

Disrupting Postsecondary Prose: Toward a Critical Race Theory of Higher Education

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Abstract

Ladson-Billings and Tate ushered critical race theory (CRT) into education and challenged racial inequities in schooling contexts. In this article, I consider the role CRT can play in disrupting postsecondary prose, or the ordinary, predictable, and taken for granted ways in which the academy has functioned for centuries as a bastion of racism and White supremacy. I disrupt racelessness in education, but focus primarily on postsecondary contexts related to history, access, curriculum, policy, and research. The purpose of this article is to commemorate and extend Ladson-Billings and Tate's work toward a CRT of higher education.

Keywords

racism, postsecondary education, diversity

“The masters tools will never dismantle the masters house.”

—Audre Lorde

In 1995, Ladson-Billings and Tate wrote *Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education*, inarguably one of the strongest critiques of the educational system. They noted how race remained untheorized in education and proposed that

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analyses of educational inequity, must explicitly acknowledge the role of racism/White supremacy¹ in education. Ladson-Billings and Tate ushered critical race theory (CRT) into education, challenging scholars and educators to raise questions, engage in conscientious dialogue, and produce research in which CRT would serve as a tool and framework to unsettle racelessness in education. Much of their emphases were placed on K-12 schooling contexts, providing a platform to extend CRT to higher education. In this article, I disrupt racelessness in education, but focus specifically on higher education and the challenges associated with moving the academy forward in a way that explicitly names racism/White supremacy in areas such as college access, curriculum, and policy. This article commemorates and extends Ladson-Billings and Tate's work toward a CRT of higher education.

Over the last 10 years, scholars have used CRT to examine educational research (Chapman, 2007; Duncan, 2002; Parker, 2015), urban schooling (Dixson, Buras, & Jeffers, 2015; Lynn, 2002; Vaught & Castagno, 2008), parental involvement (Auerbach, 2002; Howard & Reynolds, 2008; Lynn, 2004), teacher education and preparation (Ladson-Billings, 2000; Pane & Rocco, 2012), critical race praxis (Stovall, 2004, 2006), and CRT's trajectory within educational research (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Lynn & Parker, 2006). Consistent in this scholarship is a strong focus on K-12 education (Patton, Haynes, Harris, & Ivery, 2014). However, higher education is not immune, but perhaps complicit in the creation of racial inequities in K-12 schooling. More prominent scholarship on higher education grounded in CRT is needed. Patton et al. stated,

The fact that higher education scholarship is limited in its use of CRT should not be perceived as a purposeful attempt by researchers to avoid engaging race (though in some instances it may very well be the case) . . . the lack of effort to explicitly grapple with . . . racism/white supremacy . . . is a persistent trend that is symptomatic of a society that would rather tiptoe around the issue of race rather than directly address it. (p. 136)

Scholars within the field of higher education have begun to incorporate CRT to expose hidden and blatant inequities. Harper, Patton, and Wooden (2009) used CRT to argue reform efforts to advance African American education had also limited their educational progress. Patton, Harper, and Harris (2015) use CRT to examine commonly studied areas in U.S. higher education such as student engagement and college access. Patton, McEwen, Rendón, and Howard-Hamilton (2007) used CRT to challenge the racelessness of student development theory, a prominent area within the student affairs field. At the time of his study, Harper (2012) found that CRT had only been

substantively used in five higher education–related journal articles within his database, suggesting research in the field warrants a more intricate and complex treatment of race and racism. Scholarship from Solórzano, Yosso, and others with whom they collaborate was among the first to highlight the usefulness of CRT in understanding issues germane to postsecondary settings (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Yosso, Parker, Solórzano, & Lynn, 2004; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009). In addition, scholars have examined faculty experiences (Croom & Patton, 2011–2012; Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002; Hughes & Giles, 2010; Patton & Bondi, 2015; Patton & Catching, 2009; Solórzano, 1998) and student experiences (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Donner, 2005; Gildersleeve, Croom, & Vasquez, 2011; Patton, 2006; Villalpando, 2003). CRT analyses of affirmative action, and desegregation policies have also been conducted (see Gafford Muhammad, 2009; Taylor, 1999, 2000). The aforementioned research does not fully capture existing scholarship but provides a lens on higher education and CRT’s role in *disrupting postsecondary prose*, or the ordinary, predictable, and taken for granted ways in which the academy functions as a bastion of racism/White supremacy.

To further disrupt academic prose in higher education, I offer three propositions to inform educational inequity in postsecondary contexts and the embedded complexities of racism/White supremacy:

Proposition 1: The establishment of U.S. higher education is deeply rooted in racism/White supremacy, the vestiges of which remain palatable.

Proposition 2: The functioning of U.S. higher education is intricately linked to imperialistic and capitalistic efforts that fuel the intersections of race, property, and oppression.

Proposition 3: U.S. higher education institutions serve as venues through which formal knowledge production rooted in racism/White supremacy is generated.

U.S. Higher Education History as Primer for Continued Racial Inequity

Proposition 1

Capturing the present context of racism/White supremacy in higher education requires acknowledging its violent, imperialistic, and oppressive past. Evans-Winters and Hoff (2011) stated,

In a democracy it has been determined that education, and higher education, in particular play a major role in helping societies meet the demands of a post-industrial economy and in promoting the development of skills which potentially promote social equity. (p. 462)

Popular rhetoric suggests higher education is the great equalizer and affords life opportunities, particularly to those who, regardless of circumstance, “work hard.” This meritocratic discourse is laced with racist and classist assumptions that ensure hard work alone is insufficient for marginalized groups to excel. This discourse attaches nobility to higher education without examining its contributions to the inequality it purports to disrupt.

