

The Effect of Post-Racial Theory on Education

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Abstract

The proliferation of post-racial theory (PRT) in both social and political spheres of dominant American hegemony has illustrated a desire among academic circles to move past race and racial categories in social analysis. However, absent within post-racial rhetoric is critical language on how to abolish racism and racial inequality. (Samad 2009) It is my contention that the application of post-racial theory in social and legislative arenas will fail to eliminate many of the economic or curriculum based inequities within public school education. Furthermore, I contend that the aim of post-racial theory to deconstruct race as a tool for social analysis will exacerbate current achievement gaps and guarantee that equity in terms of school funding and quality of non-racist teacher instruction for non-white students may not be achieved or even addressed.

Keywords: Post-Race, Critical Education, Racism

Introduction

The proliferation of post-racial theory (PRT) in both social and political spheres of dominant American hegemony has illustrated a desire among academic circles to move past race and racial categories in social analysis. However, absent within post-racial rhetoric is critical language on how to abolish racism and racial inequality. (Samad 2009) These byproducts of the United States' nearly 400 year investment in the social construction of race to create a stratified society; as well as White supremacy, have created a society in which non-white children continue to bear the brunt of racial trauma through educational inequality, institutional racism through Eurocentric curriculum and pedagogy, and race-based teacher bias. (Capodilupo, Lin ,Rivera, Sue, Torino 2010) It is my contention that the application of post-racial theory in social and legislative arenas will fail to eliminate any of the economic or curriculum based inequities within public school education. Furthermore, I contend that the aim of post-racial theory to deconstruct race as a tool for social analysis will exacerbate current achievement gaps and guarantee that equity in terms of school funding and quality of non-racist teacher instruction for non-white students will not be achieved or even addressed.

Post-racial theory is rooted in the academic discourse of color-blind methodology. Its core aim, is the elimination of the social construct of race in social analysis and academic discourse. Discussed in non-racist terms, post-racial theory is being billed by both conservative and liberal media and academic circles as relevant and timely in today's society in which the nation has seen the election of an African-American President in Barack Obama. The election of President Obama, due in large part to an overwhelming number of White voters, has been cited as proof that White Americans are past the racial

animosities and oppressive stereotypes used to disenfranchise Blacks and non-Whites since the signing of the United States Constitution. This so-called progressive action by Whites has signaled the coming of a new era, one in which we are post-race, past the need and want to separate United States citizens based on skin-color and race-based social hierarchies.

Post-racial theory's aims of de-reifying race leaves many unanswered questions as to why eliminating race is privileged over eliminating racism. It could be argued that it is not necessarily race itself that causes the painful and socially divisive responses within American society. More likely, it is the negative essentialisms and oppressive responses from the dominant racial group of Whites to the socially constructed meanings of race in the form of racism which have torn the fabric of American social unity. It is my contention that PRT is an autocratic response to white racial exhaustion from white liberals and a racial backlash tool of the right, both looking for an end to the seemingly endless discussions of race in America. PRT seems to offer a neat and painless way to replace and repackage the false promises of social equity supposedly inherent within the Civil Rights integration policies of the 1960's. Post-racial theorists have utilized the election of Barack Obama as the proof needed to illustrate America's achievement of moving past race as a hindrance to personal upward mobility and social equality. However, not only is the centering of President Obama as the signifier of America's post-racial future wholly incorrect, it can be argued that he was used as a tool by both academics and popular media outlets to assuage white guilt about the enduring legacy of racism without any real or critical introspective work being done to address the historical basis of America's racist foundations effect on current racial tensions and attitudes.

The Roots of Post-Racial Theory

David Roediger's analysis of the persistence of race in America in his book *How Race Survived U.S. History*, demonstrates Roediger's analysis of the ability of race to survive and thrive throughout U.S. history despite various forms of legislation and periods of supposed liberalism created to combat it. His analysis offers a fresh look at the vastly researched area of race relations and the pervasiveness of racism in the United States.

The world got along without race for the overwhelming majority of its history; the U.S. has never been without it," resituates the contextual arguments on race, by, "attempting to go beyond telling stories useful only to a movement for racial equality, and to generate instead an account of the past in order to show the necessity of completely abolishing oppression based on racial categories... It (the text) further illustrates how unlikely it is that a force so longstanding, formative, and persistently recreated as white supremacy has been in the United States history will be abolished by accident, as a result of the momentum of forces like capitalism or immigration that themselves have no racist agenda.

(Roediger 2008, xii)

PRT neglects to address this enduring legacy of White supremacy, thereby leaving it open to become either a tool to further the goals of racial oppression, or a short-sighted and socio-politically inept attempt at solving the problems generated by racial discourse that address symptoms and not the cause.

Previous academic works have hinted at and included certain portions of what is now known as PRT, most notable is Arthur Schlesinger's seminal work, *The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society*, which most closely resembles the current arguments perpetrated by PRT theorists. Schlesinger's work speaks specifically to a post-ethnic future, but within the text he conflates race and ethnicity quite often and offers no definition in which to clearly delineate between the two. The author's insistence that multiculturalism and ethnic identities prevented a return to the good old days of the American republic, in which racial homogeneity created a stronger nation, is very closely tied to the rhetoric of politically conservative proponents of PRT.

