Race, Whiteness, and Education

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From Race to post-Race Theory

The concept of race and utility of race analysis have been staples of social theory and education for quite some time. One can hardly read or write about the challenges of education without confronting the "problem of race." This does not mean that scholars wholly embrace race; some actively avoid and denigrate its study. However, it suggests that while race studies may not have reached mainstream status in most disciplines, they have made an impact that significantly changes the trajectory of most disciplines that have spoken to matters of race. Gatekeepers of the disciplines, including education, who wish to uphold "excellence" rather than "diversity" have launched their battlecry in what is now familiarly referred to as the "cultural wars," as if the former were not a racial project (Symcox, 2002). That said, the race concept has been left relatively untouched, sometimes left as a proxy for the vague identity of "social group," sometimes conflated with ethnicity sometimes nationality. Particularly in the USA, race has become common sense and sometime loses both its specificity and edge. Loic Wacquant (1997, 2002) interrogates not only the utility of this move, but also the questionable, folk-knowledge status of race that passes as scientific or analytical. Or worse, Wacquant fears that with the reality of U.S. imperialism enacted at the level of theory, "American" race analysis is exported as a general world analysis rather than a particular set of assumptions. With the arrival of post-studies in the form of poststructuralism and its varieties, new opportunities for analysis, insights, and ambivalences have made it possible to ask fundamental questions about the status of race. As I have outlined in Chapter 3, it also returns to the fold more established discourses on race, such as Marxism.

This chapter delves into the recent advancements in race theory that prognosticate the future of race. Admittedly, this is not a simple task and is liable to make one an intellectual punching bag of critics from left to right. On one hand, race scholarship that forsakes a conceptual engagement of its own premises takes for granted the naturalized status of race. Questioning its solidity now seems unreal, caught up in unnecessary solipsistic arguments about the ostensible and unquestionable fact of race. After all, race groups exist and race history is indisputable. Race is real. End of story. There are several limitations to this approach. First, race was an invention and its matter-of-fact existence

today should not be confused with its objective reality without the daily dose of reification. It is worthwhile intellectually to debate the conceptual status of race if racism significantly depends on the continuation of a racialized mindset. This is perhaps what James Baldwin was referring to, when he claimed that as long as white people think they are white, there is no hope for them (cited by Roediger, 1994, p. 13). After all, it is difficult to imagine white racism without the prior category of race that is responsible for white *perception* concerning which groups deserve a blessed or banished life. Race trouble arrived at the scene precisely at the moment when people began thinking they were white. Second, conceptualizing race is intimately tied to performing it, which informs social actors of the mechanisms that oppress them and how these may be different from related but distinct social relations, such as class or gender. Perceiving race as real is then tied to acting on it. The upshot is that taking up the race concept asks the primary question, "What is race?" without which race analysis proceeds commonsensically rather than critically. For example, which collectivities constitute a racial group is still unsettled in the USA. In an extreme sense, one may be tempted to brand the inability to deal critically with the concept of race as evidence of a certain anti-intellectual tendency. But that would be inflammatory and in the end does more harm than good.

On the other hand, reducing the problem of racism to the conceptual status of race comes with its own difficulties, as if racism were caused by a concept rather than racially motivated actions, such as educational segregation and labor discrimination. A concept, not white supremacist institutions, like slavery. Not the attempt to kill off Native Americans. Not the limiting of Asian American mobility by curtailing their citizenship rights. Not the constant attacks on Latino cultural autonomy. Racism is not ultimately the problem of people who think there are races "out there" but the materially coordinated set of institutions that results from people's actions. Certainly these actions have their root in the concept of race but a whip in the hand seems more responsible for racism than an idea in the head. These arrangements do not continue merely by virtue of our investments in a concept but through historical contestations over power within a racialized field of understanding. We may go a long way with Marxists' distinction between ideas and substance but this makes it all the more ironic that for all their materialist analyses, they would rather emphasize race as an idea rather than a set of material practices (see Bonilla-Silva, 2005). It is not just that people *think* they are white, but that they *act* on it.

