



Integrating “White” America through the Erosion of White Supremacy: Promoting an Inclusive Humanist White Identity in the United States

*Rose Borunda, HyunGyung Joo, Michele Mahr, Jessica Moreno,
Amy Murray, Sangmin Park, & Carly Scarton,
California State University, Sacramento*

Abstract

The rich mosaic of U.S. demographics contains multiple languages, cultures, and belief systems. Yet, the historical legacy of an old, white supremacist "master narrative" continues to dominate our political, social, and educational systems. The authors of this paper are educators who teach in either K-12 classrooms or at the university level in the graduate education of counselors, teachers, and school administrators. As educators, we recognize that the old master narrative generates discord by emphasizing history that promotes the position and status of one group over another, which is antithetical in a democracy that is supposed to value all. Therefore, the authors challenge the biased and obsolete racist narrative that perpetuates cultural, psychological, educational, and sociological impairment. In addressing the embedded tenets of white supremacy, this article serves several purposes. First, the authors emphasize the need to re-frame how students are educated in both elementary schools and in higher education, urging the adoption of a humanist narrative that includes stories of Euro-Americans from the historical record who resisted white supremacy. It also offers recommendations for eradicating white supremacy across multiple contexts, including implications for the workplace. Further, it provides examples of how this alternative approach promotes positive integration of white Euro-Americans into the greater populace, leading to a more inclusive society.

Keywords: *white identity, humanism, reframing education*

The United States has struggled to turn from old master narratives to new histories relevant to its present and future. In those old stories, Indians necessarily had to disappear. For the Puritans to found a City on the Hill—a story often framed as an American claim to religious freedom—Indians had to die, leaving their food and land behind; their disappearance was a sign from God. In the story of frontier settlement, Indians became part of nature, fleeing westward and then just vanishing, according to some conveniently imagined “law of nature” (Deloria, Lomawaima, Brayboy, Trahant, Ghiglione, Medin, Blackhawk, 2018, p. 14).

In our present era, those who call the United States home continue to bear witness to statements, practices, and policies grounded in imperialistic and nativist ideologies that promote dominance and control of not only the people who now live in the United States but also over the life forms and resources on this land. To this point, the 45th President of the United States delivered

the commencement address to Naval Academy graduates and proudly proclaimed that, “our ancestors tamed a continent,” and added, “We are not going to apologize for America” (Newsweek, May 25, 2018). These disturbing statements perpetuate the separation and isolation of Euro-Americans from other members of this nation who do not ascribe to ideologies of conquest and domination. Additionally, the cited rhetoric escalates and aggravates the divide in our nation's political, social, and moral fiber while promoting the tenets of white supremacy.

This particular statement is one example of prevalent imperialistic and nativist ideologies that still dominate public discourse. The fact that such a statement can still be brazenly made in present era and by the elected official in this nation's highest office points to an overwhelming need to reframe our educational system in order to promote a positive and inclusive identity for people of European descent. The authors of this paper are educators who teach in either K-12 classrooms or in the graduate education of counselors, teachers, and administrators. As education scholars, we recognize the embedded nature of white supremacy in the United States and how practices, policies, and curriculum perpetuate its existence. The authors understand that by openly critiquing the tenets that sustain white supremacy, we increase our students' capacity to understand the significance of white supremacy's debilitating impact. By adopting constructive educational approaches that promote inclusion of Euro-Americans as equal, rather than superior, members of society, the authors recognize that relevant and inclusive histories and practices ultimately lead to healing this nation's unequally created origins.

The authors of this paper are passionate about the need to facilitate and implement micro and global level changes regarding white supremacy and social justice issues. That said, the intention of this paper is not to minimize or dismiss how history has demonstrated that “white” power in the past has been used to oppress and brutalize populations that fall outside of the social construction of “whiteness.” Our goal is to recognize this inhuman behavior, accept that this injustice occurred, and strive to move towards creating a more equal and socially just world. With this understanding, we strive to call out the language, behaviors, and practices that perpetuate the tenets of white supremacy and begin this interrogation by challenging the language supporting supremacist ideologies.

Calling Out the Language of White Supremacy

Further examination of the statement made by the current president who will, heretofore, be referred to as “45” reveals that it is grounded in a master narrative that has not served this nation well. Borunda & Moreno (2014, p. viii) cite Takaki (2008) who refers to the master narrative as “the inaccurate story that the United States was founded by European Americans (excluding other groups) and that Americans are only white.” In deconstructing 45's statement it is evident that it is derived from divisive imperialistic notions that heralds and celebrates the conquest of people already calling this continent “home.” This assertion assumes that the conquest precipitated by the European diaspora is an event celebrated by *all* people. It also perpetuates a misconception that all European settlers participated in and condoned the eradication of people already living here. In making this declaration, 45 implies that only the history of those who participated in the “taming” of a continent is of value, which further implies that the perspective and experiences of people calling this continent home prior to the invasion is of no consequence.

Given the reference to the “tam(ing)” of a continent suggests that the land and the people already living in America were perhaps “wild” or “uncivilized,” therefore, requiring and justifying subjugation. Conversely, this infers that the actions and behaviors of those doing the “taming” were not wild and, therefore, civilized. Subsequently, this promoted narrative implicitly sanctions

and condones the genocide, slavery, and other acts of violence upon humanity, land, and all life forms by claim of being the acts of a more “civilized” and more “superior” people. In this racist narrative we find the tenets that sustain the ideology of white supremacy.

