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HOW TO BEHAVE SENSITIVELY: PRESCRIPTIONS FOR INTERRACIAL CONDUCT FROM THE 1960s TO THE 1990s

By Elisabeth Lasch-Quinn

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The 1990s have brought renewed interest from Americans in two seemingly unrelated issues, race and etiquette. The more one ponders the outpouring of writing on these two themes, however, the clearer it becomes that the twin interests are intricately connected. A 1993 film, *"Six Degrees of Separation,"* made this connection manifest. The film depicts the rise and fall of a young black man who gains entry into the social world of the New York white liberal elite by mastering its diction and etiquette. With great aplomb, the film's main character, Paul "Poitier" (played by Will Smith), claiming to be the son of actor Sidney Poitier, endears himself to the parents of several boarding school friends, armed with inside information received in return for sexual favors for one of their homosexual classmates. In scenes reminiscent of *"My Fair Lady"* (the 1964 film based in turn on Shaw's *Pygmalion*), Paul practices articulating "bottle of beer" instead of slurring it in street dialect, and learns customs such as sending small jars of fancy jams and jellies as a token of gratitude.¹

These skills serve Paul well as he worms his way into the hearts of the wealthy, whose money-grubbing, status-obsessed lives and alienation from their own spoiled children readied them for the catharsis brought about by friendship with the adoring, attractive young black man. While his presence allows them to unburden themselves of all varieties of guilt and makes them feel young and radical (or at least countercultural) again, Paul positions himself to take advantage of the accoutrements of their wealth by using their apartment for sexual adventures and jeopardizing their expensive possessions.

The manner in which Paul Poitier enters the liberal elite's social world, through a mastery of its etiquette—including its racial complex—is highly suggestive. Its resonance derives from the development, since formal desegregation in the 1950s and 1960s, of a new association between race and etiquette. In the case of *"Six Degrees,"* Paul Poitier plays the race card with finesse, in a way that disarms his rich white victims. Paul's only mistake is his failure to realize that this tack can only take him so far. Liberal guilt runs deep but exists within a framework of propriety that runs deeper still. Violation of the rules of high society, an essential underpinning of which is the privacy of property, ends up destroying the very illusion of belonging Paul manages to create through a mastery of its etiquette.

The connection between race relations and etiquette in the late twentieth century begins to emerge when various kinds of sources from the period are arrayed, ranging from films and nonfiction satire to advice manuals and diversity training materials. The exact nature of the connection is not always obvious. But juxtaposed, sources divulge certain recurring themes, making it imperative to assess the period from the mid-1960s to the mid-1990s as one in which Americans struggled and strained to define a new interracial etiquette. This essay will present some of the genres in which an etiquette of race has received

attention and begin to explore the meaning of the heightened concern with race and etiquette in the late twentieth century.

As historians have established, prior to the civil rights movement (under Jim Crow in the South and de facto segregation in the North), there existed an elaborate code of conduct for relations between whites and blacks. Eye contact, pedestrian behavior, and forms of address were all strictly regulated in order to reinforce white supremacy and black submission. The civil rights movement sought not only to bring about equal citizenship rights for all Americans regardless of race but also to do away with the racial protocol expected for daily interactions. This protocol, after all, had formed the foundation for the continued subordination of blacks. Violations had led to punishments ranging from the loss of employment to the loss of life, through lynching.²

Since the civil rights movement ended segregation in the 1950s and 1960s, many Americans tried to abandon the notion of correct rules for black/white interactions, but failed to sever the connection between race and etiquette as completely as they both desired and professed. Instead, proper comportment for both whites and blacks (as well as others) involved in interracial encounters became a recurring preoccupation. Increasingly, propriety seemed to call for different codes of conduct according to the racial or cultural backgrounds of those involved. In addition, conflicting advice betrayed both tension and confusion.

One of the most memorable cultural artifacts in recent times that articulated race relations in the language of etiquette was the film, "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner" (to which "Six Degrees of Separation" is a sustained allusion), starring Sidney Poitier. Released in 1967, the film depicted a young, ingenuous white woman (played by Katharine Houghton) who shocks her well-to-do but liberal parents by bringing home unannounced the man she has met and wants to marry, played by Sidney Poitier.³

This film explores the humor and tension inherent in the confrontation of the woman's parents (played by Spencer Tracy and Katharine Hepburn) with their own hypocritical reservations about the prospect of their precious only daughter marrying a black man. New complexity develops when the man's parents also have trouble accepting the match. The bulk of the dramatic tension results from the excruciating politeness among the characters, especially the members of the older generation. The women, endowed with a superior, almost spiritual sense of common humanity, have far less trouble accepting the interracial couple, ostensibly because of their romantic view of marriage, but one suspects the ulterior motive of wanting to keep the social event running smoothly. The fathers are concerned, on the surface in any case, with the practical difficulties the pair would inevitably encounter, as is even the male fiancé. One of the lessons of the movie is that the treatment of all according to the same standard of respect should triumph over specific rules of conduct in a particular community.

The film stands in between the old racial etiquette of segregation and the social demands of integration. The old etiquette is represented by all the forces aligned against the young couple, including the family's black maid, who makes it known she does not approve of people getting out of their proper places.

But there is a foreshadowing of a new etiquette. While the interracial scenes are characterized by extreme politeness, the persona of Poitier's character when

he is alone with his fiancé is relaxed and sensual, uninhibited and flirtatious. But the best example of changing rules of deference is the speech he delivers to the parents of the young woman. In a strident tone, he informs them that, unbeknownst to his eager would-be bride, he will break off the engagement if they cannot promise to give unwavering support of the marriage. His reasoning is that the new couple will face so many obstacles that he is not willing to take on any “new problems.” The young woman’s father, played by Spencer Tracy, replies that he respects that decision, but resents it being communicated in the form of an ultimatum. Poitier’s character has the last word: it is not an ultimatum because his fiancé’s parents have the power to call the whole thing off. Of course, this would crush her and perhaps sever their tie with their daughter. But the more striking message, to the viewer, is that the woman means a great deal to Poitier but is not worth everything. Love can conquer most, but not all—not the prospect of continued disrespect from the white parents.