I argue U.S. higher education, from its genesis, has been a primary force in persistent inequities. For example, Wilder (2013) examined linkages between Ivy League institutions and slavery. He noted how the charter members of colonial colleges were from slave-owning families who made their fortunes from slavery and the crops/products that resulted from slave labor. Brown University was among the first to commission research on its connection to slavery and other institutions followed.

Wilder’s research alongside other archival investigations reveal that the wealth experienced by the United States as a result of the transatlantic slave trade was also experienced by and even facilitated through higher education institutions. Many celebrated institutional icons, after whom buildings are named, were the greatest contributors to the oppression of enslaved Africans and North American Indigenous populations. The revelation of a past in which human beings were stolen and brutally mistreated for the causes of institutional advancement and financial stability demonstrates how higher education’s formation mimicked the formation of the United States. In *And We Are Not Saved*, Bell uses narrative to capture how the “founding fathers” knowingly chose to rely on the enterprise of slavery to subsidize this country. Irrefutably, many of the men who participated in the constitutional convention were also involved in the establishment of postsecondary institutions or attended them. Among the 55 delegates, 5 attended Harvard, 6 attended Yale, 11 attended Princeton, 5 attended College of William and Mary, 3 attended University of Pennsylvania, 2 attended Columbia, and 1 attended Dartmouth (TeachingAmericanHistory.org). Wilder notes that the College of New Jersey (Princeton) had 8 presidents within its first 27 years, and all owned slaves. Institutional benefactors, trustees, and leaders were also involved with higher education. Wilder stated, “Governors and faculties used slave labor to raise and maintain their schools, and they made their campuses the intellectual and cultural playgrounds of the plantation and merchant elite” (Wilder, 2013, p. 138). These men solidified the racist ideologies that continue to promulgate higher education.

Delgado and Stefancic (2012) discussed challenging ahistoricism by revising histories that celebrate oppressors and deny the voices of those who experience/d oppression. It is troubling that so few institutions have made concerted efforts to connect their past in palatable ways to address longstanding inequities, which negatively affected African Americans and Indigenous groups and the overwhelming wealth accumulation that carried these institutions into the future. Harvard University's \$36.4 billion endowment remains the largest and will continue to increase. Yet, there has been no substantive institutional acknowledgment that Harvard's wealth and accumulation of resources were largely established through enslavement. Upon revealing its connections to slavery, the profits from which contributed to institutional wealth accumulation, Harvard created a website but has not offered a concrete plan of action to address historical wrongdoing. Sefa Dei (1999) noted, "Dominant group members are usually aware that any acknowledgement of complicity in racial subordination seriously compromises their positions of power and privilege" (p. 401). Considering Bell's (1995, 2004) interest convergence principle, it would be naïve to expect institutions to make more than symbolic efforts toward remedying their histories unless they have a vested interest that would ensure benefits.

Other noteworthy examples link higher education's past to present such as the overwhelmingly White composition of the U.S. Congress, Senate, and Supreme Court. Of the nearly 2,000 senators throughout U.S. history, only 26 have been people of color. President Barack Obama represents the only (in this lifetime) non-White President of the United States. The Supreme Court past and present is majority White. These observations are not earth shattering because the presence of White faces appears ordinary. The issue with longstanding, predominantly White membership is that the voices of people of color never have been represented in a more substantial capacity. Throughout history, nearly every governmental leader attended college and law school or some other post baccalaureate training. Most if not all attended elite, private institutions. The majority of U.S. Supreme Court justices attended Harvard and Yale Universities, and many of their decisions are cloaked in racist ideologies that disenfranchise racially marginalized groups. That so many leaders entered higher education and graduated without being prompted or encouraged to examine race and racism is reflective of how colleges fail in educating students to live, work, and interact across differences for racial equity.

Proposition 2

In this proposition, I argue institutions, from their establishment, relied on larger racist narratives and existing legislation to engage in oppression. Lopez

(2006) explained laws promoted violence and “altered the physical appearances of this country’s people, attached racial identities to certain types of features and ancestry, and established material conditions of belonging and exclusion that code as race” (p. 85). The construction of race through law determined citizenship and property. Violence was used to enforce law and construct race. Harris (1993) explained the historical role of the legal system in constructing Whiteness as property and validating those with White skin as full citizens. The confluence of White skin and citizenship allowed Whites, particularly men, the sole right to own and occupy land as well as people. White people engaged in centuries of domination over and exclusion of Black and other groups, while accumulating significant wealth.

The convergence of race, property, and oppression is intricately linked to the formation of U.S. higher education. Although early institutions faced significant financial struggle, their leaders quickly connected slave trading to institutional viability. Institutions used slavery for capitalistic gain as they strengthened the establishment of their physical campuses. Moreover, institutions, most led by clergy and businessmen, used their connections to secure land from Native peoples through theft and violence. Leaders engaged in their own version of manifest destiny by allowing donors to believe they would be evangelizing and civilizing Indians (Calloway, 2010; Wright, 1988). The end result was education extended to White men, several who would later become leaders of these same institutions and follow similar practices of deception, violence, and monetary gain in the name of White superiority.

