

## P R E F A C E

This book is a unique kind of collaboration. We come together as three scholars, with different disciplinary backgrounds and perspectives, to explore in new ways an issue of urgent importance and national debate: the experience and achievement of African-American students in schools.

We have written our essays separately. Each is the work of a single author, with a single voice. But we present our work together because we believe that we share key perspectives and purposes. We present our work together because we believe that juxtaposing our pieces one against the other will open up a space in the national conversation on this issue that is new and needed.

We share a general view that African-American students face challenges unique to them as students in American schools at all levels by virtue of their social identity as African Americans and of the way that identity can be a source of devaluation in contemporary American society. We believe, as we all argue, that the contemporary conversation about African-American achievement ignores these social facts in ways that seriously distort the debate. And we all believe and argue that a proper understanding of the forces acting on African-American students points to a variety of educational practices that we know can mitigate these obstacles and promote excellent achievement.

Theresa identifies dilemmas of achievement facing African-American students as members of a group subject to an ideology of intellectual and cultural inferiority, and traces, historically and thematically, an indigenous African-American philosophy of achievement capable of addressing those dilemmas of achievement. Claude brings the perspective of empirical psychology to the question of achievement, identifying a phenomenon of stereotype threat that in a

general way can be shown to affect the achievement of people who are members of groups subject to stereotyped appraisals of their abilities; he, too, suggests that positive remedies follow from a proper understanding of this phenomenon. And Asa, after arguing against explanations that ignore the lived reality of ethnic identity in the United States, show us in detail teachers and programs who do not fail to produce excellence in academic achievement, regardless of the background of the students.

We do not agree on all matters, and we speak for ourselves. But we believe that readers who read our work together will see the connections between the pieces and hope that our collective work encourages both a new kind of national conversation and new research from a variety of potentially productive directions—historical, psychological, and educational. Our children deserve both.