Three years later another work humorously explored the prevailing etiquette between the races, but here the brief flashes of assertiveness in Poitier’s character give way to a much more demonstrative black style for public interracial encounters. While “Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner” questioned the superficiality of a racial liberalism still resting on social segregation, Tom Wolfe’s satirical commentary, *Radical Chic*, pierced through the artificiality of an interracial fundraising party thrown for the Black Panthers by the white liberal elite of New York City. *Radical Chic* ridiculed a new racial order in which interracial harmony was purchased with abject white submission.

Unveiling the white elite’s perfunctory motives for supporting the black cause, Wolfe articulates race relations through an examination of etiquette. The host and hostess, Lenny Bernstein and his wife Felicia, prove themselves to be “geniuses” for figuring out how to solve the problem of servants for the Black Panther fund-raiser: they hired white South Americans.

Obviously, if you are giving a party for the Black Panthers, as Lenny and Felicia are this evening, . . . you can’t have a Negro butler and maid, Claude and Maude, in uniform, circulating through the living room, the library, and the main hall serving drinks and canapés. Plenty of people have tried to think it out. They try to picture the Panthers or whoever walking in bristling with electric hair and Cuban shades and leather pieces and the rest of it, and they try to picture Claude and Maude with the black uniforms coming up and saying, ‘Would you care for a drink, sir?’ They close their eyes and try to picture it *some way*, but there is no way. One simply cannot see that moment. So the current wave of Radical Chic has touched off the most desperate search for white servants.⁴

Of course, the liberties employed by Wolfe in the service of satire make this account shade into fiction at times, but his unstinting observations treat the new admixture of race and etiquette head on. There seems not to exist any connection between the etiquette of the situation and any kind of underlying, universal standard of respect. Instead, etiquette serves image. The important thing is to be correct according to one’s own inner circle; correctness in etiquette is what proves one is authentic, genuine, the real thing. Ironically, the white partygoers share in a kind of cult of authenticity that is ultimately masochistic. The test of authenticity seems to be distance from their own circumscribed and artificial

world, so tightly repressed as it is by its own etiquette. Establishing authenticity thus entails a rejection of this world and an embrace of a world without rules, the world of Norman Mailer's "White Negro," the white hipster enthralled by blacks' ability to live "in the perpetual climax of the present."⁵ Wolfe writes that it is "*nostalgie de la boue*, or romanticizing of primitive souls," which "was one of the things that brought Radical Chic to the fore in New York Society":

Nostalgie de la boue is a nineteenth-century French term that means, literally, 'nostalgia for the mud.' . . . [It] tends to be a favorite motif whenever a great many new faces and a lot of money enter Society. New arrivals have always had two ways of certifying their superiority over the hated 'middle class.' They can take on the trappings of aristocracy, such as grand architecture, servants, parterre boxes, and high protocol; and they can indulge in the gauche thrill of taking on certain styles of the lower orders. The two are by no means mutually exclusive . . .⁶

Any genuine fellow feeling or egalitarianism is eclipsed by a superficial show of authenticity, a form of total self-absorption which nevertheless is dependent on certification by others, and has its own elaborate rituals and protocol. According to the etiquette of this new constellation of social relations, a mere gesture, such as the black power symbol—a raised fist denoting exclusive fraternity, danger, and unyielding strength—, inspires envy among whites. Because to be black becomes a badge of authenticity and authenticity is tied with rejection of a world straight-jacketed by interdictions, blacks' behavior gains admiration when it is at its most self-righteously self-assertive, however outlandish, whereas whites can only score points through submissiveness. That whites need to submit—they must take their turn—is a larger lesson reinforced by many of the actual prescriptions for interracial conduct. Whites, for instance, should recognize blacks' monopoly on expressiveness, an increasingly cherished commodity in the cultural milieu produced by the 1960s.

Around the same time, an actual etiquette guide entitled *How to Get Along with Black People: A Handbook for White Folks, and Some Black Folks Too* chastened whites who, in proximity with blacks, misguidedly thought they could be part of a less-circumscribed world. In a humorous forward by Bill Cosby, the reader encounters a scenario in which a white man has a black colleague over for dinner:

We [my wife and I] invite them [him and his wife] in and I introduce my wife, who looks very white to me now, I tell them 'I dig' and my wife says she's 'hip' but somehow, between the pre-dinner cocktails and sitting at the table, they leave. For the life of me, I cannot figure out why.⁷

The book goes on to delineate rules for whites on how to conduct themselves properly around blacks. It lists faux pas in conversation, such as "He's just the nicest person," "He would make it no matter what his color was," and "One of my closest friends when I was a child was a little colored girl."⁸ These and what the authors call other "liberalisms" come under attack. As for interracial relationships, readers get the impression that these are rarely advised. If both parties find it necessary to pursue the romance, they should:

Discuss racial problems or incidents openly and candidly but avoid agonizing over them. A sense of humor helps.

In addition,

Whites should exercise restraint in seeking to 'find out about blacks'. While the black partner might appreciate an interest in good food or music preferences, zealous researching into the folk ways of blacks is resented.

White women in particular should be careful not to dispute, contradict, or challenge the black partner *publicly*. They [sic] just don't like it, especially coming from a white woman.

Very few blacks, male or female, enjoy public displays of affection.⁹

Whites should also avoid black expressions, like "soul-brother," "man," "right-on," "dig," "getting it together," "tell it like it is," and "doing your own thing."¹⁰ When deciding what to call blacks—colored, Negro, black, or Afro-American—whites should make the decision according to an "integration index" which typecasts blacks according to their likelihood to endorse integration based on their age, birthplace, skin color, and education.¹¹ This advice both unveiled the cool style projected by some blacks as a highly self-conscious insouciance and claimed possession of that style. Blacks could say "dig" and be authentic. Whites who adopted this language were impostors. But if whites insisted on hanging around blacks, they needed to know strict rules for keeping their impulses in line.

