

## Black Cultural Forms in Schools

Subcultures (thus) are not isolated from the powerful; their culture is set in relation to the dominant cultures surrounding them...  
(Quantz & O'Connor, 1988)

Over the years student groups with distinctive cultures have forged varied relationships with school structures. These subgroups have ranged from those that are fully integrated into the social system to others that are profoundly antischool. The “conformists” or “mainstreamers,” for example, obey school rules, show respect for authority, conform to expectations, and are generally supportive of the authority structure of their school. At the other extreme, however, are student subcultures that are expressedly nonconformist and anti-school. Their lived experiences, system of practices, and way of life differ from those of students of the dominant culture. As a result, conflict and tension characterize their relationship with school authority as they break school rules, disregard the codes of conduct, and strive to impose their own values, beliefs, and dispositions on the dominant school culture. It is this point of conflict that produces antagonistic relationships that have in recent years become the focus of many educational researchers. Ethnographic studies carried out within schools provide good insights into how dominant and subordinate cultures struggle for control of these institutions.

This book is about such a struggle. It documents and analyzes the oppositional relationship between a black student subculture and the authority structure of a Canadian high school. The influx of black immigrants into Canada over the past two decades exposed its school system to a student culture that was different from the predominantly white mainstream culture. The cohesive group of black, working-class, West Indian immigrant boys in this study, socially differentiated from the dominant culture in many ways, became a substantial challenge to the white, middle-class school structure. As we shall see, such a student group does not operate arbitrarily; the culture they generate is influenced by such powerful factors as their social class, race, ethnicity,

and immigrant status. For example, Willis's (1977) ethnography highlighted a British student subculture influenced by social class. The "lads," as Willis calls them, actively differentiated themselves from the dominant middle-class bias of the school and spent their time engaged in counterschool activities, creating diversions and enjoyment, avoiding work, "having a laff," and skillfully working the system. Conflicts and tensions pervaded the interaction between these lads and the school staff. What were the reasons for such counterschool behaviors? Willis concludes that working-class students engage in subcultural activities because they realize that conformism for their class is fruitless; schooling will not improve their life chances. So they generate behaviors that not only give them social power, but affirm their acceptance of their subordinate economic fate like their parents before them.

In addition to class-based oppositional forms, gender-based subcultures are important at their point of intersection with the black, working-class male subculture in this study. While McRobbie (1978) and Griffin's (1985) research on British working-class girls showed that females contest class and patriarchal forms of domination they encounter at home, school, and in the workplace, Fuller's (1980) study of black girls in a London comprehensive school added the dynamic of race to such interaction. She found that the rather obvious Anglocentric and middle-class biases in the structure, organization, and curriculum of the school made it a battleground of opposing values; a terrain where black girls demonstrate their resistance to class, gender, and ethnoracial values with which they do not identify. The challenges that fill the relationship between black males and females in Fuller's 1982 British study appear to have their origin in the group's differential commitment to a West Indian social formation characterized by male dominance. These intra-group tensions are of particular significance to the understanding of black females' accommodation and resistance to the domination of black male subcultural behaviors in this Canadian study. How different are black cultural forms from those of whites, and will the patterns of working-class West Indian blacks in Canadian schools be different from those of other blacks in U.S. and British schools?

### BLACK CULTURAL FORMS IN SCHOOLS

While the dynamic of race is still conspicuously underemployed in theories on schooling and resistance to the reproduction of inequality, emerging research in the U.S. and Britain is becoming more sensitive to its significance to some subordinate cultures. The earlier literature on minority-group response to the content and process of schooling viewed black subcultures from a psychosocial perspective. Black pathology and social deviance were explained in terms of the inadequacy of the black family to cope in white

society. Gradually, however, conflict theorists gained prominence in interpreting black oppositional forms as a political response to the white, middle-class organization of the school. This gradual redefinition has given new meaning to terms such as "black power," "black rebellion," and "black culture of resistance." What then is the nature of black oppositional forms at the point of conflict?

