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Equality in Writing ~ by Hunter Hines

*For years the United States has fought and strived to bring down racial barriers to provide equal rights for people in this country. Although the barriers of race and equality have been broken down for the most part in everyday life, the writing community has not fully grasped the concept. By looking at works of authors both men and women, black, hispanic, any other racial minority, or white, one can see that the conflict still today has an undermining effect on how we decide to analyze or 'judge' their work. In this paper we will be looking at examples from Jacqueline Jones Royster's *When the First Voice You Hear Is Not Your Own*, Cornel West's book *Race Matters*, and as well as other textual examples. It is my goal in this paper to confirm that the equality in the writing community has not fully been rooted in the discipline and that race does have an effect on how we perceive writing.*

Hasn't racial equality been gained in the United States? Some people may argue that it essentially has. Well, they're right, by law the United States has given equal rights to all citizens no matter what color their skin is. In fact just recently, some states that have had encounters with racial discrimination in the past are wanting to get the "Voting Rights Act" appealed! According to the New York Times, Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr. when asked about the situation simply stated "Our country has changed." (Roberts Jr.). I think that by taking this step they are trying to proclaim that hey, racial discrimination is old news, we don't need those laws anymore. Haven't we proved ourselves worthy? I don't want this paper to turn into a political debate, but how can we, as nation say we are truly expressing equality when really racial tension still exists in areas like English composition? This side of the argument has a probable argument, on the surface, however the United States as a whole does a great job of putting on the mask of "Land of the FREE and home of the brave." I'm not saying the United States isn't a free country, but if we look beyond the 'cover', the sayings, and the laws, one can see that racial discrimination does indeed still exist, more specifically in the English community. But why is this? If all races are "equal" then why aren't their inputs and voices just as important as the rest?

Jacqueline Royster is today the Dean of Georgia Tech's Ivan Allen College of Liberal Arts, as well as a Professor of English in the school of Literature, Communication, and Culture. Royster, in her paper describes particular events that stand out to me as a

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great example of how a voice that should be heard like any other, isn't. She describes the instance of her "authentic voice." Why authentic? Why isn't it like any other? Royster describes she feels like the reason why this is, is "home training." She says "the concept of 'home training' underscores the reality that point of view matters and that we must be trained to respect points of view other than our own." (32). The way we are 'brought up,' the things we are taught when we are growing up have a direct reflection on how we see other people. She describes that what some people grow up learning may not be how it is in the real world at all. (32). When I think of what she is saying the old saying "don't judge a book by its cover" comes to mind. Race should not be something that hinders us from hearing what someone has to say, it shouldn't be a speed bump in the credibility of their work. Royster states in her paper a saying that came to her is 'do unto others as you would have them do unto you.' The 'Golden Rule' as it has come to be known. But why has the 'golden rule' become more of the 'bronze rule' in a sense?

The tarnishing of the "golden rule" and the downgrade to the "bronze rule" is a good example of the inequality we associate among the races in different social classes. Personally, I believe that that social class can be directly connected to the type of education someone receives. According to the American Psychological Association (www.apa.org) this is exactly right. They state the following educational facts: "1.) African Americans and Latinos are more likely attend high-poverty schools than Asian Americans and Caucasians. And 2.) [Recently] the high school dropout rate of Latinos was highest, followed by those of African Americans and American Indians/Alaska Natives." (APA). Typically, even without knowing someone, if they're a different race we have pre-formed emotions of how we will perceive and accept them. This is essentially just "judging a book by its cover." I believe that this is a reason in which races other than 'white' are not receiving equality. The way in which race is presented, "home trains" us from day one to view people by how they look and not what they possess. It is reasons like this that race still has an effect on how we perceive their voice, credibility, and overall equality. You see, I think that the "golden rule" is something that has yet to be achieved, as of now it is simply something that we strive for. When the golden rule is fully put into action only then will we see that race, wealth, social class, etc... do not matter when analyzing voice and opinion.

By looking at just about any work cited page, it is easy to see that 'credibility' is not easily given to races other than white. Here is what I mean by this, a small experiment if you wish. Take a modern English textbook, analyze the table of contents and the

authors it possesses. One will probably find that for the most part there is quite a racially diverse line-up of writers. Awesome! Equality right? Now turn to one of those authors and their work, preferably a white one, look at the work-cited page. How many foreign sounding names, women, and races other than 'white' do you find? See, credibility is not easily given; because of the racial boundaries that still exist it is hard for writers to have a credible paper with insight from people who may be African American or Latino. But why is it like this? Why is it so tough to give credit to someone who by law is just as equal as everyone else? According to H. Richard Milner IV the author of his article, *Analyzing Poverty, Learning, and Teaching Through a Critical Race Theory Lens*, he believes "the race problem" as "... when race is used but not understood and [can] cause people to stereotype populations of students and their families based on their membership in particular groups." (Milner). This problem can be tied back to the 'social class' issue and the fact that stereotypes happen every day and are a constant handicap in the educational world.

Cornel West is an American philosopher, academic, activist, author, intellectual, and member of the Democratic Socialists of America, and is recognized as the first African American man to ever receive a Ph.D. at Princeton in Philosophy. In his book, *Race Matters*, he has numerous claims about the racial tension in America and his feeling on the issue. West in my opinion states a claim that really makes me put my thinking cap on, he exclaims, "without the presence of black people in America, European-Americans would not be "white"—they would be Irish, Italians, Poles, Welsh, and other engaged in class, ethnic, and gender struggles over resources and identity. (107-108). This doesn't apply to only blacks, however. I feel as if he is saying that overtime the stereotypes and constant degrading of races based on skin color has carried through the undertones over time and still haunts us today. Since the beginning of the United States we have seen people with skin complexities of 'not-white' as inferior. Take slaves for example, to this day there is still a haunting image of how poorly African Americans were treated and used as labor tools, the same goes for the Chinese. Throughout the 1860's The Chinese were paid dirt cheap to build our railroad for us, and that's about how we viewed their lives; dirt cheap. Circumstances like these are contributors as to why today we still have pre-formed opinions on people and where they come from. However it is not too late to change, West expresses his thoughts by saying "none of us alone can save the nation or world. But each of us can make a positive difference if we commit ourselves to do so." (109). By keeping this attitude each day can be a step in the right direction of having the true meaning of "equality" alive and well.

In conclusion, it is clear that racial boundaries have not been fully broken in the writing community. As a country we have fought for the equal opportunity for all races, and for the most part we have succeeded. Some may argue that the racial boundaries have been broken. And they have a point, on topics like voting rights and equality in everyday life. But by digging deeper and looking below the surface, one can begin to see just how "equal" we view other races. Take a look at a work cited page on just about any essay, see how many authors are women, see how many are 'not white,' then maybe you can see that although viewed as equal through law, their works, ideas, and voice are not typically heard as equal. But why is this? Could it be the "class" we associate races with, or could it be as simple as the "home-training" Royster describes in her essay? Summing up, equality in accordance to race is not completely throughout in the English discourse. Only then will we see all races have an "equal" voice, and stand in the writing community. I challenge you, next time you think you hear an "authentic" voice, to not think of it as authentic but rather a voice like any other; a voice that is equal.

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