Cultural Etiquette by Amoja Three-Rivers, published twenty years later in 1991, echoed many of the sentiments of *How to Get Along with Black People* but took them to even greater extremes. In *Cultural Etiquette*, enthusiastically excerpted in *Ms. Magazine*¹² later in the year it came out, a kind of double standard had become a guiding principle for propriety under the guise of intercultural tolerance and "healing." This pamphlet reduces etiquette to a rigid set of rules seemingly detached from any standard of mutual respect. Clearly, it is at least in part this very separation of etiquette from such a standard that necessitates the elaboration of more and more etiquette rules.

Cultural Etiquette is an odd mélange of possessiveness of traits deemed by the author "cultural," strict commandments, and strained definitions. Attacking the stereotype of blacks as having "rhythm," the author ends up hinting that they do, not by nature exactly, but because they are more in *touch* with nature:

Everyone has 'natural rhythm.' It is our human birthright. If you don't have perceptual or neuromuscular impairment, and yet you feel unable to perceive or respond to rhythms in any relevant, satisfying or graceful way, then perhaps you may want to examine the personal, cultural and historical paths that led to this unfortunate deficiency. Not having rhythm is not natural.¹³

Clearly, the implication is that whites are less natural, less expressive, than blacks—even if the condition is only temporary and theoretically can be remedied with the right instruction.

Subjects earning great disapproval in *Cultural Etiquette* include the touching of other people's drums:

Musical instruments such as drums . . . have strong spirits and when they belong to other people should not be handled casually. Never touch another person's instrument without asking permission and do not take it personally if they say 'no.'

Also, do not keep asking in the hopes that the instrument's owner will eventually change her mind. She might, after she gets to know you better, but pestering is the wrong thing to do.¹⁴

The touching of hair is also prohibited. The reader receives a definition of "dreadlocks, locks, dreads, natty dreads" and the information that "It is not a style. Usually a person who wears dreads does so as a cultural, spiritual and philosophical expression. It is also an expression of solidarity with other African peoples. Although straight-haired people can dread, it is an expression that uniquely lends itself to the hair of African people." And, just in case you were thinking about it, "No, you may not touch it, don't ask."¹⁵

In a chapter entitled "Just Don't Do This, OK?" Three-Rivers lists a number of interdictions along these lines:

Do not equate bad, depressing or negative things with darkness ...
 [such as] a black mood
 a dark day
 a black heart.
 The meaning of the word denigrate is to demean by darkening.
 Be creative ...
 Don't assume that it is o.k. to ask people of color about their racial background ...
 If you have occasion to quote another person's racist remark, try to allude to it or
 just use the first letter of the word ...
 Don't touch or invade the personal space of a person of color or a Jewish person
 unless you have established a personal, equitable relationship with them
 [sic] ...

Perhaps most helpful is:

Please don't go around expecting you can be part of another ethnic group now
 because you feel you were part of that group 'in a former life.'¹⁶

Like its subtitle, "A Guide for the Well-Intentioned," the handbook's commandments are geared toward readers who consider themselves to be liberal and sympathetic to, or perhaps even honorary members of the group—referred to in our own time as "Wannabes." The urge to draw boundaries or assert one's presence is one understandable legacy of the racial caste system extant in the United States until as recently as the mid-twentieth century, the vestiges of which are still present in some locales. However, the decision to do so by endlessly elaborating racially encoded rules of etiquette eerily evokes those innumerable daily expectations and taboos that once buttressed segregation.

Not all advice on interracial contact aims, of course, to mitigate the pain inflicted by "well-intentioned" whites. Karla Holloway writes about behavior, particularly of blacks, in the more academic treatise, *Codes of Conduct: Race, Ethics and the Color of Our Character*, published in 1995. Just as *How to Get Along with Black People* and *Cultural Etiquette* warned whites not to mistake an effusive black style as a relaxation of social guidelines, *Codes of Conduct* chastised blacks who failed to project an uninhibited sensibility. In this line of thought, expressiveness emerges as highly self-conscious, codified, and guided by an etiquette of its own. Commenting on everything from court cases to novels and films,

Holloway sets up a code of conduct by which she judges other blacks. She scolds Whoopi Goldberg for compromising her “passionate self-embrace” by carrying on an interracial romance with Ted Danson and supporting his appearance at a Friar’s Club roast for her at which he appeared in black face and joked about her sexual appetites. Though Goldberg said she had approved of Danson’s jokes as humor, Holloway commands, “B(l)ack talk has to be a consistent and passionate articulation.”¹⁷ Maya Angelou also comes under attack for speaking her poem, “On the Pulse of the Morning,” at the first presidential inauguration of Bill Clinton. Since Angelou had customarily delivered her poems with much expression and gesticulation, she disappointed many blacks, according to Holloway, for breaking a kind of “African American cultural code.”¹⁸

... When Angelou did not step or gesture, when she did not move at all around the small space of the inaugural platform, and especially when she did not modulate or cultivate her voice, African Americans like me felt quite keenly the loss of those cultural codes that could have marked the moment.¹⁹

Similarly, Anita Hill garners disapproval for her self-control. Holloway would have preferred her to “turn it out,” a term which means to unleash the anger and frustration appropriate to a demeaning situation—to “act colored.”²⁰ Holloway quotes feminist scholar bell hooks’s assertion that, instead of integrity, Hill’s behavior exemplified to many just “another example of black female stoicism in the face of sexist/racist abuse.” If Hill had allowed herself to become passionate, the hearings would have been “less an assault on the psyches of black females watching,” according to hooks.²¹

Holloway admits that she hesitates to endorse behavior such as “turning it out” on the grounds that it might reinforce the very stereotypes blacks have fought for so many years to counteract. When one member of her book club, “The Friday Night Women,” asked the others if they had ever had to turn it out, “the tenor of the night’s discussion changed,” she wrote, “as we alternately shared the hilarity of the moments when we just decided to go on and ‘act colored’ as some of us called it, and we also relived the pain of us all having had that same experience”:

In one sense, turning it out or acting colored means that we give up trying to respond to a situation as if both we and they (white people and/or men) are operating within the same codes of conduct. It can mean handing over to our adversary our version of the stereotype that motivates their disrespect to us ...