Ultimately, the master narrative perpetuated by 45 does not serve the people of this nation well. It embraces the perspective that the actions taken to “tame” this land—including genocide, broken treaties, forced relocation, as well as cultural eradication and invasion committed upon Original Nations—does not warrant remorse. This infers that any actions committed under the guises that promote and sustain white supremacy do not require, as stated by 45, “apology.” Subsequently, the cost for the creation of a nation in which a subset of humanity, those who have forcibly or deceitfully imposed their will, attempt to eradicate another is inherently granted impunity. This tenet conveys that the end justifies the means, no matter the depth of violations against humanity. By sanctioning a “no apologies” stance, 45 suggests that any means, however repugnant, are allowable and celebrated as long as it maintains and sustains the outcome of dominance. For those ascribing to the notions of white supremacy, this statement perpetuates a breach in human connectedness. The statement not only condones acts perpetrated against humanity, but it also dismisses the need for empathy and understanding for those on the receiving end of violent acts, attitudes and policies. This furthers human disconnection.

The reference to “our ancestors” by “45” perpetuates an exclusive positioning. It speaks only to the actions, policies, and ideologies of Euro-American exploitation-driven interlopers whose ultimate goal was to increase their personal wealth at the expense and exclusion of women, people of color, and people of lower socioeconomic status which included other Euro-American men (Zinn, 1999). The reference to “our” ancestors situates the aggressive colonizer as the bearer of power and civilization for this nation despite the fact that the United States is a nation of many with a range of histories and orientations that are in direct opposition to the colonizer’s worldview.

Furthermore, the use of the pronoun “our” attempts to include and subsequently implicate *all* people of European ancestry for the behaviors committed by the aggressive interloper. With this divide and rule (Freire, 1998) tactic, the exploitation-driven Euro-American subsumes other Euro-Americans into a cultural doctrine that upholds the values of aggression and domination as the referent model of behavior for all Europeans. The tenets undergirding these statements have attempted to promote the separation of Euro-Americans from non-Europeans in an effort to perpetuate not only a nativist but a white supremacy agenda.

The tension generated from this ideology does not serve the long-term viability and social stability of a nation comprised of not only Original Nations but of people from every corner of the world. The rich mosaic of U.S. demographics contains multiple languages, cultures, and belief systems. Yet, the social and cultural discord generated from an emphasis on history that promotes the position and status of one group over another is antithetical to a democracy that is supposed to value all. United States demographic projections expect that by the year 2045 white Europeans will no longer be the majority (Frey, 2018). Given these population projections, there is a critical need to promote a rendering of history that espouses Euro-Americans as members of the human race, rather than the white race. This is critical to their viability in a nation of many.

In addressing the embedded tenets of white supremacy, this article serves several related purposes. First, it challenges the biased and obsolete racist narrative that has perpetuated cultural, psychological, educational, workplace and sociological impairment in the United States. Then, the authors discuss the benefits of adopting an alternate narrative which serves to promote the integration of Euro-Americans into the greater populace. Further, we provide examples of how this alternate narrative approach, one that includes stories of Euro-Americans from the historical record who resisted white supremacy, can lead to the creation of a more inclusive culture and positive

identity development for everyone. Finally, we offer recommendations for eradicating white supremacy across multiple contexts, discussing implications for the workplace and emphasizing the need to change how students are educated in both elementary schools and in higher education. The authors provide evidence of the positive outcomes that stem from promoting examples of white people whose identity, vision, and behaviors promoted not only equity but unity. In shifting away from old divisive master narratives, we not only embrace new understandings of history that are relevant to both our present and our future but provide models of behavior that work collectively to confront and eradicate white supremacy.

The Price for Maintaining the False Reality

In modern era, our public education promotes the master narrative to our children while the general population continues to be pommelled with policies and ideologies that serve a few, at the expense of the many. Historian James Loewen (1995) addressed the danger of retelling the old master narratives:

How people think about the past is an important part of their consciousness. If members of the elite come to think that their privilege was historically justified and earned, it will be hard to persuade them to yield opportunity to others. If members of deprived groups come to think that their deprivation is their own fault, then there will be no need to use force or violence to keep them in their places. (p. 274)

Loewen (1995) expands on the cultural and sociological cost for the ongoing use of old master narratives, "...festering is the notion that 'it's natural' for one group to dominate another" (p. 44). This dangerous ethos perpetuates a social stratification created by a subset of Euro-Americans in the early making of this nation which is refueled in modern times. Given the trail of evidence from the historic to modern era that has created this notion of white supremacy, Loewen points out that "domination is not natural but cultural" (p. 44). Yet, these separatist ideologies continue to plague us as a nation due to the tensions that perpetuate the physical, ideological, and emotional isolation of Euro-Americans from the greater population.

While false notions of superiority continue to be touted in public discourse, this manuscript promotes the integration of Euro-Americans into the greater populace by fostering their capacity to socially and psychologically enculturate. It employs a mental health lens as a vital framework by which to understand how the false narrative promoted by white supremacist ideology has created a dysfunctional reality. The authors challenge the biased and obsolete narrative that has fractured a subset of people from the greater U.S. population by providing examples of Euro-Americans who have resisted white supremacy. The stories of historical figures such as Angelina Grimke and Benjamin Lay, both individuals who actively opposed the capitalistic exploitation of humanity, are told in the next section. The moral compasses of these individuals, which drove their identity, vision, and behaviors, can serve as alternative historical role models. Further, this manuscript also provides evidence of the positive outcomes that stem from promoting these alternative counter-narratives. With the intention of employing a non-separatist narrative with coherent and unifying principles, we facilitate a shift from old divisive master narratives and, instead, seek to facilitate non-separatist narratives.

