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The Social Funding of Race: The Role of Schooling

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ABSTRACT

Our nation is suffused in questions of race and racism. Despite much scholarly and public discussion we struggle to undo long-held assumptions about race and how it functions. This article looks at race from the perspective of a public commodity that the society “funds” in order to make it seem real and intractable. Throughout the article there are multiple examples of the everyday, commonsense things people in this society do to fund the concept and give it meaning from our children’s earliest days. The challenge in a society that so “fully funds” race is it seems near impossible to “defund” the concept in teacher education to allow new teachers to approach the classroom as a space where race is not determinant and highly predictive of student achievement.

In 1948 U.S. Senator Strom Thurmond from South Carolina ran for the office of president of the United States as a third-party, Dixiecrat candidate. The focus of Senator Thurmond’s campaign was to uphold racial segregation and to prohibit black people from participating fully in the society. “All the bayonets in the Army cannot force the Negro into our homes, our schools, our churches, and our places of recreation,” Thurmond reportedly said in one of his campaign speeches (Bass & Thompson, 2003). However, at the same time that Thurmond was defending white segregationists’ practices, he was financially supporting and maintaining a relationship with a daughter who was the product of his secret liaison with a black woman who had worked for his family. His actions force me to ask, “What is this race thing that could so drive the ideology of a society and at the same moment slip from the consciousness of individual actions?”

During most of my scholarly life, I have been preoccupied with the concept of race. It turns out that I am not alone in that preoccupation. Winant (2000) identifies it as a central and controversial theme of the discipline of sociology. Volumes of scholarly literature exist to make sense of race as a scientific and/or social construct. Although scientists generally agree that no biological basis for race exists and social scientists concede that it is a social construct, it continues to be one of our most baffling notions. This paper probably will do little to clarify race as a concept. Instead, I want to use this analysis as a way to think through how we “fund” race as a society and how that funding contributes to continued inequitable, unjust, and undemocratic practices in schooling and education in the United States. To build my argument, I will talk briefly about race as a concept and move to a discussion of the notion of “funding” and how funding race creates inequitable schooling. I conclude the analysis with a discussion of the work teacher educators must do to “defund” the concept if our teachers are going to be better prepared to create more equitable and just classrooms.

I can't tell you what it is, but i know it when i see it

In 1806 a jurist by the name of St. George Tucker imposed a racial determination test on three generations of women—a daughter, grandmother, and mother. These women could not prove that they were descendants from a free maternal ancestor, which at that time was the determiner as to who was white, and their owner, a Mr. Hudgins could not prove that they were descendants from a female enslaved African (Lopez, 1995). To determine whether the Wrights were black (and thus slaves) or Indian (and allegedly free), Judge Tucker of the Virginia courts insisted that in addition to skin color, there were two markers of blackness that endured over many generations. Those markers were the flatness of the nose and the coarse texture of the hair:

Nature has stamp't upon the African and his descendants two characteristic marks, besides the difference of complexion, which often remain visible long after the characteristic distinction of colour either disappears or becomes doubtful; a flat nose and woolly head of hair. The latter of these disappears the last of all; and so strong an ingredient in the African constitution is this latter characteristic, that it predominates uniformly where the party is in equal degree descended from parents of different complexions, whether white or Indians. (*Hudgins v. Wright*, 11 Va 134, Sup. Ct. App. 1806, cited in Lopez, 1995, p. 191)

By this standard, Judge Tucker looked at the long, straight hair of Hannah Wright and judged the women not to be of African descent and, therefore, free. The full ruling includes an operationalized definition of race declaring that one single African descendant, a “flat nose,” or a “woolly head of hair” made one black. Almost 200 years later this perception remains.

The concept of race, although prefigured in early history by polar notions of civilization and barbarity (Snowden, 1983) or citizen and slave (Hannaford, 1996), is a modern one, according to Winant (2000). Along with his colleague Omi, Winant points out that there is no biological basis for race, and even the socio-historical categories we use to differentiate among groups are both imprecise and arbitrary (Omi & Winant, 2014). Winant (2000) asserts that the concept of race as we now know it began to form “with the rise of a world political economy” (p. 172). As nation-states began to participate in a worldwide economy—seaborne empires, conquest of the Americas, and the rise of the Atlantic slave trade—the development of race became a practical project to create an “Other” whose threat and necessity could be integrated and deployed into every aspect of society. Such an “Other” justified not only the conquering of militarily defenseless nations, but its existence was also mapped onto an entire set of symbol systems and rationalities that made labeling a person as “other” seem natural and normal.

Thus, while European rulers saw the “Other” standing in the way of empire building, aristocrats and planters in the Americas saw a cheap source of labor, and the church saw the “Other” as both potential adherents and symbols of depravity and evil. Wynter (1990) points out that there exist prescriptive rules and canons for regulating thought and action in every society. After the 15th century, the prescriptive rules of Western societies began to embrace a notion of race that placed “European-ness” (whatever that might be) in a superior social space. I offer this truncated description of the concept to remind us that although we act as if biologically based human characteristics define race, race’s meaning only began to take shape at the end of the Middle Ages. If this notion of race is not biologically based and its social construction is arbitrary and unstable, how is it that we in the United States use it so regularly and effortlessly?

When I was a graduate student, one of my professors was recruiting students to serve as coders for a project that looked at teacher interactions with Latino students. The job of the coder was simply to tabulate the number of times classroom teachers called upon Latino students over the course of a specified class period. Among the coders the professor hired were a number of international students. Quickly it became clear that the international students had difficulty determining who was Mexican American and who was “white.” The professor reassigned the international students to another aspect of the project and replaced them with U.S.-born students who had no difficulty making the distinctions. The fairest Mexican American with the lightest eyes and hair is still recognized as other than white to students of the United States. How this happens and the implications for education are the focus of this portion of the paper.