“Turning it out” involves losing control, unleashing anger, acting obstinate and unreasonable—all of the things unfairly comprising the stereotype of black female behavior underlying the insult that triggered “turning it out” in the first place. The result, Holloway admits, is that “no one wins.” “But usually we feel better,” she adds.²²

Besides actual etiquette guides, numerous other kinds of sources dispense advice about how to act with members of different social groups, reinforcing the idea that such mixed encounters require intense examination, separate rules, and rigid—if completely internalized—regulation. Beginning in the 1970s and 1980s, but gaining in numbers and prominence since the late 1980s, diversity training programs and sensitivity courses came into frequent use. The materials used in these programs, from training videos to workbooks, as well as the often

pricey books written for managers seeking to handle the issue of diversity in their workplaces also contain suggestions for how members of different groups should behave toward one another.

In a 1995 survey of the top Fortune 50 corporations, seventy percent of the companies reported a formal diversity management program, and another sixteen percent had scattered or fledgling programs in place. Despite the substantial evidence that such diversity programs do little to decrease workplace tensions (in some cases they have been reported actually to worsen them), sociologist Frederick R. Lynch shows, diversity consultants have created a kind of "diversity machine" which includes a professional literature, trained experts, university courses, conferences, research institutes, consulting firms, and allies in major corporations and in government.²³

Though there are different schools of thought in the movement, diversity training materials tend to follow a certain pattern. Usually they begin with the rationale for their own existence, which goes as follows: since the globalization of the economy will mean that in the 21st century customers and workers will increasingly be non-white and female, anyone wishing to fit into the new economic scene, either as manager or employee, must learn to get along with a variety of people, and managers must create a comfortable atmosphere or risk stifling the productivity of the isolated or offended individuals and thus lose profits. In these videos, much care is taken to show that diversity does not just concern white men's treatment of black and female employees. In fact, from viewing the films alone, a foreigner might think that in the United States, blacks and women are most often in managerial positions.

It is worth looking closely at a typical example of these videos, "Managing Diversity," for the various messages it purveys and for the assumptions about what kind of etiquette is needed and why. Released in 1990, this training film opens with the statement:

Diversity in the workplace is a complex and demanding subject For the purposes of illustration and discussion, this training video focuses primarily on differences. This is in no way intended to imply or perpetuate stereotypes, or to value members of one group over another, but rather to explore ways in which we can all meet the challenge of Managing Diversity together.²⁴

Interspersed with authoritative statements by human resources experts, a series of dramatizations show the kinds of misunderstandings that arise ostensibly because of "cultural differences."

In one cameo, a black male manager has to ask a Greek or Italian immigrant male assembly line supervisor of production, who is beneath him in the corporate hierarchy, how much his workers can produce. The line supervisor asks what management wants and when he finds out, agrees (not surprisingly) to manufacture that amount. The black manager smiles and expresses contentment that they now have all of their "ducks in a row." On his way out of the building, however, he overhears the immigrant line supervisor expressing anxiety about the possibility of producing that quantity.²⁵

The film's narrator intervenes here to give us some tips. We learn that people differ particularly on the following issues: the way an individual relates to the group; "attitudes toward power and authority"; and "tolerance for uncertainty." Supposedly because of his relaxed view of authority, the black manager assumed

that the line supervisor could be frank with him, while the immigrant line supervisor thought he had better go along with management's original expectation at all costs. The narrator explains that following a few basic rules of behavior could prevent misunderstandings like these ones, which were supposedly caused by different cultural backgrounds: 1. communicate, 2. be clear and concise and avoid slang, 3. be aware that the cause of workplace tension might be cultural differences, 4. be alert for non-verbal messages, 5. accept different cultures as equally valid, 6. make sure to explain your company's "culture."²⁶

Next, the black manager returns to the immigrant line supervisor and lets him know that a lower production quota would be fine. The supervisor relaxes visibly and makes a joke about how they now have all of their "ducks in a line." Both manager and supervisor clearly part on much improved terms.²⁷

Several things are revealing about this scenario. First, while the film's narrator stresses the manager's mistake in using slang or clichés, in the end it is precisely a cliché (and actually the error itself, thus the cultural difference itself) which provides for merriment between the two people involved. Second, cultural differences—different attitudes toward authority—are employed to explain why an employee might feel pressured and close-mouthed around management. This sidesteps any inherent unfairness in the hierarchical corporate structure itself, and thus is part of larger trend begun in the 1920s to engineer social relations in the workplace by employing psychological theory and methods and construing genuine conflicts in interest as mere indications of the need for smoother, therapeutic "personal relations" efforts on the part of management.²⁸ Finally, we learn that blacks as a group have a relaxed attitude toward power and authority while Greek or Italian immigrants are respectful to a fault. In materials designed to counteract stereotypes, then, rules for behavior are encouraged which are based on gross generalizations about groups.²⁹

Some recognition of the flaws of a *modus operandi* that categorizes individuals' traits according to their so-called culture, simplistically rendered, does appear in other training materials. *Valuing Diversity: New Tools for a New Reality*, a book edited and substantially written by one of the most well-known proponents of diversity training, Lewis Brown Griggs, together with Lente-Louise Louw, advises managers to refine this cultural model a little: "... we must gather as much cultural information as we can, and then we must hold it to one side as we look to see in what ways it may be relevant to the individual with whom we are dealing."³⁰ One chapter lays out four rules for managing people from different groups:

1. Acknowledge the differences.
2. Educate yourself about differences by reading, listening, and putting yourself in situations where the other group is dominant.
3. Figure out how the person you are working with is like what you have discovered about the group of which he or she is a member and how she or he is not.
4. Work to value those differences.³¹

The chapter guides us through a script in which you, the reader, hypothetically a "Filipino-American woman," have an African American named Ed working under you. After you have listened carefully to his story of his experiences,

your next step is to find out as much as you can about the culture. You go to the library and to bookstores, particularly those in African-American neighborhoods or the African-American Episcopal church in your community or go to an exhibit of black artists currently displayed in a museum near you. The third step is to observe how Ed is like the culture you have read about or met. How do the things you learned apply to him? This is best done by observing, not by asking Ed a million questions about himself.