Those who Defied White Supremacy

The doctrine promoted by “45” that cites “our ancestors” would have us believe that *all* Euro-Americans in history have been complicit with separatist ideologies. Yet, the truth is that there were prominent Euro-Americans who did more than silently defy white supremacy; they spoke out against it. These individuals, who drew from humanist rather than exploitive-capitalist views, spoke from a moral center that challenged the tenets of white supremacy. To this point, Angelina Grimké, a Euro-American born into a slave holding family and turned abolitionist, called out the hypocrisy of other Euro-Americans who moved from outward sympathizers for the plight of enslaved people to being downright oppositionists once Abolitionists called for their liberation:

I know it is alleged that some individuals, who treated colored people with the greatest kindness a few years ago, have, since abolition movements, had their feelings so embittered towards them, that they have withdrawn that kindness. Now I would ask, could such people have acted from principle? Certainly not; or nothing that others could do or say would have driven them from the high ground they appeared to occupy. No, my friend, they acted precisely upon the false principle which thou hast recommended; their pity was excited, their sentiments of generosity were called into exercise, because they regarded the colored man as an unfortunate inferior, rather than as an outraged and insulted equal. (Grimke, 1837, Letter VII)

Angelina and her sister, Sarah, belonged to a prominent and wealthy family. Their standing in Southern culture privileged them with an education but also positioned them to bear witness to the atrocities committed under the legal system of slavery. Euro-American humanists such as the Grimkés challenged the voices, actions, and laws created by people in the United States who were intent in creating and benefiting from white supremacy. The historical efforts of these separatists fomented a divisive and racially stratified culture that exists still today. Yet, what we deliver as an alternative to separatist ideologies are the examples of people such as the Grimkés along with other historical individuals from United States who defied capitalist and exploitive actions. As indicated by Cajete (1994), “American prosperity has come at the expense of the environment’s degradation and has resulted in an unprecedented exploitation of human and material resources worldwide” (p. 25). The cost for not promoting a more balanced rendering of Euro-Americans in our curriculum runs parallel to a dysfunctional family system in which the fixed attitudes and behaviors are passed down from one generation to the next. The magnification and glorification of Euro-Americans who brought genocide to Native Americans and enslavement to Africans stolen from their homeland perpetuates only serves the dysfunctionality. From a mental health perspective, we take the next step in diagnosing how the isolationism and separatism of white supremacy perpetuates a pathology yet to be attended to in our culture.

Psychological Price of Self-Imposed Segregation

There are many different factors mental health clinicians consider when diagnosing a patient or client. Factors can include symptoms, length and severity of distress, physical health, personality characteristics and protective factors. Some individuals may exhibit extreme, acute, or offensive behaviors and beliefs that do not meet criteria to receive a clinical diagnosis. Although individuals may not meet criteria to receive a formal diagnosis, their behaviors and beliefs still create tension within our society.

Family therapists view pathology, the study of mental illness as attributed to a system rather than one specific part. This is to say that an individual is viewed as developing as being a product of a certain environment rather than it coming from within the self. Family therapists view the individual in context whereby there is a bidirectional process of influencing and being influenced by being in relationship with others. As such, an individual does not develop prejudices in isolation. The family is a complex, multilayered microsystem from which roles, rules, boundaries, behaviors, values, beliefs and relational patterns originate (Goldenberg, Stanton & Goldenberg, 2017). The family system is the most significant factor that influences the development of and allegiance to certain beliefs and values that are embedded in racism and prejudice. If the family system is the most influential factor in determining beliefs and values, then the beliefs and values embedded in racism and prejudice may originate from and be perpetuated by the family.

Overt and covert communication patterns learned in the home inform individuals how to view, negotiate and experience the world. Overtly, if the spoken message at home is that people who are different from the family of origin are bad or are disparaged and defamed, the child then will not only adopt these values and beliefs, but also the rituals, language and emotions associated with this message. Conversely, if a family does not engage with diverse groups of people, either blatant avoidance or lack of exposure to people who are racially different from the family, this, too, can contribute to fear of the unknown or insecurity with the unfamiliar. Whether covertly or overtly, these messages whether deliberate or unintentional gives rise to the child developing an “us versus them mentality” and to fear of the unknown. What becomes pathological then, is the projection of fear, anxiety and insecurity onto others in order to dehumanize and discredit the other. This leads to ill-founded isolationism promoted by irrational beliefs. It is then safer for the child to negotiate his or her world with less fear, anxiety and insecurity. The beliefs and values of the family system are the most predictive factors in determining the beliefs and values of the individual. For certain historic humanists- persons who served as individual variants of their time by recognizing and speaking out about the humanity in African descent, such as Angelina and Sarah Grimke- this was not always the case. Not all Euro-Americans of our country’s past aligned with the overt and covert messages that the unfamiliar other was less than human. The next section discusses yet another historical figure, named Benjamin Lay, who like the Grimke sisters was a white Euro-American humanist.

Euro-American Humanists in Historical Context

In 1619, 12 years after the establishment of the first permanent settlement in Jamestown, Virginia, 20 African slaves were sold into bondage. This was the beginning of people of African descent being identified as property instead of as people. While the Constitution proclaimed that “all men are created equal,” the Dred Scott vs. Sandford decision of 1857 excluded enslaved people from the rights outlined in the Constitution (Loewen, 1995).

The abhorrent conditions and mistreatment of enslaved people did not go unnoticed by humanist Euro-Americans. One such historic humanist is Benjamin Lay, a British born Quaker whose activism began after he migrated in the early 1700’s to the United States. Repulsed by the mistreatment of fellow human beings Lay openly confronted slave owners and slave traders. His tactics included spattering blood onto slave keepers during Quaker meetings and publishing a treatise entitled “All Slave-Keepers That Keep the Innocent in Bondage, Apostates” (Lay, 1837, as cited in Rediker, 2017). His fellow congregants would often throw him out of Quaker meetings which only emboldened him to lay his body across the entrance of the meeting house door, in the mud, and force the departing congregants to step over his body.

When the congregants expressed concern for his health by exposing himself to the freezing cold he responded by calling out their hypocrisy and saying, “Ah, you pretend compassion for me but you do not feel for the poor slaves in your fields, who go all winter half clad” (Rediker, 2017, p. 37). The constant “agitation” by Lay and other humanistic minded Quakers eventually led to change. “The Philadelphia Yearly Meeting...had initiated a process to discipline and eventually disown Quakers who traded slaves....The first big step toward abolition had been taken.” When told of this 1758 decision, Lay’s response was, “I can now die in peace” (Rediker, 2017, p. 41).