Race does not disappear because we alter conceptualizing each other as post- or non-racial *if we act on the world in a racial way and with racial consequences.* Brazil is a case in point, where the concept of a post-racial democracy is compromised by the stubborn reality of racial stratification (see Telles, 2006). Whether or not we conceptualize Brazilian power relations as racial in the U.S. sense of it, there is a clear color line among those who lead the country and those who follow. This is not to argue that people of color in Brazil are worse off than those in the USA, which is a legitimate argument. This is an empirical assertion with much veracity but is besides my point. The problem of race, or racism, cannot be reduced to the concept of race as much as religious warfare fails to be explained by divergent interpretations of sacred texts. Rather, racial contestation is decided by internal concepts (reified as they may be) externalized through social behavior and institutional arrangements. To race realists, placing the word "race" in scare quotes appears as unduly intellectualist, particularly when other social relations that are equally socially constructed are not put under a similar, bracketed scrutiny. It appears they have an axe to grind against racial analysis. To these analysts, for all the realness that Marxists, in particular, claim in the end they ultimately fail to "get real."

Having already extrapolated Marxism's relation with race analysis, here I engage two additional treatises on the viability of race as a structuring principle, a conceptual form of understanding, and a form of politics. I will limit the discussion to progressive, left-leaning discourses rather than include the obvious post-race implications in vulgar color-blind conservatism, some of which I take up in a later chapter on No Child Left Behind. That established, the progressive forms of post-racial analysis offer genuine insights that any race scholar may take to heart, something that its conservative iterations may not put on the table as they are more concerned with denying race rather than engaging it. Here, "progressive" takes on a slippery status and includes discourses that take race seriously as a marker of social difference, whether or not this takes on a determining status, as the Marxist case shows. In other words, the arguments that I showcase in this chapter do not assert that a post-racial condition has largely arrived, that race has somehow become irrelevant. The analysis is concerned less with the notion that race is declining in significance and more with posing the question, "What is the future of race?" In other words, what does race relations look like after the innovation of a race ambivalent analysis?

As we have seen, in Marxist theory race retains its ideological status and a racial cosmology inevitably subverts a clearer understanding of social life and the educational apparatus where race is learned as social practice. This does not mean that Marxism outright rejects race struggle but questions its scientific status and praxiological implications for change. In sociology, Robert Miles' (2000) work proves instructive; in history, Barbara Fields (1990) assumes prominence; and in education, Darder and Torres (2004), and McLaren and Torres (1999) have taken the lead. Instigated by cultural studies, post-race discourses distinct from Marxist orthodoxy provide an opportunity to ask new questions about race made possible by studies in the politics of representation. According to Gilroy (2000), post-race discussions signal an opportunity rather than something to be feared insofar as race understanding may be advanced in order that race may not remain standing. Like Marxism in the current

conjuncture, post-race analysis is a politics that proceeds without guarantees, with race under possible erasure (see Hall on Marxism, 1996a). It is, as Gilroy (2000) punctuates, a politics of race abolition. It is a "crisis of raciology," enabled by "the idea that 'race' has lost much of its common-sense credibility because the elaborate cultural and ideological work that goes into producing and reproducing it" takes more than it gives, that race "has been stripped of its moral and intellectual integrity," that "there is a chance to prevent its rehabilitation," and that race "has become vulnerable to the claims of a much more elaborate, less deterministic biology" (pp. 28–29). By contrast, white abolition asks a different task of race theory to the extent that it prioritizes targeting whiteness in its uptake of race. Race is dependent on what Lipsitz (1998) earlier called the "possessive investment in whiteness" so any utopia without race must confront the strongest form of racial worldmaking that is whiteness. Their differences notwithstanding, post-race and critical studies of whiteness share conversations at the abolitionist table. In Chapter 6, I inquire into the conceptual status of whiteness in race studies but here I delve into the status of race within whiteness studies, specifically within the abolition movement. Race sits strategically at a crossroad that demands scholarship which is attentive not only to its declining or rising significance but to its very future as a system of intelligibility.

