# HOW TO TEACH RACE TO WHITE STUDENTS:

# A PERSONAL ACCOUNT

by

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Abstract

The process of developing an understanding of race relations is difficult. The process of understanding whiteness and the role it plays in the socialization of this country and the people within it is very complex. For educators concerned with teaching white students about race the task is twofold. The first step is to create an understanding of the intricacies of whiteness and the second is to push students beyond that point to develop an awareness and concern for systematic oppression and institutional racism. A method of combining the research from social psychology and critical theory is one way to approach this task. From the author's experiences and personal history, this approach has been a proven success in catalyzing developmental awareness with regard to race relations. This paper combines reviews of literature with personal and observational accounts to illustrate the process through which white students may develop an awareness of themselves as racial beings and an understanding of the impact that identity has in this country.

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# Chapter One – Introduction

## "But at Least She's Still White"

I have a dog. She is a miniature American Eskimo and is pure white. One day, shortly after I began my graduate program, my roommate brought home a woman he was dating. I was already suspicious of her because of some of the racially derogatory comments he had told me she had started to say. However, not wanting to jump to conclusions about someone I had never met, I held off on sounding the race-alarm and decided to give her the benefit of the doubt. When she arrived, there were three of us in the house, my roommate, his brother, and me. All of us White. After a few moments of introductory small talk, she commented on the beauty of my dog. I embarrassedly mentioned that she had not had a bath in a while and really needed to be brushed. The woman appeared to be contemplating this as she continued to pet my dog. After a moment she looked up at me and said, "But at least she's still white."

As the comment hung in the air between us and my roommate decided it was best not to linger with her in my presence, it struck me that there were many people who would not understand why her comment bothered me. It reminded me of the time when my brother and I were discussing future occupations. He said that he wanted to be a math teacher or something equivalently unrelated to the social sciences. When I asked him why, he said that he wanted to have a job that he could leave at work, not bring home with him. He proceeded to say, "Tonya, no matter what job you choose, you will never leave it at work. You will be in a store somewhere and demand to know why the black shirts are hanging behind the white shirts, even though it may be the middle of the summer in

Arizona." We laughed, but I knew he was right. I had chosen a path that, regardless of profession, would never again allow me to hear a questionable comment and not react.

However, when one of my graduate professors asked me why I had left Corporate America to study issues concerning people of color, I did not know how to answer her. It did occur to me that I did not look at these issues as existing separate from myself. I had spent a good portion of my undergraduate career tackling issues of race and it seemed natural to continue into graduate school. I am prone to introspection enough to know that I developed through a process during the first four years and it was only because of that development that I was prepared to delve deeper into those issues in graduate school. It is from this perspective that I present the following paper. The series of events that have brought me to this point, and this topic in particular, are numerous and diverse. Their significance as a group, however, has encouraged me to tackle the daunting task of explaining the complexities involved in teaching race to white students. I am a 25 year-old white woman who has spent the majority of each of the last six years questioning issues of race. While I have done this from a variety of standpoints, the underlying issues of race and whiteness remained constant. During my undergraduate career I explored race from a social psychological and intercultural communication perspective. This was my first encounter with theories of race and my fascination with the subject led me to delve into many studies and experiences that afforded me a better understanding. What I did not know then, however, was this perspective was

only one half of the story. Upon entering the Social and Philosophical Foundations program as a graduate student, I encountered the other half. This paper serves as a summation of research I have gathered, as well as experiences I have had learning and teaching about race.

## Overview

It is my assumption that those reading this already agree that racism is a bad thing. What I am going to argue is that, in order to adequately educate white students regarding issues of race, the process must respect that the concept of race is imbued with political and emotional meanings. Each student brings his or her own experiences and feelings into the classroom and it is from those foundations that he or she will engage in the class and hear the information being presented. A combined approach that respects social psychology's racial identity development theories and sociology's critical race theories will go further in catalyzing understanding than will either approach alone. I am a product of this combined education. It is only through this combined view that the picture of racism became clear to me and it is only through using this approach that I have been able to teach and train other Whites about issues of culture, racism, racial privilege and identity development. I have chosen to offer my experiences and the experiences of others as examples in an effort to forward discussions on the topic of teaching race to white students.

The concept of whiteness is extremely diverse. The literature available on the subject is equally so. Those writing on the subject have explored it from numerous angles ranging from privilege and power to social norms and

community. I have chosen four topics in particular to use as an illustration of the depth and intricacies of the topic. White culture, white racism, white privilege, and white identity development are all topics well covered by researchers and theorists, they also are four areas that, when combined, create a strong foundation from which the topic of whiteness builds and on which rests the justification for studying and teaching the concept of whiteness in an effort to better understand race relations.

Following this, I will present information regarding critical multiculturalism and suggestions for ways to progress beyond discussions of race and culture and move into discussions of institutional repercussions and ideas for social change. Included in this is the argument that there is a place for white people in conversations about race. Despite the existence of literature that suggests those in the dominant group cannot affect change for marginalized groups, I know differently. It is my assertion that only through engaging Whites in the dialogue can the issue be addressed fully. Lastly, the arena of higher education is an ideal one for tackling such a topic and for beginning to take steps toward a better understanding of how race creates who we are and affects how we are able to live our lives in the United States. Given this, I offer my experiences and those of some of my students and others I have trained as examples of reactions to and possible progress from combining theories when addressing issues of race with white students.

# Chapter Two – Aspects of Whiteness

Historically, white authors and authors of color both have tackled the topic of race from a variety of angles. This review covers four major areas of "whiteness" research: white culture, white racism, white privilege, and white identity development. Discussing whiteness is important to furthering discussions about eliminating racism. Kivel (1996) explained this relationship as, "Racism is based on the concept of whiteness - a powerful fiction enforced by power and violence" (p. 17). He continued explaining that "whiteness is a constantly shifting boundary separating those who are entitled to have certain privileges from those whose exploitation and vulnerability to violence is justified by their not being white" (Kivel, 1996, p. 17). This separation justifies the importance of dissecting issues of whiteness in an effort to further critique the system which allows for its significance. The following four areas are only a few of the pieces in the intricate puzzle of race relations. However, they serve as a good foundation for promoting understanding.

## White Culture

### Absence of Color

White is defined as the absence of color (Webber, 1984, p. 787). This has become an important aspect of discussions surrounding issues of whiteness and visually represents the us/them mentality associated with race-related issues. The significance of something lacking, such as color, contributes to an unusual concept of cultural invisibility. Oddly enough, the most visible and pervasive culture in this country is difficult to see. Nakayama and Krizek (1995) discussed the impact this has on some white people's concept of their racial identity:

“There is another side to being culturally invisible. When I started realizing that other people were able to articulate and appreciate aspects of their cultural heritage, I began to feel uncomfortable about being transparent” (p. 292). The unusual aspect of this statement is that it is difficult to understand how a culture that is represented in all facets of media and government is “invisible” or “transparent.”

The issue of colorlessness coupled with the enormity of the white community in the United States presents a huge obstacle toward understanding. Helms (1992) asserted that “white people are raised to be confused about their own color” (p. 5). Much of this confusion comes from the idea that people who are white are people without color; thus, without culture. This erroneous leap in thinking underlies attempts to discuss race-related issues and further clouds an already fuzzy picture.

On a personal level, dissonance develops when white individuals are presented with evidence that they do, in fact, belong to a cultural group, despite common thinking. On a social level, ignoring group membership and implications of group components and benefits has created a chasm of miscommunication and mistreatment between those who are white and those who are not. Katz (1978) claimed that Whites are “unable to experience themselves and their culture as it is,” (pp. 12-13). This is because their culture is not seen as it is, complete with group membership, status, privilege, and social construction.

White as Normal

While being both pervasive and invisible, white culture is additionally difficult to discuss because, in the United States, it is considered normal. The irony is that the cultural group that has held numerical majority and power majority status in this country since its inception is the most difficult one to see. This is because it is the standard by which all others have been judged. It is the basis of comparison. In McIntosh's (1990) review of white privilege, she stated that, "Whites are taught to think of their lives as morally neutral, normative, and average, and also ideal" (pp. 31-32). And Fishkin's (1995) article addressed the "widely held assumptions that American culture is obviously white culture and that stating the obvious is superfluous, irritating, and perverse" (p. 430).

In light of this, discussions and education surrounding race relations have been one-sided and uni-directional. Implicit in this education has been the general expectation that non-white groups are responsible for educating themselves, in addition to educating Whites, about race. Whites, however, have been exempt from this responsibility. That is, Whites have not been expected to educate themselves about their group or teach others the concept of whiteness. The belief is that the white power structure is education enough about white culture and that further education about White majority status is unnecessary. And, while the kernel of truth in this is that white culture is omnipresent across the nation, the theory about being white is lacking in that it ignores the invisibility of that which is seen, felt, and experienced daily. The mundane becomes commonplace and is rendered unidentifiable. Just as a child cannot be expected to diagram a sentence, outlining its verb and noun, but can formulate, "See Dick

Run," that which is seemingly inherent and taught as normal becomes equally undiagrammable.