The illogical and groundless belief that a different skin color makes one group more superior to another was challenged even by Euro-Americans who stood to financially benefit from the exploitive tenets of white supremacy. Such is the case of the previously mentioned Grimké sisters, Sara and Angelina, who were born into a South Carolina family who held people in bondage. The sisters often confronted their parents and members of their community about the cruelty they witnessed and when seeing that they had no effect on the practice, they moved to the northern states and actively participated in the abolition movement through publishing and speaking against slavery.

Noting the ingrained attitude of false superiority in her contemporaries, Angelina poignantly addressed the irrational nature of such beliefs and how this impaired worldview would ultimately be perceived in the not so distant future:

And what is more ridiculous than American prejudice; to proscribe and persecute men and women, because their complexions are of a darker hue than our own? Why, it is an outrage upon common sense; and as my brother Thomas S. Grimke remarked only a few weeks before his death, “posterity will laugh at our prejudices.” Where is the harm, then, if abolitionists should laugh now at the wicked absurdity? (Grimke, 1837, Letter VII)

Of similar disposition was Helen Hunt Jackson who, once made aware of the injustices being committed against people who have called the Americas home for thousands of years, began her own campaign to raise the conscience of fellow Americans. By means of publication, she chronicled mistreatment by the U.S. Government from colonial times to 1881. Her book speaks to atrocities, lying, and cheating committed against humanity and was printed, at her expense, then sent to every member of Congress. Jackson contended:

...my object, which has been simply to show our causes for national shame in the matter of our treatment of the Indians. It is a shame which the American nation ought not to lie under, for the American people, as a people, are not at heart unjust.

If there be one thing which they believe in more than any other, and mean that every man on this continent shall have, it is “fair play.” And as soon as they fairly understand how cruelly it has been denied to the Indian, they will rise up and demand it for him. (Jackson 2003, p. 7)

Humanist orientations such as those of the Grimkés, Lay, and Jackson, have viable worth when taught in our curriculum. Given that the Euro-American perspective and most trumpeted voices have been those of extreme capitalists, as opposed to humanists, there has been an amplified misrepresentation in favor of those who most profited from human and resource exploitation, resulting in the accumulation of massive wealth for the few. With a complicit narrative that attempts to implicate all Euro-Americans, this limited perspective conveys a narrow and slanted narrative

that projects self-interest as the model of desired behavior while assuming to represent “Euro-American” culture and experiences that lie in direct opposition to the historical experience of People of Color. This deceptive rendering inserts the divisive cleaver that maintains social polarity and disunity while clouding our ability to envision one another past the innocuous “difference” of skin color. Yet, when we endeavor to change the narrative there is promise for positive outcomes in how we perceive one another.

The Power of Inclusive and Relevant Multicultural Education

Due to the fact that the authors of this manuscript are all education scholars, it is important to recognize their intention to address social justice education. The mission and core values of fostering social justice education resonates with the focus of this paper as well as the perspectives of each individual author. Therefore, we examined the question, “What is social justice education?” One common, but certainly not universal idea is that it explicitly recognizes the disparities in societal opportunities, resources, and long-term outcomes among marginalized groups (Shakman et al., 2007, p. 7). Other scholars in the field have used terms such as: anti-oppression education, diversity education, and multicultural education (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Sleeter and Grant, 2007). Social justice education needs to be included within the classroom with the objective to have these principles transferred outside of the classroom. Another way to perceive social justice education is that it means rejecting the interpretation of problems for people of color and/or from low-income communities as personal failures, and instead, conceptualizing their issues as effects of unfair policies and systems (Sleeter, 2014). The goal, then, becomes identifying and challenging obstacles both within and outside the school and classroom, recognizing the resilience and knowledge students bring, and becoming allies rather than enemies with the family members of these students (Sleeter 2014).

In order to move forward in higher education and create a positive multicultural awareness for students, it is essential to highlight the humanist approach for Euro-Americans. It is without a doubt that in the past, some Euro-Americans have contributed to separation, oppression, and acts against humanity, however, not all have done so. This perpetual cycle and worldview can be broken when we begin to focus on individuals and agents of change who foster equality, peace and social justice. Armed with the knowledge related to the worldview and actions of humanist Euro-Americans, the realization that the ideology of white supremacy is cultural rather than innate becomes a starting point for positive identity development. In this case, the option of adopting humanist dispositions and behaviors that carry beyond the classroom add to the capacity of the next generation to embrace cultural values that will ultimately undermine the ideology of white supremacy. Promoting such dispositions serves to develop agents of social change who can truly and unbiasedly address old as well as new challenges in our world.

Currently, the state of our society is characterized by increasing social mobility and the development of cultural contacts at local, state, national and global levels. However, as individuals are socially expanding on location, there is increasing ethnic aggression, cultural intolerance, as well as ethnic and religious extremism (Yusupova, Podgorecki, and Markova, 2015). One of the purposes of creating a multicultural educational environment within higher educational institutions is to help individuals of any nationality enter and examine their own culture and the cultures of other peoples. This can be accomplished by active reflection and exploration on their own cultural values, while familiarizing them with the cultures of others through active dialogue (Yusupova et al., 2015).

In contrast, the power of white supremacy and the black versus white (binary polarity) identity cripples the minds of students in the classroom which often leads to negative consequences outside the classroom as well. These repercussions are evident in the community as we have witnessed a number of violent clashes across the nation in current era between white nationalists and counter protestors who oppose racism and other forms of hatred. As social justice educators, it is our ethical responsibility to support, educate, model and foster critical thinking within a separate but equal platform that defies tribal affiliation. The goal is that we respect our unique identities but develop our capacity to enter a sphere of solidarity with others who are not like us.

