



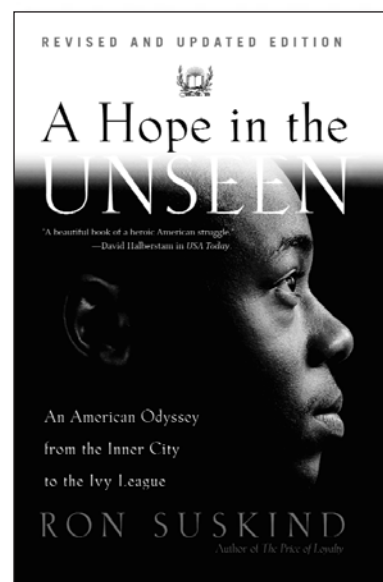
# A Hope in the Unseen

## An American Odyssey from the Inner City to the Ivy League

by Ron Suskind

Broadway | Trade Paperback  
978-0-7679-0126-0 | 400 pages | \$15.95

Reading Level: 9th Grade



“Ron Suskind takes us on an unforgettable, peculiarly American journey—a journey which exposes the fault lines of race and class, and yet gives one reason for hope. This is a tale of fierce power—and one which stayed with me long after finishing the book.”

—Alex Kotlowitz, author of *There Are No Children Here* and *The Other Side of the River*

“Suskind uses his reporter skills brilliantly, portraying Cedric’s outer and inner life and making an eloquent though unstated plea for affirmative action. Essential reading that provides some small hope for our social ills.”

—*Library Journal* (starred review)

“The drama of the story is in the mediations Cedric learns to make between the inherited and the chosen, yet ‘unseen’ parts of his life.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*

### • introduction •

Ron Suskind’s *A Hope in the Unseen* tells the story of Cedric Jennings’ last two years at Frank W. Ballou Senior High School in Washington, DC, and of his first year at Brown University. Ballou High School has a history of poor academic performance, poverty, and at-risk teens. When Cedric was a student there, just 80 of more than 1,350 students maintained a B average or better. In 2004/2005, 95% of students failed the state reading test, and 85% failed the state math test. Yet Cedric achieved acceptance into a prestigious summer program at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) after his junior year and was later accepted at Brown University.

Though written in 1995, *A Hope in the Unseen* is still relevant today in many ways. Cedric Jennings is African American; Ron Suskind, the author, is white. When a white man tells a black man’s story, the white man is in charge of that story; a racial power play of this kind evokes an uncomfortable recognition of the historical and contemporary ways in which whites have silenced and controlled Blacks in America.

Cedric’s experiences at Ballou and Brown demonstrate racial issues currently under debate: white privilege, affirmative action, connections between race and poverty, distribution of education funding, college-admission policies. Cedric’s experiences outside of school introduce issues pivotal in the development of African-American communities: the scarcity of male role models, the role of religion, the effort to define a “black” identity that allows for success in a “white” world, and society’s expectations that poor African-American men will fail. Much of Cedric’s journey, however, is a human journey to which everyone can relate: we have all experienced feeling out of place, fearing failure, recognizing personal limitations, struggling with faith, growing apart from parents, learning to accept those different from us, developing self discipline, balancing personal ambition with personal humility, and being misjudged. Indeed, the transition from high school to college, from poverty to economic stability, and from adolescence to adulthood is today fraught with the same dangers and joys that it was for Cedric.

## • cedric jennings

Cedric Jennings earned a degree from Brown University with a major in education and a minor in applied math. After graduation, he worked for a few years in the technology industry. In 2001, Cedric was accepted into Harvard's Graduate School of Education. He was awarded a Master's Degree in Education from Harvard in 2002, and in 2003 he earned a Master's Degree in Social Work from the University of Michigan. Cedric currently works for a nonprofit agency that focuses on adoptions. He has returned to the Washington, DC area.