From the outset, I would like to be clear about my intentions regarding the invocation of post-race analysis. I want to avoid being misinterpreted as suggesting that race is declining as a structuring principle of society, particularly the USA. There are signs for this prognosis, as Gilroy clearly provokes, but they are inconclusive. Gilroy's argument does not depend primarily on its empirical veracity but its logical conclusions. On the contrary, one can make a good case that race relations pulses as strongly as ever, perhaps even more significantly than previous eras. As Mills (1997) asserts, there is neither a transracial class nor gender solidarity and therefore race remains axiomatic. In addition, I do not argue that a society may reach a post-race situation by downplaying race and racial contestation, as in policies that turn a color-blind eye to race in education in a desperate attempt to make the States united again, like "the good ol' days.". Downplaying race struggle will ensure that it continues at the level of social practice. Suggesting that race does not matter does not necessarily make it so, as Gotanda (1995) clearly shows in his debunking of the apparent color-blindness of the U.S. constitution. However, that race matters does not suggest that society should continue existing in a racial form, that race should keep mattering. That is, insofar as the USA is racially structured, skin color stratified, and somatically signified does not automatically recommend their perpetuity. So the task of this chapter is not only to promote anti-racism but to consider the post-race position, which is to say, the politics of being anti-race.

The futuring of race asks neither the question of race's current significance nor its real past but more important, its projected destiny. It takes from Nayak's

(2006) assertion that "post-race ideas offer an opportunity to experiment, to re-imagine and to think outside that category of race" (p. 427). To be more precise, post-race ruminations allow educators to recast race, even work against it, as Gilroy suggests, but this move cannot be accomplished with the pretense of thinking *outside* the category of race. As I argued in Chapter 2, in a racialized formation, race has no outside. We are caught up in racemaking at every turn and presuming access to its outside comes with dangerous implications, usually founded in color-blindness. Rather, it suggests the possibility of undoing race *from within* rather than from without, of coming to full disclosure about what race has taken from us to which we no longer consent. In this sense, the unmaking of race interests the oppressed races more than the master race, the latter arguably more invested in its continuation. Therefore the analysis does not make the audacious pronouncement that this move is plausible but asks whether or not it is possible and preferable. Given the bogus beginnings of race, this point seems warranted and within the realm of possibilities. Given race's omnipresence in U.S. society, it seems impossible. That is the problematic of this chapter, wedged as it is between the possible and the impossible, between the precept of and a preference for race.

Post-Race and the Insufficient Project of Race Signification

As Paul Taylor has suggested, the innovation of post-race analysis does not signal the end of race as we know it.[1] Rather, like the "post" in post-analytic philosophy, the same "post" in post-race analysis signals an opening, not the closing of race scholarship. It allows new questions, as products of intellectual and material development, to surface. Like the "post" in many schools of thought in extant, post-race is the ability of race theory to become self-aware and critically conscious of its own precepts. It signals the beginning of the end of race theory proper, which becomes impossible to continue in the same vein. A race theory that becomes self-aware of its own constitutive activity enters the next stage of development in a dialectical moment of the thought process. Race theory becomes post-race precisely for the same reasons that modern thought is challenged by postmodern theory. Modern theory still exists but only after it reckons with the postmodern. Likewise, race theory emerges as something different, if not new, through the filter of post-race.

I believe Taylor is right to frame the discussion in this manner. It avoids the otherwise vulgar suggestion that we are "beyond race" or have "transcended race" for usually unsubstantiated reasons. It acknowledges the debt owed to race analysis proper but propels it forward without jettisoning it. What do we make of society as we remake race in a daily way? Like one might ask about modern theories after the postmodern moment, what does race analysis look like after the arrival of post-race thought? For all of Baudrillard's ranting against modern teleologies and determinisms, he did not succeed in making them irrelevant before his death (see Leonardo, 2003d). However, he forced a

response from modernist thinkers. As a carbuncle on their theories, Baudrillard and other postmodernists pushed social theory and their intellectual adversaries into different directions, if not forward. Post-race analysis accomplishes a similar move, forcing a hard and sometimes difficult look at race theory.

Race understanding stands at the uncomfortable street corner where our bodies meet their socially constructed racial identity and where we leave the same intersection unsure of what we have just become as a result of race. Gilroy (2000) writes, "[W]e always agree that 'race' is invented but are then required to defer to its embeddedness in the world" (p. 52). Nayak (2006) laments, "The problem that race writers encounter, then, is how do we discuss race in a way that does not reify the very categories we are seeking to abolish?" (p. 415). If race was a figment of the Occidental imagination, it is one of life's deepest ironies that people of color hang on dearly to a concept created in order to oppress them. Many centuries later, U.S. minorities find it hard to imagine a post-race society, either because they suspect that color-blind whiteness is up to its old tricks again or they are invested in a hard fought sense of an oppositional identity, the giving up of which means a fundamental loss of meaning. Or as Nayak (2006) observes:

> [F]or minority ethnic groups the erasure of race may equate with the obliteration of an identity and shared way of life . . . the concept of race, however tarnished it may appear, has provided an important meeting place for political mobilization, inclusion and social change (p. 422).