Studies of black students culture in U.S. schools have documented a range of attitudes and a repertoire of behaviors that are perceived as characteristic of black culture. Gilmore's (1985) study of black elementary students, for example, described their "stylized sulking" and "doin' steps" as statements of open resistance to the ethos of the school and a challenge to teacher authority. "Stylized sulking" is described by Gilmore as rather disgruntled nonverbal postures and facial expressions, and "doin' steps" as a steady alternating rhythm of foot stepping and hand clapping. Teachers and school administrators see these student activities as part of a stereotypic, communicative style of black culture and interpret them as bad attitude, defiance, insolence, and insubordination. They were associated with black vernacular "street" culture, and banned by school administrations as being lewd, disrespectful, and "inappropriate for school." Gilmore sees such an institutional response to these cultural forms as "containing the children's symbolic social portraits of the dynamic of schooling" (p.124).

At the high school level, the research of Petroni (1970) and Fordham and Ogbu (1986) found striking similarities in the practices and symbolism of black culture in U.S. schools. The students that Petroni studied painstakingly defined and monitored "black activities" to ensure their separation from "white activities." By wearing symbols of black identity such as the "Afro" hairstyle and engaging in discourses on "black power," black students created a sense of separateness in intergroup relations. In addition, students who embraced the black cultural identity disassociated themselves from both curricular and extracurricular activities they perceived as white. Powerful negative sanctions such as name-calling and labels of "Uncle Toms" and "white negroes" were brought to bear on black students who did not conform to "black ways." However, participation in activities such as athletics, perceived as the blacks' domain, received high recognition from fellow blacks. While these cultural forms were not overtly oppositional to school ethos, they were symbolic of a rebellion against the established social order. In addition, a differential commitment to black cultural behaviors gave rise to intragroup conflicts, especially between those who strove for black identity and others who gravitated toward the white, mainstream culture.

Fordham and Ogbu's (1986) ethnographic study of black students in an urban, predominantly black high school found elements of opposition and resistance against what they perceived as the prerogative of white Americans. Embracing the school curriculum and such attendant activities as speaking

standard English, spending a lot of time in the library, working hard to get good grades, and being on time were perceived as "acting white." Here again, black students who engaged in academic pursuits were labeled "brainiacs" and were alienated, ostracized, or even physically assaulted by militant blacks. In their effort to develop, express, and maintain a black cultural identity, students engaged in a number of practices that were often in conflict with school norms. They were opposed to, and actively resisted, for themselves and their black peers, any behaviors they perceived as "acting white."

Black lower-class cultural behaviors that operated in opposition to the American high school structure were vividly documented in the research by Marotto (1977) and Foster (1986). The activities of the "Boulevard Brothers" in Marotto's ethnography conflicted with the expectations of their white peers, teachers, and the authority structure of their school. Their street corner behavior repertoire and life-style included such activities as the manipulation of others, flouting school rules, noninvolvement in academic pursuits, and preserving group cohesion and identity through their style of dress and demeanor. Through their informal networks they not only generated social power, but effectively circumvented the school's maintenance system. The authority structure responded with exasperation and consternation, neglecting, suspending and failing the "Brothers." Marotto's analysis of this confrontation between student culture and school structure is summarized thus:

The school denies the students freedom, masses and fails to differentiate them, keeps them powerless and in a state of spectatorship, provides little human interaction and gives them primarily future oriented and symbolic rewards; the group's street corner frame of reference gave the Brothers independence of action and the immediate pleasure of participating in human interaction. (p.5)

Foster (1986) interprets some aspects of the culture and life-style of black lower-class adolescent males as socially approved behaviors perfected for their own survival in a hostile, urban, street corner environment. The verbal games of "Ribbin', Jivin', and Playin' the Dozens" are survival strategies designed to manipulate, persuade, and even accommodate others, including school authority figures. Verbal and nonverbal language are used by these blacks to give the impression of subservience to authority while at the same time controlling and concealing their true emotions. Street corner rituals institutionalized in the black lower-class American culture are seen as rebelliously inappropriate and a disruptive influence when practiced in schools. Teachers' refusal to tolerate this life-style resulted in tension-filled confrontations with black students. At the community college level, black student culture takes on a more contradictory element. As Weis (1985) shows, black cultural forms affirm the process of education on one hand, but students practiced contradictory behaviors such as dropping in and out of school and exerting little effort in their academic tasks.

