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## JOHN DERBYSHIRE

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SEPTEMBER 4, 7:00 A.M.

### Want a Drink?

August diary.

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**B**ack to School. Ah, high school! My daughter begins attending the local high school this week. We went along to the parents' orientation session last week. I noticed the thing I always notice at these things: The parents who show up are pretty solidly white-European. In a gathering of over 200, there were five visible exceptions — say three percent. The school boasts of being 35-percent minority, though GreatSchools.net shows 30 percent.

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I was keen to get a look at the principal, Carmela Leonardi, about whom there has been a fuss recently. In very brief: Some parents and school-board members recently tried to dislodge Ms. Leonardi, apparently believing that she showed interest in, and concern for, only the Hispanic students. The pot boiled over when Ms. Leonardi began providing translation services into Spanish at parents' meetings. Fighting against dismissal, Ms. Leonardi played the race card, threatening litigation via federal "discrimination" laws. The school board backed down. A big fat federal lawsuit would be a disaster for a small school district like this one, so it looks as though



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we're stuck with Ms. Leonardi.

For detailed news stories (though mainly biased ones — Long Island *Newsday* is several ticks to the multiculturalist left of the *New York Times*), see [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), and google at will. Ms. Leonardi gets stinky reports on [RateMyTeachers.com](#), though since I have only just started using this site, I'm not sure how much weight I should give to that. Around the neighborhood it's hard to find anyone with kids at the high school who thinks Ms. Leonardi is right for her job. Even the love-the-world bleeding hearts, the tree-huggers and whale-savers, and the types with IMPEACH BUSH bumper stickers, grumble about her.

You can't argue with a federal lawsuit, though. Thus federal laws originally passed in a spirit of atonement for slavery and Jim Crow are used as weapons in a conflict that has nothing to do with either issue — a conflict that is, depending on whom you talk to, either a clash of personalities or an arrogant assertion of Hispanic designated-victim group privileges. Thus do our freedoms — freedoms to work out our own problems at the local level, citizen to citizen — disappear into the insatiable maw of federal government power, all under the banner of "fairness," "diversity," and "anti-racism," against which none dares stand.

**Oh My God.** As further prep for my daughter's ascent to high school, I have been reading Jeremy Iversen's *High School Confidential*. Iversen is from a wealthy Manhattan family and missed the high-school experience, instead attending a tony boys' boarding school. After graduating college, he decided to do what [Cameron Crowe](#) had done 25 years before: Go back to high-school under cover. At age 24 Iversen found he could still pass for 17. He persuaded a California high school, which he pseudonymizes as "Mirador High," to let him embed as a senior, no-one but the principal knowing.

I'm not going to offer a mini-review of Iversen's book here. It does not have many surprises — certainly not for those of us who believe that California is an irredeemably messed-up place to whose land borders someone should apply a humongous power saw so that the entire wretched state could float off into the Pacific Ocean and cease bothering us.

The strongest impression I got from Iversen's book was of *mediocrity*. None of the school's students or teachers seems very smart or interesting, and not much teaching or learning gets done. One of the author's footnotes tells the essential tale: "As a Mirador twelfth-grader, I never had to write a paper longer than two pages. I never had to find any source beyond the one assigned book."

This isn't a slum school, mind. The parents of Iversen's classmates were small [business](#) and professional people and civil servants, some well above middle-middle-class. It's just that the easy hedonism of life in today's America — especially, I insist on believing, today's California — drains life of any need to struggle or concentrate. Even

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the students' misdemeanors and extracurricular adventures are insipid and unimaginative by comparison with what I remember of my own.

In these students' minds, odd scraps of awareness — fragments of world or national news, bits and pieces of vaguely-remembered history or science — float on, and quickly dissolve in, a warm balmy ocean of celebrity gossip, fashion, casual sex, status-seeking, and “relationships.” It's like being stuck for 400 pages among those people Jay Leno meets in his “walkabout” segments — people who can't place the Civil War in the correct century and can't name the current U.S. Vice President, but can tell you the precise current state of the Paris-Nicole friendship.

This is the next generation of Americans? We are doomed, doomed. Or, as any one of Iversen's female classmates would say — as they all in fact *do* say, around four times per page: Oh my God. And how I wish I had *not* learned the meaning of MILF.

**Our Truth Is....** High school has of course four stages: freshman, sophomore, junior, senior.

Four is also, as it happens, the number of stages into which the stricter doctrines of Hinduism divide a man's life.

First you are a student, celibate and earnestly devoted to the cultivation of the mind and talents. Then you are the householder, creating and supporting a family. Having fulfilled those responsibilities, you retire into the third stage, leaving the city to live on nuts and berries in the forest, with minimal possessions and only occasional family contacts. Finally, “at or beyond the age of fifty,” you become a sannyasi, abandoning the material world altogether, wandering the roads as a beggar, praying and meditating and practicing yoga.

This came to mind while I was reading about Jim McGreevey. This is the ex-governor of New Jersey, the guy who told us: “My truth is that I am a gay American.” That was three years ago, when the Love Gov was announcing his resignation, after having striven mightily for the preceding three years to do what no-one would have thought possible: to make the administration of the Garden State even more corrupt and dysfunctional than it was when he arrived.

McGreevey subsequently dumped his wife and daughter for the favors of a wealthy fund manager, Mark O'Donnell. McGreevey and O'Donnell now live together in homo-Celtic bliss at the latter's lavish spread in Plainfield, New Jersey. The ex-governor will begin full-time studies at an Episcopalian seminary this week. (The Episcopal church is short of gay ministers — didn't you know?)

For the sake of my blood pressure, I suppose I should stop reading stories about McGreevey and his antics. That phrase, though — “My truth is that I am a gay American” — has lodged itself in my mind, as somehow emblematic of the degraded state of our society. It draws me in. So here I am, reading about the loathsome McGreevey again. And again, I note how the newspapers — well, my newspaper

— refer to O’Donnell as McGreevey’s “boyfriend.”

*Boyfriend?* McGreevey is 50 years old. Do 50-year-old guys — or 50-year-old gals, for that matter — have *boyfriends*? Wikipedia is just as bad: “McGreevey has been dating an Australian-American executive, Mark O’Donnell, since late 2005.” *Dating?* What, do they go and share a pistachio ice-cream melt down at the soda fountain? Canoodle at the drive-in? Exchange class rings?

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