TOWARD A PHILOSOPHY OF RACE IN EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

There is a tendency in education theory to place the focus on the consequences of racial hegemony (racism, Eurocentric education, low performance by racial minorities) and ignore that race is antecedent to these consequences. This dissertation explores the treatment of race within critical theory in education. I conduct a metaphysical analysis to examine the race concept as it emerges from the works of various critical theorists in education. This examination shows how some scholars affirm the scientifically discredited race concept by offering racial essentialist approaches for emancipatory education. I argue that one of consequences of these approaches is the further tightening of racial constraints on the student's personal autonomy. This mandates that critical theorists gain a deeper understanding of *race as a problem,* conceptually, epistemically, ideologically, and existentially. I argue that critical theorists of education draw from work conducted in the philosophy of race by theorists such as K. Anthony Appiah, Jorge Gracia, Charles Mills, and Naomi Zack to gain insights on the metaphysics of race to better inform theory and praxis. I further recommend the creation of a critical philosophy of race in education to address and combat race as a problem and its consequences. I contend that the groundwork for philosophy of race in education must entail strategies that encourage and assist theorists and teachers to move toward the elimination of the race in society, while utilizing race only as heuristic tool to address its consequences. Additionally, I argue that a philosophy of race in education must advocate for an education for autonomy as a means to racial liberation for students.

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Before I joined the field of education, I was a graduate student in philosophy. Being a black person in Western academic philosophy is akin to being an anomaly. You are the elephant in the room that everybody sees, but that nobody wants to be caught noticing for fear that you might want to talk about it. The "less black" you can be the better. When I say "less black," I do not mean to imply that there is actually a way of *being black* nor do I intend to suggest that there are any actual intrinsic properties that one must have to *be* black. Rather, I mean "black," the racial identity typically assigned by American societal culture and the assumed qualities that accompany its ascription.

Assumptions about this collective racial identity often include conjecture regarding one's disposition, character, cognitive capacity, and one's ideological allegiance to blacks writ large. It is the latter assumption that proves as troublesome within the discipline as it does in contemporary American culture. In academic philosophy, the often-selectively applied normative model of the ideal philosopher is one who can operate as somewhat of a disembodied mind—as a thinking machine without real world commitments. It is this assumed identity that theoretically allows the philosopher to rise above one's embedded circumstances to analyze and solve complex problems about this and other possible worlds without prejudice. Typically, the ability to occupy the ideal philosopher identity for the white male is taken to as a given. However,

for persons with real world markers--the woman, the "racial" minority, ethnic minority, and members of other marginalized groups, the willingness to embrace the philosopher's identity is considered a "competence." One must show allegiance to it above all other identities (and identifiers) as these embodied identities are regarded as impediments to truly rigorous thought instead of vehicles for nuanced philosophical thought.

I discovered that the subject of race within academic philosophy is an even bigger elephant in the room, only most never see it, and most would not care anyway. It is a subject discussed on the periphery of philosophical discourse, usually as an aside to subjects taken to be of overarching precedence. Thus, it is not surprising that a philosophy about race is not readily embraced within the discipline. Indeed, its treatment is not unlike that of feminist theory, placed off to the side in some academic basement, only the philosophy of race receives fewer accommodations and substantially less critical appreciation. It has only been within the last two decades that the philosophy of race even received the privilege of sometimes being loaded in and less occasionally shot out of the primarily male and European-friendly canon.

Of course, one would think that given problematic existential issues directly connected to it, the subject of race would act as perfectly rich fodder for the philosopher's critique. After all, this is certainly the case with other topics like the environment, gender, business, law, science, and the moral status of non-human animals. The unfortunate truth is that in mainstream philosophy, the concept of race and even the role that it has played within the history of Western philosophy is virtually absent from the discourse--a point

well illuminated by philosopher, Charles S. Mills.[1] And, it has been outside of this mainstream where philosophers of race have attempted to facilitate and sustain a philosophy of race that provides diverse and innovative approaches to the often-complicated issues tied to race.

A fundamental feature of the philosophy of race, one that binds the diverse set of theories together, is that race is treated *as a problem* in and of itself. For philosophers of race, its thorough examination is considered a necessary prerequisite to any truly rigorous and comprehensive engagement of race-related issues and, in some cases, the areas with which race often finds itself at an intersection (economics, institutions, gender, sexuality).

Race is a biological falsity--a social construct.[2] Yet, in American society, race is not only considered biologically real, it is also heavily invoked in our everyday lives. It is a concept that acts both consciously and subconsciously as a determining factor of our sense of self, our personal and socio-cultural allegiances, and even our ideological, political, and global commitments. The sheer scope of these implications necessitate that we attempt to understand the concept of race. This means doing what we can to know when, where, how, why or, perhaps most importantly, whether we should employ its usage. Within the discipline of philosophy, this stewardship has been taken up, almost exclusively, by the philosophy of race. It is within this subfield of philosophy to which I commit myself as a philosopher.

So, given my experiences in philosophy and my engagement with the philosophy of race, moving into the academic field of education to pursue philosophy of education

[1] Charles Mills, *Blackness Visible*. (Ithaca: Cornell, 1998), 8-12.
[2] Ibid., 46.

was quite a culture shock. I often facetiously describe my existential transition from philosophy to education as "going from black to African American." Similar to my experience in philosophy, the sole basis of my (given) identity was the often vague and ambiguous physical characteristics frequently operationalized in American society to designate someone a member of *the* black race. Beyond this, my two fields diverged. This immediately became apparent as I moved from being expected to disavow any personal and theoretical obligations that I was presumed to have in philosophy to being assigned to a revitalized conception of *blackness* in education. It was "revitalized" in the sense that it not only contained the traditional bio-social aspects that normally accompany race-talk, albeit in a more subtle and less deliberate manner, but also a broad ethno-cultural component that acted as a mandate for new theoretical obligations.

In the educational realm, racial identity was treated as something in need of affirmation, rather than something problematic or something that should possibly be rejected. Often masked as a form of ethnicity, race was treated as something intrinsic to personhood; "black" and "African American" were labels used interchangeably, to denote natural (substantive) and ideal (normative) things. To my surprise, this treatment, which was quite overt within the classroom space, was not simply a reflection of our societal culture, but also a reflection of a substantial amount of race theory produced within the discipline. I found that even theory that attempts to avoid speaking in racial terms often does so inadvertently. Most frequently, this occurs in the form of ethnic and cultural assumptions and designations regarding particular groups of people. As a result, issues such as racism are treated as if independent of the concept of race. Instead, these issues are addressed as consequences of ethnocentrism, cultural and economic conflict, or

disparate power amongst preexisting races. This is despite the often-overt invocation of race to justify the maltreatment of persons in society, both past and present.

The difficulty of differentiating race from other constructs like ethnicity or culture is a testament to the degree that race permeates the American cultural psyche and its stranglehold on the very institutions that should be engaging it most critically. Within parts of the field of education, the combining and conflating of these constructs (race, ethnicity, and culture) and the lack of understanding of their *actual* relationship(s) suggests an absence of analytic scrutiny of race. The more immediate consequence of "race" being so deeply embedded in the educational realm of American fabric is that it can prevent theorists from properly identifying and framing the problem of race as foundational. Race can stunt our ability to find the most effective tools for bringing about the most comprehensive and effective resolutions to the racial issues facing students in and outside of the classroom.

Due to its practical goals and application for the educational setting, the compartmentalized nature of race theory in education has not facilitated the type of "surgical" discourse necessary to fully explore race at a depth adequate enough to understand its effects. This is further complicated, if not hampered, by the fact that under-theorized suppositions of *difference* sometimes act as necessary components to the various social and political agendas pushed in some of the theory. There is an abundance of theory that speaks on racial and ethnic identity within the hegemonic paradigm, but very little work on how racial identities are dispensed, the ontological content and status that accompanies racial designations, or how those constructed identities find their grounding, ontological support, and reaffirmation in the classroom advertently or

inadvertently by well-intentioned teachers. This omission represents a "race gap" in education theory.

In this dissertation, I argue that this race gap within education theory needs to be filled--that race is a problem worth isolating for analysis by theorists within education. To do this, I attempt to shed light on the processes in which the social construct of race, the ascription of racial, ethnic, and cultural identity, become idealized abstractions within some education theory. This is what I refer to as *the problem of reification*.

Like any ascribed identities, racial identities can shape what we know, how we come to know ourselves, and the world around us. Imposing negative racial identities is, of course, already of ethical concern for educators. I contend that the scope of this concern be broadened to include all racial identities, as imposing any form of racial identity can come with consequences—ones that include the production and reproduction of a variety of harms to students. Racial identities can take over and become our primary point of epistemic reference. So, instead of merely seeing the world from their unique, complex, and diverse, socio-cultural circumstances, students may end up seeing the world as a white person or as a black person.

If we take the personal autonomy of the student seriously, then the imposing of this reductive epistemological framework should be troubling. The possibility of producing, enforcing, and facilitating the continued existence of errant racial knowledge could result in the passive and active reproduction of this knowledge by the student towards herself and others. My suggestion here, and what I attempt to show in the chapters that follow, is that this is not merely an issue the scope of which is limited to the classroom, nor is the problem squarely epistemic in nature. Rather, it is that the

implications of race have real world consequences for students beyond the classroom. As philosophers of education, we can no longer ignore the problem of race and reification. Race is a moral problem, and as I assert, one that rests in our hands as theorists in the field of education and perhaps of greater importance, as agents within the broader ethical community.

Theoretical Perspective

My analysis is grounded with what I take to be a necessary set of undergirding propositions that will help insure that I avoid the reproduction of any further reification of the race concept as I move my arguments forward. First, to be in keeping with what has been accepted and supported by the empirical sciences, I acknowledge there is *no biological distinction of race(s) that corresponds to what we generally regard as races*.[3] As a society, we either tend to disregard or we are simply ignorant of any evidence that is contrary to the existence of human races. Thus, I hold that some form of *racial essentialism encapsulated by our racial and ethno-cultural reifications is the necessary component to what keeps us connected to the belief in races*. My theoretical perspective will operate on the grounds that *while there may be distinctions between race, ethnicity, and culture within the social sciences, that such distinctions are betrayed, ignored, unknown, or conflated within societal culture*. Another proposition that undergirds my theoretical perspective is that the *understanding and critical engagement of the "race" concept is necessary when attempting to address any social and pedagogical issues in which phenotype and morphology is used as an indicator for race, ethnicity and culture*.

[3] Ibid., 32.

What should be clear from this perspective is that this dissertation is intended to be an applied exercise in the philosophy of race. Furthermore, I identify myself as a racial eliminativist, meaning that I believe the most effective remedy in dealing with the problem of race and its consequences is the necessary deconstruction and dissolution of the race concept. Racial eliminativism both shapes and informs the analysis that I undertake and it is ultimately toward the abdication of race in American society that I argue in the following chapters.

Objects of Investigation

I recognize that there are a diverse array of viewpoints posited within the various areas of education theory regarding race and race relations. However, my investigation will focus on a few of the more influential and respected theorists in the broader field of critical theory in education. This includes such areas as critical race theory, critical multiculturalism, radical pedagogy, and Afrocentric theory.[4] There are several reasons why I have chosen critical theory in education as the object of my investigation. The first is that theorists within this discipline attempt to engage race in both a rigorous and philosophical manner. They approach education with a critical lens and by doing so demonstrate a commitment to self-reflectivity and the need for adaptability and correction where needed within the field of education. Secondly, areas within critical theory in education attempt to confront pressing, sometimes controversial, race-related issues head on. The final reason that I have chosen critical theory in education as the focus of this dissertation is that it is where I situate myself theoretically, as a philosopher

[4] I will sometimes refer to "critical theory in education" simply as "critical theory."

of race, within the broader field of education. Hence, I have a vested interest in this field achieving its desired ends of mitigating racial hegemony in the classroom space. These factors are of great importance to my analysis as it is neither my goal to undermine well-intentioned educational theory nor the teachers in the classroom space that it attempts to inform. Rather, I hope to enhance the field by adding to its arsenal and broadening and strengthening its knowledge base.

Since the theorists that I engage in the following chapters hail from the world of critical theory in eduation, they largely focus on the intersections between power and race inside and outside of the classroom. Specifically, they concentrate on the black/white racial paradigm. For the purposes of my dissertation, I, too, focus my analytic energies on this binary. However, my primary focal point is the treatment of black Americans, especially black students. While I do believe that my own experiences as a black individual and scholar within the philosophical and educational domains of the academy give me unique insight into this subject, the reason that I have chosen the black racial group as the principal subjects of investigation is because they are rather uniquely perceived and treated as the most monolithic of the racially/ethnically designated social groups in education theory.

Race, especially in regard to blacks, often gets ingested into what Michael Omi and Howard Winant refer to as "the ethnic paradigm"–a paradigm inherent within multiculuralist theories. They state,

> "…. with rare exceptions, ethnicity theory isn't very interested in ethnicity among blacks. The ethnicity approach views blacks as one ethnic group among others. It does not consider national origin, religion, language, or cultural differences

among blacks, as it does among whites, as sources of ethnicity. It would be quite interesting to see how ethnicity theory might address the range of subgroupings represented in the U.S. black community."[5]

The increased pressure placed upon theorists within education theory by multicultural education proponents has meant that the ethnic paradigm has become increasingly pervasive within critical theory in education. Moreover, its increased ideological dominance creates a unique set of circumstances for black students in the classroom. Persons assigned to the "black" race are thought to practice or belong to a distinctly bordered "African," "African-American," or "black" culture and are also perceived as being linked solely, and as I attempt to illuminate, even metaphysically, to the African continent. This is simply not the case for persons designated as "white." It is not thought that a white person should practice or belong to a monolithic "European" or "white" culture, nor is it expected or required that this person identify one's assigned race or ethnicity with all of Europe. Indeed, if a white person chooses to identify Europe as an ethnic affiliation, it is regarded as too broad a distinction. Usually, such an identity, "European American," would only be employed for heuristic purposes within critical and political discourse. In societal culture, however, this designation would usually collapse into countries of ancestral origin or regions within the European continent. For example, one can identify as "Irish American," "Italian American," both, or if she so chooses, neither--that is, if societal culture regards her as white. Blacks are permitted the same variability of choice in neither societal culture nor educational culture. They are

[5] Michael Omi and Howard Winant, Racial *Formation in the United States: From the 1960's to the 1990's*. 2nd Ed. (New York: Routledge, 1994), 14.

considered to be African Americans or black only. It is my view that since blacks lack the choice of self-determination in regard to identity or even negotiated identifications, they provide a solid test case for my analysis.

I recognize that the concentration on blacks within the black/white binary presents some limitations for my analysis. My conclusions will lack a high degree of generalizability, especially in regard to harms and potential harms inadvertently mandated by the theory in which I examine. There is simply too much variability and inconsistency when we talk about race, ethnicity, and culture. Thus, the same critique made of multiculturalism, for example, in regard to what is perceived as "black" or "African American culture," may or may not apply to "Puerto Rican American culture," "Chinese American culture," or "Sioux culture." This is because of the diverse histories and circumstances of people who belong to these presumed cultures or to whom these cultures are assigned in educational circles create their own unique sets of contextual particularities.

Furthermore, cultural practices of certain groups are simply more identifiable than those of other groups whose supposed "cultures" are more highly subject to external and internal conjectural definition. The existence of *an* African American culture is unique because it is treated as given, fixed by race, that is somehow thought to transcend family, socio-historical circumstances, economics, geography and be remarkably impervious to cultural syncretization. So, for the sake of analytical clarity, I acknowledge my specific approach bears only contextual relevancy specific to the conception of race as it applies

to blacks in and, in some cases, outside of the United States.[6] However, I regard this limitation as strength for the analysis that follows, as allowing ourselves to think too broadly about particular groups rests at the root of the problem of race in education.[7]

Descriptive Analysis of Critical Theory in Education

In Chapter Two, I offer a descriptive analysis of critical theory in education. I begin this task with an overview the problem of racial reification. Following this discussion, I attempt to show how some theoretical work within critical theory in education directly and indirectly affirms racial essentialism. I further reveal how some theory has the tendency to treat racial hegemony or racism as *the* problem and our cultural conception of race as independent and inconsequential to that problem. I attempt to show there is a lack of understanding of the deep essentialist ontology of race in some of the most penetrating and rigorous theoretical discourse in education. This analysis will hopefully evoke the creation of more effective and holistic approaches to combat racial issues, to provide a more exhaustive list of symptoms that occur as a result of racial ontology, and to help eliminate racial ontology altogether.

I demonstrate the claims of my descriptive argument, that some critical theory in education is guilty of reproducing race via the process of reification, by utilizing a question--directed method to provide answers to such questions as the following:

1. How are race, ethnicity, and culture generally defined and distinguished within the critical theory that I will explore?

[6] I do hope that the type of analysis of analysis that I am conducting in this dissertation is applicable to other paradigms (ethnic, gender, sexuality, national).

a. What is the conceptual relationship between these variables within the theory?
b. What is the conceptual ontology of these variables as presented by the theorist? How has does the theorist reify "race?"

2. How does the theory utilize these concepts to inform theory and practice within the field of education (e.g. in regard to identity, racism, the canon)?

I evaluate the logic of the answers/arguments that are provided. The logical analysis that I use is based on the basic philosophical methodology utilized in most contemporary Western philosophy. Formally speaking, I look for the **validity** of the theorists' positions, where an argument's validity would entail that there is no way for a conclusion to not be true if its premises are true. I also look for the **soundness** of the arguments that are made, where soundness indicates that an argument meets the standards of validity and that its premises are indeed true.[8] Like most philosophical analysis, these logical rules will be carried out implicitly rather than explicitly. While I am well aware that this standard of logic is the subject of debate among hardcore logicians and those within the field of education who decry an epistemic over-reliance on "reason," I believe that for my investigative purposes it is a sufficient, if not necessary, tool to demonstrate the problems in the theory that I engage. Where the theorists in my analysis do not explicitly state arguments and propositions, I attempt to draw inferences and propose implications based on the evidence provided within their analyses. Warranted and unwarranted assumptions that ground relevant positions are also highlighted. I approach these theorists under the assumption that they desire their work to be evaluated in a

[8] John Nolt, *Logics.* (Belmont: Wadsworth, 1997), 6-12.

reasonable, serious, and critical manner based on the evidence and arguments provided, rather than rhetorical value. This is, in part, the basis on which I have chosen their particular works for examination.

The question may be posed, "why this method?" As previously stated, logical analysis is an integral part of most contemporary philosophy in academic circles. It is present in pragmatic theory, existential theory, political theory, and moral theory. I believe it can be particularly useful for the analysis of race where so much of the related dialogue is the object of conjecture. I am in full agreement with philosophers of race, like Kwame Anthony Appiah, who champions the use of analytical philosophy to unpack the concept of race and philosopher Jorge Gracia, who states, [9]

> "Philosophy can 'put it all together'…by taking from other disciplines what they offer, by critically analyzing this information, and by supplementing it with the analyses that it uniquely can provide. Logic can help us to clarify the various conceptual issues raised by the notions of race, ethnicity, and nationality, and to identify hidden assumptions used in discourses about them and judge the validity of the arguments offered by various views."[10]

The methodological approach that I use in this dissertation will permit us to rise above the existential fray, so to speak, to better understand the metaphysics of the concepts *that inform* how we live, how we learn, and how we *know*; in turn, a successful analysis should provide useful data that will allow us to make sure that our conceptual knowledge coheres with the actual world. Unfortunately, much about our belief in race is

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[9] Appiah, *Color*, 33.
[10] Jorge J. E. Gracia, *Surviving Race, Ethnicity, and Nationality: A Challenge for the Twenty-First Century*. (Lanham: Rowman and Littlfield, 2005), xix-xx.

"otherworldly" in nature—grounded by realist assumptions, while remaining insensitive to real world evidence. A logic-based investigation will help ground the transcendent concept race in the theory.

There are two primary dimensions to my conceptual analysis of critical theory in education. The first of these is an analysis in which I explore and critique how several contemporary theorists talk about race and the role race plays within their work. Specifically, I examine how these theorists, despite their methodological and practical differences, have managed to take the normative conceptions of race of the past and restructure them as substantive and idealized ontologies.

The first of these contemporary theorists is *Afrocentric* pedagogist Molefi Kete Asante. Asante argues for an African-centered pedagogy as a solution to help better the lives of African American students. He constructs his Afrocentric approach in opposition to the dominance of *Eurocentrism* within education. Drawing from three of his works, *The Afrocentric Idea*, "The Afrocentric Idea in Education," and "Afrocentric Curriculum," I show how Asante offers an essentialist and axiomatic vision of race, especially in regard to African Americans. [11]

The second theorist that I investigate for this contemporary analysis is critical race theorist Gloria Ladson-Billings. I draw from the book in which her theory is most fully presented, *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children.* I explore her racial and cultural views regarding the education of blacks posited in her

[11] Molefi K Asante, "Afrocentric Curriculum" in Educational Leadership. 49.4 (1991), 28-31, Asante, Molefi K. Asante, *The Afrocentric Idea*. (Philadelphia: Temple, 1998), and Molefi Kete Asante, "The Afrocentric Idea in Education," The Journal of Negro Education, 60 (1991): 170-780.

influential "Culturally Relevant Teaching" strategy.[12] I attempt to show how reified conceptions of race, ethnicity, and culture are intertwined within this very influential book.

I also engage the work of critical multiculturalists Joe Kincheloe and Shirley Steinberg. I evaluate some problematic positions that they put forth in regard to the education of black students in their book *Changing Multiculturalism*.[13] I argue that their views on race are quite similar to the essentialist conception of race Afrocentric education.

The final critical theorist of education that I will examine is Peter McLaren. McLaren provides an interesting twist to the racial dichotomy by utilizing oppositional political conceptions of both "blackness" and "whiteness." I draw my analysis from two of his books *Revolutionary Multiculturalism* and *Life in Schools: An Introduction to Critical Pedagogy in the Foundations of Education.*[14]

The second dimension of my conceptual analysis is a historical conceptual analysis that provides an account of the development and construction of "blackness" in the philosophy of education. This task is carried out in Chapter Three of this dissertation. In this examination, I explore the history of black education from the philosophies offered by persons such as Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois, Carter Woodson,

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[12] Gloria Ladson-Billings, *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children*. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1994). Later in this dissertation I briefly look at Ladson-Billings own view regarding the role the concept of race should play in education in a piece that she co-authored with William Tate IV entitled, "Toward A Critical Race Theory of Education."[12]

[13] Joe L Kincheloe and Shirley R. Steinberg, *Changing Multiculturalism*. (Buckingham: Open University, 2002).

[14] Peter McLaren, *Life In Schools: An Introduction to Critical Pedagogy in the Foundations of Education*. 4th Ed. (Boston: Allan and Bacon, 2002). and Peter McLaren, Revolutionary Multiculturalism. (Boulder: Westview, 1997).

and some of the ideologies that surfaced out of the Black Power movements leading up to the establishment of Black Studies**.** I attempt to demonstrate how the philosophies of race argued for normative conceptions of race that, once activated, were intended to improve the circumstances of black people. Furthermore, I follow the conceptual trajectory from past to present to show how these historical notions of race likely came to rest as the foundations of the more contemporary conception of blackness found in critical theory in education.

Normative Analysis

There are potentially dangerous consequences for producing and reproducing reified conceptions of race—consequences that I hold necessitate that we move beyond our current starting points of looking at race. In Chapter Four of this dissertation, I argue that critical theory in education that advocates racially diasporic strategies and content will facilitate the continuance of pre-existing harms for black students. Moreover, I contend that the failure to dismantle the inherent essentialism of the race concept in our theories before re-deploying it the classroom will result in the exacerbation of these harms**.** I hold that given the nature of the racial construct and its usage within critical theory in education accompanied by the aforementioned harms, we as theorists and educators, and most importantly, catalysts for these harms, have an ethical responsibility to end these problems where possible. Mitigating negative consequences caused by the construct of race requires that we attempt to understand its individual racial ontologies as comprehensively as the available tools will permit us.

The Philosophy of Race

In Chapter Five, I show how there are theorists in education who also suggest that a greater conceptual clarity must gain ground within education when we approach questions of race, ethnicity and culture. Among these theorists are Cameron McCarthy and Warren Crichlow. They reject discourse in education circles that treats racial groups as monolithic groups in which designated members share the same sorts of biological and cultural characteristics.[15] The work of theorists like McCarthy and Crichlow help strengthen the mandate for the construction of a theoretical bridge that will take critical theorists in education towards a deeper and more holistic approach to race in education.

I offer a prescriptive argument that will help address McCarthy and Crichlow's concerns and as well as the issues I raise in the preceding chapters. The concept of race has been conceptually de-centered from race theory and buried within the ethnic paradigm of critical theory in education. I contend that the philosophy of race couched in the world of academic philosophy provides conceptual and foundational knowledge that could help close the race gap in educational theory and thereby act as a mitigating agent to offset harms by re-centering race in the discourse. I argue that critical theorists begin to bridge the divide between the disciplines of education and philosophy to provide stronger theory to confront the problem of race in education. It can provide educators with a more in-depth view of the complexities and dangerous conflation between race, culture, and ethnicity—variables in which students' identities and environment are often largely

[15] Ibid. McCarthy offers an important critique of essentialist theories in McCarthy, Cameron. "The Problem with Origins: Race and the Contrapuntal Nature of the Educational Experience" in *Multicultural Education, Critical Pedagogy, and the Politics of Difference*," eds. Christine E. Sleeter and Peter McLaren. (New York: State University, 1995), 245-264.

contingent. I intend to demonstrate that these variables need to be centered in educational discourse as constructs with consequences as such. Furthermore, I contend that educators seek a better understanding of the substantive link between the complex nature of these constructs and overt problems such as racism and ethnocentrism. This inquiry will hopefully demonstrate to administrators, educational policy makers, and theorists the need for more rigorous courses for teacher preparation that deal with such issues with a more exhaustive depth.

This chapter also includes a second question-directed descriptive analysis that attempts to shed light on the various ways in which the methodologies, strategies, and knowledge within the philosophy of race can assist critical theorists in education. This investigation will provide answers to questions such as,

1. What are some methods and approaches used to examine race within the philosophy of race?
2. How are race, ethnicity, and culture distinguished and defined within philosophical critical theory?
    a. What is the relationship between these variables?
    b. What are the ontological implications of these variables?
3. How does philosophy of race use its analysis to inform further theory (e.g. identity, racism, race relations)
4. How do these philosophies of race relate to one another? How are they different?

In the philosophy of race, simply asserting that race is a social construct does not go far enough. There is an attempt to answer the question "What, then, is 'race?' as we

know it our American culture." If there are no human races, "what do we mean when we call ourselves black, white, mixed, Asian, etc?" For these philosophers, an inherently problematic conception of race is found in the answers to such questions and given this problem, they ask, "how do we operationalize this new knowledge in regard to issues related to race?"

The growing affinity for a less critical than intended multiculturalism has complicated these questions even more so as the confusion, interchangeability, and relationships between race, culture, and ethnicity provide further ambiguity. Philosophers, then, have begun to take advantage of the methodological arsenals of their field in an attempt to offer descriptive clarity to these concepts that have been at the center of so much social turmoil. Thus, one of the primary goals for philosophers of race is to better provide a sound starting point for normative work.

I explore the philosophical works of four important philosophers of race who challenge the concept of racial realism to highlight this description of the philosophy of race. The first of these philosophers is Charles Mills. My analysis will focus on his race theory presented in the book, *Blackness Visible*. Borrowing from contract theory, Mills argues that race is a vertically (hierarchically) structured, politically, socially, and historically contingent white supremacist system. This system is maintained by a hypothetical, intersubjectively agreed upon contract amongst whites. [16]

I show how Mills, playing the role of metaphysician, offers an analysis of the "social ontology" of race. Further drawing from the fields of ethics and the philosophy of science, he places himself in opposition to "racial realism," a position that asserts a

[16] Mills, *Blackness*, 21-66.

biological conception of race in which cultural, social, and physical traits are passed on genetically. For Mills, racial realism is a manifestation of a system based on power arrangements**.** Thus, he endorses a social constructivist view on the metaphysics of race, while acknowledging that race is socially real and has social and ontological implications. I illuminate how, for Mills, "Blackness" was created in this system to be a distinction *from* "Whiteness." I further explain how racial identity, "mixed" raced, and culture factor into the racial system for Mills. [17]

I also present an overview of Kwame Anthony Appiah's theory of race. Appiah is perhaps the most highly regarded analytical race theorist of the last two decades. He utilizes methods from the philosophy of language and the philosophy of science to discover how our current folk conception of race developed from conjecture at a time before the advent of biological science. His philosophical investigation seeks to demonstrate how race was the product of suppositions about heritable biological, cultural, and moral traits. [18]

Much of Appiah's critique is concentrated on "racialism," a concept that is accepted amongst critical race theorists as synonymous with "racial essentialism" or racial realism. Appiah offers a definition that attempts to provide clarity essentially stating that racialism is the belief that human beings can be divided up and separated into races contingent upon a set of physical (e.g. skin color), nonphysical (e.g. intelligence),

[17] Ibid.
[18] Appiah, *Color*, 30-104.

and metaphysical (essences or "racial blood") traits. Each set of properties makes that particular race distinct from other races.[19]

I include what I take to be a very significant argument that Appiah makes regarding identity. He argues for the use of de-essentialized racial identities as ethical identities, and provides a compelling account for why "cultural identities" are not suitable replacements for racial identities. I also explore how Appiah confronts the problem of race in regard to the role of collective identities based around reified constructs and how they activate axiomatic conceptions of authenticity and, as I also argue in the preceding chapter, can negate one's autonomy.[20]

I further discuss how Appiah's theory of race informs his views on racism. I show how from Appiah's standpoint one must first understand the nature of our beliefs about race before we are able to adequately approach any conversations about race. I therefore, present his "Racialist Triad" which consists of three concepts: racialism, extrinsic racism, and intrinsic racism.

Another theorist that I discuss is analytical philosopher, Naomi Zack. She uses a broad set of philosophical methodologies in her analyses of the race concept. For example, Zack employs a historical-scientific analysis quite similar to Appiah's to show the ways in which scientific and essentialist notions of race that predated modern biology were conceptualized without proper bases. She argues that science is the last line of

[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid. and Kwame Anthony Appiah, "'But Would That Still Be Me?': Notes On Gender, 'Race,' Ethnicity, As Sources of 'Identity,'" *The Journal of Philosophy* 87 (1990): 493-499.

justification for proponents of racial realism and challenges the notion of race on these grounds.[21]

I further explain how Zack uses existential and logical analysis to tackle the issue of racial identity. Her analysis reveals how the concept of race, by virtue of the one-drop rule, mandates rules of racial taxonomy that maintain white supremacy. She contends this is accomplished by authorization of a racially asymmetrical paradigm that maintains a "racial purity" that the excludes blacks, and subsequently a group that remains virtually ignored within ethno-racial theory, those of "mixed-raced."[22]

Most of the philosophers in this investigation are in theoretical dialogue with one another. This is certainly the case with the final philosopher of race that I examine, Jorge Gracia. He contributes an analytical approach to race and ethnicity that is sensitive to science and the foundational analyses provided by scholars such as Appiah, Zack, Omi and Winant.[23]

Unlike Naomi Zack, and to a lesser extent, Kwame Anthony Appiah, Gracia is more starkly anti-eliminativist. In his view, the concepts of race and ethnicity, once unpacked and properly separated, are theoretically salvageable. Rather than utilize problematic conflation of race and ethnicity, Gracia proposes his "Genetic Common Bundle View" of race and "Familial-Historical View" of ethnicity, reconstructions of the aforementioned concepts that attempts to be mindful of their reality on the ground--

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[21] Naomi Zack, *Philosophy of Race and Science*, (New York: Routledge, 2005).
[22] Ibid.
[23] Gracia, *Surviving*. 82-85. It is important to note that "nationality" is a central topic in Gracia's discourse. However, I will omit this discussion in my dissertation for the sake of brevity and to retain proper scope. Furthermore, it is also worthy of note that Gracia's anti-eliminativist stance on race is in opposition to Zack's and Appiah's position; they both desire to get rid of the race construct. This point will be taken up in further detail in the final chapter of my dissertation.

culturally, socially, and biologically. I believe that he offers a potentially important route that will permit critical theorists to help unravel race and ethnicity. [24]

At the conclusion of Chapter Five, I highlight some of the ways that these philosophers of race can directly inform and supplement the work of critical theorists in education. I believe if the concerns raised by these philosophers of race are taken seriously within critical theory in education, the theoretical and strategic approaches to the problem of race in the field of education will likely look very differently than they currently do.

Toward A Philosophy of Race in Education

In Chapter Six, I offer my own vision of what a *philosophy of race for education* should encompass. Like the philosophers of race that I examine in Chapter 5, I take up the question "What is the best way to proceed given that race is a social construct and given the type of construct that it is?" Drawing from the works of these philosophers of race and my own analysis, I present a normative argument that calls for the necessary move toward eliminativism. I argue that a project that includes both racial eliminativist and anti-eliminativist components is best suited for dealing with the problem of race and racial hegemony. This proposal is intended to take into account the social constructedness of race, its harmful consequences, and the valuable role that race and ethnicity may already have in the lives of many students and their respective socio-cultural communities. I offer recommendations that I consider crucial for the success of this multi-pronged approach.

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[24] Jorge J. E Gracia, "Race or Ethnicity: An Introduction" *in Race or Ethnicity?: On Black and Latino Identity*. Ed. Jorge J. E. Gracia. (Ithaca: Cornell, 2007), 10.

I further argue that for the implementation of a philosophy of race in education to be successful, that critical theory in education must conduct and utilize conceptual analysis to ground a skill-based approach to race for teachers in the classroom. I hold that rigorous training in philosophical critical thinking for both theorists and teachers to whom our theory informs can act as a useful tool to help negotiate the difficult racial, social, and cultural terrain that acts upon students.

