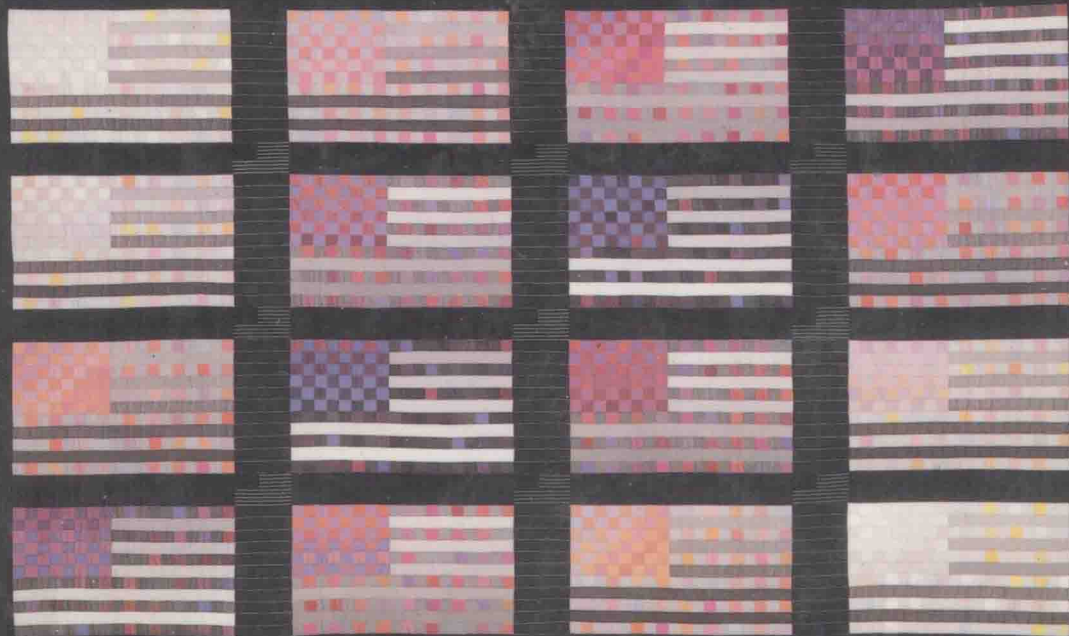


SECOND EDITION

REREADING AMERICA

*Cultural Contexts
for Critical Thinking
and Writing*



Gary Colombo ■ Robert Cullen ■ Bonnie Lisle

Rereading America

Cultural Contexts for Critical Thinking and Writing

Second Edition

Edited by

Gary Colombo

LOS ANGELES CITY COLLEGE

Robert Cullen

SAN JOSE STATE UNIVERSITY

Bonnie Lisle

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, LOS ANGELES

Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press • Boston

For Bedford Books

Publisher: Charles H. Christensen

Associate Publisher: Joan E. Feinberg

Managing Editor: Elizabeth M. Schaaf

Developmental Editor: Stephen A. Scipione

Production Editor: Deborah A. Liehs

Copyeditor: Susan M. S. Brown

Cover Design: Hannus Design Associates

Cover Art: Detail from a studio art quilt, *Squares and Bars*, Carol H. Gersen,

© 1989. From a private collection.

Cover Photography: Susan Kahn. Courtesy of The Taunton Press, publisher of *The New Quilt I*, © 1991.

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 90-71613

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Manufactured in the United States of America.

6 5 4 3 2
f e d c b

For information, write: St. Martin's Press, Inc.
175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010

Editorial Offices: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press
29 Winchester Street, Boston, MA 02116

ISBN: 0-312-05259-6

Acknowledgments

Jerry Adler with Mark Starr, Farai Childeya, Lynda Wright, Pat Wingert and Linda Haac, "Taking Offense." Reprinted by permission of Newsweek from *Newsweek*, December 24, 1990.

