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Why Do We Need Another Book on Courageous Conversations About Race?

I do not see how we will ever solve the turbulent problem of race confronting our nation until there is an honest confrontation with it and a willing search for the truth and a willingness to admit the truth when we discover it.

—Martin Luther King Jr.¹

IT'S (STILL) A QUESTION OF WILL!

In December 2005, at the National Staff Development Council's annual conference in Philadelphia, I felt a kind of excitement and joy such as I had never experienced before. I was back in the city where I had struggled through many courses, and occasionally fallen into doubt about my graduation possibilities, while attending the University of Pennsylvania. Despite those early challenges, I also experienced accomplishment there, completing the first of a series of college degrees that would lead me further and more deeply into my chosen field of education. Now I was there again, pen in hand, books stacked neatly around me, sitting proudly beside a bright and beautiful orange poster of

the cover of *Courageous Conversations About Race: A Field Guide for Achieving Equity in Schools*.

I had invited friends and family to join me at what would become the first of many signings and discussions about a book that would later define a small movement in education. I must admit that I was a bit overwhelmed that afternoon in Philadelphia by the attention *Courageous Conversations* was getting. More and more, the book was appearing in the hands of and generating discussion among my professional development colleagues, many of whom had gathered from around the country for updates on professional learning communities, responses to intervention, and positive behavior intervention and support efforts. Although “Beyond Diversity,” the international face-to-face and online training program on which the book was modeled, had been (and remains) extremely popular and successful, I never imagined that *Courageous Conversations* would become an award winner, let alone a bestseller for my publisher, Corwin.

I felt that way especially because the book was being introduced into a society that categorically denied the very presence of racism at the same time it was calling out, with some urgency, for a protocol to examine and address the myriad manifestations of racism evident in its schools. I certainly was not anticipating such mass approval for a work stemming from two simple premises. The first of these is that to address racial achievement disparities in schools, educators must first gain permission from their institutional leadership to engage in conversations about race. The second is that educators must develop the will, skill, knowledge, and capacity to sustain and deepen the dialogue about the impact of race on leadership, learning and teaching, and family/community empowerment. Still, educators by the thousands had purchased the book by then, and scores had spoken about the importance of the Four Agreements, Six Conditions, and specialized Compass introduced in its pages to assist educators in navigating and negotiating issues related to race in their professional as well as their personal lives.

I was then and remain truly humbled by the entire author experience. Even today, given my comparatively modest writing experience, I am simply amazed how authors such as Michael Fullan and Linda Darling-Hammond (or heck, even Danielle Steele!) can produce so many books in a single lifetime. This second book was, for me, a 2-year effort, and it took nearly everything out of me that the first book left behind. It also often depleted the patience of my family and friends and the members of my staff at Pacific Educational Group (PEG), Inc. The latter often had to cover for me when I would just disappear to Tahoe National Forest or Hawaii’s Big Island to unplug, concentrate, and compose this narrative, which is designed to provoke, inspire, challenge, and support the growing band of school leaders striving for racial equity. I am grateful to all for their love and support, and I remain committed to accompanying my courageous colleagues around the world on a journey to discover ways to make the so-called “achievement gap”—or what I now refer to as “racial achievement disparities in education”—a thing of the past.



I learned in crafting my first book that writing about race for a U.S. audience requires that I first state exactly what must be said to enlist the confidence of and maintain my credibility among racially conscious people of color. It next demands that I craft a revision that does not overwhelm or alienate my majority White readership. This is because, alongside my critical and targeted audiences, there exists a powerful and largely White body of critics who will indiscriminately challenge any attempt I make, meaningful or otherwise, to elevate the conversation and consciousness about race and racism in this country to a higher and more urgent level. As a result, in my writing, I spend much of my time and energy defending my right to examine and discuss the intersection of race and schooling. I strive also to carefully illustrate the importance of that investigation while simultaneously pointing out the racism of my potential detractors. Striking this peculiar balance of language and tone, while ensuring that I continue to convey my personal and deep feelings of pride, authenticity, and integrity—chapter after chapter—is both a litmus test and a goal.