In Chapter Seven, I conclude this dissertation offering some final thoughts, recommendations, and implications for implementing a philosophy of race in the field of education. Let us now begin this analysis with an examination of the problem of reification in critical theory in education.

CHAPTER II
THE PROBLEM OF REIFICATION IN CRITICAL THEORY IN EDUCATION

The Process of Reification

Every Christmas Day, millions of children awaken to find presents waiting for them. Many of these children believe that the person responsible for leaving these gifts is Santa Claus—a white, rotund, bearded man who resides in the uninhabitable North Pole and who uses flying reindeer as his mode of transportation. These same children likely believe that Santa Claus awards these gifts to them based on the moral merit of their actions.

The truth is, however, that Santa Claus is just a mythical figure of Christian lore. The Santa myth is typically invoked for the sake of tradition or for cultural and entertainment purposes. Sometimes, Santa is even used by parents as an instrument to control or constrain the behavior and desires of their children. This is because, to children, Santa Claus is no myth. Santa, his generous acts, and the values, rules, and motivations that direct these actions are very real to them. Children will shape their actions according to these beliefs. Santa Claus is so real to them that they will even set out milk and cookies for him to consume, as a bit of a "thanks in advance" for the gifts they will receive. The actual functional value of his existence bears no consequence to their reality or psychological lives.

The process by which the social construction of Santa Claus and his actions becomes interpreted by children as a real thing is what sociologists Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, refer to as *reification*. In their book *The Social Construction of Reality*, Berger and Luckmann describe reification as "the apprehension of human phenomena as if they were things…" and "the apprehension of the products of human activity as if they were something else than human products—such as facts of nature, results of cosmic laws, or manifestations of divine will."[25] So, for example, Santa is a myth but we pretend as though he is real and as a result children believe him to be a real person. We pretend as though our placing gifts under the tree is really Santa's doing. If we are successful, children come to think that Santa not only must be real but also that he must be pleased with them. Given the multitudes of trustworthy adults that "play along" with the Santa myth through various means (e.g. parenting, business, media, church, and education) there is little reason for children to doubt their own beliefs and intuitions regarding his realness. Indeed, it is this broad-scale affirmation of Santa's existence that makes him such an effective device.

There are plenty of possible examples of reification. After all, we reify throughout the course of our daily lives. The types of objects that we reify are seemingly limitless--places, inanimate objects, concepts, social statuses, rituals, rites of passages, etc. Sometimes, reifications can extend to actual people, altering the way that we see them, the way that they view themselves, or the way that they view others. Consider this example of reification**.** Imagine a person who we know of by description. She leads what

[25] Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*." (New York: Anchor, 1966), 88.

we would typically consider an ordinary life. She has an average job, a family, and friends; she pays rent or makes house payments. She has ordinary feelings (happiness, sadness, anger, loneliness) and desires (love, family, job security, financial stability). We expect her to encounter all of life's typical problems (bad relationships, job loss or dissatisfaction, familial discord, etc.). And, even though we might recognize that there are circumstantial factors that make her life uniquely different from ours, we still relate to her as a person. In fact, it is the aforementioned feelings, desires, and problems that help facilitate the sort of egalitarian and empathetic kinship that we are able to feel for her. They are what make her "normal," just like us.

Now let us say that this same person achieves high profile professional and financial success, such as becoming an award winning film actress. It is likely that our view of this person and her personhood will change substantially. She ceases being normal to us and instead becomes a type of icon--a celebrity. In American society, we reify celebrity. It is not simply an empty status used to describe someone with notoriety. We give it inherent meaning and a transcendent ontology. We make it a thing in itself. In regard to our hypothetical person, we reify her as a result of her celebrity; it becomes who she is intrinsically. Her newly reified status will likely entail a qualitatively different, probably higher value and set of standards than we normally would assign to others and ourselves. Furthermore, we extend this value to her "productions." For instance, we begin to regard her feelings, actions, and "desires" as special because they flow from her *as a celebrity*. These take on a new, often more intense meaning—her signature becomes an "autograph"; her touch becomes something that can bring admirers to tears; a photograph of her performing mundane tasks, such as drinking coffee or

showing physical affection towards someone becomes something that we hurriedly shuffle through tabloids to see; the loss of a loved one makes us grieve for her as much as we might for someone we know in our actual lives. Even the productions, circumstances, and objects of her pre-celebrity life, which would have once been considered ordinary or perhaps even arbitrary, acquire greater value. In all of these cases, the celebrity's productions also become objects of our reification. Our continued belief in her celebrity affirms these productions while also affirming the reification of celebrity, a human phenomenon, itself.

The process of reification does not necessarily require intent. Public Relations firms may help create someone's image as a celebrity, but our affirmation of this reification is usually something we do unconsciously. After all, we do not say to ourselves when buying a tabloid at the newsstand or visiting our favorite celebrity gossip website, "my action is perpetuating the celebrity of what was once a normal person." Similarly, the intent that leads to the propagation of the Santa myth by family, societal members, and institutions (schools, businesses, etc.) is typically benign. Kids who believe in Santa might unknowingly disseminate or affirm the myth to other kids in casual conversation because they think that his existence is an established matter of fact.

The Problem of Reification

While intent is not a necessity when reifying phenomena, there are potentially troubling issues that can emerge with the process of reification. These issues are largely dependent on the type of human phenomena, activity or products being reified, the properties and axioms that accompany the reification, and the degree to which the

reification itself is containable. Sometimes, a reification can gain so much power and influence that people regard it as self-evident. Belief in the reification can come to denote a fideistic commitment to its realness—a commitment that remains unwavering in the face of any credible authority or evidence that could potentially undermine it. This can, therefore, stunt our ability to recognize, acknowledge, or deconstruct the reification as a product of human creation.

Another issue is that the reification itself can become self-affirming. On the front end, we might look to it to authorize and justify a particular production that we associate with the object. We unknowingly sift through productions, selectively claiming those that are in keeping with the narrative that accompanies the reification. We will ignore productions that appear antithetical to that narrative or even dismiss them as anomalies. The selected productions then act as affirmation for the reified phenomena from which they are thought to derive. So, we can say that the affirmation exists on the back end as well.

Finally, the societal belief in the object can be so widely held and deeply ingrained in our cultural beliefs, that the reification can inadvertently, and sometimes advertently, get reaffirmed and reconstructed by societal members. In this way, when something is reified, it can take on a life of its own in such a way that it is far easier for us to sustain it than it is for us to dismantle it. All of these complications that I have described make up what I call the *problem of reification*.

The concept of "race" is a reification that finds itself entangled in the problem of reification. It is a social construct that's reification is dependent upon the abstracting of biological markers (e.g. skin color). There is very little scientific support for biological

races in humans, but as stated in Chapter 1, most people believe that race is a legitimate biological system. [26] This strong commitment to race is demonstrated by the fact that it operates as a primary frame of reference for how we conduct our social lives. It serves as a basis for how and with whom we interact socially. We refer to it to determine whom our friends and partners are, to whom we will extend moral status, and even the nature of that status. Thus, the reification of race is not simply a biological system, it is also a value system and as such race has been the basis for social and systematic inequity, discrimination, and atrocities.

Over time, however, significant socially progressive change has led to adjustments to its value schema. This has helped mitigate its capability to facilitate certain types of harms in American society. For instance, it is, in general, no longer socially acceptable to physically harm or discriminate on the basis of race. Despite such alterations, however, race as a reified entity has remained relatively intact. We still believe it be real which is a testament to its pervasiveness in American societal culture. Another demonstration of how deeply race is woven into our cultural fabric is that it is still invokes within our societal structure. Its realness is even affirmed and maintained by our social, political, and educational institutions. One need only view a census form or look at the way cultural products are marketed for confirmation of this fact.

Of course, the idea that our institutions can act as racial affirmation agents should not be surprising. After all, they are products of their own environment supported and operated by and for members of this society. We would think, however, that the

[26] Michael Omi and Howard Winant, "Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960's to the 1990's. (New York: Routledge, 1994), 53-54.

Academy, despite being situated within this deeply racialized society, could extricate itself from the reified conception of race. Unlike other institutions, it typically functions as the primary intellectual ground in which the most penetrating, reflective work and discourse regarding the nature of race occurs. It is where the concept of race has been deconstructed and delegitimized as a valid biological entity. Unfortunately, the broad scale deconstruction of race on the part of the Academy as a whole has not yet taken place. Some disciplines have increasingly begun adjusting their mainstream theory to reflect both the constructedness and the pervasiveness of the race concept. Other disciplines, however, have had difficulty avoiding the *problem of racial reification*.

Given the potentially harmful implications of the racial circumstances within the contexts of our application, schools, it is often critical theorists of education who continue to recognize the importance and necessity for engaging race. Indeed, the substantial amount of work that has been directed towards the subject in critical theory of education is a demonstration of its own commitment toward this end. Unfortunately, however, critical theory in education, specifically the more philosophically based theory, remains one of those areas within American higher education where the reified concept of race not only survives, but also gets reconstituted and re-deployed existentially. While it is not a matter of whether we attempt to confront race and race-related issues, it *is* a matter of how we engage them--whether we are keeping the concept of race grounded while attempting to complete these tasks. The truth is that as theorists situated within American society, we often fail to fully recognize the ubiquity and complexity of the race concept. As a result, we sometimes allow it to frame the content and dimensions of our work. For instance, we may unintentionally sustain race because we operate from the

traditionally based conception of race or perhaps, we fail in attempts to provide fully de-essentialized reconceptualizations of it. The potential pitfalls to the problem of reification are many ways as subtle as they are overt**.**

As previously stated, race acts as a value system grounded by erroneous biological assumptions. This means that if we are affirming race in critical theory of education and our theory is applied in the classroom, we are promoting it its legitimacy. It is, therefore, important to understand the various ways in which we contribute to the *problem of racial reification* and the ways that it manifests in the field of education. This means we must seek to identify how race is conceptualized in the theory, the nature of those conceptions, and how the conceptions are supported in the theory. In the pages that follow, I will examine how race is engaged within the various areas within critical theory of education. Specifically, I will examine theorists from critical race theory, Afrocentric pedagogy, critical multiculturalism, and critical pedagogy and attempt to demonstrate how the problem of reification materializes in their work.

The Problem of Reification in Critical Theory in Education

Critical Race Theory: Race and Culturally Relevant Teaching

One of the most common ways in which the problem of reification emerges in critical theory in education occurs when theorists apply racial boundaries to constructs such as ethnicity or culture. This takes place even as the theory attempts to understand and confront the relationship between race and power in the classroom. We find an example of this with critical race theorist, Gloria Ladson-Billings.

In the book *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children*, Ladson-Billings attempts to address the low performance of African American students in the classroom. She maintains that little scholarly attention is given to the academic needs of African American children. Among the primary reasons for this, she asserts, "…is the stubborn refusal in American education to recognize African Americans as a distinct cultural group. While it is recognized that African Americans make up a distinct racial group, the acknowledgement that this racial group has a distinct culture is still not recognized." [27] Consequently, the possibility that race and culture play a role in the learning of African American students gets ignored and as an added consequence, African American students are often treated as white students who "need a little extra help."[28]

Ladson-Billings points out that studies show that African American students perform better in schools that attend to their socio-cultural needs. These schools prevent them from being deprived of their culture and minimize the possibilities that students will be judged racially or intra-racially for their positive performance. Furthermore, studies also suggest that in schools where cultural groups are different than the dominant culture, that certain social and cultural incompatibilities can exist that could hinder a child's progress.[29] In response to these conclusions, Ladson-Billings proposes that teachers practice what she calls "Culturally Relevant Teaching." This teaching strategy, she explains, "uses student culture in order to maintain it and to transcend the negative effects of the dominant culture." She goes on to say that the "primary aim of culturally relevant

[27] Ladson-Billings, *Dreamkeepers,* 9.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid., 10-17.

teaching is to assist in the development of a 'relevant black personality' that allows African American students to choose academic excellence yet still identify with African and African American culture.[30]

Here we see that Ladson-Billings advocates an approach to teaching in which culture not only expedites success for the black student in the classroom, but also affirms that student's racial and cultural identity. Her postulation that African Americans are a cultural and racial group is supported here by her use of a conception of culture that encompasses both African and American culture. So, a clear vision of the problem of reification emerges first as she deems the blacks/African Americans to be a fixed racial group, an affirmation of race in itself, and secondly, by including African culture to affirm black racial identity. If we consider African American racial and cultural boundaries to be distinct, as she does, then we can infer that borders of the black racial group, for Ladson-Billings, extends beyond our borders to the native continent of its origins. Both this substantive account of race and her normative position that teachers assist in strengthening that racial identity with racially fixed culture are affirmations of the reified racial concept.

Ladson-Billings is dismissive of teachers who employ color-blind approaches in the classroom, arguing that to ignore "race and ethnicity" is to the detriment of those students situated in negatively disparate positions and circumstances in relation to the dominant group in society. So, it is important that teachers engage the factors that underlie the inequity in their lives.[31] She adds, "If teachers pretend not to see students'

[30] Ibid., 17.
[31] Ibid., 33.

racial and ethnic differences, they really do not see students at all and are limited in their ability to meet their educational needs."[32]

I agree with Gloria Ladson-Billings that it is important to integrate *relevant* cultural aspects into teaching and to attempt to understand the racial or cultural circumstances of their student's lives. However, by asserting that she considers African Americans to be a distinct racial group with a distinct culture that corresponds to its set boundaries Ladson-Billings is not only reifying race, but also conflating it with culture. She offers no justification or explanation to ground these claims of the distinctness of race and culture of African Americans. To send teachers into the classroom with an under theorized conception of race and culture grounded by the un-critical societal culture that affirms it, is to activate those teachers as agents of racial affirmation. Furthermore, these inadequate notions could result in the non-color blind teacher becoming culture-blinded by color as she fails to recognize and identify a student's actual cultural makeup. This would seemingly undermine the platform of culturally relevant teaching.

In truth**,** the defining of racial groups has always been contingent upon temporal, spatial, and social circumstances. These definitions typically do not escape the broader racial paradigm, but they sometimes demonstrate a grounded variability within it. For instance, a person with one white parent and one black could be considered black or African American, while in other places they are considered "mixed" or "biracial." They might even be able to "pass" as white. So, a problem that needs to be addressed within Ladson-Billings's theoretical framework is what to do when racial categories merge, as

[32] Ibid.

they often do, and how to approach race, given the diverse "racial" ancestry of many blacks in this country.

Another problem is that Ladson-Billings uses race and ethnicity in conjunction as if they are indicative of the same thing. Racial designations, however, do not necessarily correspond to one's ethnic designation. It is possible for one to carry the racial designation "black" or "African American" and have an ethnicity that is not typically associated with a black racial designation, e.g., Haitian American.

Finally, the claim that the black racial group has a distinct culture is a claim that requires an argument that Ladson-Billings neglects to provide. However, if we imagine the ethnic or cultural groups whose members are comprised of many persons assigned the black racial designation, we can see that a claim that there is a distinct black culture is an overgeneralization. Some examples are Louisiana creoles, the Gullah people of South Carolina/Georgia, Puerto Rican Americans, Dominican Americans, Cuban Americans, Jamaican Americans, Kenyan Americans, and the descendents of slaves and freedmen scattered throughout various rural, urban, and suburban regions of the United States. All of these groups are situated in a society in which there is a significant degree of inter-marriage and cultural syncretism.

To try to describe "African Americans" or "blacks" as a distinct cultural group merely offers a notion of culture in which cultural members and their culture are impervious to interactive influence. Moreover, it would make culture a racial-metaphysical birthright, instead of something learned, engaged, and shaped.
The operative conception of race in American culture has always packaged racial designations and selective cultural productions together. This is carried out with

indifference to how people actually live**.** Ladson-Billings's shared belief in this conception, her using it to ground her theory, and disseminating it for normative action in schools is codifying it institutionally. If we, as critical scholars, are going to make use of such racial reifications then it is important that we provide evidentiary support for them and their place in our theory. Unfortunately, this grounding does not always occur, as I shall now show as we move to an examination of Afrocentric education.

Afrocentricity In Education: Constructing Diasporas

Over the last several decades, theorists from within the field of education have increasingly begun to mount strong challenges to the prevalence of Eurocentricity within the American educational system. Philosopher of education, Molefi Kete Asante is one of the most influential and well-respected scholars spearheading this movement. Asante's position is that the Eurocentric paradigm that currently dominates education is inherently white supremacist. This is because the substantive content distributed to students reflects the histories and perspectives of white students. Non-white students are taught to center white narratives in their own lives. Narratives reflective of their *own* perspectives are either ignored or treated as something akin to bit part characters in the story of whites—as objects in which white subjects come into contact and "act upon."[33] For the African American student, this ultimately means having to engage the content of education through the eyes of white persons, some of who are responsible for committing atrocities

[33] Molefi Kete Asante, "The Afrocentric Idea in Education." *The Journal of Negro Education*, 60 (1991): 171.

against their ancestors. African and African Americans who may have resisted their white oppressors are suppressed within the discourse.[34]

Given these consequences for African American students, Asante posits that the Eurocentric paradigm must be dismantled. He holds that the only way to accomplish this task is through multicultural education because it is best suited to de-stratify and equalize cultural narratives. However, he contends this multicultural education must be directed by an Afrocentric approach if it is to effectively undermine Eurocentricity.[35] Asante describes Afrocentricity as

> "a frame of reference wherein the phenomena are viewed from the perspective of the African person. The Afrocentric approach seeks in every situation the appropriate centrality of the African person…this means that teachers provide students the opportunity to study the world and its people, concepts, and history from an African world view."[36]

The Afrocentric approach is intended to have application to all major subjects within liberal education. However, Asante states, it is not the goal of Afrocentricity to operate as a facsimile of Eurocentricity, nor is it intended to assume the hegemonic positioning of Eurocentricity in education. Rather, he asserts, the goal of the Afrocentric approach is to disrupt the white supremacy endemic to Eurocentric paradigm.[37] It is to accomplish this as,

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[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid., 171-172.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid., 171-172.

1) ”It questions the imposition of the White supremacist view as universal and/or classical.
2) It demonstrates the indefensibility of racist theories that assault multi-culturalism and pluralism.
3) It projects a humanistic and pluralistic viewpoint by articulating Afrocentricity as a valid, nonhegemonic perspective.”[38]

At first glance, we can see how Asante’s Afrocentric approach could loosen the tight grasp the Eurocentric paradigm has on the various levels of education. For example, if we were to visit the world of academic philosophy, we would find that European philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle, Thomas Hobbes, Immanuel Kant, J.S Mill, David Hume, John Locke, St. Augustine, Sartre, and Foucault are considered *the Great Thinkers*. It is from the theoretical vantage points of European philosophers, or American philosophers inspired by them (the Pragmatists), that textbook content and classroom discourse is often framed, and from where the majority of contemporary philosophers construct their analyses. African and African American-related philosophies are, at best, relegated to minimal status in textbooks and as result remain largely invisible within mainstream philosophy. As I mentioned in the preceding chapter, works by philosophers of race, even those that rigorously employ methodologies from “the Western tradition” to examine the social and/or moral status of blacks or who provide analyses of frameworks in which race and racial identity are constructed, are typically marginalized from the content. As the relevance of such works get diminished in the canon, so do, in many ways, the lives and conditions of the people that these works attempt to address.

[38] Ibid., 173.

It is not impossible to imagine how a successful implementation of Asante's *Afrocentric Idea* could, in theory, yield positive benefits for the discipline of philosophy and its members, especially those regarded as African American. A new African center that acts as *the* frame of reference by which we do philosophy could mean a re-evaluation of philosophers treated as moral universalists in the classroom, but whose devaluation of the moral status of blacks (e.g. Kant) is typically omitted in the classroom and in textbooks. Such philosophers' works would likely be subject to deeper, richer, and consequently less abridged analytical and interpretive exegeses within the theory and in the classroom. An Afrocentric approach to philosophy could also result in race and racism receiving broader consideration and being met with a sense of urgency within the discipline. The introduction of African philosophies might finally result in their epistemic and methodological entry into and influence within the larger philosophical conversation.

Among the primary goals of Afrocentric education is the placement of African American students inside of the educational content--to permit them to see themselves as an integral part of the discourse.[39] Thus, a re-situation of African and African American philosophy could allow persons of African descent, like so many of those of European descent, to have their lives and circumstances reflected within the content, which could permit them to finally "see themselves as the subjects, rather than the objects of education."[40]

I agree that the current state of education at secondary and higher levels necessitates that we provide effective and holistic alternatives to the Eurocentric

[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid.

paradigm. Heuristically, as I have shown, Asante's approach can have great value. However, upon deeper scrutiny, Asante's Afrocentric approach maintains the problem of reification. The way in which Asante reifies race is, on one hand, a reaffirmation of the white supremacist model of the Eurocentric paradigm. On the other hand, it is a reinvention of the reified conception of race found in American societal culture**.**

We first find Asante's affirmation of race with his validation of the traditional racial category of "white" as he corresponds it to the content within the Eurocentric education. While it is certainly possible that the subject matter of the traditional Eurocentric narrative entails parts of the lives or histories of *some* of the persons designated "white," it is certainly not the case for *all* whites within this country. Considering the ethnic diversity of "white" people in the US, persons whose ancestries may extend from Sicily to Zimbabwe, a claim that the traditional canon even represents this wide spectrum is, at best, an overstatement. By Asante's own description, the Eurocentric model has historically reified the content of its selectively chosen narratives and facilitated their attachment to the "white" racial category while omitting non-European content. Asante, however, appears to follow the lead of this model, only he designates Eurocentric education "white" while simultaneously ignoring the actual ancestral and historical diversity of those assigned to that category. This is an example of back-end and front-end affirmation. His "diversity omission" allows him to affirm race by placing a broad group of people into the Eurocentric model fixed by the white racial boundary**.** As a result, the "white" productions that make up the Eurocentric model become theirs. This, in turn, permits us to look to the Eurocentric paradigm's content to affirm racial categories.

The problem of reification also emerges as Asante attempts to link *the* white racial group to a *particular* culture and its products. He states, "…teachers do not have to think about using the white child's culture to empower the white child. The white child's language is the language of the classroom. Information that is being conveyed is "white" cultural information in most cases."[41] It is important to recognize here that Asante's position is not that teachers are promoting the language *as white*, nor is he claiming that teachers are disseminating cultural products to students *as white culture*. Rather, he is asserting that the language and culture of the classroom *are white*. In doing this, Asante is both affirming the concept of race and applying the boundaries of its reification to include linguistic and cultural productions.

Asante's racial affirmation of the black racial category differs from the treatment that he gives to the white racial category. Asante's reification of "African American" shows a historical basis as he attempts to connect the lives of contemporary African Americans to greater Africa via ancestral lineage. Asante states, "Naturally, the person of African descent should be centered in his or her historical experiences as an African."[42] However, this treatment also suggests an essentialist element to his belief that there is something that *should* connect the African-American child to Africa and in his belief that this something is *ideal*. It appears that, for Asante, this idealized element should exist for African Americans in spite of the intentional ethno-cultural genocide committed against sub-Saharan Africans. This genocide meant the enslavement, devaluation, and displacement of peoples from a variety of ethnic backgrounds followed by the deliberate

[41] Asante, Molefi K. "Afrocentric Curriculum." *Educational Leadership* 49 (1991): 29.
[42] Asante, "Education" 172.

destruction of their cultural productions (language, social and moral communities, spiritual practices, values, customs, etc.). Furthermore, it is clear that he believes that this essentialist element *should* exist regardless of the linguistic and cultural indoctrination of post-slavery African Americans carried out by Eurocentric education and by the white supremacist societal culture. Even if African Americans were *a* people, they were not culturally the same people as their African ancestors. However, Asante's model diminishes the content of the actual lives of African American students while elevating an abstracted historical Africa.

Asante's essentialist conception of race cuts quite deeply into who African Americans supposedly are intrinsically. When explaining the cultural dislocation of contemporary African Americans from their African ancestry, he offers the following psychological account of what he calls *the* "African American psyche":

> "The African person was physically separated from place, from culture, and from traditions. In the Americas, the African person was punished for remembering Africa. Drums were outlawed in most of the colonies soon after the arrival of large numbers of Africans. And since the drum was an instrument intimate to the cultural transmission of values and traditions, its disappearance was one of the great losses in the African-American psyche."[43]

Here, Asante presents an account of race in which the cultural productions are inherently tied to a distinct ontology. The oppression of African slaves—the suppression of their cultural products, has a consequence in the psychology of the contemporary African American. Asante fails to ground these consequences to the physical or social

[43] Asante, "Curriculum," 30.

world. He provides no account of what constitutes *the* African American psyche, much less an account of how the loss of drums and the cultural content for which they act as a conduit constitute a loss for this psyche. There is certainly little doubt that a loss of culture would have a psychological impact on the persons who actually practice that culture. However, to state that this loss amounts to a psychological deficit in descendents generations removed is to suggest the presence of a deeper metaphysics at play--something beyond the physical that links past and present psycho-metaphysical dispositions and that links those dispositions to culture.

It could be argued that Asante is simply providing a rich account of ethnicity. He certainly speaks of larger groups, whites and African Americans as if they were ethnicities. I contend, however, that it is more probable that he is conflating race, ethnicity, and culture. His use of culture and over-generalized ethnicities ultimately hold up the concept of race because they are structurally congruent to race. This is supported by Asante's synonymous usage of Black with African/African American and White with European. Africa and Europe are not places that have distinct cultures. Rather, they are continents made up of many countries with large numbers of ethnic groups, languages, and cultures. Asante's use of these designators is more consistent with the traditional account of race in the United States, where African descent is all that is required to determine black personhood. Indeed, he makes no mention of persons with both European and African ancestries. Consequently, there is no explanation of how one's "Africanness" gets positioned qualitatively in relation to one's "Europeanness" (or any other "ness"). However, given Asante's adherence to the traditional axioms of race for

both whites and blacks, it is safe to infer that African ancestry overrides all other ancestry.

Asante's designation "African-American" entails an essentialist component that constitutes what we are *intrinsically*. His underlying assertion is that this component is suppressed within blacks by white supremacist hegemony, even if blacks are unaware of this suppression. In other words, they are being alienated from their true selves *as blacks*. The implicit goal of Afrocentric education is to replace this component in ontologically deficient blacks. Thus, race for Asante is not simply substantive in that it constitutes what blacks are intrinsically, it is also normative inasmuch as it determines what people should be ideally. So, Asante's reification of race would permit teachers, as it does with him, to have the theoretical ground to say to their students, "*That* culture is *your* culture" to students who do not practice, understand, or know about the existence of that culture or the socio-historical formation of that culture.

It follows from Asante's metaphysical account of the African American psyche and from his normative claim that blacks *should be* centered as African, that there must be a correct way to be black or a correct way for blacks to be—a substantively mandated, normative blueprint for ideal racial action. If "black" or "African" were an ideal metaphysical ontology, then it would make sense that blacks educated under a "white supremacist paradigm" would likely deviate from Asante's racial blueprint, therefore violating the demands of their ontology. This is in essence what Asante is suggesting.

Further evidence that Asante adheres to this view emerges as he discusses consequences of European universalism that he believes to accompany the Eurocentric paradigm. He explains that this universalism is why "some scholars and artists of African

descent rush to *deny their Blackness*," and prefer "European art, language, and culture over African art, language, and culture"—people who "believe that anything of European origin is inherently better than anything produced by or issuing from *their own people*."[44] Here Asante's Afrocentricity reveals an axiomatic racial essentialism in which persons of "African descent" who may prefer "European" forms of art are accused of denying what appears to be a true fixed racial ontology--blackness. This shows, once again, that race, for Asante, constitutes personhood and the properties of that personhood are extended to particular cultural productions. In this case, black personhood is attached to black cultural productions**.** The implication is that one's "blackness" should govern particular actions, specifically those toward or against particular cultural products. So, Asante's Afrocentric approach appears to be more than a challenge to the Eurocentric paradigm as socializing system. It is a challenge to the Eurocentric paradigm as a white paradigm that suppresses black racial ontology.

Both the Eurocentric model and Asante's Afrocentric remedy impose value-laden, racial truths. The Eurocentric approach selectively places values on *some* European and European-influenced knowledge—knowledge that affirms its superior positioning. It marginalizes knowledge that problematizes or fails to affirm it. As a consequence, it devalues those persons assigned racial identities associated with that excluded knowledge and forces their adherence to Eurocentric values and epistemology. Thus, it affirms both white and Eurocentric as the standard for all.

Asante's strategically oppositional approach is more overt as it creates the problem of reification. As it tries to dismantle white supremacist education, it constructs

[44] Ibid., 172.

ethno-racial identities as *ideal types* for black students. It is African-centered or more succinctly, "black-centered," and it creates racial axioms for "black authenticity" and "black performance." So, the ultimate qualitative deviation of Asante's Afrocentric education from Eurocentric education is that it is not an interracially hegemonic paradigm that facilitates the structuring of races hierarchically. Instead, the Afrocentric paradigm makes Afrocentricity, itself, the authority for an intra-racial hegemony for blacks. It structures blacks that fall under it hierarchically based on their adherence to its ontological dictates.

One reason I chose Asante's Afrocentric education for this analysis is because his conception of Afrocentricity is quite influential within critical theory in education. Additionally, as we have also witnessed with Ladson-Billings, the way in which the problem of reification surfaces in his work represents both a trend and tendency reflected within critical theory. In particular, this includes the affixing of racial categories to particular ethnicities and/or cultures and the treatment of ethnicity and culture as static entities fixed by racial boundaries and made up of racial properties. These tendencies are present even as the theory itself attempts to escape essentialist conceptions of race. Such is the case with critical multiculturalists, Joe L. Kincheloe and Shirley R. Steinberg, who oppose essentialist Afrocentric approaches, but still fail to avoid reaffirming and reinforcing race. Let us now examine how the problem of reification materializes in their work.

Critical Multiculturalism: Race and Affirmation

In the book *Changing Multiculturalism*, Joe Kincheloe and Shirley Steinberg present a view of critical multiculturalism that is suspicious of the essentialism found in some leftist multicultural theory in education, such as Afrocentric theory, to address oppressed groups. They state that

> "left-essentialist multiculturalists often connect differences to a historical past of cultural authenticity where the essence of a particular identity was developed – an essence that transcends history, social context, and power. Such essences can become quite authoritarian when constructed around a romanticized golden era, nationalistic pride, and a positionality of purity that denies competing axes of identity…."[45]

So, already we find that the Afrocentricity of theorists like Molefi Asante would come under this critique as he firmly roots the essentialist ideal of blackness in similarly essentialized, historical Africa. Moreover, the axiomatic aspects of Asante's reification of blackness reflects a diminishing of other possible identities that may be in competition with the Afrocentric identity, such as the one that could explain why a black individual may have a preference for European cultural products. Indeed, Kincheloe and Steinberg further contend that the tendency to romanticize essentialist multicultural theories can lead to various intra-group issues. Groups privilege some forms of knowledge and identity over others, even as groups are bound together by circumstances. So, for example, Afrocentric essentialist theory, might not allow the Afrocentric GLBT (gay,

[45] Joe L Kincheloe and Shirley R. Steinberg. *Changing Multiculturalism*. (Buckingham: Open University, 2002), 20.

lesbian, bisexual, transgender), gender, multi-racial knowledge to share the same status as, let us say, an Afrocentric, gender-neutral, heterosexual based knowledge. As a result this would create a selective and incomplete version of an African-centered worldview. The voices and socio-historical knowledge of "bi-racial," homosexual, females would be subjugated and therefore take on inferior status within the theory.[46]

Kincheloe and Steinberg also argue that the romanticization in these types of essentialist theories show a propensity to offer authoritative privilege to identity itself, leaving group members to have to fight for what is or should be considered the authentic identity.[47] They maintain that critical multiculturalists show suspicion of this one-dimensional authority and thus make it a priority to understand the internal arrangement of identities within groups. Moreover, they assert that a goal of critical multiculturalism is to facilitate the interaction of the various identities that intersect at the point of the group's commonality.[48]

In describing aspects of their vision of critical multiculturalism, Kincheloe and Steinberg stress that it is the job of critical multiculturalism to produce a curriculum that attempts to know and understand the subjugated knowledge of oppressed groups. Furthermore, it is important for this curriculum to explore the consequences of that subjugation and the relationship between the knowledge of the oppressed and the knowledge of the oppressors.[49] To accomplish this task, Kincheloe and Steinberg argue that a critical multicultural curriculum must escape the dominant Eurocentric frame of

[46] Ibid., 20, 21.
[47] Ibid., 21.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid., 243-245.

reference that has diminished and brought harm to the lives of those in marginalized groups. Therefore, a critical multicultural curriculum is centered from the perspectives of these marginalized groups to mitigate the damage and diminishment they have incurred as oppressed people within American society.[50]

As I have stated, Kincheloe and Steinberg are suspicious of Afrocentric theory because it can exhibit a type of essentialism that privileges some forms of knowledge over others. This does not mean, however, that Afrocentrism has no place in their critical multiculturalism. While they do not advocate a strategic paradigm shift from the Eurocentric to the Afrocentric framework, they consider Afrocentrism a valuable resource to garner knowledge that exposes the real life circumstances of blacks as an oppressed group. [51] In their view, Afrocentrism is deeply tuned in with what is taking place for black people as it "understands the intimate connection between the economic and social stresses that afflict black communities in Western society" as well as having and understanding knowledge of the "the crises of knowledge and human meaning that subvert the culture's ability and/or willingness to respond to the chaos."[52] For Kincheloe and Steinberg, people such as rappers, reggae artists and critical black economic theorists act as the voices of Afrocentrism that convey information through their creative "protests" and pointed analysis. These Afrocentric agents are able to inform critical multiculturalism of circumstantial and psychological effects of racism of black youth and

[50] Ibid., 245.
[51] Ibid., 244-248.
[52] Ibid., 247.

as well as show them how to create countercultural students who are able to disrupt the institutionalized status quo that harms them.[53]

Furthermore, Kincheloe and Steinberg also believe that, as a marginalized perspective, Afrocentrism can prove useful in informing the content of what they call a "curriculum of affirmation" for blacks.[54] They state,

> "As a critical multiculturalist curriculum explores the degradation of Africanness in Western societies, it concurrently looks at the genius of things African for the purpose of providing affirmational experiences for black students. Critical multiculturalists want children of African descent (and children from other cultural/racial backgrounds as well) to understand African history, philosophy and culture."[55]

In addition, Kincheloe and Steinberg hold that a critical multicultural curriculum can draw from the African tradition and "diasporic tradition" to "affirm individuality and collectivity" and to provide uplifting narratives from the past that will help contemporary black youth contend with the conditions of their oppression.[56] This curriculum also looks towards contemporary activities and productions for black affirmation. They state that this curriculum of black affirmation operates as "a black studies programme that overtly forges connections between academia and everyday black life, black cultural productions. Drawing upon the collective experience in life and literature, the curriculum induces students to re-examine their lives from an Afrocentric perspective."[57]

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[53] Ibid., 247-248.
[54] Ibid., 245-248.
[55] Ibid., 248.
[56] Ibid., 247-248.
[57] Ibid., 249.