Higher education still represents the complex relations between race, property, and oppression. Despite the growth and change in U.S. demographics, the academy is an overwhelmingly White terrain in terms of physical representation of White students and symbolically in terms of curriculum, campus policies, and campus spaces.

The curriculum, for example, excludes diverse perspectives and allows the rights of use and enjoyment via a Eurocentric lens that aligns more with White people’s experiences (Harris, 1993). The curriculum operates with a disposition toward “cannon” knowledge and information that has been passed down throughout generations, ensuring Whiteness remains embedded, regardless of subject matter. Given its normalcy, the curriculum is rarely questioned because it provides a “good” education without accounting for the benefits that accrue for White people. Property rights in Whiteness also exist within diversity-related courses. Many institutions offer or require these courses as one effort to diversify the curriculum. Yet, students “enter and exit stand-alone cultural diversity courses unchanged, often reinforcing their stereotypical perceptions of self and others in the process” (Brown, 2004,

p. 325). A host of courses can fall within the category of “diversity” without any essential material that really promotes deeper learning and knowledge acquisition about diversity. As a result, diversity becomes so broad that racism and other issues that deal specifically with dismantling oppression get neutralized.

Institutional responsibility for providing a curriculum reflective of diversity is touted by academic leaders despite the obtuse language that shapes the discourse. Diversity course requirements will likely continue as a mainstay in higher education because they promote the appearance of diversity efforts while doing very little to disrupt the status quo. Jay (2003) asserted,

Transformative knowledge is dangerous. It threatens those dominant groups in our society who have a vested interest in the perpetuation of the mainstream academic knowledge that supports the maintenance of dominant structures, long-present inequities, and the current power arrangements in the United States that often serve to subordinate racial minorities . . . The teaching of transformative knowledge poses serious threat to the dominant power structures operating in American society that privileges Whites over all other racial groups. (p. 5)

Diversity courses represent incremental changes that are easy to digest, non-threatening, and most beneficial to White people. Higher education leaders can espouse a commitment to diversity and a progressive stance through offering diversity courses, all while knowing many of these courses commoditize diversity. Despite diversity courses, the curriculum is one form of property that belongs to White people, thus, the experiences and perspectives are primarily limited to White interests, and dismissive of the experiences of people of color (Ladson-Billings, 2000; Yosso, 2002). Any effort to disrupt these property rights at any point on the educational pipeline is immediately challenged (see Clark, 2015; Gibney, 2013; Manual-Logan, 2015).

Proposition 3

Higher education institutions are heralded as the spaces in which knowledge for the consumption and benefit of the larger society is centrally produced. Kerr (2001) was “convinced that new knowledge still makes the world go round and that the university is still its main source” (p. X). From a historical standpoint, much of this knowledge production is designed to colonize the mind (Sefa Dei, 1999). Pine and Hilliard (1990) argued, “Historically, every academic discipline—psychology, biology, geography, religion, philosophy, anthropology, literature, history—has been used to justify colonialism and racism” (p. 595). Scheurich and Young (1997) accurately refer to the

legitimized ways of knowing in the academy as “epistemological racism.” Knowledge production in the academy not only fuels racist ideologies, which are then infused into the structure of law, science, religion, and education, but also corrupts everyday thinking. For example, scholars (Dennis, 1995; Fairchild, 1991; Gersh, 1987; Gould, 1996) have discussed the role of scientific racism for the purposes of maintaining White purity and superiority, as well as imposing epistemicide on people of color by rationalizing the tremendous inequities toward these groups (Grosfoguel, 2013). Higher education’s role in the production of scientific racism is remarkable, and not in a good way. Wilder (2013) argued, “Race did not come *from* science and theology; it came *to* science and theology. Racial ideas were born in the colonial world, in the brutal and deadly processes of empire building” (p. 182). Faculty scientists in the early colleges and universities introduced race into science using the corpses of Africans and Native Americans to study and make leaping claims about the fate of these groups. Randall (1996) explained that slaves were used as “instructional material for teaching medical students” (p. 196). The scientists, responsible for great medical discoveries, and situated on college campuses, were heavily involved in the vile treatment of enslaved Africans and production of racial cleansing ideologies and “Darwinism.”

The Eugenics Movement is a notable example. Eugenicists were committed to racial purification ideologies for the sustenance of superior breeds (Whites). Inferior breeds were not expected to survive and deemed as threatening to societal advancement. The Eugenics Movement was saturated with higher education scholars, scientists, and institutional leaders including David Starr Jordan, the seventh president of Indiana University and founding president of Stanford University, and Charles Eliot, a science professor who would later become the president of Harvard. Both were members of the Race Betterment Foundation, founded by John Harvey Kellogg (New York University Medical School), Charles Davenport (Harvard), and Irving Fisher (Yale). Gersh (1987) stated,

... by the end of World War I, the process of creating a scientific basis for the defense of privilege and inequality was completed. The interaction of eugenics activists with elite funding produced a network of eugenics organizations, which in turn produced a growing interest in the creation of tests that would demonstrate the superior intellect of those in privileged positions. The interaction among elite-sponsored foundations, universities headed by eugenics activists, and psychologies trained in the perspectives of hereditarian thought produced the first IQ test. (p. 170)

Higher education institutions were critical in the development of the United States because their leaders and faculty could intellectualize the spread of

White superiority under the guise of science and make their claims believable and taken as absolute truth. Academicians could push the values and benefits of an educated citizenry and by doing so, increase interest among White people (particularly the sons of plantation owners) to attend colleges and universities, guaranteeing success, wealth, and the production of leaders, clergy, and businessmen, all of whom were White. The university remains the primary “locus” of knowledge production, in both past and current contexts, whereas the government and industry are all mutually shaping forces (Godin & Gingras, 2000).