The ethnicity rage in general...not only diverts attention from the real needs but exacerbates the problems. The recent apotheosis of ethnicity, black brown, red, yellow, white, has revived the dismal prospect that in happy melting pot days Americans thought the republic was moving safely beyond-that is, a society fragmented into separate ethnic communities. The cult of ethnicity exaggerates differences, intensifies resentments and antagonisms, drives ever deeper the awful wedges between races and nationalities. The endgame is self-pity and self-ghettoization.

(Schlesinger 1991, 1)

Although Schlesinger's outward presentation of his views on ethnic populations as one that will unite America, philosopher Linda Alcoff underscores the underlying racism within the text. She posits that, "this marked progress, not simply because a homogenous nation would be a stronger nation, but because what these individuals left behind included ancient prejudices and manners, or backward ways of life, clearing the way for them to adopt a more advanced way of life based on democratic ideals." (Alcoff2004, 101) The positioning of white cultural norms and ways of life as the advanced and most beneficial way of living for everyone, including non-whites, is the very same ideal being sold to Americans with current right wing views in PRT from media pundits Rush Limbaugh and Bill O'Reilly to conservative Supreme Court Justice John Roberts. (Limbaugh and O'Reilly are hosts of two of the most politically conservative and polarizing television shows in the United States.)

The right wing support of PRT is rooted in racial backlash, the idea that cognitive dissonance on issues of race has caused certain Whites within American society to refuse to acknowledge any and all claims of racism and oppression from blacks and other racialized groups. The racial backlash movement includes the advent of the 'race card', reverse racism and other mechanisms designed to shield conservative White Americans from dealing with race issues while simultaneously enhancing oppressive structures and placing the blame of downtrodden minorities solely on themselves. Critical race theorist Sumi Cho cites the effect of PRT for White backlash ideologues is one that, "is the ultimate redemption of whiteness: a socio-cultural process by which whiteness is restored to its full pre-civil rights value...(that) insulates white normativity from criticism and opens the floodgate of white resentment when confronted with previously accepted and unquestioned civil rights inequities." (Cho 2009, 1596) This also allows for the once racialized individual to be themselves cited as a racist for playing the race card while seeking redress for racial inequities at the hands of the post-racial ideologue who

recognizes that the new raceless culture gives them the leeway to levy such charges without addressing the issue.

This concept of playing the race card is expounded upon by self-professed liberal post-racial materialist Richard Ford in his book, *The Race Card*. Ford identifies mainstream media outlets and civil rights leaders like Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton as engaging in racial politics when they claim discrimination at the hands of Whites when there is none. Ford takes the provocative stance of stating structural racism in this post-racial society is playing the race card because it's not an individual racist act, but a blameless structure that we cannot control. Ford's popular position of true racism only happening to those victims of violent racial injustice and economic/political injustice at the hands of a specific racist entity serves to further the question of the legitimacy of PRT. It appears that such White voices have received privilege to determine how racialized groups can determine their racial oppression and labeling of acts of racism.

Richard Ford's views serve as a bridge of sorts to a common leftist position on PRT, which is primarily rooted in the work of prominent liberal race scholar Paul Gilroy. PRT has positioned Gilroy's *Against Race* (2000) and *Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* (1987), as the impetus for liberal support of PRT due to a more class based analysis of the social problems surrounding race. Gilroy's insistence on the de-reifying of race, destruction of racial categories and dismantling of race as a divisive social marker along with his identifying of Blacks themselves as the primary offenders of race-based nationalism opens the door for liberal engagement of PRT and ideology. Sumi Cho further charges that, "Gilroy criticizes groups of color for their fixation on race, racism, and the racial remedies, and their seemingly "threadbare political strategies" rooted in racial particularism." (Cho 2009, 1627-1628) Cho's analysis also offers the counter to Gilroy's line of thinking by identifying Patricia Hill-Collins' rebuttal that, "*Against Race* should be very reassuring to American audiences imagining that race and racism are passé and that race-holding African Americans are the problem." (Cho 2009, 1628) Although Gilroy's work seems to fall in line with PRT's notions that race should indeed be abolished and moved away from, it could be read a bit differently. Gilroy's stance could be interpreted in a post-colonial sense as rightfully calling for the destruction of race as a socially constructed monster that has ingrained itself materially within society to such an extent that no discussion of American (or British for that matter) society is replete without it. With that being said, it would be a gross misrepresentation of his arguments to believe that Gilroy calls for a casual ending to an ages old problem simply because of the election of a half black President and more accurately calls for the idea that Blacks should not hold their thinking and philosophies completely to their racial identity. This makes more sense as living completely "in your skin" as it were, lends more credence to an idea that has no biological meaning or social benefit for people of color in terms of social mobility.

Colorblind Courts: The Roots of Post-Racial Theory in Education

"Few in the country, Black or White, understood in 1954 that racial segregation was merely a symptom, not the disease, that the real sickness is that our society and all of its manifestations is geared to the maintenance of White superiority." Robert Carter (Bell 2004)

By and large, a series of historical Supreme Court decisions has dictated educational policy in the United States that sought to remedy educational iniquity based on race and racial segregation. However, these decisions are rooted in one critical court decision which would set the tone for all subsequent decisions. The *Plessy v. Ferguson* case successfully cemented the notion that racial inequities could be successfully obstructed in a courtroom by an array of laws and decisions that would do nothing more than attack symptomatic manifestations of inequality while leaving the sickness itself untouched. The landmark decision in the *Plessy v. Ferguson* case asserted that the races be separate and equal in all spheres of public life in America, and became the impetus for the subsequent destruction of social, political, economic, and educational equity within the United States. The decision provided a capstone for White supremacist ideology which would serve as a smoke screen for disenfranchising non-Whites for decades to come. By stating that the separation of the races was not based on any inherent inferiority of the latter, discriminatory and inequitable practices could be silenced with a mere reference to the colorblind nature of the U.S. Constitution. In his dissenting opinion on the case, Justice Harlan introduces the critical argument regarding which I follow regarding the inherent racism within colorblind theory and its power as a mechanism of minority disenfranchisement, discrimination and use as a method of circumventing actual racially equitable progress while disguising itself as the opposite.

