A New York City school celebrating the heritage of its diverse student body. This student was dressed as "the Sheik." Courtesy New York City Municipal Archives.

Articles from the 1930s show that teachers shaped tolerance education as a dichotomy between negative, undesirable racial traits and positive, laudatory cultural traits. In the process, race and culture were woven together because they referred to the same ideological constructs. If certain minority groups were stigmatized for their racial deficits, then these same groups could be uplifted by celebrating their cultural gifts. Inside the classroom, cultural achievements became an antidote for racial shortcomings. Confusion over race and culture permeated the educational literature from this period, so that at times it is difficult to understand what teachers meant by either concept. For example an English teacher from Des Moines, Iowa, reasoned: "We must gather together the experiences of the races and the contributions of the peoples, the common backgrounds and the cultures which have marked the progress of the race, and weave them into a foundation for the instruction of the young in international and interracial understanding and co-operation."[73]

Teachers' bewilderment concerning the distinctions between race and culture would only deepen in the early 1940s as activist scientists challenged the basis for scientific racism and asserted the importance of cultural relativism. As

early as 1935 articles in *The Social Studies* reference the work of Franz Boas and other anthropologists, showing that social studies teachers were beginning to make connections between anthropology and tolerance education. For example, a social studies teacher in New York City used the anthropological definitions of race and culture, citing specifically Boas's work to challenge "ethnocentrism" among American students. Noting that many people relied on theories of racial difference to assert their superiority over others, he argued that students must be presented with "facts" on race and culture as scientists understood them. This author explained that once men were forced to acknowledge that racial differences were not a viable explanation for group differences "we find men taking customary recourse to a general depreciation of each other's cultures."[74] This article is significant not only because it marked the first time an educator cited anthropological theories to challenge intolerance, but also because it revealed the confusion this pedagogical approach could foster. It was far too easy, this teacher explained, for prejudiced people to translate their disdain for another group's racial heritage to an equally powerful disdain for their cultural heritage.

Even as they attempted to cultivate respect for racial minorities, teachers first had to account for the fact that students understood minority groups as culturally as well as racially inferior. Introducing a lesson on cultural gifts, another teacher observed: "Students confessed to amazing misconceptions concerning other races that were cleared by wide reading. Mexico suggested sleepy people, Indians, treachery, and countless revolutions." Still, teachers hoped that by introducing a sympathetic perspective on the lives of these racial minorities, they would begin to undermine harsh stereotypes. Through "wide reading" on Mexicans and Indians, the same teacher observed that her students "learned to recognize that a foreign civilization was not necessarily inferior because it was different."[75] These were early lessons on cultural relativism, to be sure. They just happened to cast culture as a foil to race.

African Americans: A Nationless Race

Lessons on "interracial" understanding from 1900 to 1938 largely targeted white minority groups such as Germans, Poles, and Irish. In part this was because teachers understood lessons on foreigners as a practical response to World War I, which focused attention on Europe and to some extent Central and South America. It also reflected, however, the extent of white supremacy and racism in the United States that fostered a climate where teachers could openly teach acceptance of white ethnic groups, but not yet promote acceptance of American Indians, Asian Americans, Latinos, or African Americans. Some historians have interpreted this silence on what we would today consider

to be "racial" minorities as evidence that liberals in the 1930s were not attuned to the problem of racial discrimination in America.[76]

Teaching journals, however, show that teachers were not at all silent about the subject of racial minorities; it is just that their concern rarely ventured outside of a specific group of racial minorities understood to be "white." This distinction reiterates the tremendous significance of color at this time, which bestowed on certain racialized groups preferential treatment and access to important resources like quality education, better health care, and safer and higher-paying employment. In the case of schooling, being white also bestowed special attention on white racialized minorities, who were thought to posses the innate traits for democratic citizenship even if they were supposedly racially inferior. This process marked "nonwhite" students as individuals who did not possess the inherent capacities for participatory democratic citizenship.

As sites of citizenship training, public schools had a conflicted role to play in the education of African American and other nonwhite students. In the South, this problem had been "solved" by the creation of rigidly segregated public schools for nonwhites (a category that was defined differently in different states). Not only did African American schools receive only a fraction of the funding that white schools did, but in many cases black schools were run out of one-room schoolhouses with poorly trained teachers for only a few months a year. Very few African Americans in the South had access to a public high school, and what little secondary education existed was typically a "manual" or "training" school designed to prepare African American students for a limited range of jobs, typically domestic or manual labor.[77]

Public education for blacks was not much better in the North. Over one million African Americans migrated out of the South during World War I to urban and industrial centers in the Northeast and Midwest, swelling existing black populations in urban and suburban communities.[78] Nearly every American town and city outside of the deep South maintained segregated and inferior public schools for blacks through the 1930s. In one of the few battles African American social activists won relating to public education, predominantly black schools would often (but not always) be staffed by black faculty and administrators.[79] The near total isolation of black students in black schools with black teachers, combined with the popular assumption by whites that African Americans were not eligible for full citizenship, meant that in the white dominated educational press, there was very little mention of African Americans at all.