WRITING IN DIFFICULT TIMES

This second book, *More Courageous Conversations About Race*, was a much harder project for me to complete because I wrote it in what I would define as a far more racially pernicious time. As you will see over the course of this book, while the election of the nation's first president of color seemed to signal a positive moment in the history of U.S. race relations, his term in office has nevertheless left educators of today confronting racial issues more compatible with the era of segregation and outright oppression. As an author, I have struggled long and hard with the content and tone of this book to avoid being labeled angry or negative about race relations in the United States. At the heart of this struggle was the challenge I faced of expressing, in an explicit and unapologetic way, my opinion on this matter—which is that our nation has taken, as far as I am concerned, the figurative two steps forward and three steps back.

Of course, all of this has taken place amid a deafening silence about the issue of race itself. Who would have thought, for example, that education officials would ever find themselves in a quandary over whether their students should or should not be allowed to watch a televised message delivered by the president of the United States about the importance of studying hard and staying in school? And yet, when arrangements were made so that classrooms across the nation could tune in via the White House website to the president's speech at an Arlington, Virginia, high school, there was an enormous outcry from conservative pundits, Republican leaders, and White parents, even in some of the most equity-focused school districts. The gist of the complaint was that Obama was attempting to indoctrinate students with his political—read socialist—viewpoints. I do not believe, however, that such resistance to the president and his message was just politics, when other recent presidents—of both political parties but only one color—have addressed the nation's school-age children without a similar furor.

Bigotry aside, the mere fact that some of the nation's lowest-performing students, Black males, were prevented from this most important moment in education because of

adult cowardice is one of several realities that fueled me to press on and complete this book. Those students especially desperately needed to absorb the president's message and see themselves reflected in his image in the highest position of authority in the land.

In the past three years, corresponding with the bulk of Barack Obama's first term as president, this nation has fallen backward with regard to race relations and its willingness and ability to challenge racism. Some people simply cannot believe a Black man is president and refuse to accept his worthiness, intelligence, or leadership. Former President Jimmy Carter was right on point when he spoke out against this type of racist resistance in a television interview on September 15, 2009. According to Carter:

When a radical fringe element of demonstrators and others begin to attack the president of the United States as an animal or as a reincarnation of Adolf Hitler or when they wave signs in the air that said we should have buried Obama with Kennedy, those kinds of things are beyond the bounds. I think people who are guilty of that kind of personal attack against Obama have been influenced to a major degree by a belief that he should not be president because he happens to be African American. It's a racist attitude . . . based on the fact that he is a black man.²

That the White House issued a statement disagreeing with Carter shortly after his interview was not surprising, given the first president of color's inability or strategic unwillingness to address race head-on, much less to call out racism and survive in his leadership. Unfortunately, President Obama's statement served only to exacerbate the national confusion around the topic. Conversely, the statement offered by the African American leader of the Republican National Committee, Michael Steele, was not at all confusing. Steele rose in quick defense of his constituencies, many of whom were the subject of President Carter's conjectures about racism.

Equally confounding is the growing number of people in schools and society today who believe that we as a nation have somehow entered an era of post-racialism. That era, in their view, is highlighted by the election of our first Black president. It is further "colored" by his appointment of the first Brown American woman to the Supreme Court (Sonia Maria Sotomayor); by his selection of Eric Holder, another Black man, to be the nation's attorney general; and by his appointment of other officials of color to high positions of government authority.

Not surprisingly, however, despite this growing perception that both race and racism are behind us, hardly a day goes by in which some politician, media pundit, or everyday American fails to express publicly some racially insensitive remark that other supposedly more racially conscious citizens fail to point out or oppose. The outcome of this scenario is a racially dangerous one in which the Obamas, our nation's First Family, appear to lead gracefully while suffering unprecedented personal attacks and in which increasing numbers of onlookers interpret the bigoted encroachments against them as nonracist in character. Worse still, those onlookers typically characterize the civil department of the Obamas as appropriate and somehow "normal."