Although Nayak commits the usual slide between ethnicity and raciality, something he misrecognizes when he asserts that "whiteness is not homogeneous but fractured by the myriad ethnic practices," (p. 417), he is correct to note that race (not only racism) is a source of problem as well as a resource of meaning for racially despised groups. Yet he misses an opportunity. Whiteness is precisely homogenizing, wiping out ethnic differences in favor of racial solidarity, which I take up later in Chapter 6. For people of color, race is a condition of their being and to dispute its centrality in their lives violates their perceived right to be, and usually without the profitable returns that white ethnics gain as they shed their identity to ascend to white raciality. In the end, race may take away more from than it gives to people of color. It certainly benefits whites more than non-whites.

This does not mean that whites are eager to give up race but there is less of an ironic return for them. This point extends Nayak's (2006) claim that "It is precisely because whiteness is seen as an unmarked racial category that the loss of race for white theoreticians can appear inconsequential." (p. 422). We might distinguish between whiteness' discursive sleight-of-hand to conjure up a post-race reality and whites' general unwillingness to relinquish race privilege. Giving up race is consequential for whites for it is responsible for the lightness of their being, a sense of existential lack of tethers. Their sense of freedom and

mobility is a direct and negative correlation with the restrictions people of color face. Their post-race attitude is belied by their racial behavior. A post-race situation is a threat to whites' very existence and can only come at a great loss for them, which may be greater than the loss of meaning for racial minorities. Racial recollections for minorities do not vanish with a post-race reorganizing, such as the South African case, but white domination and privilege is eradicated structurally, which does not suggest that it does not continue through ideology. Arguably, race memory serves as the constant reminder against the return of white supremacy just as Jewish remembering of the Holocaust guards against its repeat. Race comes with certainties for whites and it is precisely the lack of guarantees that accompanies post-race analysis that threatens their interests. Post-race arguments are intended to challenge white supremacy before they are designed to threaten the status of its victims. The latter becomes something to give up in exchange for the greater return in ending the former. Although post-race scholars do not underestimate this loss of meaning, they consider it worth the risk for it is a system of meaning that creates more problems than liberties. This loss, as Nayak suggests, can be turned into a gain.

To dispel further any notions that this model mystifies the inner workings of race, education under post-race assumptions makes it clear that it is made possible precisely by testifying to the inhuman tendencies of a racialized humanism. Gilroy (2000) contends that his "[planetary] humanism is conceived explicitly as a response to the sufferings that raciology has wrought," (p. 18) not its obfuscation. To Gilroy, the crisis in raciology represents less a crisis of identity and more the uncertain status and preferable (rather than inevitable) demise of race, not only at the level of signification but also at the level of social organization (see also Hirschman, 2004). The sweeping global changes in economy and diasporic movement complicate and compromise racial world-making, stripping it of previous guarantees and predictive value as an autonomous relation. New events in history, such as the apparent racial contest undetermined by skin color but mediated by somatic politics between Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda, disturb our race-as-skin-color expectations. Although this case should not be overinterpreted as proof of the waning effect of skin color difference, for which we have more worldwide evidence, the Rwandan situation brings new insights to race analysis by introducing the reinterpretation of bodily differentiation through primary markers besides skin color. Even the multiracialization of beauty images, which includes increasingly more black and brown faces, signals new anxieties about race, but this time by disturbing its clear lines of demarcation rather than their enforcement. Whereas race thought was revolutionary in its own right, this new stage of development represents a revolution of the revolution, or the dynamic continuation of that transformation. To the extent that raciology introduced white subversion of the humanity inhered in people of color, post-race represents the attempt to subvert the subversion. Race changed some subjects into people of color; it may

be time to change again. This neither suggests that racism nor racialization fails to exert its dominant imprint on social processes, subject formation, and State sponsored policies. However, it means that both race struggle and raciology may begin the day but in no way end it, giving way to the era of racial ambivalence.