White as Good

In addition to white representing normalcy, it also signifies something much more powerful. It is not purely coincidental that, as DuBois (1920) stated, "everything great, good, efficient, fair, and honorable is 'white'" (p. 194); or, by comparison, that "everything mean, bad, blundering, cheating, and dishonorable is 'yellow'; a bad taste is 'brown'; and the devil is 'black'" (p. 194). While some might argue that color specification is as innocent as a child's box of crayons, the implications for coloring a world with very specific choices are not so innocent. There are many accounts of social teachings that illustrate this point, but none more eloquent than DuBois (1920) in *The Souls of White Folk*. In addition to the previous quote, the following summarizes the concept of white as good, complete with virtue and divinity:

> This assumption that of all the hues of God whiteness alone is inherently and obviously better than brownness or tan leads to curious acts; even the sweeter souls of the dominant world as they discourse with me on weather, weal, and woe are continually playing above their actual words an obligato of tune and tone, saying: "My poor, un-white thing! Weep not nor rage. I know, too well, that the curse of God lies heavy on you. Why? That is not for me to say, but be brave! Do your work in your lowly sphere, praying the good Lord that into heaven above, where all is love, you may one day, be born – white!" (p. 185)

The implications of this type of thinking go beyond unhealthy psychology. The social ills forwarded by the concept of racial supremacy invade every aspect of a society. This is a concept that Giroux (1997) explored in detail: "…educators need to understand how white institutions, ethnicity, and public life is structured through a nihilism that represents another type of moral disorder, impoverishment of the spirit, and decline of public life" (p. 237). The implications of feeding an entire society a set of lies that encourage thoughts of superiority and politics of supremacy are that individuals begin to act as though they believe them. DuBois (1920) addressed this issue by stating that a society must take responsibility for the messages being sent and their resulting factors:

> A true and worthy ideal frees and uplifts a people; a false ideal imprisons and lowers. Say to men, earnestly and repeatedly: 'Honesty is best, knowledge is power; do unto others as you would be done by.' Say this and act it and the nation must move toward it, if not to it. But say to a people: "The one virtue is to be white," and the people rush to the inevitable conclusion, "kill the 'nigger'!' (p. 190)

Whiteness as Property

Despite very real cultural components of the white community, the categorization of whiteness moves beyond simple classification. During the course of the development of this country, the concept of whiteness has taken many political forms. One of these is the manner in which whiteness has become a form of property. Harris (1993) stated that "whiteness – the right to white identity as embraced by the law – is property if by property one means all

of a person's legal rights" (p. 105). This concept is not easy to understand or explain. Harris (1993) explored it extensively and offers much on the subject: "Whiteness has functioned as self-identity in the domain of the intrinsic, personal, and psychological; as reputation in the interstices between internal and external identity; and, as a property in the extrinsic, public, and legal realm" (p. 104). Additionally, whiteness-as-property as an idea has been created and upheld politically in this country. This is explained by Bell (1988):

> The law has pretty much encouraged and upheld what Mr. Plessy argued in *Plessy v. Ferguson* was a property right in whiteness, and those at the top of the society have been benefited because the masses of whites are too occupied in keeping blacks down to note the large gap between their shaky status and that of whites on top. (p. 147)

These ideas on whiteness as property and the idea that whiteness is something in which this society has an investment further contribute to the confusion surrounding discussions about whiteness and the existence of a white culture.

Development of White Culture

Within discussions of race relations in the United States, whiteness represents more than a lack of pigmentation or ethnic grouping. It has changed and developed since its inception. White culture consists of representation from a variety of ethnic groups, but, as Lipsitz (1995) addressed, the differences between ethnic groups have become less significant in the United States and racial categorization has become more significant.

With respect to white racial categorization, the culture has developed from shared experiences, values, and learned attitudes. Lipsitz (1995) identified some of these white cultural practices:

> …wild west shows, minstrel shows, racist images in advertising, and Hollywood films institutionalized racism by uniting ethnically diverse European-American audiences into an imagined community - one called into being through inscribed appeals to the solidarity of white supremacy. (p. 370)

These shared experiences led to a sacrifice of ethnic group differences that Carter and Helms (1990) referred to: "…most White ethnic groups in America have also assimilated into what is considered to be mainstream American culture, and have consequently become more identified with the dominant White American middle-class culture than a particular ethnic group or culture" (p. 106). This is where part of the confusion and resentment for Whites develop, in a country that is busily dissecting the complexity of ethnicity and culture, those who have been taught that they are without feel abandoned.

The feeling that Whites do not have an ethnicity is real, but not true. Commonly, White Americans do not have close ties to their ethnic roots due to the number of generations between themselves and their ancestors who immigrated to the United States. A common story is that one's ancestors relinquished ethnic specification in order to fit into the quickly developing dominant white racial group. Ethnic group traditions were replaced by the conglomerate racial practices that were developing. And, even those individuals

who maintain ethnic differences share racial traditions with other Whites. Carter and Helms (1990) referred to this, stating that "…though most Whites may exhibit cultural differences if they belong to different ethnic groups, they all may be similar in some way because they belong to the same racial group" (p. 105). But, because many Whites feel a loss or void of ethnic identity, conversations surrounding culture are uncomfortable and difficult. Fortunately, research has begun to identify some of these shared white practices, devoid of historical guilt and racist thinking, in an effort to create an understanding amongst Whites about themselves.

## Aspects of White Culture

### Shared Characteristics

The first step in understanding white culture is to recognize its existence. This necessitates identifying shared commonalties. Katz (1985) developed a list of components of white culture. She identified fourteen categories: rugged individualism, competition, action orientation, communication, time, holidays, history, Protestant work ethic, progress and future orientation, emphasis on scientific method, status and power, family structure, aesthetics, and religion. Within each of these, she listed aspects that are existent in white U. S. American culture.

In much the same way, Helms (1992) included a list of "Some Aspects of White Culture" in her book, *A Race is a Nice Thing to Have.* Her list consisted of: rugged individualism, nuclear family, rationalism, time, European aesthetics, action orientation, universalism, competition, and history. Most of these are

similar to Katz' list and the repetition supports the argument that white culture exists and that white people share similar characteristics and practices.

Individualism versus Collectivism

An additional condition that is specific to white culture and helps to explain the lack of group identification is the inherent individualism taught in the white community. White children are taught that they are in control of their future and their success is solely based on their individual worth. This is similar to the lessons that McIntosh (1990) remembered: "I was taught to see myself as an individual whose moral state depended on her individual moral will" (p. 31). White children rarely receive teachings of community efforts and group similarities (McIntosh, 1990).

This characteristic of the white community becomes problematic when it is not acknowledged or understood. Particularly in discussions about race relations, conversations between Whites and people of color can become confusing and unproductive if the participants are not aware of the ideologies from which each speaks. Lipsitz (1995) identified a further complication involving this issue:

> …the stark contrast between black experiences and white opinions during the past two decades cannot be attributed solely to ignorance or intolerance on the part of the individuals but stems instead from the overdetermined inadequacy of the language of liberal individualism to describe collective experience (p. 381).

This becomes particularly problematic for individuals concerned with forwarding discussions of cultural pluralism and understanding. Additionally, the socialization of Whites not to identify with white culture creates individuals with limited racial identity understanding and development.

White Racial Bonding

Sleeter (1994) identified another shared aspect of white culture. She referred to an everyday occurrence and named it "White racial bonding" and described it as: "…interactions that have the purpose of affirming a common stance on race-related issues, legitimatizing particular interpretations of groups of color, and drawing conspiratorial we-they boundaries" (p. 34). She continued to explain that these interactions usually "take forms such as inserts into conversations, race-related 'aside' in conversations, strategic eye-contact, and jokes" (Sleeter, 1994. p. 34). This is another indication from research that Whites share particular patterns of behavior and communication that attribute to the concept of white culture. Nakayama & Krizek (1995) also identified this bonding in their literature: "…you look at each other, the Whites, and just know that we've got it better. You don't say anything but you know. It's in the look" (pp. 297-298). The significance of this research is that it illustrates another aspect of white culture that associates with privilege.

Race = Racist

A peculiar aspect of white culture that other racial groups do not possess is the concept of racism. While non-majority groups are affected by racism's presence outside of their groups, Whites must contend with it from within. In a

nation that has developed and allowed to run rampant the concept of political correctness, conversations involving race are often stilted and volatile. Due to the limited numbers of white individuals who recognize and understand white culture, often these conversations serve to produce guilt-ridden, confused Whites who do not understand why anyone would want to focus on racial differences. For many, discussing racial issues counters lessons that were learned from childhood, lessons that taught Whites that all Americans were equal and the same, lessons that taught Whites that all Americans should strive to be like Whites. From these lessons, many Whites developed a sense that racial issues should not be discussed. Roediger (1994) addressed this by saying that "Whites are assumed not to 'have race,' though they might be racist" (p. 435). This connection between being White and being racist deters many white people from claiming race or engaging in conversations about it.

Helms (1992) helped explain why Whites may be hesitant to express their feelings about being white: "…it may be difficult to discover what is positive about being White given that 'White' and 'racist' are often treated as synonyms…" (p. 14). The desire for people to detach themselves from that which is considered "bad" is easily understood. The connection between claiming group membership and accepting responsibility for that group's contributions to a system that many consider "bad" is more complex.

## White Racism

### What is White Racism?

The word "racism" is imbued with multiple meanings and connotations. One definition of racism is the following by Barndt (1991):

> Racism is clearly more than simple prejudice or bigotry…Racism is the power to enforce one's prejudices…Racial prejudice is transformed into racism when one racial group becomes so powerful and dominant that it is able to control another group and to enforce the controlling group's biases. (p. 29)

Hernton (1965) tackled the issue of racism with this definition:

> Racism is a man-made phenomenon. Nobody, not even the Southerner, is born racist. Racism may be defined as all of the learned behavior and learned emotions on the part of a group of people towards another group whose physical characteristics are dissimilar to the former group; behavior and emotions that compel one group to conceive of and to treat the other on the basis of its physical characteristics alone, as if it did not belong to the human race. (p. 178)

And Carmichael and Hamilton (1967) forwarded their definition of racism by saying that "by 'racism' we mean the predication of decisions and policies on considerations of race for the purpose of subordinating a racial group and maintaining control over that group. That has been the practice of this country…" (pp. 3-4).

Blauner (1972) explained the difference between a racist society and social stratification that occurs in most societies:

> Social privilege is not unique to racist societies. Like hierarchy and exploitation, it is a universal feature of all class societies, including those in which ethnic and racial divisions are insignificant. The values that

> people seek are never distributed equally, in the struggle for subsistence and social rewards there are always obstacles that impede some groups more than others. Thus systematic inequality and systematic injustice are built into the very nature of stratified societies. But when these inequities and injustices fall most heavily upon people who differ in color or national origin because race and ethnicity are primary principles upon which people are excluded or blocked in the pursuit of their goals, such a society is in addition racist. (p. 22)

These are only a few of the definitions and expressed intricacies of racism forwarded by researchers in the area. For the purposes of this paper, racism is defined as prejudice plus power. Those who are racist possess the power to act upon their racial prejudices in a personal, social, or institutional manner.

