The authors bring you in this edited volume a collection of essays that address the relationship between racial violence, media, the criminal justice system, and education. This book is unique in that it brings together the perspectives of university professors, artists, poets, community activists, classroom teachers, and legal experts. With the Trayvon Martin murder and legal proceedings at the center of reflection and analysis, authors poignantly provide insight into how racial violence is institutionalized and consumed by the mass public. Authors borrow from educational theory, history, gender studies, sociology, cultural studies, the arts, legal scholarship, and personal reflection to begin the dialogue on how to move toward education for racial and social justice. The book is recommended for secondary educators, community organizers, undergraduate and graduate social science and education courses.
(Re)Teaching Trayvon: Education for Racial Justice and Human Freedom
YOUTH, MEDIA, & CULTURE SERIES

Volume 2

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(Re)Teaching Trayvon: Education for Racial Justice and Human Freedom

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INTRODUCTION: (RE)TEACHING TRAYVON

Trayvon Martin was killed on Feb. 26th in Sanford, Fla., fully 60 years after Ellison published Invisible Man. The circumstances of the unarmed 17-year-old’s death suggest that even six decades later, invisibility plagues black folks, still. It happened like this. He was visiting his father, watching hoops on television. At halftime, he left his dad’s townhouse in a gated community and walked to a 7-Eleven for snacks. There was a light drizzle and he was wearing a hooded sweatshirt and jeans. On the way back, he drew the attention of George Zimmerman, captain of the Neighborhood Watch. Zimmerman, who is white, called police from his SUV and told them he was following a “suspicious” character. The dispatcher promised to send a prow car and told Zimmerman to stay in his vehicle. He didn’t. When police arrived, they found him with a bloody nose and Martin face down on the grass not far from his father’s door, a gunshot wound in his chest. Zimmerman said he shot the boy in self-defense. Police did not arrest him. At this writing, nearly three weeks later, they still have not, citing insufficient evidence. The case has been referred to the State’s Attorney and the NAACP has asked the Justice Department to intervene.

—Leonard Pitts Jr., Miami Herald

For over a year, laypersons and scholars alike watched as those in the media continued to publicly dissect Trayvon Martin, the Florida teen who was killed by a neighborhood watchman. His body, school life, choice of attire, friends, and family were all put on display for public consumption and gratification. While we watched in awe as the hydratic head of White supremacy sprung its ugly head once again, even in the death of a minor, our nation’s youth watched close by as adults mutilated Trayvon’s humanity before a live viewing audience. (Re)Teaching Trayvon: Education for Social Justice and Human Freedom looks at how society, including the media, constructs the Black male body.

From the boardroom to the courtroom, White and non-White adults (e.g. Black cultural critics, scholars, and attorneys included) desecrated not only Trayvon, but also millions of youth across the U.S. who live, walk, talk, and dress similar to the Florida teen. In the public scrutiny of Trayvon’s life, very privileged and powerful people simultaneously sequestered the lives of other young people who could identify with Trayvon and urban youth culture, especially his Black male peers. In the words of African American novelist Richard Wright, “But the color of a
Negro’s skin makes him easily recognizable, makes him suspect, converts him into a defenseless target”. In this book, teachers, university professors, attorneys, cultural critics, parents, poets, and grassroots activists of various racial/ethnic backgrounds attempt to communicate to the world the humanity of the Black male child.

More politically and culturally conscience individuals understand that Trayvon’s murder was reflective of a larger history of racial aggression and terror in the U.S. The hydratic head of white supremacy attempted to camouflage the injustice that Trayvon Martin and his family endured. In the 21st Century, the hydratic head of White supremacy is an intricate conglomerate between the white media corporate elite, the so-called “race-blind” criminal justice system, racialized policies, and racist and classist discourse in the educational system. The White-controlled media depicted Trayvon as a wayward thug who was out searching for trouble, as indicated by him walking in a majority White gated community, and hiding his Black face behind a hooded sweatshirt.

Similarly, the criminal (in)justice system painted him as a lawless drug user, in an attempt to characterize the teenager as anything other than an innocent child, despite his carrying a sweet drink and candy on his person. And, borrowing from media cues and deeply entrenched Eurocentric ideologies about people of African ancestry in the U.S. and abroad, Trayvon was sold as a fully grown man full of trickery, savagery, and Black masculine rage; enough rage to kill an adult male with his bare hands. In juxtaposition, George Zimmerman, his adult assailant and murderer, was characterized as a self-sacrificing hero; a protector of property and white women from aggressive criminally-inclined Black males.

In fact, Zimmerman was lauded in court, and in the media, for going above and beyond call of duty to prevent a second home invasion against a White woman who was home alone with a child against an alleged African American male intruder who got away. Therefore, Zimmerman had a right to stand his ground for supposedly the public good. For many, Florida’s Stand Your Ground Law is reminiscent of antiquated lynch laws. With these laws, mobs of White men were allowed to play judge and jury. Consequently, any Black man (or woman and other non-Whites) deemed to be insubordinate, disobedient, or smugly toward a White man or woman could be hanged in southern jurisdictions by Whites with little or no legal consequences. Of course, a Black person found on the wrong side of town-White neighborhoods—could also be lynched and/or legally prosecuted. As the case of slave laws (the enslaved needed written permission to travel away from their owner’s property or hold a signed document that declared them a freed person) and lynch laws, it seems that Trayvon’s murder was justified, because he was discovered in a White neighborhood without permission, and allegedly did not assent to the White sanctioned authority. Laws have always been used to support the ideologies and justify the fears of white supremacists, and the Stand Your Ground Law justified Zimmerman taking the life of a Black teen.

White supremacy tactics have always drawn on socially constructed notions of intelligence or academic aptitude to draw conclusions about the moral and behavioral propensities of people of African ancestry. Therefore, it is not surprising that media
and legal experts publicly examined and reported on Trayvon’s schooling history. For example, claims were made that Trayvon was a bully and that he was suspended from school for fighting. The teen was also accused of truancy and tardiness, and his murderer’s legal defense team reviewed his grades.

For most, it seems bizarre that a murdered child’s school records could justify that child’s murder at the hands of an adult. However, for those of us familiar with the relationship between racism and notions of intelligence, the legal and medical profession, and eugenics, we are not that surprised. Eugenicists declared some people unfit to live. The mostly White jurors declared that Trayvon was unfit to live, based on his academic background and other qualities that did not align with White Eurocentric culture; thus, Zimmerman was acquitted.

In sum, with the growth of social media, information technology, and mass media, the hydratic head of White supremacy took on a new meaning following the Trayvon Martin murder coverage and the George Zimmerman trial. Although on the one hand we witnessed millions of Americans from diverse backgrounds come together to celebrate the innocence of Trayvon, on the other hand, we also incessantly watched his innocence dissipate publicly and his adult murderer declared innocent. As a result, every child in the U.S., White and non-White, became aware of their place in the racial social order.

(Re)Teaching Trayvon looks at the meaning given to Trayvon Martin’s life and murder, as well as the eventual acquittal of George Zimmerman. The authors look at this recent, and somewhat on-going, tragedy from a critical perspective. On-going because Trayvon was not the first or last unarmed Black youth (males and females) to be killed at the hands of a White adult. One objective of the book is to bridge the gap between social theory and praxis. Another objective of the book is for authors and audiences to imagine what lessons can be taught to educators and students alike that might serve to prevent future similar tragedies. Readers will discover that the book includes a body of theoretical and empirical works that examine the historical, social, and cultural context surrounding the murder of Trayvon Martin. More specifically, the chapters address the following topics critically, yet, empathetically:

1. the role that race/racism and/or cultural domination played in shaping education, media, and legal discourse surrounding the teenager’s murder as well as the eventual “not guilty” verdict of his adult assailant and murderer;
2. how the educational system, simultaneously neglects, surveillances, and objectifies the young Black body; or
3. explores how the white corporate patriarchal media elite, along with the middle class dominated educational and legal systems interact as interlocking systems of oppression that form a matrix of domination over the Black body.

Altogether, the authors sophisticatedly and poignantly expose a long history of a society that reads, interprets, and falsely accuses the Black body of malice. What does continual surveillance and persecution mean for countless young men and women? Even more importantly, what is the role of educators (preK-22) and social
justice advocates in countering societal beliefs about youth of African descent? Furthermore, what is the role of parents, teachers, and community workers, in preparing our young for a possibly hostile environment?

The final chapters of the book directly address the pedagogical and educational implications of addressing issues that directly impact the lived realities of youth of African ancestry, urban adolescents, those of the hip-hop generation, and/or African American boys specifically. In (Re)Teaching Trayvon, the authors have an open and honest conversation about the need to re-educate the public on race and racism to save the lives of our young people and the moral conscious of this nation.

REFERENCE

PART I

PORTRAYALS AND BETRAYALS OF THE BLACK MALE BODY
A. D. CARSON

THE UNDERSTANDING

Be afraid
of me.
Very afraid. I am
your worst nightmare.

When you
walk home late-night, or
rest, home, in
comfort, in
fear of some-
one some-
how
taking from you—

some
brute, some
menace, some
delinquent—

I am
the image envisioned.