### Website References:

- [http://www.browndailyherald.com/home/index.cfm?event=displayArticlePrinterFriendly&uStory\\_id=2cc16061-3ab1-4b7d-ad37-f9052f74dc44](http://www.browndailyherald.com/home/index.cfm?event=displayArticlePrinterFriendly&uStory_id=2cc16061-3ab1-4b7d-ad37-f9052f74dc44) - A print-friendly version of a 2006 update with Cedric Jennings.
- <http://explorefaith.org/faithStories/cedric.html> - A transcription of a 2006 interview with Cedric Jennings about his faith and its role in his success.
- [http://www.ronsuskind.com/newsite/hopeunseen/archives/cat\\_cedric\\_jennings.html](http://www.ronsuskind.com/newsite/hopeunseen/archives/cat_cedric_jennings.html) - An update from January of 2004 that details what happened to Cedric Jennings after the time period covered by *A Hope in the Unseen*. This site is housed on Ron Suskind's website.
- <http://www.randomhouse.com/boldtype/0798/suskind/interview.html> - A transcription of an interview with Ron Suskind and Cedric Jennings before the book was published.

## • discussing race in the classroom: *racism, poverty, voice*

### I. Racism

The picture *A Hope in the Unseen* provides of opportunity in America is one mediated by race and class. Most people enter a discussion of racism with some form of denial: We may deny that racism exists, we may deny that we have participated in racism of any sort, or we may deny that racism can be stopped or racists changed. Tolerance.org outlines one method for breaking through such denial (*see Resources*). Another is to allow students to expand the idea of racism to include all kinds of unspoken social preferences. Social preferences may be embraced by a local community and may seem to be the norm instead of a bias. Consider, for example, preferences based on geographical region, religion, body type, style of dress, musical interests, club affiliations, or political party. Generally, such preferences are not as virulent as racism, but recognizing such biases allows students to recognize that we all make subconscious choices based on unspoken (and often unfounded) social mores.

*A Hope in the Unseen* exposes the complexities of racism in America. The connections between historical racism, institutional racism, and poverty are important for students to explore. For example, how did the historical and institutional practice of underfunding predominantly African-American schools create an environment of failure at Ballou? How did the historical and institutional practice of denying the African-American voice inhibit the ability of parents to speak up and advocate for change at Ballou? Conversely, how were the personal choices made by Barbara Jennings responsible for the environment in which she raised Cedric? For example, how would her wage-earning capabilities have been changed if she had not become pregnant as a teenager? Which decisions did Barbara truly have the power to change, and which were unduly influenced by societal notions of race, class, and gender?

Effective discussions of race should include examination of the following ideas, many of which can be applied to races and ethnicities other than Caucasian and African American.

**Historical Racism** – Historical racism stems from the American practice of chattel slavery and the earlier, imperialist belief held by the majority of people in the West that those with black skin were biologically predestined to be inferior.

**Institutional Racism** – Institutional racism has been reflected in the policy and practice of institutions such as the judicial system, the education system, corporate America, and organized religion. These policies and practices may enhance the power and access of whites while denying or diminishing the power and access of nonwhites. For example, being required to pass a test before being allowed to vote privileged those with an education, something most freedmen in post-Reconstruction America lacked. Currently, consider how an all-white faculty for a multi-ethnic student body models that only whites can be successful in academia.

**Biology of Race** – Since the early 1900s, biological information has existed that demonstrated there was no biological basis to the racial designations recognized by humanity. Though humans vary in physical traits such as skin color, eye color, and hair type, there is no identifiable piece of DNA that is significantly more common to one race than to another. For more information, see <http://www.cartage.org.lb/en/themes/sciences/LifeScience/HumanRaces/BiologyRace/BiologyRace.htm>

**Social Construction** – Though the biological basis for race has been disproved, no one denies that races and racial identities do exist. Races, then, are constructed socially. We, as members of society, define who is of which race and what it means to be a member of a particular race. For example, there was a time in America when people of Irish descent or Jewish descent were not considered white; now they are defined as part of the white or Caucasian race.

**Affirmative Action** – The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (SEP) offers a detailed and readable account of the intricacies of affirmative action (see <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/affirmative-action/>). Affirmative action is defined by the SEP as “positive steps taken to increase the representation of women and minorities in areas of employment, education, and business from which they have been historically excluded. When those steps involve *preferential* selection—selection on the basis of race, gender, or ethnicity—affirmative action generates intense controversy.”

Affirmative action was challenged in two recent time periods: the 1970s and the 1990s. The challenge of the 1990s differed from that of the 1970s in its focus on college admissions and its lack of interest in gender equality. As women currently comprise 57% of those admitted to college, they no longer require affirmative action. The 1990s challenge, then, focused on race and ethnicity in college admissions and resulted in the 2003 Supreme Court ruling upholding certain types of affirmative action.