According to Yusupova et al. (2015), in a multicultural educational safe space, an educational system is saturated with humanism, providing the integration of ethnic and cultural knowledge, cultural reflection, self-regulation, and self-development of students. Humanism places the transition to the diversity and pluralism of cultural and humanistic positions, which cause the development of cross-culturalism (Yusupova et al., 2015). The nature of cross-culturalism education fosters students to self-reflect as well as embrace the concept of cultural humility in the counseling as well as in other professions that require a high degree of empathy and cross cultural understanding.

Multicultural education environments in higher education institutions combines universal, international, and ethnic factors. It also creates the conditions for a flexible adaptation of students, for the formation of interethnic tolerance, significant individual qualities, and the willingness to live in a multicultural society (Yusopova et al., 2015). The term cultural humility, a significant concept in higher education, is defined by Tervalon and Murray-Garcia (1998) as a process of “committing to an ongoing relationship with patients, communities, and colleagues that requires humility as individuals continually engage in self-reflection and self-critique” (p. 118). Multicultural education that is grounded in cultural humility takes into consideration the flexibility and subjectivity of culture and challenges individuals, faculty, students and higher education institutions to address inequalities (Tervalon and Murray-Garcia, 1998). By facing the inequalities embedded in our society, it allows students to develop empathy towards marginalized populations. However, it can be counterproductive if educators do not also have valuable dialogues about Euro-Americans who have worked in collaboration with people of color to support, advocate and strive for the end of social injustices.

The educators and counselors of today will foster students to transfer their multicultural competency skills into the community, including the workforce setting. Through rich dialogues and interactive discussions, role playing in the classroom, and being consistent with clear and concise messages, educators can facilitate change outside of the classroom. The social justice strategies implemented in the classroom will organically result in students shaping their moral character and demeanor with a non-judgmental attitude in a variety of settings, including the workplace.

Outside of the Classroom and in the Workforce

In a 2007 meta-study on the psychological impacts of racism, researchers found racially based workplace harassment to include physical, interpersonal, and verbal assaults; assuming one is not to be trusted; treating people according to racial stereotypes (i.e., lazy, lacks ability); and assuming one is a criminal or is dangerous (Carter, 2007). These challenges and emotional reactions to hostile treatment would theoretically apply to all marginalized groups in any workplace. Against this backdrop of workplace harassment, a 2014 research report from the Center for Talent Innovation (CTI), indicates that people of color often feel that they have to hide their true selves at work. More than 35% of African-Americans and Hispanics, as well as 45% of Asians, say they

“need to compromise their authenticity” to conform to their company’s standards of demeanor or style. Forty percent of African-Americans—and a third of people of color overall—feel like outsiders in their workplace culture, compared with 26% of Caucasians.

In a nation comprised of a rich mosaic of multiple ethnicities and cultures, people of color are 37% more likely than whites to feel that they need to compromise their authenticity at work in order to conform to conventional standards of executive presence (Hewlett and Jackson, 2014). In addition, Carbado and Gulati (2000) argue that while everyone needs to create an “appropriate” workplace identity, for members of minority groups—women of all races, racial-minority men, LGBTQ people—this becomes particularly taxing because their working identities must counter common cultural stereotypes. For example, black men may feel pressured to work longer hours to rebut stereotypes of a poor work ethic among blacks.

When people of color feel that they have to mask their cultural heritage or other aspects of difference, CTI research indicates they are likely to feel isolated at work, and mistrustful of and less loyal to employers. This, in turn, leads to disengagement and a greater likelihood of turnover. In order to value racial and ethnic identity of employees, employers can demonstrate value of those who both look and act diverse. When this is evident, then employees might feel empowered to be more rather than less authentic when expressing their identity in the workplace (Carbado & Gulati, 2000).

In the current political climate, there is generally support for solving race-related employment challenges by focusing on job training and education—in other words, increasing human capital to improve access. According to Egan (2011), 65% of 321 executives of large global companies surveyed claimed to have a plan in place to recruit a diverse workforce—but only 44% employ retention programs. This signifies a gap in collective progress when it comes to retaining diversity and inclusion in the workplace. Given the research, it is also important to consider how to create better workplaces for the employees from traditionally marginalized communities who are already in these jobs. Considering these findings, workplaces ought to encourage a rethinking of some of the existing efforts to create more diverse work environments such as whether diversity and inclusion initiatives take into consideration how members of minority communities placed in those environments feel or how policies can address the emotional toll of being a racial minority in a professional work setting.

Suggesting an alternative approach to deal with diversity and foster ethnic equality, beyond assimilation, in the workplace is a process involving multiple intertwining steps. First, organizational stakeholders need to become aware of particular normalized mindsets present in the workplace. The workplace is an institutional site where normalized images are created and reproduced. They need to acknowledge the presence, contours and implications of the prevailing taken-for-granted norm worker and how this can be an obstacle to non-traditional employees. Becoming reflective about this and the fact that organizational dynamics and practices mirror societal norms may create, in the long term, the promising precondition to move beyond the norm (Meyerson & Fletcher, 2004).

In addition, inviting outsider researcher(s) and/or practitioners can be suitable to develop effective diversity policies and programs. The main advantage of employing an outside practitioner would be that the individual is not an integral member of the everyday social organizational practices or settings and does not have the same shared norms and values as the other organization members. As a result, the outside researcher is more capable of putting certain taken-for-granted and therefore invisible yet meaningful matters at the core of the discussion. The blind spots that

other members understandably have are not part of the outside researcher’s/practitioner’s experience. These blind spots are exactly the issues that need to be identified, untangled and changed in order to work towards a more inclusive workplace.

Lastly, considering the fact that marginalized employees are over-mentored, but under-sponsored (Barra, Carter, & Silva, 2010) incorporating sponsorship would be beneficial to create more diverse workplace. When people begin to see the systems of bias and privilege, their first instinct typically is to mentor those who haven’t benefited from the same privilege. While this is understandable, at its core, this instinct to mentor plays into the idea that those who are marginalized aren’t already skilled enough, smart enough, or ready for more responsibility or leadership. This places the focus of burden on the individual and conveys the message that the need to work extremely hard and be extremely good at what they do to combat the systemic privilege and unconscious bias at play in work environments. This perceived mistreatment in the workplace can be found in various studies. For example, Williams (2015) noticed that “there is a prevalent unconscious bias that black males are expected to fail while white males are expected to succeed” (p. 556). They are consistently under-promoted and under-compensated for this work, even though their work may be qualitatively excellent.

