track populated overwhelmingly by white students with means, and on the sports fields after school

¹⁹² Quote from audiotape of interview with Norman Good (1956-59), p.4.

¹⁹³ Willie James is deceased. Recollections of him are reported by Norman Good as well as by Annie. Jimmy Cole is also deceased.

¹⁹⁴ Football was considered too dangerous a sport in Merry County until the late sixties when it was first introduced.

¹⁹⁵ “I had to attribute a lot of this to the academic background that I had received in junior high, in the segregated junior high.” Quote from audiotape of interview with Norman Good (1956-59), p.7.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., p.10.

hours, black young men forged long lasting bonds with their white male peers, bonds that extended beyond graduation.¹⁹⁷ Experiencing Miller High from the vantage point of its academic track gave black adolescent men the opportunities to mingle with whites whose fathers owned stores and whose families held high profiles within the community; and this, in turn, augmented their status in the white community.¹⁹⁸

For Norman, getting into the academic track, however, required much more than good grades on transcripts. Above all, it required firm parental insistence. Immediately following desegregation, black students' transcripts were being transferred from the all black school in Suntown where these students had acquired the confidence of scholarly success built on track records of accomplishments. They knew they could, and they did. Norman shared his eagerness to prove himself at Miller High, and the insistence it took on the part of his parents to have him attend the academic track:

*"I looked forward to the experience [of attending a predominantly white school] . I never doubted my ability... When I arrived at Miller, they had a three track program...and, although they had my transcript of the grades that I had at Washington High, the counselor, I recall, said to my parents: well, we think Norman should be able to do very well in the general program. My parents said "no, we want him in the academic program... Counselor had some concern about whether I would be able to compete. "Well, O.K., fine, what about the commercial track?" [The counselor asked]. My parents said "no, the academic program". I did very well...I graduated in the top ten of my graduating class."*¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁷ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Norman Good (1959), p.7: "...one good friend, for the record, Frank Martell, we were on the track team together. He was white. We developed an excellent bond...he was the only person I let call me Norm. You know, we had that kind of a rapport and all. And he was a very popular individual...everybody knew Frank, because he had that kind of personality, he was a people person and all."

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., p.5: "I was in a class with an individual whose family owned one of two drug stores. They were prominently known...There was another individual whose dad owned...a jewelry store...and an individual whom my mother worked for doing days work. He made a comment to his mother about how well I dressed and how good a student I was."

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., p.2.

While counselors were apt to acquiesce to black parents' requests for placing their successful students into academic tracks, immediately following desegregation, they were neither recommending these students for white Higher Education Institutions, nor informing them of options beyond black colleges.²⁰⁰ Thus graduation held mixed feelings for the college-bound African-American young men of Miller High. They had set precedents, brought pride to their families, established collegial relationships with their college-bound white counterparts, but their choices for higher education were restricted, limiting in turn the continuation of their freshly established relationships with "successful" whites. Norman Good's description captures the complexity of sentiments regarding and meanings attributed to graduation and the high school diploma, as he longed to continue his education at a white University.²⁰¹

For other African-American male students, attending even black colleges was not an option. Black young men who did not make it into the academic track, moved in more treacherous circles. They were more likely to be attacked and sucked into fights. For them, Miller High was a "black and white" thing.²⁰² By law they were

²⁰⁰ The question here then remains why capable black girls did not make it into the academic track, since they too would not have been recommended for a white higher education establishment after graduation. Some evidence suggests that black females lacked the parental insistence that would set them on a course toward higher education. It appears that black families concentrated their efforts on males' academic success. Young black women were often needed after school to help with chores, and to work.

²⁰¹ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Norman Good (1956-59), p. 9. "Yes. A Day of excitement, you know. It was a happy day and in some respects a sad day, because, after having been with, at least the ones in the academic program, being with them for three years, and knowing that they were going off to universities in different parts of the country and not knowing whether you would see them... you know, that was the sad part... My classmates, many had gotten scholarships to the University of D., to S.T. University, one of them I think the University of Pennsylvania...I would have loved to have gone to one of those schools. Based on my academic record, I would have been able to do so...But anyway, the counselor had just mentioned to me about G. State University. I had gotten a scholarship to G., an academic scholarship...I would really have liked to go to University of D..."

²⁰² Quote from audiotape of interview with Doris Right (1956-58), p.9.

integrated, but in their experience, they were “still segregated.”²⁰³ Nat Right, graduate of 1963, recalled that integration was “something we had to do.”²⁰⁴ His recollections sketched one painfully vivid scene immediately following desegregation, when Nat was assaulted by a white peer, identified, as earlier mentioned, as a “hillbilly.”

“Next thing I know, he hit me in the mouth. I lost six teeth and six had to be pulled. Over the years I have gotten over it, I’ll leave it at that. He is dead and gone and my life is changed. I’m a Christian now. He can be forgiven...I was out of school myself for about four months. I had to have gum surgery...That is why I failed that year. Because the fact I wasn’t in school. Because of that.”²⁰⁵

While college-bound black young men fought for their integration through academic competitiveness, non-college-bound black teenage boys along with non-college-bound black teenage girls of the early integration fought for their *bodies* to be allowed and respected within the same high school space that white bodies occupied. For them, fighting was not a rumor, but a visceral encounter. Annie’s recollection of the infamous Halloween party underscored how black bodies were denied access:

“There was a whole lot of fighting, and I remember this particular time when they had the first Halloween party, they had a dance. And I said, we can go to that now... We almost had a riot...And I didn’t understand what was going on, but my brothers did. They said, no, [the white boys] they’re trying to start trouble...so it finally escalated. Somebody hit somebody. Somebody called somebody that bad name, nigger, of course. And then, that was it...I

²⁰³ Ibid., p.2.

²⁰⁴ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Nat Right (1958-63), p.1.

²⁰⁵ Quote from audiotape of interview with Nat Right (1958-1963), p. 1. Also, Quote from audiotape of interview with Doris Right (1956-1958), p.2. “The one thing that really, really upset our family, probably the entire community...my brother had stayed at my grandmother’s house who lived in Smithville. And, the people that she worked for, the Griffiths, brought him to school...Because at that time, I don’t think my grandmother had a telephone...the message didn’t get to him. So he was dropped off at school, he walked around the corner and he[a white male adolescent] hit him in the mouth with brass knuckles and he[brother] lost all his front teeth...that was the worse thing that ever happened.”

*remember my brother hit somebody in the head with a stick. It just wasn't a good thing...*²⁰⁶

While black male students enrolled in the academic track only heard about skirmishes, and thought that school officials handled incidents adequately,²⁰⁷ other black male students actually took and delivered the blows, and found no justice from school authorities, only implorations to try “not to take everything to heart...to ignore most of it.”²⁰⁸ Similarly, poorer white male adolescents in the fifties and sixties who did not participate in sports, and were not enrolled in the academic track, were more likely to find themselves embroiled in fights, but with the added dimension that they would also direct their aggressions toward male teachers.

Thus the general track, attended mostly by males, among which poorer white males (many of whom, as earlier discussed, were racist farm boys), and black males became the site of racial strife. All the while, Mr. Lancaster, judged the fairest of principals by whites and blacks alike and beloved by his community, felt powerless to provide any redress for the racist violence against his black students whom privately he praised. However, by the mid-sixties, life at Miller High became more bearable for young black women and men as some alumni's recollections suggested.

For Dotty Moris the first day of high school was a far cry from that experienced by Doris Right and Annie Cole in the early days of desegregation. She remembered her first day in 1963 as an uneventful one: “...But as I can remember, it

²⁰⁶ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Annie Cole (1956-57), p. 4. The brother in question here who hit the white boy was not Annie's honor roll brother. Also: “The principal got all the blacks together and he was very stern and said there wouldn't be any trouble. But we tried to explain to him...and we told him that the teachers saw it and didn't stop it. He said...some things he couldn't control.”

²⁰⁷ Refer to Norman Good's experiences.

²⁰⁸ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Annie Cole (1956-57), p. 4.

was just a normal day. We walked. So it was quite a few of us that walked together...and then we met with others, the same kids that went to Miller Elementary.’²⁰⁹ Dotty began her high school career alongside neighborhood friends who had graduated with her from primary school. Following an easy transition into a new level of schooling, she soon expanded her circle of friends, across racial boundaries:

“And then I met other people, new friends...we just became best friends. So you had an opportunity to meet new people that you just didn’t even know that were in your area...I met a lot of white friends.”²¹⁰

Dotty had “a good relationship”²¹¹ with her teachers and got involved in many school activities early on, pursuing interests that she had begun exploring in middle school.²¹² In Dotty’s story, things were no longer just “black and white” as they had been for Annie and Doris. Dotty, who was not spending her energies protecting herself from assaults to her body or her feelings, and who had already practiced being a student in an integrated school in elementary school, remembered relationships with peers less in terms of skin pigmentation, and more in terms of friendly or unfriendly behaviors across races.

As Dotty shared, while there were white students who still gave a black girl the cold shoulder, there were outright bully black students one strove to avoid.²¹³

²⁰⁹ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Dotty Morris (1963-65), p.1.

²¹⁰ Ibid., p.2.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Dotty Morris (1963-1965), p.3: “I was involved and I liked to sing and so did my girlfriend, so we were always singing, we were in the Glee Club and the choir when I was in middle school, I was in music also there. [At Miller High] I was in the school orchestra. I played the violin.”

²¹³ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Dotty Morris (1963-65), p.3. “There were always a couple of [white] kids that you felt maybe shunned you, but I didn’t hear anybody calling anybody a name, or anything like that. I know of things that happened, fights sometimes, but I can’t say...it was

Bad girls and boys, according to Dotty, were home-bred; and the public persona of the “student” was a direct reflection of familial upbringing, whether white or black. The black and white polarization of the early desegregation period was further challenged in the sixties with the beginnings of interracial couplings at Miller High.²¹⁴ Less than a decade after the county had implemented desegregation, and within less than two generations of graduates since the Halloween dance incident, a lone interracial couple in a still very rural Miller Town dated and married; their relationship forged within the world of high school.

For Dotty, Miller High in the sixties was a great school that upheld high standards of achievement, and excelled in county sports competitions.²¹⁵ In her experience, the teachers who “were older...they were patient but yet firm in their teaching”, and equal with all:

*“I don’t think there was a difference because I was black and you were white. That attention wasn’t given [by teachers] or that it was more demanding here and not there. I didn’t see that.”*²¹⁶

According to Dotty, if one didn’t succeed in a subject matter, whether one was white or black, it wasn’t because of the teacher, but because you hadn’t put in the effort required of a student:

truly because of racism. I mean, we had some bullies there too. The black culture that were just bullies, people that came from families that just started trouble.”

²¹⁴ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Dotty Morris (1963-65), p.?:- “Mary and Thomas were in my class.” -“Mary was white and Thomas was black?”-“Yeah. And they’re still married today, three kids.”-“Wasn’t it unusual to see an interracial couple then?”-“It was kind of the start, you know, at that time.”-“Were they shunned by people in the community?”-“I don’t really know about that, but I think that there were some, you know what I mean about that. But they [Mary and Thomas] continued on, and I don’t know what it was that she heard, because you know, I didn’t go there.”

²¹⁵ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Dotty Morris (1963-65), p.4: “ I remember Jeannette [Dotty’s black friend] was a hockey player. It was a high spirited attitude at Miller. If I can remember, we felt it was the best.”

²¹⁶ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Dotty Morris (1963-65), p.4.

“... if you didn’t get it, it was because you didn’t want to learn or you didn’t want to take the time. So in that respect, I can say that it [academic standard] was demanding.”²¹⁷

In Dotty’s memory, teachers were good disciplinarians who “would come out and really talk to the kids and break up fights;”²¹⁸ they were hands-on authority figures who took care of their charges, and Mr. Lancaster, who retired in 1964 after presiding over Miller High for fifteen years, was remembered fondly by Dotty, as he had been by all alumni, white and black.

While Dotty’s memories tell of her feeling more a part of her high school than Doris or Annie ever did or could, of her forging long lasting friendships with black and white peers, and participating in extracurricular activities, she still only spent two years at Miller High before leaving at the end of her tenth grade:

“My girlfriend got pregnant, I got pregnant, and we just ended up finishing, I finished my tenth grade. I ended up going to finish at Hamilton in V. City and so did she, we went together and we finished our last year and graduated...It was more for embarrassment.²¹⁹ If the times were like today, and people accepted more, I mean, it’s nothing now. Then, you were stereotyped. Oh, she’s having a baby, she’s not married, you know what I mean...Going back to school with friends that you were close to, you know, you don’t want to do that.”²²⁰

The tender subject of a teenage girl’s pregnancy and Dotty’s genuine vulnerability and courage in sharing her story, settled my dilemma of further probing into the nature of her embarrassment vis-à-vis *friends*. Thus I can only assume that the friends she spoke about might have been her white friends because Dotty went on to a predominantly black high school in the city to finish her degree with her black friend. It is plausible to assume that the embarrassment would have been greatest for her in

²¹⁷ Ibid., p.3.

²¹⁸ Ibid., p.4.

²¹⁹ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Dotty Morris (1963-65), p.2.

²²⁰ Ibid., p.13.

facing her white friends. While unwed teenage mothers, regardless of race, have been ill thought of by society at large, the burden would have been greater for a black teenage girl in a predominantly white school.

Dotty's rewarding beginning at Miller High leaves one imagining her high school career as a successful one. By the late sixties, as yearbook data and informal interviews suggested, and as Annie Cole's sister's career attests to, young black women attending Miller High would continue to succeed academically. Annie's sister, who graduated in the early seventies at Miller High, went on to become a nurse."²²¹ By the latter part of the sixties, life at Miller High for black girls had become more comfortable.

The lives of young black men who were stars on the playing fields in sports competitions continued relatively unchanged throughout the sixties. They continued to hold a privileged status among peers as *athletes*, and at the very end of the sixties when football was introduced, as *jocks*; and they were most likely by virtue of this status to develop friendships with their white male peers."²²² Yearbooks reveal very few black adolescent males enrolled in the academic track throughout the sixties. Those who were, however, were also *jocks*.²²³ Referred to by narrators who graduated in the 50s as "athletes," *jocks* would continue to hold, throughout the

²²¹ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Annie Cole (1956-57), p.9. -"My sister liked it [Miller High]...She's younger than me, 4 years."-"Did she graduate or just attend?"-"She graduated...She's a nurse." When I asked Annie Cole about interviewing her sister, she insisted that her sister would not want to be interviewed. Out of respect for Annie, I never pursued. It seemed to me that there was more to Annie's negation. Perhaps familial discord, or perhaps she knew that her sister might not want to contribute to a research conducted by a white woman. See methodology appendix.

²²² Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Nat Right (1958-1963), p.3: -"Jocks were popular." -"Were you a jock?"- "No. When I came through there was James and Samuel. They were good sports men...They gravitated to the jocks, the whites and the black jocks."

²²³ Recollections of alumni, black and white, male and female, who graduated in the fifties, refer only to "athletes." Graduates of the sixties begin to use the term "jocks".

second half of the twentieth century, a privileged position in the recollections and imaginations of Miller High alumni. *Jock life* was a place where black and white men collaborated.

For those young black men who neither attended the academic track, nor were part of the jocks, life got a little easier. Nat Right, a 1963 graduate, remembered a Miller High where “after the first couple of years [immediately following integration] things started to mellow out, [and students] got down to being students.”²²⁴ Nat’s traumatic experience when a white boy hit him in the mouth and he lost a full year of schooling undergoing gum surgery did not stop him from pursuing his high school education. Still, while Nat thought that eventually things calmed down between whites and blacks (especially following the Halloween dance incident), and while he remembered Mr. Lancaster, the principal of Miller High, as “probably one of the fairest ones there,”²²⁵ his overall experience continued to be one of discrimination.

“There was some discrimination... [teachers] ignored you if you raised your hand... we were not supposed to have knowledge. It was perceived back then that blacks were inferior...”²²⁶ There was always somebody in your class who couldn’t stand you because of your color... You had them in every class.”²²⁷

As Nat recalled, Miller High was still a fairly segregated place:

“Blacks tended to hang out with blacks, and whites tended to hang out with whites, and girls tended to hang out together, and boys tended to hang out together.”²²⁸

By 1967, when Burt Sadden graduated, transitions into high school for young black men were much easier. Burt recalled that “it was pretty easy”²²⁹ going from

²²⁴ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Nat Right (1958-1963), p.1.

²²⁵ Ibid., p.4.

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Ibid., p.6.

²²⁸ Ibid., p.3.

middle school where he had already forged many friendships, to high school where he continued those friendships. By the time Burt attended Miller High, and as Nat's testimonies suggested, things had changed, and blacks and whites had gotten used to each other working side by side. By the very end of the sixties, some black youth, as testimonies of Dotty, Nat and Burt suggested, perceived Miller High faculty as being fair. Burt remembered that: "Back then it seemed to me that everybody was treated fair and equal."²³⁰

Still, while Burt did not "recall too many racial type fights in school, just kids disagreeing,"²³¹ and while in his remembered experience all students were "pretty much treated the same"²³² by all teachers, black and white students mostly continued to stay apart.

*"...back then the blacks stayed on one side, the whites stayed on the other side. The blacks stayed to themselves, and the whites stayed to themselves. Everyone once in a while when we had to, we would intermingle. Other than that it was the blacks stayed to themselves and the whites stayed to themselves."*²³³

Unlike Dotty who remembered a more pervasive intermingling of students across racial boundaries, Nat and Burt recalled a continued separation between white and black students, a pattern that indicated perhaps a greater degree of racial border crossing between black and white women in general tracks than between black and white males in the general tracks. Annie's and Doris' recollections of the late fifties, immediately following integration, hinted at timid communications across racial divides between white and black female students; while Dotty's recollections

²²⁹ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Burt Sadden (1963-1967), p.1.

²³⁰ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Burt Sadden (1963-1967), p.3

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Ibid., p.1.

²³³ Ibid., p.2.

described direct friendships and bonds established between black and white girls by the mid-sixties. One constant remained, however: for the general track black [and white] students, males and females, Miller High was not a place you visited after class hours.²³⁴

Thus the academic track, as earlier suggested and as revealed again in Burt's recollection, continued to be populated by those students with means, or at least with the familial support to fully engage in all aspects of school life; and the general track continued to be populated by economically disadvantaged students who could not fully engage in the life of the school.

By the time Burt Sadden graduated, a decade after the Halloween dance incident, dances were now safe for black students to attend. But by then, however, as Burt remembered, blacks chose not to go to dances.

"We could have [gone to dances] if we chose to. We didn't feel comfortable with the music that was being played at the time. It was a music thing."²³⁵

Thus although Nat and Burt, graduates of the sixties, recalled a continued separation between white and black students, they did not explain the separation in the same ways that Annie and Doris, graduates of the late fifties and the very early years of desegregation, explained it. For Annie and Doris, it was a "black and white" thing.

Animosities between black and white students were strictly defined by color of skin.

For Dotty, Nat and Burt, graduates of the sixties, the "black and white thing" acquired a more complex cultural dimension. Beyond the question of the skin color, students

²³⁴ Ibid. -" Did you participate in extracurricular activities?-"No...it was go to school and work. After school it was always try to find part time work, to help the family and to survive...a few would stay, in the higher group, or the students I should say in the more intelligent classes seemed to hang around and do more at the school than just the general students. Most of the students did their hours then got on the bus."

²³⁵ Ibid., p.3.

hung out with students with whom they felt most at home, and in the general track, black students felt most at home with other black students.²³⁶

For African-American alumni Nat and Burt, as it had been for white alumnus Robert Heart, all three of whom attended the general track, high school was something you had to do, and couldn't wait to get out of. Unlike Robert Heart however, Nat and Burt were not out to "beat the system" and prove they could stick it out. For Nat and Burt, finishing high school was a question of honoring their parents, and fulfilling familial obligations. Burt explained:

*"I did attend graduation of course, it meant to me that I achieved what I originally set out to achieve as far as my family was concerned. This was one of the things my mother and father emphasized to me: you had to be at least a high school graduate to be partially successful in this world. Back then that was pretty much true. We couldn't go to college. It was more important to try and get a decent job and survive."*²³⁷

Black males in the lower general track, endured school, and just as their white male counterparts in the general track, they couldn't wait to get out. Nat confided: "I did as little as possible. I wanted to get out and keep on going..."²³⁸

Students of "The Divided Generation" of the fifties and sixties, as collectively alumni's recollections revealed, identified their places vis-à-vis one another and school authorities, *primarily* along the socially inherited binary constructions of black *or* white, female *or* male, rich *or* poor. Collectively, Miller High alumni's recollections also underscored school authorities' leniencies toward girls in general; and the influences of the combined force of tracking and economic realities of college

²³⁶ Ibid.: Blacks stayed to themselves and whites stayed to themselves."-"Was that because of racial animosity?"- "Pretty much culturally."

²³⁷ Quote from transcript of audiotape with Burt Sadden (1963-1967), p.3. Also, quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Nat Right (1958-1963), p. 2: -"Did you ever think of dropping out?"- "In my family it was not an option. Don't think of it, it was not even an option."

²³⁸ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Nat Right (1958-1963), p.2.

attendance in fostering an array of small worlds of experiences across students' situated positions within the matrix of intersecting categories of gender, race, and class identities, with academic, commercial, and general tracking status labels.

Thus, in the fifties and sixties, as alumni's recollections suggested, white middle class females, and those who could play the part, felt most at home at Miller High where they enjoyed a myriad of opportunities for self-expression. Poor white adolescent girls, on the other hand, shunned by peers and teachers alike often dropped out or became invisible; and black female students, who felt least comfortable within what was to them a hostile and alien institution in the early days following integration, transformed their circumstances from marginalized students attending at best the commercial tracks, to college-bound integrated students attending academic tracks by the end of the sixties. While the very few black male adolescents who attended the academic track and excelled in sports felt empowered by their education at Miller High, as alumni's recollections revealed, young white males on the other hand, whether in the academic or general tracks, whether richer or poorer, and many black males in the general track, experienced high school as a place where one "did time," as an irrelevant and economically useless institution, although as we have seen, for different reasons across categories of race and class.

However, while structural forces largely circumscribed the relational nature of Miller High students' experiences with each other and school authorities in the fifties and sixties, by limiting meeting places between richer and poorer, between richer whites and poorer blacks, and by organizing poorer black and white females in commercial and general tracks, and poorer black and white males in the general track,

Miller High students, through the lenses of their situated positions, within the setting of a rural town in the fifties and sixties, gingerly negotiated those positions. Under the range of unrelenting hierarchies, some students found ways to cross boundaries of class, race and gender, as I explore in Chapter II.

CHAPTER 2

“TERRAINS OF FREEDOM:” EXPLORING BEYOND SMALL WORLDS (1950-1969)

Against dividing institutional forces, some male and female students in the fifties and sixties practiced crossing class and race borders in imagination when they could not do so in actuality; and they negotiated small terrains of freedom within which they practiced new kinds of friendships. The one category of identity that seemed most ominous for graduates of the fifties and sixties, as alumni’s recollections suggested, was that of *class*.

Class was a category of identity which Miller High students were particularly sensitive to, whether they were black or white. Adolescents, who came from wealth, did not attend Miller High, and Miller High students were very much aware of that. The very wealthy youth attended the many well-known private schools in the surrounding areas. African-American young women and men might know about them through their mothers, whose domestic work brought them in contact with the wealthy families in the area. Pretty young white girls of lesser means might know them through short lived courtships they imagined might change their family fortunes.²³⁹ They occupied virtual spaces in the minds of many of those who attended Miller High. Their absence at school was recognized only by contrast to their

²³⁹ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Judy Law (1950-54), p.10: “We were asked out by boys who were at another school...And I got asked out by a couple of people who were, I would say, out of my league...meaning their family had a lot of money... And I remember two in particular who asked my father to take me out and he said “no”...He just didn’t like the idea. I remember telling my father later...you know, you may have just kept us from having the family fortune.”

presence in the neighborhoods. Graduates across the fifties and sixties recalled the contrast.

“We knew that kids who went to private schools were different. And I can remember when we worked on the yearbook, we would try to go out and collect money... we were like these poor little village children knocking on the castle door... This was just where the rich people lived and the rich people were different from us.”²⁴⁰

“The richer kids, or the kids whose parents had money, wouldn’t necessarily send them to public schools, they sent them to [narrator names all the private schools in the area.]”²⁴¹

It is also their absence at Miller High that made the school middle-to-lower-class.

“Everybody was middle or lower class. I mean, we didn’t have any upper-class, they all went to private schools. If they had any money, they went to private schools.”²⁴²

Thus attending the public high school of Millertown was *de facto* attending a school not frequented by the very rich. Within the middle-to-lower-class continuum of Miller High, however, students arranged themselves and others as “poor” or “upper-class”, suggesting that within high school borders, a status comparison quickly replaced the virtually absent “upper-class” of the area, with a high school “upper-class”, defined by Judy Law, Robert Heart and those who considered themselves “poor,” as those who were college-bound, drove their fathers’ cars, and spent their after school hours involved in extracurricular activities. Thus Alice Web, who felt like the “village child” when knocking on rich doors for money for the yearbook, in

²⁴⁰ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview Alice Web (1950-1954), p.13.

²⁴¹ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Bud Land (1968), p. 5.

²⁴² Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Alice Web (1950-1954), p. 2, and p.12. This of course suggests that wealthy students attending private schools since desegregation have been continually isolated from other minorities throughout the twentieth century. They are also most likely to be accepted to Ivy League colleges and go on to high profile positions in the business world, politics, and the like. A history that traces the relationship between peer relations forged and developed in the two different educational private and public worlds, would shed light on the actual levels of influence of public educational systems in forging more equitable relations across social strata, not to mention shed light on the educational origins of those most likely to govern the country.

the minds of students like Judy Law and Robert Heart, she constituted the “upper class” of Miller High, those who could afford to participate in after school activities, those whose fathers could afford to pay college tuitions.

Still, while the rich of the area lived behind what seemed like “castle doors,”²⁴³ within Miller High, some students practiced crossing class boundaries. Young white women of lesser means who could look the part, forged friendships across class lines with other white women within clubs held during school hours. Thus Judy Law and Alice Web became friends through club collaborations.²⁴⁴ Black young men in the academic track forged friendships across class lines with white males on sports fields after school hours as the stories of Norman Good, Willie James and Jimmy Cole revealed. Poor farm boys could cross class lines briefly during their senior year, when they might date a junior “upper-class” girl.²⁴⁵ Sometimes, however, poor white boys just couldn’t wait. Now and then, they’d force themselves into the ‘upper class.’

“Us lower peons, we just kind of hung out with ourselves...they [upper class] because they were going from one academic class to the next academic class...would walk down the corridor and they talked to themselves...and some of us would maybe be invited to their parties. Not very often...well, if the upper-class didn’t invite, we would just go anyhow. Because we would find out. We would go anyhow and show up.”²⁴⁶

²⁴³Quote from transcript of audiotape interview Alice Web (1950-1954), p.13.

²⁴⁴ Remembering her friend Judy Law, Alice Web shared: “Judy Law...she didn’t go to college...and she was one of the brightest in the class. She never thought she was going to go to college...we were to a certain extent in our slots.”(p.11).

²⁴⁵ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Robert Heart (1952-56), p.18: “We couldn’t date the upper class girls. They just wouldn’t date us. They wouldn’t. You would ask them for a date and they would just turn around and walk away. [But], if you were a junior [upper-class woman], you could date a senior of the lower class.”

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

Thus for white young women, the requisite for class-crossing was “looking the part.” For black young men, the requisite was excelling academically and in sports within the academic track. Norman Good remembered:

*“...one good friend, for the record, Frank Martell, we were on the track team together. He was white. We developed an excellent bond...he was the only person I let call me Norm. You know, we had that kind of a rapport and all. And he was a very popular individual...everybody knew Frank, because he had that kind of personality, he was a people person and all”.*²⁴⁷

For the poor farm boy, the requisite was grade level status, and now and then, bully behavior. Black young women and men who were not college-bound, and the very poor white, those who lived in “shacks”, were not reported to cross class lines.

Class distinctions, as alumni’s testimonies suggested, were inextricably linked to racial differences. Although Nat was considered “aristocracy” among his black peers, he continued to be considered “poor” among his white peers in the general track. At Miller High in the fifties and sixties, regardless of evidence to the contrary, if your skin was black, you were poor, at least among the poorer whites. Speaking of his economic circumstances, Nat Right recalled:

-“Blacks were considered poor among whites. As far as we were concerned, we were the aristocratic blacks...Blacks thought we were so rich.”
-“Your family was considered to be wealthy, but you came to school and the white kids considered you poor?”
*-“Right.”*²⁴⁸

The two different testimonies by the African American alumnus Norman Good who attended the academic track, and the African-American alumnus Nat Right who attended the general track, provide further evidence of the greater prevalence in the general track of intolerance among whites toward blacks. Norman recalled acceptance

²⁴⁷ Ibid., p.7.

²⁴⁸ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Nat Right (1958-1963), p.7.

by richer whites in the academic track, while Nat recalled rejection by white peers in the general track, even when his place of residence proved his economic standing.²⁴⁹ Moreover, Norman's and Nat's compared testimonies also bring to light poorer white students' denial of black students' possible economic success. The high status that the academic track held in the school to begin with, coupled with its demographic composition of students that included only white females and males of means with varying levels of academic credentials, and one or two black students with impeccable academic credentials, might have eliminated the pressures of race competition in the academic track. In the general track, however, as recollections suggested, perceptions of class differences were inextricably linked to the question of race; and during the early years of integration at Miller High, as earlier shown, the divide between black and white students was obvious and ominous in the general track.

Even so, the "black and white thing"²⁵⁰ didn't always hold. Against resistance by many whites who never ate with blacks at lunch time, white and black students would now and then sit together at lunch time. Either the black student was a star athlete who sat with white star athletes, or pockets of white students were neighborhood friends of some black students and had lunch with their childhood playmates. Speaking of her white friends, Annie Cole recalled:

*"You would have a few that would intermingle with you [in the cafeteria]. Like the kids that we played with in the neighborhood would come over and sit with us. Like Ike and Dewey and Charlie, and all of them...Some of it was nice. We weren't all bad."*²⁵¹

²⁴⁹ The Rights had moved to a wealthy white neighborhood: "My parents had bought land on the Corner of C. Avenue..."(Doris Right, 1956-1958, p.3).

²⁵⁰ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Doris Right (1956-1958), p.9.

²⁵¹ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Annie Cole (1956-1957), p.3.

Knowing your neighbor made sitting with her at lunch a natural extension of your life in the community. While blacks were still not allowed in restaurants reserved for whites in town in the early years of school desegregation, some Miller High black and white students were eating together at the same table in the public setting of the high school cafeteria. There they could practice new social mores within the protection of the law. However, overwhelmingly, young blacks and whites segregated during lunch time as Nat's and Bud's recollections underscored.²⁵² Thus the cafeteria, the one place within the high school that housed the greatest numbers of male and female students of different racial and economic backgrounds in one place, at one time, never fully became a place of integration, even as some students ventured to cross identity boundaries. On the contrary, it would become, as we shall see in later years, the barometer for levels, not of integration, but of segregation, and a place more akin to prison inmates' mess hall than a young people's lunch area.

It was on sports fields after school that black and white males practiced becoming friends; and now and then, black and white females experienced friendly relationships on sports fields in physical education during school hours.²⁵³ In the early days of integration, some white young women ventured friendly gestures across the racial divide, as earlier mentioned, braving peer pressures.²⁵⁴

²⁵² Refer in Chapter I to descriptions by African-American alumnus Nat Right who attended general track, and white alumnus Bud Land who attended the academic track.

²⁵³ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Annie Cole (1956-57), p.5: "I played girls' soft ball which was fun. You know, when you're playing sports, everybody, [narrator smiled remembering good times] yeah, now that was fun." Also, quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Nora Jones (1955-59), p.12: "Rose [African-American peer], who played hockey, you just didn't want to meet that girl coming down the hockey field.[narrator smiled with appreciation for Rose's skills.]"

²⁵⁴ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Doris Right, 1956, p.3: "One [white] girl, I remember quite a few that were very friendly, [one girl]...she used to wave at me [narrator makes the

Whites and blacks more easily crossed racial boundaries within same-gender-relations. However, crossing racial and gender lines simultaneously, was problematic. Although encounters between young white women and young black men began emerging in the sixties, as Dotty's recollection suggested, interracial coupling was taboo throughout the fifties and sixties at Miller High.

Black students' small numbers dramatically lessened their opportunities to find dates, since crossing racial barriers between men and women was socially unacceptable. Annie recalled how: "The blacks didn't do a whole lot of dating. They just mingled. You know, it was more social like. If they had dates, it wasn't at school...We just went to school here. We didn't date."²⁵⁵ Thus black and white students who might have been attracted to each other, held secret their desires. Doris Right, a black female alumna, reported a white male classmate confiding to her years later: "I used to watch you in class. I really liked you, but you know, we couldn't say anything."²⁵⁶ Doris also confided her own repressed interests: "You know, you would look at a person [white male] and say, "oh, gee, he's cute", and that would be it. You wouldn't even entertain the idea, you know, of any type of relationship."²⁵⁷ By the mid-1960s, one rare student-couple ventured crossing racial/gender borders at Miller High. In the couple reported by Dotty, the young man was black and the young woman was white. Still, the pair's dating was more private than public, and the couple stayed away from school socials.

gesture of hand waving timidly with elbow glued to the side of the body], because she was afraid to really talk to me because some of the white kids didn't want her to talk to us."

²⁵⁵ Ibid., p.6.

²⁵⁶ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Doris Right (1956-58), p.4.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

It is perhaps no wonder then, given the social taboos surrounding interracial couplings, that racial encounters would be most violent at high school social events that involved dates. African-American alumni's recollections of the Halloween dance vividly depicted the tensions involved.²⁵⁸ When it came to the dance floor, social status quo of the time prevailed. White racist students, buttressed by their white teachers' tacit support²⁵⁹, and outnumbering black students by an average of 12:1, claimed full control over the dance floor.²⁶⁰

Social status quo further prevailed in the power differentials manifested in dating choices. White males of means exercised greatest choice in terms of whom they could date among white young women, since they could date white women of lesser means, as Judy Law's testimony showed. Next to them, white young women of means exercised most choice by actually rejecting poorer boys, and accepting their advances only if the young men were seniors, and they themselves were of lower grade level, as Robert Heart's recollections suggested. Black males and females exercised the least choice when it came to dating within their high school community, because there were too few blacks to form a big enough social network for dating; and unequivocally, dating was the prerogative of heterosexuals.

²⁵⁸ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Annie Cole (1956-57), p.3: "They [white students] were throwing ivory soap on the floor...I thought they were maybe trying to make the floor slippery so we could dance better. You know, get more sliding and doing. But no mam...it was to instigate a fight. I didn't understand what was really going on...I thought we [the black students] just want to dance...So it finally escalated. Somebody hit somebody. Somebody called somebody that bad name."

²⁵⁹ "The teachers saw it and didn't stop it." Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Annie Cole (1956-57), p.4.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., p.4: "They ran us out of the school." Teachers' tacit support of white students' rejection of blacks on the dance floor might also have been a reflection of their fear of black expression. Historian Grace Palladino explains how: "Rock 'n' roll was everything that middle class parents feared: elemental, savage, dripping with sexuality, qualities that respectable society usually associated with depraved classes." See Grace Palladino, *Teenagers: An American History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p.155.

Beyond dating and the dance floor, power differentials in gender relations within everyday high school life were different for white and black students. White girls, as alumni's stories have suggested, patronized white boys, whether by doing their homework for them, or taking charge of all social activities related to the school; and the boys allowed them as much. In their relating with one another at Miller High, white males and females reflected behaviors with each other more akin to those of the private realm, where during the fifties, as historians have noted, "...women could be a solution to men's dilemma...[and] provide men a haven in a heartless world;"²⁶¹ suggesting thus a kind of domestic take-over by white middle-class female students of Miller High. White boys let them have the run of things, not unlike white men of the time who let their wives have the run of all things domestic, including volunteer work.

As historian Linda Eiseman suggests: "The 1950s encouraged women's activism through...civic minded organizations such as the League of Women Voters...Young Women's Christian Association...Women could participate without committing themselves to regular, paid employment."²⁶² Thus while Miller High white boys lived on the edge of classroom participation, working before and after school, sprinting out of high school windows to join firefighters at a moment's notice, or taking leave to go hunting, white female students were permanent residents of Miller High, not leaving school premises to work for pay, or save the town. When they did leave school property, it was to go on errands to shop with money already provided them by their elderly teachers. A short leap of logic then explains the

²⁶¹ See Linda Eiseman, *Higher Education for Women in Postwar America, 1945-1965: Reclaiming the Incidental Student* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press (In Press)), p.20.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, p.18.

seeming disjuncture between young women holding leadership positions in the *Future Business Leaders of America*, and on editorial staff of the high school newspaper, without access to corresponding leadership positions in the world outside high school boundaries. As long as the work remained unpaid, white young women were encouraged to develop their leadership roles.

This might also explain why white boys of lesser means who were not college bound, placed little value on attending classes for which one received no pay. For them, the “real” work occurred outside of high school, in the “real” world. So much so, that some of them risked, in a gesture of ultimate disempowerment of school authority, punching out the demanding teacher, and forsaking school altogether for the possibility of fortunes made in the ‘real’ world. Because college, which held promises of money and ascendancy into upper-middle class, required money to attend, being a student did not pay for poorer white boys. As for “richer” white boys, if not college, than fathers’ jobs often awaited them,²⁶³ suggesting thus a continuation into the fifties and sixties of a pattern of nonchalant attendance among white male high school goers, which historians of education have identified with the beginning of the high school in the early nineteenth century. Whether they graduated or not from high school, these young men were guaranteed jobs.²⁶⁴ In general, college-bound white girls and boys prepared for “...middle-class families [that] came to dominate the era... a white-collar husband, supportive wife, and several children residing in a

²⁶³ Information gathered through informal conversations with long time residents who could name whose son took over whose small business, from shoe shops to laundry shops, to beer distribution companies, and the like. Bud Land took over his father’s small company, as did Jeremy Garnes, graduate of the 70s (referred to Part II / Chapter III).

²⁶⁴ See works by Paula Fass, *The Damned and the Beautiful: American youth in the 1920s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977); and by Barbara Finkelstein, “Is Adolescence Here to Stay?: Historical Perspectives on Youth and Education” in *Adolescence and Society*, eds., T. Urban and F. Pajares (New York: Information Age Press, 2003): 1-33

comfortable home.”²⁶⁵ Judy Law explained how: “...you were meant to grow up, marry the boy next door, go to the local church, and stay in the family.”²⁶⁶

By contrast, African-American girls headed straight home after school. During school hours they might have sought the help of their more popular male counterparts to stop some white boys’ misbehaviors towards them. However, white boys’ more egregious behaviors toward black girls were furtive, and the culprits went unrecognized as they anonymously “felt behinds” in the hallways

Whether sexually offensive,²⁶⁷ or less sexual and more annoying, as DiPaglia’s teasing of Annie, some white boys’ behaviors toward some black girls at Miller were experienced by black girls as aggressive and sexual. But it wasn’t just white boys’ aggressions they dealt with. Some black girls fought with black boys and black girls because they looked different. Doris Right remembered:

*“Some of the black kids didn’t like us... We were different, not that we knew it, we didn’t know that we were any different than any other black kids. My sister and I have the green eyes, nobody during that time had green eyes, and they would call us “grey-eyed”, whatever, they weren’t even grey they were green, and they’d fight us because the color of our eyes...And one guy, he was a big guy...he would want to fight me everyday...”*²⁶⁸

Doris’ description of her relationship with other blacks echoed historian Franklin Frazier’s descriptions of black students in the earlier part of the twentieth century, where “discriminatory practices were visited by light-skinned students on darker

²⁶⁵ See Linda Eiseman, *Higher Education for Women in Postwar America, 1945-1965: Reclaiming the Incidental Student* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, (In Press)), p.18.

²⁶⁶ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Judy Law (1950-54), p. 11.

²⁶⁷ It is worth noting here that none of the white female narrators reported aggressive behaviors by males toward them. They either were never “inappropriately” touched by males, as they might have defined “inappropriate;” might have been, but didn’t remember such incidents during the interviews; didn’t want to share them if they did remember. All alumni were asked to describe their experiences of their perceptions of and relationships with the opposite sex at high school.

²⁶⁸ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Doris Right (1956-58), p.6.

ones.”²⁶⁹ However, in Doris’ experience, the reverse occurred. It was Doris and her sister, light eyed, and whose parents owned land in the more prosperous part of the town, who received their darker skinned peers’ scorn.

Black female students in the early years of integration at Miller High experienced their bodies as targets for white boys’ furtive stabs at sexual misconduct, or other blacks’ ostracizing ire. That their persons, their emotional and rationale selves, were completely subsumed under the combined weight of their gender and skin color in the early days of integration was made apparent even more so by contrast to the lack of reported aggression toward white women. Immediately following desegregation, it is against black female bodies that racial and gender inequities played out most vividly among Miller High students. These tensions would ease up considerably by the sixties. By the time Dotty attended high school in the mid-sixties, as earlier discussed, life at Miller High for young black women felt more comfortable.

While relationships across gender proved more empowering for white middle-class young women, and less empowering for black young women, relationships within gender proved more conciliatory among white and black women in the commercial and general tracks than among white and black males in the general tracks. Non-college-bound young women, black and white, were more likely to be enrolled in the commercial track. They were also more likely to cross track boundaries, though seldom, as was the case of Alice Web (academic) and Judy Law

²⁶⁹ Barbara Finkelstein, “Is Adolescence Here to Stay?: Historical Perspectives on Youth and Education” in *Adolescence and Society* (pp.1-33), eds., T. Urban and F. Pajares (New York: Information Age Press, 2003), p.20. See Franklin Frazier’s *Negro youth at the crossroads: Their personality development in middle states* (New York, Scholar Books. 1967), p.105.

(commercial). In the fifties and sixties at Miller High, young women, compared to their male counterparts, were more spread out across tracks. The commercial track was the one track within which there was a concentration of white females of lesser means as well as of black females. Furthermore, in view of the fact that preferential treatment was given to girls, as reported by alumni, male and female, white and black, it is not surprising that in general young women might have had an easier time associating with each other across class and racial boundaries.