I have no desire to overstate the case. Made clear by the stubborn standard of whiteness, from Tyra Banks, Halle Berry to Beyoncé Knowles, to Jennifer Lopez and Selma Hayek, light skin still approximates white beauty standards (see Hunter, 2005). But as colonized peoples challenge white supremacy across the globe and gain access to networks of power monopolized by whites, counting on race stratification becomes ironically ambiguous and upsets racial expectations. This is a condition not to be deplored ultimately as a sense of loss, at least not in the manner that one grieves the passing of a seemingly endless war that has given this life much meaning. Putting race to peace may open up possibilities for other ways of being that have been heretofore limited or closed, particularly for people of color. The loss should not be minimized but countered by a sense of clarity concerning the neuroses of race about which Fanon (1967) spoke so forcefully and which Gilroy calls the "rational absurdity of 'race' " (p. 14). Gilroy taps a certain post-racial suggestion in Fanon whose attempts to restore blacks in their proper human place represent black analytics, or negritude, in order then for blackness to vanish under its own weight (see also Nayak, 2006). Just how the problems of humanism fold into the refashioning of the human in a post-race condition remains contested, opening the door for Gilroy's pragmatic planetary and postanthropological humanism. Blackness, for example, may remain a culture and disappear as a racial category. Gilroy clarifies, "There will be individual variation, but that is not 'race' " (p. 42). This last point is worth elaborating.

Human differences continue but whether or not skin color variation should form the basis for social organization is the question. As a modern principle, race is a particular grouping of individuals into social groups. As embodied collectivities, these social groups could very well continue intact as we enter a post-race society, but they will no longer be considered skin groups once the race principle has been discredited. The bodies remain but they will be conceptualized differently as post-racial subjects. African Americans may continue as an ethnic group so blackness as a form of cultural practice may thrive in the absence of race where "skin, bone, and even blood are no longer the primary referents of racial discourse" (Gilroy, 2000, p. 48). It will neither sever completely its relation with blackness as a racial experience nor be reduced to it. Racial solidarity will be liberated from the "cheapest pseudo-solidarities: forms of connection that are imagined to arise effortlessly from shared phenotypes, cultures, and bio-nationalities" (Gilroy, 2000, p. 41). Of course Gilroy is speaking of both non-whites and whites, who desperately cling to identity as a visual confirmation of one's politics. For it is whites who, in their fetish of color,

clearly profit more from racial politics as a form of interest consolidation than people of color who mobilize identity movements as a form of defense against white supremacy.

As race relations enters its late phase of development, its contradictions become riper and more obvious. Its logics hang desperately onto a worldview that becomes more anachronistic. This does not mean that race struggle becomes obsolete. On the contrary, post-race condition is reached precisely by exposing the myths held up for so long by a pigmentocracy that is whiteness, which people of color both love and hate because they have been taught for so long to admire the white and hate the black collective. For people of color, self-love in this instance is always uncertain for it is bound up with self-doubt. The possibility of ending race is the task of bringing back clarity to a situation that for so long has been clouded with the miseducation of racialized humans. This is the challenge of post-race thinking.

Critical Studies of Whiteness and the Abolition of Race

Whereas post-race sets the stage for the problematization of the race concept, studies of white abolition investigate the primary investment in a racial worldview known as whiteness. Race was created by European humanism, designed to limit theories of the human to those with white skin particularly, and those broadly conceived as white by the master race. Any talk of race abolition must contend with its strongest force of attraction for whites, for whom all the talk of "getting beyond color" becomes the most reifying contradiction when shifting relations of wealth and power enter the equation (Frankenberg, 1993). Like Forrest Gump, whites run from most serious discussions of race reconciliation and toward race as a default protection even for the most down and out whites. This means that race abolition is at the same time the abolition of the white race. The future of race is the problem of whiteness. But what does this really mean?

