Vol. 10, no. 1 (Spring 2011)

This issue sponsored by
Children Creating Bridges, Inc.

Fourth Transcultural Thematic Issue

"Transcultural Impacts and Perspectives on the Future"

perspectives from across the globe

A View from the "Front Lines"

Bridging Counterpoint-Based Identity

Daniel Orr

When I was in third grade we had a day called ethnic day. It was a way the (adults) thought would be a good way for us to identify with our cultures. I remember going the African class room and the teacher telling me, "Daniel, you are not African." So I left and went to the Latin class room. Again the teacher telling me "Daniel, you are not Spanish." This happened a few more times before I ended up sitting in the hall way by myself. I hope you noticed I said the teachers and not my classmates. This was confusing to me because here I am with curly brown hair, blue eyes and tan skin. I had no idea where I belonged. When I asked my parents what I was they would tell me "you are Daniel and that's all that matters." And as I stated before, my friends were my friends. They weren't Spanish, African, Asian, or Caucasian. They were Ed, Steve, Tim, and Kevin. That day scarred me for life. The adults put in my mind that I had to be one or the other; I couldn't just be "Daniel" as my parents taught me.

I was an athlete my whole life and it was a natural ability that I had. Whatever sport I tried, I always came out on top. From this I gained from the adults the notoriety of being a star in my town. The

coaches from whatever sport always used me to show the other kids how it was done. This all so stuck with me, but in a different way. As I reached high school, I still did not know where I fit. I became friends with anyone and everyone, but this to caused yet a different problem. Because I was skateboarder, I hung out with punk rockers and the jocks would ask me why. It seemed as if I chose to hang out with anyone other then athletes, I would not be accepted. In fact as I look back, I don't think I would have had friends if not for my athletic ability. When it came to girls, I thought I was the ugly duckling. I remember thinking, "Girls do not like me because I looked so different." So I developed a sense of humor with thoughts that this would allow me to blend in a little more.

There are a lot of questions and a lot of unanswered questions for many of our youth today. I have come across a few "self help" books on the subject. But what does that author know about what a particular child is going through? One good thing for this bi-racial writer is that I grew up in a relatively small and uneventful town. The kids I started kindergarten with are mostly the kids I graduated with. When we are children we don't notice the differences as much. We tend to focus on the "friendship" aspect of life as opposed to "which" walk of life they come from. I had a good upbringing. Not rich, yet not poor, not abused, but well disciplined. I wouldn't say I was a stellar student, but by far not the worst.

As I got older, I started noticing people. All people. I noticed their mannerisms, their walks, their talks, the slang, and the attitudes, good and bad. It seemed as if I had become a sponge of sorts. I tried to find similarities between me and them. All of them at one time on occasion. It got overwhelming to think that in all my searches, I wasn't coming across anyone like me. Sure some were similar, but not the same in one way or another. Why did I search? Who knows, maybe because I felt I needed a place to be. Maybe I felt I needed someone to emulate. I played the game for most of my life and decided after college it was time for yet another change.

The problem is this — there's no definitive way to categorize a white American experience or a black American experience. We can't say, "You're black because you do _____." Nor can we say, "You must be white because you grew up _____." Whenever we might try to, there will always be an exception — either a person of that race who hasn't had that experience, or a person of another race who has had that experience — thus nullifying the idea altogether. We can't define Black as the ghetto and White as the suburbs, as some traditionally would; there are Black people in the suburbs and White people in the ghettos. When we classify and categorize, the job of separating and then reducing or elevating particular groups within a society is made easier, the dominant group can move the pieces around the board, do what they like, and remain in charge.

We have a skewed way of socially defining "White" and "Black" behaviors that are based on nothing more than outdated, inaccurate stereotypes — many of which are based in the concept of racial supremacy. For example, when we use phrases like, "He or she sounds White (or Black)," what are we really saying? Obviously we're referring to their dialect, word choice, and sentence structure. But if we say that someone "sounds White" or "sounds Black," our statement has connotations – for example, that one race sounds articulate and well spoken whereas the other may be using slang terminology and perhaps shortened and choppy sentence structure.

And all this means what? It means that, no matter how hard we try, we cannot categorize or classify, with an degree of effectiveness, the varying races and cultures in America. With increasing numbers of biracial children and interracial marriages, the lines between Black and White in America gradually become a little less clear.

As for my personal experience growing up bi-racial, I am continually reminded that everyone is unique in his/her own little way.

Daniel Orr has a Bachelors Degree in Landscape Architecture and a Associates degree in Business Management, both from the University of Southern California. In addition, he is a partner in Rendorseg

Motors, a car brokering business. A self-confessed video game junkie, Daniel owns two gaming systems. Daniel continues to seek numerous racing opportunities while establishing a writing career, writing a book of poems about "Life". Also appearing in the hit HBO show Entourage season 6 episode 3, Daniel looks forward to advancing his career in the American LeMans Series and the Porsche Mobil 1 Supercup in 2011. He can be contacted at info@danielorrracing.com.

POINTS FOR THE CLASSROOM *(send comments to forum@futuretakes.org or post on FUTUREtakes blog):*

o *The terms "African-American" and "Hispanic" connote region-based (continent-based) identity and association. In contrast, for Americans of European ancestry, the descriptors are usually more country-specific – e.g., "Italian-American," "Irish-American," "German-American" – and in this, all European nations do not fare equally! This contrast can be expressed as "fusion" vs. "fission" respectively. What are possible reasons for this dichotomy, and what are possible future scenarios for it?*

o *Might multi-ethnicity itself be a new source of identity – especially in this era of rapid change that motivates some people to cling to their "tribe" (ethnic group) for a sense of identity and stability? More generally, which other sources of identity might predominate in 2029?*

o *What are possible future scenarios for "us-them" dichotomization (counterpoint-based identity) that underlies ethnic, religious, and political strife today, and throughout history – and with what implications in the next decade?*