

visas long expired. In the interest of “homeland security,” we would track these people, regulate them, detain them, and, given the slightest excuse, expel them; and once more we would make it difficult for others to get in. How many Latin Americans, Europeans, Africans, and Asians eager to come here and contribute to our economic growth and intellectual firepower have been kept out—while entrenched terrorists, homegrown and imported, have gone about their business—we’ll never know.

So goes the sad history of American immigration policy: When in doubt, keep them out. If, in the process, we prolong a recession and lull ourselves into a false sense of security, among other consequences, that seems unimportant to many policymakers. But not to Frank Bean and Gillian Stevens, sociologists at the University of California, Irvine, and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, respectively, who have taken the opportunity to remind Americans that immigration remains, on balance, a great benefit to the United States.

As they note in their introduction—the best part of this otherwise somewhat technical tome—Americans view immigration with nostalgia and, at the same time, anxiety. The authors do a fine job of exploring and explaining these seemingly contradictory strains in the national attitude toward those who have accepted our promotion of the country as the world’s best place to live. We can thank Bean and Stevens, for example, for challenging the conventional wisdom that immigrants impoverish native-born American workers and exacerbate racial tensions. On the contrary, newcomers tend to stimulate economic activity, and, because of the increasingly diverse composition of the immigrant stream, they probably help defuse old hostilities.

That the advantages of an ever-changing national identity and culturally enriched society outweigh an occasional sense of drift and disruption seems, on the strength of the data assembled here, obvious. One senses that this book was well underway before the events of September 11, but in the aftermath it is all the more relevant and necessary.

—SANFORD J. UNGAR

NO EXCUSES:

Closing the Racial Gap in Learning.

By Abigail Thernstrom and Stephan Thernstrom. Simon & Schuster. 334 pp. \$26

In the century-long war between the advocates of process and the advocates of content in public education, Abigail Thernstrom and Stephan Thernstrom are firmly on the side of the latter. They believe that all children in primary grades should be taught to read and do arithmetic, even if that means that some of the learning may not be fun. They reject the notion that standardized tests suck the life out of a classroom. They doubt that teachers can be counted on, as the process side insists, to make schools work without a lot of outside assessment. They have seen content-rich, test-proven methods succeed in low-income schools, and they have been searching for a way to use those methods to bring average achievement rates of African American and Hispanic children up to the level shown by white and Asian American children.

This book, their manifesto, is one of the most valuable guides to saving American schools I have ever read. Stephan Thernstrom is the Winthrop Professor of History at Harvard University. Abigail Thernstrom is a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute, as well as a member of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights and the Massachusetts State Board of Education. They are confident of their opinions and not shy about expressing them. But they are also quick to admit when the research says their instincts are wrong. They lob several mortars into the enemy camp—showing, for instance, that more education dollars are not by themselves going to rescue low-income schools. But they also demonstrate that the Bush administration’s No Child Left Behind Act is unlikely to do the trick, either.

The most uncomfortable parts of this book for me, and I suspect for the Thernstroms as well, deal with the dysfunctional aspects of particular ethnic cultures. Black families, for instance, appear to have more trouble on average than their white counterparts in preparing their children for school, even when income differences are factored out. “The origins of the problem of inadequate schooling do not

lie with the children themselves,” the Thernstroms say. “They are only kids, after all—kids who come into kindergarten already behind. But the solution does lie in part with them and with their parents.”

They cite the HOME (Home Observation for Measurement of the Environment) scale devised by researchers who found troubling racial differences, acknowledged by both white and black scholars, in how parents expressed physical affection, answered children’s questions, and imposed discipline. The Thernstroms say that reformers must acknowledge that “meeting the demands of schools is harder for members of some racial and ethnic groups than for others. Some group cultures are more academically advantageous than others.”

But there are plenty of solutions, they believe. They describe in detail successful school programs run by educators of all ethnicities. Among the Thernstroms’ favorites are the KIPP (Knowledge Is Power Program) middle schools, the North Star Academy in Newark, New Jersey, the South Boston Harbor Academy, the Amistad Academy in New Haven, Connecticut, and the work of Disney Teacher of the Year Rafe Esquith in his fifth grade at the Hobart Boulevard Elementary School in Los Angeles.

Even the Thernstroms’ friends and admirers (like me, who had Abigail Thernstrom as



Closing the gap? A teacher and child paint together at New York City’s Bloomingdale Headstart Program.

a college political science instructor 39 years ago) will not like everything in this book. I think the authors should have celebrated more the rise in black achievement, even if a similar rise in white achievement has kept the racial gap from closing. And I think they are wrong to suggest that the dearth of advanced placement courses in inner-city high schools is simply the unavoidable result of poor academic preparation.

But it is impossible to reason intelligently about how to fix the bottom 25 percent of our public schools without absorbing the research and analysis presented here. I can hear the Thernstroms’ adversaries rolling up their artillery, but I don’t think they’re going to do much damage, because the authors have been so honest about the hard work that lies ahead for anyone who wants to help those schools.

—JAY MATHEWS

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

INTERTWINED LIVES: Margaret Mead, Ruth Benedict, and Their Circle.

By Lois W. Banner. Knopf. 540 pp. \$30

At age 80, I confess to a long life before the advent of women’s studies, gender studies, and lesbian and gay studies. I thought I knew a lot about sexuality from my work as an anthropologist, and I considered myself a feminist. But I hadn’t closely followed the morphing of feminist theory and the women’s movement

into academic fields. This remarkable book has exposed me to new aspects of scholarly study and, more important, to new perceptions of anthropologists Ruth Benedict (1887–1948) and Margaret Mead (1901–78).

Benedict and Mead, preeminent American women of the 20th century, were also, as it happens, women who changed my life. Benedict’s *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture* (1946) inspired me to become an anthropologist. Mead’s first ques-