



*Allied Cultures Against Discrimination*

# **Literary Critiques**

*Written by our dedicated volunteers*

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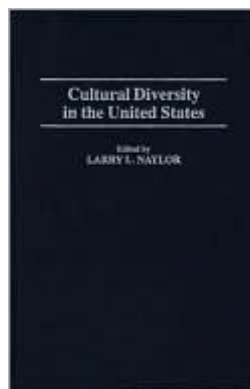
## “Cultural Diversity in the United States”

*By Larry L. Naylor*

“Cultural Diversity in the United States” examines culture and diversity topics, in regard to the following categorizations: (1) Culture and Cultural Groupings, (2) Multiculturalism: Issues for the Twenty – First Century, (3) Portrait of a Minority, (4) The Irish – Americans: From the Frontier to the White House, (5) The Mexican – American Community in the United States, (6) Filipino – Americans: The Marginalized Minority, (7) Of Prejudice and Pride.

Culture is defined as a system of changing learned ideas, and behaviors that humans adapt to. Humans group together according to the posed problems in sociocultural environments. The system of solutions to the relevant problems, where all needs are satisfied is called culture. Most cultural groups differentiate themselves from other groups by their customs, history and beliefs. The cultural system in the United States separates each cultural group according to their different accomplished beliefs and behaviors. The assimilations version of multiculturalism reveals a status quo viewpoint. This point of view directs attention to the privileged society. In addition, the philosophy of multiculturalism ignores viewpoints, considerations and perspectives of racial and ethnic minorities. In contrast, the multicultural version is more practical and ethical, since its philosophical framework relies on harmony and cooperation between racial and ethnic cultural groups. The assimilations have nothing to fear from the multiculturalist’s version, since it underscores the dominant category of society, as well as racial and minority groups, specifically: African – Americans, Hispanics, Asians, and American Indians. The African – American population is grouped by individuals whose skin color ranges from brown to black. In the United States, skin color is the modus operandi of labeling a racial minority. The self – recognition of African – Americans as an ethnic minority have resulted in limited access to political and economic power in America. The majority and ruling class’s overwhelming control of power has crystallized the African – American cultural group as a minority population group. Currently, young Irish – Americans have had a painful history, since they have overcome oppression in their native Ireland, and during nineteenth century America. This cultural group has healed from its past history, since they do not harbor feelings of ill – will, resentment or revenge toward their past and present oppressors. Another outcome from these experiences has been a demonstrated ability to overcome by accepting the differences in others with the benefits of increased racial

group toleration. The Anglo dominance in Texas has led to racial prejudice and discrimination of Mexican – Americans. Since the era of Texas independence (1836 – 1845), most Americans have stereotyped the Mexicans as backward and lackadaisical. Discrimination and a lack of educational opportunities are the reasons why Mexican – Americans have been underrepresented in higher paying occupations. Filipino – Americans as a minority group have exemplified the cultural and social diversity of American society. They have maintained their ethnic identity by retaining their cultural values and beliefs. Filipino – Americans have also experienced prejudice, stereotyping and discrimination, during their participation in American economic, political and educational institutions. Furthermore, they have been ridiculed and discriminated against when they speak the Filipino language. Overall, Filipino – Americans, and other racial and ethnic minorities have made significant contributions to the United States based on, principles and values of liberty, equality and justice for all. In American society, most of the population perceives homosexual culture as a threat to beliefs about gender roles and sexuality. An expansion of the gender concept is the primary prerequisite for homosexuals to be accepted in American society. The attestation of the presiding heterosexual white male dominance in this country will worsen homosexual problems in regard to cultural diversity. Henceforth, homosexuals who express their identities are ostracized and ridiculed. As a result, this hostile environment inhibits their abilities to be healthy and functional in lesbian, gay, and American culture at large.

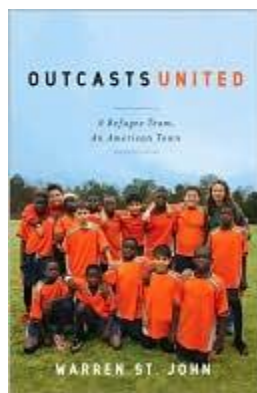


Written by: Jeffrey T. Kidd

## “Outcasts United”

*By Warren St. John*

Luma Mufleh, known as Coach Luma, is a 33-year-old Jordanian woman whose coaching efforts are chronicled in this great book about the success of a soccer team composed solely of refugees living in a suburb of Atlanta, Georgia. The players on Luma’s team, known as the Fugees, are a variety of ages, sizes and abilities. They immigrated to America from Afghanistan, Burundi, Kosovo, Liberia, Somalia and Sudan and most have endured tremendous suffering just to get to America. They do not have much in common apart from their outsider status in America. Coach Luma is at times tough and at other times warm and sensitive. Her program extends beyond soccer as she visits player’s homes, creates a mandatory tutoring program, and teaches the boys about commitment and perseverance. She creates an oasis for the refugees where they find an opportunity to live dreams they never dreamt. The setting for this true story about an amazing woman, is Clarkston, Georgia which has become one of the most diverse communities in the United States. Today, about half of the 7,100 residents are foreign-born. This touching book is a must read for anyone who wants to understand how community is built.



Written by: Cathy Sheafor

“The Face of My Childhood”

*By Alicia Ghiragossian*

In “Beyond the Words” Alicia Ghiragossian reveals a profoundly poignant poem about her identity issue and how powerfully it pierces her existence. Focusing on being an Armenian growing up in Argentina, the result of her parent’s courageous escape from the Armenian genocide in 1915 carried out by Turkey, the poem, “I Would Like to Buy” captures the essence of her feelings of “otherness” within Argentinean society. The poem, even through its literary nature, perfectly and accessibly delves into the conflicting psychology of discrimination. Specifically the main issue of “otherness” is developed and the poet brings into discussion what affects discrimination have on her adult identity- which can be universally felt by all people.

