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Using Literature in Law School: *The Importance of Reading and Telling Stories*

Judy Scales-Trent†

I. INTRODUCTION

How often the story we tell is not the one the listeners hear!

How often the course we plan is not the one the students take!

This is the story of a law school course I planned on legal and policy issues affecting women of color. I will describe what I hoped to achieve in that seminar and how I planned to use literature to achieve my goals. But the process of working with literature in the course opened the door for the students to re-shape the course to meet their own needs. So this is also the story of the seminar the students created, and why they created it. And it is the story of how they used literature to achieve their goals.

II. THE COURSE I PLANNED

How can I say this?

My child

My life is nothing

There is nothing to tell. . .¹

I have a long-standing interest in legal and policy issues facing African-American women. Are there issues which are invisible because these women are invisible? The burgeoning legal literature about black

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† Professor of Law, SUNY at Buffalo School of Law. This article is based on the shared work of students and professor in a seminar at the law school in the spring of 1990. My thanks to the students in that class, who taught me so much:

Nancy Brown, Michael Campbell, Bonnie Crogan-Mazur, Rosanna DiMillo-Sandell, Claudia Friedetsky, Bernadette Hoppe, Sharon Johnson, Alan Mealy, Anthony Natoli, Patricia Parris, Alice Patterson, Hilda Ramos, Martin Sanchez-Rojas, Geralyn Takac, Edna Torres, April Walker.

This is their article too.

An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Orgain Symposium on Women in Law and Literature, University of Texas Law School, Austin, Texas, Mar 1, 1991.

¹ Mitsuye Yamada, *I Learned to Sew*, in *Desert Run: Poems and Stories* 47 (Kitchen Table: Women of Color, 1988) ("*Desert Run*").

women shows that the issues are indeed there, but they have been hidden, as the group too has been hidden—too unimportant to see, not worthy of study. However, I was convinced that, just as there were social and legal issues which had a disproportionate or unique effect on black women, there must also be issues affecting women because they are Asian-American, Latina, or Indian. But what were they? Were they similar to the issues facing black women? White women? Were they different? Were the issues for all women of color similar to each other? Different? Finding and exploring these issues was the aim of this course. My goal was to bring the lives of women of color to the fore, pull out their issues, and engage the students in thinking about how the law might respond to them in a positive way.

In planning this course, I had been guided by the words on a print by the artist Barbara Kruger: “We construct the chorus of missing persons.”² Women of color were the “missing persons,” the missing voices in our society. What would the music of these missing voices sound like? To begin this work, I had to learn about the lives of the women of color who were not, like me, African-American: who are they? what kind of work do they do? what are their lives like? I immersed myself in as much social science material on these groups as I could find. Unfortunately, there was so little material that I was able to read it all within a few months. But it was not enough: these women were still strangers to me. To fill the void, I turned to the literature written by these women themselves. They would speak directly to me; they would tell me about their lives. Thus, I read, among other things, the short stories by Nicholasa Mohr about Puerto-Rican life in New York City;³ the stories and poems and essays by Indian women in Beth Brant’s anthology, *A Gathering of Spirit*;⁴ the poetry of Mitsuye Yamada in *Desert Run*.⁵ I read a traditional Iroquois narrative, “The Woman Who Fell From the Sky”;⁶ Gloria Anzaldúa’s story of working on the family farm in South Texas as a child;⁷ and a poem/letter from a Filipina who had just arrived in the United States, to her sister back home.⁸ It was a rich, rich discovery.

And indeed, some of this literature spoke of issues I had already

² Nancy D. Campbell, *The Oscillating Embrace: Subjections and Interpretation in Barbara Kruger’s Art*, 1 *Genders* 57, 67 (1988).

³ Nicholasa Mohr, *In Nueva York* (Arte Publico, 1988).

⁴ Beth Brant, ed, *A Gathering of Spirit: Writing and Art by North American Indian Women* (Sinister Wisdom Books, 1984) (“*A Gathering of Spirit*”).

⁵ Yamada, *Desert Run* (cited in note 1).

⁶ *The Woman Who Fell From the Sky*, in Paula Gunn Allen, ed, *Spider Woman’s Granddaughters: Traditional Tales and Contemporary Writing by Native American Women* 56 (Beacon, 1989) (“*Spider Woman’s Granddaughters*”) (adapted by the editor).

⁷ Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* 90-91 (Spinsters/Aunt Lute, 1987) (“*Borderlands*”).

⁸ Myrna Peña-Ryes, *The People Here: A Letter*, in Asian Women United of California, eds, *Making Waves: An Anthology of Writings By and About Asian American Women* 31 (Beacon, 1989) (“*Making Waves*”).

read about in the social science literature—tribal enrollment, alcoholism, toxic dumping on reservations, violence against Asian women, abortion, the removal of children from the home. So it is not so much that I discovered new issues through this literature, but that when I heard about them through the voices of the women themselves, I understood it in a different way. It was real to me in a different way. Listen, for example, to these words by Marnie Walsh, who is Sioux:

VICKIE LOANS-ARROW⁹

1972

I

this morning
 me and my cousin
 charlene lost-nation
 are in to bobby simons bar
 and charlene say
 i tired of living
 there aint nothing in it
 and bobby simon
 behind the bar
 goes ha ha ha
 when she fall off
 the stool
 im laughing too
 she so drunk
 she funny

II

i get her up
 then she say
 there aint nothing in it
 to them old white farmers
 drinking their beer
 and talking crops
 they dont listen
 dont even look at her
 and bobby simon say
 i see your mama out front
 so we go out

⁹ Reprinted by permission from Ahsalta Press © 1976 Marnie Walsh. All rights reserved.

and the sun so yellow
burn my eyes
and make charlenes mama
shiver like shes made
out of water
but it only the wind
all gold color
moving everything in waves

III

she say goddam you
charlene them kids of yours
come over and i got to
take them in
while you drunk all the time
i aint going to do it
no more
it too damn hot
i watch her shoes all torn
and wrinkly
and her fat legs
floating on the yellow wind
then charlene say
there aint nothing in it
it all plain shit
and we go back in the bar

IV

we drink and she pulls
her face up tight
tells me it dont pay to think
theres something to it
cause there aint
and says wont nobody
never believe her
what she says
i just laugh
she so drunk
she funny

V

well me and bobby simon
 drink some more
 I seen charlene
 when she gone to the can
 she dont come back
 pretty soon bobby simon
 say i better check her out
 so i go to see
 i find her all right
 sitting in a corner
 theres blood on her mouth
 and her chin
 and down her dress

VI

she looks at me
 and i see the knife
 sticking out between her teeth
 and remember what that means
 and i know shed like to die
 but cant
 so she killed her tongue
 instead
 i leave her there
 i go out the door
 and down the street
 and the yellow wind
 make me shiver and sweat
 because now i believe her
 but wont never say so¹⁰

The despair in the lives of some Indian women—despair which is noted in social science literature—will never be abstract to me again. And I will care.¹¹

I decided that on the first day of class, I would show the Barbara Kruger print to the students; I would explain that I hoped their research on women of color would help “construct the chorus” of missing voices. I also decided to include some of this literature in the course material with the hope that it would help them in this task. First, it would help them know about and understand the diverse women of color groups. My sense was that, to the extent they knew the literature of any of these

¹⁰ Marnie Walsh, *Vickie Loans-Arrow*, in Dexter Fisher, ed, *The Third Woman: Minority Women Writers of the United States* 116 (Houghton Mifflin, 1980) (“*The Third Woman*”).

