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Border Crossings: Engaging Students in Diversity Work and Intergroup Relations

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Abstract As an innovative model for diversity education, Dickinson College designed the *Crossing Borders* program to encourage culturally diverse students to live, work, and study together in multiple contexts both within the United States and abroad. Envisioning a series of crossings, the program brings together up to 20 students from Dickinson College, a predominantly White Institution, and Xavier University, Dillard College, and Spelman College, three Historically Black Colleges/Universities, to spend 4 weeks studying together in Cameroon. West Africa. Students then study at Dickinson for one semester and at one of the Historically Black Colleges/Universities for one semester.

Key words diversity · intergroup relations · race & ethnicity · identity development · historically black colleges and universities

> I just think back to the first night that we arrived in Cameroon. Sarah was my roommate. And I remember just sitting up with her, like, the whole week, all hours of the night, just talking. About how it is to be African-American, I don't know, just

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> asking her things....I felt like I was crossing borders right then and there because I never, never thought that would be me (Kristina, Xavier Student).[1]

As Kristina suggests, exploring difference is about relationship. And as Taylor, Gilligan, and Sullivan (1995) describe in *Between Silence and Voice*:

> It is about bringing ourselves closer, again and again, to the edge of our not knowing, to the edge of our silences, to the edge of subjects that feel, and sometimes are, dangerous. Each time, we play out the drama of difference; when we reach that edge, when we come up to a moment of pain or confusion or impasse, what do we do? Do we stay or do we leave, do we continue to speak in the presence of these feelings or do we close down around them and retreat to the world we know? To hold difference and sustain hope requires us, moment by moment, to hold steady, to stay with ourselves and with each other, to continue to learn how to speak in the presence of profound silences (p. 173).

The Crossing Borders Program

Dickinson College is a small, highly selective liberal arts college located in Central Pennsylvania. As an historically white college, it remains predominantly so, although it has made significant strides over the past decade in diversifying its student body. In 1995, students of color represented 7% of the student body; in 2005, they represented 13% of the student body.

The increase in numbers from 127 students of color to 296 was essential to enhance what Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, and Gurin (1999) and Chang, Witt, Jones, and Hakuta (2003) have termed our "structural diversity." We knew, however, that this was not enough; the kind of environment students encounter and the quality of interactions they have with one another once they are here are even more critical. Our challenge, like many schools, has been how to engage primarily white students in meaningful dialogues about diversity, even as we work actively to diversify the student and faculty body so that all students encounter a more welcoming and stimulating learning and living environment. This was especially important because the research clearly indicates that college students are at a critical developmental time in their lives. Their own identity formation, as well as their understanding of others, can be greatly enhanced by the experiences they have with diverse others during their college years (Appel, Cartwright, Smith, & Wolf, 1996; Chang et al., 2003; Cornwell & Stoddard, 1999; Gurin et al., 1999; Milem, 2003; Tatum, 1992, 1997).

Program Design and Implementation

Through a series of collaborative conversations among a small group of faculty, administrators, and the Provost at Dickinson College, *The Crossing Borders* program was designed as an innovative model for diversity education in 2001. It encourages culturally

[1] Quotations are excerpts taken from video-taped interviews done with the Crossing Borders students by Joyce Bylander, Lonna Malmsheimer, and Susan Rose. We interviewed the first Crossing Borders group (2001–2002) in New Orleans in March 2002. The second group (2002–2003) was interviewed both before their trip to Cameroon in May 2002, periodically throughout the fall semester 2002, and at the end of their program in April 2003. Interviews were done collectively, in small groups, and in some cases individually. The first group produced 3 hours of tape; the second group produced approximately 16 hours of interviewing. In addition, we have over 20 hours of student-taped documentation of the Cameroon trip and fall semester at Dickinson. All who participated are named here by first name and have signed consent forms indicating their willingness to participate in the study which was approved through the internal IRB process.

diverse students to live, work, and study together in multiple contexts both within the United States and abroad—and to contribute to the communities of which they are a part. Up to 20 students from Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs: Xavier and Dillard in New Orleans and Spelman in Atlanta) and Dickinson College (a predominantly white college in Carlisle, PA) come together to study in Cameroon, West Africa for the summer; they then return to Dickinson College for one semester and to one of the HBCUs for one semester. The program seeks to develop an optimal curricular model that would provide college students a transformative experience with diversity. These types of curricular innovations are empirically shown to increase critical thinking skills, decrease levels of ethnocentrism, and produce higher levels of intellectual engagement and motivation (Chang et al., 2003).