I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the work of a number of scholars who have attempted to creatively rearticulate race. In their volume, Guinier and Torres (2002) offer the concept of political race that represents a way of recruiting and mobilizing it to fight against oppressive, anti-democratic structures. Rather than rely on spurious notions of biology and genetic heritability, their work recognizes the political power that might be harnessed by oppressed people throughout the society. Rather than consider the biology of race, Guinier and Torres ask questions about how the concept can be deployed strategically in order to garner social benefits. It is a new way of thinking about something that most of the society believes it already understands. However, their work is indicative of cutting-edge thinking that has not yet gained traction in our current racial miasma. In this paper I work hard to make sense of what we already have while contemplating what might be possible.

Understanding social funding

In her outstanding work on literacy, Brandt (1998) argues for a concept of “sponsors of literacy” in which “sponsors ... are any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold literacy—and gain advantage by it in some way” (p. 166). Brandt (1998) further argues, “Sponsors are delivery systems for the economies of literacy, the means by which these forces present themselves to—and through—individual learners.” (p. 167)

As elegant as Brandt’s argument is, it is not a seamless fit for the argument I am attempting to make concerning race. For that I turn to the work of Philip Fisher (2004) who, in his description of how we as a society lack a syntax for aesthetic appreciation, suggests that we do have such a syntax of literate appreciation because literacy is “fully funded.” Fisher (2004) uses this phrase—fully funded—not to describe the financial commitment the society makes to literacy but rather to describe the *total* investment of the society in literacy. His conceptualization refers to the way, as a society, we embed literacy and literate activity in every aspect of our culture such that children come to school (and preschool) with a fully formed notion of the book as a sacred artifact, that writing conveys meaning, and that words are powerful conveyers of thought.

School becomes a site where literacy is further funded through explicit and implicit instruction as well as the public recognition of its value. Students learn that it is important to become “good readers” because praise and admiration flow to good readers. They also learn that reading and literate activities integrally link with other learning activities. But it is not merely the formal curriculum that aids in the continual funding of literacy. Literacy is funded by the myriad informal activities that surround school. A student who is absent or tardy from a school activity often is admonished to “bring a note.” A student who misbehaves may receive a “written referral” to the disciplinary office. “Passing notes” or texting during class may be seen as a serious rule infraction. Brandt (1998) helps us to see the “trucks and trains,” or traffic, between sponsorship and literacy—how the relationships between the macro social spaces such as the economy move back and forth to the micro social spaces such as individuals as literacy learners. Fisher’s (2004) notion represents a more diffuse yet comprehensive “loading” of value onto the concept even when one may believe that she is participating in a counter-social activity (e.g., the note or text in class, the holdup note in the bank, the ransom letter in a kidnapping). In the counter-social activities, we see that the concept of literacy is so fully funded that it is impossible to withdraw it from use even when it does not work to a mainstream advantage.

My argument is that like literacy, race is also fully funded by the society. Various psychologists (Cross, 1978; Helms, 1990; Parham, 1989) originally argued that children learn to identify race through various developmental stages, and others later argued that children acquire the skill as a part of a more holistic, ecological process (Johnson, 1992; Miller, 1992; Ramirez, 1998; Trimble, 2000; Wijeyeshinghe, 2001). Both groups, however, do not acknowledge the emphasis culture places or attention it “invests” in prioritizing racial identification. I want to move away from the development of the individual to suggest that the extant “regime of truth” (Foucault, 1972) determines what is possible to think and imagine about race because the present cultural model relies so heavily on race as a sense-making category.

In the United States, even before individuals start to think about their racial identification, culture sends both explicit and implicit messages about race. Novelist Toni Morrison (1989) states that “race has become metaphorical—a way of referring to and disguising forces, events, classes, and expressions of social decay and economic division far more threatening to the body politic than biological race ever was” (p. 63). So even as our natural scientists refute its biological existence and social scientists discount its material reality, we continue to fully fund it in our economic, political, social, and cultural realms.

For example, many years ago when my daughter was a preschool student, I served as a participating parent at her school. One of the children in her class was a 4-year-old whose parents had recently emigrated from Northern Italy. On one particular day, “Mario”¹ and I were working on a puzzle together. He happened to notice that my daughter and the one other African American child in the school were playing together at a table across the room. “Which one is yours?” he asked me. Before I could respond to what I saw as his honest query, there was a collective gasp uttered by both white teachers. From my vantage point Mario was asking a logical question based on the color perception that all children have. Just as we would expect him to recognize the distinction between a blue ball and a yellow ball (and have a preference if he so chose), he should be able to recognize that it was likely that one (or both) of the brown-complexioned children was associated with me. But, the not-so-subtle response of both authority figures signaled to him that there was either something wrong with him or something wrong with his question.

Later, in another interaction with Mario, I commented on a lovely handmade sweater he was wearing. He told me proudly that his grandmother in Italy made the sweater and, in fact, made sweaters for everyone in his family—his mom, dad, and sister. “Oh,” I exclaimed in jest, “I’d better go live at your house so I can get one of those nice sweaters.” “You can’t live at my house,” laughed Mario. “There are no brown people living in my house!” At that response, the same teachers this time not so subtly exclaimed in unison, “Mario! That’s not nice!” If Mario was not certain about the problem in the question he asked in the first incident, he was now unmistakably sure that he had transgressed in the second interaction and his transgression was around race.² Mario’s lack of U.S. concepts of race demonstrates how, unlike Brandt’s (1998) notion of sponsorship, the funding of race can actually occur when the ostensible action is to work against racial categorization or identification. Mario, because he lived in a household with parents who came from a culture that did not fund race in the same way as we do in the United States, was unaware of the racial coding in the same way his classmates were. He did not know that although race would be fully funded for him in this society, he had to disguise or camouflage that knowledge. But, despite the delay in the development of this funding, by the time Mario entered the middle grades in school, race would have been fully funded for him.³ By that time, making a social faux pas about race would have become a thing of the past because he would have all of the racial coding in place to either continue this social practice or consciously begin to challenge it.