Some students also carved terrains of freedom through associations with certain teachers. Overwhelmingly, this was a teacher-centered generation. Except for Bud Land, who graduated in 1968 in the academic track, all alumni interviewed recalled particular teachers who helped them, and who eased the difficulties of high school life. The gym teacher for Annie Cole, the shop teacher for Robert Heart, the older female teachers for Judy Law, the coach and journalism teachers for Linda Moss, and on.²⁷⁰ In some alumni's reports, favorite teachers taught subjects which students loved and excelled in,²⁷¹ in other reports, favorite teachers were just or inspiring, even when students neither loved nor excelled in the subject matter. Sometimes the teachers were close to the students in social status, as in the case of the shop teacher and Robert Heart; or close to them emotionally and in world views, as in the case of Annie Cole and the gym teacher, and Nat Right and the math teacher; or close in middle-class values, whether owned or aspired to, as in the case of Judy Law, Dorothy Kauffman, Alice Web, Nora Jones, and Linda Moss. Thus, as a poor farm

²⁷⁰ All other narrators, with the exception of Sandy Eycke ('54), named their favorite teachers.

²⁷¹ Annie Cole (1956-57) excelled in gym, Robert Heart loved drawing in shop classes, and later became, after years of diverse occupations, from army life to working for an architectural firm, an architect, without having attended college; Nora Jones became an artist, and raved about all the art teachers, etc.

boy, Robert Heart more readily felt understood by his shop teacher, whose world of hands-on projects was a world Robert knew from experience. Within it, he could move with greater ease than he could in the worlds of the math and English teachers. Annie Cole loved her gym teacher not only because she appreciated Annie's athletic skills, but also because this was a woman who treated blacks and whites equally, and one in whom Annie could confide. Judy Law felt sustained by her elderly white teachers because in their company she was appreciated for the middle class things Judy longed for and strived to live up to, things which she was denied in her isolated and poor country life at home: looking pretty, writing poetry, winning awards. Linda Moss loved the teachers that believed in her academic abilities, and so on. These hero-teachers often filled voids in students' lives, helped them to see worlds beyond their own, and to gain freedom in imagination if not in actuality. In the fifties and sixties, in a mostly rural small town, with a very small high-school population, and an economic and social climate conducive to class mobility, the individual teacher could become the agent that interposed motivation, inspiration, vision, and fairness between a student's social background and the high school's often documented bureaucratic tendencies for social reproduction.²⁷²

²⁷² See works by Bowles, S. & Gintis, H., *Schooling in Capitalist America* (New York: Basic Books, 1976). In their recollections, alumni often attributed their successes in life to their high school teachers. Because of the shop teacher who regularly saved Robert Heart from detentions and taught him to draw plans, Robert Heart, a poor farm boy who stuck it out to beat the system, eventually became an architect. Because of the grandmotherly figures, who encouraged Judy Law to compete and win, the poor country girl, maligned by her mother at home, found confidence enough to eventually travel to Washington, D.C. Because of her inspiring art teachers, Nora Jones pursued a career as an artist against social pressures of the time to marry and be a housewife.²⁷² Narrators who were interviewed reflected on lives of many of their contemporaries for whom relationships with teachers at Miller High led to lives that would not otherwise have been envisioned, including the life of the African-American *Millership Award* recipient, Henry Bell who went on to hold prestigious positions in corporations and at the Federal Government. He recounted having been able to land better jobs in mostly white settings because of the vote of confidence he had received from his math and foreign

However, “good relationships with teachers” did not necessarily translate into a “good education.” The mosaic of recollections from white graduates of the fifties and sixties collectively sketched out a high school education that either failed to prepare them for life after high school or was irrelevant to life outside of high school. Graduates who had been college-bound were surprised and shocked at the level and quality of work required at college level. They felt completely unprepared for higher education,²⁷³ and graduated from Miller High with few study skills and a weak academic foundation. By contrast, African-American alumnus Norman Good, who attended the academic track, remembered receiving a solid education: “ I feel as though I got an excellent education at Miller.”²⁷⁴ Recollections, as earlier discussed, also revealed that among the white college-bound, excelling in academics was not as crucial as it might have been for a black student who would have had to invest every ounce of effort to prove that he was worthy of the academic track. Accordingly, his efforts would have paid off in academic achievement and scholarly preparedness. Thus the academic track for white students was less about academic aptitudes, and primarily about economics, particularly for males.

To both college-bound and non-college bound white males, academics seemed irrelevant to “real life”, as they knew it in Miller Town. White males with means would, as it has been documented by historians for generations of high school goers before them, inherit their fathers’ businesses, or “become clerks, tellers, salesmen, or

language teacher at Miller High. He felt confident succeeding among white people. Transcriptions of audiotape interview of Henry Bell (’59), pgs,10-13

²⁷³ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Sherry Parson (1962): “I never wrote a term paper until I went to college. That was a big adjustment!” (p.2); Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Betty Land (1968): ”I remember when I went to college thinking, man, I didn’t do much work in high school at all.” (p.6).

²⁷⁴ Quote from audiotape interview with Norman Good (1956-59), p.3.

agents, and were thus able to maintain their socio-economic status without the effort of long term study.”²⁷⁵ However, by the 1950s, while they could drop out without much economic repercussion, young white males could no longer drop out voluntarily without negative social repercussions.²⁷⁶ Thus many “did time.” Their “real lives” were defined by their fathers’ businesses. White males with lesser means, also “did time,” as they continually juggled jobs on the side. They too perceived their academic education to be irrelevant and disconnected from the realities of their lives. These white male students, richer and poorer, dissatisfied with the “system,” turned out to be perhaps Miller High’s most conservative force in that not only did they “suffer” the academic system, sometimes out of loyalty to their parents, and relinquished the school’s social life to their female counterparts, but also inadvertently supported, by their complaints of the irrelevance of an academic curriculum, as earlier discussed, the public high school status quo since the triumph of the comprehensive high school.²⁷⁷

²⁷⁵ Barbara Finkelstein ((2003). “Is Adolescence Here to Stay?: Historical Perspectives on Youth and Education” in *Adolescence and Society* (pp.1-33), eds., T. Urban and F. Pajares (New York: Information Age Press, 2003), p.13. Also, see work by Paula Fass, *The Damned and the Beautiful: American youth in the 1920s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977).

²⁷⁶ Almost all alumni, across gender and race categories, reported social stigma attached to “dropping-out” and parents’ full expectation for their children to graduate from high school. All alumni, white and black, female and male, commented on the importance placed by their parents on their high school education. For white and black males in the general track in particular, who were “doing time,” it was their family members’ insistence on a high school education, and their own loyalties toward their family members that kept them there.

²⁷⁷ It was at the dawn of the twentieth century that G. Stanley Hall, then president of Clark University, and Charles W. Elliot, president of Harvard University, debated about the direction that American high schools should take. Stanley Hall’s view that all students’ needs should be addressed through a diversified curriculum became the template for the comprehensive high school. See G. Stanley Hall, “How Far Is the Present High School and Early College Training Adapted to the Nature and Needs of Adolescents?” *School Review* 9 (November 1901): 649-681. The report *Cardinal Principles of Education*, published by the Bureau of Education, U.S. Department of the Interior (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office), in 1918, fully espoused Hall’s argument on behalf of a diversified curriculum to keep as many students involved in high school life as possible. Elliot and The Committee of Ten, on the other hand, proposed concentrating on the academic core.

During the fifties and sixties at Miller High, high school education would prove most valuable to non-college bound white and black women and to the very few black males who attended the academic tracks. For these students, the high school diploma meant possibilities for social mobility and expanded terrains of freedom. These students also proved a conservative force in the perpetuation of the comprehensive high school status quo because they invested their energies in using its education within its prescribed *modus operandi* to better their lives.

Thus on the whole, students at Miller High acted much more conservatively than sociological case studies of fifties and early sixties high school life suggested. Coleman, the education ethnographer most notable for identifying high school youth of the fifties as focused solely on popularity status among peers, painted them primarily engaged in their own adolescent societies where “looking good” determined hierarchies of popularity. He underscored the little influence that adults held in the lives of high school adolescents.²⁷⁸ This work, on the contrary, reveals young females’ negotiations of appearance as a means to maintain closeness with teachers and school authorities who more readily accepted a certain look in their charges.²⁷⁹ An alumni’s reports revealed, young white women’s behaviors at Miller High were not as much about popularity among peers as they were about maintaining good relationships with their teachers, and practicing being pretty and successful. Acceptance by authority figures whom they considered role models was of utmost importance to them. These white young women were a very conservative force, as

²⁷⁸ James Coleman, *The Adolescent Society: The Social Life of the Teenager and its Impact on Education* (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1961).

²⁷⁹ Refer to descriptions of white middle class females and those who learned to look the part, in Chapter 1.

Coleman's study suggested, but at Miller High they strove to please authority figures with whom they shared almost familial relations. Their focus was on ensuring their particular *student*, rather than *peer* status.

Furthermore, Coleman's assertion that "a working class boy or girl will be most left out in an upper middle class school"²⁸⁰ does hold true in this work, evidenced in hierarchies of dating patterns, and Robert Heart's acute awareness of class distinctions. However, at Miller High, as alumni's testimonies suggested, students, female and male, black and white, befriended or shunned each other within the pre-determined tracking structures, suggesting that the school's organization of students within pre-determined groupings, influenced to a much greater degree their associations with each other, than their own volitions. In fact, as recollections of white and black alumni revealed in this work, many students wished to associate with each other across dimensions of class, but as Alice Web expressed: "We were to a certain extent in our slots."²⁸¹

School structure, rather than youth culture, overwhelmingly determined how Miller High students understood their place within school, and how they imagined their place outside of school.²⁸² Overwhelmingly alumni's recollections revealed that tracking divided students by *class*, and by *race*. Tracking had divided students by class before integration in 1956, as Judy Law's, Alice Weber's, Robert Heart's, and other graduates' of first half of the fifties testimonies revealed, and continued to do so

²⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 217

²⁸¹ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Alice Web (1950-1954), p.3.

²⁸² Furthermore, status titles such as "homecoming queen" and "may queen," as well as many of the extracurricular activities, had not been student-generated in the fifties and sixties, but handed down to students as integral part of the school's *modus operandi*, again underscoring the weight of school structure in the lives of students.

into the sixties. It overwhelmingly privileged those with means to pursue higher education studies, regardless of their academic abilities, as earlier discussed, since youth like Alice Walker (1954) and Bud Land (1968) could coast through studies with little or no effort.

After 1956, tracking had also divided students also by race. A young black man entered the rarified air of the academic track only through persistent parental insistence, relentless self-discipline, and deep seated motivation to prove himself. In general, tracking privileged white students with means since a black young man with means would not be assigned to the general track, as Nat Right's testimonies revealed. In the fifties and sixties at Miller High, a young black man's class status was subsumed under his race and made a middle-class black, first and foremost and only, *black* in the eyes of administrators as well as general track peers (as discussed in chapter I).

Peers in the general track did not accept Nat Right's middle-class status. The general track was a place where the angriest and most disenfranchised of young white men of the rural community faced the company of young black men, most of whom, while disenfranchised within the broader white community of their time, were by contrast fully integrated into their black community, steeped in family values that emphasized respect for parental authority and familial obligations. Thus resistance to Nat Right's middle-class status by white peers in the general track might suggest that those pejoratively called "hillbillies" by middle-class white peers who looked down on them, most likely felt doubly threatened by black youth who shared with middle-class white peers many of the same familial values, as well as the same Christian

religious affiliations.²⁸³ Denying black youth a middle-class status would have been a way to negate the possibility of their social superiority in a world where they were considered the least for having the least.

On the whole, students of “The Divided Generation” participated in perpetuating the high school life of the early twentieth century where “commitments to competition, conformity and individual merit” prevailed,²⁸⁴ by what they continued to do, as generations before them had, and by what they didn’t contest. Alumni’s recollections revealed that far from a society of adolescence onto themselves, students at Miller High in the fifties and sixties lived lives intimately interwoven with the lives of teachers, and of their parents. Loyalties to familial and school authorities, whom many considered their role models, pervaded narrators’ accounts.

The “doers” as Linda Moss called them, made sure to muster school spirit, to organize Miller High’s social life, and to please their elder role models. Black males in the academic track relished the opportunity to compete with their white counterparts, and prove themselves. Poorer students and those who experienced school as an unfriendly if not outright hostile place dropped out, leaving the run of things to the “doers;” and students for whom school was irrelevant or hostile, but who stayed, “did their time”. They maintained by default or by dropping out, the high school status quo in the fifties and sixties.

²⁸³ White and black, female and male alumni reported attended either the Episcopal, Catholic or Methodist churches of the community.

²⁸⁴ Babara Finkelstein, “Is Adolescence Here to Stay?: Historical Perspectives on Youth and Education” in *Adolescence and Society* (pp1-33), eds, T. Urban and F. Pajares (New York: Information Age Press, 2003), p.16. Also see R.S. Lynd, and H. Lynd, *Middletown* (New York: Hartcourt, Brace, 1929).

While the story of students' lives during the fifties and sixties at Miller High is that of many stories intertwined, on the whole their lives were heavily organized by the school's transmitted hierarchical divisions, so much so that overall their agencies boiled down to three choices: participating in established academic and extracurricular traditions; "doing time" or "dropping-out." Furthermore, while a fair and benevolent principal helped the small student-population navigate through the highly charged period of integration with less rather than more damage, and while some teachers helped build hope and self-esteem in students across gender, race and class, on the whole, students lived lives segregated along gender, race, and class. Entering the world of Miller High comprehensive high school meant, in the fifties and sixties, stepping into the habits and traditions transmitted and upheld by white middle-class female students and teachers. It was a high school ill-equipped to help students relate with each other across categories of identity, even though it offered greater possibilities for democratic engagements among students across racial, class and gender divides than did the rural town which it served. It was a place where students by and large remained close to their own across categories of identity.

Finally, overwhelmingly, across all stories told, across dimensions of race, class and gender, the one space within Miller High in which students crossed class and racial borders [though never gender borders] most consistently throughout the fifties and sixties, was in team sports. However, access to team sports after school required student availability which poorer students didn't have, restricting their possibilities for encounters and collaborations with students across dimensions of race and class. Overwhelmingly too, by all accounts, the one space within Miller High in

which students most consistently segregated was the cafeteria,²⁸⁵ where individual students, exposed to all students all at once in its vast space retreated into their familiar backgrounds.

Nevertheless, however small, the terrains of freedom gained by those students of “The Divided Generation” would fray the way for the next generation and expand possibilities for associations with peers. By the end of the ‘60s at Miller Town, with the introduction of football and marijuana, came the end to an era of formal manners and clear hierarchical relationships at Miller High. Beginning with the seventies, *in loco parentis* would no longer guide teacher-student relationships. As one alumna, a 1969 graduate remembered: “We were the last class that wore skirts. The class after us, the class of 1970, really changed a lot of things.”²⁸⁶

²⁸⁵ See Chapter 1

²⁸⁶ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Linda Moss (1965-1969), p.17.

PART II
THE BORDER-CROSSING GENERATION
(1970-1985)

CHAPTER 3

AFFILIATIONS: JOCKS, POTHEADS, FIREHEADS, PREPS, MUSICIANS AND OTHERS (1970-1985)

In the 1970s and early 80s, Miller High students began their school years as generations before them had, with the ringing of the bell by a faculty with most tenure. However, while they also inherited the *Key* yearbook, the *Miller Chronicle*, and the proms, they looked and behaved in ways that often shocked the aging and retiring teachers. Young women could now wear pants,²⁸⁷ students known as “hippies” were apt to “streak, take all their clothes off and run through crowds,”²⁸⁸ some young men wore their hair long, and some African-American young men and women wore theirs Afro-style.²⁸⁹

By 1972, sixteen classes of black and white Miller High students had attended integrated schools. Moreover, while Miller High elementary feeder schools were mostly populated by white and only handfuls of black students, reflecting the town’s demographics, elementary schools that overflowed in student population sent their white students to the predominantly black elementary school near Hard Avenue. Within that elementary school, white children grew up as a minority. As one narrator recalled:

“My friends in first grade were black. I went to the black school. After everything was integrated...they put the overflow [white] kids in the annex, on Hard Avenue...They [the black kids] were my first friends. When I see those

²⁸⁷ Yearbook data and recollections by Linda Moss: “We were the last class that wore skirts. The class after us, the class of 1970, really changed a lot of things.” (p.17).

²⁸⁸ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with African-American alumna Joanne Pet, graduate of 1974, p.8.

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

*girls, Maggie and Loretta, I saw Loretta two weeks ago, it was just the greatest thing in the world. Hug, kisses!”*²⁹⁰

While still known for its predominantly rural flavor, Miller Town was developing throughout the seventies and into the early eighties, into a suburban settlement featuring an array of houses, from single family homes bordering sidewalks along roads perpendicular to Main Street, to ranchers for business executives built in gated communities. It was in the early seventies also that black families' houses on Hard Avenue finally received indoor plumbing. The “shacks” in which the very poor lived, as reported by graduates of the fifties, were no longer visible in Miller Town by the seventies; the poorer whites lived in rented apartments often above shops or taverns along Main Street. As Miller Town grew more and more suburban during this period, and mostly whites seeking the country air trickled in, “the local people, both black and white,”²⁹¹ people whose families had lived in Miller Town for several generations, began uniting against newcomers. This bonding of “old timers” would continue to intensify and reach, by the 1990s, a defiant tone, marking insiders from outsiders.

Within the walls of Miller High, the *Future Farmers of America* club was no longer offered; *home-economics* was changed to *bachelor living* and delivered equally to boys and girls, *Future Nurses of America* was changed to *Health Careers Club*, and *sex education* and *drug prevention* classes were added at the end of the

²⁹⁰ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Tim Whittle, graduate of 1981, p.4.

²⁹¹ Quote from transcript of audio-taped interview with Tim Whittle (1981), p.5. Other narrators of the period also used the term. Jeremy Garnes (1976): “African-Americans at the time were all local. They were local Miller Town people that we knew from growing up with.” (p.7 in transcript); David Randle, African-American alumnus (1976), Joanne Pet, African-American alumna (1974) and others also referred to Miller Town residents versus new comers, in particular from the city . The term “local” is often used by Miller Town people with long roots in the community during casual conversations among neighbors.

seventies. It is also during this period that younger teachers were hired to replace the retiring “old timers,” a change that created a division between young and old teachers, as young teachers demanded more academically but less behaviorally; as older teachers demanded more behaviorally, and much less academically. Furthermore, the infusion of younger teachers, as alumni’s testimonies suggested, participated in destabilizing power-relations between teachers and students: older teachers were less respected, and younger teachers sometimes crossed borders of familiarity to the point of having affairs with students, further eroding teacher-student power differential.

During this in-between period of Miller High’s fifty year history, nestled between the early years of desegregation and the immigrant wave of the late eighties and nineties that flooded Miller Town with foreigners and city escapees, Miller High’s racial composition remained proportionately the same; however, the educational backgrounds of Miller High attendees were qualitatively different from those of the previous generation. These black and white students had attended school together since elementary level and had doubled Miller High graduating classes. By the seventies, while many schools across the country were only beginning to integrate, all Miller High students had grown up frequenting integrated feeder schools. They knew each other not only from living as neighbors whose lives intersected on the streets and in the market place but also from attending the same schools where they had forged inter-racial relationships.

This generation further differentiated itself from the previous one in that alumni remembered each other less in terms of class and race, and more as peer-

groups of *jocks*, *preps*, *eggheads*, *potheads*, *motor-heads*, *fire-heads*, *musicians*, and *so on*. This is also a period that began with the introduction of football in 1969, which had been banned by the Merry County Public School system throughout most of the twentieth century, and had been deemed by school board authorities too dangerous a sport for young men.²⁹²

The introduction of football, in turn, brought to prominence male football players who during the seventies and early eighties at Miller High were particularly favored, and remembered specifically as *jocks*: “The jocks were the group who played football.”²⁹³ The absence of football throughout the fifties and sixties most likely explains the rare use of the term *jock* by narrators who graduated before 1970.²⁹⁴ All alumni interviewed in this in-between period of the seventies and early eighties recalled male jocks, black and white, as holding high-profiled positions in the daily life of high school. Thus to understand Miller High students’ differently situated experiences during this period, one must first understand the high school world that black and white, male and female jocks participated in creating, for it is against this world that that of *potheads* contrasted, and in the orbit of which the worlds of *musicians*, *eggheads* and others revolved. As we shall see, it is at the very periphery of all the groups that those students who did not belong to a peer-group

²⁹² Yearbook data and tape-recorded conversation with female coach of thirty years. The female coach was part of the tape-recorded group interview I conducted with three teachers with longest tenure at Miller High. See Addendum: *Methodology*.

²⁹³ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Teresa Randle, graduate of 1981, p.5.

²⁹⁴ Nat Right (1963) is the one alumnus who referred to athletes of his time as jocks. The *jock* and the *cheerleader* can be identified as early as the 1920s when football became an institutional feature of secondary education. See works by: Paula Fass, *The Damned and The Beautiful: American Youth in the 1920s* (New York: Oxford university Press, 1977), and by Elliott West, *Growing Up In Twentieth Century America: A History and Reference Guide* (Wesport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1996). The absence of football at Miller High until end of the 60s is a cultural anomaly.

continued to segregate by race and class: by race, if they were black; by class, if they were white.

David Randle and Josh White, African American and white graduates, respectively of 1976, and Jim Garnes and Tim Whittle, white graduates of 1978 and 1981, remembered their high school careers not as students, but as jocks.²⁹⁵ For these young men, the first day of school was an easy transition from middle school. Having trained together throughout the latter part of the summer, they were at home with one another before classes even started:

“We played football, so we knew each other, we got there in August, in July we’d do a weight lifting thing, start practice by the time school started...we were already acclimated. I knew what my classes are. You get your schedule ahead of time. It was very easy to start school.”²⁹⁶

As alumni recalled, a jock, whether white or black, richer or poorer, sat at the jocks’ table in the cafeteria. When non-jock alumni reflected on their jock-peers of the time, they remembered them as a group unto themselves, those whom other males in particular perceived as having more fun. Musician Michael Hallner, graduate of 1976 recalled wistfully: “The jocks didn’t hold back, they had fun...dated the best looking girls in school.”²⁹⁷ An indirect peek at Ronnie Randle, a black jock graduate of 1974,

²⁹⁵ Jeremy Garnes, graduate of 1976: “I was a jock. That was the big thing. That’s what most of us cared about.”(p.12. of transcript); David Randle, graduate of 1976: “We were jocks...[play football] it’s something I really wanted to do.” (p.2 and 3 of transcript); Tim Whittle, graduate of 1981 and Josh White, graduate of 1978, also spontaneously identified themselves as jocks.

²⁹⁶ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Tim Whittle, graduate of 1981, p.1; Also, African-American alumnus David Randle, graduate of 1976: “I knew everybody!”; Also white jock Jim Garnes, graduate of 1978: “My first day was actually not at school. It was on the field.”

²⁹⁷ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with white “musician” Michael Hallner, graduate of 1976, p.10. Also, Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with African-American “jock” Teresa Randle, graduate of 1981, p.5: “There was a football table [in the cafeteria]...all guys...”; and quote from transcript of audiotape interview with white “jock” Sophie Baker, graduate of 1985, p.6: “Anyone played football was a big deal .”

through Josh's recollections, revealed a black jock fully aware of his hierarchical place, rendered by his *jock* status as well as his formidable physical strength.

-“I remember one time I was walking through the halls in high school, and this black guy, big [alumnus' emphasis] black guy, played football, he was standing in the middle of the hallway, and he was intimidating everybody, he wouldn't let any one walk by, he was just playing around. I knew him, I knew he knew my dad [sports coach] pretty good, so I walked up to him and said 'hi Ronnie, how you doin?'. He said, 'I'm not touching you, your old man will kick my but.'”

-“Were people intimidated by Ronnie standing there?”

-“Yeah. He was big and all, but he was kind of a teddy bear too. Not that I would tell him that.”²⁹⁸

Alumni who had been jocks, themselves admitted to enjoying a highly privileged position in school:

“It was a huge social stature to be on a football team and being a good football player. I had one class I didn't pass anything, it was chemistry, I got a C all year and didn't do anything. I know that's why I got it, so I could keep playing football...Athletes back then did get away with things.”

-“Did you take advantage of that?”

-“Heck yeah! We got to use the private bathrooms where the other kids couldn't. Coach let me have the keys.”²⁹⁹

While David, Tim, Jim and Josh shared memories of fun times as jocks, their recollections of non-jock peers differed, particularly for Tim, a white jock, and David, a black jock. Tim's recollections revealed a sense of righteous responsibility, David's, a sense of systemic injustice and regret.

Tim, graduate of 1981, remembered himself and his friends as protectors of people whom he considered weaker, among them the special education students and girls. Tim's recollections suggested a self-appointed romanticized role not unlike that of the white knight—a righteous jock righting wrongs, fighting off the bad jocks:

²⁹⁸ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Josh White, graduate of 1976, pgs. 9-10.

²⁹⁹ When I asked Tim: -“Did you take advantage of that?” He emphatically answered: -“Heck yeah! We got to use the private bathrooms where the other kids couldn't. Coach let me have the keys.” (p.3).

“You had a few kids that’d run their mouths always, assholes of the school. Sad to say, most of the time they were athletes, which was embarrassing for me. I got into a fight with a couple of them. Because they were teasing kids. I’d never do that. My friends and I never did that. You don’t go fight the mentally challenged. That was taboo. Hands-off. I got into a fight with some guy because he was teasing a girl, the way she walked. I said, leave her alone. He pushed me. I punched him...”³⁰⁰

These jocks, as Tim depicted, were also the protectors of blacks against white racists.

Tim remembered:

“Me and Jack and Mat [came across] this guy [who] said: “we don’t want them niggers in here.” [Me and Jack] beat the shit out of him, we beat him up in the parking lot, and Mat (the black friend) didn’t even touch him.”³⁰¹

The recollection of African-American alumnus David Randle, who graduated five years earlier than Tim, corroborated Tim’s testimony, suggesting that Tim and his friends did not act in isolation. David shared:

“[Racial slurs] were kind of taboo in that day. They would get on each other, I’m talking about white kids. They didn’t even use the word. You know, it was a problem for them.”³⁰²

By contrast to Tim’s memories, however, David’s recollections of other black non-jock peers were filled with regret. While Tim walked around beating “the shit out” of bad guys, rescuing those he considered weaker, protecting the honor of his black friends, David spent much of his emotional energies explaining to his black peers why he played ball. David shared:

“The people my age they were, I don’t want to say militant, but more active into their culture. They would ask me ‘David, why you playing ball for them, man? I’d say, ‘cause I want [alumnus’ emphasis] to play ball. “They’re just using you” they’d say.”³⁰³

³⁰⁰ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Tim Whittle, graduate of 1981, p. 8.

³⁰¹ Ibid., p.7.

³⁰² Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with David Randle, graduate of 1976, p.9.

³⁰³ Ibid., p.6.

David's testimony revealed a frustration with the white and black faculty who did not do more to actively recruit capable black young men into sports, young men who, as he saw it, needed to be sought out, and not left on their own to join in a system they saw as working against their best interests. David's recollections emphasized the importance of one's involvement in an integrated team sport as a means not only for self-expression, but also as a means for overcoming racial divides.

*"It doesn't seem right to say that some of my best friends are white, don't sound right, but I don't know a better way of saying it. See, sports is different. You do bond there. You don't lose that. You gotta trust one another. Race doesn't play a factor into that, when you get into a football team."*³⁰⁴

His love of sports competed with his loyalty to black peers. However, it was also his privileged position as jock in general, and the bonds that it allowed him to develop with white peers, that created the opportunities for David to introduce his black peers into the world of middle and upper middle-class whites:

*- "They [the rich white kids] had nice parties...I got in because I played on the team...I used to go by myself to the parties, but by senior year I used to bring other black people."
- "Was that a good thing?"
- "That was a good thing. That was a good thing...it brought everybody closer. Then you go back to school Monday morning, you just spent all Friday night, all Saturday night together, it would bring everybody closer together."*³⁰⁵

By his senior year, David had begun using his unique position as a black jock to actively create opportunities for black peers to cross racial divides. Thus not unlike Tim who somehow felt responsible for the well being of those unjustly bullied or aggressed, David felt responsible for his less privileged black male peers. None of the "jocks" interviewed reported thinking much about life after high school, and all of

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

³⁰⁵ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with David Randle, graduate of 1976, p.11.

them attended school willingly, even happily. However, how they made it through school and why differed for David from his white peers' experiences.

For David, going to school meant going against the current of truancy among his non-jock black peers. He explained:

"I loved high school. I went to school everyday. Some of my friends they'd cut school all the time. [After some time] they knew I was going to go to school. They wouldn't even say "David, are you coming with us?"³⁰⁶

His genuine enjoyment of high school might not have been idiosyncratic to David.

Other alumni's remembered stories of black jocks, as earlier mentioned, suggested a shared playfulness and ease among black jocks at Miller High during the seventies.

Resistance to peers' truanancies seemed easy for David. It was outweighed by his passion for football and acceptance among white peers.³⁰⁷ David explained his non-jock black peers' alienation as the result of an unresponsive school system, coupled with an upbringing that did not discourage using race as an excuse for not participating in school:

*"I think those kids that the system beat them³⁰⁸...for one reason or another the teachers kind of brushed off [the black kids]³⁰⁹... A lot of black kids didn't participate in extracurricular activities. Nobody really approached us "do you want to join this or that?..."³¹⁰
...I made it 'cause of my mother. "Don't come home tell me the teacher did this or did that"...the teacher was right no matter what happened. We were never allowed to use race as an excuse...If you want to do it, do it."³¹¹*

David's willing attendance at high school, however, was solely and primarily linked to his playing football. His recollections of Miller High teachers were critical.

³⁰⁶ Ibid., p.18.

³⁰⁷ Most all alumni's recollections, whether black or white, male or female, identified the fully integrated experience of the black jock at Miller High. Michael Hallner (1976): "If the black students were jocks, they stayed with [white] jocks." (Page13 of transcript).

³⁰⁸ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with David Randle, graduate of 1976, p. 19.

³⁰⁹ Ibid., p.1.

³¹⁰ Ibid.

³¹¹ Ibid., p.19.

“For me it wasn’t a very positive relationship with teachers. They kind of brushed us [the black kids] off a little bit, and we were just like there...³¹² I never met a guidance counselor in high school. I mean, they had my grades, they knew I wasn’t stupid, but they never mentioned college or anything.”³¹³

Not only did he remember feeling frustrated with the mostly white faculty who ignored black students, but also with what he called the “wrong attitude”³¹⁴ of the black male teacher who taught black history.

“He had a good old boy attitude...He even told us “they’re making me teach this class for obvious reasons”...but he didn’t really get into black history. He could have been a lot stronger.”³¹⁵

David’s recollections regarding Miller High faculty were far more critical than those of black alumni who graduated in the late fifties and sixties, suggesting a greater sense of entitlement to better services on the part of seventies’ and eighties’ black graduates than on the part of previous black generations of Miller High students. David’s insistence that faculty failed to reach out to black students resonates with late fifties poorer white males’ demands for sensitivity to students’ needs, a theme also echoed, as we shall see, by Tim Whittle, the poorer, non-college-bound white jock. While David enjoyed a privileged status among peers and with the coaches, he continued to feel marginalized as a black student. His words: “I mean, they had my grades, they knew I wasn’t stupid, but they never mentioned college or anything,”³¹⁶ echoed Norman Good’s disappointment with not having been given options by guidance counselors to go to a college other than an all black institution. The difference between David, graduate of 1976 and Norman, graduate of 1959, was that

³¹² Ibid., p.1.

³¹³ Ibid., p.13.

³¹⁴ Ibid., p.2.

³¹⁵ Ibid.

³¹⁶ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with David Randle, graduate of 1976, p.13.

while Norman expressed sadness,³¹⁷ David expressed exasperation. Although frustrated with Miller High teachers, there was never any question in David's mind that he would not graduate. As many alumni across the two time-periods reported, honoring parents' wishes was a big part of graduating: "I never thought about not graduating...I think it was a big deal for the parents."³¹⁸ While he knew that he had to graduate, he never thought about what he would do once he did graduate. It was David's coach, Luke Dare who suggested to David that he consider college, and who made sure to help him apply:

"Luke Dare, my football coach, he just said David, what are you going to do with yourself? He said, you going to college? I said I hadn't thought about it. He said you need to think about it. And he set it up. He called the school and got the [football] recruiters to come over, and he took me over to the college and he introduced me to the football coach...I probably would have gone down one of those factories in Miller Town, but I went to college."³¹⁹

David's status as jock and high performing ball player opened doors into a world he hadn't been considering for himself. While his life path turned out much better than he had envisioned, in his recollections David lamented that many more of his black peers whom he considered more deserving than himself did not participate in sports where they could have shined and as he remembered, could have enriched Miller High. David explained:

"There were good athletes from my neighborhood, but nobody really approached us about do you want to join...,³²⁰ athletes that were better than

³¹⁷ "It was a happy day and in some respects a sad day, because, after having been with, at least the ones in the academic program, being with them for three years, and knowing that they were going off to universities in different parts of the country... that was the sad part... I would have loved to have gone to one of those schools. Based on my academic record, I would have been able to do so...But anyway, the counselor had just mentioned to me about G." Norman Good (1959), p. 9.

³¹⁸ Ibid., p.18.

³¹⁹ Ibid., p.12.

³²⁰ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with David Randle, graduate of 1976, p.2.

me...The school lost a lot by not getting more of the black kids involved."³²¹

David's remembered contrast between his lesser athletic abilities as compared to those of some of his black peers', but rich and full involvement in the extracurricular life of high school, as compared to his black peers' lack of participation, underscored the precarious nature of high school success for black young men. As David understood it, it was a success that required, beyond attendance, an immersion into sports life, before and after school hours. Moreover, it required that the student actively seek participation in the absence of school authorities' invitations to do so. Thus the onus for success at high school, again, as David remembered, laid squarely and solely on the shoulders of the black male student. Were he determined to seek his inclusion, he would not be refused; but neither would he be recruited. David shared:

"...nobody approached us about...³²²so what happened...a lot of kids they didn't get involved in anything extra. They just wanted to get out of there. 2:15, time to go, we're out of here..."³²³It wasn't fun for them to go to school. I can tell you that. That's why they didn't go."³²⁴

While for David high school education became a passport out of factory life into higher education through a football scholarship and changed the course of his life, for Tim, Jim and Josh, it became a way to avoid hard choices and ultimately forfeit an academic education, choices that were facilitated by a laissez-faire older faculty and lax graduation requirements.

Echoing the stories of white male graduates of the fifties and sixties, white jocks' recollections revealed the continuation into the seventies and early eighties of

³²¹ Ibid., p.7.

³²² Ibid., p.2.

³²³ Ibid., p.3.

³²⁴ Ibid., p.20.

white young men's nonchalant attitude vis-à-vis studies and their reliance on their white female counterparts to do the daily homework for them. Tim recalled:

*"I didn't have to work hard. Girls did my homework. I never read a book in high school. I'm embarrassed, kind of, I still don't like to read... To sit and read a book, I sooner chop my finger off. It is the most boring thing in the world for me. I never read a book. I never did homework. I didn't have to do it..."*³²⁵ *So, far as I was concerned, my education was poor.*³²⁶

Their status as jocks accentuated the ease with which they got through the system with hardly any effort invested in learning; but beyond what was allowed them as jocks it was also the structure of their comprehensive high school that made it easy for them to buy free time as students by accumulating certain amounts of credit points.³²⁷

Miller High white male jocks of the seventies and early eighties, richer or poorer, knew that jobs would be found after high school, whether they attended college or not. Tim, who was the poorer jock and whose parents could not afford college, went to work for a well established company in the area where he climbed the salary ladder. Jim Garnes went to work for his father and eventually took over the family's small business. High school education for the young white male jock of the seventies and early eighties, as it had been for white young males in general at Miller

³²⁵ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Tim Whittle, graduate of 1981, p.9

³²⁶ Ibid, p.14; Josh Garnes, graduate of 1978 also recalled: "My education was probably not the best at Franklin High. I knew it was too easy...today [my kids'] work load is very, very hard...I don't believe I had any homework that I remember...When I went to college it was a rude awakening."

³²⁷ Tim Whittle (1981): "I got a C all year and didn't do anything. I know that's why I got it, so I could keep playing football...Athletes back then did get away with things." (p.3). Also: "The rules were breaking down... We had release time, which means if you had enough credits, you didn't have to take certain amount of classes. I didn't take 7th period at all senior year. And one whole school day, I just had study period." (p.14).

High at least since the fifties,³²⁸ was not about academic learning. Just as teachers in the fifties looked the other way during hunting season, or when boys climbed out of windows to run to the fire station, many of the seventies' older teachers' lax academic expectations conspired to lessen the importance and value of academic learning in the minds of their white male students.³²⁹

Jock Jim Garnes remembered:

“At high school level [the courses] were not useful and I could have done without high school...I remember taking a physics course, it was literally a joke...we would play the whole time...came test time, we never studied. He'd give us a test and walk out the room. He had copies of the test out there. One or two people would go out there and tell us the answers. Back then the older teachers just wanted to...get done.”³³⁰

Teachers who were older, as alumni recalled, gave easy grades but also were more likely to send their charges to the principal's office for misbehavior. Younger teachers challenged their students academically, but were more lax with discipline. Lax academic standards on the part of the older teachers contributed to Miller High's own version of what Labaree identified as credential inflation³³¹ and a reciprocal laissez-faire academic attitude on the part of jocks whose energies were already

³²⁸ Historians' works have tracked this trend among white male students since the early decades of the twentieth century. See Paula Fass, *The Damned and the Beautiful: American Youth in the 1920s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977).

³²⁹ Gerald Grant, in *The World We Created at Hamilton High*, alludes to teachers' laissez-faire practices during the seventies at Hamilton High, a city high school. However, he attributes those lax practices to younger teachers' "guilty liberalism" and teachers' general confusions about standards and discipline regarding black students in particular under pressures of advocacy groups and redefinitions of relationships between minors and adults with Supreme Court decisions: Gault case in 1967, and Winship case in 1970. Of interest here is that academic leniency was practiced at Miller High not by younger, but by older teachers.

³³⁰ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Jim Garnes, graduate of 1978, p.11. Echoing Jim Garnes' experience, Tim (1981) recalled that: "It was two sets of teachers. You got your young ones and your older ones... You could go right down my grades and see who my teacher was... the older teachers were putting in their time." "The older ones were the easy grade?" "The older ones because they didn't give a hoot anymore. The younger ones challenged you." (p.1).

³³¹ David F. Labaree, *How to Succeed in School Without Really Learning* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

focused on sports rather than studies. Younger teachers' more demanding academic standards on the other hand, challenged the jock supremacy. Tim's recollections suggested that certain young female teachers in particular didn't appreciate the jocks:

*"I had this trigonometry teacher I hated, she was young...I remember one day she told me: y'ou're going to be a loser...' So I was, hold on a minute, so if I don't pass this class I'm going to be a loser? I won't grow up to be a successful—I did this in front of the whole class—I won't grow up and be a successful math teacher like you and make thirty thousand dollars a year? From that point on we hated each other."*³³²

Tim's arrogant reaction to the teacher's bruising indictment of his abilities was not unlike how Robert Heart and his friends reacted to teachers whom they considered offensive. Furthermore, Tim shared with his predecessor of the fifties, Robert Heart, a lower socio-economic status. Although not as poor as Robert Heart reported to have been, Tim had not counted himself among the college-bound. These narrators' recollections might suggest that less affluent, more aggressive white males across generations of Miller High graduates continued to publicly assault their teachers verbally or physically. White male narrators across time also continued to justify their aggressions towards school authorities by underscoring teachers' unjust or insensitive behaviors, whether they reflected on their own or their friends' or peers' experiences. Thus Tim recalled how a peer whose parents had just divorced reacted to a teacher who, according to Tim, "was an idiot."³³³

*"I remember Andy Dobbs' parents split up. He was very emotionally distressed in 10th grade. The first day back to school she told him: 'just because your parents are split up don't mean you're going to get away with anything.' He started shaking. He turned five shades of red, picked the desk and threw it at her. Almost hit her. She fell on the ground and I started laughing..."*³³⁴

³³² Quote from transcripts of audiotape interview with Tim Whittle, graduate of 1981, p.9.

³³³ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Tim Whittle, graduate of 1981, p.10.

³³⁴ Ibid.

Tim's memories also echoed those of Robert Heart in that Tim and his friends would step up to the academic challenge, but only if the relationship with the teacher was a good one. Tim recalled:

“She made you learn, she was actually a very good teacher, the age of the teacher was actually a big deal for me and athletes back then did get away with things...[but younger teachers] they wanted you to learn. If they had to put up with you being a bit playful or something, as long as it did not get out of hand, sometimes they would join in...”³³⁵

Just as Robert Heart and his friends in the fifties, Tim and his friends in the seventies and early eighties attended Miller High not as recipients of instruction, but as critical consumers of its deliverance. For them teachers were not professionals one was to please or receive praise from, but paid agents of a system that owed them. Thus resisting the “system” continued to be the mark of non-college-bound young white males:

“Warren was very intelligent but he fought the system. They would fail him because they didn't like him...He was fighting the system, wouldn't do his homework, wouldn't take the tests. He was an athlete also. We both did [fight the system].”³³⁶

College-bound jocks Jim and Josh, on the other hand, while they too coasted through their high school years with little effort invested in their studies, enjoyed generally peaceful relationships with their teachers. Solidly white middle-class, they moved in circles where their parents socialized with their teachers and where the parent-teacher connection easily morphed from a neighborly relationship to a political alliance that favored the parents' child. They remembered:

³³⁵ Ibid., p.3 and 2.

³³⁶ Ibid., p.9.

“Most of the relationships [with teachers] were pretty good. I knew some of them...a lot of the teachers lived around here.”³³⁷

“A lot of the teachers you knew through your family...your parents knew them. I think it made it easier on us...The teachers knew our parents, they had to pass us...Like cutting a girl from the soccer team. If you knew her parents really well, you might keep her on the soccer team.”³³⁸

While all jocks held high profiles and enjoyed special privileges, it was jocks like Jim and Josh, the privileged among the privileged, who fully belonged, and for whom the “system” was not a problem. Their recollections echoed those of white women graduates of the late fifties and sixties whose relationships with teachers were intimately interwoven with their family and social lives outside of school. For white students of means across the two periods at Miller High the high school “system” was but an extension of home.

Whether college-bound or not, for young white male jocks, high school was about playing ball and having fun. Tests were usually easily passed, homework was often relegated to willing female peers, and jobs awaited them in their community where they were known offspring of generations of Miller Town residents.

While David, as a black man, expressed frustration at how school authorities ignored black students’ needs, and while Tim and his friends argued with teachers and reacted to what they perceived to be their unjust and insensitive behaviors toward students, all of the jocks interviewed remembered loving and respecting their coaches.³³⁹

³³⁷ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Josh White, graduate of 1976, p.1.

³³⁸ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Jim Garnes, graduate of 1978, p.1, and 17.

