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Series Editors' Foreword: The Construction, Negotiation, and Representation of Immigrant Student Identities in South African Schools (Vandeyar & Vandeyar).

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Series Foreword

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When we were born (“we” being the two book series editors), our country, the United States, was in the midst of the painful throes of the (still unfinished) Civil Rights movement. This movement, and others that would follow—around gender and women’s rights, for the disabled, and for others from other underserved communities in the United States— would serve as harbinger for change globally and locally. This same wind of change would be evident in other nation states. When they were born, the two coauthors of this volume were children both living in different Indian townships in apartheid South Africa. Both had been forced as infants to move, from Pretoria and Johannesburg respectively, into townships where they were assigned to live because of their racial identities. Both authors then came of age still under the aegis of apartheid and prepared as teachers—teachers for Indian students in Indian townships—as that was one of the few available professions to those in their racial category.

Much then has changed during the lifespans of the four of us, and this book is a product of the political advances and serendipity of the historic moment that we have been blessed to share. Yet as much as our lives might demonstrate reasons for optimism as one thinks about changes in South Africa, Africa, and the United States in relation to the transcendence of racial differentiation and hierarchy, this book is a reminder of how both

harrowing and incomplete that journey is. This book, a crucial addition from the Global South to the scholarship on immigrant students' schooling, depicts how salient and fraught racial identity, both asserted and ascribed, continues to be for the negotiation of school in South Africa. Immigrant students are loathed and marginalized for their accents and "foreign" ways, and yet they are also stereotyped and viewed jealously as more serious and committed students than their native-born Black peers. This tension directs energy laterally, with Black native-born and Black newcomer struggling for comparatively small reward in a still largely stratified system, a system in which the stronger and better-resourced schools during apartheid remain the stronger and better resourced schools now under democratic rule. The tension related to identity and who deserves what deflects critique from the persistence of a system that still largely rations schooling as a vehicle for social mobility and opportunities for all.

The supposedly dramatic changes in schooling that have occurred with the advent of democracy (changes that, to be sure, have meant previously all-White schools are no longer all White) still allow the native-born Black child to too often be understood as feckless and fail to critique why such a student might be skeptical of what school ultimately offers to her or him. In turn, despite the pan-African "Africa for Africans" rhetoric that helped give the African National Congress (ANC) moral legitimacy and safe harbor in postcolonial Africa, neither policy nor practice toward immigrant students imagines them as welcome members of an advancing continental vanguard.

This book by Vandeyar and Vandeyar provides a number of important discoveries. They broaden the literature on immigrants and schooling by offering a vivid example from South Africa. They make visible a large student population that many readers may not have previously considered. They elegantly weave together insights from psychology and anthropology about identity construction and situated assertions of group memberships. But, most powerfully, they are angry that the inclusive ideals of South Africa's turn to democracy—ideals that should celebrate both difference and entrepreneurial pluck—continue to be unrealized or underrealized. They describe a world better than the one they were born into, but not as much better as it should be. The actual practices of South African schools too often fall short of the policy goals promised in South Africa's 1996 Constitution. Both these authors and the students whose voices they capture need us to be troubled by that. Crain Soudien, a leading South African education researcher at the University of Cape Town, recently wrote:

[T]hat very little work has been done in South Africa which recognizes the centrality of education as a space of constant contradiction, and the especially the contradiction of ideas of self, other, and community. The result is that it has been particularly difficult for those who work in and inhabit the school and the world of education to approach the questions of identity with clarity. . . . [I]t remains difficult for teachers to actually understand who the people are in front of them. (2012, p. 19, italics in original)

Vandeyar and Vandeyar help us better see why and how these contradictions are generated and regenerated amidst the hope for education and democracy for all. As importantly, they are insistent about who it is—students, immigrant, and native-born—that South African educators and we readers need to better understand.