A third example regarding young children also supports this argument. My daughter’s best friend in kindergarten immigrated to the United States from China shortly before she began school. Her family were our neighbors, and the two girls played together every day at school, after school, and on the weekends. When we moved to the Midwest from the Bay Area at the end of the school year, they were visibly upset. In addition to the close relationship our daughters had developed, we were instrumental in helping the Chinese parents negotiate the business of living in the United States. We helped them with major purchases such as an automobile and local, state, and federal bureaucracies (e.g., Department of Motor Vehicles, utility companies, and tax authorities). After some tearful goodbyes, we were certain that we would only see them during return visits to the Bay Area. However, within a year, the father landed a faculty position at an institution in the Midwest. As a result, during the Christmas holiday vacation the year they moved to the area, we were able to get the girls together for a brief ski trip and a sleepover at our home.

¹ This is a pseudonym.

² This is a retelling of this story from a previous article (Ladson-Billings, 1992).

³ Although Mario thinks of himself as “Italian,” he will learn that Italians were included in the category of whiteness sometime in the 20th century (Roediger, 2006).

As the two girls were playing, I overheard my child's playmate Zhang⁴ tell my daughter that she was one of two "yellow" kids in her class in her new school. My daughter quickly reminded her, "When we were in Palo Alto you said you were white." Zhang responded in an almost embarrassed way, "Yeah, I didn't know." I could only wonder what had happened to this child in the past few years to let her know that she was ineligible for membership in this category called "white." Somewhere between kindergarten and second grade the society had begun funding race for her. Even though her best friend and her best friend's parents who were fundamental to her family's survival in their initial year in the United States had demonstrated that black people could prove to be important culture brokers with more than enough cultural capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) to assist them, she was beginning to understand that there was something special about being white. Zhang was having the concept of race funded for her beyond the confines of her household.

In his book on whiteness and the labor movement, historian Roediger (1991) states, "Even in an all-White town, race was never absent" (p. 3). Roediger goes on to describe the more pervasive and overt racism that was a part of growing up in the civil rights era. At that historical moment no one would refute the notion that we were fully funding race and racism. Today, however, one might likely argue that we are more sensitive and responsive to race and racism, and we want our children to learn to get along with everybody. Generational change in the conceptualization of race is similar to change occurring in the retirement system.

A generation ago people in the United States who were planning for retirement relied on their payroll deductions and the company contributions that comprised their pensions. They knew what they contributed, what the company contributed, and what the formulae were that governed their annuity. The retirement was both funded and public (i.e., individuals knew what to expect from their pensions). Today, with the economic restructuring and the counseling workers receive advising them to diversify their portfolio of retirement savings options (e.g., tax shelters, IRAs, mutual funds, stocks, bonds along with some company-supported savings), people continue to fund their retirements, but the process is much more private (i.e., working class and lower middle class individuals are less aware of the sources and return possibilities of their retirement savings). In the case of race, historically it has been appropriate to speak, talk, write, and act openly about race in the United States. By the 1960s, this discourse started to move into more private sectors, but it still existed. Today, we are fully funding race in myriad ways that make it difficult for teachers and other educators to defund or bankrupt the concept.

More than a decade ago, when I began thinking about this concept of the social funding of race, I had just watched then-U.S. National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice testify before the president's 9/11 commission. Whether or not one endorsed Rice and the administration's policies, it was clear that she performed well—she was well prepared, she was cordial and noncombative, she answered the questions on her own terms, and she was careful to not go "off message." Although presented with several openings to trash the previous witness, terror specialist Richard Clarke, who called her leadership and judgment into question, Dr. Rice never took the bait. Instead, she insisted on putting his advice in a larger context and tried to construct an evidence-based trail to support her testimony. In the back of my mind I wondered whether the social funding of race would arise. At the end of her testimony, the television station I was watching started with its commentaries and the very first comment from the broadcaster was, "National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice was articulate." What a strange first statement. She is the National Security Advisor of the United States of America! The word *articulate* means, "able to speak; expressing oneself readily, clearly, or effectively" (Mish, 2014). Shouldn't articulateness be a minimum requirement for such a position (Alim & Smitherman, 2012)? For those who consider this observation hypersensitive or polemic, I point it out not to make the case but to illustrate it. Such a pronouncement by a seasoned national journalist illustrates how fully funded our notion of race is. The sotto voce message of "Dr. Rice is articulate" is "we didn't expect that out of her." I cannot think of any public examples where the adjective "articulate" is used to describe a white person in a position of high regard or power. However, both Colin Powell (in his testimony before the United Nations as a part of the case for the war in Iraq) and Condoleezza Rice were repeatedly referred to as "able to speak" and "expressing themselves

⁴ This name is also a pseudonym.

readily, clearly, or effectively”—that is, “articulate.” It is a descriptor that characterized President Barack Obama throughout his administration as well. This is the pernicious effect of having fully funded race. We are at a moment where there is almost no place in the culture or the language where there is not a racial overlay.

Our tendency is to think about all things racial in dichotomous terms. Things are black or white, right or wrong, good or bad. When the subject is race and racism, we quickly default to the racists versus the nonracists. I am suggesting that because society so completely and consistently funds race it is difficult to see where one (racists) leaves off and the other (nonracists) begins. An analogy that might help my explanation here is an experience I had in Sweden. In a lovely northern city my graduate students and I decided to travel what was called the “Art Trail.” People were invited to drive a number of kilometers to see a series of public art pieces. One piece can best be described as a wood-fired heated stone bench. Some sections of the bench were comfortable and the heat was evenly distributed. Other sections were too hot and some sections were cool. What was unique about the bench was the public was both invited to sit on it and encouraged to open the lid at the end of the bench and place another fire log in before leaving. As visitors we benefited from the previous visitors’ efforts to keep the bench warm, and we maintained that warmth by throwing another log on the fire.

The way the social funding of race operates reminds me of that bench. It is already “warm” when we enter the society. We are invited to sit upon it and share its benefits, and we are encouraged to add fuel as we move on. We did not construct the bench, but we take responsibility for maintaining it. Some of us sit on a section of the bench that is cold. We are excluded from the benefits. Others sit on a section that is too hot. We are victimized by the very thing that brings others pleasure. Although the analogy may be crude, I think it helps illustrate the way we may unwittingly participate in a process that we believe benefits us without being aware of the way it regularly and systematically disadvantages others.

