

Addressing white supremacy, trauma, and silenced voices of color to advance equity and justice in higher education

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What do race, racism, whiteness and white supremacy mean?

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Race is a two faced coin. It is a culturally hegemonic social construct, designed to legitimize slavery and colonialism. Embracing race allows a white person to argue on behalf of white supremacy. For example, if “those (black)” people are biologically inferior to me, it is normal, natural and common sense for me to treat them as unlike me, as not quite human, as servants and slaves.

Racism is unearned oppression. It can be seen as existing in three dimensions: 1) Interpersonal racism or acts of means and cruelty towards an other/others; 2) Cultural racism which is (carried by language and built into the dominant culture; and 3) institutional racism (economic, legal, and built into the social structure)

Whiteness is unearned symbolic privilege (light skin), cultural privilege (including cultural styles like individualism, categorical thinking, regulation etc.), and institutional privilege (socio-economic, legal).

Racism and Whiteness trap people in cultural boxes, making it impossible for the racist and the person embedded in whiteness to “accurately understand and adapt behavior to cultural difference and commonality.”

White supremacy is the ideology that gives whiteness supreme value within a racialized social system.

Origins of White Supremacy: Colonialism and The Tempest

- ▶ **The seeds of white supremacy lie in the past;**
- ▶ Ronald Takaki (1993) in his book on *the racist origins of multicultural America*, evoked Shakespeares's play, *The Tempest*, and the future trajectory of whiteness, write:
- ▶ *The Tempest*) is a more important window for understanding American history, for its story is set in the New World (p.26) ...What was happening on stage was a metaphor for English expansion into America (p.29)...Like Caliban (in the *Tempest*), the native people of America were viewed as the "other. European culture was delineating the border, the hierarchical division between civilization and wildness (p.31);
- ▶ Theatergoers viewed Caliban as representing a lower scale of development. To be civilized meant a denial of wholeness, to repress the instinctual and identify with mind rather than body, the visual as opposed to tactile, the linear knowledge of books versus the polymorphous knowledge of experience. The civilised man was rational and as such had authority over "other". **White supremacy was born.**

White Supremacy: Framed from the start

- ▶ White supremacy is an ideology, a practice and an identity;
- ▶ According to Ibram X. Kendi (2016), racist ideas—race, racism, whiteness and white supremacy—were constructed from the beginning of the United States to serve economic interests.
- ▶ Racist ideas have never been absent from the institutional lives of people living in colonial America and the United States;
- ▶ In the late seventeenth century, to give legitimacy to the economic practice of slavery, white supremacy was given legal standing and validity through the passage of laws;
- ▶ Successive laws would bolster white supremacy until the 1960s civil rights legislation began dismantling the white supremacy legal framework.
- ▶ A lack of legal standing has not done away with white supremacy, It remains internalized in the individual and collective psyches of many of us, and deeply embedded in the culture and socioeconomic institutional structure of the society, including education.

For the ideology of White Supremacy to work...

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- ▶ Race has always intersected with social class.
- ▶ Tim Wise (2009): to justify enslaving Black people in the seventeenth century, white people were intentionally divided from Black people by being persuaded to believe that the color of their skin was more valuable than their pocket books.
- ▶ Poor and low income whites had been sold the story of race and racial hierarchy that many believe to this day. White supremacy was normalized.
- ▶ They believed the story even though the fact that enslaved Africans were forced to perform jobs for no financial reward that poor and low income whites could have done for wages meant that slavery was not in the economic interests of these white people.

The doctrine of discovery

- ▶ The Doctrine of Discovery dates from the late 15th century. Papal bulls (specifically a papal decree issued by Pope Nicholas V in 1452) gave Christian explorers the right to claim lands they “discovered” on behalf of their Christian monarchs. Any land that was not inhabited by Christians could be “discovered,” claimed and exploited. In other words, doctrine specifically sanctioned and promoted the conquest, colonization, and exploitation of non-Christian territories and peoples.