Debates over affirmative action continue around the ideas of personal merit, social class, and societal gain. Some would argue that the social gain of increased ethnic/racial representation in certain classrooms, professions, or vocations justifies the selection of an economically and socially privileged African American over an economically and socially challenged white. Others would disagree and would argue that affirmative action should compensate for lack of privilege due to any cause, not just that due to race. Discussions of affirmative action, then, are tied to discussions of **white privilege**.

**White Privilege** – White people in the United States receive benefits simply because they are white. These privileges include the ability to enter an exclusive store and not be followed by a security guard; a sense that one will be treated fairly by the police; the power of defining oneself as the norm and of defining those who are different as “other”; and the recognition of role models in the presidency, in the papacy, and on Wall Street who cannot be described as “tokens.” White privilege is often invisible, and its beneficiaries are often unaware of any privileged status.

## • discussing race in the classroom (continued)

### II. Poverty

Poverty was as decisive a factor in Cedric's life as race was. Current figures on poverty in the United States are listed below. Applying these figures to costs today will give students an idea of how difficult it was to live on Cedric and Barbara's income.

#### Free Lunch Program

A student qualifies for the Free Lunch Program if his or her family income is 130% or less of the poverty level figures on the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Poverty Level tables.

#### Reduced Lunch Program

A student qualifies for reduced lunch if family income is 131% to 185% of the poverty level figures on the HHS Poverty Level tables.

#### 2006 Annual Low-Income Levels

Size of Family Unit (number of members)	Family Income (in the 48 Contiguous States, DC, and Outlying Jurisdictions)
1	\$14,355
2	\$19,245
3	\$24,135
4	\$29,025
5	\$33,915
6	\$38,805
7	\$43,695
8	\$48,585

The figures shown in the Family Income column represent amounts equal to 150% of the family-income levels established by the U.S. Census Bureau for determining poverty status. The poverty guidelines were published by HHS in the *Federal Register* (Vol. 70, No. 33, February 18, 2005, pp. 8373–8375). The declaration-of-income form matches the figures on the chart.

Source:

<http://www.k12.wa.us/AdvancedPlacement/pubdocs/2006IBfeereductionletter.doc>

(Note: For family units with more than eight members, add \$4,890 for each additional family member.)

### Poverty in the United States

Source: <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/poverty.html>

### III. Voice

*A Hope in the Unseen* should also raise questions of authenticity and voice. Much historical work is now being done to examine the power inherent in being the storyteller versus being the story's subject. Discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of autobiography, biography, memoir, and history come naturally from *A Hope in the Unseen*.

Consider these questions concerning the voice and authenticity of *A Hope in the Unseen*. How would Cedric's story be different if he had told it himself? Can a white, middle-aged man accurately and fairly tell the story of an African-American teenager? Can anyone tell an accurate and fair story of himself? Of what merit is biography or autobiography? How does a film documentary—at one time considered more objective than text—reflect the intent of the director? How can our firsthand observations of someone in the room with us be compromised? (Consider Cedric's observations of Mr. Fleming.)

## • objections to *A Hope in the Unseen*

At both Ballou and Brown, it is common for students to engage in high-risk behaviors. Suskind and Jennings attempt to present these academic environments as realistically as possible. As a consequence, when reading and discussing the book in the setting of a high school classroom, some teachers and/or students may find certain scenes in the book to be objectionable. Note, however, that none of these scenes have been included merely for shock value. Instead, the scenes as written represent an effort by the authors to convey the reality of Cedric's story in the most accurate way. These potentially objectionable scenes are found in the book as follows:

- Page 11: Explicit quote from crack dealer
- Page 18: Girl's cover for cheating from Cedric includes explicit sexual reference
- Page 126: Objectionable language
- Page 200: Discussion of sexual acts
- Pages 210, 225, 305, 350, 351: Objectionable language

## • vocabulary

**Gamecock** (p.1) – A gamecock is a rooster trained for cock fighting. In cock fighting, roosters fight until one rooster is dead or physically unable to fight any longer. Gamecocks are bred to increase their aggressiveness and stamina; they are sometimes given drugs to increase their stamina. Though all roosters possess an inherent aggression toward other males, they have to be trained to fight as they do. It is illegal in Washington, DC to produce or observe a cockfight.