By choosing to bring together a diverse group (white students and students of color at a predominately white institution, and black students at two–three historically black institutions), we anticipated that students would come to the program at different stages of their own identity development around race and ethnicity (see Tatum, 1992, 1997). The research consistently has suggested that white students are typically the least likely of students to engage across racial and ethnic lines on a college campus. They are also the biggest beneficiaries of "exposure to diverse ideas and information and the exposure to diverse peers" (Chang et al., 2003, p. 138). Work, however, by Gurin and Tatum has also indicated that students of color, and African-American students in particular, needed both interactions with whites *and* same race peers in order to experience the full benefits of diversity in higher education. Furthermore, students of color are underrepresented in study abroad programs (Jackson, 2005; Milem & Hakuta, 2000; Perdreau, 2006).

Thus, Crossing Borders sought to establish a model that would provide college students the opportunity to live, learn and work together in three different settings: one unfamiliar to each institutional group and one unfamiliar to all. This combination of environments enables the kind of "discontinuity and discrepancy" that Gurin et al. (1999) and others have described as necessary to encourage learning that is both critical and complex. Such settings create the kind of challenge that can move students to new ways of thinking and interacting across difference.

Outreach to colleagues at our initial partner institutions (Spelman College and Xavier University) provided a strong foundation for a grant proposal. The program's initial 3 year funding was provided by the Fund for the Improvement of Post Secondary Education (FIPSE). In 2004, the three partner colleges (Dillard replaced Spelman in 2004) agreed to continue the program and to self-fund the initiative. Dickinson College remains the lead institution and provides much of the funding for the program.

Each institution has a designated administrative representative. These individuals are responsible for the recruitment of faculty to teach a core course and the recruitment and selection of students. Campuses typically hold interest meetings and have a common application. Students write essays explaining their interest in the program and their understanding of the three components, knowing that it is necessary to participate in all three components of the program to be considered for admission. This is one of the challenges the program has faced with recruitment: a full calendar year is a long commitment for most students. We knew, however, from years of success with global programs that international study and travel were enticing and enriching for students and that students of color were underrepresented in study abroad both nationally and at Dickinson. We therefore deliberately envisioned the Cameroon portion of the program as the "hook" that would entice a diverse group of students into Crossing Borders. Dickinson also has had a semester-long program in Cameroon since 1992 and could draw upon Cameroonian faculty and students to be involved in the program. More recently, Dickinson faculty have had experience running an

Ethnographic Field School in Tanzania so the Crossing Borders program may alternate with the summer study program between Cameroon and Tanzania.

Since its inception in 2001, the program has had four cohorts of students. During the 2005–2006 academic year, the program was disrupted by Hurricane Katrina. Students traveled in the summer of 2005 to Cameroon and spent the fall on Dickinson College's campus but due to the devastation caused by the Hurricane, Dickinson students did not study in New Orleans in the spring of 2006. It is our intention to continue this program with our current partners and to renew our partnership with Spelman College. We are also seeking to add a relationship with another institution in Atlanta so that we might have two partners in two cities. Since each locale was chosen for its specific American racial history, we believe the program will once again be enriched by having students from both cities participate.