Kincheloe and Steinberg also operationalize what they refer to as "the black aesthetic" for this curriculum. This aesthetic encompasses creative forms such as jazz, hip-hop, "black literature," and "black film."[58] According to Kincheloe and Steinberg**,** it can operate as an affirmation agent as it facilitates for black youth the ability to experience the world through an African vantage point. Furthermore, this aesthetic is able to convey types of collective sentiments; examples are hip-hop as an expression of "black rage" and jazz conveying "black pain.**"**[59]

While Kincheloe and Steinberg acknowledge the realness of race in American life and its centrality to the lives of many people, they reject race as a legitimate biological entity, insisting, as I have, that these essentialized categories are maintained by political and social structures.[60] Unfortunately, however, their critical multiculturalism appears to betray these sentiments. If we look closely at the theoretical implications of their critical multiculturalism, we find that their treatment of blacks provides affirmation and reconstitution of the race concept.

We first find the problem of reification in Kincheloe and Steinberg's approach as they set boundaries around racial identities. Now, as I have shown, they are quite mindful of how theory can constrict and privilege knowledge when engaging marginalized groups, such as blacks. The way in which they sidestep this problem is by constructing a conception of race, for blacks, that is seemingly inclusive of a broader amount of content. Prima facie, their use of the racial category "black" does not necessarily reflect anything other than a socially constructed designation. However, their knowledge about blacks as

[58] Ibid., 250-251.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid., 169-170.

an oppressed group is informed by what they consider Afrocentric voices. I have shown that Kincheloe and Steinberg believe that Afrocentricity, given the authoritative nature of its essentialism, can privilege identity, limit knowledge, and set standards for particularistic forms of authenticity. It is, therefore, questionable that they would use Afrocentrism as the primary reference to learn about the lives and situations of black people given that the sources of this knowledge (rappers, reggae artists, jazz musicians) would theoretically be of an ideologically constricted type**.** In doing this, Kincheloe and Steinberg, themselves, are privileging ideological intermediaries to gain knowledge about the existential lives of blacks, writ large. They are, in essence, filtering knowledge and as a result, creating a deceptively broad, essentialized narrative of black existence. In this regard, Kincheloe and Steinberg's approach does not deviate from left essentialist theories as they too allow particular identities to represent a diverse group. In privileging the knowledge gathered and expressed by these Afrocentric voices as representative of blacks, that knowledge affirms the racial boundaries of that group.

So far, I have described what I regard as Kincheloe and Steinberg's inadvertent affirmation of race through their reification of the circumstances of blacks. Taken alone, it is plausible that this may not provide conclusive evidence of these theorists' deep entanglement with the problem of reification. One could argue that my criticism only reveals a miscalculation in strategy as they attempt to account for the experiences of a more diverse array of black persons. To this, I respond, that while certain theory constricts the terms of group identity and membership for blacks, this primarily bears relevancy to intragroup and intergroup dynamics. These dynamics have always been in flux and possess minimal impact on the structure of race itself. Kincheloe and Steinberg's

approach presents a conception of race as a diverse, yet fixed category that affirms what the reified conception of the black racial group has always been--a broadly encompassing biologically grounded, fixed category with a diverse membership. So, the structure of race in their theory remains relatively stable. Where these theorists fall short in this regard is by essentializing the conditions of some blacks and extending the essence to encompass all blacks. This mirrors the treatment of the black racial concept within societal culture, where we apply the lives, activities, and circumstances of some to the whole, for better or worse.

It is certainly possible that Kincheloe and Steinberg would also rely on other sources of knowledge to inform critical multiculturalism about the existential conditions of blacks. However, in their treatise on critical multiculturalism, Kincheloe and Steinberg overwhelming privilege Afrocentric conduits of knowledge to report these conditions. Furthermore, as they continue to utilize Afrocentrism to address these conditions as they relate to black students, a deeper affirmation of race emerges from their theoretical framework. There is a broadening in function of Afrocentrism as Kincheloe and Steinberg lay out the curriculum of black affirmation. We discover this shift as they provide the framework for this curriculum, which incidentally is very similar in structure and purpose to Asante's Afrocentric approach. Both approaches operate from the view that Eurocentrism has damaged black students in some regard and that as a result, black students are in need of affirmation. Furthermore, the nature of their remedies is an implementation of Afrocentric education that will affirm the black student, as black.

In the previous section, I demonstrated how Asante's Afrocentric education is implicitly intended to correct an ontological deficiency in black students. We can infer

from Kincheloe and Steinberg's position that black students should be affirmed with African curriculum, that there already is some ontological connection with an abstracted Africa. This also represents a conflation between race (black) and ethnicity (African). It is similar to what arises in Asante's Afrocentrism where a person's "blackness" necessitates their connection to Africa, African knowledge, and culture. However, in this regard, Kincheloe and Steinberg go further than Asante. Not only do they regard African content as ideal for a curriculum of black affirmation, they also employ reified concepts such as "the black experience" and "black productions" toward this end. So, while Kincheloe and Steinberg's goal may be to affirm black students to help strengthen and better equip them to overcome the harms that they have incurred, their project inadvertently affirms ethno-racial ontology and extends that ontology to cultural productions.

An aspect of Kincheloe and Steinberg's curriculum that further undermines their resistance of essentialism is found in their referencing of "the black aesthetic" or "black pain" and subsequent treatment of these abstractions as things in themselves. These reifications are comparable in nature to Asante's transcendent, African/African-American *psyche*. The primary difference is that Asante's *psych*e extends chronologically starting with Africans of the past to present day African Americans. Kincheloe and Steinberg's reifications are more generalized racial abstractions that capture essentialized collective sentiments and productions, to which black students are supposedly able to relate by virtue of their racial ontology. So, while critical multiculturalism's curriculum of black affirmation rejects the legitimacy of essentialist, biological races, it manages to ground persons by their biological, phenotype (skin color) and genotype (African ancestry) and

assign them reified racial dispositions and cultural abstractions. What does this mean for black students and non-white students? This "knowledge" about racial aesthetics, dispositions, and feelings, constructs an epistemological and ontological barricade around black people that prevents others from fully entering. With their production-end otherization of blacks, Kincheloe and Steinberg ignore that in reality these things are constructed in dialogue with others and are therefore unreflective of the *actual* social, cultural, ethnic, and even biological syncretism that may lead to their production.

This reductionist sentiment is further illuminated as Kincheloe and Steinberg assertion that rap is "Truly a black art form" and therefore "cannot be easily 'covered' (appropriated) by white musicians-the short-lived career of Vanilla Ice being no exception."[61] The obvious implication of this argument, and quip about Vanilla Ice, a white rapper, is that there is some metaphysical ownership over cultural products because they act as reflections of a "black aesthetic." Furthermore, it suggests that it is easier for a person who shares the "black aesthetic" to change art forms within this racial diaspora of productions, as long as that newly chosen art form is fixed by black racial perimeters. For instance, a black jazz pianist who decides to become a rapper will require less effort than a white person in the same position, because rap and jazz contain the same essentialist black aesthetic. On the other hand, If we follow Kincheloe and Steinberg's logic, a white person who appreciates rap music will have a more difficult time participating in that art form because it is "truly black" and she is not. This implanting of essence into cultural products constructs a reified conception of race that is self-affirming. As it embeds the racial essence into a type of aesthetic production, that production subsequently gets

[61] Ibid., 250.

assigned to that corresponding racial group. Racial members own its production and thus when they produce it, it becomes a reflection of their race.

Racial reifications are like attempted snapshots of reality--abstractions. When they fail, there are often consequences. Kincheloe and Steinberg's assertion that rap is a "truly black art form" is a prime example of this failure. As Peter McLaren more accurately points out "rap music developed among relocated black [Caribbean] and Puerto Rican male youths of the South Bronx…."[62] As a consequence of the racial reification of this particular cultural product, various individual and socio-cultural influences are suppressed in the abstracted narrative. The result is students from marginalized groups, such as Puerto Ricans, perhaps in need of affirmation, are forced to vie for entry into a narrative locked by race. Kincheloe and Steinberg's racial essentializing is subject to the same criticism that they offer left-essentialist multiculturalism in that it suppresses "competing axes" of knowledge and identity.

Kincheloe and Steinberg, like all critical theorists, are attempting to examine and engage the circumstances of marginalized groups within complex and rugged political, socio-cultural terrain. Thus, it is understandable that there is a tendency to address the conditions and consequences with politicized conceptualizations of these groups. However, the problem of racial reification that permeates our society makes it difficult, as I have shown, for theorists to separate the essentialist conceptions of race from those politicized conceptions of race. By politically (diasporically) essentializing sentiments, dispositions, experiences, and creative forms using the traditional racial boundaries and

[62] Peter McLaren, *Revolutionary Multiculturalism*. (Boulder: Westview, 1997), 157.

rules (inclusion of certain forms under a racial fixed umbrella), Kincheloe and Steinberg's affirmation of race acts as a demonstration of this difficulty.

Politicizing The Racial Binary

As I have stated, the penchant of critical theory to present politicized conceptions of marginalized groups is understandable. However, there is a tendency to politicize the mundanity of life using well-intentioned, agenda-driven racial narratives. In some contexts, ordinary acts such as going to work, working at home, taking care of children, going to jail, having sex, playing music, get filtered through a critical ideology and thus get characterized as representative expressions of broader essentialized political themes such as: "feminist struggle," "class resistance," or the "demonstration of the communal bond of the African American family."

We find examples of this as critical pedagogist, Peter McLaren, offers analysis from his semiotic investigation of hip-hop. He states,

> "Rap helps to communicate symbols and meanings and articulates intersubjectively the lived experience of social actors. The ontological status of the gangsta rapper resides in the function of the commodity of blackness, but a certain quality of blackness that is identified through the expressive codes of the rapper is the "inner turmoil" of the oppressed black subject of history."[63]

This example demonstrates a unique departure from Kincheloe and Steinberg's treatment of the black rapper in that McLaren recognizes that the ontology of the rapper is contingent upon a commoditized blackness—a prepackaged construct with the intent to

[63] McLaren, *Revolutionary*. 171.

sell. Kincheloe and Steinberg fail to acknowledge this potential aspect of their black rapper and arguably they, themselves, commoditize the blackness of their subject as they authorize her position as a medium of knowledge about racial circumstances and as a conduit to express to black students "black pain" and "black rage." However, McLaren appears to re-converge with Kincheloe and Steinberg as he, too, identifies the rapper as expressing sentiment through his blackness, in this case, the "inner turmoil" of a broader black racial group.

It is certainly possible that cultural forms and their expressions, even when racially reified, can provide useful information about real life, as they have with the three aforementioned theorists. However, these reifications can hinder the gathering of penetrating and nuanced insight into the complex lives of individuals. This is because the expressed knowledge and its human medium(s) get dispersed within the political narrative of that reification's essence. So, McLaren's gangsta rapper (and expression) gets enveloped into "the inner turmoil of the black subject of history" in the same way that Kincheloe and Steinberg's rapper (and expression) become enclosed in "the black aesthetic." The actual individual and the complexities and nuances of her life get diminished while her essentialist racial category gets affirmed.

What often gets ignored as a consequence of this political essentializing of knowledge are the multiplicity of variables that push people towards particular cultural products—ordinary reasons such as boredom, trends, curiosity, racial authenticity, peer pressure, countercultural expression, etc. Consider, for example, the 1980's, when rap was beginning to gain acceptance in mainstream venues like MTV, but often promoted as racialized content (black music). As gangsta rap was introduced into my relatively small,

semi-rural, hometown in Tennessee so were the behaviors, attitudes, and fashion displayed in its music and/or its corresponding music videos. Responding to these images, many young black males started to emulate Los Angeles gangs like the "Crips" and "Bloods." It became "cool" to carry guns, sell drugs, display misogynistic attitudes, and even go to jail (which became a badge of honor). These cultural products were marketed as belonging to them, *as black,* despite their not residing in circumstances similar to those in inner city Los Angeles.

In this example, the broader socio-political circumstances, both in its maintenance of a racial paradigm that assigns races to particular cultural products and its commodifying of blackness (among various other related factors), no doubt facilitated the establishment of new axiomatic identities for black authenticity. However, the actual taking up of these identities was usually no more of a political expression than following any other cultural trend. In fact, it was likely the ordinariness of all of these circumstances that made it easy to transition into these identities and that made it difficult for their parents to address effectively. Narratives like this one are likely too close to the ground for encapsulation by politicized, racial abstractions, which typically speak and interpret for persons, rather than let those persons speak for themselves.

Another issue is that "black identity" has been interpreted through what I would call an "American Freedom Narrative." A freedom narrative, in its most positive form, centers blacks always within the context of liberation, Emancipation and the Civil Rights movement, etc. This narrative has been exemplified by the critical theorists that I have covered thus far, where black peoples' lives are never presented as ordinary, but rather, as inherently or ideally political—always struggling or always in need of racial

affirmation to struggle harder for freedom. McLaren's rapper's expression of blackness, serves as an example of this narrative.

Critical theory can sometimes play a game of opposites when it comes to race. In his book, *Life In Schools: An Introduction to Critical Pedagogy in the Foundations of Education*, McLaren engages the concept of "whiteness." In addressing the tendency within education theory to focus on diversity, he asserts that the focus of multiculturalism be turned towards "the analysis of white ethnicity, the destabilization of white identity, specifically white supremacist ideology and practice."[64] Whiteness, he describes, is a "cultural disposition and ideology linked to specific political, social, and historical arrangements."[65]

McLaren's more detailed outline of whiteness represents an overwhelmingly active and negative portrait of whiteness. It is, in sum, a malleable, ethnic, hegemonic type of consciousness that otherizes, dominates, and demoralizes non-whites, homosexuals, and women and that facilitates capitalist exploitation. Thus, he regards the taking up of this identity as to situating oneself at the top of the white supremacist hierarchy. Moreover, for a white person to attempt to take up a raced identity (black or brown), in McLaren's view is to deny one's responsibility for white supremacy.[66] He, therefore, recommends that we move toward the "denial, disassembly, and destruction of whiteness as we know it and advocate its rearticulation as a form of critical agency dedicated to social struggle in the interests of the oppressed."[67]

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[64]Peter McClaren, *Life In Schools: An Introduction to Critical Pedagogy in the Foundations of Education.* 4th Ed. (Boston: Allan and Bacon, 2002), 273.
[65]Ibid., 271.
[66] Ibid., 272-288.
[67] Ibid., 288.

Before continuing my analysis of McLaren's treatment of race, it is important to note that he considers race a social construct, even cautioning against using it as "an analytic category without qualification because race has no biological basis or philosophical legitimacy."[68] He states that race should always be problematized and even warns against using the term "race relations," preferring instead "racialized ethnic relations."[69]

That being said, an interesting aspect of his description of whiteness, a conception that appears frequently within critical theory, is that it treats it as something occupied—something that can be taken on, taken off, manipulated, and reconfigured for particular ends. "Whiteness" is a useful device that helps persons reflect how their own social ontology might privilege them and how their identity might make them active participants of a larger paradigmatic white supremacy. As a powerful tool, it resonates with students. So, there is sometimes value in using reified conceptualizations as devices to help us comprehend and explain the social and political circumstances of groups.

Like any other reification, however, there is a risk of using racial reifications, even for heuristic purposes. This is because they can fail to fully connect with what is actually taking place on the ground. It is true that in the United States races have been organized asymmetrically and in opposition to one another. McLaren's political reification of whiteness effectively captures these aspects of the race construct as they can operate between the white and black racial groups. It does not, however, acknowledge that people are typically situated accidentally. No one chooses his or her

[68] Ibid. 259- 260.
[69] Ibid., 260.

place within the racial hierarchy.[70] The acquisition of privilege and oppression are like games of chance--matters of luck; this is the case even if the dice were loaded by some evil genius prior to the players coming to the table, or in this case, their birth. No matter how unfair and asymmetrical reality *actually* is, employing reified oppositional identities places intent at the table. Thus, racial opposition itself gets affirmed and justified because these identities permit the accidental to appear intentional.

Being part of a non-raced groups means that many whites do not see themselves as privileged or as affirming the status quo. Most are likely unaware of it. They do not realize that the dice are loaded, so they keep rolling and often, depending on their own socio-economic circumstances, win. Similarly, many blacks may feel that whites are cheating them or benefitting at their expense. Many whites, not understanding that they benefit from their designation, feel like they are being unfairly accused. The consequences are unbalanced, but both of these viewpoints and positions within the paradigm are unfair.

Both the fetishizing and devaluing of *particular* racial identities by scholars maintains the status quo by treating the racial categorizations themselves as valid. Furthermore, it underestimates the nuance of racial identity by failing to address the potentiality for non-whites socialized within the same paradigm to internalize and affirm oppressive values. Students, white and non-whites, are victims of the racial circumstances supported by their surrounding social, political, and cultural environment. The political essentializing of race carried out by many critical scholars neglects this victimization.

[70] The exception here is people who are able whose phenotype permits them to identify as different races, or to "pass."

I contend that the omission that blacks and whites are victims of white supremacy is precisely how race gets reaffirmed and reconstituted in McLaren's works. If we look at the way that race is constructed and viewed in our society, this becomes clearer. Whites, for instance, are treated as though they are rational, with a broad range of choices, desires, and emotions. Moreover, whites can operate in society with a high degree of racial anonymity because they are racially unlinked to the aforementioned variables. This is because "white" is the default racial category that acts as an indicator for a collective of individuals. If a white person becomes a scholar, she is not considered a white scholar, white musician, or white politician. When a white person commits a crime, it is not seen as a reflection upon the entire white racial group. Only in relation to non-whites, is she raced by society.[71]

Blacks on the other hand lack this variability and anonymity. They are not viewed as individuals, but as a group. Thus, they are treated as representatives of the black race. As a result, their actions are often considered expressions of their blackness if those particular expressions are in keeping with how society links those expressions or their means of expression. This is likely the reason why some blacks feel as though they to have to regulate their thoughts and emotions around whites for fear of being labeled "an angry black man/woman."

These are important elements found within the mainstream conception of race. McLaren simply problematizes the value system. However, aside of assigning responsibility to whites for their whiteness, assigning the negative aspects of society to whites, he maintains a mirror image and internal structural blueprint of traditional racial

[71] These are points to which I will return in Chapter 4.

ontology. Whiteness is treated as something that one rationally occupies or chooses not to occupy, while blackness, as shown with his gangsta rapper, is treated as something expressed, something intrinsic, something representative of the whole.

Assigning politicized identities and narratives to racial groups reinforces, instead of problematizing the legitimacy of their boundaries. In addition, it inserts meaning within boundaries to share space with the properties already accompanying race. Applying reified political content to racial groups, thus, is no different than assigning fixed cultures or fixed ethnicities to racial groups as they both reinforce the idea that races are monolithic groups. They all require the invoking of essence when reifying already reified groups.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I investigated the problem of reification as it emerges from within critical theory in education. As we have seen with each of the theorists I have examined, there is difficulty in fully disengaging from the reified conception of race found within American society. Most often this was found where there was an ambiguous relationship between race and ethnicity or culture, or where race is assigned ethnicity or culture, or where there is politicization of race that mirrors the traditional race concept. In the next chapter, I show that a significant reason why the problem of reification arises within critical theory in education in the manner that it does is directly related to important events and philosophies that emerged from the history of black education.

CHAPTER III
HISTORICAL UNDERPINNINGS OF THE PROBLEM OF REIFICATION IN CRITICAL THEORY IN EDUCATION

In Chapter Two, I examined how the problem of reification arises within critical theory in education. As I have demonstrated, this occurs within often-confused relationship between race, ethnicity, and culture and through the employment of political reifications of race that are not fully extricated from our culturally reified conception of race. While the problem of racial reification is prevalent in educational theory, it is not a new problem. After all, only in recent decades have we had the scientific tools available to investigate the biological soundness of the race concept. Historically, education theorists often operated under the assumption that race is a biological reality or they regarded the question of whether race is real inconsequential to the real life circumstances facing blacks at the time. So, some degree of maintenance of the race concept was unavoidable.

A troubling aspect of today's critical theory in education is that is has not managed to disengage from the aforementioned theory, despite what we currently know about the race construct. Indeed, the contemporary approach to race actually reflects the discourse taking place within the first half of the 20th century. In this chapter, I attempt to show that the problem of reification as it emerges from contemporary critical theory in education is a consequence of the historical trajectory in liberatory black education that preceded it. I will accomplish this task by 1) examining important events and

developments in the history of black education, 2) investigating the theoretical underpinnings that shaped these events, 3) exploring the theoretical and active responses to these events and 4) showing how aspects of these events and the responses to them informs and influences critical theory in education as it attempts to address similar problems related to the education of blacks.

I further contend that considering the historical foundations of black education that I shall present, critical theory in education must begin to extricate itself from these foundations. I argue that this disengagement is necessary in order to gain a richer, more updated, and nuanced understanding of the race concept that will provide a more in-depth view of how or whether it should permeate contemporary theory. To begin this undertaking, let us first examine black education coming out of the Reconstruction era of America history.

The Hampton Approach

Soon after the Civil War and the abolishment of slavery in southern states, former slaves began to seek universal education that would include blacks. Within a short period of time, this idea had gathered an irreversible momentum as it gained support not only from blacks but also from white Southerners. This development worried members of the Southern white planter class facing a potential socio-economic shift brought about by the emancipation of black slaves who once tended their lands for planter profit. The question became, if blacks become educated, how would this labor vacuum be filled?[72] The answer to this question buttressed one of the most important events in the history of black

[72] James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1988), 21-35.

education; that is, Samuel Chapman Armstrong's, a Northern white philanthropist**,** founding of the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute in 1868 in Virginia.[73] Hampton was a school intended to train potential teachers to provide black children with an industrial education, a curriculum that would have students learning various trades and forms of manual labor.[74] Historian James D. Anderson states that the main task of the school

> "was to work the prospective teachers long and hard so that they would embody, accept, and preach an ethic of hard toil or the 'dignity of labor.' Then, and only then, believed Armstrong, could his normal school graduates develop the appropriate values and character to teach the children of the South's distinctive black laboring class" [75]

Hampton-educated teachers would essentially act as Armstrong's ideological ambassadors to the black populace. Teacher success in this capacity means that the Hampton model would appease both the needs of white planters and blacks. On one hand, blacks would have their right to universal education. On the other hand, the planter class would have new obedient, hardworking black laborers with a strong commitment to the value of work, thus maintaining some degree of the pre-existing socio-economic caste.[76]

It is important to note, however, that Armstrong's philosophy of education went beyond the needs of the planter class. His conservative agenda also discouraged blacks from taking part in any important aspects of public life, such as participating in politics,

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[73] Ibid., 33.
[74] Ibid., 34.
[75] Ibid., 34.
[76] Ibid., 28- 36.

voting, or any other activities that could facilitate the disruption of the social order. Hence, the Hampton ideology fulfilled a broader purpose; to continue the subordination of blacks for the political, economic, and social desires of whites.[77]

Armstrong's beliefs regarding racial ontology were crucial to the foundations of the Hampton ideology. As a consequence of both subjugation and pre-enslavement practice of what he regarded as "paganism," blacks were a morally deficient race. In contrast, Armstrong considered whites superior to blacks because they were permitted to develop morally over generations. He estimated that it would take centuries for blacks to become a moral and civilized race. Moreover, the white race's superiority mandated that they continue to govern over blacks while this development progresses. Hence, in Armstrong's view, the ontological status of black was sufficient enough justification to exclude blacks from the social and political sphere and to relegate them to the labor status. [78]

Incidentally, Armstrong's contention that slavery had caused moral defect in blacks contradicts his remedy to correct it. He believed that labor had instilled what limited moral virtue blacks had acquired. Thus, a Hampton-based industrial-moral education as James Anderson states, would "ultimately prepare blacks for self government."[79] However, for Armstrong, "the right industrial training would make them an economic asset instead of a burden to the south."[80] So, it is evident that, for Armstrong, labor would be the saving grace for blacks. Moreover, the value of blacks

[77] Ibid., 36-38.
[78] Ibid., 38-39.
[79] Ibid., 42.
[80] Ibid., 42.

rests with the fruit of their toil--moral fruits in which he felt ripe enough that Southern whites should take advantage.[81]

In sum, for Armstrong, the moral inferiority of blacks justified the following: servitude, disenfranchisement, education aimed towards strengthening moral sentiment toward labor, industrial training, redeployment into the southern labor force, and the preservation of white rule. This justification was predicated on a temporally and socially contingent conception of a morally compromised black ontology. Taken together, the implicit claim of the Hampton idea encompassed by Armstrong's philosophy of education is that racial subjugation against blacks is a moral necessity. Armstrong's goal was to embed this morality into the psyches of black students of Hampton, who would in turn spread this philosophy as a black ideology. This ideology was to shape how blacks conceive of work and ultimately, how they conceive of themselves as persons. The Hampton ideology involved the creation of a self-affirming and self-regulatory conscience in blacks. Its purpose was to keep blacks in their place—out of the way of whites while simultaneously remaining at their disposal. Moreover, it was to make blacks love their place in society and prepare them to go out into the world and teach other blacks to honor that place.[82]

The ideological and ontological exportation of Armstrong's philosophy to other educational institutions marked another important development in black education. Underscoring this is the fact that the transmission of this white supremacist model was broadcast, facilitated, and endorsed with the help of a black man, Booker T. Washington.

[81] Ibid. 42-46.
[82] Ibid.

Washington was a former student at Hampton who had been transformed by the values (self-organization, self-sufficiency, etc.) instilled in him by its praxis. He shared Armstrong's belief that blacks are morally underdeveloped and Armstrong's view that blacks remain excluded from social and political position. However, Washington's reasons for promoting the Hampton ideology were not for the purpose of benefiting whites. Rather, he saw this philosophy as a means to improve the circumstances of blacks in American society; it was remedy that would progress the moral development of blacks just as he felt that it had done for him.[83]

Washington's emergence as the poster child for Hampton ideology and his willingness to become a fervent vehicle for it demonstrate the ideological effectiveness of its schema**.** In fact, it had so inspired Washington that, according to William H. Watkins, "he developed a philosophy of racial uplift that accommodated existing racial or economic relations." [84] This philosophy included components of "self-help, hard work, and character building"—all crucial elements of the Hampton ideology.[85] However, perhaps a more telling example of Hampton's impact on Washington was his founding of the Tuskegee Normal Institute in Alabama in 1881, an institute that he modeled after Hampton.[86] Tuskegee's students were given an intellectually non-rigorous liberal education in favor of a trade based, labor-intensive education. According to James Anderson, for Washington, even a minimalist intellectual education was superfluous to the needs of black students. At one point, he even shared responsibility in pushing an

[83] Ibid., 51-52.
[84] William H. Watkins, *White Architects of Black Education.* (New York: Teachers College, 2001), 60.
[85] Ibid.
[86] Anderson, *South*, 36.

initiative to further reduce their education. Tuskegee's goal under Washington was the same as Hampton's under Armstrong; that is, to create teachers who will spread the word about the importance of labor.[87]

One of the major precedents that this model set for black education was the increasingly widespread commitment within education to the idea that the collective-interest of blacks was to be constituted by and for the self-interest of whites. This is demonstrated by the fact that the Hampton idea garnered a great amount of supporters. The supporters included the Northern industrialists who, along with many Southern whites, shared a desire to maintain the social and racial order by relegating blacks to basic fieldwork to further white interests. Thus, the Hampton and Tuskegee models necessitated a push to spread the model beyond those two campuses. It was to become a quiet, ideological, social movement.[88]

This proved successful as a broader and stronger surge of black endorsement of the Hampton model began to grow, thus strengthening its societal legitimacy. "Racial uplift" in the Hampton form, became regarded as in the best interest of many blacks and the white powers-that-be in the north and south. This growing sentiment, however, entailed an equally influential occurrence in black education; that is, the rise of a counter-contingency that did not see the Hampton model as something substantively different than modern slavery.

[87] Ibid,, 74-76.
[88] Ibid., 77-78.

Liberal Education

While there was a growing popularity for the Hampton/Tuskegee idea of education, it was not the only educational ideology implemented in the South in the late 1800's to early 1900's. White missionaries and black religious leaders funded black universities such as Fisk, Howard, and Virginia Union. These institutes implemented a liberal curriculum that was quite different from the Hampton model—a curriculum geared towards strengthening and broadening the intellect of black students. Instead of a pro-labor curriculum, blacks were taught literature, mathematics, philosophy, natural sciences, and foreign language. The intended purpose of this education was the production of new, stronger leaders for black people. [89]

The missionaries' granted blacks a broader degree of equality than Armstrong. However, Anderson states,

> "Equality was carefully defined as political and legal equality. They [the missionaries] consented to inequality in the economic structure, generally shied away from questions of racial integration, and were probably convinced that blacks' cultural and religious values were inferior to those of middle-class whites. Their liberalism on civil and political questions was matched by their conservatism on cultural, religious, and economic matters."[90]

In this regard, the missionaries shared both similarities and differences with Armstrong. The missionaries were different insofar as they were willing to share some social and political power with blacks. However, they were ideologically unified with

[89] Ibid., 240-244.
[90] Ibid., 242.

Armstrong inasmuch as their conception of race also presupposed blacks as morally deficient due to socially contingent factors (slavery and religion). This is highlighted in both cases by the concerted attempt to construct the lives and characters of black people by acculturating them with the "right" qualities that suited the appropriate purposes and expectations of whites. To the missionaries, blacks were still considered as childlike, but not so much that they could not be expeditiously socialized by a liberal education. This is in contradiction to the multi-generational approach to black education implicit in the Hampton model. Moreover, blacks were not considered so uncivilized and morally bankrupt that they were discouraged from participating in political life. In this way, liberal education for blacks was an approach that is antithetical to the desires of the Hampton model, the industrial philanthropists, and the Southern planter class who all wanted a structure more akin to the pre-civil war status quo—where social harmony means one group's total dominance over another.[91]

The liberal education model found some success in empowering black students. When the Hampton model all but failed, the philanthropic industrialists attempted to salvage its basic ideology. Theoretically, it suited their needs despite the fact that Hampton was unsuccessful in meeting the contemporary, required, academic standards of education. Moreover, Hampton and prospective students began to reject the *subordination as education* model. [92] Thus, the philanthropists began to pour their resources into other black institutions for purposes of implementing the Hampton idea and recreating a new subordinate class of black leaders that would assist in furthering its

[91] Ibid.
[92] Ibid., 258, 274.

agenda. Eventually, they were able to gain a foothold at Fisk University and put their support behind the university's similarly minded president, Fayette McKenzie. With philanthropist backing, McKenzie offered what amounted to a totalitarian grip on the liberally educated black students at Fisk. James Anderson states that McKenzie "attempted to repress student initiative, undermine their equalitarian spirit, and control their thinking on race relations so as to produce a class of black intellectuals that would uncomplainingly accept the southern racial hierarchy."[93] However, a successful rebellion on the part of the black student body and community against the newly instituted oppressive policies procured McKenzie's resignation.[94]

These actions by the students were no doubt the type of black leadership that their liberal education was supposed to evoke. Unfortunately, the philanthropists were not deterred and eventually gained a stronger influence on black colleges, which in turn allowed them to employ their retrograde, racist agendas. As a result, students on black campuses did not maintain the type of spirit that liberal education was meant to instill in them. [95] Anderson states, there began to emerge a "certain amount of compromise, indifference, apathy, and fear among blacks students." [96] These students (and their teachers) were heavily criticized for what was perceived as an acceptance of the social status quo, internalizing the values of white benefactors, and their failure "to think and act on behalf of the interests of black people."[97]

[93] Ibid., 268.
[94] Ibid., 269.
[95] Ibid., 277.
[96] Ibid.
[97] Ibid., 277-278.

The significance of this criticism relates back to the Hampton model. While blacks students tried to flourish and get an education in a society that wanted neither for them, there was a desire on the part of those who control their lives and shape their conception of self. Both the Hampton and liberal philosophies attempted to engineer students as active instruments intended to re-enter and shape black society towards the desired ends of their educators. Blacks students were being treated as means to an end. Under the Hampton ideology, they were political mouthpieces for white hegemony. The missionaries' liberal model of education told a similar story. Only its aim was not intended to benefit the white race, but rather make possible the betterment of the black race.

The aforementioned examples demonstrate the willingness within education ideology to construct, substantiate, and activate politicized ontologies along racial lines. In other words, the goal of these models was to reconstruct the concept of "blackness" or "black identity" as a moral and/or political agency (whether for the benefit of blacks or whites)**.** This is a characteristic that has been maintained by critical theorists such as Ladson-Billings, Asante, and Kincheloe and Steinberg as they put forth their constitutive content for black identity; content that is not necessarily reflective of the lives of black students, but rather idealized content intended to alter the socio-political order. As I continue this analysis, it should become apparent that the conceptualization of *black as a reified political identity* is a constant throughout the history of black education.