In this society, despite the fact that within the group of White Americans is ethnic, gender, and socio-economic diversity, the group with the greatest power in this country always has been, and still remains, White Americans. This fact, coupled with the aforementioned definitions of racism, leads to the conclusion that the only racial group in the United States that has the power to enforce its racial prejudices in an institutional manner is White Americans. This concept is unsettling for many people because, among other reasons, upon its acceptance, the newly coined phrase reverse racism becomes obsolete. Additional discomfort develops from the question that often follows this assertion: Does that mean that all white people are racist? Barndt (1991) answered this by saying, “Yes, every white person is part of the problem, but not necessarily with personal

racist intent" (p. 35). Frye (1983) took it further by saying that "as a white person one must never claim not to be racist, but only to be anti-racist" (p. 126). These ideas reflect the concept that white people are so embedded within personal and institutional white power that they are trapped in a system that demands their participation in the degradation of persons of color. Katz (1978) addressed the perpetuation of white racism by stating that "racism is perpetuated by Whites through their conscious and/or unconscious support of a culture and institutions that are founded on racist policies and practices" (p. 10). These theories assist in developing the notion that white racism is a system of oppression that harms those against whom it is perpetuated and those who, consciously or unconsciously, perpetuate it.

Racism is Harmful to Whites

Barndt (1991) viewed white racism not only as a white problem, but also a white prison. This concept is peculiar because it denotes that racism's effects harm the oppressed, as well as the oppressors:

> As white Americans, we are racist oppressors, even when we don't want to be. Against our own conscious wills, each of us participates in the corporate acts of a society that victimizes its minority people. Without conscious awareness of decision, we were made into persons whose thoughts, feelings, values, and actions are racist. (Barndt, 1991, p. 45)

This is not to suggest that the harm done to victimizers of racism can equate the harm done to the victims. In fact, no comparison can be made between the prisons that contain the oppressed and the oppressor. But, following this

analogy, Barndt (1991) explained that “the prison of white racism is maintained by keeping its inmates separate from and unaware of people of color and the world in which they live” (p. 53). This is an important concept because it illustrates the stratification of and separation between Whites and people of color in this country. Rarely do Whites know, firsthand, of the reality that being a person of color in the United States creates. Katz (1985) also noted that discussions of racism must begin to explore how it affects or benefits those who perpetuate it, namely, Whites. This was also iterated by Kivel (1996): “Our experiences are distorted, limited and less rich the more they are exclusively or dominately (sic) white" (Kivel, p37).

Whites’ View of Racism

While the idea that racism is rampant today and is solely developed and perpetuated by Whites may be obvious to those who have suffered knowingly at the hands of racism, it is a novel concept for the majority of the people in the United States. When discussing issues of race and racism, most Whites view the issue through different lenses than do people of color. Blauner (1991) noted that Whites tend to see racism as a thing of the past. He also identified comparative differences in regard to how Whites and Blacks view racism differently:

> Blacks and whites operate with different definitions of racism. The latter hold to older meanings, before the 1960s expanded the concept’s purview: systematic ideologies of white supremacy, feelings of prejudice, acts of discrimination. People of color are more attuned to newer

> definitions: institutional racism, the "atmospheric racism" of particular social milieux, and even what I have termed "racism as result," seeing the society or a particular segment of it as racist simply because nonwhites do not share equally in participation or power. (Blauner, 1994, p. 29)

Because racism, white racism specifically, is so intertwined in this country's make-up, those who perpetuate it are likely not to recognize its existence or effects.

Types of Racism

Part of the reason for confusion surrounding how Whites and non-Whites view racism is due to the fact that the concept becomes additionally complicated when discussed with respect to its different types. Jones (1972, 1981) identified three types of racism: individual racism, institutional racism, and cultural racism. Blauner (1995) referred to three types of racism as: institutional racism, racism as atmosphere, and racism as result. With Jones' types of racism, discussing the differences between the three types easily identifies the confusion. Carmichael and Hamilton (1967) introduced the concept of institutional racism to explain that racism can materialize as an intricate part of society that may not depend on prejudices to exist. They also distinguished between two different types of racism: "[Racism] takes two, closely related forms: Individual whites acting against individual blacks, and acts by the total white community against the black community' (Carmichael & Hamilton, 1967, p. 4). Jones defined it as "social policies, laws, and regulations whose purpose is to maintain the economic and social advantages of Whites over non-Whites" (Helms, 1990, p. 49). This

definition of racism is not always commonly accepted by white people. Whites tend to view racism only as personal prejudices against people of color and as something in which only extremely prejudiced people engage (Blauner, 1991, 1994, 1995; Dyer, 1988; Katz, 1978; Lipsitz, 1995). In fact, Njeri (1989) claimed that "most White Americans prefer to think of racists as a 'kind of fringe element in the society' (p. E6)." Because Whites tend to view racism in terms of its individual definition and people of color tend to view it in terms of its institutional definition, discussions surrounding the issue are complicated and confusing. Additionally, the tendency of White Americans to think that racism does not exist on institutional or cultural levels enables them to separate themselves from that which they perpetuate on a daily basis.

Invisibility of White Racism

Much like the invisibility of white culture, white racism becomes something that is both powerful for and invisible to those who enact it. This concept of invisibility develops from a lack of acceptance of responsibility that Katz (1978) explained: "White people do not see themselves as White. This is a way of denying responsibility for perpetuating the racist system and being part of the problem" (p. 13). The apparent invisibility of racism is closely linked to the preponderance of white individuals in the United States who do not identify themselves as being white or belonging to a group of people who happen to be the power dominants in the United States. Not only does lack of identification create the perception of invisibility, but because the concept of white racism is often consciously or unconsciously ignored, Dyer (1988) argued that "White

power secures its dominance by seeming not to be anything in particular" (p. 44). But, white racism is, in fact, something particular and peculiar, because its existence does not rely on recognition, but only inherent privilege.

## White Privilege

### What is White Privilege?

The concept of white privilege is closely linked to white racism. There is a correlation between white racism and white privilege that Helms (1992) identified: "White privilege is a benefit of being White and is the foundation of racism" (p. 12). And, while racism is dependent upon privilege, both provide benefits for the perpetuator while harming both the oppressed and the oppressor. Various theorists have reviewed this concept and, while there are many different ways of addressing privilege, few argue about its existence. But, a leading question into this assertion is: Who becomes privileged? White (1994) concluded that "the 'privileged' become those who possess the particular characteristic that is used to differentiate groups" (p. 18). In the United States, the particular characteristic used to differentiate groups is racial categorization. Those who possess the appropriate aspect of that particular characteristic are white.

White privilege provides many benefits and they all contributed to Blauner's (1995) assertion that ''White skin privileges' give us an objective interest, a real stake in the continuance of the present system" (p. 135). This interest materializes in three different ways, material, psychological, and institutional privilege.

Material Privilege

The first type of privilege is often the easiest of the three to identify. Material privilege includes any privileges that are allotted to Whites in the United States that offer economic, educational, legislative, or any other tangible benefit. The existence of this type of privilege began when the nation was being developed. Lipsitz (1995) referred to material privilege as a "possessive investment in whiteness for European Americans" that has existed "from colonial times to the present" (p. 371).

Due to the emphasis on monetary success in this nation, material privilege creates a powerful tool for creating an atmosphere that insures its continuance. When a group of people is socialized to maintain a level of material comfort, the threat, or actuality, of its disintegration becomes feared. Sanchez (1995) referred to this aspect of privilege and the power it wields: "Whites who are faced with economic failures or insecurity in spite of their racial privilege become a sure breeding ground for the scapegoating of racial others" (p. 391). Taylor (1995) continued this concept by stating that "they [Whites] will not abandon the existing system until that system threatens their own material well-being" (p. 404). This comfort level with material privilege is exemplified in most debates concerning affirmative action and minority-based aide. Thompson (1996) confessed his role in this ongoing process as a privilege recipient. His story, though not uncommon, is rarely spoken of and illustrates one of the ways in which this privilege materializes. Thompson was admitted to a prestigious university based on his legacy as an offspring of an alumnus. This troubled him to write an essay pointing to the discrepancy within most arguments about racial preference: "The

most important question, however, is why people all over the country are harping about ending racial affirmative action while ignoring my dubious legacy privilege" (p. 101). And though this type of activity is commonplace in this country, it is not the only way in which Whites benefit from their majority position.

Psychological Privilege

The concept of psychological privilege materializes in a variety of ways. One of these is the comfort of knowing, or being taught, that white individuals belong to a group of people who are superior to those who do not look like them. This may seem to be an absurd assertion to most, but as Mazie, Palmer, Pimentel, Rogers, Ruderfer, & Sokolowski (1993) found, "the number of Americans who assert white superiority has declined during the past decades," yet the belief that "people with light skin tones and European ancestry hold a shared racial identity exclusive of, and superior to, the racial identities of darker-skinned peoples…exist[s], despite our good intentions, just below our own consciousness" (p. 282). This belief allows Whites the privilege of maintaining a superior self-concept.

This comfort becomes a security, much like material privilege allows for material security, psychological privilege provides a sense of psychological security. Mazie, et al. later described this sense of security and their position concerning its derivation: "…whites learn from pervasive cultural messages and social arrangements that they are innately intelligent and gifted, and can expect upward social mobility and dominance over other less favored groups" (p. 285).

The conclusion is that Whites experience and benefit from this privilege, and perpetuate it through cultural transactions and social teachings.

A final way in which psychological privilege emerges is through choice. Whites are in a peculiar position of deriving benefits from their position, yet, as powerful as those benefits may be; they are able to remain unacknowledged. Frye (1983) wrote about her experience as a white woman involved in the Women's Movement. In relation to her interactions with feminist women of color, she asserted that "it is an aspect of race privilege to have a choice - a choice between the options of hearing and not hearing" (Frye, 1983, p. 111). In this situation, she is referring to the option to listen or not to listen when people of color claim that oppression exists and white privilege perpetuates it. Terry (1981) also explored this aspect of white privilege: "To be white in America is not to have to think about it. Except for hard-core racial supremacists, the meaning of being White is having the choice of attending to or ignoring one's own Whiteness" (p. 120). For many, this option to hear/not to hear, to attend to/to ignore, creates a sense of invisibility with regard to white privilege.

Institutional Privilege

Most privileges, both material and psychological, are also tied up in a third category of privilege. Institutional privilege derives from institutional racism and affords Whites with benefits while prohibiting others from social progress. Blauner (1972) explained it in the following way:

> White Americans enjoy special privilege in all areas of existence where racial minorities are systemically excluded of disadvantaged: housing and

> neighborhoods, education, income, and lifestyle. Privilege is a relative matter, of course, but in racial and colonial systems it cannot be avoided, even by those who consciously reject the society and its privileges! (p. 132)

This aspect of privilege makes it difficult to counter, or even discuss. With systemic racism creating systemic privilege, the issues are difficult to dissect from the inherent socialization that happens in this country, rendering them virtually invisible.