In order to help employees’ overwhelming press toward assimilation into mainstream cultural patterns (Pinel, 1999; Voyles, Finkelstein & King, 2014) along with above mentioned efforts to create socially just work environment, the role of schools as agents of the dominant society would be also crucial. As long as schools reflect the structure and social organization of the society, they can be expected to perpetuate its values, attitudes, and behavior patterns. Thus, educators have questioned how to teach effectively from a clear social justice perspective that empowers, encourages students to think critically, and models social change. The following section intends to shed light on this issue by demonstrating how educators can utilize a social justice pedagogical lens to treat their content in ways that meet their commitment to empowering education.

Social Justice in Teacher Education: Naming Discrimination to Promote Transformative Action

Due to a long history of dominant narrative ideology that functions to serve the few (namely, privileged whites) at the expense of the many, a legacy of racism and colonialism has had ripple effects that manifest in the public school system. Given that there is a long history of racism in America that arguably continues to be perpetuated by the President and other national leaders, public schools must be mindful to remember who they are supposed to serve. Namely, schools exist to serve the students, all students from all backgrounds and languages, in actualizing their potential. This includes many students of color along with white students.

Yet, there is a wide body of evidence that the achievement gap—sometimes more accurately referred to as the opportunity gap or “education debt” (Ladson-Billings 2006, p. 3)—is a pervasive and entrenched problem in the American educational system. Unfortunately, many of the lower-performing student groups include Latinos, African Americans, low-income students, and students whose parents do not have a college degree (Gao and Johnson, 2017). This gap is just one legacy and byproduct of social stratification, manifest in a school system that has for too long not served the needs of all students.

As educators, we must ask ourselves: “How do schools, and how do teachers and educators, take steps to heal the old, yet long-living, wounds of white supremacy?” “How can educators respond to entrenched cultural racism that is manifested in our schools?” “How can educators create balance and harmony in the schools in light of the inequities and deeply rooted prejudices that are

reflected, created, and perpetuated in the public education system?” “How do schools break the cycle of institutionalizing both advantage and disadvantage for groups of students based on color and class?” “How do schools promote a positive model for white identity development, eradicate white supremacy, and foster humanist principles so as to achieve not just life, liberty, and happiness but also life, love, and harmony?”

These issues are complex and there are no simple answers to these questions, but educators can take steps to move forward in a positive direction. First, educators must consider the students themselves. We must pay attention to demographics and keep them in mind when planning for the future. In California, for example, about 50% of the students in the state, or 1.4 million children, are designated as English Language Learners or ELLs (Taylor 2016). About 78% of the ELL students are Spanish speakers from Latino backgrounds, and while the Spanish-speaking population is growing, the white population is shrinking (Taylor 2016).

Next, teachers—who are predominantly white and middle class, and mostly female—need to consider what they can do differently in order to better serve the students. Consider Helms’ (1995) White Identity Development Model and the implications for schools and teachers as agents in developing a positive and integrated Euro-American identity (as cited in Borunda, 2013). Helms suggests that white Americans experience six distinct stages along the path of White Racial Identity Development. Helms (year) describes this pathway as a continuum that begins with a phase of initial first contact, then voyages through cognitive dissonance and distress, before ultimately arriving at an enlightened, awakened stage he calls “Autonomy” (p. 319). In the final autonomous stage of white identity development, there is a willingness to recognize the complexities of race relations, a strong sense of knowledge and understanding of racial realities, and a readiness to abandon white entitlement. Helms suggests that a strong nonracist white identity only develops after experiencing the stages of discomfort and confronting feelings of guilt and fear.

Yet, other scholars of white racial identity development question Helms’ assumptions that these stages happen as part of a continuum along a predictable path (Rowe, Bennett, and Atkinson, 1994). More recent scholarship concerning white racial identity development asserts that the Helms (1990) model, although heralded for bringing attention to issues of white attitudes, is somewhat inadequate in its explanation of racial consciousness as a sequential developmental pathway. Some scholars argue that white racial identity development happens in fits and starts (Rowe, Bennett, and Atkinson, 1994). At any rate, various models of white identity development have evolved since Helms (1990) first conceptualized this model, and scholars continue to research white attitudes and racial consciousness.

In terms of implications for schools, the bottom line is that since most public school teachers are white women, their attitudes matter and ought to continue to be studied and given academic attention. This perhaps suggests that many teachers need to critically examine their own uncomfortable feelings about race. As a starting point, teachers might question themselves by asking: What are my unconscious assumptions about race? How am I perpetuating or dismantling racism in my classroom? In asking these questions, the journey to developing a non-racist white identity begins.

Finally, schools are supposed to support democracy while promoting the values of social responsibility. In order to do this, schools must be a place where all students feel included, so that there is not an “in group” or “out group” of children. It is within these polarities of inclusion and exclusion that the seeds of hostilities between groups take root. The recent attention on bullying prevention ought to be commended (although there is still much work to be done). Educators need to pay attention not just to bullying in the schoolyard, but also to bullying in the larger social and political arena where it may be upheld as a model of behavior for children. Unfortunately, unless

we understand the need for change in ourselves and in the school system, we will continue to see the same outcomes that we are seeing now. That is why it is critically important for educators to question the roots of the achievement gap, acknowledge changing demographics, and ask ourselves the hard questions about racial realities, in order to advocate for change.