New Black Intelligentsia

W.E.B. DuBois

The events within liberal education (and its conflict with the formidable Hampton ideology) produced two important intellectuals whose influences are still felt both in and outside of the academy. The first of these scholars is W.E.B. Du Bois. Du Bois was a crucial figure in the struggles that were taking place within liberal institutions, even having an active role in such events as the student rebellion against McKenzie at Fisk.[98] However, he was better known as a vocal critic of Booker T. Washington, even debating Washington publicly over their differing philosophies of black education.

Du Bois often criticized Washington for his willingness to push the industrial education philosophy to the extreme and for his acceptance of black subservience to whites, which Du Bois regarded as an accommodation of the white notion of black inferiority. Additionally, he took issue with Washington's advocacy of particular aspects of the Hampton philosophy that would bring harm for blacks. These included political disenfranchisement, lessening of social standing, economic marginalization, and the degradation of black positioning within higher education. He felt that Washington's agenda and influence was harming the liberal agenda that he was trying to progress for black people. [99]

Du Bois was a strong advocate of a liberal black education for students because, as Jacqueline Fleming points out, he felt "liberal arts curriculum best fit the needs of

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[98] Anderson, *South,* 269.
[99] Derrick P. Aldridge, *The Educational Thought of W.E.B. Du Bois: An Intellectual History*. (New York: Teachers College, 2008), 52-54.

black Americans."[100] This was most evident as he pushed the idea that a select group of black students should be educated as leaders for the black race. In examining those educated blacks that he felt had already contributed to uplifting blacks from their circumstances, he describes the role of the leader:

> "he is, as he ought to be, the group leader, the man who sets the ideals of the community where he lives, directs his thoughts and heads its social movements. It need hardly be argued that the Negro people need social leadership more than most groups; that they have no traditions to fall back upon, no established customs, no strong family ties, no well defined social classes. All of these things must be painfully and slowly evolved."[101]

Working from this idealized conception of black leadership and this view of blacks, Du Bois felt that the appropriate aim for education is the creation and nurturing of what he referred to as the "Talented Tenth."[102] These were the black individuals who were to be educated and trained with liberal education in universities to become new leaders of the black community. They were to go out in the world and help lift the black race out of its oppressive circumstances.[103]

Du Bois believed that among the greatest deficiencies of the black race was a lack of "knowledge about life," poor moral character, and insufficient tools and skills to help blacks facilitate their own survival. The education of black children must attend to these concerns. He believed that Hampton's industrial education was insufficient for "civilizing

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[100] Jacqueline Fleming, *Blacks in College*. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1984), 6.
[101] W. E. B Du Bois, "The Talented Tenth" in *Du Bois on Education*, ed. Eugene F. Provenzo Jr. (Walnut Creek: Altamira, 2002) 84-85.
[102] Ibid., 85-86.
[103] *Anderson, South*. 104-105.

a race of ex-slaves." Moreover, simply attempting to build up their characters or provide them liberal education without inspiring them to appropriately use their knowledge was a futile endeavor**.** Du Bois felt for these types of educations to find success amongst black children, members of the Talented Tenth should serve as teachers to oversee this education. Furthermore, Du Bois held that members of the Talented Tenth be the ones to educate teachers about how and what to teach children. This is because these educated elites, by virtue of their rigorous study at liberal institutions, are best equipped to address the deeper needs of the black race.[104]

However, over time, Du Bois would reconceptualize and broaden what he regarded as liberal education. Indeed, Du Bois's most influential and long lasting contribution to black education was his development and promotion of what is now commonly known as Afrocentric education. He believed that American education had provided blacks negative stereotypes of Africa. This resulted in a disconnect between blacks in America and blacks in Africa. He, therefore, began to advocate a diasporic, Pan-African view of the world for the purpose of uplifting the black race and believed it was the obligation of black intellectuals to draw a connection between black America and Africa. This Pan-Africanism eventually became central to his approach to pedagogy.[105] Derrick Aldridge points out that, for Du Bois, Pan-African education "was the obvious strategy for addressing the misinformation about Africa and for helping people of African descent around the world unite politically to overthrow oppression."[106] We can get a

[104] DuBois "Talented" 86.
[105] Aldridge, *Thought*, 129-130.
[106] Derrick P Aldridge, "Guiding Principles for a DuBoisian-Based African American Educational Model," *The Journal of Negro Education*. 68 (2003), 193.

sense of how Africa fits into Du Bois's Pan-Africanism as he explains his own connection to it in his famous essay "What is Africa to me?"[107] He states that, "…the physical bond is least and the badge of color relatively unimportant save as a badge; the real essence of this kinship is its social heritage of slavery; the discrimination and insult; and this heritage binds together not simply the children of Africa, but extends through yellow Asia and into the South Seas. It is this unity that draws me to Africa."[108]

This quote is revealing, as it does not suggest a racialist basis for connection to the African continent. It also does not offer a declaration of extended cultural ownership as a foundation of connection. Rather, it offers a conception of Pan-Africanism that is founded on a commonality of oppression, one that extends beyond the confines of skin color, ancestry, and ethnicity—a diaspora of the suffering. This is a point in which I will later return.

W.E.B. Dubois was among those who expressed disapproval for the actions of black students once the influence of Hampton had embedded itself into black colleges. He considered these students unappreciative of the education offered to them and regarded their partaking in debauchery and indulgences more common of white college students**.** [109] He began to believe the "Talented Tenth" that he, the missionaries, and the other black leaders put their hopes and resources behind were beginning to negate their responsibilities as future leaders of the black race. [110]

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[107] W.E.B. Du Bois, "What is Africa to Me?" in *W.E.B. Du Bois: A Reader*. ed. David Levering Lewis, (New York: Henry Holt, 1995), 655-659.
[108] Ibid., 656.
[109] Anderson, *South,* 276.
[110] Ibid., 276, 267.

Carter G. Woodson

It was not just Du Bois who felt this way about the state of black education. A growing contingent of black intelligentsia shared Du Bois's sentiment.[111] Among these intellectuals was Carter Woodson, a famous historian of black pedagogy and founder of the *Journal of Negro History*. He shared his feelings on what he considered to be the primary goals of education in his highly influential book, *The Mis-education of the Negro*.[112]

Woodson's position on black education diverged from black education advocates, like Du Bois, who believed that the aim of education should be the training of future black leaders. In fact, Woodson argued for the de-emphasizing the goal of leadership because he believed that it undermines a spirit of cooperation and community. He felt that leaders are typically contentious in their ambition and often attempt to usurp the authority of other leaders. Moreover, the ambition to lead places blacks in competition with one another.[113] Woodson, therefore, argued for service rather than leadership as a central aim of black education. He states,

> "If the Negro could abandon the idea of leadership and stimulate a larger number of the race to take up definite tasks and sacrifice their time and energy in doing these things efficiently the race might accomplish something. The race needs

[111] Ibid.
[112] Ibid., 244, 277. Also Woodson. Carter G. *The Mis-Education of The Negro*. Chicago: African American Images, 1933.
[113] Woodson, *Mis-Education*, 110-113.

workers not leaders. Such workers will solve the problems which race leaders talk about and raise money to enable them to talk more and more about."[114]

Woodson further claimed that under the leadership model, the economic situation of blacks had actually worsened and so had their conception of themselves and their capabilities as a race. Moreover, blacks were used to satisfy the agendas set by leaders instead of being encouraged to address their own actual circumstances. Woodson believed that service would put persons in a better position to attend to their circumstantial needs as blacks in addition to facilitating the improvement of black Americans as a group and preparing them to "contribute to modern culture."[115]

Despite this divergence from Du Bois on leadership, Woodson shares credit with Du Bois as being among the first and most influential proponents of Afrocentric education. He held that current model of education portrays blacks as sub-persons who operate without rational ability. Woodson considered Africa a missing component of American education. African contributions to language, art and science to the world were subject to exclusion from the educational narrative. When Africans are spoken of they are minimized to object and savage status. He further claimed that black teachers educated under this model tend to do nothing to change this portrayal of Africans. This means that these teachers are using the same racist tools and praxis as white teachers consequently making them as ineffective as racist white teachers.[116]

Woodson also maintained that education harms blacks by failing to include their lives and histories into classroom content. This, he believes, undermines the notion of

[114] Ibid., 118.
[115] Ibid., 119.
[116] Ibid.,17-23.

interracial cooperation because blacks are educated to feel as though they have nothing to offer anyone and whites are educated to feel that blacks have nothing to offer them.[117] To correct this "mis-education," Woodson believed that blacks must have the opportunity to acknowledge their history's ups as other races had been permitted to do. Moreover, they should be taught that the accomplishments of the black race were equally as good as those made by any other group. If this is achieved, he asserted, then blacks "will aspire to equality and justice without regard to race."[118]

As we can see, both Du Bois and Woodson's Afrocentric frameworks are very similar. Both aimed to supply what they felt was missing from the black race to better help it succeed. However, the ultimate goal of that success was different for these theorists. Afrocentric education under Du Bois would permit blacks to connect with the oppression of oppressed people. This is quite similar with Kincheloe and Steinberg's use of Afrocentric knowledge to provide black students with inspiration to arise from their circumstances. Woodson, however, wanted blacks to see both good and bad aspects of African history so that they could connect with others and contribute to humanity writ large. It is also apparent that Afrocentric thought informs the affirmative education that Gloria Ladson-Billings desires for blacks as she uses what she regards as African and African American culture to help foster a "relevant black personality" in African American students.

Another aspect of Du Bois and Woodson's philosophies is the collective responsibility and black solidarity inherent in their work. These aspects come to light not

[117] Ibid., 23-25.
[118] Ibid., 191-192.

only as they hold black students and teachers accountable for the progress of the black racial group, but also as they ultimately challenge black individuals who they feel fail to demonstrate proper allegiance to certain content. These are themes emanating from the work of Asante, both in his view of what should constitute black culture, but also in his criticisms of those that he feels are "denying their blackness" by showing preference to European cultural productions. Indeed, Du Bois and Woodson were the progenitors of Asante's Afrocentricity. Asante even cites Du Bois as an inspiration for his approach in his book *The Afrocentric Idea* and credits Woodson's Afrocentric pedagogy put forth in *The Mis-education of the Negro* as the "impetus" to his own approach in "The Afrocentric Idea in Education."[119]

The Afrocentric, political, and nationalists themes of W.E.B. Du Bois and Carter Woodson would emerge in later years within the Civil Rights movement. Let us now discuss a more contemporary series of historical events in the history of black education that further reflect the influence of both of these theorists.

Black Power and Black Studies

In 1954, the Supreme Court overturned *Plessy v. Ferguson* putting a legal end to "separate but equal" in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education*. The court ruled that segregation had an ill effect on black students because it instilled in them feelings of inferiority.[120] This landmark case would eventually lead to widespread desegregation in public schools, which subsequently changed the college landscape forever. By the late

[119]Asante, *Idea*, xv and Asante, "Education." 170.
[120] Sheilah D.Vance, "Beyond Segregation: The Continuing Struggle for Education Equity Fifty Years After Brown V. Board of Education" in *The Sage Handbook of African American Education,* ed. Linda C. Tillman. (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 2009), 466.

1950's, blacks slowly started to matriculate onto the newly integrated white college campuses. A rising sentiment amongst black intellectuals and black nationalists began to surface--one that echoed the critiques of racially hegemonic American education in the early part of the 20th century. Proposals for a new type of studies also began to emerge. Black Nationalist groups like the Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM) spawned proposals for curricular reform that would include Black Studies in universities.

In the mid 1960's, two of RAM's members, Bobby Seale and Huey Newton, went on to found a group called the Soul Students Advisory Council and the Black Panther Party, groups that undertook efforts to get students to advocate for Black Studies. RAM had generally used low-key tactics and demonstrated a willingness to work with mainstream groups. The Black Panthers offered fairly direct approaches to accomplish their goals such as attempting to spark conflict with the police "in order to attract attention and establish their credibility as a group that would not back down from white power."[121] The Black Panther's and their strategic tactics would soon prove instrumental in bringing about the highly sought after change that had eluded Black Studies proponents.

According to sociologist Fabio Rojas, there were three conditions that made Black Studies possible. These included: 1) "disappointment with civil rights and an unwillingness to wait for white assistance, which was linked to calls for militancy and black controlled education, 2) the rise of groups such as the Black Panthers, in which individuals could learn the intricacies of movement tactics and forge strong

[121] Fabio Rojas, *From Black Power to Black Studies: How a Radical Social Movement Became an Academic Discipline*. (Baltimore: John Hopkins, 2007), 37-39.

identifications with nationalist values, and 3) the creation of foot soldiers, the newly admitted black students who were willing to fight on college campuses." [122]

In 1966, these circumstances were firmly in place when the Black Panthers sent one of their agents, Jimmy Garrett, onto the campus of San Francisco State College. His goal was to enroll in the college and organize students by converting "the black student club into a platform for revolutionary action" to instill in black students a sense of nationalism.[123] He carried this mission by holding off-campus meetings to talk about race and identity, and to enlighten the students about racism present at the SFSC campus. In conjunction with this was the expressed need to establish curriculum that addressed these and other concerns of black students.[124] These initiatives were further advanced by students participating in the activities of the Tutorial Center and San Francisco State's Experimental College. The Tutorial Center was a student-run program in poorer neighborhoods that offered both experience in academic leadership and additional exposure to groups like the Black Panthers that emphasized black identity. The Experimental College was a program with student-taught courses, including those of the "Black Arts and Culture Series" that would become a platform for the eventual development of a formal Black Studies department.[125]

This increased involvement of these black-led organizations as well as protests by black students at San Francisco State and throughout California began to create tension within the academic ranks. However, the so-called *Gater* incident and its aftermath

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[122] Ibid., 43.
[123] Ibid., 51, 52. It is worth noting that Garret was also a member of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).
[124] Ibid., 53.
[125] Ibid., 53-54.

heightened the unrest and culminated in the Third World Strike that lasted from 1968-1969. The *Gater* incident occurred following escalating disagreements between white students working for the student newspaper, the *Daily Gater*, and students of the Black Student Union (BSU). These disagreements eventually spiraled into a physical altercation when a group of black students, including BSU and Black Panther member, George Murray, confronted *Daily Gater* employees. This, and other controversial incidents, resulted in Murray's suspension from San Francisco State College.[126]

The suspension of Murray was only successful in igniting further controversy. Students of the BSU and the Third World Liberation Front (TWLF) threatened to strike if Murray was not reinstated into the college. Furthermore, they demanded the establishment of Black and Ethnic Studies programs, and increased minority enrollment at the college.[127] The protracted clash that followed between these student groups and the college administration led to numerous protests and eventually the temporary closure of the college.[128] However, the strike ultimately succeeded in causing the administration to acquiesce to some of the demands of the BSU and TWLF. Among the concessions made on the behalf of the administration was the establishment of the first Black Studies department.[129]

The success of groups like the Black Panthers in bringing about the installation of Black Studies inspired those at other schools around the country to follow suit. Similar successes began to occur at schools where strong Black Nationalist sentiments eventually

[126] Ibid., 64-68.
[127] Ibid., 68-70.
[128] Ibid., 73-75.
[129] Ibid., 86.

lead to the implementation of Black Studies departments.[130] Today, Black Studies are a part of the structural fabric of higher education. These events were important to the history of black education because they mark recognition on the part of universities of the accuracy of the substantive critiques on education made by theorists such as W.E.B. Du Bois and Carter Woodson. They also demonstrate the broadening, ratification, and formalization of their early Afrocentric remedies to these problems.

However, this acceptance of Afrocentrism on the part of critical theory bears ontological importance. As I stated earlier, how to constitute a particular black identity was always the underlying question answered within Hampton and liberal philosophies of education. Moreover, their competing conceptions of this identity were political in nature. Industrial education intended to create a black labor identity to maintain the socio-economic order and liberal education advocated black identity as an agency for racial reform and uplift. At the end of the day, the liberal conception of black identity prevailed. The materials intended to construct this identity (African and collective black American culture, history, and collectivism) did not necessarily reflect how black people lived and thought, but rather reflected a Pan-African vision for what is ideal for blacks. The Black Nationalist and Black Power movements were, in essence, an activation of a radicalized conception of this political black identity.

The establishment of Black Studies as a permanent part of the academy meant the formalizing and encoding of this particular political conception of identity and its constitutive materials into the academy. This black ontology has effectively shaped the

[130] Joy Ann Williamson, *Radicalizing the Ebony Tower: Black Colleges and the Black Freedom Struggle in Mississippi*. (New York: Teachers College, 2008),151-153.

views of blacks within societal culture. This is apparent not only as the identification for the black racial group that transitioned from Negro to African American—from race to an ethno-race, but also as a broad range of cultural productions continue to get assigned to this broad but rigidly defined racial group.

The History of Black Education and Critical Theory: A Synthesis

When disciplines are accepted into the academy, they, and their way of doing things, get adopted as well. Once they are allowed into this space, these disciplines most often present themselves and are accepted as the authority on their subjects. So, if we want to know about biology, we look to academic biologists and journals. If we want to know about how people of particular socio-economic and cultures are living, we rely on the academic disciplines of sociology or anthropology, because they are thought to house the experts and specialized knowledge on such matters. Thus, it makes sense that the installation of Black Studies within institutions of higher education, like the aforementioned disciplines, means that its cultural, historical, and epistemological content are often the authoritative resource for information about black people for other disciplines within the academy. Moreover, most disciplines within higher education selectively privilege narratives, histories, and epistemologies in their content. So, it is comprehensible why Afrocentric and nationalistic conceptions of blackness and black education are reflected to varying degrees within some critical theory in education. After all, as I have demonstrated, Afrocentrism and Black Nationalism were integral parts of the development of Black Studies.

Unfortunately, however, there are immediate consequences that follow from the acceptance of politicized conceptions of blackness by critical theorists in education. These are consequences that can skew and obscure how we, as theorists, approach race in our work and how race gets deployed within the classroom space. The first is the privileging of a particular black narrative. It is as obvious now as it was for Du Bois, Woodson, and Black activist groups inspired by their vision, that the identities and the content that they were proposing was not reflective of the actual lives of black people. Rather, such content was intended to accomplish such tasks as providing affirmation and solidarity for and amongst blacks, or it was meant to act as remedy to correct for what some considered black moral deficiency.

Employing these visions of black education by critical theorists today devalues competing and contradictory narratives. More importantly, it diminishes the lives of all those assigned to the black racial group, and all of their diversity, as they *actually* exist. Moreover, the inadequately problematized extension of flawed and outmoded normative conceptions of blackness treats blacks as deficient as it renders the content of black individuals' own lives, their interpretation of self, ethnic or racial identity inconsequential to discourse intended to impact their lives.

Critical theory in education often accomplishes the aforementioned inadvertent, but rather comprehensive, devaluation of black people as it elevates universalized and idealized standards of blackness. Within these standards, blackness manages to become inherently political, while maintaining its ontological realness historically assigned to it. In other words, the political content of what is to constitute blackness becomes encompassed by the traditional reification of blackness.

The historical development of this identity from Hampton to critical theory is the story of the process of reification, indeed, the problem of reification in operation. The acceptance of the Pan-African/Afrocentric conception of blackness by critical theorists is simply an uncritical settlement on a particular conception of race. However, given that this conception is founded upon the traditional reified notion of race, insofar as it is supported by assumptions of phenotype and an idea of a dominant genealogical African (black) descent, it is ultimately an affirmation of the race concept.

The final consequence of this acceptance of reified conceptions of blackness is the ontological reconfiguring of race done on the part of critical theory in education. The conception of blackness as it progressed throughout the history of education was a normative vision; that is, it was not an "is" but rather a "should be." In deferring to this vision of blackness, some critical theorists in education have transformed the normative into the substantive. In other words, *blackness the remedy* is treated as thought it is *blackness the reality*. This is evident for the theorists examined in Chapter Two, as Asante, Ladson-Billings, Kincheloe and Steinberg, and Peter McLaren as they grant slightly varying degrees of diasporic ownership over sentimental, cultural, social, and historical products to all black Americans. Moreover, they grant epistemic privilege to political (or politicized) voices, and authorize those voices to act as representative of an entire socially constructed and engineered racial group. In doing so, they are treating the long fought war for the ontology of blacks as a decided conflict with a clear and distinct victor. Subsequently, these theorists are applying the winner's ontology to the lives of students. These actions by critical theorists in education goes beyond simply reaffirming

the traditional reified conception race; it is the reconstituting of a racial monolith as it adds and ratifies new substantive materials and internal rules for black ontology.

Conclusion

In this Chapter I provided a brief sketch of the history of black education in America. I attempted to show that some critical theorists of education utilized broad source material written by black scholars to ground their approach to race. Furthermore, I argued that these critical theorist have reified race by transforming normative conceptions of racial identity, meant to address specific sets of circumstances at particular moments in history, into substantive conceptions of blackness. Taken alone, I believe these to be compelling reasons for those of us within critical theory in education to cease and desist using these reified conceptions of race and to step back and re-evaluate how we approach race in the theory. In the chapter that follows, I continue to expand on significant consequences that occur for the black individual as a result of critical theorists in education operating as agents for racial affirmation. Specifically, I argue that continuing to proceed without reflection and regard to the problem of reification can bring about real life consequences for students in the classroom.

CHAPTER IV
CRITICAL THEORY IN EDUCATION AND THE PROBLEM OF RACE

Critical theory in education is not a neutral endeavor. It is deliberately political because it actively tries to do what other theoretical areas within education often neglect; it attempts to recognize, expose, and mitigate the harms created by hegemonic paradigms as they present themselves in the classroom. Thus, that some critical theorists in education have adopted black affirmation strategies intended for the same liberatory purposes is as understandable as it may have been inevitable. However, as I attempted to establish in the preceding chapters, many of these theorists have not freed their conceptions of race from the reified concept of race that is so pervasive in American society. Given that race is not a passive concept and has real life consequences, the failure to disengage from an essentialized race concept prior to deploying raced-based diasporic strategies in the classroom facilitates the potential for serious consequences for students.[131]

In this chapter, I argue that the instituting of political conceptions of race risks bringing harm to black students. This, I will show, is because these strategies affirm the race construct and rely upon it for their success. While I believe that there is the potential for various sorts of harms that could occur as a consequence of the affirmation and

[131] From this point forward I use "diasporic" to refer to both the notions of pan-ethnic cultural content in the American context and the broader, global, pan-ethnic cultural content offered in Afrocentric discourse.

reconstitution of race with diasporic content, I will limit the focus of this argument to harm against the black student's personal autonomy. Specifically, I attempt to show the various ways in which political conceptions of race, once validated by teachers, can undermine the autonomy of black students at both the personal and social level.[132]

One reason that I have chosen to focus on the autonomy of the black student is that the existential conditions created by the harms to her autonomy (as a consequence of the validation by teachers of political conceptions of race), are the types of preconditions that will facilitate more destructive harms. A second reason that I believe that the autonomy of the student is important to consider is because the United States is a liberal democracy. Political philosopher Will Kymlicka points out that polls have shown that in democratic societies, "[t]he commitment to individual autonomy is deep and wide" and this sentiment spans across "ethnic, linguistic, and religious lines."[133] I also believe that autonomy is an implicit value that underlies the views of justice put forth by critical theorists regarding the education of black students. After all, it makes little sense to critique white supremacist or Eurocentric education as inhibiting the success of black students, if there is no concern about the manner in which these frameworks control those students. This is a point to which I will return later in this chapter.

I will rely on two versions of autonomy, as I believe that they capture the sentiments regarding the matter of personal autonomy in the United States. The first is

[132] I acknowledge that the importance (or necessity) of the concept of autonomy is heavily contested amongst liberal and communitarian theorists in fields of philosophy, political science, and education. To entangle myself in this debate, too deeply, would go beyond the breadth of the analysis that I am providing in this chapter.
[133] Will Kymlicka, *Contemporary Political Philosophy: An Introduction*. (New York: Oxford, 2002), 338.

philosopher Marina A. L. Oshana's overview of autonomy. She describes the autonomous or "self-guided" person as someone who:

> "…formulates certain goals, as relevant to the direction of her life, and is able to pursue these goals and make them effective in action. Moreover, she formulates these goals according to values, desires, and convictions that have developed in an uncoerced and conscious fashion. Such values can be described as the agent's own even while they reflect the influence of factors external to her. Additionally, an autonomous person is able to meet her goals without depending upon the judgments of others as to their validity and importance. Though the autonomous individual may require the assistance of others in meeting these goals, she decides which of them are most important."[134]

The second view of autonomy that I will use is Will Kymlicka's description of autonomy as "rational revisability" which refers to one's capacity to revise "one's own inherited conceptions of the good."[135] While I believe that this view is implicit in Oshana's explanation of autonomy, I think that Kymlicka's version provides some clarity, given that the subjects of these diasporic strategies will most often be persons situated within the K-12 classroom. So, where such students might not be of age to rationally engage the conceptions of the race that are presented to them, they assumedly will reach that cognitive juncture at some point. In fact, persons revising their conceptions of the good are typical occurrences in the United States. It is common, for example, for people to reject their childhood religions. Sometimes, doing so is not a

[134] Marihna A. L. Oshana, "Personal Autonomy and Society." *Journal of Social Philosophy*. 29 (1998), 81, 82.
[135] Kymlicka, *Contemporary Moral Philosophy*, 243.

popular decision to one's parents or religious community. However, in the broader social context it is regarded in American society as a right, both socially and legally.

Following the discussion of harms to the black student's autonomy, I will argue that considering the harms facing black students, we address race as a problem in and of itself. Let us now begin this analysis with a discussion of race as an axiomatic system.

Race as an Axiomatic System

Before we examine harms that may emerge from activating political conceptions of race in the classroom, let us briefly return to the race concept, itself. As I have stated, race plays such a central role in how we conceive of ourselves as individuals that even those who acknowledge its construction have a difficult time fully freeing themselves from its essentialist entanglements. The critical theorists in Chapter Two serve as an empirical testament to this point as their own analyses and remedies situate the black racial group monolithically. The problem is that race is an axiomatic entity and its nature as such presents itself in a multilayered fashion. We tend to regard race, its internal parameters, and its guidelines for determining racial membership as self-evident truths. Moreover, we treat people as though their actions are and should be governed by race. Race, as we conceive of it in the United States, is not simply a matter of being. Rather, its racial ontologies often require performance by the individuals to whom they are ascribed. These performances can encompass a wide range of actions such as the perception, interpretation, and treatment of persons or objects.

I believe that the idea of race as a performative ontology is crucial to any discussion regarding the deployment of reconstituted or reconfigured racial ontology into

the classroom. I have shown that critical theorists in education sometimes fail to unpack the race concept before re-implementing it for use. So, it is quite possible that the way these conceptions get repackaged with our traditional notions of race will affect the way they are interpreted and disseminated by teachers and, consequently, processed and performed by students. Before we move forward in our discussion, it may prove useful to extract a few of the relevant axiomatic principles that govern race, specifically those that concern the assignment of racial identity. It is my hope that this will provide a stable frame of reference that will show us the types of axioms that can merge with these refurbished racial ontologies as they intersect with the lives of black students.

Let us first briefly look at some of the principles I refer to as *Racial Identity Axioms*.[136] We can start with a very basic axiom,

I. x is an **R**, therefore x performs $\mathbf{r_1}$ (or performs $\mathbf{r_1}$ in a particular way).

With this postulate, there is the presupposition of race, its assignment to a particular individual, and a presumed causal connection to a particular type of action. It captures how race creates the anticipation for action. Examples of this axiom are statements such as "Black people are athletic," or a valuated performance of ontology, "Black people play basketball well." These examples help reveal an important aspect to racial axioms; that is, the type of performance may be highly contextual (e.g., ethnic, geography, culture, religion) yet it is still broadly applied across a racial group. In other words, the typical ways in which racial axioms are articulated allows the performance of

[136] In all of the axioms that follow, let x denote a person, $\boldsymbol{R}$ denote a race, and $\boldsymbol{r_1}$ denote the racialized action.

race to be simultaneously particular and universal. The following axiom captures the metaphysics that undergirds race as a performative ontology:

II. *x is an* ***R****, therefore x's performance of* $\mathbf{r_1}$ *is a reflection of x's* ***Rness.***

This Racial Identity Axiom treats race as something real and something expressible. When performed by individual members of a race, the action is regarded as both a display of one's connectedness to the racial group and an expression of the collective racial group as a whole. Its transcendent metaphysics emerges, first, from the reification of race itself. We also see this transiency appear as racial essence assigned to a particular action, a consequence of being marked as inherently racial or as a consequence of the performer's race. Finally, there is the individual whose racial ontology allows her to express its essence through a particular action. We can find an example of this type of axiom at work with Peter McLaren's black gangster rapper expressing a trans-historical, collectivist essence of blackness through the rapper's art form.[137]

A third Racial Identity Axiom enables us to see how racial principles can get expressed or interpreted as though validated empirically:

III. *If x is an* ***R****, x will perform* $\mathbf{r_1}$ *because* $\mathbf{r_1}$ *is a performance of* ***R.***

As with the second postulate, this axiom assumes the existence of race and a person's racial identity predisposes her to a particular form of action. However, while the first axiom merely assumes this predisposition to perform a particular action, this axiom treats it as more or less verified. This is a common way of talking about race in American society--as if its performance are matters of probabilistic assessment. Ultimately, however, this axiom requires the same types of metaphysical assumptions as our first

[137] See my discussion of McLaren's conception of race from Chapter Two.

axiom. Namely, it assumes that race is ontologically connected to the performance of particular types of action. Furthermore, the action is assigned to an entire racial group. Given the size, biological, and cultural makeup of racial groups, even if one constricted one's judgment to racial groups within the United States, such a designation would require the positing of racial essence**.** Finally, the action, when performed, would still act as an expression of that person's race. So, while this axiom might appear different than the second on the surface, ultimately they are quite similar.

Axiom III also allows us to see how race works through action, meaning that an action that is racialized (or that is bound to a raced object) creates the anticipation of its performance by the individual with the corresponding racial identity**.** Examples of the axiom in this type of manifestation are "whites play hockey because hockey is a white sport" or "Blacks support President Barack Obama because Barack Obama is black."

These three Racial Identity Axioms represent *expectations* of the performance of race. They express the performance of the raced individual in a categorical way. Race is often conceptualized in terms of expectations within societal culture, especially now, as society progresses technologically giving people access to knowledge that deconstructs previously held notions about racial groups. While the expectation of racial performance is obviously problematic by itself, the situation becomes precarious when the performance of racial ontology shifts from expectation to requirement, meaning these axioms transition from asserting what raced individuals do, to telling those with racial identity what they should do. In other words, axioms of expectation often become axioms of requirement:

If x is an ***R****, x* ***will*** *perform* $\mathbf{r_1}$ *because* $\mathbf{r_1}$ *is a performance of* ***R*****,**

becomes

If x is an ***R****, x* ***should*** *perform* $\mathbf{r_1}$ *because* $\mathbf{r_1}$ *is a performance of* ***R.***

This transition occurs when axioms of expectation are subject to *authoritative validation*. By authoritative validation, I mean the acceptance or affirmation of racial identity axioms of expectation as substantive truth by those who maintain a degree of power or control over individuals with racial identities. The authorities can include family members, teachers, religious leaders, politicians, social and political institutions, etc. The legitimacy of the validation is dependent on the how much the raced individual (or other raced individuals) values or is forced to value the authority as such. In the United States, the belief in races and their racial ontologies is so widely held that the authoritative validation of racial identity axioms comes from large segments of societal cultural itself. Thus, the standardization of axioms of expectation, i.e. their acceptance as mandates, is more the norm than the exception. It is, for instance, not uncommon for people to believe or assert that blacks should not marry whites, blacks should prefer blues over country music, or blacks should practice Christianity not Judaism.

Race's axiomatic schema is often quite complicated. Sometimes, its axioms of requirement yield axioms that affirm their performative ontology. These types of Racial Identity Axioms act as principles by which a person, assigned a particular racial identity**,** is judged for the performance, manner of performance, or lack of performance of her racial ontology. Consider, as examples, the following axioms:

A. *If x, who is an* ***R****, performs* r_1*, then x is affirming x's* ***R****ness*.

B. *If x, who is an* ***R****, does not perform* $\boldsymbol{r}_1$*, then x is denying one's* ***R****ness*.[138]

Axiom A operates as a sub-axiom. Implicit within it is the claim of the requirement formulation of Axiom II, that a person's performance of a required racial action is a reflection of her race's essence. However, this axiom goes farther as her performance of that action is not simply a reflection of her race, but also a demonstration of allegiance to its ontology. Axiom B differs from Axiom A because if the person fails to carry out her ontological commitment, she is rejecting her racial ontology. Axioms of this nature can create harmful situations for those with racial identities, because they are, in effect, axioms of authenticity. The failure to perform the necessary action is the raced individual not being who she really is; she is not being authentic to her true self. We see this type of example in American society quite commonly with claims such as "Middle class blacks are abandoning their responsibilities to their race by moving into the suburbs" or "You're white, you are supposed to listen to 'white music.'"[139]

Now that we have examined some of the types of axioms that often emerge from the race concept, the pervasive schema in which some critical theorists in education have inadvertently attached their own drafts of race should appear more lucidly. Our discussion on the history of black education showed us how its philosophical arbiters attempted to instill in black students value systems that would influence how they conceive of themselves, others, their place in the world, and the manner in which they conduct their lives. The goal was that these normative value systems would become

[138] Let $\boldsymbol{r}_1$ represent required racial action.
[139] Sometimes, axioms of authenticity can arise in a more intense manner when the individual is presented with a choice of performing her required racial actions and required actions of another race. We will see this more clearly in our discussion of social harms.

substantive conceptions of blackness that would achieve the desired ends (black student success, racial uplift, racial contributions to humanity). The diffusion of these values systems was to occur through teachers.

In Chapter 2, I argued that critical theorists in education have taken diasporic conceptions of race and adopted them as substantive forms. Additionally, many of these theorists, such as Asante, Ladson-Billings, and Kincheloe and Steinberg call for the employment of Afrocentric strategy and/or content to help facilitate the success and improve the circumstances of black students. The problem is that to complete these tasks in the manner in which these theorists do, would require the affirmation of race itself. Specifically, it would require an upholding of the black racial group that extends biologically and metaphysically to persons outside of the United States. In taking African and black diasporic content (cultural practices, products, history, and experiences) and assigning it to the entirety of the black racial group, not only do such theorists affirm race, but they also help structure it as a pan-ethnicity.