**Frank W. Ballou High School** (p.1) – Ballou High School enrolled 964 students in 2005/2006, 99% of them African American. In that school year, 65% of the students qualified for free lunch; 5% qualified for reduced lunch. Of the families represented, 24% own the home in which they live. Although the test scores for Ballou High were still very low in 2004/2005, in 2004 Ballou's marching band placed second in a national competition, and in 2005 a first-of-its-kind parent-training center was opened at Ballou High. This center is a collaborative effort of the Strong Families program of the DC Department of Human Services (DHS); of Ballou Senior High School; and of the Temple of Praise Church, which is located in Southeast DC.

**Mayor Marion Barry** (p.1) – Born March 6, 1936, Mayor Marion Barry, a Democrat, served as mayor of Washington, DC, from 1979 to 1991. Mayor Barry was forced to leave office during his third term as a result of his arrest and conviction on drug charges. He was later elected to the Council of the District of Columbia and ultimately returned to the mayor's office to serve a fourth term from 1995 to 1999. Currently, Barry represents Ward Eight on the Council of the District of Columbia. His legal troubles have continued. He was convicted of a misdemeanor for failing to pay federal and local taxes and is currently serving three years' probation; he continues to receive drug counseling after testing positive for cocaine and marijuana in October 2005. On page 205, Cedric defends Mayor Barry as being "completely framed by white cops."

**Kufi** (p. 1) – A small, round cap traditionally worn to show pride in one's African heritage, a *kufi* may be made out of *kente* cloth (a fabric made of interwoven cloth strips). The kufi became a popular clothing item in the late 1980s and early 1990s and is associated with hip-hop culture.

**Call and response** (p. 6) – Call and response is an ancient interaction between speaker and listener in which the speaker verbally or physically "calls" and the listener verbally or physically "responds." A tradition brought by slaves from West Africa to the U.S., call and response continues today in religious services, in public gatherings, in children's rhymes, and in multiple forms of African-American music.

## • vocabulary (continued)

**Pentecostalism** (p. 36) – A form of Protestant Christianity, Pentecostalism is distinguished by its belief in and practice of Spirit Baptism and charismata (i.e., the gifts of the Holy Spirit, which are gifts listed throughout the New Testament and which include teaching, preaching, healing, wisdom, speaking in tongues, interpreting tongues, prophesying, equipping, and giving counsel). There is no set doctrine for Pentecostalism. Most adherents agree, however, that *glossolalia* (or “speaking in tongues,” which is the sudden ability to speak in a language one does not know) is a miraculous sign bestowed on a believer by God. Glossolalia is often believed to be the initial sign of being baptized in the Holy Spirit: When one has been baptized in the Holy Spirit, one has successfully submitted oneself to the will of God, allowing the Spirit of God to enter and control one’s life and worship. Pentecostal worship is distinguished from other Protestant worship by its use of speaking in tongues, prophesying, healings, exorcisms, hand-clapping, and shouting. Pentecostalism is the largest and fastest growing form of Christianity in the world today. For more information, see <http://religiousmovements.lib.virginia.edu/nrms/penta.html>.

**Scripture Cathedral** (p. 36) – Still an active congregation in the Washington, DC area, the Scripture Cathedral has its own website, which is located at <http://www.scripturecathedral.com/>.

**MIT MITES** (p. 78) – The Minority Introduction to Engineering and Science (MITES) program that Cedric attended in 1994 is still active at MIT. Detric A. Carter, a 1993 alumnus of the program, has recently been named its Executive Director. For more information, visit <http://web.mit.edu/mites/www/index.html>.

**Leon Trilling** (p. 79) – Currently a Professor Emeritus at MIT, Dr. Trilling is no longer associated with the MIT MITES programs. Professor Trilling received his B.S. in Mechanical Engineering (1944) and his Ph.D. in Aeronautics (1948) from the California Institute of Technology. He was a Fulbright Scholar in Paris before coming to MIT in 1951. He joined the faculty of the Science, Technology, and Society (STS) Program in 1978, and he founded the Integrated Studies Program at MIT. Dr. Trilling also co-directed the New Liberal Arts Program. His research centered on the development of jet-propelled airliners and on the role of science and mathematics curricula in middle schools.