Colonial Encounters

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Cultural Hegemony and Gramsci

- ▶ The idea of cultural hegemony is valuable to understanding why it has been so difficult to move beyond structural inequality and inequalities in the US and western Europe.
- ▶ Ideology is a powerful tool to govern and reproduce social systems
- ▶ Ideologies like the “American Dream” are insidious in inspiring folks to believe in a society in which social mobility is actually sorely lacking.
- ▶ According to Gramsci, This power is embedded in institutions like education and religion
- ▶ In this “globalized” environment, we could now include all of the major institutions (media, law, government, and what I call corporate government, etc.).
- ▶ Dominant ideologies are so institutionalized that most of us we will inevitably encounter them if we wish to develop the skills and concepts necessary to performing a livelihood.

Context: The Hegemonic Mainstream

dominant socio-economic and cultural hierarchy
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Historical Trauma

- ▶ How does historical trauma relate to whiteness and white supremacy past and present?
- ▶ Dr. Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart, describes historical trauma as the “cumulative emotional and psychological wounding over one’s lifetime and from generation to generation following loss of lives, land and vital aspects of culture.” <https://blog.nativehope.org/understanding-historical-trauma-and-native-americans>
- ▶ This loss and pain was directly related to systemic white supremacist ideology, identities and practices or major events that oppressed groups of people such as the violent colonization of First Nations people, slavery, the Holocaust, forced migration, to the present day.



The lie

- ▶ To explain the inequities experienced by Black people in the U.S. Eddie Glaude(2020) channels James Baldwin.
- ▶ Baldwin considered a primary ideological candidate to be “The Lie.” The lie was a denial of white supremacy.
- ▶ The lie was the sanitized version of U.S, history that defines people of African descent as inferior to people of European descent.
- ▶ The lie worked so well that to this day, many white people’s assumptions about Black people and others of color are based on the premise that Europeans are genetically superior and thus worth more.
- ▶ There is a “value gap” (Glaude, 2020). White supremacy has a long genealogy and remains alive and well. *People who believe the lie silence others to reinforce the lie.*

Technologies of White Supremacy

- ▶ Airing a sense of entitlement;
- ▶ Protecting this entitlement through policing the communication styles and content of BIPOC;
- ▶ Expressing righteous anger when racism or white supremacy is challenged;
- ▶ Performing micro-aggressions, like refusing to make the effort to pronounce someone's non-European and/or non-Christian name correctly;
- ▶ Wallowing in white fragility, a stance defensive stance that can be expressed as aversive racism;
- ▶ Tone policing, where white folks create borders that exclusion certain practices related to people of color while accepting the same behavior in white people, especially men;
- ▶ Serena Williams versus John McEnroe.

Scenario One

Kai went to a private pre-school. Like all healthy 5 year olds, Kai loved to play. He comes from a very ethnically mixed family. His ethnic origins include African, European, Native and Arab.

One day, Kai came home upset and withdrawn. After days of gentle probing, we found out that his white male school friends, with whom he played super-hero games, had told him he could not be a super-hero because he was too dark.

Kai's pre-school director and teacher were informed. Their response was to ask the children to be nice to each other and let everyone join in their games. They did not talk to the parents.



Original Research

- ▶ Small group qualitative research and social justice forums with faculty and students that replicated prior evidence.
- ▶ Undertaken at a Midwest, public university.
- ▶ Subjects asked to express in collage the ways in which their experience at the university related to forms of cultural hegemony, including race.
- ▶ Dominant cultural stereotypes and a culture of white supremacy suppressed the identities, cultural knowledge and social experience of some faculty and students of color.
- ▶ Student had experienced some trauma as a result of their university experience, which they felt had undervalued and silenced their voices (Coates, 2015; Davis, 2019).



Tap In to Your Primal Instincts

NOT ALL VANILLA

IS CREATED

BOOST

HARUKI MURAKAMI

LEAVE NOTHING TO CHANCE.