For this,
many more reasons,
you should
be afraid.

This is
no threat;
mere fact…

I am
your
fear. I
know. I
tell you
you
should.

I
welcome
your
fear.

I
welcome it
mainly because
nothing can
be done about it.
It
honestly works to
my benefit.

More than
my resemblance to the
mental image,
brutality,
held so dearly,
fear me
for what I am
actually:

Literal
worst nightmare—
Man next door, your
coworker, your
colleague, your
boss, your
brother-in-law…

maybe you.

Mangled manifestation of
American
Dream,
Living
liberated, pursuing
happiness, laughing—you
trembling…
my presence.

I
wish no harm. I
harbor no ill will. I,

unangry,
unashamed,
unapologetic,
unwilling to bow head,
smile or
shuffle along

will not give you
comfort
being here
collecting mine
by right. Remember,

I, too, am
America. You have
every reason
in the world to

be afraid.
1. BLACKNESS ENCLOSED

Understanding the Trayvon Martin Incident through the Long History of Black Male Imagery

INTRODUCTION

The death of Trayvon Martin helped to resurface thoughts from theorists and critics about the tentative status of African American males in the U.S. Many asked questions about whether Trayvon’s death and the subsequent acquittal of George Zimmerman helped to set in place a new kind of racial contract (Mills, 1997), where racial violence is sanctioned and justified, as opposed to being extralegal—particularly for the young, urban Black male. Such concerns remained within the public discourse about Trayvon Martin regarding the nature of racial profiling and the hyper-visibility as well as vulnerability of Black males in schools and society. In many cases, discussions about the tragic interaction of George Zimmerman and Trayvon Martin spoke to a long history of “profiling,” where Black subjectivity is read, named and acted upon in the context of a civil democratic society.

The intent of this chapter is to explore some of the histories and discourses that have helped give ontological meaning to Black males. We argue in this chapter that there are several historical periods where Black males were discursively framed (Foucault, 1972) in relation to the material interests of labor and conceptual interests of racial marking (Holt, 1995). We argue that the context of racial violence for Black males are informed by a confluence of racial knowledge (Goldberg, 1993) that made possible and even normalized racial death — as in the case of Trayvon Martin. The thesis of this chapter is that a priori knowledge about Black males informed the Trayvon Martin incident. In other words, Trayvon Martin was a ready-made construct, developed by the enduring discourse of Black male deviance. This paper draws theoretical inspiration from the work of Keffrelyn Brown (2012), who argues that deeply entrenched historical discourses delimit how African American students are conceptualized in schools and society. Brown argues that an enduring “framing discourse” encloses Black students’ educational experiences. In a similar sense, Tyrone Howard (2013) argued:

In many ways, DuBois’s question (How does it feel to be a problem?) precisely speaks to the manner in which Black males at the turn of the 21st century may feel if they were to peruse much of the social science literature, popular press, mainstream media, and even within the academic discourse about their
academic performance and overall potential. A read through of a majority of the
literature on Black males would reveal a number of disturbing classifications.
In conducting research for this work, the terms that frequently came up with
Black males were phrases such as at-risk, endangered, remedial, in crisis,
uneducable, extinct, and left behind. (p. 57)

The first section of the paper will theorize the historical foundations of racial
Other-ing. We argue that the historical construct of the deviant Black male can be
defined through a dominant trope of Black male deviance traced back to the 15th
century. We further argue that the contingencies of time and space and the use of
multiple devices (e.g. science and theology) helped to produce a new subjective
understanding (Wynter, 2006) about Black males that informed the context of
racial violence.

Modernity and the Human Other

The social imagination of the Black male took form by the zeitgeist of European
Modernity. In the post-Enlightenment Era, the philosophical ideals of reason made
possible a world defined by giving order and classification to every aspect of the
human world, including who would be considered human. The very idea of Man
has been argued by numerous scholars to be an invention of Modernity (Wynter,
2006). The conditions of theology and science would help to set in place categories
of personhood. Sylvia Wynter (2006), for example, maintains that the theology of
medieval Latin Christian Europe sought to define those that had rejected the Gospel
into categories of otherness that helped in producing classifiable terms such as inter
alia, heretics, pagan, idolaters, or Enemies of Christ (p. 124).

What surfaced from these early conceptions of defining the non-Christians was
a more insidious notion of what Wynter calls the Human Other. Wynter further
explains that as the monarchical European state system began to take form, notions
of who could be considered a “citizen” were tied to overarching conceptions of
humanness. This set forth a new classificatory system of humanness concerned with
one’s capacity to be a rational subject or citizen—what Wynter calls Homo Politicus.
The subjective understanding of European Christian doctrine and the ideology of
what constitutes a citizen would become the defining markers of Black life. The
Negro was constructed as the antithesis to the logical and rational citizen of the post-
Enlightenment Europe. The definition of the African male would remain measured
by Western classificatory systems of citizenship and theology (Jordan, 1968). In
the context of Eurocentric constructs, all categories of good and righteous were
qualitatively and quantitatively measured through the constructs of whiteness and
blackness.

In addition to the dominant discourse of Judeo-Christian exegesis and European
political theory, the notion of whiteness helped to produce a duality between Black
and White men, which endured through most of the twentieth century. The hegemonic racial rules of White statehood and Christianity helped to ontologically enclose men of African descent in the category of the *The Racial Other*. This construction of the racial Other was not a single declaration of an enduring racial contract, but in subsequent centuries new technologies and apparatuses were employed to give new ontological meaning to Black maleness.

The racial knowledge of Black men would help to give meaning and credibility to constructs that would unsettle its grounding through various revisionist ontological projects (Mills, 1998). Thus, the production and reproduction of new racial knowledge would become vital to hold in place an enduring racial hierarchy. The most insidious and implicit way to secure the metanarrative of Black male deviance was to normalize his humanness as questionable and theologically enclosed by God’s will. The process of naming and classification was a powerful means to produce what David Theo Goldberg (1993) calls *racial knowledge*. He maintains that racial knowledge is an exercise of power that seeks to normalize social reality. Goldberg (1993) states,

> Power is exercised epistemologically in the dual practices of naming and evaluating. In naming or refusing to name things in the order of thought, existence is recognized or refused, significance assigned or ignored, being evaluated or rendered invisible. Once defined, order has been maintained, serviced, extended, operationalized. (p. 150)

The continuance of categories and images of Black males in a Western and North American context helped to sustain an established imagery of Negro as beast, while providing new and contextually defined discourse. The consequences of this normalized metanarrative have been devastating. From the 1600s to the present, old and new discourses helped to hold in place an unquestioned idea that Black men are dangerous and irresponsible. Thus, in the Fanonian sense (Fanon, 1968), the very sight of the Black male body in social spaces helped to provoke ideas that helped to cultivate an enduring racial knowledge about Black males. As philosopher George Yancy (2008) poignantly describes,

> The Black body is constructed as antithetical within a binary logic that points to the white body’s own “signifying [and material] forces to call attention to itself” as normative. Indeed, whiteness is deemed the transcendental norm, the good, the innocent and the pure, while Blackness is the diametrical opposite. This is the twisted fate of the Black body vis-à-vis white forms of disciplinary control, processes of white racist embodied habituation, and epistemic white world making. (xvi)

In the subsequent section we outline how the “epistemic white world making” during slavery and after Reconstruction discursively made Black men into Sambos, beasts and criminals.
God, Race and Black Men

During the 1600s when Africans came to the shores of Jamestown, the idea of the Black males as being a “natural slave” (St. Aubin, 2002) existed before the development of U.S. chattel slavery. As Jordan (1968) explains, the first encounters between English travelers and African men entailed observations of the so-called bestial nature of Black men. Black men were conceptualized in journals, letters, and sermons as libidinous and not capable to function within a civil society. As numerous historians and scholars (Duru, 2004; Jordan, 1968; Lyons, 1975) explain, even before chattel slavery took form in the U.S. the idea of the Black male was already conceptualized as a “natural slave”. As Duru (2004) powerfully explains,

Having been tagged as sexually potent animalistic criminals, blacks were subjected to chattel slavery in the new world. They did not, however, have the fortune of shedding the stereotypes upon introduction into slavery. On the contrary, the institution of slavery further entrenched the stereotypes. Indeed, the very existence of blacks as slaves reinforced the perception of their bestiality “the slave is outside of the culture and therefore is nonhuman; is deprived of the freedom and therefore is a beast”. (p. 4)

It was clear that Black men were constructed as the antithesis to White male “civility”. As scholars explain (Mills, 1997; Yancy, 2008), whiteness could not exist without the category of blackness. Given that modernist notions of mankind were enclosed by masculinist discourse, man was manifestly a White male. Therefore, the Black male slave became constructed by multiple discourses to give legitimacy to the idea that Black males were ontologically fit for bondage. The discourse of science and theology would have the most significant impact on how the ideas of Black men as “natural slaves” would endure.