I realize that it would be political suicide for the President, Justice Sotomayor, Attorney General Holder, and others of color in such high positions to launch into a lesson on racism at every turn or slight as a means of defending themselves, their perspectives,

or their actions in office or of challenging the characters, perspectives, or actions of others. Nevertheless, to move the Courageous Conversations approach from theory to practice, racial equity leaders must be aware of, acknowledge, and address the racism displayed by those otherwise well-meaning people who incorrectly posit that we in this nation have evolved beyond our own individual and collective racial struggles in the span of a single national election cycle.

No matter how one perceives or spins what is occurring in our nation today, the election of Barack Obama clearly represents the most racially significant event in modern times. Regardless of how one may feel about President Obama's politics or party affiliation, however, his era as leader of the free world presents either our nation's greatest opportunity or simply a missed opportunity to deepen its educators' understanding of and ability to talk about race. For that reason, this book will delve into the Obama presidency multiple times.



In the minds of our children, the inability of our nation's educators to recognize and grab hold of the increased opportunities to engage in courageous conversations about race further cements the idea that racism no longer represents a battle that they will need knowledge and skills to wage. Often, those who believe that we in this country have overcome our racial struggles cite the success of Barack Obama (or of me, for that matter) as evidence enough that we are living in a brave, new, racially just society and world. The vast difference in perspective among various racial groups regarding our so-called national post-racialism is cause for discussion—one that I will join in a later chapter.

For now, as I set you, the readers of this book, off on a course of moving Courageous Conversations from theory to practice, let it suffice to say that I believe nothing is more dangerous, especially for children of color, than to be taught that racism no longer exists. This is especially dangerous when, in fact, racism continues to be the most devastating factor contributing to the inability of those same children to achieve at their highest levels.

Now I certainly do not wish to be perceived as overlooking or downplaying the many and obvious advancements that have taken place with regard to race relations in America in recent years. However, the modicum of racial progress realized is, to me, largely a nuanced one. It is also one that has given rise to newfound racial conflicts as well the ugly specter of the nation's unfortunate racial history. Both still mar our overall progress, and those of us who are progressive educators and racial equity leaders may be fooling ourselves by asserting that the United States is much further along in addressing either than it actually is.

So much of the school reform literature, theory, and corresponding frameworks have focused on *how* to change our schools. Yet when focusing on how to achieve racial equity, educational researchers, theorists, policymakers, and practitioners have, for the most part, limited themselves to describing the pathologies of an ill-functioning system and offering strategies for surmounting them rather than getting at the root causes of those challenges.

In some ways, the *Courageous Conversations* field guide followed this formula. In it, my coauthor Curtis Linton and I suggested that the nation's public education system,

suffering as it does from institutional racism, plays an instrumental role in preserving and perpetuating racial achievement disparities. We offered a compelling case for the argument that the American school system was designed, from the very beginning, to exclude, then marginalize, and then under-educate children of color while simultaneously mis-educating *all* children of *all* races. Contemporary data, we contended, indicates that this design has proved itself effective and has achieved its intended results.

Throughout the book you now hold in your hands, I will share multiple sources of contemporary data that reveal and reconfirm my point that our current school system fails to meet the needs of the growing number of students of color within it. Our educators' collective failure to do little more than recognize this condition—and specifically their refusal to directly speak to the plight of Black, Brown, and American Indian students, much less work toward discovering solutions to their challenges—is the most compelling evidence of systemic racism. Ironically, as those educators fail under-served student of color populations at escalating rates, historically higher-performing White students increasingly are also achieving at lower levels. Later in this book, I will review current and critical achievement data that substantiate my claims that the racial disparities in education outcomes persist in all types of school systems.