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Preface for Instructors

About *Rereading America*

Designed for first-year college writing and critical thinking courses, *Rereading America* anthologizes a diverse set of selections focused on the myths that dominate U.S. culture. This central theme brings together 78 readings on a broad range of topics — success, the environment, gender roles, racism, the family, education, the media, and democracy — topics that raise controversial issues meaningful to college students of all backgrounds. We’ve drawn these readings from many sources, both within the academy and outside of it; the selections are both multicultural and cross-curricular, and they therefore represent an unusual variety of voices, styles, and subjects.

The readings in this anthology speak directly to students’ experiences and concerns. Every college student has had some brush with prejudice, and most have something to say about the environment, the family, or the stereotypes they see on film and television. The issues raised here help students to link their personal experiences with broader cultural perspectives and lead students to analyze, or “read,” the cultural forces that have shaped and continue to shape their lives. By linking the personal and the cultural, students begin to recognize that they are not academic outsiders — that they do have knowledge, assumptions, and intellectual frameworks that give them authority in academic culture. Connecting personal knowledge and academic discourse helps students see that they are able to think, speak, and write academically and that they don’t have to absorb passively what the “experts” say.

What’s New About the Second Edition

A New Approach to Critical Thinking. When the first edition of *Rereading America* appeared in 1989, many colleges were just beginning to respond to the concerns of an increasingly diverse student population. Since then, multiculturalism has become a burning issue on campuses across the country. Colleges have established programs to promote curricular diversity, and publishers have responded with a

number of readers featuring a range of multicultural selections. Most of these anthologies, however, seek to integrate rather than transform the existing curriculum. They include more works by underrepresented authors, and they may even raise issues relevant to life in a diverse society, but they rarely use these new perspectives to challenge the way we teach and learn. In this edition of *Rereading America*, we go beyond mere representation of historically marginalized groups: we place cultural diversity at the heart of our approach to critical thinking, reading, and writing.

Critical analysis means asking tough questions — questions that arise from a dynamic interplay of ideas and perspectives. But many students find it difficult to enter into this dialogue of ideas. Traditional schooling is partly to blame: presenting ideas as commodities transmitted from teacher to student and conveying information as objective “fact,” the traditional classroom gives students the impression that knowledge is static, not continually re-created through tension, struggle, and debate. Critical thinking is further impeded by dominant cultural myths: these collective and often unconsciously held beliefs influence our thinking, reading, and writing — conditioning our responses, determining the questions we ask and the questions we repress.

The selections in this edition ask students to explore the influence of our culture’s dominant myths — our national beliefs about success, gender, race, democracy, and so forth. Each chapter introduces students to perspectives that challenge these deeply held ideals and values, asking them to confront difficult questions and encouraging them to work out their own answers. Thus, instead of treating cultural diversity as just another topic to be studied or “appreciated,” *Rereading America* invites students to grapple with the real differences in perspectives that arise in a pluralistic society like ours. This method helps students to break through conventional assumptions and patterns of thought that hinder fresh critical responses and inhibit dialogue; it helps them to develop the intellectual independence essential to critical thinking, reading, and writing.

A greatly expanded introductory essay, “Thinking Critically, Challenging Cultural Myths,” offers students a thorough orientation to this distinctly social and dialogic approach to critical thinking. It introduces students to the relationships among thinking, cultural diversity, and the notion of dominant cultural myths, and shows how such myths can influence their academic performance. We’ve also included a new section devoted to active reading, which offers suggestions for prereading, prewriting, note taking, text marking, and keeping a reading journal.

We’ve structured the book so that each chapter focuses on a myth that has played a dominant role in U.S. culture. In all, we address eight myths:

Money and success: the myth of individual opportunity
Nature and technology: the myth of progress
Women and men in relationship: myths of gender
Created equal: the myth of the melting pot
Harmony at home: the myth of the model family
Learning power: the myth of educational empowerment
The mass media: selling the myths
Government by the people: the myth of democracy

The chapter introductions, more comprehensive in this edition than in the first, offer students an overview of each cultural myth, placing it in historical context, raising some central questions, and orienting students to the structure of the chapter.