One of the more powerful methods of defining and constructing Black men as predetermined for bondage and enslavement was to locate and justify their placement in society as defined and located within a divine realm. It is one thing to develop laws and ideologies that enclose the experiences of enslaved Africans, but it is another thing all together to argue that the racial hierarchy between White men and Black men are set in place by God’s will. This places the context of enslavement not in the hands of men that may have corrupt means to enslave one of God’s children, but in the very hands of God.

The first step in shaping this racialized theological imagination was to suggest that Adam and Eve were White thus arguing that whiteness and White people were the “chosen people” of God. Then the relationship between master and slave required biblical reference. The book of genesis and the story of Noah, Ham and Canaan, or what was called the Curse of Ham, would be the metanarrative to sustain the idea that of the White man as master and the Black man as slave. The crime
of Ham seeing his father’s nakedness was eternal slavery. The catch, however, for supporters of slavery was that the descendants of Ham were Kushites and of African descent, thus arguing that people of African descent were accursed to the condition of enslavement. In the words of David Brion Davis (2006),

> Given this emerging precondition, ingenious reinterpretations of “the Curse” provided divine sanction and justification to an emerging or existing social order for well over a thousand years. Thus as we shall find, it was not originally racist biblical script that led to the enslavement of “Ham’s black descendants,” but rather the increasing enslavement of blacks that transformed biblical interpretation. (pp. 66–67)

The circulation of this story through sermons and speeches offered detailed descriptions of the moral debasement and libidinous nature of the African male. Discourses of this kind led to the conclusion that the patriarchal institution of slavery must control and maintain the lustful and bestial ways of the Negro and male in particular. The intention of those who invoked this story into the American context was to create the conditions for slavery to be a form of benevolence or as way for White Americans to employ harsh conditions for the enslaved African and for the African to render obedience to their social death (Patterson, 1982) and condition of bondage.

Christianity and biblical reference was powerful in its ability to normalize the character and imagery of Black men as naturally lustful and savage. These natural behaviors and capacities were made and remade into a story not only imprisoning the public imagination but the Negro male body as well. The condition of man and sin was now enclosed within the character of the racial other—the Negro male—bred to work the land and in need of enslavement to maintain his natural desires and capacities. However, as we argued throughout this essay, a social construction cannot rely on one device alone. As the new episteme of science took hold, so did the grammar and vocabulary for constructing Black male deviance.

*Scientific Discourse and the African Male*

The efforts of scientists were to study and dissect every aspect of the Negro male body to provide further definition to a social doctrine of Black male deviance. Some of the more empirical efforts surfaced in the 1800s when anti-slavery politics grew. The Black male body, including the skin, internal organs and brain, were assessed in relation to White males to give meaning to rational man, while simultaneous making Black males into a perpetual subperson (Mills, 1998) and a “natural slave”. As Drescher (1990) notes, Blacks were assumed to be part of a distinct group, typically characterized as a subspecies. While much of the science of this time focused on placing both Black men and women within the lower strata of humankind, scientists were particularly concerned with the anatomical distinctions between White men and Black men. The work of Dr. Charles White would have a lasting impact on the
discourse of Black male deviance. In drawing from the incredulous science of skull comparison, White concluded that “The Negro’s skull… was not only flatter but had a smaller capacity than the ‘European’s (cited in Jordan, 1968, p. 500).”’

In particular, the physiologically detailed African male helped to recapitulate an old narrative of sexual libidinousness. The anatomical differences of the Black male penis also became a common discourse of comparison within White’s thesis about the “natural’ order of White male and Negro male distinctions. Jordan (1968), quoted here at length, outlines Dr. Charles White’s troubling analysis,

His case for Negro inferiority rested upon an unprecedented if not always reliable array of physiological detail. To discover whether the Negro was in fact a highly sensual creature, for example, one had only to turn to White’s scientific evidence. “That the PENIS of an African is larger than that of an European,” he announced airily, “has, I believe, been shown in every anatomical school in London. Preparations of them are preserved in most anatomical museums; and I have one on mine”. (p. 501)

Discourse of this kind would endure through the eighteenth and nineteenth century with the sole intent of further supporting the idea that Black men were savage and driven by base desires, unlike White men. While racial science can be traced to the 1700s, its prominence as a discourse increased in the context of the material imperative of a slave economy (Drescher, 1990). In other words, as anti-slavery movements increased, ideas endured about Black males as naturally bred for the condition of slavery. Saint-Aubin (2002) states,

European men of science resorted to black male physiology specifically to construct their theories of race also because a scientific rationale for the sub-human black man was primordial in justifying the antipathy toward and the enslavement of both black women and black men. In other words, whatever the psychic and psychological reasons, the efforts of the eighteenth-century European scientists and theorists cannot be divorced from issues of material gain and social, political, economic power. (p. 253)

The durability of discourse about Black males through the nineteenth century would become so entrenched in the social imagination of European and U. S. society that it was hard to know whether it was science or simply popular beliefs that helped to normalize racial hierarchies as a natural aspect of society. By the end of the nineteenth century, old ideas were set in place by an on-going doctrine that Black males were driven by desire, as well as a popular imagery about Black males that vacillated between feeble minded simpleton, also known as the “Sambo” characterization (Elkins, 1979), or as a beast capable of rape and causing physical terror. The context of the New South ideology and the old beliefs about racial hierarchy would help to engender a period of unprecedented racial terror and violence for Black males (Fredrickson, 1988).
Lynching and the Negro as Beast

As the United States moved into the 20th century, this resurfacing narrative and enduring concept of the morally debased Black male continued. Following the Black Codes of 1800–1860, Jim Crow laws now eerily advanced the disenfranchisement and second-class citizenship of Blacks. This context helped to cultivate an increased animosity whereby the lynching of Black men and boys numbering 3,446 from 1882–1968 (Tuskegee University Archives) received veritable social sanction. Beginning after the North’s victory in the Civil War, the South was faced with a possible paradigm shift. Yesterday’s property was today’s competition – politically and economically. Furthermore, White Southern men assumed the role of frontier patrolman and heroic protector based on the stigma of Black males’ penchant for criminality, especially that of raping White women. The South’s general consensus asserted that laziness was a symptom of Black unpreparedness for freedom following emancipation and their lawlessness a universal indication of inferiority in comparison to the White race (Muhammad, 2010). This spawned the era of Jim Crow (1865 – 1965) whereby laws were enacted to control the “innate savage” nature of Blacks. Throughout this time period, the racial state replaced slavery (Tolnay and Beck, 1992).

The idea of “otherness” is central to sociological analyses of how majority and minority identities are constructed. Groups having greater political power control the representation of different groups within a given society (Hall, 1999). Philosopher Ian Hacking’s notion of human kinds describes how identities are prescribed and held as fixed and authentic (Hacking, 2005), making a progressive psychological view of Blacks very troubling for the South. The South’s safeguarding of a social structure based on race met a competitive challenge with the North’s victory. Its foundational arrangement was now in limbo; freed Blacks reminded Southerners of their defeat. Emancipation fractured the pre-existing boundaries, which gave way to meaning and identity establishing the rights and privileges of Whites versus those of Blacks was fractured (Soule, 1992). Yet calling on the continuous narrative of Black inferiority, “natural order” for the Southerner had to be restored. In America, Blacks were discovering that being free was far different than being equal.

The beginning of the Jim Crow era continued to align with scientific racism, helping to justify Whites reasoning and action. These techniques, hypotheses, and theories utilizing anthropology, craniometry, and similar fields of study championed the cause of White supremacy (Jackson, 2006). “The efforts of the human and social sciences to test, tabulate, and summarize scientific truths in order to organize societal thought about people and groups” (Brown, p. 2072) has consistently been at work. This “evidence” also bolstered the continued quest of colonization and imperialism. Social Darwinism made popular in the late 19th and early 20th century led the way for the scientific rational of “survival of the fittest”. Victims of lynching were frequently described as being illiterate and feeble minded to further justify these brutal acts (Bernstein, 2005). Social stratification due to the inequalities of Blacks was natural.
“Science” in this way authenticated and explained the idea of the morally debased Black male, thus corroborating acts of control and elimination.

Otherness also connotes a “binary form of representation” (Hall, p. 229) – good/bad, civilized/savage, pure/tainted, Black/White. Ironically, White Southerners viewed the Black male many times as being harbingers of both. Black males were the best laborers but lazy, happy yet depressed, exotic and captivating but still repelling. Calculating the riffs White Southerners held, lynching attempted to lay the ultimate paradoxical claim to the Black male body – both in its entrapment and expulsion.

Whites routinely contributed “confidential information and testimony ‘corroborating’ the rumors” (Helg, p. 578) to serve as convicting evidence. This social-legal covenant bombarded Black male opportunities to a fair trial. Less than one percent of lynching participants were prosecuted (NAACP, 1986) illustrating the normalized protocol of the day. These decorated frontier patrolman and heroic protector “titles” were inculcated to White men of the South through more than a mere process of customary socialization. Lynching symbolized the convergence of mythology and ritual.