¹¹ In his essay *The Truth of Fiction*, Chinua Achebe explains how we are transformed after becoming “active participants in a powerful drama of the imagination”: “Afterwards we can no longer act as hearers only of the word; we are initiates; we have made our visit . . .” *Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays* 138, 144 (Doubleday, 1988).

women, they would only know the literature of their own group, Indian students would know about Paula Gunn Allen, African-American women would know about Alice Walker. But they all needed to know about all of these groups before they could grapple with issues of sameness and difference—before they could understand issues which they did not initially see as theirs.¹² Secondly, the literature would make them care enough about the lives of women whom they might have considered unimportant; it might make them want to do serious research about these lives.

I included this literature in several ways. First, I gave them an introductory assignment comprised completely of poems, essays, and short stories written by these women. During my reading I had been astonished and delighted to see the many similar themes in the literature of these seemingly diverse groups. Therefore, I included works which reflected these similarities in the assignment. For example, they read Maxine Hong Kingston's story about a Chinese warrior woman,¹³ along with Zitkala-Sa's story of a Sioux warrior woman.¹⁴ They read loving celebrations of the older women in their communities in the poetry of the African-American writer Alice Walker¹⁵ and the Mohawk poet Salli Benedict,¹⁶ and in a short story about an immigrant Japanese mother.¹⁷ They heard the cries of "La Llorona," the mythical woman whose lament for her dead children resonates through Mexican-American culture;¹⁸ and felt the grief of Anita, who lost her children when she left the reservation in Northern Idaho.¹⁹ At this time, they also read Audre Lorde's essay, "Poetry is not a Luxury," in which she explains the importance of reading and writing literature as a means of knowing who we are, and thus, what we need to do.²⁰

Throughout the semester, I also included literature along with legal and social science material. Thus, when they read social science material about violence against Asian-American women, they also read Mitsuye Yamada's poem, "The Club":²¹

¹² For a discussion of the value of helping law students grapple with the notions of how we are both different and the same, as well as ideas about how to do this within the classroom, see Judy Scales-Trent, *Sameness and Difference in a Law School Classroom: Working at the Crossroads*, Yale J of L & Feminism (Spring, 1992) (forthcoming).

¹³ Maxine Hong Kingston, *White Tigers*, in *The Woman Warrior* 17 (Vintage International, 1984).

¹⁴ Zitkala-Sa, *A Warrior's Daughter*, in *Spider Woman's Granddaughters* at 30 (cited in note 6).

¹⁵ Alice Walker, *Women*, in *The Third Woman* at 297 (cited in note 10).

¹⁶ Salli Benedict, *Sweet Grass is Around Her*, in *A Gathering of Spirit* at 189 (cited in note 4).

¹⁷ R. A. Sasaki, *The Loom*, in *Making Waves* at 199 (cited in note 8).

¹⁸ Carmen Toscano, *La Llorona*, in *The Third Woman* at 317 (cited in note 10).

¹⁹ Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, *A Family Matter*, in *A Gathering of Spirit* at 70 (cited in note 4).

²⁰ Audre Lorde, *Poetry is not a Luxury*, in *Sister Outsider* 36 (Crossing Press, 1984).

²¹ Reprinted by permission from Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press.

He beat me with the hem of a kimono
 worn by a Japanese woman
 this prized
 painted
 wooden statue
 carved to perfection
 in Japan or maybe Hong Kong . . .²²

When we addressed the issue of abortion, they read *Webster v Health Services*²³ and the Women of Color *amicus curiae* brief filed in that case, along with "the lost baby poem"²⁴ by Lucille Clifton:

"the time i dropped your almost body down
 down to meet the waters under the city
 and run one with the sewage to the sea
 what did i know about waters rushing back
 what did i know about drowning
 or being drowned . . ."²⁵

Thus, the literature of these women brought the legal and social science material to life.²⁶

As noted above, I put literature into this course to help the student do the legal and social science research I wanted them to do. But I added more to the seminar, additions which, I later learned, allowed the students to do their own work, and to teach me about the importance of literature in law school.

The first addition was written material in which I told stories from my own life. In one, I told of my fear of speaking about my own issues; I told of my sense of alienation and powerlessness.²⁷ Another was the story of my struggle with racism in academia as a new law school professor.²⁸ For the last class, which explicitly focused on sameness and difference between groups, they read of my struggle to come to terms with being a white black woman.²⁹ The second addition to the seminar was a writing assignment. Along with preparing a traditional research paper, they would also have to write five two-page "Reflections," one for any five of the reading assignments during the semester. In these pieces they were to develop an idea from the readings for that week. The presenta-

²² Yamada, *The Club*, in *Desert Run* 76, 76 (cited in note 1).

²³ 492 US 490 (1989).

²⁴ Lucille Clifton, "the lost baby poem" copyright © 1987 by Lucille Clifton. Reprinted from *good woman: poems and a memoir, 1969-1980* by Lucille Clifton with the permission of BOA Editions, Ltd., 92 Park Ave., Brockport, NY, 14420.

²⁵ *Id* at 60.

²⁶ See, *International Brotherhood of Teamsters v United States*, 431 US 324, 339 (1977), where the Court noted that in employment discrimination cases based on statistical proof, testimony by the individuals harmed "brought the cold numbers convincingly to life."

²⁷ Judy Scales-Trent, *Black Women and the Constitution: Finding Our Place, Asserting Our Rights*, 24 Harv CR-CL L Rev 9, 42-44 (1989).

²⁸ Judy Scales-Trent, *Affirmative Action and Stigma: the Education of a Professor* (unpublished manuscript).

²⁹ Judy Scales-Trent, *Commonalities: On Being Black and White, Different and the Same*, 2 Yale J L and Feminism 305 (1990) ("Commonalities").

tion of the idea could be in any way they chose—legal, historical, literary, personal, scientific, artistic. I wanted them to dig deeper into the subject. I was looking for thoughtful, creative work. I would not correct or grade these papers: what mattered was that they be prepared.³⁰

I then discovered that all of this—the stories and essays and poems by women of color, my own stories, the opportunity and encouragement to write whatever they wanted—all of this moved them into another law school space, a space which they cherished, and which they fought to keep. And the best decision I made that semester was to let them have it.

III. THE COURSE THEY TOOK

. . . My child
Write this
There take your pen
There write it
Say that I am not going back
I am staying here³¹

I have had a run-away class before, a class where the students got so involved in the issues under discussion that they took charge of their reading assignments. Some asked me to distribute copies of articles mentioned in the assigned material; others copied and distributed their own selection of articles for class reading and discussion. They decided when to take breaks, and when class was over. They took charge of their own education. But I must admit that this is disconcerting. A run-away class feels at first like anarchy: What is going on? What happened to all my plans? Who is running the show? The answer, of course, is that once the students get actively engrossed in their own education, they are. And once they start down that road, the question becomes whether I should stop them or slow them down. And what would happen to their excitement about learning if I did stop them? And indeed, why should I slow them down if they were so excited about learning?

This seminar was another run-away class.³² The following notes reflect some of the issues I struggled with as the class began, and as it

³⁰ My thanks to Prof. Charles Lawrence who suggested this teaching idea in a presentation at the AALS Minority Law Teachers Conference in Washington, DC, September 1989.

³¹ Yamada, *I Learned to Sew*, in *Desert Run* 47, 51 (cited in note 1).

³² This seminar was comprised of 16 students, men and women, from richly diverse backgrounds. There were Puerto-Riqueñas as well as members of the Tuscarora, Cayuga, and Onondagua tribes of the Iroquois Confederacy; black students with backgrounds in New York State as well as the West Indies; a student from Germany; students who identified themselves through their Italian heritage; a Latino who had moved when a child from South America to live with Blackfoot relatives on a reservation in North Dakota; African-American students with European ancestry and Puerto-Rican students with African ancestry; students whose last names indicated English or German or Eastern European ancestry. It was America at its best.

became clear to me that this was their class, not mine.³³

Week 2

Jan 28, 1990

Nothing went the way I thought! I thought we would talk (*some* would talk) about the material on being silenced, and "finding our voices," dualism and empowerment. I couldn't get them to address the material very much . . . But what was remarkable was how they took over the class (with my encouragement): "What should we do first? Who are we? Why did we take this class? What do we hope to get out of it?" And how the speech of the students of color was so powerful, so revealing, so brave. They dominated the class discussions. I worried some about trying to let the others have a chance, about not addressing the class materials. It was only later that I burst out laughing when I realized that in fact the major issues we addressed were *precisely* those of empowerment, and "finding our voices." The students of color were empowered in a stunning way, found their voices, and took it over! I wonder if the white students were the ones who were alienated, and felt disempowered. They seemed very interested, and asked good questions, and were also very honest and strong about who they were and what they knew and didn't know.