**Elie Wiesel** (p. 187) – More information may be found on Wiesel at <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~CAP/HOLO/ELIEBIO.HTM> and at <http://www.eliewieselfoundation.org/>.

**Ellis Island** (p. 189) – Between 1892 and 1954, nearly 12 million immigrants were processed through Ellis Island off New York City, where they were legally and medically inspected before being allowed to enter the United States. For information on the museum currently located at Ellis Island, visit <http://www.ellisland.com/> or <http://www.nps.gov/elis/>.

**Brown Derbies** (p. 198) – The Brown Derbies is one of Brown University’s best-known *a cappella* groups. The all-male singing ensemble was established in 1982. The group has released nine albums, the most recent in 2004. They are still active on the Brown campus, and they tour the country giving performances. For more information, visit <http://brownderbies.googlepages.com/>.

**Prep for Prep** (p. 202) – Prep for Prep is still an active organization, having 3,000 students and alums across the country. Over 3,500 students of color in grades five through eleven participate in Prep for Prep’s talent search each year. Most recently, 4,066 students competed for 222 spots in the program. Of those accepted, typically 75% complete the rigorous 14-month preparatory program. Those completing the preparatory program are enrolled (depending on age) in either an elite day school or a boarding school. Students are provided with tutoring and mentoring. For more information, visit <http://www.prepforprep.org/prepforprep/home.asp>.



**O.J. Simpson acquittal** (p. 202) – In September of 1995, O.J. Simpson, a celebrated and retired professional football player, was acquitted of the murder of Nicole Brown (his ex-wife) and of her friend Ron Goldman. The double homicide was a brutal slaying and was apparently unprovoked: there was no burglary, there had been no public argument, etc. Simpson had a history of abusing his ex-wife, with whom he had had two children. Though there was much evidence to connect Simpson to the crime (including publicly broadcast live coverage of his attempt to avoid arrest), Simpson was acquitted. The trial and the coverage of the trial included much discussion of racism and of the corruption found among members of the Los Angeles police force. Discussion was further fueled by the actions of police officer Mark Fuhrman.

**Mark Fuhrman** (p. 223) – Mark Fuhrman was a white officer on the Los Angeles police force who found a bloody glove on O.J. Simpson's property. The glove linked Simpson with the murders of Brown and Goldman. In preparation for trial, however, evidence was found that Fuhrman had used the term "nigger"; had shown disrespect toward African Americans in general; and had been a member of a secret police group known as MAW (Men Against Women). During the trial, Fuhrman was judged a "bad cop," and Simpson's defense attorney accused Fuhrman of planting evidence. When asked if he had ever falsified a police report or planted evidence, Fuhrman invoked the Fifth Amendment. Fuhrman's actions and testimony served as major factors in the weakening of the prosecution's case against Simpson.

**Fumphering** (p. 261) – *Fumphering* is clumsily trying to accomplish something.

**Ph.D. candidate** (p. 273) – When a person has finished all coursework and comprehensive exams toward earning a doctoral degree and has only the dissertation yet to complete, he or she is officially known as a Ph.D. candidate or as one admitted to Ph.D. candidacy. (This stage is also known as ABD—all but dissertation.) This person is usually the least experienced on a faculty.

## • discussion questions

The page numbers in parentheses show where the issue prompting the question is raised in the text.

1. What is the significance of Barbara Jennings' purchase of a 19-inch color television for \$1,500 (p. 12)?
2. What does an unnamed kid's act of violence help Cedric to understand? Why would it be acceptable to Cedric to be "scared to death" but not acceptable to be embarrassed (pp. 22, 23)?
3. "A boy, if he's lucky, discovers his limitations across a leisurely passage of years, with self-awareness arriving slowly. That way, at least he has plenty of time to heroically imagine himself first. Most boys unfold in this natural, measured way, growing up with at least one adult on the scene who can convincingly fake being all-powerful, omniscient, and unfailingly protective for a kid's first decade or so, providing an invaluable canopy of reachable stars and monsters that are comfortably make-believe" (pp. 30, 31).  
Do you agree or disagree with Suskind's ideas about boys' self-awareness? How does it apply to your life? How does it apply to most of the boys' lives of which you are aware? How does it apply to girls' coming-of-age? Do you think it had more relevance in Cedric's time than in yours, or was it (is it) always wrong (or right)?
4. To the news that Cedric cannot return to Jefferson Junior High School, Barbara and Cedric react with "nothing left to say" (p. 40). How might your parents have reacted? How might an upper-middle-class parent have reacted? Why do you think Barbara and Cedric reacted the way they did?
5. How are Cedric's anxieties about being at a crossroads typical of all college-bound high school juniors? How are his anxieties different (p. 44)?