Curricular Content: Engaging Diversity

Despite a strong record of excellent global education programs, Dickinson was less effective in confronting issues of domestic diversity at home. In order to focus on intercultural education and communication—both across and within nations—Crossing Borders envisioned a series of crossings: personal, institutional, disciplinary, linguistic, regional, national, and international. After a short orientation at Dickinson that focuses on intergroup dynamics, participant observation in their own and foreign cultures, and the history and culture of Cameroon, students travel to West Africa. While the program is primarily based in the capital, Yaounde, program participants spend the first week traveling throughout the South, West, and Northwest provinces of Cameroon. The remainder of the program is spent in Yaounde where students live and study together at the facility leased by Dickinson College in a residential neighborhood. Since the program director and faculty who accompany the students do not live in the same facility with them, the students must learn to negotiate on their own, including going to the local market to purchase food. To provide more interaction with young Cameroonians, the program engages 6–10 Cameroonian college students to participate in classes and field trips so that students are not learning and forming opinions about Cameroon in an ethnocentric vacuum. The mixture of students also stimulates interesting and important discussions about perceptions of race, class, color, gender, and identity within as well across the groups. For example, Cameroonian students were stunned that African-American students would lay claim to a history of slavery, and American students were dismayed that their Cameroonian brothers and sisters did not perceive them differently from their white American peers.

Fueled by this experience, students then return to Dickinson College for the fall semester to continue their studies of the African Diaspora; the Middle Passage; the Great Migration; race, ethnic, class, and gender relations; and community building in contemporary America. At Dickinson, all of the students take one course together, "Crossing Borders: Liberating Memory," in addition to three additional courses of their own choosing. In the spring semester, students study either at Spelman, Dillard, or Xavier. Thus, the program works with the intersections of international and domestic diversity as students experience a variety of border crossings, both within their group, between themselves as Americans and Cameroonians, and then as they return to the predominantly white college (PWI) and HBCU campuses. As one student commented:

> Throughout this semester, I have been confronted with many concepts and realities that have taken me to the far border of my knowledge and personal experience, and

> then beyond. I have been forced to think of myself, others, and my country in a much more objective, encompassing and analytical way. But the most difficult part has been sorting out where I come from and...where I will go (White, female Dickinson student).

The program has been a challenging and enriching one for the students, faculty, and administrators involved. Its goal of pushing the boundaries has been realized as these student comments indicate:

(1) I definitely changed a lot as a person. I always thought I was open minded and that I thought outside the box—but Cameroon and Dickinson really challenged that—I've had to think more about it and also the contribution I need to give back to the community (African-American, female from Xavier).
(2) I'm more self-assured, more confident. I survived Cameroon, I survived Dickinson. I just feel a lot more courageous now. (African-American, female from Spelman).
(3) Studying diversity academically is different in the two places. It's great taking post colonial literature here where you have multiple black perspectives—there are people in my class at Xavier from Trinidad, Haiti, African-Americans . . . (White, female student from Dickinson).
(4) Being at Spelman where being black is the norm, I don't have to think first—"oh, she's black and then get to know her." At Spelman, almost everyone is black so I find myself not even thinking that anymore when I see or meet someone (White, female student from Dickinson).

In all three locales, students became much more aware of the interplay between race, class, and culture. They were better able to contemplate how much they had been influenced not only by their own personal and familial backgrounds (something most students are able to articulate from an individualistic perspective), but also by the domestic and international politics of race, class, and gender at the turn of the twenty-first century. They came, in Stuart Hall's words, to an understanding of the positions of enunciation—and the ways in which identity is a "'production' which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation. This view problematizes the very authority and authenticity to which the term, 'cultural identity' lays claim" (Hall, 1990, p. 222).

Throughout the Liberating Memory course, we discussed Gilroy (1993), Du Bois (1995), hooks (2000), Trouillot (1995), Gordon (1997), and Takaki (1993) and the ways in which historical memory is a site of cultural struggle that continues to be contested.[2] In the process, we examined how dominant and alternative historical narratives have affected our own lives and understandings. We began to deal with contested truths not only within the academic literature "out there" at the macro level, but also at the meso-institutional level and the micro level, within the group and ourselves. It was here, of course, that the political became particularly personal as we explored the contested terrains that separated as well as united us.

[2] Over the years, various faculty from different disciplines have taught the core courses at Dickinson, Spelman, Xavier, and Dillard. While the Dickinson course has focused on the African-American diaspora, the interactive histories of racial and ethnic groups, using Takaki's (1993) *A Different Mirror*, and inter-group relations in contemporary America, Spelman focused on the Civil Rights Movement, and the HBCUs in New Orleans focused n the culture and history of New Orleans. In all three courses, the idea was to have students focus on local communities as well as the history of race and ethnic relations in America.