Michael described himself in a cultural way, explaining why Indians find it hard to talk in a group. Then he wouldn't stop talking! Talk about empowerment!

Edna described for Geralyn why she considered herself Latina, and not Hispanic; she described Puerto Ricans as "mestizos"—people of mixed ancestry. Martín described how when he came to the US from Central America as a child, they first moved to a Blackfoot reservation in North Dakota, where his Indian relatives lived: again, "mestizo" (though he didn't use that term). Edna and I . . . talked about the difference skin color makes within our communities. So we did a lot of work about who groups are, the difficulty of defining a group without reference to other groups (impossibility?). Alice described what it was like to grow up black in a predominantly white community . . . where her family was well accepted in the community. She said she didn't encounter racism until she came to UB (and even more, to UB law school). And Pat described the experience of a black woman from the islands: ("but you're different!"). We did a lot of work on how even those of us within the same group are different.

Nancy showed us her Iroquois passport (Haudanashonee), and told us how neither the Cuban nor Canadian customs officials would stamp it as she went to, and returned from, Cuba. She described how invisible she felt.

When Martín pointed out a proverb in Anzaldúa's book ("tell me who you go around with, I'll tell you who you are"), several students remarked that they had been raised with that same teaching: Roseanne

³³ I had planned to write up notes on each class session after it was over, for I was sure that I would learn a lot from these students. Unfortunately, I only managed to write notes for four sessions. These are the notes from the first two classes after our initial meeting. I have made minor grammatical corrections.

(Italian), Edna (Puerto Rican), Martín (South American and Indian). They were struck by how much they are the same.

I am overwhelmed by their energy, excitement, and courage. It promises to be a wonderful semester.

Week 3

Feb 3, 1990

Again, it was hard to keep the class focused on the issue I proposed for discussion. There was a lot of talk about what racism is really like on a day to day basis by the students of color—anger, bitterness. Some talk about a newly defined “*obvious* women of color”—those with dark skin. “This is what *our* lives are like.” Bonnie likes that term. At another point, she described how she was rejected by many on the reservation because she “looked Polish”—she got to escape from racism. So the group is still dealing with differences *within* certain groups, and anger *within* the group, as well as anger at whites. The white students talked about their guilt, as well as their horror at their ignorance of what was going on around them all the time. Were stunned by the reading. Towards the end of the class, I stated that it was probably a good idea to get this stuff said and out of the way (if possible . . .), but would like them to try to look at what they were saying from women of color perspective. A few did, but they obviously had another agenda.

They were excited, energized, didn’t want to leave when class was over, didn’t want to stop for a break. The next few days, I talked to a few students about how they thought the class was going. Should it be more structured, more focused on the material? “No,” they begged . . . this is the only time in law school that they have been free of structure, free to talk and learn from each other. “Please let us have that” (students from different groups: white, Latino, African-American). I’m not sure what they are learning, but clearly it is a lot. Also, as several students noted these are issues they want to think about and deal with before they graduate. They see this as their last chance. I will have to learn (yet once again!) to turn them loose and to trust them. They know what they need to know. And they want to read, and talk and learn from each other. What more could a teacher ask for!

Not only did the students follow their own agenda in class discussions, they also had very clear ideas of what they would write in their Reflections. I had expected the papers to be more neatly analytical, more theoretical, tied to other scholarly subjects. But I discovered that when they addressed the theoretical and substantive issues, they did so mainly through personal stories. For they were hungry not only to hear the stories of others, but hungry to tell their own. Like Janie, in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, they were “full of that oldest human longing—self-revelation.”³⁴ They told their stories to each other in class, and they told them to me in their Reflections. They wrote poems which they sometimes read in class. One student, a professional singer, brought in back-

³⁴ Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* 18 (U Ill Press, 1937).

ground music on a tape and sang his story to us. They listened to each other. And they learned.

It wasn't until later when I stopped to think about what we did in that class—later, when I went back and reread all their Reflections—that I understood what they were doing in the class, and what this work meant to them. One student wrote these words after reading the literary material by women of color:

This recognition of ancestral strength of the female spirit in the face of adversity appears time and time again in the literature assigned to us. It is as if the women authors, from their varied backgrounds and experiences, are inadvertently 'weaving the diverse threads of life into one miraculous, mystical fabric'³⁵ . . . and are calling upon the reader to add to the tapestry with her own story Therefore, after reading these stories and becoming enveloped in their gentle cadences, I also sought to unlock doors, to sit back for a moment, to allow the voice of my past lives its liberation³⁶

She went on to tell the story of her much-loved immigrant grandmother from Italy. After developing theoretical notions about the relationship of women of color to white feminism, an African-American woman wrote: "Let me tell you a little story."³⁷ She then developed the theory with an example of a conflict she had recently witnessed between black and white tutors in an inner-city school. After reading Michael Dorris' poignant story of raising a child with fetal alcohol syndrome, another student wrote: "Dorris' account forced me to think about my mother. Her story is the one of the hopeless alcohol addict, the one that is missing from Dorris' book."³⁸ Then she told us her mother's story, as well as her story—the story of the child with an alcoholic parent. When they read Zora Neale Hurston's "Most Humiliating Jim Crow Experience,"³⁹ they told about theirs. When we read about the historical role of domestic work in the lives of women of color, they talked and wrote about the work of their mothers and aunts and grandmothers.⁴⁰ And I finally understood that when they wrote, told, and sang these stories, they were indeed constructing "the chorus of missing voices"; for their voices, and the voices of the people they know, were the voices which had been missing.⁴¹

³⁵ Sasaki, *The Loom*, in *Making Waves* 199, 214 (cited in note 8).

³⁶ Rosanna DiMillo-Sandell, *Reflection #1* (unpublished seminar paper, Feb 7, 1990).

³⁷ Sharon Johnson, *Reflection #4* (unpublished seminar paper, 1990).

³⁸ Claudia Friedetzky, *Reflection #3* (unpublished seminar paper, 1990).

³⁹ Zora Neale Hurston, *My Most Humiliating Jim Crow Experience*, in Hurston, *I Love Myself When I am Laughing . . . And Then Again When I am Looking Mean and Impressive* 152 (The Feminist Press, 1979) ("*I Love Myself*").

⁴⁰ They also wanted to hear more of my story. After reading about employment discrimination against professional women of color, one student wrote: "I need to know how you succeeded in becoming one of this country's few black female tenured law professors How did you learn to cope with this type of racial discrimination and yet at the same time remain sane?" Alice Patterson, *Reflection #1* (unpublished seminar paper, 1990).

⁴¹ Some of these stories are reproduced in the appendix, at 104, with the permission of the authors. Minor editorial changes were authorized.