The white race deems itself to be the dominant race in this country. And so it is, in prestige, and achievements, in education, in wealth and in power. So, I doubt not, it will continue to be for all time, if it remains true to its great heritage and holds fast to the principles of constitutional liberty. But in view of the Constitution, in the eye of the law there is in this country no superior, dominant, ruling class of citizens. There is no caste here. Our Constitution is colorblind, and neither knows nor tolerates classes among citizens. In respect of civil rights, all citizens are equal before the law. The humblest is the peer of the most powerful. The law regards man as man, and takes no account of his surroundings or of his color when his sole rights as guaranteed by the supreme law of the land are involved.

(*Plessy v. Ferguson* 1896)

Legal scholar Patrick Shin highlights Harlan's tone and statement of White racial superiority being ignored by the Constitution by noting that, "...for Harlan, colorblindness represents a constitutional commitment to ignore the *actual* superiority and dominance of the "White race." Colorblindness is after all, a *defect* of vision consisting in an ability to discern certain differences that really do exist." (Shin 2007, 1211) Harlan's decision illustrates the power of the Equal Protection Clause in its ability to grant *legal* rights and protection under the Constitution to those whom society deems as inferior or unequal, but does nothing to assuage or remedy the racism which makes this protection necessary in the first place. It is this direct disregarding of the existence of racism outside of the Constitution that ensures the ultimate failure of both *Mendez* and *Brown* school desegregation cases in eliminating educational inequalities for non-White students. *Plessy* also represented a reinvestment in the concept of hypodescent, that is, the "one drop rule" which dictated that one drop of "Black" blood was all that was needed to

separate a person from the White race. How this could logically be seen as anything other than a statement of separate and quite unequal is representative of the denial that resides at the core of colorblind theory and legal interpretation. It is this same denial that undercut the potential transformative power of school desegregation cases and limited the scope of their impact by relegating them to mere minority student relocation imperatives.

The first blow in the fight for school desegregation in the United States began not with *Brown*, but with the often overlooked *Mendez v. Westminster* case of 1946 in California. Mexican immigrant parents Felicita and Gonzalo Mendez were denied the opportunity to enroll their children in an Orange county school due to their Spanish surnames and skin deemed too dark by the local by the Orange County School Board. (*Mendez v. Westminster* 1946) The Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals found that the Mendez' case was sound and represented a violation of California State law. It was successfully argued using two of the primary arguments that would later be used in the *Brown* case; that segregated schools indeed caused harm to minority children psychologically in terms of feelings of inferiority, and that isolation from the dominant group delays the Americanization and assimilation process of said children into mainstream society. It should also be noted, that in her decision on the case, Judge McCormick introduced language that would surely lead to later attacks on *Plessy*:

The equal protection of the laws pertaining to the public school system in California is now provided by furnishing in separate schools the same technical facilities, text books and courses of instruction to students of Mexican ancestry that are available to other public school children regardless of ancestry. A paramount requisite of the American system of public education is equality. It must be open to all children by unified school association regardless of lineage.

(*Mendez v. Westminster* 1946)

The *Mendez* case represents a victory in some ways, but the losses that eventually outweighed the victory deserve further analysis. Yes, indeed the children were allowed to attend the Orange County schools, but upon their arrival, they were hit with a barrage of racist mechanisms meant to oppress and delay their education even further. Legal scholar Luis Noll, summarized the work of several other legal scholars on the experiences of those Mexican American students and noted that their victory ultimately was defeated by,

inept, tracking into industrial or other nonacademic forms of structured, coercive Americanization practices, including the imposition of English-only and the punitive subordination of Spanish and generally negative perceptions of their culture, motivation, and educability, this is what critical race theorists would call educational practices for the protection of white privilege...with the goal of benefitting their more propertied counterparts.

(Noll 2010, 1453)

Although the arguments used for a successful ruling in the *Mendez* case were borrowed and “beefed up” so to speak to ensure that the case would tackle *Plessy* head on and not be relegated to State courts as *Mendez* was, the failure to attack the racist ideology behind

separate but equal was left largely untouched. The plaintiffs in the *Brown* case, therefore sought out educational equity with integration as a consolation prize, but ultimately walked away with desegregation and a program that bussed minority children into schools housed in racially hostile neighborhoods where the idea of equal education was overpowered by the hatred and violent attitudes of local Whites. The prevalent attitude held by Black parents was that if their children could attend schools with White children that had superior resources and were funded better, then that in itself would ensure educational equity. The legal briefs to the case appear to have given no consideration of how racist teachers, students, faculty or curriculum would not only hinder the equity, but make the children worse off than where they were before, was given in the legal briefs of the case. Furthermore, *Brown* did little to address the mechanisms that caused the segregation in the first place. Education scholars Gutierrez and Jaramillo assert that, "...while the *Brown* plaintiffs argued that legal racial segregation caused educational disparities, the Court only addressed the issue of segregation in educational settings. Moreover, while the Court subsequently used this landmark case as a legal precedent-a form of blanket desegregation for subsequent desegregation cases-the Court did not legislate a new moral stance or ethic among people toward educational equity." (Gutierrez and Jaramillo 2006, 178)