Clearly, Griggs did not absorb the lessons of *How to Get Along with Black People*, which warned against taking on the demeanor of a cultural detective. The result of all of your hard work, according to *Valuing Diversity*, is that "your employees" will not only "feel more valued" but they "will work harder to see that goals for the whole organization are achieved."³² Barring that, your workers are certain to feel more *observed*.

While this advice was theoretically directed to a non-African American, many other sources proclaim to help blacks make it in today's workplace. In *The Black Manager: Making It in the Corporate World* (1982, reprinted in 1991), Floyd Dickens, Jr., and Jacqueline B. Dickens advise blacks to "manage racist behavior by strategy." While some of the guidelines are similar to those given by diversity training materials, such as "learn how to approach people tactfully, sensitively, and in a way that avoids unnecessary conflict," other directives differ substantially. The basic subtext of this book is that lack of communication is not the problem, but outright racism. The black manager should follow a number of guidelines when facing interracial situations:

- Use effectively controlled anger as a tool for achieving results. . . .
- When whites are illogically resistant, lay out relevant data and let them think they came up with the idea. . . .
- When using whites as resources, show your appreciation by giving them a stroke or sharing useful information. . . .
- Watch and listen to whites in order to learn white organization norms and duplicate their behavioral approach. . . .
- When dealing with whites, be careful about what key organizational issues you discuss and how you phrase your needs relative to hot issues. . . .
- . . . be sure you have all relevant information before stating your position. When you lack the pertinent facts or sit on the fence, racists can easily control you.
- Do not depend on organizational rewards. Whites tend to not expect or give public strokes and rewards. . . .
- . . . ask key questions indirectly, to avoid giving racists a reason to react negatively to questions perceived as threatening or irrelevant³³

The Black Manager's guidelines and the diversity training materials are particularly striking when juxtaposed. One can only imagine the confusion that would result in a workplace in which one worker learned the cardinal rule of "managing diversity"—"be clear and concise and avoid slang"—and another read in *The Black Manager* that he or she should "ask key questions indirectly." What the two schools of thought have in common, however, is their acknowledgement that race relations require a new etiquette, and that this etiquette needs to be spelled out in all its particulars. Further, they share the idea that there should be

a separate etiquette for interactions among different groups of people. Such an etiquette, based on a heightened awareness of differences construed as cultural facts, clearly relies on simplistic, stereotypical renderings of the groups involved as well as a condescending assessment of and cynical resignation concerning the limits of individuals implicated in various social involvements. This resignation often translates into an unabashedly utilitarian or instrumental stance. *The Black Manager* goes on to advise blacks to:

- Eat lunch with whites to get information from their formal and informal communications networks and make personal contact [but]
- Eat lunch with blacks to share information, keep in touch with the grapevine, relax, and replenish your psychic energy.³⁴

Like the diversity training films, these guidelines are predicated on the idea that the primary reason why an elaborate etiquette exists is because each group requires the other in order to fulfill its economic goals. Since workers and customers will be increasingly diverse, lack of tolerance will compromise profits. Mere tolerance is the only goal that remains.

* * * * *

This small sample of the late twentieth-century materials directed at interracial encounters clearly illustrates several internal contradictions in the body of prescriptions as a whole. At times whites hear that they should zealously conduct research into the culture of other groups and at other times are warned that such inquisitiveness represents liberal attitudes at their most phony and intrusive. Much of this advice sanctions an open, expressive style for blacks—even when it entails confrontation and rage—, while promoting a high degree of self-restraint for whites. Some self-appointed gurus fault whites for their lack of expressiveness at the same time that they insinuate that whites are incapable of an emotional style which is the cultural preserve of African Americans. Still other advisors, especially those concerned with blacks' success in interracial workplaces, steer blacks away from their presumably real impulses and toward a repressed, white style when in the company of whites.

What these conflicting pieces of advice reveal more than anything, beyond the astonishing proliferation and multiplicity of prescriptions for behavior, is that the nature of the entire enterprise of establishing a new racial etiquette (and of course the enterprise of integration itself) has entailed a level of strain and confusion that has not been fully gauged, admitted, or explained. Surely this confusion has much to do with the huge transformation in American life wrought by the civil rights movement and the questions it raised: in an integrating and democratizing society, what will structure social relations among people who were once treated very differently from one another and whose interactions were dictated by an etiquette of caste? Now that the civil rights movement has altered some basic social realities and exposed the evils of the old order, what is the right way to act? What should be considered disrespectful, proper, gauche, inadmissible? These questions were all the harder to answer because other aspects of life were also in

flux at the very moment integration became a real possibility in some settings (partly because of the civil rights movement itself), such as traditional deference to authority and social formality. As a result, the task of itemizing the pieces of a new racial etiquette seemed to split at the seams, beset by basic, but generally unacknowledged tensions: an etiquette based on difference seemed to support double standards; the glorification of an informal or expressive style seemed to contradict the need for rigid rules of order; it is not clear on what principles etiquette rests or should rest.

It seems no coincidence that a society unable to come up with generally satisfying responses to these and other related questions would perceive itself to be in (and indeed would undergo) a more general crisis of civility altogether. There have been numerous outcries along these lines, along with alarmed reactions that dismiss such concerns as part of an insidious attempt to restore traditional hierarchies and quiet new voices.³⁵ Both sides in the civility debate generally fail to grasp the importance of the growing distance between a universal moral standard and particular rules of politeness. This is implied in the work of one of the most astute observers of today's "rudeness crisis," Judith Martin (alias Miss Manners), who identifies a separation in most people's minds between "civility, decency, consideration for others, common sense, making others feel comfortable, good sportsmanship, tact, collegiality, congeniality, respect, fairness," on the one hand, and etiquette on the other. The "E word" is shunned "Because it's artificial! It's elitist! It's old-fashioned! It's arbitrary! It's stuffy! It's prudish! It represses people from expressing their true feelings! [sic] It inhibits little children! It's hypocritical! It's dishonest! And—it uses forks!" The point here is that a civilized, democratic society demands that the former (good manners)—a basic foundation of common sense, fairness, and respect—and the latter (specific etiquette rules) are inextricable. Martin defines manners as "the moral underpinnings of etiquette." Etiquette is only elitist when deprived of such underpinnings. With them intact, "Etiquette is the great equalizer. It applies equally to everyone, and it's equally available to everyone."³⁶