The purpose of critical theory in education is to operationalize strategies and distribute content within the classroom by teachers for particular outcomes. Unfortunately, because this content is bound to an unpacked supposition of race, it will be communicated to students as categorical within the classroom. In other words, in the K-12 classroom (or the university classroom), the content will not be introduced as elements of a theoretical strategy, as one conception of race amongst possible others. Rather, broadly construed African content will be presented to blacks as though belonging to black students. Rap music will be presented as their music. The expressed pains of other blacks will be presented as their pain. The struggle of people or a particular

people in Africa will be presented as though ontologically connected to their struggle, as blacks, in the United States. Even where ontological association will be expressed explicitly, an unmitigated reification of race sets the conditions in which such connections are inferable.

These political revisions of race, encapsulated black racial ontology, will thus be intertwined with its axiomatic physiology. Let us now move our focus to possible consequences of this entanglement for black students.

Autonomy and the Black Individual

As an ontological system, race operates as if prior to the person. In essence, it creates a person by defining for them who and what they are and who and what they should become. I have shown how, as an axiomatic system, race produces guidelines by which people are to perform their racial ontology—axioms that tell persons how they *ought to be* in relation to their racial identity. The potential for harm to the autonomy of the black student largely rests on how powerfully theorists attach their politicized racial ontologies to the race concept. These critical theorists in my analysis actually nourish race with ethno-cultural content for black students. In doing so, they are merely providing the specific meanings of $\boldsymbol{R}$ and $\boldsymbol{r}_1$ for race's axioms and allowing teachers, as respected conduits of knowledge, to provide authoritative validation for these axioms.

The relationship between race, its critical revisions, and teachers are of key importance in understanding how the autonomy of the black student is at stake. That is because this relationship can impede the student's ability to recognize politicized formulations of race as what they inherently are; that is, revisions of the race construct.

This can occur as these revisions are packaged and presented as black student's racial ontology—as, by racial association, what she is and what she does. Afrocentric content, for instance, will get taught to black students *as black*. Thus, the content is not likely to be interpreted by black students as content with which she may choose to identify. Rather, the axiom-cooperative conditions encourage the black student to interpret these materials as facts about her.

A presentation of the history of the Swazi ethnic group of southern Africa as connected to the black student, whose African ancestors may have been Yoruba or Igbo, coheres with what the race concept already provides for us in American society, that blackness is grounded in biology and that Africa is the bio-geographical locus of that blackness. Given the teacher's ratification of this sentiment, there is significant likelihood that knowledge about Swazi will shape how the black student envisions and evaluates herself. Indeed, when employing diaspora-based strategy, critical theorists are relying on the student's identification with the black racial group to achieve the ends anticipated in their accounts. The question is, does this influence inhibit her ability to create values, desires, and ends for herself or does the presentation of content as ontologically relevant create values for her? Moreover, does the presentation make it difficult for her to see that teacher as an authority and as someone trying to influence her ontology?

We must remember that the race construct to which theorists attach their revisions, is a value system. As such, race itself is a conception of the good. It designates value to groups that shapes how we view ourselves and how we view one another (*as blacks*, *as whites*), and it guides action amongst and within those groups. However, although similar in some ways, race is not a conception of the good like a religious or

philosophical ideology. We treat those types of ideologies as ones to which you volitionally bind or unbind yourself. They are still treated as matters of choice, even if we are indoctrinated with them from birth. We permit people to switch and reject religions.

Race is a different type of conception of the good, because its categories are biological and metaphysical ontologies--ontologies to which you are bound. We do not consider it as a matter of choice. Rather, we regard it as something intrinsic. Moreover, race's axiomatic directives are constitutive of race; they are not independent axioms in competition with alternative conceptions of the good.[140] Thus, race is an ontological ideology; the revisions of this ideology are merely denominations of it. We typically do not rationally revise that which we do not consider revisable. It is certainly possible that we may revise how we perform race or even choose not to perform it. However, the pervasive assumption of a bio-metaphysical union between race and its performance, hinder even the modification or rejection of performance. It clouds our ability to see race or performance as revisable or at best places limitations to degrees in which they are revisable. The treatment of political conceptions of race as categorical reality by teachers would only serve to enhance the illusory notion of non-revisability for the black student.

The difficulty of revisability is likely further complicated when the student re-enters her social environment. Here, she might actually witness the performance of race at a level where the requirement axioms of race are more contextually stringent. So, for example, teachers may present rap music as an authentically black performance, thus

[140] The exception here being when racial ontologies are in conflict with one another. An example would be when a black individual is faced with a choice between a white racial action and black racial action. Each of these ontologies represents a particular conception of the good under the banner of a larger conception of the good, race.

validating for the black student that rap music belongs to her—is part of who she is. If the student looks to her surroundings through this racial and pan-ethnic lens, she may find some empirical legitimacy for this validation. As a result, the choice of appreciating, declaring allegiance to, or taking part in rap music as an artistic form might require that she evaluate herself through race's axioms of authenticity. A failure to act in accordance with her ontological demands could mean that she judges herself as inauthentic. She can internalize the guilt associated with this betrayal or she may choose to perform the required racial actions placed upon her as a black person. Thus, her desire to perform her assigned racial ontology was not of her own construction. Rather, it was generated by the axioms of her externally validated racial ontology.

A similar harm arises as a consequence of critical theorists in education failing to acknowledge the ethno-cultural and genetic diversity of the black racial group. In doing so, such theorists maintain the tunnel vision inherent in the traditional taxonomy of race. This sets the conditions for the reduction of competing value systems by restricting the black student's own life, values and experience.

Let us imagine a student whose ancestors consisted of individuals that fall under the black, white, and Native American racial group. [141] They included African slaves, Black freedmen, Cherokee and Chickasaw Indians, English Americans, and Irish Americans. The diversity of this ancestry is something that was openly acknowledged amongst his family members. Most of his family's cultural practices were random, rarely

[141] It may be of importance to recognize the inconsistency in our racial categorizations. Native Americans are treated as a race. It is quite common to hear persons refer to themselves as "white and Native American" or as having "Native American blood." I will not explore inconsistency within this dissertation, but I do believe that it is something that is worthy of exploration.

uniformly shared, and typically were never made reference to in terms of race or ethnicity. For instance, their individual religious and spiritual beliefs range from various forms of Christianity (mainstream and unorthodox) to "Hoodoo" to atheism. They listen to broad ranges of music from country to hip-hop to heavy metal. American society designates his family black, because of their appearance or their known African ancestry. Thus, most family members have accepted black as their racial identity, including family members who are able to physically "pass" as white. While some individuals in his family affirm many performative racial axioms, a significant number neither endorse nor organize their lives around them. Thus, there is a fairly wide variation in the ways in which family members have constructed their lives.

A teaching strategy that attempts to connect the black students to the sentiments, cultures, cultural products, and experiences of others based on the presumption of a shared racial ontology, could present a serious challenge to this student's autonomy. While it is clear that race has some effect on how this student sees himself, given his background, he would likely enter the classroom with a relatively loose conception of race. However, the teacher is validating the notion, common to strategies for black affirmation, that one's blackness is (should be) the central aspect to persons assigned to the black racial group. This could diminish this student's own value system—one that acknowledges the ethnic and cultural plurality that makes up not just himself as an individual, but also his family and the black racial group writ large. Moreover, inherent in the teacher's validation is that the type of performance that should matter for blacks are performances of that ontology.

Diasporic revisions of race can convey to the student that the content of his actual life is too broad to fit the axiomatic parameters of black identity. So, the student has a seemingly credible mandate to regard aspects of his own experience, knowledge, and history as inconsequential to his true black self. Thus these revisions can decide for the student the relevant identities, values, and performances and in doing so eliminate choice where choice could have been present for him. In this way, political conceptions of race can accomplish what the racial ontology that undergirds them already attempts do; that is, they invalidate or supersede competing conceptions of the good.

The final potential harm to the student at the personal level that I would like to discuss involves the activation of the black student as an ideological activist. This harm relates back to attempts to instill in blacks particular types of agency advocated by such figures as W.E.B Du Bois, Carter Woodson, Henry Armstrong, and Booker T. Washington. While the desired ends in those cases ranged from laudable to deplorable, there is little question that the achievement of these ends required placing the personal desires, values, and conceptions of the good aside. Indeed, the purpose behind their education strategies was to mold these facets of the student's character and in some cases mold them in such a way that these students would set their own desired ends aside. Thus, personal autonomy itself was treated as trivial in relation to the ends of the big picture.

It seems that some critical theorists in education are also setting aside the autonomy of the black student in a similar manner to the aforementioned philosophers of black education. The fact that many black students are hindered and demoralized as a consequence of their positioning within America's racial paradigm is no doubt as

probable now as it was in the days of Du Bois and Woodson. The remedies that critical theorists in education advocate today do not diverge very far from those of Du Bois and Woodson. There is little difference between constructing a type of black student for the purpose of black service and black leadership and attempting to create a "relevant black personality," or to reinstate Africa to into the psyche of the African American student, even if the desired end is the success of the black student. All of these visions require the actuation of political conceptions of blackness within the black student.

Once again, the problem surfaces with the teacher's presentation of this knowledge as truth. The black student is denied the opportunity to assess these conceptions as political because of the assumption or reconstitution of a racial ontological connection to the actors, creators, and practitioners of the content of her affirmation. As she embodies the axioms of these particular conceptions of the good, she becomes an unwitting poster-child for a political conception of the ideal black individual. So, like the black students of our historical analysis, black students of today may have their own autonomies set aside to achieve an end that they have not desired, planned, or constructed.

In this section, I put forward some of the personal harms facing the black student once indoctrinated with the diasporic revisions of race advanced by some critical theorists in education. Unfortunately, the validation of these revisions by teachers can produce significant impediments for the student that go beyond his psychological life. Let us now explore some the possible harms to the autonomy of the black student at the social level.

Autonomy and the Black Social Self

Race is a deceptively social ontological system. We unknowingly create it. Moreover, we act through it, often unconsciously. We determine its values: its content, its axioms, and its internal borders. In return, it acts through us. One of the ways that it does this is by assigning us our racial ontologies. In our discussion of the axiomatic structure of race, I explained how principles that emerge from the race construct create expectations and requirements for racial performance. The relationship between race and performance is a relationship between the individual and his assigned racial ontology. The individual's performance of that ontology is a demonstration of his allegiance to it.

What does it mean to demonstrate an allegiance to a racial ontology? At the individual level, it means affirming, through performance, his assigned racial identity. It also requires that he evaluate his own performances from an external perspective as though he were a fellow member of his race. In this sense, race creates for the individual an internalizable racial community to which he is accountable—a moral community. So, even at the individual level, through a kind of mimicry, race is social. Through its identity axioms, race tells us to whom we are accountable in the social world. It tells us that the moral community for whites is the membership that makes up the white racial group; for the black individual, it is the black racial group. Race tells us that the white moral agent is rational, individualistic, and has a wide range of performative actions that are not functions of his race. It also tells us the black moral agent acts from blackness and therefore has limited rationality, is communitarian, and that his performative actions are consequences of race and indicative of his race.

Examples of what I am asserting here, that race assigns moral community, are easily found in American societal culture. It surfaces in our social interactions through our various forms of segregation. It emerges from our pop culture where whites are presented as diverse individuals and blacks are presented as bound to type. It plays out in political media, where whites have no spokespersons as they are shown to embody various ideologies and platforms, but where blacks are typically only present when considered representing the views of blacks.

Unfortunately, the diasporic conceptions of race offered by critical theorists in education are a further example of how race constructs races as moral communities. The reason is found not only in the sense that their strategies advocate the ontological connection between blacks, but also in the supposition that underlies them—that black students should be affirmed, because of their race, by content deemed black. By itself, the concept of race already impedes the autonomy of blacks by assigning moral community to them, thus denying them the authority to decide for themselves who, if anyone, they value as persons. However, the teacher who impresses upon black students the view that the characters of a Ghanaian folktale, for example, should mean something to her because Africa is the continent of her relevant (black) ancestors, is reinforcing this racial view of moral community. This form of indoctrination on the part of the teacher validates for the student that black people should matter most because she shares their racial ontology.

The circumventing of the autonomy of the black student has some serious implications. One consequence is that it may determine the nature of her interactions with others in her social life. For instance, it may mean that the black student does not see non-blacks as being relevant to her life. This can go beyond simple social interactions

and extend into how she eventually comes to regard her moral commitments in our participatory democracy. The validation of the notion of a black moral community might mean that the only social and political performances that matter are those carried out on behalf of or in respect to this community. This is not without precedent. Black persons in the United States have consistently been victims of moral exclusion on the basis of their race socially, institutionally, and politically throughout the history of this country. Indeed, this is the reason why critical theorists in education attempt to address the circumstances of blacks, because in a white-centered country, the lives of black people are and continue to remain of secondary importance.

The final two harms to the autonomy of the black student relate to this validation of race as a moral community and the actuating of students as ontological activists. As I have stated, the internalization of race means that a person judges herself by how she imagines that other members of her race would judge her. This is, in essence, the acceptance of her race, as her moral community. However, a moral community does not always simply constitute the people whom you value, the people whom you assume share your values, or the people to whom you hold yourself accountable. It can also mean those who hold you accountable for your moral actions. While it may vary depending on the type of agency your morality assigns, you typically expect other moral agents to carry out the mandates of your shared morality. For race, the mandates of morality are racial identity axioms like the ones that I provided in this chapter. As mentioned earlier, race creates black agency as tightly bound to its racial ontology. Thus, the race construct sets the conditions for the black individual to be activated as, not only the demonstrative

activists, but also as enforcers of the racial identity axioms of her black moral community.

I also stated that the political revisions of race supported by critical theory just fill in the "who" and "what performance" for those axioms. Authoritative validation by a teacher provides the black student with a seemingly objective mandate to enforce and judge the performances of others sharing the black ontology. So, the autonomy of the black student can be hindered in the sense that she is indoctrinated with a value system that puts her into action as a social enforcer of a critical theory's diasporic draft of blackness. In other words, in creating and assigning moral community, it permits her to act upon others.

On the flipside of this, the teacher's validation of these political revisions in these conditions can create other activists that act upon the black student. For this reason, once again, it affirms that the black racial group is a moral community. Then, by assigning the student and all other blacks to this community, it makes her accountable to it, even if she does not assent. This is because it provides a mandate for other blacks students to enforce the axioms of these political revisions of race on her because she is black. It permits these students to say things to her akin to Asante's criticism of black scholars that I presented in Chapter Two; that is, her preference of things not designated black is a denial of her blackness. It gives other black students the authority to say that what should matter is her blackness, not her actual racial, ethnic, and cultural life content. It allows them to act as social constraints against her autonomy. They can inhibit her capacity (psychologically, socially, culturally) to pursue her own constructed conception of the good life because critical theory has bound her to both traditional racial ontology and revisionist ontology.

Finally, the teacher's presentation of diasporic conceptions of race may mean their validation for all of those present, black or otherwise. This facilitates the activation of non-black students as activists that can police ontological performances of the black student. This is, in part, because diasporic strategies verify for students the determinate racial boundaries. The teachers validation also legitimizes the notion that there is collectively shared content, agency, axioms, and thus ontology amongst black persons. In other words, it affirms for non-blacks that blacks are a moral community. However, in doing so, it also validates the legitimacy of their own assigned racial groups as moral communities.

Depending on the particular agency assigned to the non-black group, the teacher's affirmation of racial moral communities provides the non-black student reason to enforce her own racial identity axioms *and* axioms of the black racial group. For instance, the white moral agent, as a member of the most-powerful racial group in the United States, has relatively broad societal authority over groups. White students are thus permitted to protect performative boundaries of their racial group by asserting to the black student, through various performative means, "this is ours" and "this is what we do." Moreover, white students will also have the authoritative validation to declare to the black student through voice or action "that is yours" or "that is what you are supposed to do," thereby acting as social constraints similar to the previously mentioned intra-racial constraints. Thus, the political conceptions of race offered by some critical theorists risk harming the autonomy of the black student rather comprehensively at the social level.

Engaging the Problem of Race in Critical Theory in Education

One of the primary critiques made by critical theorists in education concerns the elevation of Eurocentric or "white" content in the classroom and the ignoring of the lives, histories and achievements of black persons in the United States and Africa. The consequence of the invisibility of black people in education is that students are indoctrinated with the same sentiments that asserted about black people throughout the history of the United States--that white people are relevant, intelligent, and important and black people are none of these things. Thus, the black student often adopts this as something intrinsic about her, which impedes her desire and success.

The aforementioned critique made by critical theory is consistent with the arguments that I have put forth regarding the autonomy of the black student and the political conceptions of race inherent to diasporic teaching strategies. The white hegemonic establishment is impeding the black student's chances for success with its selective, self-affirming content. With the traditional axioms of race in the backdrop, the validation of this content by teachers leads to the subsequent internalization of the implicit claims within the content itself. The student's education encumbers her capacity to guide her own life because it creates for her a particular conception of race—one that devalues her. Thus, American education undermines the autonomy of the black student because what it is to her (a social impediment) and what it does to her (creates an ideological impediment).

While, I agree with the above critique by critical theorists in education, I also believe that it should apply to their theories as well. My analysis has shown that the racial

circumstances that rest in the background are the same, only that the notions of blackness that are offered by critical theorists in education are such that once employed within the classroom they will evoke in the black student that she is indeed valuable *as a black person*. While the ends of white hegemony and critical theory in education (in regard to race) are different, the means are the same (indoctrination), and the consequences to the child's autonomy are the same.

The history and advancement of the problem of reification and the harms for the black student necessitate that we re-evaluate our path as we move forward in our attempts to make the classroom a just environment. My analysis in this and the two preceding chapters has demonstrated that race has not simply been a part of the problem. Rather it is and has been the problem all along. It is causally antecedent to the problem of racial reification in critical theory of education and if its conceptual core is maintained, it will be the causal antecedent for harms to the black student.

So, moving forward for critical theorists in education requires that we attempt to understand the race concept, so that we can grasp what it is, how it operates, and why it operates the way it does. We need to understand why and how it entangles us, as theorists. Then we will better comprehend why it is that even those of us who acknowledge its social construction still act *from* it as though it were biologically and metaphysically real when we attach our revisions to it and we rely on its axioms for our strategies to work. Most importantly, we need to gain a deeper understanding of how race defines life outside of the classroom, and then we can grasp more fully how it can, will, and does affect students within the classroom. This means that we must attempt to know race as comprehensively as we can. Once we gain this understanding we can create

strategies that address related issues for the student and environment around us more holistically and effectively.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explored how political conceptions of race offered by some critical theorists in education, once deployed by teachers in the classroom, can present serious harms to students personally and socially. I have argued that this is a consequence of these conceptions being supported by the axiomatic, ontological value system that is the race construct. I have asserted that it is our responsibility as theorists that we attempt to confront and understand race as a problem in and of itself. In the chapter that follows, I argue that a theoretical and strategic alliance with race theory emerging out of the discipline of philosophy can prove resourceful in our attempts to unpack the concept of race.

CHAPTER V
THE PHILOSOPHY OF RACE

The notion that the race concept is neglected within critical theory in education (or education theory writ large), while not widely held, is certainly not new. Some of the critical theorists that I have examined in this work acknowledge that it is a concept in need of exploration given its importance both in and outside of the classroom. For example, in "Toward A Critical Race Theory of Education," an article examining the intersection between race and property, Gloria Ladson-Billings, along with co-author William F. Tate IV, emphasize that race, as a social construct, has not garnered theoretical attention from critical theorists in education, especially when compared to other factors such as gender.[142]

It is relatively rare in critical theory in education circles that there is an attempt to engage race on a meta-level**.** Exceptions are Cameron McCarthy and Warren Crichlow who argue that the concept of race is under-theorized in critical theory in education. Their anthology, *Race Identity and Representation in Education*, is intended to fill this theoretical gap, by offering various analyses on race from a variety of analytical theorists. In its introductory article, "Introduction: Theories of Identity, Theories of Representation, Theories of Race," McCarthy and Crichlow reject discourse within education (specifically, Afrocentric theory) that treats racial groups as monolithic, as though

[142] Ladson-Billings, Gloria and William E. Tate IV. "Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education. Teachers College Record. 97.1 (1995), 49. Ladson-Billings and Tate also cite the importance of the conceptual work on race carried about by Michael Omi and Howard Winant.

members of these groups collectively share biological and cultural characteristics.[143] Moreover, McCarthy and Crichlow highlight the tendency of radical pedagogists to approach issues of race in such a way that "conceptions of racial inequality can be described as essentialist and reductionist" because they "effectively eliminate the 'noise' of multidimensionality, historical variability, and subjectivity from their explanations of racial differences in education."[144] They also point out that race theory in education tends to treat social groups like "Asians," "Latinos" and "Blacks" as if each group contained essences that "set them apart from each other and from whites."[145] McCarthy pursues similar analyses independently in his other works, such as with his article, "The Problem of Origins: Race and the Contrapuntal Nature of the Educational Experience," where he challenges essentialist theorists such as Molefi Asante and further confronts the notion that racial groups fit tidily into cultural categories. [146]

Unfortunately, the overarching essentialist and diasporic narratives of race are so pervasive within American education, that ethno-racial affirmative theory usually overshadows critiques offered by theorists like McCarthy. Challenging our notions about race, even in contemporary times, is radical work. It is radical because we do not view race in the same way as we view class and gender—as concepts that are as mutable as they are psychologically and socially ubiquitous and sometimes subtly insidious. We have difficulty recognizing that race is not just a means to hegemony, but that it is a

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[143] McCarthy, Cameron and Warren Crichlow. "Introduction: Theories of Identity, Theories of Representation, Theories of Race." *Race Identity and Representation in Education*. New York: Routledge, 1993.
[144] Ibid., xviii.
[145] Ibid.
[146] Cameron McCarthy, "The Problem with Origins: Race and the Contrapuntal Nature of the Educational Experience." in *Multicultural Education, Critical Pedagogy, and the Politics of Difference*. eds. Christine E. Sleeter and Peter McLaren. (New York: State University, 1995), 245-264.

hegemonic paradigm in itself. This failure to recognize race as problematic is in part a consequence of the obvious and seemingly benign, constitutive meaning that we derive from it on a personal, social, and even political level. It is also a consequence of race's gradual encapsulation by the ethnic paradigm in both societal culture and the academy. At the end of the day, however, race has exhibited itself historically and culturally through power arrangements within and across its groupings. As I stated in Chapter Four, as liberatory theorists, it is our responsibility to understand how the concept of race contributes to these relations and to do this, we must approach the concept of race in a theoretically holistic manner.

There are lots of disciplines in the arts and sciences that engage the race concept in ways that can benefit our theoretical approaches. However, in this chapter, I draw attention to the discipline of philosophy where we find the philosophy of race, or what is often termed "the metaphysics of race" taking place. I believe that philosophy of race offers useful tools and analyses that can help us understand what it means for race to be a social construct, as it is often referred to, but not always treated as, within critical theory in education. The metaphysics of race will help us make sense out of race by allowing us to see how race is essentialist, why and how it is ontologically powerful, and how we can deconstruct it in a way that allows us to avoid its internal metaphysical and axiomatic entrapments.

In this chapter, I examine four prominent philosophers of race, Charles Mills, Kwame Anthony Appiah, Naomi Zack, and Jorge J. E Gracia. I will place them on a conceptual, methodological, and strategic map that shows how they engage the *problem of race.* I examine how these theorists approach (or suggest that we approach) issues

related to race such as racial and ethnic identity, racism, and white supremacy**.** I also show several ways in which these theorists implicitly and explicitly converge, diverge, and build upon one another's works methodologically and theoretically**.** Following this analysis, I will pull out some of the important aspects of their work that I believe will benefit critical theory in education as it moves forward in its own analyses.

Theoretical Positions within the Philosophy of Race

Before beginning this examination, let us briefly look at some of the various underlying theoretical views found within the philosophy of race. This will assist in understand how the theorists in our examination are situated within in the discourse, thus making it easier to make sense of their respective approaches to the concept of race. Charles Mills suggests that there are three primary theoretical positions that emerge from philosophy of race. These are, "realism, otherwise known as naturalism (race is a natural biological kind, and is real), eliminativist constructivism, (race is socially constructed, is unreal, and should be eliminated as a theoretical term), and anti-eliminativist constructivism (race is socially constructed, is real, and should not be eliminated as a theoretical term)."[147]

While there are philosophers of race who attempt to restructure or re-conceptualize the traditional biological conceptions of race, these positions are increasingly rare and do not reflect of the majority of race theory taking place in

[147] Charles W Mills. Book Review: Ethics along the Color Line by Anna Stubblefield. (2007). Hypatia 22 (2):189-193.

contemporary philosophy.[148] Most philosophers of race are in keeping with the majority of the scientific world; they reject the biological realness of human races (at least as we generally conceive of them).[149] In other words, they contend that race is a social construction. Of course, taken alone, this position is not necessarily at odds with the theory coming out of many non-philosophical disciplines where race is considered a relevant variable in social life. Many of these disciplines, including critical theory in education, tend to focus specifically on issues concerning racism, discrimination, and the epistemic gaps that have occurred as a consequence of white supremacy. The philosophy of race, on the other hand, centralizes the deep epistemological, normative, and descriptive content of race, and its circumstantial consequence. It maintains a strong commitment to understanding the way(s) in which race is framed conceptually and ideologically within societal culture. In other words, if race is a social construct, then philosophers of race attempt to understand what kind of construct it is ("what is race?), how its ontology impacts life (personally, ideologically, socially, and politically), and the possible avenues available to mitigate or eliminate the negative consequences of race.

Jorge J.E. Gracia posits that there are two primary challenges to the race concept within the philosophy of race and ethnicity in his article "Race or Ethnicity: an Introduction." First, there is what he terms the "Factual Challenge." Central to this challenge is the breadth of scientific evidence that shows races are not definable or distinguishable on the basis of an individual's genetic make-up. A second challenge to

[148] Jorge J. E. Gracia, "Race or Ethnicity: An Introduction," in *Race or Ethnicity?: On Black and Latino Identity*. ed. Jorge J. E. Gracia. (Ithaca: Cornell, 2007), 1. For an examples of philosophers who attempt to maintain biological notions of race, see Kitcher's, Philip. *In Mendel's Mirror: Philosophical Reflections of Biology*. Oxford University Press, 2003. and Outlaw, Jr., Lucious, *On Race and Philosophy*. (New York, Routledge, 1996.
[149] Ibid.

race is the "Epistemic Challenge." This challenge often highlights the contextually contingent (localized) and inconsistent properties (i.e. skin color) that are often applied to relegate an individual to a racial group. Due to these problems, there are no concrete and discernable properties that are applicable to races.[150] Gracia also presents several positions found in the philosophy of race that attempt to respond to these challenges. Among these are the 1) substituting of race for ethnicity, 2) replacing race with racial identity, 3) reframing of race and ethnicity as hybrid concepts**,** and 4) re-conceptualizing race in such a way that it avoids the pitfalls of the problem of conception of race in societal culture.[151]

The philosophers that I examine in this chapter draw from philosophy's broad methodological arsenal and knowledge from other disciplines (e.g., genetics) in order to conduct the analysis to make or engage challenges and responses like the ones above. So**,** with Mill's and Gracia's descriptions of philosophy of race in mind, I will explore the metaphysics of race conducted by Charles Mills, Kwame Anthony Appiah, Naomi Zack, and Jorge Gracia. Let us now look at how three of these theorists engage the problem of race.[152]

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[150] Ibid., 1-4.
[151] Jorge J.E Gracia, "Race or Ethnicity: An Introduction." in *Race or Ethnicity?: On Black and Latino Identity*, ed. Jorge J. E. Gracia. (Ithaca: Cornell, 2007), 1.
[152] I will not explore Gracia's approach in this section, because as I will show, his engagement of race is intended to be a supplementary response to Appiah and Zack.

The Problem of Race

Charles S. Mills

Charles Mills puts forth his treatment of race in the book *Blackness Visible,* He seeks to produce a philosophical schematic of the ontological and operative structure of race--a metaphysics of race. Before accomplishing this task he offers a descriptive comparison to illuminate the basic structure of the American system of race.[153] In the chapter entitled, "But What Are You Really?," Mills asks us to imagine a system, called "quace," in which each member of society is designated to be a member of one of three "quaces": Q1, Q2, or Q3. The assignment of one's quace is purely random, no different from being given a name chosen from a hat. Quacial categories themselves are superficial. They are not connected to phenotype, economic status, family, or any other socially relevant variable. Furthermore, quacial membership is disconnected from one's future socio-cultural positioning. Thus, it provides no basis for valuation, oppression, discrimination, privilege, or wealth, nor is it governed by axioms that determine one's inter-quacial and intra-quacial interactions.

Given the nature of this system, it should not be surprising that if one were to inquire of another's quacial designation that the answer would have no ontological import. There would be no need for a more incisive inquiry in hopes of revealing any deeper meaning—no reason to ask "But what are you really?" out of suspicion that one may be withholding the *real* truth about one's quace. Being a member of a particular quace simply means that one just so happens to have received a particular arbitrary

[153] Mills, Charles. *Blackness Visible*. (Ithaca: Cornell, 1998), 44-45.

quacial designation.[154] Mills describes the basic structure of quace as a horizontal system due to inconsequential positioning of its categories and "because it has no present or historical link with political power, economic wealth, cultural influence." It is a system that is "completely disconnected from patterns of discrimination."[155]

It should be evident by now, that Mills's description of the hypothetical system of *quace* differs substantially from our actual system of *race*. It is true that race is not like quace as it is "morphologically/genealogically grounded."[156] This distinction is, for the most part, cosmetic. By itself, phenotype or genotype would not necessitate a claim that race is not a horizontal system. What makes race substantively distinct from quace is that racial groups of this system are stratified circumstantially and ontologically. Races are situated in such a way that one group, whites, are regarded as superior to all other racial groups. Whites are the privileged group socially, historically, economically, and politically, while other races are relegated to comprehensively subaltern statuses.[157] As a result, it is a *vertical* white supremacist system, rather than a *horizontal* racial system.

Charles Mills's description provides a basic blueprint that shows the structure of race--one of a "white supremacist polity." This description neither tells us what constitutes that system, nor how that system constitutes us. However, according to Mills, a person's "racial category has been taken as saying a great deal about what and who one is, more fundamentally."[158] The next step, then, is to attempt to understand the deeper

[154] Ibid., 42.
[155] Ibid.
[156] Ibid.
[157] Ibid., 45.
[158] Ibid.,

metaphysics of this system so that we can ascertain "to what extent and in what ways…is race real, and how deep is this reality."[159]

Mills proposes that a metaphysics of race can assist us in uncovering the realness of race. Borrowing from philosophy of science and meta-ethics, he offers a taxonomy of available positions on what metaphysics of race may look like. Mills suggest that there are two primary types of racial theories, objectivist and anti-objectivist. A racial objectivist theory would affirm the proposition that the existence of race is not contingent on whether we believe or affirm it to be true.[160] There are two types of objectivist theories, realist and constructivist. Realism assigns a valuation of a thing or action. This valuation would be true regardless of what we think or how we feel about that thing. On the metaphysics of race, a realist would claim that races are objectively real.

According to Mills, a stronger version of racial realism would stress the belief that "differences between races are not confined to morphological characteristics of skin and hair types and facial features, but extend to significant intellectual, characterological, and spiritual characteristics also, that there are racial essences." [161] Mills acknowledges that the racial realist view is the most pervasive view in our society. Most people believe in the existences of races as natural human divisions as well as such peculiarities, as Mills notes, as racial blood and the one-drop rule.[162] This point is evidenced by the fact that black ancestry is still the determining factor of black racial membership and that absence of black ancestry is required for white racial membership.

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[159] Ibid.
[160] Ibid
[161] Ibid., 45,46.
[162] Ibid., 46.

Racial constructivism, like racial realism, asserts that race is real. However, there are stark differences between these two positions. Where racial realism supports the notion that race is biologically grounded, racial constructivism asserts that it is a constructed taxonomy. Mills states, "racial constructivism involves an actual agreement of some under conditions where the constraints are not epistemic (getting at the truth) but political (establishing and maintaining privilege); the idealization is pragmatic, instrumental to the best way of achieving this end."[163]

When Mills speaks of the "idealization" within social constructivism, he is referring to the type of agreement that holds the racial system together. He asserts that this agreement is dependent on *idealized intersubjectivity*.[164] To better understand what this means, let us apply the constructivist perspective to Mills's system of quace. Let us imagine that we, as societal members under the system of quace, were given those particular designations of Q1, Q2, and Q3. By our participation in the system, we are in effect agreeing to its operation even if in actuality we do not believe in the legitimacy of its markers. Our participation is our consent and that operative consent gives the system legitimacy. By our treatment of Mills's hypothetical system *as real* it takes on a kind of *realness*. The racial constructivist position would therefore be that race has been constructed this way—only the vertical nature of its racial positioning was intentional and idealized social consensus provides its continued maintenance.

There are three anti-objectivist positions on the metaphysics of race: subjectivism, relativism, and error theory. Racial subjectivism proposes that one's race is

[163] Ibid., 48.
[164] Ibid., 47.

whatever a particular individual wants it to be.[165] The racial subjectivist views race as something similar to quace in that it has no objectively true ontology. Mills argues, however, that the subjectivist position is in error because race is contingent on any one person's belief about races. For example, a person may believe that races are false, but that would not negate the fact that people within the racial polity believe that races are natural kinds.