The students also wrote the research papers I required, work which engaged them deeply and which they did well. But that, I think, was work they did for me: the rest of the class was theirs. And after they did their work, they explained what it meant to them, and why it was important. In their Reflections, they wrote these words:

As I write this final 'Reflection' on the reading for this week, I find myself reflecting back on the semester's work as a whole, and the many new stories . . . I have had the good fortune to hear, and share with the group as a whole By preserving and revealing the more human, emotional side in all of us, and allowing us to again recognize and acknowledge this aspect of ourselves (versus the indoctrinated method of cold, objective rationalization forced upon us over the past two years), I felt a freeing of creative energy and reacquaintance with a part of myself that I have lately feared I might have lost.⁴²

Sometimes when I read stories about things that happen to other people, I feel as though they have written about sequences of my life, changing only the name of the characters.⁴³

The class is enlightening and, above all, fascinating as I listen to other people of color give their impressions regarding how they survive within white society. We all have similar backgrounds of oppression and being allowed to voice these experiences is vital to our existence and survival.⁴⁴

Sometimes it is helpful to know that there are other people who feel the way you do about something, but, more importantly, it is good to know that they are willing to write about it.⁴⁵

[Kingston's] story about the brave woman warrior—the swordswoman Fa Mu Lan—seemed to be the embodiment of the author's desire and need for personal empowerment in her own life The [story] made an impression on me because I experience our culture as actively encouraging us to desire what is in our own imagination, or is expressed through modern storytelling mediums such as literature The first step to truly attaining one's dreams, desires or goals is to first allow oneself to imagine what it would be like to actually experience and attain them.⁴⁶

⁴² Alan Mealy, *Reflection #5* (unpublished seminar paper, 1990).

Patricia Rangel, a University of Texas Law School student, class of 1991, made a related comment after I presented these ideas in Texas. Rangel, who described herself as a third-generation Mexican-American, equated the process of mastering law school with the process of learning to be bilingual in the language of an upperclass white male. But, she continued, the stronger voice is the original voice. Thus, allowing the students to speak with their own, strong voice, empowers them to learn the new language, and to make that new language strong as well (Conversation with Patricia Rangel, Mar 1, 1991, Austin, Tex).

This is very likely true. For students of color, discovering that there is a law school class where their voices are the privileged ones must indeed be empowering. See comment by Alice Patterson, text at note 48. But that should not obscure the fact that many white students, men included, feel alienated and constricted in law school. Indeed, Mr. Mealy is a white man.

⁴³ April Walker, *Reflection #1* (unpublished seminar paper, Feb 28, 1990).

⁴⁴ Michael Campbell, *Reflection #1* (unpublished seminar paper, Feb 7, 1990).

⁴⁵ April Walker, *Reflection #1* (unpublished seminar paper, Apr 10, 1990).

⁴⁶ Alan Mealy, *Reflection #1* (unpublished seminar paper, Feb 19, 1990).

I need to learn how to write, how to express what I feel on paper. Because if reading about me can do for others what reading about you and other women has done for me, then I should be heard.⁴⁷

I must say that it was the personal stories that the individuals in the class told that made the class so uplifting. The racial diversity of the class made the stories that much more powerful because they came from people who live them For the first time, I think, many of us felt that our thoughts were important and meaningful and would be viewed as such.⁴⁸

I appreciate the opportunity to be part of this unique class. I appreciate the opportunity to explore all the literature that I abandoned so carelessly that had always been my source of strength and inspiration.⁴⁹

The literature in this class has been so important to us all. Why? Because lawyers need to know how to hear other people's stories, how to be open to them. Who knows? One day we may hear our clients tell very similar stories.⁵⁰ Also, we play different roles in life: we will not be *only* lawyers. And we have a duty to nurture those other parts of ourselves.⁵¹

IV. CONCLUSION

There is little I can say in summation. It was their course, and they explained what they got out of it. But the lesson they teach makes me think that there should be a place in the law school curriculum for students who want to read literature together.

Last fall, I started to think about teaching literature in law school. What would such a course look like? What would be the purpose of such

⁴⁷ Hilda Ramos, *Reflection #5* (unpublished seminar paper, Apr 11, 1990).

⁴⁸ Alice Patterson, *Reflection #5* (unpublished seminar paper, 1990).

⁴⁹ Bonnie Crogan-Mazur, *Reflection #2* (unpublished seminar paper, 1990).

⁵⁰ Indeed, there will likely be times when a lawyer needs every available resource possible—including literature—to do the work that needs to be done. Professor Joan Howarth provided one example: "I used to think that the practice of criminal law was the quintessential work for lawyers. But since I started doing death-row litigation, I have realized I was wrong. Sometimes, when I'm going to meet with my clients, I think: 'This job is too big for a lawyer: we need a poet.'" (Conversation with Prof. Joan Howarth, Feb 3, 1991, Austin, Tex).

⁵¹ Conversation with Crystal Burden, a law student who took this seminar in 1991 (Feb 14, 1991).

With respect to the ability of literature to nurture, one student found a poem assigned for class so helpful to her personally that she cut it out to carry it with her in her wallet. See page 109. On another occasion, the students used literature to nurture me. During one of the last classes, I found the material too painful to discuss with the group and left in some distress, after encouraging them to continue the class without me. Several days later, one of the students appeared at my home with a plant and a very thoughtful note from the class. On this note she had written my own words back to me, in an effort to offer support and understanding, in an effort to help me regain my courage:

"I am content to be who I am, and leave to others the comfort of their own definitions.
I claim only myself, and define myself, by my own name."

Scales-Trent, *Commonalities*, 2 Yale J L and Feminism at 305 (cited in note 25).

Another student wrote a poem after that class in which she told of a difficult time in her life. She later gave this poem to me. See page 123.

I have thanked the students before, and take this opportunity to thank them once again. The gifts they gave me during this semester were many and great.

a course? I read through the book *The Call of Stories: Teaching and the Moral Imagination*, by Robert Coles,⁵² a child psychiatrist who also teaches literature at Harvard Medical School. Would there be anything helpful there? Coles pointed out that medical students confront, on a daily basis, family tragedies, catastrophic illnesses, death. He considers it important to have the students read literature as a way to help them grapple with these hard questions of life and death.⁵³ “Well,” I thought, “this is not what goes on in law school. There is nothing helpful here.”

But my students taught me that I was wrong. They reminded me that we all come to law school with our stories, our family tragedies, and our pain, just as our clients will come to us with theirs. We too need tools to help us make sense of it all with an understanding and generous heart. And literature can help us do that.

⁵² Robert Coles, *The Call of Stories: Teaching and the Moral Imagination* (Houghton Mifflin Co, 1989).

⁵³ *Id* at 92.

APPENDIX

**My First Reflection:
Cross-Cultures—Who Am I?
(January 31, 1990)**

Patricia A. Parris

While I was reading "La conciencia de la mestiza"⁵⁴ (Towards a New Consciousness), I found myself reflecting on my experiences as a child having grown up in a "mixed neighborhood" of different ethnic and racial groups. While we were aware of the differences, I suppose, as children, we never focused on these differences, simply because we were just busy playing and having fun. Yet, I knew, almost intuitively that I was different from the other "Negro" children in the neighborhood because the things that mattered to me, didn't seem to matter to them. The thing that mattered to me was including all the kids in our play—the Polish and Italian families on either side of us, the Puerto Rican family across the street from us, the Jewish family around the corner from us. It was very important that no one be left out. This was not through any conscious effort on my part, however. Like Gloria Anzaldúa, I too was the product of ". . . cultural cross pollenization" of Afro-American and West Indian parentage. My relatives of the American branch have always lived in exclusively Black neighborhoods, while the West Indian branch has always lived in "mixed neighborhoods," and continues to do so to this day. I am more comfortable in this latter setting. Throughout my life, there has always been a clash of these two cultures, both in reality and in my subconscious. My West Indian side is never satisfied—always pushing, always driving to make the extra effort. You were told to be the "best" that you can be. But you always knew what they meant—be better than the white man. This was sometimes perplexing to me because my dad's "best" friend was a white man. (Now who's patronizing whom?)

