

## **Whistling Vivaldi: And Other Clues to How Stereotypes Affect Us**

By Claude M. Steele. New York: W.W. Norton & Company (2010), 242 pages, ISBN: 9780393062496.

Many have long been familiar with the effects of overt personal and structural prejudice in education environments – see *Brown v. Board*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954) – but what about the harm caused by invisible, unconscious forms of prejudice? And how might otherwise well-meaning teachers or learning institutions put minority or otherwise historically marginalized students at a disadvantage? More important, how can its effects be mitigated?

Claude M. Steele, a prominent social psychologist, presents a multitude of arguments based in empirical research that show how the concepts of stereotype threat and identity threat can harm racial minorities and women in education environments. Stereotype threat manifests when students respond to prominent societal beliefs about their group – for instance, the racist notion that blacks are less intelligent than whites – and attempt to overcompensate to correct what they perceive to be their classmates' and professors' misperception. This can be a draining and alienating experience, and Steele leaves little room for doubting its existence, as most chapters are filled with readable and succinct summaries of experiments conducted in this area.

At times, the conclusion looks grim. Try as we might to eliminate prejudice from our classrooms and schools, students continue to suffer for reasons seemingly beyond our control. But unlike other works on the topic, Steele provides several straightforward methods, supported by experimental research, for lessening the pernicious consequences of stereotype threat. These attempt to break the powerful stereotyping narrative and include explicitly setting high expectations for all students, encouraging student belonging in the education environment, and pressing for more diverse classes and teachers. For educators of all types, this book presents a fundamental challenge and should inform pedagogy at its most basic, yet most complex, level.

Reviewed by Aaron S. Kirschenfeld, Reference & Digital Initiatives Law Librarian, UNC School of Law, in 2016.