

**The Historical Normalizing Of
Racist, Deficit Discourses
And Problem-Posing Interventions**

**Virginia Lea
(& Dang Yang)
University of Wisconsin-Stout
AERA 2011
New Orleans, LA**

Historical Normalizing of Racism

- Began once slave owners recognized the economic benefits of slavery: Slave codes
- Social construction of “race”
- Legal system of slavery and Jim Crow—”Slavery by another name” (Blackmon)
- Wage slavery: Worker enslaved to a system in which he was forced to sell his body as a commodity and to exchange the product of his labor for a wage (Engels)

Premise of Research

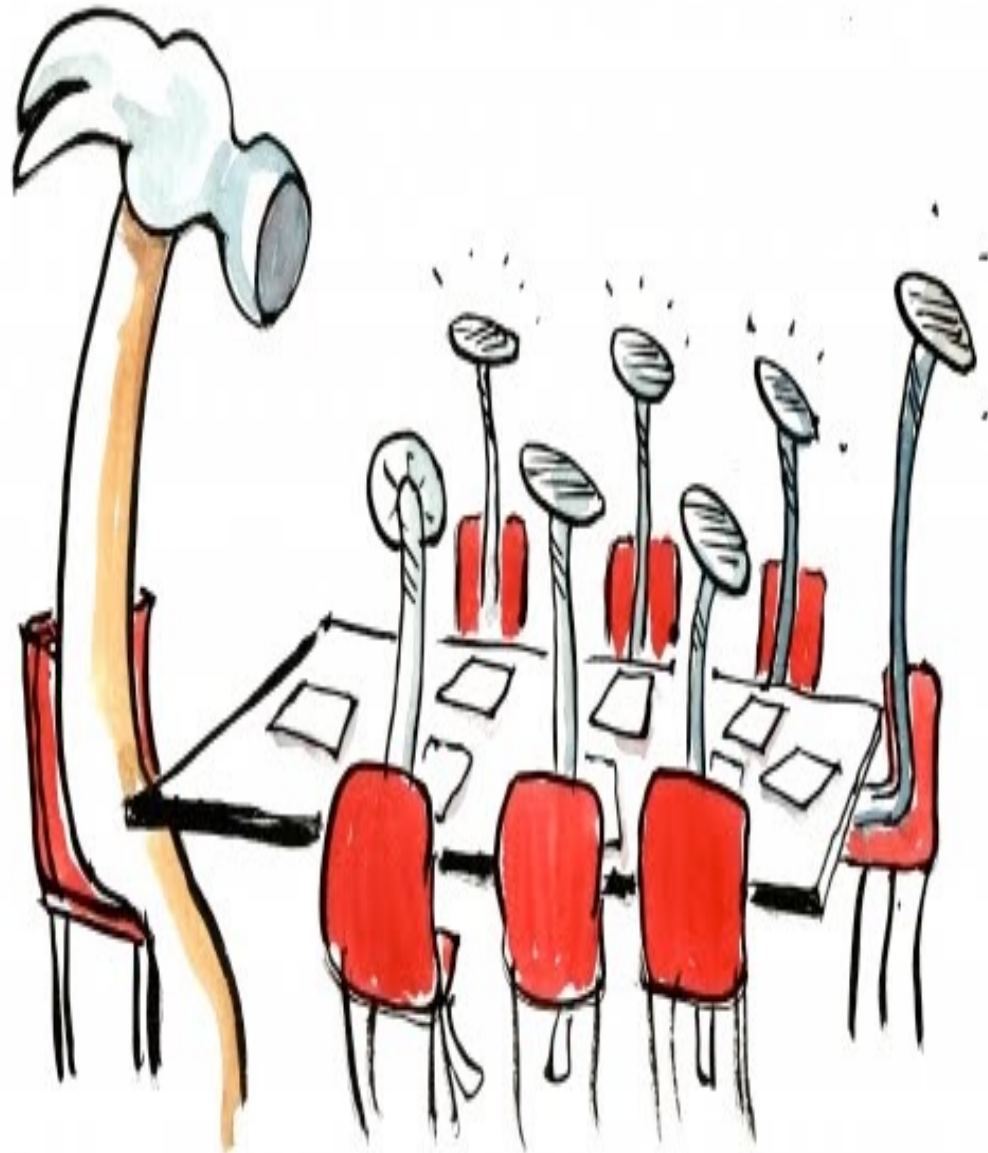
- Deficit discourses of race & class play a role in current wage slavery
- While they legitimized slavery & Jim Crow, they now play role in upholding the neo-liberal, capitalist system
- Race and class operate as functions of power: e.g. surveillance, categorization, standardization

SURVEILLANCE

Which one is the School?



Standardization



Classification/Categorization

- Racial categories played and continue to play a huge role in controlling citizens
- E.g. The past Black/Native/Arab/Of Color=inferior and White=superior paradigm has a present day equivalent
- This categorization functions as a dividing/normalizing practice to prevent poor people/low income people from working together to serve their own interests
- The hegemonic process is institutionalized, embedded in dominant culture; Most white people are unconscious of how it influences their practice

Current Zeitgeist?

- Current race and class zeitgeist – colorblindness/open racism
- Neo-liberal efforts to privatize education, health care and other public – Wisconsin, David Koch, Scott Walker, and the Tea Party
- Nascent uprisings
- In education, need for a deeper understanding of how “technologies of power” (TOPs) impact student access to education (“opportunity gap”)
- Difficult task since by definition, TOPs are hegemonic: while we consent to them we are often unconscious that they shape our ideologies, identities and practices, and consider them normal, natural and common sense

UW-Stout Pilot Study - Methodology

- *What is the Impact of Race and Socio-Economic Class as a Function of Power on Student Access to Higher Education?*
- Trying out questions aimed at getting at these “technologies of power”, given substance by race and class
- Interviewed 2 volunteer students as a pair, from reach of the following groups: Black, Latino/a, Native, Asian, White (self-identified)
- Engaged in preliminary analysis of both the validity (value) of the questions and the students’ narratives

Findings

- Students from all groups valued their programs
- They also found that the school did not encourage critical consciousness about social inequities
- The students of color had been raised to think relationally and to value relational thinking and practice (crossing social and cultural borders)
- The Black students and one of the Native students felt excluded in relation to the categorical thinking of white students on campus
- Privacy was seen as a mechanism of power on campus in the service of white students

Conclusion

- If we are ever to offer a socially just way of life to *all* people, we will have to address and transform race and socio-economic class as intersecting deficit discourses and modern disciplinary technologies of power that continue to justify and sustain highly inequitable socio-economic and educational systems
- Viz, Richard Wolfe: “The state and state economic intervention are this no longer viewed as the solutions for the waste and injustices of private capitalism. Instead, this group (the Left Party, Die Linke, in Germany) aims to change the economic base, the system of production itself. This means empowering and repositioning workers so that their jobs include receiving and distributing the profits their work yields. Their goal: to dissolve the distinction of worker and boss much as the earlier distinction of master and slave, feudal lord and serf were over come”