In this section, I described three propositions, for understanding the enactment of racism/White supremacy in higher education. These propositions reveal a clear juxtaposition between racism, capitalism, White (male) domination and power. Although the focus is largely on higher education in the United States, the system does not exist in isolation. Higher education is connected to business and industry, religion, and other entities that allow it to both facilitate and reproduce inequality. In the next section, I analyze vexing higher education issues referencing commonly identified tenets of CRT. I frame each issue and its complexities with a simple question or set of questions as outlined below because disrupting postsecondary prose, or the embedded nature of White supremacy, requires asking questions about, as well as responding to, processes that fuel racial inequities.

Who Are the Educators?

According to National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) data, 79% of faculty members are White. They comprise the majority of full professors, endowed chairs, college and university presidents, and trustees. White men are the primary beneficiaries of leadership positions in postsecondary institutions, with the exception of historically Black institutions and some minority serving institutions. The lack of racial diversity among higher education faculty and leaders is an unsurprising, longstanding trend that is commonplace in the academy. The deeply embedded nature of White supremacy is also evident in faculty promotion and tenure processes, which are presumed to be fair and impartial. Citation practices within academic scholarship are also insidious. In his examination of citation practices among law school faculty, Delgado (1984) demonstrated how scholarship produced by people of color is often marginalized, footnoted, or unacknowledged while a small grouping of White faculty repeatedly cited their own work, contributing to their status. In tenure and promotion cases, faculty members must explain the impact of their scholarship, which is often done through citations. The process of getting one’s scholarship published is wrought with racist implications because

many journal editorial boards serve as gatekeepers, often favoring “mainstream” research (Stanley, 2007). Simply stated, imperialistic scholarship practices often exclude people of color and have long-term implications on tenure and promotion.

Consumers of higher education can anticipate that little change will occur in the functioning of higher education given the stagnant nature of the leadership (all of whom are college educated), policies, racial climate, curriculum, and culture, which are deeply rooted in Whiteness. The reproduction of racism occurs without much disruption because those with the power to change institutions were also educated by these institutions, meaning they graduate from their institutions and often perform their lives devoid of racial consciousness.

The everyday nature of race allows it to remain hidden and even when revealed, remain unaddressed. This is quite noticeable at the undergraduate level. Harper and Patton (2007) stated,

It is entirely possible for students to graduate from college without critically reflecting on their racist views, never having engaged in meaningful conversations about race, and using racially offensive language unknowingly. When issues of race do emerge, many people, whites in particular, are disinterested and argue fatigue. They are tired of talking about it. Tired of hearing about how racist, alienating, and devaluing the campus is. Oftentimes, educators are responsible for letting students and ourselves off the hook rather than engaging the conversation and the necessary subsequent action. (p. 2)

The failure to push students to examine their own racial biases and racist attitudes results in racist college graduates who later become racist professionals, lawmakers, institutional leaders, teachers, and so on. In other words, students are educated in White supremacy as they pursue a “higher” education. Phenomena such as these are well documented in the literature on teacher education, as well as law and medical schools. The teacher education literature is saturated with examples of students who are ill-prepared to enter the teaching profession and have little to no understanding of race (Cross, 2003; Morrell, 2010; Pane & Rocco, 2012; Solomona, Portelli, Daniel, & Campbell, 2005; Sleeter, 2000, 2001). These teachers, nearly 90% of whom are White women, are educated on college campuses, within schools of education that typically have predominantly White teacher educators, who create and then impart the same race-absent curricular knowledge on to students, who graduate their institutions and go on to teach more students using a White lens. Ladson-Billings (2005) argued, “much of the literature on diversity and teacher education is silent on the cultural homogeneity of the teacher education faculty” (p. 230). The homogeneity to which she refers is commonplace not only in schools of education but also in most academic programs across

institutions, with the exception of ethnic studies and similar programs. Not much changes when examining medical schools. Hafferty and Franks (1994) insist medical schools are “moral communities” and training for the field involves not only the formal curriculum but also the “hidden curriculum.” They stated, “what is taught” in this hidden curriculum often can be antithetical to the goals and content of those courses that are formally offered.

These trends are taken for granted, but have extreme consequences, not only for more diverse racial representation in higher education but also for the creation of equitable hiring practices that would secure teachers of color and more thoughtful development of a curriculum to challenge students’ racist thought processes and encourage them to eradicate racism in their teaching practices and personal lives. These trends also have implications for how the increasingly diverse student body that is entering college (if they are lucky enough to gain access) and their White counterparts will be (mis)educated. For medical schools, there are implications for how racially minoritized communities will be treated and for the ever-present health disparities these groups face due to racism (Randall, 1996; van Ryn et al., 2011). In law schools, the trends reveal poor representation of the rights and experiences of minoritized groups and ensure the continued racial injustice they experience. These trends point to postsecondary prose, a predicament that has occurred consistently overtime within colleges and universities, and that safeguards the positioning of racism/White supremacy in education and in society.

Whose Story Is Newsworthy?