From these profiles of black cultural forms in all levels of American educational institutions have emerged some key insights into why student cultures conflict with school structures. Certain attitudes, rituals, and styles of behavior, perceived as characteristic of black culture, solidify black identity and at the same time alienate the dominant-group culture. Because these behaviors are at variance with the established social order, indulgent students come into conflict with the authority structure of the school. Why have these students shown no vested interest in maintaining a white-dominated school structure? Ogbu (1974) and Weis (1985) argue that the relationship of blacks and whites in the larger American society is historically rooted. Blacks' unequal and subordinate socioeconomic position in the U.S. and their struggle to extricate themselves from this disadvantaged position has given rise to student oppositional cultures that are historically informed. For example, Genovese (1974) explains that black slaves developed a culture of resistance to the institution of slavery and demonstrated their opposition through their language and communication patterns, their work rhythms, and their frequent running away from the burden of slavery. As Weis (1985:134) analyzed it, "These oppositional practices have been lived out and elaborated upon over the years, and constitute core cultural elements in the urban black community today." Black cultural forms within U.S. schools are often responses to what Ogbu and Weis see as explicit in the system: the cost of being black is that whites get greater rewards for any given amount of schooling than non-whites. This realization, Weis concludes, has "fostered the reproduction of deeply rooted race-class antagonisms in the broader society" (1986:14).

An overview of black oppositional forms within schools would be incomplete without an analysis of the development of the black youth culture in Britain. When West Indians migrated to Britain, they did so largely to increase the possibilities of both educational and occupational mobility. They were prepared to compromise and to be politically cautious in the host country. Second-generation West Indian youth, however, became defined as constituting a culture of resistance, engaging in ecstatic life-styles, and abstracting themselves from their marginalized positions in British society. A plethora of research captured a range of these cultural forms: readopting creole as a form of linguistic resistance, differential use of reggae music and its associated life-style, celebration of masculinity; street hustling and a refusal to work; and embracing Rastafarian beliefs and spreading oppositional messages.<sup>1</sup>

Researchers such as Wood (1974) Pryce (1978) see the cultural life-styles of the larger black community as a response or an orientation to social situations in which they find themselves. Their studies utilized the life-style concepts adapted from Hannerz's (1969) research of the black ghetto culture and community in the United States. The distinctive styles of existence for these black West Indians in Britain ranged from the status-aspiring "mainstreamers" or "mainliner" to the antiestablishment "teenyboppers." Pryce saw the

mainliners as achievement oriented, qualifications-conscious, and motivated by the concerns of status and responsibility. By and large, mainliners are conformers who want to be integrated in the mainstream British society, and have no allegiance to culture-specific political groups. At the other extreme of the life-style spectrum are the teenyboppers, a male subculture that has dropped out of the mainstream, are usually unemployed, and quite often in conflict with the law. They reject the status quo, and are in conflict with the dominant white society for discriminating against them in education and employment. Later in life, the teenyboppers resort to a life-style of hustling—a disreputable way of life—to earn a living, and to avoid the drudgery of routinized, unskilled labor. This life-style, Hebdige (1976) and Brake (1980) conclude, was inspired by Rastafarian ideology and resistance messages disseminated in reggae music. These are the types of oppositional cultures with which black, working-class children experiment in their communities.

The expectation of a black explosion in British schools was based, in part, on black students' oppositional frame of reference from the larger black community. Dhondy's (1974) concern was also based on his observation of black students' challenge and rejection of school discipline, study, and routine: "a reaction to the discipline machine." He concluded that black students' culture of resistance was a response to the type of labor force for which the education system was preparing them. Later, Furlong's (1984) study of black resistance in a British comprehensive school found that black boys "drew selectively on popular culture, parental culture, and aspects of their institutional life in order to create their own unique cultural resistance" (p. 217). The boys' oppositional cultural forms included rude, aggressive, and confrontational styles of interaction with the staff. They invested time in exploiting the weaknesses of the school to create the social space for their group life. Furlong argued that although the boys took a contradictory approach to education, their culture of resistance developed only after they sensed they were failing academically, and wanted to maintain the myth of possibility of success. By the same token, Cashmore and Troyna (1982:7) believe that black youths' embracement of oppositional cultures, for example, the Rastafarian subculture, has some of its beginnings within schools:

We see "the drift" as having its genesis not in the postschool experiences, as some commentators have insisted, but in the later stages of their secondary school education.