³³⁹ David Randle (1976): “He saw something in me and he helped me out. He really helped me a lot.” (p.12); Tim Whittle (1981): “He was one of the nicest, best teachers I ever had. He and I really got along...my graduation, he made it a point to find my father and told my dad that I was one of the best students he had. That meant a lot to me...He was always in my corner.” (p.10); Josh White (1976): “[The coach] everybody liked him.” (p.5).

Josh White, graduate of 1976, also remembered the coach's rougher side and the jock culture's acceptance of the coach's display of physical force as a mark of privileged attention:

*"[The coach] everybody liked him, but you were kind of afraid of him too...was rough on kids too...getting beat up by the coach was like a status symbol. You were proud of it."*³⁴⁰

Alumni's stories further suggested that male teachers in general privileged male jocks by taking particular interest in their game wins and losses, by cheering for them, and by pitting one sport team against another. Tim Whittle explained:

"[Jocks were privileged] especially when you got the male teachers... One social studies teacher was hysterical... If he liked the sport that you were playing, you were in... On Monday, he would bring it up in class. If a kid he didn't like was on a team that lost, he made sure to bring that up [too]..."

Thus not only were jocks' schedules privileged by teachers, but their performances were discussed by male teachers during classroom hours, a practice that underscored the cultural weight that sports carried among males across teacher-student boundaries at Miller High. The male bonding around sports within the school was further highlighted by recollections of female teachers' particular scorn against jocks who did not attend to their studies, as earlier discussed.

Male bonding notwithstanding, female jocks, while they "fell into the jock, semi-popular group,"³⁴¹ and held less status than their male equivalents, also enjoyed more privileges with teachers and a higher profile among peers than students who were not involved in sports. African-American alumna Teresa Randle, graduate of 1981, explained: "I felt that if you were on a team, they [the teachers] worked more

³⁴⁰ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Josh White, graduate of 1976, p. 5.

³⁴¹ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Sophie Baker (1985), p.4.

with you; because you had to leave early a lot of times.”³⁴² Teresa and white alumna Sophie Baker, graduate of 1985, fully and emphatically remembered their participation in high school as jocks. In no uncertain terms Sophie shared: “I’m definitely the jock.”³⁴³ Teresa remembered: “...I did field hockey in the fall, basketball in the winter, softball in the spring...”³⁴⁴

In keeping with their semi-popular group status, female jocks’ games were always strategically scheduled as warm-up acts for male jocks’ performances:

*“They would place the girls’ basketball games before the boys’ games on Friday evening. If you saw a rise in attendance in fourth quarter it’s because they wanted to get a good seat for the boys’ game. There wasn’t much attendance, they just started letting the girls have cheerleaders at some of our games...”*³⁴⁵

Regardless of the lesser attention girls’ sports drew, female athletes played, as did their male counterparts for the sheer love of it.³⁴⁶ Similar to male jocks’ recollections also, and in particular to David Randle’s testimonies as a black man, alumnae remembered the long-lasting bonds created on sports fields.³⁴⁷ These bonds, forged on the field between African-American alumna Teresa and her teammates, opened up doors to relationships with the white girls on her team that gave her some social advantages:

*“I didn’t drive when I was in high school. I could always call on one of the popular girls in the clique to come and pick me up, to go to a party, so I never had a problem with transportation.”*³⁴⁸

³⁴² Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Teresa Randle (1981), p.3.

³⁴³ Ibid., p. 10.

³⁴⁴ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Teresa Randle, graduate of 1981, p.3.

³⁴⁵ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Sophie Baker, graduate of 1985, p.3.

³⁴⁶ Sophie Baker (1985): “I love sports!” (p.3).

³⁴⁷ Teresa Randle (1981): -“I keep in touch with my teammates to this day!”-“A lot of bonding happens in sports?” - “It does!” (p.3).

³⁴⁸ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Teresa Randle, graduate of 1981, p.5.

These associations also exposed her to intergenerational rifts among white people at the time regarding race relations:

“I remember a friend, her father was a member of the Klan. I remember one time we were out and her car broke down. We had to go to her home. I was afraid...she said he wouldn’t bother me. I was like: ‘Deb, I’m afraid to go into your house.’ ‘Oh, no’ she said, ‘he’s asleep. You’ll be fine.’ I went in there with the four of us, and her mother brought us home. I was scared as anything.”³⁴⁹

Teresa’s recollection of her white friend’s split life, where she moved on a daily basis from the world of school and friendship with a black girl, to her home life and the presence of a racist father, echoed David’s and Tim’s recollections of rifts among whites regarding race relations. Teresa further experienced these divisions among whites when she traveled with her white friends. She shared:

“ I used to go on vacations with my white friends. I’d go to an [ocean resort], never been to an [ocean resort]³⁵⁰ in my life. They introduced me to the [ocean resort]. You would hear little racial slurs as you were walking down the coastal highway. They were like “I’m sorry.” I didn’t like it but it was not something I was going to fight...At that time Roots came out. I remember going to school and everybody saying I’m sorry they treated you like that back then...They were all very nice...Nobody treated me poorly at their home, eating dinner.”³⁵¹

Together Teresa’s and David’s testimonies painted the world of sports as a place where students crossed racial divides and black students in particular sealed long lasting relationships with their white peers, just as African-American alumni Norman Good’s and Annie Cole’s testimonies of the late fifties revealed. Black and white alumni’s testimonies across almost three decades of high school life since the first integration at Miller High in 1956, continued to accord a prominent place to sports as

³⁴⁹ Ibid., p.13.

³⁵⁰ Teresa named the place of vacation. To maintain agreements of confidentiality, the name of the vacation place was replaced with “ocean resort”.

³⁵¹ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Teresa Randle, graduate of 1981, p. 13-14.

the space where black and white students bonded within their male and female groups.

However, while in the seventies and early eighties, as discussed earlier, many white peers felt responsible for and protective of black peers, by 1985, when Sophie, a white woman jock who married an African-American jock graduate of Miller High, was attending her senior year, white students' attitudes toward their black friends were less apologetic and less constructed around the fragility of black/white relations, at least from her jock's perspective. Sophie explained:

*"The black people I disliked it wasn't because they were black, [but] because they fell into this other group [potheads]. There was one of them that harassed girls in the hallways...He would pinch girls going by, stuff like that. We all pretty much hated him."*³⁵²

Throughout the seventies and into the eighties, students' relationships across racial boundaries grew progressively more comfortable. By contrast to students in the fifties and sixties when everything "was definitely black and white,"³⁵³ students in the seventies and early eighties liked each other or not based on their shared interests and not on their race or class. Thus Tim, a white jock, knew and was friends with Teresa, a black female athlete, while Sophie, a white female jock who married an African-American man, and her jock friends, could not stand the likes of one black male pothead.

Alumni's recollections also revealed that some male jocks' notions of girls were challenging the cheerleader/jock stereotype. When one male jock remembered the athlete girls, he described them as earthy and by contrasting them to cheerleaders

³⁵² Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Sophie Baker, graduate of 1985, p.8.

³⁵³ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Doris Right, graduate of 1958, p.12.

whom he ridiculed, gave them a higher status. Jock Jim Garnes, graduate of 1978, remembered:

“The girl athletes back in our time, they were great. The cheerleaders, the prissy girls who didn’t want to get their finger nails dirty, and that kind of stuff! The girl athletes, they were just down to earth.”³⁵⁴

Jim’s recollections of his female counterparts suggested perhaps less of a consensus among peers, and in particular among male jocks, regarding the desirability of cheerleaders. Conversely, the female jock was not completely without vanity.

For Sophie, parts of the allure of being a jock were the possessions that came along with the status. She fondly remembered:³⁵⁵

“I was just glad to make the varsity team because you get the jacket, with the letter, with the M and the pins...I still have it, it’s here in the house in the attic. I can’t fit in it. I can’t part with it. I just look at it.”³⁵⁶

Both Teresa and Sophie “took it for granted that you needed a diploma and that it was a must,”³⁵⁷ and they never doubted that they would graduate. It was expected of them, and they expected it of themselves. As for the ceremonies, while Teresa reveled in them, Sophie could have done without them:

“I was excited...It was a big accomplishment, I made it. We had a party, everybody was really excited.”³⁵⁸

³⁵⁴ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Jim Garnes, graduate of 1978, p.6.

³⁵⁵ Of all the alumni interviewed during this period, Sophie was the only one to recall the tangible markers of her life as a high school jock. Needless to say that only many more interviews might reveal whether this is a gender specific recollection, a recollection more akin to be remembered by a white female, or if students of the 70s were simply less interested in material possessions than Sophie who, graduating in the middle of the eighties, might have been, reflecting a more materially conscious time. Finally, Sophie’s recollection might simply be reflective of her particular personality. Nevertheless, such details in recollections of high school alumni capture the already identified trend among American high school goers since the bobbysoxers in the 30s and 40s, of their identification with high-school-specific consumer goods, from class rings, to pens, to pins...See Grace Palladino, *Teenagers: An American History* (New York: Basic Books, 1996).

³⁵⁶ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Sophie Baker, graduate of 1985, p.3

³⁵⁷ Ibid., p.2.

³⁵⁸ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Teresa Randle, graduate of 1981, p.11.

*“I didn’t want to go to graduation because it was this big ceremony, cape and gown...a long drawn out calling names it seemed...I just wanted to go to the beach.”*³⁵⁹

Although both were college-bound, neither of them applied themselves as students.

They estimated the minimum effort required and delivered accordingly.³⁶⁰

Regardless of their admitted lack of effort, neither alumna thought that Miller High provided them with a good education, echoing their male counterparts’ recollections.

Teresa and Sophie shared:

*“Actually, [Miller High] did not give me a good education. I think at that time, I didn’t know any better...”*³⁶¹

*“... I didn’t form study habits. I wasn’t prepared to write on college level.”*³⁶²

However, they did not attribute their poor education to teachers directly, but to their lack of effort and to the broader pervasive lack of standards that made getting by an easy thing to do, implying perhaps that a more demanding academic structure might have kept them on track.³⁶³ Thus unlike their male counterparts, they assumed individual responsibility for their lackluster performances;³⁶⁴ and unlike David and Tim, both alumnae reported having good relationships with their teachers.

While Teresa enjoyed good relationships with her teachers, when asked to describe those relationships, she constructed these by using the term “indifference,” as opposed to her fifties and sixties predecessors’ use of “different treatment:”

³⁵⁹ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Sophie Baker, graduate of 1985, p.11.

³⁶⁰ Teresa Randle (1981): “If I had studied, I could have done better. I was just content with getting by...Bs and Cs.” (p.9); Sophie Baker (1985): “I would actually calculate how many homeworks I could miss and still get a B...there were times when I didn’t feel like doing it. I played sports.” (p.2).

³⁶¹ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Teresa Randle, graduate of 1981, p.12.

³⁶² Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Sophie Baker, graduate of 1985, p.9-10.

³⁶³ Teresa Randle (1981): “I didn’t take advantage of the opportunity that was there. I did enough to get by.” (p.12); Also, Sophie Baker (1985): “In retrospect...it was easy. Because it was easy, I didn’t do everything I should have done...” (p.2).

³⁶⁴ Findings here corroborate the well-documented gendered tendency for women to attribute their failures to personal shortcomings.

“In my perspective, I can’t say I had any teacher treated me indifferent. That’s actually from first grade on down, because I’m born and raised in this area. I went to Miller elementary, Miller Junior High, Miller Senior High.”³⁶⁵

When David remembered teachers’ relationships with black students, he too alluded to “indifferent” behavior. Earlier generations of black students at Miller High constructed relationships more in terms of just or unjust, equal treatment for all students or lack thereof. Perhaps by the seventies, the only expression of inequality that could elude the radar screen of discrimination was *indifference*. Unlike David however, Teresa remembered her own relationships with teachers favorably and further attributed her good relationships with faculty, to her deep roots in the community. She echoed the more affluent white jocks’ recollections of life made easier by virtue of parents knowing teachers, and teachers knowing generations of family members. Alumni’s combined remembrances suggested that black female athletes, already in a semi-privileged position in the school hierarchy by virtue of being athletes, might have experienced more favorable relationships with teachers than non-athletic black students in general, and non-athletic black male students in particular. Of note here is that David’s recollections of teachers’ indifference toward black students applied less to him than to his male black peers as he saw their athletic talents wasted. Teachers’ indifference to African-American non-jocks further reinforced the privileged position held by the athlete, male or female, black or white. Not unlike David however, Teresa also recalled guidance counselors informing her only of all black colleges and failing to mention other choices.³⁶⁶

³⁶⁵ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Teresa Randle, graduate of 1981, p.13.

³⁶⁶ Teresa Randle (1981): “They didn’t tell us about other colleges.” (p.12).

Like David, Tim, Jim and Josh, Teresa and Sophie remembered enjoying their high school years, which for them fully revolved around playing sports. Teresa happily shared: “I truly enjoyed the...years I was at Miller High. I have made a lot of good friends. I still keep in touch with them. I just had a good time!”

By contrast to the high profile status held by jocks at Miller High, *potheads* were the “parking lot” students; “...they were the people who smoked outside before they came to school...”³⁶⁷ Alumni’s recollections revealed an animosity between potheads and jocks,³⁶⁸ explained around life style choices. Jocks saw themselves as healthier than heads, suggesting that to them drinking wasn’t as bad as smoking pot. Jocks mostly “did not fool around with drugs,”³⁶⁹ that was the world of the “heads.” Jocks drank. Jim and Josh shared:

*“We did drink a lot.”*³⁷⁰

*“I mean, the jocks used to drink a lot...the drinking age back then was eighteen. We used to drink a lot.”*³⁷¹

They saw themselves as the achievers and saw the heads as those who wasted their time. Josh shared: “Our mail man, who was in high school the same time I was, he was a head. He admits to it. He was a mess back then. It’s funny to see him now.”³⁷² Josh’s allusion to the mail man’s purported admittance of having been a *head* at once captures present day scorn against drug use, as well as the jock’s construction of the

³⁶⁷ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Sophie Baker, graduate of 1985, p.4.

³⁶⁸ From the jock’s point of view, this animosity seemed all-encompassing and polarizing. Josh White (1976): “When I was in school, you were either a head or a jock.” (p.3).

³⁶⁹ Ibid. Tim Whittle recalled that one of his jock friends did smoke pot. In general, however, alumni’s recollections, across youth-constructed categories, suggested that jocks drank, while heads smoked pot.

³⁷⁰ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Jeremy Garnes, graduate of 1976, p.14.

³⁷¹ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Josh White, graduate of 1976, p.4.

³⁷² Ibid., p.12. Josh White’s use of the term “funny” was not expressed in a derogatory manner as if to laugh at the mail man, but in a manner that suggested surprise over having the mail man be a peer who attended high school same years. Nevertheless, overall, the particular recollection suggested a “wasted” life.

head as socially inferior. This perceived status is betrayed in Josh' pejorative comment, "It's funny to see him now," which he attached to the occupation of mail man. Jocks and heads did not like each other. Although there were also *female jocks* and *female heads*, the rivalry polarized males of both subgroups. David Randle remembered:

"They [the heads] had their group and we were the jocks...[there were rivalries] just with the jocks and the pot heads."

While jocks overtly rejected potheads, as did many teachers who called them "losers,"³⁷³ potheads accepted anyone and everyone who shared their affinity for smoking marijuana and getting high. Within their group they included females and males, white and black students, musicians, achieving students, even jocks; and one could visit on occasion, or be a regular. For Sam Garnes, graduate of 1974, and then a regular pothead, school was an unpleasant experience. Sam, who began smoking marijuana only in high school, remembered his first day as a stressful one: "I remember being confused, being worried about making it to the right classroom at the right time."³⁷⁴ Unlike his jock peers who received their schedules ahead of time, and became acquainted with school premises during field practices a month before school started, Sam entered the world of high school a stranger. He "didn't want to be there."³⁷⁵ His days revolved around getting stoned:

- "*Did people go stoned to class?*"
- "*All the time.*"
- "*Did teachers react to that?*"

³⁷³ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Tim Whittle, graduate of 1981, p.4: "...buddy of mine, a football player, and he loved to get high. The teacher said I'm going to make sure you don't graduate, you're a loser."

³⁷⁴ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Sam Garnes, graduate of 1974, p.1.

³⁷⁵ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Sam Garnes, graduate of 1974, p.1.

- *“Nah. Not at all. Basically you’d get stoned in the morning, then at lunch time, then after school got stoned again.”*³⁷⁶

While some jocks visited with the potheads as Tim told it: “I had a buddy of mine, a football player, and he loved to get high...;”³⁷⁷ the rivalry between jocks and potheads at Miller High, recounted by alumni who had been jocks, was also recalled by Sam:

*“There was the jocks which were the sports people, and then there was the heads, people who smoked pot...It was the competition between the jocks and the heads...the jocks assumed they were better than everybody...and wanted to be recognized...Jocks stuck together basically. The heads hung out in the parking lot...[where]you weren’t bothered by teachers.”*³⁷⁸

From Sam’s point of view, it was the jocks’ arrogance that divided the two groups. More than attitudes, it was the spaces claimed by each group that further divided them into the more and less *visible* students. Jocks’ visibility was pervasive. They were seen in the cafeteria, on the sports fields, and throughout school premises. Virtually all the time, they were *seen*. No only would potheads not be seen during sport events, but they would disappear several times a day into the outdoor parking lot, out of view. The cultural connotations surrounding the parking lot as a place where illicit behaviors occur³⁷⁹ further separated the potheads from mainstream high school activities. In Sam’s memory, the school was squarely divided into two groups: those who would “make it” and be successful, and on the other side, those who were

³⁷⁶ Ibid., p.2.

³⁷⁷ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Tim Whittle, graduate of 1981, p.2.

³⁷⁸ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Sam Garnes, graduate of 1974, p.2-3 & 5.

³⁷⁹ A stereotype reinforced in popular movies such as *Grease*, where the car is used for “making out,” engaging in illegal drag racing, or getting high.

considered the “losers,”³⁸⁰ a concept communicated and reinforced by teachers themselves.

Throughout his high school career, Sam worked an average of 20 hours a week parking cars in restaurants, mowing lawns, working at his father’s laundry business. As was the case with many young white men of the earlier fifties and sixties generations, Sam visited school more than he attended it. Unlike the poorer white boys of the fifties and sixties, however, Sam was a middle-class suburban young man alienated from school life.

Paradoxically, alienated as he might have felt, Sam believed in high school. Apart from being a place where you smoked pot with your friends in the parking lot, for Sam, Miller High was also a place that anchored your life. Its usefulness resided in its predictability. If it taught you anything, it was a sense of contractual responsibility, whereby you presented your body, your physical presence, to the institution, to be counted. Explaining the meaning of high school attendance, Sam shared that it was: “Just the responsibility. Getting up and going to school, a routine for life.”³⁸¹

For Sam, academic tasks were meaningless. For one, their rationales were not explicit—one imagined what they might be. Second, they offered no satisfaction:

“Homework, I imagine there was a reason behind that, to make you better at what you were doing, but I just didn’t enjoy it.”³⁸²

³⁸⁰ Notes on informal conversation with Sam Garnes, graduate of 1974, p.5. This information was shared by Sam during our informal conversation which followed the tape recorded conversation. Within about 35 minutes of tape recording, Sam asked that we turn off the tape recorder and continue our conversation without being taped.

³⁸¹ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Sam Garnes, graduate of 1974, p.7.

³⁸² Ibid., p.2.

Sam's recollection of homework as not being enjoyable added the criteria of *pleasure* in the construction of school work. However, Sam also constructed teachers' behaviors in terms of their visible enjoyment or lack of enjoyment of their work as teachers, echoing other narrators' recollections of the seventies and early eighties regarding the importance of "liking" what one does.³⁸³ Sam explained:

*"Some of [the teachers] seemed like they enjoyed their job, and some of them were just there to put the day in. You could sense it...they were boring, very strict discipline, no talking."*³⁸⁴

While previous generations constructed school work predominantly in terms of usefulness or not, and teachers' roles predominantly in terms of their acceptance and understanding of students' backgrounds, alumni of this generation of Miller High added yet another dimension to their understanding of both work and teachers' roles: finding pleasure in the work itself, in the process, not just the outcome. A good teacher in Sam's opinion was "somebody that could speak to you, could relate to you...that had some different fun things [for you to do]."³⁸⁵

Sam, like Robert Heart, who graduated in the late fifties, "looked up to and respected"³⁸⁶ his shop teacher in whose class he "was totally interested all the way."³⁸⁷ The fond memories of the shop teacher held across generations of white male high school goers who visited school more than attended it, who worked at jobs far more than they ever studied, and who, when it came to school, "didn't want to be

³⁸³ Refer to earlier discussed testimonies by Jock Tim Whittle: "The older ones because they didn't give a hoot anymore." (p. 1); and by Jim Garnes: "Back then the older teachers just wanted to...get done." (p.11). Other alumni echoed the general lack of enjoyment on part of teachers as they delivered their instruction.

³⁸⁴ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Sam Garnes, graduate of 1974, p. 1-2.

³⁸⁵ Ibid., p.2.

³⁸⁶ Ibid.

³⁸⁷ Ibid.

there,”³⁸⁸ suggested the importance for these young men of hands-on activities and concrete work.

Just as jocks reported that “getting beat up by the coach was like a status symbol”³⁸⁹ of which you were proud, Sam too shared memories of coaches’ aggression toward young men, and the respect their violence inspired in them.

*“Shower was mandatory after gym. Back then, you used to take showers after phys. ed. Coach would smack you with the belt, whistle strap. You had respect for him. Tough, but you had respect. You would have welts, but you took it.”*³⁹⁰

The image of naked bodies blistering with welts after a whipping administered in the shower stalls, a space where one is rendered fully defenseless, is more likely to be constructed, within present day perspective, as suggestive of power abuse rather than respect for power. White male students’ call for understanding on the part of their teachers on one hand, and their acceptance of male school authorities’ physical aggression on the other, revealed a conflicted disposition of mind and heart whereby tenderness was yearned for, but aggression respected. This was reflected in alumni’s testimonies across time, and particularly those of white male alumni who were marginal students. This duality, inherited, perpetuated and transmitted, across generations of non-college bound white male high school goers, brings into relief the emotional disconnect and physical punishment that they integrated as part of high school attendance. Making it through high school was a question of putting up with, doing time. While the shop teacher made it bearable for the disengaged, for non-college-bound young white men like Robert Heart in the fifties, and Sam Garnes in

³⁸⁸ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Sam Garnes, graduate of 1974, p.1.

³⁸⁹ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Josh White, graduate of 1976, p. 5.

³⁹⁰ From off-record conversation with Sam Garnes, graduate of 1974 (addendum to transcript, notes p.5)

the seventies, graduation was not about skills acquired or plans for the future. It was about the end of an ordeal. On graduation day, Sam and his fellow potheads were passing the joint around in full view.³⁹¹

Not all pot smokers however, were considered potheads. Joanne Pet, an African American alumna, graduate of 1974, also shared Sam Garnes' affinity for smoking marijuana. Joanne explained how: "People did more drugs than they do now...the joint was pretty much the cool thing, more than drinking... 'cause the alcohol left a smell...I was pretty crazy and pretty high myself."³⁹² Like Sam, Joanne did not participate in extracurricular activities, and was not "a school spirited person."³⁹³ Unlike Sam however, she "loved the atmosphere of going to school."³⁹⁴ Joanne made friends easily and established long-time relationships with white female students:

"I had not transitional problem as far as making friends and getting along...³⁹⁵ My friends basically were all white, and right now, my very best friend is a white lady. Very best friend. I could call her now and she would do anything for me and vice-versa. She's not my friend because she's white, or the fact that she's not black, but her personality, our [alumni's emphasis] personalities."³⁹⁶

Although she had been "pretty crazy and pretty high",³⁹⁷ Joanne "did well in school..."³⁹⁸ and had no problems at all going to Miller high."³⁹⁹ Smoking pot, for

³⁹¹ From off-record conversation with Sam Garnes, graduate of 1974 (addendum to transcript, notes p.5).

³⁹² Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Joanne Pet, graduate of 1974, p.10-11.

³⁹³ Ibid., p.7.

³⁹⁴ Ibid., p.8.

³⁹⁵ Ibid., p.1.

³⁹⁶ Ibid., p.9.

³⁹⁷ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Joanne Pet, graduate of 1974, p.10-11.

³⁹⁸ Ibid., p.8.

³⁹⁹ Ibid., p.2.

Joanne, was part of the high school's social scene, not an antidote to classroom boredom.

Her goal was “to be a secretary and work in an office.”⁴⁰⁰ While in Joanne's experience her relationships with teachers had been good and devoid of discrimination, the reality that awaited her outside of Miller High in the job market was completely different. In this sense, Joanne's recollections echoed those of previous generations of white and black women who described the contrast between great hopes and promises of high school, and the discriminatory realities of the job market:

“So I took the job...This is when discrimination slapped me right up against the head. Knocked me down like a brick wall. And then I get there, and no black people work in the office...The black people work in the factory...”⁴⁰¹

In this sense, for women in particular, and for white women of the fifties and sixties, and black women of the seventies and early eighties, the high school continued “to provide...a social experience that [was] markedly more egalitarian and more open to free choice and possibilities of self-realization than anything that [was] available to them in the realm of work.”⁴⁰² Graduating from high school however was a time of great pride for Joanne:

“That was a big thing. Had a graduation party...My brother came home from Ohio...and he drove home for my graduation, him and his family, and that was the highlight for me, ‘cause he didn’t come home often...He and I were the only ones who graduated from high school.”⁴⁰³

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid., p.13.

⁴⁰¹ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Joanne Pet, graduate of 1974, p.14.

⁴⁰² Carnoy and Levin quoted in David F. Labaree, *How to Succeed in School Without Really Learning* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), p.49.

⁴⁰³ Ibid., p. 17.

Sharing her achievement with the only sibling in her family who graduated from high school was deeply meaningful to Joanne who grew up in a family that gave little attention to acquiring an education. She remembered the messages received in early childhood:

“When I was a kid growing up in my house, it was kind of cut and dry. -Oh, you didn’t go to school today? -Neah, tomorrow. -Hum. Didn’t go to school today? -No, later. –Well, maybe you need to look for a job....It was just like, -“I don’t want to go to school anymore. –O.K. Get a job.”⁴⁰⁴

Joanne’s recollections challenged the stereotype of the pot smoker as “loser” on several levels. Not only did she succeed in acquiring a high school diploma against odds in view of her family background, but she did not lose track of her desire to become a secretary, even as she visited with pot smokers regularly. Her ability to make friends easily notwithstanding, Joanne explained her high school success, and indeed the rewarding life that she has led, in terms of learning from others’ mistakes and poor choices. Joanne defined the term mentor in an unusual way:

“A lot of people today look at mentors to be great people, Michael Jordan, Oprah Winfrey, whoever. My theory is it doesn’t have to be that way. Your mentor can be the other direction. My sister, she got pregnant she was eighteen, got married and the next day, had another baby, had another baby, bad marriage, low income. That was my mentor. Something I do not want to do. [alumna’s emphasis].”⁴⁰⁵

While graduation was a time of great pride, it was not a time of hope for Joanne, as it had not been for students of poorer backgrounds in the earlier decades. She shared: “I didn’t see any hope. I guess the only thing I knew was you graduated from high school and you went to work.”⁴⁰⁶ Joanne’s remembered lack of hope during graduation, yet simultaneous pride in the act of graduating, revealed a mixture of

⁴⁰⁴ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Joanne Pet, graduate of 1974, p.18.

⁴⁰⁵ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Joanne Pet, graduate of 1974, p.18.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid.

stoicism, akin to that of working class white young men proud to have stuck through the system, and of disappointment, akin to that of white and black women of earlier generations whose experiences of success within high school would not be matched in the market place. Thus young women and men, white and black, for whom college was not an option, as alumni's recollections revealed across the decades and into the seventies, experienced high school as a personal challenge. The diploma was the symbol of beating the system (as had been the case of working class white young men), or vindicating parents' background of poverty (as had been the case of pretty poor girls of the fifties), or dissociating oneself from a life of bad marriages and ongoing pregnancies (as had been Joanne's case). The diploma, for these students, symbolized not so much what they had achieved but what they had avoided, and perhaps in that sense, did not offer much hope. The diploma attested more to the fact that they were not failures rather than to the fact that they could be successes.

Beyond jocks, potheads and visitors of potheads, there were also those who identified themselves as *musicians*; this was the case of African-American alumnus Pat Baley and white alumnus Michael Hallner, graduates of 1975 and 1976.⁴⁰⁷ While in popular culture musicians in the seventies were stereotyped as drug users on a perpetual high, and while it is almost certain that many Miller High musicians were pot smokers, Pat and Michael were not "air-heads".⁴⁰⁸ However, they shared with potheads such as Sam, a peripheral involvement in school. Pat explained: "We

⁴⁰⁷ Pat Baley (1975): "I was a musician...I had my own band, classic rock" (pgs.3 & 2); Michael Hallner (1976): "We (Michael and two other friends) got together, practiced, but never got it rollin' 'cause we all had a difference of opinion of music. They wanted to play Kiss...I wanted to play top forty where you can make some money..." (p.2).

⁴⁰⁸ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Michael Hallner, graduate of 1976, p.2.

(musicians) didn't try hard, we just got by."⁴⁰⁹ Michael echoed: "If I got Cs that was good. The goal was to get through it, get done with high school."⁴¹⁰

For Pat and Michael, playing music was more important than anything that school had to offer. Getting by with the anticipation of getting out was how these garage musicians made it through high school. Their lives began after school hours. Michael remembered:

*"When school was out, it was my time and that's how I felt about it. So it's time to go home and do my thing, you know."*⁴¹¹

The world of musicians that Pat and Michael recalled was solely a male world. In Pat's band these males were black and white. In Michael's they were all white. Unlike male and female jocks and unlike Joanne Pet, adolescents who looked forward to going to school, a place where the heart of their lives unfolded, Pat and Michael looked forward to leaving school, and heading to their garage bands where the heart of *their* lives unfolded. Their recollections echoed those of many white and black young men of their generation and previous generations. To them, school work seemed irrelevant to life at large, "it was dull..."⁴¹²

For Pat and Michael, the "goal was to get through. It wasn't to excel, it was: you're here, just get through it, get done with school work, get on."⁴¹³ Like many young males, black and white, who stuck it through, neither of them considered dropping out. Michael never thought of dropping out for fear of having to contend

⁴⁰⁹ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Pat Baley, graduate of 1975, p.3.

⁴¹⁰ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Michael Hallner, graduate of 1976, p.7.

⁴¹¹ Ibid., p.11.

⁴¹² Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Michael Hallner, graduate of 1976, p.7.

⁴¹³ Ibid.

with his parents' displeasure.⁴¹⁴ Typing was the only class he remembered as being of some use to him in later life: "I learned more in that class that benefits me now than anything. Learning how to type was the best thing."

While Pat also just "got by," he saw the usefulness of a high school education in terms of social capital and the relationships wrought that turned out to be important connections for economic success later in life. He explained:

"You got social skills [at high school]. You met people there that...down the road might own a business and you got a job 'cause you knew them."

Pat and Michael were both peripheral students who put little effort into their studies, did not participate in any extracurricular activities, and lived to play music after school hours. However, while for Michael, a middle class suburban white young man, the whole experience was fairly useless, for Pat, an African-American young man of working class parents, high school provided the opportunity to seal friendships across racial barriers, friendships that proved to be useful connections later in life. For white young males of some means who graduated in the seventies and early eighties, as had been the case since the early decades of the twentieth century, high school had little bearing on their economic fortunes. Furthermore, the particular demographics and geographical configurations of Miller Town which more readily juxtaposed richer and poorer, white and black, gave many black families in the neighborhood the opportunity to live side by side with wealthier white people. Pat shared: "I grew up in a neighborhood where there was nothing but [white] rich people. Now I wasn't. But they were my best friends."⁴¹⁵

⁴¹⁴ Michael Hallner (1976): "You don't want to fail, because, you know, then your parents' pressure, your parents and stuff." (p.8).

⁴¹⁵ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Pat Baley (1975), p. 4.

Alumni's recollections referred to yet other student-generated labels that captured the very smart and academically successful male students: "eggheads"; the mechanically inclined shop students, all males, whose passions were to work on cars: "motor-heads;" and the "fire-heads," all males again, who volunteered for the town's fire department, and spent as much time as they could around the fire house. Except for the labels "jock," "prep," and "pothead," labels were generally assigned to males: "The guys were eggheads, girls were just smart."⁴¹⁶

Although young women continued to get pregnant at Miller High, they were less likely to leave school than graduates of the fifties and sixties. African-American alumna Teresa explained:

"There was a pregnant girl, a white girl, she had the baby, gave it up for adoption and came back to school. Another girl had a baby, kept her baby and came back to school, so she was a mother when she was in junior high, she was black. Then a couple of girls that walked across the stage on graduation that were pregnant. They ended up having the babies right after graduation from high school."⁴¹⁷

Only two alumni remembered "poor" students whom they described as marginalized.

Michael Hallner recalled:

"...the few that were poor. They turned out to be the ones that were picked on, not because they were poor, but the way they dressed. There was one girl, one boy...they were the same ones all the way through 12th grade...almost every kid in the class would pick on them... In 12th grade the girl was there but I don't think the guy was still there."⁴¹⁸

Tim Whittle also remembered, but more harshly:

"The real poor kids were teased just because they were dirty...they didn't get teased because they were poor, they got teased because they were pigs. They kind of brought it on themselves."⁴¹⁹

⁴¹⁶ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Tim Whittle, graduate of 1981, p.9.

⁴¹⁷ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Teresa Randle, graduate of 1981, p.8.

⁴¹⁸ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Michael Hallner, graduate of 1976, p.15.

⁴¹⁹ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Tim Whittle, graduate of 1981, p. 8.

Tim's particularly virulent indictment of the poor might have been a reflection of his own need to distance himself from poverty that lurked around the corner for him as he was growing up. Michael's and Tim's recollections depicted the merciless behaviors toward the poor identified also in recollections of narrators of previous generations, suggesting a continuation into the eighties of the generational transmission of disdain for the poor whose "dirty" appearance betrayed their economic status, and more than that, justified peers' disdain.

Except for Michael's and Tim's testimonies, alumni's recollections during this period did not bring into view the poor, even when directly asked about them. In fact, African-American alumna Teresa who graduated the same year Tim did, remembered only middle class students.

"Everybody was middle class. One or two working class, everybody was in the same class."⁴²⁰

This generation's more relaxed appearance might have loosened the hold the clean look had had since earliest days of high school, and might have made the "sloppy" look more acceptable, blurring lines between haves and have-nots. Alumna Joanne Pet described potheads in this way: "[Potheads] had really, really long hair, raggedy clothes, eyes red."⁴²¹ However, the teasing of the very poor as reported by Michael (1976) and Tim (1981) was being perpetuated by enough students for the two of them to have noticed and remembered. The very poor at Miller High School would continue to be stigmatized as personally deficient; and, as in the earlier

⁴²⁰ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Teresa Randle, graduate of 1981, p. 6.

⁴²¹ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Joanne Pet (1974), p.10.

generation at Miller High, the very poor would continue to drop out. Michael recalled:

“...almost every kid in the class would pick on them... In 12th grade the girl was there but I don’t think the guy was still there.”⁴²²

Another group yet of marginalized students came to view indirectly, remembered by others. While these students did not count among the very poor, they were not going to college, did not participate in sports, and were part of the working class as Tim recalled. They were treated differently, not by students, but by teachers.

“ I saw being treated differently were... your group that did work-release, that took half days and went to work. It sounds like they were in prison. I didn’t like the word “work release”. Most of these guys didn’t play a sport....guys who weren’t connected to school...and didn’t want to be involved in school. Some of the teachers gave up on them, on certain kids.”⁴²³

This group of students lived their lives within a school sanctioned limbo-like structure, where they were neither fully students, nor fully employees, prisoners as Tim suggested, but not only of school, prisoners perhaps too of pre-determined market slots for which they were being molded. The “work-release” students seemed to have been denied even opportunities to imagine alternative realities for themselves, strangers to the school and its students as they attended only half days, denied the social interactions that, as alumni’s stories have consistently revealed, offered opportunities for amassing social capital, for practicing alternative identities, for imagining a future different from one’s past.

Of all the peer-groups identified by alumni of this generation, one group of students, those whom graduates of the seventies and early eighties referred to as the “preps,” continued to hold a highly visible profile as they produced the yearbooks,

⁴²² Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Michael Hallner (1976), p.15.

⁴²³ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Tim Whittle, graduate of 1981, p.2.

wrote in the newspapers, organized school dances and continued to create the image of the school. Described through the eyes of Teresa Randle and Sophie Baker, the preps of the seventies and early eighties resembled those students whom alumna Linda Moss, graduate of the sixties, described as "...the doers...the people that were on the teams...were the people that were putting out the yearbook, were the people doing that, you know, class officers..."⁴²⁴ African-American alumna and jock Teresa Randle remembered the "preps" as "...the ones that were the class officers, cheerleaders..."⁴²⁵

However, Sophie Baker's description of the "preps" is the first among alumni's recollections to represent the "doers," in an unfavorable light. Sophie remembered the undemocratic actions of the preps who wore "alligator shirts and dock-siders:"⁴²⁶

*"They were...in the SGA. They sent out ballots for what you wanted to be your senior prom song. It seemed everything we voted for never went. We would count how many people wrote [in the ballot] this song [that they chose]...how did this song make it?"*⁴²⁷

By the nineties, many more voices would criticize the "preps."

Rivalries among peer-groups notwithstanding, "the border-crossing generation" of the seventies and early eighties, as alumni's testimonies revealed, ventured more freely across class, gender and race divides, and tended to subsume these categories under *youth-generated identities*, from *potheads* to *musicians*. This was by and large an accepting generation. Teresa Randle remembered how:

⁴²⁴ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Linda Moss (1965-1969), p.11.

⁴²⁵ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with alumna Teresa Randle (1981), p.5.

⁴²⁶ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with alumna Sophie Baker (1985), p.4.

⁴²⁷ Ibid.

“Everybody was allowed to be their own individual self. I don’t remember anybody being aggressive toward anybody. They just knew that they hung over here, and the other ones hung over there. It was a given.”⁴²⁸

However, structural forces, namely a split, inconsistent, and at times grossly insensitive faculty, that divided its students into winners and losers, neglected whole segments of students, and as we shall explore in greater depth in Chapter 4, crossed boundaries of propriety with their charges; and a continually pressing hierarchy of academic tracks, that, as we also shall see created a perpetual underclass of students, limited the range of possible relationships of Miller High students with one another while they expanded and blurred their relationships with school authorities. Still, constraining structural forces notwithstanding, Miller High students, through the lenses of their situated positions, within the setting of a growingly suburban town in the seventies and early eighties, and a national atmosphere of expanding civil rights, interacted more democratically than had the previous generation, as I explore in Chapter 4.

⁴²⁸ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Teresa Randle, graduate of 1981, p.6.

CHAPTER 4

HYBRID COMMUNITIES / BOUNDED COMMUNITIES: EXPANDING ASSOCIATIONS— OR RETREATING INTO SMALL WORLDS (1970-1985)

Miller High students, as earlier suggested, associated mostly on the basis of common interests and affinities. Describing the cafeteria, Tim recalled that “male jocks had a table, girl jocks had a table, the eggheads had a table...”⁴²⁹ and on; and overwhelmingly alumni remembered blacks and whites getting along, within and across the peer-groups.⁴³⁰ African-American Joanne Pet’s recollection captured the Civil Rights mood of the time:

“Given that it was five or six years after Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights, I was right there on the crest of it. So I didn’t feel the effect of racism...I don’t remember any incident that I felt that I was discriminated against because I was black...My friends basically, they were all white.”

The outcast in this generation of Miller High students, as recollections suggested, was in fact the white student whose racist behaviors would quickly be brought to a halt by white peers. Unlike the fifties and sixties when black students assaulted by white peers sought help from school authorities, black students at Miller High in the seventies would find ready help from their white peers, suggesting a more deeply integrated sense of racial equality among white young people of Miller High, further

⁴²⁹ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Tim Whittle, graduate of 1981, p.12.

⁴³⁰ African-American alumnus Pat Baley, graduate of 1975: “We got along. Most of the students you went to high school with you started with in elementary school.”(p.4). White alumnus Josh White, graduate of 1976: “We got along really well.” (p.8). African-American alumnus David Randle, graduate of 1976: “My best friends were white.”(p 6). African-American alumnae Joanne Pet and Teresa Randle and white alumna Sophie Baker reported as much.

evidenced in the schisms within white families surrounding racial attitudes, as the new generation of whites sought friendships with blacks against parental wishes.⁴³¹

While in general “girls and boys did not sit together”⁴³² unless “they were terribly in love,”⁴³³ many students “did intermingle all the time”⁴³⁴ across groups, forming hybrid communities of a variety of combinations. Jocks, male and female, black and white, tended to cross into other groups more often. They visited with girls (if they were males), visited with musicians, and others; and on the very rare occasion they visited with potheads,⁴³⁵ with whom “eggheads,” male, and female, white, and black, also visited.⁴³⁶ Those who belonged solely to the pothead group stayed to themselves, although they accepted anyone willing to get high, whether female or male, black or white. These were students immediately identifiable, as narrators recalled, by their unkempt appearance and distracted behaviors.⁴³⁷ While preps, overwhelmingly represented by the more prosperous white student contingency, did not themselves cross class boundaries, they did include jocks, and cheerleaders,⁴³⁸ both white and black, as well as eggheads.⁴³⁹ Fire-heads and motor-heads were

⁴³¹ Refer to African-American alumna Teresa Randle’s testimony in Chapter 3 regarding her white friend and her KKK father; as well as to stories by African-American alumnus David Randle and white alumnus Tim Whittle regarding white peers policing other white peers against racist attitudes.

⁴³² Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Tim Whittle, graduate of 1981, p.11.

⁴³³ Ibid.

⁴³⁴ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Jim Garnes, graduate of 1978, p.7.

⁴³⁵ African-American alumnus David Randle: “I felt comfortable [at lunch time] eating anywhere...I knew all the girls in high school.” (p.6. & 12); White alumnus Tim Whittle: “A buddy of mine, a football player, he loved to get high.” (p.2); African-American alumna Teresa Randle: “I actually hung out with everybody, so I never sat at one particular table.” (p.4).

⁴³⁶ African-American alumnus Pat Baley: “A lot of the brainiacs were with the heads.”

⁴³⁷ Michael Hallner: “You’d look at them, and they didn’t act normal, they were like spacey...long hair.” (p.9).

⁴³⁸ Tim Whittle (1981), p.12: “There is one black cheerleader that I remember...” Also refer to African-American alumna Teresa Randle’s recollections of calling on the “popular” girls for rides, in Chapter 3.