Perceptions of inherent Black male immorality continued to marry them to the embodiment of evilness, wickedness, and sin. Thus, as avatars of good, supremacy, and virtue—White males lynching a Black male operated as a blood sacrifice (Owen & Ehrenhaus, 2004). These rituals many times acted as public events. Crowds numbering the hundreds and thousands bore witness to these occasions. Bodies – some charred or castrated would be raised in the air for public spectacle. Cheers and applause ebbed and flowed. Onlookers scurried for human souvenirs as relics (Owen & Ehrenhaus, 2004). Postcards were created from photographs of the event and sold. The front page of newspapers brandished the event. This myth of the vile Black male image circulated alongside rituals of lynching educated Southern youth, instilled behavioral models, and transmitted a practice and experience to be replicated. The public willingly shared in this “communal rape” (Weigman, p. 465) as the removal of evil and bloodletting functioned as a rite of passage – ascribing to both Whites and Blacks in the South their “proper place” within this caste system. Lynching during the post war years served as a powerful mechanism constrained by time and space to characterize the sociopolitical structure of the South (Weigman, 1993).

Efforts to keep Black men wedded to this menial portrait of natural bestiality manifested itself with the panic of the “Black rapist”. The stigma of the Black rapist was so entrenched in the psyche of most Southerners that laws such as the White Slave Traffic Act of 1910 could be passed. Better known as the Mann Act (authored by Illinois Congressman James Robert Mann), it criminalized the transport of “any woman or girl for the purpose of prostitution or debauchery, or for any other immoral purpose” (Yale Law Journal, 1947). The Mann Act and miscegenation laws enforcing the racial segregation and criminalizing of interracial marriages acted as instruments of control. Having such far-reaching application, Black men bore the brunt of what in essence were the sociopolitical intersections of immigration, urbanization, and the changing role of women. Interestingly, the collective hysteria of the Black male
The rapist did not monopolize their representation until after emancipation and there is no substantive evidence of the frequent crime of White women being raped by Black men (Helg, 2000). Propagated fear spurred by the press swept the land, surmising the ultimate revenge of slavery by Black males was the conquest of the White woman.

From emancipation, through the Civil Rights movement and present day, intergroup antagonism intensifies when competition for economic and political resources escalates, as the “dominant group may attempt to eliminate, expel, or at least control the minority group” (Soule, p. 433). Freed Blacks after Reconstruction posed a significant threat to the economic stranglehold Whites held in farming and the emerging manufacturing sector of labor. Furthermore, the Democratic Party of the South began to feel the threatening momentum of the Populist Party during the 1890s. Above all, White Southern elites had to thwart Black mobilization and the consolidation of poor Whites and newly freed Blacks, which the Populist Party began doing successfully. As a result, regional levels of lynching increased (Soule, 1992) as a measure to deter both Blacks and “negro-loving” Whites in joining sides. Likewise, Jim Crowism aided the deterrence of Black-White alliance by embedding an attitude amongst poor Whites of “at least we’re better than Blacks”. Even abolitionists’ efforts to forward emancipation were not atypical in their paternalistic tone. Blacks, though human, still warranted White benevolence and tutelage (Hall, 1999). Being Black was the social, political, economic and especially moral line of demarcation that not only Southern Whites held but was part and parcel of the American experience.

What is seen historically by analyzing the phenomenon of lynching and the era of Jim Crow is an unwritten pact of American society grounded in the enclosed narrative of the morally debased Black male. This image, rationalized and restructured with time, gave way to a “neo-slavery” state. This pact remained alive by placing a troubling emphasis on the fabricated conduct of Black males while dehumanizing an entire segment of the population. Authenticated by “science,” legitimized by laws, fueled by economic and political competition, energized by media, all cloaked in fear – the Black male remained an entity to be controlled whereby lynching was its highest form.

HISTORY AND TRAYVON MARTIN

Jesse Washington, Emmett Till, The Scottsboro 9, the Central Park 5, Oscar Grant and Trayvon Martin represent a history all too familiar to young Black men in the US—the narrative of legal and extralegal injustice. The context of Trayvon Martin, for example, is made possible by a confluence of racial histories, constructs and structures. When the paths of George Zimmerman and Trayvon Martin intersected that fateful night in Sanford, Florida, multiple constructs converged: overzealous community policing, inequitable state laws and the stereotyping of a young Black male.
However, we argue that this scene had already been produced before this interaction. The lighting, the set, the actors and the script were all taken from an old story that can be traced back to antiquity. All the more, this stage even resulted in incurring implicit knowledge and associations of Blacks to apes and “although social conventions may have rendered extinct the explicit representation of Blacks as apelike…the association has persisted in the minds of Whites and non-Whites alike and has come to influence their perception and behavior”. (Goff, et. al, 2008, p. 294) The telling and retelling of Black male deviance, whether it has been English travelers, preachers, scientists or politicians; the metanarrative of the “criminal blackman” (Russell-Brown, 2009) had been constructed, reconstructed over and over again resulting in what could be called Jim Crow 2.0. The power of a metanarrative over time is its ability to become normal and implicit to the worldview of that time without needing empirical reasoning. This is the context of Black males in the U. S. The prevailing ideas about fear, irresponsibility and danger are not simply sociological observations - they emerge from an enduring and perennial discourse. Here we find Frank Wilderson (2010) thoughts useful,

[T]he structural, or absolute, violence, what Loïc Wacquant calls the “carceral continuum,” is not a Black experience but a condition of “Black life”. It remains constant, paradigmatically, despite changes in its “performance” over time—slave ship, Middle Passage, Slave estate, Jim Crow, the ghetto or prison industrial complex. (p. 75)

What this means is that Trayvon Martin or insert any young Black male here: _________ had been an already constructed text. In this sense, Trayvon Martin’s death by the frontier patrolman, George Zimmerman, was a story affixed by the continuities of White male contempt and Black male death. History has laid the foundation for a relentless and unforgiving series of images wherein the systems of reasoning (Popkewitz, 1998) found in anthropology, theology, the natural sciences or other apparatuses have helped to hold in place a kind of symbolic violence that has discursively made Black males into the proverbial “folk devil” (Cohen, 2002) or boogie-man.

Since Trayvon Martin’s death, new research (Goff et al, 2014) has found that the context of decision-making as it relates to Black males may in fact be informed by historical and contemporary images about the dangerous Black male. This study has profoundly shown that history has helped engender a kind of implicit knowledge about Black males that has had deleterious implications to the discursive and material context of Black males’ lives and more specifically, to the life of Trayvon Martin. For Goff et al (2014) and his colleagues, they recently found that Black boys are not as likely to be seen as “childlike” than White males. This kind of adultification of Black boys described by Goff et al. (2014) and Ferguson (2002) has had a significant impact on how they are perceived in schools and society.

By no means, however, do we wish to diminish the seriousness of Trayvon Martin’s death as just another death. But his death and George Zimmerman’s
subsequent acquittal and pseudo-celebrity status point more to a pattern than an aberration, wherein Black males in the context of crime and punishment remain enclosed within a narrative of fear and deviance and exonerated White male contempt. George Zimmerman like many of the Southern whites during Jim Crow embraced the conceptions of being a 1) frontier patrolman and 2) heroic protector. The frontier patrolman’s primary role is one of preemptive measures such as policy/ law making, gathering of materials (i.e. guns, rope, etc.), and policing/ area surveillance. Zimmerman’s position as neighborhood watch coordinator situates itself within this category. The heroic protectors act as trackers in pursuit, capturers, in addition to real and pseudo judge, jury, and executioner. Zimmerman’s act of tracking, and ultimately killing, Trayvon Martin is an example of this. However, be it the killing of Trayvon Martin or the lynching of Jessie Washington, society’s perception of the Black male as deviant not only allows for these events to take place but also in many ways validates and supports the carrying out of such acts. We continue to witness that before the Black male is killed, his image is killed first.

In moving forward, we argue that the process of undoing this metanarrative seems unimaginable, given the durability of its making over time. However, we maintain that new questions must be pursued that focus less on Black boys behaviors and dispositions (Brown & Donnor, 2012) and more on the histories (Brown, 2011) that created such conditions. Love (2013) powerfully summarizes the context of the history we outlined in relation to Trayvon Martin,

To “See Trayvon Martin” is to acknowledge one’s power and privilege, and reconcile these social constructions to the plight of one’s students of color. If educators do not take action to problematize, examine, confront, and challenge their own inscribed dispositions to create social change, they determine that their role in schools is to criminalize Black bodies. So long as educators continue to enforce policies that demonize innocent children, they thus allow for the murder of thousands of Trayvon Martins in classrooms every day. (pp. 11–12)

Numerous scholars have studied how teacher attitudes and institutional inequalities greatly impact the quality of education for a student (Vaught, 2008). Can this explain the disproportional suspensions and dismissals of Black males (Ladson-Billings, 2011; Ganao, Silvestre, Glenn, 2013), the systemic placement of Black males into special education programs (Harry & Anderson, 1994), extreme security measures at schools (Ellis, 2008), and the widening achievement/ opportunity gap? Brown (2012) powerfully argues that the mindset that teachers possess about Black students is vital to understanding the ways in which educational inequities are reproduced and normalized. Brown however, believes that what has been produced overtime into a framing discourse can also be troubled by employing a critical socio-cultural knowledge. She maintains a hope in the power of knowledge to alter the ways in which Black youth are understood in schools and society.
In agreement with scholars concerned with the power of enduring historical discourse (Brown, 2011; Popkewitz, 1998; Wynter, 2006) in shaping the present, we maintain that without engaging in a deep and historical examination of the subtext of Black male contempt over time in society and schools, it’s likely that we soon will be writing and contemplating about another Black male death as in the case of Jordan Davis, the recent incident in Florida, where again an overzealous White male employed extralegal violence against a young Black male. We of course hope and pray that our assertions are wrong.