What factors within British schools, and the society at large, have given rise to West Indian oppositional and even counterschool cultures? Willis (1977:49) refers to "patterns of racial culture" and describes racism as embedded in the formal as well as the informal structures of school culture:

Both [white] lads and staff do share their resentment for the [black] disconcerting intruder. For racism amongst the lads, it provides a double support

for hostile attitudes. The informal was, for once, backed up by at least the ghost of the formal.

Carby (1982) and Cashmore (1982) argue that the situation for black students in school was an extension of the situation the whole West Indian community faced socially in British society. Therefore, Cashmore (1982:184) concludes, forms of resistance in school must be understood within the wider context of the struggles against discrimination faced by the whole black community: "students practising forms of resistance as members of the black fraction of the working class."

How do black cultural forms in British schools compare with those in American schools? First, there are striking similarities in patterns of association. Establishing a group identity based on color and preserving group cohesion appear to be a key feature of this culture. Identity and group cohesion were maintained by in-group linguistic codes and communication patterns. The uniqueness of "black language" in the U.S. and West Indian "dialect" in Britain made it difficult for dominant-group students and teachers to participate in the communication process. In addition to the alienating effects of these language forms, popular black music such as "rap" and "reggae" was used to disseminate oppositional messages. Dress and demeanor also featured prominently in black identity, and are often a source of conflict between students and teachers. The literature also revealed that in both British and American schools there is differential commitment to black cultural identity. Black mainstreamers buy into school rules and regularities and support the status quo. Students who gravitate to more oppositional cultures spend a great deal of time opposing authority, being confrontational, and investing very little time and effort in their school work. Social commentators see such behaviors as growing out of the culture of the larger black community and as resistance to the subordination that racial minorities face in these white societies. As Genovese (1974) and Weis (1985) argue, the U.S. race-class antagonism is historically rooted in slavery and reproduced through an ongoing dominant-subordinate relationship that has existed between the two groups over time. In the case of Britain, its history of colonialism created similar tensions between blacks and whites in the West Indies. These tensions were heightened when immigrants from these islands sought equality with white natives in British society. From this comparative overview it appears then that the history of relationships between blacks and whites in the wider society helps determine the nature of in-school relationships. According to Weis, history is also one of the factors responsible for the difference between black and white cultural forms. Weis (1985:132) explains:

The fact that blacks constitute a castelike group in American society means that student culture will automatically take a somewhat different shape and form from that of the white working class. Student cultural forms is also affected by the nature of historic struggle for particular groups.

A second difference between black and white oppositional forms may be related to their level of acceptance of the achievement ideology. Willis's working-class lads and MacLeod's (1987) "Hallway Hangers," for example, are white subcultures that flatly reject any possibility of upward mobility through schooling and therefore found it less conflicting to engage in the oppositional activities in school. To the contrary, some black working-class subcultures studied by Weis (1985), MacLeod (1987), and Fuller (1980) have high aspirations of "making it," so it is with much inner conflict that they resist the process of schooling. MacLeod concludes that ethnicity plays a key role in determining black students' belief in their chances of achieving social and economic mobility in society. Identifying ethnicity as a factor in black response to the achievement ideology is significant to the study of West Indian immigrants and their expectations in the Canadian socioeconomic structure. Such expectations have become powerful forces in mediating relationships with school structures. How do West Indian cultural forms impact on the Canadian school structure?