In one of the most recent attempts to locate both the cause and the remedy for what he sees as Americans' "pursuit of selfishness" and glorification of "the viciously offensive," Stephen Carter's *Civility: Manners, Morals, and the Etiquette of Democracy* emphasizes the loss of a religiously based sense of sacrifice—the glue he thinks holds society together. Particularly since the 1960s, he writes, individualism, selfishness, technological change, "our wealth and privilege," and disunity have made sacrifice for the sake of living in proximity with others seem unnecessary, with a resultant estrangement of the "rules of civility" from the "rules of morality."³⁷ In a review of Carter's book in *The New Republic*, historian Rochelle Gurstein draws on the work of J.G.A. Pocock to locate much deeper roots of the disassociation between manners and morals (and a much less simplistic notion of their potential point of connection), a change wrought by the rise of the new commercialism of the eighteenth century and its attendant liberal sensibility, which elevated civil liberties over the "public spiritedness of civic virtue," making politeness "an alternative" to such virtue. This set the stage for the reduction of civility by twentieth-century Americans to "just a question of rules" without underlying meaning.³⁸

The broader implication here is that both long-term and short-term cultural

transitions have fostered modern Americans' alienation from the moral dimensions of their social bonds and the guidelines necessary to sustain them. Certainly a perennial aspect of American race relations well before the 1960s, the lack of any explicit understanding of the connection between etiquette and moral equality resurfaces in much late-twentieth-century advice on interracial conduct (as well as general social rules having nothing to do with race, for that matter), as reflected in arbitrary, conflicting tenets and unexplained double standards. There are several ironic results of the absence of a firm connection between manners and morals: manners have become increasingly elaborate; general rebellions against manners have occurred, only to be countered by new attempts to articulate social rules once the impossibility of a viable social life without generally understood guidelines is rediscovered; analysts of the various crises in civility merely propose new sets of rules rather than addressing the question of why the current ones do not work.

Deeply embedded in interracial etiquette is also a related tension between heightened awareness of self-presentation and attempts to manage or control emotional life, on the one hand, and an ideal of informality in social relations on the other. Unfortunately, the historiography of manners has rarely addressed race in a sustained fashion; the little we know about manners and race tends to come from primary, undigested accounts or studies understandably devoted to elaborating the history of African Americans or race relations in themselves rather than in relation to more general developments in the history of manners or emotional expression. Still, the small but rich body of scholarly literature on manners in the West has yielded highly significant frameworks for initial explorations of how broad cultural shifts might have affected ideas about interracial behavior since the 1960s.

Turning to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, both John Kasson and Cas Wouters build on Norbert Elias's depiction of a long-term trend toward greater and more internalized emotional control³⁹ and help, for example, to illuminate the late-twentieth-century reemergence of the nearly frantic etiquette anxiety of the sources arrayed here. Kasson argues that the rise of bourgeois refinement over the course of the nineteenth century resulted from urbanization, the advancement of capitalism, and the fluidity of American life. These conditions caused middle-class Americans to create public identities that served their economic and social interests. Twentieth-century consumerism only heightened the degree to which individuals sought to control their emotions in order to compete in the marketplace by gaining "cultural capital." The etiquette of refinement paralleled a new segmentation of the self, which resulted from the imperative of rehearsing theatrical parts for public consumption. The basis for any solidity of the self eroded in a climate in which façades, possessions, and other external signs of worth dominated daily life.⁴⁰

The function of etiquette, in Kasson's view, is made manifest by the extremely elaborate edicts governing behavior at table. Any assembly formed for the purpose of collective dining possesses an intrinsic potential for "leveling" people of differing social status and for creating a sense of "human bondedness," or "communitas," in Victor Turner's word. This particularly threatened the late-nineteenth-century middle class, which feared the social fluidity around it and craved social distinctions. One etiquette book remarked that during dinner peo-

ple are in "closer contact than at a dance, or any other kind of party."⁴¹ The forsaking of genteel behavior at meals threatened to bring about everything from social anarchy to the unleashing of raw competitiveness in the form of bestial appetites. It is interesting to note that interracial dining was one of the most fraught aspects of integration. Indeed, the two films mentioned previously—"Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?" and "Six Degrees of Separation"—have a dinner as their central occasion. At both of these occasions, inherited or remembered roles are subverted and blacks, considered socially inferior by mainstream America at least until the 1960s, appear in these new settings as, in a sense, social superiors.

Cas Wouters has theorized in these pages that in the twentieth century, the democratization of the Western welfare states brought about social integration and a weakening of rank assignation according to class and power. Attendant upon this trend was a growing "informalization" of "codes and behavior and feeling." Such "codes have become more lenient, more differentiated and varied," Wouters writes, no longer reflecting "large differences in power and respect." As the "extremes in these codes and ideals," which mirrored clear-cut status differences, faded from view, management of the emotions took on new importance, as individuals were increasingly judged by their image and not their economic standing. If anything, this made etiquette more complicated, since it put people in control of making the right choices for themselves. New pressures also developed to behave in a way that appears informal, unconstrained, and free of feelings of superiority, which actually requires a heroic degree of self-control.⁴²

While Wouters seems unaware of the limits of both democratization and integration in the twentieth century—a pretty gaping oversight—the idea of a growing "informalization" is compelling, especially in Wouters's ironic description of individuals desperately trying to appear informal (though this suggests actual "informalization" is a misnomer). The growing appearance of informality in social interactions is achieved, after all, only through an intense concern with appearance, norms, and emotional restraint. While Wouters sees this new emphasis on simultaneous restraint and informality as resulting from heightened equality, John Kasson argues that this kind of managed emotional response gets in the way of a "full and humane democratic social order."⁴³ But both observe a long-term heightening of self-control and a more elaborate, if internalized, itemizing of desirable and undesirable behaviors.