In my grandmother's house when I was a child and long after her death, my grandfather had frequent visitors of all backgrounds. Shortly before coming here to U.B., my neighbor who had no family in the United States wanted to meet my grandfather, because in her home of China, elders are revered. My grandfather "Pop" became her "Pop" as well. This seemed perfectly normal to me, because, you see, everyone who knew my grandparents only knew them as "Mom" and "Pop." It is probably from their pioneering spirit that the sense of my own individuality and independence have always been what I am—not just what one sees, my race or my sex.

It was not until I began my first job at age 17, that I began to experi-

⁵⁴ Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* at 77 (cited in note 7).

ence bigotry and prejudice for the first time. There was an applicant, a white man of 25 years or so, who refused to allow me to process his application. In fact he refused to even take the application package from my hand. For the first time I learned I too had the ugly beast of prejudice in me. I remember thinking to myself, "How dare he think he's better than me." He was in need, I was not. But then my humanity returned to me, and I felt sorry for him. He obviously didn't know we're all the same. He'd been denied the richness of knowing people different from himself, denied the knowledge and wisdom of their experiences and all of the possibilities they possess. You see, he was from the coal mines of West Virginia. He was limited by his experiences. I have always refused to be limited by others' definition of me. To be a product of cross-cultures, Black and female, is to have "a plural personality" and, as Anzaldúa describes—"nothing is thrust out, the good the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned." Not only [do we] "sustain contradictions, [we] turn the ambivalence into something else" (our own inner strength(s)).⁵⁵

⁵⁵ *Id.* at 79.

Reflection #1 (retroactive)**Claudia Friedetzky**

Class session 2. Pat: "Have you ever been in the minority?"

Last summer in New York City:

I travel underground. Something catches my attention. I am enraptured. A black man walking into the subway car I am sitting in. He makes music using the door for percussion, and a comb enveloped in paper to play the melody. Leaning against the door for balance, his head is cocked forward towards the comb. Gushes of strained breath make the paper vibrate, the door trembling under his tightly clenched fist.

Having finished the piece, he walks around with a paper cup in his hand, collecting money. I scramble for change in my wallet. I am embarrassed to give him money. I wish nobody would see me putting money in his paper cup.

Two elderly Jewish women sitting across from me talking in Jiddish. I stare at them in the hope of finding in the features of their faces some traces of their history. Where are you coming from? When did you emigrate to the U.S.? So, you were in Auschwitz? And you, in Buchenwald? Yes, I have been in Buchenwald, visited the camp and seen the stump of the Goethe Eiche (Goethe Oak). In my mind, I listen to their stories. In my mind, I cry because survival is deeply touching, and their survival is especially dear to me.

A white, dykey looking woman enters the car. She has dark hair in a crew cut. I flirt with her. She gets off at the next stop.

Once she is gone, I realize I missed mine. Should have gotten off five stops ago to catch the train to the Upper West Side. Now I don't know where I will be going. I leave the car at the next stop, and pull my subway map out. I am exactly 15 blocks away from the place where I want to be. No problem, I think: I can walk over there, rather than going back with the train.

Arriving on the ground, I see a huge intersection. I orient myself quickly to make sure that I walk into the right direction. Unwittingly, I search for what seems to be exceptionally rare here: faces of the color of my skin. Instead, I look into faces that are olive-shaded, some black as ebony, some light-brown with a golden tint. I could imagine myself as occupying the far-end of a color spectrum if it weren't for a language and a system, a vision, that positions us in opposition to each other, that reduces us to a single aspect of what it means to be human. I feel deprived of my blackness.

I keep on searching for faces to recognize myself in. I feel like a red spot in a dark sea, exposed and vulnerable because of the color of my skin. There, another white person, a man walking swiftly in the opposite

direction. His presence doesn't alleviate my uneasiness. The unlikely color play questions my existence, my ways, my language.

I think of the history of racism in America. My mind, always ready to indulge in sappy drama, conjures up the image of a crowd releasing its collective anger, accumulated during centuries of oppression, on the frail body of a young woman lost in the maze of New York City. What would I tell them to defend myself? I could point to my German ancestry. Upon that they would just laugh in my face. All evil originated in Europe. Convinced of my guilt, I would willingly die for the sins of my fellow white people, and all other sins ever committed on the face of this earth.

Unfortunately, the crowd doesn't even take notice of my frail body. Still indulging in the cathartic effect of my imaginary sacrifice, I ponder the role of martyrism in the historic excesses of racism. What is it about this deep longing for sacrificial death in Western cultures?

A long line is forming in front of a store. I am exceedingly curious about why people are standing in line. Yet I don't dare to stop, and look, or get in the line myself.

I finally arrive at a park that stands as a green barrier between me and the Upper West Side. I wonder about the location of the park on a hill, so steep that surely nobody would want to take a walk here. For a while I just climb around trying to find a way to get to the top. There used to be stairs carved in rock. Now they look like ancient ruins testifying to better times.

Apart from myself there are only two men walking in the park. I pass them by on my way to the top. They stop to talk to me. One of them asks me for money. I pull out my wallet, eyeing them suspiciously. Both of them look rather emaciated. In fact, it seems as if they have to hold each other to stay on their feet. I hand one of them a dollar bill.

On the other side of the park lies the Upper West Side. From here I can't see the houses, the streets, and the people of Harlem. The branches of densely planted trees obstruct the bypasser's vision.

Back on the Upper West Side, I recognize myself in people's faces, my culture, language, and way of life however despised it may be. The shock of contrast temporarily provides me with a deep sense of equilibrium.

I try to imagine how a black person from Harlem experiences the "mixed" parts of town. Does the overwhelming presence of the white culture and white consciousness shake her up each time she crosses the barrier like it shook me when I visited Harlem? And does she feel safe in Harlem the way I feel safe on the Upper West Side?

Reflections On Various Readings

Hilda M. Ramos

MY MOST HUMILIATING JIM CROW EXPERIENCE⁵⁶

When I read this I realized I too had had a humiliating Jim Crow experience. I must have been around ten years old and I was attending Catholic school. Since we moved, my mother decided to transfer my brother and me to another Catholic school in our new neighborhood. The semester had already started, so when I arrived at the new school I had to be introduced to the entire class. "Children, this is Hilda Ramos, our new student" said the teacher, as I stood in front of the class. "Oh my god, another black girl," whispered two girls who were sitting in the front to my left. I immediately turned around to see where this black girl was. After all, I didn't recall anyone else entering the room with me. No one there: I still remember that puzzled look on my face. As I looked around the classroom I noticed one girl whose complexion was very similar to mine, and then it hit me: "I'm the other black girl." Now I was really confused. I went home and asked my mother why she had never told me that I was black. "You're not black" she said then, and "You're not black" she says now, except that now I know that I am and then I really believed I wasn't.

That whole time period seems very clear to me. Looking back at it now, I can see why. It wasn't very long before the end of that year that my mother was called into school. I was constantly in trouble for fighting. Finally my mother went into the principals' office to inform them that she was taking me out of their school because I was being called BLACK. I remember my mother being very upset about that. The funny thing is she now gets very upset with me when I call myself "black."

HOMAGE TO MY HAIR⁵⁷

As a kid I remember wrapping a towel around my head and swaying back and forth as I watched my long beautiful straight hair catch on my shoulders. When I saw Whoopi Goldberg do the same thing on her one woman show I really felt she was telling a story about me.

⁵⁶ This reflection is based on Hurston's essay by the same name in *I Love Myself* at 152 (cited in note 39).

⁵⁷ This reflection and the next are based on poems with the same names, by Clifton, in *Good Woman* at 167-68 (cited in note 24).

HOMAGE TO MY HIPS

Now this is quite a poem. I like this one so much I'm keeping it in my wallet. I have a right mind to make a few copies and send them out to people like my mother, my brother, an old dance teacher and all others who have made one too many comments about my hips . . . to those people who have done a fine job at making sure I develop a nice complex about my body.

. . . .