Because of the relatively new impact of black immigrants on the Canadian scene, sustained research on black culture in Canadian schools is only just emerging. This study was predated by a few empirical but mostly speculative and journalistic accounts of the existence and impact of a black youth subculture within urban schools and communities. For example, the *Toronto Life* magazine (March 1981:72) carried the following impressions:

In the areas of Toronto where the West Indian community is concentrated ...gangs of black kids can be found at any time of day, lounging about, smoking a joint, listening to reggae on somebody's radio, chatting.... They have dropped out of school, aren't very welcome at home...They exist almost entirely outside the mainstream of society (Siggin).

Such a description of a West Indian youth subculture in Toronto does not speculate as to why these youngsters separate themselves from the dominant culture and no longer embrace schooling as an avenue for making it in Canadian society. Other social commentators, however, have offered wide-ranging explanations. One of the most popular is the traditional immigrant adjustment model that explains the difficulties of newcomers in overcoming the differences between their old and new cultures. The rate at which immigrants overcome these cultural discontinuities often relies on factors such as the coping strategies of the immigrant and the receptivity of the host environment. Other explanations of subcultural behaviors such as cultural deprivation and social deviance among West Indian immigrants locate the problem squarely on the shoulders of the individual with disregard for the negative effect of the institutional structures in which they live. This is what Ryan (1976) describes as "blaming the victim."

This study of working-class West Indian students in a Canadian high



school provides a perspective that scrutinizes the interaction of culture and structure. Central to this formulation is the notion of culture and cultural politics: how students utilize ethno-specific behaviors to oppose the school structures they perceive as not serving their interest. Here, we will explore the interaction between the authoritative system of the school representing the dominant culture of the wider society, and the cultural forms of students with allegiances to the specific subgroup differentiated from the dominant culture by class, race, and immigrant status. What is it within schools that student subcultures oppose? And why are institutions of learning described as arenas where class, gender, and race antagonisms and meanings are lived out?

### SCHOOLS AS ARENAS OF CONFLICT

From a review of the literature it appears as if student subcultures oppose school structures because of their hidden and formal curriculum. Some educational theorists such as Apple and Weis (1983) see schooling for working-class students as characterized by the tacit teaching of middle-class norms, values, and dispositions through institutional expectations and the routines of day-to-day school life. Working-class subcultures often oppose the rigid rules, the respect for external rewards, the orderly work habits, and the demand for subordination that schools sought in order to achieve these expectations. Theorists such as Parsons (1959) view the function of the hidden curriculum as a necessary one offering students the opportunity to become responsible citizens. More radical theorists such as Bowles and Gintis (1976) see the hidden curriculum as a way of preparing students to take their place in a socioeconomic system. They claim that middle and working-class students are socialized differentially, with the middle class involved in high levels of cognitive inputs, taught with flexibility, and given the opportunity for interpersonal development. For the working-class students, however, Bowles and Gintis claim that their relationship with the schooling process is marked by a high degree of certainty, control, and student powerlessness. There is explicitness in the criteria for student evaluation, rule following is enforced, and the hierarchy of authority is well defined. Students who do not acquiesce to official authority are made to suffer the consequences through low grades, negative evaluations, and a withdrawal of privileges. Working-class students dislike such explicit top-down policies and codes of conduct, so conflict, tension, and opposition abound between "rule makers" and "rule breakers."

Closely linked to the tensions and conflicts surrounding the routines of everyday school life is opposition to the formal curriculum. Research on tracking and the stratification of knowledge in American, British, and Canadian schools indicates that the working-class and racial minorities are more

likely than their white, middle-class peers to be in low-track programs. It is such placement that determines minorities' future positions in the occupational hierarchy. Working-class and racial minority students have become very much aware of their futures and actively reject a curriculum that commits them to a future of generalized labor. Ogbu (1974) and Weis's (1985) explorations of black cultural forms in U.S. schools found that conflict with the school curriculum and lowered work efforts result when students realize that their education is only "second best" to that of whites. In her test of Bowles and Gintis's hypothesis that schools fragment students into tracks, then reward their capabilities, attitudes, and behaviors in different ways, Oakes (1985) concludes that the hidden and formal curriculum are inextricably related to each other and also to the broader socioeconomic system. Students with insights into how school structures limit their social advancement in life become antagonistic to such structures, making schools an arena for conflict. How does this struggle fit into the broader theoretical framework of schooling, social reproduction, and resistance? Let us now examine some of the theories that explain the culture-structure dualism.