Other scholars have similarly charted the heightening of expectations for self-control in modern life, sometimes drawing on a more explicit connection with economic motivations. In their study of the history of anger, Carol Zisowitz Stearns and Peter Stearns cite everything from social fluidity, democratization, and population growth to the rise of investment capitalism as factors in the increasingly stringent requirements for the repression of anger. But a large part of their book *Anger* involves a discussion of the rise of the human relations programs in early twentieth-century American industries through which managers sought to deflect emotion from the job site to the personal realm, suggesting that a primary imperative for the shift in emotional style was economic. Management had a direct interest in restricting outbursts and through an onslaught of programs, such as counseling services and sensitivity training, directed em-

ployees' behavior "toward a style more suitable for corporate and service sector behavior."⁴⁴

Arlie Hochschild's *The Managed Heart* also emphasizes the role of the service industries in demanding so much emotional exertion from certain employees that they become alienated from their own feelings as the whole apparatus of training programs and advice intrudes between their impulses and their actual expressions. Both *Anger* and *The Managed Heart* point to the twentieth-century work world's demand for emotional control. This perspective raises the question of the connection between the fascination with etiquette in the late twentieth century and the imperatives of the economic sphere. With the rise of the black middle class since the civil rights movement as well as the globalization of the economy, businesses stood increasingly to lose from the alienation of blacks as customers, and even in some cases as workers. Economic imperatives of course were tangled with legal ones, which managers could neglect only at their peril in an increasingly litigious society. But in any case, it is worth pursuing the suggestion that the need to court those of different backgrounds with ultra-sensitive etiquette is, in some cases anyway, related to the impulse to constrict emotions for the sake of better business and more controllable workplaces and market transactions. Hochschild speaks of the workplace requirement for flight attendants, for example, to suppress their genuine emotions and to force other ones to surface. The *Lucas Guide*, an organ that ranked the quality of service on airlines, delivered high praise in one case in these terms: "The atmosphere was that of a civilized party—with the passengers, in response, behaving like civilized guests."⁴⁵

The economic utility of etiquette is declared up-front in some contemporary etiquette guides, which, like the sensitivity training videos, frankly posit that failure to master the new etiquette will hurt business. A 1996 guide entitled *Multicultural Manners* tells readers how they might use the book:

If you work in marketing, for example, and are looking for ways to expand your customer base among ethnic groups, you might check the index heading of a particular group and read the listed entries to find out what would or would not be congruent with their values and customs. This might help you reach your target market more effectively.

Because people often realize their mistakes too late, sometimes *Multicultural Manners* will be consulted after the fact, to find out what went wrong. Let's say you sell real estate, and you've had difficulty in closing sales with Chinese clients. You could look under "Chinese" and discover a "Feng Shui" entry that would unlock the mystery and explain the reluctance of your customers to purchase certain houses or commercial properties. You would discover ancient Chinese beliefs that influence contemporary purchasing decisions. That would give you clues as to how to salvage future sales.⁴⁶

Both scholarly and popular discussions help direct our attention to changing emotion management,⁴⁷ revealed through etiquette, as a response to changes in the organization of society. Even if social fluidity is more imagined than real, awareness of newly emergent social constellations seems to be one viable explanation for the outpouring of reflections upon proper behavior. The new

concern for interracial etiquette has clearly arisen in response to the decline of the older code of behavior under segregation and recognition of the horrors of that system. Yet the course of interracial etiquette was also a product of a period undergoing a simultaneous attack on authority and formality (and its manifestations such as etiquette), and long-term cultural transformations such as the crisis in civility, heightened demands for self-control and self-scrutiny, and the cult of informality, all of which revealed tremendous uncertainty and anxiety over where to turn for basic constitutive principles governing social relations themselves.

As a result, prescriptions for interracial contact from the 1960s to the 1990s reflect both an attempt to codify a new etiquette and an increasing acceptance of multiple co-existing codes of conduct. This is not an issue easily resolved. Clearly, any form of social life relies on certain guidelines and rules. And certainly when members of different cultural or social groups interact, sensitivity to differences in conduct and customs is required. But the acceptance of ever more elaborate edicts for such interactions often not clearly based in a moral ethos compatible with democracy suggests not necessarily growing respect for differences but fear of them. The civil rights movement succeeded in questioning at its roots the older etiquette of race relations under segregation. But the proliferation of prescriptions for conduct since the formal dismantling of segregation indicates that, while another aspect of social reform in the sixties was the attempt to eradicate etiquette itself and all it represented—elitism, superficiality, artifice—, a struggle for a new etiquette quickly emerged. The tenets of this new etiquette vary according to the particular dispenser of advice, but the obsession with finding a special etiquette of race stands out as a prominent feature of American life in the late twentieth century, as does the attempt to find answers to awkward uncertainties and novel demands wrought by integration in the enactment and articulation of new social rules.

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ENDNOTES

1. "Six Degrees of Separation," directed by Fred Schepisi. 111 minutes. 1993. This is an adaptation by John Guare of his play of the same title.
2. Bertram Wilbur Doyle, *The Etiquette of Race Relations in the South: A Study in Social Control* (Rpt. 1937; Port Washington, New York, 1968); I. A. Newby, *Jim Crow's Defense: Anti-Negro Thought in America, 1900–1930* (Baton Rouge, 1965); Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, *The Revolt Against Chivalry: Jessie Daniel Ames and the Women's Campaign Against Lynching* (New York, 1979); W. J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York, 1941); C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (Rpt. 1974; New York, 1989); and Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896–1920* (Chapel Hill, 1996).
3. "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner," directed by Stanley Kramer. 108 minutes. 1967. The story and screenplay were written by William Rose.

