

Executive Editors' Comments

And We Can Be Saved: The Power of Multicultural Education

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One major challenge facing today's multicultural world is how we can best understand each other to create a world of harmony that is devoid of terror attacks and wars. In wars, people are terrorized, traumatized, displaced, disenfranchised, deformed, disabled, injured, and killed. In addition, wars are very expensive—no war has ever been cost-effective. Money and resources spent in them could be used to educate our children and youth and further advance our society or economy. It has become increasingly clear that a socio-economic recession, natural disaster, or political turmoil in one community or region of our country or world could have far-reaching consequences on other communities, other parts of our nation, and other parts of our world. For instance, people are still feeling the negative impact of the hurricane, Katrina on New Orleans and other parts of Louisiana and Mississippi. A logical extension is that educational problems confronting culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students (e.g., African Americans students affect our socio-economic and political fabrics as a nation). Put another way, what happens to African American students in today's school programs affect their future and the future of our nation (Obiakor, 2001, 2008a, 2008b).

We cannot afford to be close-minded or in disharmony. No doubt, the more we understand each other, the more we value each other; the more we value each other, the more we listen to each other; the more we listen to each other, the more we hear each other; the more we hear each other, the more we learn from each other; the more we learn from each other, the more we educate each other; the more we educate each other, the more we change each other; and the more we change each other, the more we can advance our society. *This is the very essence of multicultural education!* It is no surprise that the United States of America, the greatest country and democracy in the world, just elected Senator Barack Obama, an African American (with a Kenyan father and White mother) as its President. President-elect Obama did not win the election because of African American voters alone. He won the election with supports from Whites, Latinos, Asian Americans, Native Americans, and African Americans. This historic election seems to prove that multicultural education works. In our opinion, it is a powerful tool that can save our students, families, schools, communities, nation, and world.

In his book, *And We Are Not Saved* (our motivation for the title of this commentary), Bell (1985) was frustrated about the sluggish nature of "racial justice"—he felt that racial justice was very elusive to African Americans. A few years later, he became even more frustrated in his book, *Faces at the Bottom of the Well: The Permanence of Racism* (Bell, 1992) because he got tired of the racist games played by certain members of the White majority. While we advocate for measurable changes in our schools and society, we are hesitant to believe that racism is absolutely permanent. The good news is that people can grow, learn, teach, and lead! In addition, we know that we can be saved through multicultural education. For instance, for education to be powerful to African Americans, it must be culturally relevant and sensitive. As a result, general and special educators must maximize the learning potential of these students while recognizing the dangers of misidentification, misassessment, mislabeling/miscategorization, misplacement, and misinstruction in educational programming. We

cannot succeed by floundering in mediocrity. The goal must be to advance multiculturalism in all educational/pedagogical activities. To a large measure, educators and service providers must develop the pedagogical power to make a difference in the lives of CLD learners (in this case, African Americans, the focus of the Special Issue).

In this Special Issue of *Multicultural Learning and Teaching (MLT)*, Beachum and Lewis focus their attention on educational quagmires of African American students in this era of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. To achieve their goal, they invited scholars and educators to join them in this venture. Lewis, Hancock, James, and Larke discuss the progress or lack of progress of African Americans since the passing of the NCLB legislation; Siwatu explains preservice teachers' self-efficacy and beliefs in an era of accountability; Ockerman and Moore present a qualitative analysis of attitudes and perceptions of low-income urban high school students related to counseling needs; Bowman-Perrott and Lewis examine reading and discipline data of African American elementary and secondary students; Beachum and McCray describe what educational leaders can do to help urban schools; and Cooper and Peebles discuss prospective principals' openness to organizational change and the education of African American students.

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