The reproduction theorists such as Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) and Bowles and Gintis (1976) maintain that institutions such as schools perpetuate people's social-class positions in society. Bowles and Gintis, in particular, hypothesized that the capitalist economic system is a hierarchical structure that requires people of various social origin and educational preparation for its smooth operation. Schools are instrumental in educating, socializing, and delivering to the workplace people for these categories of work. To ensure that the social relationships of a stratified workplace are maintained, the school teaches respect for authority and the institutional hierarchy. This parallel between the social relationships of the school and the workplace is described by Bowles and Gintis as the "correspondence theory." How is education structured so that working and middle-class children are prepared differentially for their work roles? Here, Bowles and Gintis suggest that working-class children invariably are educated in neighborhood schools whose unwritten curriculum puts emphasis on subordination to authority, rule following and direction taking. This type of education, over time, reproduces generations of working-class and racial minorities at the bottom of the socioeconomic hierarchy with very little chance of upward mobility. Middle-class students, on the other hand, are educated in suburban schools that teach internalized control and give students the opportunity to participate in the decision-making process. This prepares them for more managerial positions in the stratified work force.

Giroux (1983) criticized the theory of social reproduction for being too deterministic. Students are not passive role-bearers or pawns in the capitalist system as Bowles and Gintis make them out to be; to the contrary, they exercise relative autonomy and actively resist the school structures they dislike.

Willis's (1977) research described a vibrant student culture that opposes and contests the regularities of schooling. His theory of cultural production labels the process by which subordinate groups such as his working-class, disenfranchised "lads" develop strident attitudes and practices in opposition to their kind of schooling. Is Willis's emphasis on the cultural also an extreme response to the uncritical structuralist explanation of schooling and social reproduction? Giroux's indepth analysis of the structure-culture dualism has provided a framework to examine these extreme accounts of schooling and the possibilities for bridging this dualism. He argues that the structuralist perspective is important because it identifies the economic, political, and ideological forces in society that shape the domination of the subordinate groups. With these structures in place, domination appears to "exhaust the possibility of struggle, resistance and transformation" (Giroux 1983:137).

The structuralists attach no significance to any form of contestation, struggle, and opposition to dominant institutional practices. The culturalists, on the other hand, insist on the relative autonomy of the cultural and the conscious struggle and actions of subordinate groups. But they fail to acknowledge the power of institutional mechanisms to control and shape human experiences. For example, Willis was aware of the structural determinants that shaped the attitudes and behaviors of the working-class "lads," but he did not analyze or elaborate on their full impact. For West Indian minorities in Canadian institutions, the imposition of dominant-group norms, values, social practices, and expectations on a group socialized in another culture has a significant impact on the content, process, and outcome of schooling. This study analyzes the structure-culture impact on school life as these forces strive to dominate each other.

## THEORIES OF RESISTANCE AND CULTURAL INVERSION

Resistance theories developed out of studies that examine the opposition, confrontation, and struggle between student cultures and the school's authority structure. But may all oppositional behaviors be defined as resistant? In developing his theory of resistance, Giroux (1983) insists that oppositional behaviors must have sociopolitical significance to be seen as resistance. When students refuse to follow certain school rules and routines and refuse to embrace school ethos that they perceive as acts of subordination, they are engaging in acts of resistance. When black students in Fordham and Ogbu's (1986) study rebuke their black peers for "acting white," they are actively resisting white structure and domination. Likewise, when black college students in Weis's (1985) study go through the routine of schooling but exert little effort in their study, they may be resisting an education that they see as only "second best" to that of whites. Dhondy's (1974:45) observation of

rejection of school curriculum in British schools fits the definition of black culture of resistance:

Their [blacks'] rejection of work is a rejection of the level to which schools have skilled them as a labor power, and when the community feeds that rejection back into the school system, it becomes a rejection of the function of schooling.

