

EDITOR'S NOTE

In its larger contexts the topic of this issue of *Ethnic Studies Review*, "Fair Access," has many referents. In 2004 we are marking the fiftieth anniversary of *Brown v Board of Education* which stated unequivocally that separate but equal systems of education did not and could not exist, and yet equal education for all our children still does not exist. Recent reports detail that in many urban areas school systems are at least as segregated as prior to the *Brown* decision, and all levels of government seem satisfied with that status quo. We watch with astonishment as over six hundred people are being detained by the United States Government without charges against them or access to lawyers at Guantanamo. We witness at the moment of Haiti's celebration of its 200th anniversary of independence not only the mysterious removal of the democratically elected President of Haiti but also the continual refusal to grant refugee status to fleeing Haitians while it is granted to Cubans almost automatically, thus creating great inequities in immigrant access. We decry the Patriots Act passed by the Congress of the United States at the instigation of the Bush Administration that whittles away at the freedoms guaranteed by our Constitution. We know that many do not have access to health care in the United States. These and other issues of fair access must be our daily concern.

Ashton Wesley Welch gets at the heart of the issue of fair access in his discussion, "Ethnic and Racial Definitions as Manifestations of American Public Policy," which concerns the formation of laws made to exclude or include. He shows that efforts that find their way into law with the purpose of excluding any given part of the citizenry are very precise so that those who are enforcing exclusion, that is denying fair access, can act with legal authority. Interestingly, those areas in civil society that are inclusive do not need close definition or precision. They are more or less unremarkable. Welch uses these categories to discuss the history of American laws on race and ethnicity.

Adrian J. Lottie and Phyllis A. Clemens Noda tackle one of the most divisive problems in the United States: the issue of Affirmative Action. Their discussion of those who attack affirmative action points to the failure to appreciate the contributions that have been brought to the country by people of color and calls for a coalition to work against these exclusions. As we know affirmative action is far from new—for examples, in the past if a student's parents graduated from a given institution, that student was (is) certain to be admitted to that institution no matter his or her scholarly achievements; moreover veterans have received bonus points on civil service examinations, a detriment to females. Affirmative Action is a vital step in promoting the diversity in education important for the health and progress of the whole society.

Joseph F. Sheley's "Centering Race- and Ethnicity-Related Issues in Social Sciences Curricula" concentrates on the issue of diversity which he calls a "truly important component of social (re)organization and change and thus a major source of social friction." Sheley sees the need for students of the social sciences to be knowledgeable about the value of diversity and

finds that schools offering masters and doctoral degrees are requiring very few courses that take up this issue. This is again a matter of fair access to provisions of our society.

In Harriet Joseph Ottenheimer's "From Cousin Joe to the Comoros: Orthography and the Politics of Choice in Africa and African America" beautiful and interesting experiments in accessibility are presented. Ottenheimer in working on a study of blues singing in New Orleans became acquainted with a singer known as Cousin Joe. The two developed a teacher-student relationship and a friendship and worked out an exchange that gave both access to their individual objectives: hers to understand the blues; his to write an autobiography.

Ottenheimer's second adventure came from fieldwork done with her husband in the Comoro Islands off the Indian Ocean coast of Africa. Here, finding that they could not communicate with the native peoples either in French or Swahili as they had envisioned, she developed a Shizwani-English dictionary arrived at through working with the inhabitants, much as she had worked with Cousin Joe. All parties again gained accessibility to knowledge and expertise that had previously been outside of their possibilities.

In a different vein Celeste Fisher and Carole Wiebe discuss in "Race, Sex, and Redemption in *Monster's Ball*" the opportunities or lack thereof of honest and successful interracial sexual relationships being portrayed in film. They demonstrate how too often scripts having to do with interracial couple end up showing how the white person is relieved of bigotry and racism through the good offices of the black person. The authors explore the question of what, in this kind of situation, is left for the black person. It turns out that the expectations of that person have to be minimal. Again it is a matter of accessibility.

As this issue of Ethnic Studies Review goes to press we are witnessing the continuing denial of equal rights and fair access for same sex couples. While the Civil Rights Movement should have expanded far enough at this point to make this a non-issue, there are some who would like to keep the movement at a standstill so that peoples' energies cannot be spared for other urgent matters. The issues of fair access demand our perpetual vigilance. As Walt Whitman put it, "If they are not yours as much as mine, they are nothing, or next to nothing."

Faythe Turner
Editor
Greenfield Community College
Massachusetts

Correction: ESR 2002 Volume 25 Issue 2, "Immigration: A Special Issue," p. 48, line 2 of Pegge Vissicaro's and Danielle Cousins Godfrey's article, "Immigration and Refugees: Dance Community as Healing among East Central Africans in Phoenix, Arizona" should read "That approach defines an etic view..."