Higher education rhetoric suggests students have excellent educational experiences that prepare them for life after graduation. However, based on race, academic preparation can and often does look different. Concepts and phrases such as “learning outcomes” “assessment” and “evaluation” are regularly used to gauge how students experience college but rarely account for, at least in a critical way, the nuanced experiences that shape the racial realities of college life. CRT scholars value and acknowledge the power of counter storytelling and the practice of naming one’s reality. I argue that postsecondary institutions, predominantly White in particular, suppress the voices of racially marginalized groups through the negative campus racial climates that exude an atmosphere of disinvite.

From the early 1970s to present, scholars have consistently written about Black students at predominantly White institutions (PWIs). Experiences such as being singled out in the classroom for the “minority” perspective, feeling like the “fly in the buttermilk,” being cast as the affirmative action admit, and having little to no representation of your culture visible on campus are just a

few examples of the microaggressions and isolation that racially minoritized students endure. These experiences become intensified based on students' racial and ethnic affiliation and contribute to their differential racialization (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). For example, Asian American students are treated as model minorities, a divisive tactic rooted in exceptionalism, whereas all Latinas/os are "Mexicanized" and presumed to be "illegal aliens." American Indian students are reduced to mascots and historic relics. Collectively, these instances describe campus environments rooted in racism/White supremacy.

The systemic devaluing of people of color in higher education is unjust and contributes to a dominant narrative in which stereotypes are promulgated absent redress. These stereotypes are filtered through racist fraternity and sorority parties that mock and insult people of color and college athletics in which students and their talents are commoditized (Associated Press, 2015; Donner, 2005).

Although students have racially disenfranchising experiences in college, they also counter this one-note script for the sake of psychological self-preservation (Villalpando, 2003). They use social media (e.g., *I Too Am Harvard*) to present an alternative reality, engage in peer pedagogies, rely on counter spaces such as culture centers or multicultural affairs offices on campus (Harper, 2013; Patton, 2006; Stewart, 2011), or reach for support beyond the campus (family, church). Institutions have not seriously engaged in disrupting the racist status quo. Doing so requires acknowledgment of and space for reenvisioning a campus where students of color are valued and all are educated about the realities of race and racism (Harper & Patton, 2007).

Who Is Invited?

The dominant narrative of meritocracy suggests anyone can attend college. Although some will never experience college, others have unlimited access to any college. College access discourses are laced with racially coded language determining who can attend college and what college they will attend. "College readiness" is one concept in the access discourse. Readiness is often determined by K-12 education experiences. Literature has shown that disproportionately, students of color attend schools with fewer resources, have limited access to advanced placement courses, and typically have lower standardized test scores (Fletcher & Tienda, 2010; Hallett & Venegas, 2011; Welton & Martinez, 2013; Yamamura, Martinez, & Saenz, 2010). With minor exception, the shaping of this discourse is rooted in racial inferiority of people of color and their lack of capital, rather than systemic and structural

oppression. It focuses on what people of color *do not* have, instead of what they *do* have.

White students benefit from a legacy of privilege that ensures most of them will attend college. Given the history of U.S. institutions, White people have legacy admissions privileges because of family names that date back generations. Hurwitz (2011) stated, “Relatives of alumni (legacies) offer enthusiasm and familiarity to colleges, and the special treatment awarded them in the admissions process helps to preserve generational ties that also are intended to motivate financial generosity” (p. 481). White students are the primary beneficiaries of legacy admissions. According to Hurwitz’s (2011) study of highly selective colleges, the probability of college admission for legacy admits is 23.3% higher. For primary legacies, or students whose parents attended the institution, the probability increased by 45.1% in comparison with non-legacies (Ashburn, 2011). The idea of legacy admissions in higher education should not be separated from the enslavement of Africans and the labor by these “propertied” individuals, which resulted in institutional wealth, land, and resources. It cannot exist separate from generations of men and women, mainly White, who attended the most prestigious and wealthy institutions and can now engage their “rights of disposition” to ensure that their children also benefit (Harris, 1993).

Access, cloaked in the myth of hard work, without acknowledging racism in the college admissions, recruitment, and admissions policies is irresponsible. Each year, admissions counselors travel to identify “top” students attending “top” schools and recruit them to their respective institutions. However, top schools and top students are usually White and middle-class. As a result, racial diversity, an important aspect of recruitment, gets minimized as White students fill up institutional seats, and fewer students of color are represented. Patton et al. (2015) stated,

CRT scholars would argue that this lack of representation is not merely accidental but instead by design; institutions, states, federal policies, and policymakers—most of whom are white—all play a role in who gains access to higher education and who is afforded prime opportunities to thrive in these environments. Given the preponderance of postracial rhetoric, higher education as an entity has been complicit in submitting to the ideals of colorblindness and race neutrality. (p. 196)

Whose Intellectual and Physical Property?

Currently, research within science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) are considered prime “intellectual real estate” in the academy. STEM

researchers are more likely to gain institutional support and external funding to enhance their work. STEM-related research is important, but underlying elitist discourses position it as more or most important than any other field of study. Merton (1988) references this phenomenon as cumulative advantage, or

the social processes through which various kinds of opportunities for scientific inquiry as well as the subsequent symbolic and material rewards for the results of that inquiry tend to accumulate for individual practitioners of science, as they do also for organizations engaged in scientific work. (p. 606)

This elitism is rooted in racist ideologies, particularly given the historical trajectory of scientific racism and the continued absence of people of color in STEM fields.