This negative response to the dominant-group prescription of education for the workplace fits Giroux's definition of resistance: the cause and meaning of opposition has "a great deal to do with moral and political indignation" (p.288). Giroux and others caution that not all oppositional behaviors of students have radical significance or are rooted in a reaction to authority. Hargreaves (1982) criticized researchers for their indiscriminate application of the category "resistance" to all student behaviors and using the concept as a sort of trawling device that does not distinguish between resistance and other modes of student responses. Mullard (1985) suggests that resistance should be seen as an expression of power relationships where socially distinct groups interact competitively, each possessing interests that are "anchored in diametrically alternative conception of social reality" (p.38). Student subcultures, then, use oppositional behaviors to dismantle the social and institutional structures of schools and replace them with ones that are more compatible with their own needs and desires.

What frame of reference is most appropriate for explaining forms of resistance practiced by immigrant minorities in a host society? Here, Ogbu's (1987) cultural differences and cultural inversion theories are useful starting points for analysing the behaviors of West Indian immigrant students. According to Ogbu, immigrant minorities possess a distinctive ethnic, linguistic, and cultural identity developed in their homeland before coming into contact with the host culture. West Indian immigrants to Britain or Punjabi immigrants to the U.S. demonstrate behaviors, language, and communication patterns that stand out as a part of their group's cultural and social identity. Secondary cultural differences, Ogbu explains, develop when two groups come into contact involving the subordination of one group. Such cultural differences are evident in what he describes as castelike minorities such as native, Mexican, and black Americans whose cultures have been subordinated by the dominant group over a long period of time. These secondary cultural differences are acts of resistance and opposition to the low status prescribed for them by the dominant culture. While primary cultural differences of immigrant groups are seen as one of content, secondary differences of castelike minorities are categorized as one of style. Studies of minorities in U.S. schools describe their differences from the dominant culture in terms of "communication style," "interaction style" and "behavior style." Minority groups have used these cultural styles very effectively in their practice of

“cultural inversion.” This Ogbu describes as the tendency for minorities to use their cultural style to resist dominant-group institutional practices, to protect and maintain their social identity, and to reject the negative stereotypes used to portray them.

This study of West Indian boys extends Ogbu’s theory by examining how these immigrant students combine their primary and secondary cultural differences in a unique strategy of resistance to their school structures. Their content-style dualism has the potential to generate additional attitudes, symbols, and behaviors that are very dynamic in their oppositional practices. Some black students in the British school system embrace the Rastafarian subculture with its corresponding differences in language forms, dress, and demeanor and antiestablishment modes of behavior that are antithetical to dominant-group norms and values. This cultural inversion results in “the co-existence of two opposing cultural frames of reference...” (Ogbu 1987:323).

This brief overview of resistance theories will be helpful in putting into perspective the relationship that exists between the authority structure of Lumberville High School and the West Indian student subculture. Ogbu’s theory of primary and secondary cultural differences has provided the framework for the study of minority group immigrants and their practice of cultural inversion to oppose institutional structures.

#### THE CANADIAN ENCOUNTER

Black West Indian culture and struggle is a novel feature of the Canadian classroom. This book delves into the lives of a group of black immigrant boys to show how they employ their cultural resources to resist those aspects of schooling that dominate their lives. But what implications does this culture of resistance have for the boys’ social relations in school, and for the dominant-minority group dichotomy in the Canadian society at large? Do the boys themselves see race and color as a significant mediating factor in their interaction with dominant-group students, teachers, and school authority? Such evidence could call into question Wilson’s (1978) claim of the declining significance of race in American, and in this case, Canadian society. How does the boys’ culture of resistance restrict their educational opportunities that will, in turn, determine the place they take in the country’s socioeconomic structure? If these black, working-class students accept the folk theory that education is the only way of “making it” in white society, why do they actively resist the school structure in which this valuable commodity may be received? How do they negotiate this delicate balance between accommodation to education and resistance to the structures that provide education?