## • discussion questions (continued)

6. Explain LaTisha's ideas about "staying local" versus trying to "go somewhere he ain't even seen or has no idea about" (p. 48). Is there anything about her view that is accurate? Is there anything about her view that is wrong?
7. What are Ramsey's concerns about having a white director for an enrichment program for minority students? Are his concerns valid or not? Are his concerns racist (p. 92)?
8. What is meant by "racial authenticity" on page 93? How do you see this happening today?
9. After Cedric hears Trilling tell him he is not MIT material, Cedric calls Trilling a racist. How is Cedric right? How is he wrong (p. 97)?
10. Why is Cedric's SAT score such a barrier? What options for improving his score are not available to him? Why (p. 105)?
11. Respond to Justice Thomas's advice to Cedric to "say to yourself, I'm not a black person, I'm just a person" (p. 121). How is this advice helpful? How is it harmful? How is it unrealistic?
12. Explain Cedric's classmates' reactions to his acceptance to Brown. Can you think of a current example of a similarly mixed reaction to accomplishment (p. 125)?
13. Why do you think the code at Ballou allows girls more traditional success than boys? Is that true in your school or family or community? Why or why not (p. 127)?
14. Why must the receptionist at the accounting firm use a "Vanna White" voice on the phone? Why must she hide that she is really a "ghetto girl?" How does this support the idea of white privilege? (p. 142)?
15. Consider Barbara's definition of a man on page 145. Is this a realistic definition? Explain. At what point, if any, does Cedric become a man?
16. Must worldly and spiritual success conflict, as Suskind reports that Bishop Long believes they do (pp. 148 – 153)?
17. How does the description of Cedric's first days at Brown exemplify white privilege (pp. 168 – 170)?
18. Consider the discussion on identity in which Cedric was a participant during his first days at Brown. Formulate your own definition of identity and include your response to Ira's point (p. 176); to Cedric's point (pp. 176, 177); and to Vida's attempt to restate Cedric's point.
19. What is the source of the conflict between Rob and Cedric? Why can't they get along (pp. 180, 196, 204 – 208, 217, 243, 245, 289 – 290, 294 – 295, 320, 338 – 342)?
20. Suskind's coverage of Elie Wiesels's speech to Brown students is almost dismissive. Indeed, there is no comment from Cedric at all. What are possible reasons why Cedric could be unimpressed and unmoved by Wiesel (p. 187)?
21. How would Cedric agree and/or disagree with the professor's opinion (voiced on p. 192) about affirmative action in the Ivy League? Based on his comments on page 193, how would Stephen Wheelock respond? Offer solutions for leveling the playing field for people like Professor Wheelock.
22. Explain what happens during and after the discussion of Richard Wright's essay. Why does Cedric put his head in his hands? How does this scene relate to the ideas expressed on page 193?
23. Based on Cedric's early days at Brown, what would you say Cedric believes about white people?
24. Part of the affirmative action from which Chiniqua benefited came in the form of years of academic and social counseling/tutoring. Brainstorm about what social counseling/tutoring she might need to be comfortable at a place like Brown. Explain the weaknesses inherent in such a program. For example, did Chiniqua learn to be "white?" If so, what does that mean? Consider the effect of giving "typical" Brown students social counseling in order to enter/embrace/accept Chiniqua's culture/society.