What funding race means in schools

Given that race is fully funded in our society, what does such funding mean in schools and classrooms? Since the late 1920s, schools have been grappling with the issue of bringing unequal status groups of learners together in a classroom as a part of a larger project of social improvement and to improve individual and group achievement. Banks (2004) documents the work of community and school-based groups to incorporate immigrants (particularly European immigrants) and later non-white communities, particularly African Americans, into the mainstream. As important as this inter-group movement was and as benevolent as its founders and activists may have been, it is important to understand that their major purpose was to assimilate the “Other” into what they firmly believed was the superior culture—white, Anglo-Saxon American culture.

In addition, the school has been a site of citizenship and human rights contestation for centuries in U.S. society. Meyer (1977) argued that societies use schools as legitimating institutions that confer theories of knowledge and theories of personnel (i.e., what is worth knowing and who the knowers should be). Early in the history of the United States, schooling was reserved for the social elites—white, male, wealthy children. Over time, more groups and categories of people were deemed eligible for schooling. African Americans were among the last groups able to avail themselves of universal, K-12 public schooling. Historian James Anderson (2002) points out that secondary high school education did not become universally available in the South for African Americans until the 1960s.

At the highest level of U.S. society the inclusion and exclusion of particular groups of students from school (a key access point to social mobility) has been a major site of conflict. The landmark Supreme Court decision, *Brown v. The Topeka Board of Education* (1954), while ostensibly motivated by efforts to defund race to create equal education, was actually driven by foreign relations and the problem of selling democracy to other nations during the Cold War in the midst of apartheid-like school and social arrangements (Dudziak, 1988/1995).

Today, although African American children have access to K-12 public schooling, there are aspects of schooling that fund race in ways that further solidify race and the social responses to it. Although it is difficult to give full attention to the myriad ways in which race is funded in schools, the concept

works and is foundational to our understanding of us as Americans. In the rest of this essay, I offer broad categories of aspects of schooling that display the concept of the social funding of race.

Access to equal education

More than 60 years have transpired since the Supreme Court of the United States ruled that separate schooling was inherently unequal (*Brown v. Topeka Board of Education*, 1954). Over that 60-year period, we have seen the growth of white resistance, the displacement of black teachers and administrators, and resegregation that compounds race and poverty. It is important to note that for a brief period, southern schools actually were more desegregated than their northern counterparts. This brief period of southern school desegregation was the result of favorable court decisions and somewhat supportive presidential administrations (i.e., Kennedy and Johnson). However, by the time Richard Nixon came into office, he made it clear that the school desegregation decisions had to be reversed. According to Orfield and Eaton (1996), “Following Nixon’s election, H. R. Haldeman, Nixon’s chief of staff, recorded in his diary the [p]resident’s directives to staff to do as little as possible to enforce desegregation” (p. 9). This work to block and reverse school desegregation was a part of what became the Republican Party’s “southern strategy.” By cultivating an antigovernment discourse (i.e., a modern version of states’ rights) and appointing conservative justices to the courts, Nixon created a template that would serve subsequent conservative candidates and office-holders well. Richard Nixon appointed four justices to the Supreme Court, and among his appointments was William H. Rehnquist who had served as a clerk for Justice Jackson during the *Brown v. Board of Education* case. Although he tried to distance himself from this opinion⁵, as a clerk, Rehnquist wrote a memo that stated, “I realize that it is an unpopular and unhumanitarian position, for which I have been excoriated by ‘liberal’ colleagues, but I think *Plessy v. Ferguson* was right and should be reaffirmed” (Senate Hearing on the Judiciary, 1986).

The ability of the Republican Party to create a “solid South” reflects a social funding of race where the language that is recruited never has to include the word “race” or related vocabulary yet clearly signals that race is the central issue. The terms “school desegregation,” “forced busing,” “neighborhood schools,” “social engineering,” “school choice,” and “vouchers” have been used to mask the deeper malady that race and racism represent in the society. The race language has been removed, but because race is so well funded in our consciousness, one can talk about it without having to do so explicitly.

What is brilliant about this strategy is that the language and discourse, which can be presented in ways that seem to be sanitized of any racialized meanings, have been employed with families of color to persuade them to support schooling that is against their own self-interests. For example, families of color are encouraged to advocate for neighborhood schools or choice even though their choices are likely to comprise poor schools and substandard alternatives (Fitzpatrick, Gartner, & LaForgia, 2015). Although the words are cleverly disguised not to denote race-based concepts at first, once one is familiar with these types of conversations, it becomes obvious what these words connote.

Today, the 12 largest urban school districts in the United States can be described as “hyper-segregated.” School districts such as Detroit, Dallas, Memphis, Baltimore, Houston, Los Angeles, and Chicago have few white students with whom to diversify the student populations. The very notion of an “urban school” or an “inner-city school” conjures up visions of black and brown schoolchildren. For example, in Riverside County, California in 1998, a school district needed to name a new school, and the debate surrounding the selection of the name illustrates how certain terms tend to connote “blackness,” and therefore, something “Other.” Just before the Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday, the school board decided to name the new high school after the “American” hero and civil rights leader. The school would serve a primarily white, upper-middle-income community. At the school board meeting, a number of parents protested. A Mr. Dale Dunn stated, “Martin Luther King was a great man but naming the school after him would be a mistake. Everybody will think we have a Black school out there” (Terry, 1998). What did Mr. Dunn mean by the term “black” school and what disadvantage did he imagine his children might suffer from such a designation? How had the naming of a school after a national hero become a source of racial fear?

⁵ Later Rehnquist would assert that the memo did not reflect his views, but rather the early views of Justice Jackson (Davis, 1984).