It is an accepted fact that tracking and the stratification of knowledge prepare students for different stations in life. Have students at Lumberville

penetrated this ideology and therefore reject the capacity of the school's formal curriculum to deliver the appropriate education for their social advancement in Canadian society? Students in other settings respond differently to schooling they perceive as leading nowhere. In this study we analyze potentially transformative endeavors of the boys to escape schooling that reproduces their low-class status in Canadian society. Driven by the achievement ideology, the students explore extracurricular sport as a viable alternative to the formal curriculum and explore intricate "escape routes" out of a school they perceive as a barrier to progress. Do they achieve their aspirations through these creative ventures or do the structural confines of schooling overcome human agency? An analysis of these powerful forces later in this book provides some answers to these questions.

The issues raised in this book are important in comparing Canada with other Western democracies in the schooling of racial minorities. Canada's policy on multiculturalism has led racial minority immigrants to expect an open opportunity structure with equal access to education and other life opportunities. But has the "black tile" in the Canadian cultural mosaic been afforded any better opportunities than racial minorities in countries such as the United States and Britain where expressed practices are to "melt the ethnics" and assimilate them culturally? These issues of policy and pedagogy are critical for educators contemplating multicultural and antiracist education for ethnically and racially diverse school populations. This account of a Canadian school encounter with a group of black immigrant students raises sensitive questions about structures and practices in multiracial classrooms. For example, does the racial culture now evident within schools compromise the pedagogical process? Are the oppositional responses of black students a result of too wide a gap between their achievement ideology and the opportunity structure?

To seek answers to these questions and to capture the interaction between a black student subculture and the school structure in which it operates, I utilized a qualitative research strategy. This approach provided an "inside perspective" of the conflict between black students and the authority structure of the school. Within this larger framework of qualitative methods the ethnographic approach proved ideal for portraying the social reality of the subculture in relation to the dominant school culture. For a one-and-a-half-year period starting in the spring of 1983, I immersed myself in the life of Lumberville High School. During this time I identified a cohesive group of black adolescent boys and documented their interactions and relationships with peers, teachers, and school administrators. Participant observation was conducted inside and outside classrooms and during extracurricular activities. These observations extended beyond the boundaries of the school and into the boys' neighborhoods and homes. The data gathering process was multimodal, employing individual and group interviews with focal students,

teachers, coaches, administrators, and parents. Data from these sources were further supplemented and corroborated by secondary documentary data to give a holistic picture of the boys and the regularities of the school (See appendix A for a full description of the research methods).

The ethnography that emerged from such fieldwork reflects the range of behaviors, feelings, conflicts, and tensions expressed by marginalized students. Informants' perspectives were quite often in conflict with each other and also with the official position of the school. But such contradictory accounts of the schooling process are not unusual in such an arena of conflict. It was only by a variety of data collection methods that satisfactory levels of reliability and validity were achieved. Qualitative studies are not theory-free; researchers utilize theoretical assumptions to help them make sense of the data they accumulate. For this study, the paradigm shift from social and cultural reproduction theories to resistance theories provided the framework for explaining the social inequality generated by the process of schooling within my research setting. However, the inadequacy of these models as analytic tools opened the possibility for incorporating other theories.

In this introductory chapter, I have documented the rise in schools of oppositional cultures mediated by social class, gender, and more specifically, race. With emphasis on racial forms of culture, a comparative overview of black oppositional cultures in the U.S., British, and now Canadian schools was presented along with the theoretical perspectives postulated for such opposition to school structures. In chapter 2, black life and schooling in Canadian society will be placed in an historical perspective, comparing the pre-twentieth-century era with post-1967 West Indian immigrant life in Canada, "the land of opportunity." This historical overview provides a backdrop for a detailed study of black cultural forms in a Canadian high school today. Chapters 3 through 5 are mainly descriptive, detailing black students' creation of an oppositional social identity, while chapter 6 explains how school structures contribute to this culture. In these chapters I supplement the traditional ethnography with related literature highlighting the similarities and differences among black oppositional styles in different multiracial societies. Chapter 7 analyzes the outcomes of the spiralling interaction between school structure and student cultures. These outcomes are put in the context of the students' projected position within Canada's socioeconomic structure. Chapter 8 suggests strategies for reducing black oppositional forms and increasing the educational opportunities of black, working-class students in Canadian schools.