Race, particularly its U.S. iteration, is an opportunity structure for white ethnics. For whites who experience class or gender oppression, whiteness becomes a form of coping mechanism. This is not insignificant and means that race was created by and for whites. People of color recreate race as well but usually as a protective response to whiteness. In critical studies of whiteness, race is understood as a differential system of advantage that benefits all whites regardless of their class or gender status. However, race has been used as a contradictory mechanism *among* whites as well. For the white working class, the history of race is full of contradictions. At once, they are beneficiaries of race and victims of capital. They experience group exploitation but have the ability to denigrate any person of color above their class status by simply appealing to race superiority. Roediger (1994) finds that "whites are confessing their confusion about whether it is really worth the effort to be white. We need to say that it is not worth it and that many of us do not want to do it . . .

exposing how whiteness is used to make whites settle for hopelessness in politics and misery in everyday life" (p. 16). Here we have to contextualize Roediger's analysis as speaking directly to the experiences of poor or working class whites. Inserted into the racial opportunity structure known as U.S. race relations, previously denigrated white ethnics find their mobility by being articulated with white raciality.[2] They escape persecution from Europe or elsewhere to find their new belonging in U.S. race relations. But the white working class does not benefit from whiteness in an absolute way, often clinging to it as a protective shield from the cruelties of labor exploitation.

Race has been used as a mechanism of mystification for the white working class in order that they learn to accommodate the ravages of U.S. capitalism. A pedagogy of white abolitionism does not begin with the premise that whites should learn to own their whiteness but to disabuse themselves from the common perception that the white race exists. Again, we return to the conceptual rejection of race; moreover, the abolition movement mounts a practical rejection of race as well. They do not ask whites to engage whiteness but rather to disengage from it. Abolitionism is not built around an oppositional sense of whiteness, which by definition does not exist because whiteness has never existed for other reasons besides oppression. In other words, it is completely and utterly negative, which leads Roediger to make the provocative announcement that whiteness is *nothing but oppressive and false.* It remains to be seen if whiteness possesses any redeeming characteristics. If this is correct, then educators must replace "the bankruptcy of white politics with the possibilities of nonwhiteness" (Roediger, 1994, p. 17). Roediger is not particularly fixated on the wholesale rejection of race as a form of organization. He is much more concerned with whiteness as a form of violence that seduces the white working class against its own objective class interests, some of which they share with workers of color. But in following the logical conclusions of Roediger's ideas, we would have to link the future of race with the demise of whiteness since it occupies a focal and privileged place in race, without which its center would collapse.

To the abolitionist, arguing for the transformation of whiteness lacks both a theory and history of whiteness. It lacks a sufficient theory because it does not explain whiteness as a distinct category from white people but conflates them. Thus, it disperses whiteness in light of the observation that a variety of white people exist, which misunderstands race's *modus operandi* to concentrate difference rather than proliferate it. Arguing for difference within whiteness is tantamount to constructing differences that do not make a significant racial difference, more accurately falling under the domain of ethnic diversity. The Irish may be radically different from the English in terms of culture and political history, but in terms of race these differences are put aside in exchange for their loyalty to whiteness as the glue that binds them against people of color. Students may insightfully suggest that "real whites live in England," which is a

point well taken. But it does not ask the fundamental question, "What is whiteness?" To the abolitionist, whiteness has existed for one simple, historical reason: racial stratification. Ethnic distinctions are not forgotten but sidestepped if the racial conjuncture demands it. Whiteness is the oldest child of race, which "is the empty and therefore terrifying attempt to build an identity based on what one isn't and on whom one can hold back" (Roediger, 1994, p. 13). It is nothing but oppressive.

If whiteness is false and oppressive, then it stands to reason that race is the source of that mystification. Rather than the common alibi that U.S. racialized minorities are trapped in a cult of ethnicity instead of furthering the general, national interests (Schlesinger, 1998), whites appear as the ultimate special interest group (Banks, 1993) for the perpetuation of race. As a result, Ignatiev and Garvey (1996a) encourage whites to break the codes of whiteness by challenging other whites (and people of color) who assume that the body they address in front of them is a white person. This repudiation is part of "unthinking whiteness" insofar as race enables people to think of themselves as whites. They function through a white ideology (whiteness) that must be undone. Race relations begins to unravel since white exists with its Other and both are burst asunder in the process. Without a privileged center, there can be no denigrated margin.