Invisibility

From research done on college campuses concerning race relations and racial identity comes the concept that white privilege is invisible to most white students. Lipsitz (1995) referred to this phenomenon by stating that white students "seem to have no knowledge of the disciplined, systematic, and collective group activity that has structured white identities in American history" (pp. 382-383). This can be extrapolated to refer to the white population as a whole. Much of this can be attributed to the cultural and social teachings that happen with regard to whiteness in this country. In reference to the emphasis placed on skin color in the United States, this is most clearly illustrated in Dyer's (1988) contrast of Black and White:

> In the realm of categories, black is always marked as a colour (as the term "coloured" egregiously acknowledges), and is always particularizing; whereas white is not anything really, not an identity, not a particularizing

> quality, because it is everything - white is not colour because it is all colours. (p. 293)

This can be further understood by applying Lipsitz' (1995) theory that white privilege, or what he referred to as possessive investment in whiteness, "fuels a discourse that demonizes people of color for being victimized by these changes, while hiding the privileges of whiteness by attributing them to family values, fatherhood, and foresight - rather than favoritism" (p. 379). These assertions support Blauner's (1994) theory that white privilege (and other forms of "racial phenomenon") is "difficult if not impossible for a member of the oppressing group to grasp empirically and formulate conceptually" (p. 30).

That which is taught as normal and seen daily is difficult to identify and even more difficult to understand. It requires the ability to step away from one's world and view it from the outside. The frightening contrast of that which is believed and that which is real keeps the few who venture to peek from looking long enough to comprehend what they are seeing.

Despite the fact that it is hard to see, white privilege acts in much the same way as White racism in its effects on the oppressors. These recently explored costs of privilege have led many theorists to wonder why the institution has been upheld for so long, when the long term costs outweigh the short-term benefits.

Examples of Privilege

The most pragmatic offering of research in the area of white privilege is McIntosh's (1990) list of twenty-six privileges she identified that exist in her life.

Her list has been used by many since and illustrates the seemingly ordinary nature of white privilege:

> I can, if I wish, arrange to be in the company of people of my race most of the time.
>
> I can swear, or dress in second-hand clothes, or not answer letters without having people attribute these choices to the bad morals, the poverty, or the illiteracy of my race.
>
> I can easily buy posters, postcards, picture books, greeting cards, dolls, toys, and children's magazines featuring people of my race.
>
> I can take a job with an affirmative action employer without having coworkers on the job suspect that I got it because of my race.
>
> I can choose blemish cover or bandages in "flesh" color that more or less match my skin. (McIntosh, 1990, pp. 34-35)

These are only a few of her examples, but they serve to illustrate the "normal" nature of white privileges. These are the benefits for which some theorists are beginning to claim Whites have had, and continue, to pay a price.

Costs of White Privilege to Whites

There are two different ways in which white people pay for white privilege. The first is a cost they share with those they oppress. It can only be recognized with respect to the reward of living in a culturally plural society and the resulting cost of living in one that is not. Blauner (1995) stated that "it is hard to argue that these white privileges can compare in importance with all the pain and loss everyone suffers from living in a society so divided, so lacking in real community,

and so rent with underlying hatreds" (p. 135). This cost can develop in interpersonal relationships, business relationships, and personal well-being. While this may be a cost that everyone pays, few choose to recognize its significance.

The second cost of white privilege is specific only to Whites. Because it is paid in full by Whites alone, recognition of this cost may be what finally catalyzes the efforts to end white privilege. Njeri (1989) described a woman, Lillian Rose, who holds workshops across the country for Whites dealing with issues of white culture and white identity. Her premise is that Whites must first recognize their own culture and then attempt to understand the role that it has played in shaping their lives and the lives of those around them. She asserts that there is a price that "whites pay for being the dominant group in a society that has demanded cultural homogeneity and denigrated differences. They lose fundamental aspects of their own identity. This loss…has important psychological implications" (Njeri, 1989, pp. E1-E6). These implications materialize in a confusion of culture and a lack of cultural understanding amongst Whites.

## Identity Development

The field that can be credited with the development of much of the research about racial identity development is counseling psychology. White racial identity is based on the progress made with regard to racial/ethnic minority identity development. The two most popular white racial identity models are those developed by Helms (1984, 1990, 1992, 1995) and Rowe, Bennett, and

Atkinson (1994). Both share similar ideas about various stages, or statuses, of white identity, but each approaches the issue from different perspectives.

Models

The Helms' model was one of the first white racial identity models developed. Helms' work was originally based on Cross' (1971) four-stage model of nigrescence and her white identity theories developed from her own Black model of development. Her model was based on several premises:

> In order to develop a healthy White identity, defined in part as a nonracist identity, virtually every White person in the United States must overcome one or more…aspect of racism. (Helms, 1990, p. 49)
>
> …he or she must accept his or her own Whiteness, the cultural implications of being White, and define a view of Self as a racial being that does not depend on the perceived superiority of one racial group over another. (Helms, 1990, p. 49)
>
> …the evolution of a positive White racial identity consists of two processes, the abandonment of racism and the development of a non-racist White identity. (Helms, 1990, p. 49)
>
> Maturation is triggered by a combination of cognitive-affective complexity within the individual and race-related environmental stimuli. (Helms, 1995, p. 184)
>
> …the general developmental issue for Whites is abandonment of entitlement. (Helms, 1994, p. 184)

> …healthy identity development for a White person involves the capacity to recognize and abandon the normative strategies of White people for coping with race. (Helms, 1994, p. 188)

Her original model consists of five stages:

1. Contact - obliviousness to racial/cultural issues.
2. Disintegration - awareness of the social implications of race on a personal level.
3. Reintegration - idealization of everything perceived to be White and denigration of everything thought to be Black.
4. Pseudo-Independence - internalization of Whiteness and capacity to recognize personal responsibility to ameliorate the consequences of racism.
5. Autonomy - bicultural or racially transcendent world view. (Helms, 1990, p. 68)

Then, in 1995, she published an updated version. With her latest model, Helms changes the categories of developmental processes from stages to statuses. She explains that the term stages was inadequate for the following reasons:

> (a) An individual may exhibit attitudes, behaviors, and emotions reflective of more than one stage (Helms, 1989; Parham & Helms, 1981); (b) to many researchers, stage seems to imply a static place or condition that the person “reaches” rather than the dynamic interplay between cognitive and emotional processes that racial identity models purport to address;

> and (c) neither theory nor measurement supports the notion of the various stages as mutually exclusive or “pure” constructs. (Helms, 1989, 1990c) (Helms, 1995, p. 183)

While these changes appear to be grammatical in nature, the explanation provided with the updated version serves to illustrate a more dynamic model than the previous one.

Much like the updated Helms model, Rowe, Bennett, and Atkinson (1994) introduced their version of a white identity development model. Whereas Helms model is a white racial identity model, the Rowe, Bennett, and Atkinson version is a white racial consciousness model. Their work was based on Phinney’s (1989) stages of ethnic identity and Marcia’s (1980) ego identity statuses. The model is divided into two different types of statuses and is presented in a complex circular diagram. The inner circle contains the three types of unachieved statuses:

> Avoidant type. Attitudes indicative of avoidance include a lack of consideration of one’s own White identity as well as an avoidance of concern for racial/ethnic minority issues.
>
> Dependent type. Although persons characterized by the dependent type appear to have committed to some set of attitudes regarding White racial consciousness, they have not personally considered alternative perspectives.
>
> Dissonant type. Persons whose attitudes resemble the dissonant type are clearly uncertain about their sense of White racial consciousness and racial/ethnic minority issues. (Rowe, Bennett, & Atkinson, 1994, p. 136)

The significance of the inner circle of unachieved statuses is that they are "attitudes for which either exploration or commitment, or both, are lacking…" (Rowe, Bennett, & Atkinson, 1994, p. 136).

The accompanying outer circle of the model contains four achieved status types. An achieved status "requires some exploration or consideration of racial concerns and a concomitant commitment to some beliefs" (Rowe, Bennett, & Atkinson, 1994, p. 136). The achieved status types are:

> Dominative type. Persons who exemplify dominative White racial attitudes are characterized by a strong ethnocentric perspective, which justifies the dominance of racial/ethnic minority peoples by the majority culture.
>
> Conflictive type. Persons who hold attitudes characteristic of the conflictive type of White racial consciousness are opposed to obvious, clearly discriminatory practices, yet are usually opposed to any program or procedure that has been designed to reduce or eliminate discrimination.
>
> Reactive type. Persons who embody reactive White racial attitudes are aware or racial/ethnic discrimination as a significant feature in American society and are reacting to this acknowledgement.
>
> Integrative type. Persons who maintain integrative White racial attitudes display a variety of behaviors derived from a pragmatic view of racial/ethnic minority issues. (Rowe, Bennett, & Atkinson, 1994, p. 141)

The model is designed to illustrate clearly the dynamic quality of identity development. The inner circle of unachieved statuses is divided into a center, consisting of the avoidant and dependent types, and an outer ring, consisting of

the dissonant type. The inner two types are separated with a single line, halving the center circle. The middle ring is bordered on both sides with a single circular line. The outer ring consists of the four achieved statuses separated from each other with double lines. The significance of the lines is that an individual can move through any single line, but cannot travel through double lines. In order for a person to move from a dominative status to a conflictive status, she/he must move through dissonance. This creative construction aided a theory similar to Helms' idea that "maturation is triggered by a combination of cognitive-affective complexity within the individual and race-related environmental stimuli" (Helms, 1995, p. 184). Rowe, Bennett, and Atkinson wrote that they "believe that racial attitudes change following, and as a result of, experiences that cause dissonance in the person's cognitive structures or schemas" (Rowe, Bennett, & Atkinson, 1994, p. 135).