The overwhelming Whiteness of STEM reveals property rights in Whiteness, particularly the absolute right to exclude. Although efforts are underway to increase representation, recruitment is only one aspect. The racism embedded within STEM learning environments must also be disrupted, particularly if the goal is to retain students of color to contribute to a more diverse STEM workforce. Scholars describe isolated STEM environments that exude a culture of Whiteness and are unwelcoming to people of color (Herzig, 2004; Johnson, 2012; Soldner, Rowan-Kenyon, Inkelas, Garvey, & Robbins, 2012), yet the climate remains unchanged. Faculty are not challenged to rethink their curriculum, relinquish their biases, or connect with students of various racial groups.

The STEM fields are highly valued allowing faculty to accumulate wealth and resources to produce more STEM research. STEM faculty can secure tenure, continued promotion, prominence, and other rewards. However such rewards, primarily accrue for White faculty who occupy the bulk of STEM academic spaces. Such benefits are less likely in humanities and social science fields where there is greater likelihood of finding more people of color. This is not to suggest that other fields are less racist than STEM, but to simply note that there are more people of color, particularly in the field of education. Ironically, education is devalued at institutions of higher education, particularly because resources and funding, although available, do not exist in abundance as they do in STEM. Ultimately, there is a *de facto* segregation that occurs in academia or as Delgado Bernal and Villalpando (2006) suggest, an “apartheid of knowledge” in higher education. Thus, STEM fields which are largely populated by White people are valued over education, humanities, and social sciences, where more people of color are likely to be situated, resulting in a devaluation of intellectual knowledge in comparison (p. 169).

Overall, intellectual “property” in the academy is about more than creative license and ownership. It is also about having the capacity and resources to produce “valued” knowledge and capitalize on it for increased advantages.

The promotion of STEM over other fields of study is not accidental. Instead, this phenomenon may well be linked to the role of science and the capacity for scientists, particularly academics, to promote ideas (whether scientifically derived and ethically sound or not), under the guise of science, to make them sound true and relevant for the masses. Such was the case with scientific racism. In the present context, the knowledge produced by the science community is undeniable, particularly, in the biological sciences. Academic scientists and researchers who sought cures and treatments for various ailments and diseases produced tremendous knowledge about human life. The wealth of medical discoveries is important, but how some of this science was produced is intricately linked to scientific racism, poor ethics, and utter disregard for human life. Randall (1996) stated,

Many people are surprised at the level of distrust of the health care system held by African Americans. However fear and distrust . . . is a natural and logical response to the history of experimentation and abuse . . . this fear and distrust is rarely acknowledged in traditional bioethical discourse. (pp. 190-191)

The case of Henrietta Lacks is telling. While seeking treatment for a medical condition, doctors at Johns Hopkins took a sample of her cells, unbeknownst to her. These cells, presently known as the HELA line, have been studied over time and reproduced, and are key to medical advancement. The science community, largely situated on university campuses and affiliated hospitals, benefitted greatly from the medical deception and exploitation of Lacks, a young African American woman; yet, her living family remained in poverty. Lacks’ cells became the property on which many scientists capitalized past and present (see hooks, 2013). Presently, universities are still complicated in poorly conceived ethical protections for human subjects, subjects from whom they receive vital bio-materials that are worth significant amounts of money (Andrews, 2005). These same subjects are neither beneficiaries of these large sums of money and are exploited in the name of scientific research, produced by top university entities.

Property and the seizing of it for institutional expansion also has larger implications in terms of how institutions acquire space and from whom they acquire the space. History has shown how institutions were intricately involved in Indian removal processes to acquire additional land for campus expansion. Removal in present day contexts is described as “gentrification” and “urban renewal,” both of which presumably enhance neighborhoods and communities as

new residents—who disproportionately are young, white, professional, technical, and managerial workers with higher education and income levels—replace older residents—who disproportionately are low-income, working—class and poor, minority and ethnic group members, and elder—from older and previously deteriorated inner-city housing in a spatially concentrated manner . . . (Marcuse, 1985, pp. 198-199)

Gentrification allows more White, affluent, educated people to encroach on and displace low-income and racially marginalized communities, shifting everything from racial demographics, education, and housing options. Where higher education is concerned, several institutions, especially those located in urban areas, have used their power and money to displace and dislocate communities of color over the years. For example, Mullins and Jones (2005) studied the expansion of Indiana University's "premier urban research campus," IUPUI. The desire to expand its medical school and create an undergraduate campus was possible only by removing African Americans who lived in the surrounding area. Once a flourishing locale for African American families, businesses, and churches in the 1960s, Mullins and Jones noted,

Today hundreds of acres of homes that stood in the neighborhood in 1960 are all gone, their heritage is often completely unrecognized, and the vast scope of transformation and the university's complicity in that transformation is ignored or inelegantly remembered. (p. 251)

In efforts to rebuild American cities, the establishment and expansion of universities in urban areas were heavily supported by federal legislation. The Federal Housing Act of the 1950s provided financial support for "urban renewal areas," solidifying the involvement of urban universities in "reshaping urban America" (Mullins & Jones). Similar instances of urban universities whose expansion expressly displaced families of color occurred with the University of Illinois at Chicago, University of Pennsylvania, and Columbia University (Etienne, 2012; Krissoff Boehm & Corey, 2015; Maurasse, 2001; Webb, 2013). Mullins and Jones (2005) stated,

Research on urban campuses provides powerful opportunity to conduct truly engaged scholarship and make unrecognized but deep-seated privileges visible. Much of the archaeological story to be told on such campuses revolves around the racial and class privileges that made university expansion possible and now have rendered it rather invisible, even as many of these institutions now experience a tension between the willingness to face up to their institutional complicity in urban renewal and simultaneously continue spatial expansion. (p. 251)

Which Institutions?