Confronting Americanness in Cameroon

The broad notion of America has never really included everybody, and all the redefinitions notwithstanding, the inclusive use of "American" remains ambiguous even today (Sollors, 1994, p. 115).

> You know, we don't all have the same color, but when it all comes down to it, we (African-American and White students) are all viewed as American. It's so hard for African-Americans in terms of finding our identity (Aja, African-American student from Xavier).

In the context of Cameroon, all of the students—be they black or white—soon discovered that they were seen as "American." While this produced no cognitive dissonance for the white students, it did challenge the personal and national identities and world views of the African-American students in profound ways.

Before Cameroon, Jamie declared:

> I had never, ever *once* in my life thought that I was American. I *never* say that I'm American. Even when I identify myself as African-American, [the] American [part] doesn't add to it. So when we got there, we're filling out the forms for the hotels and we're like, "Nationality"—what do we put here? I have never, ever felt like I felt when I put American down, because I was just like—"What is going on here?" I was just—I'm still, I'm still just like, on this, emotional confusion ride, I don't know what it is... but I've never in my life thought I was American (Jamie, African-American woman from Xavier).

> I remember when we were signing ID papers when we registered for a hotel room and there was "Nationality," and I'm like—"Okay"...I turned to somebody, I'm not sure who I turned to, but—I asked them, I was like, "Okay, well...Are we black, or—are we black American, or are we Americans, or—do we say African-American, or do we say 'African...kind of?'" [laughter]

"I just left it blank," laughed Steve, as he listened to other African-American students tell of their similar reactions. He too had never felt like an American before Cameroon, nor does he now, although he knows that by some definitions he is one.

> As an African-American, a black American, a black American male—however you want to put it—going to Cameroon and having that, you know, reality check that—"Yes, you are an American." And then you come back to America and you're like, "I don't feel like I'm an American. I—I just don't. I don't feel like I'm an American."

The experience for Tandra, an African-American student from Spelman, was both similar and different. Being in Cameroon helped her to acknowledge her Americaness which also came with a recognition of material privilege.

> It kinda helped me to see that—I am American. And I guess, growing up in America, growin' up in Georgia, growin' up in the South, and I mean in the South...it's kinda like, "Yeah, well y'all don't even think I'm American, you think I'm black first, you know. After 9-11, people were wavin' American flags, and I was like, "Whatever! Don't wave an American flag because, on the one side you wave an American flag, on another side you wave a Confederate flag" Under that American flag, black men were lynched; you know, black women raped. How dare you try wavin' an American flag

> now and say, "We're a good nation." "We're a peaceful nation." We don't even know what you're doin' under the tables and on foreign soil. But—[laughter] once I got in Cameroon it was like—I guess it was the fact that the Cameroonians knew I was American, there was no doubt about it.
>
> "You—American" [laughter]. I don't know as you'd call them privileges, but because of some of the amenities that I have in America. I realized that I am American. I'm still messin' with certain issues, like, "okay, they say I'm rich, but I ain't rich, I'm not rich! You know, I'm not!" [laughs]. But then days later, you're still reflecting on (it): "Hey, wait—I am rich." You know?
>
> I mean, just the fact of the exchange rate made you rich over there. Just the fact (that) certain things that you have over here, you don't have to worry about like photocopying textbooks, pencils, paper, clothes. That stuff's just a *given*.

Aja, an African-American Communications major from Xavier University commented that "her whole American side" was realized in Cameroon. The challenge for Aja came directly in her conversations with two Cameroonian students, Blossom and Linda.

> We were talkin,' and Linda was very opinionated about how she felt about black Americans: "You are not African-American. You are American, and you should make America accept you because that's what you are"—you know, "You were born in America. Why do black Americans always want to associate themselves as being African-American? You're not *from* Africa."