BUILDING ON THE FIELD GUIDE

To counteract the fundamental intentions of the early framers, the first *Courageous Conversations* book focused on assisting educators of all colors to develop their ability and capacity simply to begin talking about racial matters. The result of this interracial discourse, my coauthor and I postulated, would be a more racially conscious, and thus racially knowledgeable, cadre of teaching professionals. Such teachers, we asserted, could, in turn, have a greater impact on the educational outcomes of the growing populations of children of color in America. They could also influence and elevate the social and intellectual development of White American students.

Although the specifics of our philosophy and of the protocols described in the field guide may be unique to the field, perhaps even groundbreaking, clearly our conjecture that race matters and that we educators need to talk about race are not revolutionary. Rather, we believe that facilitating open and honest dialogue among educators, students, and their families about the impact of race and racism on learning and teaching, although often controversial, is nothing short of . . . *courageous!*

A few years after the *Courageous Conversations* field guide was published, I felt the gravitational pull of the racial equity field drawing me toward the possibility of offering yet another “here-is-the-problem-and-here’s-how-to-fix-it” book. Strong was my resistance to that pull, however. Although I knew that such a book would sell, I was also painfully aware that books alone cannot instigate deep, sustainable, systemic transformation in a system that is well-programmed to destroy the intellectual curiosity, cultural foundations, and social imagination of children of color and, by extension, their White counterparts.

As much as I wanted to answer the call to provide advanced-level support to educators on the front lines of the racial equity leadership battle, I was at a loss to find a contemporary and embraceable way to address what I, and my great teacher mentors who

had journeyed on this path before me, believe to be the real problems of schooling in this country since its inception.

Until now.



Each chapter in this book, like those in the preceding volume, provides you, my readers, with a number of opportunities for reflection. Some chapters also present challenging prompts to help you personalize the themes discussed within them and apply the research outlined in each to your own work. The examination and explanation of the multiple theories, tools, and perspectives in this book are deeper and much more encompassing than those presented in the field guide. This is because my goal in these pages is to engage you in narratives that compel you to synthesize your knowledge and transform it into direct and measurable action. In this way, we can together close the professional “knowing-doing” gap in education.

Before writing this book, I spent several months reflecting on the tremendous work that leaders in the field of racial equity have been and are doing in schools and other settings around the country. But rather than provide mere racial autobiographies detailing how other educators arrived at deeper understandings of the impact of race in their personal, professional, and organizational lives, I wanted to showcase some unique efforts to implement courageous racial equity leadership. Thus, I conclude each of this book’s chapters with a section titled “Voices From the Inside,” written by education leaders who “walk the walk” and “talk the talk” of racial equity work. These first-person vignettes detail the real-life efforts of those who daily face race-relations challenges in their classrooms, schools, and districts. They show how the authors engage in thoughtful and effective racial equity leadership practices with passion and unyielding persistence. They also provide concrete pathways to guide you in challenging systemic racism, uncovering racial landmines and barriers to success for under-served children of color, and offering hope for the achievement of racial equity in all schools for all students. Last, they share, I believe, the very perspectives that can enable you to move the Courageous Conversations approach from theory to practice with greater precision—and yes, speed.

That said, I do not intend in this book to restate the narrative of race and racism in public education that Curtis Linton and I offered in our first book. Rather, I will assume that you have examined that earlier work and have reached the point at which you can effectively translate into practice the theories it advocated. This second book will focus on demonstrating how you can use the Courageous Conversations Protocol to transform your school leadership, learning, and teaching as well as your engagement with families and communities of color.

This book will also provide you with a candid view of racially unjust schooling via a number of well-constructed counternarratives documenting the work of my organization, PEG, in school systems across the country for the last 15 years. These counternarratives detail some of the “monumental moments” in public education, incidents that will facilitate a deep understanding of the tangible factors that contribute to the academic failure of students of color but also highlight the ways in which our educational system continues to advantage White, middle-class, monolingual children. They further reveal

how that same system also advantages those who are willing and able to embrace the cultural beliefs, behaviors, and perspectives of the White dominant group.