While going through my notes I found something which I wrote, but I can't remember whether or not I wrote it after reading something, during class, after class or if it was just a thought. Since I did find it in my book I think I should include it as one of my Reflections. Here it is: "During my women of color seminar I've realized that, unlike other people of color, I don't always see myself as such (a person of "color" that is). Better yet, I never stopped to wonder if the white people I interact with or have interacted with see me as such. I don't know if this is good or bad, but I do know that I don't think I like feeling as though I should always remember that I am a woman of color and that things will always be different for me because of it."

Reflection #1
(February 7, 1990)

Rosanna DiMillo-Sandell

I. INTRODUCTION

There is an undeniable thread that runs throughout the tapestry of stories we were assigned to read for Week #3, a thread quietly connecting the varied tales of the Asian-American, Indian, Black, Latina, and American-Indian women. Reverberating in each is a legacy of endurance and strength, passed on from generation to generation, often taking shape in the form of a mother or a grandmother.

In "I Learned to Sew"⁵⁸ the narrator, upon her arrival in America, finds that the man she was to marry no longer wants her as his wife. She is told ". . . you are too ugly for him . . . why don't you go back to Japan on the next boat?" But she refuses to leave and says, "I am not going back . . . I am staying here." And, indeed, she does stay and does make a life for herself in America. At the end of the poem, she is sewing and praying for her grandchildren's health and education . . . and admonishing them to write down her story so it would never be forgotten that she had not gone back, that she stayed.

Lynn Randall, an American-Indian, recounts a story that her grandmother has told her many times before in "Grandma's Story."⁵⁹ The event centers on a time when her grandmother, as a young mother of nine children, is hastily forced out of her home because the Army has arbitrarily decided to use her land as a place to train soldiers to "fly and drop bombs." As grandmother is orchestrating the move of children, husband, and belongings she steps on a rusty nail protruding from a floorboard. In spite of the pain and the swelling in her foot, she continues working. In the end, it is her husband who breaks down in frustration over what has happened.

In "Women,"⁶⁰ the narrator characterizes her Black female ancestors in the following way:

They were women then
 My mamma's generation

. . .

⁵⁸ Yamada, *I Learned to Sew*, in *Desert Run* at 47 (cited in note 1).

⁵⁹ Randall, *Grandma's Story*, in *A Gathering of Spirit* at 294 (cited in note 4).

⁶⁰ Alice Walker, *Women*, in *The Third Woman*, at 297 (cited in note 10).

How they battered down
 Doors
 And ironed
 Starched white
 Shirts
 How they led
 Armies

. . .
 To discover books
 Desks
 A place for us. . .

This characterization of Black women is similar to the depiction of many Puerto Rican women given to us by Rina Bemmayer in "Stories to Live By: Continuity and Change in Three Generations of Puerto Rican Women."⁶¹ Ms. Bemmayer considers the story of her mother and other garment workers like her a "tremendous source of inspiration and validation" of her own experience as a Puerto Rican woman.

This recognition of ancestral strength of the female spirit in the face of adversity appears time and time again in the literature assigned to us. It is as if the women authors, from their varied backgrounds and experiences, are inadvertently "weaving the diverse threads into one miraculous, mystical fabric"⁶² and are calling upon the reader to add to the tapestry with her own story. In doing so, in reveling in and reliving past triumphs, in acknowledging the mother-Phoenix as she resurrects again and again from her own ashes, the authors show us a way to derive an unparalleled source of strength for ourselves.

Therefore, after reading these stories and becoming enveloped in their gentle cadences, I also sought to unlock doors, to sit back, for a moment, to allow the voice of my past lives their liberation. I desired to entertain the voice within, to dive into the layers and layers of sweet-scented bedsheets of my past . . . unraveling the memories. In doing so, perhaps I, too, might emerge fortified.

II. PRE-GRANDMOTHER

My father arrived in America from Italy in 1947. He met my mother at night school learning English. As he tells it, she went to learn English, he to meet her. My mom had come to America in 1953 at the age of seventeen. Her own mother and father in Italy had sent her to family in America believing the life here would be better than what they could provide in their poor farming village of San Bernardo, Catanzaro. Her aunt and uncle, who could not have children of their own, became

⁶¹ Rina Bemmayer, *Stories to Live By: Continuity and Change in Three Generations of Puerto Rican Women*, 16 *Oral Hist Rev* 1 (Fall, 1988).

⁶² Randall, *Grandma's Story*, in *A Gathering of Spirit* at 214 (cited in note 4).

her legal guardians. (They had been in America since 1925). It is these two people she would from that day on consider her "real" mother and father, and who I and my four siblings would consider our "nonna" and "nonno."

I am my parents' first born and was named for my "grandmother." It is on her story that I will focus because it is her life that has brought so much life to mine.

III. GRANDMOTHER

When I was a little girl, I used to think my grandmother was a queen. When my grandparents would take me downtown to shop, my grandmother always donned her Sunday best. If she wore a pink dress, she'd have a pink necklace, a pink hand-knitted shawl, pink high-heeled shoes and a pink purse to match. It didn't matter that she was only five feet tall, weighed over 200 pounds and couldn't speak a word of coherent English—whenever my grandmother led us into a Montgomery Wards or Kresge's, it was as if my grandfather and I were part of the retinue to the Queen of England. She walked so straight and proud, and I, as I followed her, too, walked straight and proud. After all, was I not related to royalty?

In 1942, as my grandmother told it, she decided it was time to become an American citizen. She believed she had finally learned enough halting English to help her with the citizenship test. For months, with my grandfather's help, she studied diligently—learning the number of U.S. senators, the names of the three branches of government, the first ten presidents. On the day of the test the "judge," as my grandmother called him, asked her the questions she had anticipated he would ask. The last question, however, he had asked was not one that she had expected. The judge asked her, "Mrs. Molinaro, do you like Benito Mussolini?" The question flustered her. Yet her response took only a second. "No, judge," she said. "Oh, no. Please excusa me, but, ifa I hada gun, I woulda shoot him." She became a citizen on the spot, one of the proudest moments of her life. Until the day she died, she could tell you how many senators were in the U.S. Senate, who the first ten presidents were and how she detested Benito Mussolini and all that people like him represented to Italy and the world.

Though my grandmother never went to school, her belief in education (like so many of the ancestors of the authors we have read) was paramount. As a child any academic honor—however trivial—bestowed on my siblings and me was immediately rewarded with anywhere from fifty cents to a dollar (depending on the amount of effort my grandmother thought had been exerted in attaining the honor). Later, when I became a high school English teacher, my illiterate grandmother could

not contain her joy. "When people ask me," she would say, "I tell them 'My granddaughter is a HIGH SCHOOL teacher. She teaches big kids, 18 years old, not little ones. The ones she teaches are just one year away from university. She does not get to sing little songs or play games with them because she is preparing them for the university.'" And had I become, instead, an elementary teacher, she would have found a way to make that, too, the most significant profession anyone could ever pursue. When I decided to give up my secure teaching job and go to law school, I asked her if she thought I was "crazy" (as my parents and most everyone around me had thought). She said solemnly in Italian, "Of course, you are not crazy. It is never crazy to want to better yourself with education. It is wonderful."

For many years after she arrived in this country, my grandmother sold hand-sewn wares to wealthy "American" women to help with expenses. Her own home was adorned with this handiwork—crocheted curtains, tablecloths, armchair covers. But the artistry did not stop here. Aromatic smells of frying peppers and eggs, baking bread, simmering sauce and meatballs often greeted those who entered. Vases of sun-drenched roses were placed throughout the house—all snipped from the carefully tended rosebeds that surrounded the outside of my grandparents' small home. In the backyard was a well-tended vegetable garden and flourishing grapevine. A clear message resonated to all of us who partook in these sights and smells: no matter how humble the task, whether pruning a rosebush or making a salad, take painstaking pride in it and you will, somehow, arrive at a job well done.