The problem regarding racism and ending segregation is not to question the aims or decision of *Brown*. In fact, I contend that there was more at stake for the plaintiffs than simply having the right to have their children sit next to White children in school. However, it appears that the focus on school desegregation allowed the larger picture of racial equity in general to be lost or minimized for the sake of a smaller victory. Logically, all extant systems of segregation should have been challenged as a result of the quest for educational equity. There is no rational explanation that can cause one to address the trauma of segregation in one area, and not all others. Research done by Gutierrez and Jaramillo also came to similar conclusions about the nature and scope of the *Brown* decision being oddly limited considering the fact that school segregation was no different than race-based segregation in other spheres of social life by positing that, "the 1954 *Brown* decision reversed the legacy of the "separate and equal" doctrine established by *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896). While *Plessy* applied to all public services in the United States, *Brown* pertained only to public schools, and therefore did not have the capacity or the legal jurisdiction to fully dismantle the application of "separate" or "segregated" public services. Of significance, neither *Plessy* nor *Brown* applied to de facto segregation, and the narrow scope of *Brown* only outlawed de jure segregation, leaving intact the vast apparatus of the fact of segregation."(Gutierrez and Jaramillo 2006, 175)

Critical Race Theorist Derrick Bell has conceived a theory that helps to illuminate the Court's methodology of disenfranchising Blacks while parceling out crumbs of equality. In his text, *Brown v. Board of Education and the Unfulfilled Hopes for Racial Reform*, Bell outlines the "interest convergence" theory which suggests:

The interests of blacks and achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when the interest convergence with the interest of Whites in policymaking positions. This convergence is far more important for gaining relief to the degree of harm suffered by blacks or the character of proof offered to prove that harm.

Even when interest convergence results in an effective racial remedy, that remedy will be abrogated at the point that policymakers fear the remedial policy is threatening to superior societal status of whites, particularly those in the middle and upper classes.

(Bell 2004, 69)

Bell's theory does much to explain how simple school desegregation is allowed, but other forms of segregation and racism itself is not challenged at all. The *Brown* ruling was less about the damage school segregation causes socially and economically to Blacks, but more about the damage done to America's image as a fair and democratic nation during that time period when the United States government sought to prove that Communism was the inferior and socially oppressive style of government. It was much more convenient to parcel out the morsel of school desegregation and parade it on the world stage than to openly eliminate the structural racism and White supremacist attitudes that developed the separatist mechanisms now being challenged. On this idea of Communism as the catalyst for interest convergence, Bell furthers that, "looking back to that time, it is likely that not since the Civil War had the need to remedy racial injustice been so firmly aligned with the country's vital interests at home and abroad. This historic attraction to granting recognition and promising reform of racial injustice with such action converges with the nation's interest, providing an unacknowledged motivation for the courts reading statement in *Brown*." (Bell 2004, 67)

Providing further evidence of the Supreme Court's willingness to undercut the desegregation mandates set forth by the *Brown* decision and protect the interests of the White middle and upper economic classes from enduring the desegregation of their well-funded predominately White schools, the *Milliken v. Bradley* case in Detroit stands as a solid example. The District Court, in a five to four opinion, found that the Detroit public schools were unconstitutionally segregated. The Detroit Public Schools system as well as the State of Michigan were found to be responsible for the allowing the school system to operate with a 36.2% White enrollment within its district. (Brown 2005) To remedy this situation, the District Court mandated an inter-district desegregation plan that included the predominately White dominated suburban schools, which were also state-created school districts and thus responsible for the segregation numbers that contributed to the lack of Whites within the urban districts. The Supreme Court struck down the District Court ruling citing that the suburban district was not the offending district and not in violation of the Constitution, so therefore inter-district remedies were invalid and unconstitutional. Law professor Kevin Brown highlights the importance of this ruling in his text, *Race, Law and Education in the Post-Desegregation Era* by asserting that,

Since the scope of the desegregation remedy is determined by the extent of the constitutional violation, the court concluded that, absent a showing that a constitutional violation within one district produced a significant segregating effect in another, there was no justification for cross district remedies... thus a general rule was that a desegregation remedy would stop at the boundary of the offending school district. In addition, by allowing suburban school districts to be safe harbors for parents who did not want their children to be part of a school

desegregation remedy, Milliken helped to contribute to "white flight" from urban to suburban school districts.

(Brown 2004, 210)

White flight was yet another tool to undercut school desegregation efforts; that along with critical decisions in *Keyes v. School District No. 1*; which allowed states themselves to determine whether de jure or de facto racism caused school segregation (critical because *Brown* could only affect de jure segregation), and *Board of Education v. Dowell*, which became the first school desegregation termination opinion, opening the doors for State Courts to legally challenge *Brown* and implement their own method of desegregation, or not desegregate at all, began to set the foundation for current arguments that race-based educational equity is not critical to the courts nor dominant American culture.