For most of this discussion, I have referenced the more elite, selective institutions in the United States, namely because their practices of exclusion set the stage for how other institutional types would emerge. However, as part of the overall postsecondary system, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Tribal colleges, community colleges, and for-profit institutions as well as regional campuses are not immune from the racism/White supremacy that permeates higher education. In other words, the language used to reference different institutional types is racially coded where “elite and selective” mean White and wealthy. All other institutions are marked in some way to differentiate them by social class or primary racial group affiliations, hence “Black” in HBCU, “Tribal” to refer to Native American institutions, and “White” to describe predominantly White institutions. The racial signifiers delineate which people would be more likely to attend a given institution with very little blurring of color and class lines. Community colleges and for-profit institutions primarily educate low-income, working-class, and racially minoritized groups. More in-depth exploration, beyond the scope of this article, reveals how these various institutions came into existence and how the categories have been perfectly maintained for centuries in some cases and decades in others.

The first historically Black institutions were established to educate African Americans because they were not allowed access to existing institutions. Deemed intellectually inferior and fit only for manual labor, early private HBCUs were supported by missionaries, while the federal government via the Morrill Land Grant Acts established later institutions (Anderson, 1988; Jenkins, 1991; Wennersten, 1991). Most Tribal Colleges are tribally controlled and were established in the late 1960s to educate native populations (American Indian Higher Education Consortium, 1999). Both HBCUs and Tribal Colleges are among the few places where African American and Native American cultures, respectively, are highly valued and sustained. The federal government has never equitably funded these institutions. Nor have their financial resources at any point in history been on par with predominantly White institutions (e.g., Harvard endowment is \$32.7 billion, whereas Howard endowment is \$460.7 million). They have not benefitted from generations of wealth that elite colleges and universities have seen, and federal mandates have only provided cursory support for these institutions.

Presently, the relevance of HBCUs is consistently questioned (Egwu, 2011; Stuart, 2013; Tobolowsky, Outcalt, & McDonough, 2005). Community colleges are only recently gaining traction and national attention due to the Obama Administration’s college attainment efforts. However, a community

college education is only valued to a certain extent in comparison with an education from an elite, more selective institution. For-profit institutions are overwhelmingly populated with people of color. Such institutions are presumably devoted to student success but have garnered a reputation as degree mills that leave many students swimming in debt, namely, people of color. Higher education is not only a racist system, but one mediated by class and status of various institutions.

How Is Diversity Filtered Through Policies and Programs?

Gillborn (2005) refers to education policy as an “act of White supremacy.” It is dangerous to believe the cure for racism/White supremacy is contained in law and policy alone. Their effectiveness is closely linked to how they are interpreted and implemented. Scholars have written about the role of policy and its impact on and within higher education. Much of the scholarship focuses on affirmative action policies, and rightfully so. The debates surrounding affirmative action are longstanding and complex and receive their greatest attention in relation to race-conscious admissions policies. The most well-known argument in favor of affirmative action is couched in the discourse of diversity. Moses and Chang (2006) described the process through which the “diversity rationale” was created and has been maintained, not only as a legal strategy to shape educational policy but also as an intellectual tradition. They argued the diversity rationale merits “serious and careful attention” due to its capacity to both hinder and promote progress. As Bell (2003) noted, diversity is a huge distraction and makes it difficult to determine victory from defeat.

The idea of diversity is a fashionable concept used throughout higher education, regardless of context. Most within-college and university settings would argue the value of having diversity. However, higher education has not reached a point of true racial diversity, in terms of demographics or with regard to policies, procedures, the curriculum, and numerous other areas. Diversity is espoused in higher education, but not sufficiently enacted. At an institutional level, diversity-related policies and programs purportedly foster a sense of accountability on college campuses. They also presumably reflect the institution’s commitment to diversity. However, efforts to enact diversity typically result in three outcomes: Diversity efforts in higher education diminish the significance of race, become synonymous with *race* only, and/or place a huge burden of the work toward racial diversity on racially minoritized groups.

For example, Iverson’s (2007) examination of diversity policies revealed racially coded language that further marginalized people of color. She found

these policies used White men as the standard to which students of color were measured and when those students were deemed as meeting this standard, they gained access or “insider status.” In other words, they were rewarded for adhering to White male standards and presumed to be exceptional. Moreover, the language used in these plans constructed a deficit discourse of students of color as deficient and at-risk. The plans also failed to explicitly name the racist structures that promote unsafe and unwelcoming environments for people of color. Diversity policies, although designed to ensure diversity, often foster structural and systemic racism/White supremacy in higher education. Iverson stated, “A university’s diversity action plan may construct a world for racial minorities that disqualifies them from participation, even as it strives to include them as full participants” (p. 592).