In 1973, the doctors removed my grandmother's cancer-ridden stomach and kidney. That night, after the operation, we all surrounded her bed. My grandfather, overwhelmed by the many machines and tubes attached to my grandmother, suddenly burst into tears. My grandmother, knowing that such pity could very well lead to counterproductive self-pity, lifted her arm feebly and said, "Tony, if you are going to cry, please leave." They gave her three months to live, but she went on 15 more years, long after my sweet grandfather had passed on.

Till the day she died my grandmother never stopped telling me I was the most beautiful, smartest and kindest child God ever created. After all, she would chuckle, I was her namesake—so how could I be anything but wonderful? The memories of this woman, the love and dignity she emanated, her respect for others shall stay with me the rest of my life. Though her story is not as dramatic as many of those we have read in class, it is from the authors of this literature that I have learned how we are all served in reliving the "triumphs" of the past—however small and insignificant—especially if we incorporate the message into the tapestry of the present. I hope I may do this with the simple stories of my grandmother. I hope I am worthy of the tapestry.



Rosina & Antonio Molinaro
1952
Lockport, NY

“GOOD” and “BAD” Hair:*A Hair Piece Revisited*⁶³**Edna Y. Torres**

I haven't thought about the "hair" phenomenon (at least not consciously) until I read the articles related to grooming and employment discrimination. As Paulette Caldwell related the story of her own mother's dismay over her afro, I couldn't help but smile as a feeling of *déjà vu* came over me. Yes, I had definitely heard that before.

When I was 11 years old I encountered racism for the first time. It didn't come from the obvious source but rather from the very people who I thought would protect me from it. My fellow Puerto Ricans were calling me a "nigger"! I didn't know exactly what it meant but I knew from the tone in which they said it that it was not meant as a compliment. I was 11 years old and I wanted to have friends. Well, since I couldn't change my skin color, I did the next best thing: I STRAIGHTENED MY HAIR! It was amazing what a difference "straight" locks could make. I was Ms. Popularity.

When I reached high school, I no longer straightened my hair but I continued to blow-dry it. High school was an emotionally uplifting experience for me. I went to a predominantly black high school and for the first time in my life it was okay to be black. And as for my hair, I was deified. Comparatively speaking and according to all of my Black peers, I had the "good" stuff (whatever that meant). That is the reason why I will always have a place in my heart for Blacks. They represent to me the beginning of my freedom. They took me in and accepted me just the way I was.

It is interesting and maddening to see how strongly your environment determines your status. When I was with Puerto Ricans (I should qualify, Puerto Ricans with light skin and straight hair), I had to straighten my hair to feel included; when I was with Blacks, I was put up on a pedestal. When I went to college, the class distinctions were so strong that I didn't have time to deal with the intricacies of hair textures.

College marked the beginning of the end of parental and dominant culture control. If I learned anything in my Ivy League educational experience I learned that I was a beautiful person inside and out. My hair was cut very short, which enraged my mother. "The secret of getting a Latino man is long hair," my mother would say (please understand that my mother hasn't had long hair in years). I would very calmly respond that what I did to my body I did to please myself. "If a man couldn't handle my cropped locks then he wasn't worth my time!" It was very liberating to say that to my mother and have her understand

⁶³ This refers to an early unpublished draft of Paulette Caldwell, *A Hair Piece: Perspectives on the Intersection of Race and Gender*, 1991 Duke L J 365.

that the choices I made had to be for me. As for my hair, it was curly, thick, and natural. I loved it! I felt like Paulette Caldwell does when she gets her hair braided—BEAUTIFUL!

Last year, a third-year Latina student commented on how bad my hair looked because I had let it go natural. Because my hair is longer my curls are more noticeable. I immediately ran to the bathroom to look at it. It looked fine to me, but I was so angry that she could be so rude! If you haven't already figured it out, she was a white Latina. I was angrier at myself for feeling even a tad bit insecure. I had come a long way from those mean kids who called me "nigger" and I couldn't believe that I let this woman have the power to affect me.

Well, I took a deep breath, held my head up high and walked out of the bathroom with the regal elegance and pride of my African ancestors. To all of the so-called professionals, to all of those belonging to the dominant culture, to all of the mothers trying to protect their daughters from the world's cruelty, I leave you with the powerful words of Alice Walker as spoken by Miss Celie in *The Color Purple*: "I'm pore, I'm black, I may be ugly and can't cook . . . But I'm here."⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Alice Walker, *The Color Purple* 176 (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982).

Reflection**(February 28, 1990)****April Walker**

Sometimes when I read stories about things that happen to other people, I feel as though they have written about sequences of my life, changing only the names of the characters. This is how I felt when I read the article "Black Women Lawyers Coping with Dual Discrimination."⁶⁵ While I am not an attorney yet, I can certainly empathize with the events experienced by these women. Allow me to give an example.

It was the conclusion of my second year at SUNY at Buffalo Law School. I had been working at the Attorney General's office in Rochester for approximately eight months as a legal aide. To begin with, I have no idea why I was called a legal aide since my duties were identical to those of my co-worker who was a student aide and a sophomore in college. We both answer the phone and mediate consumer complaints. Furthermore, due to a job classification, the student aide position pays 12 cents more an hour. This was the first clue indicating my position was non-legal.

Getting back to the end of my second year law school career, the Attorney General's office usually hires at least two law school interns to work there for the summer. Naturally I approached the regional head and applied for one of these positions.

I provided him with my resume and sat in on what I thought was a formal interview. Instead of inquiring about my credentials and previous work experience, he sat there staring at the sleeve on my blouse. As I concluded my "why you should hire me" speech, he paused and said: "That looks like baby bye-bye on your shoulder." "Excuse me?" I said. He explained that when he used to say good-bye to his children they would always get food on his shirt and he thought that was what was on my blouse. What in the world did this have to do with the interview?

I quickly got the impression that he had not paid attention to a thing I said nor was he taking this interview or my application seriously. I got up and thanked him for his undivided attention.

The story continues today. Even though I am a graduating senior I am still given menial clerical tasks. I am not even asked to perform simple legal research duties as are the first-year law students. I may be asked to look up a case or to clarify a statute, only to be closely scrutinized by the assigning attorney.

I have no idea what I am thought of in the office but "a promising attorney" is not one of them. Am I insulted? Yes! Am I discouraged? No. I do not know why, and I am not sure that I want to know. At least not now.

⁶⁵ Nina Burleigh, *Black Women Lawyers Coping with Dual Discrimination*, 74 ABA J 64 (1988).

By the way, that substance on my sleeve was only a feather from my down coat.

Reflection
(March 28, 1990)

Alice Patterson

*Women in Shadows*⁶⁶ brought back so many memories of my sister-in-law's assimilation into our family. My brother, Larry, is an American serviceman. While in Korea, he met and married Na Kum Suk. Kum, like many Asian people, took on an American name, Jeannie. Actually Larry met Jeannie in Korea but married her in Texas. Our family did not meet Jeannie for almost a year and a half. Jeannie came to live with us because my brother had been stationed in Germany. During the first year and a half of their marriage, Dwight Ulysses was born.

Jeannie's first meeting with us was quite frightful to her because she was meeting us for the first time and Larry had already been shipped to Germany. She spoke English moderately well. Therefore, we were fortunate enough not to have a language barrier between us. Dwight was the ice-breaker for everyone. He was my parents' first grandchild so naturally a great fuss was made over him.

My family is very close, and we recognized that Jeannie would feel homesick and very isolated with Larry thousands of miles away. The entire family planned short trips and picnics to keep her from feeling so lonely. We went to Toronto, Niagara Falls, and almost any place else Jeannie decided she wanted to see. My mother came up with the idea that Jeannie might want to meet with and visit other Koreans, so she found a small Korean store in Buffalo. There Jeannie was able to meet people from her country who spoke the same language.