As Aja is recalling this, she remembers that even the African friends she had at school before she went to Cameroon always made her feel like they had access to Africa because they are *from* Africa. "But," she exclaimed:

> I am not from Africa. So Linda's whole take was, how dare I claim, or how dare black people claim *African*-American, like, how can they do that? They are American...It was really difficult for me to take.

Aja described herself as having been a promoter of Africa as the motherland and of pan-Africanism, something that Landau and Moore (2001) also had found characteristic of African-American students studying in Ghana. Aja explained:

> When I was younger, I was really militant. And you know, going to Cameroon, I just saw myself as goin' back home [laughter]....But here was my sister—telling me I wasn't African—anything, that I wasn't even black—and I was like, "Oh my God, you know, you're supposed to be my sister; we all are sisters, you know. How can you say something like that?"

Aja's sense of her cultural identity as an *African*-American was shaken and then redefined in relationship to both the Cameroonian and American white students with whom she was interacting. Rather than seeing "cultural identity" as one shared culture and ancestry that is stable and unchanging, with "continuous frames of reference and meaning," she came to see it as much more complex. Along with other students, she came to appreciate her cultural identity as reflecting common historical experiences with other black people who had suffered discrimination and displacement as part of the forced African Diaspora that created rifts of separation, dispersal, and fragmentation. But she also came to realize that Africa did not stay the same—it too was transformed. As Hall (1990, p. 226)

eloquently put it, while there are: "...many points of similarity, there are also critical points of deep and significant difference which constitute 'what we really are;' or rather, since history has intervened, what we have become " (p. 226). The major turning point for Aja came when the other Cameroonian student, Blossom, went on to explain more about the complexity and multiplicity of African identities as she experienced them.

> Blossom, had more of a sensitive approach in explaining that concept to me. She was tryin' to explain, like, "Okay, you know, black people, they always want to come back to Africa, to so-call 'find their roots'." And she was saying that, "Okay. Let's take Cameroon for example." It's important for African-Americans [to know that Africa], is not the country, it's the continent. Cameroon is just one country in Africa—and yes, well I'm from Cameroon. *But*—I'm from Bamenda in Cameroon. And that's the northwestern province. And in Bamenda, I'm from the Bali village, and I speak this language in this village..." And she just continued. "There are so many breakdowns in my own country, you know. How do you expect to come here from America, and you haven't been here in I don't know *how* long? And how do you expect to come to Africa and find one place where you fit or you belong? What is 'welcome back?' You never *left*, who *are* you?" I don't understand how we can start to approach that whole concept of finding our identity because ...like Linda said, where would we go? I appreciated her for bein' real.

The reality that there was not a fixed place to return to, no point of "original return," became painfully clear. Yet, it is also the case that this sense of connection is real, and not just a mere phantasm either. Cameroon was a major center of the centuries-long trans-Atlantic slave trade which radically transformed America. Today, millions of Americans have a partial, and almost always unspecifiable, African ancestry. So as Hall (1990) argued, "there is *something* (here)—not a mere trick of the imagination" (p. 226). Such yearnings and felt connections come out of a history of being torn away, of disconnection—they, too, have a history. "Cultural identities are the points of identification, the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture. (They represent) not an essence but a *positioning*" (Hall, 1990, p. 226).

Difference can and does exist, in and alongside continuity and community. Rather than seeking to return to the sacred homeland, a number of these students became interested in understanding more fully the ways in which new communities are formed and imagined. Hall argued as follows:

> [The] Diaspora experience is not defined by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of "identity" which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by *hybridity*. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference (Hall, 1990, p. 235).

The struggle for understanding and coherence in order to find a place to belong was by no means Aja's alone, or just the African-American students' alone. Throughout our discussions, it became increasingly clear how much the history and institutionalization of slavery, and racism, in its particular form within the context of the United States as compared to the Caribbean or Brazil, affect us all. And in helping us understand this, the image of ghost was particularly powerful. "That U.S. slavery has officially ended, yet continues in many complex forms—most notably institutionalized racism and the cultural denigration of blackness—makes its representation particularly burdensome in the United

States. Slavery here is a ghost, both the past and a living presence..."(Trouillot, 1995, p. 147; see also Gordon, 1997.)