REFERENCES


KAREN A. JOHNSON & KENNETH L. JOHNSON

2. “LOOKING-LIKE TRAYVON”

The Narratives We Tell about Race

The socio-cultural and political conditions that have led to the killing of Trayvon Martin and as witnessed by America’s first African-American president are metaphor of the paradoxical relationships of power that continue to perpetuate racialized spaces and identities, which lead to assumptions of white innocence and black guilt. The public outrage concerning the circumstances of the death of Trayvon Martin, plus the initial refusal to arrest his killer, George Zimmerman and his subsequent acquittal has evoked comparisons to the circumstances of the death of Emmett Till.

From the lynching of Till in 1955 to the vigilante killing of Martin in 2012, the shed bloods of Black boys have filled the ink blotters from which much of the script of American history has been written and experienced. The similarities in each case of teenage boys are apparent, such as the racial dynamics, the ages of the victims, (i.e. Till was 14 and Martin was 17), their middle-class backgrounds, as well as the fact that both were visiting relatives away from home, when they were killed by men who were later acquitted. Variations of similar cases regarding the killing of Black men and boys are familiar to generations of African Americans who have witnessed these types of tragedies for centuries. The tragedy of Trayvon Martin elicited a sympathetic response from President Barack Obama, who stated, “Trayvon Martin … could have been my son”. Another way of saying that is Trayvon Martin could have been me 35 years ago” (www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/07/19/remarks-president-trayvon-martin). Still, the most powerful Black man in the world stood in awe, along with millions of others, as he witnessed Trayvon’s killer go free, thereby highlighting the price for looking-like Trayvon continues to be paid in blood.

With that said, the purpose of this chapter is to raise the following questions: What do the killing, criminalization, and vilification of Trayvon Martin reveal about the narratives we tell about race? And how do the racialized and spatialized narratives we construct impact the lived and educational experiences of Black youth? The murders of Emmett Till and Trayvon Martin have moved us to raise these questions, especially in light of the fact many Americans believed that with the election of President Barrack Obama to the highest office in this nation, it symbolized America’s progress toward a post-racial society. Yet, the racialized narratives surrounding the killing of Trayvon Martin is as pernicious as the lynch narratives of the nineteenth
century (Stabile, 2014). Unfortunately, racial justice continues to elude us, fifty-one years after the March on Washington and sixty-years after the *Brown v. Brown of Education*, despite the presence of an African American president in the White House. Consequently, in what seemed to have been a post-racial moment with the election of President Obama in 2008, race persists as one of the most significant and enduring factors influencing the lived experiences and the educational opportunities of Black youth (Lipsitz, 2011).

Hence, the premise of this paper is simple: racialized narratives are crucial to constructing and seeing the physicality of the Black male body, such as Trayvon Martin’s, as one that conjures up the imaginings of terror, hatred, and “Otherness”. To fully unpack our premise, we examine two key themes—the production of racialized identity and the production of racialized space. We present a postmodern approach as an important framework that allows us to critique the murders of Emmett Till and Trayvon Martin, within the current climate of racial hatred. This approach helps us to understand how looking-like Trayvon is maintained as a contested and targeted social status, across time and space and made possible through the explicit and tacit consent of the law and cultural practices. Additionally, this approach allows us to discuss how educational studies and educational legal strategies influenced the production of “separate but [un]equal” spatial categories based on race, where “White” educational space is defined as superior to “Black” space as a matter of American jurisprudence; and how the surveillance of racialized space continues in contemporary times. We contend that the White/Black binary opposition is necessary in the production of the ideal of white supremacy and at the exclusion of marginalized Whites from academic and public discourse. This exclusion facilitates the de-legitimization and criminalization of Black bodies. Our intent in this chapter is neither condemn nor absolve the perpetrators of these horrific killings, but rather to point to power relationships that give rise to them.

In this chapter, we use the reframe “looking-like” Trayvon throughout in our efforts to tap into Frantz Fanon’s concept of *epidermalization* and Paul Gilroy’s concept of *raciology* to delineate the point of the long-standing stories we tell in this nation about race. We conclude the chapter with a couple of educational recommendations that may move us toward a racially just nation. In the next section, we explain further the postmodern approach.

**FRAMING THE ISSUES**

Indeed, the killing of Trayvon Martin and the racial assumptions of guilt and innocence are influenced by the production of racial knowledge or what Franz Fanon (1952/2008) and later Paul Gilroy (2000) have coined as *epidermalization* or *raciological thinking* respectively. These terms refer to the “persistent intention to make the mute body disclose and conform to the truths of its racial identity” (p. 46). These concepts signify the embodiment of racial identity and the theories and social practices that frame the body as a racialized being. As Gilroy explains,
It refers to a historically specific system for making bodies meaningful by endowing them with qualities of “color”. It suggests a perceptual regime in which the racialized body is bounded and protected by its enclosing skin. The observer’s gaze does not penetrate that membrane but rests upon it and, in doing so, receives the truths of racial difference from the other body. (p. 46)

We argue, in this chapter, that this type of thinking is unfortunately paramount in the social science, education theory and schooling practices.

The field of education theory as well as schooling practices continues to be at forefront in creating the discourse and representational categories by which Americans come to understand racialized spaces and identities. The functionality of race is and has always been involved in the maintenance of real and imagined spatial parameters as defined in the laws, policies, and practices of the de jure segregated schools of the past as well as the de facto segregated schools of the present. De facto school segregation occurs geographically through tax based school funding and zoning laws as well as pedagogically through “hidden” curriculum practices, such as advanced placement academic programs for Whites and remedial programs for Blacks (Kharem, 2006; Kozol, 2005; Apple, 2004; Anyon, 1997; Orfield & Eaton, 1996; Shujaee, 1994; Giroux & Purpel, 1983; Oakes, 2005). These practices divide public schools, along racial lines and in turn, discursively apply authorized knowledge canons in ways that favor Whites, while disadvantaging Blacks.

The production of racial identities or the use of race as a taxonomical means for controlling and categorizing identity through policies and practices is a second way that education discourse has and continues to produce racial knowledge. The White/Black racial binary is a categorical framework for measuring student success or failure rates and achievement gaps, etc. We argue that the problematic inclusion of epidermal thinking, i.e. skin color as a categorical variant in education theory, where it is defined as “culture,” subtly implies that measurements of intelligence, character and dress can be assumed through the optic gaze. Within these discursive frameworks, the black body is consistently associated with deviant behavior or one that produces subpar academic performance (Fenning & Rose, 2007; Losen, 2011; Barton & Coley, 2010; US Department of Education, 2014). This is assumed especially when poor, marginalized Blacks in underfunded schools, are compared to Whites in well-funded schools (Kozol, 1991; Barton & Coley, 2010; US Department of Education, 2014) The assumption of deviance that is associated with Black bodies and conversely the standardization and association of excellence with White bodies, in turn authorizes moral and intellectual assumptions to be made based on information gathered from the epidermalization of the data.

Postmodern Approach: A Methodological Perspective

Critical and existential theories have been the theories of choice for many Black intellectuals who take on the challenge of studying race (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006; Brooks, 2004; Bell, 1987). These theories are useful for explaining the “why”
Critical race theory (CRT), for example, addresses questions of inequity in American institutions, such as schools, and insists that racism is endemic. CRT challenges “deficit discourses” that fault marginalized people for these institutional inequities. On the other hand, existentialists draw upon “lived experiences” of Black people in efforts to contextualize the racialization of the body and to address the “what” of racism. Other frameworks, such as post-Blackness, postmodern Blackness, and ontological Blackness, in similar ways, offer descriptive analyses of the Black experience (hooks, 1990; Anderson, 1995; Touré, 2011).

The postmodern approach is an appropriate framework to examine race because it makes clear our understanding of epidermal and raciological thinking. A postmodern explanation of the killing of Trayvon Martin would consider raced and gendered bodies as a crucial element to be analyzed due to the fact it is a constructivist and deconstructive framework that departs from a positivist empirical, epistemological standpoint. As a constructivist framework, it repudiates the perspective of modern science, which purports that truth-producing objective thought and scientific methodology bring forth valid knowledge claims (Rosenau, 1992; Washington & McCarley, 2012; Baber & Murray, 2001). Theorists of this perspective maintain that epistemological notions of truth are actually fragmented and partial. Hence, they put forth the idea that theory is socially constructed, thus, there are a myriad of ways of knowing, interpreting, and analyzing truth claims.

As a deconstructive methodological perspective, it works as a tool to unpack the way discourse, such as epidermal and raciological thinking, functions to construct oppositions and hierarchies (Baber & Murray, 2001).