*“I would like to buy  
The face of my childhood.  
To take it out  
Of the photo album  
Of refugees  
And draw it identically  
In another land  
-that of my ancestors-  
Naked  
Newly born  
From the fires  
Because in spite  
Of all the lives  
I have lived  
I am still not myself.  
I would like to wander  
Through the streets  
Of that land  
Pregnant with freedom  
Where bones  
Were burst  
With gunpowder  
On a bed of flags.  
I would like to touch that land  
To feel my past  
In its fragrance  
And reclaim  
My essence.”*

The poem captures the reader's attention by its rawness and truth and relates the psychology of feeling discriminated against entirely. Throughout the poem there are references of a split soul- a person who cannot claim her identity. The poet wants to "buy the face" of her childhood and cut it out of the pictures that **label** her as a "refugee" in Argentina and "draw" it into the land of her birth. The issue of labeling is inherent in discrimination which replaces the dignity of a human being with a false idea and a false, usually damaging, stereotype, type, or image. A human being cannot be pigeonholed. She is no longer a free child in the photograph but instead she is doomed to be a "refugee" and inevitably an "other" in society. The status of "refugee" not only negatively labels the poet, but also speaks directly to the fact that she does not belong in Argentina and that she is ultimately a victim. The term "refugee" is not necessarily negative, yet both the fact that she is a refugee from genocide and the "otherness" that society views her with contribute to the negative association. No doubt this kind of labeling is destructive to a young child and will affect her in adulthood.

Furthermore, it is intriguing how the poet mentions "in spite of all the lives I have lived I am still not myself." In a philosophical and existential way the poet makes a powerful and sorrowful statement about how deeply the discrimination has affected her. The many lives she speaks of are the phases of life, childhood, adolescence, adulthood, her creative life and how in spite of living and breathing she is still not herself. She was never able to discover herself because her growth was always tainted by false labels. Discrimination is destructive. And sadly, as seen in her psychology, it has the power to make herself a stranger to her own self. This point is made clearer in the next lines when she emphasizes how walking the streets of Armenia, now free yet stained with the blood and the dead after the genocide, is the only place she can reclaim her identity. It is there that she can "touch the land," "feel her past" and ultimately "reclaim her essence." In her imaginary and hopeful visit to Armenia the poet pictures a time when she can at last reclaim her identity and be herself. Significant to point out is the poet's need to belong, the poet's need to experience a familiar culture, and the poet's need to feel the history of her people. As a refugee child in Argentina, the poet had to assimilate culturally by learning Spanish, going to Argentinean schools and learning the customs. She did all those things and still had society, mostly children her age at the Argentinean school, treat her differently and not understand her accent or family. She would even try in vain to change her last name, culturally Armenian, due to

the fact that she was being taunted as a refugee. To be a child in an alien place while living with a family deeply rooted in her native culture created an identity crisis within her. This crisis, in turn, prompted the need to understand who she is, to belong to her culture. She cannot find herself in a place where she is labeled, discriminated and not at peace. She loses herself. This statement reaches universal levels and every human in every corner of the planet can relate to the need to belong and how discrimination forces into our faces our “otherness”, which is not a negative thing after all. Therefore, discrimination does nothing but hurt, isolate and cause chaos for the soul as so effortlessly expressed in this poem.



Written by: Robert Danielak

“Looking into and behind the color-blind mind”

*By Ellis Cose*

In "Looking into and behind the color-blind mind," affirmative action has made people falsely believe that American Society is color-blind. American Society is originated on principles of freedom and equality which is regarded as a subjective issue, and value. Ultimately, on the other hand, American Society professes race-based slavery. The majority of white America believes that racism is a dead issue. They also maintain that if blacks work hard they will be totally successful. The latest white racist attitude presupposes that blacks are more successful than whites; revealing a subjective disregard for racial equality. For black persons to succeed in Anglo America they must excel in their job performance. To alleviate the problems of racism, white America needs a reality check. Whites must ultimately realize that black America still remains in a state of crisis. Once blacks become more active in government; they can change society for equal opportunity, and complete integration in the workplace.

From the 1960's to present, there has been progress as far as racial equality is concerned. This work in progress remains unfinished and unfulfilled. Black society must continue to advocate in regard to human rights, civil liberties and racial equality. The present day status quo as far as discrimination is concerned is unacceptable. The American public need not be ignorant and uneducated as far as racial equality is concerned. Presently, the American public at large is hypocritical in regard to fighting for the cause of racial equality. The public declares that they are for racial equality; only for the reason that American Society views this cause as popular and acceptable. In reality, what the public truly profess is that it is acceptable to have a divided Society with a powerful white majority, and a powerless black minority. In today's society, subtle discrimination is being replaced with "aversive racism". Aversive racism is defined as the

behavior that whites exhibit toward blacks when they unintentionally and unconsciously discriminate against them. An example of this is when a black applicant applies for a position. The white person who has the hiring authority intentionally, searches for inadequacies in the "black applicant's" application, then consequently disqualifies this person under false pretenses. The hiring person utilizes his or her false pretenses to justify and rationalize their decision.

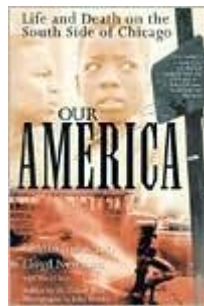


Written by: Jeffrey T. Kidd

“Our America: Life and Death on the South Side of Chicago”

*By LeAlan Jones and Lloyd Newman with David Isay*

Although not a feel-good story, this is a powerful poignant story of two boys living on the south side of Chicago in a public housing project called Ida B. Wells. The story begins when a radio reporter gives the boys a recorder and the boys set off to find the story behind the death of a five-year old who was dropped to his death from the 15th story of a building by two other young boys. The story quickly becomes more than the story of one boy's death and becomes instead the story of the survival of LeAlan Jones and Lloyd Newman. Although the book is very factual in its examination of the death of a young boy, it is also a story about poverty in America. This book is a must read for anyone interested in youth and poverty and it provides a great opportunity for young people to explore the topic as well.



Written by: Cathy Sheafor

## “A Task”

*By Czeslaw Milosz*

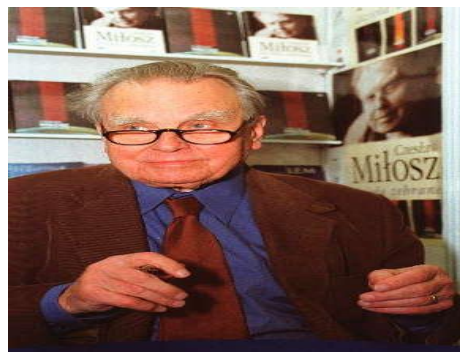
Czeslaw Milosz, Polish poet, essayist, prose writer, and Nobel Prize winner captures the essence of an oppressed mind victimized by the discriminations of the communist government of Soviet Russia in his poem “A Task.” Specifically, this poem relates the profound damage that controlled speech and the lack of freedom of speech can have on a writer- and on anybody desiring to express themselves. Although this may not be the most common concern when considering discrimination, it is discrimination against all people and the right they have to expression. Controlling a person’s right to speech is lowering their status in society, making them unequal to those in government or in roles of power, and damages human dignity. Many countries around the world, most notably North Korea, Russia, Cuba, and many countries touched by communism in the past, impose the injustice of “controlled speech” on newspapers, media, writers, artists, and civilians wishing to speak up, protest, and petition. Dictatorships as well, such as North Korea, and many African countries controlled by military regimes, and even radical groups, impose this type of discrimination on their people- not to mention other and more torturous forms of discrimination including race, religion, and gender. Milosz’s poem reads:

In fear and trembling, I think I would fulfill my life  
Only if I brought myself to make a public confession  
Revealing a sham, my own and of my epoch:  
We were permitted to shriek in the tongue of dwarfs and demons  
But pure and generous words were forbidden  
Under so stiff a penalty that whoever dared to pronounce one  
Considered himself as a lost man.