Despite the apparent similarities of the two models, their respective theorists disagreed on the concept of white racial identity/consciousness models. Both claimed that, prior to their own, no theory or model existed to explain how Whites feel about themselves and their racial group (Helms, 1984; Rowe, Bennett, and Atkinson, 1994), but, rather, existing theories explained only how Whites feel about ethnic/racial minority groups. Rowe et al. (1994) went so far as to assert that the Helms model contained "little about a White identity" (p. 131). But, except for the formation of the models themselves, the two theories are very similar and their stages/statuses/types are almost identical in nature. Rowe et al. (1994) claimed that they "see no evidence that the process of changing attitudes

is developmental" (p. 134), yet, as mentioned earlier, "…attitudes change…as a result of…experience" (p. 135). There are limitations to both models.

This is not to discredit either model, nor to imply that they are not helpful in understanding processes that white individuals' experience through the development of an identity. In fact, both theories offer very useful information with regard to how Whites feel about ethnic/racial minority groups and how Whites feel about their own racial group. Though the authors assert that the models that refer to how Whites feel about ethnic/racial minority groups lack information about how Whites feel about Whites, these two entities are so intertwined that they cannot be separated. A white person, in the United States, cannot develop an ideology about either ethnic/racial minorities or Whites, without consulting her/his feelings on the other. Because this country thrives off of a comparison of opposites, Whites are "only white when somebody [isn't]" (Nakayama and Krizek, 1995, pp. 299-300). Additionally, both theories assert that the process is dynamic, but to conclude that this means that the process is not developmental is erroneous. One must develop through various stages, but not necessarily in a particular order or with an intended final goal.

The aforementioned models are useful in developing theoretical frameworks with which to discuss the experience of developing a white identity. The models themselves do not serve to illustrate an intended goal. They are meant only to diagram stages or statuses that white individuals may experience in regard to their racial identity, the authors even state that the models are not intended to claim superiority of one stage or status over another. In order to fully

understand whiteness and The concept of being a white ally incorporates the theories behind identity models, but asserts its own claim that, for the purposes of promoting cultural pluralism, white individuals should strive to reach the autonomy status of the Helms' model and the integrative type of the Rowe, Bennett, and Atkinson model. A person in either the autonomy status of the Helms' model or the integrative type of the Rowe, Bennett, and Atkinson model will exhibit a solid sense of her/his own racial identity and an appreciation of that of others. This creates a sense of understanding and comfort with race issues that is essential for progressing into discussions of critical theory and catalyzing change.

## Conclusion

This compilation of information is meant to serve as an indicator of the complexity that issues of whiteness create. Each of the four topics is distinct and combined they help create a powerful system of institutional racism and violence toward people of color in the United States. It is only through dissection of every aspect of race that racism can be fully addressed. As discussions of whiteness continue, it is imperative that the issue of power not be ignored. While Whites share a culture, it is different from other racial groups and needs to be understood for those differences. This places Whites in the peculiar position of needing to understand their own culture and then discovering that their existence perpetuates a system of oppression. It is a distasteful task, but without its completion, the picture is only partially illustrated and the complexity of racism cannot be fully understood.

# Chapter Three – Being Critical, Teaching Critically

Once the complexity of whiteness is understood, the next hurdle is teaching about it in an effort to catalyze change. The issues surrounding race are as equally complex to teach, as they are to understand. Due to the volatile nature that discussions of race tend to create, any instructor tackling the topic must be well educated prior to entering the classroom. If handled incorrectly, discussions of race can create everything from alienation to violence. Many theorists and researchers have written about this and offer their guidance for teachers who want to educate students responsibly. The methods they offer fall under the category of critical thinking. This chapter is being presented as the "next step" in how to educate all students interrogating white ideology. Chapters two and three serve as the theoretical foundation for chapter four which will provide examples of my own experiences learning and teaching about race.

One aspect of critical thinking is the process of examining current systems of oppression, including their origin and genesis. While the task of dissecting even this young country's past in an effort to explain the present is too large an undertaking, many authors have shed light on the peculiarity of whiteness and the development of its perceived power. It is important to be exposed to literature that highlights aspects of history not commonly shared in the classroom. W.E.B. DuBois is one author who uses powerful words to expose the foundation upon which our current system of oppression rests.

DuBois (1920) traced the European roots of the dominant white ideology represented in the United States. The following excerpts illustrate the process of

development leading to the current system of racial oppression. This perspective is essential to understanding the current stratification between Whites and non-Whites in this country. While DuBois wrote in the 1920s, the current system is reflective of the conditions he observed. This first quote focuses on the miseducation that has forwarded a biased perspective of whiteness:

> Europe has never produced and never will in our day bring forth a single human soul who cannot be matched and over-matched in every line of human endeavor by Asia and Africa…If we could scan the calendar of thousands of lesser men, in like comparison, the result would be the same; but we cannot do this because of the deliberately educated ignorance of white schools by which they remember Napoleon and forget Sonni Ali. (DuBois, 1920, pp. 190-191)

Following, DuBois discussed the manner with which the concept of color has come to represent so much more than various skin tones:

> The European world is using black and brown men for all uses which men know…Ever have men striven to conceive of their victims as different from the victors…It has been left, however, to Europe and to modern days to discover the eternal world-wide mark of meanness, - color! (DuBois, 1920, p. 193)

Lastly, DuBois offered a perspective on the role that America has chosen to take with regard to its position in the world. While this may seem an obvious complaint to anyone familiar with critical thinking, it is not a perspective

addressed in our schools or in our media. This message that DuBois wrote in the 1920s is one that is equally valuable today:

> It is curious to see America, the United States, looking on herself, first, as a sort of natural peace-maker, then as a moral protagonist in this terrible time. No nation is less fitted for this role…America has taken her place as an awful example of its pitfalls and failures, so far as black and brown and yellow peoples are concerned…Absolutely without excuse she established a caste system, rushed into preparation for war, and conquered tropical colonies. She stands today shoulder to shoulder with Europe in Europe's worst sin against civilization. She aspires to sit among the great nations who arbitrate the fate of "lesser breeds without the law" and she is at times heartily ashamed even of the large number of 'new' white people whom her democracy has admitted to place and power. Against this surging forward of Irish and German, of Russian Jews, Slav and 'dago' her social bars have not availed, but against Negro she can and does take her unflinching and immovable stand, backed by this new public policy of Europe. She trains her immigrants to this despising of 'niggers' from the day of their landing, and they carry and send the news back to the submerged classes in the fatherlands (DuBois, 1920, pp. 198-199).

I present this information to offer the perspective of one author of color on the issue of whiteness and its historical significance. While many others have written on the subject, this offers a glimpse of alternative perspectives available that counter much of what we learn and teach in our schools.

## Theories

As has become the case with education and diversity, students are being taught that eating tamales and wearing kimonos while reciting “I Have a Dream” constitutes learning about culture. This is insufficient. However, because the educational sphere has only recently allowed access to discussions regarding race, researchers and theorists must somehow marry what we know and what we think we need to know together with ways to accomplish the task. In order to eradicate the oppressive aspects of our society that DuBois addressed, we must begin by altering how and about what we educate. Giroux (1992) used the term “radical education” which he defined as the following: “Radical education doesn’t refer to a discipline or a body of knowledge. It suggests a particular kind of practice and a particular posture of questioning received institutions and received assumptions…it has a public mission of making society more democratic” (p. 10). He continued by stating that radical is synonymous with critical and that the two basic assumptions on which radical education operates are that “there is a need for a language of critique, a questioning of presuppositions” and that it presents “a language of possibility” (Giroux, 1992, p. 10). He described radical educators by saying that:

> Radical educators…criticize and indeed reject the notion that the primary purpose of public education is economic efficiency…Radical educators believe that the relationship between social forms and social capacities is such that human capacities get educated to the point of calling into question the forms themselves. What the dominant educational

> philosophies want is to educate people to adapt to those social forms rather than critically interrogate them. (Giroux, 1992, p. 10-11)

Giroux continued in this book by questioning issues of language and power and analyzing the relationship between what schools say they are doing and what they actually are doing.

Following this, Giroux (1997) introduced the concept of insurgent multiculturalism. In doing so, he critiqued popular definitions of multiculturalism:

> It is important to acknowledge that in its conservative and liberal forms multiculturalism has placed the related problems of white racism, social justice, and power off limits, especially as these might be addressed as part of a broader set of political and pedagogical concerns. (Giroux, 1997, p. 235)

This is an important distinction between the form of multiculturalism that he deemed necessary in the struggle to critically educate and the one that he claimed exists now. The one Giroux offered as a goal for challenging discussions involving race is one that is not "limited to a fascination with the construction of identities, communicative competencies, and the celebration of tolerance" (Giroux, 1997, p. 235). Education must take steps to move into an area of discussion that tackles issues of power and oppression. Giroux's theories call for educators to be mindful of past methods and their shortcoming. They then must develop a curriculum and method of instruction that counter previous teachings and tackle issues of race directly. This is all done with the understanding that while it "will not in and of itself change the nature of existing

society, it will set the foundation for producing generations of students who might" (Giroux, 1997, p. 29).

Many of Giroux's theories developed from a man who helped set the foundation for critical thinking. Freire (1997) wrote about oppression and the relationship between oppressor and oppressed. His theories arose from his work in Latin America and the theories he developed working with oppressed people. Critical theorists and educators have used these theories because they offer a perspective on the intricacies of oppression. Freire stated that while a person may come to understand that she is an oppressor, this "does not necessarily lead to solidarity with the oppressed…true solidarity with the oppressed means fighting at their side to transform the objective reality which has made them these "beings for another" (Freire, 1997, p. 31). He continued by writing that "pedagogy which begins with the egoistic interests of the oppressors (an egoism cloaked in the false generosity of paternalism) and makes of the oppressed objects of its humanitarianism, itself maintains and embodies oppression" (p. 36). These two ideas are essential for educators. Only by thoroughly understanding issues of racial oppression and then committing to critically dissecting them can educators teach in an effort to catalyze change.

It is also important for teachers to acknowledge their positions of power. Regardless of race, instructors are given a level of authority based purely on position. White instructors are doubly awarded and must pay particular attention to issues of egoism and paternalism. This was also addressed by Freire when he wrote about the nature of humanism: "A real humanist can be identified more

by his trust in the people, which engages him in their struggle, than by a thousand actions in their favor without that trust" (Freire, 1997, p. 42). This point is problematic for educators because genuine caring and trust cannot be created. At best they can be induced by the right word at the right moment, but there exists no science for creating genuine solidarity. The challenge for educators is to create those moments and to be prepared for them when they occur.