How and Why Race-Based Education Legislation Fails To Eliminate Achievement Gaps

Fundamentally, even court mandated racial equity measures may be undone as they come closer to threatening dominant White cultural hegemony in regards to the social and material benefits of that hegemony known as Whiteness. In these cases, what the courts are essentially protecting are the predominately White, exclusive neighborhoods and the elite, well-funded schools that service the children in those neighborhoods. The court rulings successfully safeguard them from integrated schooling and intrusion into suburban communities by inner-city Blacks. Despite efforts to bring educational equity through legal decisions being undercut by the very courts that pass the mandates and legal imperatives, the court's decisions often result in race-based education legislation intended to close achievement gaps that occur between White and non-White students. However, legislation assumed to be aimed at race equity, such as former U.S. President George W. Bush's No Child Left Behind Act 2001, represent a mechanism that is easily counteracted by both de jure and de facto racist ideals such as White flight/residential segregation and diversity penalties for racially integrated schools outlined in federally enforced education legislation.

The key component of NCLB's reward/punishment system is grounded in a letter-based grading system in which "F" or failing schools receive less funding and risk being taken over by the federal government for repeat "F" grades, and passing schools receive more funds and access to resources the closer they get to the ultimate grade of "A." What is not noted directly in the Press regarding the Bill's language, is that schools that have target groups within the bill, (minority and special needs students) must have achievement from those students in particular or risk receiving a failing grade despite the progress of the majority of the student body. A study of schools in California and Florida measured the impact of this portion of the bill and found that, "schools were designated (as failing) not because tests have shown their overall achievement levels to be faltering, but because a single student group-disabled learners or Asian students, for example-have fallen short of the target. As a result, the chances that a school would be designated as failing increased proportion to the number of demographic groups served by the school... in the early years of in NCLB implementation schools serving poor, minority, and LEP (Limited English Proficiency) students and those with a greater number of subgroups for which they are

held accountable for disproportionately identified as "needing improvement"-what one group of researchers has called a "diversity penalty.'" (Darling-Hammond 2004, 11-12)

The core directive of NCLB is to eliminate the achievement gaps per race and low-income class hindrances, and yet the schools that service these populations are much more apt to receive failing grades, thus less funding and resources, causing reactionary public school systems to engage in re-segregating populations and encouraging White-flight to suburban areas for better schools, thereby reversing the efforts altogether. Education scholars Charles Boger and Gary Orfield underscore this phenomena by positing; "the branding of interracial schools as academically inadequate deepens the problem by driving middle-class whites from integrated schools to overwhelmingly white schools and neighborhoods...trying to impose accountability while ignoring the inequalities built into segregation can result in punishing those who are working in the most typical situations and urging them to leave for schools in the suburbs...the courts are trying to impose artificially integrated schools in a society where the continuous spread of residential segregation will invariably undo this process." (Boger & Orfield 2005, 13) Comparatively speaking, the resistance to integrate schools by majority White school systems in order to lessen the risk of receiving a failing grade from NCLB reviews is akin to the intense resistance of Southern Whites to integrate public schools in the 1960's after *Brown's* "with all deliberate speed" desegregation directive. The key question that was at stake in the hearts of Whites then, can be used to explain the willingness to re-segregate now; what do Whites have to gain by integrating their schools and allowing non-Whites to utilize their resources and gain a quality education? It is materially in the best interests of Whites to exclude minority populations from schools based on NCLB reward distribution. Losing funding has shown that quality of instruction decreases as faculty do not wish to take pay cuts or teach at a school labeled as failing and will have reduced classroom resources based on budget cuts. (Vinovskis 2009) This notion also illustrates how failing inner-city schools, which service predominately Black and Latino populations, will continue to delve deeper into educational sterility due to less-skilled teachers being employed and even less funding for books, computers and other critical resources needed to level the educational playing field.

Initially praised by civil rights activists like the NAACP and education equity theorists such as Arne Duncan (who is now the education-minded Mayor of Chicago), NCLB was touted as a grand equalizer of sorts, promising to eliminate achievement gaps based on racial and class disparities by ramping up standardized test scores and ensuring higher quality instruction through teacher training programs. (NEA 2010) The failure of NCLB to fulfill any of its promises should come as no surprise as it is essentially a renaming and reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, which came as a result of the cries for educational equity during the late 1950's to 1960's Civil Rights Movement. (Rotella 2010) The weaknesses inherent within this Act are duplicated within NCLB, and its effectiveness is noted only in its ability to maintain the status quo. For example, the key factor in determining a school's success and ultimately its letter grade, is the measurement of student achievement on standardized tests. Historically, African American parents have rallied against the use of standardized tests as a measurement of academic progress due to apprehensions about the culturally biased nature of the tests,

which is empirically supported by statistics that illustrate how lower income Black students consistently underperform in comparison to their White counterparts. NCLB's dependence on standardized tests has caused such a profound effect on schools, teaching methodology has been largely manipulated to instruct the information from the requisite state test rather than traditional curriculum from textbooks and teacher instruction. In a study conducted to examine support for the high-stakes testing aspect of NCLB policy, research uncovered that, "opponents argue that high-stakes tests fail to improve student learning and are discriminatory to racial and ethnic minorities. They also argue that these tests result in a reduction of time for ordinary instruction, that they limit students instructional opportunities, that they negatively affect teacher morale, and they cause a great deal of anxiety for the students," and in regards to African-American opposition to the testing, the researchers further that, "after decades of policy attempts "supposedly designed to alter white privilege" in education, many African Americans are suspicious of new policy attempts, and believe it to be "rooted in the advantages that whites have and fight to maintain." (Lay & Stokes-Brown 2008, 430, 432)