As teachers began to consider more carefully this question of "interracial" relations and racial tolerance, the subject of African Americans began to creep into the dominant educational discourse on race in the 1930s. Among white-dominated teaching journals, the *Elementary English Review* and *Social Education* devoted the most attention to the subject of African American education in

United States, although only three or four articles each. While *Social Education* tended to deal more explicitly with the "Southern race question" in terms of social and economic issues, the *Elementary English Review* focused instead on the best ways to instruct black children. Neither of these teaching journals treated African Americans in the same way that they treated white racialized minorities. African Americans could not be conflated with a single nation—instead they were positioned in between, but distinct from, both Americans and Africans. Lacking a national heritage, teachers steered away from speaking and teaching about blacks in terms of culture, even as this trend accelerated for other racial minorities and despite the fact that black educators taught lessons on black achievements through the study of Negro History.[80]

Indeed, most of the white educational discourse on African Americans was prescriptive, that is, it identified problems with black children and suggested solutions. For example, Pittsburgh children's librarian Eugenia Brunot published "The Negro Child and His Reading" in the summer of 1932 to advise white teachers on how to teach black children. She explained that poor reading habits were caused by limited social and economic experiences including unstable families, poverty, overcrowded conditions, and frequent changes in guardianship among "Negroes." Brunot suggested that teachers could observe black students alongside Irish and Italian children in order to consider the specific "racial inheritance" and "peculiar culture" that defined their distinct classroom experiences.

Brunot then detailed the racial and cultural traits that influenced the literacy skills of black children at the public library where she worked. Describing how black students selected books to read, she recounted, "Gold and jewels in abundance must sparkle, satin robes must trail through the pages, giants must be very tall and terrible and the fire-breathing dragon must slay his fair quota of minor heroes before (after desperate struggles) his seven horrible heads are hacked off by the intrepid youngest son." According to the author, "Negro boys and girls are particularly fond" of fairy tales and stories of the "grotesque," and that "being no devotee of Webster," a black child reads "slowly and generally chooses books decidedly below his school grade."[81] Even as the author insisted that economic and social factors explained the literacy skills of black students, she made sweeping generalizations about how and why black students picked certain books to read. The fact that Brunot viewed her own work as benevolent enabled her to cast "Negro" children in stereotypical, essentialist, and derogatory terms.

White teachers writing on the subject of African American education, while frequently sympathetic, could display acute and often appalling racism. For example, Frances Bacon, a children's librarian from Baltimore, composed what was intended to be a funny appraisal of a white woman's experience teaching in an inner city library entitled "Epaminondas at the Library." The title referred to a popular children's book of the era, much like *Little Black Sambo*, that depicted

African Americans as unintelligent, lazy, and generally uncivilized. The author related her dismay at encountering a "seething mass" of colored children on her first day working at a new library. She found she could barely understand the children's spoken English—both syntax and pronunciation—and struggled to answer their questions at the front desk. "How should I ever be able to help them when I couldn't even understand their questions?" she fretted. Bacon shared her discovery with readers: "It takes training and much imagination. I am advised to listen for the rhythms and sounds and translate into the proper words. This is very helpful, for colored children love rhythmic words and will change them to suit their own ears."[82]

Like her colleague writing three years earlier from Pittsburgh, this librarian recounted that black children loved fairy tales as they were fascinated with the "swashbuckling and macabre." She also puzzled over the racial traits that distinguished black children from youngsters of other races. Noting that black children were "naturally noisy" she explained, "The keen intellectual curiosity of, for instance, the Jewish child, that makes him work so hard on scientific problems, is not found to any marked degree in the colored child."[83] Likewise, she tried to understand these differences in a broader social context. She related her dismay at how dirty the "Negro" children were and how they damaged the books whenever they looked at them. "After walking about the neighborhood and realizing the conditions of poverty and crowding, however, I was more tolerant." Yet, Bacon's tolerance had its limits. As she admitted, "It is an uphill job to teach cleanliness and good care of something as perishable as a book to these Elizabelles and Jeffersons when they have no place to keep their possessions, no privacy, no tradition of 'clean hands for reading' and so very many little brothers and sisters."[84] Whatever sympathy this author felt for children coming from these "conditions of poverty and overcrowding" faded quickly as she recounted their families' inability to maintain clean, private, or responsible homes.