The position of racial relativism is similar to subjectivism. The difference is that for the racial subjectivists, race is dependent on the beliefs of the individual, but for the racial relativists, the status of race is contingent on the "decisions of a sub-community of like-minded people within a larger population."[166] Mills acknowledges that constructivism has some element of relativism insofar as the realness of race is dependent upon the vertical system. However, the ontology of this system does not permit the status of race to be dependent upon "sub-communities." R2's or R3's, for instance, can hold the belief that races do not exist or that all races are equal. Unfortunately, however, holding this position does not negate that fact that within that system races are thought to exist and to be inherently unequal. So, the racial relativist is in error because it does not reflect the nature of the race system. [167]

Finally, error theory of race would reject the propositions of both the realist and the constructivist in asserting that race is biologically and socially unreal.[168] Once again, the verticality of the system of race and the social, historical, ontological significance of

[165] Ibid., 49.
[166] Ibid.
[167] Ibid.
[168] Ibid.

racial assignment is testament to the social realness of race. [169] Race, in other words, means something within societal culture.

The realist position is the primary opponent in Mills's analysis because as stated earlier, it is the most pervasive view on the metaphysics of race—the view held by most societal members. However, Mills argues that race is socially, contextually, and historically contingent. This is demonstrable by the lack of universality of racial designations. For example, the race system in the United States is different than race in Puerto Rico or Brazil. Furthermore, the scientific community does not support the racial taxonomy nor do they support peculiarities like the one-drop rule.[170] In this sense, race is unreal because racial realism is false. However, race is quite real inasmuch as race is given operational consent by the social members whom it governs. Mills, therefore, endorses the racial constructivist view because it accounts for both the biological falsity of race and social realness of race—a view that acknowledges the intersubjective-objectivity of race while placing itself in opposition to racial realism.[171]

Kwame Anthony Appiah

Kwame Anthony Appiah is an analytical philosopher who, like Charles Mills, challenges the position of the racial realist while attempting to provide an answer to the question "what is race?" The difference between these theorists, however, is that Mills is interested in understand the "social ontology" of race as a white supremacist system,

[169] Ibid., 49-50.
[170] Ibid., 46.
[171] Ibid., 47-50.

while Appiah is concerned with understanding the development and legitimacy of race as a concept.

In his essay," Race, Culture, and Identity: Misunderstood Connections," Appiah posits that "America's social distinctions cannot be understood in terms of the concept of race: the only human race in the United States is *the* human race." [172] To prove this claim, Appiah makes use of two methodologies borrowed from the philosophy of language and the philosophy of science that allow him to play the role of critical race investigator. The first method is called the ideational view of meaning. It involves collecting people's ideas or "criterial beliefs" about the meaning of a word and finding what, if anything, corresponds to those beliefs. For Appiah's purposes, the ideational method will allow him to answer a conceptual version of the question "What is race?"; that is, "What is it that we mean when we speak of race or races?"[173] One potential problem using an ideational method in contemporary society is the variable and sometimes conflicting nature of beliefs about race. Over time, race has come to mean many different things to many different people. To account for this, Appiah uses what he calls a vague criterial theory in conjunction with his ideational method. Under this view, once Appiah has collected criterial beliefs, race will be "something that satisfies a good number of those beliefs."[174] In other words, the goal is to find what is common to all of the criterial beliefs.

It is important for Appiah, however, to obtain the strongest criterial beliefs about race**.** Since our current ideas about race are the weaker remnants of the ideas held by

[172] K. Anthony Appiah and Amy Gutmann. *Color Conscious*, (New Jersey: Princeton, 1996), 32.
[173] Ibid., 33-34.
[174] Ibid.,. 36.

those before us, this necessitates that his ideational analysis look to the past where beliefs about races were the strongest. Thus, an ideational analysis for race must also be a historical analysis. He argues that collecting criterial beliefs of those who are responsible for our current ideas about race, specifically those who existed at a time in which there was "more full-blooded discourse," will provide greater clarity.[175] He states that, "We can explore the ideational structures of which our present talk, so to speak, is the shadow, and then see contemporary uses of the term as drawing from various different structures, sometimes in ways that are not coherent."[176]

Once Appiah is able to collect the ideational criteria for race, he will then employ the second method, the referential view of meaning. This position asserts that if we want to discover the meaning of a word, then we need to find the thing to which that word refers.[177] Appiah uses a version of this view utilized by the philosophy of science called the "causal theory of reference." According to this theory, we must "find that thing in the world that gives the best causal explanation" of a word.[178] So, Appiah's referential method asks that he use the criterial beliefs about race gathered from his ideational view to find the referent that caused our beliefs about races.[179]

Appiah explains that our common criterial beliefs about race are generally assumed by most to be grounded in science. Questions about race have been deferred to the experts—scientists. So, for the purposes of his analysis, Appiah uses persons who would have been considered the experts of their respective times. One of the persons,

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[175] Ibid., 38.
[176] Ibid.
[177] Ibid.,. 34.
[178] Ibid., 36.
[179] Ibid., 40-41.

Thomas Jefferson, was an instrumental participant in the racial discourse that took place in the United States in the early 1800s.[180]

For Jefferson, characteristics such as hair, intelligence, creativity, courage, disposition, beauty, smell, skin color, were naturally distributed among racial groups. This means that whites, for example, had more physical beauty, a greater propensity to produce great art, literature, and were intelligent, while the natural makeup of blacks caused them to smell unpleasantly and lack intellectual ability. [181] So, for Jefferson, race is "a concept that is invoked to explain cultural and social phenomena, it is also grounded in the physical and psychological natures of the different races; it is, in other words, what we would call a biological concept."[182]

Appiah draws a similar conclusion when investigating criterial beliefs of famous late 19th century British literary critic, Matthew Arnold. Unlike Jefferson's criterial beliefs, Arnold's beliefs about race were not based on a black/white racial binary. Rather, his races included groups such as the Saxons, Normans, and Celts. He believed that each race carries with it an essence that contains certain positive and negative characteristics. For example, he attributes tendencies such as spirituality or "love of beauty" to the Celts and tendencies like vigorousness and insolence to the Normans. These essences were heritable and therefore could be combined with other essences through the biological intermingling of races. Such essences could even present themselves in the creative products of their biological owners. Indeed, according to Arnold, the existence of

[180] Ibid., 42,43.
[181] Ibid., 44-46.
[182] Ibid., 49.

different moral characteristics in the British literature was a consequence of the mixing of racial essences of the Celtic and Saxon essences.[183]

Both Thomas Jefferson and Matthew Arnold's beliefs about race constitute what Appiah calls racialism. It is a view that is homogenous with Mills's description of the realist position of the metaphysics of race (an equivalence that Mills acknowledges in his work).[184] Appiah states that it is the belief that "we could divide human beings into a small number of groups, called 'races', in such a way that the members of these groups shared certain fundamental, heritable, physical, moral, intellectual, and cultural characteristics with one another that they did not share with members of any other race."[185] Appiah points out the scientific dubiousness of their claims. Thomas Jefferson, for example, espoused his views of biological races before there was an actual field of biology. During Jefferson's time, there was only a field of natural history, which would not have been able to account for a biological notion of race.[186] Thus, there would not have been strong empirical grounding for the belief that races were biological entities nor any reason to presume that "talents" or character traits were heritable. Where Jefferson's racialism was unfounded, Arnold's was incomplete. Appiah points out that Arnold's view has no inheritance theory that can explain the biological interactions and racial diffusion of essences, nor does he provide an account of "how we balance the effects of nature and the effects of culture."[187] Appiah attests that Darwin's work detailing his theory of evolution had been published years before Arnold was presenting his beliefs about

[183] Ibid., 57-58.
[184] Mills, *Blackness*, 44.
[185] Appiah, *Color*, 54.
[186] Ibid., 49.
[187] Ibid., 60.

races.[188] Arnold's usage of the term race did not cohere with the scientific meaning of race of his time period. So, where Arnold was speaking about a conception of race in which racially distinct essences were transmitted biologically, Darwin was speaking about the role of environment in determining the fate of biological traits via natural selection.[189]

Appiah argues that the criterial beliefs of Jefferson and Arnold fail on the ideational view. These beliefs do not cohere with what is currently known about human biology. Biology, simply put, does not account for moral and cultural traits, nor does it support the existence of human essences thought to entail characteristics. However, what contemporary science does support is that humans are genetic creatures subject to the circumstances of our surrounding environment. Furthermore, Appiah points out that even the *actual* biological traits that were attributed to races by Jefferson could not be captured by just one classificatory system. There are multiple biological classifications that could be created to account for these traits in human beings. Therefore, under the ideational view, there are no races.[190]

Under the referential view, the concept of race does not fare any better. Appiah looks to two possible referents to fit the biological criteria. The first referent is a "population," a "community of potentially interbreeding individuals at a given locality."[191] Appiah offers two senses in which the term populations could potentially be appropriate. The first is a more technical usage of the term, used by population

[188] Ibid., 64.
[189] Ibid., 65.
[190] Ibid., 72.
[191] Ibid., 72.

geneticists, in which populations could denote isolated, genetically diverse groups that are able to interbreed with one another. Appiah notes that this usage of the term population is more applicable to plants and animals where one will find different strains and breeds. However, this is not true of humans.[192] For example, the difference between what we consider black and white race is not like the differences between the Cairn terrier and the Yorkshire terrier breeds in dogs. Rather, humans are more like one of those breeds, only genetically isolated, because there are no other human breeds.

Another view of population could be a "relatively reproductive" isolated community within a given locale. Appiah contends that there are isolated groups in the US, such as the Amish, that could qualify. However, this conception of populations fails to correspond to the biological characteristics used to denote the racial groups "blacks" and "whites."[193]

Appiah proposes that a second possible referent for the biological criteria of race could be "groups defined by skin color, hair, and gross morphology, corresponding to the dominant pattern for these characteristics in the major subcontinental regions…."[194] He argues, however, that given the human variation of phenotype and morphology amongst Americans, sometimes a result of biological intermingling, categories may or may not provide for a perfect fit for everyone, if at all. Furthermore, he asserts that this referent offers no biological or social import.[195]

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[192] Ibid., 73.
[193] Ibid.
[194] Ibid.
[195] Ibid., 73.

He concludes his analysis by asserting the futility of the concept of race. Not only does it fail under the ideational view, but he states that "you can get various possible candidates from the referential notion of meaning, but none of them will be much good for explaining social or psychological life, and none of them corresponds to the social groups that we call 'races' in America."[196] So, in regard to the traditional race concept, we can say that Appiah is an eliminativist.

So far, I have presented an overview of the theories of two philosophers of race. To review, social and political philosopher Charles Mills offers a theoretical framework that, in opposition to the realist position, proposes that race as white supremacist polity maintained by idealized intersubjective agreement. The realist is also posited as a dominant false position held within the context of that system. Analytical philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah provides a conceptual analysis of race that attempts to demonstrate that our contemporary conception of race is based on racialism (realism), and that racialism is false. In Appiah's theory, the realist position gets framed causally.

I will later show how both of these theorists center their accounts of race in their analysis of issues such as racial identity and racism. For now, however, let us turn to a brief discussion of another theorist--a philosopher of race who is perhaps known for offering a comprehensive engagement of the race concept.

Naomi Zack

As stated earlier, Mills and Appiah are attempting to provide a theoretical account of what race *is* (although for Appiah it is a necessary antecedent step). Philosopher

[196] Ibid.

Naomi Zack, however, seeks to demonstrate what race *is not* (in this sense she reconverges with Appiah). To accomplish this, she makes use of a wider set of philosophical approaches ranging from general methodologies in the philosophy of language, philosophy of science, existentialism, and traditional philosophy.

In the book *Philosophy of Science and Race*, Zack takes up an analytical argument against the biological conception of race. She argues that most people are committed to a position of minimal realism. It is the belief that,

> "There is a world that exists independently of thought, sensation, perception, language, and other symbolic representation. Information about this world is accessible through the human senses. Similar sensory conditions and sensory equipment result in the same or equivalent symbolic descriptions among different observers. The sensory information thus agreed upon can be combined in agreed-upon ways to result in knowledge."[197]

The "world" that exists independently for the minimal realist would include the physical world.[198] With that being said, Zack's argument can be summarized as follows: Most people [within the context of the American public] believe that scientists are the primary authority on knowledge of this world. Most people also believe that races are natural kinds and that this position is scientifically grounded. If it is not the case that science supports the existences of human races as biological entities, then it is not logical to maintain the belief in human races.[199] So, in *Philosophy of Science and Race*, Zack's methodology, arguing from the realist position, attempts to show that there is no

[197] Naomi Zack, *Philosophy of Race and Science*. (New York: Routledge, 2005) 5.
[198] Ibid.
[199] Ibid,. 2-7.

biological basis for race, by challenging positions defending a scientific basis for race—positions that argue that traits like skin color are the products of races.

There is some interesting overlap between Zack's theory and both Mills's and Appiah's. To some, Zack taking up a realist position may seem in contradiction to Mills's constructivist position. However, I argue that Zack's argument from the realist position illuminates an implicit realism inherent in Mills's and Appiah's theories; that is, like Naomi Zack, they both rely on science to prove the falsity of the racial realist position. Thus, there would have to be a commitment on both of their parts to a position of minimal *scientific* realism.

It is also worth noting that there are methodological and conceptual parallels between Appiah's and Zack's analysis. Indeed, Zack's analysis could be considered an expanded and more scientifically exhaustive version of Appiah's analysis. Zack's starting point, like Appiah's, is the belief in racialism found in those who preceded us. She examines the racialism of philosophical thinkers Immanuel Kant and David Hume (as opposed to Thomas Jefferson and Matthew Arnold).[200] She furthermore suggests a causal connection to contemporary racial realism. She states, "Hume and Kant's kind of unquestioning belief in the existences of races in private folk belief and in many quasi-empirical and "soft" intellectual areas, which include: defenses of anthropological typologies and critiques of these typologies…; claims of race-based links in the habitability of intelligence."[201] It is these racialist beliefs that she seeks to overturn by demonstrating that there is no scientific basis for them. Thus, the parallels between Zack

[200] Ibid.,13-23. Zack uses Appiah's descriptors of "intrinsic and extrinsic racism," two forms of racialism, to describe Kant and Hume. These distinctions will be discussed later in this essay.
[201] Ibid., 23.

and Appiah are vivid**.** It serves as an example of how philosophers of race are in constant dialogue with one another. Moreover, it shows how these theorists attempt to refine each other's positions. In Zack's case, she is doing what Appiah's conceptual analysis using the philosophy of language does not require; that is, she is placing the conceptual battle more firmly in the territory of the sciences, the last line of defense for the racial realist, to make a more complete case for why we need to abandon the race concept.

Now that we have examined how three of our theorists approach the problem of race, we will now turn our attention to these theorists' engagement of race as it relates to factors such as identity and ethnicity. I will also introduce the race theory of Jorge Gracia as he attempts to engage some of the positions that follow. Let us first begin, however, with Charles Mills as he engages racial identity.

Race and Identity

Mills on Racial Identity

Charles Mills's question "But what are you really?" represents a very complex conundrum for most anti-realist or anti-racialist philosophers of race. Even though race is biologically false, it has ontological implications in social life. One of the problematic characteristics of race is that it is not an ideal system. An ideal system of race would "have rules that regulate its interstructure and guarantee as far as possible its reproduction…every person in the system should have a designation, R1, R2, R3….if there are people for whom that designation is R0, then this would be an outcome of the

system rules."[202] He goes on to say that in an ideal system, the rules must be concise and account for all potential ambiguities, intra-racial offspring, the offspring of those offspring, newcomer to the system, etc.[203]

Since race lacks concise and lucid internal rules to govern, then attempting to ascertain the criteria that could determine one's racial identity can be problematic. How then can we know who we are in the ontologically deep sense?[204] Mills demonstrates this by testing criterion to see how they could measure up as indicators of one's racial identity. One of these candidates encompasses standard criteria for determining race, phenotype and morphology. The problem with phenotypic traits, like skin color, for example, is that it is not a failsafe criterion for determining one's real metaphysical status. It is possible that someone who "looks white," lives her life as a white person, is therefore taken to be intrinsically white. However, in American society, a revelation that she has some "black blood," would mean that she was never *really* white, but instead an ontologically black person pretending to be white.[205] The one-drop rule, therefore, undermines physical bases for race, as criteria for racial identity.

Another candidate for racial identity is culture. Mills contends that under the realist metaphysics that culture would be a result of one's racial biology. This means that there would be a biological commitment to use one's own cultural products. To carry out this commitment would be to be true to one's ontological self. On the other hand, to use the cultural products of another race would be an act of *true-self* negation. Thus, playing

[202] Mills, *Blackness*, 43.
[203] Ibid.
[204] Ibid., 50, 51.
[205] Ibid., 51.

both the banjo and the guitar should cause a metaphysical dilemma within that person. Mills correctly points out, however, that American culture is a composite made up of a multiplicity of cultural influences from every continent. This is not generally acknowledged within the broader context of American culture, even though it is true at its most basic levels. The vertical white supremacist system facilitates a selective racial co-opting of the products of cultural syncretism--one that, to use my previous example, allows the African banjo to become a white cultural product.[206] Mills's analysis reveals that other potential criteria for racial identity, ancestral awareness, experience, and self-identification suffer similar problems, leaving the problem of identity within a vertical race system unsettled.[207]

Zack on Mixed Race Identity

These sentiments are echoed in Naomi Zack's *Race and Mixed Race*, her critique of the exclusive nature of a binary concept of race. She asserts "the American biracial system does not permit the identification of individuals, in the third person, as mixed race. If individuals cannot be identified, in the third person, as mixed race, then it is impossible for them to have mixed race identities, in the first person."[208]

Through an existential analysis, she shows how a racial "kinship schema" that accompanies the race concept requires one to ask Mills's question, "But what are you really?" as "what are they?" That is because one's racial identity is contingent upon the

[206] Ibid.,. 53.
[207] Ibid.
[208] Naomi Zack, *Race and Mixed Race*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 4.

racial identities of one's forebears.[209] The kinship schema structures whites and blacks as two separate families, each with its own particular guidelines to claim an identity within those families. According to Zack, white identity is closely connected with our folk concept of race (racialism). The white family scheme follows the one-drop rule—a rule meant to maintain white racial purity. The white family schema, however, goes beyond the one-drop rule, which limits itself to ancestry. For a person to have a white identity under the white family schema not only can she not have any black ancestors, she also cannot have any black descendents or spouses, as they too will act as a basis by which to race her. Thus, white identity is a denial of blackness and an affirmation of white superiority.[210]

According to Zack, the black family schema is the same as the white family schema, except it encompasses a broader notion of what is considered white. The black family schema uses phenotype for racial designation. Thus, people who belong to groups that normally considered "white" (some Latinos, Turks, Sicilians, etc.) by the white family schema may be considered non-white in the black schema. So, in the black schema, for someone to be considered white, she must satisfy both the descent condition and the phenotype condition.[211] Zack asserts that, in general, blacks do not share the same biological conception of race as whites, meaning there is no necessary belief that they are ontologically inferior to whites or that whites have better intrinsic qualities. Sometimes, black identity entails an oppositional view towards whites because they feel

[209] Ibid., 52.
[210] Ibid., 19-29.
[211] Ibid., 37.

that whites are in control.[212] However, this does not negate the fact that the physical concept of race is central to the binary racial family model. The black schema affirms the white schema by excluding others from white racial membership and by assigning black membership to those whose race is ambiguous. In other words, a person must be designated either white or black, even if she has black and white ancestors, thereby leaving no room for a mixed race identity.[213]

Mills and Zack's visions appear compatible. Mills frames the issue of racial identity in the context of a vertical political framework--one that positions identities hierarchically but also, as a consequence, in opposition to one another. Zack's existential presentation provides a demonstration of how a race-based white/black family framework inhibits the emergence of mixed identity. It could be argued that Zack's analysis shows the non-idealness of the vertical race system. We will now see how Appiah moves his discussion of identity into more normative territory, offering an analytical re-conception of racial identity that is sensitive to the biological falseness and social realness of race.

Appiah on Racial Identity

Appiah, like Mills, rejects culture as a suitable replacement for the concept of race, if what is meant by culture are shared values, products, and beliefs. He asserts that the belief that the black racial group has a common culture-a culture that is universally held amongst blacks within the United States is something that is in need of proof. He points out that the common contention regarding blacks and culture is that if *x* is assumed

[212] Ibid., 37-38. This is a view echoed by Charles Mills. He states that "as long as a structure of privilege exists in the United States (and elsewhere) claims to racial identity….to affirm whiteness in this context is to affirm white entitlement to privilege; to affirm blackness is to challenge black exclusion." *Blackness*, 93.
[213] Ibid,. 3-4.

to be a member of the black racial group, then *x* is assumed to have a particular culture regardless of whether or not it reflects *x*'s experienced culture.[214] Appiah refers to this spurious view, that cultural is disseminated to individuals biologically, as "cultural geneticism"—a view that he likens back to Matthew Arnold's racialism. [215] Appiah also points out that diasporic notions of culture treat blacks as though there is an "authentic self" and Africa American cultural identity as though constructed independently of white society.[216] Appiah rejects this view. He states,

> "African-American identity…is centrally shaped by American society and institutions: it cannot be seen as constructed solely within African-American communities. African-American culture, if this means shared belief, values, practices, does not exist: what exists are African-American cultures, and though these are created and sustained in large measure by African-Americans, they cannot be understood without reference to the bearers of other American racial identities."[217]

So, for example, it would be difficult to speak of cultural products that are typically attributed to black people (Christianity, gangster rap, or "soul food,") without understanding the role white persons, white-favored institutions or conditions played in the creation of racially designated cultural ownership.

Appiah argues that racial identity may be the most optimal replacement for the concept of race. Racial identities are generally already ascribed to us and labels can have

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[214] Appiah, *Color*, 83-90.
[215] Ibid., 90-91. Appiah credits Henry Louis Gates for this terminology.
[216] Ibid., 94-95.
[217] Ibid., 95-96.

a significant effect on how we look at ourselves and how we live our lives. In general, labels affect the process called "identification." He describes this as "the process through which an individual intentionally shapes her projects---including her plans for her own life and her conception of the good—by reference to available labels and available identities."[218] He contends that sometimes labels can come with the expectation that we perform a particular way in a particular context. For example, the label "professor," as generally perceived in the university setting, may compel us to present ourselves with a degree of authority, to dress a certain way, or to modify our common way of speaking. These types of labels are more superficial. There would be little expectation that a professor perform her identity to her friends, family, or sales clerk. They ask nothing of us other than to act in a particular ways, in particular times and places.[219]

Racial labels, on the other hand, have a deeper dimension. They are different from labels like "professor" because their expectations are ontologically mandated. To borrow the phrase from Mills again, the labels are expected to provide the answer to "but what are you, really?" and prescribe actions in deference to that answer.[220] Appiah states that "because ascription of racial identities—the process of applying the label to people, including ourselves—is based on more than intentional identification that there can be a gap between what a person inscriptively is and the racial identity he performs: it is this gap that makes passing possible."[221]

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[218] Ibid., 78.
[219] Ibid., 78-79.
[220] Ibid., 79.
[221] Ibid.

Appiah further insists that identification is not always voluntary, as some identities are ascribed to us by general consensus, but we are able to control how much those identities shape our lives. Racial identity is an example of this. However, the physical bases, social realities, consequence, and consensus for racial ascription make controlling the centrality of the racial identity more difficult.[222] Historically, the recognition of racial identity has been based on the tendency to focus on the body as a basis for collective identity. So, one conceives of herself as connected to others based on something ontologically shared: "I *am* black, that person *is* black, and therefore, we share *blackness*." The result has led to a reaffirmation of racial essences. This has been the mistake in the politics of identity—to look to the body for the answers. [223]

Appiah's proposal is that we decentralize the body, in this regard, and instead conceive of racial identities in terms of the label, itself, as it has always been what determines the terms and consequences of racial membership. Recognizing the importance of identity in the politics of identity, Appiah offers this re-conception of racial identity as,

> "***R***, associated with ascriptions by most people (where ascription involves descriptive criteria for applying the label); and identifications by those that fall under it (where identifications implies a shaping role for the label in the intentional acts of the possessors, so that they sometimes act *as an* ***R***), where there

[222] Ibid.
[223] Ibid., 81.

is a history associating that label with an inherited racial essence (even if some who use the label no longer believe in racial essence)."[224]

Under Appiah's view, one's racial identity does not suppose racial essence, but also does not have to deny that an essence was historically attached to it; it is *racial* without being *racialist*. I can conceive of that identity as being connected with others who share that designation, without having to affirm what is designated. As a result of its ontological disentanglement, I can, if I desire, regard that identity as any other—of some, little or no importance in regard to how I choose to live my life. It can be arbitrary or it can be an ethical identity. This allows for identities to have political import, without the ontological import. Appiah's proposal of racial identity can therefore provide a response for those who resist Mills's system and Zack's schemas. That is because it allows one to acknowledge the constructedness of the designated racial labels, without having to endorse the ontological content that usually accompanies those labels.

Jorge Gracia on Race, Ethnicity, and Identity

Jorge Gracia attempts to respond to the challenge of making sense out of race while responding to the critiques of theorists such as Appiah. Gracia rejects racial and ethnic essentialism "not only because it is false but also because it freezes groups of people in certain states and circumstances preventing them from adapting to different situations in order to satisfy effectively the conditions imposed on them by their environment."[225] However, he believes that Appiah (and many scientists) are acting too hastily in concluding that race is incoherent because it fails to correspond to anything that

[224] Ibid.
[225] Gracia, *Surviving*, 144.

actually exists in the world. Gracia maintains that even if race is a social construct, it has properties that make it distinguishable from other human categorization systems. [226] For example, we typically understand that "black" denotes race while "Haitian-American" denotes ethnicity and that Haitian denotes a nationality.

Gracia also takes issue with the assumption that if something is a social construct then it is automatically dangerous. After all, he asserts, we group each other in multitudes of socially constructed ways (e.g. height) all the time with seemingly little consequence. Another problem for theorists who side with Appiah is that there are some scientists who assert that there is some genetic variation between groups of humans that may indeed fall within the boundaries of the traditional concept of race. Gracia further points out the fact that there is broad agreement amongst scientists that humans can be grouped genetically. While he is not claiming to advocate for the traditional concept of race, he does believe that the aforementioned issues are sufficient enough for showing some restraint in regard to dismissing race as a concept.[227]

Like Appiah, Mills, and Zack, Gracia believes that attempting to understand race is a valuable undertaking. He, thus, attempts to offer a nuanced, heuristic presentation of race that attempts to free its essentialist metaphysics and that also disentangles race from the ethnic paradigm. Gracia believes that leaving race and ethnicity untouched is dangerous. He believes that it is necessary to provide adequate explanations of the concepts of race and ethnicity that will make it possible to make sense of what it is that

[226] Ibid.,77-81.
[227] Ibid., 81,82.

we are referring to when we talk about race or ethnicity. Let us look first at Gracia's formula concerning ethnicity, the "Familial-Historical View." He states,

> "An ethnos is a subgroup of individual humans who satisfy the following conditions: (1) they belong to many generations; (2) they are organized as a family and break down into extended families; and (3) are united through historical relations that produce features that, in context, serve (i) to identify the members of the group and (ii) to distinguish them from members of other groups."[228]

Ethnicity, for Gracia, is simply the relation(s) that binds individuals within the group to one another. In other words, an individual's ethnicity consists of her having whatever particular feature or features connect her to that ethnos.[229]

To summarize Gracia's view, for a group to be considered an ethnos it must have a period of development that lasts over multiple generations. To understand Gracia's second condition, it is important to recognize how he conceives of the notion of family. There are several types of families, including the nuclear family, which would include what we tend to consider our immediate family (partner, spouse, children, etc) and the extended family which could include those family members not residing with you or who perhaps have their own families (cousins, in-laws, step-cousins, etc). For membership in a family, it is not necessary that a family be related genetically. For instance, if x marries y, then x becomes part of y's family and y becomes part of x's family. X's father, for example, become's y's father-in-law. If x and y adopt a child, then that child becomes

[228] Ibid., 54.
[229] Ibid., 52-54.

part of both x's and y's family. One's membership in a family might be the result of being x's adopted son, and another's membership might be a consequences of marrying that son. Thus, as in the case of nuclear and extended families, there does not have to be a common feature binding for all members of the family.[230]

Gracia maintains that an ethnos consists of similarly variable, historical relationships to the aforementioned types of families. He uses as an example, what he considers a Hispanic ethnos. There are a wide variety of available features that allow a person to have a Hispanic ethnicity. Examples of this are, a person who was born in Puerto Rico, or who was born in Germany but grew up in Spain, or who is the child of someone whose mother grew up in Mexico. In all of these cases, these people would be regarded as Hispanic because of their particular relationships to the ethnos. For Gracia, all that matters in regard to an individual's ethnicity is that the individual has a feature(s) that is distinct to her ethnos. This does not mean that the individual shares that feature with all other Hispanic persons, only that she shares a feature that is considered distinctive to that particular group. Those historical features might be filial (mother-stepdaughter), social, linguistic (language), cultural (shared customs), and even biological (blood relative). These factors are contingent on the historical development of a particular ethnos, because it is through the course of this history that what counts as relevant features are determined.[231]

An important aspect to Gracia's Familial-Historical View is the overall contingency of an ethnos and its membership. Gracia states that "[e]thne are fluid, open,

[230] Ibid., 46-50.
[231] Ibid., 49, 50.

and changing; members come and go, enter and leave, as they forge themselves and with members of other groups depending on particular and contingent circumstances."[232] If a person from Denver, Colorado is Hispanic because she resides in Puerto Rico after marrying someone who is Puerto-Rican, then it is possible that she can leave that ethnos by simply moving back to the Denver. This is because moving away for Puerto-Rico would sever the historical relation that connects her to members of the Hispanic ethnos.[233] It is also quite possible for an individual to have multiple ethnicities. For instance, someone might be a member of Gracia's "Hispanic" pan-ethnic group, but have also have a distinctive feature of another possible ethnos (or ethne), such as "African American."[234]

We are able to see here how Jorge Gracia's description of ethnicity escapes the type of essentialism that is often applied to ethnic and ethno-racial groups. An essentialist concept of ethnicity would mean that there is some fixed property that the individual of an ethnos shares with all members who share that ethnicity. Gracia's Familial-Historical View, recognizes that 1) the development of the ethnos is historically contingent, 2) the relations within the ethnos vary from person to person, 3) the properties used to determine membership are historically and contextually contingent, and 4) that the individual is not bound to that ethnos as its membership is always in flux either as a result of either the actions of the individual (e.g. severing ethnic relations) or the evolution (e.g. changing criteria for membership) or possible dissolution of the ethnos.

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[232] Ibid., 52.
[233] Ibid.
[234] Ibid., 72-73.

Now that we have examined Gracia's account of ethnicity, let us investigate the concept of race, another type of family.[235] Gracia calls his theory of race the Common Bundle View.[236] It states,

> "A race is a subgroup of individual human beings who satisfy the following conditions: (1) each member of the group is linked by descent to another member of the group who is in turn also linked by descent to at least some third member of the group; and (2) each member of the group has one or more features that are (i) genetically transmittable, (ii) generally associated with the group, and (iii) perceptually perspicuous."[237]

In Gracia's Common Bundle View, race, like ethnicity, is a matter of the individual having the appropriate historical relation that binds him to other members of his racial group. However, the primary divergence from ethnicity is that links such as marriage, language, or cultural practices bear no metaphysical import for racial membership. Instead, for Gracia, the defining aspect of race is the historical, genetic link between racial members; this is an aspect that would have only been sufficient, but not necessary for some ethnicities (depending on the properties that emerged from an ethnos's development). To be linked by descent means that the pertinent relationships are matters of birth. For instance, *x* might be an ***R*** because *x*'s mother is an ***R***. If *x* also has a phenotypic feature considered indicative of *x*'s race, such as black hair, then *x* as has satisfied the second condition thereby making *x* an ***R***.

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[235] Ibid., 88.
[236] Ibid., 82.
[237] Ibid., 85.

In the three stipulations for the second condition, we see several ways in which Gracia's racial metaphysics attempts to avoid the essentialism of our traditional notion of race; that is, there is some essential property each member of a racial group has that makes her of that race. First, his view does not posit a feature (or set of features) that could be construed as a collective essence. Rather, he is asserting that an individual need only have one of the collectively assigned, but not collective held features. As with ethnicity, there is no feature that is common to all members of a race. Thus, Gracia is acknowledging the high variability of persons who were assigned to racial groups. Secondly, it is clear that, for Gracia, these features designated to a particular race are socially determined, as they are "generally associated" with a particular race as opposed to being properties intrinsic of the individual.

A third way in which Gracia's Common Bundle View avoids essentialism is by responding directly to Naomi Zack's contention that the racial identity schema is asymmetrical and therefore does not permit mixed race identities. Gracia agrees with Zack on this matter, but argues that under the criteria that he has provided, the one-drop rule for racial identity has no place in his model precisely because of this asymmetry, which favors the notion of white purity. In other words, with the traditional model of race, not only are the features of the bundle different, but the rules for determining racial membership are also dissimilar from race to race. Gracia holds that the Common Bundle View provides an objective way to determine what race and racial identity entails. As was the case with ethnicity, it is quite possible for an individual to have multiple races. All that would be required is that a person can share one or more distinct descent links (even if that link is from the same parent or grandparent) and have observable features

considered indicative of those races. That means a person could theoretically be white, black, and even a member of any other group that qualifies as a race.[238] Thus, Gracia's conception of race is able to avoid the existential problems regarding mixed identity that concern Zack.

As we have seen, race and ethnicity do share some aspects in common such as both being predicated on historical and familial relations and no common feature-requirement for membership as well as sharing differences. Namely, there is the descent link that acts as a necessary feature for a race, while it is only one of many possible sufficient, but not necessary, features for an ethnos. Moreover, there are also "genetically transmittable," socially designated, phenotypic features of races as opposed to the variable types of features of ethne that emerge from its historical development.