Milosz begins the poem by describing the “fear” and “trembling” he feels when wanting to “fulfill” his life with the basic human need to express oneself truthfully. If he would be able to express himself truthfully, his life as a writer and as a human being (with an inherent right to expression) would be complete. However, the controlled speech the government imposes does not allow this essential human right and he is left to “reveal a sham.” This “sham” is a lie, and he knows it, and it is an example of the countless lies people are forced to tell in his “epoch.” While the government allows lies, propaganda, and “shrieking” in “the tongue of dwarfs and demons,” he writes so powerfully that “pure and generous words were forbidden.” Any reader can see the

hypocrisy in allowing lies and mutations of the truth, seen in the imagery of “dwarves and demons,” to be allowed while forcing words of truth and justice into the shadows. However, the point he is trying to make is even harsher than that: the fact that words of truth were not even allowed at all, let alone pushed back into the shadows. If anyone “dared to pronounce” a truth they would become a “lost man” hinting on the government’s punishment of shipping offenders to Siberian work camps, gulags, jail, and even death.

The need to express oneself in this environment of communism and the dangers of doing so is described to have destroyed the soul of the man (representing many people) in this poem. Controlled speech robs humanity of fulfillment. And while this discrimination may not be the most obvious type, it reminds us of the great freedom we have in America to be able to speak out and produce change from the power of our will to do so. Milosz’s poem is a reminder of what can happen to the individual, let alone society, when they are unable to stand up to those that promote injustice. We are forced to become silent, and silence cannot fight injustice. Therefore, the poem is an eternal reminder for the free world, especially in our great country of America, to never allow injustice of any kind. Free countries must fight for the voiceless and the poem is a reminder to stand up and get your voice heard for marriage equality, gender equality, human rights, and any issue regarding racial and other types of discrimination. Any step in this regard is powerful, from signing a petition to protesting. Milosz, in this haunting poem, makes it absolutely clear that it is the power of the voice that is so essential and instrumental to change and that the lack of it is likened to death.



Written by: Robert Danielak

## “Teach Like Your Hair's on Fire”

*By Rafe Esquith*

This is a must read for educators of all ages. Rafe Esquith teaches 5th grade in a Los Angeles neighborhood where guns, gangs and drugs are part of everyday life. Most of his students are first generation immigrants who live in poverty and few speak English well. But, Esquith's students score in the top 1 percent on standardized tests and they go on to attend some of the nation's best colleges and universities. Esquith details his teaching methods in this book, explaining how he teaches Vivaldi, Shakespeare, algebra and much more to his students. But, this book is more than a book about teaching. It is a story of courage, commitment, innovation, and opportunity. While written and marketed as a book about teaching, Esquith's story is one of overcoming discrimination and his approach is one that everyone can learn from, whether they teach or not.



Written by: Cathy Sheafor

## “The Bluest Eye”

*By Toni Morrison*

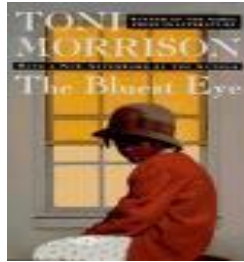
In “The Bluest Eye,” written by Toni Morrison, the author elaborates on the following African – American themes: ugliness, black racial prejudice, importance of spirituality in enduring lives of hardship, African Medicine, spirituality, and incest. The theme of this book describes: racism against blacks, discrimination based on skin color, and black society’s intolerance to the taboos of incest.

The story involves the following characters: Frieda and Claudia who were sisters, Mrs. MacTeer, was the girl’s mother. Next, Pecola Breedlove, the central character, whose wish and prayer for blue eyes was granted. Soaphead Church was a West Indian with light brown skin. He was a, “Reader, Adviser, and Interpreter of Dreams.”

Pecola Breedlove was called ugly by her teachers and classmates alike. As a result she developed an inferiority complex. To gain respect and acceptance, she prayed and wished for big pretty blue eyes. After Pecola received her blue eyes Claudia and Frieda accepted her with admiration. To black society blue eyes were symbols of beauty. Pecola’s possession of blue eyes converted her from ugly to beautiful. Soaphead Church told Pecola , if the dog outside of his apartment dies after eating poison, then she will get her blue eyes in two days. Next, he said, if the dog lives after eating the poison, then her wish for blue eyes would be denied. Finally he said, for her wish to become a reality it must be God’s Will. After two days, her prayers and wishes for blue eyes was granted. She got her blue eyes.

After a few days, Pecola was sexually assaulted when her father – Cholly, had incestuous relations with her. Frieda and Claudia heard the news that Pecola was pregnant from Cholly when they were selling flower seeds in a neighbor’s home. Frieda and Claudia performed an act

of faith with the hope that the baby would survive. This act proceeded according to the following stages: (1) a prayer for the baby, (2) planting flower seeds behind their house, (3) burying the flower seed money near Pecola's house. The flower seeds did not bloom, and the baby died. In the end, Claudia and Frieda permanently sever their friendship with Pecola. They severed their relationship with Pecola, since incest is regarded as a taboo to black society. In addition, the black community discriminates against incest in black society.