Demeaning generalizations about African Americans were not uncommon in the articles written by "tolerant" whites in the mid-1930s as white teachers began to question how to teach black students, or even less commonly, how to teach about blacks to white students. On the rare occasions when white students were introduced to the subject of the "Negro," this was done uncritically. To take one example, an English teacher producing a special "Pageant of America" in 1934 included a scene featuring a slave plantation in the antebellum South. Describing the play to readers of the *Elementary English Review*, she boasted, "The whole scene is refined, showing the best of the colored race, yet at the same time dwelling upon their superstitions, their mannerisms, and their mode of life. This scene gives the pageant much mirth."[85] In this way, white teachers simultaneously highlighted what they believed was the "best of the colored race" while depicting African American life in such a way as to add "mirth" to the lesson.

Notably, the only article in a mainstream teaching journal that asked teachers to celebrate the culture of African Americans was written in 1933 by a self-identified "Negro" author. Wilhelmina Crosson of the Hancock School in Boston promoted the theme of African American contributions to American culture in her article "The Negro in Children's Literature." Crosson explained that she did not enjoy attending school as a child because "We read stories of every race's contribution to the development of literature but our own, and of every race's part in the laying of the bricks in its history but our own."[86] Therefore, Crosson promoted African and African American literature, which she believed would help "the Caucasian race see that the African is not merely a black savage, incapable of leadership and judgment."[87] Not only did "Negro" literature promise to defuse white racialist thinking, but Crosson assured readers that it would "make the Negro child strive to lift his race to higher levels."[88] Crosson's interest in "race pride" and her sophisticated analysis of the benefits of African American literature for all students suggest this teacher drew on the expanding literature and activism from black intellectuals like Carter G. Woodson, W. E. B. Du Bois, and Charles S. Johnson.[89] Few white teachers seemed to have been reading the same work.

While English teachers and librarians considered how to teach to and about black children, social studies teachers reflected on American race relations in terms of questions of political economy. Although typically denigrating in their descriptions of what one teacher described as "Southern Remus darkies," social studies teachers writing in the midst of the Great Depression tended to focus on economic inequalities and a lack of equal opportunities, writing:

> The conviction is spreading, also, that our major problems are not those of race relationship but rather are to be found in the region's poverty, in its health problems, in its poor educational facilities, in the low skill of its laboring millions. Their solution, of necessity, elevates black as well as white. This promises, also, to raise the color line from a horizontal to a vertical position and thus open the door of opportunity to all of both races while it preserves the integrity of each.[90]

An article written by a teacher in North Carolina agreed with the economic roots of the problem:

> Neither the biologist nor the psychologist has given us any reason to believe that these Southern people, either white or black, are fundamentally any better or any worse human stock than is to be found elsewhere in the nation. However, in the midst of a natural environment that could afford the basis for a rich and abundant civilization

they present a picture of poverty, frustration, and deficiency that is almost unbelievable.[91]

While social studies teachers tended to address political and economic concerns more explicitly than English teachers, they were nevertheless unequivocal in their desire to "preserve the integrity" of the black and white races by supporting rigid racial segregation. Like English teachers, social studies teachers in the years leading up to World War II found little cause to celebrate or even consider the culture of American blacks. As racial minorities without a nation, African Americans were also without culture in the mainstream, white-dominated educational discourse on race.

Nazism and Racial Prejudice

By 1937 American teachers were aware of the growing menace of Nazism and its racial doctrines. As early as 1934, social studies teachers criticized the racialist policies of Nazi Germany in teaching journals.[92] The mounting violence in Europe and Asia in the late 1930s was beginning to influence tolerance education in American schools in 1936, 1937, and 1938. Teachers now targeted "racial prejudice" as a specific problem for educators, and they further suggested that tolerance education would counteract the evils of Nazi racism. While teachers had taught about national groups in an attempt to speed the assimilation of recent immigrants and to inculcate a more cosmopolitan outlook among all students, now, for the first time, they expressed concern about the problem of *racial prejudice*. They specifically connected tolerance education to racial discrimination, and later violence, against Jews in Germany. Rising international tensions drew teachers into urgent deliberations on how to promote friendly relations, peace, and goodwill and especially how to combat the growing menace of irrational prejudice against racial minorities. As a result teachers were willing to experiment with different strategies in the classroom.