A postmodern approach elevates our inquiries of the killing of Trayvon Martin beyond the search for subjective intentions of individual racist actions and beyond the subjectivity of the experiences of victims of racist acts to explore the interconnected relationships with the production of knowledge and the institutional practices that continue to facilitate these relationships. This approach focuses on questions of “how” by deconstructing essentialized identities and disrupting the continuity of historical master narratives. In this sense, this approach interrogates the discursive production of the “knowledges” that facilitate racial identities as well as the processes that monitor racialized space.

The postmodern approach is more of a theoretical approach as oppose to a method per se. Frantz Fanon and Paul Gilroy used phenomenology as a mechanism for studying race. They utilized this methodological perspective for the purpose of engaging race and unpacking racialized knowledge. For the purpose of our chapter, we too use phenomenology as a way to assist us in deconstructing and critiquing the concepts, categories about racialized knowledge pertaining to the death of Trayvon Martin and the educational disenfranchisement of Black youth in this nation. Our questions and themes are our guideposts to help us observe what are the phenomena surrounding racial knowledge pertaining to the killing of Trayvon and the question of race in this nation.
Cornel West (1999) use of postmodernism aptly provides a “genealogy of modern racism” by interrogating the binary methods of scientific observation, which are based on comparing and contrasting opposites to establish difference as a factor in developing a “normative gaze”—a gaze that “secretes the ideal of white supremacy,” from the onset of western epistemological inquiry (p. 71). His work exposes the White/Black race binary as a central metaphor that was used to establish truth claims, in the natural and social sciences, such as in biology, anthropology, theology, and aesthetics. West’s inquiry goes beyond experiential models that tend to essentialize the Black experience, by providing a blueprint for tracing race as an object of inquiry across an interdisciplinary purview. His conclusions provide a powerful explanatory model for understanding the pervasive mechanisms of white supremacist ideology as it embeds in western epistemology as rational thought. Central to West’s critique of western scientific methods is his focus on the influence of European aesthetics that are found in “Greek ocular metaphor” as the so-called visual standards of perfect human forms (West, 1999, p. 75).

However, perhaps what is overlooked in West’s conclusions is an explanation of how white mediocrity is also necessarily concealed as a component of white supremacy. Whiteness represents a superlative in the Western thought and as an identity construct and a political status, it assumes the quality of pureness, goodness and legality. Certainly, whiteness as a representational category of the social sciences and in public discourse mythologizes and standardizes white middle-class status, by negating the existence, moral behavior and social-economic status of poor, undereducated Whites or Whites who are involved in anti-social behaviors. Instead, these behaviors are discursively inscribed on Blacks as a means of perpetuating a white supremacist ideology. For instance, the categories ascribed to Trayvon Martin, as someone who was a criminal, thug-like deviant teenager, are seldom used in social science research to represent White teens (Ferguson, 2005; Ferguson, 2000).

The representative category of “Whiteness” and “Blackness” function in a binary opposition, across discursive arrays including ‘jurisprudence’, the social sciences and cultural aesthetics. These in turn produce forms of rationality, iconic metaphors and spatial territorialism that criminalizes ‘rogue’ Black bodies and deputizes everyday citizens like George Zimmerman and the killers of Till, in such circumstances to regulate such aberrations as reasonably deemed appropriate. The myth of meritocratic rule, whether it is believed to be established through divine appointment or as manifest destiny, is wholly dependent upon the systemic production and maintenance of discourses that demonize and/or criminalize Blackness; and thereby absolve non-Blacks from the category of guilt in comparison (Foucault, 1977; Ross, 1997; West, 1999; Hall, 1997). Whites are deputized by the distributed power of cultural sensibility and backed by localized interpretation of guilt or innocence to expel the threat of Blackness. We refer to Whites not in the subjective sense, but rather as the performance of discursive processes that produce these racial sensibilities.
“This guy looks like he’s up to no good or he’s on drugs or something. It’s raining and he’s just walking around looking about” (http://phoebe53.wordpress.com/2012/03/26/zimmerman-911-call-transcript-trayvon-martin/).

…“Yeah, now he’s coming towards me … He’s got his hand in his waistband. And he’s a Black male!” (http://phoebe53.wordpress.com/2012/03/26/zimmerman-911-call-transcript-trayvon-martin/).

The two quotes above come from the 911 call that George Zimmerman made to the Sanford, Florida emergency dispatch center. Zimmerman’s description of Trayvon Martin reveals the social surveillance and epidermal thinking in which Martin was subjected to by Zimmerman.

What is striking about Zimmerman’s descriptions about Trayvon Martin is the narrative he constructs about Martin—a narrative that reflects his unadulterated repulsion of the Black male “other!” Indeed, Trayvon’s Blackness/Otherness was constructed on his body (Eisenstein, 2006). His Black male body was a discursive terrain, where racist assumptions about his Blackness/Otherness were vilified and criminalized. In Zimmerman’s construction of Martin as the racialized Other, reveals underpinnings that as a Black male, Trayvon was out-of-place—he did not belong in the predominately White gated community, called the “Retreat at Twin Lakes,” that he was visiting.

Whiteness requires symbolic boundaries to be constructed so that blackness can stay in their place. As Hall notes (1997), “symbolic boundaries keeps things pure” and white (p. 216). And what unsettles Whiteness, or in this case, what unsettled Zimmerman was Blackness was out of place. In other words, conscious and unconscious racism evokes the fear of the Black defiler who is infecting the presumed pure and innocent White space (Ross, 1997). Trayvon’s Blackness represented a danger, in the White space. As Judith Butler (1993) notes, “the black male body in the public psyche is always performing as a threat, no matter what it is doing” (Butler cited in Eisenstein, 2006, p. 183). Apparently, for Zimmerman, racial and symbolic boundaries had been transgressed; hence, it needed to be ethnically cleansed, removed, and murdered so that whiteness could be restored to order. The racial hatred that Zimmerman exhibited toward Martin reveals how “racism uses the physicality of bodies to punish, to expunge and isolate certain bodies and construct them as outsiders” (Eisenstein, 2006, p. 180).

Zimmerman’s stereotypic utterance of fear, hatred, and eventual murder of Martin is what we have come to expect in this nation, from people who have internalized the narratives we tell about race. Unfortunately, the assumption that Blacks, in this case more specifically, the Black male presence in public spaces or in private predominately White gated communities have come to denote terror and a threat to White society’s “personal safety” is a sentiment that is also reflected in public schools (Ferguson, 2005, p. 439; US Department of Education, 2014; Southern Poverty Law Center, 2010). Ann Arnett Ferguson’s research on Black boys in public schools delineates this issue.
Ferguson’s (2000) concept of ‘adultification’ offers vivid pictures of young Black males that have been racialized in such ways that their moral maturation has been inscribed on their bodies. Researching the racial disparities in punitive actions applied toward Black and White middle-school aged boys accused of the same infractions, she notes,

The exemption of black males from the dispensations granted the ‘child’ and the ‘boy’ through the process of adultification justifies harsher, more punitive responses to rule-breaking behavior. As ‘not-children,’ their behavior is understood not as something to be molded and shaped over time …. Therefore, the treatment required for infractions is one that punishes through example and exclusion rather than through persuasion and edification, as it is practiced with young white males. (pp. 89–90)

Significant in Ferguson’s research is the idea that adultification relies on the visual judgments of teachers and school administrators who forgo the paradigm “boys will be boys,” choosing instead to inscribe adult malice on the behavior of Black boys. We argue that deficit assumptions about moral character and intelligence are made by school officials who rely on information that is based on skin color, which is informed by allochronic social science research and raciological thought.

This idea points to localized surveillance where judgments are made, records are compiled and the lives of Black children are impacted. Ferguson’s research reveals that the assumption of innocence extended to White youth is withheld from Black boys in schools, communities, and under the law. Black boys under the age of eighteen are disproportionately charged with felonies, tried and convicted in criminal courts as adults, and unfortunately are placed in adult prisons (Ferguson, 2006; Alexander, 2010; Giroux, 2003; Fenning & Rose, 2007). They are also more likely than other racial groups to be suspended or expelled from school (US Department of Education, 2014; Southern Poverty Law Center, 2010).

In a recent comprehensive report conducted by the US Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights (2014), it was revealed that Black children in preschool programs are more likely than non-Black children to be suspended. While Black children represent approximately 18 percent of students in preschool programs, they are 42 percent of the preschool population who are suspended once and are 48 percent of preschoolers who are suspended more than once.

The Southern Poverty Law Center (2010) also collected data on school disciplinary practices in New Orleans. Their report reveals that a large number of the city’s schools implement ineffectual and abusive discipline policies that disproportionately affect African-American male students, particularly with regards to out-of-school suspensions and expulsions (p. 2). The suspension and expulsion rates reveal that the out-of-school suspension rate in the Recovery School District (RSD), a district, which is predominately Black, was more than two times the state average and more than four times the rate found in the nation, for the 2007–2008 academic year (p. 3). The report illustrates that the suspension rates in the 2008–2009 school year, in the
RSD schools, were close to 7000 out-of-suspensions in a system that has an overall student population that is close to 13,000 (p. 3). For the most part, the suspensions were for very minor infractions, “such as dress code problems or being tardy to class or school” (p. 3). With regards to the expulsion rates in the RSD schools in the 2007–2008 school year, it was close to two times the statewide rate and 10 times the overall U. S. rate (p. 3).