Written by: Jeffrey T. Kidd

## “War and Truth”

*By Alicia Ghiragossian*

In “War and Truth” (also available in Spanish) Alicia Ghiragossian, Nobel nominated Armenian-Argentinean poet brings to light many human rights issues that the recent Bush administration inflicted upon Americans and the international community. These issues involve the administration’s and FEMA’s reprehensible reaction to hurricane Katrina, increasing foreign anger around the world that discriminates against America, discriminating Iraq as the place to create a false war and to wage Bush’s irrational agenda, creating propaganda similar to that used to promote genocides in history, and initiating systemized torture. As she so powerfully, poignantly, and truthfully recounts in the soulful landscape of the book, there were, and still are, many issues of discrimination that have lingered from the Bush administration. The book bears considerable relevance today after the release of the Torture Memos on April 16<sup>th</sup> by the Obama administration which now unfortunately proves Bush’s legacy of human rights violations. Dr. Oscar Arias Sanchez, Nobel Peace Laureate, said about the book and Alicia’s illuminating perspective that: “She is an eloquent witness to the enduring human quest for peace.” As a voice for truth and justice the book is a reminder for all those who distrusted the Bush regime that they were ultimately right in their disdain for a government now factually proven to have committed many human rights violations and major discriminations.

The book begins with a soulful account of the 9/11 terrorist attack and then begins to discuss the discrimination issues regarding Katrina:

“Of New Orleans...

The city you let submerge

Under water.

What was that?

Didn’t you like the status

Or the color of those people?

They were Americans like you

So why rescue them with guns?  
And treat them like prisoners of war  
Why were they arrested  
For trespassing  
In their own houses?  
Whose spirit did you want to crush?

Although incredibly painful and difficult to read, the poet expresses a raw truth for thousands of people who were voiceless during the aftermath of the hurricane. It is the *actions* of a government that count in times of crisis, and clearly in this disaster thousands of people were forgotten. Her reference to rescuing them with “guns” and treating them like “prisoners of war” also reflects the distrust law enforcement and officials had in these communities of the New Orleans area, many of which were African American. Therefore, she poses a great question: “why the guns?” and one may also add “why the disrespect?” These questions reveal many issues which speak to the improper discriminatory responses that these officials and law enforcement had in a time of crisis. The question must be asked: why there so much distrust and indecency shown for the population of that area? Treating the victims of this disaster as dangerous and criminal is injustice and transparent discrimination which to this day leaves the area in shambles and lacking the potential it could have reached given proper federal aid in 2005. Everyone should ponder the questions the poet poses as to why the *costliest* and *deadliest* natural disaster in US history, killing more than 1,600 people, displacing more than 1 million, and causing more than \$25.3 billion dollars in damages (About.com US Politics) received such a despicable reaction and treatment. The Bush administration did not only crush the spirit of those affected by the hurricane, but of all Americans who sympathized and empathized in sharing the burden of the disaster.

Furthermore, regarding the massive lies of the Iraq war, weapons of mass destruction, and the now proven illegal torture, the poet makes a clear and emphatic statement saying that instead of lessening the anger toward the Americans and our place in the world, the Bush administration increased it. She writes about our false trust in the government: “We expected you

to dissolve foreign anger against the country, yet you increased it.” The Bush administration did nothing to promote our better values and only increased discrimination against America as an imperialist and a war monger, damaging the good efforts of innocent Americans everywhere. The poet in her genius revelation of the Bush administration’s agenda declares that the American ideal became Bush’s egotistical “*I-deal*” of massive brainwashing, corruption, confusion, and war. In their quest to impose their self-centered “*I-dealings*” the Bush administration buried the internationally respected “legal authority” and “civil liberties” of America under a massive lie and myth in order to have his war. Is this not akin to the Third Reich the poet asks:

“We had the atomic era.

The time for Hiroshima.

We have the oil era.

The time for Iraq.

What happened

With civil liberties

And our tradition

Of legal authority?

Why barter those blessings

With this supremacy myth

To remind us the leaders

Of the Third Reich?”

The answers for readers everywhere are clear as they are haunting. Our rights, America’s standing as a nation of laws and justice did indeed get “bartered.” She continues the brilliantly accusatory and perspicacious section by explaining how the lies of the Bush administration grew into a propaganda monster denouncing all those that spoke up for the opposite and for truth as anti-American. This of course is discrimination against all those seeking justice. She writes that

this discrimination, in order to bolster their claim for war, for torture and for bartering civil rights is the same corrupt mentality used countless times in history for genocides and other wars:

“It seemed tailor made

In the past

For a genocide

To exterminate millions

With impunity...

It seems tailor made

In the present

For tortures

Rape of dignity

And trampling

Human rights.”

Therefore the poet in her deliberate, direct, and profoundly raw style denounces this discrimination imposed by the Bush administration against all those trying to speak the truth. She likens them to the other radicals in history that used lies and corruption to promote and succeed in their evil agenda; and it is the way the Bush administration protected their “right” to torture. Countless Arabs, Muslims, and international individuals of “interest” were made scapegoats and discriminated to fulfill Bush’s terrifying agenda for oil and power in Iraq and sent to be tortured in Guantanamo. The New York Times, in April 2009, reported that water boarding was used even before Justice Department lawyers “approved” any interrogation techniques. As citizens, our own privacies of the 4<sup>th</sup> Amendment, through the wire tapping that occurred, were “bartered” and because of this our dignity as a people of the free world “raped” by a discriminatory and delusional administration.

Furthermore, in addition to the physical losses of bartered rights and the casualties of civilians and military are also the countless “possibilities,” she says, that were lost. She writes:

“Will humanity and justice ever prevail? Again

My child did not go to war.

I have not lost anyone.

But haven't I truly

When my country has lost

so many

and So much...

Don't we all lose

A little of something

When human beings vanish

Before fulfilling their dreams?”

Many politicians, pundits, and journalists have talked about the legacy of the Bush administration. War and Truth, written in 2006, is a timeless voice of truth and justice that reminds us, however painfully, that Bush's legacy is one of major and disgraceful discrimination that separates itself from the true ideals of the United States of America. From the victims of Katrina, to the attacks on human rights, to those barred from speaking the truth so many years, to the recent revealing of the “legalized” torture, the administration left nothing but a trail of destruction and demise for American values and in so doing damaged human dignity for every one discriminated against nationally and abroad. To read the full book War and Truth/Guerra y Verdad please visit [www.poetalicia.com](http://www.poetalicia.com).



Written by: Robert Danielak

*“Leola and the Honeybears: An African American Retelling of Goldilocks and the Three Bears”*

*By Melodyue Benson Rosales*

Melodye Benson Rosales’ *Leola and the Honeybears: An African American Retelling of Goldilocks and the Three Bears* tells the story of Leola, a young African American girl who wants to help with her grandmother with the wash. When dismissed by her grandmother, Leola wanders into the Piney Woods where she meets a stranger, Mr. Weasel. In order to escape being swallowed whole, Leola hides in a strange home where she eats southern food before finding a comfortable bed on which to rest. This southern retelling of the classic fairytale is elegantly illustrated with oil paintings that draw you into Leola’s adventure. It provides an excellent opportunity to discuss cultural differences with children and is a must read for anyone looking for good children’s picture books.