In 1936 the *English Journal* criticized what it viewed as meager programs of tolerance education in a roundtable entitled, "The English Teacher in Relation to the International Scene."[93] Here the author proclaimed: "We must cease our romantic vaporings on loving our foreign neighbors, with no definite, constructive policy to chart the intermediate steps." Francis Shoemaker argued that the key to an effective pedagogy of international relations was to have students recognize "that races are, after all, mere temporary geographic accidents." Like many English teachers, this one insisted that by reading literature "on the contributions of other cultures" students would become less racially prejudiced through imagined encounters with foreign peoples. He elaborated, "His

vicarious experiences will tend to individualize members of these other groups so that all Italians will not remain 'dagos,' all Germans 'huns,' and all Englishmen proverbial cockneys or 'by-jovers.'[94] This kind of tolerance education underscored a more egalitarian understanding of race as well as knowledge of the cultural contributions of racial minorities.

Over the next two years the *English Journal* continued to emphasize the importance of racial tolerance and international goodwill. Writing from a high school in Stambaugh, Michigan, one teacher described her classroom efforts to foster a "peace-inoculating experience." One of the most important features of this teacher's work was her use of an attitude test to gauge her students' racial prejudice before and after her lesson. Attitude tests like this one would become a defining feature of tolerance education during World War II as teachers struggled to defend the effectiveness of their antiprejudice initiatives. In this case the teacher listed twenty-five nationality and occupation groups, and then had the students record their immediate reactions to each one as "pleasant, unpleasant, or indifferent." She then led the class in a discussion of why they might harbor prejudice against certain groups of people. Concluding that students simply did not know the people they disliked, the teacher presented minority groups in terms of their literature and special "contributions to civilization." The students composed essays and presented talks on the group they had studied, practices the teacher understood as "formulas for peace."[95] Lessons like this would become a model for tolerance education once the war broke out. This teacher carefully contextualized the lesson as an educational response to international events, referenced the scientific approach to tolerance pedagogy, and directed a unit that differed little in content from the international relations education or many Americanization efforts of previous decades by highlighting minority groups' "contribution to civilization."

In May of 1938 the *English Journal* reported an entire course dedicated to tolerance education under way in the Santa Barbara High School in California. This course, Builders Together, stated as its goal:

> To build understanding of and sympathy with the various peoples who have contributed to the cultural growth of America; to learn what those contributions have been and to understand the backgrounds that enabled these peoples to contribute . . . to build by the aid of all these elements a creative Americanism.[96]

In this course, the teacher organized a student-led census of the high school to determine the "chief heritages" of the community. The students then interviewed and collected artifacts from among Santa Barbara's Mexican, Scandinavian, and Italian families in order to discover how each group's "racial gifts could be used

to build an even better Santa Barbara." Like other teachers of the late 1930s, this teacher used the term "culture" to describe the lifeways of each immigrant group, but because she considered each group to be a distinct race, she sometimes referred to a group's special attributes as "racial gifts." In conclusion, the teacher noted, "wholesome pride in race and in world-citizenship came to many," underscoring the connection between racial tolerance and international affairs.[97]

In 1937, social studies teachers joined the effort to fortify the nation against the impending war by teaching racial tolerance and understanding. As one teacher from Brooklyn bemoaned, "We teach the futility of war, yet we seem to be approaching chaos with recklessness equal to that of the year 1914. We teach tolerance, yet race hatred has shown its consequences in more than one place."[98] Like his colleagues in English, this teacher understood tolerance education as a prescription for world peace. He wanted tolerance education to include open, critical engagements with the key issues that were responsible for animosity between people and nations. Yet, even as the author composed his lesson plan, he acknowledged that any teacher who conducted critical discussions of social and economic bases for war would most likely be labeled an "indoctrinator" and removed from his position.

As international tension escalated, social studies teachers staked out a meaningful role for American public schools. "Should the teacher be a propagandist for peace or a prophet of the inevitable war?" asked a teacher from Two Rivers, Wisconsin.[99] The head of the social studies department in Muncie, Indiana, reminded teachers, "If the school is to meet its obligation of training for citizenship, it cannot fail to give attention to the problems of world community."[100] Teachers from across the country including Abington, Pennsylvania, and South Bend, Indiana, debated how to make civics and history "functional" in terms of the international conflict.[101]

Even as teachers expanded their horizons—articles on "The Moslem World" and American Indian history both appeared in 1938—others argued that the goal of American education was to promote the American Way of Life, not waste time celebrating foreign cultures.[102] A teacher from LeRoy High School in New York wrote bitterly, "if the millions of American dollars spent annually for education have any justification at all, it is certainly this: to further acknowledge, an understanding, and an appreciation of American thought and culture."[103] In a sense, these seemingly contradictory positions would be somewhat resolved during the war itself. American teachers would teach about foreign people and racial minorities in a way that seemed to highlight their proximity to white American norms, a pedagogy that promised to reduce racial prejudice as it fortified national unity.

In December 1937 Rachel Davis DuBois, who now served as director of the Progressive Education Association's Commission on Intercultural Education,