Racialized narratives and school policies and practices inscribe moral intention on the bodies of Black children, robbing them of their youth, their future and too often their lives. Racial discourse is locally operational to produce surveillance systems that monitor Black movement and judge Black behavior. Teachers and school administrators make assessments of Black children based on the tools provided through teacher education and education leadership programs that rely on allochronic data.

The racial narratives that speak to the assumption that Black male youth, who “look-like” Trayvon, are inherently bad and thus are in need of strict school disciplinary practices are indeed tied to issues of racial injustices and repression. This assumption impacts the quality of learning experiences in schools and later may results in negative life outcomes. Upon being informed of the results of the US Department of Education’s Office of Civil Rights 2014 report, the U. S. Attorney General Eric Holder (2014) stated, “this Administration is moving aggressively to disrupt the school to prison pipeline in order to ensure that all of our young people have equal educational opportunities” (Holder cited in the US Department of Education Report, 2014, p. 1).

Indeed, there is an interrelationship between racist assumptions about Black youth, especially Black males, and the harsh disciplinary policies in U. S. schools and in the overall society with Stand Your Ground and Stop and Frisk dictums (www.aclu.org/racial-justice/racial-profiling). And Black youth are always more likely to be harshly punished at a rate disproportionate to their population (US Department of Education, 2014; Losen, 2011; Southern Poverty Law Center, 2010; Alexander, 2010). Such punitive actions are analogous to that found in the criminal justice system and without a doubt functions as a mechanism for racial suppression (Johnson, 2012).

It is significant to note that current school disciplinary policies and practices are so harsh and pervasive toward Black youth who “look-like” Trayvon that the U. S. Attorney General, Eric Holder stated that President Obama’s Administration “is moving aggressively to disrupt the school to prison pipeline” (Holder, 2014). Holder and U. S. Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan view these disciplinary policies as infringing on the civil rights of students of color and noted that the impact often leads to high dropout and incarceration rates (US Department of Education, 2014; Losen, 2011; Johnson, 2012, p. 25).

Still, education research that labels Black youth as bad or “at risk” tends to produce deficit discourses that further victimizes them by attributing social problems, such as school failure, illegal drugs, increased homicide and incarceration rates to purported inherent consequences of their color rather than on institutional policies and laws
that promote these outcomes. The criminalization of Blackness morphs cultural identifiers, such as economic class, educational status, and the confident behavior of Black youth, by contributing these as factors in a perceived threat (Ross, 1997; Hall, 1997; Alexander, 2010; www.aclu.org/racial-justice/racial-profiling; Butler cited in Eisenstein, 2006, p. 183). Blackness in public and legal discourse trumps the category of innocence typically extended to youth and robs Black youth from the initial consideration of innocence through anthropomorphic descriptions of their physical attributes, mental state or a refusal to acquiesce. The demands of white supremacy and consequently the criminalization of Blackness require the delineation of not only of race, but also of social class. The existence of Whites from lower socioeconomic status is overlooked in social sciences, thus rendering white as superlative. At the same time, Black middle-class identities are underrepresented or categorically denied (Haymes, 1995b; Kelley, 1997). The absence of critical research analysis on marginalized, rural, poor, Intermountain West White populations, in states like Utah, etc., as well as Appalachian Whites of the Southeast must be addressed as counter-narratives to these discourses.

The Production of Racialized Space in Education

“As long as I live and can do anything about it, niggers are gonna stay in their place. Niggers ain’t gonna vote where I live. If they did, they’d control the government. They ain’t gonna go to school with my kids”.

—J. W. Milman interviewed by William Hule, 1956

“Residential segregation and white dominance are integrally related. White choices are not only the aggregation of individual preferences regarding proximity to blacks. Rather, governmental and private forces—in interaction with each other—in the past created a racialized process of urban/suburban development in which “good” neighborhoods were defined as white and whiteness was defined as good, stable, employed, and employable”.

—Martha R. Mahoney, 1997

J. W. Milman, one of the killers of Emmett Till, made the first above statement one year after he and others were acquitted of the killing of Emmett Till. The phrases Milman utters, “niggers are gonna stay in their place” and “they ain’t gonna go to school with my kids” speak to his violent commitment to “controlling the borders” or the “symbolic boundaries” in which Black and White people lived (Eisenstein, 2006, p. 182; Hall, 1997). Such raciological thinking about African Americans support the white supremacist assumption that Black people “belong somewhere else” (Lipsitz, 2011, p. 28). Such thinking has resulted in the racialized spatial regulation of Blacks that has bolstered an ideology of white supremacy and spatialized apartheid (Haymes, 1995b, p. 5).
With regards to linking the production of racialized space to educational knowledge, it is important to understand that there is a “relationship between social space, educational knowledge, classroom practices” and “race, class and differentiated educational practices” (Buendia, Ares, Juarez, & Peercy, 2004, p. 836). Without a doubt, education has a spatial component to it, which taps into epidermal and raciological thinking specifically with regards to the racial representations biases, images, and socially constructed assumptions it conveys (Gilroy, 2000).

We argue that the spatialization of race in education is reliant on: 1) Equity-based binary social science theory to produce geographic/physical and de facto segregation; 2) Integrationist legal strategies; 3) and other federally funded programs that tap into the assumptions of the “at risk” “disadvantage” so-called uneducable “Other” of Black children who look-like Trayvon.

Binary categories used in education theory and practice, such as suburban/inner-city are used to differentiate White suburban spaces from Black urban spaces and in turn attempts to explain the implications of geographic/physical segregation on factors, like achievement gaps and graduation rates and dropout rates. These raced, classed and geographic spatialization put forth common sense assumptions that excellence in education can be realized in White suburban geographic spaces and in contrast, Black urban spaces are the epitome of failure and deficiency. For example, “inner-city,” appears to be a reference to a racial category, [read “Black”]. Conversely, when educational scholars make reference to the geographic category, “suburban,” it is also a reference to the racial category, “White” (Petrovich & Wells, 2005; Carnoy & McEwan, 2005). Similar assumptions that statically link race to social class are terms like “Black” means “poor” and “White” means “middle-class”; or “suburban schools” mean superior and “urban schools” schools mean inferior. Additionally, the use of the terms like “at risk,” “disadvantaged,” “culturally deprived,” “the non-English-speaking” are “place markers for the racial and classed labels of school populations” (Buendia, Ares, Juarez & Peercy, 2004, p. 843). The “Othering” narrative that is pervasive in educational studies where researchers or educators talk about the supposed needs of minoritized groups are put forth as “unquestioned knowledge” (Buendia, Ares, Juarez & Peercy, 2004, p. 843 & 844).

These research studies provide empirical validity and academic authority to link racial segregation to cultural dissonance and social pathology (Carnoy & McEwan). In particularly, economic, educational and geographic social stratifications are explained as empirical consequences of racial segregation (Petrovich & Wells, 2005). In education, this means that racial segregation in American schools can be used to explain academic outcomes like achievement gaps, to interpret test scores as well as to explain socio-economic performance disparities. It also means that the category of race can be morphed or substituted with other taxonomical indicators, such as socio-economic status or geographic origin.

Martin Carnoy & Patrick J McEwan (2005), for example, attempt to directly address the relationship between educational equity and school vouchers, by
examining the academic outcomes of voucher programs, in Milwaukee, Cleveland, and New York, among others. However, these researchers fall into the trap of interposing spatial and ontological Otherness between suburban and urban spaces and schools in a manner that conveys superiority and inferiority. For example, they frame the question of educational equity, within the context of the disparities between “inner-city” Blacks and “suburban” Whites in public school settings. Concerned with the limited research that hide widespread use of vouchers and the growing use of vouchers to pay for religious schools, the researchers collected statistical data related to various categories of academic outcomes wherein which voucher students (i.e. “low-income,” “inner-city” African Americans) test scores were compared to suburban (i.e. White middle-class) students.

Another area where the production of racialized and spatialized categorical claims can be found is in the integrationist legal strategies of the Civil Rights era. Strategically, segregation was challenged and defeated as a matter of jurisprudence, thereby rendering the enduring legacy of the “separate but equal dictum” in the Brown v. Board of Education landmark Supreme Court decision of 1954. However, the desegregation of the public schools, for our purposes, must be understood to have inconsequentially established a legal framework for conceptualizing educational excellence for Blacks as parity with Whites. Ironically, central to the legal claims made in Brown v Board of Education I and II were desegregationist reliance on the race relations sociology that validated the idea of white supremacy. Notwithstanding, the disparities in public school funding then and now is traceable, along racial lines, where White schools districts were/are funded by well-endowed property tax bases; while Black schools were/are poorly funded due to a variety of reasons such as outdated tax-based funding, slashing of government education funds, etc. (Kozol, 2005; Anyon, 1997; Kozol, 1991).