25. On page 203, Suskind describes Chiniqua's relationship with whites: "Close contact with whites is no novelty for her. She's been a passing friend and fierce competitor of white kids for years. She knows some are nice, some are not—just like blacks—and they're no more gifted or graced. It was she, after all, who wrecked the grading curves in high school. White kids? There's a lot about her that they can never, ever understand and not much hope of any breakthroughs anytime soon." Explain what is meant by the last sentence. What specifically about Chiniqua's life cannot be understood by whites? Why? Do you believe Chiniqua's belief is realistic in twenty-first-century America?
26. What ideas from the 1960s social and political movements do you see as influential in today's society? How are these ideas influential today? Or, do you agree with Zayd's mother that very little of it has survived (p. 226)?
27. Was Barbara wise or foolish to make the trip to Brown for parents' weekend (p. 227)?
28. Why was Cedric uncomfortable at Donald Korb's house (p. 249)?
29. What does Professor James mean when he says Cedric is "not accommodationist" and is "culturally fixed"? Would you agree or disagree? Are these descriptions negative or positive (p. 260)?
30. Read Cedric's musings on pages 274 and 275. What is the difference between pride and confidence? Which does Cedric possess?
31. Why is it harder for Cedric to be friends with Zayd than it is for Zayd to be friends with Cedric (pp. 277 – 280)?
32. What is your response to Mr. Fleming of Slater Junior High School (p. 282)?
33. How does Barbara Jennings come to owe \$1,352 in back rent and to be threatened with eviction? What changed in her life to cause her not to pay her rent on time (p. 288)?
34. On pages 292 – 293, Suskind describes the groups at Brown. How are such divisions positive? How are they negative?
35. What is your opinion of Mr. Wakeford's assessment and grading of Cedric's poem? What does finding "some distance from yourself" mean? What does it enable one to do? What does it prevent one from doing (p. 296 – 303)?
36. Chiniqua says, in reference to music and culture, "You have to have grown up with it like us, to really know it" (p. 315). Do you agree or disagree? If this is true, what does it tell us about cross-cultural relationships?
37. Cedric writes in his paper for his education class that "The first step is to agree that most people share the goal of true diversity, with many races competing freely and successfully" (p. 338). Is this true in your experience? Why would some people be against true diversity? What will true diversity cost some groups?

## • research projects

1. Research the current pay and benefits for a Department of Agriculture employee in Washington, DC. Be sure to research only pay and benefits for an employee with only a high school diploma. Using this figure, calculate if it is possible to live above the poverty level on such a figure. Compute housing costs, electrical costs, phone fees, grocery expenses, and transportation for a family of two. Would Barbara and Cedric be any better off today in this situation than they were in 1995?
2. Plan four days of meals for two on \$9.00 (see p. 41). You must provide something to eat each and every day, but you may not be able to provide three meals every day. What is the most nutritious food you could provide?

## • research projects (continued)

3. Consider the description of the MITES program given on pages 90 – 93. Describe the strengths and weaknesses of this program and come up with a plan for eliminating the weaknesses. (For example, how could this program have helped Cedric more?) Compare your ideas to any changes that have occurred in the program since Cedric was there.
4. Research Clarence Thomas's record as a Supreme Court justice. How do his decisions on the bench and in the running of his office demonstrate his professional success or failure in living up to the advice he gave to Cedric?
5. Research Brown University. Summarize its history concerning minority enrollment and education. How has Brown changed in this regard since Cedric was there? How has it stayed the same?
6. Expand the research on Brown to include other Ivy League schools (Yale, Harvard, Columbia, Cornell, Dartmouth, Princeton, and the University of Pennsylvania). What is their collective history concerning minority education? How has it developed over the years? What still needs to be changed? Explain why Ivy League practice is important even for those not associated with the Ivy League.
7. Without letting your class know, construct for them a replication of Cedric's experience of difference at either Ballou or Brown. Involve your teacher and as few classmates as needed to demonstrate prejudice. Consider ostracizing students without warning on the basis of arbitrary criteria: color of eyes, type of shoe worn, height, etc. Continue the experiment as long as possible, and then lead the class in a discussion about what happened and how they felt. Summarize in writing the experiment, the reaction of the class, and what you learned.
8. Cedric enrolls in his education course by chance—it was available and seemed passable. Cedric currently holds a M.A. in Education. Interview five people to see how they got into their current professions. Ask questions to discover how their college majors relate to their jobs, how they chose a major, and how they got their current positions. Be sure your interview pool includes people from various races or ethnicities and members of both genders; ask questions about any racism or sexism they encountered.
9. Research current African-American attrition rates at five colleges. Compare your findings with the attrition rates for other ethnicities and for white, non-Hispanic students in those same universities. If possible, find results divided by economic class in order to explore the connections between race or ethnicity and economic class. What conclusions can you draw from your findings?
10. The majority of Cedric's most successful conversations involve a discussion of music. Track those conversations and present an analysis of how Cedric uses music as a tool to gain social acceptance. Compare this to an analysis of what tools you use to become part of a social group.
11. Cedric also uses his knowledge of television shows to show he can fit in. Research the characters/shows Cedric mentions. If Cedric has gained most of his knowledge of white people through television, what image does he have of white people? For example, what do Marsha Brady, Wally Cleaver, and Casey Kasem show us about whiteness? If you gained most of your knowledge about one race or ethnic group from today's television, what image would you have?
12. Create a musical picture of Cedric. Using only music he mentions in the book, select songs or lines from songs to represent Cedric's life.

