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Dear Colleague:

Children do not look backward. While their dotting parents may keep their offspring's outgrown shoes and discarded doodles, the children themselves are too busy widening their horizons, with their eyes to the future, to find such relics of their immediate past inspiring. Exceptions, of course, occur. The psychiatrist Robert Coles notes, sadly, that the children of migrant workers, as young as twelve or thirteen, can already see that their future in America is bleak. Under the weight of such knowledge, a characteristic response is reminiscence: youngsters in their early teens look back wistfully to their past, like old men and women, for a reconstituted and romanticized past is their only remaining source of pride and consolation.

Recently, I had to dig into my personal files for a document. I retrieved the document and then, very foolishly, I started to read some of the correspondence of two decades ago. The letters of rejections--and there were a few--can still humiliate me now. Most letters, however, were friendly; a number even announced successes and triumphs. How curious that even these "good" letters now bring me more sadness than cheer. They remind me somehow of an abandoned room, with drapes over the furniture, and a late-afternoon sunlight that shines on a ghostly dance of dust. I quickly close the file, turn on my word processor, and immediately warm blood returns to my veins, the horizon broadens, and I repossess a sense of self.

The child's life narrows when she, rather than move forward as healthy children usually do, returns to and dwells in her past. For her parents, it is otherwise; when they enter into the child's history their horizon opens up. Likewise, my personal files. For me to go through them is to move into an increasingly narrow world: if I know little now, I knew even less when I was forty, twenty, ten. But, for some other person--say, a student interested in an academic's life in the 'fifties--my files may well be a revelation--a treasure trove that will enrich him. I can see him looking through my files with sparkling eyes. His horizon expands as he assumes another person's viewpoint.

Ethnic Studies will undoubtedly enrich the lives of majority (white) students. Their horizon will be broadened by entering into worlds not their own. But what is there in such programs for minority students?

Best wishes,