While Giroux questioned the use of the term multicultural education, Pai and Adler (1997) modified it. They began with Bennett's (1995) definition:

> This view of multicultural education implies the centrality of our ability to think critically and reflectively about our own ways and those of others in selecting and developing the most appropriate means of achieving our many varied purposes. (quoted in Pai and Adler, 1997, p. 120)

And they then continued by offering "The Aims of Multicultural Education":

> The cultivation of an attitude of respect for and appreciation of the worth of cultural diversity.
>
> The promotion of the belief in the intrinsic worth of each person and an abiding interest in the well-being of the larger society.
>
> The development of multicultural competencies to function effectively in culturally varied settings.
>
> The facilitation of educational equity for all regardless of ethnicity, race, gender, age, or other exceptionalities. (Pai and Adler, 1997, p. 121-122)

These aspects of multicultural education serve as a practical theory of education and stray from the process of critiquing current methods and historical

ramifications. Used as a foundation for developing curriculum based on critical theory, these aims can help an educator remain focused and decrease the chance of alienating students.

## Practice

Critical theories are only half of the equation. The second piece is application. Wink (2000) defined critical pedagogy as a process of naming, reflecting critically, and acting (p. 27). One of the ways an educator can practice critical pedagogy is through problem posing. Wink (2000) defined problem posing and stated that it is central in critical pedagogy:

> Problem posing brings interactive participation and critical inquiry into the existing curriculum and expands it to reflect the curriculum of the students' lives. The learning is not just grounded in the prepared syllabus, the established, prescribed curriculum. Problem posing opens the door to ask questions and seek answers, not only of the visible curriculum, but also of the hidden curriculum, which is why many are uncomfortable with it. Problem posing causes people to ask questions many do not want to hear (p. 60).

She followed this definition by insuring that problem posing is "nothing more than conceptualizing critically and articulating clearly (Wink, 2000, p. 135). This seems a simple enough task, but the mere act of questioning (method, choice of curriculum, testing procedures, hidden curriculum, etc.) is the only way to identify the socialization practices and reinforcement of the status quo that our schools are designed to perpetuate.

The literature presented above and the discussions that now take place within the field of education offer an alternative perspective to the way we have always viewed schooling. While the political arena and business-driven governance of our country encourage a philosophy of education that socializes students to the status quo, the act of being critical allows us to see that this is not merely an innocent continuance of national values. These authors and many others have begun to present methods of teaching and curriculum philosophies that counter conventional methods.

The purpose of this paper is to develop the necessary steps to teach white students about issues of race, with the hope that they will develop a socially responsible compassion toward eradicating oppressive systems. In order to do this, an instructor must first understand the complex nature of racial identity development, and then be able to teach it. Following this, after a developed sense of racial identity has been established, that same instructor must somehow find a way to push the envelope. While, as Freire tells us, one may fully understand issues related to oppression, there is no guarantee that she will not still persist in perpetuating them. Though the methods of instruction discussed in this section are not specific to white students, their message must be employed to teach white students about race. There must exist a degree of desire to question the way things have always been done if this topic is going to be tackled in any successful form. As a side note, no instructor should attempt to discuss these issues with students, or anyone for that matter, unless he is fully aware of the deeply ingrained nature of our system of schooling in each student, each

school, and each community. In attempting to teach issues of race to white students, there can develop resistance in many forms to the information being presented. An instructor is much better equipped to deal with said resistance if she is well versed in both aspects of whiteness and critical theory.

# Chapter Four – On Being White

My own experiences, as a student and teacher/trainer of race related issues, have afforded me a unique perspective on the subject. I did not begin this journey with the intention of using what I learned for anything more than personal introspection. As I continued to read theories that illustrated the mechanics behind many of the experiences I was having, I began to pay closer attention. It was not my intention to gather information as a researcher, yet I discovered, as the years progressed, that I had done just that. As a participant in my own life and experiences, as well as those of others, students, friends, people I trained, etc., I developed a large collection of information related to issues of whiteness. While the information may not be statistically significant, the repetition of particular thoughts, comments, and behaviors supports the argument that there exist shared experiences of white people tackling issues of race.

## Observing Participant

The legitimization of participatory research has begun to gain attention in the social science arenas. This method of data gathering originally required the observer to remain as unobtrusive as possible. Cole (1991) commented on the difficulty this presents: "I would guess that more than one participant observer, not to speak of those using more conventional research methods, has had his or her observations influenced, often unknowingly, by his or her very presence in social situations" (p. 159). As one alternative to traditional research methods, Whyte (1991) used the term "Participatory Action Research (PAR)" to represent a

more participant-oriented method for researchers who are concerned with social progress and who want to “devise strategies in which research and action are closely linked” (p. 8). Lastly, Anderson (2000) explored the role of the participant observer and defined it by stating that “in this role the researcher engages in the regular activities of the community to a degree, then periodically withdraws from the setting to check perceptions, record field notes and analyze data” (p. 128).

The following information has developed from the perspective of an observing participant. While closely related to the aforementioned definition of the participant observer, my role placed an emphasis on the participation, rather than the observation. This further limits the generalizability of the data, but does not prevent it from maintaining worth as a starting point in understanding the process of at least one person’s journey of racial discovery.

## The Undergraduate Years

The issue of race is one that I have spent the last six years exploring. To dissect only the most important pieces of that adventure is a difficult task. The following provides a brief account of the history that began my journey toward racial understanding.

My sophomore year of college began the educational portion of my journey toward racial awareness. Two events happened that year that changed my life. The first was that one of my friends begged me to join her on a three-day multicultural retreat sponsored by Student Life. I had no interest in the subject and told her so. The begging continued and was intensified by another person I knew who told me he would be facilitating at the same retreat. He had attended

the prior year as a participant and encouraged me to go. I folded under the pressure and signed up. I received a package of information that requested I bring something with me that represented my culture. For two weeks I walked around asking people what represented my culture. I had always been taught that I was me, nothing more, nothing less, just me. I liked me, but I did not see anything significant about my life that would constitute any sort of culture. The odd thing was that I was very familiar with the concept of culture. I had spent the previous summer living in a community in Tijuana, Mexico that fully embodied the essence of los pobres de México, and the experience afforded me both an ability to speak Spanish without sounding like la gringa that I was and an understanding of the impact my family and my environment had had on my opportunities. What it did not teach me was a concept of me, as a racial being. I could have brought artifacts of the Navajo culture where I had spent previous summers or the Mexican culture I adopted during the months prior, but I had nothing that I would have been content presenting as a representation of myself. I was much too diverse an individual to be categorized as a member of a single culture. In the end, I chose to bring a quote by Montaigne that I had stumbled upon the day before I left: "I have gathered a posy of other men's flowers and only the thread that binds them is my own." That was me, that was my culture, as I knew it. I was only the embodiment of the numerous influences in my life and I represented nothing more than my own twist on the world's cultural riches.

The second event that changed my life occurred when that same friend told me about a class she was planning to take and showed me the required

readings. The course was Intercultural Communication, and one of the books was Gordon Allport's (1979) The Nature of Prejudice. I started reading it and got hooked. I enrolled in the class with her and enjoyed it so well that I decided to pursue a communication degree with an emphasis in intercultural studies.

These two events combined to present me with information I had never encountered before. At the retreat, I heard people say things about Whites and privilege that I had never heard. I had no idea that there were people who looked at me and first saw me as white. And I had never dreamt that particular categorization held any sort of significance. I was also shocked at the anger from years of pent-up frustration that could be articulated in an environment where it was safe to do so. Basically, until that moment I had no idea I was white. Even after that moment it took a long time for me to say, "I am White" and not be ashamed or feel a need to qualify the statement. This comfort and understanding were the result of numerous training sessions, countless books and articles, many courses, hundreds of friends and strangers, and a couple patient mentors. After my initial exposure, I became a mad woman, hungry for any piece of information and any person willing to talk to me honestly. It was not easy to find people of color who were willing to say to my face what they only felt comfortable saying when no one with my face was around. I think only after it became obvious that I was a glutton for punishment (or that I had a sincere interest in understanding) did they take me seriously.

During this process, I kept occasional journals and continued writing poetry that had begun when I was young. The topics of my journal entries and

my poems all came to center around the same issues. The following is an excerpt from a journal I kept for one of my intercultural communication courses:

> This is abstractly related to Cornel West's presence on campus the other day. I never made it to see him, but I understand that it was an incredible experience for those who managed to get there early enough for seats. Because I didn't make it to see him, I was speaking to a friend of mine about his reaction to the presentation.
>
> My friend is a 24 year-old African-American male. Our conversation took place on the phone. Our relationship is unique in that we both attended the Leadership 2000 conference in January – this is a multi-cultural developmental experience. So, my friend and I began discussing the lecture and his feelings about it. His main point was that West had managed to articulate many opinions and emotions that mirrored his own.
>
> I sat, holding a telephone receiver for at least 25 minutes without saying anything while he released a myriad of outrages, hardships, hopelessnesses (sic), depressions, persecutions, and surrenders. I tried to tell him that I would do most anything to be able to understand the society from his perspective – to be able to experience it. He asked me why – why would I want to experience the worst, most inhumane side of this country's people? I couldn't explain it to him then, but I've been thinking about it since. The more I hear about the continuous and present persecution of black people the more I understand that, despite my own

> convictions, the color of my skin makes me guilty of those persecutions in the eyes of many. I sympathize, I cry, and I hurt every time one of my friends is treated inhumanely because of their culture – but I'm still being blamed for it. Maybe I'm not in a position to make a comparison, but I would rather be beaten than holding the club. There is absolutely no reason why I'm not on the other end – there's no reason why they're not the ones looking down on my family. For that, I would rather be discriminated against than cause the suffering I have seen in the eyes of people who deserve so much more.
>
> One of the best compliments I've ever received was during Leadership 2000 – one of the guys in my group was also African-American. What he said to me was, "Tonya, if this was the Civil Rights era, I know you would be marching, holding your sign." I pray he's right. (February 9, 1995)

As is the case with racial identity development, patterns of paternalism and immersion tend to develop into cultures other than one's own. Around this time, someone had recommended that I hunt down Helms' (1992) book, A Race is a Nice Thing to Have: A Guide to Being a White Person or Understanding the White Persons in Your Life. The book read like a workbook complete with exercises for white people attempting to discover their racial identities. The hands-on exercises included culture quizzes and challenges to identify positive aspects of whiteness.