4. Tom Wolfe, *Radical Chic and Mau-mauing the Flak Catchers* (New York, 1970), 9. "Radical Chic" originally appeared in *New York* magazine in June of 1970 in different form.
5. Norman Mailer, "The White Negro: Superficial Reflections on the Hipster," originally published in *Dissent* in 1957, in Ann Charles, ed., *The Portable Beat Reader* (New York, 1992), 600.
6. Wolfe, *Radical Chic*, 32–33.
7. Bill Cosby, Foreword to Sheila Rush and Chris Clark, *How to Get Along with Black People: A Handbook for White Folks, And Some Black Folks Too* (New York, 1971), 6.
8. Rush and Clark, *How to Get Along with Black People*, 52.
9. Rush and Clark, *How to Get Along With Black People*, 48–49.
10. Rush and Clark, *How to Get Along With Black People*, 53.
11. Rush and Clark, *How to Get Along with Black People*, 11–30.
12. Amoja Three-Rivers, "Cultural Etiquette: A Guide," excerpted in *Ms. Magazine*, v. 2 (Sept./Oct. 1991): 42–3.
13. Amoja Three-Rivers, *Cultural Etiquette: A Guide for the Well-Intentioned* (Distributed by Market Wimmin, Indian Valley, VA, 1990), 7. This is an interesting contrast to the scene in "Guess Who's Coming To Dinner" when Poitier points out to Tracy that blacks might seem to dance better than whites for cultural reasons; "they are dancing *our* dances," he laughs. "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?"
14. Three-Rivers, *Cultural Etiquette*, 18.
15. Three-Rivers, *Cultural Etiquette*, 7.
16. Three-Rivers, *Cultural Etiquette*, 16–17.
17. Karla F. C. Holloway, *Codes of Conduct: Race, Ethics, and the Color of Our Character* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1995), 69.
18. Holloway, *Codes of Conduct*, 76.
19. Holloway, *Codes of Conduct*, 80.
20. Holloway, *Codes of Conduct*, 31–34.
21. bell hooks quoted in Holloway, *Codes of Conduct*, 35. The quote is from bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston, 1992), 79–82.
22. Holloway, *Codes of Conduct*, pp. 30–31. Holloway quotes Lorene Cary who wrote in *Black Ice* of her mother's "turning it out": "I always saw it coming. Some white department-store manager would look at my mother and see no more than a modestly dressed young black woman making a tiresome complaint. He'd use that tone of voice they used when they had *important* work elsewhere. Uh-oh. Then he'd dismiss her with his yes. I'd feel her body stiffen next to me, and I'd know that he'd set her off. . . .
And then it began in earnest, the turning out. She never moved back. It didn't matter how many people were in line. It didn't matter how many telephones were ringing. . . .

Sometimes she'd talk through her teeth, her lips moving double time to bite out the consonants. Then she'd get personal. . . ." (From Lorene Cary, *Black Ice* [New York, 1991], 58–59.)

23. Frederick R. Lynch, *The Diversity Machine: The Drive to Change the "White Male Workplace"* (New York, 1997), 7–10.

24. "Managing Diversity." Video. (1990). CRM FILMS. Directed by Denise Dexter, written by Larry Tuch, and produced by Melanie Mihal. Narrated by Brock Peters.

25. "Managing Diversity." Video. (1990.)

26. "Managing Diversity." Video. (1990.)

27. "Managing Diversity." Video. (1990.)

28. Stuart Ewen, *Captains of Consciousness: Advertising and the Social Roots of the Consumer Culture* (New York, 1977).

29. "Managing Diversity." Video. (1990.)

30. Lewis Brown Griggs and Lente-Louise Louw, eds., *Valuing Diversity: New Tools for a New Reality* (New York, 1995), 81. Quotes are from Chapter Four, "Diversity Issues in the Workplace," written by Frances E. Kendall.

31. Griggs and Louw, 81.

32. Griggs and Louw, *Valuing Diversity*, 82.

33. Floyd Dickens, Jr. and Jacqueline B. Dickens, *The Black Manager: Making It in the Corporate World*, revised ed. (New York, 1991), 293–295.

34. Dickens and Dickens, *The Black Manager*, 294.

35. For a brief introduction to this vast debate and its general tenor, see "The Civility Wars," *Utne Reader* (March–April 1997): 15–16.

36. Judith Martin, *Miss Manners Rescues Civilization from Sexual Harassment, Frivolous Lawsuits, Dissing and Other Lapses in Civility* (New York, 1996), 1–3, 6.

37. Stephen L. Carter, *Civility: Manners, Morals, and the Etiquette of Democracy* (New York, 1998), 10–11.

38. Rochelle Gurstein, "The Tender Democrat," *The New Republic* (October 5, 1998): 44–45. This discussion is further indebted to Gurstein's helpful elaboration of this connection in her letter to the author, November 15, 1997.

39. Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, vol. I: *The History of Manners* (New York, 1978).

40. John F. Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility: Manners in Nineteenth-Century Urban America* (New York, 1990).

41. John H. Young, *Our Deportment, or the Manners, Conduct and Dress of the Most Refined Society. . . .* (1879; rev. ed. Detroit, 1884), quoted in Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility*, 203.

42. Cas Wouters, "Etiquette Books and Emotion Management in the Twentieth Century: Part One—The Integration of Social Classes," *Journal of Social History*, 29, 1 (Fall 1995): 107–124; Cas Wouters, "Etiquette Books and Emotion Management in the Twentieth Century: Part Two—The Integration of the Sexes," *Journal of Social History* 29, 2 (Winter 1995): 325–339; and Wouters, "On Status Competition and Emotion Management," *Journal of Social History* 24, 4 (Summer 1991): 699–717.
43. Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility*, 260.
44. Carol Zisowitz Stearns and Peter N. Stearns, *Anger: The Struggle for Emotional Control in America's History* (Chicago, 1986), 157.
45. Arlie Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling* (Berkeley, CA, 1985), 6.
46. Norine Dresser, *Multicultural Manners: New Rules of Etiquette for a Changing Society* (New York, 1996), 4.
47. For another example, in *Captains of Consciousness* and his other work, Stuart Ewen has astutely depicted the role of advertising in mobilizing the anxiety about social life that underpins consumerism's ability to perpetuate itself.