Patton, Ranero, and Everett’s (2011) critical race analysis of multicultural student services and programming (MSS) also points to how their existence becomes synonymous with race only. For example, “traditional” campus activities such as homecoming and welcome week, although open to all, tend to be very exclusive and unwelcoming. Thus, MSS offices bear the brunt of the work for welcoming students of color and making them feel a semblance of belonging. MSS offices are largely responsible for doing the “diversity” work that others on campus will not do and are not held accountable for doing (Stage & Hamrick, 1994). Ultimately, PWIs where most MSS offices are located benefit greatly from the presence of MSS, while placing a huge burden on these offices to support students of color rather than enacting an institution-wide commitment to these students.

Despite the rhetoric of diversity, many in higher education are unnecessarily afraid of it. During a recent exercise in free speech, I learned a group of students on the Indiana University Bloomington campus held signs that read “diversity = white genocide.” As troubling and erroneously conceived as this idea is, students have a right to exercise freedom of speech. Free speech policies represent another example of how racism/White supremacy gets diminished. Lawrence (1990) noted college campuses “have seen a resurgence of racial violence and a corresponding rise in the incidence of verbal and symbolic assault and harassment to which blacks and other traditionally subjugated groups are subjected” (p. 434). Although written more than two decades ago, Lawrence’s quote holds significant, present-day relevance. Racist speech is everywhere on campuses, and some would argue the most blatant forms are spoken on fraternity (and sorority) row (Owens Patton, 2008). The challenge surrounding racist speech is that it is “protected,” like all speech, despite how injurious the language/actions might be. After the damage has been done, those using racist speech may claim their words were not intended to be offensive or harmful, and in some cases offer an apology. Neither action

addresses the psychological injury of the person who was offended, nor does the action lead to more substantive efforts to educate the offender. Despite the existence of campus policies in place to regulate speech on campuses, racist speech will remain protected due to the First Amendment. Lawrence details the common argument:

We recognize that minority groups suffer pain and injury as the result of racist speech, but we must allow this hate mongering for the benefit of society as a whole. Freedom of speech is the life blood of our democratic system . . . we cannot allow the public regulation of racist invective and vilification because any prohibition broad enough to prevent racist speech would catch in the same net forms of speech that are central to a democratic society. (p. 457)

Lawrence's interpretation of the contradictory arguments surrounding the protection of hate speech is a reminder that despite higher education's diversity rhetoric, racially minoritized people and other oppressed groups must make sacrifices for the greater good even despite efforts to diminish our humanity.

Despite the existence and promotion of diversity discourses in programs and policies, it is clear that on the one hand efforts are made. On the other hand, every effort results in further disenfranchisement for people of color. Bell (2003) noted, "these are difficult times for those working for racial equity." His words are prophetic as institutions continue to argue from a diversity stance, yet yield outcomes that are the very antithesis to diversity and racial justice.

Looking Toward the Future, Despite the Past

One might presume that the field of higher education would have, at minimum, called attention to the lineage of racism in the academy. Although numerous scholars have discussed and conducted research on topics that on the surface seem to deal with race, more often than not issues of racism/White supremacy remain invisible in the higher education literature, particularly in relation to studies about the organizational structure, governance, and leadership of higher education, the history and philosophy of higher education, finance and management of higher education, student affairs administration, research on institutional type, and so on. As noted earlier, Harper's (2012) work on race and racism in higher education research revealed that scholars rarely acknowledged these factors to explain issues of retention, success, access, and overall experience for college students. Given that we live

in a “post-racial” society, racism/White supremacy continues to flow throughout higher education literature and research.

In this article, I offered three propositions toward a CRT of higher education. In doing so, my goal was to explicitly discuss the role of racism/White supremacy in the academy, particularly its influence on virtually every aspect of the higher education enterprise. This analysis revealed the endemic and inherently racist structures of higher education. It also highlighted the importance of revising history to present more accurate accounts of the establishment of U.S. higher education. The numerous examples presented above demonstrate the usefulness and importance of foregrounding race, naming White supremacy, disrupting dominant, Eurocentric ideologies, challenging neutrality and colorblindness, and legitimizing the experiences of people of color. Moreover, the examples reveal the convergence of racism along with other forms of oppression (classism, imperialism) and how they manifest in higher education. Plainly stated, higher education has a long way to go, and CRT can and should be used as an epistemological lens for studying and transforming higher education as part of a larger social justice agenda. As a racial realist, I fully accept the idea that racism/White supremacy will not end; nevertheless, I am hopeful and fully committed to dismantling them in higher education (and beyond). In closing, I offer one final proposition for readers to consider: *Higher education serves as a space for transformative knowledge production that challenges dominant discourses and ways of operating in and beyond the academy.* I offer this proposition fully acknowledging that higher education cannot serve as the only mechanism through which racism/White supremacy is dismantled. However, colleges and universities educate thousands of lawyers, doctors, judges, teachers, professors, scientists, business owners, leaders, and citizens in this country; the influence of higher education is undeniable. The conceptualization and growth of CRT within the walls of the academy suggest that higher education, although culpable for the re-manufacturing of racism/White supremacy, can also exist and serve as a contested space in which scholars of color and all committed to racial justice can galvanize to influence the future of higher education and its role within society. Institutions must collectively consider their impact and strategies for re-envisioning the future of higher education in a way that not simply educates students but also educates them about race and prepares them to disrupt racism, White supremacy, and other forms of systemic oppression.

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Note

1. For the purposes of this article, I will use racism/White supremacy interchangeably.

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