⁴³⁹ Refer to discussion of “preps” in Chapter 3. By the nineties, preps would also include African-American students.

overwhelmingly represented by white male students, who, there is evidence to suggest, were of lower socio-economic background.⁴⁴⁰ Now and then, however, the rare black male might join in.⁴⁴¹

Collectively, alumni's testimonies further suggested that peer-group affiliation counteracted broader societal inequities and discrimination, since belonging to a peer-group most often meant belonging to an interracial group. However, those students who did not belong to a peer-group continued to segregate by race and class. By race if they were black, by class if they were white. Membership to a peer-group offered an identity to layer over the raw *race* and *class* distinctions. Without the cloak of peer-group appurtenance, however, one remained exposed as adult-defined, a creation of economic hierarchies and of institutionalized racism. Using the term "social class" to describe peer-groups, Tim Whittle remembered that:

*"If you weren't in a social class and you were black, you sat with the black kids. Teresa sat with the girl athletes, Amy sat with the girl athletes. Rona sat with the black girls because she didn't play a sport."*⁴⁴²

In the cafeteria then, black students who were not part of the jock-group, sat together, girls with girls, boys with boys. African-American alumna Joanne Pet explained that it was "a comfortable type of segregation."⁴⁴³

*"You segregate yourself regardless. We as people do it today. It's just a natural thing...black people sitting over here, guys over here, girls over here...It's just a natural thing."*⁴⁴⁴

⁴⁴⁰ Tim Whittle (1981), white alumnus who had grown up in a working-class family, shared: "My brother was a motor-head and fire-head..."(p.13).

⁴⁴¹ Tim Whittle (1981) shared how one of his black friends preferred country music, dressing country style and working on cars with the motor-heads.

⁴⁴² Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Tim Whittle, graduate of 1981, p.12.

⁴⁴³ Ibid., p.6.

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid.

Joanne's recollections about black students sitting together at lunch out of comfort rather than because of racist attitudes on part of students, was also echoed by African-American alumnus David Randle who while he felt at ease as a jock "eating anywhere," remembered the cafeteria segregation as a question of feeling "comfortable."⁴⁴⁵

*"We had open lunch back then, so you could bring in music. So naturally we [the blacks] wanted to hear something and they [the whites] wanted to hear something else. They didn't force us in any groups. Just felt more comfortable."*⁴⁴⁶

White alumnus Tim Whittle also remembered how when you didn't belong to a peer-group: "You went with who you were most comfortable with...you went with your comfort area, kids you knew when you were younger."⁴⁴⁷

Thus a segment of the African-American student population experienced Miller High as *black* students, rather than as jocks, as musicians, potheads, fire-heads, and on. Whether pro-actively, by refusing to participate in the white culture, as David's recollections earlier mentioned suggested,⁴⁴⁸ or by default, as in the case of many young black women who continued the previous generations' roles as caretakers at home, thus forsaking extracurricular activities or after school social time with peers,⁴⁴⁹ many black students kept to themselves, suggesting that the idea that everyone intermingled was the construction of the privileged students, white or black,

⁴⁴⁵ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with David Randle, graduate of 1976, p.6.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁷ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Tim Whittle (1977-1981), p.14.

⁴⁴⁸ Refer to David Randle's testimony in Chapter 3.

⁴⁴⁹ "Black female students, they didn't participate in anything...you got to look at the black community. I mean, a lot of single parent families. The older females rushed home [after school] cared for siblings or did dinner...It's still like that." Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with David Randle (1976), p.4.

whose high profiles at school, and identifiable appurtenance to a peer-group, made navigating social borders easy.

When students found no peer-group affiliation, they remained “black,” or “work-release” students,⁴⁵⁰ or “poor,” categories of identity that bound the person to institutionalized roles with binary constructions of black/white, rich/poor, haves and have-nots; categories furthermore that robbed one of opportunities to broaden one’s social connections, and perhaps even robbed one of opportunities to imagine and practice alternative futures; futures that the African American male and female jocks, David and Teresa, the African American male musician Pat Baley, and the African American alumna Joanne Pet, were able to imagine as they expanded their social networks within interracial peer-groups, and forged connections that paid off economically and socially, later in life. Lacking peer-group affiliation, one became, by default, member of a community racially and socio-economically defined, bounded by the weight of broader social categories imbued with connotations of inequities.

Still, during the seventies and early eighties, male and female, white and black Miller High students, as recollections suggested, experienced greater freedom to be themselves with each other regardless of skin color, and gender, than previous Miller High graduates ever had. The dance floor in particular was no longer a threatening place for black students. By contrast to the fifties, when rock’n roll, as historian Grace Palladino has suggested “was everything that middle class parents feared: elemental, savage, dripping with sexuality, qualities that respectable society usually

⁴⁵⁰ Refer to Tim Whittle’s testimony about “work release” students in Chapter 3, and how they were neglected by teachers.

associated with depraved classes,”⁴⁵¹ and when accordingly, white middle class teachers at Miller High tacitly supported white students’ exclusion of blacks at school dances, the seventies and early eighties witnessed a full emancipation of the dance floor at Miller High. Not only had it become a place where white and black couples danced side by side, but a place where black males danced with white females and white males danced with black females. African-American alumna Joanne Pet remembered:

*“I had no problems looking at the white boys, thinking they were cute or vice-versa. I had this guy...and the boy was drop dead gorgeous, blond haired white boy. And he asked me to parties. I mean it wasn’t a question am I going with him. What else am I going to do? If I’m living, I’m going. I’d have to be dead not to. You know what I mean?”*⁴⁵²

Speaking about interracial couples, African-American jock Teresa remembered: “The junior class there was a couple. I can still see her, I can still see him...they are still married.”⁴⁵³

While students had substantially democratized dating patterns since the fifties and sixties, and male and female students in greater numbers were going out with people of backgrounds different from their own, new hierarchies emerged at Miller High, the result of the introduction of football at the very end of the sixties. As several alumni’s recollections revealed, jocks dated the cheerleaders, and the best looking girls in school.⁴⁵⁴ However, jock Jim Garnes’ testimony about his preference

⁴⁵¹ See Grace Palladino, *Teenagers: An American History* (New York: Basic Books, 1996), p.155.

⁴⁵² Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Joanne Pet, graduate of 1974, p.16.

⁴⁵³ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Teresa Randle, graduate of 1981, p.8.

⁴⁵⁴ White jock alumna Sophie Baker (1985) shared: “The nice looking jock boys in the crowd, they dated the cheerleader type girls, not the jock girls, back then”(p.6); White musician Michael Hallner (1976) shared: “...your jocks always dated [the cheerleaders], the best looking girls in school, and the best looking girls always dated the jocks, you know, sports people.” (p.11).

for female jocks over the cheerleaders, alluded to in the previous chapter,⁴⁵⁵ challenged testimonies that male jocks would not be interested in female jocks. Jim's memories of his female counterparts suggested perhaps less of a consensus among peers, and in particular among male jocks, regarding the desirability of the "cheerleader type," further suggesting that inherited binary constructions in popular culture around jock/cheerleader, popular/unpopular, attractive/unattractive, might never have represented the lived experiences of most high school goers, but the highly visible and noticeable experiences of a few. It might not be too bold to advance that "the distorted lens of historical mythologizing"⁴⁵⁶ might be at play as movie directors, advertisers and crafters of popular culture perpetuated certain stereotypes in peer associations.

What alumni's stories seemed to reveal, from the fifties into the early eighties, was that constructions of "popular" students were directly related to the intensity of their visibility, in turn directly related to their level of participation in extracurricular activities. Popularity was more a high profile status than a value status. Alumna Teresa Randle captured this when she shared: "the popular girls were the ones that were the class officers...cheerleaders..."⁴⁵⁷ In the same way that people might be fascinated with the lives of celebrities, but criticize them and never purport to want to live their lives, less visible students might have been looking, and in the nineties as we shall see, even looking down on the visible students for their arrogance, but not

⁴⁵⁵ "The girl athletes back in our time, they were great. The cheerleaders, the prissy girls who didn't want to get their finger nails dirty, and that kind of stuff! The girl athletes, they were just down to earth." Jim Garnes (1978), p.6.

⁴⁵⁶ See Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), p. xi.

⁴⁵⁷ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with African-American alumna Teresa Randle, graduate of 1981, p.5.

necessarily wanting to be like them. Thus “popularity” was more a constructed abstraction for naming those who held high profiles by virtue of their visible performances, than by virtue of peers wanting to emulate them.

Beyond perceptions of popularity and male-female relationships, recollections suggested that girls, when compared to boys, continued to be perceived as “definitely...a lot smarter.”⁴⁵⁸ From the fifties to the early eighties at Miller High, peers, and in particular male peers, whether white or black, continued to perceive females as smarter and better students. Female smarts were also linked, across time periods, to effort, evidenced in alumni’s references to young women doing homework for their male counterparts. The feminization of the “good” student throughout these periods, a phenomenon that morphed into the stereotypically less feminine and more “purposeful” student in the nineties, as we shall see, suggested an understanding of good students as those who did as they were told. Something that, at least as reported by alumni interviewed across the two generations of graduates, was better accomplished by young women than young men.

However, unlike “the divided generation,” “the border-crossing generation” depicted a student body less involved with faculty and school authority. For one, seldom did alumni, across race and gender, spontaneously remember their principals, and when asked about them, they vaguely recalled their presence, or not at all.⁴⁵⁹

Three principals succeeded each other between 1970 and 1985. The first two principals held offices between ’70-’73 and ’73-’78. While the third principal, Mr.

⁴⁵⁸ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Tim Whittle, graduate of 1981, p.9.

⁴⁵⁹ Speaking of their principal: Josh White (1972-1976): “I don’t remember him when I was there.” (p.5); Teresa Randle (1977-1981): “Mr. Krauss was distant. I mean, he didn’t really know me personally. He was distant.” (p.2).

Krauss, held office much longer, between '78 and '91, he was not remembered fondly by alumni who graduated before 1985. The very few alumni, who remembered Mr. Krauss as an effective principal, were graduates of the early nineties, as we shall see. Thus narrators' recollections revealed an administration uninvolved in students' daily lives except when punishment was to be administered. Jim Garnes recalled:

“They [principal and vice-principal]were distant. They didn’t walk the hallways or anything...Only time you saw a vice-principal, is when you were in a lot of trouble. You were going to get yelled at. If you ever saw the principal, then you were in real, really big trouble. You really did something wrong.”⁴⁶⁰

While Mr. Lancaster had been, throughout his tenure from 1949 to 1964, beloved by Miller High students, and from 1956 on, by black students as well as white, as had been his successors who served between '64-'66 and '66-'70, principals in the seventies and early eighties were perceived by Miller High students not only as distant and punishing, but also vengeful. Tim remembered: “This one vice-principal wanted [a buddy of mine, a football player] out of school.”⁴⁶¹

Students' relationships with teachers, on the other hand, were not as clear cut, and continued uneven, as they had been in the fifties and sixties. Students who most felt alienated from faculty were black males as David's testimonies suggested. David's disappointment with the only black faculty who taught history, as earlier discussed, echoed that of city dwelling African American youth in the early decades of the twentieth century as documented by historian E.F. Frazier,⁴⁶² simultaneously

⁴⁶⁰ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Jim Garnes, graduate of 1978, p.10.

⁴⁶¹ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Tim Whittle, graduate of 1981, p.2.

⁴⁶² See E.F. Frazier, *Negro Youth at The Crossroads: Their Personality Development in The Middle States* (New York: Scholar Book, 1967) In this work Frazier quotes a disgruntled black youth: “I’ve often wondered why we didn’t study more about Booker T. Washington than George Washington! No matter how much I try, I can never be George Washington...” (p.105)

underscoring the century long dissatisfaction of black high school goers with the unilaterally white bias in the history curriculum, and dramatically revealing the absence of overt complaint by Miller High black students in the seventies against such biases. Young black men who did not participate in sports, and who were not academically engaged, as suggested by David's recollections, asserted their dissatisfaction by not participating in school life rather than protesting its curriculum.

There is reason to believe that the relatively small number of African American students at Miller High in the seventies, the close-knit community within which they lived where long established black and white families shared an identity across races as dwellers of Miller Town, as opposed to city dwellers, and the one black teacher's reluctance or inability to galvanize the energies of Miller High black male youth toward academic participation, combined to silence overt protest on part of dissatisfied young black men whose families emphasized respect for authority, and getting along with everyone. African-American alumna Joanne Pet summarized other African-American alumni's recollections of their upbringing when she shared: "I was familiar with getting along with white people...I wasn't taught that there was a difference between you and me."⁴⁶³

Thus the lack of outreach on part of the white faculty to recruit, as David remembered, the many talented black male youth on one hand; the one black teacher's failure to fully deliver the African American historical reality that might have motivated and inspired Miller High's black student population, as David's memories hinted; and the force of parental influence that emphasized "getting along," contributed to keeping many young black men covertly dissatisfied, seeking solace in

⁴⁶³ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Joanne Per (1974), p.7.

group rejection of a system they felt rejected by. This was however a group rejection manifested in non-participation in extracurricular activities, and in skipping classes; but not in dropping-out completely, nor protesting change overtly.

Students who most butted heads with faculty were non-college bound white males of lesser means, as Tim's recollections revealed. Some of these young men who either avoided or fought with teachers of academic subjects established connections with the coach if they were involved in sports, as David and Tim did, or with the shop teacher, as Sam Garnes did. The persona of the coach loomed large in the memories of black and white males for whom sports provided a belonging. Some males in the seventies seemed to accept and find status from being "beat up" by the coach, whether these young men were jocks or potheads. There is reason to believe that the introduction of the football jock culture, non-existent before the very end of the sixties, might have contributed to the greater acceptance on the part of many male students of coaches' aggressive behaviors toward them as part of a manly show of stoic endurance.⁴⁶⁴

While coaches beat up on young males, other teachers made love to their female students. Narrators' recollections of teacher/student affairs in the seventies and eighties brought into relief the transformation of a high school climate with the infusion of a very young faculty. While reports of student/teacher affairs emerged in recollections of alumni who attended in the late seventies and early eighties, such affairs were also remembered by graduates of the nineties, suggesting a continued

⁴⁶⁴ The football jock culture might have participated in shifting aggression from male students toward coaches in the fifties (recall Robert Heart's (1956) testimony of friend punching the coach and dropping out) to aggression by coaches toward male students.

trend in teacher/student affairs for at least the latter three decades of the twentieth century at Miller High.

Sophie Baker recounted an affair between her friend and their teacher, an affair that escaped the radar screens of school authorities as well as that of parents. Her recollection underscored not only the young friend's inner turmoil and vulnerability, but also the young women's fascination with carrying out a love affair with an older man, a fascination that helped Sophie be accomplice to the illicit relationship. In hindsight, at the time of the interview, and from the perspective this time of a mother of a teenage daughter, Sophie regretted her participation in her friend's affair. As a youth, however, she vicariously lived out a fantasy through her friend's involvement with the older male teacher and intensified the experience by keeping it secret at the request of the teacher.

*"I'm embarrassed to say this. I helped her. ..He was younger, closer to our age, and when teachers...say they care about you, love you, and she was having problems at home, parents fought all the time, as an adult I can look back and see that she needed attention, and he gave her attention in the wrong way...I was a little bit enchanted with the whole older man thing...I would drive her to his van...he made us swear to secrecy...This girl had low self-esteem, and when you take advantage of that, that makes you a predator."*⁴⁶⁵

Tim Whittle also reported rumors of an affair between the African American teacher and a white student in the late seventies that while unconfirmed, sketched out the pervasiveness in young people's imagination of the time, of the possibilities of teacher/student love affairs. Tim shared:

*"I got to Miller High a year late on a scandal with a teacher and a girl...I think '77. A black male teacher with a student white girl—that was a double thing. I don't know if she was pregnant or if he just slept with her. That was some kind of a scandal...he disappeared."*⁴⁶⁶

⁴⁶⁵ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Sophie Baker, graduate of 1985, p.14.

⁴⁶⁶ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Tim Whittle, graduate of 1981, p.4.

While such affairs broke laws governing adult conduct toward minors, conventions of sexual behaviors for whites and blacks, and the tacit ethical understanding and social obligation that teachers, by virtue of the power differential inherent in their relationships with students are called to care as parents might, students and teachers lived their daily lives in proximity to each other within tensions that tugged at the previously reigning *in loco parentis*.

Evidence suggests that the influx at Miller High during the seventies and eighties of younger teachers who, closer in age to their charges, spent time with students outside of school hours fraternizing with them created a social environment within which teacher and student could readily become friends and lovers, especially within the broader social and legal climate of the times where students' rights were on the rise and school authorities' paternalistic roles on the decline.⁴⁶⁷ Sophie shared:

“When I was in school...I spent time with people [school peers and teachers] on the weekends, it was platonic [with] the teacher...especially with sports, [spent time] at [teacher’s] house, cook outs...”⁴⁶⁸

Young teachers, as alumni reported, were also more apt to put up with student misbehavior if it meant greater participation by students in classroom discussions, while impatient older teachers routinely sent their charges to the principal's office.⁴⁶⁹

⁴⁶⁷ A series of laws had been passed that expanded students' rights in secondary schools, as well as rights of young people in juvenile court proceedings. See rulings in *Tinker versus DeMoines* in 1968; also in 1968, the ACLU published “Academic Freedom in the Secondary Schools” in which they argued for “a recognition that deviation from the opinions and standards deemed desirable by the faculty is not ipso facto a danger to the educational process;” as well as Supreme Court decisions in the *Gault Case* in 1967, and *Winship Case* in 1970. For details about *Tinker versus DeMoines* see Urban & Wagoner, *American Education: A History* (New York: McGraw Hill, 2000), p.338. For details about ACLU on academic freedoms in secondary education, and the *Gault* and *Winship* cases, see Gerald Grant, *Hamilton High* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1988), pgs 50-51.

⁴⁶⁸ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Sophie Baker, graduate of 1985, p.14.

⁴⁶⁹ Recall from Chapter 3, Tim Whittle's testimony: “The younger ones challenged you. They were the ones you got into arguments with. They also stimulated you...⁴⁶⁹If they had to put up with you being a

These younger teachers not only loosened rules of engagement within the classroom, but also warned students ahead of time when administrators were displeased with their behaviors. In essence, teachers snitched on school authorities higher up, and acted more as peers to their students than authority figures. As one alumnus put it: “the younger teachers would tell you when someone was on the prowl for us,”⁴⁷⁰ while the old teachers were more likely to “send you to the office.”⁴⁷¹

Young teachers’ disengagement from the establishment on one hand, and their behavioral allowances on the other, contributed to blurring the traditional teacher-student boundaries for both teachers and students in turn making student-teacher affairs easier. However, while the more nefarious results of younger teachers’ less hierarchical attitudes toward school authorities as well as students might have resulted in some student-teacher affairs, the more empowering consequences one might have expected, such as greater participation on the part of black male students, and in general a more political student body, never materialized. The split between much younger and much older faculty, created, according to alumni’s recollections, a rift that focused teachers’ attention more on other teachers than on students. Tim recalled that there was “a huge difference” between the young and old teachers. He shared: “I don’t think they liked each other. That is what cracked me up.”⁴⁷²

While in rare cases female students were reported to have affairs with male teachers, in general, female students’ relationships with their teachers were far less disappointing or contentious than they were for male students who were not college-

bit playful or something, as long as it did not get out of hand, sometimes they would join in, they would find it funny.”(p.11)

⁴⁷⁰ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Tim Whittle, graduate of 1981, p. 2.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid., p.2.

⁴⁷² Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Tim Whittle, graduate of 1981, p. 2.

bound. Female alumni in general reported good relationships with teachers.⁴⁷³ By contrast, male alumni interviewed remembered fondly mostly the coach and the shop teacher. Albeit non-intellectual males who constructed their expertise as physical prowess, discipline and team work in sports, and designing, organizing, and producing projects in shop—hands-on activities that required physical and manual dexterity, the coach and the shop teacher were respected by male youth. However, while the coach enjoyed a relatively high status position at Miller High, the shop teacher held the lowest status on the hierarchical totem pole of subject matters. Thus whatever satisfaction male students might have derived from building and producing concrete objects in shop, one might assume they also integrated the institutionalized low value that such activities held.

Male students who took shop, or were part of the “work-release” program, as narrators reported, held a lower status in the minds of teachers. Teachers “liked the smart kids, and the jocks.”⁴⁷⁴ Miller High faculty, as earlier shown, communicated a bias against manual work and part-time school attendance through “work-release.” Students themselves, however, as reported by narrators, did not share in their teachers’ bias, strongly suggesting that the privileging of certain types of knowledge-making was an adult construction no longer espoused by high school goers in the seventies and early eighties, as it had been by students in the fifties and sixties.⁴⁷⁵

There is reason to believe that youth-generated peer associations within a generally

⁴⁷³ Teresa Randle (1981): “I always had a good rapport with teachers.” Sophie Baker (1985): “I think a lot of people formed fairly close bonds with teachers at that time.”

⁴⁷⁴ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Sophie Baker, graduate of 1985, p.5.

⁴⁷⁵ Recall from Part I/Chapter I, Budd Land’s remark (1964-68): “The general track was for those who were just going to go out and work as laborers. They were the slower kids or those that just didn’t care about what they were doing.”(p.6).

tolerant student-body where “everybody was allowed to be their own individual self”⁴⁷⁶ created social conditions within which peers were less likely to compare each other based on the academic tracks they attended. This finding opens up historical possibilities for student-generated change in status allocation of subject matters, not for the sake of quickly tucking away credits toward an easy credential, as historians of education and education scholars have documented,⁴⁷⁷ but for the sake of surviving an otherwise meaningless environment, as in the case of Sam and others like him for whom shop, for example, was a site of meaningful learning. While Miller High students did not take the opportunity of their particular space in time to challenge adult communicated hierarchies of learning sites and instead retreated away from confrontation with school authorities into their bounded or hybrid communities, whether these were black non-jock males who refused to join the system, black and white musicians who lived for their garage music, or potheads who found solace in the shop; the opportunities had been there. In other parts of the United States, and urban settings in particular, some high school students were articulating their dissent against institutionalized inequalities. One such urban student deconstructed the high school system as a reproduction theorist might have, and articulated a desire for unity among youth across racial and class divides.

High school is used to put people in various slots. It puts black people or poor people into slots—they will be working class. People like us here will go to college and flounder around in the arts. We are not supposed to have any consciousness of what goes on in working kids’ minds...kids are coming to

⁴⁷⁶ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Teresa Randle, graduate of 1981, p.6.

⁴⁷⁷ See works by Arthur G. Powell and Eleanor Farrar, *The Shopping Mall High School* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1985); as well as Labaree’s work earlier cited.

realize one another's needs and want to break out of this classification system.⁴⁷⁸

However, while Miller High students, as alumni interviewed reported, did not make public their possible discontent, they did ignore adult imposed hierarchies. Miller High students' attitudes toward various sites of knowledge-making (i.e. classroom, shop, sports field, etc.) were liberal and democratic, while teachers' attitudes were elitist. Students arranged themselves on a horizontal continuum that equally juxtaposed them according to labels that captured their passions and interests, rather than their accomplishments: eggheads, smart girls, jocks, fire-heads, potheads, motor-heads, and the like. While potheads and jocks often butted heads, so to speak, their rivalries were at a standstill, neither group achieving, among peers, supremacy over the other, especially in view of the fact that many more peers could visit potheads than participate in sports for which you had to compete. Teachers on the other hand, arranged students in polarized fashion, either vertically as losers or winners: "A trigonometry teacher...[she said] you're going to be a loser;"⁴⁷⁹ or as insiders and outsiders, as in the case of work-release students earlier mentioned.

Examining Miller High from students' perspectives has brought into question the institutionalized hierarchy of what is considered valuable knowledge-making (i.e. the shop versus academic track), beyond what is considered valuable content of knowledge (i.e. identified curricular biases and questioned knowledge-content, in particular in subject matters such as social studies). Excavating high school life from

⁴⁷⁸ See Kenneth Fish, *Conflict and dissent in the high school* (New York: Bruce Publishing Company, 1970), p.6.

⁴⁷⁹ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Tim Whittle, graduate of 1981, p.9. Tim reported other incidents of teachers calling students "losers" (p.2.) Pothead Sam Garnes (1974) and musician Michael Hallner (1986) also mentioned teachers' divisions of students into "winners and losers."

students' perspectives has revealed in this work a hereto missing piece for the understanding of educational inequalities in comprehensive high schools. For many male students across class and race, from the fifties to the early eighties, learning was meaningful when they were engaged in manual work,⁴⁸⁰ or in music making, and on. Inequality, at least as seventies and early eighties graduates' testimonies suggested, rested in teachers' devaluation of certain types of knowledge-making sites. Even when school authorities officially sanctioned, as they did in the seventies (and throughout the nineties), an activity deeply rooted in a social efficiency goal⁴⁸¹ such as the "work-release" program, teachers devalued participation in the program, de facto devaluing it as a legitimate site of learning for students.⁴⁸²

Counteracting to some extent the institutionalized inequity evidenced in faculty's and school authorities' devaluation of certain subject matters, was students' affiliations to hybrid communities created through peer-groups and through border-crossings between peer-groups. In the meeting places between school structure and student agency, affiliation to youth generated peer-groups, for this generation of the seventies and early eighties, played an important role in how teachers and students accorded young people varying degrees of legitimacy as high school students. The affective importance attributed to group belonging, by students and teachers, is a phenomenon perhaps uniquely American that alternately protected and exposed young people in the institutional setting of the comprehensive high school.

⁴⁸⁰ As in the case of the economically disadvantaged Robert Heart in the fifties, and the middle-class pothead Sam Garnes, the motor-heads, and "work-release" students in the seventies and on.

⁴⁸¹ For in depth analysis of the social efficiency perspective on education, see chapter 1 in Labaree's *How to succeed in school without really learning* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), pgs. 15-52.

⁴⁸² I develop this finding in depth in the Epilogue.

Students who lacked peer-group affiliation acquired nebulous identities. Other students and teachers in particular, as alumni's recollections suggested, would lose sight of students as individuals when they did not belong to a particular peer-group. By default, these students were grouped on the basis of socially determined categories of race or class, as earlier discussed. Thus black students, males and females who had no peer-group association, were robbed of "individual" status. They became the *black* kids who, as David's testimonies suggested, went individually unnoticed by a white faculty, something he lamented in view of the many talents he knew many of them to possess. David on the other hand, by virtue of being a jock, was accorded *individual* attention. Conversely, these black students found comfort with each other as black students, not so much because they shared the same race, but because they shared a similar culture, as African-American alumni recalled.⁴⁸³ Work-release students who lived in a limbo state, neither full-time students nor full-time employees were also robbed of individuality, and were seen as the working class people coming and going at the periphery of school life, a group whom many teachers "gave up on."⁴⁸⁴ This phenomenon, by which specific peer-group-affiliation granted individual status and lack of specific peer-group-affiliation erased the individual within an amorphous group generally organized under a race or class category, did not automatically equate individual recognition with positive recognition. Regular potheads were individually identified as losers by teachers:

*"A buddy of mine...he loved to get high, the teacher said, I'm going to make sure you don't graduate high school, you're a loser..."*⁴⁸⁵

⁴⁸³ Recall testimonies in Chapter 3 by David Randle, Teresa Randle and Tim Whittle.

⁴⁸⁴ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Tim Whittle, graduate of 1981, p.2.

⁴⁸⁵ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Tim Whittle, graduate of 1981, p.2.

Memories of seventies' and early eighties' graduates have shown that students and teachers individualized those students who belonged to peer-groups, but generalized and categorized students by race and class when students did not belong to peer-groups. This analysis shows the influential power held by peer-generated group affiliations on the basis of shared interests, in influencing both students' and teachers' perceptions of students, and in particular, in providing opportunities for lessening race and class divisions among students, if not among teachers.

This analysis further shows the role that school authorities' relationships with each other play in molding student perceptions of faculty. The absent principals, the disinterested older teachers, the imprudent younger teachers who snitched on administrators, and the feuds among faculty along the generation gap, together combined to weave an inconsistent and often unresponsive environment for students who did not count among the smart and the jocks. Thus, if you were a student of an older teacher, you did well if you behaved, whether you studied or not. If you were the student of a younger female teacher, you did well if you were smart, whether you behaved or not. If you were the student of a younger male teacher, you did well if you were a male jock, even if you weren't smart. One can only imagine the myriad contradictory messages that young people sorted through, and around which they negotiated their daily student lives. One can also imagine how such adult-behaviors would create in the eyes of young people, a laughable high school world at best: "that is what cracked me up;"⁴⁸⁶ and an alienating world at worse in which they perceived that teachers: "gave up on you."⁴⁸⁷

⁴⁸⁶Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Tim Whittle, graduate of 1981, p.2.

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid.

Finally, while differences in white and black students' experiences of their high school years continued to differ in the seventies and early eighties as reported by alumni interviewed, these differences no longer starkly pitted white and black students against each other. Thus unlike recollections of black graduates of the fifties and sixties whose overall impression of school authority was favorable, while relationships with peers were reported problematic, black graduates of the seventies and early eighties experienced the reverse: a rapprochement with students, but a greater alienation from high school authorities. Nat Right, African-American alumnus of the early 60s who was assaulted by a peer, remembered his principal fondly as a fair man, and spoke of students finally getting to the "business of being students." By contrast, David, African-American graduate of the seventies, remembered poor and disappointing relationships with teachers and administration, but very good long lasting relationships with white friends. In the seventies and early eighties, "resisting the system"—which had been, during the early days of integration at Miller High, the *modus operandi* of many poor white males—was now becoming the *modus operandi* for black males who were not jocks.

Young black men whom faculty and administration had not reached out to, who could not find a space among peer-generated groups, retreated into a voluntary racial/cultural segregation within the comprehensive high school they attended, and resisted the "white" system, as David's recollections revealed. This segregation, as earlier discussed, was not aimed at white students,⁴⁸⁸ as it might have been at the

⁴⁸⁸ Refer to testimonies in Part I / Chapter I by African-American alumnus Burt Sadden (1967) who explained black students' refusal to attend Miller High dances as "culturally," not racially motivated. Also, refer to David Randle's testimonies in Part II / Chapter 3 regarding cultural differences between black and white students, in particular with regards to tastes in music.

white school authorities. According to David, it was the lack of outreach on the part of faculty and staff that made entering a peer-group affiliation so much more difficult for black students.

At the meeting place between structure and agency, many black students chose the comfort of shared culture against what they perceived to be a cold and unresponsive white system, one to be mistrusted. In response to an administration and faculty removed from their daily student realities, they abstracted faculty and administration into an all encompassing and nebulous “system.” Just as they might have felt abstracted as individuals into the overarching “black students,” so did they abstract school authorities into a “white system,” not unlike the way that white males of the fifties and sixties abstracted high school life into “the system,” as they too felt themselves unseen and unrecognized.

The result however, was a hardened identification with *race* for many black students, and a hardened identification with *lower class* for many white students of work-release programs,⁴⁸⁹ that as we shall explore in Part III, provided the foundation for a complete re-organization of student associations. The affect that sprung out of those hardened identifications, coupled with an explosive demographic shift, and zero tolerance policies delivered by ever more distant school authorities, created the conditions for segregation among students more rigid, and fragmented than it had been in the early years of integration at Miller High.

⁴⁸⁹ “Work-release” students seemed to be overwhelmingly white. Was it because employers during the seventies and early eighties preferred white workers, and there might have been a tacit understanding that the white students would be recruited? More data collection is necessary to unravel the predominance of working class whites in the “work-release” programs, beyond student population numbers.

PART III
THE RE-DIVIDED GENERATION
(1986-2000)

CHAPTER 5

DIMENSIONS OF DIFFERENCE: THE RIGID BORDERS OF RELIGION, ETHNICITY, NATIONALITY, RACE, AND CLASS (1986-2000)

In the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s, Miller High students attended an overcrowded high school where it was “tough to get from one end to another [between classes]...If your class was next door, literally you had to fight through the hallway.”⁴⁹⁰ It was a school that by one alumna’s recollections was “old and ugly.”⁴⁹¹ The solution to the overcrowding came only late in the 90s with the construction of a state-of-the-art 600-student addition that was completed in 2000.⁴⁹² An influx of new arrivals to Miller Town contributed to the overcrowding: immigrated Russian Jews⁴⁹³ and ex-city dwellers, many of whom were taking advantage of the recently erected ‘section 8’ apartments,⁴⁹⁴ and most of whom were black. During this period, the population explosion accelerated the expansion of Miller Town, as high-end and low-end houses filled up any remaining farm fields, restaurants multiplied, grocery chains and gas stations, antique shops, shopping centers and malls, spread.⁴⁹⁵

⁴⁹⁰ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Heather Kran, graduate of 1993, p.1. Other alumni reported the overcrowding during their high school careers at the end of the eighties and throughout the nineties: Sue Cohen (1995); Cecilia Hood (1996); Bill Jackman (1999); Jackman, p.3: “It was crowded, really crowded in the hallways.”

⁴⁹¹ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Sue Cohen, graduate of 1995, p.13.

⁴⁹² Miller High Alumni Directory 2000, p.xi.

⁴⁹³ At that time, many Asian Indians were also immigrating to Reisterstown, but in smaller numbers than Russian Jews. The limited resources available to conduct this research, on one hand, and the larger number of Russian immigrants, made me decide to concentrate on locating the Russian point of view.

⁴⁹⁴ *The Community Times*, through 1970s. Holdings in archives of town library

⁴⁹⁵ *The Community Times*, through 1970s. Holdings in archives of <Miller Town> Library. Also, testimony of alumnus Harry Rice, graduate of 1987, upon returning from college and abroad in the early nineties: “it was strange to see so many new houses and roads that weren’t there before.”(p.9); also testimony of alumna Cherry Little, graduate of 1992, explaining changes over time: “My father

This accelerated development and avalanche of newcomers created a reaction from both whites and blacks with long time roots in the community toward all those whom they called “new comers,” and whom they accused of bringing bad city habits with them. Still, while a young Russian immigrant might hear an irate Miller High peer shout “Russian go home,”⁴⁹⁶ irritations by old timers were mostly directed toward ex-city blacks who doubled the population of black students at Miller High.⁴⁹⁷

Alumni explained the changes in Miller Town population in the nineties as follows:

*“By the 1990s the black population in Miller Town had changed a lot, because I don’t like to say anything bad about it, but look at all the apartments... We didn’t know those people though. They were all new comers.”*⁴⁹⁸

“In the nineties, that’s when blacks that weren’t raised here started moving here... This area just exploded. In the nineties, the population probably tripled. Farms were dropping left and right. Black kids from other towns were moving here and they were different from Miller Town black kids totally different, you ask the black kids from Miller Town, they will tell you. I will quote you my buddy C.J. [black friend], he said to me, any time a county black starts hanging out with a black from the city, the black kid is either dead or in jail. We have friends that are dead from high school because they started getting hooked up with other black kids from the city then they became heroin addicts, I’m not saying it’s their fault, it’s just a different culture. Every kid I grew up with that was black, soon as he started hanging out with non-county people, black or white, they were in jail or dead... you’re mixing two different

he’s seen a complete change in the community since he’s been there and he’s been there for thirty one years. Yeah. And they built up around us... I mean, it used to be like all farm lands... [oh]...I forget about the malls...’cause Springfield Mall was just opening and Oak Field at the time...(p.31 and p.34).

⁴⁹⁶ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Vera Debin, graduate of 2000, p.11.

⁴⁹⁷ Yearbook data. Also, African-American alumna Teresa Randle, graduate of 1981, in comparing black population of students of the nineties to that of the seventies: “It has changed now, I went to a graduation last week, there are more African-American kids, almost 60%. I read in the paper that they have more racial tensions, I didn’t witness that when I was in school [in the seventies].” (p.6-8).

⁴⁹⁸ These reflections on changes in the community were shared by those alumni who themselves still counted as “old timers,” and most of who had graduated from Miller High in the seventies and early eighties. This particular quote is from transcript of audiotape interview with David Randle, graduate of 1976, p.14. David continues to be a resident of Miller Town, one who has first hand witnessed changes in the community.

cultures...that's when they had some racial issues...black kids from the city."⁴⁹⁹

In response to what many perceived to be city kids' nefarious influences on local kids, the blacks and whites who grew up in Miller Town and were now having families, began sending their children to private schools or home-schooling them.⁵⁰⁰

Thus Miller Town, in the last decade of the twentieth century, transformed from a place where one was likely to cross paths with a known face, into a town of xenophobic old-timers, and eager new-comers hoping to find a better life; and the town's high school was absorbing an unprecedented amount of newly transplanted youth "with attitude," among which a segment of the recently immigrated Russian youth who identified themselves as the Russian mafia, trafficked in drugs, hated blacks and rednecks, and sported anti-American sentiments. "Rednecks" in turn, who as previous analyses revealed, had consistently displayed racist attitudes toward blacks, were no longer being silenced by vigilant white peers, as they had been during the seventies and early eighties. To their list of black foes, "rednecks" now added Russian Jews, as some alumni revealed, and as we shall further explore.

No longer was Miller High nestled within an out of the way rural-suburban town. It was now the high school of an urban-suburban town directly connected by a

⁴⁹⁹ Again, quote from transcript of audiotape interview with an "old timer", Tim Whittle, graduate of 1981, p.5-6.

⁵⁰⁰ African-American alumna Teresa Randle, graduate of 1981, explained: "I have one child, she goes to a private school, so long as I can do it, I will keep her there. I feel it is safer...There are a lot of kids that are angrier than ever before, other people are raising them...We have kids in group-homes in this area now...It's like foster homes, which means that more and more kids are on medication. When they don't take their medication, you don't know what kind of child you will have that day. I just don't want my daughter to be involved in that." (p.7) African-American alumnus Pat Baley explained: "We home-school. My kids are good and I want to keep them that way. Kids get all their bad habits starting in middle-school. [I want] to protect [my kids] against bad influence of peers."(p.4) White alumna Roberta Jones, graduate of 1991, explained her parents' choice regarding the schooling of her brother: "My brother went to a private school...[my parents] were worried the years that came under me, each year seemed to be a little bit worse and worse, worrying about whom your kids were hanging out with...he was a boy and he could get into more trouble." (p.4).

metro line to downtown city life. Miller Town had become accessible to visitors who could not afford to own cars. Black city-parents desperate to see their children attend the better county schools, concocted fictitious residential addresses and began sending their youth to Miller High, to the growing frustration of administrators forced to investigate the legitimacy of school attendance by students who were black.⁵⁰¹ Expulsions, previously unheard of, became more common place, as did undercover narcotic cops who were now looking for *ecstasy* more than for marijuana. One alumnus summarized the impact of social changes in Miller Town during the late eighties and throughout the nineties, in this way:

*"I think perhaps the Miller Town area [was] beginning to realize that it's not isolated any more, that it has to deal with the outside world, and certainly, seeing the growing pains that go with that."*⁵⁰²

Miller High students were now taking classes in *Education for Responsible Parenting*; business classes included introductory courses in marketing; psychology classes had been added, and the popularity of Lacrosse had replaced that of football. In the hallways, students kissing passionately were a regular occurrence.⁵⁰³ Girls

⁵⁰¹ Information gained from conversation with current Principal and group interview with three veteran teachers.

⁵⁰² Harry Rice (1987), p.11. While the traditional ringing of the bell the first day of school continued, and while the building remained, in the eyes of this generation, an antediluvian construction, students' means and styles of communication were by contrast, high tech, forcing administrations to incorporate into school policies, rules about the use of tools such as cell phones. In the decade of Columbine-like tragedies, and the insistence by many parents that their children be allowed to use cell phones on school premises, both as emergency tools as well as means for coordinating last minute changes in overbooked schedules, on one hand, and the speed at which drug deals could be arranged between students during school hours, and friends or lovers could chat away instruction-time across classrooms through text messages, on the other, the cell phone emerged as "a tool so great", to quote Firesign Theater, "it could only be used for good or evil." Conference calls and internet text messengers further extended young people's possibilities for electronically connecting with each other in virtual communities. In the three-dimensional world, young Miller High School students now met at the recently opened Springfield Mall in the neighboring Springfield town, where they also rode into the city on the metro.

⁵⁰³ Heather Korn (1993), p.6: "[There was] definitely kissing in the hallways...When you've seen it that often, we'd seen it since 7th and 8th grade, they started way back. A girl, the summer of eighth grade had twin boys...she was twelve actually. So we have been seeing it for a while."

showed up to school wearing more revealing clothing than ever before in the history of Miller Comprehensive High School,⁵⁰⁴ and students who wore T-Shirts advertising alcohol or drugs were called to task.⁵⁰⁵

It was also during this period that the rare young person openly expressed being gay, at the risk of great ridicule,⁵⁰⁶ and that Miller High youth participated in clubs often conservative in nature or religiously and racially defined, among which: *Youth Against Drunk Driving*, the *Christian Young Life Club*, the *Fellowship of Christian Athletes* (FCA), the *Jewish Youth Group*, and the *Black Awareness Club*.⁵⁰⁷ A *Bible Study*⁵⁰⁸ group met every morning. At Miller High, at the end of the twentieth century, young people of Judeo-Christian religious traditions openly congregated on school premises to profess their beliefs.

This generation of Miller High graduates inherited the youth-defined peer-groups of the previous, added the *punks*, *goths* and *geeks* or *nerds*,⁵⁰⁹ and no longer

⁵⁰⁴ “There are some we looked at and went ‘maybe she could put something more on than a bathing suit.’” Heather Korn (1993), p.6.

⁵⁰⁵ Heather Korn (1993): “If there was an alcohol or cigarette advertisement, they would be told to turn your shirt inside out, or they would have somebody come get you or bring you new clothes, or something like that.” (p.6).

⁵⁰⁶ Heather Korn: “There was one kid, one or two classes ahead of us, who was very openly gay, and he got teased a lot...he got it a lot.”

⁵⁰⁷ It seems likely that the influx of black students brought to prominence attendance in the Black Awareness Club.

⁵⁰⁸ Bill Jackman, graduate of 1999 and a member during his high school years of the FCA as well as Young Life Club: “We have a bible study” (p.9). Also, Vera Debin, graduate of 2000, reflected on “ultra right wing” peers attending the “morning bible study.” (p.7).