Curriculum

The school's advertised curriculum is another site for the social funding of race. What intellectual information and experiences students have access to, what they are denied access to, and what distortions of information they encounter can serve as powerful funders of our racial ideology. Many scholars have done content analyses of curriculum texts to determine the degree to which various groups and perspectives are represented in the information and materials schoolchildren receive. Textbook examination work offers quantitative analyses of how many instances of various people and groups of color and/or women appear in standard textbooks, particularly in history/social science and language arts/literature texts. Although these methods contribute greatly to scholarship, here I choose to consider the qualitative issues about that representation and how more specific narratives can contribute to the social funding of race, that is, when we put the data in the context of particular life stories we better understand how racial aggressions and microaggressions harm individual citizens as well as the body politic.

King (2004) proposes a typology of knowledge moving from hegemony to autonomy that identifies concepts that she calls invisibilizing knowledge, marginalizing knowledge, expanding knowledge, and deciphering knowledge. Invisibilizing knowledge focuses on a monocultural depiction of the society that uses the term "we" and "our" to signal a notion of common interests, while simultaneously silencing the interests of the socially and culturally excluded. This type of curriculum elevates the achievement of the West over all others and tacitly regards only the contribution of Europeans and European Americans as notable. Morrison (1989) suggests that there are "structured absences" and silences on certain topics that writers use to construct an imagined white self (King, 2004).

Marginalizing knowledge in the curriculum can include "selected 'multicultural' curriculum content that simultaneously distorts the historical and social reality that people actually experienced" (King, p. 361). For example, a textbook may refer to "our common culture" and characterizes each ethnic group's arrival in the United States as an "immigrant experience." Such a textbook would describe the European Americans' experience as immigrants at Ellis Island, Asian Americans' experience as immigrants at Angel Island, Native Americans as "first immigrants" across the land bridge, and African Americans as "forced immigrants" on slave trade ships. In this model, various groups are represented, but the nature of their representation distorts the specificity (and harsh realities) of their real experiences.

Expanding knowledge reflects what James Banks (2004) calls an additive approach to the curriculum. Here curriculum developers create additional canons (e.g., black canons, Latino canons, Native American canons, Asian canons) without disturbing or interrogating the legitimacy of a hegemonic European canon. Thus, students can take a variety of courses and read a variety of literature that add to the size of the curriculum without raising fundamental questions about how such additional studies come to be "in addition to" what represents the official curriculum (Apple, 1993).

Finally, King (2004) addresses what she terms deciphering knowledge that is designed to "expose the belief structure of race in literature, school texts, and other discursive practices" (p. 363). This work pulls on Foucault's (1972) notion of the archaeology of knowledge and is evident in Morrison's (1992) literary criticism that beseeches us to decipher the racial presence and ideology that exist in ostensibly "white" texts. Rather than be consumed with trying to add to the extant canon, this is work that requires us to look at what images, ideas, perspectives, values, and ideologies are made available and instantiated by reading certain texts. According to those who advocate for deciphering knowledge, the problem with *Huckleberry Finn* is not simply Huck's use of the "N-word." Rather the reader needs to struggle with why an adult black male is made serviceable and childlike vis-à-vis an adolescent, indigent white boy. Or, in reading the *Tempest* or *Heart of Darkness*, we have to help students understand the way race (or specifically, blackness) is prefigured as degradation and savagery and grasp the effect this perception has on the depiction of the characters and setting of the novels.

Although this discussion references contemporary understandings of the role of the curriculum, this issue of the role of the curriculum reflects a long-standing debate. Carter G. Woodson (1933) argued that the same curriculum that told white children that they and their ancestors were responsible for building and contributing everything good to civilization tells black children that they and their ancestors have done nothing and contributed nothing to civilization. More pointedly, Woodson (1933) asserts that

lynching, as a racist practice, would not have been possible had it not already occurred in the classroom. These strong words speak to the power of the curriculum and the way it can inspire much more than the dissemination of biased information.

Instruction

Curriculum alone cannot explain the way schools participate in the social funding of race. The instruction that students receive also contributes to this project. The degree to which teachers are willing to reinforce or interrupt the racial discourse represents a constant source of social funding of race as a concept. In an earlier work (Ladson-Billings, 2003), I argued that although more children's and young adult literature authors had been more deliberate and persistent in taking up racial themes in their books, few teachers were willing to engage the full range of questions and issues such books present. Books that use historical events (e.g., slavery, school desegregation, the civil rights movement) are presented as long-ago, far-away problems that the society has solved, while books that take up social issues (e.g. racism, prejudice, discrimination) are taught as examples of individual character flaws. Rarely do teachers engage students in questions about their current-day experiences with race and racism. Thus, it is possible for a teacher to be teaching a text that deals with the resistance to school desegregation and keep the discussion solely contained within the text while children are sitting in classrooms (and schools) that are segregated.

Instruction is also implicated in the social funding of race by the way teachers arrange their classrooms and the way schools group students. Ability groups very often map onto students' race (and class)⁶ positions, with the "high-ability" group filled with high-status (i.e., white and or upper income) students and the "low-ability" groups filled with low-status students. At the secondary level, this racial differentiation is made starker by the creation of tracks and/or special programs for students. Some schools brag about their student diversity, but inside the programs and classrooms there exists a resegregation. Honors programs and Advanced Placement Programs are almost exclusively white and upper middle class while basic courses (see data from Quinton, 2014) remedial courses, and courses that fail to lead to admission into colleges or universities are filled with black and brown faces. In addition to the actual segregation of the students, the data suggest that students in the low-status programs are more likely to be taught by teachers who have less experience and are less well qualified (Darling-Hammond, 2000). This particular social arrangement serves to reinforce notions of racial inferiority without ever having to overtly express such thoughts. Students quickly learn that to be taught by certain teachers, in certain courses, in certain schools, confers either an elite or a deprived status, and that status very conveniently coincides with race.

Discipline and classroom management

Schools have to be places where children and adults are safe. They have to be places where there is some form of order and regularity. They do not have to be places of punishment. Unfortunately, that is exactly what they represent for some children. In a visit to a working-class elementary school that had gained a reputation for having unruly students, the principal took me to see the "Restitution Room." This innovation was her answer to misbehavior. She seemed quite proud and asked me what I thought. I was horrified to see a room, devoid of any decorations, books, or other learning material, filled with rows of desks and little black boys (the school is about 50% black) ages 6 to 11 seated silently with their hands folded. An adult paraprofessional was in the room to ensure they did not speak or get up from their desks. "Well," I replied, "I guess this is just great if what you are preparing the students for is prison!"