Gracia takes issue with those who strategically attempt to posit ethnic races or racial ethne, which, as I pointed out earlier, is one of the responses to the factual and epistemic challenges to race. He claims that this view is based on the assumption that the ethnicity and race are now intrinsically bound together, and thus "1) one cannot speak sensibly about race apart from ethnicity, or vice versa, and 2) one cannot classify someone as a member of a race and not of an ethnos, or vice versa."[239]

Gracia offers several reasons why we should not confuse race and ethnicity. First, he maintains that it is important that we understand these concepts before we attempt to use them in conjunction with one another. Secondly, there is often resistance to the

[238] Ibid., 88-92.
[239] Ibid., 149.

conflation by those who do not fit its narrative. Finally, biological and social scientists do not maintain this correlation between a racial genetics and cultural production.[240]

Gracia argues that the reason that there is a tendency to treat race and ethnicity in a singular manner is because ethnicity, as he has described it, permits descent and morphology as potential features for an ethnos in the same way that it permits other factors such as culture or language. However, these features are contingent upon the dictates of historical development and therefore are able to change over time. This is not the case regarding race, however, because the presence of genetically transferable racial identifiers is a necessary condition for a group to be considered a race. So, Gracia asserts, in some circumstances it is possibly useful to talk about a particular ethnos in racial terms. However, it is inappropriate to do so without a mindfulness of that ethnic group's historical and circumstantial contexts.[241]

Another basis for confusing race and ethnicity is a consequence of the view that race and ethnicity are in a symbiotically productive relationship in which each yields characteristics for the other. Gracia offers the following example:

> "racial identification often leads to segregation, and this in turn may result in the development of an ethnos. The segregation of "Blacks" tends to link them together in ways that separate them from other races. This strengthens their historical interrelations and tends to produce ethnic features. Thus, one may speak

[240] Ibid., 35-36.
[241] Ibid., 149.

of a "Black" ethnos, characterized by "Black" food, customs, values, and so on."[242]

However, Gracia goes on to say that race and ethnicity are still different in this regard. When a person of a particular race is said to internalize or perform the ontology of a different race, it is not race that is being referenced, as there is no mention of any genetically transmitted features. Rather, such claims concern ethnic or cultural features, which, of course, speak to an ethnic dimension.[243]

Gracia does state that ethnic features can facilitate the development of racial features, noticing how social mores can lead to ethnic isolation, which in turn results in phenotypic features. For, example, racial segregation in the south, may have lead to distinct bundles of physical features (skin color range) that become racially marked as "white" or "black."[244] However, Gracia points, out that there are several circumstantial factors that are able to facilitate the creation of ethnic or racial features (e.g. religious segregation, geography, economics, social mobility).[245] However, this provides a greater mandate, in Gracia's view, to keep race and ethnicity separate categories because the conflation of these constructs makes little sense when there are ways of understanding them, such as the Familial-Historical View of ethnicity and the Common Bundle View of race.[246]

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242 Ibid., 149-150.
243 Ibid., 150.
244 Ibid.
245 Ibid., 150.
246 Ibid.

Now that I have examined how these theorists approach issues such as identity and ethnicity, let us now turn to a brief sketch that shows how these philosophers frame the concept of race in relation to the problem of racism.

Racialism, Racism, and White Supremacy

It is common in academic scholarship to centralize such problems as racism and white supremacy without reference to the consequential role that the race construct actually plays in these matters. However, the four philosophers of race that I have investigated here see race as intrinsically bound to the issues of racism. This is perhaps most evident with Kwame Anthony Appiah. His theory of racism is, in actuality, a theory of racialism. Racialism, remember, is the belief in human races each of which share their own distinct and exclusive biological and non-biological traits; it is the belief in racial essences. Appiah contends that even though racialism is a false doctrine, as long as positive moral qualities are distributed across races, each can be respected, can have its 'separate but equal' place" in a world of racial identification.[247] He argues, however, that racialism is presupposed by two racialist doctrines, extrinsic racism and intrinsic racism. Extrinisic racism is the belief that races have morally relevant qualities that act as a basis for discriminating against that race (favorably or unfavorably). These qualities can be positive or negative. So, for example, if a person refuses to associate with a person of a different race because they believe that each member of that race is uncreative, then they are extrinsic racist. In the face of evidence that disproves the extrinsic racist's belief,

[247] Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Racisms" *Ethics In Practice*. Ed. Hugh LaFollette. (Malden: Blackwell, 1997.), 376.

she relinquishes that belief. If they will not relinquish that belief, then she either has a cognitive incapacity that prevents her from doing so or she is an intrinsic racist. [248]

The intrinsic racist, on the other hand, believes that one's race is an indicator of moral status. An example of an intrinsic racist would be someone who will not associate with whites because she considers them morally inferior. Unlike, the sincere extrinsic racist, the intrinsic racist cannot be swayed by evidence. Appiah also argues that an intrinsic racist extends her positive moral consideration to those with whom she shares racial membership. Thus, race for the intrinsic racist is like family. Examples of this form of racism would be the Ku Klux Klan, or Black Nationalism, the former being based on "shared moral character" for exclusion and the latter representing inclusion, for the sake of solidarity.[249]

There are a couple of points worthy of note about Appiah's racialist triad. The first, perhaps obvious, point is that, its impossible to talk about racism without acknowledging the false belief about races. So, in effect, racism is the *acting out* of racialism. A second point is that this conception racism provides a broader coverage, when it comes to classifying acts as it encompasses both subtle and overt or extreme forms of racism. A final point is that the racism is not necessarily asymmetrical in terms of who is guilty of racism. So, if we apply Appiah's doctrines to Mills's vertical race system, it is possible that an *R3* can be intrinsically racist against *R1* or *R2* as much as *R1* can be racist against *R2* or *R3*. So Appiah's view is not meant to account for the stratified power differential of the American race system (white supremacy, distribution of

[248] Ibid., 377.
[249] Ibid., 281,282.

property, etc). Rather, it is intended to show the possible racialist and racist ideological positions available *within* the American race system.

In *Race and Mixed Race*, Naomi Zack makes use of Appiah's distinction of intrinsic racism to illuminate the white family kinship schema, asserting that the doctrine is a prerequisite to her own distinctions of racism, unintentional and intentional racism.[250] She states,

> "[u]nintentional racism involves assumptions [on the part of whites] that blacks (and perhaps other people of color as well) that are not included in the important activities of one's life. It is not necessary always to be aware of one's own whiteness while living in this exclusion; one simply lives in a white world and non-whites are only occasional and important agents in that world."[251]

So**,** this type of racism involves passive indifference of non-whites, such as knowing blacks but not associating with them, not having blacks in your life, even not having to know any blacks. What makes unintentional racists "racist" is that they participate in a system in which black people are treated unfairly. Unintentional racism is like a weaker extrinsic racism in that it does not require a strong commitment to the belief in biological races. Their differential acts are due to their blind adherence to cultural norms that promote such acts.[252] At the same time, most racialists would likely be unintentional racists by this view, unless they are actively attempting to prevent racism or to include blacks in their lives.

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[250] Zack, *Mixed*, 26.
[251] Ibid., 26.
[252] Ibid., 25.

Intentional racism "entails a frequent or constant awareness that one is white, accompanied by strong value-negative judgments against blacks."[253] Intentional racists practice more overt forms of racism such as participating in hate groups or purposely attempting to undermine equality for blacks. Operatively, it seems like a less subtle from of intrinsic racism, only its commitment to the belief in racially inherited (presumably cultural or moral) traits is a matter of probability. In the cases of both unintentional and intentional racism, the operant white kinship schema presupposes the validity of the American racial paradigm.[254]

So, for Appiah and Zack, it is impossible talk about the problem of racism without first addressing the traditional concept of race, because racialism authorizes racism. If we take into account Mills's description of the vertical system and the metaphysical position on race against which he has positioned himself ~~against~~, it is evident that there is agreement between Mills and Zack. Like Zack's binary racial schema, Mills's vertical race system is based on assumptions of white supremacy and the idealized intersubjective agreement by those who fall within that system further ratifies the legitimacy of the dominant white positioning. There has always been the belief in racial realism that undergirds this system. Thus, it is also understandable why, in response to Appiah's distinction between racialism (realism) and racism, Mills states, "not merely have all racists been realists, but most realists have been racists."[255] Race and racism are inherently bound to one another.

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[253] Ibid., 24.
[254] Ibid., 24-25.
[255] Mills, *BIackness*, 46.

In the previous section, I stated that Gracia believes that his de-essentialized conceptions of race and ethnicity will provide a frame of reference that will help us better understand the historical and social nuances that surround the race concept. In addition to this stated purpose, Gracia also shares Mill's view that the race concept will facilitate a greater comprehension of the more nefarious consequences of race. He states,

> " Race has been the source of much oppression and abuse. To correct this requires not only that we refer to race, but also that we have an appropriate understanding of it. Without a concept of race, we cannot fight the ghosts that populate our social consciousness or overturn the oppressive structures that are embedded in our institutions…we need an appropriate and adequate understanding of race to understand the root of much evil and conflict in human society; we cannot rely on a faulty one."[256]

Appiah appears to reluctantly agree with the point that Gracia is making here. He believes that it may be a necessary step to maintain some conception of race, which is why he proposed a de-essentialized racial identity as a possible substitute for race. However, Appiah's proposal is a cautious one because he believes collective identities often accompany their own axioms, or what Appiah calls "scripts." Thus, he maintains, they have the tendency to dominate over other personal identities.[257] He states, "Racial identity can be the basis of resistance to racism; but even as we struggle against racism—and though we have made great progress, we have further still to go—let us not let our

[256] Gracia, *Surviving*, 98.
[257] Appiah, *Color*, 98-103.

racial identities subject us to new tyrannies."[258] Naomi Zack however, has historically diverged more starkly from this point of view (Appiah and Gracia), often arguing for the elimination of the race concept through education for these particular purposes. Although, in her more recent work she argues that to confront racism that we must also turn our focus toward gender as she holds that racial (and ethnic) taxonomy and oppression has always been a consequence of white male rule.[259]

Philosophy of Race and Education

All of these philosophers of race exhibit distinct analytical measures to approach the issue of race. Appiah's analytic approach is useful for critical theorists because we can apply his analyses to ourselves. We can how we, and other theorists, use the concept of race in our analyses, how we contribute to its evolution, and how our own conceptions of race correspond to what is known about race in the sciences. Naomi Zack's methodology provides an analytical avenue to examine a variety of existential consequences of axiomatic structure of the race concept. Both Mills and Gracia's social constructivist approaches provide us with methods that allow us to create our own heuristic models and analyses by which we can explore race.

These philosophers' analyses yield substantial amounts of knowledge that are needed by critical theory in education. They expose various aspects of the way race is constituted and the way in which it can structure an individual's identity. Charles Mills shares much in common with critical theorists like Asante, Kincheloe, Steinberg, and

[258] Ibid., 104-105.
[259] Naomi Zack, "Ethnicity, Race, and the Importance of Gender," in *Race or Ethnicity?: On Black and Latino Identity*. ed. Jorge J. E. Gracia. (Ithaca: Cornell, 2007),121.

McLaren because he is concerned with the nature and consequences of white supremacy. His analysis showed us how race, itself, is a manifestation of white supremacy because it ranks races hierarchically. Thus, race, for Mills is causal, not consequential, of white supremacy.

Both Zack and Appiah's conceptual analyses of race illuminate the problematic, conjectural development of the race concept. They demonstrate how the concept of race is predicated on now discredited scientific racialism and realism. In other words, race, as we know it, is and always has been a false concept. One reason that this should be important to critical theory in education is that the ways in which we sometimes affix cultural traits to race are arguably contemporary manifestations of racialism. This move on the part of critical theorists would require the assumption or imposition of shared essentialist properties that span across a broad range individuals, families, and ethnicities.

Jorge Gracia highlights the necessity of understanding both race and ethnicity as distinct concepts. His new proposals for these concepts enable us to disencumber race and ethnicity when they are confused with one another, as they often are in critical and multicultural theory. Moreover, his conceptions provide us with ways of knowing if, when, and how race and ethnicity are connected in cases where we suspect there is connection or overlap. Gracia's highlighting of the significance of historical relations in his conceptions of race and ethnicity allows us to see that race and ethnicity are in a contingent and circumstantial flux. This is important for critical theorists in education as it could help provide us with more effective and accurate ways to ensure that theory and practice are indeed culturally relevant by not locking students into racialized ethne that do not speak to their current ethnic and cultural realities. Furthermore, the contingency of

race and ethnicity mandate that we understand their development before we send these concepts for praxis in the classroom.

One aspect of Gracia's Familial-Historical View of ethnicity that speaks to the aforementioned point is that culture is a sufficient but not a necessary feature of an ethnos. This factor should be of great important for critical theory in that it sanctions that we are cautious when attempting to assign cultural products collectively to individuals. For example, even if black Americans qualify as an ethnicity under the Familial-Historical View, culture may not necessarily be the feature that binds particular individuals to an ethnos. Thus, before we deploy strategies of black affirmation, it is necessary that we have an understanding of the multiplicity of ways and degrees in which students are related or relevantly invested in their ethnic membership(s).

The problem of mixed racial identities is largely ignored within critical theory in education. This is because the persons to whom those identities would get assigned are often eclipsed by the essentialist racial binary**.** The transition from the biological paradigm of race to the ethnic (bio-ethnic) paradigm of race, has only served to further mask this problem.[260] As I demonstrated in Chapter Four, our failure, as theorists, to recognize our own complicity in reinforcing the one-drop rule by treating blacks as a monolithic group can endanger students. Naomi Zack's contribution on mixed raced identities makes it possible to understand how, in this way, we are affirming the traditional white supremacist model of race that attempts to maintain the purity of whiteness. Moreover, her analysis shows us consequences to the individual who fails to be recognized within the racial binary. The nature of mixed racial identities needs to

[260] See Chapter 1 of this dissertation for Omi and Winant's description of the racial paradigm.

come to the front of critical discourse, because it is more often the norm than the exception.[261]

Jorge Gracia's Common Bundle View and Familial-Historical View offer a possible solution to Zack's analysis. These views facilitate our understanding of how an individual can have more than one racial identity and additionally, one or more candidates for ethnic identities of varying types (e.g. family, Creole, African American, Pan-African). Furthermore, his de-essentialized conceptions of race and ethnicity show us why we need to take care in assigning cultural or racial content to individuals in a hierarchical manner (i.e. showing greater deference to one's "blackness" or "Africanness" over one's "whiteness" or "Europeaness" or vice versa).

Another important contribution that these theorists make available for critical theory in education is that they all show how race is of crucial importance when confronting issues such as racism. Appiah's racialist triad best highlights this point by showing that the primary difference between the belief in races and racisms is that the latter simply means that we act upon the knowledge that underlies the former. For example, the belief in an actual black race encompasses the belief that there are certain essential characteristics intrinsic to members of that race. Racism for Appiah is simply when we allow our racialism to inform how we view and treat persons from other races, whether that means that we consider them as part of our moral community or whether it compels us to oppress, alienate, or avoid those from other races.

[261] In the chapter that follows, I argue that problem of mixed-race is a justifiable ground to eliminate the race concept.

Finally, the question of what to do given the nature of the race construct is a discussion that is sorely needed within critical theory in education. The above-mentioned methodologies and analyses can inform us on these matters. Furthermore, the potential consequences of race, such as those I have highlighted in the dissertation thus far, mandate that we do something. We cannot simply take to the field when more overtly destructive race-related consequences occur, yet passively sit in the stands on the matter of race. Action on the race construct is necessary because race is causally antecedent to the aforementioned consequences.

If we are going to make legitimate attempts to mitigate the consequences of racial hegemony for students, we need to decide if facilitating the maintenance of realism in theoretical discourse is the best course of action. In this chapter, I have shown there are other options available. It is possible, that we may decide that we have to take up the eliminativist position(s) that Naomi Zack has endorsed in her works. We might need to adopt the reluctant anti-eliminativism of K. Anthony Appiah by asserting that we cautiously replace race with racial identity while moving toward a raceless society. Finally, it may be necessary that we engage race with the stronger anti-eliminativist constructivism of Charles Mills and Jorge Gracia where we create models and concepts to help explain the nature of race, racism, and white supremacy. The debates of these and other like-minded positions are long overdue in the field of critical theorist in education.

Conclusion

In this Chapter, I proposed that the philosophy of race is a theoretical resource that will allow critical theory of education to fill its "race gap." I argued that this can better enable critical theorists to contend with the problem of race in education. I examined the theoretical approaches from four of the most well known philosophers performing the metaphysics of race today. It is my hope that critical theory in education and the philosophy of race facilitate a theoretical and strategic merger between these areas for a philosophy of race in education. In the next chapter of this dissertation, I offer my vision of what I believe a philosophy of race in education should entail in theory and practice.

CHAPTER VI
TOWARD A PHILOSOPHY OF RACE IN EDUCATION

Introduction: A Critical Philosophy of Race in Education

In this dissertation, I have asserted that race is a hegemonic paradigm. What makes it hegemonic is not simply because it provides justification for persons from one racial group to act upon another nor that it authorizes individuals within racial groups to impose racial axioms intra-racially. It is hegemonic also in that, in American society, we are largely complicit in its dominance over us. Moreover, as I have shown, even some critical theorists in education who attempt to mitigate the consequences of racial hegemony treat race as a concept that is in no need of investigation, deliberation, or validation. In doing so, they too consent to its racial hierarchies. So, our complicity in our own hegemony (and by "our" I mean all of those assigned to racial groups) rests largely on what we do not understand or choose to ignore about races; there are no biological, ethnic, and cultural races.

The racial obscurantism that casts a panoptic ethno-racial net over us makes it difficult to see how our actual existence and experiences, as biologically and culturally diverse persons in complex, symbiotic, conversation with one another, undermines the notion of racial essence. The consequence is that we approach the world with breached,

imperceptive senses and interpret our experiences and the experiences of others accordingly.

As scholars who prioritize bringing about a just and fair environment for students, critical theorists in education should neither subject nor commit students to racial sovereignty**.** This requires that we approach race in a way that merges the visions of theorists like Cameron McCarthy and the philosophers of race we have discussed in the previous chapter. We must move toward a critical philosophy of race in education that attempts to confront race as a problem as it begins to intersect with the axes of education theory and praxis.

In this Chapter, I outline the characteristics necessary for a liberatory critical philosophy of race in education. The first of these, I argue, should encompass a theoretical framework that challenges the traditional concept of race while also showing sensitivity to its social dimensions and consequences. I make a case for this framework as I evaluate moral arguments for and against the elimination of race.

The second characteristic I contend is necessary for a critical philosophy of race in education is that it embraces and advocates an education for autonomy as liberatory education. I describe two of the fundamental features of this education: a skill-based and knowledge-based education for racial liberation. I recommend that this education for autonomy be conducted for potential theorists, pre-service teachers, and students.

The final characteristic that I recommend for a philosophy of race in education is that it is a self-reflective endeavor. Let us begin the examination of the eliminativist and anti-eliminativist arguments for race.

Eliminativist and Anti-Eliminativist Arguments

A philosophy of race in education must consider how to push forward in the face of racialist hegemony and the consequences for those touched by it. At its heart, this is a moral and ethical issue facing critical theorists in education. So, a philosophy of race in education should take under deep consideration the legitimate moral concerns of proponents of racial eliminativism and anti-eliminativism. Jorge Gracia provides an overview of the principal moral arguments that represent both sides of this debate between these two theoretical stances. Let us first look to the arguments for continuing the use of the race concept.

Arguments for Racial Eliminativism

According to Gracia, there are three main arguments that call for the elimination of the race concept. The first argument asserts that racial designations tend to have "negative connotations." Applying racial labels to individuals risk imposing these negative connotations upon them which can, in turn, act as justification for unequal treatment. We should, therefore, discontinue using the race concept.[262] K. Anthony Appiah's examination of Thomas Jefferson's racialist beliefs about blacks shows how the tendency to ascribe unfavorable qualities along racial lines were always a feature of the racial paradigm, even by those once considered authorities on races**.** Even today, black racial designation is still associated with diminished intelligence, hyper-sexuality, and propensity for violence—a point aptly demonstrated by the selective presentation of blacks in media and celebrated within pop culture.

[262] Gracia, *Race*, 10.

Furthermore, as Appiah pointed out racialism is the precondition for racism. The only thing that separates racism from racialism proper is whether we act on our racialist beliefs. We must also remember, however, that racism for, Appiah, was more complex than members of one racial group treating persons of other racial groups unfairly. Racism extends to both negative and positive moral qualities and moral status attributed to racial groups. We often act in the interest of others with whom we share racial membership because we assume that they are "like us" in a manner that transcends phenotypic and experientially grounded characteristics**.**

In the aforementioned sense, the unequal treatment of others is subtle and implicit**.** The association of positive connotations set the conditions in which we grant moral consideration to our racial group, but not others, not because we consider them inferior. Rather, it is because we do not consider them. We act upon other racial groups in how we treat our own racial group. This is, perhaps, the most common and acceptable form of racism in American society today. An overt example of this is "I'm not anti-black/anti-white, I'm pro-white/pro-black," although I would argue that the more harmful instances of this type of racism occur in more subtle forms. We are typically pro-white or pro-black without even recognizing we are thinking this way. We unconsciously choose to stay in the company and act in consideration of those with whom we are most familiar.[263] Often times, this is our racial group, because as Gracia stated, races are a type of family. Although, the familial connections of race, are deeper than Gracia was attempting to point out. As I argued in previous chapters, races can designate moral

[263] This point is further illuminated in the upcoming discussion on "meaning" and "identity" in the discussion of anti-eliminativism.

community—and in some ways that simply means the persons whom you "consider." Unconsciously or consciously considering our own racial groups, but not considering others (because they are not like family) is still potentially dangerous. This form of racism is analogous to our moral nationalism exhibited when we empathize with those who suffer in this country while remaining indifferent to the similar or worse suffering of others elsewhere. Our lack of awareness and absence of volition in this regard make this type of racism more acceptable. We rarely consider it racism.

It is also important to recognize that racial designations are not symmetrical and therefore do not affect racial groups in the same way. The white race in American society is largely regarded as the ideal race. In the broader societal context, "white" is a relatively raceless designation, meaning that an assignment of the label itself carries with it little to no collectively applicable value or meaning. When white individuals lie, cheat, or commit murder, it is not interpreted within American society as associated with their whiteness. Black people, on the other hand (and some other raced groups), are often assigned collective responsibility for actions or characteristics exhibited by individual members of the racial group.

A common fear of critical theorists in education is that black students have internalized the negative characteristics assigned to them within white supremacist society and therefore have a lower sense of desire and self worth. I have shown in previous chapters that the implicit intention of theorists who put diasporic strategies into operation is to revise the black-devaluing traditional conception of race. The purpose is to help black students overcome the consequences of asymmetric ontological assignment. Of course, it is not considered necessary amongst theorists to affirm struggling white

students in the classroom with racially marked content—students whose socio-cultural circumstances may impede their success. After all, the white racial designation has no negative ontological import. It is therefore, understandable why theorists would move toward correcting the unevenness of ontological assignment.

However, while well intentioned, such strategies are misguided even if they managed not to actualize diasporic conceptions of race. Group disproportionality is a constitutive feature of race, present since its initial application to humans. In other words, the ontological disparity between whites and blacks, figuratively speaking, came with the instruction manual for the race concept. Thus, it is a mistake to continue to treat only the symptoms of race, when we know that it has always carried ontological baggage. The necessary solution is that we do away with the ontologies that accompany racial categories. Effectively accomplishing this task requires that we eradicate the racial paradigm in American society. To maintain the racial paradigm is to continue to assign its fictitious and harmful ontologies to individuals and groups. Our complicity, as theorists, in subjecting students in the classroom to this danger is therefore morally and ethically irresponsible.

Gracia describes a second eliminativist position that concerns the allocation of power in American society. This argument goes that racial groups are not situated equally within this distribution. Some racial groups have superior positioning over others. By continuing to apply racial labels to individuals, we are effectively placing them into the racial pecking order.[264] Whites in the United States are the racial group that has the most power socially, institutionally, and politically. Even historically, non-racial groups who

[264] Ibid., 12-13.

suffered social and systematic discrimination, such as Irish, Italian, and Jewish Americans ultimately faced less hardship once accepted into the racial paradigm as members of the white racial group.[265] This trend is continuing. As political scientist Andrew Hacker points out, "Hispanics and Asians are merging into the "white" category, partly through intermarriage and also by personal achievement and adaptation."[266] However, for persons with known "black" ancestry, this racial mobility is not permitted.[267] Indeed, while the white racial designation has expanded to include persons of descent not previously considered white, the black racial group has evolved over time in such a manner that excludes those with some black ancestry from white racial membership. For instance, through no historical accident there are no longer such designations as Mulatto; there is just the category "black."[268] Thus, even black individuals who share ethnicities now racially marked white, continue to be relegated to a lower position in the racial stratification.

I have shown that critical and philosophical theorists (past and present) highlight the unequal positioning of racial groups and the dominance of whites within that paradigm. The question is "what are the options available to create fair and equitable circumstances for individuals, and specifically for students in the classroom?" Diasporic education places the unfair burden of having to overcome an undeserved set of circumstances upon black students by, in essence, attempting to manufacture within them a refurbished black self. Similarly, "white privilege" strategies steadfastly place the

[265] Andrew Hacker, *Two Nations: Black and White, Separate, Hostile, Unequal*. (New York: Ballantine, 1995), 8-9.
[266] Ibid, 9-19.
[267] Consider as examples, Tiger Woods and Keanu Reeves, both well-known celebrities of Asian descent. Reeves is considered white in the United States, but Woods is not even recognized as "Asian."
[268] Ibid, 13.

burden upon white students to relinquish the privileged position in the racial hierarchy. Whether alone or in supplement, these strategies miss the big picture; as with the assignment of moral characteristics and status, the dominant position is intrinsic to the race system itself.

Historically, stratificatory racial positioning has always been connected to the perceived moral status (intrinsically and characteristically) of racial groups. Even where there is no direct consequence of moral status, the socio-economic and cultural circumstances of blacks today are an effect of how they were morally regarded in the past. Slavery required the belief that blacks were morally inferior to whites, as did stripping African slaves of their religious, cultural, and social practices, and the committing of various other egregious acts against them. To varying degrees, the position of black people in American society today is a consequence of social engineering and neglect, and not a matter of accident (except by their birth into the racial system). The denial and manipulation of education for blacks, and the numerous other overt systematic attempts to maintain white supremacy are testaments to this fact. There is little doubt that the consequences of this subordination in education still manifest themselves throughout American society.

We must remember that race is constructed as a hierarchy. By maintaining it, as critical theorists, and encouraging through teachers that students continue implementing and imposing racial categories, we only serve to galvanize teachers and students as complicit actors in their own racial oppression. No social gain justifies our continuing to breathe life into the race concept with awareness of its frequently demonstrated and

historically precedented consequences, especially when we can eliminate these consequences by purging the race construct.

The final argument for racial eliminativism that Gracia describes is "the history of racial and ethnic naming indicates that these labels are usually imposed on dominated groups and do not reflect the views of the dominated."[269] In the case of race, the creation and application of its labeling has benefitted whites and acted to the detriment of blacks. Therefore we should cease using the race concept.[270] While, the previous eliminativist arguments offer supplementary support to this argument, Naomi Zack's analysis of the racial schema shows how, at its very core, race was designed to maintain white purity. It accomplishes this maintenance, in part, by treating "black blood" as inherently impure and, as consequence, a threat to the purity of "white blood." Historically, the laws defining the biological parameters for white or black racial membership were subject to white authority. One example of this is the one-drop rule discussed by Zack. Another example are anti-miscegenation laws that remained a part of the legal fabric of this country well into the latter half of the 20th century, that made it illegal for whites to marry non-whites.[271]

Even today the structural preservation of racial categories is still subject to the opinions of those in the white racial majority. It does not matter if a person with both black and white ancestry regards himself as bi-racial or multi-racial. Furthermore, it is

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[269] Ibid., 13. It is worthy of noting that Gracia is not only talking about race, once again, but also ethnicity. While I do not conduct a metaphysics of ethnicity in this dissertation, I believe that such an analysis is necessary in the future to tease out the various possible groups encapsulated by the ethnic paradigm of race.
[270] Ibid.
[271] Peggy Pascoe, "Miscegenation Law, Court Cases, and Ideologies of "race," *Twentieth-Century America in The Journal of American History*" 83 (1996): 47-59.

inconsequential if most black Americans acknowledge and accept his self-identification. As long as white racial group is in a dominant position over blacks other racial groups**,** the recognition of racial identification will remain out of the hands of black individuals in the broader context of societal culture. It is reckless to indenture some students to the desires of those in racially privileged positions or to assign them into pre-existing, privileged positions by affirming racial categories. Moreover, it is not morally plausible to maintain a racial paradigm that was not only created by the privileged group, but that also still favors that group.

All of the previous eliminativist positions, offered by Gracia, and supported by me, show how continuing to endorse the race construct is existentially harmful, especially for those assigned to unfavorable categories. Moreover, preserving the concept of race with knowledge of the aforementioned consequences while simultaneously decrying the conditions of white hegemony, as critical theorists in education often do, is theoretically and morally inconsistent. However, while I believe that the eliminativist arguments provided thus far are decisive, I would like to offer another possible argument for the eliminativist position that Gracia overlooks that a critical philosophy of race in education should take into account.

The argument that I offer concerns the inherent obscurantism that has accompanied the constitution and application of the race concept. Race, in the traditional biological paradigm and even now as it continues to shift into the "ethnic paradigm," conceals knowledge. In Chapter 4, I argued that critical theory of education exacerbates what the race concept already does; that is, it ignores the biological and ethno-cultural diversity that exists in human races, especially in regards to people racially marked as

black. I asserted that it accomplishes the denying of knowledge by elevating blackness as the unilaterally relevant and constituent factor that makes up an individual. One way that it does this is biologically.

Consider the fact that geneticists have found the presence of significant European admixture in black Americans based on analysis of genetic markers associated with different African or European populations. Evidence also shows that even the degree of European ancestry varies from place to place within the United States, which some scientists attribute to the migration of Americans to northern regions. Moreover, black Americans appear to have more African ancestry than those who would be considered black (by Americans), such as in Jamaica and many other countries situated within the African continent (although even in those places there is a presence of European admixture in black populations).[272]

With respect to the aforementioned evidence, we can infer that our current conception of race, which regards blacks with some white ancestry as ontologically identical to blacks with no white ancestry, buries histories. These are not just the histories of blacks, whites, and other racial groups. It is the history of the United States. Embedded within these histories are stories that explain how it is that persons who are thought to descend only from peoples of Africa came to have European admixtures and how persons thought to have only European ancestry came to have African ancestry. The current model in education treats white history and black history as though separate and unequal. The codification of theoretically reactive and prescriptive racial separatism supports and

[272] Esteban Parra, et al., "Estimating African American Admixture Proportions by Use of Population-Specific Alleles", *American Journal of Human Genetics* 63 (1998), 1839-51.

exacerbates this problem. If the critique of the white supremacist model is that it deliberately prevents blacks from knowing and acknowledging their histories, certainly scientific information, as I provided here, makes the case that this inhibition begins with the invention of race.

Racial obscurantism also extends to both ethnicity and culture. Race elevates only ethnic and cultural relations that we racially recognize as black as the relevant ethno-cultural factors to understanding the black racial group, individually and collectively. Thus, race makes it difficult to recognize the important influences that make up black individuals. The descendents of American slaves for example, speak English, typically practice Christianity, and eat the same foods, celebrate the same holidays, and practice the same rituals as many white Americans. Moreover, they live in all parts of the country and socially and intimately interact with the cultural environment of their localities and regions. However, they are continuously referred to as a culturally distinct group. Differences are highlighted between white and black Americans that fail to apply to the entirety of either racial group. The cultural syncretism of African, Native American, Asian, and European cultures and its effects on individuals situated in the United States fails to get recognized as a consequence of race.[273]

This epistemic concealment that occurs as a consequence of the racial paradigm has serious moral consequences. It forces us to deny what constitutes us as social beings, not only insofar as it ignores the richness of our individual cultural and biological development, but also our intricate social, cultural, and even biological connections to one another. Furthermore, it forces us to view others through this same binary lens. As an

[273] Mills, *Blackness*, 53.

example, Andrew Hacker points to how various peoples of the Caribbean acknowledge and attempt to maintain their diverse ancestries and histories.[274] However, the American racial paradigm encourages us to see only what is relevant to the paradigm itself when we view others. So, the consequences are global as well.

Black Americans are not a homogenous group. We are persons of many origins, ethnicities, and cultures assigned to a monolithic category. What happens when racially marked people from the Caribbean come to the United States and are denied recognition of their ethnic and cultural ties by persons in this country? What happens to the Haitian Americans, Cuban Americans, and Jamaican Americans who are born in this country but retain cultural elements of the cultures of previous generations? The racial paradigm encourages them to either purge their own ethnicities and cultures or it forces them to have to fight for acknowledgment within American society. This dilemma has serious ramifications under racial hegemony. If the ascription of the black label means that individuals (or groups) have to deny their ethnic relations and cultural practices, it is understandable why they would feel compelled to distance themselves from that racial designation or group. In addition, an ascription of a negative racial ontology is only going to exacerbate this desire.[275] Therefore, racial conditions in the United States create the social circumstances in which individuals have to distance themselves from what is perceived in society as their blackness, further marking "black" as the undesirable category.

[274] Hacker, *Nations*, 14-15.
[275] Refer back to the discussion of the first eliminativist argument.

So, the race concept not only shapes individuals but acts upon those who do not fit neatly within its categories. Diminishing the knowledge and role of social groups in shaping people by ignoring the actual groups themselves rests firmly at the foundations of racial hegemony. Moreover, considering both that racialism is such a widely held belief system and that non-white racial groups are increasingly viewed as a distinct cultural groups, the sub-groups that fall under these racial outgroups are pitted against one another (e.g. African Americans against Dominican Americans, Puerto Ricans against Mexican Americans). The only way to prevent these circumstances is to free these individuals and groups from the constraints of race. This means that we must eliminate the race concept as a legitimate system of categorization.