⁵⁰⁹ Although this study identifies shifts in terminologies that address students considered smart and academically inclined: *egghead*, *geek* and *nerd*, it lacks the data to capture the subtleties that might reflect changes in actual meanings. For example, the “egghead” of the seventies was considered to be the “smart” person, the intellectual; the “geek”, while smart, might have engaged in behaviors considered weird; or the “nerd” might have been involved in obsessive pastimes such as rock collections. That some alumni of the late eighties and nineties interviewed described themselves as *nerds*, although they did not reveal “weird” behaviors, may indicate that they attributed the new meanings that these terms acquired when describing who they were in the past. Today, a prep dedicated to academics will proudly be called a “nerd”, perhaps as computer nerds such as Bill Gates gave the term a more respectable and envied meaning; emphasizing the carry-over power of high

talked about *potheads*, but instead of *drug users* and *dealers*. However, unlike graduates of the seventies who perceived themselves and others, through their recollections, as belonging to clearly defined peer-groups, or not at all, in which case they identified themselves and others racially and by economic status, graduates of the late eighties and nineties remembered themselves and others first and foremost as *Christian, Jewish, Russian, Black, Farm Girl* and once again as *Redneck*, superimposing religious, national, ethnic, and class dimensions to youth categories inherited from the previous generation. These categories of identity, however, played out differently for rule-abiding students and for those who challenged the system.⁵¹⁰

Almost all alumni interviewed recalled a very regulated high school setting, depicted administrators in terms of punishing forces, and spontaneously situated themselves vis-à-vis the principal to underscore their rule-abiding status.⁵¹¹ Alumni's recollections suggested that *not* knowing the principal on a personal level was a gauge of one's consistent good behavior. Knowing the principal, on the other hand, could only mean that one had transgressed. Alumni Harry Rice, Sue Cohen and Cecilia Hood, respectively graduates of 1987, 1995 and 1996, explained, when asked about their principals:

school labels into the "real-world", and the re-imagination of the meaning of that label through worldly success recycled back into the high school.

⁵¹⁰ Of interest is that while *gender* no longer featured as an organizing category for nineties' alumni who consistently reported equal treatment of, interaction between and participation by females and males, the category *sexuality* emerged as an organizing category only briefly alluded to by one alumna, as mentioned in an earlier footnote. Lack of data precludes further discussion.

⁵¹¹ All alumni interviewed had been "rule-abiding" students. While I had been able to identify a student who had counted among those I have labeled "rule-breakers," the alumnus refused to be interviewed, or to suggest other alumni for me to interview. Thus "rule-breakers" in this study come to view indirectly through recollections of those alumni interviewed, as well as through the recollections of three long-time tenured teachers whose oral histories I also collected.

“I cannot remember seeing the principal walk the hallways...was very strict. You stayed away from the office.”⁵¹²

“I couldn’t tell you the name of the principal and vice-principal...I couldn’t tell you what he looked like, I wasn’t at the office much, I had no reason to be with the principal.”⁵¹³

“Never dealt with [the principal], never had to.”⁵¹⁴

Furthermore, alumni referred to school rules as “the law...”

“Mr. L., he laid down the law...If you got caught [using drugs] there was no questions asked, you were automatically expelled and off the school property...on the first day they told you, they set down the guidelines...no drugs, no hitting on teachers...Mr. L. he didn’t ask too many questions, if you were caught...you were out the door.”⁵¹⁵

...and spontaneously recited a litany of prescribed behaviors:

“There was no drinking, no smoking, no drugs, no weapons, can’t bring anything to school that looks like a drug, don’t lay a hand on a teacher, you don’t hit a teacher, you’re not supposed to fight...the basics.”⁵¹⁶

Of the three generations of alumni interviewed, this one stood alone in its vivid recollections of its school’s disciplinary apparatus. Moreover, as this period of the late eighties and nineties progressed, memories revealed increasing expulsions, and decreasing “school spirit.” Remembrances of those who attended in the late eighties regarding strong community involvement and pride in being a Miller High student⁵¹⁷ transformed for those who attended throughout the nineties into memories of dim school spirit.⁵¹⁸ Alumna Heather Korn, graduate of 1993, remembered: “The

⁵¹² Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Harry Rice, graduate of 1987, p. 2.

⁵¹³ Ibid., p.12.

⁵¹⁴ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Cecilia Hood, graduate of 1996, p. 6.

⁵¹⁵ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Cherry Gate, graduate of 1992, p.31.

⁵¹⁶ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Hether Korn, graduate of 1993, p.3.

⁵¹⁷ Harry Rice (1983-1987): “...parents were involved...there was a lot of spirit.” (p.6.);

Cherry Gate (1988-1992): “We showed our school spirit” (p.27); “...the band, and the choir, the auditorium was full. There was a lot of family, alumni who used to come and watch.” Last testimony of school spirit: Heather Korn (1989-1993): “We had more spirit than any class.” (p.5.)

⁵¹⁸ Speaking about lack of school spirit: Cecilia Hood (1992-1996): “During homecoming week, but other than that, not really.” (p.6.); Bill Jackson (1995-1999): “I wouldn’t say it was ...school spirited.”

new kids that went to school behind me, they weren't as involved as we were, they weren't as excited about being there as we were." Testimonies further suggested that administration's hard line approach to discipline contributed to the lack of spirit. Sue Cohen remembered how the "administration came down really hard:"

"There was a tradition, a "senior doughnut-run", where we run across the street to Dunkin' Doughnuts...my year, if we decided to do it, we'd get kicked out of school. The administration came down really hard my senior year...spirit day [when you're supposed to do the twin-dress alike], nobody did that...nobody came to football games..."⁵¹⁹

Rule-abiding students, as recollections of those interviewed suggested, included students who belonged to religious youth groups; immigrant students seeking social mobility through lawfully sanctioned means; students deeply involved in community service occupations; and usually high profile students with means, *the preps*, who continued as they had since before desegregation, to craft the school's official representation to the outside world, although, as we shall see, with much less enthusiasm, and much less school-wide participation.

Sue Cohen, graduate of 1995 and Bill Jackman, graduate of 1999, belonged respectively to the *Jewish Youth Group* and to the *Christian Young Life Club*. Both Sue and Bill, along with friends who shared their beliefs, could be seen recruiting members to their religious organizations on school premises. Sue and Bill shared:

"We were always trying to recruit people for the youth group. If there was somebody I thought was really nice and Jewish, I would say, why don't you come to this meeting..."⁵²⁰

(p.4). Of note is that many black students of the previous generations reported not sharing in the school spirit.

⁵¹⁹ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Sue Cohen, graduate of 1995, p.8.

⁵²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.14.

*“We’d try to get into the school culture...we’d talk to the principal...if you see us around, don’t be scared, we’re not here to hurt.”*⁵²¹

Part of Sue’s and Bill’s ethos as young people openly committed to their religious beliefs, and unapologetic about expressing these within the public school system, was an avoidance of conspicuous consumption. Bill belonged to the *Fellowship of Christian Athletes* (FCA), and was part of a growing number of jocks who refrained from excessive drinking, or from drinking altogether. Within the *Young Life Club* he played games once a week, learned some sign language, and listened to or gave “a five to ten minute Christian message at the end”⁵²² of the club meeting. Sue underscored the *Jewish Youth Group*’s adherence to sober behavior when she distanced herself from the stereotype of the *Jewish American Princess* (JAP), a stereotype suggesting conspicuous consumption and self-indulgence:

*“Most of my close friends I had through my youth group...it was the Jewish Youth Group, it was really tight...There were other groups, the JAPS, I hate to say that reference, but they were. I didn’t really socialize with them.”*⁵²³

In alignment with their remembrance of self-control, these alumni’s memories further revealed a keen sense on their part that high school meant little in and of itself, that it was just a “stepping stone”⁵²⁴ to get to college, and that it required a purposeful and disciplined engagement.

Sue and Bill attended a combination of honors, and some “highly competitive”⁵²⁵ gifted and talented classes, saw themselves as rule-abiding students, and deeply involved themselves in extracurricular activities dear to their hearts. Sue

⁵²¹ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Bill Jackman, graduate of 1999, p.9.

⁵²² Information and quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Bill Jackman, graduate of 1999, p.8.

⁵²³ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Sue Cohen, graduate of 1995, p.2.

⁵²⁴ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Sue Cohen, graduate of 1995, p.15.

⁵²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

invested her energies in journalism which was “a big deal [to her] at the time,” and where she “was the editorials co-editor.”⁵²⁶ Bill played in the Lacrosse team which “went to the regional finals a couple of years in a row.”⁵²⁷ Sue identified herself as “one [of the] nerds,”⁵²⁸ and Bill, as a jock. These were students of middle-class background, who experientially understood that to secure some advantages in college applications they had to invest their energies competitively during their high school years. Alumni of this generation remembered that as high school students they were very much aware that higher numbers of high school goers, whether they wanted or not, headed for college, because it was “harder to get a job without a college-degree...they [wouldn’t] hire you as soon.”⁵²⁹

Sue and Bill remembered that teachers in honors and AP classes were demanding,⁵³⁰ and that competition among peers could be fierce. Sue shared:

“The gifted classes were very competitive...A friend of mine was running for valedictorian, and someone else was too. That person took college courses over the summer, had it put towards high school, so that boosted that person’s quality point average. The other kid didn’t take another advanced course...It was really sad.”⁵³¹

⁵²⁶ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Sue Cohen, graduate of 1995, p.4. As the Jewish student population grew at Miller High in the nineties, one saw more Jewish names on the journalism, suggesting a continuation into the end of the century, as the historian Paula Fass had identified, of proportionately more Jews, in particular female Jews in activities involving writing. See Paula Fass, “Creating New Identities: Youth and Ethnicity in New York City High Schools in the 1930s and 1940s,” in J.Austin &M.N.Willard (Eds.), *Generations of Youth: Youth culture and History in Twentieth Century America* (pp95-117), eds., J.Austin &M.N.Willard (New York: New York University Press, 1998).

⁵²⁷ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Bill Jackman, graduate of 1999, p.5.

⁵²⁸ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Sue Cohen, graduate of 1995, p.2.

⁵²⁹ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Bill Jackman, graduate of 1999, p.12.

⁵³⁰ Bill Jackman (1999): “I remember one of my honors history teachers that was very demanding. We had to write a report on two presidents a week, four, five pages each president.” (p.3).

⁵³¹ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Sue Cohen, graduate of 1995, p.6-.7. Sue’s testimony underscores once again the weight of economics in higher track competition, since attending college summer courses requires financial wherewithal.

These were dedicated students. Sue “cared about doing well and put a lot of stress on [herself],”⁵³² and Bill “hung out with pretty high achievers...”⁵³³ Just as they put the onus of disciplined and responsible behavior upon themselves, whether as young religiously devout people, as earlier discussed, or as academic achievers, they projected unto all other students the same onus of personal responsibility for academic success. Reflecting on Miller High students and teachers, Bill shared that “if kids are willing to learn, they will teach them.”⁵³⁴ Furthermore, for them, high school graduation celebrations such as the *prom* seemed superfluous. Bill remembered dances as the purview of girls, where they were usually more involved than boys “in a prom type thing”.⁵³⁵ Sue remembered them as devoid of any sense of closure: “A lot of people didn’t go to the prom, and it didn’t matter to us. We just didn’t care, it was just school, it was a stepping stone to get to college.”⁵³⁶

Their recollections further revealed that being a Jewish or Christian student first and foremost, and secondarily a nerd or jock, considerably narrowed one’s world of associations. In an overcrowded school where it had become impossible to know most of your classmates, within the spaces of “tight”⁵³⁷ youth groups, and learning along side “pretty high achievers,”⁵³⁸ Sue and Bill lived their high school career within particular streams of student-life that ran parallel to many other streams.

⁵³² Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Sue Cohen, graduate of 1995, p.7.

⁵³³ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Bill Jackman, graduate of 1999, p.12.

⁵³⁴ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Bill Jackman, graduate of 1999, p.12.

⁵³⁵ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Bill Jackman, graduate of 1999, p.10.

⁵³⁶ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Sue Cohen, graduate of 1995, p.15.

⁵³⁷ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Sue Cohen, graduate of 1995, p.2.

⁵³⁸ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Bill Jackman, graduate of 1999, p.2.

First, they were less likely to intermingle with black students who throughout the nineties continued underrepresented in honors and GT classes,⁵³⁹ and they were less likely to intermingle with non-religious young people. When Sue recalled youth from other backgrounds, these were young people from another faith: “Christian people came to my Barmitsva, I went to their Confirmations, we all seemed to get along.”⁵⁴⁰ They were also less likely to come across sexually active youth, or those who did drugs, let alone know them personally. Sue literally did not know whole segments of the student body population:

“I don’t remember any of my classmates getting pregnant...I heard other people did drugs, I didn’t do drugs, so I didn’t think [the drug-prevention classes] were useful...I didn’t know anybody who had sex...”⁵⁴¹

Bill, on the other hand, made it a point, as a religious youth, to distance himself from those jocks that drank by participating in the *Fellowship of Christian Athletes*, as earlier mentioned. Similarly, Sue purposefully distanced herself from the JAPS whom she could not completely avoid, since she shared with them the same secular culture, by actively retreating “into [her] own group”⁵⁴² of religious Jewish youth.

While the *Jewish Youth Group* remained tight, and included only young people who actively participated in their Jewish faith, the *Christian Young People Club*, as Bill explained, included a few Jews and some *punks*: “We had more than a few punks...and at least three or four kids that were Jewish.”⁵⁴³ Still, the overwhelming majority of those who participated in the *Young People Club*, included

⁵³⁹ Scans of yearbook captions next to senior pictures across time periods consistently reveal proportionately less black students in honors classes, or, what were known in the earlier days, as “academic” tracks.

⁵⁴⁰ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Sue Cohen, graduate of 1995, p.3.

⁵⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.10.

⁵⁴² Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Sue Cohen, graduate of 1995, p.3.

⁵⁴³ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Bill Jackman, graduate of 1999, p.9.

athletes who were also part of the FOC, and a lot of preps. Blacks, and Russians who for the most part were secular Jews, as we shall see, never joined. In recalling those who participated in the *Young People Club*, Bill described that:

*“A large amount were athletes...and the preppy kids... We wouldn’t get cross-racial, I guess there was a separation with the black and white side of issue in this area in general.”*⁵⁴⁴

Thus while many black youth were fully involved in their faith as Christians,⁵⁴⁵ they did not enter the worlds of *FOC* or *Young People Club*. In fact, by the end of the nineties, as Bill remembered, sitting arrangements among students in the cafeteria clearly captured streams of students divided along ethnic and racial lines and revealed parallel worlds that did not intermingle.

*“I guess there was a separation with the black and the white side. Usually the black kids would hang out with black kids, the white kids hung out with the white kids, there was some cross-over, not overabundance though...it wasn’t like everybody that was black hated everybody that was white and vice-versa. There were incidents [of racial discord] but not extremes. There were people in school that were racist either way, but it wasn’t overall...”*⁵⁴⁶*There were the Asian Indian kids, not black, not white, race-wise didn’t fit anywhere...”*⁵⁴⁷*The Russian kids were definitely a group...”*⁵⁴⁸

Among those “Russian kids” that Bill alluded to was Ivan Strasky, graduate of 2002, who began his testimony with a description that captured an essential shift in the identity of the immigrated Russian from the turn of the twentieth century to the turn of the twenty first, when he shared:

⁵⁴⁴ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Bill Jackman, graduate of 1999, p.9.

⁵⁴⁵ Although I was not able to secure interviews with two black students who graduated in the 90s (see addendum: *methodology*), whom I had identified through snow-balling, I know first hand, through my personal friendship with many long time black residents in the area, that many of the young black people in the community are actively involved in their churches. Alumna Vera Debin (1996-2000) also recalled “black kids speaking of Jesus” in the hallways and talking about church meetings.

⁵⁴⁶ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Bill Jackman, graduate of 1999, p.6.

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid., p.9.

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid.,p.10.

*“In the midst of Americans we always spoke Russian, you had to, that was the cool thing to do. Among ourselves, we spoke English.”*⁵⁴⁹

These were no longer the Russian immigrants of a century ago who struggled to speak the American English, to present an American persona in public, and who in the privacy of their homes forsook teaching the mother tongue to their progeny. Russian immigrants of the 1990s often spoke English before they immigrated to Miller Town, USA, and continued to teach their offspring the mother-tongue, fully aware of the advantages of being bilingual in the America of the 21st century. Many young Russians at Miller High used their bilingualism as an identity banner to signal their allegiance to “Russianness.”⁵⁵⁰

Ivan and Vera, Ivan’s elder peer who graduated in 1999, counted among the rule-abiding Russian youth. These were strategic students for whom high school “was a means to an end.”⁵⁵¹ Ivan remembered two very distinct groups of young Russians attending Miller High, and how he belonged to the academic group:

“I think there are two distinct groups of Russians: you have the highly academic Russians, immigrant Russians whose parents are always telling their kids, “school, school, school, we came here for your benefit, we sacrificed so you can reap the fruits of what we left behind, the only way you can succeed is school” ...

*There are some kids who chose to take their parents’ advice and listen to them... [and] others who chose the path of being defensive...”*⁵⁵²

He remembered being a student whose “primary objective was not to assert [his] Russianness,”⁵⁵³ as we later shall see was the case for those Russians who broke rules, but to build a winning curriculum vitae. He and Vera were part of the Russian

⁵⁴⁹ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Ivan Strasky, graduate of 2002, p.1.

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid., p.3.

⁵⁵¹ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Vera Debin, graduate of 1999, p.2.

⁵⁵² Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Ivan Strosky, graduate of 2002, p.3.

⁵⁵³ Ibid., p.4.

students who were mindful of doing whatever it took to get into good American colleges:

“To get As and to do what it takes...⁵⁵⁴ throughout high school I tried to take the highest level classes as possible, that was my goal, blindly looking at it, give me the hardest class...I’d double-up [on courses], took AP classes...”⁵⁵⁵

“I was very competitive, I compared [academic performance] to college...instead of the standard classes.”⁵⁵⁶

As Ivan understood it, being an immigrant imbued all he did with utmost dedication:

“...this pattern of making hard choices continues today, that is the direct result of being an immigrant student.”⁵⁵⁷ As an achiever preparing for the best higher

education America could offer, Ivan understood the importance of cultivating good relationships with teachers:

“Kids at that level always have great relationships with teachers, because they do whatever it takes to get the teacher to like you...To get an A you need a relationship with the teacher...”⁵⁵⁸ I was president of my class, I’d always be in the lunchroom with the teachers.”⁵⁵⁹

He was an organized, goal-oriented and highly motivated student, who along with other Russian youth like him who strove to vindicate their parents’ sacrifices, single-mindedly pursued college-track courses, building relationships with teachers and guidance counselors along the way.⁵⁶⁰ Vera too engaged in studies purposefully and successfully, and although her teacher-student relationships were formally impeccable, she confided that she could not even remember her teachers’ names,

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid., p.9.

⁵⁵⁶ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Vera Debin, graduate of 1999, p.1.

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid., p.9.

⁵⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid, p.4.

⁵⁶⁰ It was the guidance counselor at Miller High who spoke highly of Ivan and recommended I interview him to catch the Russian perspective.

dramatically suggesting that high school was a quick and swift passage-through on the way to long and serious studies in higher education.⁵⁶¹

While Ivan and Vera attended mostly GT classes, and immersed themselves in academics, they did not identify themselves as *nerds or geeks*, as had the American alumni Harry Rice, and Sue Cohen.⁵⁶² They both solidly identified themselves as Russian immigrants. American alumni's recollections further suggested that regardless of Russian students' various levels of participation in academic strata, they were consistently identified by others as Russian, not as *jocks*, or *nerds*, and on.⁵⁶³ Thus, whether of *nerdish* or *jockish*⁵⁶⁴ inclination, a Russian student remained a Russian student. The institutionalized nature of such peer-groups as *nerds*, *jocks*, made those labels American-specific. A freshly immigrated youth remained a foreigner, at least for the duration of his high school years, and as such would not acquire an inherited peer-group identity. Ivan himself remembered how in the cafeteria Russian students huddled together: "Two tables with Russian kids, each table holds about twenty-five people, a lot of Russian kids."⁵⁶⁵ Vera further recalled how in general, it was much more comfortable to remain within her Russian group where she felt at home than to risk rejection by stepping into another group. Tired of

⁵⁶¹ Vera Debin (2000): "There was a very few teachers that I had any kind of relationship with other than in class." (p.1). Cecilia (1996) also shared: "I don't really remember the teachers that much." (p.7)

⁵⁶² Harry Rice, graduate of 1987: "I was one of the geeks, no doubt" (transcript p.3); Sue Cohen, graduate of 1995: "I was one of the nerds" (transcript p.4.)

⁵⁶³ Bill Jackman (1995): "The Russian kids were definitely a group." (p.10); Cecilia Hood (1996): "People kind of stayed in groups...we had a large population of Russian kids." (p.5 & p.8); Betty Ames (1999): "Everyone definitely segregated themselves...two tables of... and then the Russian kids." (p.3)

⁵⁶⁴ Ivan Storsky, graduate of 2002: "Some [Russian] kids were athletes...I do remember two Russian kids who did wrestling..." (p.7)

⁵⁶⁵ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Ivan Strosky, graduate of 2002, p.4.

trying to “fit in” throughout all her middle school, Vera spent her whole high school career along side her Russian friends and boyfriends:

“All the Russian students hung out together...Actually, until 9th grade, I hardly hung out with Russian kids, I tried to fit, I spoke only English, drove my parents crazy...we spent so much time in middle school trying to fit in, that by the time we got to high school, it was we didn’t want to fit in...some of us came when we were twelve or thirteen years old, it was easier to speak Russian...so it was pretty much all Russian people, Russian boyfriends, Russian friends.”⁵⁶⁶

Like the GT students Sue and Bill, as earlier discussed, Ivan and Vera interpreted other students’ lack of academic success as a question of personal choice and effort.⁵⁶⁷ However, as Ivan saw it, a particular type of immigrant student was *more* likely to succeed if he applied himself:

“My perspective, it is so much easier to be a Latino immigrant. You don’t have to be that hard working or that intelligent to get here. In the general population that is Mexican immigrants, the really smart ones are the average ones. The Russian and Indian⁵⁶⁸ immigrants, people that had to cross the ocean, and had to deal with governments, the iron curtain, it was parents who were witty that found their way through that.”⁵⁶⁹

Ivan understood the immigrant story as one of natural selection which privileged, in this case, his national/ethnic group. The initial “wit” required to transplant lives overseas, translated, as he saw it, through “genes and observing their parents”⁵⁷⁰ into producing more capable Russian youth. Thus he attributed the fact that one “wouldn’t

⁵⁶⁶ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Verad Debin, graduate of 2000, p.2-3

⁵⁶⁷ Ivan Strosky (2002): “When Russian kids chose not to take the path of defensiveness, they [could] easily succeed.” (p.3); also Vera Debin (1999): “The programs were not difficult to get into, anyone who put in the effort would be able to do so, the people that were in standard, they chose to be there, they didn’t want to put the extra effort, they were satisfied with their place.” (p.5).

⁵⁶⁸ Time constraints prevented efforts invested in locating and collecting voices of Asian Indian immigrants. They were however much less numerous than Russian immigrants. This is a story to pursue.

⁵⁶⁹ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Ivan Strosky, graduate of 2002, p.10.

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid.

find many Latinos in the upper structure”⁵⁷¹ to the dual-role played by genetics and role-modeling. Ivan’s use of “overseas hardships” and the “iron curtain” as supporting evidence of his assessment of the immigrant reality, however, proved that he knew little about the oppressive government regimes that many Latinos were fleeing or the life-threatening escapades they endured through routes more tortuous than a direct flight from Europe. He also, perhaps in his zealous mythologizing of his immigrant story, forgot that it is precisely the fall of the iron curtain in 1989 that opened the flood gates for the massive Russian exodus at the end of the twentieth century. As might often be the case for those immigrant children who may be eager to vindicate their parents’ sacrifices and who were raised on hearty helpings of hardship stories that tell of all that was endured for their benefit, Ivan constructed his immigrant story as an epic; one he also constructed for Asian Indians, among whom he counted his good friend Prag, an MIT student. Ivan proudly shared that at Miller High, “the achievers are immigrants,” Russian immigrants in particular who counted among the “really smart and hard working Russian kids.”⁵⁷² While he did remember a couple of Russian athletes, the rest were “that pole of the Russian community [at Miller High] that did nothing extracurricular.”⁵⁷³ It is “that pole” of Russian students that challenged the system and its American nature. Whether academically dedicated or anti-American and rebellious, most Russian students dealt with yet another identity layer, that of being Jewish.

Ivan and Vera shared the complex relationship that many Russian students developed around the “Jewish” label when it referred to the religion and not the

⁵⁷¹ Ibid.

⁵⁷² Quote from transcript of audiotape of interview with Ivan Strosky, graduate of 2002, p.7.

⁵⁷³ Ibid.

culture, and how they found themselves defending Judaism without knowing much about it:

“If Judaism was ever insulted, Russian kids immediately perked up their ears. The irony in that is that out of the group of Russian kids, none of them that I remember were ever barmitsva. I was culturally Jewish, not by ceremony. Russians in Russia, they were never allowed to practice their religion. They called themselves Jewish, they often didn’t have a clue of what the holiday is about... The Judaism has been pulled out of them. They come here, they can practice Judaism, they don’t know what or how to do it... The Russian kids are called Jewish because they are Russian, and because they are so loyal [to “Russianness], they have to defend Judaism.”⁵⁷⁴

“I didn’t fully understand that I was Jewish until I came here, so in my family, we never got into religion.”⁵⁷⁵

The label “Russian Jew,” doggedly adhered to and flaunted by a segment of Russian students who preferred the mafia world to that of academia, as we shall later see, was often used, as Ivan remembered, like a shield that mirrored back as discrimination any feedback from teachers. Ivan explained:

“Whenever the teacher challenged them, not because of being Russian, but because the teacher was being a teacher: “why didn’t you do your homework, why are you late,” they would automatically be defensive, and often perceive it as discrimination.”⁵⁷⁶

Unlike their defensive peers, and as successful students, Ivan and Vera sported the Russian immigrant label differently, not as a target of ire and reason for defensiveness, but as a vindication of their parents’ strife. Vera explained:

“I knew I was going to college for sure, my parents were going to murder me if I didn’t go... I graduated with honors, my parents were proud.”⁵⁷⁷

While religious beliefs and strategic academic competition grounded the daily behaviors of Sue, Bill, Ivan and Vera, many middle-of-the-road white students on the

⁵⁷⁴ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Ivan Strosky, graduate of 2002, p.6.

⁵⁷⁵ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Vera Debin, graduate of 2000.p.7.

⁵⁷⁶ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Ivan Strosky, graduate of 2002, p.7-8.

⁵⁷⁷ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Vera Debin, graduate of 2000, p.7.

other hand, who were neither members of youth groups, nor high achievers, and who did not identify with a particular nationality or ethnic group, welcomed the reassurance of zero-tolerance rules that as they saw it, kept things orderly and safe for the majority. Cherry Gate and Heather Korn, graduates of 1992 and 1993, in describing their principals, remembered:

*“Mr. L., our principal, he laid down the law and I mean, you were never upset going through the hallways.”*⁵⁷⁸

*“Our principal, she commanded respect...she held her ground and I really liked that...”*⁵⁷⁹

These were students who took standard courses and whose classroom realities sketched out differently than for those attending the exclusive worlds of honors and GT courses. Bill Jackman, who had attended, throughout his high school career, one or two general level courses and could compare them to his regularly attended GT and honors classes, explained how “in the standard level, it was a little rougher...The teacher was more afraid, maybe not of students doing something to her, but just from keeping the class from getting too disorganized.”⁵⁸⁰

As had been the case for previous generations, it is also within the “standard level” courses through which the majority of the student body traveled, that students were more likely to encounter each other less as competitive academic performers, and more as representatives of diverse racial, ethnic, cultural and socio-economic interests and struggles. It is therefore as black or white, Russian Jew or redneck, subsidized apartment or middle class suburban home dweller that some of these

⁵⁷⁸ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Cherry Gate, graduate of 1992, p.24.

⁵⁷⁹ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Heather Korn, graduate of 1993, p.3. Mr. L. presided over Miller High between 1978-1991, and his female successor, the only female principal in the history of Miller High, presided between 1991 and 1997.

⁵⁸⁰ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Heather Korn, graduate of 1993, p.3.

students competed with each other, and not as college-résumé builders. It is within the “standard level” courses where much of Miller Town’s social wounds flared up, a place where young people lived closest to the economic realities of their town, as work-release students, part-time firefighters, emergency medical technicians (EMTs), and on. It is within these classes that one found most young people working before or after school hours as burger flippers at the local fast food restaurants, as veterinary technicians at local vet hospitals, waiters and waitresses at the higher-end restaurants, cashier tellers at local grocery store chains, and as employees at the many mall retail stores and corporate giants from Target to K-Mart to Home Depot that by the nineties had spread around town. It is also within the “standard level” courses that one was more likely to come across drug dealers, and witness illegal behaviors.

Alumni interviewed across the late eighties and throughout the nineties reported growing incidents of violence. However, while those alumni who attended Gifted/Talented and Honors classes barely remembered fights and only heard rumors,⁵⁸¹ alumni who attended general classes reported more vividly feeling the impact of incidents of violence.⁵⁸² Heather Korn recalled how “you knew who the drug users were” and that “if you wanted to get drugs, you could have them in ten minutes.”⁵⁸³ She also shared how one day when she was at home sick: “one of the older students brought a weapon to school, a really big gun, we saw it on the news. I was so glad I wasn’t at school that day.”⁵⁸⁴

⁵⁸¹It was also the case for those students attending the academic tracks during the fifties and sixties. Refer to *The Divided Generation*, Part I / Chapter I, in particular refer to recollections by Norman Good, African-American graduate of class of 1959.

⁵⁸² This again was also the case for those students attending the general and vocational tracks in the fifties and sixties. Refer to Part I.

⁵⁸³ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Heather Korn, graduate of 1993, p.3.

⁵⁸⁴ Ibid., p.3.

To Roberta Jones, Cherry Gate, and Heather Korn, graduates of 1991, '92 and '93, zero-tolerance policies were a welcome protection against what the alumnae remembered as growing school violence. As students attending standard classes, they were more likely than their Gifted /Talented and Honors counterparts to witness fights first hand, in particular racial fights which increased throughout the nineties. Cherry Gate remembered, although furtively and regretting having shared her memory almost immediately after uttering it, how her own sister had been the target of racially related death threats:

“A few years after I went to school, yeah, my sister was supposed to graduate back in '96, and she actually got a death threat and she went to Springfield High. Uhum. She moved because she was scared to go and stay at the same school because at that point in time it was the racial fights going on.”⁵⁸⁵

While Cherry, who graduated in the early nineties, hinted at possible black racism toward her sister, Bill Jackman who graduated at the end of the nineties spoke matter-of-factly about white as well as black racism, suggesting that as the nineties progressed and racial and ethnic tensions escalated, many Miller High white youth considered “racism” no longer singly the sin of the whites.⁵⁸⁶

Still, Bill who actually attended the second half of the nineties, the years that Cherry suggested were marked by “racial fights going on,” recalled racial fights as being incidental and far from representing the norm.⁵⁸⁷ The disparity in Cherry’s and Bill’s assessments of the severity of racial problems at Miller High could be interpreted, as earlier discussed, in terms of Bill’s attending the removed spaces of

⁵⁸⁵ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Cherry Gate, graduate of 1992, p.25. Cherry declined giving me her sister’s phone number saying that she didn’t want to talk about it. While I tried to press the issue, as diplomatically and inoffensively as possible, Cherry did not want to elaborate on her statement.

⁵⁸⁶ Bill Jackman (1999): “There were people in school that were racist either way...” (p.6).

⁵⁸⁷ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Cherry Gate, graduate of 1992, p.25.

GT classes, that made him less likely to witness violence among peers than if he attended standard courses. However, there is also reason to believe that Cherry's sister's involvement in the racial incident she recounted, and perhaps her own racist inclinations, might have colored her interpretation of the extent and nature of racial problems at Miller High. While her testimony implied that the onus of the racial problems in her sister's case laid squarely on the threats from black students, it wasn't until I interviewed, almost a year later, Cecilia Hood, who graduated the year that Cherry's sister would have graduated would she have continued her studies at Miller High and not have gone to Springfield instead, that I reframed Cherry's testimony in terms of possible racist animosity by Cherry and her kin against newly arrived blacks.

Cecilia shared:

*"I think twice in the course of my high school there was a big racial fight, between the black kids and the farmers... Two kids from Miller High were sent to Springfield High, got expelled, and two others got expelled and were not allowed back."*⁵⁸⁸

Cecilia's identification of the whites involved in the racial fight as being "farmers," fit Cherry's self-description as "a back-home-farm-country girl" who "worked at [her] parents' farm."⁵⁸⁹ Then too Cecilia's memory of two kids being sent to Springfield High matched Cherry's mention of her sister's going to Springfield High. Their accounts differed only in that Cecilia remembered that the students had been expelled and sent to Springfield High, while Cherry's recollection implied that her sister had chosen to go to Springfield High because the racial tensions at Miller High had become untenable. Finally, Cherry's refusal to elaborate on the incident, or to

⁵⁸⁸ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Cecilia Hood, graduate of 1996, p.2.

⁵⁸⁹ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Cherry Gate, graduate of 1992, p.35.

provide me with access to her sister, further cast suspicions on her sister's total innocence in the racial incident.

Cherry's and Cecilia's conflicting testimonies illustrate the escalating reality of racial tensions at Miller High during the nineties between "farmers" as they called themselves or "rednecks" as others pejoratively called them, and blacks, as well as Russians.

Beyond their shared feelings of security under principals who "laid down the law," Cherry, Heather, and Roberta placed themselves somewhere between "the group that did drugs" and the "higher group...that you knew were really smart."⁵⁹⁰ These were alumnae who remembered themselves as unassuming, down to earth kind of students, those who hung out with the "standard" group.⁵⁹¹ These girls distanced themselves from the preps and those with money and constructed the distancing as a matter of moral choice. Cherry shared:

*"I never hung...I guess with the popular group because I didn't believe in their status, the way of doing, the way of thinking, it was about the right clothes, the right make-up, the right hairdos...they were up on the Vogue and stuff, you could feel they were snobs."*⁵⁹²

While the memories of those alumnae interviewed who graduated in the fifties and sixties highlighted the importance of "looks,"⁵⁹³ and while the memories of those alumnae interviewed who graduated in the seventies highlighted the lack of importance attributed to "looks" in general, the memories of these nineties alumnae stressed the emotional tensions that young women experienced around issues of

⁵⁹⁰ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Heather Korn, graduate of 1993, p.4.

⁵⁹¹ Heather Korn: "All my friends were in standard." (p.4).

⁵⁹² Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Cherry Gate, graduate of 1992, p.27. Also, Heather Korn (1993): "A lot of the kids that did hang out with the kids that did have the money, they would have the snobby attitude..." (p.4).

⁵⁹³ In the fifties and sixties "looks" determined teacher-student relationships to a greater extent than they did relationships between students.

clothing as these reflected on one's economic status and high visibility in school. While the identity of the "prep,"⁵⁹⁴ as recollections across time periods revealed, was always synonymous with upper-class status and high visibility in all social affairs pertaining to school, recollections of alumnae of previous generations, did not in general linger on the "preps," except for Sophie Baker, graduate of 1985, who remembered the "preps" negatively, as earlier discussed. By the late eighties and nineties, the "prep" was not only criticized, but also avoided.

In Cherry's and Heather's eyes and those of their friends, the preps were vain people, exclusive rather than inclusive. By contrast to preps' undemocratic attitudes, Cherry and Heather saw themselves as solidly down to earth "regular people" who considered everybody as equal:

*"My friend was also the same. She was middle-class...she stayed away from them [the preps], she felt the same thing I did, and the groups that were just basic regular people [felt]. You could feel that they [the preps] were snobs. In other words, they would make you feel that. Okay?"*⁵⁹⁵

*"They had the snobby attitude, but they were no different than you and I."*⁵⁹⁶

There was another group of students yet that Heather in particular found offensive—to the senses: the Russians,⁵⁹⁷ echoing the late nineteenth and early twentieth century "American" complaint against many immigrants' "poor hygiene." Heather recalled: "We had a large group of people who were not clean people, like they didn't shower."⁵⁹⁸

⁵⁹⁴ The "prep" was not remembered as such by alumni interviewed in the fifties and sixties, but rather as the "doer" (when the one identifying the role was the prep student: see testimony by Linda Moss, '69) and "upper class" (when identified by the non-prep student: see testimony by Robert Heart, '56).

⁵⁹⁵ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Cherry Gate, graduate of 1992, p.27.

⁵⁹⁶ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Heather Korn, graduate of 1993, p.4.

⁵⁹⁷ While Heather did not directly identify the group, and while it is impossible to extract a quote from the transcript which would confirm it, there is reason to believe that she spoke of the Russian students, since she had identified all other groups by their names directly, (blacks, preps, etc), but had not mentioned the "Russians", while alumni who had graduated in the same time period had all identified the Russians, as earlier cited.

For these young women who attended mostly general courses and worked in the community after school hours,⁵⁹⁹ who felt shunned by the preps and unsafe without rules to protect them against those students apt to engage in illegal drug dealing and violent behaviors, high school graduation *was* the end of their student career, at least for the immediate future following it.

Cherry, Heather and Roberta constructed their high school days not as “a means to an end,” or a “stepping stone to get to college” as their peers in GT classes might have, but as a process of maturation with graduation itself marking the end of the life stage of adolescence. Cherry’s, Heather’s and Roberta’s recollections suggested young people who had fully integrated a sense of themselves as incomplete humans on the way to maturity, and had associated the idea of high school graduation as a marker of their new identities. While Roberta Jones lamented having to grow-up, Cherry Gate celebrated the process:

“It’s really hard being a teenager, because you’re in the middle... still being parented by your parents, and it’s hard...⁶⁰⁰ now [at graduation] you know you got to do something., ”⁶⁰¹

“I grew out of my shell into a better person.”⁶⁰²

These alumnae’s recollections echoed to a certain degree those of “the divided generation” who attended the general or commercial tracks who either saw the end of high school as a rite of passage, or the high school diploma as a legal tender

⁵⁹⁸ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Heather Korn, graduate of 1993, p.4.

⁵⁹⁹ Cherry Gate, (1988-1992): “I worked for Riverside Veterinary Hospital my senior year...well, I used to groom when I was at horse shows, and I worked at my parents’ farm” (p.33); Roberta Jones (1987-1991): “I worked as a grocery clerk on weekends and a couple of times during the week.” (p.10).

⁶⁰⁰ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Roberta Jones, graduate of 1991, p.9.

⁶⁰¹ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Roberta Jones, graduate of 1991, p.11.

⁶⁰² Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Cherry Gate, graduate of 1992, p.31.

attesting to one's right to assume one's own independent life without stigma, in particular if one was a woman. While Heather and Roberta went on to community colleges, Heather right after and Roberta shortly after, finding that their high school diploma limited their job options, they, along with Cherry, remembered experiencing the end of high school as a place where one left as an adult, ready to assume adult roles.⁶⁰³

The "standard classes" however, as Roberta's recollections suggested, were also the place where young people who didn't like school, and who didn't know what their lives were yet about, went to.

"I let everything interfere with my school work. I didn't like it...I wasted all this time on something I didn't really enjoy...I just don't do well in school..."⁶⁰⁴

For them in particular, school was a no-win situation. Neither staying in it nor leaving it brought any sense of relief. Leaving it meant that "now you know you got to do something,"⁶⁰⁵ yet you might still not have known what you were supposed to do or be outside school walls. Roberta shared: "It [high school] still didn't help me pick out what I wanted to do." Neither ready to assume a place in the job market, nor headed for college, and feeling as if she had wasted her time within high school, Roberta could not find a socially defined acceptable place within which to place herself. At graduation she was an adolescent required to be an adult in a world for which she felt unprepared.

⁶⁰³ Heather Korn (1993): "I cried the entire time...I'm pretty sentimental...I had a friend in every row...some of them knew they were going in the service...I had one friend whose dream it was to be a housewife..." (p.2); Cherry Gate (1992): "Graduate, move on with my life." (p.27).

⁶⁰⁴ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Roberta Jones, graduate of 1991, p.10-11.

⁶⁰⁵ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Roberta Jones, graduate of 1991, p.11.

Having spent their high school years closer to the job market than their GT peers, closer to girls who got pregnant and boys who enlisted, closer to drug dealers and social prejudice, it is little wonder that these students would have understood the end of high school more in terms of entrance into adult life, than their GT peers whose dependence on parents would have to be prolonged as they pursued undergraduate and graduate studies. For the standard class rule-abiding students, high school still held some sense of finality. Many of these alumnae's friends were part-time firefighters, emergency medical technicians,⁶⁰⁶ and sometimes work-release students,⁶⁰⁷ young people whose lives daily and weekly were involved in community life. Inevitably they would soak-in much more directly the effects of economic-competition and social pressures, and integrate, perhaps even perpetuate the social prejudices of their surroundings.⁶⁰⁸

By contrast, preps' experiences of Miller High in the late eighties and throughout the nineties were dramatically different. Preps continued to be identified by their economic status, and the high profile they assumed through their pervasive involvement in the school's extracurricular and social life. In describing the preps, Bill Jackman accentuated their wealth and isolated up-bringing:

“Kids that knew each other their whole life, they grew up together, a lot of those kids played sports, that connection...they do have a decent amount of money...they did the same things growing up and people don't like to

⁶⁰⁶ Cherry Gate (1992) “A lot of the guys I hung out with were EMT and junior firefighters.” (p.35); Heather Korn (1993): “The junior firefighters. You heard the siren go off, they all sat up straight, itching to get out of their seats.” (p.10).

⁶⁰⁷ Cherry Gate shared that her boyfriend and now spouse was part of the work-release program, and that he trained in a local mechanic shop.

⁶⁰⁸ Cecilia Hood (1996): “Boys that were involved in the fire department, they wore flannel shirts and jeans, country boys..” I think twice in the course of my high school there was a big racial fight, between the black kids and the farmers.” (p.2).

change...a lot of them dressed preppy, I think it was more they were used to hanging out with each other."⁶⁰⁹

Vera Debin too accentuated their wealth:

*"Their parents were wealthy, they had the best clothes, the trendiest clothes...the wealthy kids hung out with wealthy kids...the preps..."*⁶¹⁰

Cherry Gate stressed their upper-class status, visibility, and underscored, as Bill had, their tight bonding:

*"The popular group, I guess we would consider like the upper, upper class...I would say their appearances and everything would make them bond together."*⁶¹¹

Recollections of two alumnae, Cecilia Hood and Betty Ames, graduates of 1996 and 1999, suggested that they had been, during their high school years, the preps that Bill, Vera and Cherry talked about. While neither Cecilia nor Betty identified themselves directly as *preps*, although Cecilia identified herself as being part of the *popular group*, both alumnae were of upper-middle class background, remembered their high school years fondly as a time when they were involved in myriad sports, extra curricular activities and leadership roles, and reported enjoying long time friendships with peers whom they had known since early childhood. Betty explained:

*"I played two sports every year, I was class treasurer, I did meetings for that, I was also in SADD..."*⁶¹²*I was in GT and AP Honors classes...I was in school every day from 8 in the morning and I didn't get home until 5:30..."*⁶¹³*The class officers, we put a lot of effort into organizing [school events].*⁶¹⁴

⁶⁰⁹ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Bill Jackman, graduate of 1999, p.7.

⁶¹⁰ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Vera Debin, graduate of 2000, p.2.