Simultaneously, I was being introduced to racial identity models that Helms, and others, had created. I was able to find myself within the various stages and understand some of the thoughts I was having and behaviors I was exhibiting. These are aspects of my progression about which I was cognizant and included in my journal:

> …in my relations with tributary groups, my most common and favorite is the African-American group. I think that I would fall under the Resistance and Immersion stage of identity development. The characteristics specific to this stage that I relate to are the realization of prejudice and the paternalization. My eyes are opened – wider than I ever dreamed possible – to prejudices (specifically against African-Americans). At the same time, I have found myself trying to protect, or compensate for wrongs done to individuals I know. Often times I'll even go out of my way to befriend or just smile at a black person walking by me. One more area to which I relate, but am not particularly comfortable with admitting, is the attempt at immersion. Often times it depresses me to think about the fact that despite my efforts, I will never truly belong to that group. It's not so much that I want to change my ethnicity or skin color, but there are a lot of qualities that many ethnic tributary groups share that the white, dominant group does not. The whole idea that they need to stick together and protect each other is something that I envy. I don't feel that closeness with many people, let alone with an entire population. Another aspect that I envy is that strength of historical importance. I've been told many times

> that they had to fight to gain that knowledge of their history and the pride they can now take in it. I have also been told that if the white population wanted to, we could do the same thing. I just don't see it happening. At least, it can't happen until we are considered minority. Even then, as long as white people form the dominant group, any sort of pride is seen as white supremacy. Well, I don't believe that to be true in every instance, but on a whole, I don't see the bonding of European Americans happening in the near future. (February 21, 1995)

In retrospect, the thoughts I expressed were fairly textbook. After taking the progression further and continuing beyond that point to where I am now, I remember the process of discovery and the blanket generalizations I made with regard to groups to which I did not belong. In addition to my studies, I also developed interpersonal relationships that served as the true catalysts for each step of my journey. The better able I became at existing in situations where most white people did not, the more I learned about the type of person I could no longer be. I listened to stories that I thought only happened in Mississippi, I heard reflections on the wrong words spoken by professors, and I witnessed seemingly innocent acts that could no longer be once I knew how others saw them. I credit my natural instinct to over analyze everything for my rapid development through various racial identity models. However, to leave out the emotional variable that came from friendships that caused painful recognition of past ignorance would be to tell only half of the story. The following is one of the poems I wrote during that time:

You tell me of my guilt for things I can't conceive

You say the color of my skin says thing I can't perceive

You tell me how "my people" sinned and how I reflect that hate

That white has become the color of evil and it's time that somebody paid

I hear your pain and cringe at your rage, I cry when you speak of the scars

My heart breaks and my skin crawls when I see how your world has been marred

The image you paint of reality is hard to see with bleached eyes

The colors mesh and the white fades every time I hear your cries

You speak the unspeakable, I hear the unheard, your terror has become what is real

The unthinkable and unfair have snuck into my life, my harmonious world has ceased to shield

I can no longer ignore the existence of evil, your stories educate and your words reveal

The lies and the hardships, the blood that has spilled, the welts your perfect skin conceals

You say I'm to blame for knowledge I didn't have and the changes I make may be too late

But you can't understand the questions I have to ask to be told that there's prejudice and hate

To see your world, I have to leave my own and deny the beliefs I once embraced

I can't pretend to combine two worlds that are separated by lethal hate
You say I'll never understand, but I tell you I want to try
You say I will never see your truths, but I can if I look through your eyes
I want to walk on your path and step in your tracks
And wear the clothes that have been ripped off your back
You tell me I'm responsible for the bruises and tears, that I created your hatred, I created my fears
You don't believe that it hurts me, too, if I could, I would take your place
But, I can't, so I'll stand by your side and look my world in the face
I will stand by your side and feel your pain, accept the bruises and feel the shoves
Block the blows that shatter your dreams, because I'd rather be beaten than holding the club (February 19, 1995)

The process of development is complex and intricate. There is no one thing that I can name as the turning point, or the most significant event that led me to where I am now. There are many others who were involved, family and friends who encouraged and discouraged me, and instructors who spent extra moments offering names of authors and titles of books that I could read. By the end of my undergraduate career, my knowledge had led me to participate in countless campus events involving outreach and diversity. I had progressed through intergroup relations training and had facilitated discussion groups and trained faculty in methods of teaching / handling diversity in the classroom. I co-created one of the largest student protests the school had ever seen and was

rewarded with the honor of sitting on the development committee for the first center on campus devoted to the full-time job of fostering and maintaining intergroup relations (the Intergroup Relations Center) – a proposal I had created during the height of the protest.

To look back on that period of time and the emotional swings and intellectual growth is tantamount to revisiting the site of one's birth. That educational path determined the turns I would take later on and the graduate course I would study.

## The Graduate Years

I returned to Arizona State University (ASU) as a graduate student at a time when I did not think that I had anything more to learn about race and culture. I identified as a progressive white person who had climbed, struggled, and scratched her way to the top of any racial identity model ever developed. I had in my bag of experiences the knowledge gained from training others to follow my footsteps and question the reality they had once accepted. While I did not realize it at the time, that was only the starting point. I had created a strong foundation that allowed me to push myself (and be pushed by others, often times kicking and screaming) to take my re-understanding of reality one step further.

### M.Ed. in Higher Education

My first teaching experience in college occurred when I was an undergraduate student. The course was a one-credit, peer-facilitated course designed to orient freshmen to campus. When I returned to campus as a graduate student, I was hired to teach the three-credit version. The irony was

that I had been called upon as an undergraduate student to develop curriculum and training practices dealing with intergroup relations issues for both courses. This was mandated from the senior administration of the university following the same student protest that had created the Intergroup Relations Center. When I returned to teach the course, I was very excited about the prospect of teaching a course that allowed me to educate students about issues I thought were extremely important. I also knew that the course curriculum was flexible enough to allow for autonomy when choosing weekly topics. Wanting to treat my students as the adults they soon were to become, I presented a variety of topics to them and allowed them to choose which ones they were interested in studying throughout the semester. One of the topics that they emphatically did not want to cover was race. When I asked them why, they told me that they had had the topic shoved down their throats since middle school and they were sick of it. Unfortunately for them, I was planning on implementing the topic throughout the course, regardless of their desire to choose it as a specific topic. Because I had worked for a year developing curriculum and gathering training exercises covering everything from cross-cultural communication to in-group / out-group dynamics, I had plenty to choose from.

I was teaching two sections of the same course and both proceeded nicely. But despite the interactive levels of the exercises and the interesting discussions that followed, I was never satisfied with the results. Most courses at ASU consist predominately of white students. These classes were no exception. Teaching race in an all-white class is difficult. One reason for this is that there is

rarely an alternative opinion offered. If engaging discussions occur it is usually because the facilitator fuels the fire. This can be true in multi-racial courses, as well, but it has been my experience that the odds of finding someone willing to speak up about race are better if the demographics are not homogeneous. This issue was particularly intensified in a class of first-time college students busily developing identities as non-high-schoolers away from mom and dad.

An additional reason for my dissatisfaction was that when I heard comments from students that indicated to me that they were not "getting it" I got frustrated. The typical comments were ones I had coached other instructors through dealing with, but that did not make it any easier to deal with them in my own classroom. Every time one of my students said, "I don't see what the big deal is, racism doesn't really exist anymore," and I had to launch into a discussion on the difference between personal and institutional racism, it reminded me that not so long before I had made similar comments. I was not far enough removed from that area of my development to be able to take myself away from the comments being made. Only later, after I had moved on to critical theory issues and perspectives was I able to hear comments like this and be comfortable with where those students were in their development. I was struggling with wanting to educate and hating them for not already being educated. This is something that I discovered frequently when training instructors. The level of development that a teacher brings with him into a classroom will be reflected in the instruction given. This was why, during my next teaching gig, I decided that it is essential for teachers, kindergarten through

graduate school, to be educated properly in these issues prior to entering a classroom.

M.A. in Social and Philosophical Foundations of Education

After I discovered that the M.Ed. program did not require, or allow for, writing a thesis, I decided to switch programs. Additionally, I had developed an interest in urban schooling issues and wanted to pursue it. I read articles and books attesting to the numerous problems developing in school systems in inner cities, so I decided I was going to solve them. As I continued reading, however, and my critical theory classes began, I started to realize that the problems did not develop in those schools, nor did anyone within those schools have the power to change them. So then I decided I was going to become a policymaker and force change from the top. The problem is that policymakers are not on top. The problem is actually bigger than they are. So what is bigger than policy? Government. While I knew enough to know policies are made through government, big “G” Government is something else entirely. As I began to realize that policymakers do not make a move without support, I decided to find out who supports/controls them. From there I jumped to economics, business, and, finally, capitalism where I came to the conclusion that money rules everything. Not only that, but the system is so big, no one will ever be able to change it.

Meanwhile, in addition to trying to fix the world, I had started teaching a third year course on the Sociology of Education. The course was part of the teacher preparation program and the only one in the program that introduced the

students to critical theory. I was simultaneously excited and petrified. Teaching freshmen topics that I knew thoroughly was one thing, but tackling difficult topics guaranteed to invoke resistance in weathered juniors was something else entirely. I was comfortable with my ability to handle a classroom and facilitate difficult discussions, and I was looking forward to the challenge. I was also intrigued by the possibility of implementing racial identity lectures and exercises into the curriculum and teaching third-year students who were bound to be intellectually developed and ready to be challenged. These were to be the future teachers of America and I was ready to tackle the task of offering them guidance and tools that would help them make the world a better place. But that was not the experience I encountered.

The course was designed around critical theory and the concept of ethnography. Throughout the semester, the students were supposed to be building a “My Culture” paper. The first draft was due a couple weeks into the class and the final was the last project due. The paper was meant to be an ethnographic perspective of their lives. Another assignment during the course was an observational exercise meant to train them in using ethnographic terminology and practice.