Still, it was the raciological assumptions that put forth the idea that Whiteness, White spaces, and White schools were more superior to Blacks ones (and for the most part they were during the era of segregation). But one of the lingering results of that idea today, is the continued belief that White schools are better than those schools inhabited by predominately Black students. And thus, education reformers continue to frame the issue of educational equity in pre-civil-rights terms by offering policies that ultimately usher Blacks into White spaces. They maintain that if Black students were provided the opportunity to integrate into White schools/White spaces, this would contribute to the quality of their learning experiences (Wells, 2009).

Consequently, federal education policies, which include the Brown v. Board of Education decision to federally funded programs, such as Title I programs, compensatory literacy programs, and many others have been implemented to remediate the minoritized Other.

These programs, however, continue to rely on categorical norms which couple race and class in ways that essentialize Black students’ educational experience and identity as a static under-class, who are seeking an escape, from the failing predominately Black public school system. The underlying theoretical assumption
of these policies is the integrationist paradigm of educational equity that became the dominant mode of solving racial inequity, during the civil-rights era. But what is problematic about this dependency of educational theory as it pertains to allochronic social science narratives regarding Black students is it prohibits the inclusion of representational categories that challenge the White/Black racial binary or myths of Black inferiority, at the vortex of those theories. Scholarship on historical and contemporary Black educational excellence (Johnson, 2000; Siddle-Walker, 1995; Jones, 1981; Ramsey, 2007) in predominately Black spaces are ignored, devalued, or rendered invisible in the dominant educational discourse. Yet, this scholarship lays claim to alternative ways of knowing and speaks to the issue that Black excellence can flourish in Black spatialized educational settings.

Summary

In this chapter, we used a postmodern approach to examine the themes – “the production of racialized identity” and “racialized space” – for the purpose of understanding the enduring narratives we tell about race in this nation, particularly as it pertains to the killing of Trayvon Martin. We drew on the terms used by Frantz Fanon (epidermalization) and Paul Gilroy and (raciological thinking) in our efforts to unpack and understand how the perceptual regime of racialized knowledge forces the mute body of the Black male “Other” to conform to the truth of racial difference. To explicate our points, we discussed how the Black male body is always performing as a threat in and out of the school settings. In these settings, research data, such as the recent US Department of Education’s Office of Civil Rights, has revealed that Black youth are more likely than other racial ethnic groups to be suspended from schools even on the preschool age-level. This phenomenon reveals that the production of raciological narratives as well as pedagogical policies and practices mark moral meaning on the bodies of Black children that in turn do not one to see Black youth as innocent. The production of racialized knowledge permeates the social science, educational studies and schooling practices; and in turn negatively impacts the life chances and educational opportunities of Black youth.

In our section on racialized spaces, we contend that use of race as a taxonomical means for categorizing geographic space through discourse, policies and practices is a second way that education theory has and continues to produce racial knowledge. Racialized spaces and race and class-based stratified schools, in which Black youth attend, depend on the social construction of race—a construction that paint White/Black geographical spaces as superior and inferior binaries. We posited that education reform discourses use binary categories, such as suburban [read White and middle-class] and inner-city [read Black and poor] as a way to produce empirical and authoritative knowledge claims that implies that Black school failure is tied to Black educational spaces. These spatialized norms put forth the notion that the differences between White and Black educational geographical spaces are fixed and natural markers of race, class, and space. These race, class-based and space narratives mask
the real problem, that being white supremacy. In essence, these racialized narratives’ role is to reinforce and reproduce the very idea of race. Unfortunately, the allochronic raciological thinking continues to contribute to the vilification, criminalization, and disempowerment of Black youth who “look-like” Trayvon.

Conclusion and Recommendations

“But if we in America have reached that point in our desperate culture when we must murder children, no matter for what reason or what color, we don’t deserve to survive, and probably won’t”.


Upon learning about the murder of Emmett Till, native Mississippian-born novelist and poet, William Faulkner (1897–1962), uttered the above quote and questioned whether this nation would survive such brutal tragedy. The raw and savage lynching of Emmett Till brought to the national attention the gut-wrenching and unvarnished racism that this nation maintains towards African Americans. Decades later, the murder, criminalization, and vilification of Trayvon Martin reveal that race still matters, especially in the age of President Obama.

Indeed, the killings of Till and Martin, and even more recently, other Black youth, are not aberrations by individuals, who harbor anti-black hatred or simply subliminal biases. To a significant extent, our past and current tragedies and misperceptions relating to the racial killings of Black youth by White society are part of a larger phenomenon that is attributable to a historical legacy of coded, explicit racialized narratives and paradigms of “symbols, concepts, and images, through which [this nation] understand, interpret and represent racial differences” (Haymes, 1995a, p. 105; Omi, 1989, p. 114). An unpacking of the raciological narratives we tell in this nation helps us to understand the disdain and repulsion that this nation harbors toward Black youth. It is these same types of ideological frameworks that operate in schools. As Kharem (2006) argues, “historically, the cultural images of nonwhites as savages… have confirmed in the minds of many whites they have the right to treat nonwhites [read Black youth like Trayvon or Emmett] as the “other” (p. 4). These “cultural images,” notes Kharem “have done so much damage that some teachers still believe these demeaning cultural images, which illustrates to us how much white supremacist ideology still influence our society” (p. 4). One of the most arresting realities about this nation’s history is the inhumane and methodical underdevelopment of African Americans (Marable, 1983). And in the field of education, we argue that this brutalization includes the miseducation, deculturalization, and disempowerment of Black youth, who “look-like” Trayvon.

Additionally, in the age of President Barack Obama—in the age of a so-called post-racial society, we have learned that the narratives we tell about race as well as institutional structures of racial oppression have not dissipated since his time.
in office. Undeniably, the election of President of Obama in 2008 and again in 2012 represents a milestone in the African American odyssey in this nation. Still, throughout his tenure, President Obama has been subtly and overtly bombarded with the exigency to show subservience to any White person on demand, despite his rank as commander and chief to this nation. For example, during his first State of the Union Address, Congressman Joe Wilson of South Carolina unprecedentedly interrupted the president by calling him a liar. And Arizona’s governor, Jan Brewer, accosted Mr. Obama as he deplaned Air force One, by defiantly pointing her index finger close to the president’s face as she expressed white rage over his policies (Rothman, 2013). Six years into his presidency, President Obama continues to hear challenges to his legitimacy as citizen of the United States and consequently his presidency. Hence, the legacy of lynching, murdering, vilifying, and delegitimizing people who “look-like” Trayvon, and who do not abide within the physical and virtual spatial limits imposed on them, continues to function in the Obama era.

The racial assaults and disrespect that President Obama has encountered, along with the killing of Trayvon Martin, reveal that we do not live in a post-racial society. Additionally, there have not been impactful policies emerging from the White House that would put a death knell to institutionalized racial oppression in this nation. His presidency unearths the fact that his individual achievement has not torn down the walls of deeply entrenched White supremacist policies, practices, and racial ideological assumptions. As Cornel West (1994) argues, “the paradox of race in America is that our common destiny is more pronounced and imperiled precisely when our divisions are deeper” (p. 8). Consequently, there are many lessons and recommendations that could be gleaned from the killing of Black youth who “look-like” Trayvon. His murder as well as the enduring legacy of racial oppression is a call to action. As concerned citizens, educators, grassroots community activists, and other progressive stakeholders, we need to continue to struggle against an oppressive, exploitative, White supremacist society that create oppressive dehumanizing experiences and human misery. For these reasons, we provide a couple of recommendations that may help us move toward social change.

We recommend that this nation as well as educational school systems begin to have a national dialogue about institutionalized racism. We believe such dialogue allows for this nation, in particularly educational settings, to face our truth about racism as well as wrestle with the issues of institutionalized racial injustice. Such dialogue, we argue, will help us to move toward healing as well as pursue federal, state, and local policies and practices that support racial justice and social transformation. On the school system setting, we argue, that more school systems, need to implement Glenn Singleton’s and Curtis Linton’s “Courageous Conversations about Race” summits in efforts to understand how racism operates in schools and to pursue strategies that would mitigate against the high suspension and expulsion rates that Black youth encounter in schools as well as to find solutions that would contribute to their academic success. The U. S. Attorney General, Eric Holder’s affirmed
commitment to addressing the racial disparities in U.S. public schools is a step in the right direction. His commitment provides a glimmer of hope for needed policies that would counter the assaults on Black youth in this nation.

It is imperative that we, in this nation unpack, expose, interrogate, and resist white supremacist policies and practices that contribute to our oppression, repression, and degradation. We must learn from the struggles of the past, in particularly the African American struggles for freedom, and with this knowledge arm ourselves with a righteous indignation—an indignation that will enable us to evoke our human dignity and in turn give us the strength to battle for our human liberation. The authors of this chapter are in agreement with bell hooks (2000) when she posits that this nation’s institutional social injustices “will be our nation’s fate if we do not collectively challenge” and dismantle them (p. 8). Indeed, “our hopes are on a tightrope,” as Cornel West (2010) posits, “and American hangs in the balance—and we either hang together or we hang separately” (p. 656). The struggle continues!

REFERENCES


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