⁶¹¹ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Cherry Gate, graduate of 1992, p.26.

⁶¹² SADD: Students against Drunk Driving.

⁶¹³ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Betty Ames, graduate of 1999, p.2 & p.4.

⁶¹⁴ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Betty Ames, graduate of 1999, p.9. Cecilia also shared: "The popular kids, some of us played sports...we were friends since middle school."

While Betty and Cecilia held the high profiles that their counterparts of earlier generations had held,⁶¹⁵ they did not enjoy the levels of participation to their organized social events that their predecessors had enjoyed. The worlds created by the preps, which had been patronized by “the divided generation,” and tolerated by “the border-crossing generation,” were being boycotted by many non-preps of the late eighties and nineties.

Over the three time periods studied here, there is evidence to suggest that school social events, the prom in particular, had been the playground site for Miller High white female preps, and a somewhat symbolic space within which, across time, the preps exerted progressively greater control over all aspects of its details even to the point of rigging the results of school-wide elections regarding the prom song in order to impose their own sentiments against majority vote, as Sophie Baker remembered about her graduating prom of 1985. The preps continued also to represent the school through yearbooks, without necessarily representing all students.

Vera Debin explained how biased the yearbooks they created were:

“I think they [the preps] went around and tried to get pictures of all the clubs, and all the band, but it was pretty much them and their friends, all extra pictures.”⁶¹⁶

In her testimony, Vera had suggested that yearbooks would “probably be more interesting if people were assigned to a committee to do the yearbook, randomly selected.”⁶¹⁷

⁶¹⁵ They were called “upper class” by some alumni of the fifties. Some self-described as “doers” in the sixties; and they were referred to as the “preps” by Sophie Baker in the early eighties.

⁶¹⁶ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Vera Debin, graduate of 2000, p.6.

⁶¹⁷ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Vera Debin, graduate of 2000, p.6.

Across the three generations of Miller High studied here, alumni's recollections suggested that preps image-managed their school.

However, while Linda Moss, graduate of 1969, who remembered herself as one of "the doers...the people that were on the teams...putting out the yearbook,...class officers...,"⁶¹⁸ enjoyed a "big school spirit,"⁶¹⁹ and great participation to all school events which she helped organize, Betty Ames, thirty years later, felt frustrated by the lack of student participation. She remembered:

"The class officers, we put a lot of effort into organizing [school events.]..it'd be frustrating when people didn't participate..."⁶²⁰ School spirit was terrible."⁶²¹

Preps continued to organize, but over time, fewer and fewer people showed up; and there is reason to believe that the prom became the site which non-preps could boycott, symbolically rejecting, through non-attendance, the world of the "prep," the one peer identity primarily defined by "upper-class" socio-economic status.

Thus when Sue Cohen remembered not caring about going to the prom, she also might have been, as a religious youth who distanced herself from excessive consumption, as earlier discussed, rejecting the ostentatiousness of proms. Over time, as yearbook pictures revealed, proms had become progressively more elaborate productions. By the nineties at Miller High they had evolved into showy productions that involved chartered limousines and expensive attire.⁶²² The Russian immigrant alumna Vera Debin was among those who barely visited her prom, peaked and almost

⁶¹⁸ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Linda Moss (1969), p.11.

⁶¹⁹ Ibid., p.10.

⁶²⁰ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Betty Ames, graduate of 1999, p.9.

⁶²¹ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Betty Ames, graduate of 1999, p. 2.

⁶²² Information gained through yearbook picture captions and fifties graduates' comments about the elaborate and very expensive proms. Also, Vera Debin (2000): "It was big limousines and big fancy dresses." (p.6)

immediately left with her boyfriend. She felt that it was but a congregation of those who organized the prom to show off their expensive clothes. She shared:

- “I wanted to see with my own eyes, walked in, saw what it was about, took pictures and left.
- What was it about?
- The[prep] cliques again, everybody looking at each other’s dresses.”⁶²³

Preps’ growing monopoly over time over the phenomenon *prom*, might have contributed to institutionalizing the prom as a *prep phenomenon*. It is perhaps too that the institutionalized nature by the 1990s at Miller High, of originally youth-generated peer-groups, from preps, to jocks, to nerds or geeks, and on, and the institutionalized nature of the dance itself, inherited from the late nineteenth century,⁶²⁴ made it difficult for a college-bound nerd with strong religious convictions, or a Russian immigrant, or a “farm-country girl” to participate in a prep devised extravaganza, a ball for the princesses where king and queen are crowned. Furthermore, the general lack of school spirit throughout the nineties, and the many student nuclei, where “people kind of stayed in their groups,”⁶²⁵ and seldom crossed over between groups, might have made parties held outside school premises by various groups more appealing than any social event organized within school premises.

Although by the nineties the preps, as alumni’s stories revealed, were more a world unto themselves than at any other time since “the divided generation,” they

⁶²³ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Vera Debin graduate of 2000, p.6.

⁶²⁴ See Barbara Finkelstein, “Is Adolescence Here to Stay?: Historical Perspectives on Youth and Education” in *Adolescence and Society* (pp.1-33), eds., T. Urban and F. Pajares (New York: Information Age Press, 2003).

⁶²⁵ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Cecilia Hood, graduate of 1996, p.5.

were no longer only white. Black and white preps lived parallel lives, and on occasion intermingled. Bill Jackman and Vera Debin explained:

*“There were two popular groups. The popular black kids and the popular white kids. They didn’t look down on each other, they would still interact and stuff, there was definitely two sides.”*⁶²⁶

*“A lot of the popular kids among the black kids would be friends with the preps.”*⁶²⁷

By the nineties, African-American girls regularly filled the ranks of cheerleaders, and were, along with their white peers, homecoming queens.⁶²⁸ Alumni’s recollections indicated that some African-American youth embraced the prep/popularity status. Thus while race and culture primarily determined associations across peer groups for blacks and whites and Russians in the nineties at Miller High, within those divisions a segment of the youth across race and ethnicity congregated as youth of means who held high profiles. Thus while during the fifties and sixties, African-American youth of means Nat Right would be perceived by his white peers in the general track as “poor,” by the nineties, economically well-to-do African American youth were perceived as such. The “prep” was a socio-economic status that subsumed race and ethnicity. Vera also recalled one Russian peer “who came here when he was a baby, his parents were very well off, he pretty much hung out with them [the preps], he hardly spoke Russian.”⁶²⁹ Being well-to-do gained you access to the world of preps. As a Russian then, the less immigrant you were and the more money you had, the easier a prep you became. Thus under the umbrella of upper-

⁶²⁶ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Bill Jackman, graduate of 1999, p.11.

⁶²⁷ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Vera Debin, graduate of 2000, p.8.

⁶²⁸ Sue Cohen (1995): “Homecoming queen, she was black.” (p.2).

⁶²⁹ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Vera Debin, graduate of 2000, p.4.

middle class status, the categories of race, nationality, ethnicity, and religion,⁶³⁰ merged at Miller High. If you were wealthy enough, you could be black, or Russian, or Jewish, or Christian, and more easily rule-abiding, since your personal life would be deeply interwoven with myriad school sanctioned activities which you, as a prep, would participate in developing and nurturing. Of course, if you were wealthy enough, you were part of a minority.

When asked to reflect on their peers in general, Betty and Cecilia recalled, as had all other graduates of “the re-divided generation,” how students segregated into groups:

“Everyone definitely segregated themselves....in the cafeteria...two tables of black kids, and then the Russian kids, the athletes...definitely students grouped within their cultural backgrounds”⁶³¹

“People kind of stayed in their groups...⁶³²The black kids did sit together. We started having a large population of Russian kids.”⁶³³

They also recalled accounts of racial fights, which they, unlike their peers in the general track, never saw close-up. Commenting on an article that she had read in the *Community Times* about racial fights at Miller High, Betty remembered: “I never noticed [racial tension]. It could be that I was removed from anyone involved in it.”⁶³⁴ Cecilia, as earlier discussed, remembered the expulsions of students transferred to another high school because of their involvement in racial fights but had never witnessed them first hand. Betty and Cecilia, like Sue and Bill, lived their high school years along side incidents of violence which did not affect them directly. Rule-

⁶³⁰ Refer to Bill Jackman’s description of youth participating in the *Young People Club*.

⁶³¹ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Betty Ames, graduate of 1999, p.3.

⁶³² Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Cecilia Hood, graduate of 1996, p.5.

⁶³³ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Cecilia Hood, graduate of 1996, p.8.

⁶³⁴ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Betty Ames, graduate of 1999, p.6.

abiding students, they engaged in leadership positions and sports, and lived lives parallel to those whom some alumni remembered as “troublemakers.”⁶³⁵

Just as students of lesser means, as earlier discussed, remembered the preps and how they dressed, Cecilia and Betty also remembered students with lesser means, and how *they* dressed:

*“There were a couple of kids that didn’t have a lot of money. They wouldn’t dress so great.”*⁶³⁶

*“Boys that were involved in the fire department, they wore flannel shirts and jeans, country boys.”*⁶³⁷

While for the generation of the seventies and early eighties clothes were more likely to be taken off as students streaked, and overall given little attention, clothes and cars in the nineties, just as in the fifties and sixties at Miller High, played captivating roles in the imagination of many students. Speaking from the prep’s point of view, Betty recalled: “a lot of that behavior [people making fun of people] came from the cars people drove. People turned fifteen and their parents would get a brand new explorer.”⁶³⁸

Betty and Cecilia, just as the “upper-class” and “doers” of “the divided generation,” and the preps of the seventies and early eighties, “always expected to go to college,”⁶³⁹ whether they invested in the grades or not.⁶⁴⁰ Betty’s recollections in particular revealed her loyalty to Miller High, a school that as preps before her, she

⁶³⁵ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Vera Debin, graduate of 2000, p.4.

⁶³⁶ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Betty Ames, graduate of 1999, 8.

⁶³⁷ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Cecilia Hood, graduate of 1996, p.2.

⁶³⁸ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Betty Ames, graduate of 1999, 8.

⁶³⁹ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Cecilia Hood, graduate of 1996, p. 7.

⁶⁴⁰ Betty Ames (1999): “I would sit in front of the TV from eight to eleven every night doing my homework. I’d do it in front of the TV. I didn’t make straight As, I got by...when I went to college I went WOW...freshman year I did more work than I ever did in all four years of high school.” (p.4); Cecilia Hood (1996): “I don’t remember the teachers that much. I remember the social and the sports” (p.7).

had re-presented to the world and to its students through yearbooks; a school in which she invested many extracurricular hours on social events to which too few students came. Speaking of her alma mater, Betty shared:

“I can’t imagine my life without it... I definitely felt that Miller High was a great school... I felt like I got a good education, probably better than at a private school.”⁶⁴¹

While remembering the preps first and foremost as wealthy and self-centered, the Russian alumna Vera Debin, with a sense of concern for fairness, shared that:

“They are the people with the school spirit. I can see why they are representing the school.”⁶⁴²

Although some wealthier African-Americans counted among the preps, and intermingled as preps, as earlier mentioned, most African-American students segregated as black students. David Randle, graduate of 1976, in commenting about the nineties in Miller Town, drew a distinct line in terms of attitudes toward whites by African-Americans, between African-Americans who had grown up in the town, and those who hadn’t, between his generation and the new generation of young blacks, indicating new-comers’ and new generation’s impatience with the white status-quo.

“You’ve got to look at our situation. We grew up in the county. We kind of knew how things worked. We kind of knew what to do and what not to do. And then you’ve got twice as many people. I mean, what happened to the black population at Miller then [in the nineties]? It more than doubled. So you’re talking about a whole lot of people. I mean they came from the outskirts, they came from the city, and they didn’t want things to change, or they wanted things to change faster.”⁶⁴³

When I asked David if I could interview his daughter who was finishing up high school, to get an African-American high school student’s point of view of the latter

⁶⁴¹ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Betty Ames, graduate of 1999, p.8.

⁶⁴² Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Vera Debin, graduate of 2000, p.6.

⁶⁴³ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with David Randle, graduate of 1976, p.15.

part of the nineties, he said that she would not want to be interviewed by me, and implied that she would not want to be interviewed by a white person;⁶⁴⁴ and that while he had not been brought up to “use race as an excuse,”⁶⁴⁵ his daughter’s generation, regardless of home upbringing, approached relationships between blacks and whites, expecting racial animosity. Racism, in the Miller High of the nineties, surged. However, in the nineties at Miller High, depending on your point of view, racism could be white or black.⁶⁴⁶

Moreover, David, recalling his experience as a coach at Crescent High, a county high school predominantly attended by black students, told about when their football team played Miller High in the late nineties. His recollections revealed a racist principal.

“We had a game at Miller High. I’ll tell you the name, name is Thomas Lawrence, the principal, I’m standing on the sideline with the principal of Miller High, Crescent High is playing, and there’s a penalty, and the first thing he says is “Oh, here they go again”. I mean, how am I supposed to feel...I knew exactly what he meant: “They’re all black so something is going to happen, they’re getting ready to start something.”⁶⁴⁷

Nineties alumna Heather Korn’s recollection suggested the opposite, an administration that privileged black students to the exclusion of white students.

“One day they had a speaker come. All the black students were invited to go, to listen to the speaker. None of the white students were allowed to go. They[the black students] were taken out of class. It was a big deal because, at the time they [the black kids] were having a big fit, [it was] not too far from the Rodney King beatings. So a lot of people started saying if we only had something for the girls, or only for the whites, there would be a big problem. We’re just sitting back and watching this happen.”⁶⁴⁸

⁶⁴⁴ David’s observation was echoed by an African-American colleague of mine, who had graduated from college in the nineties, and who explained to me how young African-Americans thought it unacceptable that whites study them.

⁶⁴⁵ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with David Randle, graduate of 1976, p.19.

⁶⁴⁶ Refer to Bill Jackman’s testimonies regarding white and black racists earlier mentioned.

⁶⁴⁷ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with David Randle, graduate of 1976, p.17.

⁶⁴⁸ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Heather Korn, graduate of 1993, p.12.

Heather's either purposeful, or slip-of-the-tongue use of "they were having a fit" as she referred to black students' feelings about the broadly televised cruel beating of Rodney King, betrayed racial animosity on her part. Then too Heather's words: "if we only had something for the girls, or only for the whites, there would be a big problem, we're just sitting back and watching this happen," captured both the late twentieth century constructed concept of reverse-racial discrimination, as well as the extent to which racism lived close to the surface in the nineties at Miller High, no longer policed or buried deep as it had been in the seventies and early eighties. It had not occurred to Heather, as she was elaborating on the idea of reverse-racial discrimination, that the *Bible Study Group*, which met daily, was attended by *white students only* who represented, as Vera described: "the ultra religious right."⁶⁴⁹

While black students mostly sat together, it was, as it had been since the early days of integration, on the sports fields that students worked as teams and forged friendships across racial and ethnic backgrounds. Betty Ames recalled how: "a lot of the basketball players were black and the white basketball players would hang out with them."⁶⁵⁰ Still, it was only within certain sports that black and white young men met in the nineties. Throughout the nineties the football team fared poorly,⁶⁵¹ and attention went to basketball, soccer and lacrosse. Black male students neither played

⁶⁴⁹ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Vera Debin, graduate of 2000, p.7. I had asked: "Would black kids attend those [bible study] meetings?" Vera categorically answered: "No." I went on: "So this was just," she interrupted with: "the ultra religious right."

⁶⁵⁰ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Betty Ames, graduate of 1999, p.3.

⁶⁵¹ Sue Cohen (1995): "Our football team wasn't so good." (p.2.); Cecilia Hood (1996): "football was horrible back then" (p.4); Bill Jackman (1999): "The football team didn't get a whole lot of support because they were 1 and 9 every year while I was in high school" (p.5.)

soccer nor lacrosse⁶⁵² so basketball was the only sport other than football where they played with whites. Throughout the nineties, however, football had lost the prestige it had enjoyed during the seventies and early eighties. Yearbooks however revealed black female students on soccer teams, as well as on soft-ball and field-hockey teams. This finding suggests perhaps that greater numbers of young black women attending Miller High were emancipating from family chores in the late eighties and nineties. Cecilia, who played “soccer and lacrosse,”⁶⁵³ remembered that her group of female jocks included “a group of black friends and two friends who were Indian.”⁶⁵⁴

Other groups of students, glimpsed at through alumni’s recollections, included the *punks*, *goths* and the *head-banged* kids who were white. Only two alumni mentioned the *punks*, and only Vera mentioned the *goths*. Vera remembered the punks, as she had all other groups, and as alumni remembered all groups in general, as fiercely independent, a drastic contrast to the seventies and early eighties when youth often crossed peer-groups. She shared:

*“A punk would not go and talk to a prep because he doesn’t need their acceptance.”*⁶⁵⁵

Bill Jackman vividly recalled an exception, one *punk* in particular who crossed all group boundaries:

*“He was a punk kid, he was in a punk band, traveled around the country, he had a mohawk, he was the most extreme looking kid out of the whole crowd. He crossed over in all the groups, every teacher loved him, he was a great kid. You look at him, you run away from him.”*⁶⁵⁶

⁶⁵²Betty Ames (1995-1999:) “The soccer players were white, but there’d be an Indian kid who’d play soccer” (p. 3). This was corroborated by yearbook data. Of interest would be to investigate the reasons for lack of young black men’s participation in lacrosse and soccer.

⁶⁵³ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Cecilia Hood, graduate of 1996, p.4.

⁶⁵⁴ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Cecilia Hood, graduate of 1996, p.3.

⁶⁵⁵ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Vera Debin, graduate of 2000, p.7.

⁶⁵⁶ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Bill Jackman, graduate of 1999, p.8.

Only Cecilia mentioned the “head-banged” kids who “wore all the metal tee shirts, like *Guns and Roses*.”⁶⁵⁷ That these groups were barely recalled is difficult to interpret. While they represented a minority of students, one would be inclined to think that their appearance would have made them stand out in memories. Perhaps the daily encounter over a four year period with, as Bill Jackman put it “most extreme looking” kids, eventually made the “extreme” just part of the scene, and easily overlooked.

Whether rule-abiding punks, preps, or Russian immigrants; “down-home-farm girls” or religious youth, these young people’s lives further ran parallel to those known as “troublemakers.” Trouble-makers, as Betty and Vera described, were targeted by the administration:

*“They [administration] knew who the good kids were and the kids that got into trouble. They [the administration] were looking for the kids that got into trouble all the time.”*⁶⁵⁸

*“The trouble-makers would get treated differently.”*⁶⁵⁹

Rule-abiding graduates of the end of the twentieth century at Miller High identified trouble-makers in generational and generic terms, as a new crop of unruly beings filling out high school space. Roberta Jones, who graduated in 1991, recalled:

*“I just remember the last couple of years in high school the younger kids seemed to be a little bit more out of control...I didn’t think they were as eager to be friendly with teachers, they were more trying to get into trouble...I think that by the time I was a senior, I think the freshmen coming in, it just seemed, like they didn’t care as much. Yeah, back-talking, “I don’t have to do it”, “I don’t care if you send me to the principal.”*⁶⁶⁰

⁶⁵⁷ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Cecilia Hood, graduate of 1996, p.3.

⁶⁵⁸ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Betty Ames, graduate of 1999, p.7.

⁶⁵⁹ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Vera Debin, graduate of 2000, p.4.

⁶⁶⁰ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Roberta Jones, graduate of 1991, p.4.

Then too, drug-users and drug dealers featured prominently in the memories of all alumni of this period among rule-breakers.⁶⁶¹ Under zero-tolerance policies and organized efforts to create “drug-free zones,” punishment for these rule-breakers was swift:

“We always made sure it was a drug-free zone. If you got caught you were expelled and off the school property.”⁶⁶²

As the decade moved along, trouble-makers took on more distinct identities, and emerged from within some of the least porous groupings of students, the Russians, blacks and those referred to as “rednecks.” Trouble-makers were “standard class” attendees.

Reporting on Russian and black animosities, Ivan explained:

“Russian people were not tolerant of African Americans. Mostly Russians here are Jews, who came over because of discrimination, you’d think they’d be open minded...endless cycle of discrimination...the most clashes came between the Russian community and African-American.”⁶⁶³

Still, as earlier mentioned, other alumni recalled that clashes occurred between black students and the farmers.⁶⁶⁴ But some farmers called “rednecks” also fought with Russian students and egged them on with “Russian go home.”⁶⁶⁵ Ivan remembered:

“What has happened is at Miller High, there is a distinct community of students who would be called, quote unquote, “rednecks”, that is just what people generally say, people who are close-minded, hate Jews, hate blacks, could be categorized as KKK types, so that sub-population at Miller High would threaten, by just being there, the Russians, because of their Judaism, and because of their being Russian, it’s all kind of a broad assault on

⁶⁶¹ Heather Korn (1993): “You knew who the drug users were. Oh yeah, if you wanted to have drugs, you could have them in ten minutes”(p.3); Most all other alumni except for Sue Cohen, mentioned drug use at Miller High.

⁶⁶² Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Cherry Gate, graduate of 1992, p.31.

⁶⁶³ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Ivan Strasky, graduate of 2002, p.5.

⁶⁶⁴ Cecilia Hood (1996): “...twice in the course of my high school there was a big racial fight between the black kids and the farmers.” (p.2).

⁶⁶⁵ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Vera Debin, graduate of 2000, p.4.

Russians...On occasion I have heard slurs about Jews directed at Russian students.”⁶⁶⁶

There is reason to believe also that while clashes between “rednecks” and blacks and “rednecks” and Russians occurred primarily because of racist attitudes, they might also have occurred for economic reasons involving drug dealing. Some alumni’s recollections suggested that in the perception of Miller Town old-timers, the arrival of city blacks increased drug-overdosing incidents among black and white students, as well as drug deals imported partially by black “newcomers.”⁶⁶⁷ Drug dealing, however, as Ivan’s testimony suggested, was also taken-up by many Russian Youth who fancied themselves “Russian Mafiosos,”⁶⁶⁸ wore “their leather jacket, stern look, a cigarette and a defensive approach to things.”⁶⁶⁹ Ivan shared:

“I have heard stories about Mafia this and Mafia that. Kids pick up on this idea of Russian Mafioso...Russian kids they are smart, unfortunately their business was drugs.”⁶⁷⁰

It is reasonable to assume that Russian and African American drug dealers might have perceived each other as enemies when competing for the same market, especially in view of their loyalties to their respective racial and ethnic groups. Ivan shared how: “There is a very strong cohesion in the Russian community...Russian culture is very loyal.”⁶⁷¹

Beyond cultural loyalties, many of the Russian “trouble-makers” and “trouble-maker black kids”⁶⁷² shared two other characteristics that might have contributed,

⁶⁶⁶ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Ivan Strasky, graduate of 2002, p.7.

⁶⁶⁷ Old-timers’ perceptions earlier explained are corroborated by *Community Times* accounts of increased drug trafficking in the area, and further north.

⁶⁶⁸ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Ivan Strasky, graduate of 2002, p.5.

⁶⁶⁹ Ibid., p.3.

⁶⁷⁰ Ibid., p.8.

⁶⁷¹ Ibid., p.5.

⁶⁷² Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Vera Debin, graduate of 2000, p.8.

ironically, to their also shared animosities toward each other. Students of both groups tended to come from the city. Ivan reported that:

“A lot of the Russians moved from the cities to suburbia, which is a big shock. In the city, it is a tight community. You walk everywhere, go to café, bar, everything was city oriented, then hit suburbia and oh, what do we do!”⁶⁷³

This youth had been transported from the high energy life of the city, to the comparatively lackluster life of suburbia, that while it was urbanizing, lacked the immediate accessibility to sites of action that a city proper offered: “what do we do!” One can imagine that these young people itched to make something happen. Proud⁶⁷⁴ and loyal and restless, they also shared a fundamental mistrust of the American educational system.

African-American students who in the seventies, as alumni’ recollections suggested, were progressively “more into their culture,”⁶⁷⁵ by the nineties had fully asserted their culture by creating a parallel world to that of white students, as earlier discussed. While in the seventies many African American students might have been disappointed with the “good old boy attitude”⁶⁷⁶ of their only black teacher, by the nineties many were asserting their difference as well as disillusionment with the white establishment, in particular the white educational system, to the point of refusing to be interviewed by a white Ph.D. candidate in Education. Too many might have felt that black people had been over-studied by representatives of the white race who in turn had too little to show for their research in terms of advances in the education of

⁶⁷³ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Ivan Strasky, graduate of 2002, p.8.

⁶⁷⁴ David Randle (1976) alluded to African-American pride when he shared that the new generation was no longer interested in cooperating, but in seeing changes in white status quo occur faster. Russian pride was alluded to by Ivan Strasky when he shared: “They assert that image, the tough guy image.” (p.3)

⁶⁷⁵ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with David Randle, graduate of 1976, p.2.

⁶⁷⁶ Ibid.

black youth in America.⁶⁷⁷ Similarly, some Russian youth had a “lack of confidence, lack of faith in the American system.”⁶⁷⁸ Ivan explained that:

“They were that pole of the Russian community, nothing extracurricular, they were not committed to going to college, or if they were, they had a negative perception of school; that they didn’t want to have anything to do with school... There is a strong anti-American feeling, and it takes so long for Russians to realize that... what can an American teacher authority teach me?”⁶⁷⁹

Russian “trouble-makers” could often be seen arguing with their teachers, and teachers would anticipate their challenges:

“From the way I know teachers and the way I talked to them after the years I left, there is this perception that teachers definitely know the difference between a Russian kid and average American Joe. I don’t think teachers ever treated kids differently willingly...but when students started arguing with the teacher, the teacher would be more likely to but heads with the Russians...just because it was almost expected, because us Russian kids would always argue pretty well, I don’t know if that is Judaism or the Russian culture...as soon as the teacher sees she is losing an argument, she uses her authority. There is a pre-disposition against Russian kids, because that general stereotype.”⁶⁸⁰

The shared pride, loyalty to their respective cultures, city restlessness, and fundamental mistrust of the American educational system, could have made the youth among black and Russian students who were considered “trouble-makers,” allies in rebelling against “the system,” but it didn’t. Perhaps, as I earlier suggested, it was

⁶⁷⁷ Again, this sentiment was also echoed by an African-American colleague of mine who had graduated from high school in the early nineties, and who shared with me that a new generation of African-Americans no longer considered it acceptable that the “study” of African-Americans or blacks be conducted by whites; and that blacks or African-Americans should be the ones to “study” their own. Her remarks emerged from our discussions around the epistemology of ethnography, and vividly sensitized me to questions of legitimate knowledge-making. Because it is my deep commitment to contribute to scholarly work that helps those whose voices have been by-passed or silenced, and to help historical protagonists “appropriate the social construction of meaning to advance their own interests” (George W. Noblit et al., 2004, p.14), I fully appreciate that my “whiteness,” might be construed as an affront, in particular, within the context of research. For a thoughtful discussion of historical evolution of ethnographic inquiry in education and policy, and implications for emancipation of underrepresented voices, see George W. Noblit, Susana Y. Flores and Enrique G. Murillon, Jr., *Postcritical Ethnography* (Cresskill, New Jersey: Hampton Press, Inc., 2004).

⁶⁷⁸ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Ivan Strasky, graduate of 2002, p.8.

⁶⁷⁹ Ibid., p.7-8.

⁶⁸⁰ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Ivan Strasky, graduate of 2002, p.6.

competition in the drug market that made these rule-breakers rivals. Furthermore, young Russian rule-breakers seemed to revel in competing to break rules first, and to have things “happen sooner to [them].”⁶⁸¹ Ivan explained:

*“First to get drunk, the first to [smoke] cigarettes, the first to use marijuana, the first to use ecstasy...huge use and abuse of ecstasy, a lot of people fell into that, that always happened earlier in the Russian community.”*⁶⁸²

Ivan also elaborated on the black / Russian clashes by referring to the notion of *defending one’s identity*:

*“I don’t think the African American community ever started anything. It was defensive, on the African-American part, just as it was on the Russian part, just as it would be in any minority. Defend their identity.”*⁶⁸³

Since within the high school setting, in most every way, “trouble-maker” black and Russian students shared similar city backgrounds, mistrusts of authorities, and propensities for illegal drug dealing, it is difficult to see how the difference in *minority identity* might have been so drastically constructed as to warrant animosities between blacks and Russians, other than by referring to skin color within the realities of the drug market.

While male rivalries had dominated the memories of previous generations of alumni, by the nineties, girls were fighting more often, and more fiercely as alumni recalled.⁶⁸⁴ Black and white girls fought their own racial battles. Heather recalled:

“It was a black girl and a little white girl who was very snotty, she made it known that she was very racist. She was in the cafeteria line, she looked at this girl funny, and the big black girl got ticked off because the white girl looked at her funny. Somewhere in the middle of everything, while we were

⁶⁸¹ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Ivan Strasky, graduate of 2002, p.2.

⁶⁸² Ibid.

⁶⁸³ Ibid., p.6.

⁶⁸⁴ David Randle, African American graduate of the 1976, shared that as a teacher and coach, throughout the nineties, although not at Miller High, he was more often and more regularly breaking up fights between girls: “Now...fights everyday, mostly girls.”(p.9).

eating lunch, you heard somebody scream then you heard loud bangs. The [black]girl came up behind her, grabbed her hair and slammed her face into the cafeteria table. They both ended up getting suspended, so it wouldn't look like a racial issue."⁶⁸⁵

Girls could be seen "scratching,"⁶⁸⁶ while fighting over boys. Roberta described:

"There was one fight that was outside of the lunch room...It was two girls probably fighting over a boy."⁶⁸⁷ Ivan described Russian girls who might count among the trouble-makers and rule-breakers, as: "Strong Russian bitch. Don't mess with that girl, she will talk you off."⁶⁸⁸ Thus by the end of the nineties, as alumni's testimonies suggested, males and females equally engaged in physical fights and verbal aggression.

By the end of the twentieth century, Miller High students were doubly segregated: along racial, class and ethnic/national categories of identity on one hand, and within those categories, divided among rule-abiders and rule-breakers. To complicate the matrix of segregation, students were further divided in their experiences of each other and school authorities along "standard classes" and "upper tracks," as they had been in the 50s and 60s. In the following chapter I discuss the relational dynamics at the intersection of Miller High's structural forces and its students' agencies that contributed, in the late eighties and nineties, to creating parallel worlds of experiences for students. Students who by the end of the century had acquired habits of self-segregation; and tendencies to objectify teachers as either a discriminatory and antagonistic force, or a necessary and useful authority that

⁶⁸⁵ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Heather Korn, graduate of 1993, p.11.

⁶⁸⁶ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Betty Ames, graduate of 1999, p.4.

⁶⁸⁷ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Roberta Jones, graduate of 1991, p.3.

⁶⁸⁸ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Ivan Strasky, graduate of 2002, p.3.

helped one feel safe in an increasingly violent school system, and opened doors to higher education.

CHAPTER 6

PARALLEL WORLDS: SEGREGATING INTO RULE-ABIDERS AND RULE-BREAKERS, INTO BLACK AND WHITE, RICH AND POOR (1986-2000)

What had begun in the mid-fifties at Miller High, under Brown versus Board of Education, as a structurally-imposed-integration, ended at the end of the twentieth century, as a seemingly voluntary student-segregation, and along with it, class and race divisions were exacerbated. I discussed earlier how in the seventies students who lacked peer-group affiliation acquired nebulous identities.⁶⁸⁹ This phenomenon by which specific peer-group-affiliation, ironically, granted individual status, and lack of specific peer-group-affiliation erased the individual within an amorphous mass generally organized under a race or class category, shifted by the nineties to where ethnic/national, racial, religious, and class segregated groups with boundaries more rigid than ever before in the history of Miller High here studied, became the dominant organizing peer-associations, within the broader “rule-abiding” or “rule-breaking” status. “Class” and “race” were no longer categories of identity by default, as they had been in the seventies and early eighties, but rather the markings of individuality.

⁶⁸⁹ Students and teachers would lose sight of students as individuals when they did not belong to a particular peer-group. By default, these students grouped themselves on the basis of socially determined categories of race or class. Thus black students, males and females who had no peer-group association, were robbed of “individual” status. They became the *black* kids who, as David Randle’s testimonies suggested, went individually unnoticed by a white faculty, while he on the other hand, by virtue of being a *jock*, although black, was accorded *individual* attention. Conversely, these black students found comfort with each other in sharing a similar culture, as African-American alumni recalled. Similarly, work-release students who lived in a limbo state, neither full-time students nor full-time employees were robbed of individuality, and were seen as the working class people coming and going at the periphery of school life, a group whom many teachers “gave up on.”

Young people's loyalties to each other in the nineties at Miller High, which consolidated around race, religion and class divisions primarily, not only significantly diminished students' integration across these categories, but divided students into stereotypes, for administrators, teachers, students, and parents alike.⁶⁹⁰ Vera shared:

*"I remember some incident, somebody got into a fight, with one of the [Russian] guys in our group and then his mother got a restrain order against the Russian boy, because she was afraid that the rest of the Russian kids would come to her house and beat her boy up."*⁶⁹¹

A confluence of structural forces precipitated what might have been diverted during the seventies and early eighties: a hardening of boundaries along racial and class divides, and the concomitant stereotyping. The particular demographics, the stringent disciplinary technologies delivered by distant school authorities, the broader intensification of the credential race and the institutionalized power of the *preps*, combined to create in the nineties, an environment conducive to student disengagement, as evidenced in lack of school spirit, and to student segregations⁶⁹² along *comfort zones* steeped in class, race, religious and nationalistic consciousness.

The sudden and overwhelming influx of ex-city dwellers and immigrants to Miller High drastically increased the number of students who were new to the neighborhood, who came from myriad middle schools beyond the regular Miller High feeder schools, as well as from Russian schools directly, and many of whom had not

⁶⁹⁰ The reader will recall the white principal's comment about black football players: "Here they go again;" the teachers' expectations of argumentative and unruly behaviors on part of Russian students; and alumni's recollections about "a lot of people that smelled bad" referring to Russians; or about the "ultra right wing" students who attended the bible study, etc.

⁶⁹¹ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Vera Debin, graduate of 2000, p.4.

⁶⁹² As Betty Ames (1999) put it: "There was a little intermingling, but definitely big groups that separated themselves." (p.3).

practiced peer relations within integrated schools.⁶⁹³ Thus youth were doubly strangers: to each other and to neighborhood kids attending Miller High. The school was also doubly strange to them: directly, because they would not have grown up attending the town Fall Festivals organized on its premises, or the games and presentations in its gym and auditorium; and indirectly, because they would not have had older siblings and relatives relay school traditions or gossip about teachers. Not surprisingly, as newly arrived outsiders, within an overcrowded population of Miller High students, these young people would have sought the company of those young people with similar backgrounds. As Russian immigrant alumni put it:

“... it was easier to speak Russian...”⁶⁹⁴

“I was drawn to the Russian crowd...hanging out with Russian friends, dressing the Russian way...speaking Russian.”⁶⁹⁵

In a general comment about human nature, one African-American alumna of the seventies explained, especially about black students who did not belong to peer-generated groups in the seventies:

“You segregated yourself regardless...It’s just a natural thing. We do it every day. Subconsciously we do it. So, it’s a comfortable type of segregation...Didn’t you find that you could walk into the library and you had your Asian people kind of sitting here, black people sitting there...and you might have a Caucasian table here... You know, like on my job, we have maybe four Asian people, and they kind of do sit together in the cantene, they speak their own language...They feel more comfortable.”⁶⁹⁶

⁶⁹³ Ex-city African-American youth were coming from city schools that had been turned into all black schools with the “white flight,” and Russian immigrant youth were coming from all white schools.

⁶⁹⁴ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Vera Debin, graduate of 2000, p.3.

⁶⁹⁵ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Ivan Strasky, graduate of 2002, p.1.

⁶⁹⁶ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Joanne Pett, graduate of 1974, p.6.

Alumni's testimonies across time overwhelmingly revealed⁶⁹⁷ that when entering Miller High without prior or subsequent involvement in extracurricular activities, students of similar racial, class and ethnic backgrounds tended to naturally congregate. This was particularly the case for Miller High students in the late eighties and nineties. Amidst the overcrowding, they huddled in groups *for comfort*: the Russian immigrant students for whom America was still foreign, and the religious students, for whom the dominant America, as they perceived it, was too lax in its mores. Other students huddled together *out of comfort*: the preps who simply knew each other forever and traveled the same upper-class circles; the African-American students, new-comers and new-generation, who no longer adjusted their attitudes to fit the white world of Miller Town as might have the previous generation of Miller High African-Americans, who "knew what to do and what not to do;"⁶⁹⁸ and the "farmers" or "rednecks" who felt besieged by ex-communists, Jews, and blacks all at once, and wanted people to "go home" as recollections of others impressionistically sketched out.⁶⁹⁹

Thus alumni across time periods consistently reported that students associated with certain groups and not others, out of a need for comfort, which often they defined culturally,⁷⁰⁰ that is with reference to shared upbringings, language, and musical tastes.

⁶⁹⁷ Also see testimonies by Tim Whittle, Sophie Baker, David Randle, alumni of the seventies and early eighties; also see testimonies by Bill Jackman, Betty Ames, as well as Vera Debin, alumni of the nineties.

⁶⁹⁸ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with David Randle, graduate of 1976, p.14.

⁶⁹⁹ In particular refer to Ivan Strasky's recollections of redneck admonitions: "Russian go home."

⁷⁰⁰ See testimonies, in Part I / Chapter I, by African-American students Annie Cole and Burt Sadden in the late fifties and sixties regarding the "other worldness" of an all white environment, and the differences in music tastes between white and black students; as well refer to testimonies, in Part II / Chapter III, by African-American alumni David Randle, Pat Baley, Joanne Pet and Teresa Randle, and

This understanding sheds light on the difficulties that young people faced to find a place of comfort, more particularly in the nineties, within the exposed environment of an institution that stripped one of privacy to the point where one's personal effects could be searched if suspect.⁷⁰¹ Thus comfort became the *other body* whose language and cultural affinities reminded one of home. Youth group associations wrought around familiarity were but the most natural and spontaneous expression of the human need for shelter and comfort in face of institutional discomfort created by overcrowding, intolerant and strict punitive disciplinary strategies, and an influx of foreigners.

“The re-divided generation's” segregation, constructed out of a need for the familiar, is further made clear by contrast to “the border-crossing generation's” more porous groupings and freer intermingling. In the seventies and early eighties, when students knew each other from frequenting the same elementary schools, when the population had remained fairly stable, and when school policies had been relatively lax in comparison to zero tolerance policies, students of “the border-crossing generation” experienced greater interracial and cross-class friendships and greater intermingling across categories of race, and class.

However, there is also evidence to suggest that throughout time periods, a segment of African-American young men and women did not dissociate race from culture, and that a segment of the white young men and women, namely those referred to as “hillbillies” or “rednecks,” also did not differentiate race from

white students Jeremy Garnes and Sophie Baker of the seventies and early eighties, regarding the comforts of familiarity and shared cultural backgrounds.

⁷⁰¹ At least two to three narrators across time periods remembered bathrooms policed. Also, personal effects and lockers could be searched at a moment's notice for drugs or arms.

culture.⁷⁰² This fusion of race and culture became the norm for students in the nineties. While throughout the fifties and seventies students were more likely to imagine or understand race in terms of skin pigmentation only⁷⁰³ and culture as something that could be shared by both races, by the nineties at Miller High, young men and women understood skin color to mean being of a particular culture. Thus being a black American meant being of a different culture than a white American. This would explain why many young county blacks subsumed their own particular upbringings and particular cultural values under the racial category “black;” and why they identified with ex-city black youth, often to the dismay of both black and white long-time county residents, who lamented, as earlier discussed, losing their young to drugs and the bad influences they attributed to city blacks. One African-American long time county mother said: “I don’t want them blacks from the city coming into my town ruining Miller Town. That’s how old blacks in this area feel.”⁷⁰⁴

On the other hand, as recollections further suggest, white students who were “rednecks” conflated being anti-black, anti-Russian, and anti-Jewish, with being white American;⁷⁰⁵ and Russian immigrant students conflated being Jewish with being Russian, even as they recognized their detachment from the Jewish religion.

Thus race, ethnicity and nationality, rather than shared affinities across those

⁷⁰² Refer in Part II / Chapters 3 and 4 to alumni’s testimonies of black students who lived on the periphery of school life, and for whom being black was their culture; and refer to white male fire-heads, whom Cecilia described as “wearing flannel shirts,” being “farmers,” and for whom being white American was their culture.

⁷⁰³ The reader will recall African-American Joanne Pet’s comment as she compared her skin color to mine: “that there is no difference between and I.”

⁷⁰⁴ Quoted by Tim Whittle (1981), transcript p.8. Also, from long conversations with Millie, 85 year-old African-American woman, who to many is considered Miller Town black community’s matriarch.

⁷⁰⁵ Refer to previous chapter. Not only did Ivan Strasky’s testimonies suggest rednecks’ white supremacist attitudes, but so did Cecilia’s (white prep graduate of 1996) descriptions of racist attitudes on part of rednecks suggest the same; as did by inference, testimonies of Cherry Gate, as earlier discussed.

categories, became the familiar landmarks to which various groups of Miller High youth gravitated as they sought familiarity, except, as previously addressed, when youth congregated as faith communities primarily, whether Jewish or Christian.⁷⁰⁶

At Miller High in the nineties, the lack of comfort that the many newly-transplanted students experienced at school by virtue of their “outsider” status was further accentuated by the zero tolerance policies which divided Miller High students into rule-abiders and rule-breakers. There is reason to believe that student loyalty to one’s racial or ethnic group increased with increase in frequency and severity of punishment for transgressions.

There were already indications, in the testimonies of alumni who graduated in the seventies and early eighties that student-to-student loyalty increased when unjust treatment by faculty and staff, as well as by other students, was perceived.⁷⁰⁷ By the nineties, as disciplinary actions increased, so did students’ loyalties, even when they might have endangered the good rule-abiding status of some students. Vera and Ivan remembered how they stood up for their Russian peers, even when they risked getting in trouble themselves:

⁷⁰⁶ More research is needed to explore the influence of greater social movements and politics on students’ tendencies to segregate by religion, race, and ethnicity; as well as to explore the more immediate influences of the changed curriculum over time, in particular in social studies, which was more likely, toward the end of the century, to recount histories of peoples from different racial, class and ethnic perspectives. Ivan Strasky’s comment about how minorities behave (“I don’t think the African American community ever started anything. It was defensive, on the African-American part, just as it was on the Russian part, just as it would be in any minority. Defend their identity.”) suggests that by the end of the nineties, students had been schooled in dividing the world according to categories of race, class, ethnicity, gender, and on; as well as seeing themselves belonging to one of those groups.