Timely New Readings. You'll also discover significant changes among the readings in this edition. While we've retained the most successful materials from the first edition, we've done our best to find the most current and stimulating new selections available. Most of the new pieces are very recent and offer an even broader range of perspectives. As in the first edition, we've sought out readings that will spark student interest and classroom debate — pieces such as Gloria Anzaldúa's theory of "mestiza consciousness," Shelby Steele's interpretation of American racism, and *Newsweek's* account of "political correctness" on U.S. campuses. We've added essays by some of the country's most dynamic and controversial scholars: Patricia Nelson Limerick, Haunani-Kay Trask, Susan Griffin, and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. We've also included a number of writers who speak powerfully to many first-year college students — writers such as George C. Wolfe, Jamaica Kincaid, Sandra Cisneros, Bebe Moore Campbell, and Mike Rose. Occasionally we have preferred more seasoned selections — Gordon W. Allport's analysis of in-groups or Martin Luther King, Jr.'s essay on the economic roots of racism — because these are the clearest, most definitive, or most accessible treatments of an essential topic. As in the first edition, our cross-curricular emphasis has led to an eclectic mix of genres, styles, and rhetorical strategies.

Expanded Apparatus. *Rereading America* offers a wealth of specific suggestions for class discussions, critical thinking activities, and writing assignments. We believe strongly in the generative power of collaboration and have included many activities that lend themselves to small-group work. The prereading exercises that follow each chapter introduction encourage students to reflect on what they know of the cultural myth at hand before they begin reading selections addressing it; our purpose is to make them aware of the way that these dominant cultural forces shape the assumptions, ideas, and values they bring to

their studies. The three groups of questions following each selection ask students to consider the piece carefully in several contexts: “Engaging the Text” focuses on close reading of the selection itself; “Exploring Connections” puts the selection into dialogue with other selections throughout the book; “Extending the Critical Context” invites students to connect the ideas they have read about here with sources of knowledge outside the anthology, including library research, personal experience, interviews, ethnographic-style observations, and so forth. In this edition we’ve also included a number of questions linking readings with contemporary feature films for instructors who want to address the interplay of cultural myths, the mass media, and critical analysis in greater depth.

The accompanying manual, *Resources for Teaching Rereading America*, provides detailed advice about ways to make the most of both the readings and the questions; it also offers further ideas for discussion, class activities, and writing assignments.

Acknowledgments

We were surprised and delighted by the generous response to the first edition of *Rereading America*. The encouragement and advice we received from instructors, and even from whole classes of students, throughout the United States have made the second edition a truly nationwide collaborative effort. We’re very grateful to all those who took the time to offer their responses and suggestions: Mike Rose, University of California, Los Angeles; Don Lipman, Los Angeles City College; Frank La Ferriere, Los Angeles City College; Katya Amato, Portland State University; Jeanne Anderson, University of Louisville; Rodney Ash, Western State College of Colorado; David Axelson, Western State College of Colorado; Valerie Babb, Georgetown University; Flavia Bacarella, Herbert H. Lehman College; Jim Baril, Western State College of Colorado; Patricia Ann Bender, Rutgers University, Newark; Sara Blake, El Camino College; Maurice Blauf, Hutchins School of Liberal Studies; Laura Brady, George Mason University; Cheryl Christiansen, California State University, Stanislaus; Gloria Collins, San Jose State University; Harry James Cook, Dundalk Community College; Dulce M. Cruz, Indiana University; Wendy J. Cutler, Cynthia Dubielak, Hocking Technical College; Miriam Dow, George Washington University; M. H. Dunlop, Iowa State University; Steve Dunn, Western State College of Colorado; Harriet Dwinell, American University; Iain J. W. Ellis, Bowling Green State University; Marie Foley, Santa Barbara City College; Peter Gardner, Berklee College of Music; Ervene Gulley, Bloomsburg University; Mary R. Georges, University of California, Los Angeles; Paul Gery, Western State College of Colorado; Krystyna Golkowska, Ithaca College; James C. Hall, University of Iowa; Craig Han-