A hallmark distinction between the field guide and this book is that the earlier work is primarily descriptive and theoretical, while the book you now hold in your hands (or are viewing on your electronic reading device) focuses on implementation. This second book is, in effect, a response to the first book's call to action. Its objectives, thus, are two-fold: to help White educators move beyond guilt and rhetoric to a place of purposeful action and to support educators of color in finding the courage and language to name the individual and systemic racism around them, accept the challenge to speak their truth, and feel empowered to hold the system accountable for providing quality education for *all* children.

Curtis Linton and I began the *Courageous Conversations* field guide with a question posed in some form or fashion by the late Asa G. Hilliard III, the late scholar of educational psychology and African history, to each and every group of educators he encountered. That question: Do we—teachers, administrators, parents, and other education stakeholders—have the *will* to educate *all* children? Linton and I challenged our readers to consider Hilliard's question before presenting them with the assemblage of histories, narratives, frameworks, and strategies that we believed might bring urgent and lasting care and repair to our education system. For some, this challenge alone was effective. As proponents of racial equity, those leaders are today seeing remarkable results in their districts, schools, or classrooms. For the lion's share of our early readers, however, such noteworthy successes have not yet been realized. This book, I believe, presents the “missing link”—it calls out the specific situations and circumstances that will benefit from skillfulness in courageous conversations about race, and it challenges racial equity leaders to bridge understood theory with bold and courageous practices.

As I was writing this book, I found myself facing an enormous dilemma. On one hand, many of the readers of the field guide told me that they wanted Book Number Two to present another, albeit more advanced strategy to help them move the Courageous Conversations approach from theory to practice. Others wanted some “feel-good words” about what they were already doing. Still others indicated that racial autobiographical narratives, with complementing exercises and prompts, would be helpful. Thus, it became increasingly clear to me that this book would have to be remarkably different; that it would have to challenge the “willing” to reconsider whether they are indeed *truly willing* to do whatever is necessary to educate *all* children. But what, exactly, constitutes *will*?

In the field guide, Linton and I suggested that it involves passion, practice, and persistence—that is, it requires educators to care deeply about meeting the needs of underserved children of color. It further demands that we educators manifest our depth of concern through our commitment to a likewise deep and continuous engagement in new learning about ourselves and our craft over time. This charge resonates closely with Dr. Hilliard's timeless message and meaning. As he once wisely wrote:

The knowledge and skills to educate all children already exist. Because we have lived in a historically oppressive society, educational issues tend to be framed as technical issues, which denies their political origin and meaning. . . . There are no pedagogical barriers to teaching and learning when willing people are

prepared and made available to children. If we embrace a will to excellence, we can deeply restructure education in ways that will enable teachers to release the full potential of all our children.³

Like Hilliard, I still believe that the dysfunction evident in our nation's education system today is less about a dearth of skills and knowledge and more about educational practitioners' and policymakers' will and purpose. Having thus reminded you, the readers of this second *Courageous Conversations* volume, of this underpinning philosophy—basic yet difficult though it may be to embody in mind and deed—I feel compelled to reiterate this book's central premise. Quite simply, it is that we, the self-proclaimed or perhaps even publicly acknowledged leaders for racial equity in education, have yet to demonstrate or determine our own individual or collective will to educate *all* children. (Indeed, our individual and collective plights and purposes to rectify the racial ills and injustices in our educational systems are fraught with conditions and self-imposed detours.)

For most of us, whether our work is in public or private schools, preK–12 or higher education, the first step in moving *Courageous Conversations* from theory to practice is not to determine what we should do next, but rather to ask ourselves: Why haven't we yet done what we already know we need to do? Too often, the need to preserve adult employment trumps the need to provide effective schooling of children. Protecting the adults in our nation's schools continues to be more important than serving our children. The lack of courage on the part of some educators simply to *speak truth to power* locks all educators in a holding pattern, in which we fail to embrace and amplify existing best practices.

Our cowardice also causes us to fall woefully short in discovering and developing essential, innovative strategies for achieving equity. The resulting inadequate habits of mind and work, among even the most racially conscious of educators, result in our tiptoeing around the racist philosophies, policies, programs, practices, and (especially) feelings of our most racist colleagues while trampling on the spirit, souls, and thus, the future possibilities for success, of our most needy children.