Written by: Cathy Sheafor

## “A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier”

*By Ishmael Beah*

In "A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier" Ishmael Beah depicts the reality of the atrocities committed in Sierra Leone from 1993 to 1998. The author describes the details of the murders, rapes, and looting committed by both the rebels and army factions. In addition, Beah reveals the drug abuse of the armed factions by revealing that marijuana, and cocaine were the drugs of popular usage.

In January of 1996, when Beah was fifteen years old, he was released from the army. After this he was sent to a rehabilitation camp called the Benin Home. The purpose of the Benin Home was to rehabilitate boy soldiers, and rebels who suffered from the major symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Ishmael was selected to interview (by Mr. Kamara the Director of the Benin Rehabilitation Center) for presenting a speech at the United Nations in New York City based on his past experiences of giving inspiring speeches about why boy soldiering must be stopped. Beah was selected to give his speech for the following two reasons: One, he personally suffered, and participated in the war. Two, he had successfully undergone rehabilitation.

At the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Ishmael began his speech by saying "I am from Sierra Leone, and the problem that is affecting us children is the war that forces us to run away from our homes, lose our families, and aimlessly roam the forests. As a result, we get involved in the conflict as soldiers, carriers of loads, and in many other difficult tasks. All this is because of starvation, the loss of our families, and the need to feel safe and be part of something when all else has broken down. I joined the army because of the loss of my family and starvation. I wanted to avenge the deaths of my family. I also had to get some food to survive, and the only way to do that was to be part of the army. I have been rehabilitated now, so don't be afraid of me. I am not a soldier anymore; I am a child. We are all brothers and sisters. What I have learned from my experiences is that revenge is not good. I joined the army to avenge the deaths of my family and to survive, but I've come to learn that if I am going to take revenge, in that process I will kill another person whose family will want revenge; then revenge and revenge and revenge will never come to an end ..." (p.199)

In conclusion, "A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier", defines the reasons that children join the army or rebel forces. These children are the children that are permanently displaced from their families. Their parents, brothers, and sisters are either massacred or flee

wherever they can find safety. The children are faced with two horrendous options: One, join an armed faction, or two, starve to death. The author expresses through his experience that the concept of revenge is meaningless.



Written by: Jeffrey T. Kidd

## “Waiting for the Barbarians”

*By J.M. Coetzee*

Internationally acclaimed South African author J.M. Coetzee shows both his literary power and political/social insight in his novel *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980). The novel is known as one of the most gripping indictments ever written on the subject of colonialism and the innate discrimination and human rights violations it produces. The novel is set in an unnamed empire that is being threatened by “barbarians” or the native people of the land. The narrator of the novel is portrayed with a greater compassion for these “barbarians” whom he considers mere victims of an irrational war. However, he is too weak and lacks the conviction to protect them against his brutal and vicious colleague, Colonel Joll. It is through the eyes of the narrator that J.M. Coetzee shows the victimized and human side of these supposed “barbarians” and the ultimate realization at the end of the novel which is a scathing and eternal voice against all such discrimination and human rights violations.

It is significant to describe the many images of the horrible treatment of these “barbarians” to grasp the effect the novel is making. While these images are physical they are no doubt metaphors for the additional damage the strong and powerful do to the souls and spirits of the weak when positioned as erroneously superior; such as colonial empires and what they do to the natives. Specifically in this novel, Coetzee is not shy to portray the “barbarians” in dehumanized situations while also paralleling them to more tender portrayals which allow the reader to feel the internal struggle of the narrator. He sees “a little boy who stands on one leg, his arm on his mother’s shoulder, staring back curiously at the onlookers. Someone brings a bucket of water and a ladle. They drink thirstily.” Clearly these “barbarians” are human. A young boy with one leg is no threat, nor is the mother who clutches him to her shoulder. So why are they in captivity and why do these soldiers of the unnamed Empire treat them as dangerous? Perhaps it raises again the question of “otherness” which is inherent in discrimination. The “otherness” of these people engendered a fear in the stronger Empire, and thus they responded to the false fear with war. In addition, the “otherness” of the “barbarians” is also described in parallel terms: at once showing their majestic relationship to nature and the psychology of the Empire and why

they captured them. The narrator, struggling with the question of dehumanizing these clearly *human* beings says:

“These river people are aboriginal, older even than the nomads. They live in settlements of two or three families along the banks of the river, fishing and trapping for most of the year, paddling to the remote southern shores of the lake in autumn to catch red worms and dry them, building flimsy reed shelters, groaning with cold through winter, dressing in skins. Living in fear of everyone, skulking in the reeds, what can they possibly know of a great barbarian enterprise against the Empire?”

This section of the novel is significant because we are able to see that these “barbarians” are not the evil enemy and it is the Empire’s own fears which dehumanize them in order to control them, and ultimately their fear creates a system of captivity. This is not unlike racial segregation, marriage inequality, gender inequality, and slavery. All of these systems dehumanize a set group of individuals in order to assuage the majorities fear and ignorance of the “differences” of these people while keeping the transparent power they do not wish to “lose” to them. And this is exactly the struggle that the narrator recognizes. Unlike his other comrades, he is not afraid of these “differences” and sees no need to dehumanize them.

Beyond the death, sickness, hunger, and illness, however, the narrator makes a surprising discovery that also adds to the cycle of dehumanization that the majority afraid of a minorities influence creates. He notices that the bread, sugar, tea, and food they receive are enough to suffice. The narrator is in awe of the unusual peace of these people, while in captivity and how quickly they grew accustomed to the ready food no matter how little. He says: “They are happy here; indeed unless we chase them away they may stay with us forever, so little does it seem to have taken to lure them out of a state of nature.” “Happy” here of course is a relative term. While the narrator describes the “barbarian’s” acceptance of their captivity as “happy” it is quite clear they inherently cannot be, especially when many are sick, dying, and many have lost their babies and children. However, this section is significant because it explains the fear of the “other” perfectly. It is the fear that they may enter their society and stay forever; integrate and never disappear. And this is the goal of the unnamed Empire: to keep them dehumanized so they can never be equal. This is akin to segregation all over the world and seen especially in the

apartheids of South Africa- which as a native of the country is defiantly a political message made by Coetzee.