Despite the long-standing position of African American parents being against high-stakes standardized testing, the inclusion of said testing and its importance to grade-level progression and graduation in NCLB language is puzzling. It seems counter-intuitive at best to include a previously proven ineffective rubric for gauging minority student progress in order to improve minority student achievement. Given previous trends, the positioning of high-stakes tests as the primary device for gauging public school instructional effectiveness will all but ensure that a large number African American and Latino students will continue to be educated in failing schools, further exacerbating the drop-out rate among those populations and enhancing educational inequality. Further research from Lay and Stokes-Brown (2008) highlights this position by affirming that, "African Americans and Latinos have lower graduation rates and are more likely to attend failing schools that are whites. According to a Manhattan Institute study, 78% of whites, 55% of African Americans, and only 53% of Latinos graduated from high school in 2003. In the face of decades of educational reforms aimed to reduce the gaps in achievement between racial minorities and whites, "millions of minority students attend schools that are segregated, inequitably financed, vapid in curricula delivery, teacher-centered and generally hostile in any sense of learning environment." (Lay & Stokes-Brown 2008, 431)

In spite of the previously stated shortcomings of NCLB in terms of language, rubric and failure to address issues of de facto racism as a hindrance to its successful application, President Barack Obama has utilized its foundation and large portions of its language in his own education policy known as Race to the Top (RTTT). Although Obama has referred to his plan as an overhauling of NCLB, upon close examination it seems to be a mere restructuring of certain points but largely still having the same spirit of NCLB. Gone is the much debated grading system for each school that would determine how funding is meted out, however, the competition for schools to receive federal funding based on student performance is still at the core of the legislation. RTTT also still relies heavily on yearly standardized testing as a gauge for student progress, although it also adds graduation rates, student attendance and learning climate as indicators of success as well. Current underperforming schools still have an unfair disadvantage as they have

tremendous ground to make up for due to funding cuts and near closures resulting from NCLB penalties, and RTTT offers no assistance for these schools within its current language. When President Barack Obama was challenged on this issue by the National Urban League and NAACP in a press conference for the roll out of RTTT, Obama replied, “I know there’s a concern that Race To The Top doesn’t do much for minority kids, because the argument is, well if there’s a competition, then somehow some states or some school districts will get more help than others. Let me tell you, what’s not working for black kids and Hispanic kids and Native American kids across this country is the status quo. That’s what’s not working.” (Klein & McNeil 2010, 2)

In theory, attacking the racial and educational status quo is precisely what is needed, but through analysis of RTTT’s application and ambiguous language concerning school mandates and responsibilities, the status quo appears to be secure for the time being. Examination of the legislation reveals that that states are required to implement, “challenging academic standards” to receive federal money for poor students under a section known as Title I, “but states are allowed to define “challenging,” and many set standards at mediocre levels.” (Dillon 2010, 1) Race To The Top also brings attention to teacher training as an area of improvement necessary to close achievement gaps, and will implement, “teacher-quality provisions by requiring states to develop evaluation procedures to distinguish effective instructors, partly based on whether their students are learning. These would replace the law’s current emphasis on certifying that all teachers have valid credentials...” (Dillon 2010, 2) What these teacher evaluation and training programs do not address however, is teacher bias. Critical to dismantling education inequity, teacher bias is not and has not ever been addressed in federal education mandates. Although this would seem to be an obvious point of emphasis if educational equality was indeed the goal, assumptions of teacher objectivity have never been challenged, yet it is clear that United States teachers are humans produced in a highly racially stratified society and are not immune to its psychological and ideological ills concerning race.

Teacher Bias, Pedagogy and Minority Student Expectations

“...white people in the United States are aware, however faintly, that they have been deeply scarred by their own racism. When this profound, but vaguely understood scar becomes clear, whites will sense the loss that has been theirs.” –Harold Adams on White educators (Colangelo, Dustin, Foxley, 1985, 87)

It has been assumed that educational inequality is remedied through legislative imperatives and Supreme Court decisions, however, a critical and oft overlooked component of achieving racial equity takes place in the classroom with interactions between students and teachers. Citizens of America have overlooked the idea that teacher objectivity is a given and need not be addressed. I make this assertion based on teacher certification and training courses being centered around technical instruction acumen and knowledge of standard curriculum in a given field. Psychological subjectivity certification is not, nor has it ever been a part of mandatory teaching certifications. With that being said, how can school districts guarantee that non-White students are not being subjected to the racially-affected pathologies of their White instructors? Teachers are simply human beings who have chosen teaching as a

profession, not people hatched in a bubble shielding them from racially stratified environments and situations that shape their natural social development. It's quite easy to point out the blatant racist who discriminates against students or faculty with brash, racially inflammatory language or actions, but how do we identify the teacher who doesn't know or understand that they hold racist views?