I believe that education is the fundamental method of social progress and reform . . . Education is a regulation of the process of coming to share in the social consciousness; and that the adjustment of individual activity on the basis of this social consciousness is the only sure method of social reconstruction.

—John Dewey⁴

Since John Dewey first presented his views about the purpose of education—still a centerpiece of conversation and coursework in our graduate schools of education today—lively debates about preserving the status quo versus creating and inventing new possibilities for future transformations in society have abounded. However, the rhetoric about how schools should help students to use their minds well so that they can address

the social, political, economic, and cultural challenges of today and tomorrow—whether real or imagined—plays like a broken record, or rather, like a scratched CD.

Still, many educators, especially those of us in the academy, continue to feel good about the articles we submit cementing our progressive ideology because, somehow, putting our ideologies into practice is not as concrete as writing about them. Fortunately for them, but not for their students, those educators are rarely graded on the practicality of their ideals. Given our nation's currently challenged economy and its increasingly poorly funded schools, I do not doubt that many students would prefer that educators be held accountable for moving democratic education theories into practice so that schools can become the engines of social transformation that Dewey envisioned.

When I launched my teaching career at San José State University nearly a decade ago, I set out to challenge the status quo regarding how school leaders are developed. I insisted that my students, all of whom were hoping to earn a master's degree and an administrative credential at the conclusion of their 2-year academic pursuit, not only put racial equity theories into practice but also attain mastery of that practice. The only possible grade I offered them was 100 percent mastery—that is, no one got out of my classes with a passing grade until they got it right, in practice. Until then, they and their grades, in my view, were incomplete.

I took this admittedly strict approach because I believed then, and believe still, that the only real way to effect lasting transformation of what school leaders do in their classrooms, schools, and district or university offices is to enable them to imagine, see, touch, embrace, and practice the reforms to which they are introduced as pre-service teachers, via their own studies and apprenticeships, or as in-service professionals via staff development exercises. Certainly, nothing was more demoralizing to my students, as practitioners, or to me as their professor than when we discovered alumni of our program who had found their way back to the status quo, sometimes even becoming leaders of the status quo, a year or two after graduation. When that happened, I could only ask myself: What more can I do in my classroom or in my in-service work with our school and university partner-educators to ensure that what my students know about racial equity and what they are able to do to achieve systemic equity transformation has greater lasting power?

THE “MORE” IN MORE COURAGEOUS CONVERSATIONS

From the outset, this book assumes that you already know enough about what needs to be done. But rather than ask, “Why aren't you doing it?” and inundate you with data points and decontextualized exercises to convince you that our nation (the world, actually) has an equity problem, each chapter presents a contextualized discussion, followed by a series of “essential questions,” concluding with a personal narrative or vignette (“Voices From the Inside”). The questions posed (i.e., “Why have I failed to act?” “What prevents me from internalizing the Four Agreements and Six Conditions?” and “What is my next and more significant level of courageous leadership?”) are intended to summon readers from a place of earned praise for theoretical mastery of the Courageous Conversations basics to a more adaptive and transformative space, in which you can engage in effective racial

equity practices in and beyond your own sphere of influence and control. Then, to ensure that readers clearly “see” the possibilities inherent in such transformational leadership, each chapter ends with a “practicing” racial equity leader’s personal narrative providing details, in his or her own voice, about how they helped to move the Courageous Conversations program from theory to practice.

Many racial equity leaders and readers of the *Courageous Conversations* field guide have expressed the importance of becoming acquainted with exemplars or systems that have experienced notable and measurable success through application of the Courageous Conversations Protocol. To my knowledge or understanding, no racially diverse school district has, as yet, eliminated racial disparities completely. Several, however, have made extraordinary progress toward that end. Although a collection of narratives on the racial equity journeys of governing boards, superintendents, principals, and teachers should not be viewed as prescriptive, it can offer essential nourishment to sustain educators as they experience the productive disequilibrium that is sure to result from the strategic insubordination required to stare down institutional racism. Their shared “equity experiences” will invite you to take immediate action in your own workplace and guide you to define and assess your practice and its impact.