⁷⁰⁷ Refer to Tim Whittle’s (1981) testimony in Part II / Chapter III when he recalled how he rooted for his friend whom he thought was being unjustly treated by a teacher and the vice-principal who “wanted him out of school,” or how with two other friends he beat up a student who made a racial slur against their black friend. Also, David Randle, graduate of 1976 recalled how his black peers remained loyal to each other as black students in face of what they perceived to be unfair treatment by white faculty, by refusing to seek participation.

“Somebody said something wrong, or pushed you out of the way...If somebody would say something in front of a Russian student, the other Russian students would kind of back him up. So, it would be scary.”⁷⁰⁸

“There have been a lot of times, oh, that black kid said something about the Russian kid, and then “you guys, after school, parking lot”. Countless times, and I’d go, because in the back of my mind, “Ivan, what are you going to do? You’re not going to fight, because if you get in trouble, it’s not worth it. But if something bad does happen, you have to stand up.” Even in my academic mind, when I knew what I had to do to succeed and go to college, I still had this association...that I have to go.”⁷⁰⁹

Judging by Ivan’s testimony, one can easily extend the same kind of loyalty to the black students who engaged in the parking lot fights that Ivan described, as well as to the “red neck” students with KKK tendencies. Thus, while seeking comfort might have propelled ex-city blacks and Russians to associate as black students and Russian students primarily, zero-tolerance policies might have contributed to sealing group loyalties around racial and ethnic boundaries. A Russian immigrant might be a trouble-maker, but he was Russian first. Similarly, a black or redneck might be a trouble-maker, but he was a black or redneck first. Loyalty to racial or ethnic associations might further explain why young county blacks would more easily connect with city blacks; and why the mother of a white boy assaulted by a Russian boy might have assumed, as earlier mentioned, that “the rest of the Russian kids would come to her house and beat her boy up”—out of loyalty to their Russian peer.

Then too, the institutionalized nature, by the nineties, of the *preps*, the one group of students who continued to construct the public image of the school across time periods while they also continued to ignore the variety of peers and student life as earlier discussed might have inadvertently contributed to further lessen school

⁷⁰⁸ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Vera Debin, graduate of 2000, p.4.

⁷⁰⁹ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Ivan Strasky, graduate of 2002, p.5.

spirit and student participation across groups. While stories of alumni who graduated in the fifties suggested that some poorer students like Judy Law and Robert Heart practiced playing the part of richer students⁷¹⁰ by dressing the part as did Judy, or by mimicking the social manners of wealthier students, as did Robert; and while the stories of some African-American alumni from the seventies revealed black students crossing class borders, sealing friendships with the wealthier white students, and building social capital for life after high school; stories of alumni who graduated in the late eighties and nineties, revealed outright rejection of “preps” through “prom boycotts” and moral indictments of their values, as earlier discussed.

Stories across time suggest that while it had been easier for the “preps” to represent the school, take charge of its many extracurricular activities and social events, and have students go along with their agendas, during the fifties and sixties when the student population was relatively small and overwhelmingly middle class and American white; and even during the seventies and early eighties when the population continued majority middle-class, and a very tolerant student body allowed for easy visitations across peer-groups; it would not have been as easy however for the “preps” to muster school-wide participation in the nineties.

A very diverse student-body, which more than ever in the history of Miller High felt disassociated from white American upper-class values, whether experientially or in imagination, rejected, as recollections revealed, the “preps” and what they stood for: conspicuous wealth, and ivory tower like seclusion from the lives of the majority of students. And while preps included, by the nineties, young black

⁷¹⁰ Alumni who graduated in the fifties did not use the term “preps” but the terms “upper class” and “doers.”

women, recollections suggested that students did not feel represented in yearbook accounts of their school and its student-body, and some felt that the “preps” acted undemocratically, privileging their own, and “snobbing” the rest.

Thus white and black *preps* were judged by peers on the basis of class distinctions. When social mobility through education seemed possible for the poorer whites of the fifties; when in general education meant less for the majority white students,⁷¹¹ as analyses have revealed; and when social mobility through education seemed possible for a proportionately significant amount of the African-American Miller High youth throughout the sixties and seventies, especially for African-American young women,⁷¹² then “preps” were tolerated as part of the high school scene, although their “popularity” continued to be constructed by those who were not “preps” more in terms of their high profile status, than any value status.⁷¹³

By the nineties however, Miller High “preps” were judged by their peers, as remembrances revealed, no longer by their high profile status, but by their materialistic values and self-absorbed manners which made them in the eyes of many, “snobs,” removed from the realities of most all other students.⁷¹⁴ By the nineties, it had become difficult for “preps” to muster school-wide participation in the social

⁷¹¹ Refer to numerous accounts of white males, whether college-bound or not, for whom school seemed irrelevant; and to stories of white college-bound females who could coast through school with little effort.

⁷¹² See stories by sixties African-American alumna Dotty Morris (Part I / Chapter 1), and of seventies African-Alumnae Joanne Pett and Teresa Randle (Part II / Chapter 3).

⁷¹³ This is analyzed more in depth in the section: “PART II / Chapter 4. My analysis has led me to conclude that “preps” were not eagerly emulated by students in a race for popularity, across the three time periods here studied, as the sociologist Coleman had suggested for those he studied in the late fifties. “Popularity,” as alumni’s recollections suggested, was understood as one holding a high profile through pervasive visibility in all aspects of school life. Analysis of recollections revealed that “popularity” was constructed more as “celebrity” status might be, appealing to some, revolting to others, and not necessarily attached to a notion of “superiority.”

⁷¹⁴ The reader will also recall Vera Debin’s comment regarding the production of yearbooks by the preps: “It would be more interesting to have people assigned to the committee to do the yearbook [that were] randomly selected.” (p.6).

events they worked hard to organize, as students boycotted prom dances, and school spirit was at an all-time low. By the nineties, “preps” had fully become the one group identified in recollections primarily by upper-class economic status, and least identified with either race, ethnicity or even religion, suggesting that appurtenance to the preps required only upper-class economic wherewithal.

Thus the upper-class economic status of both white and black preps would have plausibly further galvanized the frustrations of those students identified as “farmers” or “rednecks,” as they felt snubbed by preps, who by the end of the century included black students.⁷¹⁵ The reader will recall lower-class white students’ refusal to recognize Nat Right’s middle-class status in the sixties, because he was black. The reader will also recall Cherry’s disdain in the nineties for the preps, Cherry who identified herself as “a back-home-farm-country girl;” as well as her sister’s involvement in a racial fight. These among other testimonies earlier discussed, further suggest that the continual undercurrent of animosity experienced by some of those white students identified as “farmers” and “rednecks,” toward the visibly rich, and toward blacks, an undercurrent that might have been repressed in the seventies and early eighties by vigilant white peers, surfaced and exploded in the nineties.

The preps of the nineties, black, white and Russian,⁷¹⁶ came to represent a coalition of races and ethnicities bound by superior consumer power. For the “rednecks” of the community, who witnessed the disappearance of the farms they had worked on for generations, as malls and restaurants, and the general consumer life-

⁷¹⁵ By the nineties, many county black families had moved into middle and upper-middle class homes. Tim Whittle (1981) shared: “[In the 90s], that’s when blacks that weren’t raised here started moving in, and the local people, both black and white, were starting to build big developments around here. This area just exploded in the 90s.” (p.5).

⁷¹⁶ Refer to descriptions of preps in Chapter 5.

styles of the city took over, this coalition might have seemed overwhelming, and more than that, as alumni's recollections seemed to suggest, an affront to their "farm-country," "down-home" way of life.

The insular and xenophobic tendencies of "rednecks," and their long standing racism, the mistrust and survival skills imported by newly transplanted poorer black city folk, as well as by many Russian folk eager to change their fortune in America all the while begrudging it its Americanism, the zero tolerance policies that divided those who toed the line and those susceptible to expulsions; the explosive overcrowding, and the "prep factor," combined to create strands of clashing identities claiming their space and legitimacy within the halls of Miller High, and within an educational system that by the end of the twentieth century was scrambling, yet again, to reclaim its relevance.⁷¹⁷ After forty-four years under Brown versus Board of Education, Miller High students segregated according to adult-devised census categories of identity: religion, race, ethnicity and nationality, and lived parallel lives.

The parallel lives of rule-abiding and rule-breaking students, and within these, the parallel lives of Jewish, Christian, Russian, Black, Redneck, "Farm Girls", and "Regular People" students, were further experienced qualitatively differently, as earlier discussed, by those students attending the standard classes, and those attending the upper tracks. Within these structurally inherited divisions traced back to the very creation of the comprehensive high school, not only did the lower tracks continue to expose students to violence more readily than did the upper tracks, and to further

⁷¹⁷ See William Wraga, *Democracy's High School: The Comprehensive High School and Educational Reform in the United States* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1994); also see Michael Sedlack, Christopher Wheeler, Diana C. Pullin, and Philip A. Cusick, *Selling Students Short: Classroom Bargains and Academic Reform in the American High School* (New York: Teachers' College Columbia University, 1986).

separate students' experiences into parallel worlds that rarely intersected, but also the highly competitive climate at the end of the nineties for access to colleges increased student rivalry in the upper tracks, and the clashing groups in the lower tracks increased violence among students in standard classes.

As a result, student-to-student relationships hardened within and across tracks. Achievers competed sometimes ferociously against each other as Sue Cohen's testimony regarding the aspiring valedictorian revealed, and as Bill Jackman's, Ivand Strasky's and Vera Debin's recollections suggested. This was a first in the history of Miller High, as reported by those alumni interviewed. In the fifties and sixties, students easily coasted through upper tracks, in large part because the upper tracks were economically rather than academically defined, and were by and large reserved for those who could afford college tuitions, as discussed in Part I. In the seventies and early eighties, students again invested little effort, in particular as the older teachers held low standards for their charges. In general students of the seventies and early eighties were less invested in studies or in pleasing teachers. The Miller High upper track attendee of the late eighties and nineties, by contrast, felt the pressures of academic competition. Of the previous generations' students, perhaps the experiences of fifties graduate Norman Good, the African-Alumnus who attended the academic track where he had to prove his competitive spirit, might have approximated those of the nineties' academic track students; still, as Norman Good recalled, he "competed in a good spirited way for grades."⁷¹⁸ Memories of nineties' graduates revealed how rather than "good spirited," competition was strategic and stressful.

⁷¹⁸ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Norman Good (1959), p.10.

Moreover, achievers constructed their upper track status as proof of their superior qualifications by pointing out that students attending standard classes were either of lesser intelligence, as Ivan's recollections emphatically suggested, or not as hard working, as Bill's and Vera's testimonies revealed. In this sense, alumni's recollections echoed those of the fifties and sixties graduates who constructed "lower track" students as less deserving.⁷¹⁹ Thus when students focused on ensuring their particular *student* rather than *peer* status as was the case for "the divided generation" and the "re-divided generation" then competition among students along institutional tracking intensified. The more teacher-centered the students, within a dividing and hierarchical system, the more likely they were to construct each other hierarchically, according to institutional divisions.⁷²⁰ The reader will recall how in the seventies and early eighties, teachers' divisions of students' status according to tracks were not embraced by "the border-crossing generation" whose respect for teachers had plummeted when compared to that of "the divided generation" of the fifties and sixties.

What is of importance here is that teacher-centered students, that is students invested in either pleasing their teachers (50s and 60s), or befriending them as they sought competitive advantages (achievers of late 80s and 90s), or not crossing them in

⁷¹⁹ In particular refer to Bud Land's testimony (1968) in Part I / Chapter 1. From transcript of Bud Land interview, p.6: "...those who were just going to go out and work as laborers. They were the slower kids and the ones that didn't really care about what they were doing."

⁷²⁰ I would like to make a distinction here between the documented psychological observation that peer pressure can detract or reinforce young people's attention to studies (depending on the type of peer pressure), and the observation I make here. This work offers another explanation for teacher-centered behavior on part of adolescents that is not attributed to peer influence (whether "positive" or "negative"), but to structural pressures, and a relentlessly hierarchical system that divides young people into more or less deserving, more or less smart, divisions that students integrate as their defining characteristics, the closer they identify with teachers who represent or espouse the hierarchical system within which they serve, and who evaluate them accordingly.

order to ensure their protection in a zero-tolerance climate, (rule-abiding standard class attendees of the late 80s and 90s), integrated notions of each other as superior or inferior as defined by classes taken and grades acquired. Thus Ivan and those students institutionally recognized as belonging to that “pole”⁷²¹ of Miller High youth whose academic status set them apart from the majority of students, considered someone like Cherry, who attended the general classes, of lesser merit. Cherry in turn placed herself hierarchically lower than the GT attendees Ivan, Sue, Bill or Vera. Recall how Cherry, Heather, and Roberta situated their place in school somewhere between “the group that did drugs” and the “higher group...that you knew were really smart.”⁷²² Tellingly, as if in an attempt to avoid the lowest status along academic tracking, they placed themselves above those who “did drugs,” a qualification that does not define one academically but socially. Tellingly too, not doing drugs accorded them a status of good conduct, which in turn ensured acceptance and belonging to an institution hyper vigilant against transgressions, and readily apt to expel.

However, while “the re-divided generation” resembled “the divided generation” in that it was school-authority, rather than peer-centered, students of “the re-divided generation” did not develop personal relationships with school authorities, as had graduates of the fifties and sixties. Rule-abiding students of the late eighties and nineties, objectified or abstracted school authorities. Achievers saw them as a “means to an end.”⁷²³ Recall Ivan’s words: “Kids at that level always have great relationships with teachers, because they do whatever it takes to get the teacher to like

⁷²¹ I use here Ivan’s own hierarchical term “pole” (transcript, p.7). See Chapter 5.

⁷²² Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Heather Korn, graduate of 1993, p.4.

⁷²³ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Ivan Strasky (1998-2002), p.3.

you...To get an A you need a relationship with the teacher...⁷²⁴ Standard class attendees saw school authorities as ivory tower keepers of the law, whose presence was made manifest only through expulsions, and punitive actions. One alumnus' recollection summed it up: "I cannot remember seeing the principal walk the hallways...You stayed away from the office."⁷²⁵

Rule-breakers too objectified school authorities and continued to clash with teachers whom they continued to construct as "the system" as they had across generations. Recall fifties graduate Robert Heart's feelings toward teachers and school authorities when he said that he had been determined: "to beat the system somehow."⁷²⁶ Russian rule-breakers' attitudes echoed those of Robert Heart, when "they would automatically be defensive, and often perceive it as discrimination"⁷²⁷ when teachers called them to task. Robert and his friends had also decried the system's tendencies toward discrimination evidenced in Robert's sharing how teachers were: "trying to make a fool out of you...they were picking on us [farm boys]."⁷²⁸

However, by the nineties, unlike during the fifties when the shop teacher might have "saved" someone like Robert from endless detentions (extreme punishment of the time) by taking personal interest in his life, rule-breakers of the late eighties and nineties were less likely to be pardoned and were also less likely to develop meaningful personal relationships with teachers. Meaningful relationships with teachers were also less likely for successful students and those fully integrated

⁷²⁴ Ibid.

⁷²⁵ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Harry Rice, graduate of 1987, p. 2.

⁷²⁶ Ibid., p.9.

⁷²⁷ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Ivan Strosky, graduate of 2002, p.7-8.

⁷²⁸ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Robert Heart (1952-1956), p.8.

into the life of the school. The GT student Vera Debin confided: “There was a very few teachers that I had any kind of relationship with other than in class;”⁷²⁹ and the prep jock Cecilia Hood shared: “I don’t remember the teachers that much.”⁷³⁰

Overwhelmingly graduates of the nineties talked about *teachers in abstracted terms*, referring to the category “teachers,” and none of them recalled or *named a particular* teacher, as had graduates of the fifties and sixties; further underscoring the segregation between teachers and students, between school authorities and Miller High youth by the end of the century.

For rule-breaking students in particular, organized crime of the nineties, and rivalries along race and ethnic divides, dramatically changed their teacher-student dynamics when compared to rule-breakers of “the divided generation.” I forwarded earlier as I analyzed student-teacher relationships that even the rebellious youth of the fifties and sixties were teacher-centered, in that they defined their actions against those of the teachers and school authorities, not against those of peers. Robert Heart and his friends fought mostly with teachers, the extreme case being that of his friend punching the coach and dropping out.⁷³¹ The rule-breakers of the nineties, on the other hand, fought mostly with each other within their own world, parallel to that of upper track.⁷³²

⁷²⁹ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Vera Debin (1995-1999), p.1.

⁷³⁰ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Cecilia Hood (1992-1996), p.7.

⁷³¹ Recall the litany of problems with teachers, from the coach, to the English teacher, to teachers who insisted on calling on “farm boys,” etc. See Part I / Chapter 1.

⁷³² Beyond alumni’s testimonies, this finding was further corroborated by the testimony of a Miller High Spanish teacher with over twenty five years of tenure who explained how in the nineties, you had two “parallel worlds:” the world of those whom he called the “mainstream” students, and those he placed in the category of antisocial students. He said that most of the time students went about their business, the mainstream not being bothered by the “troublemaker” contingency; and the troublemaker contingency not interested in the “mainstream” world. This teacher was interviewed along with two

Over a fifty year period, under progressively more punitive policies, and less available one-on-one teacher-student attention as Miller High population grew to the point of overflowing in the nineties; and under fifty years of a progressively more distant administration, which rather than visibly engage with Miller High youth, as students became more numerous and more diverse, retrenched into isolation and out of view, becoming less accessible, and swifter to punish; under a half-century of relentlessly institutionalizing forces, by the nineties, rule-breakers had developed into hardened, adult-like criminals; and they to retrenched into their own worlds, just as the administration had. By the nineties, rule-breakers lived criminal activities punishable with expulsion, and adult-like sentencing; and they hated and fought each other along racial, ethnic, and nationalistic divides, loyal to their black, Russian, and redneck groups.

That students in the late eighties and nineties were remembered as rule-abiders or rule-breakers suggested an environment more akin to that of inmates in a prison, than of students in a school. Moreover, remembrances of an explosive cafeteria where racial fights erupted and racial and ethnic threats and slurs were exchanged,⁷³³ described the atmosphere of a prison mess hall rather than that of a place for students to congregate in safety and to eat. While there is little doubt that school authorities were taken aback, in the late eighties and nineties, with the sudden influx of youth, both immigrant and from the city, as they scrambled to build an annex, this historical analysis shows, with the privilege of hindsight, that segregating

other teachers with longest tenure at Miller High, in a group interview I conducted toward the end of my study. See addendum: *methodology*.

⁷³³ Refer to Chapter 5 and descriptions of violence among girls, as well as Ivan's description of exchanged insults.

forces had already been entrenched in the organizational structure, which fully came to view with the avalanche of newcomers to the county.

For a half-century at least, the Miller High cafeteria continued to be a “herding-place” where students were left to their own devices to establish relationships in isolation from their teachers who ate in their own quarters. Thus students, segregated from their teachers during meal time, a time notoriously reserved, across cultures, for community and communal relationships, further segregated among themselves as they sought familiarity and comfort. The teacher-student segregation came vividly to light in Ivan’s description of his privileged position with teachers in a school system where relationships are constructed hierarchically. When Ivan shared: “I was president of my class, I’d always be in the lunchroom with the teachers,”⁷³⁴ he made it clear that he was not part of the student cafeteria crowd, but that he had access to the private world of faculty who ate away from the students who were considered lesser in the hierarchy of relationships.

It is little wonder then that in the overcrowded Miller High of the nineties, within the space of the cafeteria, racial, ethnic and class animosities flared up. Carnoy and Levin’s remark that “schools continue to provide Americans with a social experience that is markedly more egalitarian and more open to free choice and possibilities of self-realization than anything that is available to them in the realm of work,”⁷³⁵ a remark which might have captured the experiential realities of the previous two generations, no longer applied to “the re-divided generation.” By the end of the twentieth century, Miller High was a place where students less and less

⁷³⁴ Transcript of audiotape interview with Ivan Strasky (1998-2002), p.4.

⁷³⁵ David F. Labaree quoting Carnoy and Levin in *How to Succeed in School Without Really Learning* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997) p.49.

participated in the life of their school, and where competitions within upper and lower tracks were as stressful as that found in the world outside: achievers competed more fiercely to keep ahead; rule-abiding standard class attendees held their breath hoping not to be sucked into what they perceived to be growing violence around them; and rule-breakers broke rules with greater consequence than ever before.

SUMMARY

Miller High alumni's recollections told the story of three generations of students who, bound in time by different demographic configurations, different school disciplinary measures, and different shades of hierarchy in student-teacher relations, constructed their associations with peers and school authorities markedly differently. Students of the *Divided Generation* of the fifties and sixties attended a Miller High that served a predominantly white, rural, middle-class population, and beginning in 1956, when the school integrated, also served a small community of African-Americans with county roots that extended back into the nineteenth century. The *divided generation* related with each other *primarily* along the socially inherited binary constructions of black *or* white, female *or* male, rich *or* poor. On the whole, they defined their place in school with reference to their *student* rather than *peer* status, and accorded greater weight to the role school authorities played in their experiences of school life than to the role their peer associations might have played.

Their *student* status was further reinforced and sustained by a principal who was perceived as a fair man, involved in students' lives; and by small graduating classes where teachers and students often developed close, even life-changing relationships. In contrast to ethnographic works of the time, which underscored the limited influence that adults held in the lives of high school adolescents,⁷³⁶ Miller High graduates of the *divided generation* revealed the importance that students across gender, race and class accorded adult authority-figures. Those who graduated often did so to honor parental wishes, as well as to please school authorities.

⁷³⁶James Coleman, *The Adolescent Society: The Social Life of the Teenager and its Impact on Education* (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1961).

To a great extent Miller High students of the *divided generation* reflected, in their relationships with each other and school authorities, the social strata of their times: interracial couplings were taboo, and white females in particular, along with their elderly white middle-class teachers, infused social events, yearbook and newspaper representations of the school community with white middle-class values. White middle-class *female* sensibilities pervaded all aspects of academic and social life at Miller High in the fifties and sixties. Young white middle-class female students, many of whom were identified as the “upper-class” or the “doers,” referred to by following generations as the “preps,” were generally pampered, supported and encouraged by their grandmotherly-like teachers with whom they shared intimate ties, through family friendships, church affiliations, or school related achievements, whether academic or social.

For these young women, school was an extension of their home, and into it they brought their middle-class domesticity, as they organized bake-sales, took care of writing homework for their male counterparts, ran errands for their teachers and decorated for dances. These young women participated in reproducing, along side a fatherly white principal and the many white female teachers and their white male counterparts whom they often patronized,⁷³⁷ relational dynamics akin to those of the middle-class private realm of the time, where “...women could be a solution to men’s dilemma...[and] provide men a haven in a heartless world.”⁷³⁸ They worked hard at making the school look good, at making their principal proud, and at making boys’

⁷³⁷ Recall accounts of female students doing homework for their male counterparts, or covering for them during class when they were absent.

⁷³⁸ See Linda Eiseman, *Higher Education for Women in Postwar America, 1945-1965: Reclaiming the Incidental Student* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, (In Press), p.20.

workload easier. It is against the background of a school represented in many ways as a white middle-class home through white middle-class female students' dedicated involvement, that all other students attended Miller High.

For black young women in particular, that white middle-class home immediately following integration proved alien, treacherous and at times surrealistic. Relationships with teachers were uneven, as some faculty were welcoming, and others, racist. Relationships with peers were often humiliating as white boys harassed black girls during school hours. Young black women missed the presence of their mothers on school premises, where white, not black parents influenced school authorities. By the end of the sixties however, many African-American young women of Miller High were using their integrated education to expand their social networks and economic opportunities. Nevertheless, black females rather than black males, and black females more than white females, unless these white females were poor, spent their after-school hours taking care of family, which prevented many from participating in after school activities.

Except for the very poor and pregnant girls, whether white or black, young women were in general treated better than boys by school authorities. For many young white males in the academic and general tracks and for many black males in the general track, high school was a place where one "did time;" it was an irrelevant and economically useless institution. Many white young men with means invested little in their studies because jobs awaited them regardless of their school performance. Some poor white young men juggled jobs before and after school, they had no time left for studies. Many poorer black youth invested their energies in

fending off racist attacks. The rare young black men in the academic track, who, along with their more motivated white male counterparts, excelled academically and in sports, enjoyed the support and admiration of their teachers and peers, and forged long lasting friendships with their white counterparts. These young men thoroughly immersed themselves in school life and fully enjoyed it.

Black and white, female and male, poorer or richer, students of the *divided generation* befriended, shunned or fought with each other within pre-determined tracking structures. School structure, rather than youth culture, determined how Miller High students understood their place within school, how they imagined each other, and how they could relate with each other.

The tracking system privileged white students with means in the academic track, regardless of their academic abilities; organized poorer black and white females in commercial tracks mostly, and poorer black and white males in the general track; and limited meeting places between richer and poorer. Poorer white “hillbilly” young men in the more populated low status academic settings often initiated racially motivated fights against their black peers. Within the less populated, high status academic and sports activities, peers were more likely to forge often long lasting relationships across racial divides.

While the one space within Miller High in which students crossed class and racial borders most consistently was in team sports, access to team sports after school required student availability, which poorer students didn’t have. Their lack of participation in turn restricted their possibilities for encounters and collaborations with students across dimensions of race and class. Conversely, the one space within

Miller High in which students most consistently segregated was the cafeteria where individual students, exposed to all students all at once in its vast space, sought comfort with each other by retreating into their familiar backgrounds. In general, crossing racial lines was gender specific, and more readily achieved between young women than young men.

On the whole, young people of the *divided generation* proved to be conservative students. They were part of a community of people who attended their churches, abided by laws, and taught their children to get along. Pep rallies and school plays were supported and well attended, and school spirit, buttressed by a white middle class constituency, was high.

While African American students challenged the status quo through their very attendance, they did not question either the curriculum or the very organization of the comprehensive high school. They deferred to school authorities. In that sense, the *divided generation* participated in perpetuating the high school life of the early twentieth century, where “commitments to competition, conformity and individual merit” prevailed.⁷³⁹ However, within the small terrains of freedom gained by those students of the *divided generation* who crossed racial and class borders, whether on sports fields, or within the spaces created with favorite teachers, they frayed the way for the next generation and expanded possibilities for associations with peers.

Students of the *border-crossing generation* of the seventies and early eighties attended a Miller High that served an increasingly suburban, and on the whole,

⁷³⁹ Barbara Finkelstein, “Is Adolescence Here to Stay?: Historical Perspectives on Youth and Education” in *Adolescence and Society* (pp.1-33), eds., T. Urban and F. Pajares (New York: Information Age Press, 2003: 1-33) p.16. Also see R.S. Lynd, and H. Lynd, *Middletown* (New York: Hartcourt, Brace, 1929).

“comfortably” integrated community. They ventured more freely across class, gender, and race divides, and subsumed these dimensions under *youth-generated identities*, which included the *jocks*, *eggheads*, *fire-heads*, *motor-heads*, *potheads*, and *musicians*, among others. They associated mostly on the basis of common interests and affinities, rather than on the basis of the tracks they attended, or the racial profiles they shared.

The introduction of football in 1969, which had been banned by the County Public School system throughout most of the twentieth century, brought to prominence the jock culture, and with it the power of the coach as an aggressive adult authority, who opened doors to college scholarships. While jocks were favored by school authorities and were rivals of potheads, peer-groups allowed each other equal status on a horizontal continuum along which students moved between groups which included male, female, black, and white students alike. While the *preps* continued to organize social events and produce yearbooks, some students began complaining about the preps’ monopoly over social events, in particular the school prom. Grumblings against preps notwithstanding they were tolerated as yet another group. This was in general an accepting student-body, where “everybody was allowed to be their own individual self.”⁷⁴⁰

During this time period black and white students added “cultural” distinctions to that of race. Thus for some students *being* black or white *was* being of two different cultures. For others, being white *or* black was just a question of skin pigmentation. “Culture” was something that could be shared by white and black alike.

⁷⁴⁰ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Teresa Randle, African-American graduate (1977-1981), p.6.

Students who did not belong to peer-groups were defined by race and class. A segment of the African American student population experienced Miller High as *black* students, rather than as jocks, musicians, potheads, fire-heads, and on; and a segment of the white population experienced Miller High as *work-release* students, or even as the *poor*. Whether pro-actively, by refusing to participate in the white “culture,” or by default, as in the case of many young black women who as caretakers at home had to forsake extracurricular activities or after school social time with peers, many black students kept to themselves. Work-release students who lived one foot in the labor market, one foot in the school, also kept to themselves. Thus in the seventies and early eighties at Miller High, peer-group affiliation counteracted broader societal inequities and discrimination, since belonging to a peer-group often meant belonging to an interracial group.

Institutional tracking in the seventies and late eighties played less of a role in students’ relationships with each other, when compared to the previous generation, but significantly alienated certain groups of students from teachers. Male students who took shop, or were part of the “work-release” program, held lower status in the minds of teachers. Teachers, particularly the young teachers “liked the smart kids...”⁷⁴¹ Miller High faculty communicated a bias against manual work and part-time school attendance through work-release, even as it espoused the comprehensive high school curriculum. Students themselves, however, did not share in their teachers’ bias. They did not privilege certain learning-sites; in particular the academic tracks and high profiles sports, over the “shop.” Youth-generated peer associations within a generally tolerant student-body where “everybody was allowed to be their own

⁷⁴¹ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Sophie Baker (1981-1985), p.5.

individual self”⁷⁴² fostered social conditions within which peers were less likely to compare each other based on the academic tracks they attended.

However, structural forces beyond tracking, namely a faculty split between young teachers who demanded more academically but less behaviorally, and older teachers who demanded more behaviorally, and much less so academically; a faculty often inconsistent, and at times grossly insensitive, that divided its students into winners and losers, neglected whole segments of students, and crossed boundaries of propriety with their charges; and the continually pressing hierarchy of academic tracks, combined to create a perpetual underclass of students, in particular among males attending the general track, and contributed to alienating students from teachers and administrators. Furthermore, black students of the seventies and early eighties experienced a rapprochement with students, but a greater alienation from high school authorities. In fact, many white youth acted as protectors of their black peers against white racists.

However, those black students who did not belong to peer-groups, chose the comfort of shared race against what they perceived to be a cold, untrustworthy and unresponsive “white system.” In response to an administration and faculty removed from the daily realities of their students, many African-American males in particular, abstracted faculty and administration into an all encompassing and nebulous “system,” just as they felt abstracted as individuals into the overarching “black students.” The result was a hardened identification with *race* for many black students, as well as a hardened identification with *lower class* for many white students of work-

⁷⁴² Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with African-American alumna Teresa Rande (1977-1981), p.6.

release programs,⁷⁴³ who felt shunned by school authorities. This hardened identification with race and class provided the foundation for a complete re-organization of student associations by the end of the eighties.

Still, while the administration grew more distant, while racial and class boundaries became less porous for segments of white and black students, and while faculty no longer assumed a sense of parental authority, school policies remained relatively lax when compared to the following generation. During the seventies and early eighties also, mostly neighborhood students attended the comprehensive high school. By 1972, sixteen graduating classes of black and white Miller High young men and women had been students in integrated schools that fed into Miller High. These were students accustomed to interracial communities. They had danced together at school dances and dated each other as interracial couples. Overall, students of the *border-crossing generation* experienced greater freedom to be themselves with each other regardless of skin color and gender than previous Miller High graduates had experienced.

By the end of the eighties however, students were attending a Miller High that served a community divided between the black and white county “insiders,” and the newly immigrated Russian and ex-city black “outsiders.” It was a community that at the end of the twentieth century, and almost overnight, had been transformed from predominantly white middle-class, into a diverse population of disparate economic backgrounds, as both estate-like homes, and “section 8” apartments were being erected. It was a community that was transforming from suburban to urban-suburban.

⁷⁴³ More data collection is necessary to unravel the predominance of working class whites in the “work-release” programs.

Amidst the avalanche of strangers with increasingly diverse backgrounds, this generation of students identified themselves primarily with reference to their racial, ethnic, national or religious backgrounds, and understood their place in school as that of *rule-abiders* or *rule-breakers*. This was a generation impacted by its school's disciplinary apparatus, the increasing expulsions, and decreasing "school spirit." Within a very regulated high school setting governed by distant administrators perceived by students as punishing forces, students spontaneously situated themselves vis-à-vis the principal to underscore their rule-abiding status: *not* knowing the principal on a personal level was a gauge of one's good behavior; knowing the principal, on the other hand, could only mean that one had transgressed.

The sudden demographic makeover which transfigured Miller High's until then mostly white student population into a diverse community; the presence of young people who had not practiced cross-racial relations within integrated schools, namely city blacks, and immigrant Russian students; the explosion in student population in general, which resulted in crippling overcrowding; and the school's implementation of zero tolerance policies contributed to students subsuming the previous generation's peer-group identities to those constructed around race, nationality, ethnicity and class, as they sought yet again, *comfort and familiarity* within a turbulent mosaic of identities. As Russian students and black students retreated into their own, and united *as Russian or black*, so did those students for whom their presence felt threatening, among them, *rednecks* and religious groups. Black, Russian and redneck groups were further divided along law-abiding students, and "troublemakers," among whom those who dealt drugs and engaged in racial

fight. The school's punitive disciplinary actions however were not so much met with compliance as they were instead with an increase in students' loyalties to each other along ethnic, racial, nationalistic and religious divisions.

Rule-abiding students included those who belonged to religious youth groups; immigrant students seeking social mobility through lawfully sanctioned means; standard class attendees deeply involved in the life of their community; and usually high profile students with means, *the preps*, who continued as they had since before desegregation, to craft the school's official representation to the outside world.

Rule-abiding Jewish and Christian young people openly committed to their religious beliefs, and unapologetic about expressing them within the public school system, sought each other's company often in protest against conspicuous consumption, and use of drugs or alcohol. School-spun religious groups were overwhelmingly white, as church going young black people congregated outside school premises.

Rule-abiding Russian immigrant youth were strategic students for whom high school "was a means to an end." These were students who were mindful of doing whatever it took to get into good American colleges, and who were apt to construct themselves as intellectually and constitutionally superior to other immigrants.

Another segment yet of rule-abiding students included those who attended the "standard classes," and who welcomed zero-tolerance policies. As had been the case for previous generations, it was within the "standard level" courses that young people encountered each other less as competitive academic performers, and more as representatives of diverse racial, ethnic, and socio-economic interests and struggles. It

is therefore as black or white, Russian Jew or redneck, subsidized apartment or middle class suburban home dweller that some of these students competed with each other, and not as college-résumé builders. It was within the “standard level” courses that much of Miller Town’s social wounds flared up, a place where young people lived closest to the economic realities of their town, as they worked before or after school hours. It is also within the “standard level” courses that one was more likely to come across drug dealers, and witness illegal behaviors.⁷⁴⁴ Therefore rule-abiding standard class attendees were more likely to perceive their high school’s zero-tolerance policies as protective measures ensuring their well-being amidst increased violence.

As had been the case for the *divided generation* of the fifties and sixties, students of the *re-divided generation* experienced the parallel worlds that tracking engendered at Miller High. Without the mediating effect of peer-groups that in the seventies and early eighties created venues for amicably crossing race and class divides, students of the *re-divided generation* lived isolated lives along upper or lower tracks. Those attending Gifted and Talented or Honors classes were less likely to experience first hand incidents of violence, or daily racial and ethnic tensions. Those attending the “standard” classes, on the other hand, were more likely to experience first hand racial, ethnic and class struggles.

Unlike the *divided generation* which experienced close relationships with teachers, the re-divided generation objectified teachers and school authorities: achievers saw them as a “means to an end;”⁷⁴⁵ standard class attendees saw school

⁷⁴⁴ Refer to accounts of drug dealing by students attending general track in Part II, Chapter 3.

⁷⁴⁵ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Ivan Strasky (1998-2002), p.3.

authorities as ivory tower keepers of the law; and rule-breakers saw them as “the system.” By the nineties, segregation between teachers and students had also hardened. While *preps* continued to be identified by their economic status, and the high profile they assumed through their pervasive involvement in the school’s extracurricular and social life, they did not enjoy the levels of participation in their organized social events that their predecessors had enjoyed. The worlds created by the preps, which had been patronized by the *divided generation*, and tolerated by the *border-crossing generation*, were being boycotted by many non-preps of the late eighties and nineties.

Non-prep students of the *re-divided generation* symbolically rejected, through non-attendance, the worlds of the “prep,” the one peer-identity primarily defined by “upper-class” socio-economic status, since by the nineties *preps* also included black and Russian students with means, who played the “upper-class” part. In turn preps of the *re-divided generation* felt frustrated by the lack of student participation in events in which they invested great efforts to organize. They lamented how “school spirit was terrible.”⁷⁴⁶

Although some wealthier African-Americans counted among the preps, most African-American students, including the black preps, segregated as black students who re-created within the black community of students the hierarchy of popularity originally espoused by white preps. While in the seventies and early eighties many white and black students had subsumed race under “culture,” a segment of African-American young men and women, as well as a segment of the poorer white young

⁷⁴⁶ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Betty Ames, graduate of 1999, p. 2.

men, did not differentiate race from culture.⁷⁴⁷ This fusion of race and culture became the norm for students in the nineties. Thus many young county blacks subsumed their own particular upbringings, and particular cultural values, under the racial category “black,” and identified with ex-city black youth, often to the dismay of long-time black county residents, who lamented losing many of their young to what they perceived to be the bad influences of, and drug dealings imported by, city blacks. Many African-American youth of the *re-divided generation* approached relationships between blacks and whites, expecting racism; and racism, in the Miller High of the nineties, surged. However, in the nineties at Miller High, depending on your point of view, racism could be white or black, and the notion of “reverse discrimination” gained popularity.

Students who were “rednecks,” in turn conflated being anti-black, anti-Russian, and anti-Jewish, with being white American;⁷⁴⁸ and Russian immigrant students conflated being Jewish with being Russian, even as they recognized their detachment from the Jewish religion. Thus race, ethnicity, nationality, and religion, rather than shared affinities across those categories, became the familiar landmarks to which various groups of Miller High youth gravitated as they sought familiarity at the turn of the last century.

What had begun in the mid-fifties at Miller High, under Brown versus Board of Education, as a structurally-imposed-integration, ended at the end of the twentieth

⁷⁴⁷ Refer in Part II / Chapters 3 and 4 for alumni’s testimonies of black students who lived on the periphery of school life, and for whom being black was their culture; and refer to white male fire-heads, whom Cecilia described as “wearing flannel shirts,” being “farmers,” and for whom being white American was their culture.

⁷⁴⁸ Refer to previous chapter. Not only did Ivan Strasky’s testimonies suggest rednecks’ white supremacist attitudes, but so did Cecilia’s (white prep graduate of 1996) descriptions of racist attitudes on part of rednecks suggest the same; as did by inference, testimonies of Cherry Gate, as earlier discussed.

century, as a seemingly voluntary student-segregation, one that exacerbated class and race divisions in particular. Across time periods, institutional forces reinforced divisions among students along status laden, hierarchically organized subject matters and extracurricular activities; or through intimidating herding-like spaces such as the cafeteria that propelled students to seek comfort in familiar ethnic, racial or class communities. Institutional habits of valuing or devaluing students according to the subjects they took, even as the institution offered the very subjects it devalued, or of herding them in impersonal spaces, restricted young people's associations with each other across diverse racial, ethnic, and economic backgrounds, and fostered, even hardened segregating habits among them. Finally, students' own economic circumstances determined to a large extent possibilities for their involvement in extracurricular activities that proved central to developing relationships with peers across diverse backgrounds, in particular on sports fields.

Still, against the overarching and perdurable weight of high school structure, some young people forged friendships across borders of race and class, whether on sports fields or in the academic track, across time periods; or during the hiatus period of the seventies and early eighties when they created peer-group associations across racial, gender, class, as well as tracking divides. Those bright spaces across time, and the one hopeful time at Miller High, tell of possibilities for greater cross-racial, cross-class and cross-ethnic relationships among students, within the integrated comprehensive high school. They also tell of possibilities for student-generated change.

CONCLUSION

The story of Miller High as revealed through diverse students' relational experiences is the story of an integrated comprehensive high school that over the last half of the twentieth century remained an incubator of divisions.⁷⁴⁹ These divisions came to light most clearly in the recollections of the Divided and Re-divided generations, and in the critical attitudes of the Border-Crossing Generation. Graduates of the seventies and early eighties, who forged friendships across racial, class and even tracking divides,⁷⁵⁰ highlighted and condemned school authorities' tendencies to ignore black students, give-up on work-release students, privilege academic track students, and in general divide students into winners and losers.⁷⁵¹ Thus the hardened racial, ethnic and class segregations among youth by the end of the last century took root in an existent infrastructure of segregation within Miller High.⁷⁵²

⁷⁴⁹ In the fifties and sixties, beyond racial and class divisions, Miller High school authorities also fostered *gender* divisions; and across time periods, before and after Miller High's integration in 1956, they continued to foster *class* divisions. The reader will also recall the progressively more stringent disciplinary measures deployed by Miller High school authorities over the course of the fifty years, culminating in the 1990s with Zero Tolerance Policies. The more the student population grew, the more school policies became punitive, and school authorities distant. In turn, loyalties among students along racial, ethnic and class divides congealed as punitive measures increased. (See Part II and Part III).

⁷⁵⁰ The reader will recall that a segment of the African-American youth as well as a segment of the working class youth continued to segregate by race and class throughout the seventies and early eighties, and racism lurked under the surface even if kept in check by most white students during that period.

⁷⁵¹ Refer in particular to testimonies by Tim Whittle (1981) regarding discrimination against working class students; by David Randle (1976) regarding discrimination against black students; and by Sophie Baker (1985) regarding preferences given to the "smart" kids in upper academic tracks. While only one graduate (African-American alumna Joanne Pet) of the seventies directly referred to the civil rights movement, one can extrapolate with some confidence, given the descriptions of the Border-Crossing generation regarding white students protecting black students' rights, that Miller High youth of the seventies and early eighties found the buoyancy to cross gender, racial and class divides precisely because of a national mood steeped in the civil rights movement.

⁷⁵² Across time periods, the cafeteria remained a place where students continued to segregate by race and class to greater or lesser degrees—greater in the fifties, lesser in the seventies, then greatest in the nineties. Also, the general track and the vocational track remained places where over the fifty-year period, violence among students along racial divides continued to occur. Thus when during the nineties demographic shifts brought into school parameters Russian immigrant and black city youth mistrustful

That this history has unearthed divisive tendencies of the high school is not new knowledge. The comprehensive high school's systematic sorting of students has been well documented in educational histories and ethnographies, often linked to broader capitalist and market economic forces, and examined in terms of institutionalized racism.⁷⁵³ That this history has further revealed the role played by students in importing cultural influences from outside of school is also not new knowledge. This insight has been captured by anthropologists and educational ethnographers, although barely by historians of education.⁷⁵⁴ However, while this analysis confirms findings regarding the divisive results of tracking across time

of the school system and of each other, their segregating tendencies were exacerbated within these existing segregating spaces.