The American students wanted to have authentic relationships with Cameroonians and with one another. And it was this desire that enabled them to overcome their defensiveness, and to be able to listen and to speak. Both Wah's (1995) documentary *The color of fear* and Trouillot's (1995) analysis in *Silencing the Past: The power and production of history* helped them to think through what authenticity involves. They came to understand that "authenticity is not a type or degree of knowledge, but a relationship to what is known...Whether it invokes, claims, or rejects The Past, authenticity obtains only in regard to current practices that engages us as witnesses, actors, and commentators...Even in our relation to The Past our authenticity resides in the struggles of our present" (Trouillot, 1995, pp. 148, 150–151). This knowledge empowered them to recognize the validity of different points of view and to work through the fear they had in confronting and understanding each other's realities.

Confronting Whiteness in America

While none of the Euro-American students questioned whether or not they were American (they simply knew they belonged here), they did come to a more profound understanding of the pervasive impact of racialized alienation on identity. As they listened to their African-American brothers and sisters struggle with the meaning of "Americanness" and hybrid-identities, they struggled with what it meant to be white within the context of America as well as Cameroon. The initial challenge for them was to recognize that being white was also *being raced*. As Trouillot (1995) has argued, "The ultimate mark of power may be its invisibility; the ultimate challenge, the exposition of its roots" (xiv). The white students had to deal with the ways in which whiteness is interwoven with privilege and not having to question whether they were fully accepted as citizens—even if they were working-class or lower-class whites—in the United States.

> It was in Limbe (Cameroon) and we were in my room...with Tandra, Steve, Aja, and Lewis (all African-American students) and...I don't know what we were talking about [laughs]—about some really good things. We were just starting to get to know each other then, and...I realized that I didn't really *accept* the fact that I was white and the implications that came with that. I was trying to put myself in their shoes, and Steve was talking—and (finally) I was like, "Whaddya want from me?" I think I just said it like that: "What do you want from me?" like, "I'm here for a reason. What am I supposed to do?" And Steve was like, "I just want you to understand," and I'm like, "Understand *what?*" And...The conversation progressed, and I was explaining to them that, growing up...my mom always told me to, um... to look at people's insides, and that the outside didn't matter, and you're not supposed to discriminate, and—Know you love the person for who they are inside...In a sense, I felt that was great, and I still think it's great, but... Looking *through* is different from looking at and accepting that and then learning from that. You're missing something when you just look through, and I think that's what I had done until I had that conversation in Limbe. That's when I really. started the learning process of what it means to be white...Being color-blind doesn't solve the problem. No, not at all (Cory, a white female student from Dickinson).

These white students were able to move beyond feeling guilty and defensive. They were able to listen to the experiences of their African-American peers and join with them as allies

in the struggle for greater social justice—something that was important to all of them. And perhaps paradoxically, as they came to recognize the significance of difference, they also discovered it mattered both more and less. The important piece was not to move beyond difference but to acknowledge and respect difference and come together in relationship to one another and work on projects of mutual interest. As Tavris (1992) eloquently put it: "As long as we ask, what can we do about them (women or men, black or white, lower or upper class)—whoever 'the other' or 'the opposite' may be, it can never be answered. The question, rather, should be: 'What shall we do about us, so that our relationships, our work, our children, and our planet will flourish'" (p. 333).

Susan, a white student from Dickinson, concurred that this was important work:

> Crossing Borders and being in Cameroon has created a kind of hyper-awareness that makes you constantly aware. We'd be in class–and our professors would be, "Okay, this is what you learned...Okay, now think about it..." And we're like, "Okay, I'm thinking about it." "No. *Really* think about it as a white female who grew up in the working class." In a lot of courses, you'd hear: "We're all equal. It doesn't matter that you're black and I'm white, and we can have the same experience." But now I've learned that we may sometimes even have equal opportunities, like Cameroon, but even then, it's different, because you're black, and I'm white; or you're another generation and I'm younger; or you're male and I'm female...Those things *are* a real factor and they make a difference.