The ending of the novel is the epiphany section. The narrator finally breaks down the excuses he makes for the Empire, the excuses he makes for himself, and takes a stand. He releases the prisoners because they are human with an inherent right to freedom just like citizens of the Empire. However, because he worked with the Empire to capture these people he cannot be part of the “New Empire” of clarity and freedom. He, representing the majority, are tainted and stained by the discrimination, injustice, and dehumanization they forced upon these people. So long as they are alive the “barbarians,” now natives, are a reminder of the injustices caused upon them. The narrator states in one of the most poignant epiphanies ever written on the subject:

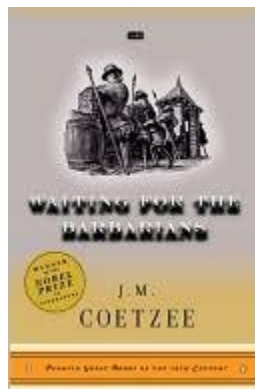
“It would be best if this obscure chapter in the history of the world were terminated at once, if these ugly people were obliterated from the face of the earth and we swore to make a new start, to run an empire in which there would be no more injustice, no more pain. It would cost so little to march them out into the desert (having put a meal in them first, perhaps, to make the march possible), to have them dig, with their last strength, a pit large enough for all of them to lie in...leaving them buried there forever and forever, to come back to the walled town full of new intentions, new resolutions.”

While incredibly poignant, the point is harrowing. As a living reminder of injustices he caused them, the narrator, representing others like him, would rather erase the memory of this dehumanization by killing these people. He recognizes the injustice he caused is so deep and painful that there is no other way for him and others like him to start over fresh. However, this is not reality and he must deal with the reality in front of him and therefore he will use all in his power to better the situation, regardless if the memories stay alive. He declares:

“But that will not be my way. The new men of the Empire are the ones who believe in fresh starts, new chapters, clean pages; I struggle on with the old story, hoping that before it is finished it will reveal to me why it was that I thought it worth the trouble. Thus it is that, administration of law and order in these parts having today passed back to me, I order that the

prisoners be fed, that the doctor be called in to do what he can, that the barracks return to being a barracks, that arrangements be made to restore the prisoners to their former lives as soon as possible, as far as possible.”

Coetzee’s genius can be seen in this last epiphany expressed by the narrator. The narrator must live with his choices and “struggle on...hoping that before it is finished it will reveal to me why it was that I thought it was worth the trouble.” It is clear that Coetzee is analyzing the psychology and politics of colonialism and its bitter production of segregation, apartheid, discrimination, and truncating of civil liberties. This epiphany is especially true for countries like the U.S.A, South Africa, Germany, Cambodia, Rwanda, Russian, Turkey, and many others with a history of slavery, discrimination, segregation, and genocide and unfortunately those that still practice it today. However, Coetzee also integrates a realistic hope within his message. Beyond showing what dehumanizing a selected group of people through discrimination or truncating freedoms can do to society in general, it is possible for those in power to change. Like the narrator who realizes the uselessness of fearing and dehumanizing “others” there is hope for everybody to change by accepting people that are supposedly different and respecting the humanness that is theirs just like yours.



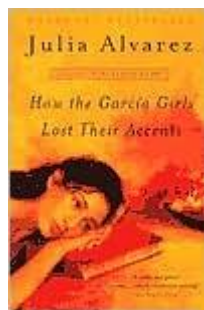
Written by: Robert Danielak

## “How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents”

*By Julia Alvarez*

Julia Alvarez’s novel, *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents*, a semi-autobiographical account of a family’s immigration to America, begins in 1989 with a visit to the Dominican Republic. The novel is a series of short stories, presented in reverse chronological order. Each focuses on a different family member: Papi, Mami, and their four daughters, Carla, Sandra, Yolanda, and Sofia. The family arrives in New York in 1960 after their father’s attempt to overthrow Dominican dictator Generalissimo Trujillo forces the family into exile. In the Dominican Republic, the Garcia family lived comfortably, taking advantage of opportunities afforded to them because of their genteel status. The Dominican culture takes center stage in a series of stories of the family’s homeland and each story unveils the differences between Dominican and American culture. As the girls grow up in America, struggling to exist in a new culture where skin color matters and language is a barrier, each symbolically loses her accent.

Alvarez’s novel is a powerful story of individual struggles to bridge cultural gaps and build identity. In addition to telling an intricate story of culture clash during the social and sexual revolution of the 1960s, Alvarez reveals the power of family during times of change and transformation. *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accent* provides an excellent opportunity to explore the issues of culture, race, gender, family, war, and change. Add it to your reading list. You’ll be glad you did.



Written by: Cathy Sheafor

## “Shooting an Elephant”

*By George Orwell*

George Orwell, internationally renowned author of *Animal Farm* and *1984*, was born in India in 1903. His father was a British civil servant there, and later Orwell also served in the Imperial Police in Burma from 1922-1927. These facts are crucial because it was his work as an Imperial Officer which instilled within him the abhorrence towards British Imperialism and towards imperialism in general so prevalent in some of his works. His Imperial service also produced within him a sense of guilt about his services for the government, which he only realized in his later twenties, and which gave him the haunting feeling that he must make up for it. It was this volition and need for justice which led him to write one of the most controversial and anti-colonialist essays in English Literature, *Shooting an Elephant* (1936). The essay is still relevant today as it explores the ultimate futility of a class society and also the psychological, political and social implications that imposing rule on seemingly inferior people creates. This futility can be seen in modern military campaigns such as the American war in Iraq and the conflict between Israel and Palestine where violent and deadly tension is created as a result of imposition. The essay focuses on one man, who must take responsibility and do something about the elephant that runs wild and attacks the native Burmese. It is in this situation that Orwell masterfully divulges the psychology of a man “selected to power,” who really is only a mask for colonialism and quite divided himself over the evils of imperialism.

Primarily, the essay divulges the raw and anxious nature of the narrator directly at the onset as he describes his persona and how he is perceived in Burma. He says: *I was hated by large numbers of people – the only time in my life that I have been important enough for this to happen to me. I was sub-divisional police officer of the town, and in an aimless, petty kind of way anti-European feeling was very bitter.* The section goes on further to describe how the Burmese jeered and molested European women walking alone in the streets, and how he himself, though a police officer, was insulted and harassed even by Buddhist monks. This is a significant introduction because it shows that imperialism and the forced imposition of rule by an alien power on a native people not only forces discrimination upon the natives, but instills hatred in the natives themselves and creates a cycle of racism and anger. Therefore, the essay excellently

reveals this truth about the nature of imposed rule that sadly instills hatred and discrimination that may not have been there before. This is akin to Bush naming Iran, one of the most pro western countries in the Middle East, as part of the “Axis of Evil” and therefore instilling a negative hatred that may not have been there before. Furthermore, this is also seen in the futility of the Guantanamo torture and prison sight which by imposing a fake “mask of power” on supposed and as yet not convicted “terrorists” only increased hatred towards America.