⁷⁵³For illustrative examples of histories of education that most closely reflect on the high school and its sorting mechanisms, see works by (Bowles and Gintis, 1976); (Anderson, 1988); (Reece 1995). According to Bowles and Gintis, school hierarchy of power and authority parallels the organization of power and authority in the workplace. The authors liken the role of grades to that of wages and establish a direct correspondence between competition among students, and their lack of control over the curriculum with competition among workers and *their* lack of control over required contents of their assigned tasks. Bowles and Gintis advance that the American Educational system serves the purposes and needs of the "production process and structure of class relations in the United States." In *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*, Anderson underlies dominant paradigms of social reproduction in the Hampton Model of Normal School Industrial Education for the blacks (chapter 2) and tracks reproduction of castes in the black public high school of the south (chapter 6). For reflections on the sorting mechanisms of public schools in general, see works by (Tyack, 1974); (Tyack and Hansot, 1982), and (Michael Katz, 1968 & 2001). These historians of education identify the modernizing tendency of schools to prepare youth for various work-stations in society, to assure that youth is "properly socialized to the new modes of production, attuned to hierarchy, affective neutrality, role-specific demands, extrinsic incentives for achievement" (Tyack, 1974, p.73). For illustrative ethnographies that focus on the high school and expose its divisive and exclusionary practices, see: (Fine 1991); (Bratlinger 1993); (MacLeod, 1995); (Davidson 1996). Also see works by Jeanie Oake's *Keeping Track: How Schools Structure Inequality* (1985); Jonathan Kozol's, *Savage Inequalities* (1991). These ethnographies expose institutionalized racism and classism.

⁷⁵⁴ Anthropologist John Ogbu attributes student behavior within school to cultural influences outside of school. By comparing involuntary minorities' cultural backgrounds, Ogbu concludes that involuntary minorities (i.e. black youth) inherit through "family and community discussions and gossip, as well as through public debates over minority education" mistrust of school and school authorities and a deeply ingrained skepticism about their chances to succeed in schools. See "Voluntary and Involuntary Minorities: A Cultural-Ecological Theory of School Performance with Some Implications for Education," in *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* 29 (2): 155-188, 1998, p.28. This work however challenges the notion that immigrants do not share with those whom Ogbu calls "involuntary minorities" the same distrust of school authorities, as evidenced in Russian students' mistrust and even disdain of American teachers. For other explorations of student-imported habits of association, see classic works by (Hollingstead, 1949) and (MacLeod, 1987). Historians of education, as explained in the introduction, have not examined the high school from students' perspectives.

periods, of institutionalized race and class discrimination and of students' inherited economic and cultural realities imported into school spaces, it offers somewhat different explanations for the same results and problematizes the comprehensive high school of the second half of the twentieth century⁷⁵⁵ as a “devolving” institution, progressively more harmful than helpful to either a democratic or capitalist society in a demographic landscape of accelerated diversity.

The findings in this history shed light on students' role in the perpetuation of segregation at Miller High. When herded in large spaces such as the cafeteria, and left to their own devices, students retreated into communities of shared race, ethnic and class backgrounds, and segregated to recreate smaller, familiar communities. Within the spaces of the cafeteria at Miller High, race, class and ethnicity became safe oases in a crowded and impersonal environment, a piece of home away from home in a diverse community. That in such a space *segregation was desirable* from students' points of view opens up to investigation the unintended and paradoxically divisive consequences of large communal areas such as the cafeteria. The intimidating power of a large herding hall, that exposed one to the eyes of all, all at once, spurred division.

Crossing racial, ethnic and class differences in such a space was particularly intimidating for the Divided and Re-divided generations. It was intimidating for students of the Divided Generation in part because they were settling into a new social order following the integration of 1956. It was intimidating for students of the Re-divided Generation because they included large numbers of newly migrated

⁷⁵⁵ While Miller High remains but one example of a comprehensive high school, its demographic transformations and adoption of ever more punitive disciplinary measures are not unique to it.

students, who were unaccustomed to a diverse environment, and who looked for safety and comfort in an overcrowded school.

That in the seventies and early eighties Miller High students formed interracial and cross-class peer-groups which included females and males on occasion, is an anomaly in the fifty-year history of Miller High. It represents but a decade and a half of the five decades examined. A confluence of factors conspired to lift Miller High students of the seventies and early eighties above gender, racial and class divides. They lived at a time when civil rights suffused the national psyche, when most students attending Miller High were neighborhood youth (which meant that only a handful of African-American youth attended), and when all students came from integrated elementary schools. It is safe to advance that without the particular national mood and local demographics of their time, Miller High students would not have as easily created cross-racial, cross-gender and cross-class peer-groups. Not only had they never been a politically active or contesting student-body, but high school authorities were progressively becoming more distant, and continued to divide students along racial and class lines, though less along gender lines.

Moreover, if they did not belong to peer-groups, students of the Border-Crossing Generation segregated by race if they were black, by lower class if they were white.⁷⁵⁶ Thus in the midst of Miller High's most integrated period, segregation among poorer whites and disengaged blacks continued and underscored the perdurability of segregation among students in Miller High over time. By and large however, segregation among students in the cafeteria was the result of a dynamic

⁷⁵⁶ Refer to Part II, chapter 4. Segregation by class among whites separated the working class students from the 'preps', a phenomenon identified as early as 1949 by Hollingstead in his work *Elmtown's Youth: The Impact of Social Class and Adolescents*. (New York: J. Wiley, 1949).

interplay between an architecture designed to herd students in large spaces, a population of diversity, and students' tendencies to recreate the familiar and comfortable.

This work has also brought to light the “devolution” in Miller High’s capacities to attend, ironically, either to democratic or capitalist aims. Educational sociologists have documented the tensions between capitalist and democratic aims of high school education and identified shifts in the prevalence of one or the other according to time periods.⁷⁵⁷ Instead of shifts in tensions, this work has identified the growing predominance of capitalist aims and the diminishing focus on democratic aims between 1950 and 2000. Moreover, findings suggest that by the end of the twentieth century, Miller High’s social reproductive role was itself being challenged.

Over the course of fifty years, Miller High grew more prison-like, its school authorities more distant and school policies more rigid. While Miller High’s instructional standards remained constant,⁷⁵⁸ its democratizing capacities diminished

⁷⁵⁷ For an analysis of the competing tensions as they play out according to time periods, see work by sociologists Carnoy and Levin, *Schooling and Work in a Democratic State* (1985). According to Carnoy and Levin, schools carry the dual role of simultaneously preparing workers for the labor force, and citizens for active political participation in a democracy. Because the preparations for capitalist production on one hand and for democratic citizenry on the other are incompatible, schools, according to the authors, become sites of conflict with one tendency or the other (toward capitalist or democratic preparation) dominating in any historical period. “On one hand, schools have traditionally reproduced the unequal hierarchical relations of the nuclear family and capitalist workplace; on the other hand, they have represented the expansion of economic opportunity for subordinate groups and the extension of basic human rights” (p.14). The case of Miller High however shows a growing predominance toward capitalist aims, to the point that by the 1990s, among “subordinate” groups, only those immigrant students starved for capitalist competition, having fled their homelands for lack of economic opportunities commensurate to their ambitions, benefit from the extension of “basic human rights.” These were immigrants already well to do in their homelands (Refer to testimonies by Russian immigrants and their favorable reflections on Asian Pacific Indian immigrants in Part III, and unfavorable regarding Hispanic immigrants). Thus not all “subgroups” benefited from the “democratizing” aims of Miller High.

⁷⁵⁸ Academic standards remained relatively low for the majority of Miller High students. While little seemed to be required of students attending the general and vocational tracks across time periods, alumni’s recollections also underscored the little that was required in terms of academic performance from students attending the upper academic tracks for most of the half century studied, until the 1990s.

over the course of the fifty-year period.⁷⁵⁹ It devolved from a mitigating social force in the mid-fifties that interposed the safety of a legally integrated space between future and past generations where new cross-racial habits of citizenry could potentially be practiced, to an incubator of violence and segregation by the 1990s.⁷⁶⁰ While in the early days of integration Miller High held the promise of a new world where people of all backgrounds might learn to get along as equals, and while the seventies came closest to fulfilling that promise, although through students' rather than school authorities' efforts,⁷⁶¹ it ultimately exacerbated divisions among students by the end of the century.

By the end of the twentieth century Miller High no longer provided its students with experiences “markedly more egalitarian and more open to free choice and possibilities of self-realization than anything that [was] available to them in the realm of work,”⁷⁶² as Carnoy and Levin have suggested. On the contrary, by the end of the twentieth century, Miller High had become a place where students participated in the life of their school less and less, and where competitions within upper and lower tracks were as stressful as those found in the world outside: achievers competed more fiercely to keep ahead; rule-abiding standard class attendees held their breath

Furthermore, Miller High's sorting system did privilege the well-to-do who continued to attend the upper academic tracks across time periods.

⁷⁵⁹ While scholars have documented the tensions between capitalist and democratic aims of high school education, this historical analysis traces the

⁷⁶⁰ By the nineties, both black and white parents began sending their children to private schools or home schooling them in response to the accelerated violence and racial strife at Miller High.

⁷⁶¹ Refer to Part II / The Border-Crossing Generation.

⁷⁶² Carnoy and Levin quoted in David F. Labaree, *How to Succeed in School Without Really Learning* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997) p.49: “schools continue to provide Americans with a social experience that is markedly more egalitarian and more open to free choice and possibilities of self-realization than anything that is available to them in the realm of work.” The reader will recall how a poor female student such as Judy Law might practice leadership positions within the school walls, as might an achiever black young man such as Norman Good, in the fifties, only to find limitations imposed on their leadership participations in the broader society.

hoping not to be sucked into what they perceived to be growing violence around them; and rule-breakers broke rules with greater consequence than ever before. While to a greater or lesser extent Miller High had always served as a holding place for many of its youth, in particular male youth,⁷⁶³ within the fifty years of this history it devolved from an educational establishment into a detention-like institution that fostered social unrest and violence among many students even as it provided a few safe spaces⁷⁶⁴ for a select few to forge cross-racial and ethnic relationships.

Students also experienced “integration” unevenly across different curricular tracks. Across time periods and across backgrounds, Miller High students were more likely to engage with peers of different racial and economic backgrounds if they attended upper academic tracks and participated in sports, and they were more likely to fight along racial, class and ethnic divides if they attended vocational and general tracks and did not participate in extracurricular activities. Certain extracurricular activities⁷⁶⁵ and sports were perdurable sites across time periods that fostered pockets of peer-integration. Within smaller, more intimate spaces, in particular within sports where team collaboration is vital to “winning,” Miller High students were more likely to establish long lasting relationships across race and class backgrounds.⁷⁶⁶ While

⁷⁶³ Recall testimonies of male youth living at the periphery of school life in the fifties and sixties as volunteer fire fighters, or poor farm boys, some itching to get out and make their own fortunes; in the seventies and early eighties as disengaged black youth, or “work-release” students; in the nineties as Russian, ex-city black and otherwise “troublemaker” youth engaged in unlawful behaviors and racial strife; and across time periods, youth who reported “doing time.”

⁷⁶⁴ Namely the upper academic tracks and sports into which only a small percentage of students would be invited.

⁷⁶⁵ As has been shown, white middle and upper middle class females mostly filled the ranks of the many extracurricular activities across time periods. Beyond sports, black students, women and men, were likely to participate, across time periods, as has been shown, in choirs and music; and black females also participated in Future Business Leaders of America clubs across time periods, as well as Future Nurses of America.

⁷⁶⁶ In relation to sports and upper academic tracks: this history confirms findings regarding the high social status accorded athletes and jocks across time periods. However, it also identifies that this social

sports and upper academic tracks remained exclusive sites into which only a few select Miller High students were invited, they come to view in this history as also possible sites for fostering integration among peers, not solely as exclusive sites.⁷⁶⁷

By contrast, the general and vocational tracks were incubators of racial violence across time periods, places where students were more likely to import their street level prejudices as they lived lives split between the marketplace and the classroom. These were also the most populated tracks. The findings reveal that the porous boundaries of the lower and vocational tracks, spaces within which the high school was least insular to the outside world across time, and most like the work place, allowed for the economic and racial strife of Miller Town to ignite within school parameters. The violence that ensued in these tracks among students on one hand, and the general lack of activism among students on the other, further suggests that Miller High students learned to fight each other rather than the school system.

Here then, in the spaces of the general and vocational tracks, where Miller High remained most open to marketplace influences, are where the instructional goals⁷⁶⁸ of the comprehensive high school most vividly and painfully got in the way

status became dissociated from good academic standing in the seventies when football was introduced. Prior to the introduction of football, it appears that involvement in sports (throughout the fifties and sixties) also indicated good academic standing. Furthermore, the reader will recall that until the 1990s when competition for acceptance into colleges increased substantially, white students in upper academic tracks, in particular white male students, consistently reported not being prepared for college, suggesting, as has been discussed in the analysis, both lower school standards, as well as less involvement in studies on part of white males

⁷⁶⁷ Further research is needed to explore why upper academic tracks fostered cross-racial, and cross-class relationships, since unlike sports fields they are not sites conducive to team collaboration, but rather to individual competition. Norman Goodman's testimonies of the early integration days, perhaps suggest that evidence of intellectual prowess and competitiveness are traits that students in the upper tracks regard highly enough to transcend any racial or class prejudice.

⁷⁶⁸ Whether these instructional goals are expressed in student-centered terms, to "serve the needs and interests of all in a diversified curriculum," (Grant, 1988, p.210) or expressed in terms of a social efficiency theory of education as "an effort to make the school curriculum more responsive to the needs of the occupational structure," (Labaree, 1997, p.22). The student-centered mandate appears in

of students getting along across racial, class, and ethnic divides. Where Miller High acted as the hyphen between school and marketplace, it unwittingly created the social conditions for segregation and violence. In the spaces of general and vocational tracks, the spaces that in fundamental ways define the comprehensive high school,⁷⁶⁹ Miller High was the weakest in fostering peaceful relations between students across diverse backgrounds; there it was the weakest in interposing a four-year temporal space during which one might practice the ideals of a democratic society. Moreover, over the course of fifty years, this weakness intensified as students also imported illegal behaviors from the streets through the general and vocational tracks.

The more “work-like” Miller High became, the more it engendered violence and segregation. By comparing the worlds of the general and academic tracks at Miller High, one finds that in the general tracks where the high school was most like the market place violence increased while it remained at bay in the secluded spaces of honors classes and upper academic tracks, and on the playing fields of sports. These findings offer compelling arguments on behalf of a solely academic rather than comprehensive high school system in promoting cross-racial, class and ethnic collaborations and friendships among students.

The very spaces that defined Miller High as a comprehensive high school and linked it to the world of work were also the very spaces that bred violence and segregation among students. This history suggests that the confined spaces of the high

the report, *Cardinal Principles of Education*, circulated as Bulletin 1918, n0.35, by the Bureau of Education, U.S. Department of the Interior (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1918). For discussion of *Cardinal Principles of Education* see Gerald Grant's *The World We Created at Hamilton High*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1988) p.210, from which I quote. Also, for a social efficiency point of view, see David Labaree, *How to succeed in school without really learning*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

⁷⁶⁹ For discussion of *Cardinal Principles of Education* see Gerald Grant's *The World We Created at Hamilton High*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1988), pages 210-211.

school intensified rather than diffused imported social strife within the general and vocational tracks. It suggests that beyond simply reproducing social divisions, or reflecting social strife, Miller High by its very nature⁷⁷⁰ as a comprehensive high school compounded, intensified and bred segregation and violence. Thus its established infrastructure of segregation made it vulnerable to an accelerated and substantial demographic shift toward diversity.⁷⁷¹ Such a shift intensified violence and segregation in a comprehensive high school that had been attuned and organized to segregate, rather than to unite.

Of interest too is how males and females experienced diversity differently across time periods.⁷⁷² Females rather than males reported a propensity to cross racial boundaries regardless of academic tracks. By the nineties, however, females engaged equally in racial fights along side their male counterparts. Such fights continued to occur particularly among students attending general tracks.⁷⁷³ Thus by the nineties, gender differences were minimized, in that young women adopted males' more aggressive behaviors (rather than young men adopting the more pacific ways of previous generations of young white and black women). By the nineties, young women fought across racial and ethnic divides, and by so doing, further strengthening segregation at Miller High.⁷⁷⁴

⁷⁷⁰ By "nature" I refer to the comprehensive high school's mandate to serve all in a diversified curriculum, and I refer to its organization of students (whether divided into tracks or herded in the cafeteria).

⁷⁷¹ Refer to Part III and analysis of impact of demographics on Miller High.

⁷⁷² Until the nineties, females were more likely to cross racial boundaries than were males. By the nineties, females were engaging in racial fights along with their male counterparts. Again it is important to emphasize that such fights were less likely to happen in the upper academic tracks.

⁷⁷³ Refer to Part III, chapters 5 and 6.

⁷⁷⁴ This study also identifies the feminization and de-feminization of the student-role over the half-century (Refer in particular to testimonies of the divided generation and the border-crossing generation). Until the nineties, when competitions for colleges transformed many more males into

This historical analysis undermines the assumption that desegregated comprehensive schools actually foster integrated environments, or lessen racial prejudice.⁷⁷⁵ The case of Miller High shows that “integration” in a lawfully desegregated public institution has been the experience of only a select few students across time since *Brown versus Board of Education*. A publication in submission, *In Search of Brown*, which examines among other data⁷⁷⁶ the experiences in integrated schools of graduates of the Class of 1980, suggests that “school desegregation fundamentally changed the people who lived through it...desegregation made the vast majority of the students who attended these schools less racially prejudiced and more comfortable around people of different backgrounds.”⁷⁷⁷ The findings in *In Search of Brown* confirm the findings in this history in that those who graduated in the seventies and early eighties (The Border-Crossing Generation) more readily forged friendships across racial divides. However, this history further reveals that for most

purposeful and strategic students who invested in their relationships with teachers, and closely followed their grade point average, “being a student” seemed to be a role relegated by many males to female students, whether white or black. Thus until the nineties, being a student was more likely to be perceived and experienced by male students as a feminine endeavor. The reader will recall white female students doing homework for their male counterparts, involving themselves in the social life of school, and being considered generally better students; the reader will further recall black female students’ more aggressive pursuit of studies as means to better their economic circumstances, at least from the fifties to the early eighties; and males students’ testimonies, again until the nineties, of female students’ more favored positions in school.

⁷⁷⁵ Recent studies have documented patterns of school re-segregation across the nation and warned of the dangers to a diverse democratic society of public practices that racially divide its youth. However, while these studies question the fate of the civil rights movements, they build arguments on the assumption that desegregated schools, by virtue of being desegregated, foster integrated environments. See report by Gary Orfield and Chungmei Lee, “Brown at Fifty: King’s Dream or Plessy’s Nightmare,” *The Civil Rights Project Harvard University*, (17 Jan. 2004) <http://www.civilrightsproject.harvard.edu/research/reseg40/resegregation04.php> (Jan.31, 2005).

⁷⁷⁶ See “How Desegregation Changed Us: The Effects of Racially Mixed Schools on Students and Society,” by Amy Stuart Wells, Jennifer Jellison Holme, Anita Tijerina Revilla, and Awo Korantemaa Atanda. A report drawn from forthcoming book *In Search of Brown*, to be published by Harvard University Press in 2005. The authors also interviewed “more than 500 graduates, educators, advocates, and local policy makers who were directly involved in racially mixed public high schools in different communities 25 years ago.” (p.5).

⁷⁷⁷ Ibid.

students such experiences did not continue into the end of the twentieth century. More importantly this study has shown that across time periods, students in the general and vocational tracks did not experience “integration” in positive ways. The authors of *In Search of Brown* not only interviewed people who had experienced desegregation twenty-five years ago when the nation rode the crest of the civil rights movement, but also interviewed “educators, advocates, and local policy makers,”⁷⁷⁸ a population of people less likely to have attended the vocational tracks.

The very “comprehensiveness” of Miller High, that is its marketplace spaces,⁷⁷⁹ made it a force of segregation rather than integration. By the end of the twentieth century, the tension between the comprehensive high school’s democratic and capitalist aims had been supplanted with a new tension, one that pitted its capitalist aims with its segregating modus operandi. For capitalism to thrive, a good amount of social order is necessary. By the turn of this century, social order in the general and vocational tracks was more than ever threatened. Furthermore, as this history has shown, policing students to ensure order only intensified loyalties along racial and ethnic divides, and fostered violent outbursts as students protected those loyalties,⁷⁸⁰ suggesting that the greater the policing, the more elusive the social order.⁷⁸¹

Thus the question arises whether a comprehensive high school such as Miller High, having abandoned its democratic goals, can continue to serve the very capitalist

⁷⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁷⁹ The general and vocational tracks as earlier discussed.

⁷⁸⁰ Refer to Part III, chapters 5 and 6.

⁷⁸¹ Most peaceful relationships between students across dimensions of race and class occurred in the seventies when disciplinary measures were relatively lax. Of note also is that the early years of integration fared relatively smoothly because of a very present and involved principal who developed personal relationships with the students across diverse backgrounds. (See Part I).

interests for which, many historians have argued, it was created. Without a bedrock foundation of democratic habits of association within its walls, this history suggests that Miller High will only more harshly continue to breed violence, racial and ethnic hatred, and hardened class divisions.⁷⁸² It will actively participate in creating an angry and divided citizenry. Finally, if cross-racial, class and ethnic relationships are best fostered in tracks that concentrate heavily on academics and in extracurricular activities that require collaboration, as this history has shown, is it not time to abandon the invention of the comprehensive high school and its three-tiered curriculum, focus on academics, and democratize extracurricular activities?⁷⁸³

⁷⁸² Recall testimonies regarding parents choosing to home school their children or send them to private schools at great personal costs.

⁷⁸³ The reader will recall how across time periods, only students who could afford to stay at school before or after school hours could participate in extracurricular activities, in particular sports. The benefits for cross class, and race relationships through sports activities strongly suggest that more sports divisions would allow more students to participate across various abilities.

ADDENDUM METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this addendum is to explain the methodological design of this study, and to discuss the challenges for data interpretation of what is known among historians engaged in collecting oral histories as *oral history doing*.⁷⁸⁴ I begin by addressing the more technical aspects of *oral history doing*: identification and location of alumni, interview protocol, transcribing and coding. I then follow with a discussion of memory-elicited data, and the further complex issue of researcher / participant co-constructed interviews used as primary sources. I end by addressing secondary sources, and the particular use of yearbooks in this analysis. Concerns regarding the study's limitations are incorporated in the discussions enumerated here.

Identification and location of alumni

I identified alumni by referring to Miller High yearbooks held in the town library archives. As I identified alumni, I searched for their addresses and phone numbers in the alumni directory provided to me by the library archivist, an alumna herself. While I could identify alumni in yearbooks by gender, and race, and even to some extent by ethnicity through last names, I could not as easily identify them by economic status—serendipitously, I fell upon “poorer” and “richer” alumni. When alumni identified through yearbooks could not be located in the alumni directory, I forged ahead until matches were made. It was particularly difficult to locate African-American alumni of the fifties through the early eighties, and in particular males, who rarely included their names in the directory.

⁷⁸⁴ See Donald Ritchie, *Doing Oral History* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995).

Doors opened up for me into the African-American community when I came across a history, in the town library, written by an African-American gentleman who had collected the oral histories of members of the oldest African-American community in the county. I immediately contacted Don Louis,⁷⁸⁵ the author, who suggested I speak with Millie,⁷⁸⁶ eighty-five year old matriarch of this oldest African-American county community. Millie took me into her world, and connected me with African-American Miller High alumni.

My goal was to identify an average of nine alumni per decade, to include as much as possible, equal proportions of male and female alumni of different racial and economic backgrounds who attended in the first half and second half of each decade. The question immediately arises: why “nine”, as opposed to, for example, “one hundred” alumni? Since my intent was primarily to locate *different perspectives* and to capture *meanings* ascribed to relationships in school, rather than investigate the veracity of a past occurrence, “difference,” not “volume,” mattered. Secondly, grounding my study deeply within one single institution, made collecting a smaller number of oral histories much less problematic than if I had spread my study across numerous sites. Finally, I was not interested in producing a “collective” memory of Miller High students over the last half of the twentieth century. Undeniably, such an endeavor would have required “volume” and would have carried headaches of its own, since by the end of the century, fragmented perspectives (as this work has

⁷⁸⁵ His name has been changed so as not to compromise agreements of confidentiality with alumni interviewed. It pains me to have to conceal his name and his work for the sake of my work. I wish there were a way around this—his hard work too should be recognized!

⁷⁸⁶ Again, her name has been changed, and again it pains me that I cannot recognize her publicly. Her help to me has been invaluable. Her life is now part of my family’s life, and coming to know her has made me a richer person.

shown), would have challenged the notion of a “collective” memory. Seeking to construct “collective memory,” works best, when the group whose memory is sought, is homogeneous.

“Nine interviews per decade” also offered the advantage of being an amount of interviews that as a lone researcher I could handle, given available time and resources, and that would allow me to include, *at least* the perspectives of two black females, two white females, two black males, two white males, (or approximate combinations thereof) with one perspective to spare, for a total of nine, distributed between the first and second half of each decade. While I had originally scheduled to interview forty-five alumni, I finally interviewed thirty-seven. Eight cancelled, and I ran out of resources to pursue. Beyond the Russian population of the late eighties and nineties, immigrant students from abroad also included Asian Indians, and Latinos. They however represented a much smaller community than that of Russian immigrants, and again, while it would have proven invaluable for this study to include their perspectives (the absence of which I sorely lament!), I did not have the resources to invest in locating these populations of immigrants.

I began the data collection process by sending letters to identified alumni in which I included an explanation of my project, a copy of the IRB form, as well as a stamped return envelope for their reply. Five out of the fifty people I had written to in my first batch of letters answered my mail; two of them declined to be interviewed, and those who answered were all alumni of the fifties. Of the second batch, none responded. The three alumni of the fifties who did accept proved invaluable contacts, as did Millie, through whom I contacted several African-American alumni, who then

led me to other alumni, black and white. Thus I located most graduates through snow-balling.

Alumni of the fifties were much easier to locate, and much more eager to tell their stories, so much so that I could not afford, as a single researcher, to interview them all. While I could locate later graduates, they were not as eager to be interviewed, busy with work and raising children. This explains the disproportionate amount of graduates interviewed before integration in the fifties, when compared to the other two generations. Nevertheless, their perspectives offered a sort of base-line, and painted the Miller High at the point of entry of this history.

I proceeded with interviews as soon as I could schedule them, even as I worked to locate others. In the early stages of data collection, interviewing and locating alumni to be interviewed proceeded in tandem. While I had planned to begin interviewing graduates of the fifties and seventies first, since they were located at the beginning and middle of the time period—to feel out the period—my plan soon dissipated. I had to adapt to alumni’s schedules and availability. Nevertheless, I was able to spread out my beginning interviews across the decades and to pick up somewhat on changes in mood across time periods.

Interviewing Protocol

After introducing myself, explaining the project, and reviewing in detail the contents of the IRB form, which I then asked alumni to sign, I took time to make small talk while I prepared my recording equipment and to set alumni at ease about the taping process, I emphasized that we could stop the recording at any time (for a break, if something needed to be said “off the record,” etc.).

I began all interviews with open-ended questions that asked narrators to describe their relationships with peers, teachers and authority figures. This proved a very productive way into the conversation for all my interviews because it provided the space for alumni to jump into their memories as these came to them, without my prior imposing an order. As narrators' comfort levels increased, I followed with more probing questions about details of their experiences and the meanings they ascribed to their high school education and diploma. Only twice did such a broad, open-ended question spur alumni to meander on tangents into their personal lives, tangents that had nothing to do with their high school experiences. Nevertheless, allowing them the meandering helped establish a rapport that yielded fecund interviews. While some researchers send a list of interview questions in advance to help the "interviewee" prepare for the interview, I chose not to send questions in advance. I wanted the conversation to emerge spontaneously; and I wanted to avoid formally written questions that might restrict either alumni or myself (more on this in the discussion on elicited-memory data).

Thirty-two interviews were held in alumni's homes, mostly during weekends or in the evening after work; one interview was conducted in the lunch room at an alumna's work place; three were conducted in a quiet area of the archives in the town library; and one was held at a book store. I always gave alumni the choice of our meeting place; I also took precautions, especially when interviews were conducted in homes, to let my family know of my whereabouts and to make sure to let alumni know that my family knew where I was. Throughout all my visits I felt safe, and alumni and I quickly established good rapports.

Tape-recorded sessions ranged on average one hour. On occasion I followed-up formal interviews with informal chats over the phone or through email communications. To the thirty-seven oral histories conducted with alumni, I added one group-interview with three Miller High teachers. One teacher, a female coach, had been working at Miller High for thirty years. The Spanish and English teachers shared between the two of them, fifty years of tenure. The opening question I posed to them was to describe to me their experiences of Miller High students over time. This interview lasted fifty minutes, and was conducted between classes in a quiet room of the Miller High library.

Transcribing and Coding

As much as possible, I transcribed interviews, *as soon as possible*. Each transcription yielded on average twelve single-spaced pages. When inflections in the tone of voice, or laughter qualified a remark in a striking way, I made note of it in the transcript. I spent an average of seven hours per one hour of recording, transcribing. I proceeded with analysis along side of data collection as I transcribed, reviewed transcriptions, and refined further questions accordingly. The very fact of transcribing was for me, in many ways, an important part of analysis. It is during the transcribing process that I jotted notes about comments I had not probed to my satisfaction, either to revisit with the alumnus or alumna, or to bring up in future interviews. Transcribing became for me more than just a preliminary stage to coding and analysis, it was the first stage of analysis as alumni's voices began echoing or contradicting each other. Transcribing kept the voices loud and alive in my ears.

When I settled to systematically code I coded “manually,” that is without the use of a program;⁷⁸⁷ and I coded chronologically, beginning with the transcripts of those alumni who graduated in the fifties, then sixties, and on. Within each decade, I first created profiles for each alumnus/a, after which I looked for patterns across alumni’s experiences. I did not *a priori* assume that being *black* or *white* or *female* or *male*, or *other*, would *per force* create similar experiences within those categories, although I expected it would, having myself integrated those categories of difference from years of study in social sciences. It was important that I allow identifications to emerge from students’ lived lives, within their time and place, as they may. In the process, I developed my own idiosyncratic coding style.

For each transcript I created accompanying *coding sheets* on which I identified the alumnus/alumna, and where I organized themes that I had identified for the particular transcript. All my *coding sheets* were written by hand, in pencil, allowing me to easily re-arrange themes; and they were attached to transcripts.

Coding sheets were first completed for each individual transcription and then compared across transcripts, within decades. Those transcripts that shared most themes were grouped (e.g.: white females for the decades fifties and sixties). From there on my analysis proceeded in narrative form. I compared experiences between groups within decades, and then across decades. At this stage the narratives were two or three pages long per group and mostly written in syncopated prose. It is during this last stage of comparison (across decades) that *generations* emerged, as groups consolidated, sometimes to include two decades (50s and 60s), and sometimes with overlaps in the decades (70 s and early 80s; and late 80s and 90s).

⁷⁸⁷ I have since discovered the NviVo coding program which I believe of value for coding interviews.

Finally, I also visited with the current principal to explain my study to him. Our meeting lasted about thirty minutes. Immediately following my meeting I wrote down field notes that captured information relevant to my study. It was important that I be “up-front” about my study with the school administration, since they would eventually learn about my interviewing alumni and teachers. As a gatekeeper, the principal was distant at first, but he warmed up to me when he found out that this was not a documentary history, and that the school and its alumni would be kept anonymous. Soon he began sharing his own stories of graduation ceremonies and the “ringing of the bell” the first day of school.

Memory-elicited data

Because what I sought to recover was diverse students’ *interpretations* of their high school experiences, their *perceptions* of one another, the *meanings* they attributed to their relationships, and the *values* they ascribed to their education, I chose to mine as primary sources of data the remembered experiences of alumni, *precisely* because they were memories.

Within the world of memory, experience has been interpreted, perceptions have been sifted and they have settled; meanings have been attributed. Within memory, lingers the lasting impression.⁷⁸⁸ Furthermore, evidential issues surrounding the question of memory, while sensitive of course, held less weight than they might have would I have attempted to investigate, for example, the reputation of a particular Miller High teacher or administrator through students’ remembered oral testimonies;

⁷⁸⁸ See Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988) p.131; Also see Peter H. Lindsay and Donald A. Norman, *Human Information Processing: An Introduction to Psychology* (New York: Academic Press, 1977).

or would I have sought to construct an overarching collective memory of a homogeneous group of people with shared interests in perhaps representing their reality unilaterally.

Still, one might critique use of recollections as a means to capture students' interpretations, since the interpretation of one's experience *while experiencing it*, may have changed as one gained maturity. What circumvents this problem, in this study, is the live co-production of the interview, which allows for a distinction in the *present* context, during the *interview-making*, between the interpreted experience at the time of the *memory-making*, and the re-interpreted experience *a posteriori*. For example, one alumnus recalled thinking that homework was useless, but in the present thought that homework in general might have some grounding value. Of interest to me, within the context of this research, and regardless of the alumnus' re-interpreted evaluation of homework in the present, is that *when he was a student, he thought* homework was useless.

In this sense, memory, elicited within the context of the making of an interview, allows for analytic distinctions that cannot be as readily made when mining such sources as diaries, journals or biographies, where *a posteriori* re-interpretations are more easily slipped into the narratives by those who lived the history, and are not as easily caught by the researcher. The original interpretation then, became the one that I compared to other alumni's original understandings of their experiences, across situated position, because it is in the compared experiences that I gauged to what extent one alumnus' understanding at the time of his youth was an idiosyncratic understanding and to what extent it was shared and with whom.

The raw feeling and raw interpretation at the time of the experience is what mattered to me for the purposes of my study. If an alumnus' experience at the time was shared with young people who were similarly situated (i.e. white, middle-class male / or white poor male / or black male jock, or potheads, etc.), then that alerted me to the possible role of school authorities in young people's construction of homework "as irrelevant" (i.e. teachers' attitudes toward poor black males, or white potheads, etc; fragmented instruction in general; or fragmented and sloppy instruction for lower track students? etc...).

Triangulation

Beyond checking interview information against yearbook data, histories, and the *Community Times*, I also triangulated information by: (1) comparing alumni's memories within their shared situated positions (i.e. all white middle-class females); (2) between identified groups (i.e. black female's experiences versus black males' experiences, etc.); and (3) across groups, by comparing alumni's recollections of alumni that I did not interview (i.e. pregnant girls, etc.).

Researcher / participant co-constructed interviews

First, as I expressed in the Introduction, there is the obvious: that the oral history interview is a joint production of conversations created in spaces between two strangers who themselves, within the process of the interview, address and experience each other from their respective situated positions. Thus it is not inconceivable that what some alumni shared as *being remembered* might have been concocted alternately to impress, or to mislead. In turn, it is not inconceivable that regardless of my intentions, and in spite of my preparedness, I might have communicated through

body language or an inadvertent turn of the phrase what might have been perceived as an expectation or even judgment, altering thus an alumni's attitude and candor.

While my own experience of all thirty seven interviews conducted with men and women, African-American, white, and immigrated Russians, poorer and richer, who graduated from Miller High between 1954 and 2002, suggested to me that these were honest people sharing authentic memories, it was the echoed memories, and patterns of recollections within and across categories of gender, race, ethnicity, and class identities, and across strangers, that suggested as much sincerity as an interview setting allows.

Nevertheless, that I am a white woman with a slight foreign accent who introduced herself to alumni as a Ph.D. candidate in Education, presented a persona, the interpretations of which, by the thirty-seven alumni, I cannot begin to unravel. While I entered the homes and spaces of alumni discretely and respectfully, showed genuine interest in their stories, and expressed heartfelt gratitude for their participation in my study; while I dressed casually, as did alumni who greeted me on weekends in jeans and weekend comfort clothes; while I listened more than I spoke, and abided by the interviewer "golden-rule" never to interrupt; while I accepted their teas and coffees graciously when they had already prepared them for my visit; while all this, *who* I appeared to be to them, affected their story telling to me. Tim Whittle is the only alumnus who expressed an opinion about how I might have been perceived by the old timers of Miller Town, when he mentioned, while speaking of "old-timers" versus "new-comers:" "In this huge town, of the people who are here now, as my grandmother used to call them the "move-ins"—she wouldn't even talk to you! You

“move-in” with an accent! (Tim imitates his grandmother’s indignation, and laughs, razzing).”⁷⁸⁹

The question of “situated positions” also brings to light the unequal encounters between alumni and myself. The conversations, while dually constructed, were for my purposes primarily, however freely alumni agreed to participate, and however they might have enjoyed recalling school days. Ultimately, I, the researcher, while I conscientiously strove to remain faithful to my data, *I* ultimately owned our conversations by reinterpreting them. Thus while those alumni interviewed freely agreed to give their stories away to me with the understanding that their testimonies be kept anonymous, my “whiteness,” in conjunction with my Ph.D. candidacy in Education, and the power differential inherent in the production of research interviews, created in the eyes of two potential African-American interviewees, graduates of the nineties, a persona to whom they would not want to grant an interview. I did not have the resources to pursue identifying and locating African-American graduates of the nineties, beyond the snow-balling that came to a halt at the doors of these two graduates; graduates whom I never met, but whose relatives (whom I interviewed) reported to me that their daughter, and brother, who are “militant”⁷⁹⁰ about race issues, would not want to be interviewed. While I am disappointed not to have heard their perspectives *directly*, and instead have had to glimpse at African-American youth’s experiences in the nineties indirectly, through others’ reported recollections and testimonies, I honor *the agency* of these two young people, as they refused to give away their insights and interpretations to someone

⁷⁸⁹ Quote from transcript of audiotape interview with Tim Whittle (1981), p.7.

⁷⁹⁰ Word used by alumnus David Randle.

whom they understood to represent an educational establishment that they perceive has failed black students.

Finally, within this discussion regarding researcher / participant co-constructed interviews is the issue of language itself. As a former foreign language teacher and avid student of socio-linguistics, I construct “voices” as a social, rather than intra-psychic phenomenon. In this view of language, meanings are constructed by individuals as these individuals relate to one another. As Bahtin puts it: “The word in language is half someone else’s...It is populated—over populated—with the intentions of others.”⁷⁹¹ Thus within this premise, “to understand voice, researchers must accept that what they hear is a function of who they are as individuals within the social community.”⁷⁹² Beyond my racial, ethnic, and economic backgrounds, beyond my political convictions and ethical beliefs, I am, in the production of this dissertation, first and foremost a scholar molded by a community of social researchers of their time. I speak a language that divides the world into categories of race, class, and ethnicity; accordingly I hear, see and experience divisions of race, class, and ethnicity.

Thus what I “heard” alumni say, I heard within my situated academic position—an historian of education of my time; and the “trustworthiness” of my interpretive narrative, not unlike narratives hermeneutically constructed, without reference to an outside world, “cannot simply be confirmed through a process of triangulation or reference to an external world. Instead, it is established in part by the

⁷⁹¹ References in Donald Freeman, “ “To Take Them at Their World” : Language Data in the Study of Teachers’ Knowledge,” *Harvard Educational Review* Vol.66 no.4 (Winter 1996): 732-761, p.749. See M. Bahtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p.294.

⁷⁹² Donald Freeman, “ “To Take Them at Their World”: Language Data in the Study of Teachers’ Knowledge,” *Harvard Educational Review* Vol.66 no.4 (Winter 1996): 732-761, p.748.

understanding it triggers in those who hear or read it.”⁷⁹³ Because my history cannot reveal the precise location of the place I studied, or the names of those people I interviewed, because, in sum, I provide but my own narrative as my “word” for an external world I describe, explain and analyze, and within which I place the lives of historical protagonists as I interpreted them, much of my work’s trustworthiness then, depends on it “reading true” to scholars familiar with like investigations. Ultimately, whether an historical narrative constructed around oral histories co-produced in interviews, or a narrative constructed around documentary evidence, or quantitative data, “historical writing is selective and interpretive, it is necessarily guided by the individual historian’s sense of what is important, where to find it, and how social change and human motivation work...”⁷⁹⁴

Secondary Sources

I analyzed yearbooks, referenced the *Community Times*, and histories of peoples of the county held in the town library. I also visited the county board of education library to locate information on student demographics, and county school policies. Locating secondary sources that listed precise numbers of graduates across time proved more challenging than I expected. Not only did Miller High not keep information older than five years (when I visited in 2003, the school had gone through a recent “major clean up” as the administrative assistant explained), but also the information available at the board of education tracked population shifts only by geographic sections, not by individual schools. Thus I identified demographic

⁷⁹³ Ibid., p.750.

⁷⁹⁴ Carl F. Kaestle, “Recent Methodological Developments in the History of American Education,” in *Complimentary Methods for Research in Education*, ed., Richard M. Yaeger (Washington, DC: American Educational Research Association, 1997): 119-131, p.126.

changes within Miller High's student population first through alumni's recollections, which I then corroborated with yearbook data, estimating shifts in student population by senior graduating pictures. Various additions over time to the 1930s building, documented in the *Alumni's Directory*, further confirmed reported changes in population at Miller High. Finally, I acquired a good sense of population changes through citizen laments, and editorial comments expressed in the *Community Times* over time, as well as through my own encounters with the people of Miller Town.

Of particular interest to this study, is the use I made of yearbooks, inspired by the work of Youth Historian Paula Fass, who in her historical essay: "Creating New Identities: Youth and Ethnicity in New York City High Schools in the 1930s and 1940s,"⁷⁹⁵ opened up new ways to consider yearbook data. Fass analyzed the distribution of students by ethnicity in various extracurricular activities. Following her lead, I developed a systematic record keeping of the distribution of students by gender, race and ethnicity in the various extracurricular activities, from the following yearbooks: 1958; 1964; 1969; 1974; 1978; 1984; 1992. I summarily reviewed all other yearbooks.

Because I could not take yearbooks home with me to reference, I took notes by hand at the archives, and alternately organized yearbook data on a 17" x 11" sheet of paper, or 8 ½" x 11", depending on what materials I brought with me that day. I conclude this addendum by underscoring that this work is a beginning into new ways of considering and constructing student life in high school, through relational analyses, beyond situated analyses, within historical periods. As a beginning, it also

⁷⁹⁵ Paula Fass, "Creating New Identities: Youth and Ethnicity in New York City High Schools in the 1930s and 1940s" in Joe Willard and Michael Austin editors *Generations of Youth: Youth Culture and History in Twentieth Century America* (New York: New York University Press, 1998): 95-117.

promises more for the future than it might be delivering in the present, as many more perspectives yet need to be recorded.

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