Ironically, the call to complexify white identity ends up reducing it to white ideology. By contrast, abolitionists claim that whites are not "stuck with whiteness" and have acted against it time and again. In this process, it has been noted that white race traitors still accrue white privileges even when then disidentify with whiteness (Alcoff, 1998; Kincheloe and Steinberg, 1998). That is, racial structures still recognize abolitionists as white, who cannot monitor every moment that privileges them. Howard (1999) recounts a critical race moment when he forgoes the purchase of a new car to protest the racist practices of a car dealership. In this instance, he recognized white privilege and acted against it. Yet of course, racist car dealerships are a dime a dozen and another one awaited Howard. As a cautionary note, this is a reminder of white irony in race radical movements that break with the "White club" (Ignatiev and Garvey, 1996a) or "White racial bonding" (Sleeter, 1996, p. 261) because they are followed by the shadow of their privilege. That being the case, this is not a criticism that applies particularly to abolitionism, but to any white participation in a race movement within a racist social system. They will be recognized as white despite their disavowal of whiteness. This is unavoidable even when whites claim to disinvest personally in their advantages.

Within a racial formation whites are not born but made. They are not conceived in the biological sense (pun intended), but in the social sense. Dissolving whiteness, both in the ideological and institutional sense, means that the category white would neither be powerful nor useful as a racial category. This is not just a conceptual change, as in thinking differently about whiteness but a

practical undertaking at the level of social practice. In other words, renouncing one's whiteness is a speech act of revolutionary proportions. It is not guided merely with the pronouncement "I am not white," but by the commitment "I will not act white." "White people" becomes an oxymoron because classifying people as white is at loggerheads with the notion that they exist because whiteness depends on the desire to disappear. To the abolitionist, white people, like race, are an abstraction. What Fanon (1967) would have been tempted to call "the fact of whiteness" vanishes right in front of our eyes. Perspectives that recognize the existence of racial groups, as is common in multiculturalism, are doomed to reify a racial imagination that has no basis in reality. Abolitionists, like Ignatiev, urge us to forget race and instead remember our common humanity.

Despite the call for disidentification, white abolitionists may find themselves swimming against an impossible tide. Roediger (1994) admits that "there is a sense in which whites cannot fully renounce whiteness even if they wanted to" (p. 16). This point does not vitiate against promoting abolitionism because it is misconceived or misguided, but brings up serious questions about its political reception. It should not be rejected because its likelihood of succeeding is low or that it is unrealistic. Abolitionism is not wrong because it may not, in the end, work according to plans. Critical race theorists never tire of telling us that racial strategies that challenge the establishment often converge with white interests and so maintain white advantage. A racial strategy cannot be judged solely on the likelihood of people taking up its cause. Abolitionism's possibility rests precisely on its unreasonableness, its shattering of racial codes.

That said, a racial strategy that fails to compel people to act leaves something to be desired. In other words, dismantling whiteness is not only a conceptual problem, but a political one. White resistance is not the only issue. Whites may be the subjects who answer the call, but will not be the only ones to hear it. People of color will find it difficult to believe and support the abolitionist philosophy because they have good reason to be suspicious of any white-led movement that claims to solve the problem that it created. People of color have been disappointed time and again by white retrenchment, racial malaise, and general inability to develop a certain stick-with-itness for the racial longue durée. This is the radical nature of white supremacy to be able to withstand all kinds of challenges and continue, albeit in different, compromised forms (yes, even abolitionism!). In the end, whiteness is not rigid, but incredibly flexible, a fact that abolitionism may underestimate. This conundrum represents a fatal contradiction in Ignatiev's neo-abolitionist movement because race is not just a figment, but a "pigment of our imagination" (Rumbaut, 1996). In other words, race is a combination of real and non-real characteristics, ideological as a category but material in its modes of existence. It is both real and imagined.

In one fell swoop, Ignatiev seems bent on constructing race (and whiteness) as only an illusion or ideological chimera, a trope that makes it quite compatible

with orthodox Marxism. In other words, Ignatiev is convinced that race and whiteness are illusions and *nothing but illusions.* It begs the question: How does this sound different from color-blindness? Miles (2000) sums it up and claims:

> There are no "races" and therefore no "race relations." There is only a belief that there are such things, a belief which is used by some social groups to construct an Other (and therefore the Self) in thought as a prelude to exclusion and domination, and by other social groups to define self (and so to construct an Other) as a means of resisting that exclusion. Hence, if it is used at all, the idea of "race" should be used only to refer descriptively to such uses of the idea of race (p. 135).