cock, State University of New York, Albany; Jan Hayhurst, Community College of Pittsburgh; Jay W. Helman, Western State College of Colorado; Penny L. Hirsch, Northwestern University; Roseanne L. Hoefel, Iowa State University; Carol Hovanec, Ramapo College; John M. Jakaitis, Indiana State University; Jeanette J. Jeneault, Syracuse University; Kathleen Kelly, Northeastern University; Kathleen Kiehl, Cabrillo College; Frances E. Kino, Iona College, Yonkers Campus; Elizabeth Mary Kirchen, University of Michigan, Dearborn; Judith Kirscht, University of California, Santa Barbara; Phil Klingsmith, Western State College of Colorado; Philip A. Korth, Michigan State University; Catherine W. Kroll, Somono State American Language Institute; Jim Krusoe, Santa Monica College; Sheila A. Lebo, University of California, Los Angeles; Mitzi Lewellen, Normandale Community College; L. Loeffel, Syracuse University; Bernadette Flynn Low, Dundalk Community College; Paul Lowdenslager, Western State College of Colorado; Janet Madden-Simpson, El Camino College; Annette March, Cabrillo College; Clifford Marks, University of Wyoming; Peggy Maron, University of Wyoming; Laura McCall, Western State College of Colorado; Richard McGowan, St. Joseph's College; Ann A. Merrill, Emory University; Dale Metcalfe, University of California, Davis; Charles Miller, Western State College of Colorado; Kathy Molloy, Santa Barbara City College; Merlyn E. Mowrey, Central Michigan University; Denise Muller, San Jose State University; William Murphy, University of Maine, Machias; Susan Nance, Bowling Green State University; Patricia M. Naulty, Canisius College; Scott R. Nelson, Louisiana State University; Fran O'Connor, Nassau Community College; Sarah-Hope Parmeter, University of California, Santa Cruz; Sandra Patterson, Western State College of Colorado; Marsha Penti, Michigan Technological University; Erik Peterson, University of Minnesota; Linda Peterson, Salt Lake Community College; Michele Peterson, Santa Barbara City College; Madeleine Picciotto, Oglethorpe University; Kirsten Pierce, Villanova University; Dan Pinti, Ohio State University; Fritz H. Pointer, Contra Costa College; Paige S. Price, University of Oregon; Teresa M. Redd, Howard University; Walter G. Rice, Dundalk Community College; Renee Ruderman, Metropolitan State College, Denver; Geoffrey J. Sadock, Bergen Community College; Mollie Sandock, Valparaiso University; Jurgen E. Schlunk, West Virginia University; Esther L. Schwartz, Allegheny County Community College; Jennifer A. Senft, University of California, Los Angeles; Ann Shapiro, State University of New York, Farmingdale; Michele Moragne e Silva, St. Edward's University; Craig Sirles, De Paul University; Bill Siverly, Portland Community College; Antony Sloan, Bowling Green State University; Susan Belasco Smith, Allegheny College; Cynthia Solem, Cabrillo College; Susan Sterr, Santa Monica College; Mark Stiger, Western State College of Colorado; Ann Stolls, University of Illinois, Chi-

cago; Brendan D. Strasser, Bowling Green State University; Ruth Ann Thompson, Fordham University; Mark Todd, Western State College of Colorado; Michael Uebel, University of Virginia; Keith Walters, Ohio State University; Robert R. Watson, Grand Valley State University; Nola J. Wegman, Valparaiso University; R. L. Welker, University of Virginia; Douglas Wixson, University of Missouri; Nancy Young Bentley, Curry, and Regis colleges; and Naomi F. Zucker, University of Rhode Island.