Public records of suspensions and expulsions indicate that black and brown students are much more likely to experience such sanctions. Although some might argue that standards of behavior should apply to all students, we see that the meaning attributed to behaviors and the implementation of discipline

⁶ Although the focus of this essay is on race, I am cognizant of the way race and class co-vary and the tremendous overlap between the two subject positions.

standards vary greatly depending on students' race and class positions. African American male students, according to Majors and Billson (1993) are more likely to be suspended for "non-contact" violations (e.g., wearing a hat in the building, donning banned attire, being in the "wrong" place) than any other group of students.

While observing a student teacher I noted that she had reprimanded an Asian American child nine times for leaving his seat. "Sit down, Stanley." "Go back to your seat, Stanley." "I'm warning you, Stanley." After a while, a little black boy got up from his seat and the student teacher angrily responded, "Larry, you're out of here!" and dispatched him to the principal's office. During our post-observation conference, I showed her my log with the times and instances of Stanley's infractions and Larry's one misbehavior and her reaction to it. This young woman was one of my better student teachers. She expressed commitments to social justice and equity in her university coursework and desired to teach in a multiracial, multilingual school. When she saw my observation log, she was shocked by her own behavior. Race was so fully funded for her that she had come to see the black child as the problem even when his behavior was no different from the Asian student. Of course, she may have been nervous to have her supervisor watching her every move. She may also have just had it with little boys leaving their seats uninvited. She alone is not to blame—the culture that engendered this behavior in her is as well.

In a more extreme example, I was in a high school (not as a professor but as a parent), and a white male student was in a heated altercation with a white male teacher. At one point in the argument, the student called the teacher a "sorry, M—F—!" At that point all of the people within earshot (which included a black janitor, another white student, and me) sucked in their collective breaths. The teacher then said to the student, "Why are you talking to me like that? You're not black!" Both the janitor and I were rendered speechless. There was no talk of detention, suspension, or expulsion. Blackness had just become equivalent to rudeness, disrespect, obscenity, and license. And what meaning did the white students, both the offender and the bystander, take from this outburst and subsequent reaction—that black people alone are capable of bad behavior? This scenario serves as another example of the social funding of race.

Assessment

In the current climate of accountability it is important not to overlook the way testing and assessment have been instrumental in the social funding of race. At its crudest level, intelligence testing and the interpretation of such tests have long been a mechanism for the social funding of race. Authors Herrnstein and Murray (1999) created quite a stir in the late 1990s when they revived the genetic difference theories of the 18th century by citing group IQ test scores as if there was not debate about the validity of such measures. Interestingly, the debate about their volume quickly devolved into a discussion about race. Most of the data in their book is about class, which is a part of the volume's subtitle. But race is the flashpoint term. In a society committed to the quantification and ranking of almost everything, the ability to affix numbers to individuals and aggregate those numbers to particular groups is an interesting and curious phenomenon.

In addition, as much as most people decry Herrnstein and Murray's (1999) interpretations, we continue to use a variety of measures to quantify student learning and to determine who is most worthy for a variety of society's benefits. The current testing frenzy occurring in most urban (and rural) classrooms has almost stripped such classrooms of anything approaching real teaching and learning (McNeill, 2000; Rothstein, 2004). Testing has become a proxy for student learning without any consideration for the differential challenges with which many students live. Because testing serves as the proxy for student achievement, much of the discourse about the "achievement gap" fails to address the ecological racism that characterizes the society. However, some advocacy groups take on racism directly. ERASE (Expose Racism & Advance School Excellence) is an initiative of the Applied Research Center (ARC) that published a report on the relationship between testing and race. According to Gordon and Piana (1999):

Almost all standardized tests, including IQ tests and the SATs, have what is called a statistical "outcome bias" against African American and other people of color. That is, African Americans consistently score measurably lower on these tests than do white test-takers. (The fact that a test has an outcome bias does not mean that the people who

designed the test were consciously, or even unconsciously, biased. It simply means that there is more than an accidental difference among the scores of different groups of test-takers.)

Even if we could devise a fair test, we have to acknowledge the conditions under which students who are victimized by the social funding of race come to the test. Steele (1999) has done work suggesting that if we can manipulate the setting to minimize the import of race, African American students do as well as their white peers. In an experiment he conducted in 1999, Steele studied the performance of Stanford University sophomore students on a graduate admissions test, using a control and intervention group to measure the differences in performance when students enter the test with different expectations. When the control group took the test, the students in this group were told that the test was one that measures intellectual ability. In the control group, the African American subjects performed much poorer than their white counterparts. When the intervention group took the test, they were told that the test is not a measure of intellect. There is no measurable difference in the performance of African American and white students in this group. Steele refers to the phenomenon of “stereotype threat” as “the threat of being viewed through the lens of a negative stereotype, or the fear of doing something that would inadvertently confirm that stereotype” (Steele, 1999, p. 45). Steele (2003) asserts that all are susceptible to stereotype threat regarding stereotypes that are associated with groups with which individuals affiliate (e.g., women drivers, midwestern naïveté, Arab terrorists). However, individuals of marginalized races likely face a greater stereotype threat because of the way society funds race. When society funds race, the damage it does compounds since there are an exponentially greater number of instances where that stereotype threat can be activated, particularly when so many things have come to stand for race (e.g., crime, poverty, school failure).

So, how do we prepare teachers in a context that is suffused with race and racism?

What’s a teacher educator to do?