Silenced Voices: A Black colleague

- ▶ We have never been allowed to be experts on our own lives and experiences. When White people want to know about Black people they ask other White people. The most efficient thing would be to ask Black people and read books about the true history of this country. The ways I have been silenced include school where I was not allowed to be authentically Black and was expected to ascribe to respectability politics, and relationships with White peers who did not take what I had to say seriously.

Specific voices: A Hmong colleague 1990s

- ▶ Baseless generalizations and stereotypes about Hmong people in my neighborhood and throughout the nation.
- ▶ Atlantic Monthly portrayed Hmong and other Southeast Asian youth as gangsters, delinquents, and overall low achievers, involved in robberies, burglaries, vandalisms, gang violence; immigrants who refused to learn English, who lived solely for our welfare checks; people with little ambition to do otherwise, a drain on the economy
- ▶ Arrested at 15 because he resembled another young man. Spent the next 48 hours including Thanksgiving Day in jail, laying on his bunk, staring out through a small translucent ceiling window; remembers the taste of cold sliced turkey and canned cranberry sauce
- ▶ Despite the lack of evidence, the inconsistent eye witness account, and the inconsistent details of the crime, court appointed attorney settled his case; He received six months of probation for a crime he did not commit.
- ▶ Through this experience, his voice began to rise from a place inside of himself that that had not been previously explored. Inspired to explore his own social identities and its effects on his experiences throughout his life and college career; Angered for years because it did not matter that he had been an honor student...the only thing that mattered was that he was an Asian man.

The One Best White Supremacist Education System—Past and Present?

- ▶ The cultural discourses that shaped the imperialist conquest of the so-called new world (Chomsky, 1993), the Shakespearean world view, also informed what David Tyack, back in 1974, called the "one best (educational) system" in the United States.
- ▶ Schools would be based on a normative view of education. All students would be judged by the same standards which actually operated as dividing practices since the norm was familiar and more meaningful to white middle class students.
- ▶ As a result, the achievement gap, better described as the opportunity or race gap, persists. (Tyack, 1974; Bastian et al, 1993; Oakes, 1993; Kozol, 1991).
- ▶ Many recent practices sold to many in the educational field as common sense educational practice are justified by appeals to science and rationalism. They include high stake testing, school choice, standardized curricula, sanitized social studies curricula and much more. All were informed by the cultural discourses of whiteness.

The Way Forward

- ▶ Voices are certainly rising.
- ▶ Efforts to advance a movement towards equity and justice in higher education is gathering momentum as shown at this conference;
- ▶ Although troubling to white supremacy, university faculty and staff must work collaboratively to identify inequitable, ideological curricula, pedagogy and assessment structures of education, and reframe these structures of equity, diversity and inclusion for all students (Lea, 2017; Lea, Lund & Carr, 2018).

Counter hegemony

- ▶ **Cultural hegemony** is the process whereby people are persuaded that norms, values, interests, practices, laws and policies that meet the needs of elites are normal, natural and common sense--even if they do not meet the needs of people of the downside of power.
- ▶ Cultural hegemony with a trauma lens is a framework that a better understanding how and why racial ideologies and white supremacy were born, why they were embraced by people of European descent who aspired to a comfortable life, what interests they served and still serve, and how they are disseminated and reproduced daily through our dominant institutions like education.
- ▶ **Counter hegemony** is the process whereby people work to critique, dismantle or transform hegemonic power. They oppose the idea that the way things are is normal, natural and common sense. They challenge the ideologies that sustain the political status quo and attempt to change the systemic cultural and structural nature of, for example, education: the way history is taught in schools; the inequitable way schools are funded; the lack of culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogy; the low status given to the arts in schools; the poor preparation of teachers to engage students in social critique of, for example, the media; the dearth of teachers of color in schools. Counter hegemonic voices **rise above fear of hegemony**.