We owe many thanks to Charles Christensen at Bedford Books for his continued enthusiasm and support. Our editor, Steve Scipione, has been a model of good humor and sound judgment at every stage of the revision process. At Bedford we also wish to thank Joan Feinberg for her unfailingly wise counsel, Kim Chabot and Laura McCready for chasing facts and trafficking manuscript, Susan M. S. Brown for her alert and perceptive copyediting, and Debbie Liehs and Elizabeth Schaaf for carefully attending to details and steering the book through production. In Los Angeles, Debbie Eisenstein helped us tremendously by doing preliminary research and tracking down elusive texts. Finally, and always, Elena Barcia, Liz Silver, and Roy Weitz merit special thanks for living with late-night phone calls, tactfully ignoring mountains of paper, and reviving tired spirits when our energies flagged.

Contents

Preface for Instructors	v
Introduction: Thinking Critically, Challenging Cultural Myths	1

1

Money and Success: <i>The Myth of Individual Opportunity</i>	17
---	-----------

<i>The Gospel of Wealth</i> ANDREW CARNEGIE	20
--	----

“Upon the sacredness of property civilization itself depends — the right of the laborer to his hundred dollars in the savings-bank, and equally the legal right of the millionaire to his millions.”

<i>Changing Modes of Making It</i> CHRISTOPHER LASCH	27
---	----

“Formerly the Protestant virtues appeared to have an independent value of their own. . . . Now success appeared as an end in its own right.”

<i>Stephen Cruz</i> STUDS TERKEL	36
-------------------------------------	----

“The American Dream, I see now, is governed not by education, opportunity, and hard work, but by power and fear.”

<i>Symbiosis</i> GEORGE C. WOLFE	42
-------------------------------------	----

“Well, well, well, look at Mr. Cream-of-the-Crop, Mr. Colored-Man-on-Top.”

<i>Women at Risk</i> SUZANNE GORDON	46
--	----

“If women abandon caring for competition, . . . then *who will* care? What kind of liberation will we have purchased?”

<i>Streets of Gold: The Myth of the Model Minority</i>	54
CURTIS CHANG	

“Along with other racial minorities, Asian Americans are still scraping for the crumbs of the economic pie.”

<i>The Lesson</i>	64
TONI CADE BAMBARA	

“Equal chance to pursue happiness means an equal crack at the dough, don’t it?”

<i>Class in America: Myths and Realities</i>	72
GREGORY MANTSIOS	

“Lottery millionaires and Horatio Alger stories notwithstanding, evidence suggests that the level of inequality in the United States is getting higher.”

<i>Mike LeFevre</i>	87
STUDS TERKEL	

“When I hear a college kid say, ‘I’m oppressed,’ I don’t believe him. You know what I’d like to do for one year? Live like a college kid. Just for one year.”

<i>Class Poem</i>	95
AURORA LEVINS MORALES	

“This is my poem in celebration of my middle class privilege.”

<i>You’re Short, Besides!</i>	99
SUCHENG CHAN	

“. . . my accomplishments are many, yet I was not asked to write about any of them. Is being handicapped the most salient feature about me?”

2

Nature and Technology:	
<i>The Myth of Progress</i>	107

<i>Empire of Innocence</i>	110
PATRICIA NELSON LIMERICK	

“Whether the target resource was gold, farmland, or Indian souls, white Americans went West convinced that their purposes were as commonplace as they were innocent.”

From a Native Daughter 118
HAUNANI-KAY TRASK

"I understood the world as a place and a feeling divided in two. . . .
There was the world that we lived in — my ancestors, my family, and
my people — and then there was the world historians described."

Talking to the Owls and Butterflies 128
JOHN (FIRE) LAME DEER AND RICHARD ERDOES

"You have not only despoiled the earth, . . . you have even changed the
animals, which are part of us, part of the Great Spirit."