A recent study by psychologists at the Teacher's College at Yale University sought to analyze the reactions, interpretations and perceptions on White teachers' ability to conduct a dialogue on race in their classrooms, and examine global perceptions of race. The study uncovered four prominent themes that I contend should properly illustrate the need for a closer examination of teacher psychology and pathology based on race. The themes and results were as follows:

1. Denial of whiteness and white privilege: Although whiteness and white privilege was not a theme introduced by the researchers, many participants seemed defensively aware of the negative associations with light skin color and either disavowed being white (if Jewish or Irish) or expressed anger/frustration at being unfairly blamed for racism.
2. Colorblindness: ...participants who subscribe to a colorblind attitude appeared to embrace a quality framework and the way they view the world around them is they thought that people were neither advantaged nor disadvantaged because of skin color, these individuals stated they were unwilling to discuss racial issues and preferred to end such dialogues by disclaiming racial or ethnic differences.
3. Fear of appearing racist: ...a major theme that emerged from both focus groups is white students' fear that they would appear racist if they engage in conversation about race... most of the comments by participants revealed reluctance to dialogue about race in the classroom for "fear of having my comments misunderstood and labeled racist." Thus they would either not participate or say "safe things" from the perspective of political correctness. This fear served as a barrier to participants expressing their authentic feelings about race.
4. No Right To Dialogue on Race: ... in each group, roughly half of the participants expressed reluctance to enter a dialogue because they believed one must be a victim of racism "to have a valid voice to talk about race." One female stated that it was her "white, privileged, Christian" background that is responsible for not having an opinion about race. This suggests that some participants have several layers of identity that serve as buffers between them and the realities of racism by externalizing them. It also suggested that dissidents may believe they have no role in the creation and maintenance of racism.

(Capodilupo, Lin, Rivera, Sue, Torino 2010, 209)

What is critical to note about the above findings, is that the teachers privileged their own attitudes and feelings, as well as those of the Whites students when concerns about discussing or handling issues of race were raised. Concerning the results of the study, the researchers concluded that, "although disheartening at some level, they point to several major conclusions for effective cultural competency training; (a) the importance of lived experience in relating to individuals who differ from trainees in terms of race, culture, or ethnicity, (b) becoming aware of "nested emotions" like feelings of anxiety, deals, and anger that may impede self-exploration; and (c) acknowledging and confronting hidden

racial biases and prejudices... honest and open racial dialogues between individuals and groups have been identified as important means to create these conditions are promoting racial healing, lessening the power of racism, making hidden biases visible, and facilitating an understanding of different worldviews."(Capodilupo, Lin, Rivera, Sue, Torino 2010, p.206) These recommendations are not currently apart of any teacher improvement or certification program currently in place or mandated by NCLB or RTTT legislation. Given this fact, the potentially transformative impact of these findings within U.S. public school classrooms will never be known.

Further analysis of the negative effects of teacher subjectivity on non-White children has illustrated that students themselves are keenly aware of teacher bias; and their self-esteem, approach to school work and outlook on school in general is affected in ways that are not measured in academic statistics analyzing the reasons for achievement gaps. A study conducted on how High School-aged African American students perceived their White teachers and teacher expectations produced results that illustrate these affects quite vividly. The results produced these primary conclusions for analysis: "First, the majority of the 48 students in this study believed that race or ethnicity was a factor in the way that teachers treated them. Second, many of the respondents indicated they perceived that some of their teachers have lower expectations for African American students. In particular, many students reported that they were either not encouraged or blatantly discouraged from taking advanced or honors classes. Also, they reported that some teachers had demonstrated, by word or deed, not expecting as much in terms of high quality work from African-American students in comparison to what they expected from White students." (Booker, Lyons, & Pringle 2010, 38) For the students themselves to perceive discrimination from their teachers must be accounted for in critical analysis of education equity.

There is no inherent reason to exclude examination of data pertinent to measuring the psychological distress which would have a clear and marked effect on performance, attitude, and overall outlook on school as an equitable learning environment. When examining reasons for minority student achievement gaps, in regards to developing legislative countermeasures, notions of students being held back by teacher subjectivity and negative psychological trauma are not included as major factors. The focus is nearly always on the shortcomings of the students and the environment from which they come, (hence the busing of minority students to and desegregating of White schools) causing legislation like NCLB and RTTT to appear more like ways for inferior minority children to catch up to Whites, rather than examining the ways in which the instruction of these children by racially affected instructors in both inner-city and suburban schools is a critical component. Racially intolerant or oppressive attitudes held by teachers are not seen as so detrimental that they should be corrected, as illustrated by this quote from a Principal at a suburban High School in which black students from the inner-city are bused in, "some teachers do not treat all kids fairly...you try reasoning with them, but they just believe that some kids are smarter than others. So what do you do?" (Ovando & Larson 2001, 41) It would tremendously assumptive to assert (but not necessarily wholly incorrect) that this indifferent attitude toward allowing discriminatory attitudes among teachers is reflective of the majority of White principals, however, as this study

illustrates, it can be logically implied that is reflective of far too many to ignore it as a legitimate and crucial factor in discussing inequitable education environments for Black and Latino students. Also imperative to note as a contributing factor to teacher bias, is the persistent presence of a White washed and Eurocentric status quo affirming public school curriculum.

Even with efforts to achieve equilibrium in terms of resources and opportunity for non-White children, the problem of ethnocentric deculturalization within public school curriculum is yet another unaddressed and critical point of analysis. Minority students are confronted with a curriculum that is counter-intuitive to achieving a sense of self-worth and validation within mainstream society, as current educational standards revolve around preserving elitist and White Supremacist notions of America, economics and history. Standards of education continue to delve deeper into White conservative views of America, as illustrated in May 2010, when the Texas State Board of Education “adopted a social studies and history curriculum that amends or waters down the teaching of the civil rights movement, religious freedoms, America’s relationship with the U.N. and hundreds of other items.” (Castro 2010) This decision will have a major impact not just on Texas, but on the entire country as the standards set in Texas, “will be used by textbook publishers who often develop materials for other states based on guidelines approved in Texas.” (Castro 2010) This measure serves as a capstone for dominant White hegemony in controlling how and what children will perceive as history and the struggle for racial equality in the United States. How are minority children going to be affected by all but eliminating them from U.S. history and downplaying their predecessors’ fights for equality on the American landscape? Computers and well trained-teachers cannot equalize the culturally destructive power of Eurocentric domination of racialized children’s minds.