As the students discovered, these differences of experience and perspective are varied both within as well as between groups. Moreover, the differences do not necessarily create divides; they can be shared in ways that are both mutually illuminating and liberating.

Finding Individuality in Diversity

While the conversations were not always easy, the students all acknowledged that they were challenging in positive ways. It was in the midst of greater diversity that both the black and white students said they felt freer individually.

> Being in Crossing Borders this term has given me a lot of courage just to say what's on my mind, to just be—freer, you know, especially being in a classroom where there's another black student. Last term, in...seventy-five percent of my classes I was the only person of color. You know, where—I had to *think*, and think twice about everything that I was planning to say and what I meant by it—making sure that my statement couldn't be, you know, misinterpreted as, "Okay, this is *how all black Americans* think, this is how *all black females* who live in the South Bronx, this is what they think." Whether that's the way people actually were thinking, or whether it was just my imagination, you know, I didn't have to feel that—that much anymore, because there's someone...other than myself, to say, "Well I'm black, and I'm a female, and I don't agree with you," you know? And—and to have students see that, and just to have that comfort of knowing that I can represent *myself* more than I have to represent, you know, "my people," whatever that means...Being in Crossing Borders has done that for me. And the Crossing Borders students—the other students, they've done that for me (Val, an African-American student from Dickinson).

Jacquie, a white Dickinson student from Montana, suggested that initially it was the seeming homogeneity of Dickinson that caught her off-guard:

> I've actually been able to more firmly establish my identity with Crossing Borders than before. It was by coming to Dickinson that I...felt off balance and as if I didn't know who I was. And it was Crossing Borders that put it all together and say that, "It's okay to be whoever you are." It's so diverse, it's ok to be whoever you are.

Serena, an African-American woman from Xavier, reflected that:

> I used to have a certain lingo with my black friends, and one with my white friends. Like some of my black friends were in your face, "Why are you talking to white people?" Now I'm not tripping—now I don't care what anyone thinks about who I'm walking with—it's all the same now—more universal. I mean, we are applying what we've been learning (through Crossing Borders) to our lives right now (Serena from Xavier).

Beyond Personal Transformation

Perhaps paradoxically, the attention paid to personal feelings and group processes as we discussed many volatile issues, enabled the students to look both at and then beyond the personal element and examine the cultural values, social forces, structural conditions, and institutional practices that have perpetuated racism, classism, and sexism. Articles from Anderson & Hill-Collins' (2002) reader, *Race, Class, and Gender* were helpful here in stimulating and guiding our conversations.

As the students experienced and reflected upon the impact of racism, classism, and sexism, they began to understand more fully the context of their own colleges within the history of U.S. higher education. Rather than reinforcing the old polemic of the superior–inferior hierarchy of PWIs and HBCUs, the students were able to articulate the very historical, social, and economic structures that helped shape these institutions and their place in American society. For example, Marc was able not only to compare and contrast these three institutions, but also to recognize and critique the unique history of Xavier as compared with Tulane and Loyola, all of which are located in New Orleans.

> Loyola is probably an even better comparison because they're a smaller school and Catholic. So what's the problem? You know? Why aren't *our* facilities as nice as theirs? It's so obvious. Like their campus is so much nicer; the facilities that they have and the books that they have, the resources, are that much more...They have basically just everything available to 'em that we don't, you know? It's just, I don't know. It's obvious, it's frustrating...it hurts, you know? Because...you oughta have pride in whatever you do, wherever you go, and wherever you're from.

> It hurts so much because they don't *realize* the historical context in which these universities were formed? It's just like they're making a generalization and they don't understand what is really goin' on, the dynamics behind the way these institutions work, and the way they were founded. Xavier has a strong reputation, *but*, at the same time, you know, it has its drawbacks. And it's never gonna be what Loyola or Tulane is if things keep goin' the way they are. If you have instructors who are teachin' four classes, as opposed to teachin' two or three...Iit's a big difference, in the way they can

> they can teach you, what they can teach you, how much time they can spend with you...(Marc, African-American male at Xavier)