My mother was very aware that Jeannie would need a private place of her own. (My mother comes up with the great ideas, and we do all the work!) We converted the third floor of the house into a mini-apartment for her.

Since my parents worked and my brothers spent a lot of time away from home, Jeannie and I grew very close. I helped her fill out forms when the English was too incomprehensible to her. She taught me how to cook Korean foods and how to swear in Korean.

Her perception of "family" was quite different from mine. What I mean to say is that Jeannie's perception of family is different from the American perception. For instance, when Jeannie cooked a meal one night for herself, my sister, and me, we were expected to sit on the floor and eat from a communal bowl. This was a new experience for my sister and me. Jeannie was pleased that we had eaten this way because she said she missed eating in this fashion. Also, children are treated much differ-

⁶⁶ Bok-Lim C. Kim, et al, *Women in Shadows: A Handbook for Service Providers Working with Asian Wives of U.S. Military Personnel* (National Committee Concerned with Asian Wives of U.S. Servicemen, 1981).

ently. Jeannie carried Dwight tied to her back constantly. My mother, aunt, and practically every other mother kept telling Jeannie she would spoil Dwight. However, when they saw that Dwight was a well-adjusted child, the comments ceased.

Once when Jeannie and I talked about her first few months with us, she said that had we not been so open and caring in making her part of the family she would have gone home to Korea.

Reflection #5
(April 11, 1990)⁶⁷

I don't exactly know what Audre Lorde is getting at in her piece about Black women and anger.⁶⁸ She seems to say that she hates what she sees in Black women because that is what she sees in herself. In a sense I can relate to her. Back in my college days I was in the process of defining myself. I knew that I wasn't going to be like all the other girls who talked only about boys, marriage, and babies. I wanted to be someone important, someone people would respect. I realized back then that I would never be that person if I stayed a "girl." I had a college professor who put a few days aside one semester to talk about interviewing skills and attire appropriate for interviews. She told all the females in the class never to wear pearls to an interview because "pearls say girl." I remember thinking, "What the hell's wrong with that?" Nevertheless, it was at this point that I decided that being a "girl" wasn't going to get me anywhere. I had to learn to carry myself in a way that no one could "say girl."

The first part of my demeanor I attacked was my way of speaking, especially to men. You see, no one paid attention to me for very long after I began to speak. They would either interrupt me or look all around while I was talking to them. That is such a frustrating experience. I even had a boss pat me on the cheek after interrupting me and before going on his merry way.

I was determined that this had to stop. I began to research the problem and reflect upon my own actions. I discovered that most women are not taken seriously when they speak for several reasons. They either speak too quickly, at too high a pitch, with their hands, or end with a rising inflection. They also allow others to interrupt them, laugh nervously or end a thought with approval seeking phrases like "wouldn't you agree?" I was guilty of six out of seven.

After learning all of this, not only did I practice speaking without the above unmentionables, but also I began noticing how prevalent those traits were in most women. I noticed how many of them were trampled on and virtually ignored by every man in the room, how they continued the incessant high-pitched chatter and hand-waving until I wanted to scream. I know why I wanted to scream. Those women represented something that I recognized in myself and something I absolutely detested. They were me, stammering and slipping. I wanted to wring their necks.

I don't know if this type of thing is what Audre Lorde is talking

⁶⁷ The author of this Reflection wishes to remain anonymous.

⁶⁸ Lorde, *Eye to Eye: Black Women, Hatred and Anger*, in *Sister Outsider* at 145 (cited in note 20).

about. If so, I think I can sympathize with her and add one more thing. The feeling never goes away. It never disappears with time. Once you've recognized something you don't like in yourself you always see it in others. A woman was being interviewed at work the other day. She was behind closed doors with one of the hiring partners. I heard her giggle. My skin crawled.

**Reflections on Class of April 11
THE CLUB (FIRST MEETING)**

Bonnie Crogan-Mazur

I enter the room. . . . so many eyes . . . so many noses.

If I only were a dog I could sniff one familiar scent.

Half bodies, like store mannequins, posed in coffee-cup embrace.

Quickly, I sit near the mannequin most like me (so I think).

Wrong choice: she smokes, I don't.

I gaze at the forms trying to hide behind the thin
wisps of cancer-laden airbornes.

I try to give each half-body a humanity. Try to make them people.

First they are groups, smokers and non-smokers.

One half-body (smoker group) raises her hand to speak.

She's missing three fingers. Accident or birth error?

Second woman, thin-lipped, high stiff collar, seems annoyed.

Grumpy-faced, giving me this "I don't like you" look.

I reach up to smooth my hair. Check my own stiff collar.

Did I sit in the wrong spot? Are there assigned seats?

Oh gawd, have I taken someone's usual seat?

My ears redden, my face flushes. I gulp my water.

"ALL STAND FOR THE PLEDGE TO THE FLAG!"

The voice is somewhere far away in my mind.

At last, something I know how to do!

We all rise; the unison is most comforting.

The hands to our hearts, most reassuring!

The words so familiar. I almost cry in relief.

We all sit again.

Fright scurries back under my chair and shakes my knees.

Who would guess, looking at me from the knees down, that I

Am a successful businesswoman.

Who would guess, looking at all of them from the waist up,

That they are my peers!

I think my chest is going to explode, I'm trying so hard

just to control my breathing.

Oops, the gavel sounds: we have forgotten **OUR CLUB PRAYER.**

What Club prayer? **ALL STAND!**

Only this time I am not comforted.

We all fold our hands; I am not reassured.

I feel my buttocks shake in allegro tempestoso rhythm.

We all pray. Well, they pray and I lipsynch mumbo-jumbo.

We sit again. Buttocks have completed their rondo.

Knees still knocking . . . **VIVACE!**

Pretty blond woman passes out papers.

Yapping mouth reminds me of my mother-in-law's poodle.

Half-bodies screw up their faces and study the paper.

I screw up my face and study them.

Balance in last month's checking account . . . Bla..Bla..Bla
 Missing finger lady drones on and on.
 President rings bell. Time to vote!
 Who moves to accept treasurer's report?
 Grumpy lady still making faces at me. I choose to ignore her.
 Time to vote? Reality break! Vote on what?
 Betty so moves, Janice seconds,
 "All those in favor" . . . they aye . . . I lipsynch.
 "All those opposed" . . . no nays . . . silence
 Motion carried. I want to shout
HEY . . . WHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON HERE?
 But, I don't.
 Maybe things will get better.
 Maybe someone will be my friend and show me around.
 Maybe someone will like me, stupid as I am.
 Maybe someone will talk to me; no one has!
 Maybe they all hate me.
 Maybe they needed a minority to belong to their club.
 Maybe I look the least like a minority and most like them.
 Maybe they don't want me here at all.
 God, get me through this night. I promise..I promise..anything!
 Secretary reads CLUB correspondence.
 More motions, more seconds.
 They aye some more, I lipsynch some more.
 I want to be home. On my chair, watching NOVA.
 I want to be someplace where I know what is going on.
 Meeting adjourns.
 I look for my purse. Get me the hell out of here!
 People smile. Half-bodies raise. Whole bodies emerge.
 Crabby woman rushes out. I see her run into the restroom.
 Someone whispers she has colitis or cancer..she wears a bag.
 Poor woman. I'm ashamed I thought she didn't like me.
 Missing finger lady comes over to welcome me. She shakes my hand.
 It feels weird. "Car accident" she tells me holding it up for
 Examination. "Sorry we couldn't express a proper hello.
 No casual talking during meeting . . . we fine people 25¢ for talking."
 Everyone comes over as we wind things up. Grumpy ones,
 Pleasant ones, tired looking ones, beautiful ones.
 We are one big WOMAN's CLUB.
 But I am only partly a member. I will have to grow.