I make the assumption that most teacher educators want to do good work—not only in their classrooms, but also in the society. They want to prepare teachers who are competent as pedagogues, subject matter experts, and engaged citizens in a democratic society. One of our challenges is structural. The typical teacher education program has access to prospective teachers for two years or less. Most teacher educators have access to prospective students for one or two semesters in specific courses, field experiences, and/or seminars. In addition, only one or two teacher educators in a program take on issues of race and racism directly, despite the great impact it has on schooling and its presence in society. Teacher educators have written in a compelling fashion about the difficulty of helping prospective teachers confront race and racism in themselves and in their teaching practices (Anderson, 2017; Cochran-Smith, 2000; Irvine, 2001; Kailin, 1999; King, 1991; Obidah, 2000). Their stories are telling both because of how prospective (and in-service) teachers respond and how their institutions fail to support their work. The teacher educators who want to do this work represent some of the members of the academy most committed to dismantling racism. However, if we think about the work race and racism does for the society, we may begin to see why this is such a difficult task.

Tim Wise, a well-known antiracist who writes for *Z-Magazine* and *Alter-Net*, discusses the power of this race-driven ideology (1999). Wise’s elderly grandmother spent most of her life fighting against racism and injustice. She was so passionate about her commitments that she challenged her own father—a southerner and member of the Ku Klux Klan—to choose between her and the Klan. All of Wise’s grandmother’s civic work was aimed at eradicating racism and probably had a major impact on the kind of person Tim would become. However, as her mind began to deteriorate and the family placed her in convalescent care, Wise was shocked to experience the depths of what he calls the “racist socialization” that his grandmother (and everyone) receives. His grandmother could no longer remember the names of her children and her grandchildren. She could not do the simple everyday tasks of feeding herself and carrying on a coherent conversation. However, there was one thing that remained present for her. She looked upon her convalescent home attendants, almost all of whom were African American, and regularly called to them using the society’s most despised pejorative—“Nigger.”

Wise points out that our thoughts and feelings about race are deeply embedded in our psyches, and that appeals to reason regarding racism are unlikely to undo the tremendous amount of work the culture has done to establish and maintain race and racism as foundational categories for understanding ourselves and others. What he calls racial socialization I think of as funding. As previously argued, I see funding as a more global construct that speaks to the direct and indirect benefits that accrue (or fail to accrue) to members of the society. If a society decides to fund its military and not fund social welfare, that funding decision has implications for everyone in the society. It is not as if people who disagree with that funding priority are somehow not affected by this decision.

I am cognizant that throughout much of this essay I have focused on the symbolic, social, and psychological components of race. This focus is deliberate in that I am attempting to show that even when structural barriers are removed, the social funding of race maintains the belief systems and actions of members of the society. However, it is important not to minimize the structural components. Indeed, one of the ways we fund race is through structures. The quality of schools, neighborhoods, and goods and services, as well as the response of institutions, differ greatly along racial lines. In many ways the question of structural versus symbolic is a chicken-and-egg one. Did preexisting structures create symbolic language and beliefs about race, or did symbolic language and beliefs precipitate structures that maintained racial inequality? In perhaps a coward's way out, I argue that the two—the structural and the symbolic—are intertwined. In the United States, the society was both building a nation (that included economic, political, social, and cultural components) and building an ideology. Race was an important part of both projects and came to have salience in both arenas.

To speak of schooling is to speak of both structures and symbols. We consider not only bricks and mortar, or even organizational structures; we also consider the language and symbols that make school a recognizable construct across cities and municipalities, states and national boundaries, and generations. To “go to school” is not merely about going to a place. It is also about imagining a place. Similarly, we have a set of structural and symbolic notions that undergird our conception of the teacher. Although teaching as an occupation has changed over the history of the United States—going from a more male-dominated to a female-dominated profession and from a somewhat prestigious career to one whose status is regularly called into question—it too has both structural and symbolic components. Structurally, we understand teaching to be a profession that requires a particular set of skills and knowledge. Minimally, teachers must complete a four-year college education. However, increasingly, beginning teachers are expected to do work beyond their undergraduate degree. Much of this work takes place in professional schools and colleges of education. Although we decry the poor quality of teachers in the United States, these structural parameters do limit who can enter the profession.

But our understanding of teachers does not begin (or end) with the structural components. Regularly, I ask my students the question, “Who is the teacher in the popular imagination?” We explore this question by viewing a variety of commercial film depictions of teachers. Because most of my graduate students have already worked as teachers, they are keenly aware of the sharp contrast between the actual work of teaching and the Hollywood screen depictions of teaching. These screen depictions contribute to our symbolic notions of teachers and their work. In some cases they serve as a recruitment tool for those who might enter the profession (and perhaps as a deterrent for others).

The typical teacher education program requires students to complete about 40 semester credits of liberal studies requirements, another 30 of upper-level concentration in a disciplinary major, another 20 upper-level concentration in a disciplinary minor, and at least 30 semester credits in professional education coursework. The professional education coursework sequence most likely includes courses in educational foundations (i.e. sociology, philosophy, history), child or adolescent development, and methods of teaching, as well as field experiences. If we look carefully at this organizational structure of teacher preparation, we can see that our task is like the work of Tantalus. When students enter the teacher preparation program, there is hope that their efforts might provide relief to schools and students challenged by racial biases. Unfortunately, teacher education that attempts to defund race cannot satiate these schools yearning for change. Prospective teachers come to us with notions about race so well-funded that it seems we merely get closer to, but can never quite reach, the waters of educational equity.

Ultimately, we must reach prospective teachers earlier in their educations. Our access to and influence on prospective teachers needs to begin much earlier than their junior year of college (or after their senior year as is true in many postbaccalaureate programs). We have to have ways to engage them through the general liberal arts courses and concentrated majors and minors that they pursue on their way to professional education coursework. The educational foundations, developmental psychology, teaching methods, and field experiences courses have to serve as correctives to the structural and symbolic systems that have worked so efficiently and effectively to suture notions of race to common sense in our society. Instead of only presenting students with data about racial differences (that often invokes guilt and anger but little action), we need ways to interrogate the work that race does in the society. Even among our most well-meaning prospective teachers we find a degree of helplessness and hopelessness around the notion of race. Our students have come to accept race as a given and racial inequity as a project too big for them to challenge. They almost never consider the spurious nature of the concept and how it has been used to shape their consciousness about human beings.

