

**Fiske-Rusciano and Cyrus: *Experiencing Race, Class,  
and Gender in the United States, Fourth Edition***

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**Preface to the Fourth Edition**

The first few years of the new millennium have been saturated with debate concerning fundamental ideals and principles by which people live worldwide. Large migrations of populations, due to shifts in economic opportunities, natural disasters, and especially war, have put into sharp relief the need for reassessing who we are and where we are headed as a society. Each nation, each identity group, does this in its own way, focusing upon what seems most urgent, most potentially divisive, or upon a shared opinion that a group wants to voice. *Experiencing Race, Class, and Gender in the United States*, Fourth Edition, offers an opportunity to look at many of these issues as experienced by the diverse population of this country. Collecting details of the “American Experience” is an ongoing effort that requires each of us to keep our eye on the shifts and different reflections of this richly varied and complex society. Learning more about the past and present through many voices, will help us all to problem-solve with balance and wisdom, as valuable, participating members of this country and of the world.

*Experiencing Race, Class, and Gender in the United States*, Fourth Edition, introduces students to basic concepts of multiculturalism and to seminal debates taken up by social scientists, physical scientists, and political commentators. Some points however, can only be made by the poets and literary writers included herein. This text encourages readers to examine their own lives, by challenging notions of hierarchy and stereotypes that often seem so natural and largely go unchallenged. Such a journey is transforming and lengthy, and part of an ongoing American experience. *Experiencing Race, Class, and Gender*, Fourth Edition, is a guide for students in thoughtful exploration of issues that surround personal and institutionalized bigotry. It encourages informed debate and avoids being doctrinaire, for learning to think through these issues is a far greater commitment than carefully agreeing with the professor.

***Organization of the Book***

This book is divided into three main divisions: “Identity” (Parts I-IV), “Power” (Parts V-VI), and “Change” (Parts VIII-IX). The first division, “Identity,” requires students to examine their own lives and those of others in order to understand how everyone’s identity is shaped by the experience of race, ethnicity, gender, and socio-economic class.

The book then moves to an exploration of the institutional forces that exert power over everyone. The second division, “Power,” examines the important connections between social forces and individuals and groups to promote an understanding of the kinds of challenges and structural obstacles that prejudice and discrimination create. The readings probe the issues of structural discrimination and power—specifically the dynamics of racism, sexism and classism. The selections provide personal testimony, historical background, data from law and the social sciences, and analytical discussions of how power and discrimination operate in American life.

People who have not critically examined the inequities of American society previously may feel a combination of anger, frustration, and even despair when they first confront such knowledge. Thus, the third division, “Change,” shows students how they can direct this emotional energy to improving the social order by acting positively on their own newfound awareness. Part VIII, “Taking Action,” outlines concrete step-by-step strategies for effecting personal change and initiating collective social action. Finally, the book closes as it begins—with individual experiences; Part IX, “Change Makers,” introduces ordinary people who have succeeded, often at some substantial personal costs, to negotiate the issues involved in race, class, gender, and ethnicity and to effect real social change. Part X “Race, Class, and Gender After 9/11,” presents the challenges that now face us since the terrorist attacks on September 11,

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2001. There are as many challenges to meet within our country's borders as there are abroad, and many of the questions are intertwined.

The introductions to the three main divisions and the ten parts provide a context for the readings, identifying the major concerns and issues and defining important theoretical terms (which are highlighted by boldface type). Notes follow some of the readings to explain references that may be unfamiliar to students. Every selection is followed by a set of questions, "Understanding the Reading," to aid comprehension and to stimulate critical thinking about the issues the selection raises, and by "Suggestions for Responding," writing topics and activities to encourage personal exploration of the issues. Finally, each of the three main divisions and the ten parts ends with suggestions for additional activities such as field or library research, individual and group projects, and life-experience exercises.

***New to the Fourth Edition***

The Fourth Edition has 34 new reading selections and an original sketch by Comanche artist and poet, Lonnie Poco. It is a mixture of social science and the humanities, with two new added sections: "Sexual Identity" and "Race, Class, and Gender After 9/11." "Sexual Identity" features a previously unpublished autobiographical essay by Jessica Stearns: "A Transsexual's Story." "Race, Class, and Gender After 9/11" is a section that challenges students to become active in a rapidly changing society, with readings on: domestic security and civil liberties, racial targeting of immigrant families, feminist perspectives on 9/11, seeing Islam as evil, the plight of refugees, and working class women as war heroes. Other new readings introduce the reader to anthropologists' statement on race, the ethics or practicality of racial profiling in a doctor's office, cosmetic surgery on racial features, racism in cyberspace, urban Indians, gay marriage, poems and short stories by American Indian artists, the Bush Administration's denial of many research grants to scientists dealing with HIV/AIDS or teenage sexuality, and an updated discussion of affirmative action.

***Background***

*Experiencing Race, Class, and Gender in the United States* grew out of a 5-year effort at Rider University to respond to the demographic realities of this nation as we move into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Starting in 1987, we evaluated our curriculum to determine its inclusiveness. Although we found that it addressed diversity more fully than we had anticipated, we also felt that much more work needed to be done. Thus, with funding from the New Jersey Department of Higher Education, we implemented a comprehensive faculty development program. In addition to the more conventional tactic of revising traditional courses, we formed an interdisciplinary faculty team to create a course on the diversity of American cultures for first-year and second-year students. The first edition of this book was a direct outgrowth of that effort and was tested in multiple sections of our course as well as courses at other educational institutions.

From the beginning, the faculty team decided that understanding such complex concepts as power, racism, and sexual harassment required the insights of many disciplines. Accordingly, the interdisciplinary approach of this book provide a board, integrative perspective on these issues. *Experiencing Race, Class, and Gender in the United States*, Fourth Edition, incorporates several kinds of sources: poems, individual stories, both literary and biographical; compilations of information and data from many fields, including anthropology, sociology, psychology, history, economics, and

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communications; and analytical pieces from a number of disciplines. The readings range from straightforward journalistic articles to literary works to complex analyses of data. The authors represent both genders as well as the broad spectrum of ethnicities, cultures, classes, and world-views that make up the population in the United States.

***Acknowledgements***

I acknowledge the admirable scholarship and activism of my late colleague, Virginia Cyrus, who created the first three editions of *Experiencing Race, Class, and Gender in the United State*. In the spirit of her work, I continue to offer students material from many disciplines, in scholarly pursuit and understanding of the major debates of our society, surround racism, sexism, classism and bigotry in its many forms. I am deeply grateful to colleagues at Rider University, who have either directly guided me to selections, or helped me think through ideas that have somehow found their way into this book: Frank Rusciano, Marc Wallace, Pearlle Peters, Bosah Ebo, Nancy Schluter, Judith Johnston, Millie Rice Jordan, Marv Goldstein, Joe Gowaskie, Lise Vogel, Jonathan Mendilow, and Minmin Wang. My special thanks to two former students Clarethia Ellerbee and Derek Schork, who allowed me to publish their essays, to Lonnie Poco, poet, artist and long-lost friend, and to Carlos Cumpian, poetry who helped me find Lonnie. My gratitude also goes to all the kind permissions coordinators and others who enabled me to include these specific works, and to Linda Tulli, who secured many of those previous permissions.

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