The essay continues to show how the narrator himself is confused about imperialism, and offers us this profound and insightful revelation that: *I had already made up my mind that imperialism was an evil thing and the sooner I chucked up my job and got out of it the better. Theoretically – and secretly, of course – I was all for the Burmese and all against their oppressors, the British. As for the job I was doing, I hated it more bitterly than I can perhaps make clear. In a job like that you see the dirty work of Empire at close quarters.* He also gives a reason for joining the Imperial Police, which rings true for many young people around the world and reveals how government blinds youth to serve in futile and evil purposes through propaganda: *I was young and ill-educated and I had had to think out my problems in the utter silence that is imposed on every Englishman in the East.* Surely this speaks to the disruptive powers of propaganda that the government imposes on youth to recruit them in their imperialistic and military ploys, and it is utterly unjust and unfair, just like the injustice it reaps. The narrator realizes this himself: *All I knew was that I was stuck between my hatred of the empire I served and my rage against the evil-spirited little beasts who tried to make my job impossible. Feelings like these are the normal by-products of imperialism; ask any Anglo-Indian official, if you can catch him off duty.* Therefore, masterfully the essay pinpoints the cycle of hatred and anger which is born from all types of imperialism, colonialism, and any discriminatory system which subjects one type of society to lower standards and human rights.

After learning that an elephant was running wild in the streets, the narrator reacts by getting a gun, for protection only, and heads out to instill peace. He emphasizes many times that he only wanted to “observe the elephant” until it leaves and had no intention of killing it. It is this moment in the essay where the narrator reveals the psychology of a man trapped between the evils of a government and the hatred of a populous which he must play the leader to. While the elephant was not harmful in any way and was busy eating, the narrator felt pressure from the

crowd that this would be the perfect time to shoot the elephant. He realizes his divided situation and thinks:

*Here was I, the white man with his gun, standing in front of the unarmed native crowd – seemingly the leading actor of the piece; but in reality I was only an absurd puppet pushed to and fro by the will of those yellow faces behind. I perceived in this moment that when the white man turns tyrant it is his own freedom that he destroys. He becomes a sort of hollow, posing dummy, the conventionalized figure of a sahib. For it is the condition of his rule that he shall spend his life in trying to impress the "natives," and so in every crisis he has got to do what the "natives" expect of him. He wears a mask, and his face grows to fit it. I had got to shoot the elephant. I had committed myself to doing it when I sent for the rifle. A sahib has got to act like a sahib; he has got to appear resolute, to know his own mind and do definite things. To come all that way, rifle in hand, with two thousand people marching at my heels, and then to trail feebly away, having done nothing – no, that was impossible. The crowd would laugh at me. And my whole life, every white man's life in the East, was one long struggle not to be laughed at.*

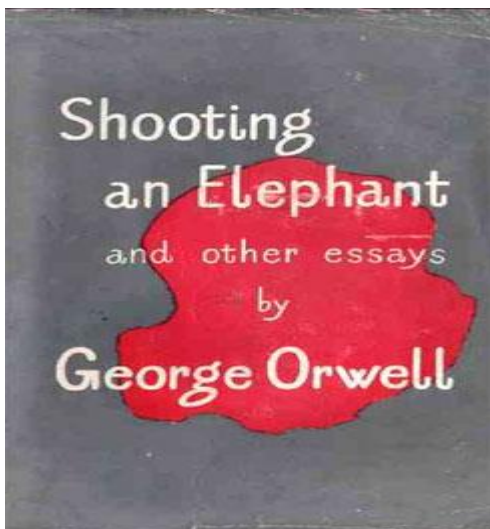
Therefore, the power and prestige of an Imperial officer is nothing more than mask and a puppet, and even worse he kills his own soul for working for the evils of the government. He finally shoots the elephant and feels so much agony for the wounded animal, which takes hours to die and which the people were prepared to strip for food. The profound barbarism of the situation creates a momentous impression on the mind of the reader and we are able to see, and also feel, the profound futility of the narrator. What was his role? Wouldn't a native be better prepared to deal with the elephant without killing it? And it is this very futility that unveils the mask and hollow role of the Imperial officer, the modern equivalent of any forced military operation which imposes its role on a people who have no trust for it. By playing a false role the narrator does nothing but continues the evil discrimination of the British government and destroys his own soul while being utterly lost in a foreign land.

The essay concludes with a haunting reminder of this futile "role playing" that leads to nothing but destruction and the narrator ponders about the opinion of the populous and about his leadership. He also shows how he has changed negatively as a human being and how he became his role, which means he is only concerned for the mask he wears:

*Afterwards, of course, there were endless discussions about the shooting of the*

*elephant. The owner was furious, but he was only an Indian and could do nothing. Besides, legally I had done the right thing, for a mad elephant has to be killed, like a mad dog, if its owner fails to control it. Among the Europeans opinion was divided. The older men said I was right, the younger men said it was a damn shame to shoot an elephant for killing a coolie, because an elephant was worth more than any damn Coringhee coolie. And afterwards I was very glad that the coolie had been killed; it put me legally in the right and it gave me a sufficient pretext for shooting the elephant. I often wondered whether any of the others grasped that I had done it solely to avoid looking a fool.*

The bitter irony has become that while striving to not look like a fool, he has become a fool. He does not even see the death of the native as the death of a human being, but as something that will maintain the right for him to have shot the elephant in the court of law. He is a fool, playing a role that is futile. And while this essay may be at once specific to this situation, there is no doubt that George Orwell elevates the relevance of the discussion about imposed military power, and many governments around the world must realize the destruction they cause to the souls of young people and generations everywhere due to their thirst for power, rule, military exploits and the subsequent subjugation of certain peoples.