Anti-Eliminativist Arguments

Now that I have examined some of the arguments against the race concept, I would like to briefly turn the focus to some of the objections to eliminating race. While, I have argued for the eliminativist position, I believe that these anti-eliminativist positions are not easily dismissible and thus should be taken into account before attempting to construct a philosophy of race in education.

Jorge Gracia provides three central concerns of the anti-eliminativist positions. The first position asserts that "race [and ethnicity] have influenced, and still influence, the course of human history in significant ways and have substantially affected the lives of individual persons."[276] Thus, to eliminate these concepts would mean ignoring the whole host of harms that have occurred as a consequence of racial and ethnic

[276] Gracia, *Race*, 12.

categorization.[277] The second position against the elimination of race argues that given its past and present impact, we cannot discard race as this would leave us with no way to adequately address its negative consequences. Race is crucial to understanding how racism and white supremacy operates.[278] The final moral argument against racial eliminativism is that keeping race allows us to have an appropriate frame of reference by which we, as a society, can learn from our past to insure that we do repeat the mistakes of race in the future. Getting rid of race increases the potential for the worsening and repetition of destructive racial consequences.[279]

These three arguments are similar because they all assert that we need race to adequately understand race and address its consequences. Indeed, the point is well taken. There is no way to comprehend the personal, socio-cultural, and systematical oppression of black people without referencing the essentialist American racial paradigm that treats whites as the morally and ontologically superior group. It is also necessary to racially label persons affected negatively affected by race in order to adequately address and alleviate their circumstances.

On the surface, these arguments appear damaging to the eliminativist position. However, a closer look reveals that these anti-eliminativist arguments are not really incompatible with eliminativism. The eliminativist arguments that I have provided deal more precisely with the existential implications of race—how racial positions situate individuals morally, characteristically, and socio-politically in the racial hierarchy and the epistemic burdens race puts on individuals. These eliminativist arguments maintain that

[277] Ibid.
[278] Ibid., 12-13.
[279] Ibid., 13.

because the race generates immoral consequences, utilizing the race concept is in itself immoral, and as I have added, unethical in the classroom space. The moral arguments against eliminating the race concept are a theoretically different sort of argument; they posit race as heuristically and analytically valuable. They seek to preserve race as a necessary tool that permits us to understand and effectively address the immorality of its consequences. This is quite different than suggesting that we continue assigning racial ontologies.

In our discussion in the previous chapter it was quite clear that these arguments undergird the positions of the three anti-eliminativist philosophers of race, including Gracia. Moreover, it is implicit in the eliminativist arguments of Naomi Zack, who uses the race concept to expose its own falsity and demonstrate the asymmetry of its binary schema. The goal of the aforementioned philosophers of race is to deconstruct and disentangle race from its inherent essentialism. In this sense, their positions are eliminativist because a de-essentialized race concept is no longer the traditional race concept. In other words, to demonstrate the bio-metaphysical falseness of race, which these theorists do, is not simply to argue for eliminativism as an end, it is actively eliminating the race concept through analysis**.** Thus, the above-mentioned philosophers race demonstrate that an existential racial eliminativism and an analytical anti-eliminativism are theoretically consistent positions. This is a point to which I will later return.

It is important to address an assumption that Gracia mentions in addendum to the third anti-eliminativist position that intends to respond to racial eliminativism**.** Gracia states, “Refusing to accept the role of race in our experience in particular and even talk

about it, only serves to exacerbate racism. It also misses the point that race…can be used to correct social ills, provide meaning, and develop a beneficial sense of identity in people."[280] This first claim seems plausible, as we cannot simply pretend that race does not exist socially in hopes that it will go away. To pretend would allow racism to continue without utilizing the most effective tool that we have to address it—the race concept.

However, the second point, which posits race as a normative prospect for meaning and identity, is more troublesome given the danger, as Appiah accurately points out, for racial identities to become dictatorial over our other personal and social identities. In addition, this nourishing of racial identities risks re-substantiating racial boundaries as the perimeters for moral community. Once again, as I demonstrated in Chapter 2, Molefi Asante's political revision of race differs from the traditional notion of race insofar as it does not apply negative characteristics to blacks as a group. However, he imposes its refurbished Afrocentric ontology upon others as the basis for moral judgment (denying one's racial ontology). Furthermore, we also witnessed that Asante's diasporic racialism is broadly applied and imposed on the black racial group by critical theorists in education which, I argued, is not without moral consequence.

Nevertheless, I believe that the idea of race as a source of meaning and identity bears some import and offers a fourth potential argument for maintaining race. It is an argument that has real world relevance as it concerns our conceptions of self and others, and thus, is necessary for consideration by a philosophy of race in education. As I have stated, race often acts as an ideological basis by which we conduct our lives. It works its

[280] Gracia, *Race*, 13.

way into our personal, social, political, and professional choices. For some of us whose racial group occupies an out-group status, racial boundaries demarcate a figurative (and sometimes literal) safety zone. We may appreciate the artistic creations of others because they share our same racial designation. Racial labeling may mark for us a (local, regional, or global) community from which we draw significant relational, ideological and cultural value. The fact that race plays such a valuable role in our lives creates somewhat of a dilemma for critical theorists. Should we dispose of race because it is a moral and epistemic aberration or should we attempt to preserve it because of the considerable meaning that it provides for many people?

I believe that the aforementioned dilemma is not without some precedent. After all, there have been a number of hegemonic paradigms that throughout the course of history have no doubt been the basis of meaningful relationships. There have been blood-based aristocracies dividing groups into royalty, nobility, and commoners; religions that mark some people as chosen and others as condemned; caste systems that mark people as outcasts by virtue of the biological descent from ancestors who worked "lowly" occupations. Race, in essence, is like all of these paradigmatic frameworks. A person's presumed race was used to assign him to a particular group. If he was white, they were considered of higher moral stock than those of other raced-groups and, as I have alluded to in this dissertation, social, cultural, and political power were and largely still is distributed along racial lines. However, like these other oppressive paradigms, race sets the conditions in which individuals are locked into circumstantial relationships with similarly grouped others, and those others, at least in some cases, will act as the persons to whom individuals are going to best be able to relate. Moreover, as both Appiah and

Gracia highlight, ethnicity and culture can emerge as a result of the aforementioned racial circumstances. The ends, however, do not justify the means, or at least they would not justify them in other similarly oppressive frameworks.

Take, for example, the economic class system in the United States where there are primarily three recognized groups: lower class, middle class, and upper class. Each of these groups has different degrees of socio-cultural mobility, access and (coercive and volitional) isolation contingent upon economic factors in combination with other variables (race, ethnicity, etc). Gangster rap, for example, emerged from persons living in environments where the consequences of violence were felt in ways unlikely to occur in more affluent, well-protected, neighborhoods. Operas, orchestras, and academic societies are cultural manifestations that materialize amongst those who are financially better off.

The relationships amongst people who fall under these groupings are likely to be different as well. For instance, growing up in my hometown, being both impoverished and black meant that there was only a small selection of neighborhoods that my family could live in—ones that we could afford and ones that were safe for blacks to live in. However, having limited access in this regard meant that I grew up knowing and feeling connected to the other people who were restricted to the same circumstances--namely, other poor, black persons. There is little doubt that the meaning derived from these circumstances shaped not only my conception of self and others today, but also has influenced and informs the career path that I have chosen today. In healthier racial socio-economic circumstances than those of my childhood, a person is likely provided with less communally compact relationships, but with a broader range of choices. As a consequence, charting a path for herself that secures a just environment for oppressed

people may not be a priority or recognizable choice. She may feel more connected to people who share her economic and racial status, because they are who she recognizes as "like her." So, her choices in life might simply reflect the status of her more privileged grouping. However, her affluence and relative freedom from the social constraints of race do not make her life any less meaningful to her than my lack of wealth and freedom did to me.

The problem is that despite the value of social class, the meaning and sense of identity in the aforementioned cases would not exist if not for the hegemonic framework of class. Would we argue that we should keep the class system, because its class groupings are beneficial? Should we teach students that they should embrace lower class status because it provides them with distinctive types of meaning and identities? The tactics in critical theory in education seem to go in the opposite direction of this, where theorists often condemn the oppressive class structure created by capitalism. Critical theorists concerned with social justice would not argue for a return of aristocracy or that we should affirm a Japanese-American student as *burakumin* (low caste).

Race should be no different. It is true that race has been a source of valuable meaning for individuals. However, we must remember that as such, it is also a fundamental basis for social, cultural, and systematic oppression. If race were not a source of meaning and identity there would not have been the subjugation of American Indians, African and Asian descent in this country. Meaning and identity, in this regard, cut both ways and this will always be the case in oppressive paradigms. As theorists in education, we must be sensitive to the meaningful role that races plays in the lives of all students in the classroom, but that does not mean that we should ignore or affirm the

hegemonic paradigm on which that meaning is based. To not mitigate hegemony where we can is ethically irresponsible as theorists.

Considering all of the above arguments both for and against racial eliminativism, I believe that a philosophy of race in education must attempt to satisfy the valid concerns of both sides of the debate. Therefore, a philosophy of race in education must attempt to eliminate racial hegemony and this means that we work toward the deflation and the removal of the race concept existentially. Heuristically, however, the race concept is necessary in order to address the circumstances of students and permit them to confront their own racial conditions in rational and informed manners. This means that a philosophy of race in education should assist students in recognizing that race and its ontologies are false, while acknowledging that as a consequence of racialism it has been a source of division, oppression, and in many cases meaning and creativity. For this eliminativist/anti-eliminativist project to have success, it is necessary that theorists, teachers, and students are educated to effectively engage race conceptually and existentially. In the following section, I argue the type of education that I consider necessary for a comprehensive philosophy of race in education.

Education for Autonomy as Liberatory

To overcome racial hegemony, race must be challenged both as a conception of the good and as social construct. Race has three primary strengths, all of which help maintain it. First, it is regarded or treated as self-evident and therefore goes unchallenged by theorists, teachers, and students. Secondly, it is often such a crucial aspect to our senses of value, self, and choice that it is self-affirming. Finally, it is socially and

culturally accepted as biologically real and its attachment to ethnicity and culture affirm race for people. These strengths concern race as a conceptual and ideological problem and therefore account for its complex ground.

However, race also has its weaknesses. First, it is a scientifically discredited concept. There are no human races. Secondly, race's ideological trajectory, over time, has gradually moved further from its initial ontological framework, and therefore it exhibits a provable contingency.[281] Third, race is not a conception of the good like a religion because the fideistic commitment to race is involuntary. These weaknesses all show how race is also an epistemological problem. We believe that it exists because we were presented with false knowledge continually perpetuated by the society around us**.**

At first glance, it would appear that all it would take to exploit the weaknesses of the race concept is to provide counter-knowledge to its epistemic assumptions. The problem, however, is the evidence demonstrating the falsity of race has been available for quite some time. Moreover, in the years since race's discrediting by the sciences, there has not been a collective race to the podium to announce its demise as biological truth. This is in no small part due to the ideological nature of race. And while it may not be like a religion, we often have a cult-like commitment to it and its explanatory value in our lives. So, a philosophy of race in education that seeks to existentially eliminate the race concept needs tools that are able to attend to both the strengths and weaknesses of race. An education for autonomy is, I believe, necessary as a liberatory tool for this task.[282] For

[281] The move from the Jeffersonian paradigm of race to the ethnic paradigm of race among scholars is an example of this weakness.
[282] I am not asserting that these are that an education for autonomy is the only type of education necessary, just that it is a necessary education for racial liberation.

success of this endeavor, an education for autonomy requires at least two indispensable features: a skill-based component and a knowledge-based component.

Before I offer a more detailed vision of what this education may entail, it is necessary to offer a bit of a disclaimer about my reliance on autonomy. As I have mentioned, it is not my desire to ensnare myself in debates about the importance of autonomy as a liberal ideal, although I value it as such. Moreover, as I have argued, the concern by critical theorists regarding the imposing of white supremacist teaching on black students seems to allude to something that bears resemblance to personal autonomy, even if not stated explicitly by those theorists. Indeed, I would assert that if we are not concerned with whether black students are able to have a part in the construction of their own values and life plans, there is little ground on which white supremacy can be critiqued, given that it is like any another social and cultural factor that constitutes us as individuals.

I acknowledge, however, that as Michele Moses points out, some theorists in education have argued that importance of autonomy in education is overstressed because it neglects the role of groups in making up individuals.[283] However, I share her view that the development for personal autonomy is necessary to "provide students with the capacity for deliberation about their own cultural community as well as others."[284] Moreover, this sentiment captures the goal of the education for autonomy that I am proposing. It is important that individuals are able to rationally reflect on the conceptions

[283] Michele S. Moses, "Multicultural Education as Fostering Individual Autonomy," *Studies in Philosophy and Education*. 16 (1997), 382.
[284] Ibid., 384. Moses argues in this important work that multicultural education should be used for the development of personal autonomy.

of the good life with which their various communities indoctrinate them. The education for autonomy that I am advocating here is intended as a liberatory tool rather than a liberal ideal. To overthrow racial (or sexual, ethnic, and gender) hegemony, as theorists, teachers, and students, it is important that we have the tools to liberate ourselves to avoid being complicit in our own and others' subjugation.

Furthermore, one of my central arguments against utilizing diasporic conceptions of race and, indeed, race itself is that it hides the truth about what actually constitutes individuals and groups. I have argued that the ethnic paradigm of race acknowledges and imposes one monolithic group as relevant to an individual's identity, instead of allowing for the possibility of other group relations. It is my view that an education for autonomy helps bring these other possible group connections to into the light from wherever racial hegemony has hidden them from view.

It is also important to note my advocating of an education for autonomy is not an endorsement of the current model of liberal education. Liberal education, in many ways, has not lived up to its promise and its promises. It has been unsuccessful in providing students (of all levels) with the skills that permit them to critically engage the world in a sophisticated and adaptable manner. Moreover, it has not supplied them with a broad, accurate, and unabridged knowledge about the world. However, it is not clear that this malfunction is simply a result of liberal education itself. Its failure is due in part to the limitations put on what skills and knowledge students learn and who gets to benefit from them. Liberal education is and always has been subject to the decisions of persons in

dominant racial groups.[285] There is a reason theorists such as Gloria Ladson-Billings, Molefi Asante, Joe Kincheloe, and Shirley Steinberg are compelled to critique the absence of blacks and Africans in the content of education. Educational institutions, like most social and political institutions, are sometimes platforms for hegemony. My analysis up this point is an attempt to demonstrate this point.

However, the above mandates that theorists, teachers, and students need to have the skills and knowledge to critically evaluate what is taught, how it is taught, why it is taught, and the subsequent consequences of this information. If we do not have the critical tools necessary to liberate ourselves from racial hegemony, even as it acts through liberal education (which means liberating ourselves from the current model of liberal education), then how are we, as theorists, going to help free others? This requires that a philosophy of race in education endorse a model of education that is liberatory, meaning that it is geared toward the use and production of the aforementioned tools. Let us now look to the role that a skill-based approach plays in this an autonomy education for racial liberation.

A Liberatory Role for Reason in a Philosophy of Race in Education

It is essential that potential theorists, teachers, and students acquire the skills that will allow them to critically engage race as a conception of the good. The focus of this education in the K-12 classroom would, of course, mean the development of reasoning skills that not only help students problem solve, but also identify problems, and critically engage those problems with other students**.** However, it is imperative that in this

[285] My discussion of the education of blacks in Chapter 3 provides ample evidence for this claim.

education that the subject of race is incorporated into the development of reasoning skills.[286] This is crucial given that students are typically indoctrinated with racialism from youth and this racialism is constantly affirmed at all levels of society and interaction. There is no way for students to escape the confines of race and racial ontology if they do not have the skills to do so. An education for autonomy will make it easier for students to recognize their own racial conditions and conditioning.

Education for autonomy as skill-based education should also be promoted in education programs that house future theorists and teachers. I believe that philosophy programs in the Western tradition, where rational thinking and discourse are synonymous with *doing philosophy*, provide a useful template by which advanced degree and pre-service teacher programs can model themselves**.** From the first undergraduate philosophy course, there is a focus on the enhancement of reasoning skills, whether by practicing the Socratic method, taking practical reasoning classes, or analyzing philosophical texts. This *critical thinking as reason* component is the one mainstay throughout every course in philosophy programs. Thus, the young philosopher's capacity to negotiate, improve upon, and problematize difficult subject areas is able to cultivate through the course of her education.

The philosopher is also trained to critically evaluate new and unfamiliar areas of knowledge, not only in texts, but also in dialogue with others. The cultivation of analytical skills in this regard are crucial when attempting to negotiate the complex and

[286] Of course, this education needs to be age appropriate. The use of race and skills is explained in more detailed in the upcoming section on knowledge.

murky waters of race (and ethnicity)[287] Collective and dialogical analysis is important in an education for autonomy for racial liberation because race is a social construct. Thus, it should be engaged both critically and socially. This is an aspect that should be allowed to develop in within education programs, in a similar manner as it develops in philosophy programs.

Our work is applied and has a lot at stake. Therefore, a philosophy of race in education advocates that our own field of education and its sub-disciplines attempt to develop and nurture similar skill-sets in our future theorists and teachers. This begins with implementing analytical components in our own courses. This way theorists and teachers can acquire the skills denied to them elsewhere and be able to merge these analytical skills with other forms of critical thinking often hidden from view by the racial (and gender) paradigms in education.

Moreover, courses with analytical components will encourage students in education programs to put those skills to use by examining and creating the applied content of our field. For example, a philosophy of race in education course might evaluate the works of theorists such as Ladson-Billings or Kincheloe and Steinberg, or Jorge Gracia. As part of this critical evaluation, the course requires that students provide critical exegeses of these theorists' works. This will help students recognize the strengths and weaknesses in these theoretical works. However, analytical skills will help students correct these weakness, further develop the strengths, and help students determine when, where, how, to whom, or whether these theories are applicable. An education for

[287] Examples of this are the philosophers of race in Chapter 5 who are in constant conversation with one another, improving upon each other's works.

autonomy in this manner will assist in cultivating stronger theory and instruction to help contend with the problem of race in our own discipline, including in our own work.

Another important benefit of analytical training in education programs is that theorists and, especially K-12 teachers, will have more capabilities to pass on to their students in the classroom. As I stated in the previous section, liberal education has failed students by not providing them with the skills and curriculum necessary to critically examine the content of their personal, social, political and global surroundings. A skill-based education for autonomy provides teachers with the means to fill in the skill and race gaps created by liberal education, thereby providing a necessary resource(s) that permits students to confidently engage the problem of race.

An additional reason, that analytical education is important for theorists and teachers is that it will help nurture our ability to identify the encumbrances placed upon theory and praxis by racial hegemony. It is, for example, important that we are able to recognize how teachers are reifying race in the classroom or imposing ethno-racial models on students, or acting as authoritative validators for problematic race theory. It is also important that we apply this same analysis to our own works to help ensure that we are not inadvertent agents of racial oppression acting upon students. We, too, are indoctrinated by society to see *race* and to see *race as ethnicity*. This makes us see racial, ethnic, and cultural properties that are not actually there and it also prevents us from seeing what there *is*. It is my hope that a skill-based education for autonomy will help reveal for us what the racial paradigm has concealed—the truth.

However, truth means knowledge. A liberatory education for autonomy is an insufficient tool for theorists, teachers, and students to deal with the problem of race, if it

is solely a skill-based education. So, let us now look at the function of knowledge in an education for autonomy.

A Liberatory Role for Knowledge in a Philosophy of Race in Education

The view that I am proposing requires a somewhat different approach to the problem of race than most critical and multicultural theorists recommend inasmuch as I do not advance the idea that knowledge is the primary component in confronting issues facing black students. Rather, I advocate that knowledge, as part of an education for autonomy, supplements a skill-based strategy for racial liberation. I am in agreement with Appiah who, in regard to education for autonomy, states that it is important that we "prepare students with the truth and the capacity to require more of it."[288] The role that I am positing for knowledge in this project is intended to set the record straight about race because for too long, we have allowed race to the write the record for us.

The ethnic paradigm of race is firmly embedded in multicultural education and critical theory in education. As a consequence, theorists condemn teachers and students to a hierarchical, axiomatic ontological system that is based upon scientifically invalidated assumptions about humans. The analysis in this dissertation has shown that this condemning often gets carried out by the promotion of epistemic frameworks that affirm racial ontology. This use of knowledge is misguided because the knowledge itself is in error.

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[288] K. Anthony Appiah in "Thoughts on Liberal Education," The Promise of Multiculturalism: Education and Autonomy in the 21st century, ed. George Katsiaficas and Teodros Kiros. (Routledge: New York, 1998), 40.

To free students from the constraints of racial hegemony, a philosophy of race in education advocates that we problematize knowledge, not act from problematic knowledge. For race, this means that we critically engage information compromised by, or more specifically, constructed from racially hegemonic materials. We must confront knowledge that affirms racial categories, treats racial categories as ethnic categories, and that attempts to broadly apply content to individuals marked by racial categories.

Thus, a philosophy of race in education must do more than advocate an education for autonomy; it must embrace it by providing its own liberatory knowledge. It should advance knowledge that tells the truth about the race concept. We cannot approach race as though it is real biologically, ethnically, or culturally just because it is socially real. We must treat it as a construct. This means that we impart knowledge that shows how racialism, the belief in human races, has shaped the lives of those who fall within racial boundaries in harmful and sometimes even meaningful ways. Moreover, we must attempt to illuminate, for teachers and students (through praxis), the various ways in which racialism intersects and intermingles with other paradigms such as class, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity.

A similar way in which knowledge will play a role in an education for autonomy is by bringing attention to conflicting racial paradigms. For instance, the American racial paradigm has its own distinctive characteristics, such as its one-drop rule, its asymmetric racial ontologies, its limited number categories, and its consistent mixture of racial and pan-ethnic categories (black, white, Asian, American Indian). As I stated in my eliminativist arguments, this conflicts with distinctive paradigms found in Latin

American countries.[289] Emphasizing knowledge of these competing frameworks not only demonstrates to students how race is socially constructed, but also shows how persons hailing from places where other racial, ethno-racial, or ethnic models affect individuals existentially when they come into contact the American paradigm of race (racism, ethnocentrism, labeling, racial and cultural reductionism). This example shows how a philosophy of race in education advocates for both an existential eliminativism and a heuristic anti-eliminativism. It demonstrates how theory and praxis can address the historical, geographical, and cultural contingency of the race concept, while still utilizing race to address its consequences.

Multicultural approaches often interpret experiential and cultural knowledge through the ethnic paradigm of race. A philosophy of race in education encourages the elimination of racial obscurantism, through an education of autonomy that recognizes the uniqueness and diversity of individual and group experience. Moreover, it collects this knowledge from various forms, such as the narrative experiences collected through academic, artistic, and literary work. It goes beyond this, however, by also activating the experiential knowledge brought to the table by theorists, teachers and students as valid sources of unsettled knowledge worthy of critical evaluation.

In addition, an education for autonomy attempts to shed light on the existential realities of race, ethnicity, and culture through self-identification and reflection while allowing for new ways of understanding individuals and groups. For example, a student brings her own unique perspective into the classroom. Society might designate her as a member of the black racial group, but she expresses how her parents, who are also

[289] Gracia, *Surviving*, 89-90.

designated black hail from very different backgrounds. She knows that her father grew up a poor farmer from Kentucky and that his ancestors were African slaves. Her mother is a Creole of West African, French, Portuguese, and Native American descent from the city of New Orleans. An education for autonomy encourages the student to express and attempt to understand the ways in which her own values and cultural practices are amalgamations of her upbringing by her parents and growing up in San Diego, California. Moreover, it encourages her to recognize other outside influences that play a role in constructing her identity. The ethnic paradigm of race interprets this as *the* African American or black experience, but an education for autonomy attempts to free the student from essentialist entanglement by acknowledging her experience as distinctive to her as an individual, and as a member of her commonly unique family, and as members of her various other socio-cultural environments.

We get a sense, then, of how an education for autonomy attempts to provide the conditions in which the student utilizes her own knowledge to free her from the constraints of race. This education allows her to express her narrative as she experiences it, not by a racial framework that is imposed up on her. However, this education does not ignore how the racial framework shapes the student's sense of identity in relation to her environment or to others within it. It does not advocate that the student's identity be stripped from her. It does encourage, however, that her racial identity is critically evaluated through truth and not through racialist interpretation.

The self-evident, racialist paradigm typically stops the dialogue when it is challenged by knowledge that undermines its dominance**.** Education for autonomy attempts to supply students, teachers, and theorists alike with the skills to engage,

negotiate, problematize, and make sense of and apply the knowledge learned where related to the race concept. So, an education for autonomy is where skill and knowledge and community come together and allows that conversation about race to continue in a critical and sophisticated manner.

Toward a Philosophy of Race of Education

The final aspect that I consider necessary for a critical philosophy of race in education is that it is self-reflective. In other words, in cannot simply act as a philosophy of race in education, it must also perform as a philosophy of race o*f* education. This necessitates that it conducts metaphysical analyses of the race concept as it is utilized in theory and praxis and throughout the broad discipline of education, including the philosophy of race in education itself. It is important that as a discipline a philosophy of race in education is always evolving and self-correcting and always sensitive to itself as a part of an institution situated in a society where the commitment to racialism is one of the most dominant, stubborn, long lasting, and widely-held conceptions of the good.

Furthermore, a self-reflective philosophy of race in education must broaden its knowledge base to include information and strategies outside of the field of education. It cannot simply create epistemic, strategic, and theoretical dialogue with disciplines that overtly share the same social and political goals. It must also draw from the variety of broad and valuable resources available to it both in and outside of the Academy. It must try to be informed by the theory emerging from social and biological sciences, Women's Studies, Philosophy, Law, Queer Studies, and Black Studies. Furthermore, it cannot cut itself off from the real world if it seeks to help the students who live within it. It must

attempt to know how people really think on the ground, in everyday life, in the multitude of unique circumstances in which they reside. It must attempt make sure that its theories and the praxis that it informs corresponds with actual life. To do this will keep the field of education honest and relevant, to make sure that its theory does not overshoot the circumstances of the actual world while trying to bring about a just future world.

Conclusion: Toward A Philosophy of Race For Education

In this Chapter, I argued that critical theory in education should create its own philosophy of race in education. I recommended an existential eliminativist and analytical anti-eliminativist hybrid project that advocates a skill and knowledge-based education for autonomy. I argued for this approach for a philosophy of race for education because it can assist students, teachers, and theorists to best recognize and challenge race as an inherited conception of the good and free the epistemic constraints that it puts on our conceptions of self and others.

Racial hegemony has plagued this country since its inception and degraded its racial minorities. However, everyone has suffered as a consequence of race. It deprives us of knowing and learning about our differences and similarities and places barriers between the variety of possible human relations, identities, and meaning that we have not been able to forge with one another. It is my hope that a philosophy of race in education can help reverse this damage to bring about a just social environment in which individuals and groups are able to flourish—in the absence of race.

CHAPTER VII
CONCLUSION

In this dissertation, I examined the nature of the reified conception of race as it relates to theory taking place in the field of education, specifically in the field of critical theory education. My analysis began in Chapter Two, where I showed that race is so pervasive that even as critical theorists in education, we often put forward analyses and strategies, intended to reverse the consequences of racial hegemony, but that ultimately reaffirm the essentialist notion of race that has been a mainstay in American society for centuries. The presuppositions that undergird the approaches of such scholars as Molefi Kete Asante, Gloria Ladson-Billings, Peter McLaren, Joe Kincheloe and Shirley Steinberg frequently present the black racial group as a monolithic human entity. I demonstrate this point by highlighting ways in which ethnic and cultural properties were attributed across the racial groups. For instance, the primary remedy used to relieve the social and racial circumstances for black students was the normative application of African content for the purpose of black affirmation, as was the case with Ladson-Billings, Asante, and Kincheloe and Steinberg.

In Chapter Three, I presented a historical analysis of the problem of racial reification in critical theory in education. I examined some of the key scholars and events that helped shaped the education of black people in this country. The important figures and theorists of my examination included Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. DuBois and

Carter Woodson. DuBois and Woodson offered diasporic racial strategies for liberal education intended for the aim of bettering the circumstances the black racial group. The vision of these two philosophers of education inspired the events that eventually led to the creation of Black Studies programs in higher education. My analysis concluded that philosophies and events that emerged from this history, especially the acceptance of Black Studies in the American academy, provided the grounding by which critical theorists in education conceptualized the black racial group biologically, ethnically, and culturally. I argued, however, that the critical theorists in education of my analysis converted the normative conceptions of race from the history of black education into substantive conceptions of the black racial group.

Chapter Four was an analysis of the consequences of critical theorists in education implementing diasporic strategies attached to an unproblematized reified race concept. In this analysis I took a closer look at the race concept in American society. I explored how as an axiomatic paradigm, race creates expectations and requirements for the performance racial ontology. Given the nature of race, I concluded that if critical theorists in education operationalize diasporic conceptions of race in the classroom, then they risk tightening racial constraints on black students, consequently inhibiting their personal autonomy.

In Chapter Five, I argued that the harms to students mandate that critical theorists in education attempt to circumvent the problem of race. I suggested that we draw from the theoretical, strategic, and epistemic arsenals of the philosophy of race. I offered an analysis of four of the most well-known and respected philosophers of race. They are Kwame Anthony Appiah, Naomi Zack, Charles Mills, and Jorge Gracia. My analysis of

these philosophers' theories illustrated how the philosophy of race can reveal the inherent oppressive and essentialist nature of the race construct. Further, I offered recommendations to show how the philosophy of race can provide critical theorists in education with useful tools that will allow us to make sense of race and better inform theory and praxis.

Finally, I recommended the development of a philosophy of race in education that seeks to bring an end to the racial hegemony for students by moving toward the existential elimination of the race concept. The philosophy of race that I suggested promotes an education for autonomy as a tool for racial liberation. This education is intended to provide the analytical skills and corrective knowledge that will cultivate in theorists, teachers, and students, the capacity to engage race as a hegemonic conception of the good. I further argued that it is necessary that a philosophy of race in education is willing to analytically engage the broad field of education in the academy to ensure that as a discipline we are not complicit conduits for racial hegemony. This is the project that I have attempted to carry out in this dissertation--a metaphysical analysis of race in the discipline of critical theory in education.

As theorists in education, we are, in many ways, the first and last line of defense against racial hegemony for students in the classroom. It is our theories that teachers utilize to inform their interactions with students. Thus, it is important that our theories not oppress students by condemning and locking them into ethno-racial constraints as a consequence of our positing and authorizing racialist conceptions of identity. The analysis that I provided in this dissertation is intended to show how we sometimes fail in this regard. However, its purpose is also to act as a demonstration, as one philosophy of

race in education, to help us understand how and why we sometimes fall short and also to help us understand the necessity for preventing its occurrence—the need to pick ourselves back up.

As the last line of defense, theory in education attempts to inform the classroom in such a way that it protects students from the consequences of racial hegemony. We are situated in a society where race permeates through every aspect of our culture(s) and institutions. As critical theorists, it is important that we ensure that students are protected from racial hegemony through effective education. That means that we need to make certain that they are provided with tools that can help safeguard them from the oppressive venues of hegemony in society, including us, as critical theorists and our impositions on them when we fail to act with caution in our theories. The philosophy of education that I am advocating is intended to offer students of all levels a stronger and tighter last line of defense.

It is my hope that both the analysis and normative arguments in the metaphysics of race that I conduct in this dissertation have implications beyond my immediate scholarly confines. It is my wish that my work inspires others to conduct their own philosophical analyses. The field of education can only benefit from a critical philosophy of race in education to provide a means to challenge racial hegemony where it begins, from the race construct itself.

A philosophy of race in education, working in conjunction with theorists such as Gloria Ladson-Billings, can develop culturally relevant strategies for education that draw out and address the concerns of the substantial number of cultural groups that are currently hidden or ignored as a consequence of the ethnic paradigm of race. A

philosophy of race in education can work closely with feminist theorists in education to attempt to make sense of the complex interactions that occur at the conceptual and consequential intersections of race and gender and to develop strategies that encompass other ways of knowing and learning. It can work with qualitative and quantitative research theorists to attempt to develop strategies for gaining precise research on how the racial essentialism, racial obscurantism, and racial axioms adversely affects students and teachers within the classroom.

Furthermore, a philosophy of race in education can also have implications on educational policy. While there is an effort by policymakers to mitigate the consequences of race in education, very little takes place attempting to diminish the concept of race. A philosophy of race in education can provide important analyses, arguments, and research that make a case for the need to implement broad-scaled strategies that move toward the elimination of race while also attending to its consequences. Indeed, a philosophy of race in education, if successful, can change the way in which we approach race and ethnicity insofar as it attempts to make lucid what the racial paradigm has made unintelligible.

The most important possible implication of the work that I offered here is that its reverberations reach beyond the classroom space to the social and global world that has been imprisoned by the American racial paradigm. We must remember the classroom is a microcosm of the society that surrounds it. That means that what takes place within its walls does not end once students and teachers exit the room. My analysis and recommendations for a philosophy of race in education, if successful, provide a means by which individuals (and groups) may eventually find liberation from racial hegemony and are able to forge a world for themselves without reference to false ontologies. In this

sense, they activate themselves as persons better able to develop their own conceptions of the good life, with one less constraint on their freedom and choices. As they interact with the world, hopefully persons will see that world's doors suddenly open to new possibilities that were once ideologically shut.

Before I joined the field of education, I was a graduate student in philosophy. Being a black person in Western academic philosophy is akin to being an anomaly. You are the elephant in the room that everybody sees, but that nobody wants to be caught noticing for fear that you might want to talk about it. When I came to the field of education I became African American and that is all anyone seemed to notice. In both cases, my racial designation told my instructors and colleagues everything they needed to know about me. Yet, in this dissertation I have merged the best of the two fields that I hold dear to create a philosophy of race in education. I hope that the work the I offer here will mean that one day someone who used to share my racial designation is able to walk into her philosophy or philosophy education class, sit down, open her books, and smile because there are is no elephant in the room and she has a story of her own that she can't wait to tell.

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