Storyteller 135
LESLIE MARMON SILKO

"He hated the people because they had something of value, . . .
something which the Gussucks could never have. They thought they
could take it, suck it out of the earth or cut it from the mountains; but
they were fools."

The Spell of Technology 150
CHELLIS GLENDINNING

"If we are, as a society, unquestioning devotees of linear progress, then
we assume we can expand into infinity . . . with no attention to the
infringement on the rights of people, cultures, animals, and eco-
systems perpetrated in the service of our belief."

The Returning 162
GAIL TREMBLAY

". . . It is the returning to earth
. . . that feeds the muscle
of the heart and makes love possible."

Living on the Land 164
KATHLEEN STOCKING

"Sometimes I think we must be crazy to live this way — especially in
winter — but deep down I know it's the only right way."

being property once myself 174
LUCILLE CLIFTON

"what wants to be a tree,
ought to be he can be it."

Split Culture 175
SUSAN GRIFFIN

"We try to break the heart and the spirit of Nature, which is our own
heart and our own spirit. . . . We are divided from our selves."

Women and Men in Relationship: *Myths of Gender* 188

***Girl* 191** JAMAICA KINCAID

“ . . . try to walk like a lady and not like the slut you are so bent on becoming . . . ”

***Some Individual Costs of Gender Role Conformity* 194** JANET SALTZMAN CHAFETZ

“In short, the feminine role stereotype gears women for economic failure. . . . The masculine role stereotype gears men for economic success.”

***Nora Quealey* 202** JEAN REITH SCHROEDEL

“ . . . I’m tired of being dirty. I want my fingernails long and clean. I want to not go up to the bathroom and find a big smudge of grease across my forehead. I want to sit down and be pampered and pretty all day. Maybe that wouldn’t satisfy me.”

***The Rite of Work: The Economic Man* 207** SAM KEEN

“To be poor in a consumer society is to have failed the manhood test, or at least to have gotten a D–.”

***Little Miracles, Kept Promises* 221** SANDRA CISNEROS

“Dear San Antonio de Padua,
Can you please help me find a man who isn’t a pain in the nalgas.
There aren’t any in Texas, I swear. Especially not in San Antonio.”

***Images of Relationships* 233** CAROL GILLIGAN

“ . . . Men and women may perceive danger in different social situations and construe danger in different ways — men seeing danger more often in close personal affiliation than in achievement and construing danger to arise from intimacy.”

Where I Come from Is Like This 241

PAULA GUNN ALLEN

"The tribes see women variously, but they do not question the power of femininity. . . . they never portray women as mindless, helpless, simple, or oppressed."

Reflections on Race and Sex 249

BELL HOOKS

"Black liberation struggle must be re-visioned so that it is no longer equated with maleness."

What Price Independence? Social Reactions to Lesbians, Spinsters, Widows, and Nuns 257

ROSE WEITZ

"The stigmatization of independent women . . . is neither automatic nor natural. Rather, it seems to derive from a particular social constellation in which men fear women's sexual and economic independence."

The Two 270

GLORIA NAYLOR

"The quiet that rested around their door on the weekends hinted of all sorts of secret rituals, and their friendly indifference to the men on the street was an insult to the women."

4

Created Equal:
The Myth of the Melting Pot 279

Racial Formation 283

MICHAEL OMI AND HOWARD WINANT

"Race is indeed a pre-eminently *sociohistorical* concept. Racial categories and the meaning of race . . . have varied tremendously over time and between different societies."

Formation of In-Groups 292

GORDON W. ALLPORT

". . . we tend to develop a partisanship and ethnocentrism in respect to our in-groups. . . . What is alien is regarded as somehow inferior."

Split at the Root: An Essay on Jewish Identity 307
ADRIENNE RICH

"Sometimes I feel I have seen too long from too many disconnected angles: white, Jewish, anti-Semite, racist, anti-racist, once-married, lesbian, middle-class, feminist, exmatriate southerner, *split at the root* — that I will never bring them whole."