Of course, the major danger of this work is that teachers and teacher educators will default to the notion of “color blindness.” This is a romantic notion taken up by social conservatives in an effort to increase the likelihood that disenfranchised people of color will suffer further social marginalization and alienation from the society. The movement in California under Proposition 209 is a primary example of this thinking. By declaring that admissions to state universities and colleges should be “race neutral,” the state virtually guaranteed that large numbers of black and brown students would be excluded from these institutions. This is an important example of how it is impossible to disentangle the symbolic from the structural. Color-blind rhetoric can only work in color-blind structures, which we do not have in U.S. society (see Bowen & Bok, 1998). Where a society has worked hard to create structures that uphold racial inequity it is difficult, indeed disingenuous, to leverage a language and symbols that destroy and/or counteract it. Thus, color-blind rhetoric is actually a new tool in the social funding of race. By pretending that the structural and symbolic instruments are not in place (or that they are inconsequential), color-blind rhetoric can claim the high moral ground while instantiating the status quo and rolling back any progressive movement toward racial justice.

The other difficult aspect of this work for teacher educators is that they have to try to defund the concept of race while simultaneously using it. When poet-activist Lourde (1983) insisted that you cannot destroy the master’s house with the master’s tools, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (2012, p. 15) rejoined that the *only* way to destroy the master’s house is with the master’s tools. Although my political and ideological perspectives align more closely with Lourde’s than with Gates’s, I must confess that in this particular instance I am forced to agree with Gates. I must use the concept of race to bankrupt it as a concept. How do we get teachers to bankrupt race as a concept without having them talk about and engage it more fully? We can’t. What are missing from most teacher education programs are deep intellectual interrogations of race and the work of race in the society. We must provide prospective students with data that either re-inscribes students’ long-standing notions of race or evokes emotional responses that trouble the students (and change their ways) without employing race in their teaching practice.

At least a decade ago in a course on social foundations, a colleague and I gave students some data on the differences in life chances between African American and white children (Edelman, 1987). These data were stark and, in some cases, shocking in the degree to which so many black children have little or no chance of leading successful lives. My colleague and I asked the students to describe how this was possible in the United States of America. We used what we understood as the students’ devotion to the nation as a place of fairness and justice to provoke them to make sense of the contradiction of black life in the society. More than half of the responses indicated that the reason for these disparities was the institution of slavery.⁷ Another portion of the responses indicated that blacks had not received an “equal opportunity” to succeed in the society. Only one student in three cohorts of prospective teachers (over a three-year period) identified the structure of U.S. society as the cause of racial inequality. Of course, more than 10 years ago, none of our students would identify race as a construct as a part of the problem.

⁷ What I find curious about “slavery” as the most cited reason is that discussions of reparations fall on deaf ears. People believe slavery is the cause of the inequity but do not believe attempts to remediate it are warranted.

Even more disturbing for us as teacher educators were the students' expressions that "this was just the way things are" and that "this was the only way things could be." They could not imagine any other alternatives to the current racial hierarchy.

I detail this experience with our students—all white, generally all socioeconomically privileged—to demonstrate how we must begin to question their thinking about race early in their preparation. We assume that what they know and understand about race is consistent with what we are teaching about race. In other classroom activities, I have asked students to write a racial autobiography in which they describe the first time they noticed race in their lives and what role race has played in who they are. These essays tend to evoke strong emotions and sometimes anger. One student responded when asked to think about her white racial identity, "Why do I have to be white? Why can't we just be Americans?" I replied, "What's wrong with being white? Is there any shame in that designation?" Another student rushed to her defense by stating, "No, white people have lots to be proud of. They discovered America and made it great. White people can be proud that they are the only ones to be presidents of the United States and if it weren't for white people the slaves wouldn't be free!"⁸ In just these few sentences, one can see how difficult the work of defunding the concept will be. Not talking about race would not dispel the first student's notion that a color-blind approach would solve our racial difficulties or the second student's obvious ignorance about the structural and symbolic inequities that place us in our current dilemma. We have to talk about race in order to redefine it.

Perhaps the only way out of race as a sense-making concept is through the use of metaphors. Our work must resemble the work of liberation fighters. Liberation fighters use the currency of their oppressors because that is the only money worth anything. They use the language of their oppressors because that is the only way they can be made understandable. They use the available weapons of the oppressors because they work. The differences lie in the purpose to which they put that currency, those words, and those weapons. Teacher educators have to talk about race not to re-inscribe it and give it even more power, but rather to take control of it and expose it for the lie it is. We have to find ways to render it useless.

Although this work sounds impossible and impractical, it is exactly the kind of work African Americans have been participating in since their arrival in the Americas. Theirs has been a project not only of survival, but also of subversion and revolutionary freedom. The work of African American survival necessitates the creation of new language and forms of human expression. Increasingly, it is black cultural forms that energize and attract majority-culture white students but the dominant culture works hard to snuff out or appropriate and stereotype such forms. Our best examples of democracy may not come in the form of distant patriots of the 18th century. They come in the yearnings of people such as Fannie Lou Hamer and Martin Luther King, Jr. They may come in the long-suffering of Nelson Mandela and the compassion of Desmond Tutu. They may come in the poignant vocals of Marvin Gaye who asks, "What's going on?" and in the insistence of Grand Master Flash and KRS-1 who know we really do have a "fear of a Black Planet."

Finally, teacher educators must work to defund race, however impossible the task. Bell (1991) argues that we must fight against racism despite its permanence in U.S. society and culture. Fighting for justice is never just about winning. It is about the hope of winning, but more important, it is about fighting for the right cause regardless of the odds. Our responsibility to democracy and democratic education extends much further than the current occupants of the White House and the state houses. It extends much further than offering the current students we hope to shape into democratic educators who will live and work in a multicultural society. It extends into spaces and places we can only imagine, but extend it must. We are obligated to retrieve a vision of democracy that, although never intended to extend to non-whites, women, or poor people, belongs to them just the same. This vision can never be realized as long as its foremost enemy—the construct of race—serves the current shape of democracy so well.

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⁸ This was obviously prior to the election of Barack Obama.

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