Miles' otherwise thoughtful analysis of racism boils it down to a problem of false beliefs. No credible race theorist would refute this claim. Many individual whites do believe they are superior to people of color, which is made possible by the first condition that they must believe themselves to be white people. The problem is that they collectively practice this false belief, which graduates from a mere idea to an indomitable, material force. It would have been enough had it remained only in their heads. But because whiteness is also in their hands, they have built a society after their own image. In other words, the idea of race is material in its modes of existence. Although race may not be real (particularly in the scientific sense), it exists in real terms, such as a racial economy and its institutions. That races *should not* exist is a different point altogether from saying that they do not currently exist.

Ignatiev does not show the parsing out of real and non-real elements of race and rejects the entire kit and caboodle. However, abolitionists are on to something because it is symptomatic that whites, who spend a lot of time and energy resisting racial identification, would now find a problem with a framework that sanctions this already existing tendency. In other words, why would whites resist the philosophy of abolitionism when they practice it daily through color-blindness? It suggests that whites really do cherish whiteness, and therefore race, if not in an active sense then at least as a source of meaning. Whites' knee-jerk reaction implies that they notice their whiteness when its elimination becomes an imminent threat and therefore must be protected. But is whiteness ultimately worth it for the general white population, and particularly for the white working class? Abolitionists do not think so. In this section, I have gone a long way with the new abolitionism and find that its focus on whiteness gets at the crux of the problem. Although it falls into the trap of regarding race as purely ideological and located in people's heads, abolitionism's relentless attack on whiteness and the white frame of mind begins race analysis on the right foot.

We live in a time when race is under intense questioning. It is not the first time as racial analysis of society, the USA in particular, is only tolerated if it cannot be obliterated. The difference in the current moment is that progressive

scholarship has taken this situation and reversed people's normal expectations. Like judo, post-race analysis takes the otherwise reactionary implications of color-blindness and uses its momentum against itself. In a complicated dance with hegemony, post-race scholars strike a compromise that upsets the head-to-head confrontation that usually results in racial antagonism. There is something subversive in this move. Arguing for the moribund status of race, post-race proponents in its cultural and whiteness studies variations do not rehabilitate race but annihilate it. Where they differ from color-blind pretenders is their ability to go *through* race instead of *around* it. They are able to speak to race rather than about it.

5
The Color of Supremacy

In the last decade, the study of white privilege has reached currency in the educational and social science literature. In 2009, the city of Memphis, Tennessee hosts the Tenth Annual Conference on White Privilege. Concerned with the circuits and meanings of whiteness in everyday life, scholars have exposed the codes of white culture, worldview of the white imaginary, and assumptions of the invisible marker that depends on the racial other for its own identity (Frankenberg, 1993, 1997; Hurtado, 1996; Kidder, 1997; Rothenberg, 2002). In particular, authors like Peggy McIntosh (1992) have helped educators understand the taken for granted, daily aspects of white privilege: from the convenience of matching one's skin color with bandages, to opening up a textbook to discover one's racial identity affirmed in history, literature, and civilization in general. In all, the study of white privilege has pushed critical education into directions that account for the experiences of the "oppressor" identity (Hurtado, 1999).

This chapter takes a different approach toward the study of whiteness. It argues that a critical look at white privilege, or the analysis of white racial hegemony, must be complemented by an equally rigorous examination of white supremacy, or the analysis of white racial domination. This is a necessary departure because, although the two processes are related, the conditions of white supremacy make white privilege possible. In order for white racial hegemony to saturate everyday life, it has to be secured by a process of domination, or those acts, decisions, and policies that white subjects perpetrate on people of color. As such, a critical pedagogy of white racial supremacy revolves less around the issue of unearned advantages, or the *state* of being dominant, and more around direct processes that secure domination and the privileges associated with it.

Racial privilege is the notion that white subjects accrue advantages by virtue of being constructed as whites. Usually, this occurs through the valuation of white skin color, although this is not the only criterion for racial distinction. Hair texture, nose shapes, culture, and language also multiply the privileges of whites or those who *approximate* them (Hunter, 2002b). Privilege is granted even without a subject's cognition that life is made a bit easier for her. Privilege is also granted despite a subject's attempt to dis-identify with the white race.