## • resources

### **Racism**

<http://www.tolerance.org> Tolerance.org offers tools for identifying hidden biases and for deconstructing biased language. All tests can be performed in a matter of minutes on the computer, with immediate results. This is a good activity for identifying the racist within and for making discussions of race and racism less abstract and more personal.

### **Affirmative Action/Diversity Issues**

<http://www.diversityinc.com/public/main.cfm> *DiversityInc* is a print magazine investigating issues of diversity in the workplace, education, and government.

<http://aad.english.ucsb.edu/> The Affirmative Action and Diversity Project website is hosted by the University of California at Santa Barbara. It includes Immigration Debate Resources and information on the idea of reverse racism.

<http://www-personal.umich.edu/~eandersn/biblio.htm> This bibliography of information on racism and sexism is hosted by the University of Michigan. It includes annotations of titles and information on key theories and terminology as well as summaries of and links to key legal decisions.

<http://www.inmotionmagazine.com/index.html> *In Motion Magazine*<sup>®</sup> is a multicultural, online U.S. publication about democracy. It includes sections on “Rural America,” “Healthcare,” “Art Changes from Where I Stand,” and “Global Eyes,” as well as on “Affirmative Action,” “Human and Civil Rights,” and “Education Rights.”

<http://www.bamn.com/> By Any Means Necessary (BAMN) is an activist organization founded in 2000 at the University of Michigan to support affirmative action.

<http://www.debatingracialpreference.org/> This website offers pro and con views for different facets of the affirmative action debate.

### **The Black Church**

<http://www.theblackchurchpage.com/> Claiming the Church as the heart of the African-American community, *The Black Church Page* aims to “harness the power of the internet to bring this community together.” This site is interdenominational among black church denominations. It includes “Word of the Week,” “News,” “Spotlight Ministry,” “Featured Artists,” and “Christian Comedy” as well as Bible Trivia and contacts for churches across the country. By visiting this site, you will see the connection between the black church and the black community in action.

<http://blackandchristian.com/main.shtml> This site is similar to *The Black Church Page* but has more information on history, on global issues, and on professional development for pastors and future pastors.

### **Poverty**

<http://www.kff.org/kaiserpolls/3118-index.cfm> This Kaiser Report gives the results of a survey of Americans about poverty. It also highlights the experiences of some poor Americans.

<http://www.nber.org/digest/jun06/w11681.html> A National Bureau of Economic Research report on why poverty still exists in 2006.

## • about this guide's writer

**Margaret E. Wright-Cleveland**, author of this guide, is a student in the doctoral program in American Literature at Florida State University (FSU) in Tallahassee, Florida. She also teaches interdisciplinary American Studies courses as well as literature and writing courses at FSU. In addition, Margaret writes and edits curriculum and professional development materials for Adult and Community Education with Leon County Schools and the Florida Department of Education.

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Brooks, Terry. **The Shannara Trilogy**  
Butler, William. **The Butterfly Revolution**  
Cather, Willa. **My Antonia**  
Cisneros, Sandra. **La casa en Mango Street**  
Cisneros, Sandra. **The House on Mango Street**  
Clark, William van Tilburg. **The Ox-Bow Incident**  
Clarke, Arthur C. **Childhood's End**  
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Hayes, Daniel. **The Trouble with Lemons**  
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Kafka, Franz. **The Trial**  
L'Amour, Louis. **Hondo**  
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Maxwell, William. **So Long, See You Tomorrow**  
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Richter, Conrad. **The Light in the Forest**  
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Shaara, Jeff. **The Last Full Measure**

Shaara, Michael. **The Killer Angels**  
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