Conclusion

“Post-raciality does not apply when it comes to America’s public schools, which are as racially imbalanced and as resourcefully disparate as ever.”

(Samad 2009, 22)

Education scholar and researcher Frederick Yeo outlined his theory of the effects of ethnocentric deculturalization in his text, *Inner-City Schools, Multiculturalism, and Teacher Education: A Professional Journey* (1997), by positing that, “Unfortunately, the children of the inner-cities, who are usually from non-mainstream cultures, confront a curriculum that ignores their cultural capital in favor of the dominant, western Euro-American White culture, and their individual and social knowledge is seen as “non-mainstream.”” (Yeo 1997, 41). It is this non-mainstream “outsider” status of these children that cannot be legislated away or measured with standardized test scores. The current methodology of measuring student achievement and search for educational equity is flawed in that it assumes an inherent inferiority and demands a certain belief about the outlook inner-city minority youth, especially Black males, have about school. Dr. Yeo, citing the seminal work of ethnographer John Ogbu on inner-city education of Black males, reiterates that, “Black youths do not consciously reject school meanings and

knowledge. In fact, Black youths state emphatically that schooling is important to them and that they want to get an education in order to escape from poverty and other problems of the ghetto community.” (Yeo 1997, 55) This citation is used to illuminate the idea that it is actually the converse of commonly held beliefs concerning Black youth and that the schools themselves reject Black youth by maintaining systems and curriculum that are counter-intuitive to the desire of the Black male inner-city youths to be educated and escape their impoverished conditions.

These failings in anti-racist curriculum development have resulted in mainstream assertions about the educability of minorities and the possibility of some inherent mental inferiority on the behalf of African-Americans themselves, and a “blame the victim” mentality in regards to inequity remedies. On this idea, researcher Cameron McCarthy asserts that, “At every historical juncture of the racialization of dominant educational institutions in the United States, African Americans and other racial minorities have contested and have sought to redefine hegemonic conceptions of racial differences in ‘intelligence,’ ‘achievement,’ and the curriculum strategies of inclusion and exclusion and selection that these commonsense racial theories have undergirded...explanations of Black ‘underachievement’ are consequently situated within pathological constructions of minority cognitive capacities, child-rearing practices, family structures and linguistic styles.” (McCarthy 1990, 4)

Post-Racial Theory provides the basis for understanding why race as a social construct should be eliminated for the benefit of society as a whole, but with the deep roots of oppressive racist ideologies and constant reiteration of minorities as permanent ‘outsider’ figures, it seems highly unlikely and illogical to assume that dominant Eurocentric hegemony can disentangle itself as a cultural norm present since the inception of the United States. As evidenced within this article, legislation, Supreme Court mandates, and socio-political ideology specifically designed to eliminate disparities and achievement gaps based on race have not been markedly effective in eliminating these gaps or served as a remedy for racism and racist pathology.

In its application, PRT guarantees no equal treatment of, or reversal of oppressive and discriminatory attitudes towards negatively racialized minorities within American education systems, due to teacher bias, pedagogical White-washing and an unspoken investment by economic and political elite in White Supremacist ideology to uphold the intersection of race and class oppression mechanisms inherent within capitalism. This investment in an unjust and repressive system all but guarantees that the inequitable structure of education for non-Whites will solidify them as an under educated workforce, ill-equipped to gain footing in a society where higher education is necessary to ascend to higher economic rungs in American society. Evidence of this claim is supported by education research at Boston College that states, “Considering educational and career development without accounting for the reality of racism in education and work neglects a significant challenge in students’ lives. Existing research reveals that poor and working-class youths are aware of the inequities in the educational system related to race and social class and anticipate that they may not be prepared for higher education.” (Blustein, Castaneda, Davis, Jernigan, Kenny, Koepke, Land, Murphy & Urbano 2010, p. 248) This lack of preparedness cannot be undone by a theory such as PRT, which would ignore

their problems based on race altogether, seeking to attribute their issues to other issues which would only be symptomatic at best.

PRT also assumes that eliminating race will help to strengthen the bonds of all currently racialized people by finally uniting under a banner of ‘American,’ casting away cultural identities for a singular consciousness, presumably dictated by the dominant White hegemony responsible for the maintaining the racially separatist mechanisms currently in place. What is lost in this assumption is that minority students, specifically African American children, have been found to take critical, self-esteem enhancing pride in their racial identity, often using it as a source of inspiration to fight through inequality and perceived inferiority by prevalent White culture. University of Michigan researchers posit that, “It (racial identity) is also an important cultural asset for black youth because they can serve as a buffer against the negative effects of racism. Scholars have asserted that racial identity can buffer the negative effects of racism by instilling racial pride and making individuals feel good about sales despite prejudices, discrimination, and the state was associated with their race.” (Caldwell, Faison, Jackson & Thomas 2009, p. 422) It is not the racial identity that suppresses racialized groups as assumed by PRT, it is the racism and stigma of inferiority attached to the racial designations that present the challenges that have yet to be remedied or addressed. It is my penultimate contention, that in order for educational equity to be achieved, equity within American culture must be achieved first.

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