Racism and the White Backlash 319
MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

"... for the good of America, it is necessary to refute the idea that the dominant ideology in our country even today is freedom and equality while racism is just an occasional departure from the norm."

Three Thousand Dollar Death Song 331
WENDY ROSE

"... You: who have
priced us, you who have removed us: at what cost?"

We, the Dangerous 334
JANICE MIRIKITANI

"And they commanded we dwell in the desert
Our children be spawn of barbed wire and barracks."

C. P. Ellis 336
STUDS TERKEL

"A Klansman and a militant Black woman, co-chairmen of the school committee. It was impossible. How could I work with her?"

I'm Black, You're White, Who's Innocent? 347
SHELBY STEELE

"I think the racial struggle in America has always been primarily a struggle for innocence. . . . Both races instinctively understand that to lose innocence is to lose power."

Racism and Cross-Racial Hostility 359
VIRGINIA R. HARRIS AND TRINITY A. ORDOÑA

"All people of color face the oppression of racism. The commonality could serve as a powerful unifying bond. . . . But instead of unifying, we fight one another to stay 'one step up' from the bottom of the racial hierarchy."

A Fire in Fontana 366
HISAYE YAMAMOTO DESOTO

"Something weird happened to me not long after the end of the Second

World War. I wouldn't go so far as to say that I, a Japanese American, became Black. . . . But some kind of transformation did take place."

Los Vendidos 375
LUIS M. VALDEZ

"Yes, señorita, this model represents the apex of American engineering! He is bilingual, college educated, ambitious! Say the word 'acculturate' and he accelerates."

*La conciencia de la mestiza/
Towards a New Consciousness* 386
GLORIA ANZALDÚA

"En unas pocas centurias, the future will belong to the mestiza. Because the future depends on the breaking down of paradigms, it depends on the straddling of two or more cultures."

Child of the Americas 396
AURORA LEVINS MORALES

"I am a child of the Americas,
a light-skinned mestiza of the Caribbean,
A child of many diaspora, born into this continent at a crossroads."

5

Harmony at Home:
The Myth of the Model Family 399

The Paradox of Perfection 402
ARLENE SKOLNICK

"The image of the perfect, happy family makes ordinary families seem like failures."

Looking for Work 410
GARY SOTO

"For weeks I had drunk Kool-Aid and watched morning reruns of *Father Knows Best*, whose family was so uncomplicated in its routine that I very much wanted to imitate it. The first step was to get my brother and sister to wear shoes at dinner."

The Children of Sex, Drugs, and Rock 'n' Roll 416
RICHARD LOUV

"As with sex, drugs aren't the problem. The problem is adults and the messages they send to children."

Black Family Life 431
JOSEPH L. WHITE

“Being part of a close-knit extended family group is a vital part of Afro-American life.”

Envy 439
BEBE MOORE CAMPBELL

“‘It’s not fair,’ I wailed. Ole Blondie had her dollhouse-making daddy whenever she wanted him. . . . Jackie, Jane, and Adam had their wild, ass-whipping daddy. . . . Why couldn’t I have my daddy all the time too?”

An Indian Story 453
ROGER JACK

“Finally it got so I didn’t worry as much about the folks at home. I would be out walking in the evening and know someone’s presence was with me.”

Friends as Family 463
KAREN LINDSEY

“. . . the truth hidden by the myth is that people have always created larger families than the biological family — larger, and infinitely more diverse.”

The Gay Family 477
RICHARD GOLDSTEIN

“Lesbian motherhood and gay fatherhood raise terrors so primal that they make orgies and sexual devices pale as emblems of deviance.”

6

Learning Power:
The Myth of Education and Empowerment 492

What High School Is 496
THEODORE SIZER

“School is conceived of as the children’s workplace, . . . it takes young people off parents’ hands and out of the labor market during prime-time work hours.”