Implications for Children in K-12 Settings

Many students, especially white students, may experience difficulty in discussing matters of race (Flynn 2012). For example, some students may be resistant to talking about race or they may feel uncomfortable doing so in a classroom setting. Educators who cultivate safe and welcoming classrooms may help to mitigate such feelings of discomfort and resistance. A study of safe classroom spaces among college-level students by Holley and Steiner (2005) confirms what previous literature has suggested as steps that instructors may take to promote healthy and nurturing school classroom environments. These steps include that teachers should aim to develop guidelines for class discussion, present a nonjudgmental attitude, and exude an approachable, supportive demeanor (Holley & Steiner, 2005). Participants in this study used words like “nonjudgmental” and “unbiased” to describe desirable conditions of instructors. Students in this study responded that instructors who are critical towards students contribute towards making the classroom space feel unsafe. Specific strategies outlined by this study and aligning with existing literature include how instructors cultivate safe spaces by modeling that they are comfortable with conflict, showing respect for different opinions, encouraging student participation during class, remaining personable and accepting of students, self-disclosing about themselves, presenting as calm in the classroom, and also demonstrating competencies in the course matter (Holley & Steiner, 2005).

One of the most important strategies is to also create ground rules around class discussions. This helps students to know what the expectations are of themselves and their peers. Safe classroom spaces facilitate student capacity to civilly address and discuss difficult topics but necessitate that educators empower students to partake in critical conversations about sensitive topics. It is imperative that educators understand the value in creating change, and that they foster an environment in which students feel that they may express their individuality and perspectives without fear of adverse reactions (Delano-Oriaran and Parks, 2015).

Within empowerment, there is an emphasis on taking action. In an example shared by Flynn (2012), two middle school teachers had students reflect on what they could do as antiracist leaders. A number of students proclaimed their understanding of the need for social justice endeavors. Flynn (2012), also notes that teachers should recognize the power of having students share their own narratives, in order to help catalyze students’ understanding of institutional systems, including schools. Another empowerment strategy that we suggest is for teachers to promote dialogue and learning about Euro-Americans who were humanists and have made a difference in the history (e.g. Grimke Sisters). This may also inspire students to take actions that lead to meaningful change.

Children’s understanding of themselves and the world around them is largely informed by the adults in their lives, through various socialization processes (Priest, 2016). Multicultural personality development is critical to this understanding and educators have the opportunity to honor the many diverse perspectives and identities that make up our past, present, and future. Fostering safe spaces in schools and communities will help individuals develop their multicultural dispositions, by emphasizing the strengths that exist within school systems and highlighting the value in representing diverse cultures (Ponterotto, Mendelowitz, and Collabolletta, 2008).

Actively Teaching and Including Humanist Perspectives

The impact of drawing from humanist models of behavior provides opportunity for building cross cultural bridges. In interactions where development of knowledge of self and of others is promoted, the capacity to appreciate and emulate individuals from other cultures different from our own dislodges rooted prejudices. Additionally, drawing from humanist models provides the means by which to identify shared values and bind people from different and disparate histories with a unifying vision. To this end, the following excerpts are from final papers submitted for a university course taught by adjunct faculty, Tom Higgins. The text and curriculum for this course is grounded in humanist-oriented history and focuses on development of self as a positive agent of social change. These excerpts provide evidence as to the positive and powerful impact of studying the acts and dispositions of humanist-centered models.

The following excerpt was written by a Hmong American undergraduate student studying to become a social worker:

I would like to acknowledge some of the very courageous humanists who made a difference in the History, the Grimke Sisters, Angelina and Sarah. Although both sisters were raised in a household and a social structure that enforced slavery, it was very brave that both Euro-American girls, were courageous to go against slavery and advocate for women's rights. During that era, the girls refused to be part of the culture of Silence and took actions upon it and went against their family. Angelina and Sarah have moved me to be courageous and continue their path and advocate for myself and others. In the helping profession it is important that we acknowledge the oppression culture and take action upon it. (Higgins, 2017)

The fact that the actions of Euro-American humanists have been largely absent from our public education is evident in the following excerpt from a Mexican American Junior who is preparing to apply to graduate school to become a counselor:

I learned about the Grimke Sister's and Colonel Shaw and how their humanist role played a major part of history. As I was reading about them I would reflect on whether I learned or heard of them in my high school history classes, but there was never an "aha" moment. I recalled me hating my history classes because they were so boring and in other words I learned the banking method of education. However, in this textbook I learned about the different humanists in history and I found it to be quite interesting. As I think about going into the counseling field, I aim to be like the Grimke sister's and fight for what is right. Although, I may have more privilege than others due to my education, I won't let that be a reason why I should take advantage of others. This is an example of what the Grimke Sisters did. They knew their wealth and color allowed them to have a good life, but if it meant at the cost of mistreating and hurting innocent people they were not up for it. Since they didn't agree with what they were being taught, they decided to do something about it even if it meant going against their own family. (Higgins, 2017)¹

The realization by students that they have received a biased rendition of history, consisting of a master narrative, often leads to frustration in discovering that their formal education has not provided a full picture reflecting behaviors and attitudes of a wide range of historical participants.

1. Tom Higgins is an adjunct for a California State University, Sacramento, Course.

Yet, once students are exposed to a wider spectrum of participants whose moral compass is more relevant to who they are, they find people to not just be intrigued by but to emulate. This discovery is further discussed by the student whose quote was previously cited:

An event that was inspiring in many ways was when Colonel Shaw accepted the position of colonelcy of the first black regiment. Reading about his challenges and seeing how his heart began to change over time was eye opening. At first, he thought he was a good person and had a good heart but was never actually submerged where he could ask more questions and why's? When he first got to meet the black men, he experienced racism against the black men. I recall reading the letters he wrote and saying that he saw the black soldiers different from him. However, in his last letters I saw a change of heart and he considered the African American soldiers the same as him. Along with that he fought with them until his last breath. A valuable lesson I took from this event was that as I go into my future profession as a counselor, I may now feel that I am a great person and have a good heart. However, there will be a time where my heart will be tested and then I will ask myself which side will I choose to do? What is right or wrong? (Higgins, 2017)

The following excerpt from an undergraduate Euro-American male who strives to become a Rehabilitation Counselor, gives us pause. As evident in this student's conclusion after studying from a humanist perspective, the hue of the skin color becomes irrelevant. In this student's understanding after learning about the actions of humanists is how one's power and privilege can be used, constructively, to unite, rather than divide, and to uplift, rather than maintain white dominance.