It is my hope that, together, the racial equity theory, essential questions, and narratives in this book can help to elevate you to a place of more effective equity practice, where you can attain more tangible and measurable results for *all* children in *all* classrooms. I also hope that the combined voices in this book, focused as all are on combating the problem of systemic racism, will provide you, as a co-leader in the battle for racial equity, with the language and knowledge base you need to uncover, examine, address, and eradicate barriers to academic success for under-served students of color.

I challenge you, however, to *put this book aside right now* if you have not read and internalized its precursor, *Courageous Conversations About Race: A Field Guide to Achieving Equity in Schools*. I do this because it seems to me a bit disingenuous, as well as unproductive, for anyone to assert that he or she has the will to put a theory into practice when he or she is unfamiliar with the very basics of that theory. I have been using the *Courageous Conversations* field guide as a primary text in my course at San José State and with PEG’s preK–12 and higher education clients for more than 5 years, and I am continually amazed by the large numbers of students and clients who show up for my class or training without ever cracking the spine of that book. However, it is my steadfast view that the first text is effective only when readers carefully consider the narratives contained within it, complete the book’s exercises, and apply its Protocol to their personal, professional, and organizational racial equity challenges.

Therefore, if you have studied and committed to the field guide’s basic premise that a civil and productive way to dialogue about race is desperately needed, and you have attempted yourself to lead such dialogues with limited success, *MORE Courageous Conversations About Race* is definitely *your* book.



Chapter 2 will feel familiar as you are called on to refocus on your existing level of will and moral imperative and to authenticate your resolve for achieving racial equity in your institution. Recognizing the struggle many Courageous Conversation practitioners

face, especially when summoned to *speak truth* to power in critical, perhaps job-threatening situations, this chapter also introduces the Personal Racial Equity Purpose (PREP) tool as a means of inviting you to develop, intensify, and fortify your courageous leadership pursuits.

In Chapter 3, I briefly reintroduce the components of the Courageous Conversations Protocol before exploring some of the common barriers school leaders encounter as they internalize and apply that Protocol's Four Agreements, Six Conditions, and specialized Compass to everyday, racialized situations in schools. These tools provide educators with a way *into* understanding how careless focus on other aspects of human diversity (i.e., economic status, gender, religion, or sexual orientation) can fortify racial inequity. This chapter examines these important intersections and explains how our society's multiple cultural layers can serve as both strengths and challenges when educators set out to facilitate the discovery of racial meaning for themselves and for others.

Critical race theorists point to gradualism and incremental change as the means by which American society addresses race. Thus, Chapter 4 explores what is different and what is the same in the racial landscape of our schools since the field guide was published in 2006. In this chapter, I point out how the language that racial equity leaders commonly embrace (language that includes terms such as *achievement gap*) and our ingrained omissions (such as excluding American Indians from data sampling and equity programming) serve as primary methods for perpetuating racism. I also squarely examine the nature and scope of the resistance that racial equity leaders face in their efforts to create schools that work for *all* children, and I explore strategies for engaging those who need alternative points of entry into racial equity work. Before exiting this discussion, I also specifically name and identify people who intentionally block racial equity efforts.

Chapter 5 presents an exploration of what seem to be some of the hottest topics in the racial equity arena—those issues and circumstances that urgently command educators' highest level of will, skill, knowledge, and capacity to effectively employ the Courageous Conversations Protocol. In this chapter, I submerge my readers, going into great specificity, in information about what is happening to a particularly challenged and challenging population in our nation's schools: Black males. This chapter also offers a critique of liberalism and exposes the devastating consequences that accompany the "soft bigotry" of well-meaning White educators who disproportionately refer students of color to highly restrictive environments such as special education or English-language development classes.