Critical Multiculturalism

- ▶ Multicultural Education grew out of racial and ethnic struggle: Teacher's content and pedagogy involves naming and actively challenging racism, whiteness, and other forms of oppression and injustice.
- ▶ Critical multicultural education is politically guided practice that goes beyond current multicultural education practice that tolerates, accepts difference and diversity. Classroom is a place in which difference is affirmed; teachers and students engage in a critique of themselves and the world (the read the word **and** the world).
- ▶ The teacher links a dynamic conception of culture, identity and lived experience. For example, s/he consistently attempts to link the details of everyday school practice to the wider social structure, communities and social relations in which students and their families live, work and play.
- ▶ The teacher embraces the theoretical viewpoint that radical change in social structures is possible because human beings have historically demonstrated "agency," and "a praxis of possibility."
- ▶ The teacher facilitates a classroom that allows for the possibility of alternative and hybrid ways of thinking, feeling believing, and acting in the world.
- ▶ It is an answer to the question: "We may oppose practices that reproduce dominant discourse but what do we put in its place?" Teacher and students look for solutions to local and global inequities and injustices.

Questions...

- ▶ Why is it important for educators to be aware of our biases?
- ▶ What is the “hidden curriculum” and cultural hegemony? In what ways do you think these “practices of power” impact what goes on in your classroom and school?
- ▶ How does whiteness or white supremacy silence the voices of students and faculty of color?
- ▶ How do the world views of students from different ethnic groups impact how they experience school?
- ▶ What are culturally responsive pedagogy, culturally sustaining pedagogy and critical multiculturalism? How can these pedagogies be implemented to create more equity and inclusion in the classroom and school?
- ▶ What intersecting categories of difference, in addition to race, should be addressed in the effort to advance equity and justice in higher education?

Questions...

- ▶ We need to prepare a new generation of teachers and citizens to live equitable and inclusive critical multiculturalism.
- ▶ Critical multicultural pedagogy suggests we start the process of developing critical consciousness and cultural awareness with cultural responsiveness and sustaining practice.
- ▶ In the context of Black Lives Matter protests, would it make a difference to the development of intercultural awareness to apply this approach to the dominant white faculty, staff and students at many universities, or is this likely to reinforce white supremacy?
- ▶ A pervasive, critical multicultural, campus climate is therefore important if we want students, faculty and staff to think critically from multiple knowledge perspectives, and be able to distinguish fact and meaningful analysis from distorted fiction, belief and opinion.

OVERVIEW

- ▶ Intersecting, systemic ideological and structural forces like race, racism, whiteness and **white supremacy**, gender and social class oppression play an enormous role in reproducing inequities and inequalities in education and the wider society (Cabrera, 2018; Sharkey, Taylor & Serkez, 2020; Kirah, 2017)
- ▶ To create a more equitable, diverse and inclusive educational system and society, we need to better understand how and why racial ideologies and white supremacy were born, why they were embraced by people of European descent who aspired to a comfortable life, what interests they served and still serve, and how they are disseminated and reproduced daily through our dominant institutions like education.

Looking forward

- ▶ Since white supremacy, racial ideologies and other ideologies are deeply embedded in our social system, so we need to (continue to) work collaboratively on
 - ▶ 1) developing our own critical consciousness of the ways we are persuaded to agree to white supremacy;
 - ▶ 2) disseminating counter hegemonic ideas based in equity and fact, and
 - ▶ 3) restructuring society to reflect these socially just ideas and future possibilities

Stamped from the beginning

- ▶ Ibram X. Kendi (2016) argues that racist ideas--race, racism, whiteness and white supremacy—were constructed from the beginning of the United States to serve economic interests.
- ▶ That's the good news, because in theory they can be changed.
- ▶ Yet, it is 2020 and these idea remain normalized in the dominant U.S. culture and function as dividing practices.
- ▶ As Foucault would have it, they are mechanisms of power
- ▶ Calhoun; Grady; Post-racial America; Trumpism