Students' abilities to examine and critique these structures and inequities reveal the ways in which this experience is not just about individual growth and group dynamics—about personal transformation and relationship-building—all of which are central and very important. Crossing Borders is also about larger social issues and a commitment to creating a more just, compassionate, democratic society and world. It recognizes that democracy is strengthened not by homogeneity of thought and culture but through the negotiation of heterogeneity and civil discourse. As Gurin et al. (1999) contended, students educated in diverse institutions will be more motivated and better able to participate in an increasingly heterogeneous and complex society. Guarasci and Cornwell (1997) concurred, arguing in *A democratic education in an age of difference* that "community and democratic citizenship are strengthened when undergraduates understand and experience social connections with those outside of their often

> parochial 'autobiographies,' and when they experience the way their lives are necessarily shaped by others" (p. xiii). In the case of Crossing Borders, students not only have been given the power to see and understand how their life choices and chances are shaped by and affect larger social issues, they have also had the opportunity to hone some of the skills needed to challenge and transform the very institutions in which they participate.

Conclusion

What has been most empowering within the Crossing Borders program has been the engagement in sustained dialogues and in research that genuinely drew upon the resources of all of us: students, teachers, and administrators alike. We have been led out of our traditional roles as educators and students and into an exploration of current issues and social understandings that are a part of the history we were discovering, documenting, and transforming.

As we moved through the various semesters, it became increasingly clear that, "What needs to be denounced here to restore authenticity is much less slavery than the racist present within which representations of slavery are produced. Authenticity implies a relation with what is known that duplicates the two sides of historicity: it engages us as actors and as narrators....(Trouillot, 1995, pp. 150–151); *and* we would add, as people who are able to examine a multiplicity of perspectives and trust the validity of others' experiences that may be quite different from our own. What has made this program so successful is the ability of students to really listen to one another, "to hear one another into speech" (Morton, 1985, p. 29), and to care enough to carry on the conversation even when it becomes difficult.

Clearly, the readings were an important part of this, not only in terms of academic content but also in terms of stimulating intellectual and emotional processes. The students recognized that they had foremothers and forefathers who had helped forge the way before them. One particularly resonant passage for the class came from Lorde's (1984) *Sister Outsider*, where she asks if she would have been any more unafraid had she not spoken:

> Your silence will not protect you. I am not only a casualty, I am also a warrior. And of course I am afraid, because the transformation of silence into language and action is an

> act of self-revelation....For it is not difference which immobilizes us but silence. And there are so many silences to be broken (excerpted from Lorde, 1984, pp. 40–44).

In the course of the semester, students also came back to the words of Cherríe Moraga:

> We...need each other. Because my/your solitary, self-asserting *go-for-the-throat-of-fear* power is not enough. The real power, as you and I well know, is collective. I can't afford to be afraid of you, nor you of me. If it takes head-on collisions, let's do it: this polite timidity is killing us (Moraga, 1992, p. 27).

Trouillot (1995) has argued that "any historical narrative is a particular bundle of silences, the result of a unique process, and the operation required to deconstruct these silences will vary accordingly (p. 27). This holds true as well for personal and group narratives. In fact, this particular group of students had a remarkable and respectful way of "calling each other out"—holding one another accountable, and moving beyond defensiveness and towards greater mutual understanding and collective action. As Jesse, a white male student from Dickinson reflected:

> I feel like I've grown a lot. I went into this thinking: they're throwing a whole bunch of white kids in with a whole bunch of black kids to see what would happen but it's been much more than that and much more of an individual thing. I feel more confident with myself and with people I don't know. I'm much more likely to reach out to others and be open. It's eerie how well this process worked—and it is a process—it's still going on.

These students not only came to the table; they sat and ate with one another and drank deeply—and we are all the more strong and hopeful because of it. Such growth and meaningful exchange doesn't just happen on its own. It requires thoughtful, deliberate planning—a space within which meaningful and sustained dialogue can take place—but it is well worth the effort. Such work is not just coincidental or experimental. It's carefully cultivated. It is what you hope for, and you are grateful when it happens. In fact, our survival as a country and world are dependent upon creating and nurturing such spaces and relationships.

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