My racial equity friends and critics alike have suggested that my previous writings and fieldwork have focused too much on Black and White racial issues to the exclusion and perhaps detriment of other groups of color. Thus, Chapter 6 illustrates my efforts to deepen my understandings about how the processes of dispossessing Brown students of their language, American Indian students of their history, and most students of color of their culture have direct and negative impacts on their achievement. By mindfully engaging with these multiple and critical perspectives, I reached my own place of disequilibrium, and this chapter traces my personal and professional, yet still unfinished, racial equity journey. Thus, in the truest sense of moving Courageous Conversations from theory to practice, I also recognize in Chapter 6 my own personal struggle with respect to the Agreement: *Expect and accept nonclosure*.

In Chapter 7, I describe PEG's belief and purpose. I also detail its signature Systemic Racial Equity Framework as a compelling and comprehensive model that can lead educators away from engaging in the "random acts of equity" that are, I believe, the primary response to racial disparities in our schools and school systems. This framework demonstrates how important it is for preK–12 educators in our nation's schools to challenge racism in a way that is systemic, consistent, and coherent—in every classroom, every day, and all the time. It also underscores the importance for those educators to develop the critical competencies they need to effectively engage educators at institutions of higher education and independent schools, who also perpetuate (and in some ways exacerbate) racial inequality in public schools, as partners in their racial equity efforts.

Chapters 8, 9, and 10 examine critical components of the PEG Systemic Racial Equity Framework. These chapters go deeper into what leadership, learning and teaching, and family and community empowerment look and feel like in school systems that are focused on achieving racial equity. Together, the three chapters serve to fortify readers' understanding of how the Courageous Conversations Protocol can be used to strengthen school leaders' adaptive skills and help them construct equitable environments that produce educators who are proficient in culturally relevant teaching and effective in creating meaningful partnerships with parents of color.

My penultimate chapter, Chapter 11, is devoted entirely to a case study illuminating the educators and efforts of Eden Prairie Schools in suburban Minneapolis, a public school district that truly is pushing the boundaries of equity leadership and learning. In the 12th and final chapter, I offer my deepest and most current thinking on the overall state of our national efforts to transform systems of education into democratic and more equitable environments that intentionally work to eradicate racism. I do so because I realize that I am completing this second book during one of the most racially charged and fascinating times in U.S. history. As our nation stands poised to witness the possible re-election of the nation's first Black president, while confronting a rapid escalation of racial hate crimes and the skyrocketing dropout and incarceration rates of young men of color, I am compelled to reflect more intensely on what more and different I can and must do to raise the consciousness and embolden the actions of the growing forces of racial equity leaders across this country and in various places around the world. Given how fast and vehemently resistance has mounted to PEG's equity efforts in the various systems with which we partner, my final chapter is also where I comment on the up-to-the-moment characteristics and dynamics of the terrain on which I anticipate future racial equity leaders will more intentionally and boldly move *Courageous Conversations About Race* from theory to practice in their personal, professional, and organizational spheres of influence.

At times when I was growing up, my wise grandmother—we called her "Nana"—would tell me, "Glenn, when you know better, you should do better." I believe this was her way of telling me that good theory is useful only when put into effective practice. It is my hope that this book will provide you, my readers, and educators everywhere with a deeper understanding of how and where we all, as leaders for racial equity, can identify and apply the most effective protocols for talking about race. Thus, beyond its usefulness as a technical resource, I envision this book as an advanced sourcebook for courageous leaders who are poised to take bolder actions and insist on results that are more substantial.

I believe it can arm you with a sufficient supply of racial equity language, understanding, and leadership examples to allow you to challenge the status quo and instigate systemic transformation—that is, if *and only if* you truly have the *will!*

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

Now might be a good time for you to stop and consider what defines the racial culture and climate in the system where you work. Take a minute to answer the following Essential Questions:

1. How would you characterize the racial culture and climate of the region/district in which you are engaging in your Courageous Conversations work?
 2. How have these racial culture and climate characteristics influenced and affected your racial equity leadership profile and/or style?
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