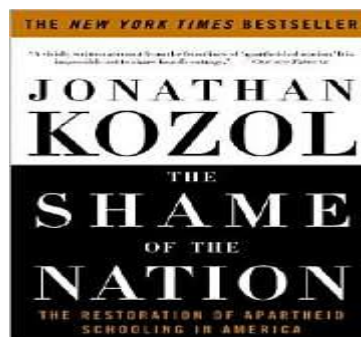


Written by: Robert Danielak

## “The Shame of the Nation: The Restoration of Apartheid Schooling in America”

*By Jonathan Kozol*

In “The Shame of the Nation: The Restoration of Apartheid Schooling in America,” activist and author Jonathan Kozol explores the modern-day segregation of children in various public schools across the nation. Years of hands-on research and experience, coupled with the personal accounts of the children and teachers at such schools enables Kozol’s work to be poignantly informative. “The Shame of the Nation: The Restoration of Apartheid Schooling in America” illustrates the disconcerting reality of poor and minority children of urban schools, most of whom are comprised of African-American and Hispanic families, that have become so segregated to a degree comparable to that of a pre-Brown v. Board of Education era. Throughout the book Kozol presents data that shows unpleasantly ironic situations; he mentions how it is like a “slap in the face to pioneers” such as Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King, Jr., who fought for equality, yet, the schools bearing their names are typically the least integrated. In another instance, Kozol shows the discrepancy between the rich “white” children’s education and that of the poor minorities who attend the segregated urban schools; the more privileged private schools benefit from extra teachers, enrichment programs, smaller class sizes and significant monetary contributions from the parents. On the other hand, segregated schools rarely have any financial contributions where essentials like textbooks, teachers, and school building repair do not get fixed. Despite such circumstances, Kozol also highlights the people who are constantly trying to work through the constraints, such as compelling teachers, principals and especially, the students themselves. Jonathan Kozol’s knowledgeable background and passion for education reform powers the work to be eye opening and creates motivation for change.

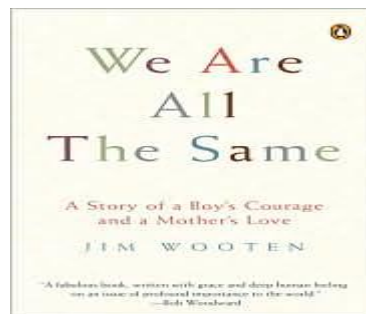


Written by: Erika Viado

## “We Are All the Same”

*By Jim Wooten*

This heart-warming tale of a South African boy with AIDS is both powerful and eye-opening. Written by an award-winning journalist, the book is a touching account of Nkosi Johnson’s battle against AIDS. Born to a poor mother who was dying of AIDS, Nkosi grew up in the home of a white South African named Gail Johnson. He travelled around the world to raise money for Nkosi’s Haven, a home for women and children battling AIDS. But, Wooten’s story is more than an account of one amazing child and his courageous fight. It is also a story of AIDS in South Africa where 7,000 infants die of AIDS each month. A tear-jerker, this is a must read for anyone interested in the power of the human spirit.



Written by: Cathy Sheafor

## “Getting Even: Why Women Don’t Get Paid Like Men”

*By Murphy & Graff*

Chapter 5 of “Getting Even: Why Women Don’t Get Paid Like Men” titled “Plain Old Discrimination” the authors examine the following areas where women experience discrimination: hiring, promotion, pay, pregnancy penalty, and lawsuits.

A prime example of inhibiting women to attain professional jobs occurred in 1952, when Sandra Day O’Connor applied for a lawyer job. The firm she applied to stated that they don’t hire female lawyers. Sandra Day O’Connor held an elite ranking in her law class, since she graduated third out of one – hundred and two of her 1952 Stanford Law Class. Many hiring professionals utilize illegal hiring policies called, “gut instincts,” which give men an unfair advantage in the hiring process. The biased reasoning for their hiring decisions is simply that men are more capable than women of doing a good job. In the hiring process, a man and a woman’s qualifications may be equal, but the job is given to the man based on sex biases. Another injustice women face is that after succeeding at an interview, they must pass an additional test, which is to prove their job competence. Many managers slot applicants according to their sex, regardless of their capabilities and credentials. For example, women were slotted as cashiers with low pay and promotion potential at Home Depot during the 1990’s. The men on the other hand, were slotted as sales associates with career paths to management positions. In addition, at Publix grocery stores women’s promotions and raises never occurred, since they were never offered. Like Home Depot, women were restricted to cashier job slots which paid less with little or no likelihood for promotion. Job promotions and advancements were biased in the men’s favor, since managers picked men who worked in the stocking isles. Moreover, the “tap – on – the shoulder method,” gave management unrestricted power / authority to chose men without explanation.

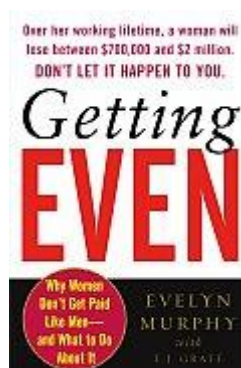
“When one woman, Genevieve Oney, complained that she had no chance to move up, she was actually told, you’re making good money for a woman. What is good money for a woman? Before the lawsuit, men working at Publix full-time made, on average, 35 percent more than women working there full-time. Apparently, good money for a woman is 65 cents to a man’s dollar.”

Another type of discrimination which workforce women experience is the pregnancy penalty. Women who become pregnant suffer repercussions for their pregnancy, namely:

termination, demotion, and placed on unpaid leave. An example of the pregnancy penalty was when a woman detective experienced the penalty phase for the consequences of having a second child. Her police department's employment policy in regard to pregnancy was that pregnancy is an, "off – the – job injury". This woman detective experienced the following consequences due to her pregnancy: her overtime pay was rescinded, as well as her authorized use of an unmarked police car. The police departments' action of rescinding her overtime pay placed her in a financial hardship, since her overtime pay accounted for one – third of her total gross earnings. When this woman detective refused to accept her departments penalty phase concerning pregnancy, she was penalized again by being sent out on unpaid leave, and stripped of her entire paycheck. This woman detective took her police department to court and won. As a result from this discrimination lawsuit, she lost respect from her colleagues, family, and her husband, who divorced her.

"Worse, the lawsuit did not get this police officer's paycheck even with what it should have been. In the end, this particular cop received \$401,361 as part of her group's jury award. Of her portion, \$137,000 went to her lawyers. Another \$132,000 went directly to state and federal taxes. That left her with \$132,361 some of which had to be used to cover debts incurred while being unable to work overtime during the lawsuit."

The monetary funds she received did not cover her loss of pay, as well as the following hardships: mental, emotional, and personal distresses. Ultimately, the case was categorized a success, since it forced the police department to change its policy in regard to pregnant police officers and detectives.



Written by: Jeffrey T. Kidd