Initially, I failed to understand why you (Dr. Borunda) chose to incorporate many Euro-Americans as your humanists; I did not understand why you did not select individuals of color, who saved themselves. Throughout the course of the semester, I realized you wanted to show the importance of allies, specifically that the color of one's skin remains arbitrary. What matters instead remains what is inside our hearts. Also, you wanted to show that anyone can become a humanist, as well as the fact that European-Americans can use their privilege to avert the issue of racism. (Higgins, 2017)

Clearly, there is promise in bridging the divides in our nation. Despite the fact that the United States was built upon sanctioned exploitation and dominance of humanity, the future can look different if we provide a rendering of Euro-Americans' participation in undermining white supremacy. As allies in the effort to mitigate the tenets of separatist and isolationist policies, rhetoric, and education, the development of positive and inclusive identity has promise not only for Euro-Americans but for all others living in the United States who envision a harmonious existence for all. In this way, the promotion of relevant history may yet heal us from our contentious and divisive past.

Conclusion

The stories we tell our children about our past, as a nation, conveys elements of what we want them to know. When the stories obscure, omit, or misappropriate the truth, there is a disservice committed by conveying to our children that the truth does not matter. Instead, they learn that the victor, regardless of how the “win” was achieved, is not held responsible for acts of aggression

or deception against humanity. Imbedded in such rendering of our history the false narrative currently employed does not only excuse such behavior but does not hold the violators accountable. This current model only fuels division and resentment within this nation.

Reforming our curriculum so that it includes multiple perspectives promotes possibilities for viewing our world, our communities, and our neighbors in a more hopeful manner. Children who are guided by educators who not only value them but who also recognize their potential will generally respond to narratives in which the full range of human character and actions are represented. To this end, there is value in exploring not only the fallibility of human beings who have committed atrocities upon other humans for reasons of greed and power but also in learning about the best of humanity who sacrificed their well-being so that others may enjoy equality. Shifting from emphasis on a master narrative to an inclusive counter narrative shows promise as our children can consider their own character development as they learn about a range of historical figures from this nation's past.

This nation is at a moral crossroad where we must acknowledge and openly recognize the entrenched roots of white supremacy. Its presence is apparent at multiple levels and yet, with the evidence provided from employing a counter narrative, it is clear that the blocks this pathology was built upon can be dismantled. Multiple recommendations discussed in this manuscript promote strategies to decrease racial polarization and create inclusive policies in which all people, including Euro-Americans, are invested in and living democratic as well as humanistic lives. As a nation, we no longer have to be held hostage to irrelevant old master narratives; a promising future is possible and best informed by the practices of inclusivity and teaching about painful truths but also ensuring that we are providing balanced perspectives.

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Dr. Rose Borunda, Interim Director for the Doctorate in Educational Leadership program, has taught in the Master of Science in Counselor Education program since 2002. Her experience in child abuse prevention and school counseling fostered her interest in social justice. From teaching at D-Q University, a tribal college, and consulting for UC Davis Tribal TANF program, she gained insight to the capacities of resilient communities. Her first book, "What is the Color of Your Heart?" promotes the capacities of positive identity development and cross racial bridge building. Lessons from her "first teachers" served as a major inspiration for her second publication, "Speaking from the Heart; Herstories of Chicana, Latina, and Amerindian Women."

Dr. HyunGyung Joo is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Graduate and Professional Studies in Education at The California State University, Sacramento. She teaches classes in the Counselor Education program and specializes in bullying and school connectedness. Her credentials include B.E. in Elementary Education, Seoul National University of Education; M.Ed. in Elementary Counseling Education, Seoul National University of Education; Ph.D. in Counselor Education and Supervision, The Pennsylvania State University; and National Certified Counselor.

Dr. Michele Mahr obtained her Ph.D. in Rehabilitation Psychology from the University of Wisconsin, Madison in 2016. She is currently an Assistant Professor at California State University teaching graduate courses in the Counselor Education program with an emphasis on the Rehabilitation Counseling Specialization. Dr. Mahr’s research interests include substance and addiction, multiculturalism, and exercise behaviors for individuals with disabilities. Additionally, Dr. Mahr recently published a book chapter on *Counseling Families and Children in Rural Poverty*. She currently has several publications related to substance abuse and addiction for individuals with disabilities with an interest in the neuropsychology of addiction.

Dr. Jessica Moreno is an assistant professor in Counselor Education within the Marriage Couple Family Counseling specialty at California State University, Sacramento. She is the coordinator of the MCFC program and is the clinical supervisor for the Center for Counseling and Diagnostic Services at CSUS. She is also a licensed MFT in the state of California and is currently in private practice in Sacramento.

Dr. Amy Murray has 20+ years of experience as a public school teacher and administrator in Placer County, California. She has also worked as an education research assistant at California State University, Sacramento. As an author, she is published in the areas of social justice education and inclusive classroom practices. Academic interests include teacher preparation and professional development.

Dr. Sangmin Park is an assistant professor of Career Counseling program at California State University Sacramento. She specializes in counselors’ multicultural competency development and career development of minority populations.

Dr. Carly Scarton, Assistant Professor, is Co-Coordinator for the School Counseling Program at Sac State. She specializes in LGBTQ++ mental health and school counseling. Her credentials include: B.S. in Sociology and Criminology, Saint Francis University; M.Ed. in Counselor Education, Penn State University; Ph.D. in Counselor Education & Supervision, Penn State University; Graduate Certificate in LGBT Health Policy & Practice, George Washington University; National Certified Counselor.