The first semester I taught, I gave a brief lecture on expectation prior to assigning the first draft of the paper and told them to explore their lives for a thesis to use on this paper and the ones to follow. The assignment was purposefully left open-ended to allow the students freedom to explore and dissect their lives. I assumed this would be a welcomed change from typical, rote

assignments. I was wrong. Out of a class of thirty-some students, two expressed interest in the paper. The rest of the class was divided between ambivalence and extreme irritation. Those who were ambivalent submitted papers that resembled diary entries (despite explicit instructions not to). The irritation from the others stemmed from the lack of step-by-step instruction and was intensified when I informed the class that I was disappointed with the lack of effort they had shown in their first drafts. I took responsibility for not being clear in my instruction and gave them the opportunity to rewrite the papers without penalty. What progressed from this can only be viewed in retrospect as a very bad idea to give freedom and second chances to undergraduate students.

After the political game subsided and I was able to concentrate on the actual papers, I discovered that my third-year, intellectually developed students were not ready to discuss issues of systematic oppression. This became more obvious as the semester continued.

By the time the second draft of the paper was due, my students complained about not understanding the assignment. This happened in the final month of the class. As this point, I asked them if they had ever heard of personal and social identity. When one student said she knew what I was talking about because she had been to an Intergroup Relations program, I decided to devote one class to teaching the very basic principles from social psychology. We moved from personal/social identity to in-group/out-group dynamics and ended with a brief discussion of culture. For the first time all semester, I saw light.

Despite the progress made toward the end of the class, the final papers were disappointing. Few of the students chose to tackle race or ethnicity and most of the ones who did were not white. The topics covered by my white students included the following: athlete, man, Mormon, Christian, middle-class, lower-class, and American. Those who acknowledged whiteness did so grudgingly:

> My culture? When I thought of my culture, the obvious came to my mind: white, middle-class American. I came to this conclusion because that is what everyone said I was, like they went home with me every night and lived there. It was a stereotype I feel (sic) into by the outward appearance society saw. Realistically, I don't think this describes me at all. I think my culture evolves from the first memory of me trying to hide the person I really was. (quoted from a student's paper written Fall 1999)

In addition to the inadequate discussion of whiteness, those who tackled the subject of other races or ethnicities downplayed the significance of oppression:

> As for minorities, I can understand that they have problems with the police, that they may not be waited on in restaurants, that they can have a hard time finding work, or that they get upset when the Southern states want to keep the rebel flag because of tradition. I can see how these may be some of the most blatant forms of racism. But even with all of these obstacles, I believe that most of them can be overcome. I overcame my

> shyness and self-doubt, and I continue to overcome other obstacles as they come my way. (quoted from a student's paper written Fall 1999)
>
> During a late night talk a tall white girl from Safford told me I had an accent like a Mexican. She thought I was a "Beener" but after talking to me found out that I was just "white". A "Beener" is a person who is half Caucasian and half Mexican-American. I did not realize I talked like everyone else in my hometown. This assumption of people bothered me for a long time. I did not want others to think I was Mexican…I learned early not to make racial jokes against Mexican-Americans or the whole school would hate me…Because all of my friends were Mexican Americans, I was in no way prejudice. (quoted from a student's paper written Fall 1999)

I also had a few students who tackled the topic much like I did early on:

> Before examining my culture and the influences and expectations therein, first realize that I am the king of code-switch. I am not a believer in multiple-personalities, but I can firmly say I led and lead multiple lives. I am so multi-cultural that I can hop from one to the next and back and not even know it.…This might have something to do with my abhorrence of being labeled. I am a unique individual. (quoted from a student's paper written Fall 1999)

The following semester I employed discussions of social identity early on and discovered that, by combining theories from social psychology and critical theory, the students were better able to comprehend the information being

presented. Their final papers illustrated this understanding. The white students who tackled race fell into three categories: didn't get it, started to get it, and got it. The second category was encouraging and the third actually gave me hope. Those who started to get it were able to discuss race and acknowledge whiteness, but did not know how to apply it to issues of privilege and power:

> The first time I noticed I was different was the summer I was five years old. My older sisters had taken me to the swimming pool. Swimming was one of my favorite past times. My olive skin tanned easily in the sun and my mom called me her "golden-brown girl." This particular time, as we were rinsing off in the showers so that we could head home, a little girl walked into the bathroom with the darkest skin I had ever seen. It was almost black. Trying to assimilate this new information into my little world, I turned to my older sister and exclaimed in awe, "Look at her tan. She is even darker than me. I am going to have to tell Mom about this." My sister, looking a bit embarrassed and mortified, rushed me out of the bathroom. When we got home, I learned for the first time about African Americans. I learned that I was White. (quoted from a student's paper written Spring 2000)
>
> My family is a traditional upper-middle class family with good social standing in the community. However, we did not start off living this way. The first house that I lived in was in Waukegan Illinois. Now at the time that I lived there Waukegan had started to go "downhill" as many people put it. Many of the neighborhoods were being inhabited by different

> minorities (mostly Hispanic and African American). This is when I delve into my first encounter with cultures different from my own. My parents decided that they wanted me to continue to receive a good education and enrolled me in a private Catholic school. Now, I never realized what my parents had done until I took this class. They basically assumed that since there were minorities moving into the neighborhoods the quality of education would decrease. Some people would look at this and talk about how ignorant my parents were. But this is how society works. We segregate ourselves. You can visit any major city and see this happening day by day. There are neighborhoods that are completely made up of one minority. For example there is Little Havana in Miami, Chinatown in San Francisco, and Greek town in Chicago. (quoted from a student's paper written Spring 2000)

Those who got it were able to articulate their white identity and attribute aspects to privilege to it:

> I am English, Irish, German, Scottish, and Norwegian; but, what does this mean? Nothing really, except for the fact that my skin turned out white, and my race does mean something in my culture. It breaks my heart to say it, but people with white skin find acceptance in my culture more easily. Although things are changing, it feels like it will take forever to undo the ethnocentrism that I see in my world. (quoted from a student's paper written Spring 2000)

> When I first started thinking about this paper, I thought it would be easy. I have a big family, and know a lot about my ancestors and their history. So I thought I would just write about them and the assignment would be finished. However, I soon learned there is a lot more to my culture than just a bunch of names on a Geneology (sic) sheet. During this class, I have learned more and more things about myself and about the world in which I live. My eyes have been opened to a different world and my thinking has changed dramatically. (quoted from a student's paper written Spring 2000)

I was thrilled at the progress made by some of my students. However, because thorough understanding can only come from the developmental process, one semester of teaching these topics is not sufficient. At ASU, for example, students are required to take three credit hours of a cultural diversity / global awareness course. That is the equivalent of the amount of time I had with my students. For me, during my undergraduate studies, that was the equivalent of the very first course I took in intercultural communication. I could have stopped there and graduated without ever taking another course that discussed issues of culture or race. This becomes a sensitive subject because it coincides with discussions of educational philosophies and the purpose of a higher education. My bias is that all students should be presented with information that enables them to examine their world and view it and socialized messages from a critical perspective. However, not everyone thinks that higher education's purpose is to educate beyond instilling job skills.

Toward the end of the last semester I taught, many of my students were frustrated because they had started to understand. Some of them asked me what they were supposed to do with the information I had given to them. I did not have an answer for them. So, I went to my advisor. I sat down in his office and asked him what I was supposed to tell my students when, after giving them a semester's worth of information about a system that is much bigger than they are and has developed a stratified society that our educational system is designed to perpetuate, they wanted to know what to do with it. I asked him if what we were doing was right. If no one had the answer for how to change it, then what good was it to make people aware? I asked him what I was supposed to do with the knowledge I had gained and what I was supposed to tell my students to do. He looked at me and said, "I teach. What are you going to do?"

# Chapter Five – Conclusion

One day a friend of mine came home from football practice with a story he wanted to share with me. He had left New Orleans to play community college in Arizona. I had developed friendships with him and some of his teammates, most of whom were from inner cities around the country. More than one of them had verbally claimed to hate white people and none of them were bothered in the slightest to admit it. We had engaged in multiple discussions about our various thoughts on race and this was to be another one of those. He told me that he had been talking to a white guy from the team and the discussion of race came up. After my friend had told him that he hated white people, the guy questioned, "If you hate white people so much, how come you hang out with that girl?" My friend's response was, "Tonya? She's not white."

Slightly taken aback, I asked him what, if not white, I was. I will never forget the words he said:

> You're not White, you're colorless. God didn't make very many of you, but he made a few. The only reason why you are white is because that's who's in the majority right now. If Blacks were the majority, you would look black. You have to look like them so that they'll listen to you.

His statement went against every identity and race theory I have ever read, but it is the one I hold onto the strongest. I do not know if I was chosen by a divine power, but I do believe that he was right about whose voices have been allowed to be heard. One of my professors told me one time that Audre Lord had said that you cannot dismantle the master's house with the master's tools. I

agree with this statement, but I do not think it means that there is no place for Whites in discussions about racial equality in this country if they are willing to develop new tools. I would never have chosen education as a field to study if I did not think that people could change based on the discovery of new knowledge. Looking back on my experiences, I know that I would not have been able to critically question issues of race had I not been exposed to people and thoughts that were not a part of my world prior. I had to fight to learn a lot of this information because it went against everything I knew to be true. I saw that same struggle in my students and the people I trained.

The key to helping people understand and to creating a desire to question reality is motivation. If you find the right way to say what you know needs to be said, then you can change somebody's life in the time it takes for them to hear it. The process of unlearning and relearning is a long one, but I know there are people who would choose to know rather than choose the lies they have always been told. No one has ever said it more simply than Fannie Lou Hamer when she said, "What you don't understand is that as long as you stand with your feet on my neck, you got to stand in a ditch, too. But, if you move, I'm coming out. I want to get us both out of the ditch" (quoted in Beilenson & Jackson, 1992, p. 15). We can only move when we choose a direction. To help white students begin to understand the ramifications of perpetuating systems of oppression, we must first be able to teach them what it means to be white and how that invades every aspect of our lives. And then we can teach them how to critically examine their worlds based on that information. Only through that progression can people

begin to truly understand the socialization they have endured and the ways they can begin to alter it. As instructors we must question our ability to aid someone in the process without hindering them with our own developmental issues. And, as Giroux (1997) says, recognize that through this process we are not setting out to change the world, but rather to "set the foundation for producing generations of students who might" (p. 29). And, above all else, we must teach.

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